

3 Info ministry launches new media strategy



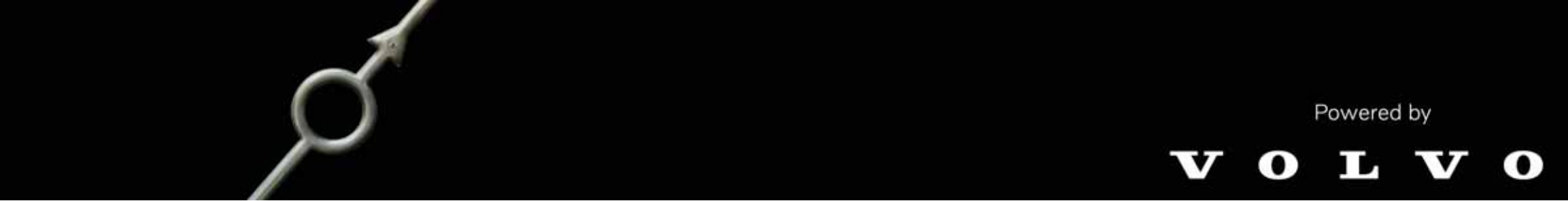

6 Killings in Iraq spark calls for election boycott



13 Gaza bookshop owner's dreams buried in rubble




16 Booker shines as Suns sink Lakers, Grizzlies stun Jazz



# UN declares ‘war’ on COVID; 115,000 medics have died

India passes 300,000 deaths • Countries mull how to rebuild post-COVID world



AMRITSAR: A health worker collects a nasal swab sample from a man to test for COVID-19 in a mobile testing van yesterday. — AFP

**GENEVA:** The UN chief yesterday declared the world “at war” against COVID-19, as India’s death toll crossed 300,000 and Japan opened its first mass vaccination centers – just two months before the start of the Olympics. At least 115,000 health and care workers have died from COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic, the WHO chief said yesterday, calling for a dramatic scale-up of vaccination in all countries.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged governments to apply wartime logic to stark inequalities in the response to the pandemic, warning the crisis was far from over despite rapidly advancing vaccination rollouts in wealthy parts of the world. “Unless we act now, we face a situation in which rich countries vaccinate the majority of their people and open their economies, while the virus continues to cause deep suffering by circling and mutating in the poorest countries,” he said.

Vaccine sharing, strengthening the WHO and adopting a pandemic treaty were among proposals from world leaders yesterday on how to halt the COVID-19 pandemic and prevent future health catastrophes. Deadly outbreaks in India, Brazil and elsewhere have pushed the global death toll past 3.4 million, even as rich countries such as the United States and Britain have eased restrictions.

India has witnessed horrific scenes in recent weeks with severe shortages of oxygen at hospitals and crematoriums overwhelmed, although the number of new daily infections has fallen in big cities. However, experts say the real numbers of deaths and infections in India – fueled by a new coronavirus variant and “super-spreader” events such as mass religious festivals – are probably much higher than the official figures.

“We are seeing the bodies along the river Ganges which don’t seem to be recorded as COVID deaths but are very

likely to be COVID deaths,” Ashoka University biology professor Gautam Menon told AFP. India has administered close to 200 million vaccine shots, but experts say the program needs to be ramped up significantly to bring the virus under control.

The brutal wave has been accompanied by the emergence among coronavirus patients of thousands of cases of the usually rare infection mucormycosis, or “black fungus”. The government has given figures between 5,424 and 8,848 for the number across India. It usually records fewer than 20 cases a year.

Another Asian country that has faced criticism over a slow inoculation rate is Japan, where the first mass vaccination centers opened yesterday. Japanese authorities are trying to speed up their vaccination drive with just two months until the postponed Tokyo Olympics begin. Just two percent of Japan’s 125 million

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News in brief

Partial sight restored of blind man

PARIS: Scientists have for the first time managed to partially restore the sight of a blind patient by altering his cells. The technique known as optogenetics involves genetically altering cells so they produce more light-sensitive proteins. Scientists in Europe and the US recruited a man who had lost his sight and began treating him with optogenetic techniques. This involved injections in his eye and several months of stimulation with light emitting goggles, which transformed images of the visual world into light pulses projected into the retina in real time. In a clinical first, they were able to restore partial sight for the 58-year old patient. — AFP

Omanis protest over layoffs

DUBAI: Dozens of demonstrators in Oman’s northern industrial city of Sohar protested in recent days over unemployment and layoffs, in a rare occurrence in the sultanate. Videos posted online yesterday appeared to show protesters amid a heavy contingent of security forces deployed in Sohar, about 200 km northwest of the capital Muscat. Some footage showed tear gas being launched at demonstrators. On Sunday, the labor ministry said in a statement it had “followed with great concern the gathering of a number of citizens... (who were) calling for job opportunities” and support for those who have been laid off. — AFP

Outrage over Belarus ‘hijacking’

MINSK: Pressure was building yesterday for a tough international response to Belarus’ forced landing of a European airliner so it could arrest an opposition activist. The Ryanair flight from Athens to Vilnius carrying dissident journalist Roman Protasevich was diverted while in Belarusian airspace on Sunday over a supposed bomb threat. Accompanied by a Belarusian fighter jet on the orders of strongman Alexander Lukashenko, the plane landed in Minsk where Protasevich, who had been living in Lithuania, was arrested along with his Russian girlfriend. The unprecedented move sparked an international outcry, with Western leaders accusing Belarusian authorities of essentially hijacking a European plane. — AFP

## Assembly session in doubt over premier’s grilling

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition lawmakers yesterday threatened to prevent the National Assembly session to convene unless the prime minister accepts to be grilled amid lingering disputes with the government and speaker. Opposition MPs have already filed two grillings against HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah

## Saudi ups pressure on anti-vaxxers

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia is tightening the screws on vaccine sceptics, barring them from pilgrimages and overseas travel and blocking access to universities, malls and offices in a contentious effort to boost inoculations. So-called anti-vaxxers threaten to jeopardize global efforts to beat the coronavirus pandemic, health experts say, but Gulf nations, including Saudi Arabia, are cranking up the pressure on those refusing to get vaccinated.

Riyadh is accelerating a nationwide

Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and a third is expected soon, but Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and the government say a decision was taken by the Assembly on March 30 to postpone all grillings against the prime minister until the end of 2022.

Opposition MPs insist that the decision was illegal and breach the constitution. The opposition already blocked sessions last month and insisted that the prime minister cannot be protected against grillings. Opposition MPs Abdulkarim Al-Kandari, Shuaib Al-Muwaizri and Marzouq Al-Khalifa said today’s session will not be allowed to go ahead unless the prime minister agrees to be grilled. Opposition MPs were scheduled to meet late yesterday to discuss issues related to the sessions for today and tomorrow.

The Assembly office has decided to hold a special

session on Thursday to debate the issues of Jerusalem, financial rewards for frontline workers and the controversial issue of holding written high school examinations. Meanwhile, five lawmakers yesterday submitted a draft law proposing to amend the nationality law to allow granting citizenship to children of Kuwaiti women married to foreign husbands.

Under the current law, children are granted Kuwaiti citizenship only if their fathers are Kuwaitis. Kuwaiti women are barred from this advantage. The bill submitted by MPs Adnan Abdulsamad, Ahmad Al-Hamad, Mohammad Al-Huwaila, Saifi Al-Saifi and Khalil Al-Saleh states that citizenship should be granted to children of Kuwaiti women when they reach 21. The children should have been legal residents of Kuwait for a long time.

vaccination drive as it moves to revive tourism and host sports and entertainment extravaganzas, all pandemic-hit sectors that are a bedrock of the “Vision 2030” program to diversify the oil-reliant economy. The kingdom has allowed only vaccinated pilgrims or those who have recovered from COVID-19 within the previous six months to perform the year-round umrah pilgrimage.

A similar move is expected for the upcoming annual hajj, a key rite of passage for Muslims, sources close to the government say. This month, only vaccinated or immunized citizens were allowed to travel abroad, after the kingdom lifted a ban on overseas trips introduced last year at the start of the pandemic.

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RIYADH: Saudi passengers arrive at King Khaled International Airport on May 17, 2021 after authorities lifted travel restrictions for citizens immunized against COVID-19. — AFP


## Study shows dogs can detect COVID

PARIS: Dogs can be trained to detect more than 90 percent of COVID-19 infections even when patients are asymptomatic, according to research published yesterday, which authors hope could help replace the need to quarantine new arrivals. Using their remarkable sense of smell – which can pick up the equivalent of half a tea-

spoon of sugar in an Olympic-sized swimming pool – dogs have already shown that they can sniff out maladies such as cancer, malaria and epilepsy.

Several previous studies have shown proof-of-concept that dogs can detect SARS-CoV-2. Researchers from the London School of Tropical Medicine wanted to see if dogs could detect a distinctive odor given off from chemical compounds associated with someone who is COVID positive but doesn’t show symptoms. They gathered samples of clothing and facemasks from people who had tested positive for mild or symptomatic SARS-CoV-2.

