



**4** Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center nominated for int'l award



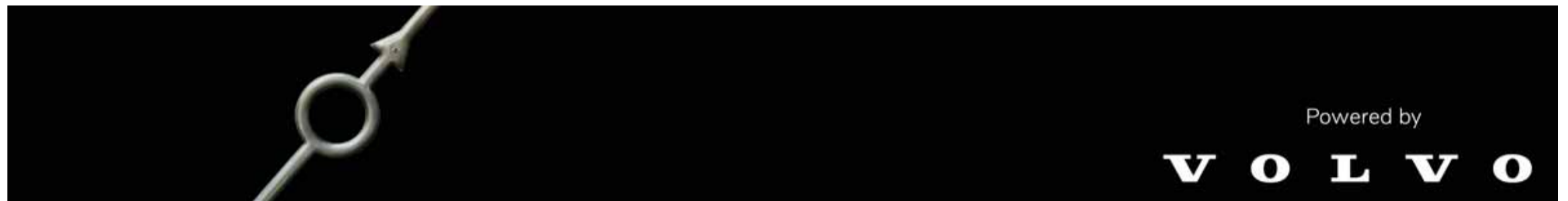
**5** Syria wounded fear closure of aid corridor



**12** Virtual Van Gogh exhibition set to lure shoppers in Dubai



**15** France want to move on from 'immense sadness' of Euro exit



# Coronavirus in Kuwait: A tale of two sisters

## One vaccinated, one passed away • Admitted to Mubarak, in ICU

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** Two sisters in Kuwait. Both in their 40s. Both asthmatic. Both hard working, fun-loving, decent and family-oriented. But their lives will diverge dramatically. Only one got the vaccine, the other didn't have the opportunity. Now one is dead from the virus and one lives to tell the story.

Ria, 47 years old and Gemma Lynn, 40 years old were known to all as the Talaro sisters. Ria came to Kuwait in 1995, working first as a domestic helper and later as a sales clerk in a shop. In 2009, she helped her younger sister also come to Kuwait to find work. Both women supported families back in the Philippines.

"I love my sister very much. She is the extended version of my life," said Ria. "We see each other daily, but we never missed saying 'I love you' each day. When she is out somewhere I talked to her through video-call until she comes back, making sure that she will come home safe."

In early June, the sisters who also shared a single room in a flat in Salmiya, both got sick from the coronavirus. Ria had received her first dose of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine on May 12 through her employer but sister Gemma Lynn hadn't received hers yet. "We both experienced the flu and fever at the same time," said Ria. "We suspected it might be just a simple seasonal flu, so we both took the steaming rituals (locally known in the Philippines as tuob, inhaling steam).

But the steam did little to help and the next day, both felt worse so they took a taxi and went to the local government clinic. There they saw a doctor and received only Panadol and were told to go home and rest. But the sisters felt scared so they went to a private clinic to get a swab test and then went back home.

On June 10, they found out they were COVID positive and so they decided to go to Mubarak Hospital. Again they took a taxi, this time from Salmiya to Jabriya.

"I told my sister we better stay in the hos-

pital since both of us are asthmatic," Ria explained. "I was scared although I got my vaccine because the company arranged it for us. But I also wanted to get the vaccine ASAP because I have more underlying illnesses like high blood pressure and enlargement of heart. I am taking medicine for that regularly. So I told Gemma Lynn, since we know that we are COVID positive, we better stay in the hospital. So we went as normal patients and we told the doctor about the positive result of the test. The doctor who checked on us that time was relaxed and just told us to go home and isolate from the rest of people in our flat, which we did," she said.

The next day, however, Ria's fever rose and they decided to go again to Mubarak

Continued on Page 2



Gemma Lynn



KUWAIT: Gemma Lynn's body is kept in a coffin prior to the funeral.

## Assembly term to end July 1, says Speaker

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday that the current Assembly term, which has been marred with controversy and disputes, will come to an end tomorrow.

He said that he has received an Amiri Decree calling to end the current assembly term on July 1 and the term will be closed after discussing the financial status of the country. Ghanem said that he has received five motions to hold a special session to discuss a number of issues and he will

invite MPs to hold the session today.

During the special session, issues like amending the election law and amending a law that bars people convicted of insulting HH the Amir from contesting elections. The opposition has also submitted a motion to discuss changes to the country's nationality law to allow administrative courts to look into complaints related to citizenship, currently prohibited under the law.

Based on the speaker's statements, the Assembly will not discuss a motion submitted by opposition MPs calling to give priority to debate grillings against ministers ahead of grilling HH the prime minister. The motion was supposed to be discussed on July 6.

Ghanem meanwhile denied claims by opposition MPs that the government will impose taxes and raise charges on public services through emergency Amiri decrees during the recess of the Assembly.

Two MPs yesterday submitted a proposal calling on authorities to grant Kuwaiti citizenship to

father and brothers of Saudi policeman Abdulaziz Mohammad Al-Rasheedi, who was brutally killed by an Arab national on Monday.

The Arab first stabbed his own Kuwaiti mother to death before driving to another area. As Rasheedi tried to stop him, the murderer hit him and then stabbed him to death. A number of lawmakers had already called for honoring the family of the deceased by granting his relatives the Kuwaiti citizenship.

MP Abdullah Al-Turajji said yesterday he has sent a question to the interior minister asking him if the government had received lists of names of Kuwaiti citizens who hold other nationalities. Turajji said he has learned that a Gulf state has submitted to Kuwait, lists of names of Kuwaiti citizens holding other nationalities, banned under law, and names of stateless people who hold nationality of other countries. The lawmaker asked the minister if the lists include names of current and former MPs and senior government officials.

## Daughter held captive for 9 years by family

**KUWAIT:** The Public Prosecution in Kuwait is investigating a case involving five members of a family for allegedly keeping a woman member of the family confined to her room for the last nine years, Al-Jarida Arabic daily reported. According to the report, the woman was forced to marry a man who was 15 years elder to her.

However, she returned to her family home, refusing to live with her husband. Her father locked the daughter in her room where she remained in captivity ever since. Recently, she was able to send a message to one of her friends who reported the matter to the authorities who entered the house and rescued the woman, the daily added.

## OPEC+ expected to move to cool crude market

**LONDON:** The OPEC+ group of oil-producing countries will meet tomorrow and are expected to agree to boost production in August in order to meet demand and dampen recent price rises. While improvement in demand drove the group's most recent rises in production, now price levels will also be a guiding force behind the club's decisions.

After demand dropped when the coronavirus pandemic broke out last year and crude prices briefly turned negative, the club led by Saudi Arabia and Russia imposed sharp production cuts in order to raise prices. The 13 members of OPEC and their 10 allies in the OPEC+ grouping were rewarded by seeing prices for the two contracts of reference, Brent and WTI, recover to around \$75 per barrel, levels not seen since October 2018.

However that strategy has worked almost too well and the group is currently following a policy of cautiously turning the taps back on. While on the face of it buoyant prices are a boon for producers-and some of them will be pushing to increase output to cash in-there are also risks. Russia is expected to favor increasing output, as it has done at several recent OPEC+ meetings.

Continued on Page 2

## After Gaza war, lawyer builds Palestinian case

**GAZA CITY:** Overlooking war-battered Gaza from the tenth floor of a tower block, Palestinian human rights lawyer Raji Sourani has a new bundle of files-on victims of last month's war with the Zionists.

For years, he has been building cases in the Zionist-blockaded enclave to be submitted to the International Criminal Court. The 66-year-old lawyer has already filed dozens of cases with The Hague-based court since

2015, after the Palestinian Authority ratified the court's Rome Statute.

The cases represent Palestinian victims of war crimes committed by the Jewish state, according to the lawyer. For Sourani, the ICC chief prosecutor's announcement in March of a full investigation into the situation in the occupied territories was a day of hope. Sourani, who founded the Gaza-based Palestinian Centre for Human Rights in 1995, said an ICC investigation will allow victims to restore their "dignity" and see "proper justice".

"We are dreamers, because I mean, if you look around us, the fact is it's so sad, so bad. It's totally unbalanced," he said, weighing up his legal struggle against the might of the Zionist entity's

Continued on Page 2

## World passes three billion vaccine mark

**PARIS:** More than three billion COVID-19 vaccines have been administered around the world, an AFP tally found yesterday, as countries race to contain the virulent Delta variant that is fuelling outbreaks all over the globe.

Meanwhile, COVID-19 infections are rising again in Europe after falling for two and a half months, mainly because of the Delta variant in the UK and Russia, according to the tally.

The two countries have experienced not only the most new cases in Europe, but also the most rapid spread among those that have recorded more than 1,000 cases per day.

Russia has recorded 20,400 daily cases for the last seven days, or a 25 percent increase in a week, while the United Kingdom has registered

Continued on Page 2



GAZA CITY: Palestinian Ryad Eshkuntana and his daughter Suzy are pictured in Gaza City over one month after his wife and other children were killed in a Zionist air strike. — AFP



MOSCOW: People queue up to receive the Russia's Sputnik V vaccine against COVID-19 at a vaccination center set up in a shopping mall in Moscow yesterday. — AFP

## Local

# Crown Prince meets Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad; PM hosts envoys



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets the Czech Ambassador to Kuwait Martin Dvorak.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets the Belgian Ambassador to Kuwait Leo Peeters.



Deputy Chief of Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets the Senegalese Ambassador to Kuwait Abdulahad Mbacke.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Meanwhile, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace the outgoing Czech

Ambassador to Kuwait Martin Dvorak. His Highness the Prime Minister also received the outgoing Belgian Ambassador to Kuwait Leo Peeters yesterday. Separately, Deputy Chief of Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received the outgoing Senegalese Ambassador to Kuwait Abdulahad Mbacke — KUNA

## OPEC+ expected to move to cool...

Continued from Page 1

Moscow "may be more inclined to support a production increase in order to ensure a higher market share while limiting the risk of rising non-OPEC production," according to Ole Hansen from Saxobank.

"Pressure will likely not only come from within the group, but there will also be growing calls from key consumers to cool the market down, as countries come out of the other side of COVID-19 lockdowns," says Warren Patterson of ING bank. India is a notable example. The world's third-largest consumer of crude has been hit by a vicious coronavirus wave in recent months and has urged OPEC+ "to phase out crude output cuts to temper rising inflationary pressures", noted Stephen Brennock from PVM.

"If prices remain this high, this will eat into con-

sumers' disposable incomes and potentially choke economic growth, which, over time, will weigh on crude prices," explained Fawad Razaqzada of Thinkmarkets. The OPEC+ states have left themselves room for maneuver as they are currently still planning to leave 5.8 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude in the ground over the month of July that they could easily extract and sell. Most investors are currently expecting a modest rise of some 500,000 bpd over the month of August.

But OPEC+ always has the capacity to surprise. The outlook for crude demand has been steadily improving in recent months. In its last report in mid-June, the International Energy Agency (IEA) forecast that global demand would outstrip pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2022.

Jeffrey Halley of Oanda noted that demand will be boosted as "Americans embrace a travel intensive summer" on cars, planes, and cruises, as well as due to the fact that "the global vaccination rollout is improving".

As ever in recent months, the cartel will have to pay attention to diplomatic developments relating to one of its members in particular—Iran. — AFP

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: A tale...

Continued from Page 1

Hospital. But on the second visit, the two sisters were again sent home despite Ria's high fever.

Back at home, Ria's fever subsided but Gemma Lynn started feeling worse. She had a high fever and was having difficulty breathing. So the sisters, for a third time, took a taxi to Mubarak Hospital. This time, they were not turned away and due to the severity of Gemma Lynn's symptoms, she was admitted. Ria left her sister in the hospital and returned to her apartment. "I went home at nearly 1am. My sister called on her mobile phone and informed me she will be admitted in the emergency room.

The last word I heard was that she will not get the access to the phone and in case of any questions she had given my number to her doctor. That night she told me to take a rest. I was thinking she would be discharged the following day, but she was not discharged," Ria told the Kuwait Times, crying.

"The following day, my sister called. She said she is in the COVID ward of the hospital and she felt a bit better. I was elated at this news," Ria said. But she could only speak with her sister via phone since visitors are not allowed in the COVID wards.

Ria felt certain her sister was on the mend but then on June 19, Gemma Lynn started to deteriorate. "She said she felt very tired and sick and she could hardly breathe and they were moving her to the ICU," Ria explained. "I could hear her gasping for breaths. I was worried about her and

wanted to visit her, but they don't allow visitors on ICU, so I only got updates about her from the doctor through the phone. The doctor said she is a fighter and the doctor expected she would recover," she said. Sadly, Gemma Lynn did not make it.

"On June 27 I got a call from the hospital that my sister was ready to go home, so I was happy going back to the hospital but the happiness turned into sadness when I heard the real news about my sister," Ria said.

"When I arrived in Mubarak, they gave me a discharge report from the doctor saying my sister expired early morning (that same day) due to COVID-19. I was stunned and could not believe it. I was thinking maybe it was just a nightmare. I said my sister is alive and she spoke with me only a day ago. But she was pronounced dead. I just cried and cried," she said.

"I was allowed to see her for five minutes only for the last time. They had given me a PPE to just see her, in the afternoon, her body was brought to the cemetery for burial," Ria explained. "Just that fast, she died and until now I cannot believe she's gone. It was the longest day of my life. Very devastating. I should die first because I have more diseases than my sister," she told Kuwait Times.

Gemma Lynn leaves behind three children, all of them in the Philippines and studying.

"I feel that I owe her everything, especially in raising my only son. I left him with her when he was only few months old because I accepted the job offer as domestic helper to Kuwait in 1995," Ria recalled. "Now she is gone, and I promised her on her grave that I will take care of her children. Her eldest is 20 years old, the second is 18 years old and the youngest is 16 years old. They can live without me because they have a supportive father anyways, but I felt I owe her a lot, so I promised I will look after her children until I am alive also," she concluded

## World passes three billion...

Continued from Page 1

16,400 daily infections, up 70 percent, according to the tally based on official sources. Russian and UK officials blame the Delta strain first identified in India for the vast majority of new cases.

Driven by the situation in both countries, infections in Europe are rising again, now at the rate of 56,800 new cases per day — 21 percent more than a week ago. At least 3.9 million people have died from COVID-19, and while some wealthy countries are succeeding in bringing infections down thanks to strong vaccination drives, others where shots are not as readily available are struggling. According to the tally, high-income countries as defined by the World Bank have administered an average of 79 doses per 100 inhabitants, with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain taking the lead.

In low-income nations, the figure is just one shot per 100 people. Yesterday, foreign ministers from the Group of 20 major economies stressed the need for greater global cooperation in the face of the pandemic. "Multilateral cooperation will be key to our collective ability to stop this global health crisis," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the ministers in the ancient Italian city of Matera. Western leaders have pledged to donate one billion doses to poorer countries, but have been widely criticized for being too slow to help.

Vaccine hesitancy has also played a part in slow uptake. In Russia, which recorded its highest daily death toll yesterday since the outbreak of the pandemic, officials have introduced mandatory shots for some groups of citizens to counter skepticism. The country reported 652 coronavirus fatalities over the past 24

hours, with a record-high number of daily deaths — 119 — in Saint Petersburg, which is due to host a Euro 2020 quarter final on Friday.

Meanwhile, Australian public anger is growing at the slow pace of vaccinations in a country that had been broadly successful in eliminating local transmission and leading an almost-normal life.

The Delta variant has pushed Sydney, Perth, Darwin and Brisbane into lockdown, meaning a total of more than 10 million Australians are having to stay home. But so far, less than five percent of adults are believed to have received both vaccine doses. Brisbane resident Nicola Hungerford, 57, said she expected lockdowns to keep happening "until the government gets their bloody act together" on the vaccine rollout. "It's gobsmacking and they're just irresponsible. It shows how little respect they have for people," she said.

The speed of transmission of the Delta variant has fuelled concerns over ongoing or upcoming sporting events. Yesterday, Germany urged the British government to reduce the number of fans allowed into Wembley stadium for the final Euro 2020 matches. "I think it's irresponsible for tens of thousands to gather in close proximity" in countries where the Delta variant is spreading, Interior Minister Horst Seehofer told Germany's Augsburgers Allgemeine newspaper. UEFA and the British authorities have said some 45,000 supporters will be allowed to attend a game between England and Germany yesterday afternoon, equivalent to 50 percent of capacity. Attendance will be increased to 75 percent, or more than 60,000 fans, for the semi-finals and final at Wembley, in what will be the largest crowds at a sports event in Britain since the start of the pandemic. "It was really sad to see poor people burying their loved ones in an undignified manner, but the rising water level has made it worse," Sonu Chandel, a boatman, said. "There is always the fear of (a body) hitting the oar or (my boat) running over a dead body as the water level goes up." — AFP

## After Gaza war, lawyer builds...

Continued from Page 1

apparatus. Sourani and his team of 60 document everything they can to try to prove the Jewish state deliberately targets civilians in its battle against Gaza's rulers, the Islamist movement Hamas.

The occupation army blames Hamas for deliberately placing military targets in densely populated areas. His list is long: from the blockade since 2007 to victims' accounts of the 2014 Gaza war, to the suppression of the 2018 "Great March of Return" protests when Palestinians demanded the right to go back to homes their families fled or were expelled from during the Jewish state's creation in 1948. Now, he has added the latest Zionist attacks on Gaza.

Photographs of destroyed buildings, detailed lists of victims, reports on missiles used by the Zionist army, mapping of bombed locations; his painstaking work is stored in dozens of filing cabinets.

The lawyer, who studied in Egypt and Lebanon, said the last conflict was lopsided. The Zionist regime is "the mighty army in the Middle East, the one challenging Iran, Hezbollah, and bombing Syria," he said, waving to the devastation its bombardment wreaked on Gaza, a crowded territory of two million people. The May 10-21 conflict killed 260, including some fighters, according to Gaza authorities. The Zionist army denies targeting civilians and insists it does all it can to avoid "collateral damage". Not enough, according to Sourani. "Wars are between armies," he said.

"Civilians must be avoided," Sourani listed family after family killed in the Zionist strikes.

"Is Hamas the Shorouk Tower, the Hanadi Tower, the Jala Tower?" he asked angrily, naming commercial and residential tower blocks reduced to piles of smoking rubble because Zionists claimed they housed Hamas bases. "What have the water pipelines to do with Hamas? What has the electricity, the sewerage system, to do with Hamas?" he said, referring to infrastructure impacted in the conflict. To those who argue Zionists entity has the right to self-defense against Hamas rockets, the lawyer points to a power imbalance: One side has fighter jets, while the other side is a population under blockade.

"Gaza is the largest open-air prison," said Sourani. "They want to send us to the Stone Age." Sourani said that when he spent three years in Zionist jails, he used "every minute" to study Hebrew and humanitarian law. "I have lived my whole life under occupation. No one can say that the occupation is just," he said.

In his book-lined office sits a bust of Robert F Kennedy—a human rights award in memory of the late US senator's belief that individual moral courage can overcome injustice. Sourani, who received the award in 1991 along with Jewish lawyer Avigdor Feldman, is proud of the honor—but said he was disappointed that Joe Biden, then US vice president, had also received it in 2016.

"We want people who defend what Robert Kennedy said—justice for all," he said, criticizing Biden over his insistence on the Zionist entity's right to self-defense. "We don't want to see anything more than the rule of law, justice and dignity for the victims we represent," he said. "We have no personal wish for revenge, but I think Palestinians are entitled to justice and dignity." — AFP

Local

# Cabinet urges public in Kuwait to receive anti-COVID vaccine

**KUWAIT:** The Cabinet appealed to people to receive the anti-coronavirus vaccines to maintain safety of both individuals and the society. This came during the Cabinet's weekly meeting held at Seif Palace on Monday, under chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. It urged people to ignore all rumors and false information circulated about the vaccines, in light of the spread of the disease and its rapid repercussions that require concerted efforts of all as a common societal responsibility. This will help curb the transmission of the infections, Minister of Health and Acting Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Dr Basel Al-Sabah said after the meeting.

The Cabinet had decided to allow citizens and close relatives as well as accompanying housemaids who had taken the first jab of the anti-virus vaccine to pass through land and maritime exits as of yesterday. 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.

The Cabinet also announced the beginning of direct flights to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Britain, Spain, the US, The Netherlands, Italy, Austria, France, Kyrgyzstan, Germany, Greece and Switzerland as of 1/7/2021. In the same context, Dr Basel made a presentation to the Cabinet on the lat-

est developments relating to the coronavirus at local and international levels, in light of the new variants and the rise in infections all over the world. He also briefed on the Cabinet on the situation of the virus in Kuwait, in light of the latest data and statistics that show the rise in infections and patients at hospitals.

