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VOLVO

# EU invites 'concrete' US plan on vaccine patents

## Virus deaths top 4,000 in India as pope calls for patent waivers

### Saudi: Only vaccinated can return to workplace

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia said Friday that employees will only be allowed to return to their workplace in person once vaccinated against COVID-19. Vaccination will become a "mandatory condition" for the face-to-face return of public and private sector employees, the ministry of human resources and social development said in a statement, urging workers to "begin the process" to get a job. The health

ministry said it has administered more than 10 million coronavirus vaccine doses, in a country with a population of over 34 million.

The kingdom has reported more than 423,000 coronavirus infections and more than 7,000 deaths from COVID-19 since the pandemic began. On Sunday, the government said it will permit citizens immunized against COVID-19 to travel abroad from May 17. —AFP

PORTO, Portugal: Europe yesterday passed the ball back to Washington in a debate over COVID vaccine patents, pushing the US for a concrete proposal and a commitment to export much-needed jabs. Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, speaking after a summit of EU and Indian leaders, said the EU had exported much of its own production and that America should follow suit.

"Now that a further part of the American population has been vaccinated, I hope that we can come to a free exchange of components and an opening of the market for vaccines," she said. European Council chief Charles Michel said the bloc was ready to discuss a US offer to suspend patent protection on vaccines—once the details are clear. "We are ready to engage on this topic, as soon as a concrete proposal would be put on

the table," Michel said at an EU summit in Portugal that discussed that subject, among others.

He added that the EU had doubts about the idea being a "magic bullet" in the short term and encouraged "all the partners to facilitate the export of doses." France's skepticism was plain, with President Emmanuel Macron declaring "patents are not the priority".

Influential voices support the push to waive patents, not least that of Pope Francis, who criticized putting "the laws of the market or intellectual property above the laws of love and the health of humanity".

The Pope expressed his backing for "universal access to the vaccine and the temporary suspension of intellectual property rights", condemning the "virus of individualism" that "makes us indifferent to the suffering

of others". "A variant of this virus is closed nationalism, which prevents, for example, an internationalism of vaccines," he said.

The World Health Organization, India and South Africa have all called for patents to be temporarily suspended.

Meanwhile, new COVID-19 deaths surged past 4,000 for the first time in India yesterday in one of the world's worst outbreaks, as the pope called for patent waivers to "allow universal access to the vaccine." The call for waivers has gained momentum after the United States announced its surprise support for such a scheme to enable adequate vaccine supplies to fight the raging pandemic.

India now accounts for nearly half of the world's new known cases according to an AFP database, and it reported a national record 4,187 new deaths yesterday. — AFP

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## Local

# Kuwait FM: Amir's letter to Moroccan King highlights solid, strong bilateral relations

## Kuwait, Morocco mark 60 years of diplomatic relations

**RABAT:** Kuwait's Foreign Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah said Friday "the written letter to Moroccan King, which was delivered during a meeting with Prince Moulay Rashid bin Hassan II, included praise for the solid, strong, and historical relations between the two countries." Sheikh Dr Ahmad had delivered the letter from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to King of Morocco Mohammed VI during a meeting with Prince Moulay in Rabat earlier on Friday.

In a press conference, Sheikh Dr Ahmad pointed out that this year marks the anniversary of 60 years since the beginning of diplomatic relations between the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Morocco. He added that there are common visions and approaches for the political leadership in the two nations to launch another platform for deeper relations and more fertile prospects this year, hoping for another "positive turning point" in which all matters are discussed with the aim of strengthening and consolidating relations at all levels and in all fields.

On the meeting with Moroccan counterpart Nasser Bourita, the Foreign Minister said that discussion focused on the ongoing preparations for the work of the Moroccan-Kuwaiti Joint Higher Committee, which is supposed to convene this year in the Moroccan capital, Rabat. He emphasized that the Higher Joint Committee, which includes different sectors, would give a new spirit and a



**RABAT:** Kuwait's Foreign Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah delivers to Prince Moulay Rashid bin Hassan II a letter from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to King of Morocco Mohammed VI. — KUNA photos

doubling of momentum in which interests would be expanded and commonalities maximized. Sheikh Dr Ahmad added that the meeting also delved into lessons learned by the two countries in combating the coronavirus pandemic, including strengthening the health systems in the two countries, enhancing food security, exchanging experiences, in addition



**Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah attends a press conference with his Moroccan counterpart Nasser Bourita.**

to discussing all issues and developments on the Arab and regional arenas, as well as international affairs.

The Kuwaiti minister recalled the "historical and honorable" Moroccan stands, whether through Kuwaiti-Moroccan relations, and various historical visits of the leaders from both countries. Sheikh Dr

Ahmad also mentioned Morocco as being the first supporter of Kuwait membership in the Arab League, in addition to the firm stance of the late Moroccan King Hassan II towards the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the support for Kuwaiti legitimacy in a firm position with the conscience of the entire Kuwaiti people. — KUNA

## Europe Day and another year of strong European - Kuwaiti relations

**KUWAIT:** Dr Cristian Tudor, European Union Ambassador to Kuwait, released the following statement marking Europe Day and celebrating the relationship between Kuwait and the European Union:

"Europe Day is an occasion to celebrate peace and unity in Europe. This year marks the 71th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration, a powerful declaration that initiated the process of European integration and the longest Peace Project



**Dr Cristian Tudor**

throughout history. We are also marking this year the 10th anniversary of the EU diplomatic service i.e. European External Action Service 'EEAS'. The launch of the EEAS on 1 January 2011 was a major step in the European integration process, established with the aim of more coherence, cooperation and consistency in EU foreign policy.

"The relationship between the State of Kuwait and the European Union is truly unique. Kuwait was the first GCC country to sign a Cooperation Arrangement with the European Union, which is a cornerstone in our bilateral relations. This Arrangement has also resulted in the convening of the First Senior Officials' Meeting between both sides, also a first for GCC countries, in November 2018. This Cooperation Arrangement has also paved the way for both sides to deepen dialogue and to engage in detailed discussions on various areas such as trade, investment, economy, human rights, security, humanitarian assistance cooperation and development.

"On human rights, the State of Kuwait and the European Union have an opportunity to exchange views annually within the framework of the Human Rights Dialogue. The last round of discussions took place virtually in March 2021. As a follow-up to the dialogue meeting in 2020, we organized a webinar

on strengthening women's political participation in Kuwait ahead of the parliamentary elections, in cooperation with local authorities.

"Kuwait and the European Union co-hosted in the past international donor and relief conferences for Syria, Iraq, and the Rohingya people. In March, the EU hosted the fifth Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region to advance the peace process and finally put an end to the humanitarian crisis as well as finding a sustainable political solution after 10 years of the conflict in Syria. Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah represented Kuwait in the Conference and reiterated Kuwait's unwavering support to the Syrian people.

"The EU Delegation in Kuwait is keen on promoting people-to-people relations, as an important component for developing solid and longstanding relations between the EU and Kuwait. In this context, we have worked with Kuwaiti non-profit organizations such as LOYAC and Kuwait Society for Human Rights. The EU attaches great importance to post-COVID recovery and work with Kuwait on green and digital transformation. In this context, we held webinars in April on net zero Energy buildings and renewable energy. This approach reflects the EU's policy to achieve zero

carbon emissions by 2050.

"It is a fact that when it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic, no one is safe until everyone is safe. Therefore, the EU is working hard to accelerate the internal roll out of COVID-19 vaccines. At the same time, the EU is already contributing in a very significant way to the global vaccination drive via exports and the international COVAX facility. This way, the EU is helping low and middle-income countries to vaccinate their population. When we speak about the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to pay tribute to health workers all over the world including in Europe and Kuwait for their tremendous work in combating the pandemic.

"As we celebrate Europe Day during the holy month of Ramadan this year, I would like to avail of this opportunity to send my greetings to HH the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah; HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to all Muslims in Kuwait and abroad 'Ramadan Kareem'. I invite you to read about our virtual events to mark Europe Day by visiting the EU Delegation in Kuwait social media accounts '@EUinKuwait' as well as my Twitter account '@CristianTudorEU'. I look forward for more cooperation between Kuwait and the EU for many years to come."

### Ramadan Kareem

## The Meaning of Life

By Yasmeim Mohammad Salim

"What is the meaning of life?" The posed question is a philosophy that has been raised countless of times and is as old as the earliest civilizations. We as humans, tend to reflect upon this question quite frequently. Although this dilemma has been resolved by many throughout history, people still tend to be skeptical about which theory to follow. The comparison of theories are generally within social, historical and religious contexts.

What is the purpose of life? Often times we think that we were gifted this life in order to chase after the possessions that we may lack. This theory is widely followed by a significant number of people. The poor man seeks affluence, while the rich man seeks simplicity. The married man longs to be single and the bachelor longs to settle down. The old person wants to be a child again and the child wants to grow up quickly. These are all examples of how most humans are never content with what they have and consistently seek what they do not have.

What is the purpose of existence? Throughout history, there have been numerous theories that describe the meaning of life according to different schools of philosophy. Nevertheless, many people still refuse to believe in any of them. These philosophies date back to the dawn of humanity, which proves how important the question of life is to humanity. Some of the philosophies of the meaning of life were historical impacts that were composed by famous philosophers that are well-known by their wisdom. According to experts, until now there exists more than twenty different schools of philosophy that explain the meaning of life. All of these philosophies are grouped into four categories, namely:

- I. Life has an objective meaning
- II. Life has a subjective meaning
- III. Life has no meaning
- IV. Life has a supernatural/unexplainable meaning

What is the use of these philosophies? An example of these philosophies is Aristotelianism. This philosophy was, as the name indicates, introduced by the well-known Greek philosopher Aristotle. It states that every human must be good

and virtuous according to their own definition of good. Apparently, believing in and submitting to God is considered religion. Therefore, the meaning of life is already prescribed. As a result, this belief falls under the philosophy of Theism that dates back to prehistoric times. Henceforth, we understand the different ideas behind these various philosophies - which serves to provide a philosophy for the purpose of life. (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/life-meaning/>)

What is your purpose in life? Each person finds a different goal or purpose in life, which in turn affects their thinking, intentions and decision-making. A human's purpose structures his life and also, affects his after-life. A person may believe in the aforementioned philosophies about the meaning of life or form his/her own philosophy of how they want to live. So, this is a highly subjective matter.

What is the actual meaning of life? The Islamic perspective on the meaning of life is grouped under the philosophy of Theism. The meaning of life for Muslims is to follow God's commandments, in order to gain abundant happiness and prosperity in both this mundane life and also, what comes after, i.e., the eternal life. This life is made as a trial for all mankind to worship one God and obey Him to become a better person (virtuous/good). "I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me." (Quran, 51:56). This (to be good) is what Aristotle (a wise philosopher) has stated, just as almost all philosophies state. Everyone seeks to live a great life, filled with abundance and prosperity. Therefore, one must comply with Allah's commandments and whoever does that will not only have a fulfilled life on earth, and bliss Hereafter. "And whoever relies upon Allah - then He is sufficient for him. Indeed, Allah will accomplish His purpose. Allah has already set for everything a [decreed] extent." (Quran, 65:3)

- Courtesy of TIES: TIES is among the projects funded and managed by Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue. TIES aims at empowering Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, please call 25231015/6 or 94079426 or e-mail: [info@tiescenter.net](mailto:info@tiescenter.net).



## Gulf Bank supports UNHCR efforts during Ramadan

**KUWAIT:** As part of its commitment to community sustainability, and in keeping with international efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations, Gulf Bank contributed its support to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). During the month of Ramadan, Gulf Bank's efforts included providing humanitarian aid and basic daily needs to refugees. Gulf Bank's support covered basic costs for refugee families, including housing rent, food, and health services, in addition to debt repayment.

Regarding this initiative, Lujain Al-Qenaei, the Assistant Manager for Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, said: "The month of Ramadan could not pass without us extending a helping hand to our refugee communities. We appreciate the efforts of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and Gulf Bank is keen to seize every opportunity to provide assistance to those in need in an effort to ensure the provision and sustainability of security and peace."

The UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting

rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people. As one of the United Nations' organizations, the UNHCR was established with the aim of protecting and supporting refugees, at the request of a government, or the United Nations itself. It assists refugees in completing their voluntary return to their home countries, integration into receiving societies, or resettlement to a third country.

Gulf Bank's latest initiative is one of many sustainability events that the Bank organizes and participates in at the community level, with various initiatives taking place during Ramadan. Throughout the holy month, Gulf Bank has also organized several recreational activities and events that have taken place during walking hours in several residential areas, as part of its social responsibility to engage with the local community.

Throughout the year, Gulf Bank has remained committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank's social responsibility initiatives go hand in hand with international efforts, aligning with the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Also known as the Global Goals, the SDGs were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.



Local

# Kuwait agencies have little optimism about this year's travel chances

'Demand on travel could increase after recent vaccination drive'

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Everyone wants to travel in summer and many people are already planning their trips, but whether this will be possible is not clear yet, due to the still-raging pandemic. The Eid Al Fitr holiday, which will begin next week, also used to be high season for travelling, but last year was a washout and this year doesn't seem much different.

According to Ghasan Saleem, Sales Manager at Al-Othman Travel Agency, the situation is not stable around the world. "The situation in most countries is still bad and many are under lockdown, so most people are afraid to travel and don't want to take the risk, especially now with the new Indian strain of the virus. The situation is not clear yet for this summer," he told Kuwait Times.

"The majority of our work for the past couple of months was making bookings for domestic workers, and the remaining bookings were for medical treatment and study. Recently we worked on umrah trips, but still not the usual volume. The most popular destinations if people start travelling again will be Turkey, Lebanon and Europe," added Saleem.

He is pessimistic about travelling this year. "I don't see any positive signs. The number of travel agencies compared to potential passengers is huge, so business is divided. Before the pandemic, there were 16 direct flights to Turkey weekly, in addition to indirect flights, while now there are only four flights," he noted.

"Last year, most passengers were flying one-way from Kuwait - expats who left the country. The

problem we face is the extremely high ticket prices to Kuwait due to the limited capacity of flights, which is only 35 passengers on board. Also, I think most people are afraid to travel, especially after two Kuwaitis got infected in Turkey and died there, in addition to a Kuwait tourist in Dubai. But I hope that things will get better," concluded Saleem.

Khaled Abduljawad, Head of Tourism at Musaed Alsaleh Travel, is optimistic. He believes travel this year will rise compared to 2020 by 20 to 40 percent. "Travel during this Eid is not expected. The unstable situation and high ticket prices does not encourage travelling. I expect demand for travel to hike after the recent decision of mandatory vaccination for Kuwaitis who want to travel," he pointed out.

Abduljawad expects two to three million people will be vaccinated. "I think after vaccinating the majority of the population, the situation will improve, and foreigners will be able to enter the country again," he said.

People want to travel no matter where. "As most people didn't travel last year, they are willing to travel anywhere. Clients are asking me to book them to any destination that doesn't require a visa. Dubai is always open, yet they still require a PCR test, even for vaccinated passengers," explained Abduljawad.

Saled Al-Ruweyih, Sales Manager at Travel Mate, does not expect travel to be any better than last year. "The situation is still bad all over the world. I won't advise people to risk their health and travel for tourism this summer. Even my friends in Europe



**KUWAIT:** People queue up to receive a dose of the COVID-19 coronavirus vaccine at the Kuwait Vaccination Center in Mishref. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

are advising me to avoid travelling to Europe now. People in general are worried of the pandemic, especially the new strains of the virus," he said.

According to him, almost 70 percent of travelers will be flying to Turkey. "Until now only a few clients have made a booking. The majority of them will be

travelling to Turkey and the United Kingdom as they have properties in these countries. Even umrah trips are fewer than in previous years as people are still afraid of travelling. I think that around 40 percent of people are willing to travel, while 60 percent aren't," stressed Ruweyih.

## Ooredoo continues to support charitable, humanitarian initiatives

**KUWAIT:** In continuation of its efforts on the humanitarian level during Ramadan, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, continues supporting charitable and humanitarian initiatives launched by Al-Najat Charity Society during the last ten days of the holy month.

Fatima Dashti, Senior Manager, Public Relations, Internal Communications and Social Responsibility at Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "What distinguishes Al-Najat Charity Society, is its diversification of its humanitarian projects and initiatives it launches, which serves a large segment of the needy inside and outside Kuwait, which comes under the umbrella of Ooredoo Kuwait's social responsibility strategy. The strategy has the goal of promoting the culture of giving among the community, supporting the needy families and enhance the company's pioneering role toward community supporting."



Fatima Dashti

From his side, Omar Thuwaini, Head of Resources, Public Relations and Media Sector at Al-Najat Charity Society, said: "During the last ten days of Ramadan, we usually intensify our charitable campaigns. The first campaign was launched on the night of Ramadan 21st under the name of 'Teach me Islam' which aims to educate 4,000 converts the principles of Islam, Arabic - language of the

holy Quran - , sharia sciences and Islamic studies." "On Tuesday, the night of Ramadan 23rd, Al-Najat Charity Society also launched its 'Kuwait Humanitarian Village in Chad' under the slogan 'Your righteous deeds will pay off', as we aspire to establish an integrated village that includes all the basic facilities and provide a decent life for the needy families," Thuwaini added.

Thuwaini continued: "Next Thursday, Ramadan 25, we will launch our orphan sponsorship campaign, a highly rewarding deed in Islam. The campaign will continue for three days, and the monthly sponsorship cost is KWD 15. A sponsor's support helps cover essential needs, such as food, clothing, health care, or education. Through this initiative, we aim to sponsor 350 orphans in various poor countries."

As part of Al-Najat Charity Society group of initiatives during the last ten days of Ramadan, the charity will also be launching another campaign on Monday, Ramadan 29th. The campaign aims to offer young children and youth who have lost any parts of their bodies like an arm or leg in result of wars and accidents, with artificial limb. The charity also aims through this humanitarian initiative, to change their reality and inspire them to rely on themselves in performing daily activities such as walking, eating, or dressing.

Thuwaini extended his thanks to Ooredoo Kuwait, appreciating its cooperation and continues support for charitable projects, campaigns and activities, stressing that this distinguished partnership effectively contributes to improving the lives of thousands of needy families inside and outside Kuwait.