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BANGKOK: Bobby the K9 retriever dog sniffs sweat samples to detect the COVID-19 coronavirus through volatile organic compounds at the Faculty of Veterinary Science at Chulalongkorn University on May 21, 2021. — AFP



## Local

# Kuwait's Amir receives coin celebrating 40th GCC anniversary



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Mawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a commemorative coin from CBK Governor Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a commemorative coin from CBK Governor Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives a commemorative coin from CBK Governor Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem at Seif Palace yesterday. His Highness the Amir also hosted Central Bank of Kuwait Governor Mohammad Al-Hashel who presented to His Highness a coin-like commemorative gift, celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Gulf Cooperation

Council (GCC). Hashel also presented commemorative coins to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah in separate meetings yesterday. In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince also received Speaker Ghanem at Seif Palace.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday addressed cables of condolences to UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan and Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Umm Al-Quwain Sheikh Saud bin Rashid Al-Mualla on the demise of Sheikh Shamsa bint Majed. His Highness the Crown

Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also sent cables of similar content to the UAE President and Umm Al-Quwain Ruler. Meanwhile, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent cables to the UAE President and Umm Al-Quwain Ruler, expressing solace on Sheikh Shamsa's death. — KUNA

## Forty tons of aid sent by Kuwait destined for Gaza arrives in Cairo

CAIRO: Up to 40 tons of medical and relief aid from the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society (KRCS) arrived in Cairo on Sunday, in preparation to be delivered to the Palestinian people in Gaza Strip within the framework of Kuwait's continuous humanitarian role for brotherly and friendly countries. The Acting Head at Kuwait's embassy to Egypt Minister Plenipotentiary Osama Al-Obaid said in a statement to the press that this effort is in line with directions by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Kuwait's vision of the necessity of continuing its humanitarian and relief role at the Arab, Islamic and international levels. He stressed that Kuwait is exerting its full efforts at the regional and international levels to support the Palestinian cause. Obaid

has affirmed the shipment is scheduled to move to Al-Ismailia and then to the field hospitals in El-Arish with the help of the Egyptian Red Crescent after obtaining the necessary permits. The Kuwaiti embassy in Cairo has coordinated with the Egyptian Foreign Ministry to facilitate the arrival of KRCS delegation to Gaza, he added. The head of the KRCS delegation, director of the society's disaster and emergency management Yousef Al-Miraj said in a similar that the society's chairman, Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, had issued a direction to send an immediate aid shipment to Gaza Strip and to provide all kinds of support to the Palestinian brothers urgently. He added that the shipment consists of 40 tons of medical equipment, devices and relief materials accompanied by number of volunteers from KRCS for delivery for the field hospital in Al-Arish and then to Gaza Strip through Rafah crossing in cooperation with the Egyptian Red Crescent. Obaid and Miraj expressed their thanks and appreciation to the Egyptian Foreign Affairs and Egyptian Red Crescent for the cooperation and facilities for all procedures to enter the Kuwaiti relief aid to Gaza Strip. — KUNA



CAIRO: Gaza-bound aid from Kuwait is unloaded from a plane that arrived in Cairo on Sunday. — KUNA

## KRCS offers COVID-19 vaccines to Lebanon

BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced on Monday allocating \$500,000 to secure anti-coronavirus vaccines for Lebanese people, Syrian and Palestinian refugees. The announcement came during a meeting held between Lebanon's Minister of Health Mohammad Hassan, KRCS Deputy Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi and Head of KRCS's mission in Beirut Dr Musaad Al-Enezi.

The Lebanese Minister hailed Kuwait's extraordinary and unprecedented humanitarian efforts exerted for his country. "The KRCS initiative comes as part of distinguished initiatives of Kuwaiti government

and people," Minister Hassan said. KRCS supports Lebanon's efforts in encountering health challenges, especially during such exceptional living, economic and political conditions, he said. He acclaimed Kuwait's support to public hospitals, including its funding for restoration of emergency wards. Offering COVID-19 vaccinations supports efforts to combat this pandemic, a matter that became the main source of interest for all the globe's peoples, and represents the intentions of KRCS in supporting the society segments suffering from poor economic and living conditions, minister Hassan noted.

Hasawi affirmed that the KRCS would

continue relief support for the country, its people and refugees. He also shed light on latest assistance KRCS offered to the country following Beirut Port's massive explosion back in August of the year 2020 which left extensive destruction and damage in the city. Meanwhile, Enezi said this initiative will be launched soon with attendance of KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer and a Kuwaiti medial team. It will be coordination with international organizations namely United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). — KUNA



BEIRUT: Lebanon's Minister of Health Mohammad Hassan (right) meets KRCS Deputy Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi (center) and Head of KRCS's mission in Beirut Dr Musaad Al-Enezi. — KUNA

## UN declares 'war' on COVID...

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population has been fully vaccinated, compared with around 40 percent in the United States and 15 percent in France.

Speaking alongside Guterres at the World Health Organization's main annual assembly in Geneva, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said he wanted 10 percent of every country's population vaccinated by September. "The pandemic is not over," he said, pointing out that just during the first hour or so of the assembly, nearly 1,000 people had died worldwide from COVID. "This is not the time for incremental improvements or tinkering at the edges," he told the assembly. "This is the moment for bold ideas, bold commitment and bold leadership, for doing things that have never been done before."

The WHO "must be the heart, the compass, of our global health approach," French President Emmanuel

Macron told the assembly. "This organization must be robust in times of crisis, it must be flexible enough to react to emergencies," he said. German Chancellor Angela Merkel meanwhile said "the priority must be to enable the world to respond to a pandemic threat as rapidly as possible," and voiced support for the creation of a global health threats council.

Tedros also paid tribute to the estimated 115,000 health and care workers who have died from COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. "They have saved countless lives and fought for others who, despite their best efforts, slipped away," he said, describing the medical workers lost to the pandemic as having paid "the ultimate price in the service of others".

He said many medics have felt "frustrated, helpless and unprotected, with a lack of access to personal protective equipment and vaccines". "The number of doses administered globally so far would have been enough to cover all health workers and older people if they had been distributed equitably," Tedros added. More than 75 percent of all COVID vaccines have gone to just 10 countries. — AFP

to hack their reward system and obtain treats even if there were no COVID-19 samples in a given test. "This means that the dog fully understands and gets a reward for a correct negative as well as a correct positive," said Claire Guest, from the school's Faculty of Infectious and Tropical Diseases.

Overall, the dogs were successfully able to identify between 94 and 82 percent of SARS-CoV-2 samples. The researchers then modelled how effectively these success rates, combined with traditional PCR tests, could help detect mild or asymptomatic COVID-19 cases. — AFP

## Saudi ups pressure on...

Continued from Page 1

The kingdom has said that from Aug 1, vaccinations will be mandatory to enter government and private establishments, including education institutions and entertainment venues, as well as to use public transport. The sweeping announcement came just days after authorities said only vaccinated public and private sector workers would be allowed to return to the workplace.

The decisions have sparked pushback on social media from vaccine sceptics, with hashtags such as "No to compulsory vaccination" and "My body, my choice" gaining traction. "You won't be able to do any of the following," wrote one Twitter user. "Can't travel! Can't work! Can't go to public places! Can't even buy food! Can't study!"

The measures in the state stand in contrast to incentives offered by liberal democracies like the United States, where cash prizes, baseball tickets and even free drinks are being offered to boost vaccination. "A monarchy like Saudi Arabia can enforce such principles and this is likely to be effective in urging some who did not want to get vaccinated," Monica Gandhi, a professor of medicine at the University of California, told AFP. "However, it can be perceived as coercive."

Other Gulf governments are taking similar steps. The neighboring emirate of Dubai, one of seven that make up the United Arab Emirates, said this month that only vaccinated people would be

allowed to attend sports events and concerts. Bahrain has announced plans to temporarily restrict entry to malls, restaurants, cinemas and salons to those who have been immunized.

In Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE, which has reported the highest number of infections in the Gulf, citizens have launched social media campaigns against mandatory vaccinations. But Saudi Arabia, the biggest Arab economy, appears bent on pressing ahead in tandem with efforts to reintroduce high-profile events that help soften its ultraconservative image.

Saudi Arabia could offer a record fee of over \$150 million to stage a boxing clash between Tyson Fury and Anthony Joshua this year, ESPN reported in April. The kingdom is also set to host a Davos-style investment summit in October and its first-ever Formula One Grand Prix in December.

"Vaccinations are crucial for getting the Saudi economic engine running at full speed again," Robert Mogielnicki, a resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, told AFP. "Higher vaccination rates will support key non-oil industries, such as tourism. Saudi officials want to ensure the show will go on with more concerts, cultural events and entertainment opportunities."