### Financial position

Meanwhile, the ministers were briefed on a presentation made by Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic and Investment Affairs Khalifa Hamada, CEO of Kuwait Investment Authority Farouk Ali Bastaki and Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Finance Aseel Suleiman Al-Munifi on the State's financial position on June 28, 2021. The Cabinet voiced its satisfaction about the Kuwaiti economy's state and the results of the unprecedented general performance of investment. It expressed appreciation to the efforts made by officials of the Ministry of Finance and authority in order to preserve, manage and develop these assets.

The Cabinet listened to a presentation made by Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Sabah Al-Sabah on the details of killing a Kuwaiti woman and policeman Abdulaziz Al-Rasheedi. The minister informed the Cabinet about the arrest of the killer who passed away while taking medicine. The General Department of Relations and Security Media at the Ministry said earlier that the killer was apprehended after gunfire exchange, and was immediately transferred to hospital but died effected by gunshot wounds. The Cabinet expressed its sorrow and sad-



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

ness over this gruesome crime, thanked the Interior Ministry's efforts to arrest the defendants in record time. The Cabinet affirmed the Kuwaiti society's rejection of such crimes which run counter to "our religion and values", offering sincere condolences to Rasheedi's family.

Furthermore, Minister of Education Ali Al-Mudhaf offered the results of the high school's final test, which was held in unexceptional health conditions. The Cabinet expressed appreciation to the efforts made by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health to create appropriate atmospheres to the test, in accordance with a plan along

with health requirements and preventive requirements recommended by the health authorities, in cooperation with all concerned authorities in order to preserve health and safety of students.

In addition, the ministers discussed the affairs of the National Assembly and were briefed on the agenda of the parliament's upcoming session. The Cabinet also discussed the political affairs in light of the latest developments on the Arab and international arenas. It expressed heartfelt condolences to US President Joe Biden on the collapse of a residential building in Florida State that killed or injured some people. — KUNA



**Ministers attend the Cabinet's meeting.**

## Law bars companies with non-Kuwaiti part owners from owning property

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Real Estate Union released a statement yesterday criticizing regulations that ban any Kuwaiti commercial company from owning properties in the country in case it has one or more non-Kuwaiti part owners. According to the union, the justice ministry has recently stopped transferring properties to companies that do not have full-Kuwaiti shareholders, based on a law that was issued in 1979. "Among the most important goals of the Real Estate Union are to create a secure umbrella that includes real estate owners in Kuwait to promote in the business community, defend the real estate owners' rights, and carry out an effective role in organizing and developing the sector," the union said.

"The union would like to announce, based on statements of several of its members, that the real estate registry and documentation department at the Ministry of Justice has stopped transfer of property to any real estate to shareholding company, public or closed, until after producing a list of company shareholders at the time of its formation, as well as a list of its current shareholders" that show that all of them are Kuwaiti, it explained. "This



**KUWAIT:** A general view of buildings in Kuwait City and its surrounding areas in this archive photo. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

is as per article 8 of decreed law 74 for 1979 to organize Kuwaitis' ownership of real estate, which bans ownership of real estate for companies in which non-Kuwaitis are partners, while companies must guarantee that there are no foreign shareholders among its shareholders' list."

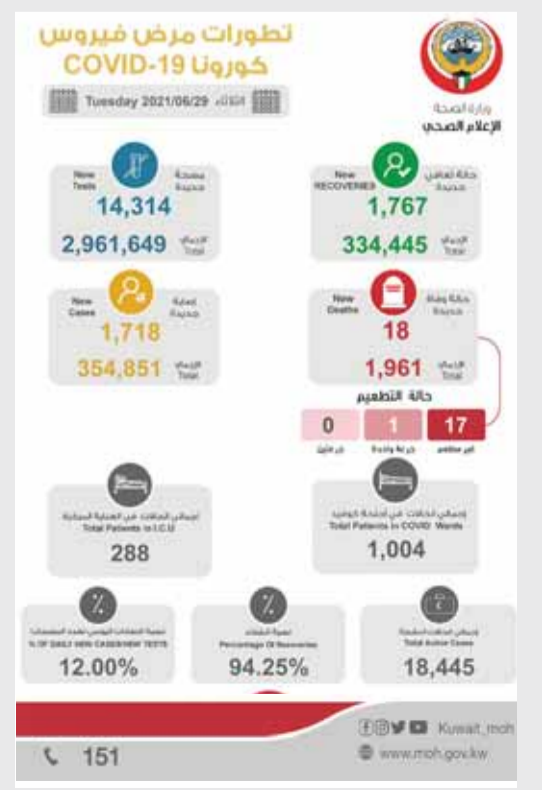
The union slammed this procedure which it says "causes direct and unacceptable damages" to Kuwaiti companies, especially real estate firms list-

ed in Boursa Kuwait. "The Kuwaiti stock exchange system allows non-Kuwaitis to buy stock, which means they can buy shares in a real estate company; at which point said company would be barred from acquiring any property inside Kuwait!" the union exclaimed. It urged action to change this law "that hurts efforts to attract foreign investors, promote Kuwait's stock exchange market and turn Kuwait into a financial and commercial hub."

## Kuwait reports highest single-day deaths record

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Ministry of Health yesterday reported 18 deaths related to the novel coronavirus that were recorded over the previous 24 hours: the highest single-day record since the disease spread in the country. The ministry also reported 1,718 new cases; up from 1,652 the previous day which saw 10 deaths registered. Of yesterday's reported deaths, 17 were for people unvaccinated against COVID-19 while one had taken a single dose. Total deaths have reached 1,961 and cases jumped to 354,851 as of yesterday.

In the meantime, the number of patients in intensive care units also climbed to 288 from 280 the previous day, while the total number of active cases went down from around 19,000 to 18,445, the health ministry said in its daily bulletin. The percentage of daily new cases to daily tests reached 12 as 14,314 swab tests were taken in the past 24 hours, the ministry said yesterday. In the meantime, total recoveries reached 334,445 after 1,767 fresh recoveries were registered within the same period. Thirty three percent of new COVID-19 cases were registered in the Ahmadi Governorate, while 24 percent were registered in Hawally, 18 percent in Farwaniya, 14 percent in Jahra and 11 percent in the Capital.



**RABAT:** Kuwait's delegation to the Arab Civil Aviation Organization's meetings. — KUNA

## Kuwait takes part in Arab Civil Aviation meetings

**RABAT:** Kuwait is taking part in meetings of the Arab Civil Aviation Organization's (ACAO) Executive Council, held in Rabat, Morocco, on 29-30 June. Kuwait's participation in the event is part of its executive membership in ACAO,

Director General of Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation Yousef Al-Fozan said in a statement. The meetings will focus on aviation safety and security, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and measures taken to face the crisis, he said. He added that the aviation in the Arab countries was strongly affected by the pandemic, hoping to find solutions to resolve the issue. Kuwait will also take part in the 26th session of the organization's General Secretariat on 1-2 July, which Kuwait currently chairs, Fozan noted. The meeting will include handing the secretariat's chairmanship to Lebanon. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Director General of Kuwait Humanitarian and Friendship Society Khaled Mohammad bin Sabt (right) with Director of the Deportation Department at the Interior Ministry Colonel Waleed Al-Ali.

## Society pay for deportees' travel tickets

**KUWAIT:** Director General of Kuwait Humanitarian and Friendship Society Khaled Mohammad bin Sabt visited Director of the Deportation Department at the Interior Ministry Colonel Waleed Al-Ali to present him airline tickets for insolvent deportees who are at the deportation department. "We work through a multi-stage strategy to strengthen cooperation with all state agencies as well as citizens and residents who support the society goals," Bin Sabt said. "The deportation department will provide us with the names of deportees who are insolvent, while the society's administration will make airline tickets available for them," he added.

**Kuwait Times**  
Established 1961  
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT  
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF  
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher  
**YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN**

Editor-in-Chief  
**ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN**

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432  
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7  
FAX : 24835620/1  
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163  
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125  
COMMERCIAL : 24835618  
P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.  
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com  
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

#### News in brief

#### Municipality employees referred to prosecution

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) announced yesterday referring employees from Kuwait Municipality to the Public Prosecution for forging official documents. Nazaha said it referred supervisors and other employees to the prosecutor as part of its crackdown on corruption and the corrupted in line with Law No 2 (2016), the authority said in a statement. It did not elaborate on the specific nature of documents nor identity of those referred. Nazaha commended people who report any corruption-related issues, and reasserted it was providing full protection and confidentiality for the informants.

#### 200K civil IDs in PACI machines

**KUWAIT:** More than 200,000 civil IDs are placed in machines at the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI), the majority of which are for people who have renewed their residencies while stuck abroad, according to a local report. The stacked IDs make it difficult to place new ones in the machines, although PACI is preparing a plan to provide IDs to those who urgently need them. Al-Qabas Arabic daily wrote yesterday, quoting an anonymous PACI official. According to the source, the Kuwait Mobile ID smartphone app has solved the issue for people who are yet to receive their physical civil IDs, ever since it has been approved by state departments, banks and other entities.

#### Kuwait oil gains 36 cents

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait crude oil gained 36 cents during Monday's trading sessions to reach \$74.94 per barrel (pb) compared with \$74.58 pb last Friday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Benchmark Brent futures dropped \$1.50 to reach \$74.68 pb and West Texas Intermediate lost \$1.14 to \$72.91 pb.

# Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center nominated for int'l award

**KUWAIT:** The Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center has been nominated for the 2021 LCD Berlin Awards under the category of 'New Cultural Destination of the Year' (Middle East/Africa). Other nominees include the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, and the Museum of the Future in Dubai, UAE.

The awards, known as the 'Oscars for Museums', aims to "shine a light on the most exceptional offerings of the world's existing and emerging leading cultural destinations, celebrating the vibrancy of cultural organizations and connecting arts and tourism worldwide," according to a description posted on its official website. "For the awards, LCD and visitBerlin identify and recognize the most creative and innovative projects from cultural institutions and initiatives shaping culture worldwide."

Established to be one of the world's largest cultural projects, the Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center comprises Natural History Museum, Science and Technology Museum, Arabic Islamic Science Museum, Space Museum, Fine Arts Centre, and Theater. The Center was named after one of the most inspiring leaders in Kuwait's modern history, the late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. The Center is home to a total of 22 world-class galleries, with over 3000 exhibits, exploring the facets of our world.

The nominations for Europe include the Munch Museum in Oslo, Norway, James Simon Gallery in Berlin, Germany, and National Gallery in Athens, Greece. For North America, the nominees are The Momentary in Bentonville, Arkansas, US, Oklahoma Contemporary in Oklahoma City, US and Fotografiska



KUWAIT: The Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center — KUNA photos

New York, in New York City, US. For Latin America, the Nominees are the Museo Regional De Aysen in Aysen, Chile and the Museum of Image and Sound in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, while the nominees for Asia Pacific include X Museum in Beijing, China, National Kaohsiung Center For the Arts Weiwuying in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, and the Museum of Underwater

Art in Queensland, Australia.

"We aim not only to celebrate and showcase the radiance and soft power of cultural organizations, but also to inspire a dynamic exchange and establish a global network between culture and travel," Leading Culture Destinations (LCD) wrote on the awards' website.



## NBK Academy celebrates 24th batch's graduation

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) Academy celebrated the graduation of the 24th batch, the 1st in 2021, of newly hired employees who successfully met admission criteria for this intensive course, specially designed for fresh Kuwaiti university graduates.

The graduation ceremony was attended by Salah Al-Fulaij, CEO of NBK - Kuwait, Sulaiman Al-Marzouq, Deputy CEO of NBK - Kuwait, Emad Al-Ablani, GM - Group Human Resources and Mohammed Al-Othman, GM - Consumer Banking Group, in addition to other executives from the bank, in line with all precautionary measures and social distancing to protect everyone's safe.

The Academy's training program, which lasted for four months, hosted 13 participants and covered various areas of the banking business, such as banking principles, risk management, financial accounting, marketing, negotiation, consumer and commercial lending, as well as training on creativity, innovation and design thinking. Various blended learning interventions occurred through in person and virtual courses.

Furthermore, their development continues through eLearning after the academy ends.

On this occasion, Najla Al-Sager, Head of Talent Management, Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "NBK Academy, launched 12 years ago, embodies the bank's strategy to recruit fresh graduate national talents, and aims to develop and enable them to work in the banking sector."

NBK has a firm belief in the importance of investing in its people by providing a unique environment in the areas of employee training and development, which contributes to enhance their skills and help them build a successful career path that supports sustaining the bank's growth in the future, she added. It is worth mentioning that the program content is regularly enhanced to keep pace with the latest international researches and studies related to the banking sector and administrative sciences.

The Academy reflects NBK's vision to support sustainable human capital development as one of its top strategic priorities and a shared responsibility between the various governmental institutions and the private sector. NBK Academy was inaugurated in 2008 with the aim to pave the way for new Kuwaiti graduates to join the banking services sector. The Academy provides graduates with the best training programs developed in cooperation with leading international institutions and universities to meet the demands of the labor market.



Najla Al-Sager



**Kuwait Times**  
ESTABLISHED 1961  
THE FIRST DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

STAY CONNECTED



- Read Kuwait Times now on your phone for **FREE**
- Send Subscribe to **+965 944 88888**
- Enjoy the first daily paper in Kuwait on your phone

P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait

Tel: 24833199 - 24833358 - 24835616/7 | Fax: 24835620 - 24835621

E: info@kuwaittimes.net



COVID returnees give Bulgaria hope of stemming the exodus

## US sending 2.5 million COVID vaccine doses to Bangladesh

Page 7

Page 6



AL-BAB, Syria: Displaced Syrian Mustafa Shaaban Abu Khalil walks alongside his son who lost a leg due to bombing, on a street in the rebel-held city of al-Bab northwest of Aleppo in northern Syria. —AFP

# Syria wounded fear closure of aid corridor

## A Russian veto threatens to jeopardize life-saving assistance

**AL-BAB, Syria:** In a camp in northwest Syria, Mohamad al-Abdullah relies on UN aid to treat a spinal injury that could have paralyzed him had it not been for cross-border aid. But that life-saving assistance is now threatened by a Russian veto. With Moscow threatening to shut the region's last crossing from Turkey at a UN Security Council vote in the coming days, the 17-year-old and millions like him risk losing a vital conduit for medical and food supplies.

"All my medicine comes from abroad through the crossing," Mohammad told AFP from his tent in the opposition-held Syrian town of Azaz. He still has pieces of shrapnel lodged in his back and ribs from a 2014 car bomb blast that wounded his spine, killed his father and prompted him to flee Deir Ezzor in Syria's east to seek refuge in the northwest.

"If (the shrapnel) moved only a millimeter, I would be paralyzed. That's what the doctors told me," he said. "If the crossing closes, I will sit idly in this tent, unable to move, because if it wasn't for my medicine, I wouldn't be able to stand up from the pain."

The painkillers he desperately needs reach Azaz via the opposition-controlled Bab al-Hawa crossing on the Turkish border, the only entry point for UN

assistance into Syria's beleaguered northwest.

But the resolution authorizing such deliveries expires on July 10 — by which time the Security Council must have voted on its renewal. Damascus ally Moscow says the UN mandate on the border violates Syria's sovereignty, and wants to close Bab Al-Hawa when the current provision expires, re-routing aid through regime-controlled territory. The UN has warned that blocking aid via the crossing could cause a "humanitarian catastrophe".

### 'Medical crisis'

More than three million people live in the Idlib region in Syria's northwest, much of which is controlled by jihadists and allied rebels. Around 2.4 million people there need humanitarian aid, according to the UN. It says some 1,000 trucks have passed through the crossing every month over the past year, carrying in vital COVID-19 vaccines, hospital equipment and medicine for diabetes, tuberculosis and leishmaniasis.

NGOs have warned that re-routing such supplies through regime-held territory could lead to disaster. "The notion that the Syrian government can replace

UN aid is absurd," Amnesty International's Syria researcher Diana Semaan said on Friday. There is currently no agreement between the UN and Damascus to authorize UN aid deliveries to the northwest from inside Syria.

Aid groups have repeatedly accused Damascus of hindering humanitarian assistance to areas outside its control. "The Syrian authorities have a long history of diverting and obstructing humanitarian aid," Amnesty International said in a statement.

It warned against a "medical crisis" in the northwest similar to the one currently gripping northeastern Syria after the closure of another checkpoint there under Russian pressure last year.

Ireland and Norway, non-permanent members of the Security Council, presented a draft resolution Friday aiming to keep Bab Al-Hawa open for one year. Permanent members the United States, France and Britain had also wanted to reopen the nearby Bab al-Salam crossing with Turkey, which was shut last year, diplomats have said. The International Rescue Committee has pushed for Bab al-Salam to be reopened, arguing that "one crossing alone has proved insufficient to meet the scale of needs".

### Price hikes

Sitting outside his shop in the town of Al-Bab, Mustafa Shaaban said his entire family relies on life-saving medicine delivered by the UN and its partners. The 57-year-old, who escaped a regime offensive on Aleppo city, said he injured his skull during Russian bombardment of Al-Bab years ago.

The same attack killed his eldest son and blew off his other son's leg, forcing him to use a prosthetic limb. Separate shelling on their house wounded his grandson and his daughter, who underwent three intestinal surgeries and is now equipped with a stomach prosthesis.

She desperately needs drugs for the pain and for her stomach. "The effect on our family will be a big one," if Bab al-Hawa closes, he said. Back in Azaz, Ahmad Hamra, a displaced Syrian also from Aleppo, said he had lost both his legs in an airstrike on the city that killed his brother. He now takes daily doses of pain killers, which have seen price hikes amid a nationwide economic crisis. "I get all my medicine (for free) from clinics," the 37-year-old said from inside his tent in an Azaz displacement camp. "I can't afford to go and buy it from pharmacies." —AFP

## Thousands rally to protest US strikes in Iraq

**BAGHDAD:** Thousands of members of Iraq's Hashed Al-Shaabi paramilitary alliance gathered in Baghdad yesterday to mourn comrades killed in US air strikes along the Syrian border. The American raids early Monday sparked an exchange of fire between pro-Iranian militias and the US-led coalition in eastern Syria, and heightened fears of a new US-Iran escalation amid ongoing efforts to revive Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with major powers.

With chants of "vengeance for the martyrs", the Hashed members massed in Freedom Square near the Iraqi capital's high-security Green Zone where the US embassy is located.

Security forces were deployed in large numbers, sealing off the Green Zone after a string of recent incursions by armed groups backed by Washington's arch-enemy Tehran. Several high-ranking Hashed figures took part in the symbolic funeral, including its top commander Faleh Al-Fayyadh and Hadi Al-Ameri, head of one of its main factions, the Badr

Organization.

Many of the mourners, accompanied by vehicles packed with armed men, wore black and held up signs reading: "Attacks on the Hashed must speed up the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq."

Others carried pictures of the revered Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and Hashed's former second-in-command Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, who were killed in a US drone strike near Baghdad airport early last year. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitoring group said yesterday that nine fighters were killed in the strikes near the Albu Kamal district on the Syrian side of the border, updating an earlier toll after two of the wounded had succumbed to their injuries. The group earlier reported that a weapons store had been destroyed.

### 'Strong message'

The Hashed, most of whose commanders are backed by Tehran and which has become the main power broker in Baghdad, said four of its fighters were killed in the Qaim region near the border. The fighters were stationed there to prevent jihadists infiltrating Iraq, the group said, denying they had taken part in any attacks against US interests or personnel and



BAGHDAD: Women hold signs showing posters of (right to left) slain Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander Qasem Soleimani and Iraq's Hashed Al-Shaabi commander Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis (both assassinated by a US drone strike in early 2020) and a slain Hashed fighter, during a symbolic funeral parade organized by the Hashed in the capital Baghdad yesterday. —AFP

warning they had "the legal right to respond... and hold the perpetrators accountable on Iraqi soil".

The Pentagon said the strikes targeted operational and weapons storage facilities at two locations in Syria and one in Iraq, all near the common border, that had been used by militias engaged in drone attacks against US interests in Iraq. US forces were subsequently "attacked by multiple rock-

ets" in eastern Syria, but there were no casualties and personnel "conducted counter-battery artillery fire at rocket launching positions", coalition spokesman Wayne Marotto said on Twitter. American forces in Iraq, where 2,500 US 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. —AFP

## G20 talks urge greater global cooperation

**MATERA, Italy:** G20 ministers led by the United States said yesterday that the coronavirus pandemic showed the need for greater global cooperation, as African nations sought help to develop their medical infrastructure. In a sharp reversal from the previous US administration, Secretary of State Antony Blinken emphasized the need for multilateral institutions as foreign ministers from the Group of 20 major economies met in the ancient Italian city of Matera.