## PACI adds COVID-19 vaccination status on Mobile ID app

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) launched a new update for the Mobile ID smartphone application to include some important modifications, such as the COVID-19 vaccination status. This came under the directives of the Minister of Public Works and the Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Civil Information, Dr Rana Al-Faris, and the Director General of the Authority, Musaed Al-Asousi. Asousi noted that the app works on all smart device systems (Android, IOS, and Huawei), adding that all COVID-19 vaccination data will appear directly once the application is updated. The Mobile ID app was launched in



accordance with the Cabinet decision to be used as a digital civil card, and the number of its users has exceeded 1,700,000 so far. — KUNA

## Kuwait curfew: What you need to know

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait imposed a curfew from 7:00 pm to 5:00 am until the end of Ramadan to help curb an increase in COVID-19 cases. During the curfew hours, pharmacies, medical stores, co-operative societies and supermarkets are allowed to continue operation only through delivery services, while restaurants and cafes are allowed to deliver food from 7:00 pm to 3:00 am every day. Also during the curfew, people are allowed to go to prayers at mosques only by walking, and the government allowed people to practice walking and jogging from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm. The government meanwhile allowed salons and health clubs to reopen during the day but kept restaurants and cafes closed except for drive-through and delivery services. Meanwhile, taxis are allowed to carry only a maximum of two passengers.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry launched a booking service, allowing people to shop from 7:00 pm to 12:00 am during the curfew hours. The service is valid for all co-ops and supermarkets around Kuwait. To book an appointment, a shopper should visit [www.moci.shop](http://www.moci.shop), enter the required information (civil ID number and serial number, contact number and email address), the reason for appointment (food supply center) and the time and date of the appointment. The shopper would then receive a barcode to show once they reach the shopping center.

### Where to obtain a curfew pass?

Citizens and residents that need a pass during the curfew hours to leave their homes can apply for a pass at <https://www.paci.gov.kw/>. The pass is available for those in need of emergency medical treatment, doctor's visits, blood donation, COVID-19 swabs and COVID-19 vaccinations.

### Co-op delivery during curfew hours

During curfew hours, co-ops, grocery stores and other markets will be allowed to offer delivery services. Most co-ops will accept orders via delivery. Here is an incomplete list of co-op WhatsApp numbers. Each co-op will be responsible for deciding if and when they provide delivery services and not all may be providing.

Omariya Co-op  
WhatsApp 6041-0067

Farwaniya Co-op  
WhatsApp 6767-8211

Qairawan Co-op  
WhatsApp 9000-3749

Jahra Co-op  
WhatsApp 5160-2458

Abdulla Al-Mubarak Co-op  
WhatsApp 6066-6338

Nuzha Co-op  
WhatsApp 9784-5531

Khaitan Co-op  
WhatsApp 6777-9745

Ardhiya Co-op  
WhatsApp 6902-0779

Rabiya Co-op  
WhatsApp 2438-8316

Wafra Farm Co-op  
Tel: 9883-5245 / 5170-0085

Salmyia Co-op  
Tel: 22253225

Jabriya Co-op  
Tel: 1805-353  
WhatsApp 6566-6084

Rawdha & Hawally  
WhatsApp 9662-2883

Shaab Co-op  
WhatsApp 9090-4455

Wafra Co-op  
WhatsApp 5055-0539

Keifan Co-op  
WhatsApp 5178-1719

Rehab Co-op  
WhatsApp 9222-2358

Mishref Co-op  
WhatsApp 5055-9900

Faiha Co-op  
Tel: 1861-000  
WhatsApp 9098-6000

Rumaithiya Co-op  
WhatsApp 6066-0045

Bayan Co-op  
WhatsApp 9004-2500

Fahaheel Co-op  
WhatsApp 5178-9951

Adan & Qusour Co-op  
Tel: 5034-3111 / 6593-3975

Salam Co-op  
WhatsApp 9788-7832

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## Ramadan Diwaniya

## Lockdown gave artists more time to work on pieces at home: Grand Mosque Art Consultant

It takes years of hard work and labor to perfect your style: Al-Ali

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti professionals are interviewed by Kuwait Times to learn more about the nature of their jobs, and changes and challenges they have faced during the pandemic. The following are excerpts from Kuwait Times' interview with Fareed Al-Ali, Art Consultant at the Grand Mosque.

**Kuwait Times:** How is your daily work amidst the coronavirus pandemic? Are you still going to work daily?

**Fareed Al-Ali:** So many people are complaining about the lockdown and curfew because of the pandemic, but for me as an artist, this is a good time to spend at home since I have lots of things to do. Normally you wouldn't see me in the house because I would be very busy. Now I have a lot of time to do calligraphy at home and arrange everything in the house - boxes and books I have in the library. I am also reading Islamic art projects I am planning after the pandemic. I can see the coronavirus will be a thing of the past soon. I go to work as well. I am enjoying the new timings.

**Kuwait Times:** Tell us about your work at the Grand Mosque.

**Al-Ali:** I started working at the Grand Mosque in 2005. Our workload is less now because we cannot hold activities or gatherings. We hold virtual art expos, but these are not as good as actual exhibitions where you can see and feel the details of the artworks. But we have to do this so that our creativity is not affected. Before the pandemic, we used to have lots of activities - exhibitions, workshops, conventions, lectures, Quran recitation competitions, cultural weeks and expos within and outside Kuwait.

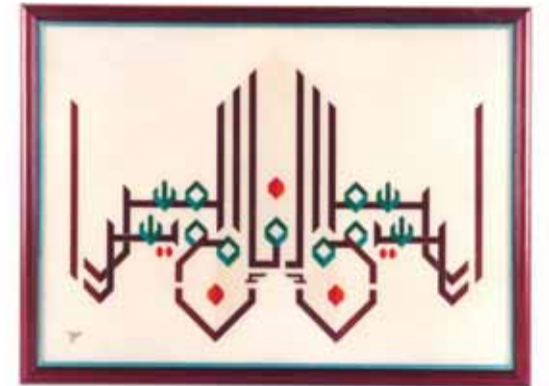
**Kuwait Times:** Some people are comparing this pandemic to the Great Depression and World Wars. How do you view it?

**Al-Ali:** In war, you know who your enemies are, who you are fighting against. We cannot see the virus, we are all in danger and we are all in the same boat - anxious and uneasy, because we don't know when the virus is going to strike us. This is not a normal virus; there's no medicine for it and it will take time to find the cure for this virus. We don't know when the pandemic is going to end.

In war, we normally come together to fight as one and win the battle, but against this virus, we are told to stay at home and maintain a distance from one



**KUWAIT:** Fareed Al-Ali, Art Consultant at the Grand Mosque.



A calligraphy artwork by Fareed Al-Ali.

another to stay healthy. In war, we fight using many weapons, fighter jets and missiles, but against the coronavirus, we are only reliant on a vaccine. At this stage, not all countries around the world have the vaccine and are still waiting for doses to arrive. Thank God we have vaccines here in Kuwait.

## Years of hard work

**Kuwait Times:** You are a well-known calligrapher in Kuwait. Was this your passion/hobby? When did you start?

**Al-Ali:** To perfect your style and calligraphic instinct, it takes years of hard work and labor. I've been doing this now for the past 45 years. I develop



Everything bad will come to pass

my skills because I love it. I started when I was a child. I love calligraphy and want to impart this knowledge and art throughout the world. I still feel calligraphy done by hand is the best of all. You can see individuality and personal touch. It's natural.

**Kuwait Times:** After graduating from university, which path did you pursue?

**Al-Ali:** When I finished college, I immediately

started working as an architect - that was my degree at the university. My hobby then took me to calligraphy. I worked at the Municipality, the engineering department at the ministry of public works, the army and the ministry of defense's art department until I retired. I am working as an art consultant at the ministry of awqaf at the Grand Mosque until now. I am happy with my achievements before and now, and all the activities by the ministry of awqaf to promote Islamic art, not just in Kuwait but all over the world. I am happy to create things which nobody dares to do.

**Kuwait Times:** Tell us about your family.

**Al-Ali:** My parents helped me to be of service to Islamic art. They were my source of strength at that time and very helpful. My parents have a very special place in my heart - they are the reason where I am now. They bought all the tools for me to be a good calligrapher and artist. My wife and children are very supportive too. My wife is very artistic - sometimes she shows me something I wasn't able to see.

**Kuwait Times:** What was the outcome of your virtual calligraphy expo last year with participation by hundreds of calligraphers from all over the world?

**Al-Ali:** The international virtual art calligraphy exhibition which we held during the onset of the pandemic was very successful. It was the biggest expo in the world at that time. The message of the expo was that Allah will help us continue with our lives. Everything bad will come to pass. More than 103 calligraphers joined from all over the world to make this expo possible and 340 artworks were submitted. We achieved the goal of the exhibition I am very thankful to everyone who participated and visited our virtual expo.

## ACK launches iftar meals distribution drive

**KUWAIT:** The Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) kicked-off its annual Ramadan iftar meals distribution drive as part of its corporate social responsibility strategy. The initiative is a humble gesture during the holy month of Ramadan from ACK towards community members and disadvantaged families.

Over the past years, ACK had organized initiatives every Ramadan with its students, staff and faculty to hand out iftar meals to needy members of the community, but as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the college limited volunteers to only a small number of staff members. The team streamlined efforts to distribute Iftar meals and ensure compliance with precautionary measures.

May Al-Musallam, Senior Manager of Public Relations at ACK, highlighted the importance of giving back to the community, noting that the College remains true to its core values of helping the community even more in difficult times such as these. "ACK was built around a culture of care, and as a college, we believe it is our responsibility to care for all those in need, not just our students. It is important to us to lend a helping hand to those who need it," concluded Musallam.

**KUWAIT TIMES RAMADAN QUIZ 2021**

Kuwait Times annual Ramadan competition will publish every day throughout the holy month of Ramadan. All thirty coupons containing the correct answer must be sent to the newspaper to become eligible for the raffle draw. All coupons must be received on or before Monday 17 of May 2021. Winners will be announced in Kuwait Times.

ISSUE NO: 18430 RAMADAN 26, 1442 AH

## Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

**26- The Messenger of Allah, sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam, led many battles; however, fighting did not occur except in a limited number of them. What was this number?**

- A. Five  
 B. Seven  
 C. Nine

## Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

**Date :**  
**Name :**  
**Civil ID :**  
**Tel :**  
**Email :**

ISSUE NO: 18430 RAMADAN 27, 1442 AH

## Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

**27- What is the name of fast-breaking food?**

- A. Sawm  
 B. Zakat  
 C. Iftar  
 D. Sadaqah

## Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

**Date :**  
**Name :**  
**Civil ID :**  
**Tel :**  
**Email :**



IWG members attend the virtual meeting.

## IWG hosts 'Ramadan Around the World' virtual meeting

**KUWAIT:** International Women's Group (IWG) - Kuwait celebrated the holy month of Ramadan in a virtual meeting that showcased the customs and traditions of Bangladesh, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine and Turkey, with presentations organized by the respective embassies. The event was held recently under the patronage of Sheikha Hanouf Bader Al-Muhamad Al Sabah, spouse to Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Honorary President of the IWG - Kuwait.

Ambreen Mustafa, spouse of the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and President of IWG, delivered the welcome speech and Rima Khalidi, spouse of the Ambassador of the State of Palestine and Vice president of IWG introduced the honored presenters.

Sheikha Hanouf in a special videotaped Ramadan speech said: "Dear friends in the International Women's Group, Ramadan teaches us valuable lessons about the importance of trying our utmost to do good and of seeking to help the less fortunate. We in this group take pride in all our women, who have taken the initiative to serve the community and to improve Kuwait and humanity." She also extended her best wishes for universal health, prosperity and peace and stressed the importance of adherence to state guidelines in the fight against the pandemic during the holy month of Ramadan and moving forward.

IWG's 'Ramadan Around the World' presentations included colorful and festive videos of the participating countries' foods and customs, all beautifully presented and narrated by the IWG honorary member of each country, and Ramadan greetings from several Ambassadors, including:

- General Md Ashikuzzaman, Ambassador of Bangladesh to the state of Kuwait and his spouse

Nahid Niaz.  
• Manar Kreshan, spouse of the Ambassador of Jordan to the state of Kuwait.

• Sharpiah Ab Raman, spouse of the Ambassador of Malaysia to the state of Kuwait.

• Kathiya Alkharusi, spouse of the Ambassador of Oman to the state of Kuwait.

• Ambreen Mustafa, spouse of the Ambassador of Pakistan to the state of Kuwait.

• Rami Tahboub, Ambassador of Palestine to the State of Kuwait and his spouse Rima Khalidi.

• Aysa Hilal Koytak, Ambassador of Turkey to the state of Kuwait.

The Ramadan traditions of Kuwait were expertly presented by Sarah Al-Bakar of KTV 2 who took members through a wonderful and detailed cultural journey covering special Ramadan foods, clothing and customs such as Abu Tubaila, Zaad and girgian. The event concluded with special thanks to the distinguished presenters, volunteers, online participants and the IWG board members for making the event a great success.



**KUWAIT:** Ambreen Mustafa, spouse of the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and President of IWG (right) and Rima Khalidi, spouse of the Ambassador of the State of Palestine and Vice president of IWG.

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Saudi Arabia, Pakistan vow to reset strained relations

## Syrian shepherds suffer with grazing lands a no-go zone

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JERUSALEM: Palestinians gather to perform the last Friday prayers of the fasting month of Ramadan, outside the Dome of the Rock mosque at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site, in Jerusalem's old city, Friday. —AFP

# 205 Palestinians wounded in clashes

## US, EU and regional powers urge calm after days of Jerusalem violence

**JERUSALEM:** Israel braced for more protests yesterday after clashes at Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa Mosque compound wounded more than 200 people and as the US, EU and regional powers urged calm after days of escalating violence.

In the unrest following Muslim prayers Friday, Israeli riot police fired rubber bullets and stun grenades at Palestinians who hurled rocks, bottles and fireworks at officers at Islam's third-holiest site, which is also revered by Jews. Israeli police said 18 officers were wounded while the Palestinian Red Crescent reported that 205 Palestinians were injured in the violence at Al-Aqsa and across annexed east Jerusalem, including more than 80 who were hospitalized.

Video footage showed Israeli forces storming the mosque's sprawling plaza and firing sound grenades inside the building, where throngs of worshippers including women and children were praying on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan. An AFP reporter witnessed hundreds of Palestinians hurling stones at police. He said officers locked the doors of Al-Aqsa mosque, trapping worshippers for at least an hour.

The clashes came as tensions have soared over Israeli restrictions on access to parts of the Old City during

Ramadan and the threat of eviction hanging over four Palestinian families in east Jerusalem to make way for Jewish settlers.

The Islamist movement Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, urged Palestinians to remain at the Al-Aqsa compound until Thursday morning, when Ramadan ends, warning that "the resistance is ready to defend Al-Aqsa at any cost". Al-Aqsa is in the Haram Al-Sharif compound, known to Jews as the Temple Mount, which also includes the Dome of the Rock.

### 'Heavy price'

Yesterday, dozens of Arab citizens of Israel protested in Nazareth in solidarity with Jerusalem Palestinians, holding signs that read "the occupation is terrorism". The High Follow up Committee for the Arabs in Israel, which represents the country's 20 percent minority, called for protests in other Arab cities and Jerusalem.

The United States—a staunch Israeli ally whose tone has however toughened under US President Joe Biden—said it was "extremely concerned" by the events and urged both sides to "avoid steps that exacerbate tensions or take us further away from peace". "This includes evictions in east Jerusalem, set-

tlement activity, home demolitions and acts of terrorism," the State Department said.

The European Union called on the authorities "to act urgently to de-escalate the current tensions," saying "violence and incitement are unacceptable and the perpetrators on all sides must be held accountable". Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas said he held the Israeli government responsible for the unrest and voiced "full support for our heroes in Al-Aqsa".

Yair Lapid, an Israeli politician attempting to form a coalition government to replace Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, sent encouragement to police officers. "The state of Israel will not let violence run loose and definitely will not allow terror groups to threaten it," he tweeted. "Whoever wants to harm us must know that he will pay a heavy price."

### 'Barbaric attack'

Al-Aqsa mosque director Omar Al-Kiswani said in a video posted by Palestinian activists that, directly after the evening iftar breakfast meal, "the Al-Aqsa mosque was stormed and unarmed worshippers were attacked to empty it". Hundreds of people slept on the carpets on the mosque Friday night.

Although this is not unusual during Ramadan, many stayed in an act of defiance against the police action.

Jordan condemned Israel's "barbaric attack", and Egypt, Turkey, Tunisia, Pakistan and Qatar blasted Israeli forces for the confrontation. Israel also drew criticism from Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, two countries that signed normalization accords with Israel last year. Iran called on the United Nations to condemn the Israeli police actions, arguing that "this war crime once again proved to the world the criminal nature of the illegitimate Zionist regime".

The clashes followed a week of intensifying violence. Earlier, Friday, Israeli police said officers killed two Palestinians and wounded a third after the three men opened fire on the Salem base in the occupied West Bank—the latest of several deadly shootings that week. Clashes have also repeatedly broken out in east Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, fuelled by a years-long attempt by Jewish settlers to take over Palestinian homes. Israel's Supreme Court is to hold a new hearing in the case on Monday, when Israelis mark Jerusalem Day to celebrate the "liberation" of the city, including with a parade of Israeli flags through the Old City. —AFP

## 'Sick with fear': Journalists at risk in the Sahel

**BAMAKO, Mali:** Recent killings and kidnappings of reporters in the Sahel have highlighted the severe risks faced by journalists in the war-torn African region, with some describing themselves as "sick with fear". A brutal jihadist conflict in the Sahel nations of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso has left vast swathes of territory outside of state control, and thousands of people dead. Journalists covering the insurgency often find themselves targeted by armed groups, either because of their reporting, or their ransom value. The considerable risks involved in practicing journalism in the vast semi-arid region were underscored this week when it emerged that French reporter Olivier Dubois, who had gone missing, was likely being held captive by jihadists.

The 46-year-old freelancer had disappeared on April 8 in the northern Malian town of Gao, where he had travelled to interview an Al-Qaeda-linked jihadist commander. But Dubois said in a video that surfaced on Wednesday—which has not been independently confirmed—that he had been abducted by the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM), the biggest jihadist alliance in the Sahel.



BAMAKO, Mali: Recent killings and kidnappings of reporters in the Sahel have highlighted the severe risks faced by journalists in the war-torn African region, with some describing themselves as "sick with fear". —AFP

News of his kidnapping also followed the killing of Spanish reporters David Beriain and Roberto Fraile, and Irish NGO worker Rory Young, in Burkina Faso in April. Salif Zangre, a Burkinabe video journalist, told AFP that the killings are a reminder "of how exposed we can be in our profession".