But the kingdom still has a long way to go, and it remains unclear how it will inoculate a bulk of its population before August. Saudi Arabia's health ministry says it has administered more than 12 million coronavirus vaccine doses, in a country with a population of over 34 million. Amid apparent supply shortages, the kingdom has delayed the second dose for many residents despite an uptick in infections. The country has reported over 440,000 coronavirus cases and more than 7,200 deaths. — AFP

## Study shows dogs can detect...

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Samples of the socks of 200 COVID-19 cases were collected and arranged in lab tests for six dogs that had been trained to indicate either a presence or absence of the chemical compound. The dogs needed to be trained not to identify "false positives" in a bid



## Local

# Kuwait's Amir receives new ambassadors' credentials



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Bulgaria Dimitar Dimitrov. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Ethiopia Hassan Tago.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Nigeria Jazuli Imam Galadanci.

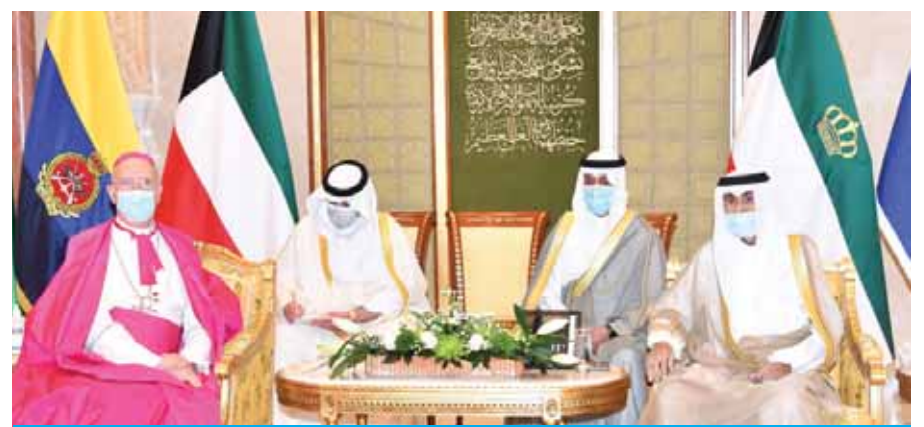


His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of the UAE Matar Al-Niyadi.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday received credentials of the newly-assigned ambassadors of Bulgaria Dimitar Dimitrov, Ethiopia Hassan Tago, Nigeria Jazuli Imam Galadanci, the UAE Matar Al-Niyadi, the United Kingdom Belinda Lewis and the Vatican Eugene Martin Nugent. The ceremony was attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Chairperson of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Saud Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and Amiri Diwan Undersecretary and Director of His Highness the Amir Bureau Ahmad Fahad Al-Fahad. —KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of the United Kingdom Belinda Lewis.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of the Vatican Eugene Martin Nugent.

## Info Ministry eyes official media as 'main knowledge source'

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Culture and State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi said that the ministry is working on developing the official media to achieve sustainable development. "We aim to make official media the main source of knowledge, leadership and excellence," he said during a ceremony to launch the 2021-2026 strategy of the ministry of information yesterday.

"The strategy has a clear view - to have sustainable media with meaningful content that combines originality and modernity, reflects diversity and innovation, and encourages creative competencies in partnership with the private sector and civil society," said Mutairi.

"This strategy focuses on human resource development of the ministry of information. "The strategy will support creative employees as well as develop Kuwaiti media content. Furthermore, the strategy will provide high-tech and modern equipment to



KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Culture and State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi speaks during a ceremony to launch the 2021-2026 strategy of the ministry of information yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

keep abreast of global developments in this field," he pointed out.

The ministry's strategy will improve various sectors, according to the minister. "The strategy will unify the identity of the ministry and its sectors. It will develop legislation to match the 'New Kuwait' vision. It will also improve financial resources and develop media marketing tools. It will also support

drama, cinema and theatre production, in addition to establishing a 'media production city' and specialized media authorities," explained Mutairi. He added that the strategy would also provide a positive environment for media work and restructure the sectors by setting the specializations of all employees. It will also boost technical and digital transformation, he noted.

"We set certain criteria to measure the success of the ministry while executing the strategy, including the viewership rate and interaction with official channels, high returns from marketing and advertising and measuring the level of satisfaction and acceptance of the viewer, in addition to interaction with international media and media representatives inside and outside Kuwait," Mutairi said.

The criteria also include the rate of participation in media festivals, exhibitions and conferences, in addition to the number of initiatives submitted by media leaders. "We trust the ability of young Kuwaitis who are working in the media field to face challenges and turn them into opportunities, especially since Kuwaiti media was distinguished in its past, brilliant in its present and ambitious in its future," he said.

It took the team working on this strategy 120 working hours to prepare it. "Forty-one discussion panels were held inside and outside the ministry, in which over 550 people participated. They also reviewed the experience of international, Arab and Gulf countries and conducted over 200 office surveys, studies and reports with specialists. I would like to thank all those who worked on preparing this strategy," concluded Mutairi.



KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Basel Al-Sabah participates in the WHO's 74th World Health Assembly yesterday. —KUNA

## Kuwait follows latest world health updates, strategies: Minister

KUWAIT: The WHO's 74th World Health Assembly will provide the State of Kuwait with a chance to keenly follow the latest health updates and best strategies to counter disease, namely the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Health Minister Dr Basel Hamoud Al-Sabah said yesterday. Health Minister Dr Basel, who is heading Kuwait's delegation to the virtual meeting until June 1, indicated that the theme of the meeting will be ending the coronavirus pandemic, preventing the next one, in addition building together a healthier, safer and fairer world. He added that the meeting would touch on the health situation in Palestine and the occupied Golan Heights, the efforts to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG) 2030, as well as a variety of important health issues. Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah noted that a celebration will be held on the sideline of the event on May 28 to present Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Prize for Research in Health Care for the Elderly and in Health Promotion to China's National Center of Gerontology.

### Ten deaths

Kuwait had on Sunday announced registering 992 new coronavirus infections, 1,166 recoveries and 10 deaths over the previous 24 hours. The new figures increased the death toll to 1,734, overall infections to 299,215 and recoveries to 285,118, Spokesman for the Ministry of Health Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. The ratio between the total recoveries and infections hit 95.28 percent, he noted. There were 153 patients at the intensive care units, while 12,363 others are receiving treatment at hospitals as of Sunday, he pointed out. As many as 8,396 medical swabs were conducted in the same period, taking the total tests to 2,525,643, he stated. He noted that the ratio of infections to these swabs reached 11.81 percent. Dr Sanad renewed public calls to abide by the precautionary measures and social distancing as well as avoid gatherings. He also appealed to the public to follow the officials social media accounts of the ministry and the state's bodies to be briefed on guidelines and recommendations to help control the spread of the pandemic. — KUNA

## Approval to reopen nurseries on June 1

KUWAIT: Representative of the Nurseries Owners Union Hanan Al-Madhahka said a meeting was held with Social Affairs Ministry Undersecretary Abdulaziz Al-Shuaib, describing it as fruitful and positive. She said final arrangements were made for the reopening of nurseries from June 1.

The undersecretary will also allow the reopening of special needs nurseries, Madhahka said in a statement published by Al-Rai Arabic newspaper yesterday. She added that the ministry will write to the disabled authority, which will follow up the implementation of health protocols, provided that each nursery submits lists of employees who have been vaccinated or undergo a PCR test before the opening day.

Member of the union Fayeze Al-Shimmari said the nurseries' operation plan has been decided and the reopening will be on June 1. He said following health protocols was the most important item discussed with Shuaib. He said the operation plan includes an inspection period starting from mid-April. A statement by the union said Shuaib will deal with obstacles faced while renewing nurseries' licenses.

## Deputy FM receives Saudi ambassador



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri meets Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad Al-Saud. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri met yesterday with Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad Al-Saud. During the meeting, they discussed bilateral relation between the two

countries and means of developing them on all levels. Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Foreign Minister's office Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar was present at the meeting. —KUNA



## Local

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# Zain launches 'RISE', a Middle East first for organizational mental wellness support

## Our people's mental health is our psychological capital: Kharafi

**KUWAIT:** Zain Group, a leading telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, announces the launch of RISE, a groundbreaking mental health initiative for Zain personnel, and the brainchild of Vice-Chairman and Group CEO, Bader Al-Kharafi. The timely introduction of RISE coincides with Mental Health Awareness Month 2021, which runs the course of May.

The pioneering initiative within Zain is one of the first such programs to be offered across a private organization in the Middle East region and is aimed at creating a more inclusive organization that considers and supports its employees given rising work pressures in modern commercial environments and at a time when COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on working norms.

Zain firmly believes that when leaders actively engage in mindfulness practices, the "psychological capital" of an organization rises. It is expected that RISE will increase employee retention, loyalty, morale and engagement as well as reduce medical costs and employee absenteeism.

Two activities that will immediately be available under the new initiative include a Group-wide subscription to Headspace for all Zain's 7,000 employees, and mental health counseling and therapy from psychologists provided either in-person in Kuwait or virtually across six other operating markets in partnership with Kuwait Counseling Center (KCC).