"Multilateral cooperation will be key to our collective ability to stop this global health crisis," said Blinken, winding down a week-long trip to Europe.

"That's also true for the work we must do to strengthen global health security moving forward so we can detect, prevent and respond better to future health emergencies."

Blinken pointed to US contributions to COVAX, the UN-backed initiative that aims to vaccinate low-income countries, including President Joe Biden's promise to provide 500 million Pfizer doses.

Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, the host of the talks, said that the pandemic, which has hit his country particularly hard, exposed global vulnerabilities. "Multi-lateralism and cooperation are fundamental in responding to global challenges," he said.

Foreign Minister Christophe Lutundula of the Democratic Republic of Congo, participating as part of an Italian push to involve African nations in G20 talks, warned that coronavirus was far from over in his continent and called for urgent measures. In addition to immediate aid, he called for the G20 to back the capacity of developing countries to pro-

duce vaccines themselves and to help launch a continent-wide agency that will encourage scientific cooperation.

The G20 must help "concretely and in detail so we move beyond speeches to urgent action on the ground," he said.

Such cooperation "will help African countries counter the shock of COVID and revive their economies for the greater good of the international community", he said. The talks will prepare for a G20 leaders' meeting in October in Rome that is expected to see the first summit between US President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping amid soaring tensions between the world's two largest economies. With China participating virtually in Matera, yesterday's conference was focused more on general themes but marked a major US shift following the defeat of former president Donald Trump, who belittled international institutions as part of his "America First" philosophy. —AFP

## Iran 'examining' whether to extend IAEA monitoring deal

**TEHRAN:** Iran is "examining" whether to extend an agreement to allow the UN to monitor some of its nuclear activities, government spokesman Ali Rabii said yesterday.

Questions around IAEA cameras and other surveillance tools are part of broader talks underway in Vienna to try to salvage Iran's tattered 2015 nuclear deal with major powers. Iran restricted access to some of its nuclear facilities to inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN's nuclear watchdog, in February under a law passed late last year.

Since then, the Islamic Republic has refused to provide real-time footage from IAEA cameras and data from other surveillance devices that the UN agency has installed in these locations. The IAEA and Tehran have nevertheless negotiated a compromise that guarantees a certain degree of monitoring of Iran's nuclear program. The monitoring equipment remains in the IAEA's custody, but the data is in the possession of Iran and should not be deleted as long as the arrangement remains in force.

Initially agreed for three months, the compromise was extended for a further month but then expired on June 24. The IAEA has since been urging Tehran to inform it of its intentions.

Regarding the agreement with the IAEA, "we are examining the need [to renew it] and any other possibility," Rabii said yesterday, without elaborating, at a press conference in Tehran.

On Monday, the Iranian foreign ministry had said "no decision" on the deletion or retention of the recorded data had been taken yet. The 2015 nuclear deal offered Tehran relief from Western and UN sanctions in exchange for a commitment to never acquire nuclear weapons, and a drastic reduction of its nuclear program. But the pact was torpedoed in 2018 by former US president Donald Trump, who unilaterally withdrew the United States and reimposed US sanctions and imposed new ones. In retaliation, Iran renounced most of its key commitments restricting its controversial nuclear activities, which it says are for peaceful purposes only. —AFP

## International

# COVID returnees give Bulgaria hope of stemming the exodus

## Returning emigrants may halt country's chronic population decline

**SOFIA:** Nicko Ventsislav is part of an unprecedented phenomenon: one of the six Bulgarians who chose to return home last year for everyone who left. The 29-year-old joins returning emigrants who have been pushed back in part by coronavirus-induced economic downturns and job losses in their adopted countries, and pulled back in part by lower costs and a better lifestyle in the land of their birth.

In the search for a silver lining from the pandemic, that's led some in Bulgaria to hope that the flood of returning emigrants may help stem the country's chronic population decline. Bulgaria's population began to fall in 1989, the year its communist regime collapsed. It peaked at around nine million and has since shrunk each year to seven million people by 2019, according to World Bank estimates.

Ventsislav was part of that drain, leaving the former Soviet bloc country and now-European Union member almost a decade ago. But after losing his job at Nice airport in southeastern France at the start of the pandemic, Ventsislav's focus returned to his homeland.

"On the 70th day of lockdown in France, I started to browse job adverts" back home, he said. He was lured by an offer from Telus International Bulgaria, a business process outsourcing company that targets potential returnees. They paid for his plane ticket and offered him 5,000 leva (2,550 euros, \$3,040) to help him relocate.

### Pandemic a 'big boost'

Since 2017, Telus has brought back about 150 young Bulgarians, says General Manager Kristina Ivanova, adding that the pandemic gave their efforts a big boost. Even though life is getting back to normal across Europe, Ventsislav says he plans to "stay home".

"I have a permanent contract; I found an apartment, hobbies and entertainment are cheaper here so at the end of the month I have more money left than I would in France," he says. Desislava Nikolova, a 38-year-old project manager at French sporting goods retailer Decathlon, has been teleworking since last spring and spending most of her time in Bulgaria.

"I get a (Western) European salary that I spend in Bulgaria where... prices are much lower than those in Europe. This is the ideal combination," she says, while juggling work tasks on her laptop at a cafe in downtown Sofia. She says she decided to come back to spend more time with her family and friends, as Bulgaria was never subjected to a strict lockdown. "In France we couldn't even go to the hairdresser's, but here things haven't closed at all," she says.

### 'Live in a bubble'

And even if she doesn't return to Bulgaria permanently, she says she would love to be able to spend at least half the year in the country. "We live in a bubble in Bulgaria—easy access to the sea and the mountains, good balance between work and leisure," says Hristo Boyadzhiev, chief of the Tuk-Tam ("Here-There") non-profit group that helps returnees to reintegrate in Bulgaria.

Still, it's not all plain sailing. Several people weighing up a return complained to AFP about red tape, corruption, bad management and workplace ethics. Others have grown used to more global lifestyles.

After a year of teleworking from Sofia, Mariya Peykova, 32, plans to return soon to her finance job in Paris. "I miss the city with its bike lanes, its beauty and cosmopolitan character," she says.

For Pascal Zhelezov, it was hard to re-adapt to



**SOFIA:** Nicko Ventsislav, 29, talks to a colleague at an office in Sofia. The year Bulgaria ended communist rule in 1990, the country's nine million population shrank by about 200,000 - and has continued to drop each year since then, sliding to 7 million people in 2019. —AFP

the mindset he found on his return after 14 years in the United States. Zhelezov says he felt "astounded by the pessimism, even nihilism" he found among his compatriots, not to mention the widespread belief in conspiracy theories.

Many of the returnees took part in anti-corruption protests that swept Bulgaria last year, decrying the perceived arrogance and venality of the political elite. A recent report for the United Nations Population Fund mentions the opportunity for countries in the region to "retain at least some returnees" as a result of the pandemic, pointing to the value they bring in terms of "experience and connections to global networks and markets". But

Tomcho Tomov from the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce estimates that most of the pandemic returnees have already left again.

"The majority of companies have failed to jump at this opportunity despite the labor shortage, because of the uncompetitive salaries," he says. In an effort to maintain the momentum of returnees to Bulgaria, two television channels tell the success stories of those who have come home in the hope of inspiring others to follow suit.

"Life abroad weighs you down: you make money, but you don't have time to spend it," says Petya Kertikova, who lived in the US before returning to host the TV show "The Returnees".

## Tigray rebels vow to drive out 'enemies'

**ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia:** Dissident leaders in Ethiopia's war-hit Tigray have vowed to drive out "enemies" from the region, suggesting fighting will continue despite a federal government ceasefire declaration. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray last November to oust the northern region's former ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

He said the move came in response to TPLF attacks on federal army camps, and promised that victory would be swift. But almost eight months on, the operation suffered a serious blow when rebels known as the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) entered the regional capital Mekele on Monday, prompting celebrations in the streets as federal soldiers and members of an Abiy-appointed interim regional government fled.

Abiy's government then announced Monday night it was declaring a "unilateral ceasefire," though there was no immediate response from the TDF.

A statement overnight from Tigray's pre-war government hailed the TDF advances and said Mekele was fully under its control. "The government of Tigray calls upon our people and army of Tigray to intensify their struggle until our enemies completely leave Tigray," the statement said.

### Rebels march on

Communications appeared to be cut throughout the region on Tuesday, making it difficult to verify reports of troop movements. The International Crisis Group, a conflict prevention organization, said the TDF was "now in control of most of the region, including major towns." A UN official briefed on the security situation yesterday that Ethiopian troops and their Eritrean allies had fled the town of Shire, about 140 kilometers (87 miles) northwest of Mekele, sparking further street celebrations.

"The population has taken to the streets in droves. Huge crowds line the main routes and movement is somewhat difficult," read a UN security assessment distributed yesterday afternoon. It said Ethiopian and Eritrean checkpoints had been vacated, and representatives of Tigray's Abiy-appointed interim government had also fled.

Shire is home to hundreds of thousands of displaced Tigrayans, and the assessment noted that humanitarian operations continued even after four vehicles carrying TDF fighters arrived from the east before noon. More TDF fighters were expected to reach Shire later in the afternoon and evening.

For months the TDF did not hold any major cities and towns, but its leaders have repeatedly boasted that they were regrouping in remote rural areas. Its recent gains come about a week after it launched a major offensive that coincided with Ethiopia's highly anticipated national elections.

The brutal war in Tigray has been marked by massacres, widespread sexual violence and other abuses. — AFP

## Turkish reporters demand protection after violent arrest

**ISTANBUL:** Dozens of reporters in Istanbul and Ankara rallied yesterday demanding protection from the police following the violent arrest of an AFP photographer during a banned Istanbul Pride event.

Award-winning photographer Bulent Kilic filed a "violent arrest" complaint against police officers who pinned him to the ground with their legs against his neck and back while he was covering the march on Saturday. He was released without charges after being taken to a police station for questioning. Dozens of Pride event protesters were also briefly detained.

AFP chief executive Fabrice Fries "strongly protested" the incident in a letter urging Turkish officials to "swiftly investigate this incident and take the necessary measures so that the involved officers are held accountable". Dozens of journalists

rallied near the Istanbul governor's mansion yesterday holding photos of Kilic's head pinned to the ground and signs saying: "We can't breathe".

"Press freedoms cannot be silenced," they chanted while some hung their cameras to the fence surrounding the governor's mansion in protest. Many reporters in Turkey have drawn parallels between the manner of Kilic's arrest and the killing of African American George Floyd by white police officers last year.

Similar slogans rang out during an unsanctioned event attended by dozens of reporters in a park in the Turkish capital Ankara. "Our colleagues face violence for simply doing their job," the Turkish Journalists' Association's Ankara branch head Esra Kocak Mayda said as anti-riot police observed a short distance away.

Reporters Without Borders' (RSF) Turkey representative Erol Onderoglu



**ISTANBUL:** Journalists and protesters hold an image of AFP photographer Bulent Kilic and signs reading 'we can't breathe' during a demonstration in front of the Governor's Mansion in Istanbul, yesterday held to demand protection for journalists. —AFP

called on the government "to provide clear instructions for state security forces to end this unacceptable and unfair treatment before it is too late". Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government comes under relentless criticism for stifling the

media and political dissent.

Reporters say their jobs became even more difficult after the Turkish police issued a circular in late April banning the dissemination of images or audio of officers without their consent. —AFP

## Concerns over Slovenia EU presidency

**LJUBLJANA, Slovenia:** Slovenia will tomorrow take up the EU's rotating six-month presidency overshadowed by concerns for media freedom and the rule of law under its conservative Prime Minister Janez Jansa. It will be the second time the Alpine state of two million people heads the 27-member bloc under Jansa.

But while in 2008, it was celebrated as a milestone since the ex-Yugoslav nation's independence, the mandate now could be bumpier. Slovenia's presidency comes at a sensitive time when the EU dispenses money from its unprecedented 750-billion-euro (\$900-billion) rescue fund aimed at helping member economies recover from the coronavirus pandemic. Under the slogan "Together. Resilient. Europe", the Jansa government says its priorities include steering the bloc's economic recovery and strengthening its resilience to pandemics.

### 'European values'

Slovenia also wants to "strengthen the rule of law and European values", according to the government's websites on the presidency. But that could be tricky: EU leaders have recently argued over a Hungarian law banning the "promotion" of homo-

sexuality to minors that is expected to come into force soon. At a summit last week, EU leaders attacked Viktor Orban—a close Jansa ally—over the legislation, which they view as homophobic and contrary to EU values, while the Hungarian nationalist premier argues it protects children. Jansa's comments in Brussels on the matter were guarded, saying he thought it could be resolved without any "new unnecessary divisions".

"We have to strengthen the EU, within which our values and national identities are protected and can continue to thrive," Jansa wrote on the presidency website. Hoping to integrate its Western Balkan neighbors, Slovenia has planned a summit in October—the only high-profile event during the six months. But whether Jansa can be a uniting mediator remains to be seen, with critics raising concerns about his alliances.

Last week, the three-time premier met far-right Brothers of Italy party leader Giorgia Meloni, just before he met Orban, as well as Poland's Mateusz Morawiecki. In his tweets, Jansa has attacked EU officials, including European Parliament members who had expressed their concern over the situation of democracy and rule of law in Slovenia. "We owe the EU nothing. We fought for our freedom and democracy 30 years ago," the 62-year-old, whose most recent mandate began in March 2020, tweeted in May.

### 'Cool' relations

Jansa's numerous spats have led to the "cooling of relations" between Ljubljana and the European

remain in Germany, may have been radicalized.

"The Bavarian Central Office for Extremism and Terrorism has taken over the probe because an Islamist motive is likely," Bavarian state prosecutors and the state criminal investigations office said in a statement. The 24-year-old man on Friday went on a knife rampage in the city of Wuerzburg, stabbing three women to death and leaving six other people seriously injured.

The Somali suspect, who arrived in Germany in 2015, struck in the city center, first at a household goods store before moving on to a bank. He was cornered by bystanders, then overpowered by police after they shot him in the thigh.

Investigators found records showing that the man had been treated at a psychiatric institution, and



**BRUSSELS:** In this file photo, Slovenia's Prime Minister Janez Jansa arrives on the first day of a European Union (EU) summit at The European Council Building in Brussels. —AFP

Commission at a time when the country is under increased scrutiny because of the presidency, daily Delo's columnist Uros Esih wrote recently.

"I believe there will be constant tensions between the Slovenian presidency, its proposals and the EU institutions," the political commentator said. The government so far has failed to appoint two prosecutors to the EU's new anti-corruption body, leading its head to criticize Slovenia for its "manifest lack of sincere cooperation". "These are the things that worry us," French Green MEP Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, a European Parliament rapporteur on Hungary, told AFP, underlining "the closeness of the Slovenian prime minister and Viktor Orban". —AFP

police said he was not a known Islamist. However the Bavarian authorities said a number of factors made an Islamic extremist motive appear probable.

The German government has been hesitant to classify the assault as a terror attack and urged the public to wait until the investigation is complete before drawing conclusions.

Chancellor Angela Merkel said "what is certain is that the horrific act is directed at all humanity and every religion", her spokesman Steffen Seibert tweeted on Saturday. However the mass-selling Bild newspaper accused the government of turning a blind eye to indications of a radical Islamist motive, while the conservative broadsheet Frankfurt Allgemeine Zeitung said Germany needed to "bid farewell to its illusions" about migration. — AFP

## International

# US sending 2.5 million COVID vaccine doses to Bangladesh

## South Asian country confronts fresh waves of infections

WASHINGTON: The United States began shipping 2.5 million doses of Moderna's COVID vaccine to Bangladesh yesterday, a White House official told AFP, as the South Asian country confronted a wave of new infections. "Thanks to the US commitment to playing a leading role in ending the pandemic everywhere, 2.5 million doses of the Moderna vaccine will begin to ship to Bangladesh," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Illustrating the urgency, delivery is expected to be completed this week. Bangladesh, which neighbors India, began a severe lockdown on Monday in response to spiraling infections from the Delta variant. People are restricted to their homes, with offices closed, traffic shut down and the security forces enforcing compliance.

The South Asian country of around 170 million people recorded nearly 6,000 cases last Friday. Authorities say that districts near the Indian border are suffering especially badly, with hospitals in the cities of Khulna and Rajshahi overwhelmed. Bangladesh "has a 55 percent week-over-week increase in cases, driven largely by the Delta variant," a White House official said, explaining how the country made it onto the urgent list.

President Joe Biden has declared the United States the world's vaccine "arsenal" in the war on COVID-19. The role reflects US pharmaceutical power but also Biden's emphasis on restoring Washington's leadership around the world after the tempestuous and often chaotic years under Donald Trump.

US officials deny they are competing in "vaccine diplomacy" with authoritarian China and Russia, which have used nationally produced vaccines to fill the supply vacuum in less-developed regions during the pandemic.

### No 'strings attached'

Like many other countries, Bangladesh has desperately sought more vaccines and has not been picky about where they come from. Health minister Zahid Maleque said in May that the country wants to buy 50 million doses from China's Sinopharm. It also wants to buy five million Sputnik doses, foreign minister A K Abdul Momen said after meeting the Russian ambassador this month.

The White House pointedly said that its vaccine shipments—mostly made through the World Health Organization's Covax program—come free in all senses. "We are sharing these doses not to secure favors or extract concessions. Our vaccines do not come with strings attached. We are doing this with the singular objective of saving lives," the official said.

The Biden administration has committed to donating \$2 billion to Covax and also purchasing 500 million Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines for the African Union and 92 poorer countries. At the recent G7 summit in Britain, US partners agreed to donate another 500 million doses.

"Putting an end to this pandemic requires eliminating it around the world," the White House official said. "This is a unique moment in history and it requires American leadership."



MUNSHIGANJ, Bangladesh: In this file photo people board a ferry to leave for celebrations during a lockdown imposed to contain the spread of the COVID-19 in the Munshiganj district of Dhaka. —AFP

Additionally, some 80 million doses from the US supply are earmarked for foreign allocation by the end of June. Two million doses of the Pfizer vac-

cine are now being shipped to Peru and 1.5 million Moderna doses to Pakistan, the White House said earlier Monday. —AFP

## Rights take back seat under HK security law

HONG KONG: China's national security law for Hong Kong has shaken the city's legal foundations in the year since it was imposed, lawyers say, with court decisions and sweeping new powers for prosecution fuelling concerns about rights and the rule of law.

Unlike the Communist Party-controlled courts in mainland China, Hong Kong has an internationally respected common law system that forms the bedrock of its reputation as a global financial hub.

Circumventing Hong Kong's own legislature, the security law was drafted in Beijing with the wording kept secret until it came into force on June 30 last year as authorities tightened controls after massive and often violent pro-democracy protests in 2019.

In the year since the law was enacted, Hong Kong judges have declared that jury trials are not a constitutional right, and the presumption of bail

is not guaranteed in national security cases.

"It's like an alien species invading our territory, an unstoppable sandstorm sweeping from the north," a defense lawyer told AFP. He was one of four defense counsels involved in ongoing national security cases that spoke to AFP, on condition of anonymity so they could speak freely.

They alleged that Hong Kong courts now only "paid lip service" to rights when national security rules came up against longstanding protections in the city's own legal system. Authorities have arrested 114 people under the security law, and 64 of them have been prosecuted.

A watershed moment came last week, when the trial of the first person charged under the security law began without a jury and with three specially selected judges. Trial-by-jury has been a 176-year-old cornerstone of Hong Kong's common law system.

Constitutional law scholars have warned of the threat to the city's legal system, with courts trying to avoid irritating Chinese authorities, who hold final authority in security law cases. "When (the court) gives up a fundamental right without any rigorous scrutiny, it is also providing an intellectual rationalisation for a draconian regime," Johannes Chan, the University of Hong Kong's

coronavirus restrictions during elections her National League for Democracy (NLD) party won by a landslide last year, her lawyer Min Min Soe told reporters. "She asked the people to stay united and be consistent," she added.

The specially-convened court in the capital Naypyidaw also heard testimony on a separate charge of sedition, although Suu Kyi's legal team argued two documents submitted by the prosecution were inadmissible as they were unsigned. Former president Win Myint and senior NLD leader Myo Aung are also on trial for sedition and appeared beside Suu Kyi yesterday. Myanmar has been in turmoil since Suu Kyi's ouster, with huge protests, renewed clashes between the military and ethnic rebel armies in border regions and an economy spiralling into freefall.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has justified his power grab by citing alleged electoral fraud in the November poll won by the NLD. The military has cracked down brutally on dissent—shooting protesters, arresting suspected dissidents in night raids,

Miyazaki said "the death sentence is unavoidable" because Kakehi's "criminal responsibility is extremely grave", public broadcaster NHK reported. "She used cyanide on the men after making them trust her as a life partner. It's a calculated, cruel crime based on a strong intent of murder," Miyazaki said. When contacted by AFP, officials at the top court could not immediately confirm the reports.