He added that while this did not affect journalists' desire to cover the news, he stressed that they needed to take serious precautions. Describing their work, two local reporters—who are not named for security reasons—told AFP they are often "sick with fear". —AFP

not accepted by hospitals for admission," Panday told AFP as he waited outside a oxygen cylinder filling station in Moradabad district. "They are demanding an RT-PCR (test), and that is not available," he said. The 42-year-old said the family spent an astronomical 40,000 rupees (\$545) to arrange an empty oxygen cylinder.

"The government says that there is ample supply of medicines and oxygen. But look how hundreds of desperate people are struggling to save their brothers, sisters and parents," he said. Police are on guard at the filling station, allowing only those with doctor prescriptions to get oxygen. The aim, authorities say, is to stop black marketeers. "But we know many people are unable to get tested and are sick. But they can't get oxygen," said manager R K Yadav.

A regional court on Wednesday said that deaths in Uttar Pradesh due to oxygen shortages were "criminal acts and not less than a genocide". But complaining can land ordinary people in trouble under chief minister Yogi Adityanath, 48. Last week the firebrand monk declared that those making "false" claims about shortages would be prosecuted and their properties seized. At least two people and a hospital have been charged by police for "spreading rumors and fear". —AFP

## Battling COVID, and govt denial, in rural India

**MORADABAD:** People in India's most populous state Uttar Pradesh are fighting not just a raging pandemic but also a prickly nationalist local government that many say is in denial. The state authorities, headed by a monk touted by some as a successor to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, insist there are no shortages and take a dim view of those "spreading fear". But the virus is clearly wreaking havoc as it spreads beyond big cities into the towns and villages not only of Uttar Pradesh, home to 240 million people, but elsewhere in India's colossal hinterland. Brijesh Pandey spends hours every day in the hot sun jostling with others for medical oxygen for his brother-in-law, who is now at home struggling to breathe. Even though his relative clearly needs hospital treatment, he was unable to get a bed because of government red tape.

"We could only get a rapid antigen test done which is

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- Copy of last educational achievement
- Copy of Baladiya health card



## International

# Syrian shepherds suffer with grazing lands a no-go zone

## Syria's decade-long conflict puts livestock farmers in doldrums

**AL-HAYJANA, Syria:** Syrian farmer Mohammad Saasaani grew up grazing sheep in the vast Badia rangelands, but today they are rife with jihadists, a place too dangerous to take the herd. Like many livestock herders, Saasaani can barely afford fodder for his dwindling flock.

"We're worried we'd be marching off to die with our sheep," said the 51-year-old, a prominent sheep breeder in the Damascus countryside. "We fear landmines, Islamic State group fighters and bandits," he added, a red and white scarf wrapped around his shoulders.

The Badia, a desert and steppe region which runs from the countryside around the capital to the border with Iraq, was where herders roamed with their animals. But Syria's decade-long conflict has turned it into a no-go zone, denying livestock farmers their main source of grazing.

The Badia used to supply 70 percent of feed for animals across the country before the war, says Osama Hammoud, who runs the livestock department at the agriculture ministry. Now it is a hideout for IS jihadists who use it as a launching pad for their attacks, even after the collapse of their "caliphate" in 2019. Russian and Syrian warplanes have routinely targeted IS positions in the area, but failed to stamp them out.

The Badia is also littered with landmines and other explosive remnants, which have killed and maimed hundreds across Syria in recent years.

### 'Looking for safety'

In the rural area of Al-Hayjana outside Damascus, Saasaani tended to a newborn lamb, while also keeping an eye on the rest of his flock under the scorching spring sun. Herding runs in his

family. Saasaani's father used to take him along to the Badia, hundreds of sheep in tow.

They would often reach the gates of the ancient city of Palmyra in central Syria, over 200 kilometres (130 miles) northeast of Damascus, but the war "has limited the areas we can access," he said.

With reduced grazing ground, Saasaani must turn to imported fodder, which is increasingly expensive due to the devaluation of the Syrian pound. Skyrocketing feed prices have forced him to sell most of his flock, depleting it from 500 to less than 100. The UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) says Syria has lost up to 45 percent of its livestock since the start of the war. Hammoud, from the agriculture ministry, said Syria once boasted 15 million sheep and 10 million cows in 2010.

That number has been slashed nearly in half. Near his sheep and goat pen on the edge of the desert, Hasan Touhan sat beneath a large tent he once used to pitch in the Badia. "I used to take my sheep all the way to the border with Iraq, but with the start of the war we stopped moving around," the 50-year-old said. "Now we are looking for safety, rather than food for the livestock."

### Slaughter or sell

Abdul Razzaq Wayha, the director of an animal welfare center in rural Damascus, said the loss of grazing in the Badia was just one of many problems. Livestock numbers are dwindling as droughts worsen year after year, he said. FAO's Syria representative Mike Robson said mass displacement over the years of war had also forced fleecing farmers to abandon animals they could not feed.

"The livestock sector in Syria has been really quite badly affected by the crisis," he said.



A bedouin boy holds the lambs of Abu Mari, a livestock farmer who raises camels, goats, and sheep, in the village of Ghezlaniah, in the countryside of the Badia region southeast of the capital Damascus. —AFP

Overall, "the lack of availability of feed" has been a key factor. FAO is trying to assist by providing fodder and improving local feed production to meet the demand. But unable to afford food for all their animals, farmers are still being forced to slaughter or sell some of them.

They include cattle farmer Saleh Farah, who has been forced to put his favorite cow Saada on the market, so he can afford to buy feed for the rest. "Fodder alone makes up 75 percent of the cost of raising cows," the 59-year-old said. "This makes meat very expensive." —AFP

### News in brief

#### Napoleon fans outraged

**PARIS:** A reproduction of the skeleton of Napoleon's favorite horse Marengo has been hung over the French emperor's tomb in Paris to the outrage of his present-day fans as they commemorate 200 years since his death. The artwork dubbed "Memento Marengo" by artist Pascal Convert immortalizes Napoleon's loyal steed, who bore the general through several battles before being captured by British troops at Waterloo in 1815. Convert based his work on ancient traditions of horses accompanying their masters to the grave, copying the skeleton from the thoroughbred's remains kept in London's National Army Museum. —AFP

#### Chadian police fire tear gas

**N'DJAMENA, Chad:** Chadian police fired tear gas yesterday to disperse protesters, who defied a ban to demonstrate against the junta that took power after longtime ruler Idriss Deby Itno died fighting rebels. Military authorities late Friday banned the protest called by the Wakit Tamma grouping of opposition political parties and civil society bodies. Police used tear gas to break up a gathering in a southern district of the capital N'Djamena, an AFP reporter said, adding that security forces had fanned out across the city. A small group of people burnt a French flag in a northern area. —AFP

#### France charges 3 over neo-Nazi plot

**PARIS:** Three members of a neo-Nazi group arrested in eastern France on suspicion of planning an attack on a masonic lodge have been charged, a judicial source said yesterday. The suspects, two men aged 29 and 56 and a 53-year-old woman, were indicted on Friday evening by a Paris anti-terrorist judge on suspicion of forming a "terrorist criminal association", the source added. Three others also arrested on Tuesday—two men and a woman—have since been released. Belonging to a group calling itself "Honour and Nation", the suspects are believed to have planned a violent attack, although they were not on the verge of carrying it out, a source familiar with the investigation said. —AFP

#### Protest for Mexico metro crash victims

**MEXICO CITY:** Hundreds of protesters gathered in Mexico's capital on Friday demanding justice for the people killed when an elevated metro line with a history of problems came crashing down. The death toll climbed to 26 on Friday after a woman hospitalized with injuries from the accident died. "Our deepest condolences," Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum tweeted, adding that officials will continue to monitor the rest of the injured. At the site of the accident, demonstrators who had set off from various parts of Mexico City converged and paid tribute to the victims with candles and flowers. —AFP

#### Army show of force at Libya council HQ

**TRIPOLI:** Dozens of armed men staged a show of force late Friday at a hotel used as a headquarters by Libya's presidential council as the nation's deep divisions resurface. The country was plunged into chaos after longtime dictator Moamer Kadhafi was ousted and killed in a NATO-backed uprising in 2011, and over the years the conflict has drawn in several foreign powers. An interim unity government finally came into being in March, replacing rival administrations in east and west, and aims to lead Libya to elections later this year. The armed men were seen at the entrance of the Hotel Corinthia in the heart of the capital Tripoli, according to images on social media. Local press labelled them militias. —AFP

## Border divides and unites Swedish twins separated by COVID

**SVINESUND, Norway:** They haven't been allowed to have each other over to their homes for a year now because of COVID. So come rain or shine, two 73-year-old Swedish twins have met every Saturday each on their side of the border, on a bridge that links Norway and Sweden. Every week, Ola and Pontus Berglund each keeps well behind a thin, yet impassable line on the ground, toting camping chairs, thermoses, sandwiches and plenty of good cheer.

"We're not allowed to cross the border. I have to stay one meter (yard) away on my side and he has to stay back one meter on his side," Ola explains, the little Norwegian and Swedish flags they've attached to the bridge fluttering in the wind. "So basically there has to be two meters between us," he says, pushing his chair back, suddenly aware that he is too close.

At his feet, painted on the road, is a simple white line, the words "Norge" and "Sverige" on either side. The pandemic has put a halt to the identical twins' weekly visits to each other's homes. Ola lives in Halden, in southeastern Norway, where he moved almost 40 years ago for love, while Pontus lives a half-hour drive away in the southwestern Swedish town of Stromstad.

Instead, they come together here, at a more or less respectful distance, on the old Svinesund bridge that straddles a fjord between the two countries. They've celebrated their 72nd and 73rd

birthdays this way on April 20.

"It's very strange but it's become a need, a pressing need, because we used to see each other every week and we wanted to continue that," says Pontus from the Swedish side. "The pandemic hasn't stopped us from seeing each other and for us, that's a victory."

While the local restrictions have changed over the months as the virus situation has evolved, the border has remained closed. The closure has angered Norwegians—many of whom own summer homes in Sweden, where life is cheaper—to such an extent that they sued the Norwegian state to get it to lift the mandatory quarantine required when they return home.

### 'A little party'

The few motorists who use the bridge usually smile or wave at the two grey-bearded gents sitting in their chairs. Ola, a former nursing assistant who now spends his time making scenery for a theatre, and Pontus, an artist and amateur ornithologist, have become local celebrities, with some people driving up to five hours just to take their photograph.

"That's not very important to us. The important thing to us is to be able to get together and talk about whatever we want," says Ola, sporting a red bow tie "because it's May 1st". From their privileged perch, the two have, on occasion, found themselves in the role of benevolent smugglers—like the day when they delivered a puppy born in Sweden to its new family in Norway. That's their fondest memory, they say. In more than a year, they've only missed their weekly rendezvous three times—because of stubborn police who wouldn't let them onto the bridge. Otherwise, they've kept to their schedule through blizzards or heatwaves, simply dressing for the weather. —AFP



Pontus (L) and Ola Berglund are seen while sitting the first one on the Swedish side and the second one on the Norwegian side of the old bridge of Svinesund with corresponding country flags, in Svinesund, Norway, on May 1, 2021. — They haven't been allowed to have each other over for a year because of Covid. So come rain or shine, two 73-year-old Swedish twins have met every Saturday, each on their side of the border, on a bridge that links Norway and Sweden. —AFP

## Harris walks tightrope in US border role

**WASHINGTON:** US vice presidents always yearn for a chance to share the spotlight, but when Kamala Harris got put in charge of the Mexico border mess, she might have been forgiven for secretly wishing she could return to the shadows. Certainly the job is a high-profile opportunity to escape the notorious frustrations of being White House number two.

On Friday it was Harris—not her boss, President Joe Biden—who held a virtual meeting with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. "We thank President Biden for naming you to lead all things related to migration," Lopez Obrador said.

And in early June, it will be Harris making an official visit to Mexico and Guatemala, likely beating Biden's first trip abroad (to Europe) by about a week. So what's the downside of running point on the southern border? The southern border.

Few issues have as long a history of bedeviling

both Democrats and Republicans as immigration and asylum on the approximately 2,000-mile (3,000-kilometer) US-Mexico frontier.

And what was already a tricky issue became outright toxic under Donald Trump, who built much of his presidency on demonizing undocumented immigrants and touting the need for a large wall.

So when illegal border crossings surged right from the start of his administration, Biden suddenly found himself in a perilous situation. Harris, he decided, was the heavyweight figure to find an answer. "When she speaks, she speaks for me," he said on March 24.

### No border visits

Technically, Harris is not meant to deal with the border itself. Her brief is to look for deeper solutions in the Central American countries where most of the migrants start from—the "Northern Triangle" of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Figuring out how to persuade those people to stay home was the main topic of discussion with Lopez Obrador on Friday.

But in reality, the public and certainly much of the Republican opposition don't draw the distinction. One of the most frequent criticisms from Fox News and right-wing media outlets is that Harris has already failed by not visiting the border. "The



US Vice President Kamala Harris speaks during a women-led small business roundtable discussion at the Providence Innovation Center in Providence, Rhode Island. —AFP

Northern Triangle," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said defensively in April, "is not the same as the border."

Yet to Harris' critics, the damage is done. After all, she travels to many other places in the United States on vice presidential business. Why not to the sharp end of the crisis she wants to fix? —AFP

## Scottish party eyes slim majority in knife-edge vote

**EDINBURGH, UK:** The Scottish National Party hoped a second day of vote-counting yesterday would bring it a slim majority in the devolved parliament while Prime Minister Boris Johnson decried its plan for an independence referendum. The UK voted in a series of local and regional polls on "Super Thursday" in its first major vote since Brexit and the pandemic.

Johnson's Conservative Party performed strongly and claimed a traditional Labour seat in a parliamentary

election. But the focus remained on Scotland, where a vote for the devolved parliament in Edinburgh tested public support for the SNP's plan to hold a fresh referendum on independence that could reshape the UK. The SNP on Friday won 39 of the 48 seats declared but lost two key targets. It needs 65 seats to claim a majority at Holyrood for the first time since 2011.

### 'Hopes fading'

"Hopes of SNP majority fading", the Herald daily headlined its election story, while The Scotsman wrote: "SNP hopes on a knife-edge amid gains for Nicola Sturgeon's party." Deputy First Minister John Sweeney told BBC Radio 4 yesterday morning that the SNP "is going to be the largest party in the Scottish Parliament" but said an overall majority "was always a very, very challenging mountain for us to climb".

He predicted that the Scottish parliament would however have a majority "of people who are committed to the holding of an independence referendum." The other pro-independence party with Holyrood seats is the Scottish Greens. Johnson in an interview with The Daily Telegraph indicated that he would not agree to a referendum even if the SNP wins a majority. "I think a referendum in the current context is irresponsible and reckless," Johnson told the right-wing broadsheet. Asked what he would do if Sturgeon pushed for a referendum without Westminster's consent, he said "there's no case now for such a thing... I don't think it's what the times call for at all." Sturgeon has stressed that she will only hold a legal referendum and that it will be held when the virus crisis is over and not before the end of 2023. —AFP



## International

# Saudi Arabia, Pakistan vow to reset strained relations

## Riyadh, Islamabad sign several agreements

**JEDDAH:** Saudi Arabia and longstanding ally Pakistan signed several agreements yesterday and vowed to reset ties strained by months of disagreement. On his seventh visit to the wealthy kingdom since his 2018 election, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan was given a warm welcome by Saudi officials in the western coastal city of Jeddah.

He was greeted by Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the airport, before holding talks with Saudi officials at Jeddah's Al-Salam Palace. "They affirmed the depth of relations between the two brotherly countries and underscored the importance of expanding and intensifying aspects of bilateral cooperation and coordination," a Saudi statement said.

Although the kingdom was the first foreign country Khan visited after taking office, Riyadh appeared frustrated with Islamabad last year.

In a sharply worded statement in August, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi called on the Saudi-based Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to convene a high-level meeting on Kashmir. The call raised eyebrows in Riyadh, where it was widely seen as a warning that Pakistan was preparing to call for a session outside OIC auspices. Saudi Arabia prides itself on its role as guardian of Islam's holiest sites and is particularly sensitive about any move that might undermine its leadership of the 57-member pan-Islamic body. And while the wealthy nation has supported Pakistan with billions of dollars in aid and loans in recent years, observers say the kingdom is also keen not to upset India, a key business partner and importer of Saudi oil.

The kingdom recalled \$1 billion of a \$3 billion loan to cash-strapped Pakistan, and an expired multi-billion-dollar oil credit facility to Islamabad has not been renewed, a diplomatic source told AFP in September. Prior to that, Pakistan rebuffed calls to send ground troops to support the troubled Saudi-led military campaign against Yemen's Houthi rebels.

### 'Exceptional cordiality'

But Khan's visit appeared to have restored cooperation between the two Islamic countries that are both heavily engaged in the "war on terror" which requires effective intelligence sharing. "The two sides stressed the need for concerted efforts by the Islamic world to confront extremism and violence, and reject sectarianism," the Saudi statement said.

The official Saudi Press Agency said the two



**JEDDAH:** Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (right) and Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan (second right) greeting Saudi officials in the Red Sea city of Jeddah. — AFP

sides signed agreements addressing the treatment of criminals, and crime. They also agreed two memorandums of understanding on combating drug trafficking, and on financing energy, water and infrastructure projects.

The two countries also agreed to establish a Saudi-Pakistan Supreme Coordination Council (SPSC).

"During the meeting, it was agreed to further strengthen, deepen and diversify the existing bilateral political, economic, trade, defense and security ties," a Pakistani statement said. "The talks were marked by exceptional cordiality and a commitment to fortify the upward trajectory in the bilateral relationship," it added.

### Saudi-Iran moves

Pakistan has close links with Saudi Arabia, with more than 2.5 million of its nationals living and working in the kingdom, but it also maintains close

ties with Iran and represents Tehran's consular interests in the United States. For decades, Pakistan has tried to balance its strong relationship with Saudi Arabia and its ties with Iran, with which it shares a near 1,000-kilometre (625-mile) border.

In 2019, Khan travelled between Saudi Arabia and Iran in a bid to calm animosities between the rival Muslim powers. His visit to Jeddah comes as Saudi Arabia and Iran hold secret talks in Iraq, the first significant effort to defuse tensions since the regional powers cut ties in 2016 after Iranian protesters, infuriated over the kingdom's execution of a Shiite cleric, attacked Saudi diplomatic missions.