Commenting on the RISE initiative, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO, Bader Al-Kharafi said, "We consider our people's mental health as our psychological capital. Throughout our history, Zain has shown time and again that we are not afraid to tackle sensitive or taboo issues. Given the ongoing pandemic and its resulting disruption to working norms and rising levels of uncertainty in normal life, we have identified mental health issues for our people as an important area to be managed."

Kharafi continued, "Our greatest asset is our people, and for Zain to remain successful, we need to make the conditions of employment as supportive and uplifting as possible. We are determined to confront all our people's mental issues head-on and remedy through RISE, ensuring they love their work and perform at optimal levels."

Headspace is a global leader in mindfulness and meditation, with more than 70 million members across 190 countries. Headspace was one of the first meditation apps in the world and remains a leader in mindfulness and mental training through its app and online content offerings that cover

everything from stress, movement, sleep, focus and more. Headspace for Work (H4W) is its science-based employee mental health solution, working with more than 2,000 companies to help them build healthier, more productive cultures and higher performing organizations. H4W is an upstream, preventative workplace mental health solution that focuses on keeping healthy people healthy, not just on treating the unwell.

Jolawn Victor, Chief International Officer at Headspace said, "We are delighted and honored to work with Zain on their RISE initiative. The last year has exacerbated the challenge of balancing our work and home lives and we believe in the need to integrate well-being routines across all 24 hours of the day, not just during business hours or when we finish work. Mindfulness has many scientifically proven benefits, and we are thrilled that Zain leadership is prioritizing their team's mental health and leading the way for other organizations in the region."

Kuwait Counseling Center is one of the region's leading psychological centers providing psycho-educational, comprehensive assessments, therapy, training services for more than 10 years. KCC's corporate programs have served more than 30 multinational companies and will now be working on assisting and educating staff at Zain with personal and work-related problems on destressing techniques, mindfulness, and ways to create a calmer, more productive working environment.

Dr Joanne Hands, Clinical Director of Kuwait Counseling Center and President of the Middle East Psychological Association said, "Your current emotional circumstances should not limit where you can go, they tell you where you need to start. You are not alone! We firmly believe that addressing workplace mental wellbeing can help strengthen the positive, protective factors of employment and reduce risk factors for mental illness and burnout and improve general health and productivity. We are delighted to partner with Zain and support this unique initiative which will set the standards for corporate wellbeing and mental health in the region."

Among early initiatives being introduced under RISE, Zain will roll out mandatory 15-minute breaks during working days between 10am and 3pm to afford staff the opportunity to access content from Headspace. Moreover, both Headspace and KCC will provide therapy to Zain personnel to overcome: Stress and burnout; Family problems; Substance abuse; Eating disorders; Depression and Anxiety.



Absenteeism is often a by-product of negative working environments created by stressful conditions, do end up costing the organization as a result of lost working hours. Working from home, as many of people are being forced to do given the pandemic, gives rise to stresses of its own, be it a sense of isolation or disconnection, or difficulty in managing how and when to transition from work to personal time while occupying the same space.

The issue of well-being at work and the effects of the negative environment that can be created by stress was articulated in a study by workforce consulting firm Life Meets Work, which revealed that when manager and leaders are stressed, their anxiety can be felt across the entire organization, often to the point where good employees will walk away from a job to save their own health.

The study also found that when leaders fail to manage their stress in a constructive way, more than 50 percent of their employees perceive their leader as harmful or ineffective. Further, when leaders are unable to manage stress, employees lose their drive to advance within the company.

One of the most effective ways to manage stress is through mindfulness, which relates to a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. In due course, Zain intends to evolve the RISE initiative to also include use of Artificial Intelligence for Mental Health in line with the company's '4Sight' digital transformation strategy.

### News in brief

#### Arrivals must 'quarantine' waiting for PCR test result

**KUWAIT:** Arrivals to Kuwait who are vaccinated against COVID-19 still need to quarantine at home until their PCR test result is released, and comes out negative. Entry to Kuwait is currently limited only for Kuwaitis, and those vaccinated are not required to quarantine.

#### Murder trial adjourned to June 7

**KUWAIT:** The Criminal Court on Monday adjourned the murder trial for the man suspected of killing Farah Akbar to June 7. The suspect has plead 'not guilty' to first degree murder and kidnap charges.

#### New female judges

**KUWAIT:** The Supreme Judicial Council approved the appointment of seven new female judges in Kuwait, raising the total to 15.

#### Inmate commits suicide

**KUWAIT:** An inmate at Kuwait central jail committed suicide by hanging using an electric cord inside his cell Sunday night, the interior ministry announced.

#### Sites for dog shelters

**KUWAIT:** The Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources made a request to the Municipal Council to allocate sites in Wafra, Abdali and Sulaibiya to build shelters for stray dogs.

## ACK to hold first virtual career fair

**KUWAIT:** The Alumni and Career Placement Center at the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) is organizing its very first virtual career fair which is scheduled to be held over the span of two days. The fair takes place tomorrow and Thursday. The virtual career fair aims to provide ACK graduates and students great networking and recruitment opportunities similar to the annual in-person ACK Career Fairs but due to the recent Pandemic challenges, the fair is now moved to a digital platform.

The career fair will give both students and alumni a valuable opportunity to get in touch with over 46 recruiters directly, and will include various workshops and seminars prior to the fair days in order to maximize

the benefits and enrich ACK graduates and students with lots of recruitment hints and tips.

On this occasion, ACK would like to thank the following sponsors for their generous contribution and participation. The Platinum Sponsors are: Kuwait Finance House, Boubayan Bank, National Bank of Kuwait, The Kuwaiti Danish Dairy Company, Gulf Bank, and Al-Sayer Facilities Company. Gold Sponsors are: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait, Khibra, Commercial Bank of Kuwait, and Alargan International Real Estate Company.



**Dr Ayad Salhie, Dean - Admissions and Registration, ACK**

## ICSK - Amman hosts investiture ceremony

**KUWAIT:** The Indian Community School Kuwait, Amman (ICSK - Amman) conducted its investiture ceremony for the academic year 2021-2022 recently. As per the current guidelines, the ceremony was held online with equal enthusiasm and vigor as usual. The newly elected members were duly sworn in during the solemn occasion.

Earlier, the nominations to contest in the senate election was filed by the selected candidates on April 14, 2021. This year, there were 51 contestants vying for various positions in the senate. Subsequently, "Meet the Candidate" program was held online on 18th wherein the contestants were allowed to express their visions to the students of classes VII to X.

The online senate election was conducted on 20th April 2021 with students from classes VII to X casting their votes to elect their leaders. ICSK Amman declared the result of the election on 21st April and proudly presented its eight-core Senate and eight respective House Captains and Vice Captains.

The investiture ceremony, an occasion where the young students were prepared to don the mantle of leadership and discharge the responsibilities entrusted to them by the school was held on May 20, 2021. The solemn ceremony commenced at 10:30 am with our vivacious and lively anchors striking the



right chord immediately. The event began with the recitals from the Holy Quran followed by the National Anthems of Kuwait and India which was then followed by the lighting of the lamp.

The Chief Guest of the program was Abdul Sageer, Business Head - PowerGen, Cummins Kuwait Company and General Convener Kuwait Engineers' Forum. The other dignitaries who graced the occasion were Dr V Binumon, Principal, ICSK Senior and Senior Administrator, Vice Principals Sheeja Ravi, Susan Rajesh and Deputy Vice Principals Mini Shaji, Sushmeeta Prakash of other branches of ICSK and HR and Admin Officer Deepak Kumar Seth.

Principal Rajesh Nair delivered the welcome speech and extended a warm welcome to the Chief Guest Engr. Abdul Sageer and felicitated him by presenting a memento. He congratulated the newly appointed Senate Members and wished them well. The highlights of the program

were the presentation of entire electoral process, the investiture of the Senate followed by Oath taking by the newly elected senate members. The president of the School, Lakshita Karthikeyan gave the acceptance speech on behalf of all the members.

The Chief Guest was cordially introduced by the Senate Advisor Sumitra Nandakumar. In his address, the Chief Guest Abdul Sageer after congratulating the newly elected members urged them to take up the responsibilities, use opportunities and balance them well with academics. His pearls of wisdom were truly motivating and inspiring to everyone present.

The school choir in sync with the occasion belted out an inspirational song "we are unstoppable", which was enthralling and melodious. The school senate members 2021-2022 spoke briefly expressing their heartfelt gratitude and promises. The vote of thanks was rendered by the Vice Principal Dr Mary Isaac.