The defense lawyers had claimed Kakehi was incapable of going through trials due to dementia, and she told Yomiuri TV before the ruling that she "did not want to die". Kakehi reportedly amassed one billion yen (\$9 million) in payouts over 10 years, but subsequently lost most of the fortune through unsuccessful financial trading. She had relationships primarily with elderly or ill men—meeting some through dating agencies, where she reportedly stipulated that prospective partners should be wealthy

Mainland Affairs Council said in a statement, calling the Macau authorities "disrespectful and unfriendly". It said four other Taiwanese employees whose visas are still valid will remain in the semi-autonomous city to keep the office running.

It comes a week after seven employees of Taiwan's trade office in Hong Kong left the financial hub following their refusal to sign a similar "one China pledge" acknowledging Taiwan as part of China. Macau and Hong Kong abide by authoritarian China's view that democratic, self-ruled Taiwan is part of its territory and must be seized one day, by force if necessary. Both have closed their trade offices in Taipei and Beijing has sought



HONG KONG: In this file photo taken on June 12, 2019, protesters shelter under umbrellas during a downpour as they occupy roads near the government headquarters in Hong Kong. —AFP

chair professor of public law, wrote in a journal article in May.

"If the judiciary is not vigorous and vigilant in protecting fundamental human rights, there would no longer be any rule of law." Hong Kong's judiciary declined to "comment on the legal or other substantive issues in individual cases", citing the principle of judicial independence. —AFP



YANGON: This handout photo taken and released by Dawei Watch Monday shows protesters holding flaming torches during a demonstration against the military coup in Dawei. —AFP

shutting down news outlets and rounding up journalists. More than 880 civilians have been killed, according to a local monitoring group. —AFP



Chisako Kakehi was arrested in 2014. —AFP

and childless. Cyanide was found in the body of at least two of the men she was involved with and police reportedly found traces of the poison in the rubbish at her Kyoto home. —AFP

to pile diplomatic and economic pressure on Taiwan. The Taiwanese council also said there was a protest "by pro-China people outside our office in Macau to smear" the Taiwanese government. "This shows that the authorities and civil sector in Macau have been disrespectful and unfriendly to our side," it said.

The Macau government has not responded to an AFP request for comment. According to Taiwan's Liberty Times newspaper, the protesters accused Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen of damaging the "prosperity and stability" of Macau and Hong Kong in a demonstration a few days before Chen Chia-hung's departure on Sunday. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Summer storms lash Germany

BERLIN: Heavy rain, giant hailstones and gale-force winds lashed parts of southern Germany and Switzerland on Monday night, causing widespread flooding and tearing off part of the roof of an opera house. Several road tunnels were flooded and rail services were completely suspended in and around the German city of Stuttgart, according to police and rail operator Deutsche Bahn. Video footage showed rivers of water gushing down streets and car windscreens shattered by huge hailstones. Emergency services across the southern states of Rheinland-Palatinate and Baden-Wuerttemberg reported hundreds of calls to the emergency services to deal with flooded cellars, fallen trees, landslides and stranded drivers. —AFP

#### Romania no-confidence vote

BUCHAREST: Romanian Prime Minister Florin Citu will face a vote of confidence in parliament yesterday, with the opposition accusing the pro-EU government of "leading the country into the abyss". Ex-banker Citu and his cabinet were sworn in last December following parliamentary elections in which the Social Democratic Party (PSD) came first but failed to find allies to govern, opening the door to Citu's liberal PNL-led coalition government. In order to be successful, the no-confidence motion must garner 234 votes, a scenario seen as unlikely by analysts. The PSD and the nationalist AUR party, which back the motion, have a total of 205 seats. —AFP

#### Fresh clashes in Colombia

BOGOTA: Anti-government protesters and police traded blows on Monday in demonstrations across Colombia that marked two months of unrest in which more than 60 people have died. Colombia has been rocked by protests since April, following opposition to a proposed tax hike that morphed into a mass movement against the right-wing administration of President Ivan Duque. The demonstrators demand an end to police repression and more supportive public policies to alleviate the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has plunged more than 40 percent of the country's 50 million inhabitants into poverty. —AFP

#### Dutch police seize tons of cocaine

THE HAGUE: Dutch police yesterday said they had seized almost three tons of cocaine and millions of euros in cash on a farm near Amsterdam's Schiphol airport, in one of their biggest drug hauls to date. Law enforcement swooped last Thursday on the property near the village of De Kwakel, a few kilometres south of Schiphol, after a long-running probe, arresting a suspect. A second suspect was stopped later in a car nearby, police said in a statement. —AFP

#### Former S Korean mayor jailed

SEOUL: The former mayor of South Korea's second-largest city was jailed for three years yesterday for sexually harassing two female staffers, the latest such high-profile conviction in a still patriarchal society. Oh Keo-don stepped down as mayor of southern port Busan—a city of 3.5 million that hosts Asia's biggest film festival—last year following allegations he acted inappropriately towards subordinates. Three months later, Seoul mayor Park Won-soon was found dead of an apparent suicide after a woman staffer accused him of sexual harassment. —AFP

## Suu Kyi urges Myanmar to stay 'united'

YANGON: Ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi asked the people of Myanmar to stay "united" in the face of military rule, her lawyers said yesterday, as she reappeared in a junta court. The Nobel laureate, and daughter of independence hero General Aung San, has been under house arrest since a February coup that sparked huge pro-democracy protests the junta has tried to crush with deadly force.

Invincible to the outside world bar a handful of courtroom appearances, Suu Kyi, 76, has been hit with an eclectic raft of charges. She could face more than a decade in prison if convicted on all counts.

Yesterday, she heard testimony that she flouted

## Japan's 'Black Widow' loses final appeal

TOKYO: A Japanese woman dubbed the "Black Widow" who used cyanide to kill her elderly lovers had her final appeal against the death sentence rejected yesterday by the country's top court, local media said. Chisako Kakehi, 74, was sentenced to death by hanging in 2017 for the murder of three men—including a husband—and the attempted murder of another, in a case that gripped Japan. Two years ago, a high court dismissed an appeal by the serial killer who pocketed millions in insurance payouts and inheritance, drawing comparisons in the media with the spider that poisons its mate after copulation.

Yesterday, Supreme Court presiding judge Yuko

## Taiwan rep leaves Macau over 'one China' spat

MACAU: The acting chief of Taiwan's representative office in Macau has returned home after refusing to sign a document recognizing China's sovereignty over the self-ruled island, Taipei said yesterday.

"The future situation is not optimistic," Taiwan's

# Business

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 30, 2021

## United Airlines unveils huge jet order in bet on travel recovery

### To acquire 270 new planes consisting of 200 Boeing aircraft, 70 Airbus jets

**NEW YORK:** United Airlines announced yesterday a huge new plane order with Boeing and Airbus in the biggest bet thus far by a major carrier on a travel industry recovery from COVID-19. The US carrier plans to acquire 270 new planes consisting of 200 Boeing aircraft and 70 Airbus jets. The order would be valued at \$35.4 billion based on the listed price of the jets, although airlines often end up paying much less than the list price.

United executives described the order—the biggest in the airline's history—as a landmark moment symbolizing the radically improved outlook for travel due to coronavirus vaccines. Still, United and other major airlines are expected to report another quarterly loss for the April-June period when they release their earnings reports in July, reflecting the continued drag of a travel crisis that has devastated travel revenue for more than a year.

United's business travel volumes are still down 60 percent, with international travel off even more, said United Chief Executive Scott Kirby. "We're not back to 100 percent," Kirby said on a conference call with reporters in which he outlined how the company leaders had strategized on its needs early in the pandemic.

"Because we accurately mapped out the trajectory of the crisis in March and April of last year, it's

really allowed us to be prepared and make the right short- and long-term decisions," he said. Company officials were not asked about the so-called Delta virus variant—which is spreading rapidly in many parts of the world—during the hour-long conference call, but the announcement illustrates broad confidence in the industry's prospects even as the pandemic evolves.

#### Narrow-body focus

The biggest component of the order will be 150 of Boeing's new 737 MAX 10, which is still undergoing tests in a process closely monitored by US regulators. The announcement is a victory for Boeing's jet, which was grounded for 20 months following two deadly crashes.

The other two components are 50 Boeing 737 MAX 8 and 70 Airbus A321neo. All three models are narrow-body jets, making them well-suited for domestic and shorter-distance trips that have been among the first to see passenger numbers recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Both the Airbus model and the next-generation 737 MAX are bigger than earlier versions of the same aircraft, a feature especially beneficial for increasing capacity in New York, San Francisco and other markets where adding more flights is difficult or impossible, United officials said.

United officials made clear during the conference call that they have seen very recent signs of an acceleration in business travel bookings, with firms eager to resume client visits as they see their competitors returning to the skies. Executives also said they were bullish about international travel, speaking of the summer of 2022 as being a "record breaker" as US consumers make up for lost opportunities during the pandemic to visit Europe and Asia.

The new planes will include enhanced in-flight entertainment options aiming to delight consumers with access to games and thousands of shows and movies. In another step to please consumers, the company plans to upgrade its existing fleet of narrow-body planes to add more compartment space for luggage.

Richard Aboulafia, an aviation expert at Teal Group, said purchases of the A321 and the 737 MAX—both single-aisle planes—make sense for the airline in the current market. "The domestic markets are coming back pretty fast and fuel prices are coming back fast too," Aboulafia said. Airlines must make long-term bets to remain competitive, even if current market conditions still present significant problems, Aboulafia said, adding that current low interest rates also encourage making purchases now.

# AIRBUS



PARIS: File combination photograph created on March 3, 2021, shows the company sign of Airbus in Donauwoerth, southern Germany on July 20, 2020 (TOP) and the Boeing logo in Washington DC on October 22, 2019. United Airlines have announced yesterday, a huge new plane order with Boeing and Airbus in the biggest bet thus far by a major carrier on a travel industry recovery from COVID-19. —AFP

Scott Hamilton of Leeham News, an aviation website, said he was surprised at the size of the order. Boeing likely provided United an appealing discount because the company "has to rebuild its order book" after the MAX crisis, he said. —AFP

## US banks reward shareholders after Fed greenlight

**NEW YORK:** Some of the United States' biggest banks announced Monday they would pay tens of billions of dollars to shareholders in dividend increases and stock buybacks after getting the go-ahead from the Federal Reserve. The Fed lifted some COVID-era restrictions on banks last week as they proved able to successfully weather changing economic circumstances.

In response, investment bank Morgan Stanley decided to double the amount it pays per share from the third quarter onward, and announced a share buyback program of up to \$12 billion by the end of June 2022. "Morgan Stanley has accumulated significant excess capital over the past several years and now has one of the largest capital buffers in the industry," CEO James Gorman said in a statement Monday.

The largest US bank in terms of assets, JPMorgan Chase, has said it plans to raise its dividends by a more modest 11 percent. And Bank of America, which announced a \$25 billion buyback program in March, said it would increase its dividends by 17 percent, while investment giant Goldman Sachs said it would increase dividends by a heftier 60 percent.

Citigroup said it would leave dividends unchanged for now. The Fed banned the country's largest banks from engaging in share buyback programs and had capped shareholder dividend payouts during the coronavirus pandemic, saying they needed to conserve capital during the crisis.

Begun at the start of the pandemic, the measure was originally only supposed to last until December 2020, but was extended until March 31 and then again until the end of this month. —AFP

## IMF approves \$1bn, three-year loan for Uganda

**WASHINGTON:** The IMF board on Monday approved a \$1 billion, three-year loan for Uganda to help the African nation recover from the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new aid provides \$258 million immediately to help the government cover spending, and comes on top of an emergency loan of nearly \$500 million last year, the International Monetary Fund said in a statement.

The pandemic upended years of progress in reducing poverty, but the Washington-based crisis lender noted a modest recovery underway even amid continuing uncertainty and risks to the outlook.

"Uganda's economy has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic, which reversed decade-long gains in poverty alleviation and opened up fiscal and external financing gaps," IMF Deputy Managing Director Tao Zhang said in a statement.

The government will work on debt reduction and investments in infrastructure "while increasing social spending, including for vaccines" and reducing poverty, he said. —AFP

## Spending in mobile apps surges to new high

**SAN FRANCISCO:** App revenue from mobile phone users around the world climbed to new heights in the first half of this year, nearly reaching \$65 billion, market tracker Sensor Tower said Monday.

Apple and Google saw their respective mobile app shops thrive as the Silicon Valley giants remained under fire for the power they wield at their respective marketplaces. Preliminary figures from Sensor Tower indicate that \$64.9 billion was spent across the App Store and Google Play in the first six months of this year in a 25 percent jump from the same period in 2020.

Sensor Tower projected that \$41.5 billion would be spent at Apple's App Store during the first half of this year on subscriptions and apps, including in-app purchases such as virtual items for game characters. Google Play was expected to generate a total of \$23.4 billion in revenue by the end of June.

Video-snippet sharing sensation TikTok was the top grossing non-game mobile app, with users spending more than \$920 million in an increase of 74 percent from the first six months of last year, according to Sensor Tower. Google-owned video streaming platform YouTube was the second biggest non-game revenue generator, with users spending some \$565 million there, the market tracker estimated.

Globally, spending in mobile games hit \$44.7 billion in the first half of this year, up nearly 18 percent from the same period in 2020, according to Sensor Tower. "While consumer spending in mobile games is growing at a slower clip than last year, this doesn't

## Lebanon hikes fuel prices to shore up forex reserves

**BEIRUT:** Lebanon hiked fuel prices by more than 30 percent yesterday as it reduced subsidies that have eaten away at the central bank's foreign currency reserves amid a painful economic crisis.

Petrol and diesel prices went up sharply, according to a revised price list published by the official National News Agency (NNA), in a week when a steep currency devaluation sparked angry street protests.

The sharp fuel price rises came as Lebanon, a small country of six million people, grapples with an economic crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the world's worst since the mid-19th century.

The Lebanese pound—which has been pegged to the dollar at 1,507 since 1997 — sold for more than 17,000 to the greenback on the black market this week, a record low.

The price of 20 litres of 95-octane petrol shot up nearly 16,000 Lebanese pounds (\$10.6 at the official rate) to reach 61,000 pounds (\$40.6), according to NNA.

The price of the same amount of 98-octane petrol climbed by 16,300 pounds (\$10.8) to reach nearly 63,000 pounds (\$42).

Meanwhile, the price of diesel reached 46,100 pounds (\$30.7), up from 33,300 pounds (\$22.2).

The new prices came after weeks of long queues at petrol stations that had started rationing gasoline



BARCELONA: People visit the Parallel stand at the Mobile World Congress (MWC) fair in Barcelona yesterday. —AFP

indicate a downturn for the industry but rather a normalization after the surge in interest during the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic," Sensor Tower said in a post.

Chinese internet titan Tencent had the top grossing mobile game, Honor of Kings, which generated more than \$1.5 billion in the first half of this year, according to the market tracker. The survey shows the growing importance of the so-called "app economy" and comes amid criticism over the tight control of the two large marketplaces by

Apple and Google.

The Sensor Tower figures were released as a federal court mulls evidence presented during a trial in which Epic Games is trying to break Apple's tight grip on its App Store, and potentially disrupt the entire mobile ecosystem. Epic, maker of the popular Fortnite video game, is seeking to force Apple to open up the App Store to third parties seeking to circumvent Apple's procedures payment systems and its commission as high as 30 percent in the process. —AFP



BEIRUT: Scooter motorists queue for fuel outside a petrol station in Lebanon's capital Beirut yesterday as the energy ministry hiked up fuel prices. —AFP

and diesel fuel amid shortages.

Fuel importers blamed the crisis on a delay by the central bank in opening credit lines to fund fuel imports due to depletion of foreign currency reserves. For their part, Lebanese officials said smuggling to Syria and stockpiling by fuel distributors had contributed to shortages.

The central bank used to fund 85 percent of fuel imports at the official exchange rate of 1,507 Lebanese pounds to the dollar while importers fund the rest of the cost at the street rate.

But the government last week authorized the funding of fuel imports at the weaker exchange rate of 3,900 Lebanese pounds to the dollar instead of

the official peg to ease the crisis.

The central bank Monday said it would open credit lines for fuel imports based on the new exchange rate in compliance with the government's decision.

Following the central bank announcement, the energy ministry said that fuel tankers docked in Lebanese waters had started offloading fuel shipments that would boost supply in the coming days.

Fadi Abu Shakra of the union of fuel distributors told NNA on Tuesday that six tankers had started offloading shipments and they would soon be distributed to gas stations across the country. —AFP



## Business

## UIC elects Selmi as Chairman, Tarkait as Deputy Chairman

KUWAIT: Union of Investment Companies (UIC) general assembly elected its board of directors for the next three years. Saleh Al-Selmi was elected Chairman, Abdullah Al-Tarkait, Deputy Chairman, Faisal Sarkhouh, Secretary, Abdullah Al-Shatti, Treasurer, Hamad Al-Saad, Tareq Al-Mansour, Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem, Bader Al-Sebaie and Essa Al-Essa were elected as board members. The assembly was keen on

forming a board that includes experienced and competent investors, to ensure the continuation of achievements at all levels, particularly in regards to the financial and investment sector development.

The new board seeks to make a quality move through proposals and views given to official entities, in addition to the demands leading to the presence of the investment sector, which is considered the shadow of the banking sector.



Saleh Al-Selmi



Abdullah Al-Tarkait

# Europe development bank eyes stronger recovery in COVID-hit regions

## EBRD predicts average growth of 4.2% in 38 emerging economies

LONDON: Europe's development bank yesterday forecast better-than-expected economic recovery this year across its geographical regions of investment following COVID-induced slumps. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development revealed its revised estimates on the occasion of its 30th annual meeting, which is being held online this week due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The EBRD predicts average growth of 4.2 percent this year in the 38 emerging economies in which it invests, up from an earlier forecast of 3.6 percent. The bank was founded in 1991 to help former Soviet bloc countries switch to free-market economies but has since extended its reach.

"The recovery of the emerging economies in eastern Europe, central Asia and northern Africa is gathering pace following the COVID-19 pandemic," the EBRD said in a statement which cited the beneficial impact of vaccination. The institution, which invests alongside the private sector, then expects 3.9-percent expansion next year.

### 'Economies have restarted'

"The increasing rollout of vaccination programmes and improvements in the public health situation have allowed for a gradual withdrawal of social distancing measures and other restrictions," the bank said. "As a result, economies have restarted."

Higher commodity prices had meanwhile handed a major boost to the revenues of commodity-exporting nations. Average activity in the EBRD's countries of investment shrank by 2.3 percent last year on chronic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

Yet this marked an improvement from prior guidance of a 3.9-percent contraction, thanks also to strong exports and fiscal support.

The EBRD yesterday warned that the outlook remains clouded by uncertainty owing to the highly transmissible Delta COVID variant that was first identified in India.

"Huge uncertainty remains with regards to the path of the COVID-19 Delta variant which poses particularly large risks for countries that have made less progress on vaccinations and for economies highly reliant on international tourism," said chief economist Beata Javorcik.

The lender, whose shareholders comprise almost 70 countries, has since grown to invest in 38 emerging economies spanning central and eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.

Odile Renaud-Basso, a former head of the French Treasury, is overseeing her first EBRD annual meeting after taking the helm in November.

Renaud-Basso told AFP in an interview ahead of the meeting that she wants to restore the bank's green investment targets while addressing workplace equality as economies recover.

The bank last year invested a record 11 billion

speech to the Utah Bankers Association. He repeated his skepticism about the need for a US CBDC and tamped down what he views as "fever pitch" enthusiasm for the concept.

When it comes to the fleeting craze over baggy parachute pants in the 1980s the consequences are "merely puzzling or embarrassing," but with a currency it could be more serious. "Before we get carried away with the novelty, I think we need to subject the promises of a CBDC to a careful critical analysis."

While there is a high bar to clear given potential costs and security risks, Quarles said he would not prejudge the Fed's recently-initiated process to examine the prospects for an official digital money. A Federal Reserve CBDC could "present an appealing target for cyberattacks and other security threats," or be used for money laundering, he said.

Meanwhile, the main attraction of bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies "are its novelty and its anonymity," Quarles said. "Gold will always glitter, but novelty, by definition, fades. Bitcoin and its ilk

economic recovery stays on track.