"The prime minister of Pakistan's visit to Saudi Arabia is an important milestone in bilateral relations," Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan tweeted yesterday. "The kingdom is keen to further strengthen relations between the brotherly countries as well as enable broader economic cooperation." — AFP

## COVID threatens Everest climbing comeback plans

**EVEREST BASE CAMP, Nepal:** More than 30 sick climbers have been evacuated from the foot of Mount Everest, raising fears that coronavirus may scupper a hoped-for bumper season on the world's highest mountain. Nepal's tourism industry suffered a devastating blow last year when the pandemic prompted a complete shutdown of its summits, costing millions in lost revenue. This year authorities have eased quarantine rules in an effort to lure back foreign adventurers and have issued climbing permits to more than 400 people, a new record.

An Everest permit alone costs \$11,000 and climbers



**Nepal's mountaineer Kami Rita Sherpa (third right) performs a ritual after an interview with AFP at the Everest base camp in the Mount Everest region of Solukhumbu district as Sherpa Friday reached the summit of Mount Everest for the 25th time, breaking his own record for most summits of the highest mountain in the world. — AFP**

## Chinese rocket to tumble back to Earth

**BEIJING:** A large segment of a Chinese rocket is expected to make an uncontrolled re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere on the weekend, but Beijing has downplayed fears and said there is a very low risk of any damage. A Long March-5B rocket launched the first module of China's new space station into Earth's orbit on April 29. Its 18-tonne main segment is now in freefall and experts have said it is difficult to say precisely where and when it will re-enter the atmosphere.

Re-entry was expected to be around 2300 GMT yesterday, according to the Pentagon, with a window of nine hours either side. Chinese authorities have said most of the rocket components would likely be destroyed on re-entry.

"The probability of causing harm... on the ground is

extremely low," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told reporters on Friday. Although there has been fevered speculation over exactly where the rocket-or parts of it-will land, there is a good chance any debris that does not burn up will just splash down into the ocean, given that the planet is 70 percent water.

"We're hopeful that it will land in a place where it won't harm anyone," said Pentagon spokesman Mike Howard. Howard said the United States was tracking the rocket segment but "its exact entry point into the Earth's atmosphere cannot be pinpointed until within hours of its re-entry". Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin earlier said that the US military had no plans to shoot it down, and suggested that China had been negligent in letting it fall out of orbit.

"Given the size of the object, there will necessarily be big pieces left over," said Florent Defelie, an astronomer at the Paris-PSL Observatory. "The chances of debris landing on an inhabited zone are tiny, probably one in a million." In 2020, debris from another Long March rocket fell on villages in the Ivory Coast, causing structural damage but no injuries or deaths.—AFP

Officials at a health clinic catering to the climbers say more than 30 people have been flown off the camp in recent weeks. At least two have tested positive after returning to the capital Kathmandu.

But the government has yet to confirm a single COVID case on Everest. "Some evacuated may have tested positive in Kathmandu. They did not test at the base camp, so we cannot be sure where they got infected," said Nepal's tourism department chief Rudra Singh Tamang. Health professionals at the camp say they do not have the capacity to test for the disease. "We have permission to only work as a clinic so we don't have tests here. We have made requests but nothing has happened yet," a doctor there said. More than a thousand people are typically camped at the bustling tent city at the foot of Everest, including foreign climbers and the teams of Nepali guides that escort them to the peak.—AFP

### 'We don't have tests here'

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## Pakistan imposes Eid shutdown as virus cases soar

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan yesterday began a nine-day shutdown affecting travel and tourist hotspots in a bid to prevent a surge in COVID-19 cases during the holiday of Eid Al-Fitr. Already battling a third wave of infections and increasingly nervous about the crisis across the border in India, the government has imposed the most severe restrictions since a one-month lockdown in April last year. "These measures have been necessitated by the extremely dangerous situation which has been created in the region with the spread of virulent mutations of the virus," tweeted planning minister Asad Umar, who has been leading the government response to the outbreak. Eid, which comes at the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, usually sees the mass movement of people around the country and tourist spots crowded with Pakistanis.

Last year the country saw a spike in cases in the weeks after the celebrations. Businesses, hotels and restaurants as well as markets and parks will be closed, while public transport between provinces and within cities has been halted. The military has been mobilized to monitor the restrictions. Mosques, however, which have been packed each night throughout Ramadan—with few people wearing masks—will remain open. Authorities fear curbs on places of worship could ignite confrontation in the deeply conservative Islamic republic.

Impoverished Pakistan has recorded more than 850,000 infections and 18,600 deaths, but with limited testing and a ramshackle healthcare sector, many fear the true extent of the disease is much worse. Health officials have warned that hospitals are operating at close to capacity and they have rushed to increase the number of intensive care beds.—AFP



## Notice of Sale of the retired Assets (preserved as functional) of Shuaiba Refinery

**Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC)** a subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, is pleased to announce the Sale of the retired assets (preserved as functional) of its de-commissioned Shuaiba Refinery, Kuwait through a sealed-bid auction Sale process.

Potential Buyers interested to participate in the Sale process are invited to access the information and download Expression of Interest file through KNPC webpage:

[www.knpc.com](http://www.knpc.com)

Potential Buyers are required to submit their responses (along with the completed and validly executed Expression of Interest form and related documentary back-ups set out in Annexure - 2 thereof) not later than 1 pm Kuwait time on 01/06/2021, to email address

[SHUAssetsSale@knpc.com](mailto:SHUAssetsSale@knpc.com)



## Business

SUNDAY, MAY 9, 2021

## EU and India relaunch trade quest

## Focus on maintaining global vaccine supplies, monitoring spread of virus variants

PORTO: The EU and India met at a virtual summit yesterday hoping to relaunch long-stalled trade talks and discuss how best to work together against the coronavirus pandemic battering the south Asian giant. The devastating wave of infections sweeping India has already impacted the meeting by forcing Prime Minister Narendra Modi to scrap plans to fly to Portugal to see his European counterparts.

But the 27-nation bloc and the world's largest democracy remain determined to capitalize on growing momentum for tighter relations fueled by shared concerns over the rising might of China. "I am positive that we will be able to do a major step forward because between the EU and India there is a close relationship, but also a lot of untapped potential," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said. "The most untapped potential is in trade and investment."

Modi called the meeting a "moment of profound geopolitical significance" in an editorial for news site Politico co-authored with Portuguese premier Antonio Costa, who currently holds the rotating EU presidency. "We must seize this opportunity to elevate our relationship, using the huge potential of our democratic spaces to advance trade and investment ties and to support effective multilateralism and a rules-based order," they wrote.

EU countries have sent medical equipment and drugs worth an estimated €100 million (\$120 million) to India as part of international efforts to help it fight against the flood of COVID-19 cases. The focus on the virus at the summit will be on making

sure the two vaccine-producing powerhouses can maintain global supplies and monitoring the spread of variants - as well as on trying to plan together to tackle future pandemics.

"We obviously need to continue our efforts together to ramp up production, secure the necessary raw materials, and keep supply chains open," a senior EU official said. "Leaders are going to commit to work together to better prepare for and respond to global health emergencies." Von der Leyen said the two sides would agree a "common platform" on sequencing the COVID-19 virus to help keep track of any new variants that may emerge.

## Waiving patents

Modi also pushed the EU on waiving patents for COVID-19 jabs after the US threw its weight behind the proposal. European Council chief Charles Michel said the bloc was willing to discuss the initiative once a concrete proposal was "on the table", but leaders have expressed skepticism about lifting patents. While the pandemic casts a long shadow over the summit, the key announcement is the restarting of talks with India on a free trade agreement that have been suspended since 2013.

Von der Leyen said talks would resume on a trade pact and begin on separate deals to protect investments and regionally specific products. She said that the two sides would also look to cooperate on developing cutting edge technologies including artificial intelligence and supercomputers. Negotiations on



PORTO: EU leaders pose for the family photo of the European Social Summit hosted by the Portuguese presidency of the Council of the European Union at the Palacio de Cristal yesterday. — AFP

the trade deal were halted eight years ago after getting stuck on issues including cutting tariffs and access for Indian workers to Europe.

## 'Elephant in the room'

It remains to be seen if India is now willing to drop an approach viewed as deeply protectionist

by the EU to seal a deal this time round. But growing tensions with China could create a new impetus for talks - with one diplomat calling Beijing "the elephant in the room". For the EU, the push comes as efforts to ratify an investment deal agreed with China have hit the buffers after relations soured over tit-for-tat sanctions. — AFP

## SNCF launches low-cost bullet train service

MADRID: French rail operator SNCF inaugurated Friday a low-cost, high-speed rail service in Spain linking Madrid and second-city Barcelona. The Ouigo service will whisk passengers the 620 km between the two cities in just two and half hours, with prices starting at €9.00. The first Ouigo train left Madrid's Atocha station for Barcelona at 10:15 am (0815 GMT) with invited guests on board.

The commercial service will start tomorrow, the day after a pandemic state of emergency ends in Spain and people can move more freely between regions, with five daily return journeys between the two cities. SNCF plans to launch similar services between Madrid and the eastern cities of Valencia and Alicante on the Mediterranean coast by the end of the year, and to the southern Andalusia region by 2022-23.

It will initially use four recently refurbished double-decker trains in Spain but plans to operate 14 trains in the country by 2023. SNCF has invested €600 million (\$722 million) in the Spanish operation despite posting huge losses in France because of the pandemic. Spanish state rail operator Renfe, which until recently operated a monopoly in Spain, planned to launch its own low-cost, high-speed rail service dubbed Avlo last year to compete with



MADRID: SNCF's low-cost Ouigo TGV trains are pictured at the Madrid Puerta de Atocha train station on Friday during a pre-launch presentation for the Madrid-Barcelona route. — AFP

Ouigo but the start of the service was delayed due to the pandemic. It is scheduled to start on June 23 with a service linking Madrid and Barcelona.

Avlo is the cheaper cousin of Renfe's popular high-speed service called AVE - which is Spanish for bird. Italian rail operator Trenitalia and Spanish

airline Air nostrum are due to launch a third budget bullet train service in Spain called Ilsa during the second half of 2022. Spain's high-speed rail network extends for 3,200 km, making it the second-longest in the world after China's but it is underused. — AFP

## In fight against variants, some firms target T cell jabs

PARIS: Getting COVID vaccines into the arms of the world's population is an international priority - but will today's jabs stay effective against virus variants that are spreading across the globe? It is one of the big questions about the pandemic, with Pfizer chief Albert Bourla recently acknowledging that it is likely a booster will be needed to help extend the protection conferred by its vaccine and ward off new variants.

A recent study presented a mixed picture. It found that the antibody response of current vaccines could fail against variants. However, a second immune response in the form of killer T cells - which attack already infected cells and not the virus itself - remained largely intact. Several startups are working on developing shots centered on T cells in hopes of producing a jab that would not only provide protection against new virus strains already on the loose, but also variants that don't yet exist.

Alexis Peyroles heads up French biotech firm OSE Immunotherapeutics, which is developing a vaccine that targets T cells that has just begun clinical trials. "It could offer several years of protection," he told AFP. Another French firm, Lyon-based Osivax, is also working on a T cell shot, promising a "universal" vaccine that would be effective against any potential variant.

The government of France, which has yet to develop its own vaccine, is supporting the effort with millions in funding. Such projects are far from widespread. Among the 400 vaccines under development counted by the

World Health Organization only a few are aimed at universal use. The most advanced shot of its kind is the ImmunityBio vaccine under development in the United States. Very preliminary results released last month were mostly encouraging.

## 'Complement and broaden'

No lab foresees a final product before next year and many scientists are skeptical about the usefulness of trying to develop a shot to protect against a virus strain that doesn't yet exist. "Mass vaccination itself is a form of evolutionary 'selection' pressure," British virologist Julian Tang told AFP, "and this pressure may push the virus to evolve to escape any vaccine protection - so it can be a double-edged sword."

Other questions involve the extent to which the body will be able to fight the virus with a T cell-based response. T cells and antibodies work together to form an immune response in the body. French virologist Yves Gaudin pointed out that if an antibody response fails, "T cells don't serve much purpose". He said he is "doubtful about the effectiveness of such a vaccine," emphasizing that an ideal vaccine would be effective in both areas.

In Europe and the United States, the plan for T cell jabs, should they see the light of day, would be to give them to people who had already received the current antibody vaccines. Peyroles confirmed that OSE's vaccine, should it prove effective in trials, is indeed meant as a way to strengthen current inoculations. "You would complement and broaden the response created by the first vaccines in terms of scope and time." He added that T cell vaccines could offer protection to people who have difficulties developing antibodies due to other ailments such as diabetes or cancer. — AFP

## WhatsApp delays enforcing new privacy terms

WASHINGTON: Facebook-owned messaging colossus WhatsApp on Friday retreated again from its plan to force users to accept new terms which critics said could expand data collection from its two billion users around the world. WhatsApp, which was set to enforce its new data-sharing policy on May 15 - following a delay in response to a user outcry - revealed on its website that it would not immediately cut off users who don't accept the new terms, although it would send reminders to those who don't opt in.

The update will allow additional sharing of information from WhatsApp with Facebook and its other applications such as Instagram and Messenger, such as contacts and profile data, but not the content of messages which remain encrypted. The platform had claimed the update was chiefly aimed at merchants who use WhatsApp to chat with customers - allowing them to share data with Facebook.

But critics feared it could open the door to broader data sharing with Facebook with potential implications for user privacy. "No one will have their accounts deleted or lose functionality of WhatsApp on May 15th because of this update," according to the latest website update, which was seen earlier by The Verge and other media outlets.

But users will get "persistent" reminders about the policy and may lose some functionality if they fail to accept the new terms. "After giving everyone time to review, we're continuing to remind those who haven't had the chance to do so to review and accept," the web page said. "After a period of several weeks, the reminder people receive will eventually become persistent." — AFP

## After shift on vaccine patents, US backs freer flow of components

PARIS: The new US position in support of lifting patents on COVID-19 vaccines has taken attention away from an equally significant change by Washington, which plans to open up trade in the raw materials used to make them. After having recently taken heat for blocking such exports, Commerce Secretary Katherine Tai said Wednesday that the US government would "work to increase the raw materials needed to produce those vaccines".

The assertion was hidden at the bottom of the statement unveiling Washington's remarkable reversal of its position on COVID-19 vaccine patents, which coincides with a shortage of doses in emerging and developing nations as cases surge in some countries. Long legal and economic policy debates likely lie ahead about waiving vaccine patents, particularly at the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Meanwhile, the difficulties faced by some laboratories in obtaining components to manufacture vaccines look set to stymie the drive to ramp up production. Two labs have recently spoken out about their difficulties, laying the blame at Washington's door. Germany's Curevac said it could not secure supplies of certain materials from the United States.

Several days earlier, India's Serum Institute, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, called on US President Joe Biden to step in. "Respected @POTUS, if we are to truly unite in beating this virus, on behalf of the vaccine industry outside the US, I humbly request you to lift the embargo of raw material exports out of the US so that vaccine production can ramp up," the company's president Adar Poonawalla wrote on Twitter.

There is no actual embargo on exporting vaccine components. Instead, Biden, like his predecessor Donald Trump, invoked the Defense Production Act - which normally concerns wartime - to confront the pandemic. While it does not explicitly ban exports, it puts the US government first in line to buy certain products made in the country.

US officials have previously played down the possible effect of the law on global vaccine production. "There's just more global manufacturing happening everywhere in the world than suppliers can currently support," a US official told a White House briefing late last month on condition of anonymity.

Over the past two months, a number of public and private actors have noted the shrinking supply of components needed to manufacture vaccines. At least 50 components, perhaps as many as 100, go into the jabs. They include items like the glass vials to ship them, as well as certain types of plastics needed for containers used in the manufacturing process. Then there are the ingredients themselves. — AFP



## Business

# Rental cars becoming scarce and expensive for US travelers

## Agencies' struggles a boon for car sharing platforms

**NEW YORK:** Talk about sticker shock: The \$600 price tag for Joe Pohlen to rent a car for two days was twice as expensive as his plane ticket. The Michigan businessman was stunned, but the experience is becoming more common for US travelers, an unexpected consequence of the pandemic. Not only have prices skyrocketed, it can be hard to just find a car at all.

Pohlen told AFP that Hertz was the only agency that had a vehicle available during a brief trip to the East Coast. And though he chose "the cheapest possible option," the bill came to \$601.59 for a vehicle rented in Maryland and returned in Pennsylvania two days later. Business and tourist travel came to a screeching halt in March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States, prompting car rental companies to sell off their fleets and stop buying new cars.

Avis in February said it had reduced its fleet by a third. But now that mass vaccinations have allowed travelers to get back on the road, the companies are struggling to meet the surge in reservations. Starting in March, demand increased in areas such as Florida, Arizona and around Utah ski resorts. Avis chief Joseph Ferraro said on a conference call Tuesday. An Enterprise spokesperson told AFP that like the rest of the industry the company "is seeing increased demand for vehicles for spring and summer travel - especially in popular US vacation destinations."

### Replenishing the fleets

The global semiconductor shortage that has disrupted auto production since the start of the year has meanwhile only made matters worse for the companies trying to build back their stock of cars. Because of the production issues and pent-up demand from consumers, automakers prefer to sell their available cars to individuals, who pay more than the rental agencies. That has forced those companies to adapt as best they can, including by holding onto their cars longer.

"One of the silver linings of this pandemic is that our vehicles just didn't have as many miles put on them, allowing us the flexibility to hold them slightly longer," Ferraro said. Avis also is focusing more on vehicle maintenance. But for consumers, "to get into something that's three years old, four years old, and with 30 or 50,000 miles, that doesn't have the features that you are accustomed to, that could really impact your perception of the brand," said Ivan Drury, an auto industry analyst at Edmunds.

That is especially true if customers have to pay a lot more than usual. To avoid frustration, Enterprise recommends travelers "reserve a vehicle as early as possible". "Providing flexible travel dates and branch pick-up locations in your search may also help increase your options," the company said. The higher cost for rental cars comes just as the reopening economy has led to a boom in demand for certain products and services. That coupled with supply bottlenecks and unforeseen events like the semiconductor shortages has pushed many US prices higher.

But the car rental agencies' struggles have proven a boon for platforms like Turo, a car sharing marketplace that connects car owners with potential renters. "We are thrilled that a record number of travelers are discovering the amazing hospitality of Turo hosts, our superior selection, convenience and value," Turo chief Andre Haddad said in a message to AFP.



MIAMI: In this photo taken on April 12, 2021, people wait in line at the Miami International Airport car rental center. — AFP

Bobby Binissa, an emergency room trauma nurse in Los Angeles, has offered three cars on Turo since the start of the year. "My Tesla has been booked for the last two months, at least until the end of May,"

he told AFP. And he has two old vehicles he rents as well, when his family doesn't need them. "I have upped the prices, because demand is picking up so. But not too high because if you raise your price, then you have competition from the other hosts."