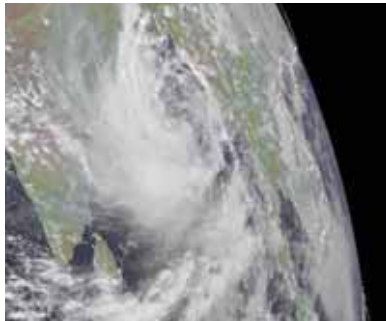
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India orders mass evacuations as second cyclone in a week looms

## Volcano death toll mounts as aftershocks shake DR Congo

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GAZA CITY: Relatives mourn the death of a member of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, the armed wing of the Palestinian Fatah movement, Mahmoud Abu Jrad, during his funeral in Beit Hanun in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday. — AFP

# Blinken leaves for Mideast trip

## US official to meet regional leaders to solidify shaky ceasefire

**WASHINGTON:** The United States' Secretary of State Antony Blinken departed yesterday for a Middle East trip aimed at consolidating the ceasefire that brought 11 days of deadly bombardment between Zionist forces and Hamas to a halt.

"Secretary Blinken will meet with Zionist leaders about our ironclad commitment to the security," US President Joe Biden said in a statement. "He will continue our administration's efforts to rebuild ties to, and support for, the Palestinian people and leaders, after years of neglect."

Biden, who came under criticism from many within his own Democratic party for not pushing US ally Zionist entity more publicly to call a ceasefire, has touted his administration's "quiet, relentless diplomacy" to bring about a halt in the fighting.

Zionist response to the Hamas rocket barrages also drew sharp criticism from some liberal members of the US Congress who have questioned American

arms sales to the Jewish state. Blinken's trip, in addition to meetings with Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas, will take him to Cairo for consultations with President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and then to Amman to speak with Jordan's King Abdullah II.

The State Department confirmed the trip's itinerary but did not elaborate on the topics that would be addressed during the secretary's visit.

### Two-state solution

In a tweet, Blinken said the trip would aim to support "efforts to solidify a ceasefire." "The United States has engaged in intensive diplomacy to bring an end to the hostilities and reduce tensions," he added.

Zionist strikes on Gaza this month killed 248 Palestinians, including 66 children, and have wounded more than 1,900 people, the Gaza health

ministry says. Rockets and other fire from Gaza claimed 12 lives in the Jewish state, including one child and an Arab teenager, a Zionist soldier, one Indian, and two Thai nationals, medics say. Some 357 people in the entity have been wounded.

The United Nations says more than half of those killed, the overwhelming majority in Zionist air strikes, were civilians.

Biden, in his statement, said part of Blinken's trip would be involved working on "the coordinated international effort to ensure immediate assistance reaches Gaza in a way that benefits the people there and not Hamas, and on reducing the risk of further conflict in the coming months."

Blinken on Sunday reaffirmed US support for a two-state solution as the only way to provide hope to Zionists and Palestinians that they can live "with equal measures of security, of peace and dignity." Support for a two-state solution—the vision of Zion-

ists and a Palestinian state living peacefully side by side—restates a long-time US goal, though Blinken conceded on ABC's "This Week" that this was not "necessarily for today."

Meanwhile, an assailant stabbed two young Zionist men before being shot dead by police at a tram station in Jerusalem yesterday, Jewish police told AFP.

Hadassah medical center said it was treating two men in their 20s for stab wounds. Both were in moderate condition and one was identified by the army as a soldier.

There was no immediate confirmation of the assailant's identity. The incident happened a short distance from Sheikh Jarrah, which saw weeks of protests against the planned expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in the occupied east Jerusalem neighborhood in the build-up to this month's fighting perpetrated by occupation forces. —AFP

## Assad: Syria's iron-fisted president

**BEIRUT:** Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, an ophthalmologist by training who has overseen one of the century's bloodiest conflicts, is expected to renew his stranglehold on power in elections on tomorrow. In appearance—whether in person or in the many portraits in the capital Damascus—he usually eschews the military garb favored by former strongmen such as Iraq's Saddam Hussein or Libya's Muammar Gaddafi.

Instead, he opts for a sharp-cut business suit and sober tie. In official meetings, during interviews and even on the frontlines, the cold and enigmatic 55-year-old can almost appear timid. But he speaks calmly but firmly, pausing briefly at moments to flash a coy smile. Even at the height of the war, Assad was unwavering in the belief he would crush a rebellion, that he says was waged by "terrorists" seeking his overthrow with assistance from the West and Arab Gulf countries.

His matter-of-course win—the second in a decade—will be a slap in the face of foreign and domestic opponents.

### 'Hope through work'

With his campaign slogan, "Hope through work", Assad has cast himself as the sole architect of a reconstruction phase for the war-ravaged country. One journalist, who met with Assad on several occasions before and after war broke out in 2011, told AFP the president is a "unique and complex figure".

"Each time I met him he was calm... even during the most difficult moments of the war," the journalist, who declined to be named, said. Assad has "the same qualities" as his father Hafez al-Assad, who ruled Syria with an iron fist for nearly three decades until his death in 2000, he said.

"In politics, it's important to know how to shuffle cards, not just how to arrange them," the journalist added. "Assad has mastered the shuffling game." Assad's life changed radically when his older brother Bassel, who was being groomed to inherit power from their father, was killed in road accident in 1994. He quit his studies in ophthalmology and left London where he had met his wife Asma, a British-Syrian and Sunni Muslim who worked for financial services firm J P Morgan.

Back home, he took a course in military studies and was tutored in politics by his father. When the latter died Bashar became president by referendum, running unopposed, then winning



DAMASCUS: People walk next to election campaign billboards depicting Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, a candidate for the upcoming presidential vote, in the capital Damascus, yesterday. —AFP

a second term in 2007. Sworn in at the age of 34, Assad was widely seen by Syrians pining for freedoms as a reformer, who could do away with years of repression and introduce economic liberalization.

In the early days, Assad would be seen driving his own car or having dinner at restaurants with his wife.

He relaxed some of the heavy restrictions that existed under his father. But his efforts at reforming Syria quickly evaporated as authorities arrested and jailed academics, intellectuals and other

members of what was then known as the Damascus Spring movement.

When the Arab Spring reached Syria in March 2011, peaceful demonstrations broke out calling for change. Assad, who is also commander-in-chief of the armed forces, responded by ordering a brutal crackdown on the protesters and civil war swiftly ensued. Throughout the war, that has killed more than 388,000 people and displaced half the population, Assad's position has not changed—and he has shown no inclination to step down. —AFP

## 12 killed in weekend spate of US shootings

**WASHINGTON:** A dozen people were killed and about 50 injured in shootings across the United States over the weekend, after President Joe Biden last month branded the country's gun violence an "epidemic." The spate of shooting incidents included deaths in New Jersey, South Carolina, Georgia, Ohio and Minnesota. In total, the attacks claimed 12 lives and wounded at least 49 others.

Two people died when gunfire broke out at a house party in Camden, New Jersey on Saturday night, and at least 12 people were injured, according to police. In

South Carolina, one 14-year-old girl was killed and 14 people wounded at a concert.

Police in Atlanta, Georgia, found three gunshot victims early Sunday after responding to a call about shots fired. All three victims were pronounced dead at the scene, US media reported.

Three others were killed and eight injured outside a bar in Youngstown, Ohio, early Sunday morning, while a 16-year-old girl was killed and seven people injured in a park in Columbus. A deadly shooting also occurred in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the night before supporters and relatives of George Floyd, the Black man killed by a white former police officer last spring, held a march Sunday on the first anniversary of his death.

One person was killed and eight injured, with one victim in critical condition. Minneapolis police told AFP that one suspect in the shooting had been arrested, while a second suspect had died.

The United States has suffered a series of mass

shootings in recent months, including at a FedEx facility in Indianapolis, an office building in California, a grocery store in Boulder, Colorado—as well as a birthday party in the same city a few weeks later—and at several spas in Atlanta. Biden has introduced six executive measures aimed at tamping down the crisis, including a proposed rule to halt "ghost guns," as firearms built from home kits are known, and boosting support for agencies involved in tackling community violence.

In addition to mass shootings, gun violence in general—including less-publicized incidents often involving family members or acquaintances—has surged across the United States last year.

Gun sales jumped at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, 2020 was one of the most violent years in the United States in decades. So far this year, there have been at least 200 mass shootings in the United States, according to the Gun Violence Archive. —AFP

## Iran, UN nuclear monitor extend deal until June

**VIENNA:** The UN nuclear watchdog and Iran yesterday said an agreement to monitor Tehran's activities would be extended by a month until June 24, as world powers hold talks to revive a 2015 nuclear deal. Global powers have been meeting in Vienna since early April in a bid to bring Washington back to the deal—which the US left in 2018.

The withdrawal under then president Donald Trump and re-imposition of sanctions led to Iran stepping up its nuclear activities. Iran in late February limited the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s access to nuclear sites it has been monitoring as part of the 2015 deal.

A three-month agreement reached on February 21 allowing some inspections to continue was extended by another month, the IAEA announced. "The verification and the monitoring activities that we agreed will continue as they are now for one month expiring on June 24th, 2021," IAEA director general Rafael Grossi told a news conference. Tehran has also agreed that information collected so far by agency equipment in Iran would not be erased, he added.