"We need government to immediately update the Shortage Occupation List," he will say, warning of insufficient numbers of butchers, bricklayers and welders. "Where there are clear, evidenced labour shortages, businesses should be able to hire from overseas." The shortage occupations list plays a key role after the government ended free movement between Britain and EU member states on January 1.

In addition, the CBI wants the government to invest in skills for jobs that have labour shortages, as Britain prepares to fully exit COVID lockdown on July 19. The government must do "more to support British workers, directing them to qualifications we know are in short supply", Bilimoria will say.

Trade body UK Hospitality recently warned of a staffing crisis due to the twin impact of the pandemic and Brexit. "We've got a perfect storm of factors coalescing," Bilimoria was to add. "During the pandemic, many workers from overseas left the UK to return home-hit-

the Beirut flights." Flights to and from Beirut include 40 kilograms in free baggage, and fares start at KD 49 one way.

Passengers should review COVID regulations before booking to ensure compliance with local regulations on vaccination and PCR test certificates.

### Travel advisory for passengers traveling to Beirut

Passengers arriving in Beirut are not required to quarantine. Passengers who have been vaccinated for over 15 days and children under the age of 12 years are not subject to a PCR test on arrival. Non-vaccinated passengers will be subject to a PCR test on arrival and quarantine until a negative result is announced. All passengers are required to register on <https://covid.pcm.gov.lb/impactmobile/curfew> in addition to downloading the "Covidletrack" mobile app. Travel advisory for passengers leaving and returning to Kuwait

Passengers travelling out of Kuwait should ensure they carry their vaccination certificate if they hold a Kuwaiti citizenship, while passengers holding all other nationalities will need to present their vaccination or PCR test certificate. At the time of this announcement, entry into Kuwait is presently limited to pas-



European Bank for Reconstruction and Development head office.

euro (\$13.4 billion) across emerging economies to help counter fallout from coronavirus. That marked a 10-percent increase from 2019.

The institution is meanwhile targeting 2025 as the

year when more than half its investments will be in green projects. It is also looking at being fully aligned with the goals of the 2015 Paris climate agreement by the end of next year. —AFP

## Digital currency craze might be like bad fashion fad

WASHINGTON: The current craze over all things digital, including calls for official crypto currencies, may have similarities with an unfortunate fashion fad, a top Federal Reserve official said Monday. While "America's centuries-long enthusiasm for novelty" has been mostly beneficial, Fed Vice Chair Randal Quarles warned that "when coupled with an equally American susceptibility to boosterism and the fear of missing out, it has also sometimes led to a mass suspension of our critical thinking and to occasionally impetuous, deluded crazes or fads."

Central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) could pose serious risks and may not solve any problems with the existing financial system, Quarles said in a

## UK must relax post-Brexit immigration

LONDON: Britain must relax post-Brexit immigration rules to help tackle staff shortages and secure recovery from the pandemic, the country's main business lobby said yesterday. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) wants the government to expand its so-called shortage occupations list, allowing migrant workers to fill more types of jobs more easily.

CBI president Karan Bilimoria, addressing a London conference later, will declare accordingly to prepared remarks that a "perfect storm" of shortages resulted from Brexit and the COVID-19 health crisis. Bilimoria said the CBI has identified two things the UK government can do straight away to help make sure the UK

## Jazeera Airways resumes flights to Beirut

KUWAIT: Rolling out its summer schedule with favorite destinations for tourists from Kuwait and the Middle East, Jazeera Airways yesterday announced that services to Beirut will resume on June 30 with scheduled flights on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Flights are scheduled to leave Kuwait at 7:00 pm and arrive in Beirut at 10:10 pm. Flights from Beirut leave at 11:10 pm, enabling vaccinated travelers to enjoy an extended weekend in the Lebanese capital. Jazeera Chief Executive Officer, Rohit Ramachandran, said: "We are excited for the return of flights to a favorite summer destination for tourists and travellers visiting family and friends. Beirut was one of the first destinations operated by Jazeera Airways back in 2006, and demand for the capital remains strong. Our fully vaccinated pilots and cabin crew look forward to welcoming customers on board



PARIS: File photo shows a physical imitation of the Bitcoin crypto currency pictured with a US one dollar bank note. The current craze over all things digital, including calls for official crypto currencies, may have similarities with an unfortunate fashion fad. —AFP

will, accordingly, almost certainly remain a risky and speculative investment rather than a revolutionary means of payment." —AFP



Karan Bilimoria

ting the UK's hospitality, logistics, and food processing industries particularly hard.

"The UK's immigration system is also a barrier to hiring people from overseas to replace those who may have left." The CBI is Britain's biggest employers' organisation and represents 190,000 businesses across the country. —AFP

## German inflation eases in June

FRANKFURT: German inflation cooled slightly in June after hitting a 10-year high in May, preliminary data showed yesterday, but economists say price growth has yet to peak as Europe's top economy rebounds from the pandemic. Consumer prices rose by 2.3 percent year-on-year, federal statistics office Destatis said, dipping below last month's 2.5 percent when the index reached its highest level since 2011.

Compared with May 2021, inflation climbed by 0.4 percent. The growth was driven mainly by energy prices, which jumped by more than nine percent on the year. Food and service prices grew at a slower clip than in May, Destatis said. The June figures were in line with analyst forecasts.

Economists and policymakers have been at pains to stress that recent inflation surges in Europe and the United States are likely to be transitory, driven mainly by one-off effects linked to post-lockdown reopenings and supply chain bottlenecks.

In Germany, prices have also ticked up in part because of the introduction of a carbon tax this year and the end of a temporary sales tax cut introduced to mitigate the economic damage from the health crisis.

But the June inflation figure "is only a brief respite on the way to peak inflation," warned LBBW bank economist Jens-Oliver Niklasch. Many economists expect German inflation to reach between three and four percent this year, fuelling debate about when the European Central Bank should start removing some of its vast stimulus for the euro region.

Using the ECB's preferred yardstick, the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP), German inflation jumped by 2.1 percent year-on-year overshooting the ECB's inflation target of "close to, but below" 2.0 percent.

ECB chief Christine Lagarde however has repeatedly said that higher inflation in the eurozone lately was mostly the result of "temporary factors" and would not prompt the bank to tighten its ultra-loose monetary policy anytime soon. —AFP



### Safety measures

sengers holding a Kuwaiti citizenship, their first-degree relatives and domestic workers. Starting August 1, 2021, new regulations for entry to have been announced by the Government of Kuwait, mandating that returning residents have valid proof of vaccination. Passengers are requested to review these regulations to ensure they comply with local regulations.

Jazeera has also implemented many other measures to ensure the safety of passengers since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its expanding fleet of Airbus A320neo aircraft are all equipped with hospital grade HEPA air filters. Every safety and precautionary measure is also a standard today on its aircraft and at Jazeera Terminal T5 in Kuwait.

## Business

# North American trade deal empowers Mexican workers

## Hotline set up to allow whistleblowers submit their labor allegations confidentially

**MEXICO CITY:** A revamped North American free trade agreement is giving factory workers new muscle to flex in Mexico, where labor unions have long been accused of shady backroom deals with employers. The year-old United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) requires the three countries to guarantee worker rights to collective bargaining, union democracy and freedom of association.

It created a "rapid response labor mechanism" to consider complaints against employers suspected of violating the rules, with potential penalties including tariffs. A special internet-based "hotline" set up by the United States allows whistleblowers to submit their labor allegations confidentially.

Since USMCA took effect on July 1, 2020, replacing the North American Free Trade Agreement, the United States has invoked the rapid response labor mechanism twice with Mexico. In May, Washington asked Mexico to investigate allegations of "serious violations" of worker rights during a union vote at a General Motors plant in Silao, in the central state of Guanajuato.

The next month the United States formally called on the Mexican government to review whether workers at the Tridonex auto parts facility in the border city of Matamoros were denied collective bargaining rights.

### 'Real unionism'

It is a reflection of the mood in the White House under US President Joe Biden, who ran for office as a champion of American workers. The Democrat pledged to take action to ensure employees are

protected from unfair competition from cheap labor in other countries.

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, a leftist free-trade skeptic who took office in 2018, has also vowed to improve worker rights. The trade deal has provided an additional catalyst for change, resulting in Mexico enacting a labor reform in 2019 demanded by US Democrats as a condition to approve the USMCA.

Mexico "needed a regulation guaranteeing that unionism was not just a lie, but a real unionism," said Leonor Quiroz, head of the ethics commission of the Coparmex business federation. The reform enshrined union rights, and the rapid response labor mechanism became a key to ensuring compliance.

So-called "ghost unions," born from surreptitious agreements between labor leaders and company bosses, have long favored employers over Mexican workers. Such questionable practices are denounced by the United States as unfair competition.

### 'Troublemakers'

In the case of the GM plant in Silao, the Mexican government suspended the vote by workers in April to approve their collective contract, after finding "serious irregularities." It gave the union, named Miguel Trujillo Lopez, until August 20 to repeat the vote "without coercion or intimidation."

Israel Cervantes, a dissident union leader in Silao who lodged a complaint under the trade deal, said it was "shameful" that the government simply



**QUEENSTOWN:** File photo shows Wye Angus cattle grazes through tall grass at the University of Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station. One year after it took effect in the midst of a record economic downturn, the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) has yet to end trading friction between the North American allies. —AFP

gave them more time. He accuses Miguel Trujillo Lopez of prioritizing "the interests of the company, not the workers."

Two employees at the Silao plant, who spoke to AFP anonymously, said they had been branded "troublemakers" and threatened with being "blacklisted" by other colleagues for criticizing the union. Quiroz said the biggest challenge for the Mexican authorities is to ensure that neither workers nor companies abuse the rapid response labor mechanism.

She also noted that it can only be used in cases when non-compliance with the rules "affects trade

or investment" between the parties. Some experts are concerned about the risk of the United States using the mechanism to "bombard" Mexican factories with complaints in order to give US firms a helping hand.

"If that happens, then it will be detrimental to trade and at the end of the day it will be detrimental for companies because they will end up doing less business," said Valeria Moy, director of the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness think tank. Manufacturing accounts for almost 90 percent of Mexican exports, 80 percent of which go to the United States. —AFP

## Gulf Bank continues Diraya campaign across all channels

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank is continuing to spearhead various efforts in support of the Diraya campaign, an awareness campaign initiated by the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Banking Association. Gulf Bank's efforts are in keeping with the Bank's commitment to educating customers about their banking rights, raising awareness about cybersecurity, and informing customers on the various opportunities available to improve their quality of life.



Hamza Al Tailji

The Diraya campaign spans several topics, including the borrowing process, bank cards, cybersecurity, security tips, and services for customers with special needs. The campaign also aims to clarify the mechanisms for raising official complaints in an effort to protect customers' rights, and also aims to highlight the banking sector's tasks and roles in stimulating and developing the economy.

Regarding the campaign, the Assistant Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Hamza Al Tailji, commented, "At Gulf Bank, we are constantly working to educate our clients about banking transactions across our various customer-facing channels, as part of our wider efforts to promote financial literacy and a culture of savings and investment. We are also always working to educate customers on how to take advantage of the various services and products available to them as part of our commitment to national economic sustainability efforts."

The Diraya campaign by the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Banking Association has undoubtedly had a great impact on educating our community about various financial and banking transactions, and has played a vital role in explaining the foundational cybersecurity concepts that customers may not traditionally be aware of."

Gulf Bank stressed that fraud schemes are often diverse, and customers may be targeted via several methods such as: text messages, emails, or even phone calls. Gulf Bank reiterated that the Bank will never request customers' personal information via emails, text messages or phone calls, and that customers should avoid responding to any of these messages, as they are fraud attempts aimed at obtaining banking information in order to rob customers of their personal finances or data. Customers should also be careful when dealing with electronic links, as the act of simply clicking on a link may expose the customers' confidential banking data to theft.

Gulf Bank urges customers to be mindful of the following tips when conducting their banking transactions in order to protect their bank accounts:

- Never store any confidential information such as debit card numbers, credit card numbers, or PIN numbers on your mobile phone.
- Never write down your password on your card and do not share your password with anyone (this also applies to the one-time password "OTP").
- Log out of the Gulf Bank application or website as soon as you have completed your banking transactions.

## Al Sayer holds COVID vaccination drive for employees

**KUWAIT:** Al Sayer Group Holding held a mega vaccination drive at Multipurpose Hall in Ardiya for the employees of the Group Companies, affiliates and sister companies, in association with Ministry of Health. The efforts towards immunization as part of the fight against pandemic, reflected Al Sayer's commitment to ensure safety of the community. The mega vaccination was carried out as full day event where around 3,000 employees were inoculated by a 45-member team consisting of doctors and nurses from Kuwait Ministry of Health.

Mubarak Naser Al Sayer representing Al Sayer Board of Directors appreciated the commendable efforts of Ministry of Health and specially thanked Dr Buthaina Al Mudhaf Assistant Undersecretary for Public Health Affairs of the Ministry of Health, Dr Dina Al Dhubaib Director of the Central Department of Primary Health Care for their exceptional support and the Head of the Mobile COVID-19 Vaccination Units Team for their exceptional support.

According to Nehad Al Haj, Group Manager of Al Sayer Corporate Excellence "We thank the Ministry of Health who have accepted our request to visit our premises to inoculate our big team of employees who are always working hard to provide better and safer customer service and safeguarding the interest of our stakeholders. Our objective is to keep building on a community which is immune against the vulnerable effects of the virus and we are aligned with all government entities collectively



Group photo

working towards public safety." Since the start of pandemic, Al Sayer Group Holding and its team of volunteers have extended strong logistical and nutritional support to various government entities as well as raising awareness with social messages to curb the spread of the virus to stress on the point "Kuwait is Fine".

### Together we will fight against COVID-19

From Al Sayer Group Holding we request all communities in Kuwait to adhere and cooperate with the extreme precautionary measures recommended by Ministry of Health and taken by the government authorities as much as possible to restrict the spreading of this global disease. Also, we urge all citizens and expats not to give in to panic and fear about this deadly virus, always ask Allah Almighty to lift this pandemic and all pandemics from our country, Muslim countries and the world, and commit to effectively protecting yourself and family with personal hygiene and sanitization, washing hands regu-



A employee get his vaccine.

larly, wearing protective gears when needed and maintaining social distancing. Al Sayer wishes everyone in our beloved Kuwait and global community a fast recovery from this pandemic and return to a normal life.

## NASDAQ Dubai welcomes listing of \$600m Mudaraba Sukuk by AUBK

**KUWAIT:** Ahli United Bank of Kuwait (AUBK) announced its pride of the great success achieved by its issue of Unconvertible Mudaraba Sukuk Additional Tier 1 Capital (AT1) of \$600 million to enhance its capital base. In this regard, Nasdaq Dubai, the region's international financial exchange, welcomed the listing of these Sukuk. General Manager - Treasury of Ahli United Bank of Kuwait (AUBK) Abdullah Al-Langawy yesterday, rang the Nasdaq Dubai market opening bell to celebrate the listing of the Sukuk.

This issuing reflects AUBK solid position as a leading Islamic financial institution in the region. The listing also underlines the close capital markets' ties between the state of Kuwait and the UAE. The Tier 1 Capital Certificates attracted more than \$1.8 billion in orders, covering 3 times the targeted issue size, which emphasizes investors' confidence in the Bank's management, performance and business. The issue offers a return rate of 3.875% p.a., distributed periodically every six months.

On this occasion, Jehad Al-Humaidhi, the Acting Chief Executive Officer at AUBK said: It is the second issuance for AUBK to be listed successfully at NASDAQ Dubai. It is attributable to our trust in NASDAQ's Dubai credibility and transparency in dealing fairly with all issuers and investors while rendering solid and active secondary market for financial securities. The listing of Ahli United Bank's Sukuk in Nasdaq Dubai, the region's international financial exchange also reinforces our relations with investors worldwide.

Al-Humaidhi added: The great turnout witnessed by our recent issue clearly underlines the market's confidence in AUBK's growth strategy despite the challenges of the Corona Virus pandemic. It is also an indication of the strength of the bank's solid credit position and the notable standing it enjoys with both international and regional investors.

It worth noting that AUBK announced, in late May, that it had obtained final approvals from the Kuwait Capital Markets Authority (CMA) and the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) to issue securities (non-convertible certificates). At the time, the Bank has declared that the issue will be treated as AT1 Capital instrument, with the aim to enhance the capital base in line with Basel III requirements and CBK instructions issued to Islamic banks in this regard. These Sukuk are perpetual in nature, and are based on Mudaraba structure and fully com-



Abdullah Al-Langawy rings the Nasdaq Dubai market opening bell to celebrate the listing of the AUB's Sukuk.

pliant with the principles of Shariah. The Bank has determined the optional first call-date is five years of the settlement date. The Bank's selection of the appropriate timing, size and terms of issue and the target markets are the success drivers of this issue, after hiring Citigroup, HSBC Bank, Standard Chartered Bank as Global Coordinators in addition to their role with KFH Capital, KAMCO Invest, Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank and Kuwait International Bank as Joint Lead Managers and Book Runners. The oversubscription and such high turnout of investors from the GCC, Asia and Europe reflect the Bank's success in marketing the issuance and the series of marketing meetings preceded the Sukuk offering. A ratio of 70% of the subscriptions was received from GCC, including Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, in addition to an international turnout from Europe and the United Kingdom of 18%, and 12% from Asia and other regions.

The investor's base was prudently diversified including financial institutions, companies, investment portfolios, asset & funds managers and investments from high net worth clients and private bankers. She emphasized that these Sukuk represent a good source of capital support for AUB, which diversifies the sources of funding and capital and boosts the bank's financing base, as well as achieving a balance between the different components of its capital, to continue its growth. The proceeds of the Sukuk will be deployed to support the expansion strategy adopted by the Bank. This issue enhances the capital adequacy ratio to highly positive levels. Undoubtedly, the implementation of this issue in this efficiency reflects the Bank's robust position and strength as a leading Islamic financial institution in Kuwait.



Nasdaq Dubai, welcomes the listing of AUBK's Sukuk.



This picture shows Japanese tattoo artist Ichi Hatano posing with a "hannya" mask digital image on a digital display, following an interview with AFP at his studio in Tokyo. — AFP photos



Japanese tattoo artist Ichi Hatano drawing a "hannya" mask digital image, following an interview with AFP at his studio in Tokyo.



This picture shows CEO of the BAE, a crypto art platform, and the exhibition's curator, Sascha Bailey (left), demonstrating a virtual reality (VR) device to a visitor (center) during "CryptTOKYO", a physical blockchain art exhibition in Tokyo.

## FROM TATTOOS TO TOKENS AT TOKYO'S FIRST CRYPTO ART SHOW

Tokyo tattoo artist Ichi Hatano's usual business has dwindled during the pandemic, but now he's keen to mine a new stream of income at Japan's first crypto art exhibition. Hatano's ink featuring Japanese folk creatures was especially popular with foreign visitors until Japan closed its borders to tourists due to COVID-19. Hatano has now gone digital, selling his designs as non-fungible tokens (NFTs), virtual objects that have taken the art world by storm. "It's great for artists to have a new market, it opens a lot of possibilities," said the 44-year-old, who has five digital artworks on sale at the show, which opened last weekend in Tokyo.

Using the same blockchain technology behind cryptocurrencies, NFTs transform anything from illustrations to memes into virtual collectors' items

that cannot be duplicated. They rocketed into the mainstream this year and are now traded at major auction houses, generating several hundred million dollars in transactions every month. Despite swapping his familiar canvas of human skin for pixels, Hatano said the creative process is the same. "This is the emergence of a new economy, a new way to value art," he told AFP, saying he hoped the technology would allow creators like him to reach a wider public.

His work is among 150 NFTs from several dozen artists on display at the "CryptTokyo" exhibition in the Japanese capital's trendy Harajuku district. Screens on the walls show a rotating selection of the works, whose NFTs can be bought online with the Dai and Ethereum cryptocurrencies for amounts ranging from a few hundred dollars up

to around \$50,000. Hatano hopes to bag around \$1,400-2,400 for each of his offerings. Some of the most expensive works are by Maxim, frontman of the British electropunk group The Prodigy and a recent convert to NFT art.

### 'Part of everyday existence'

Any digital creation can be traded virtually as an NFT, allowing artists to monetize digital art by giving buyers bragging rights to unique ownership—even if the work can be endlessly reproduced online. Classic parts of internet culture from GIFs to home videos have been auctioned off for huge sums. In March, the American digital artist Beeple became one of the world's three most valuable living artists when an NFT of one of his works sold for \$69.3 million.