Drury says the unusual situation has offered these platforms the opportunity to really compete with rental agencies for the first time. But it won't last long since once the companies rebuild their fleets they will be "operating in a different league". — AFP

### NBK Economic Update

## Global markets extend gains in first quarter 2021

**KUWAIT:** Global equity markets continued to rally in 1Q21, with several major indices reaching all-time highs supported by major stimulus, central bank dovishness, positive vaccine developments, and stronger macro-economic data. Meanwhile, GCC markets outperformed, helped by additional factors including higher oil prices and the easing of pandemic-related restrictions in some countries and despite renewed restrictions in others.

The positive trend extended well into April, with the S&P500 recording the strongest monthly gains (5.2 percent) since November 2020, despite higher volatility and weaker performance towards the end of the month, largely due to concerns related to higher inflation as the recovery progresses (reflation), the possibility of tighter policy, and pandemic-related uncertainty.

Looking ahead, perhaps the largest risk to an enduring equity rally and the economic recovery continues to be the pandemic-related uncertainty, especially amid the resurgence of the virus in some countries in Europe and Asia. Additionally, concerns that the continued accommodative fiscal and monetary policies could lead to higher-than-expected inflationary pressures (and hence the potential for increasing interest rates) represent a further risk to equity markets.

### European markets lead gains on recovery prospects

Global markets were broadly positive in 1Q21, with the MSCI AC World index up 5.5 percent q/q, led by European equities (Euro Stoxx 50 +10.3 percent q/q), while the DJIA and S&P500 rose by 8 percent

and 6 percent respectively. European markets, previously battered by a second wave of Covid and renewed restrictions, are expected to benefit from an expected economic recovery, especially as stock valuations remain attractive relative to the steep valuations of US stocks.

The softer performance in US markets versus European ones can also be attributed to the sharp surge in US bond yields, which has squeezed the US risk premium sparking some concerns among investors. Along the same lines, US stock performance was also impacted by inflationary concerns stemming from the economic recovery and fears that the Fed may consequently hike interest rates sooner than expected, though these concerns later eased as the Fed's reaffirmed its Dovish stance.

Also noteworthy is the investors' rotation to sectors that stand to benefit the most from an economic recovery ie stocks with better growth prospects in the short-term and lower valuations. This shift in investor preference can perhaps be reflected by the Russell 2000's vast outperformance of other US indices (+14 percent q/q) which is the main US index for small-cap stocks.

Equity markets could do relatively well in 2021 as virus risks diminish, policy remains highly accommodative and the economic recovery progresses. However, some downside risks remain, generally centered around virus uncertainty, which can affect the economic outlook. Specifically for the US, relatively high valuations, rising inflation expectations, and a sooner-than-expected winding down of monetary easing are the main risks in our view.

### Regional markets outperform amid higher oil prices

GCC markets outperformed their global counterparts, with the MSCI GCC up a solid 12.6 percent q/q helped by higher oil prices, vaccine rollouts, and a better fiscal outlook. In the lead were Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia, up 17 percent and 14 percent respectively with investor confidence in the latter also boosted by the announcement of a series of

large investment plans as part of a major economic diversification push.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's All-Share index rose a decent 4.1 percent q/q, pushing market capitalization to a 15-month high (KD 34bn). The All-share index was lifted largely by the premier market (+4.5 percent) with the technology, real estate, and financial sectors in the lead. The average daily traded value stood at KD 39 million, reflecting continued interest in local stocks and a healthy level of market activity, though net foreign inflows slowed considerably to around KD 6 million in 1Q21, largely due to the end of the market upgrade related flows of 2020.

Looking ahead, the easing of virus concerns amid the rollout of vaccines and a positive economic outlook should be supportive of regional market sentiment. With that said, these markets will continue to be influenced by oil prices, the pace of structural reforms, geopolitics, and pandemic-related developments.

### A positive but uncertain outlook for equities in 2021

Record-low benchmark interest rates, continued central bank dovishness, and growing signs of an economic recovery will likely continue to lend support to markets going into 2021. This bullish sentiment is reflected in global stocks continuing to set all-time highs, with softer demand for safe-haven assets such as gold and the USD. With that said, near-to-medium term market prospects are subject to a notable degree of downside risks stemming from pandemic, inflation, and policy-related uncertainty (tapering stimulus, higher interest rates), factors which have led to increased market volatility as of late.

Further, the Biden administration proposed raising the capital gains tax in the US, which will likely weigh down on US markets if approved as proposed. Potential headwinds can come from a renewed increase in US bond yields, though possible increases could be kept in check by ongoing Fed purchases, uninterrupted issuances by the treasury, and foreign inflows given lower yields elsewhere in developed markets.

## Facebook panel punt on Trump puts onus back on Zuckerberg

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Facebook's top executives set up an independent oversight board to avoid having to make tough decisions about explosive content - but the panel's first major ruling on Donald Trump sent the ball right back into Mark Zuckerberg's court. The panel on Wednesday opted to uphold the ban on the former US president's use of the leading social media network, saying Facebook was right to oust him, but sidestepped an overall decision on whether he will ever be allowed back.

It gave the company six months to justify why his ban should be permanent-leaving a grenade in Zuckerberg's lap on the issue of free speech, and spotlighting weaknesses in the platform's plan for self-regulation. "Facebook didn't want to make the decision because it's politically loaded," said Hany Farid, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley and dean of its School of Information.

"So they kick it down to the oversight committee and the oversight committee says, 'We don't want this, you decide'," he noted, adding that the board had "punted on the hard question" of Trump's long-term access to Facebook. Zuckerberg has treated the case like Kryptonite, reportedly asking the company's top public affairs executive Nick Clegg, a former British deputy prime minister, to write a first draft of his statement defending the ban, and then to decide whether to refer the case to the oversight board. That is not surprising, according to Sarah Roberts, an assistant professor of information studies at University of California, Los Angeles. "Zuckerberg has pretty famously made these comments about not wanting to be in the business of being the arbiter of truth," Roberts told AFP. — AFP



WASHINGTON, DC: US President Joe Biden speaks on job numbers from April, 2021 at the East Room of the White House Wednesday. — AFP

the chances Biden's spending plans are approved and the Federal Reserve keeps interest rates lower for longer.

Unemployment surged in the United States when the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, but has declined in the year since, aided by the vaccines and three massive government rescue packages. The April data show the economy has 8.2 million fewer jobs than it had in February 2020, before the pandemic hit.

In March, Biden signed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, and is now asking Congress - which his Democrats only barely control - to pass a \$2.3 trillion jobs and infrastructure proposal aimed at fighting climate change and revamping roads, bridges and other infrastructure. He also proposed a \$1.8 trillion plan to expand education, childcare and social programs.

The Republican opposition has generally regarded his proposals as a spending spree fueled by tax increases they see as harming American competitiveness, and lawmakers pointed to the downbeat employment numbers to make their case. "This terrible jobs report needs to serve as an important reminder that jacking up taxes right

## Disappointing jobs data new challenge for Biden agenda

**WASHINGTON:** The United States added just 266,000 jobs in April - a quarter of the number expected - in a surprise setback for President Joe Biden's efforts to revive an economy blighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The weak hiring also pushed the unemployment rate up slightly to 6.1 percent, according to the Labor Department's monthly employment report released Friday.

The data defied economists' upbeat predictions that widespread COVID-19 vaccines and government relief measures would allow businesses to return to normal and add one million jobs last month. Biden said such setbacks are not unusual during recoveries, and the report undermined criticism that his massive spending programs were not needed since the economy was already recovering.

"We knew we were facing a once-in-a-century pandemic and once-in-a-generation economic crisis. We knew this wouldn't be a sprint, it'd be a marathon," the president said in comments following the data release. He again called on Congress to approve two spending proposals costing more than \$4 trillion that are aimed at revamping US infrastructure and the workforce. "We can't let up. This jobs report makes that clear. We've got too much work to do," he said.

While analysts say the jobs rebound may still happen in coming months, the report nonetheless complicates that assumption. "This is a big miss that changes how we think about the recovery," University of Michigan economics professor Justin Wolfers said on Twitter. On Wall Street, the Dow and S&P 500 finished at record highs, with investors regarding the weak report as improving

### News in brief

#### US magazine staff down tools

**WASHINGTON:** Writers at a US magazine stopped work Friday after the company's chief executive penned an essay in the Washington Post suggesting "risks" to their job status if they did not return to the office. The move came after Washingtonian CEO Cathy Merrill questioned the work status of remote employees in one of the country's biggest newspapers. "If the employee is rarely around... management has a strong incentive to change their status to 'contractor,'" Merrill wrote. She later apologized, sending a memo saying "there will be no changes to benefits or employee status," but not before an outcry from the staff. — AFP

#### Twitter lets people leave tips

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Twitter on Thursday began letting some users add virtual tip jars to accounts so people can support their tweets by tossing in money. A limited number of users around the world who tweet in English can add a "Tip Jar" feature to their profiles, according to Twitter senior product manager Esther Crawford. The group included creators, journalists, experts, and non-profits. A Tip Jar icon on a profile page indicates an option to be taken to services such as Patreon, PayPal or Venmo to send money to a creator, according to Crawford. — AFP

#### Philip Morris to phase out cigs

**TOKYO:** The head of tobacco giant Philip Morris said the company will phase out conventional cigarettes in Japan within 10 years, in an interview with the Nikkei business daily published Friday. The Marlboro maker announced in 2016 a long-term goal to stop selling cigarettes and replace them with alternatives that it says are less harmful - but this is the first time it has given a clear deadline. Philip Morris International is betting on its IQOS: A sort of short cigarette inserted into a device that heats the tobacco and releases a vapor. — AFP

#### Total pulls Le Monde ads

**PARIS:** French energy giant Total pulled adverts from Le Monde after it reported that the company was paying gas revenues to Myanmar's military through a tax haven, the newspaper said Thursday. The company was due to run several adverts in the French newspaper over the coming weeks, but these were cancelled after it ran an article this week titled "Myanmar: How Total finances the generals through offshore accounts". Le Monde said they had documents showing that Total operated a gas pipeline from Myanmar to Thailand through a joint venture with the military-controlled Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise. — AFP

#### ADB to stop financing coal plants

**MANILA:** The Asian Development Bank will stop financing new coal power plants under a draft energy policy released Friday that was cautiously welcomed by environmental groups. The ADB, which provides loans and grants for projects in the poorest countries in the Asia Pacific region, said its current policy was no longer adequately aligned with the global consensus on climate change. "Coal and other fossil fuels have played a large part in ensuring access to energy for the region's economic development, but they have not solved the energy access challenge, and their use harms the environment and accelerates climate change," the Manila-based bank said in the document. — AFP



## Business

## KIB achieves stable financial results in 2020

**KUWAIT:** KIB recently held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) on May 6, 2021. The AGM approved the Board of Directors' recommendation not to distribute dividends for the financial year ended December 31, 2020. Attendance minimized as a safety precaution and the meetings were convened in a manner that took into account health and safety measures and social distancing protocols. Attendees were required to wear face masks and hand sanitizers were provided to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

During the AGM, Chairman of KIB, Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah, commented: "During the year 2020, KIB was able to uphold the stability of its financial results and achieve its business objectives, while continuing to provide the best-in-class customer service. Thanks to the Bank's long-term focused management approach and its prudent risk management policies, we were able to mitigate and move past the exceptional circumstances we faced over the past year, which helped us further cement our position as a leading financial institution in the market."

Al-Jarrah further noted that KIB's financial results for the year ended December 31, 2020 were stable despite the lingering repercussions of the pandemic. He pointed out that the Bank generated nearly KD 64 million in operating income in 2020, while the Bank's assets grew by 4 percent to reach KD 2.80 billion, comparable to almost KD 2.69 billion at the end of December 2019. This growth was the result of an increase in the size of the financing portfolio by KD 113 million to reach nearly KD 1.98 billion, versus nearly KD 1.87 billion at the end of 2019, achieving a growth of 6 percent. Al-Jarrah noted that the volume of investments grew by KD 4.5 million to KD 186 million versus KD 181 million in 2019, primarily from the increase in high-quality Sukuk investments. On the other hand, depositors' accounts increased by KD 175 million, achieving a growth of 12 percent to reach KD 1.64 billion versus KD 1.47 billion in 2019. The Bank's shareholders' equity amounted to nearly KD 258 million.

#### Diversity of finance portfolio and financial investments

On his part, Raed Jawad Bukhamseen, Vice Chairman and CEO of KIB, said: "At a time when the world was experiencing a global economic contraction driven by the COVID-19 pandemic and an oil market collapse in 2020, KIB was able to support its growth strategy in order to

maintain its financial position in the regional debt capital markets. That being said, the Bank successfully concluded a series of successful financial transactions last year, including the issuance \$300 million Tier 2 Basel III compliant 10-Year non-call 5-year Sukuk. These first-of-its-kind instruments were at a profit rate of 2.375 percent per annum, with a total participation reaching approximately US\$2.7 billion, which is about 9 times the volume of Sukuk issuances.

The Tier 2 Capital Sukuk are the highest rated T2 in Kuwait and the GCC, in addition to being the first USD T2 Sukuk from Kuwait to be listed on London Stock Exchange (LSE). This issuance enhanced the bank long term funding base and increased KIB's capital ratios in accordance with Basel III; this was reflected on the Bank's capital adequacy ratio, which reached 22.13 percent as of December 31, 2020, thus exceeding the minimum required levels of the Central Bank of Kuwait's (CBK) regulatory bodies.

During 2020, the Bank made significant progress in terms of enhancing its capital, as highlighted by Fitch assigning KIB's AT1 Sukuk 'A-' rating and a final A+/F1 long- and short-term ratings respectively to the Bank's Sukuk program.

KIB also acted as Co-Manager for the noteworthy issuance of the first-of-its-kind 'Sustainability Sukuk' by the Islamic Development Bank (ISDB), with a value of USD 1.5 billion for a period of five years and an aim to mitigate the effects of the novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) for ISDB member states aimed at addressing the health and socio-economic implications of coronavirus pandemic.

Furthermore, the Bank signed a bilateral Murabaha financing agreement with EQUATE Petrochemical Company valued at up to USD \$150 million for a tenor of 3 years. The transaction was aimed at partially refinancing an existing facility previously extended by a consortium of banks for business expansion, which contributed towards the diversification of the Bank's financing portfolio."

Bukhamseen also stressed that KIB is taking solid steps towards the future. Moreover, the Bank is implementing new development strategies related to human resources by hiring highly-competent talent and providing intensive training courses for employees in order to acquire the skills that contribute to the Bank's growth and are required for keeping pace with the Bank's adopted innovations and digital transformation approach. He further highlighted



that the Bank has also been moving towards a policy of Kuwaitizing senior management positions by increasing its national employment rate to 73.14 percent as part of its commitment to support Kuwaitization in the banking sector in line with CBK's vision.

#### The journey of success continues in spite of the challenges

KIB's Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Mohamed Said El Saka, pointed out that KIB was able to overcome the major challenges and obstacles that hit the country's economy and its financial sectors specifically. He added: "KIB has proven to be capable of delivering topnotch banking services to customers at all times. The reality is that the Bank's digital transformation strategy has strengthened its position in the market, the pillars of this strategy included revamping the Bank's core digital infrastructure, introducing more advanced services, in addition to providing all possible digital services and technologies during quarantine and curfew, which helped enhance our operational processes and brought us closer to our customers."

El Saka further stated that distribution ratios on depositors' accounts recorded good annual returns by the end of 2020, across all products from the Savings Account to the Long Term Deposit which extends to three years. He also noted that profits were credited into depositors' accounts

on the same day the Bank's financial results were announced.

#### Global credit ratings

KIB has committed itself to a conservative approach towards addressing the crises in 2020, this was positively demonstrated through its high global credit ratings. In this light, Fitch Ratings, has affirmed KIB's Long-term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'A+' and viability rating (VR) at 'bb-', with a negative outlook in April 2021.

#### Excellence in Corporate Social Responsibility

KIB believes that social responsibility is an integral component of its business model. During 2020, KIB restructured its social responsibility program to focus on supporting community initiatives and endorsing preventive measures. In reality, the Bank has succeeded in playing a key role in supporting the State's decisions and laws, as well as positively influencing members of the community, while at the same time providing the best-in-class customer service and preserving the health and the safety of its employees. KIB's concerted efforts have earned enormous recognition, including the "Creativity in Social Responsibility" Award, which marked the significant and meaningful impact the Bank has left on people through its media campaigns amid the pandemic.

## Gulf Air adds Santorini and Mykonos this summer

**MANAMA:** Gulf Air, the national carrier of the Kingdom of Bahrain, announces the addition of two boutique summer destinations to its global network with Santorini and Mykonos in Greece. Both Santorini and Mykonos will be served by the airline's new Airbus A320neo with two weekly flights each starting from 2 June until 22 September for Santorini and starting from 3 June until 30 September for Mykonos. The seasonal summer routes to the Greek islands will boost the airline's network with popular boutique seaside destinations that are favourite to many tourists and families in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the region especially as demand for travel grows gradually towards the summer holidays with travel restrictions easing off in Europe.

On the occasion of the announcement, Gulf Air's Acting Chief Executive Officer Captain Waleed AlAlawi said: "We've researched and studied various destinations to add to our seasonal summer network and we're excited to reveal Santorini and Mykonos as the new boutique additions. Reviewing potentials and listening to our customers' feedback, we are confident that both Greek islands will provide the perfect experience for honeymooners, friends and families to spend their holidays. We will be flying to both these

## 2021 models from Mazda bedazzle visitors at Avenues

**KUWAIT:** As part of its celebration of the launch of latest and distinct models for the year 2021, Kuwait Automotive Imports Company, KAICO Al-Shaya and Al-Sagar, the exclusive distributors of Mazda cars in Kuwait, displayed the 2021 Mazda cars in the Avenues during the holy month of Ramadan. With the presence of Ashish Tandon General Manager and Nader Salmeh, Senior executive manager-vehicles Sales, which provided an opportunity for car fans and customers in general and Mazda in particular to discover Mazda's concept of luxury and new updates.

This celebration invited all Mazda followers and fans to be among the first customers to have the opportunity to discover the new Mazda 6 and Mazda CX-9 up closely. With the launch of these two models at the beginning of the year, Mazda is adding to its assortment of cars of various sizes and designs. Its new models enhance the diversity and introduce the latest modern models. These new cars offered by Mazda are considered the latest and best, as they reflect creativity in design, employment of the latest technology applications, use of the best safety features, and great attention to performance. During the event, KAICO pre-registered test drive requests under the supervision of the Mazda expert, Ashish Tandon, General Manager at KAICO, expressed his pride in launching the latest cars from Mazda in 2021 to make them accessible to customers in Mazda showrooms in Kuwait. These models reflect an energetic and attractive picture for young men, young women and families.