### 'Not ideal'

Grossi said the outcome of this "long discussion" was "important" but the situation was "not ideal". "We should all be reminded that the temporary understanding is a sort of stop-gap measure. It is something that we came up with as a way to avoid flying completely blind," he said.

Iran's Supreme National Security Council said in a statement that the one-month extension aimed to "provide the needed opportunity for negotiations to progress and produce results." Iran's envoy to the IAEA, Kazem Gharibabadi, also confirmed the agreement's extension, Iranian news agency IRNA reported. "I advise (the countries taking part in Vienna talks) that this opportunity, which was provided over Iran's good faith, be used towards the complete lifting of sanctions in a practical and verifiable manner," he was quoted as saying. —AFP



## International

# Volcano death toll mounts as aftershocks shake DR Congo

## Hundreds of people spend night in the street as lava destroys homes

**GOMA, DR Congo:** Five people were found choked to death on toxic fumes from the eruption of eastern DR Congo's Nyiragongo volcano yesterday, as strong aftershocks rocked the city of Goma. The deaths bring to 20 the number killed since Africa's most active volcano erupted on Saturday, spewing red-hot molten lava that engulfed houses in its wake.

"We have just discovered five dead people," civil society leader Mambo Kawaya told AFP, saying that they were "asphyxiated by the gas" as they tried to cross the cooling lava some 13 kilometers (eight miles) north of Goma. A sixth person is in a "critical state with trouble breathing and has been taken to hospital," Kawaya said.

Goma, a city of some 1.5 million people in the shadow of the volcano, was on edge as violent aftershocks continued through the night and into yesterday morning. "They're multiplying and they come at any moment," one resident told AFP, describing the aftershocks as "very worrying".

"The night was long—there is fear in our stomachs," she said.

Tens of thousands of residents had fled the city in panic—around 7,000 of them to neighboring Rwanda—when Nyiragongo began erupting on Saturday evening. Along with the five people found dead on Monday, at least 15 people have died, although most were not killed directly by the eruption.

Authorities said nine people died in accidents during the rush to evacuate, while four prisoners were killed while trying to escape in the melee. Two people were found burned to death. Officials said 17 villages on the city's fringes had suffered major damage.

### Schools shut, electricity cut

While the river of lava stopped at the edge of Goma and many residents have now returned, each aftershock brought anxious residents back out onto the streets yesterday. "We just had a big aftershock—I'm scared to stay in my office," said a resident who gave her name only as Deborah, an employee at an international organization, reached by telephone.

"I'm wondering if I should stay or go home. The electricity has cut out," she said. Schools are still shut with pupils told to stay at home, although businesses and petrol stations were open again.

Nyiragongo's last major eruption, in 2002, claimed around 100 lives.

### Hundreds homeless

By yesterday the blackish solidified lava was still hot and smoking, with dozens of people turning out to inspect it or even walk on it, despite the risk of inhaling toxic fumes. The volcano appeared calm on the horizon, with the usual smoke rising from its crater. A government delegation including seven ministers arrived from Kinshasa early yesterday, while President Felix Tshisekedi has cut short a European tour to supervise the aid operation.

Health Minister Jean-Jacques Mbungani said upon his arrival in Goma that the delegation was set to organize support for people made homeless after the eruption after "assessing the state of affairs". Hundreds of people spent night in the street after the lava destroyed their homes.

Government spokesman Patrick Muyaya warned Sunday that the prices of food and other essentials are set to rise in Goma as the eruption has cut off several hundred metres of the road to Butembo,



**GOMA:** Residents are seen gathering in a busy street after an eruption from Mount Nyiragongo in Goma in the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo. —AFP

the region's main trade route. After taking part in a UN reconnaissance flight over Nyiragongo, volcanologist Kasereka Mahinda said it was uncertain why the aftershocks were continuing and whether the volcano's burst of activity was finished.

"Because of the fog we were unable to see the inside of the crater," said Mahinda, the scientific

director of the Goma Volcanology Observatory. "If there is lava in the crater, the fracturing caused by the movement of the earth would represent new activity," he said.

"If there is no lava in the crater, then these earthquakes are happening because the earth is in the process of refinding its balance." —AFP

## Gunmen burn another election office in Nigeria's southeast

**LAGOS:** Police have repelled an attack on a station in Nigeria's restive southeast but the gunmen stormed into a nearby election office and set it on fire, a spokesman said yesterday.

Southeast Nigeria has seen a surge in violent assaults on security personnel and key government offices since the start of the year, leaving scores of officers dead. "There was an attack on our station in Akwa yesterday but it was repelled by the gallant officers on duty," Anambra state police spokesman Tochukwu Ikenga said. "Unfortunately, the attackers used a decoy to deceive the police and went to a nearby INEC (election body) office and set part of the building ablaze with explosives," he said.

He said no arrests had been made but police were investigating.

"An investigation is under way to unravel those behind the series of attacks and arson in recent weeks," he said. Last week, electoral chief Mahmood Yakubu condemned rising armed attacks on election offices, saying the violence might jeopardize election preparations.

Nigeria holds general elections in 2023 to choose the successor to President Muhammadu Buhari, who took office in 2015. At least five election offices and vital election materials have been razed in the southeast alone this year. Last week, the INEC headquarters in Enugu was also attacked.

No group has claimed responsibility, but Nigeria's southeast has seen a surge in attacks on police and prisons that authorities have blamed on separatists who want more independence for the indigenous Igbo people in the region.

Meanwhile, hundreds of protesters partially blocked a highway into Nigeria's capital Abuja yesterday after residents reported a spate of kidnappings in the area. Setting tires on fire, a crowd barricaded a section of the Abuja-Kaduna highway in the Tafa area of Niger state, bordering the federal capital, an AFP journalist at the scene reported.

"Kidnappers too much!" an angry young man shouted. "Five days ago, they kidnapped four people, and then they came back again, yesterday, and kidnapped 16 people," one protester said.

Africa's most populous country has been plagued by kidnappings for years, with criminals largely targeting the wealthy and prominent.

But more recently, the pool of victims has expanded and the vulnerable and poor across the country are now also taken for ransom. "It's not ok. It's getting too much," the protester said. "Any time they come, the security always come after they have left."

Local media reported that 12 people were kidnapped in nearby Madalla town and two others in Bwari just last week. "We are having serious chaos... We don't sleep here, we don't sleep at all... If there is no good reinforcement, the problem will go far beyond this," another protester said. —AFP

## Boris Johnson sets wedding date: Report

**LONDON:** British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his fiancée Carrie Symonds have set a wedding date for next year after delaying plans due to the pandemic, The Sun tabloid reported yesterday. Known for his colourful love life, Johnson will be only the second prime minister ever to marry while in office, following Robert Jenkinson in 1822.

The couple have sent "save the date" cards for July 30 next year, The Sun reported. When elected in 2019, the 56-year-old became the first

prime minister to live at Downing Street as part of an unmarried couple. His partner Symonds, a 33-year-old former head of communications for the Conservative Party, gave birth to their son Wilfred in April last year. This was just weeks after Johnson left intensive care as he recovered from a severe case of coronavirus.

The couple have lately been hit by a scandal over the costly redecoration of their Downing Street flat, which is being probed over allegations that contributions by a Tory party donor were not declared fully. Johnson has been married twice before. He had four children with his previous wife, lawyer Marina Wheeler, before they split in 2018. The couple only finalized their divorce last November. Johnson also reportedly has a daughter born as the result of an affair. —AFP



**In this file photo,** Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (right) with his partner Carrie Symonds leave after attending the annual Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey in London on March 09, 2020. —AFP

## Killings in Iraq spark calls for election boycott

**BAGHDAD:** A wave of deadly attacks on pro-democracy activists and journalists in Iraq have sparked mounting calls to boycott October parliamentary elections, as perpetrators go unpunished. Killings, attempted murder and abductions have targeted more than 70 activists since a protest movement erupted against government corruption and incompetence in 2019.

Elections were set in response to a central demand of the protracted protest movement that lasted from October to June 2020, and during which demonstrators also rallied against Iran's influence in Iraq.

But as attacks continue with impunity, more voices have joined a call to boycott the vote. Former lawmaker Faeq Al-Sheikh Ali resigned after anti-government campaigner Ihab Al-Wazni was shot dead in an ambush in the central holy Shiite shrine city of Karbala on May 9. "I announce my withdrawal from

the legislative elections," he said after Wazni's killing.

He also called for other leaders of the protest movement to pull out of the race. "Prepare... to continue the revolution in the coming months against Iran and its dirty militias," Sheikh Ali said. "There is no other choice but to topple this criminal regime." Authorities have consistently failed to publicly identify or charge the perpetrators of the killings, which have not been claimed.

However, activists have repeatedly blamed Iran-linked armed groups that wield considerable influence in Iraq. Wazni had for many years criticized Iraqi armed groups and Iran's outsized influence in the country. The day after he was killed, prominent journalist Ahmed Hassan was also shot in southern Iraq. He remains in a coma after undergoing brain surgery.