But in Japan, there's still some way to go before crypto art becomes a main-

stay, said Yasumasa Yonehara, 62, an artist exhibiting at the show. "NFTs are known in Japan for the sale of tweets by famous people for astronomical sums, and few know what it's really about," he said. An authenticated version of Twitter founder Jack Dorsey's first tweet—the first ever on the social network—was sold in March for \$2.9 million.

Japanese buyers are still approaching the format with caution, agreed the exhibition's 27-year-old curator Sascha Bailey. "The problem a lot of people have with NFT art is 'how do I live with it, how do I interact with it in my everyday life?'" Bailey, who runs the international sales platform Blockchain Art Exchange, told AFP. "What we're attempting to do here, at least in the proto-stages, is to show how this can be part of your everyday existence." Some of the static works have augmented

reality features—coming alive when viewed through a smartphone screen—and talks with artists are also planned during the three-week exhibition. French artist Botchy-Botchy, 48, sold his first NFT at the Tokyo show.

"The real plus is that the artist gets royalties at each resale of its token," he said. And in the art industry, "that's really a new thing". Bailey said he sees Beeple's massive sale as "an exception" and thinks greater value lies in the potential of NFTs to spark broader creativity. "Maybe (Beeple's sale) was important to show the mainstream art world that it's a competitive thing... I see crypto art being the most powerful and meaningful when it's helping smaller artists," he said. —AFP



Members of the Biking Bandits gather for the "Homies Night Ride" in Soweto.



Tiyiselani Mashele (left), 34, co-founder of Biking Bandits, cycles during the "Homies Night Ride" in Soweto.



Tiyiselani Mashele, 34, co-founder of Biking Bandits, gestures as he cycles during the "Homies Night Ride" in Soweto.



A member of the Biking Bandits dances while they take a break during the "Homies Night Ride" in Soweto.—AFP photos

## South Africa's 'Biking Bandits' reclaim Soweto streets

Letting out exhilarated howls in the light of a full moon, young cyclists barrel down a steep hill on their "fixie" bikes, sound bars blaring out music, in South Africa's Soweto township. They are the Biking Bandits, a group that emerged in March, about a year into national coronavirus restrictions. When it hit them that the tough curbs were far from over, auto technician Tebogo Galagala and his friend Tiyiselane Mashele started cycling together in the evening, just for fun. They formed the Biking Bandits, whose nighttime jaunts have since infiltrated urban hip culture, attracting scores of young black riders across the township famous as the birthplace of the anti-apartheid movement.

"Urban cycling in Soweto and also in

Johannesburg is growing quite numerously," said Galagala, 26, excitedly preparing his vintage one-speed bike for the urban night ride with his "crew". "We are growing numbers. The culture is growing," Galagala enthused. Under apartheid, cycling was purely utilitarian, a way to commute to work—the journey from Soweto to central Johannesburg covers 25 kilometers (15 miles).

But today, to 34-year-old Mashele and crew it's for "leisure, for fun, for creating a community and engaging with other like-minded people". They get together twice a month for the 12-kilometre (seven-mile) Homies Night Ride—using the slang word "homies" to suggest that all cycling skill levels are welcome. Commuter minibus drivers, notorious for their reckless driving habits, benevolently honk at the cyclists, gawking at their multi-coloured bikes. Galagala hopes for dedicated cycle lanes.

### 'Black boy joy'

But bicycles do not come cheap for a lot of young people, many of whom are unemployed. Yet the demand for fixie bikes—vintage road bikes with their gears removed, a boon for urban cycling—has surged, according to artisanal constructor Kutlwano Malefane. He charges as much as \$400 for a

basic model, and says demand has doubled since before the pandemic. The high price tag does not deter the night riders, many of whom save for months to be able to buy one. "Just having young black kids cycling in Soweto... (is) black boy joy," said Mashele, donning a helmet and mask.

The riders relish the chance to "claim the space (and) change people's mindsets around us black people cycling," said Mashele, who works for a government roads agency. "It's not something you see every day," he said, suggesting that cycling has long been considered a sport for the wealthy-read white. "For me it's the lifestyle, the fashion," said Tshepo Moyo, 27, wearing skinny jeans, a cosy jersey and a beanie while proudly showing off his bike with custom zebra tape on the bars. Mashele chimed in: "We're not wearing spandex or anything, we wear our jeans and sneakers." For 22-year-old club member Thapelo Makama, who grew up in the township, riding bicycles has been a lifelong ambition. "As a kid you used to always want a bike," he chuckled, describing how bystanders often cheer the cyclists on as they go on their night rides. — AFP

## Therapy dogs soothe amid trauma of Florida collapse

Blocks away from the wreckage of a Florida apartment tower that suddenly collapsed last week and left scores of people missing, Patrick Williamson sat with his German Shepherd, offering her company to whomever needed it. Five-year-old Gracie has helped him cope with the trauma he experienced serving in the US Army in Iraq, and with 11 people confirmed dead and 150 missing after the oceanfront apartment block collapsed in the middle of the night, he hoped she could do the same for the people of Surfside, Florida. Gracie "provides me with the opportunity for a better life," Williamson told AFP. "My philosophy is, if she can do that for me, she can do that for someone else."

As rescuers comb through the rubble of the 12-story building in hopes of finding survivors, aid workers from across the United States have traveled to the Miami-area town to offer everything from snacks to prayers to therapy. Among them is the United Cajun Navy rescue group, which asked its volunteers to bring therapy dogs to help people cope with the trauma of the collapse. "You start petting a dog, conversation happens and that is healing," said Jay Harris, a dog trainer who brought four of his clients' dogs—three poodles and a mixed breed—to Surfside to help whomever needed the sort of comfort only an animal can bring. "It really helps with the stresses," he said.

### Beyond just relief

The Cajun Navy is best known for its relief efforts after storms, but National Executive Director Jennifer Toby said around the time Hurricane Harvey devastated Texas and Louisiana, she came to realize that there was more to helping storm victims than providing supplies. "When whole cities are wiped out and

people in shelters for weeks at a time, it's really nice for emotional support animals to come in," she told AFP.

With Champlain Towers South reduced to rubble by an unexplained collapse that occurred over the course of seconds, the day-and-night rescue effort that brought engineers and specialists from as far away as Mexico and Israel has transformed Surfside. Road closures and checkpoints now greet visitors to the community of pastel bungalows and beachside high-rise condominiums, leaving streets eerily empty, with the quiet punctuated only by convoys of police cars and buses carrying families of the missing and deceased.

### No help needed

Toney Wade, a veteran of search and rescue operations around the world, traveled from Louisiana with Hoeder, his three-year old Belgian Malinois, who specializes in finding the remains of drowning victims and once located bone fragments of a body that had been set ablaze. But Wade was told there were enough rescuers and sniffer dogs engaged in the hazardous work of combing through the debris, which has seen workers use tools including heavy machinery, listening devices and even buckets to move rubble and locate people beneath. On Monday afternoon, Wade sat under a canopy as one of the many rainstorms that had hampered the relief effort approached, hoping Hoeder could give those who needed it a moment of comfort.

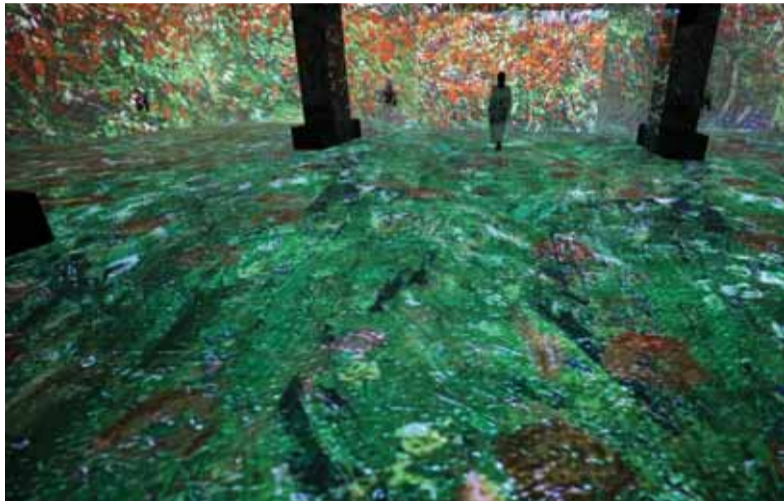
"Dogs just show you pure love, nothing in between," said Wade, who is commander of the Cajun Coast Search and Rescue, another volunteer group. A visit to family members of the victims was organized on Monday, but before the therapy dogs and their owners left their perch outside Surfside's community center, a relative of a victim ran up to Gracie, sharing a moment with Williamson's dog as tears welled in her eyes. "Closure is key for everything," said Williamson. "These times we interact with people are going to be memories they can need if they find out they need more closure than they obtained." — AFP



United Cajun Navy volunteer Jay Harris feeds dogs he brought for therapy in Surfside, Florida. — AFP photos



United Cajun Navy volunteer Patrick Williamson plays with his therapy dog Gracie in Surfside, Florida.



## Virtual Van Gogh exhibition set to lure shoppers in Dubai

Shoppers and art lovers will soon be able to step into Van Gogh masterpieces projected onto walls and floors in an immersive experience in a Dubai shopping center. The installation by French firm Culturespaces is reminiscent of "Loving Vincent", the 2017 drama chronicling the life of the Dutch post-impressionist, in which moving images were created using frames painted on canvas. The exhibition, which will showcase digital displays of works from the Saint-Paul Asylum, Saint-Remy collection and others including Irises, opens on July 1 and will run until mid next year.

"Our mission is to make art accessible to all and to be able to share this new way of discovering art with as many people as possible," Catherine Oriol, director of Infinity Des Lumieres at Dubai Mall, told AFP as a pianist played nearby. The exhibition is in the mould of the Atelier des Lumieres in Paris, where classic works are shown alongside complementary sound and



visual displays. The Dubai Mall exhibition seeks to "connect visitors directly to the art", Oriol said. One of the seven emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates, Dubai has in recent years become a global hub for tourism and luxury services.

It has sought to remain open to overseas visitors even as the coronavirus pandemic has hammered international travel. "We hope in the future that we will be able to create new exhibitions related to the region, (such as) calligraphy and poetry," said Oriol. After an initially strict



lockdown, life in the Gulf emirate—one of the first destinations to once again welcome visitors in July last year—has largely returned to normality, with restaurants, hotels and beaches open to the public. It is set to host the six-month World Expo opening in October, after it was delayed

by a year due to the pandemic. Culturespaces has opened a number of digital art exhibitions around the world, including in France and South Korea, and is scheduled to launch another in New York next year. — AFP



Visitors look at projected paintings and drawings at the Van Gogh exhibit produced by Culturespaces and directed by Gianfranco Iannuzzi, Renato Gatto, and Massimiliano Siccardi, during a preview of the digital exhibition titled "Infinity des Lumieres" in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, on Monday. — AFP photos

## Picasso painting found in Greek gorge years after heist

Greece yesterday said it had recovered a Picasso painting personally donated by the Spanish master to the Greek people, almost a decade after it was stolen alongside two other artworks in an audacious heist at the National Gallery. "Head of a Woman", gifted by Pablo Picasso to Greece in 1949, was recovered in Keratea, a rural area some 45 kilometres (28 miles) southeast of Athens, officials told a news conference. Police said a 49-year-old builder had confessed to stealing the artworks in 2012 and had been arrested. The man said he had initially hidden them in a home but had recently stashed them in thick vegetation at a local gorge.

### 'Great joy and emotion'

"Today is a special day, (a day of) great joy and emotion," Culture Minister Lina Mendoni told reporters. Mendoni said the painting would have been

"impossible" to sell as it had a personal inscription by Picasso on the back—"For the Greek people, a tribute by Picasso." The artist had given the cubist painting to the Greek state in recognition of the country's resistance to Nazi Germany during a painful 1941-44 occupation. "This painting is of particular importance and sentimental value to the Greek people, as it was personally dedicated by the great painter to the Greek people for their fight against fascist and Nazi forces," Mendoni said.

Another painting stolen in the same heist in January 2012, 'Stammer



This handout photograph taken and released by the Greek Culture Ministry yesterday shows a recovered painting of Picasso titled "Head of a Woman" flanked by a painting by Dutch painter Piet Mondrian, in Athens. — AFP

Windmill' by Dutch painter Piet Mondrian, was also found. According to police sources cited by news agency ANA, the self-confessed thief had monitored security operations at Athens' National Gallery, Greece's largest state art collection, for six months previously. The heist lasted just seven minutes. It was originally believed that two men broke in, cutting the paintings from their frames. But police said the suspect likely had no accomplices. Greek media reports said police had brought the builder in for questioning following surveillance and he confessed, showing them where he had hidden the paintings.

The man, who is represented by one of Greece's leading criminal lawyers, reportedly claimed he was an art lover and did not intend to sell the paintings. A sketch by 16th-century Italian artist Guglielmo Caccia, better known as Moncalvo, was also stolen in the same robbery. But state television reported it was damaged in the heist and discarded.

A state report found that the National Gallery's security had not been upgraded for over a decade, with the then police minister calling safeguards "non-existent". Several areas in the museum were out of range of security cameras, while the alarms were faulty and prone to ringing gratuitously. In addition, the gallery had a reduced security presence at the time owing to a three-day staff strike. — AFP

## 'F9' leaves rival films choking on dust

Universal's new "F9: The Fast Saga" not only lapped all other films in North American theaters this weekend, it pulverized them with an estimated take of \$70 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Monday. Confirming the persistent appeal of fast cars and muscle-bound men, this ninth installment in the "Fast and Furious" franchise easily became the biggest money-maker since the COVID-19 pandemic began, even as one in five US theaters and most of those in Canada remain shuttered. Suffice it to say that Vin Diesel, Michelle Rodriguez and John Cena have to deal not only with exploding cars, plane crashes and private armies but also rocket cars, electromagnetic weapons and ominous satellites.

Coming in second-left far behind in the dust of "F9"—was Paramount's "A Quiet Place Part II," at \$6.2 million for the three-day weekend. The John Krasinski-directed horror film, starring his wife Emily Blunt, has shown staying power,

however. Since its release five weeks ago it has taken in \$136 million domestically. In third place was "The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard," from Lionsgate, at \$4.85 million. The action comedy has Ryan Reynolds, Samuel L. Jackson and Salma Hayek reprising their roles from 2017's "The Hitman's Bodyguard." In fourth, down one spot from last weekend, was Sony's family-friendly "Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway," at \$4.77 million. The mixed live-action/animation has James Corden voicing the title role, with live performances by Rose Byrne, Domhnall Gleeson and David Oyelowo.

And again in fifth place was Disney's family-friendly origin film "Cruella," at \$3.8 million. Emma Stone stars as the pooch-tormenting title villain. So, how should Hollywood be feeling about its incipient recovery? "The industry is still settling" after its 15-month shutdown, David Gross, who runs movie consulting firm Franchise Entertainment Research, told Variety. "The effects of the pandemic will take time to heal, (but) the new normal is coming." Rounding out the top 5 were:

"The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It" (\$3.0 million)  
"In the Heights" (\$2.2 million)  
"Spirit Untamed" (\$1.0 million)  
"Nobody" (\$560,000)  
"12 Mighty Orphans" (\$555,000) — AFP

## Sports

# Row to Tokyo: Qatar's lone woman rower defying expectations

DOHA: Qatar's sole female Olympic rower Tala Abujbara had flirted with basketball as her sport of choice. But she settled on a life on the water after a college rowing coach spotted the "tall and athletic" student's potential.

Now 28, Abujbara is building up momentum from a creditable performance in the women's single sculls final at the world championships in Linz, Austria in 2019 as she heads to Tokyo. "Qualifying was a huge step. And now it's just executing it," Abujbara told AFP as she prepared for practice runs under scorching summer sun across a man-made creek in the north of the Qatari capital Doha.

Abujbara, who studied in the United States where she started rowing in 8X sculls, burst onto the scene in 2018 winning gold at the second Arab Championship in indoor rowing "ergometer" hosted by Kuwait. Then in the 2019 world championships she finished 26th overall and got a chance to compare herself to the very best.

"I think when I first started rowing, I didn't even know what rowing was," said Abujbara who sported blue mirrored sunglasses, a grey short-sleeved T-shirt, black leggings and a sun visor. "(But) this idea of qualifying for the Olympics and competing there crept in and I've been working towards it for a few years now."

Abujbara said one unforeseen hurdle was having to compete solo after returning to Qatar from the United States where she had become accustomed to rowing in a team. "After I graduated, I returned home here and



DOHA: Qatari rower and Olympic hopeful Tala Abujbara, 28, sculls in the capital Doha on June 4, 2021. — AFP

there were no other people — so I had no choice but to row in a single," she said laughing.

### 'Best foot forward'

"To be honest, I'm still adjusting to it. I think I'm always a team sport athlete at heart. So that's probably been the biggest challenge," she said, adding she still visualizes having her teammates alongside her.

As for taking up the sport in her conservative

Muslim Gulf homeland, Abujbara, whose sister is on the national fencing team, said she was largely below the radar. "There wasn't much of a response. I rowed very, very quietly, most of the time, just kind of coming here doing my thing, not making much noise. Not many people knew about it," she said of her sport which is uncommon in Qatar.

"I worked at (Qatar's) Aspire Academy for sports excellence for a while. And that was great, because my

colleagues were sports scientists and coaches," she said. "One of my colleagues at Aspire, his wife was a rowing coach... and they kind of took a look at the rowing qualification criteria and they realized there actually might be an opportunity for someone from this region to qualify. And so they planted that seed in my head a long time ago."

However the coronavirus pandemic threw Abujbara's planning, as in the case of innumerable other athletes worldwide, into disarray. "The plan was to graduate from my master's degree and try to qualify for the Olympics, hopefully go to the Olympics, and then start my (consulting) job," she said. "Of course with the Olympics being delayed — plans change, and I've had to balance both. So it's been a challenge."

The upshot was 80-hour weeks while trying to secure a place for Tokyo. "But I'm very happy it worked out," she said. Qatar, which has sent observers to Tokyo to study the Games' delivery because of the demands of COVID-19, will be hoping the Olympics pass off without major incident as attention switches to safely staging the 2022 World Cup.

Back at the man-made creek in Doha, Abujbara was characteristically modest about her chances at Tokyo. "I'm nowhere near being a medal contender," she said. "We need to recognize that there are incredible women doing amazing, amazing things in this sport. "That being said, I'd really like to put my best foot forward (and) show that I belong there." — AFP

### 'Greedy win'

"I keep saying this group is resilient — but this group really is... We're a good team no matter who's on the floor. The group. Work's not done. But we came into a hostile environment and got a greedy win without three of our starters. Now we've got to do it again two more times."

George, who has stepped up as de facto team leader in the absence of the injured Kawhi Leonard, was in commanding form once more on Monday after a quiet first half performance. The Clippers star went 15-of-20 from the floor with three three-pointers, 13 rebounds and six assists. "I haven't shot the ball well this whole series," George said of his second-half display. "At some point I had to have a breakthrough. My teammates have been carrying me, and tonight I had to come through."

George was backed with 23 points from Reggie Jackson while Marcus Morris added 22 points. DeMarcus Cousins added 15 points. Phoenix meanwhile were led by Devin Booker with 31 points while veteran Paul had 22 points. Cameron Johnson added 14 points.

The Clippers got off to a first start, opening up a 10-point lead at 36-26 after the first quarter and leading 59-52 at half-time. But Paul's jump shot to give Phoenix their first lead of the night at 62-61 in the third quarter was the catalyst for George to take over.

The 31-year-old seven-time All-Star erupted for 18 points over the remainder of the period, quickly restoring a double-digit lead for Los Angeles which ultimately proved decisive. Although Phoenix rallied in the fourth to get within five points, back-to-back three-pointers from Jackson helped the Clippers pull clear and close out the win. "They came out and punched us in the face at the start of the game," Suns ace Booker said. "We need to be locked in from the beginning to end." — AFP

## George keeps Clippers alive as Suns downed

LOS ANGELES: Paul George scored 41 points as the Los Angeles Clippers kept their NBA Western Conference finals series alive with a battling 116-102 road victory over the Phoenix Suns on Monday. With the Suns poised to clinch a series victory in front of an expectant home crowd, George once again put the Clippers on his back to stave off elimination from the postseason.

The Clippers talisman exploded for 20 points alone in the third quarter to take the game away from Phoenix, who took a fleeting lead midway through the period with a Chris Paul jump shot. It was the only time Phoenix held the lead throughout game five, and the Clippers can now level the series at 3-3 with a victory in game six in Los Angeles on Wednesday.

"That's just who we are — we fight, we're scrappy, we leave everything on the line and we do it together," George said of the Clippers' never-say-die approach. "That's the most important thing — we do it together."