On this occasion, Nader Salmeh, Senior Executive manager-Vehicles group said, "KAICO always strives to present the latest models of the 100 percent Japanese Mazda cars,



destinations for the first time in the history of Gulf Air and will be the only airline in the region flying to Santorini."

In 2019 and in line with its strategy to become the customer's airline of choice, Gulf Air announced its boutique business model concept which would reinforce its focus on product and customer experience. Similarly with the hospitality industry, Gulf Air differentiates itself as a boutique airline that is unique in the way it operates in comparison to airlines that are more volume driven. This approach will give the airline a competitive advantage that is being translated currently within the revamp of its new fleet, new Falcon Gold class offering, upgraded economy class experience, new destinations and its presence in the new terminal at Bahrain

International Airport.

Gulf Air currently flies to and from Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Kuwait, Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam, Madinah, Muscat, Cairo, Amman, Casablanca, London, Paris, Frankfurt, Athens, Bangkok, Manila, Singapore, Dhaka, Colombo, the Maldives and several destinations in India and Pakistan. Being one of the few airlines that never stopped flying in 2020, Gulf Air continuously works closely with the government authorities across its network to resume operations as demand for travel grows. Gulf Air boasts a flexible and agile network by immediately adapting to government guidelines and civil aviation directives and has been responsive to continuous changes and updates.



and to satisfy our customers, we have launched two different Mazda models at once" and added, "The best way to choose a car for you and your family and the conviction that it is the perfect car is to try it yourself, and drive it your way, that's why we provided the opportunity to pre-book your test drive for the two new models.

#### Mazda 6...modern design and joyful driving experience

The Mazda 6 is the leading model in the design of Mazda models, being the most elegant thanks to its dynamic and streamlined design in the rear, and it is a sports saloon equipped with everything needed in the cockpit, which is customized to help you enjoy your trip. The Mazda 6 is equipped with a highly efficient SKYACTIV-G direct injection petrol engine, which achieves fuel efficiency of up to 14Km/Litre. The car is also equipped with an advanced set of safety systems that include Driver Monitoring, Lane Keeping Assist, Lane Departure assistant and Blind Spot Monitoring System to ensure the safety of your loved ones while driving. While the interior is equipped with the MZD CONNECT system that gives you superior internet connectivity, advanced navigation and 360-degree monitoring.

While Mazda maintains its established traditions of being among the few cars that are still entirely manufactured in Japan, while the company has developed the "Mazda 6" to

become one of the best sedans that combines the advantage of luxurious appearance and sculpted sporty design, in addition to a full range of SKYACTIV Technology.

#### Mazda CX-9...the new definition of luxury

Mazda CX-9: The pure beauty of "less is more". Clean curves and undulating surfaces, embracing and reflecting the surroundings. Sleek, bold proportions lifting and energizing the spirit. Inside, the cabin is a study in premium materials and superior craftsmanship.

The new Mazda CX-9 boasts many specifications, including standard cylinder deactivation technology that can close the outer cylinders when there is no need to increase fuel efficiency. The new Mazda CX-9 is fitted with the SKYACTIV-G engine, a 4-cylinder 2.5-liter turbo engine with 231 horsepower linked to a 6-speed automatic transmission. The stunning KODO design of the all-new Mazda CX-9 also infuses pure vitality and solidity that raises it to the status that it deserves and defines an SUV. The new CX-9 offers a well-thought-out cabin that makes life in the driver's seat - and passenger seats - enjoyable and easy. From the perfect placement of the dashboard and reclining on the back seats, to the many features such as HMI Control Switch, Noise Reduction and High Vibration (NVH), a human-centered cabin that's ideal for long distances and every day.

## Markaz reports net profit of KD 4.06m in Q1-2021

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" reported its financial results with total revenues of KD 8.23 million, as compared to loss of (KD 9.02) million for the same period in 2020, thus showing an increase of 191 percent. Markaz achieved a net profit of KD 4.06 million and Earnings per Share (EPS) of 8 fils for the quarter ended March 31, 2021.

Diraar Yusuf Alghanim, Chairman stated: "I am pleased to report a significant improvement in revenue and profitability for a successive third quarter. This clearly demonstrates the resilience of Markaz's business model and its ability to successfully respond to the market challenges of today. We are proud of the dedication of our colleagues and particularly, our executive management for their exemplary professionalism.

"The year has started on a positive note with an upturn in economic activity and recovery across major global equity markets. However, the ongoing impact of the pandemic and its new variants pose a concern regarding the near-term outlook. Markaz continues to closely monitor the course of the pandemic and management remains committed to taking necessary operating measures to mitigate business risks."

Ali H Khalil, Chief Executive Officer stated: "Markaz reported Asset Management fees of KD 2.55 million in Q1 2021, an increase of 41 percent y-o-y and 23 percent on a sequential basis. Despite the difficult market conditions, Investment Banking fees increased by 10 percent y-o-y to KD 0.22 million. "Q1-2021 revenues were further supported by a 46 percent increase in net rental income to KD 0.89 million. Total revenues also include gains from investments at a fair value of KD 4.7 million as compared to a loss of KD 13.9 million in Q1 2020 due to the onset of the pandemic last year. From a capital structure perspective, Markaz repaid debt of KD 5.05 million, reducing the firm's debt to equity ratio to 0.56x. On a further positive note, AUM at the end of the quarter was KD 988 million as compared to KD 979 million at the end of 2020."

## AUB congratulates winners of Al-Hassad weekly draw

**KUWAIT:** In accordance with full preventive guidelines and measures set by health authorities, Ahli United Bank (AUB) held the weekly draw of Al-Hassad Islamic account which is the very first draw in Islamic banking in Kuwait and has won the "Best Savings Product in Kuwait 2019" by the prestigious Banker Middle East Magazine for the numerous unique features it provides. Al-Hassad Islamic account offers over 750 prizes, over 12 month period and has reshaped the lives of thousands lucky winners.

The Bank announced 20 winners of KD 1,000 as follows: Meshal Samy Al-Tamimi, Saleh Taha Abdullah, Jehan Ali Ahmad, Dalal Farouq Al-Zanki, Ahmad Mousa Al-Khashem, Shafeeqah Ali Akbar, Faisal Hajji Al-Jaser, Sarah Ghuloum Shah, Fadheelah Salem Hussain, Youssef Ibrahim Al-Qabandi, Shaikha Metub Al-Usaimi, Adel Al-Najjar, Ashwaq Al-Mutairi, Soud Mohammad Al-Mutairi, Abdullah Abdulfattah Al-Ali, Dawoud Sulaiman Al-Duwaisan, Hani Abdullah Mohammad Al-Haddad, Salah Khaled Moubark Al-Whaib, Hanan Khalil Taqi and Esam Jaragh. The draws of Al-Hassad include several cash prizes, such as KD 100,000 each Eid and the grand quarterly draw of KD 250,000 prize which continues to be a key aspiration for customers who are wishing to fulfill their dreams. Al-Hassad offers 20 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 for each winner. In addition to this attractive package of rewards, Al-Hassad Islamic account incorporates a Wakala contract for projected annual profits, making this account beneficial to all customer segments that are

aspiring to build their short and long-term savings through a unique savings account with many advantages.

Furthermore, for the first time in Kuwait, the AUB Al-Hassad presents the "Privilege Draw", which is a quarterly draw of KD 25,000 exclusively for Al-Hassad customers who maintained their balances for more than one year and have not won a prize in the past five years. For all draws, the clients are eligible for one draw chance for each KD 50 deposited in their Al-Hassad account. It is worth mentioning that Al-Hassad Islamic account has won the "Best Savings Product in Kuwait 2019" by the prestigious Banker Middle East Magazine for the numerous unique features it provides. Such features include the simplest and easiest program, highest number of winners, largest prize value, unique draws during Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, loyalty multipliers, unique online account opening feature, transparent draws held during radio shows with live broadcast on the Bank's social media platforms.

## Al-Hassad

The highest number of winners in Kuwait

Quarterly	KD 250,000	Eid Al-Fitr & Adha	KD 100,000
Privilege	KD 25,000	Weekly	KD 20,000



# CLINIC PAGE



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- Canadian Board of General Surgery
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- American Board of Surgical Critical Care

**Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad**  
Surgery Department  
Consultant General Surgery, Laparoscopic & Colo - Rectal Surgeon

Instagram: [@daralshifa](#)  
Email: [alshaddad@daralshifa.com](mailto:alshaddad@daralshifa.com)

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- Laryngology Fellowship, McGill University- Canada.
- Fellow of the European Board of Otolaryngology - Head & Neck surgery.
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Email: drbuhaimed@beautybeyond.com.kw  
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**DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED**  
Consultant of General Surgery  
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**Academic Certificates - Training**

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- Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- G.I. surgeries.
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email: [wbuhaimed@gmail.com](mailto:wbuhaimed@gmail.com) Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228

Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building

**Dr. Ahmad Alaeddine**  
Head of Cardiology departmenta at Dar Al Shifa hospital

- Consultant Interventional and conventional cardiologist.
- Specialised in the Diagnosis and treatment of all adult cardiac diseases, including those cases that need urgent intervention in Cath lab (primary angioplasty).

مستشفى دار الشفاء  
Dar Al Shifa Hospital  
Tel: 1802 555

Instagram: [@daralshifa](#)





This photographs taken on April 21, 2021 show staff members preparing plant-based food samples during the launch of ADM's plant-based innovation lab in Singapore. — AFP photos

## VEGGIE SATAY: SINGAPORE LAB COOKS UP ASIAN FAVORITES, MINUS THE MEAT

From faux-chicken satay to imitation beef rendang, a high-tech Singapore laboratory is replicating popular Asian dishes with plant-based meat alternatives to feed the region's growing appetite for sustainable food. Flavor specialists and food scientists in white coats work with plant extracts at the newly opened facility to create vegetarian versions of traditionally meaty dishes that taste like the real thing.

Demand for sustainable foods in Asia, while small compared to the West, is rising in tandem with greater awareness about healthy eating and concerns about the environmental impact of meat consumption. Plant-based burgers and chicken nuggets have already found their way to the region, but US food processing giant ADM is focusing its efforts on dishes with more local appeal.

"We work with local chefs, work with



A staff member displays a sample of coconut-flavored syrup.

local customers to really develop and tailor the taste to what's needed here in Asia," said Dirk Oyen, the company's Southeast Asia vice president and general manager for human nutrition. "That's really the key - so we can create the local taste."

The ADM lab has cooked veggie ver-

sions of satay (grilled meat skewers served with a peanut sauce) and rendang (a beef curry slow-cooked in coconut milk and spices). It hopes to perfect the base ingredients for such delicacies and market them to consumer firms and supermarkets.

The scientists use cutting-edge technology to fuse nutrition, texture, aroma and flavor to create protein-rich, vegetarian meat alternatives, mainly using soy and pea beans. Their products mimic beef, chicken and seafood and can be used in a wide variety of finished dishes. They also recreate processed meat products, such as faux ham and sausages.

Asia is already home to some plant-based staples, such as tofu and tempeh, but ADM hopes to offer consumers a broader, and more sophisticated choice. Worries about the environmental impact of eating meat center on the amount of



Gluten-free brownies are displayed.

methane, a potent greenhouse gas, produced by cattle, as well as the logging of forests to make way for pastures.

While demand for meat alternatives is growing in Asia, companies like ADM still face challenges, ranging from persuading consumers to change age-old eating



Palm sugar-flavored chocolate cubes are displayed.

habits to stiff competition. Singapore is already home to a host of local start-ups creating sustainable foods ranging from "lab-grown" seafood to dumplings made with tropical fruit instead of meat. — AFP



Panel beater Pedro Manso poses in front of a Chevrolet BelAir 55 car rebuilt by him in his workshop in the town of Placetas, Villa Clara province, central Cuba, April 24, 2021.

### Cuba's Chevy doctor keeping classic cars on the road

In Cuba, where American cars older than the average inhabitant are a common sight on city streets, Pablo Manso makes his living in a very particular niche: Repairing Chevrolets from 1955, 1956 and 1957. The self-taught technician plies his trade in a workshop he built 15 years ago at his home in Placetas, a small city in the rural center of the communist island.



Manso reviews a car part made by him in a metal molding machine he invented.

He recreates Chevy parts with machines he built himself in a country where US sanctions have crippled imports of cars, parts and tools of the trade. "Modern cars do not interest me," the 53-year-old Manso told AFP with a shrug. It took him years to teach himself his craft, working day and night and learning through trial and error. "I was tearing my hair out," he laughs.

His efforts have paid off, and today, Chevrolet owners from all over Cuba - even further afield - look to him to keep



Manso helps apprentice Lemaydi Madrigal in his workshop. — AFP photos

their motors running. "People are commissioning pieces from many countries," Manso said proudly - citing orders from the United States, Canada, Italy and Spain. In the first half of the 20th century, Cubans imported tens of thousands of American cars, then brand new. But economic sanctions declared in 1962 against the government of Fidel Castro stopped the influx. "We need tractors, not Cadillacs," Castro responded at the time.

#### Pampered cars

Today, it is estimated that some 60,000 American classic vehicles from the 1940s and 1950s are in circulation in Cuba. The cars are pampered by their owners, who rely on them for daily transport but also to convey tourists in a country where the cars have themselves become a key attraction. Manso himself owns a red and white Chevrolet Bel Air from 1955, a shining museum piece with almost all its original parts except for the engine, which is from Toyota.

This has been the biggest adaptation to most surviving Chevys in Cuba, with the original engines not surviving the passage of time. Manso says Chevrolet "made a leap towards modernity" in 1955, and that year, 1956 and 1957 were the "years of success" for the US automaker - hence his chosen specialty. He recalls getting a visit once from the head of a Chevrolet workshop in Miami, accompanied by the manager of an auto parts factory in Taiwan who got "goose bumps - he could not believe these rustic machines could produce such quality parts".

Manso has taken on a 32-year-old apprentice, Lemaydi Madrigal. Shaping a piece of metal for a part, she told AFP she knew "almost nothing about cars" at first. "What I like most (to make) are the floors of the luggage compartments: They are big, they are complicated but I like them!" she said. — AFP

### Ancient Roman 'domus' with mosaic floors under modern flats

It doesn't look like much from the outside, but a building in central Rome holds a hidden treasure in the basement: The remains of a Roman era home, including elaborate mosaics. At the entrance of the 1950s building at the foot of Rome's Aventine Hill, all appears normal, with a resident loaded with shopping bags kindly holding the door.

But venture a bit further, and down a short flight of stairs one arrives at the prize, hiding behind an ordinary grey metal door. It is there where mosaics from a Roman "domus", or home, dating from between the first century BC to the second century AD, are visible.

Ensuing generations of Romans imposed six different levels of floors over the ages until in 2014, the remains were revealed by excavations to transform the former headquarters of the National Bank of Labour into an apartment building after its purchase by French bank BNP Paribas. "We are here inside an 'archaeological box'... an architectural structure having two functions: to protect the mosaics and to allow the public to have access to it," Roberto Narducci, an archaeologist from Rome's Directorate of Cultural Assets, told AFP.

The mosaics depict sinewy vines creeping from pots, black and white geometric patterns, and even a bright green parrot perched atop a branch. Doors opened to the public on Friday after four years of technologically complex excavation work that was completed in 2018. "Here we're inside a private building... just where they were planning to build eight



Remains of a magnificent Roman villa, or domus, under the apartment building.

sive. "It's a tremendous relief. It's late, but better late than never," Harris County Commissioner Rodney Ellis told AFP. In 1991, as a state senator, Ellis carried a bill to have those names removed. But he didn't follow up, saying: "I thought passing a law was enough." However the power to officially change the titles of features like lakes and rivers belongs to a federal panel called the US Board on Geographic Names that is due to revisit the matter on June 10. The panel had voted against the changes in 1998, after waiting years to consider the question. Their explanation?

#### 'Review and revise offensive names'

They cited "a concern that there had

garages," Narducci said, smiling.

#### Goodbye garages

The garage plan was shelved after an agreement with BNP Paribas, which financed work on the excavations, he said. A multimedia visit greets the public, using plays of light and a soundtrack punctuated with bird songs to transform the atmosphere once again into the Roman "domus" of a wealthy family. The light show imposes brightly colored paintings reminiscent of those of Pompeian villas on the walls, while missing portions of mosaics are replaced as if by magic.



A view of the apartment building under which the remains of a Roman villa has been buried for almost 2,000 years is seen at the foot of Rome's Aventine Hill on May 6, 2021. — AFP photos

Undoubtedly, the former home better evokes more of its original splendor - even after the passing of more than 2,000 years - through the chosen format rather than transforming all elements to a museum. "We had the opportunity to study several layers of mosaics that were superimposed on each other over the centuries, six in total: from a scientific point of view, this happens very rarely," said Narducci.

provides for visits by the public on the first and third Friday of each month, under the supervision of a guide. "It's true we're inside a residential building, but we are also on an archaeological site where the objects belong to the state," Narducci said. — AFP



### TEXAS RACIST PLACE NAMES POISED FOR HISTORICAL RECKONING

Racist and offensive Texas place names are holdovers from a dark past, but they are poised to finally change as a reckoning on how white America treats Black people washes over the United States. Though state lawmakers sought to officially rename a series of features in 1991, that change was stymied,

and decades later places like "Negrohead Lake" or "Negro Creek" still carry their derogatory monikers. Yet the murder last year of African American George Floyd under a white police officer's knee has brought new impetus to confronting racism, including place names or statues honoring Confederate war generals. While Texas fought on the side of the slavery-supporting Confederacy during the nation's civil war, today it is a state where non-Hispanic white people are in the minority.

A vote by a federal panel that is set for next month could finally officially rename 16 Texas places whose names include the word "negro", a once common description that many now see as outdated and offen-

been no consultation with local governments, nor did the (1991) legislation provide any biographical details" on the people whose names would be given to the features, board geographer Jennifer Runyon told AFP. Under the rules, applicants are supposed to show a link between a place and any person for whom it would be named.

But, Runyon said no follow up on those questions was ever submitted to the bureau after its rejection. That changed in late 2020 when the panel got a media query about the names, which then led to Miller, the Harris County commissioner, pushing to get the changes reconsidered. Runyon said the panel

agreed, in part, because the state has not been using the old names for close to 30 years now, "along with the renewed interest in the matter".