### 'Who killed me?'

After Wazni's murder, a movement born out of the anti-government protests called Al-Beit Al-Watani—the National Bloc—said it would boycott the October elections. "We reject elections until the killers of the leaders of the October revolution are behind bars," the bloc's founder Hussein Al-Gharabi told



**KARBALA:** Vehicles drive past a banner reading in Arabic "Who killed me?" and depicting renowned Iraqi anti-government activist Ihab Al-Wazni (Ehab al-Ouazni), who was shot dead in an ambush earlier this month, in the shrine city of Karbala on May 23, 2021. —AFP

AFP, referring to the protest movement.

Since then, 17 groups have joined the call for a boycott. They had presented lists for the elections, believing they had strong popular support to change the system through the ballot box.

But all that changed with the murder of Wazni and the attack on Hassan. "We

are firmly against holding elections, as long as weapons are freely available and killings continue," the groups said in a joint statement on May 17. Pro-democracy activists called for a protest today in the capital Baghdad, to demand the government arrest those responsible for the killings. —AFP

## Italy cable car crash probed as child fights for life

**STRESA, Italy:** Investigators probed the causes yesterday of a terrifying cable car crash in the Italian mountains that left 14 people dead, including five Zionists, and a young child fighting for life. The five-year-old boy remained in hospital, the only survivor of Sunday's accident on the summit of Mottarone mountain in the north-west Piedmont region, with a hospital official saying the next two days were critical.

The cable car crashed to the ground after a cable broke, according to first reports, while one member of the emergency services said the security brake failed to function. The accident came at the start of Italy's much-anticipated reopening to tourists after coronavirus closures, and elicited condolences from around the world.

But it also drew condemnation from some commentators over weak security controls in the country's transportation sector, even though the investigations are

still at an early stage. Transport Minister Enrico Giovannini arrived in the town of Stresa, from where the cable car started, to meet with local and regional authorities. Prosecutors opened an investigation Sunday into potential charges of involuntary manslaughter, while a government-commissioned inquiry by technical experts is also underway. The accident was the first involving a cable car in Italy since 1998, when a low-flying US military jet severed a cable at a ski resort, killing 20 people. "There are various aspects of this affair that will certainly be clarified," Giovannini said in a short press conference, without taking questions.

### 'Minute by minute'

The fatal accident near the end of the 20-minute ride up the scenic mountain may have had a dual cause, according to the regional head of Italy's alpine rescue team, Matteo Gasparini. "They are all suppositions, but I think there has been a double problem, the breakup of the cable and the non-working of the emergency brake," he told La Stampa daily.

"We don't know why it didn't activate, while in the downstream car it worked." That meant the cable car began quickly falling back and picking up speed before it "ended up catapulted out of the support cables",



**The Italian Firefighters "Vigili del Fuoco" shows a general view above the Mottarone peak, the cableway arrival building (bottom left), Lake Maggiore (top rear) and a pylon (rear c-r) below which a cable car crashed to the ground above the resort town of Stresa. —AFP**

Gasparini said. The cable car hit a pylon, then hit the ground, tumbling down the mountain for about 500 meters (1,640 feet), before coming to a stop, according to news reports. Rescuers found five bodies still inside the cable car, with the others strewn outside. —AFP



# India orders mass evacuations as second cyclone in a week looms

## Yaas expected to barrel into West Bengal, Odisha states tomorrow

**KOLKATA:** Indian authorities yesterday ordered the evacuation of nearly half a million people out of the path of a new cyclone heading towards eastern India just one week after another deadly storm smashed into the west coast. The cyclones are hitting as India reels from a surge in coronavirus infections that has plunged the healthcare system into crisis and pushed the country's COVID-19 death toll above 300,000.

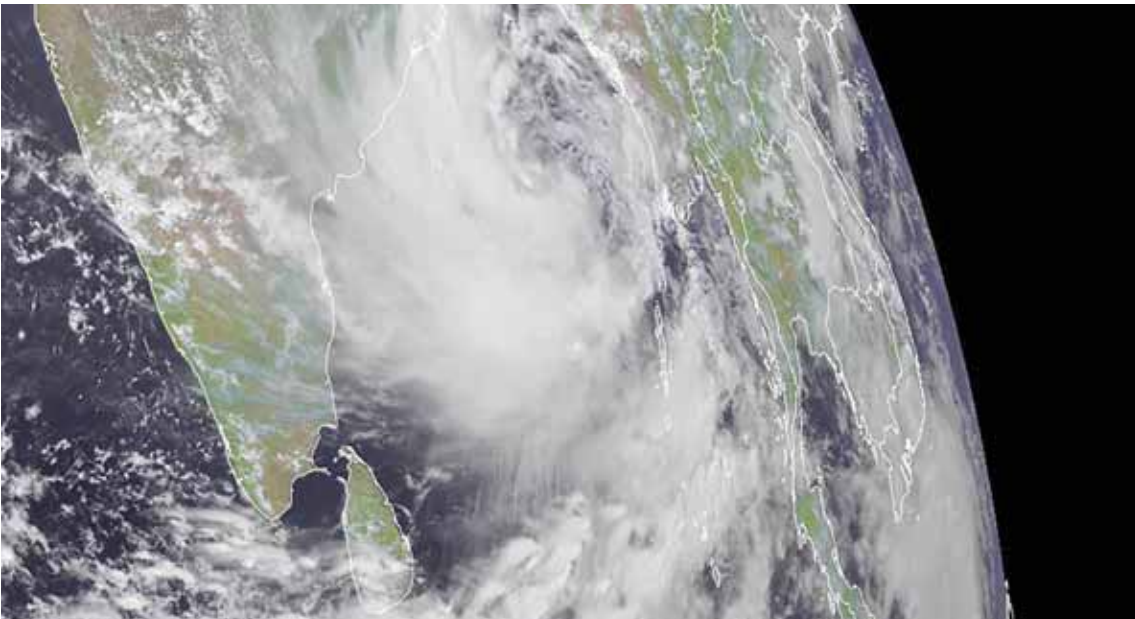
Experts say storms off India's coast are increasing in frequency and intensity as climate change warms ocean waters. The India Meteorological Department said Cyclone Yaas had formed in the Bay of Bengal and was expected to barrel into West Bengal and Odisha states tomorrow. Neighboring Bangladesh has also been put on alert. Yaas could pack gusts of up to 185 kilometers (115 miles) per hour as a "Very Severe Cyclonic Storm" at the time of landfall, the department said.

Storm surges of up to four meters (13 feet) high were "likely to inundate low-lying coastal areas", it added. Evacuations in coastal districts and the Sundarbans mangrove forest, a UNESCO world heritage site, started on Sunday, West Bengal disaster management minister Javed Ahmed Khan said. "We

have to evacuate nearly half a million people... to schools (and) government offices, which have been turned into cyclone centers to provide shelter to these people," Khan told AFP.

Odisha's special relief commissioner, Pradeep Jena, told local media evacuations were being planned, with the state also making arrangements to provide power back-ups to oxygen plants supplying hospitals with COVID-19 patients. Additional oxygen supplies were also being sent to hospitals with virus patients in areas that could be affected by Yaas. The military and disaster teams have been deployed to help with the preparations and potential rescue operations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Sunday.

Last Monday, Cyclone Tauktae-India's first major tropical storm this season-slammed into the western state of Gujarat, battering several states with torrential downpours and strong winds. The death toll from Tauktae rose to at least 155 yesterday after more bodies were recovered from an oil rig off the western city of Mumbai and several support vessels, the navy said. In Sri Lanka, the weather bureau warned the island nation's fishermen not to venture into the Bay of Bengal. —AFP



This RAMMB/CIRA handout satellite image shows a cyclone (right) approaches eastern India yesterday at 09:00 UTC. — AFP

## Myanmar's Suu Kyi defiant in first comments since coup

**NAYPYIDAW:** Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi yesterday voiced defiance as she made her first court appearance since being detained in a coup, vowing her ousted political party would live on. Myanmar has been in uproar since the February 1 putsch, with near-daily protests and a nationwide civil disobedience movement. More than 800 people have been killed by the military, according to a local monitoring group. The junta has threatened to dissolve her National League for Democracy-which swept elections in 2020 — over alleged voter fraud.

The Nobel laureate-who has not been seen in public since the coup-sounded "healthy and fully confident" during the 30-minute meeting, her lawyer Min Min Soe told AFP. "She wishes her people to stay healthy as well as affirmed the NLD will exist as long as people exist because it was founded for people," Suu Kyi has been hit with a string of criminal charges including flouting coronavirus restrictions during last year's election campaign and possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies.

There was a heavy security presence in the capital Naypyidaw, an AFP correspondent said, with the road to the specially-constructed courthouse blocked by police trucks. There have been weeks of delays to Suu Kyi's legal case and her lawyers have struggled to gain access to her. The next hearing was set for June 7, Min Min Soe said, adding she had also met with former president Win Myint, who was ousted and detained along with Suu Kyi.