The win marked the third time during these playoffs that the Clippers have won an elimination game, and Monday's win came without several starters including the injured Kawhi Leonard. "All season long we've been down guys, guys have been out, different guys have been stepping up and playing well," Clippers coach Tyrone Lue said.



TAMPA: Yanni Gourde #37 of the Tampa Bay Lightning scores a goal past Carey Price #31 of the Montreal Canadiens during the second period in Game One of the 2021 NHL Stanley Cup Final at Amalie Arena on Monday in Tampa, Florida. — AFP

## Lightning strike as Canadiens downed in Stanley Cup opener

MIAMI: The Tampa Bay Lightning overpowered the Montreal Canadiens to launch their bid for back-to-back Stanley Cup titles with an emphatic 5-1 victory on Monday. The 2020 champions dominated the underdog Canadiens with a clinical display at Tampa's Amalie Arena to go 1-0 up in the best-of-seven series.

Erik Cernak put Tampa ahead in the first period before Yanni Gourde doubled the home side's lead in the second. Ben Chiarot pulled a goal back for Montreal near the end of the second period to give the visitors hope.

But strikes from Nikita Kucherov, Brayden Point and Steven Stamkos in the third period sealed a deserved victory for Tampa Bay. Lightning coach Jon Cooper said the team's aggressive offense in the third period had been crucial. "Any time you can get the lead you want to extend it, then when you can do that you want to protect it," he said. "In a 2-1 game — when you're going into the period, whoever's getting

the next one it is probably going to be a pivotal part in the game. It was fortunate that we got it."

Canadiens defenseman Jeff Petry meanwhile called on Montreal to remember their battling victories on the road in the series win over the Vegas Knights. "It's one game of a seven-game series, so we have to use what we did in Vegas, that experience, that mindset, to rebound," he said. "We're going to watch some clips on what we can do better. I think everybody knows that our effort is there, but we can all bring a little bit more. That's what we did in Vegas, and that's what we're looking to do for game two."

Montreal are bidding to become the first team from Canada to lift the Stanley Cup for 28 years after a protracted National Hockey League championship drought for the hockey powerhouse. The Canadiens' preparations for the final had been disrupted by Covid-19, which deprived the upstart title hopefuls of right wing Joel Armia and coach Dominique Ducharme on Monday.

Armia, who has eight points in 17 games including five goals during the playoffs, did not travel to Florida for Monday's clash. Montreal have been the surprise package of the postseason after starting the playoffs as 500-1 rank outsiders. However the Canadiens polished off a series of title contenders en route to the final, dispatching Toronto in the first round, Winnipeg in the second and Vegas in the semi-finals. — AFP



TAMPA: A Tampa Bay Lightning flag is waved in Game One of the 2021 NHL Stanley Cup Final between the Tampa Bay Lightning and the Montreal Canadiens at Amalie Arena on Monday in Tampa, Florida. — AFP

## 'You're on pal': Biden, Trudeau bet on NHL Stanley Cup final

WASHINGTON: With the upstart Montreal Canadiens seeking to make hockey history and end Canada's 28-year Stanley Cup drought by dethroning the Tampa Bay Lightning in NHL finals starting Monday, two of the world's most powerful men are getting in on the action.

Just hours before game one of the best-of-seven

final, Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau tweeted to US president Joe Biden proposing a bet on who will claim hockey's most prestigious trophy. "Two of the best teams in the NHL are facing off right now... how about a friendly wager. @POTUS?" Trudeau said. Biden responded, saying simply: "You're on pal. #GoBolts"

Neither leader said just how much they were willing to put down, but the odds may currently be in Biden's favor: game one Monday night saw Tampa's "Bolts" overpower the Canadiens with an emphatic 5-1 victory. Trudeau is known as a lifelong fan of his hometown team, the Montreal Canadiens. The US President is also known to be a hockey lover, telling journalists back in 2010 that he "fervently" roots for the Philadelphia Flyers from his home state of Pennsylvania. — AFP



PHOENIX: Mikal Bridges #25 of the Phoenix Suns plays defense on Paul George #13 of the LA Clippers during Game 5 of the Western Conference Finals of the 2021 NBA Playoffs on Monday at Phoenix Suns Arena in Phoenix, Arizona. — AFP

## NBA's Simmons quits Australia's Olympic basketball squad

SYDNEY: Ben Simmons withdrew from Australia's Olympic basketball squad yesterday, with officials saying he was having a "rough time" in the NBA and wanted to focus on improving his skills. The 24-year-old guard was heavily criticized for his wayward shooting when the top-seeded Philadelphia 76ers were bundled out of the NBA playoffs by the unfancied Atlanta Hawks earlier this month.

National coach Brian Goorjian said he and the rest of the squad supported Simmons' decision and hoped he would represent Australia's Boomers in the future. "It is a pretty rough time for him right now and I know it (the Tokyo Olympics) is something that he wanted to do, but the timing just hasn't worked," Goorjian said in a statement. "The best thing for everybody right now is for him to go on and develop that skill package and improve in a couple of areas for his next season in the NBA, but the Boomers are always here for him."

Australia are ranked third in the world heading into the delayed Tokyo 2020 Olympics next month and Simmons was expected to be a linchpin in their quest for a first Games medal. However, he has never played for the national team, prompting former Boomer and NBA star Andrew Bogut to question his commitment.

"To be too blunt, if you need to be recruited to play for your national team and have a presentation about why you should play, you shouldn't play," Bogut told

Fox Sports Australia after the latest withdrawal. "It's bittersweet. We don't really know what he can bring because he's never brought it for the national team."

Veteran Patty Mills, who is expected to lead Australia in Japan, said Simmons would face no criticism from within the squad. "We support each other through the good, bad and ugly, whatever it may be, and Ben isn't an exception to that," he said. "No matter what he does, myself and the team will continue to support him because this is a safe place."

Simmons' future with the Sixers is under a cloud, with US media reporting the Eastern Conference franchise want to offload him. The Boomers will go to Tokyo also without former Dallas Mavericks swingman Ryan Brookhoff, who quit last week citing mental health issues, and centre Isaac Humphries, who has a foot injury. The 16-man Australia squad are currently assembling for training in Las Vegas, where they will be cut to 12 early next month before playing exhibition matches against the United States, Nigeria and Argentina. — AFP



Ben Simmons

## Sports

# Messi at the double as Argentina trounce Bolivia in Copa America

**CUIABA:** Lionel Messi celebrated his record 148th international cap with two goals as Argentina trounced Bolivia 4-1 to clinch top spot in Copa America Group A on Monday. Messi — who had equalled Javier Mascherano's Argentinian caps record of 147 last week — marked his 148th appearance in style, setting up the opening goal before bagging a brace of his own.

The victory at Cuiaba's Arena Pantanal stadium sees Argentina advance to a quarter-final on Saturday against Ecuador, the fourth placed finishers from Group B. Bolivia, who had already been eliminated after three defeats in their opening three games, were outclassed from the outset by a rampant Argentina.

The Argentinians almost took the lead after three minutes, only for Bolivia goalkeeper Carlos Lampe to pull off a remarkable double save from Sergio Aguero and Angel Correa in quick succession. But Argentina did not have to wait long for the breakthrough, when Messi's delightful chipped pass released Papu Gomez who volleyed past Lampe to make it 1-0 after six minutes.

Argentina doubled their lead on 33 minutes when Gomez was brought down in the area by Bolivia's Diego Bejarano. Messi duly stepped up to convert the penalty to put Argentina firmly in control. Bolivia got their first shot on goal shortly afterwards, Jeyson Chura's ferocious long-range effort forcing Argentina goalkeeper Franco Armani into a diving save at full stretch.

But Argentina reasserted their dominance and it was Messi who made it 3-0, latching on to a clever lofted pass from new Barcelona team-mate Aguero



**CUIABA:** Argentina's Lautaro Martinez celebrates with Lionel Messi after scoring against Bolivia during the Conmebol Copa America 2021 football tournament group phase match, at the Arena Pantanal Stadium in Cuiaba, Brazil, on Monday. — AFP

and lobbing a cheeky finish over the advancing Lampe. Bolivia pulled a goal back in the 60th minute with a cleverly worked move, Chura's deft back heel releasing Leonel Justiniano down the right flank who crossed for Erwin Saavedra to score. Argentina responded swiftly though, substitute Lautaro Martinez tapping in from close range in the 65th minute just two minutes after coming on for Aguero. In Monday's other Group

A game, Uruguay clinched second place in the table after downing Paraguay 1-0 in Rio de Janeiro. Edinson Cavani's first half spot kick proved decisive for 'La Celeste', sending Uruguay into a quarter-final against Colombia on Saturday. Paraguay finished third and will now play Peru on Friday. Chile, who finished fourth in Group A, face a daunting task against hosts Brazil on Friday. — AFP

## Maradona's doctor 'not in charge' of icon's final days

**BUENOS AIRES:** Diego Maradona's personal physician denied through his lawyer Monday any responsibility for the football icon's death, in which he and six other health care workers are being investigated for manslaughter, and requested a new medical board be assigned to the case. Neurosurgeon Leopoldo Luque, 39, appeared before Buenos Aires prosecutors to answer to claims that he and other caregivers had neglected Maradona in his final days, precipitating his death.

"Luque has nothing to feel guilty for," the doctor's defense attorney Julio Rivas said at the end of Monday's hearing near Buenos Aires. "What he said was simply that he was always concerned with Maradona's health, and every time he was called for any issue, he went and helped him. He was his family doctor, but not in charge of his home care."

Maradona, 60, was found dead in bed last November, two weeks after the surgery, in a rented house in an exclusive Buenos Aires neighborhood to where he was brought after being discharged from hospital. He was found to have died of a heart attack. "I see no responsibility either in Agustina or in Leo" for Maradona's death, Rivas said of Luque and co-accused psychiatrist Agustina Cosachov, 36. According to Luque's lawyers, two private health care companies bear that responsibility. But other members of the team have said the duo was in charge of the retired footballer's care.

### 'Agonizing' end

A panel of 20 medical experts convened by Argentina's public prosecutor said last month that Maradona's treatment was rife with "deficiencies and irregularities." But Luque's lawyers took issue with the report Monday and insisted there were no clinical studies that indicated heart problems for Maradona before his death.

Four checkups between 2019 and 2020 that

included cardiology testing were "perfect," Rivas said, as Luque asked for a new medical review board for the case. The 20-member panel concluded the footballer "would have had a better chance of survival" with adequate treatment in an appropriate medical facility.

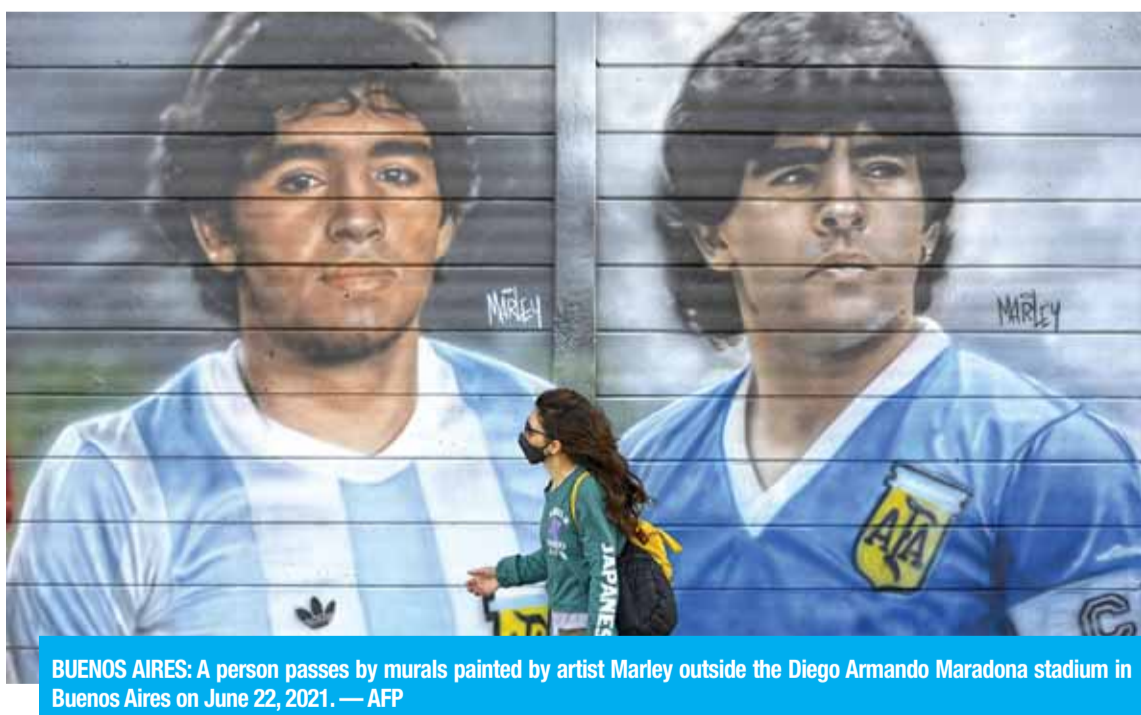
The board found the team had provided inadequate care and abandoned the idolized player to his fate for a "prolonged, agonizing period." A judge will next decide whether to order a trial, in a process that could take years. The suspects risk between eight and 25 years in jail if found guilty. An investigation was opened following a complaint filed by two of Maradona's five children against Luque, whom they blame for their father's deterioration after the operation. Luque, who has described the sporting legend as a friend, arrived at the prosecutor's office in San Isidro, Buenos Aires, in a dark suit and tie and dark glasses an hour before the hearing Monday. His questioning closes a two-week process of interrogation. He and the other six have appeared one by one to defend themselves against the accusations.

### 'I did my best'

Luque, 39, has repeatedly denied guilt and recently said, "I'm proud of what I did" to assist the patient, denying he had abandoned him. "I did my best. I offered Diego everything I could: some things he accepted, others not," he said in a recent interview. The doctor said Maradona had been depressed in his final days. "I know that the (coronavirus) quarantine hit him very hard," Luque has said.

Maradona appeared in public on October 30 last year at an event to mark his 60th birthday, visibly weakened and appearing to be having difficulty speaking and walking. Luque ordered him hospitalized, which is when the blood clot was discovered.

Discharged from hospital after surgery, Maradona was confined to home care, but some of his medical team have told prosecutors the house lacked medical equipment. Last week, a lawyer for co-accused nurse Dahiana Madrid, 36, said the medical team leaders had "killed Diego." "In the end, there were many warning signs that Maradona was going to die, give or take a day. And none of the doctors did anything to prevent it," attorney Rodolfo Baque said at the time. —AFP



**BUENOS AIRES:** A person passes by murals painted by artist Marley outside the Diego Armando Maradona stadium in Buenos Aires on June 22, 2021. — AFP

## T20 World Cup moved to UAE, Oman, ICC confirms

**NEW DELHI:** The Twenty20 World Cup has been shifted to the United Arab Emirates and Oman due to the coronavirus situation in India, cricket's world body confirmed yesterday. The tournament was originally meant to happen in India but the country is emerging from a COVID-19 surge in April and May and experts fear a new wave of cases later this year.

"Our priority is to deliver the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021 safely, in full and in its current window," said Geoff Allardice, acting chief executive of the International Cricket Council. "Whilst we are incredibly disappointed not to be hosting the event in India, the decision gives us the certainty we need to stage the event in a country that is a proven international host of multi-team events in a bio-secure environment."

The Board of Control for Cricket in India had already said on Monday the tournament would be shifted. The event will take place from 17 October to 14 November. It will be held across four venues — the Dubai International Stadium, the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi, the Sharjah Stadium, and the



**LONDON:** Britain's Andy Murray celebrates winning against Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili 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, on Monday. — AFP

## Murray gives Brits a lift with first Wimbledon singles win since 2017

**LONDON:** Two-time champion Andy Murray won his first Wimbledon singles match since 2017 on Monday with a four-set triumph over Nikoloz Basilashvili and hailed the Centre Court crowd which carried him to victory. Murray, the champion in 2013 and 2016 but who has fought a long battle with hip and groin injuries in recent years, triumphed 6-4, 6-3, 5-7, 6-3 over the 24th seeded Basilashvili.

"It has been extremely tough, even in the last few months," said 34-year-old Murray. "It was not the most serious of injuries but it was frustrating not to be able to get on the court. I have had so little momentum over the last few years but kept on going to the gym and trying to get back to do it again."

Now ranked a lowly 118 in the world, former number one Murray will face either Oscar Otte of Germany or France's Arthur Rinderknech for a place in the last 32. His last appearance in the singles tournament at Wimbledon four years ago ended in a five-set loss to Sam Querrey in the quarter-finals.

A long-standing hip problem, which required surgery, then pushed him tearfully to the brink of retirement. It was a roller-coaster evening for Murray who let slip a 5-0 lead and two match points in the third set. That led to a delay in proceedings to allow for the Centre Court roof to close. But Murray broke in the first game of the fourth set to send him on his way to victory.

"There was some fatigue there and I was just trying to just sort of not get too amped up or too hyped up," he said. "The crowd definitely were into it. I think people are just desperate to be out watching sports or going to the theatre, whatever — people just want to go out and do stuff and have a good time. I realized the last 18 months not to take moments like that for granted. You know, enjoy those things that we love doing. I think everyone was into it today. It was a really good atmosphere, and it didn't feel like the crowd was half full." Wimbledon, which was cancelled last year, is operating at just 50 percent capacity until the finals weekend when 15,000 people can attend the championship matches. Three-time major winner and back-to-back Olympic gold medalist Murray said he intends to keep playing. —AFP

Oman Cricket Academy Ground. 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. 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.

At the time India was experiencing a massive surge in COVID-19 cases that overwhelmed the health system in many places, and much of the country was under lockdown. India, home to 1.3 billion people, has eased many lockdown restrictions in recent weeks following a sharp fall in the number of new infections. —AFP

### News in brief

#### KFA calls for General Assembly

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Football Association (KFA) called yesterday on local clubs for a General Assembly meeting on August 9 to discuss proposals submitted by FIFA and members to amend the statute to pave way for early elections. KFA, in a tweet, said the General Assembly meeting would also discuss resignations by some board members. It added the clubs would also discuss the financial and administrative statements of 2018-20. Meanwhile, KFA said it would hold on July 6 a ceremony to honor national team captain Bader Al-Mutawa for playing 185 international games, the most worldwide. — KUNA

#### Tour de France riders strike

**FOUGERES:** Riders at the Tour de France staged a symbolic protest yesterday to back up a call for safer stage finishes and road security after a series of pile-ups marred the opening days of the 21-day bike race. Shortly after the start of the 150-kilometre flat run from Redon to Fougeres the entire peloton came to a stop for a brief period, before setting off again at a leisurely pace. Monday's stage featured four serious falls with Australian sprinter Caleb Ewan pulling out after breaking his collarbone in four places, former champion Geraint Thomas dislocating his shoulder and 2020 runner-up Primoz Roglic ending his day covered in grazes. The falls follow Saturday's opening day where there were two other falls, the first caused by a roadside spectator with over half the peloton coming down in a spectacular domino effect. — AFP

#### Wawrinka drops of Olympics

**PARIS:** Former Olympic Games gold medalist Stan Wawrinka yesterday joined the growing list of players withdrawing from the Tokyo Olympics. Three-time Grand Slam title winner Wawrinka, who won an Olympic title in men's doubles alongside Roger Federer at Beijing in 2008, has undergone surgery on his left foot. The 36-year-old hasn't played on the tour since Doha in March. "He is very disappointed not to be able to play in the Games and represent Switzerland in Tokyo," said a statement by his management team. "But he is working hard on his recovery and towards his goal of getting back on court as soon as possible." Wawrinka joins Rafael Nadal, Serena Williams, Simona Halep and Dominic Thiem in withdrawing from the Games which start in Tokyo on July 23. — AFP

#### Fernandinho signs extension

**LONDON:** Manchester City captain Fernandinho has signed a one-year contract extension at the Premier League champions, saying he has unfinished business at the club. The deal keeps the 36-year-old Brazilian at the Etihad Stadium until 2022 and he is targeting another shot at the Champions League after City lost to Chelsea in their first final in the competition last month. "In my head and my mind, the job is not done yet and so that's why I decided to stay here another year and try to help the team and the club to achieve the goals that they're looking for," said Fernandinho. Fernandinho joined City from Shakhtar Donetsk in 2013 and has made 350 appearances and won 12 domestic trophies during that time. — AFP

#### Nice appoint new coach

**NICE:** Christophe Galtier, who led Lille to the Ligue 1 title in France in May, has taken over as coach of Nice, the Riviera club's owners Ineos announced on Monday. "OGC Nice is pleased to confirm the appointment of Christophe Galtier as new head coach, with immediate effect," wrote Ineos in a press release. Galtier, 54, took over as coach of Lille in December 2017 and, against the odds, led them to the Ligue 1 title last month. Just days after securing the title, he announced his desire to leave the northern club and find a new challenge, in spite of having another year left on his contract. He was linked with both Lyon and Napoli but Nice was the favorite for the Marseille-born coach. — AFP

#### Bournemouth hire Parker

**LONDON:** Bournemouth hired Scott Parker as their new manager after he left Championship rivals Fulham earlier on Monday. Parker quit as Fulham boss after reportedly losing faith with the club's owners following the Cottagers' relegation from the Premier League this season. The 40-year-old was announced as Bournemouth's new boss less than four hours after leaving Craven Cottage. Bournemouth had announced on Sunday that Jonathan Woodgate would step down as manager when his contract expires at the end of June. Woodgate was unable to lead Bournemouth to promotion this season, with the Cherries losing to Brentford in the play-off semi-finals. — AFP



# Mbappe the culprit as Switzerland stun France on penalties

**BUCHAREST:** Switzerland defeated world champions France 5-4 on penalties in the last 16 of Euro 2020 on Monday as Kylian Mbappe missed the decisive spot-kick in the shootout following a thrilling 3-3 draw in Bucharest. Mario Gavranovic equalized in the 90th minute as Switzerland came from two goals down before Yann Sommer saved Mbappe's penalty to book

grabbed his second of the game before Gavranovic levelled in the final minute. Switzerland converted all five of their penalties before Sommer dived to his right to turn away Mbappe's kick, as the Swiss won a major tournament knockout tie for first time in 83 years.