Under the proposal, Negrohead Lake, which is near Houston, would be rebaptized Lake Henry Doyle for the first African American law student to attend a public university in Texas. It is impossible to say how the board will vote, but its members will do so in a remarkably different context than they did decades ago. Runyon said they have "definitely seen an increased interest in the matter", primarily via media queries into the process of changing offensive names. — AFP



Lifestyle | Features



Various animals are pictured in their enclosures at Kuwait Zoo on Friday. The zoo is still closed to the public. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Rare sapphire glitters in Geneva auction

The largest Kashmir sapphire ever auctioned and a royal tiara which everyone can try on via Instagram are the stars of this year's May magnificent jewels sales in Geneva. Gems worn by French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte's adopted daughter also dazzle among the historic treasures being sold by Sotheby's and Christie's auction houses on May 11 and 12.

The Kashmir sapphire, a 55.19 carat gem, was formerly in the collection of Maureen Constance Guinness, a marchioness of the aristocratic Anglo-Irish brewing family, who died in 1998. Kashmir sapphires of over 30 carats are very rare. It is being sold alongside a cushion-shaped Kashmir sapphire weighing 25.97 carats and the pair are estimated to fetch \$2-3 million.

Following their discovery in the early 1880s, the mining of Kashmir sapphires only lasted from 1882 and 1887, making such gems some of the most coveted on the market, according to Sotheby's. They have a rich cornflower blue hue with a soft, velvety texture, and retain their luster in any light. "Kashmir sapphires are among the rarest colored gemstones known to man," said Benoit Repellin, head of magnificent jewels sales at Sotheby's in Geneva. "These gems have over the years acquired an almost legendary status."

### Instagram tiara

Among the other historical pieces on sale is a tiara kept for more than 150

years in the Italian House of Savoy royal dynasty. The diadem, containing 11 natural pearls and diamonds, dates from the second half of the 19th century and is estimated at \$1-1.5 million. The tiara is also a masterpiece of ingenuity as it can be separated into two parts, allowing it to be worn as a necklace, Repellin told AFP.

of themselves wearing the Savoy tiara in a sumptuous Italian palace.

In the big gems category, Christie's is offering a rectangular white 100.94-carat diamond called the Spectacle, valued at \$12-18 million. The internally flawless diamond is the largest stone ever to have been cut in Russia and was cut from a

### Napoleonic treasures

Marking the 200th anniversary of Napoleon's death, Christie's is selling nine imperial jewels adorned with sapphires and diamonds, from the collection of his adopted daughter, Stephanie de Beauharnais. The nine pieces, including a tiara valued at up to \$275,000 and a neck-

Besides their historical value, the jewels are also prized for their natural blue, as sapphires usually undergo heat treatment to accentuate the color. Cisamolo also noted the growing Asian market for such gems. "At the moment, we see a lot of Asians who like to wear these important jewels, for major events in their life," she said.



Sotheby's said it was witnessing unprecedented global demand for royal jewelry, particularly from younger clients in Asia. Collectors from that continent have bought a third of the tiaras sold by the auction house in the past five years. Keen to attract the interest of a new generation, Sotheby's created an Instagram filter that allows people to create a picture

rough stone unearthed in the remote northeastern Yakutia region in 2016. Other standout items include a pendant set with a 104.40 carat pear emerald, mounted by US jeweler Harry Winston, offered by Sotheby's for \$1-1.5 million. It is a "really exceptional weight for emeralds, which are more fragile stone," said Repellin.



Pictures taken on May 5, 2021 show a sapphire and diamond brooch, made with an oval-shaped sapphire and old-cut diamonds, sapphire and diamond earrings made with pear and cushion-shaped sapphires and old-cut diamonds, and a sapphire and diamond necklace made with octagonal step-cut sapphires, rose and old-cut diamond and gold, all early 19th-century circa 1800 and once owned by Napoleonic adopted daughter, Stephanie de Beauharnais, during a press preview ahead of sales by Christies auction house on May 12, 2021 in Geneva. — AFP photos

lace estimated at up to \$350,000, "have remained in the same family since they were offered to Stephanie de Beauharnais, on the occasion of her wedding at the Tuileries Palace" in Paris, said Marie-Cecile Cisamolo, a jewelry specialist at Christie's.

Some 38 sapphires from Sri Lanka were used to create the set in the early 1800s.

The Christie's sale also includes a sapphire crown worn by queen Mary II of Portugal, who was twice the country's reigning monarch before her death in 1853. The crown, set with a Burmese sapphire in the center, is estimated at \$190,000-\$385,000. — AFP



Christophe Guignement (left back), scriptwriter and author of cartoons and co-founder of the Maison Junior association, teaches participants of a residency in Alogavi, Togo, on April 29, 2021. — AFP

## Young W Africans write first French TV series

In a luxury villa on Lake Togo, ten young West African screenwriters are getting a rare chance to hone their skills and see their work on the small screen. The Togo initiative by Maison Junior association brings together writers from five countries with the idea of eventually crafting the second season of the French series "Junior des idées au Or" - "Junior with the golden ideas" - to become the first major French series written entirely in French-speaking West Africa.

The animated film takes a look at the daily lives of a group of African schoolchildren, including the hero Junior. "In Season 1, it was French screenwriters who made this series and who spoke about the daily life of African children," said Christophe Guignee, screenwriter, cartoonist and co-founder of Maison Junior. "Now we are turning it around: it is African screenwriters who will talk about the daily life of African children. It must be accessible for Europeans and at

the same time, something Africans can identify with."

Accompanied by two French professionals and one Togolese, the ten have already completed a four-month distance course. After the stay in Togo, the young screenwriters will have another two-month period of distance training. "This training is interesting, because it allows us to offer content that is modelled on our realities, on what we are experiencing in Africa," said Odilon Edjedji, a 25-year-old from neighboring Benin.

For the young writers, it is a real chance at sharpening their skills. "In Africa, it is not always easy to train in cinema. And as for scriptwriting, it is not easy, because training is rare," said Anais Kere, a 23-year-old Burkinabe journalist, screenwriter and film critic. The training is both theoretical and practical. But it also has a new challenging aspect.

Two famous Togolese slam-rappers, are also supervising the students in conceiving a song for the series. Sitting around a table in the middle of the villa's lush garden not far from the Togo capital Lome, the young screenwriters have trying to adapt text to music. "There are things that I did but did not understand," said Yoann Feteke, a young Togolese screenwriter. "With this training, I gradually mastered all the stages of writing." — AFP

## The music festival refusing to bow to COVID

Pulsating crowds, booming open-air sound systems, megastars lapping up the adoration of thousands - music festivals are fast receding into distant memory thanks to COVID, but one event in Serbia is refusing to yield. The Exit Festival - one of Europe's biggest with organizers saying 200,000 attended in 2019 - is aiming to become the first such event to go ahead in Europe since the pandemic began.

Other big names on the circuit like Glastonbury, Lollapalooza and Hellfest have already cancelled this year because of the virus. But Exit spokesman Sanjin Djukic claimed medical experts had agreed it was possible to hold the event safely if visitors produced vaccination certificates or negative test results. "We can say with absolute certainty that visiting Exit will be a lot safer than going into a bar or getting on a bus," he told AFP.

Tickets for the event, which takes place on a fortress overlooking the city of Novi Sad, are already on sale with the date marked down as July 8-11. Stars already lined up include David Guetta, DJ Snake, Nina Kraviz, Tyga, Sepultura and Metronomy. However, a line-up was announced last year too, shortly before the event was cancelled.

### 'Every gathering is a risk'

This year, the organizers are finding inspiration in trial gigs held recently in Spain and England, apparently without a problem, and a ramped up vaccination drive. The inoculation program in Serbia is well ahead of most other countries, with more than a fifth of its population having received two jabs. But even countries with better rates of vaccination than Serbia are playing it cautious with music festivals. Neighboring Hungary, where two-thirds

are vaccinated, has already abandoned plans for its marquee music event, the Sziget festival, which is usually held in August. Most of the big-name festivals in the UK, another country ahead of Serbia with vaccinations, have been postponed along with continental European stalwarts Solidays and Rock am Ring.

Even though daily infection numbers are slowly dropping in Serbia, experts are still wary of holding such a massive event, especially as many visitors would come from abroad. "Every gathering is a risk, and a certain amount of transmission has to be expected," epidemiologist Zoran Radovanovic told AFP. "The only dilemma is what you consider to be an acceptable risk." However, he pointed out that the risk would reduce as the rate of vaccination increased. "If a festival was organized today, it would be a disaster, but in July I believe we will have a much better situation," he said.

### 'He who dares'

The organizers got a huge boost in late April when the local authorities in Novi Sad gave their backing to the festival. "We have to think about the mental health of

our citizens too, especially the young who have been deprived of everyday activities for more than 14 months," Novi Sad mayor Milos Vucevic told AFP. Vucevic, who is also part of a government-appointed crisis group charged with battling the coronavirus, said the festival would be "a symbol of Serbia's victory over the pandemic".

However, Serbia's ruling party has a history of claiming victory over the pandemic, having declared one last April. The festival, which began life in the protest movement against Slobodan Milosevic, is now by far the biggest tourist draw in Novi Sad. Organizers reckon it has generated roughly €200 million of revenue over the past 20 years.

It has played host to The Cure, Beastie Boys, former Led Zeppelin singer Robert Plant, Manu Chao and Wu-Tang Clan. But there is plenty of risk involved in trying to host it this year, a point not lost on mayor Vucevic. "Whether it's going to be a victory or a fiasco, whether it will go ahead or not, we will see in the days to come," he said, adding: "He who dares, wins." — AFP



In this file photo taken on July 7, 2011, festival goers cheer during a concert at the EXIT festival near Novi Sad. — AFP



## Sports

## Photo of the day



Horacio Llorens trains in El Hierro, Canary Islands. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Pelicans' Williamson out with fractured finger

**NEW YORK:** New Orleans Pelicans star forward Zion Williamson will be sidelined indefinitely with a fractured left ring finger, the NBA team announced Friday. The setback came as the Pelicans, chasing a play-in game position in hopes of reaching the playoffs, began a five-game road trip at Philadelphia on Friday. The team said in a statement that Williamson underwent a series of diagnostic tests Thursday and a CT scan revealed the broken finger, with more evaluation needed to determine a treatment plan and return timetable.



Zion Williamson

Williamson ranked ninth in the NBA in scoring with 27.0 points a game and also has grabbed 7.2 rebounds and passed off 3.7 assists a game. At 30-36, the Pelicans rank 11th in the Western Conference with the top 10 having a chance to compete in the post-season. They are 1 1/2 games behind 10th-place San Antonio and three games behind ninth-place Memphis with six games remaining. —AFP

## Short-handed Jazz outshine Nuggets, Blazers get leg up on slumping Lakers

**LOS ANGELES:** Bojan Bogdanovic torched Denver for a career-high 48 points as the Utah Jazz remained in top spot in the Western Conference with a 127-120 victory over the Nuggets on Friday night. The under-manned Jazz were without their dynamic guard duo of Donovan Mitchell and Mike Conley, but throughout their injury absences other Utah players have been stepping up and Friday it was Bogdanovic's turn. "I'm playing better. I'm shooting the ball better," Bogdanovic said. "So I'm getting in the right shape in the right moment right before the playoffs."

Mitchell has missed the last 11 games with a right ankle sprain and Conley has missed six straight games with a hamstring injury. Jordan Clarkson had 21 points and eight assists for the Jazz, who improved to 48-18 and are one game ahead of Phoenix for the top seed in the Western Conference. Clarkson was coming off a 30-point game against the San Antonio Spurs on Wednesday. Rudy Gobert had 14 points and nine rebounds, Georges Niang had 13 points and Joe Ingles had 10 points and nine assists for the Jazz in Salt Lake City.

Like Utah, the Nuggets are limping into the postseason. But they are still getting it done even though all-star Jamal Murray is out for the season with a torn ACL. Michael Porter paced Denver with 31 points, Nikola Jokic finished with 24 points, 13 assists, and Paul Millsap chipped in 19 points for the Nuggets, who have won 10 of 13 games since Murray got injured. "What didn't we see from him tonight?" Jazz coach Quin Snyder said of Bogdanovic. "He was making great reads. He really scored every way possible."

Bogdanovic nailed a three pointer with 4:39 left in the fourth to give the Jazz a 114-106 lead. Denver went on a 5-0 run to cut the lead to just three. Clarkson then hit a three-pointer and Gobert made a basket to make it 119-112. Denver clawed their way back to get within three points with a minute remaining but Clarkson sealed the victory with the last of his six threes. Denver shot 60 percent from the field and 50 percent from three-point range.

In Portland, Damian Lillard put on a show for the fans scoring a game-high 38 points as the Trail Blazers defeated the slumping Los Angeles Lakers 106-101 in a key positional game as the playoffs draw closer. CJ McCollum scored 21 points for the Trail Blazers, who welcomed fans back to the Moda Center for the first time this season.



PORTLAND: Damian Lillard #0 of the Portland Trail Blazers drives to the basket against Anthony Davis #3 of the Los Angeles Lakers during the third quarter at Moda Center on Friday in Portland, Oregon. —AFP

Portland moved into sixth place in the Western Conference, while dropping the Lakers into seventh place. The victory gives the Trail Blazers the important tiebreaker edge in the standings after they won two of three games over the Lakers this season. The top six in the conference avoid this season's new play-in round.

Anthony Davis finished with 36 points and 12 rebounds for the Lakers, who lost for the eighth time in the past 10 games. The Lakers played without injured LeBron James (ankle) and Dennis Schroder, who was out because of health and safety protocols.

## Doncic delivers

Elsewhere, Luka Doncic scored 24 points and surpassed the 5,000 career point mark as the Dallas

Mavericks defeated the Cleveland Cavaliers 110-90. Doncic became just the fourth-youngest NBA player (22 years, 67 days) to reach 5,000 points when he scored his seventh point of Friday's game. Only Carmelo Anthony, LeBron James and Kevin Durant did it at a younger age. Doncic played just 23 minutes and also had eight rebounds.

With the win, the Mavericks clinched the Southwest Division title, giving them the fifth seed if there is a three-way tie with the Los Angeles Lakers and Portland. "I think it's something that's always worthwhile," said coach Rick Carlisle. "It shows that you're one of the better teams. It's big and we'll take it. It's important to get this win, try to get through this game unscathed and get ready for Sunday." —AFP

## Nadal admits Zverev defeat 'step back' but remains positive

**MADRID:** Rafael Nadal admitted his 6-4, 6-4 loss to Germany's Alexander Zverev in the Madrid Open quarter-finals on Friday was a "step back" but insisted there were plenty of positives as he plots his way to a 14th Roland Garros title. Nadal has now fallen early in two clay-court Masters tournaments ahead of the Grand Slam in Paris, after going out in the Monte Carlo quarter-finals last month before winning in Barcelona.

Even in Barcelona, however, he needed to save a championship point to beat Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final. Nadal is hoping to clinch a 14th Roland Garros title and record-setting 21st major in the French capital next month.

"I took steps forward, but when you go up a staircase, there are times when it happens that you take a step back, that's what happened today," said five-time Madrid champion Nadal. "It's a week where there were a lot of positive things. I'm leaving Madrid with good feelings in general, and the bad one having played a match like today. Now, what is the goal before Roland Garros? Go to Rome (for next week's Italian Open) and win, that's all."

Nadal had been hoping to reach the semi-finals of a Masters event for the 75th time. "I had the match under control at the beginning and was playing well for six games, probably playing better than him," said the Spaniard. "Then at 4-2 serving for 5-2, I had a disaster."

Nadal continued: "Of course, playing against one of the best players in the world, under these circumstances, with this speed of the court, it's very difficult." Zverev has beaten Nadal three times in a row but this was his first victory on clay against the world number two. "It's definitely one of the biggest wins of my career so far, especially on clay against Rafa," Zverev said. "It is the toughest thing to do in our sport. Beating him in his house, in Spain, is incredible."

Zverev's impressive straights-set win at the Caja Magica earns him a meeting with Dominic Thiem in the semis, in what will be a repeat of last year's US Open final, which was won by Thiem. After losing to world number eight Andrey Rublev in Monaco, Nadal was convincingly beaten by Zverev and the spotlight will be on the 34-year-old now in Rome next week, his last tournament before heading to Paris.

It started well for Nadal when he broke Zverev to love to lead 4-2 in the first set, Zverev serving a double fault to give away the first advantage. But the world number five immediately hit back and then pulled away, four straight games clinching him the set. —AFP



Rafael Nadal

## Reds ace Miley throws second MLB no-hitter in three days

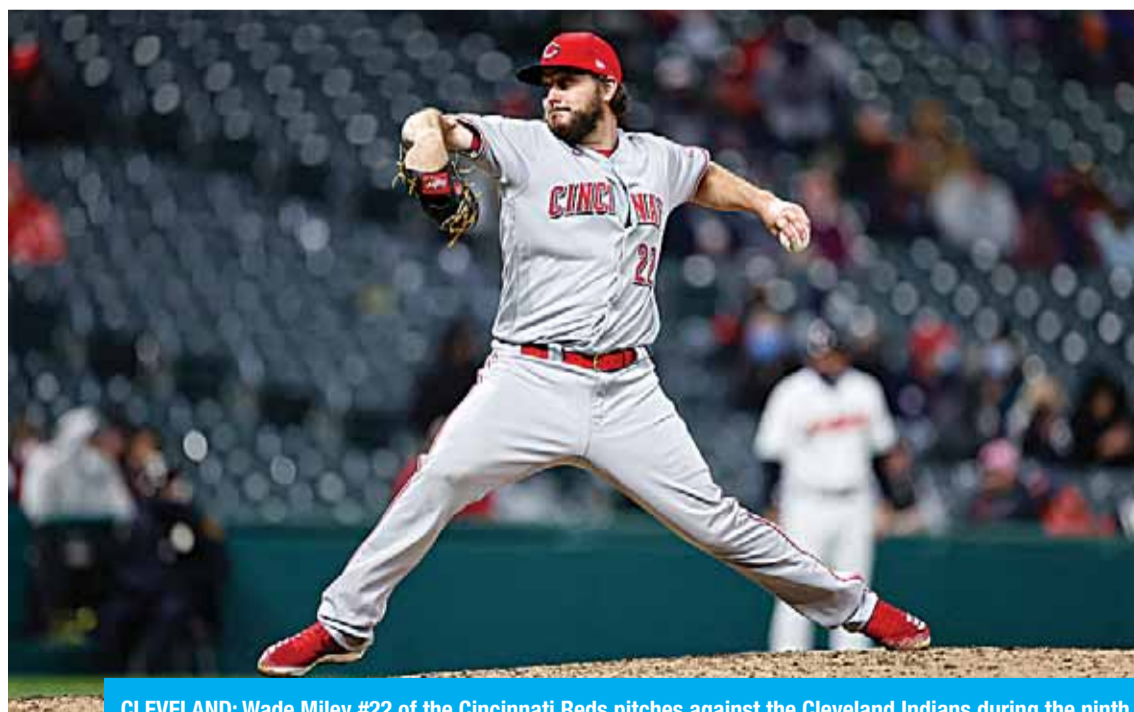
**LOS ANGELES:** Left hander Wade Miley threw Major League Baseball's fourth no-hitter of the season, striking out eight batters as the Cincinnati Reds blanked the Cleveland Indians 3-0 on Friday. The 34-year-old Miley delivered a dynamic performance, retiring the first 16 batters he faced and walking just one as the Indians suffered their second no-hit game in a month.