"The two goals came very quickly after the missed penalty. For normal players it's almost impossible to

Steven Zuber used the space afforded by Rodriguez's overlapping run, clipping in a left-wing cross that Seferovic headed past Lloris after rising all too easily above Clement Lenglet. After a dismal first half, in which France failed to test Sommer, Deschamps ditched the experiment of three at the back, hauling off Lenglet and introducing Kingsley Coman while reverting to a more familiar 4-4-2.

### Lloris saves penalty

But France were indebted to Lloris for sparing them from further trouble after a lung-busting run from Zuber eventually resulted in a penalty for the Swiss when he was brought down by Benjamin Pavard. Argentine referee Fernando Rapallini immediately pointed to the spot following a VAR review, but Lloris flung himself to his right to claw away Rodriguez's attempt — the seventh missed penalty of 15 taken at the tournament.

The momentum soon swung sharply in France's favour as Benzema, scorer of both goals in the 2-2 draw with Portugal in the group phase, superbly dragged a pass from Mbappe into his stride, lifting over Sommer to level.

The Real Madrid striker headed France in front two minutes later when Griezmann's dinked effort was turned away by Sommer but only to a waiting Benzema who headed in from point-blank range. Pogba's magnificent 25-yard strike had France on the cusp of the last eight, but Seferovic powered in a terrific delivery from substitute Kevin Mbabu with nine minutes left to give the Swiss hope.

Gavranovic then had a goal ruled out for offside, but there was no doubting his last-minute equaliser as he skipped past Presnel Kimpembe and drove low beyond Lloris. Remarkably, Coman nearly won the game with the final kick, rattling the crossbar right at the end of injury time.

An ailing Benzema was withdrawn at the start of extra time for Olivier Giroud, moments before Sommer tipped over superbly to deny Pavard. Pogba released Mbappe with a piercing pass through the Swiss defence but the Paris Saint-Germain forward sliced wide, with Sommer flying to his right to grasp Giroud's header before his penalty heroics, which came at the expense of the star of France's World Cup triumph in 2018. — AFP



**BUCHAREST:** France's coach Didier Deschamps greets supporters after their loss to Switzerland on Monday. — AFP

## Deschamps' job 'safe'

**PARIS:** French football federation president Noel Le Graet said yesterday he "doesn't think" that France's early exit from Euro 2020 will affect Didier Deschamps' future, but that he would talk with the coach. Le Graet was asked at the general assembly of the French Olympic committee if France's shock last-16 loss on penalties to Switzerland would put Deschamps' job under threat. "No, I don't think so," he said. "We mustn't muddle things. We'll need to talk." Deschamps' contract runs until the end of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, where France will defend their title. "I have a lot of affection for him," Le Graet added. "I know the difficulties of football. It comes down to so few things." France's bid to add the European crown to their 2018 World Cup triumph was ended after a dramatic 3-3 draw on Monday in which the Swiss fought back from 3-1 down with less than 10 minutes remaining. "At 3-1 I thought it was won," said Le Graet. "I'm obviously very disappointed. "Not to reach the quarters is a disappointment. That said, it's the vagaries of football, everyone will tell you that." — AFP



**BUCHAREST:** Switzerland's goalkeeper Yann Sommer saves a penalty by France's forward Kylian Mbappe during the Euro 2020 round of 16 football match between France and Switzerland at the National Arena in Bucharest on Monday. — AFP

Switzerland a quarter-final clash against Spain. "It was an incredible evening. I am so proud of the team," said goalkeeper Sommer. "At 3-1 nobody believed in us anymore, but before the match we said we'll fight until the end whatever happens."

Haris Seferovic had given Vladimir Petkovic's Switzerland a shock lead on 15 minutes but Ricardo Rodriguez's spot-kick was brilliantly saved by Hugo Lloris early in the second half. Karim Benzema, recalled to the France squad for the tournament after a five-and-a-half-year international exile, then struck a quick-fire double to put the Euro 2016 finalists back on track. Paul Pogba's sensational curling effort made it 3-1, but Switzerland forced extra time as Seferovic

come back from, but today we were a great team and everyone gave it everything," said Petkovic. Lloris conceded France paid the price for failing to hold on to their two-goal lead.

"It's painful, even more so after a penalty shootout where it becomes a lottery," said Lloris. "The only regret we can have is that at 3-1 we need to manage the match better. We've been able to close it out in the past few years."

France coach Didier Deschamps controversially switched to a 3-4-1-2 formation designed to extract the best from his attacking trio of Benzema, Mbappe and Antoine Griezmann, but it was instead Seferovic who gave the Swiss a surprise lead.

## Czechs frustrated by Baku trip for Denmark quarter-final

**PRAGUE:** The Czech Republic expect a tough Euro 2020 quarter-final against Denmark this weekend, but they are more concerned about the trip to Baku that will likely discourage many fans from attending the game. The Czechs got a taste of what post-COVID football may be like when they beat the Netherlands 2-0 in Budapest on Sunday in a packed stadium including 7,000 Czech fans. But it will be far more difficult for supporters to travel to the Azerbaijani capital for Saturday's last-eight tie.

"I don't understand this and I haven't got over it yet," midfielder Antonin Barak told reporters yesterday. "We won't be able to get our fans and our families there. If we played in Copenhagen, they (Denmark) would be at home but we could still get lots of Czech fans there."

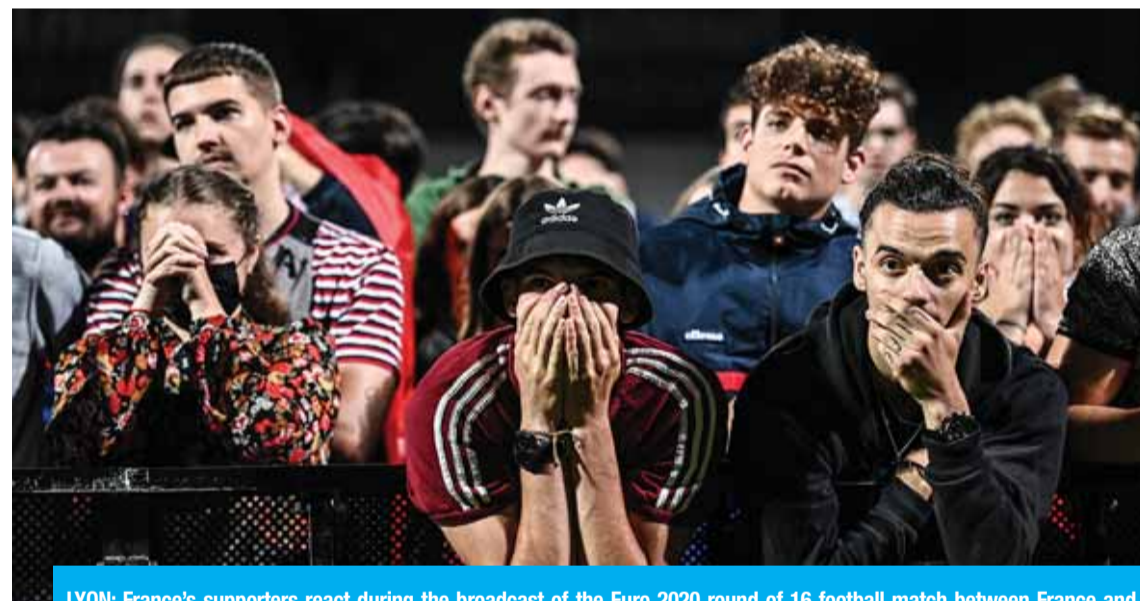
Their support in the group stage was reduced to just handfuls of fans due to COVID restrictions in Britain where they played all three games. "Concerning Baku, we are terribly sorry because in Budapest we experienced a real Euro atmosphere for the first time," said assistant coach Jiri Chytry, slamming the "unfortunate decision". "We think the fans would deserve more than just this one opportunity," he added. The Czech foreign ministry has slapped the dark red COVID label of a very high-risk country on Azerbaijan. Czechs entering Azerbaijan will need a visa and have to present a negative PCR test together with proof of complete vaccination or immunity upon arrival, the ministry says.

The shortest plane trip available between Prague and Baku before the game takes nine hours with a change in Istanbul. Travellers will need another negative PCR test to get back to the Czech Republic. "It must be quite a thinker who came up with this. It's a tragedy," Czech forward Patrik Schick said after the Netherlands game. Chytry said there were more complications linked to the Baku trip. "We will fly this distance knowing that there are only three days between this game and the semi-final," he said, with the winner of the Baku game due to play the semi-final at Wembley on July 7. But Barak, Schick and Chytry have all agreed there is little they can do. "We have to focus on the game, whatever the conditions are," said Barak. "It will be the same for the Danes, it's even farther for them, so it doesn't make sense to clog up your head with this." — AFP

## Berlin urges UK to reduce Euro crowd sizes

**BERLIN:** German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer yesterday urged the British government to reduce the number of fans allowed into Wembley stadium for the final Euro 2020 matches, as fears grow over the spread of the Delta variant.

"I think it's irresponsible for tens of thousands to gather in close proximity" in countries where the



**LYON:** France's supporters react during the broadcast of the Euro 2020 round of 16 football match between France and Switzerland in a fan zone set up at the Gerland stadium in Gerland near Lyon, on Monday. — AFP

## France desperate to move on from 'immense sadness' of Euro exit

**BUCHAREST:** Euro 2020 was supposed to be the next step on Kylian Mbappe's path to greatness and France's golden chance to become world and European champions, only for their campaign to end with a painful failure in a penalty shoot-out.

A defeat on penalties by Switzerland, with Mbappe having the decisive spot-kick saved, after a remarkable 3-3 draw in the last 16 saw France become the first World Cup holders to fail to reach the Euro quarter-finals since Italy did not qualify for the tournament in 1984. The recall of the exiled Karim Benzema had appeared to further strengthen the team who lifted football's biggest prize three years ago, but Didier Deschamps' men never managed to hit those heights again.

Questions will be asked in France of why a team boasting a plethora of attacking talent were unable to beat Hungary and Switzerland, with Deschamps' tactics, Mbappe's lack of goals and a shaky defence sure to be under the microscope. "It's very difficult to move on from this," Mbappe said on social media. "There's an immense sadness after this elimination."

But France and Mbappe will have to quickly forget their defeat and ensure the mistakes which cost them in Bucharest are not repeated at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. The pre-tournament favorites at Euro 2020 can claim they were still unbeaten, barring penalties, and their World Cup title defense is just 17 months away.

"highly contagious" Delta variant is spreading, Seehofer told Germany's Augsburg Allgemeine newspaper. The appeal came just hours before a last-16 clash between England and longtime rivals Germany at London's Wembley stadium. UEFA and the British authorities have said some 45,000 supporters would be allowed to attend the game, equivalent to 50 percent of capacity.

Attendance will be increased to 75 percent of capacity, or more than 60,000 fans, for the semi-finals and final at Wembley, in what will be the largest crowds at a sports event in Britain since the start of the pandemic. In Germany, where Munich's Allianz Arena has hosted several Euro 2020 matches, the capacity cap has been set at a strict 20 percent-or-around 14,000 spectators.

Mbappe burst onto the international scene in Russia in 2018, scoring four goals and becoming the first teenager to net in the World Cup final since Pele 60 years earlier. But he endured a frustrating European championship, starting with a disallowed goal and ending with Switzerland goalkeeper Yann Sommer's save from what proved to be France's last kick. "I'm sorry for the penalty. I wanted to help the team but I failed," said the 22-year-old. "It will be difficult to find sleep tonight but unfortunately those are the risks of this sport that I love so much."

Despite going four games without a goal, Mbappe was a threat throughout the tournament, only to be let down by his finishing, usually so deadly. A failure to stay onside denied him a brilliant individual goal in the opening 1-0 group phase win over Germany, before he missed two big chances in extra time against the Swiss. Still hobbling after pulling up following a poor left-footed shot wide, the Paris Saint-Germain star then saw his spot-kick saved. But Deschamps, whose contract runs until the end of the World Cup, was quick to defend his young striker.

"A lot was expected of Kylian," he said. "Even though he didn't score, he often played a decisive role. He took the responsibility to take the last penalty and no-one is angry at him. In the changing room, no one was more to blame than anyone else. Kylian has taken responsibility, he feels guilty but he shouldn't." — AFP

Seehofer said the 20-percent rule could serve as "a benchmark" to other Euro 2020 venues as well. Britain is experiencing a surge in new coronavirus cases blamed on the Delta variant that was first detected in India.

Germany has designated Britain as a virus variant risk area, meaning only German nationals or residents are allowed to enter from the UK, barring a few exceptions. All UK arrivals, including vaccinated people, have to quarantine for 14 days once in Germany.

Strict travel curbs imposed by both countries are expected to dissuade many German fans from making the trip to England. Chancellor Angela Merkel has in recent days repeatedly expressed concern about the Euro championship fuelling the spread of the Delta variant on the continent. — AFP



**COPENHAGEN:** Spain's forward Alvaro Morata celebrates after scoring his team's fourth goal during the Euro 2020 round of 16 football match between Croatia and Spain at the Parken Stadium in Copenhagen on Monday. — AFP

## Morata wins redemption in Euro 2020 quarters

**COPENHAGEN:** Alvaro Morata earned redemption with a key role in Spain's dramatic passage to the Euro 2020 quarter-finals after a difficult time with the national team which led to fans savaging him and his family with abuse.

Juventus forward Morata lashed home a brilliant goal in the 100th minute of an epic match at the Parken Stadium in Copenhagen to put Spain 4-3 ahead after La Roja had thrown away a two-goal lead in the final seven minutes of normal time.

Morata calmed Spanish nerves with the sort of composure which he had lacked in the tournament up to that point, cushioning Dani Olmo's cross with his right foot before arrowing in a left-footed shot that Croatia goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic could barely see, let alone save. Mikel Oyarzabal made sure of the win that Spain's performance deserved three minutes later but it was Morata who coach Luis Enrique singled out for plaudits after the match.

"I've been telling you this for months, we do not depend on a single player to score goals," Luis Enrique told reporters after the match. "I don't think there is a single coach in the world who wouldn't admire or heap praise on a player like Alvaro Morata."

Morata raised his fist to the Spain fans gathered in the southern corner of the Parken and was greeted by rapturous applause, a stark contrast to the abuse he received after his side's 1-1 draw with Poland which he said he had kept him up for nine hours in the night.

Spain coach Luis Enrique, who said on Sunday that the police should investigate the abuse, was full of praise for the center-forward's qualities. "He is able to give you superiority, he can defend as if he were a center-back, he dominates in the air, he scores goals and he is physically powerful," he said. "We should be grateful that he is Spanish and that we have Alvaro in our team." Spain will now face Switzerland in the last eight in Saint Petersburg after France's shock exit on penalties, giving Spain a theoretically easier path to the final. However they will need to cut out the silly mistakes if they are to get past the Swiss, who showed on Monday that they are as capable as Croatia at punishing complacency. — AFP

## England reach Euro 2020 quarter finals to end Germany curse

**LONDON:** Raheem Sterling and Harry Kane fired England into the Euro 2020 quarter-finals as they sealed a 2-0 win against Germany that ended decades of hurt at the hands of their bitter rivals yesterday. Sterling struck with 15 minutes left in a tense last 16 tie at Wembley before Kane clinched England's first knockout stage victory over Germany since 1966.

In the 55 years since England beat the Germans in the World Cup final, the Three Lions had endured a painful litany of defeats against Die Mannschaft when the stakes were highest. England were eliminated from the 1970, 1990 and 2010 World Cups by Germany, who also beat them in the Euro 96 semi-finals at Wembley. But Gareth Southgate's side have finally exorcised the ghosts of Paul Gascoigne's tears and their own manager's penalty miss 25 years ago.

England produced a gritty display capped by clinical finishes from Sterling, who now has three goals in the tournament, and Kane—who finally bagged his first of the competition. England, yet to concede a goal in the tournament, head to Rome on Saturday for a quarter-final against the winners of last night's other last 16 tie between Sweden and Ukraine.

Chasing a first major international trophy since 1966, England's side of the draw looks wide open, with a potential semi-final against Denmark or the Czech Republic unlikely to strike fear into their hearts. It was only England's second knockout stage win in the history of the European Championship and their first victory over Germany at Wembley since 1975.

For Germany manager Joachim Loew, it was an agonizing end to his reign as he prepares to step down after the tournament. Always keen to deflect attention, Southgate



**LONDON:** England's players celebrate their second goal during the Euro 2020 round of 16 football match between England and Germany at Wembley Stadium in London yesterday.

will have relished his moment of redemption, especially since his decision to switch to a three-man defense to match up with the German formation paid off. With the vast majority of the 40,000 crowd supporting England, the players walked out to a wall of sound that included a hostile reception for the German national anthem.

### Knockout blow

England needed a tone-setting moment to ease their visible anxiety early on and Sterling provided it as he drove forward for a 25-yard blast that forced a fine save from Manuel Neuer. With Harry Maguire win-

ning a series of thunderous headers and tackles and Bukayo Saka probing intelligently on the right flank, England gradually took control.

However, Germany almost snatched the lead as Kai Havertz played an inch-perfect pass to Timo Werner inside the England area. But Werner endured a dismal first season in front of goal for Chelsea and once again he was unable to produce a precise finish as he shot straight at Jordan Pickford. A misplaced pass from Thomas Mueller sent Sterling scampering through the Germany defense on the stroke of half-time. Yet when the ball ran to Kane, he was too



**Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, Prince George of Cambridge, and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, celebrate the win. — AFP photos**

slow to apply the finishing touch as he rounded Neuer and Mats Hummels' tackle snuffed out the danger.

Havertz's blistering half-volley forced a superb tip over from Pickford soon after the interval. It was Saka who made way when Southgate made his first change, sending on Jack Grealish in a game-defining moment.

Grealish's presence immediately brought more energy to England and in the 75th minute they finally delivered the knockout blow. Grealish worked the ball wide to Luke Shaw and his low cross reached Sterling, who pounced with a clinical close-range

finish to send Wembley into ecstasy. Mueller should have equalized when Havertz's pass sent him clean through, but the Bayern Munich star rolled his shot wide and fell to the turf in dismay. Kane made Mueller pay in the 86th minute as he finished off a lethal England counter-attack with a diving header past Neuer from Grealish's cross.

During the first day of England's Euro camp at St George's Park, Southgate showed his squad a motivational video featuring some of the team's greatest victories. Now they have added their own chapter to the list of England's finest moments. —AFP



**Kuwait Times**  
Established 1961  
The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf

**REGISTER TODAY**  
for the **COVID-19 vaccine**

Free for all residents of Kuwait. To register visit:

**[www.moh.gov.kw](http://www.moh.gov.kw)**

**STEP 1:** Click on COVID-19 VACCINE REGISTRATION **STEP 2:** FILL OUT BASIC INFORMATION **STEP 3:** SUBMIT FORM

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe, effective and approved by Kuwait's Ministry of Health