Miley, who has also pitched for Houston, Milwaukee, Baltimore, Seattle, Boston and Arizona, is in his second season with the Reds. He tossed the first no-hitter for the franchise since 2013 when Homer Bailey did it. Miley said it hasn't sunk in yet. "It's so far-fetched," Miley said. "I'm speechless."

On April 14 in Chicago, the Indians were no-hit by White Sox's Carlos Rodon in an 8-0 decision. This is also the second no-no this week for the league after Baltimore's John Means no-hit Seattle on Wednesday. The Indians came into the game having won five straight but they didn't get a baserunner until the sixth inning. Amed Rosario reached second base on a throwing error by Reds infielder Nick Senzel.

Miley walked batter Cesar Hernandez later in the inning but managed to get out of the tight frame without surrendering a hit. "He kept us off balance," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "He put on a clinic. I mean he cut the ball in on the righties, threw a changeup, threw a four-seamer in, he just went back and forth."

The game was scoreless after eight innings. In the top of the ninth, Cincinnati's Senzel and Jesse Winker singled



CLEVELAND: Wade Miley #22 of the Cincinnati Reds pitches against the Cleveland Indians during the ninth inning at Progressive Field on Friday in Cleveland, Ohio. —AFP

off Indians pitcher Emmanuel Clase. Senzel scored on a throwing error by Clase. Winker trotted home on a balk, then Mike Moustakas hit an RBI single and that would be all the runs the Reds needed for the win.

Miley got the final out in the bottom of the ninth when Jordan Luplow hit a grounder to the shortstop. "I will never forget that," Reds manager David Bell said. "I will never forget the look on Wade's face. I'm so glad he's

enjoying every moment."

The other no-hitter in 2021 was delivered by the San Diego Padres Joe Musgrove, on April 9 against the Texas Rangers. Arizona Diamondbacks pitcher Madison Bumgarner threw seven no-hit innings against the Atlanta Braves as part of a doubleheader on April 25, but it wasn't counted as an official no-hitter because the game didn't last nine innings. —AFP



## Sports

# Nothing can stop Olympics from going ahead: IOC's Coates

SYDNEY: International Olympic Committee vice-president John Coates was adamant yesterday that nothing could stop the Tokyo Olympics from going ahead, despite ongoing risks from COVID-19. Asked by AFP if there was any scenario in which the Games, which are due to start on July 23, could be cancelled or postponed again at this late stage, he replied: "No, there's not. The prime minister of Japan said that to the president of the United States two or three weeks ago. He continues to say that to the IOC. We're working with him (Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga) on all of the safety measures. It's going ahead."

Suga held talks with US President Joe Biden in April and stressed the Asian nation was doing everything possible to contain COVID-19 infections and hold a "safe and secure" Olympics. But questions continue to be raised about the viability of the Games, given the ongoing pandemic and a virus state of emergency in Tokyo and other parts of Japan being extended on Friday. While Japan's COVID-19 outbreak remains much smaller than in many countries, with just over 10,500 deaths, its vaccine rollout is moving slowly and polls show most Japanese people support cancellation or another delay.

Coates, the point man for the Games as head of the IOC's coordination commission, said a huge amount of work had been done to ensure the safety of athletes and the Japanese public. "We spent the first half of last year identifying all the worst-case scenarios," he told reporters in Sydney on the sidelines of the Australian Olympic Committee's annual general meeting. "We



SAPPORO: A volunteer (right) holds a placard asking people to refrain from watching the competition to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus while an athlete (center) competes in the half-marathon race which doubles as a test event for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, in Sapporo on May 5, 2021. — AFP

spent the next six months looking at the countermeasures that are necessary. We're implementing those countermeasures, predicated on there being no vaccine, so that situation has improved. The Games will go ahead."

US drugs giant Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech on Thursday announced a deal with the IOC to provide vaccines to competitors and staff at the

Games. In a statement, the firms said they would coordinate with national sporting bodies to make sure that coronavirus vaccines are available to anyone who needs one before travelling to Japan.

### 'Safety comes first'

Coates said it was a big step forward. "All of the precautions that we have been taking are aimed at the

health of the athletes and the health of the people of Japan," he said, denying the IOC was putting sport and financial considerations before health. "We've put an amazing amount of work into the procedures that ensure the safety of the athletes through testing ... boosted now by all athletes around the world now having access to the vaccine."

But he also admitted that not having the Japanese public fully on board was a concern. "I think there's a correlation between the numbers who are concerned about their safety with the numbers who have been vaccinated in Japan," he said.

"And the numbers (vaccinated) are very small, particularly among the elderly. So as the vaccine is rolled out in Japan, I think that will improve. The other message we have to get across to them, and are getting across to them, is that these measures we've been taking and trialing at test events are working," he added.

While some Olympic test events and qualifiers have been postponed, cancelled or moved abroad, others, notably the diving World Cup, have been successfully held in Tokyo with athletes from overseas. Coates revealed a Tunisian official at a recent rowing event in Tokyo tested positive for coronavirus, but said that only proved the tough measures were working.

"He tested okay before he left Tunisia, tested okay on arrival then three days later tested positive," he said. "But the system worked and he was taken out of his team, the competition, and no one else tested positive. Sorry for him, but that was a very good experience (for organizers)." — AFP



LEICESTER: Newcastle United's Slovakian goalkeeper Martin Dubravka (left) saves a shot by Leicester City's Spanish striker Ayoze Perez during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Newcastle United at King Power Stadium in Leicester, central England on Friday. — AFP

## Newcastle dent Leicester's Champions League bid with shock win

LONDON: Newcastle United derailed Leicester City's bid to qualify for next season's Champions League with a 4-2 win on Friday that all but secured their place in the Premier League. Defeat left Leicester third, two points in front of Chelsea and five ahead of West Ham, with both London clubs having a game in hand over the Foxes. Only the top four at the end of the Premier League season qualify for the Champions League.

Joe Willock, on loan from Arsenal, fired Newcastle in front in the 22nd minute at the King Power Stadium as he scored in his fourth successive top-flight game for the Magpies. And the visitors doubled their lead before half-time with a rare goal from Paul Dummett. Callum Wilson appeared to put the result beyond doubt with two second-half goals for Newcastle.

Marc Albrighton and Kelechi Iheanacho however, both scored inside the final 10 minutes for Leicester before Newcastle saw out the game. Leicester, who face Chelsea in the FA Cup final next weekend, are now in danger of fresh Champions League heartache after they missed out on the top four of the final day of last season.

### 'Lacked concentration'

Their three remaining league games are all against teams currently in the top six, with Brendan Rodgers' men travelling to Manchester United on Tuesday before they face Chelsea and Tottenham after their Wembley clash with the Blues. "We lacked concentration and if you do that against good teams and good players they punish you," Rodgers told Sky Sports.

Leicester suffered a setback shortly before kick-off when experienced defender Jonny Evans pulled out

after being injured in the warm-up, with Rodgers saying: "He is the brain in our defensive line...It was big blow for us." Rodgers, however, insisted: "We are still in a really good position and everything is still in our hands."

Newcastle's win, which took place a day after UK tax authorities dropped their criminal investigation into the club, saw them move 12 points clear of the relegation zone with three games left to play. They will be assured of top-flight survival without kicking a ball if Fulham fail to beat Burnley tomorrow.

"Some of the counter-attacking was excellent, delighted with the win," said Newcastle manager Steve Bruce. "We made it a bit hairy towards the end. We are not safe, for the Premier League you can't take it for granted."

Newcastle made the early running and got the goal they deserved when Willock capitalised on a mistake by Caglar Soyuncu to beat Kasper Schmeichel from 10 yards. Dummett made it 2-0 in the 34th minute when he powered in a header from Matt Ritchie's corner.

Midway through the second half, Newcastle were 3-0 in front when Ritchie's pass down the left evaded Timothy Castagne and allowed Wilson to round Schmeichel before scoring. Wilson had his second goal and Newcastle's fourth in the 73rd minute firing in the rebound from a tight angle, after his initial shot hit the post, to crown a counter-attack.

Newcastle were cruising at 4-0 ahead only to suffer a nervous finish following late goals from Albrighton and Iheanacho. Magpies goalkeeper Martin Dubravka had to make a brilliant stop to preserve his side's two-goal lead when he denied Ayoze Perez from point-blank range. — AFP

the closer we get to the title, obviously," said Lille striker Jonathan David who scored his team's third goal. We have certainly taken a big step, now we will look at the other results."

However, he cautioned: "The hardest part is to come, all the matches are difficult and we have seen it this season by losing points in matches where we were favorites. "You have to stay focused until the end if you want to win the title." Lille pressed from the start and won a penalty after 62 seconds as both Seko Fofana and Jonathan Clauss lunged into a challenge on Jonathan Bamba. The 35-year old Yilmaz smashed the spot kick in off the inside of the post.

Michelin, who was one of two Lens players sent off as Lens lost 4-0 at Lille in October, received his first yellow card for a tackle from behind on Yilmaz after 29 minutes. He collected his second for jumping into Mehmet Zeki Celik rather than contest a header after 35 minutes. Yilmaz punished the home team five minutes later with a ferocious, curling long-range drive that left goalkeeper Jean-Louis Leca flat-footed as it flew into the top corner. Lille added a third after 60 minutes. Leca parried a Bamba shot straight to David who scored. — AFP

## Lille win derby to tighten grip on Ligue 1 lead

LENS: Ligue 1 leaders Lille held their nerve to win 3-0 at local rivals Lens on Friday and put the pressure back on their pursuers who play later in the weekend. Lille took early control when veteran Turkish striker Burak Yilmaz converted a second-minute penalty.

They cruised to victory after Lens defender Clement Michelin was sent off for the second time in the Derby du Nord this season. Lille have two matches left and the victory puts them four points ahead of reigning champions Paris Saint-Germain, who visit Rennes today. Third-place Monaco are eight points behind with three games to play.

Lens, meanwhile, surrendered their hold on a guaranteed Europa League place, dropping below Marseille on goal difference. "The fewer games left,

## UK 'open' to hosting Champions League final due to Turkey travel ban

LONDON: Britain on Friday said it was willing to step in to host the Champions League football final, after the UK government placed Turkey on a coronavirus travel red list. Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said the UK was "very open to hosting the final round" of the competition, which is due to take place between English clubs Manchester City and Chelsea in Istanbul on May 29. The English Football Association were in talks with European football's governing body UEFA already, he said, but added the choice of venue for the final was a decision for UEFA.

Shapps said Chelsea and City supporters should not travel to Istanbul, telling a Downing Street press conference: "I'm afraid we are having to put Turkey on the red list and this will have a number of ramifications. First of all, it does mean with the regards to the Champions League, fans should not travel to Turkey. The FA are in discussions with UEFA already on this. We are very open to hosting the final but it is ultimately a decision for UEFA. But given there are two English clubs in that final, we look forward to hearing what they have to say."

"The UK has already got a successful track record of football matches with spectators, so we are well-placed to do it," Shapps added. Explaining the travel restrictions, Shapps said: "Red countries are those which should not be visited except in the most extreme of circumstances, where repeated testing and isolation in designated government hotels on return is compulsory. Non-UK residents who have been in a red country in the last 10 days will still be barred from entering the UK."

### UEFA need 'time to reflect'

UEFA responded to the British government's decision by telling AFP in an email: "We have just learned that Turkey has been put on the red list and we need a bit of time to reflect on this." City have yet to comment on the UK government's offer to stage the final, with British media reports indicating the club would wait for guidance from UEFA.

But the Chelsea Supporters' Trust, who are due to meet with UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin, called for the final to be moved to the UK. "Turkey has been added to the red list and therefore no CFC supporters can travel to watch the UCL final," said a CST tweet. "We are meeting with the UEFA president this week and will request that the fixture is moved to the UK."

When Turkey announced plans for a third lockdown last week following a coronavirus surge, UEFA insisted this "should not have any impact" on the Champions League final, set to take place at the Ataturk Olympic Stadium with a "limited number of spectators".

Turkey had seen daily COVID-19 death tolls rise to around 350, higher than during two previous spikes last year. Last year's final was also scheduled to played at the Ataturk Stadium but the pandemic forced UEFA to organize instead a "Final 8" tournament in Lisbon in August. — AFP



ROMA: Manchester United's Norwegian coach Ole Gunnar Solskjaer reacts during the UEFA Europa League semi-final second leg football match between AS Roma and Manchester United at the Olympic Stadium in Rome, on May 6, 2021. — AFP

## Solskjaer plans rotation following fixture pile-up

LONDON: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer is planning sweeping changes during Manchester United's run of four matches in eight days, saying the knock-on effects in the Premier League top-four race is "everyone else's problem".

Last Sunday's clash with Liverpool was called off after fans invaded the pitch at Old Trafford during protests against the Glazers, United's American owners, following the collapse of the European Super League. The postponed fixture was moved to next Thursday. Before that United, on course to finish second in the Premier League, face Aston Villa today and then Leicester on Tuesday.

United's three top-flight fixtures in five days come after Thursday's intense Europa League semi-final second leg at Roma, where they lost 3-2 but triumphed 8-5 on aggregate to reach the final against Villarreal.

Asked if he could name substantially different line-ups from one match to another during this period, Solskjaer said: "Yeah. Two games in three days is difficult but you can accept that. We do that at Christmas. Two games in three days after a long season, with all the games we've had, even more difficult. Three games in five days, very, very, very difficult. Almost impossible. And four games in eight, it is impossible."

The Norwegian said the fixture schedulers had shown a lack of understanding about the demands of playing in the Premier League. "I've got to look after the players," he said. "That might be someone not happy with my team selection for one game or two games. That might affect whoever gets into the fourth position or the Champions League. That's not my problem. That's everyone else's problem." Both Leicester and Liverpool are fighting to finish in the top four, which means qualification for next season's Champions League. — AFP



LENS: Lille's Turkish midfielder Burak Yilmaz (center) celebrates after scoring a goal during the French L1 football match between Lens and Lille LOSC at the Bollaert Stadium, in Lens, northern France, on Friday. — AFP



## Real, Barca, Juventus lament UEFA 'threats'

### Nine clubs sanctioned over Super League project as three hold out

ROMA: Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus yesterday defended the aborted Super League project after the nine other clubs were given a financial penalty by UEFA for their involvement. The three clubs said they had received "unacceptable" threats from UEFA and FIFA since the project collapsed just two days after it was announced last month, when six Premier League clubs and three other teams pulled out.

In a joint statement, Real, Barcelona and Juventus said the Super League had been launched "with the aim of providing solutions to the current unsustainable situation in the football industry". They argued that they and the nine clubs who withdrew under pressure from supporters' protests — Tottenham, Arsenal, Manchester City, Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool, Atletico Madrid, Inter Milan and AC Milan — "shared the same concerns... that structural reforms are indispensable to ensure our sport stays appealing and survives in the long term".

Those nine clubs on Friday agreed to forego five percent of their revenue from UEFA competitions for one season and between them make a 15-million-euro (\$18.25 million) donation to support grassroots and youth football in Europe. A spokesperson for Manchester United confirmed the Glazer family, which owns the club, would cover their club's share of both sums. They also committed to participating in UEFA competitions for which they qualify and agreed to pay fines of 100 million euros if they ever seek to play in an "unauthorized" competition.



Real, Barcelona and Juventus said: "We regret to see that our friends and founding partners of the Super League project have now found themselves in such an inconsistent and contradictory position when signing a number of commitments to UEFA yesterday."

UEFA said it would take "appropriate action" against the three clubs who still support the Super League project. The clubs responded that "the founding clubs have suffered, and continue to suffer, unacceptable third-party pressures (and) threats."

#### 'A mistake'

UEFA on Friday announced sanctions, including financial punishments, against nine of the 12 clubs behind the aborted Super League project, after the clubs "apologized" and acknowledged "a mistake". The governing body of European football said that "in a spirit of reconciliation" the nine clubs had agreed to a "Club

Commitment Declaration" and accepted a five percent cut in their European revenue for one season. However, Barcelona, Real Madrid and Juventus, did not sign the declaration. UEFA said it "reserved all rights to take whatever action it deems appropriate against those clubs that have so far refused to renounce the so-called 'Super League'."

"The matter will promptly be referred to the competent UEFA disciplinary bodies," the statement concluded. Some media have reported that UEFA is contemplating a two-year ban from European competition for the three holdouts, the maximum its rules allow.

However, their options are clouded by a ruling from a commercial court in Madrid on April 20. The court banned UEFA and FIFA from making any moves to block a Super League or taking any disciplinary measures against the clubs, players or officials

involved. It is also unclear what penalties the clubs that have withdrawn may owe to the remaining clubs for breaking their agreement to join the Super League. The nine clubs that opted out of the project have agreed to a series of "reintegration measures".

"These clubs recognized their mistakes quickly and have taken action to demonstrate their contrition and future commitment to European football," said UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin. "The same cannot be said for the clubs that remain involved in the so-called 'Super League' and UEFA will deal with those clubs subsequently."

"It takes a strong organization to admit making a mistake especially in these days of trial by social media. These clubs have done just that," said Ceferin. "In accepting their commitments and willingness to repair the disruption they caused, UEFA wants to put this chapter behind it and move

forward in a positive spirit."

The English Football Association said in a statement that it was "delighted" that the six English clubs had committed to UEFA's competitions and suggested that it too might punish the clubs. "The FA has an ongoing inquiry into the involved of the six English clubs and we have formally requested all relevant information and evidence regarding their participation," the statement. "Once we have the required information, we will consider what appropriate steps to take."

Earlier on Friday, Manchester United co-chairman Joel Glazer wrote to his club's fans saying he was "personally humbled" by their reactions and understood "why our initial support for the European Super League left you feeling angry and let down." "I would like to reiterate my sincere apology for the mistakes that were made," he said. — AFP



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