"It's hard to say why this meeting was now allowed," Richard Horsey, Senior Adviser on Myanmar to the International Crisis Group told AFP. "But (it) certainly suggests that the regime is feeling more



YANGON: In this file photo, people participate in a rally in support of Myanmar's State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi. —AFP

confident-despite the magnitude of the ongoing crisis and resistance." As the lawyers left the compound in Naypyidaw, police arrested a legal representative of senior NLD figure Myo Aung, lawyers told AFP.

**'Everything she can'**

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing gave a two-hour interview to Hong Kong's Phoenix Television last week, with the full program yet to air, though portions have been released. Asked about Suu Kyi's political achievements, the military leader said: "In short, she has done everything she can." The military announced a one-year state of emergency after it seized power, and said it would be followed by fresh multi-party elections. A group of ousted lawmakers-many of them previously part of the NLD-have formed a shadow "National Unity Government" in an attempt to undermine the junta.

The junta has classified them as "terrorists". In a

separate interview excerpt, Min Aung Hlaing disputed the death toll from the protests and said he was not ready to adopt a consensus brokered last month by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to halt the violence. The continuing bloodshed has pushed some in the anti-junta movement to form a so-called "People's Defence Force" (PDF) in their townships-made up of civilians who fight back against security forces with homemade weapons. Sunday saw heavy fighting between junta forces and the Karenni National Progressive Party-an ethnic armed group with a stronghold in Kayah state on Myanmar's eastern fringe. The military used tanks, mortars and helicopters in the fighting which continued into Sunday night, according to a senior KNPP leader. Four people taking refuge in a church were killed in army shelling, according to media and a spokesperson for a local group coordinating evacuations from the area. — AFP

## Afghan forces, Taleban clash near capital

**MIHTARLAM, Afghanistan:** Afghan forces clashed with Taleban fighters in a provincial capital about 120 kilometers (75 miles) from Kabul, officials and witnesses said, prompting the defense minister to take charge of a counteroffensive. Violence has soared in Afghanistan since US forces began their final pull-out on May 1, as the insurgents press on with a campaign to seize new territory. Fierce fighting erupted late Sunday on the edge of Mihtarlam, a city of around 140,000 people and the capital of Laghman province. At one point Defense Minister Yasin Zia took personal charge in the field, officials said.

"With the arrival of reinforcements, the enemy has sustained heavy blows," Zia, a former army chief of staff, said in a video message. The ministry said at least 50 Taleban fighters were killed in overnight fighting. Taleban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP the insurgents captured 37 security checkpoints on the outskirts of the city. Casualty figures and battlefield gains can rarely be independently verified in Afghanistan and both sides frequently exaggerate their successes and minimize losses. An AFP correspondent reported fighting continuing in some parts of Mihtarlam yesterday, adding that hundreds of people had been displaced.

A student from Mihtarlam, who gave just his first name Zabihullah, said he went to school after government forces assured him they had control, but had to flee when fighting resumed. "I'm not sure which part of the city is safe now," he told AFP. The attack on Mihtarlam comes as the Taleban push on in efforts to capture new territory. In recent days the insurgents have seized the districts of Nerkh and Jalraiz in the province of Wardak, just 40 km from Kabul. Wardak has long been used by militants as a gateway to reach the capital and launch deadly attacks. The Taleban also captured Burka in northern Baghlan province earlier this month after government troops withdrew from the area. The Taleban campaign has spurred speculation the militants are waiting for the Americans to complete their withdrawal before launching all-out assaults on Afghan cities. —AFP

## Future sours for Hong Kong's brazen Apple Daily tabloid

**HONG KONG:** A shadow of fear hangs over Hong Kong's outspoken and staunchly pro-democracy Apple Daily newspaper, with its billionaire owner Jimmy Lai now jailed and many reporters asking themselves: "Are we next?" Each day, tomorrow's date is hung up on the walls of the bustling newsroom, a constant reminder of the need to get the next edition out. But there are growing signs a time may come when the 26-year-old newspaper has no tomorrow in a city that once marketed itself as a regional bastion of the free press.

"I am facing the greatest crisis since I took up the post over three years ago," Apple Daily's chief editor Ryan Law told AFP, just days before authorities used a new national security law to freeze Lai's assets, including his media empire shares. On a table in Law's office sat five recent resignation letters from staff, a vivid illustration of the worries coursing through the newsroom. But Law, an Apple Daily veteran of some two decades, remained defiant-and devoted to journalism despite the threat. "Some colleagues asked if Apple will eventually close shop when the CEO or I am arrested," he said. "I said: Apple is still here even after Mr Lai's arrest."

**Caught in crosshairs**

As China's crackdown gathered pace in the wake of 2019's huge and often violent democracy protests, mainland authorities made no secret of their desire to see Apple Daily-and its Next Digital parent group-shuttered. The raucous tabloid, founded by Lai in 1995, has unapologetically backed Hong Kong's long and fruitless democracy campaign and can be withering in its criticism of both Beijing and Hong Kong's leaders. Lai has long been branded a "traitor" and a "black hand" by Chinese state media, and declared guilty by senior communist party leaders. Hong Kong's police chief has recently taken to calling for a "fake news" law, making clear Apple Daily is in his sights.

Prosecutions have come thick and fast for Lai over the last year. He is currently serving a 14-month sen-



HONG KONG: This file photo shows Apple Daily editor-in-chief Ryan Law pointing to a copy of the first newspaper front page in the newsroom in Hong Kong. —AFP

tence for attending two protests in 2019, and faces two more ongoing prosecutions linked to other rallies. But the most serious charge is "colluding with foreign forces"-a new security crime-for allegedly campaigning for international sanctions. Lai faces up to life in jail if convicted and it was the security law charge that enabled authorities to seize his assets. In an interview with AFP last year, Lai was frank that his own chequebook kept Apple Daily going.

Although it remains the city's most popular media group, like most printed press its circulation has cratered, from around 400,000 at its peak in the 1990s to just 80,000 now. Any company that relies on the Chinese market has long avoided advertising with the paper. Since Lai's assets were frozen, Apple Daily has said it may have only 9-10 months of money in the bank. Zoe, a reporter who has been at Apple Daily for more than five years, described a constant weight pressing down on her. "The morale is rather bad," she told AFP, asking to use a pseudonym to speak freely. "It feels like something is approaching us... I worry that someday soon I may not be able to work in the press." Hong Kong remains a major regional press headquarters, hosting the offices of many international media companies. But the city has been sliding down press freedom rankings since its 1997 return to China. —AFP

### News in brief

#### 12 die in Congo gold mine accident

**KINSHASA:** A dozen clandestine miners died when a makeshift gold mine collapsed in the north of the Democratic Republic of Congo, UN radio Okapi reported yesterday. The accident took place around midday Saturday near Bondo in Lower Uele province, the report quoted regional deputy Eddy Pascal Sinango as saying. It was the latest in a series of mine accidents that have killed around 50 people so far this year, Okapi added, quoting local Radio Tele Uele (RTU). "Seventeen people entered a gold shaft in a quarry that was closed by mine officials since last January," Okapi said in reference to the latest disaster. —AFP

#### Spain smashes drug ring

**MADRID:** Spanish police said yesterday they had broken up a hashish smuggling ring with the arrest of 10 people including its suspected leader, a former British marine. Officers arrested the suspects last week in the southern provinces of Cadiz and Malaga as well as in Spain's North African enclave of Ceuta, the National Police said in a statement. Among those arrested was the alleged leader of the ring, a former British Royal Navy marine "with extensive nautical knowledge" who is suspected of transporting the drugs by sea. The unidentified man, who lived in a "luxury urbanization" in Cadiz, had "ties with criminal organizations in European nations such as Britain and Ukraine," where the ring sent its drugs. —AFP

#### Turkey detains top IS suspect

**ISTANBUL:** Turkish intelligence officers have arrested an Egyptian-born terror suspect wanted by Washington who was a top explosives expert for the Islamic State group, state media reported yesterday. The suspect, identified as Mustafa Abdulwahab Mahmud and born in 1999, was detained with three others on the outskirts of Istanbul after fleeing Syria, the reports said. The indictment said he joined the IS group in Syria, where he specialized in making suicide belts and various explosive devices. The Istanbul prosecutor's office is seeking 22.5 years in prison on charges of membership of a terror group. —AFP

#### 1.7m affected by Japan dating app

**TOKYO:** The personal data of more than a million users of one of Japan's most popular dating apps may have been exposed by a hack, its operator has warned. Net Marketing Co, which runs the Omiai app, said it detected unauthorized access in April to the server that stores member information. "We have learnt that it is very likely that some member information was leaked due to unauthorized access," the company said in a statement. Images of driving licenses and passports that had been submitted for age verification were among the data compromised between April 20-26, the company added. —AFP

#### Deaths spark outrage in China

**SHANGHAI:** The deaths of 21 ultramarathon runners in China throw a light on an industry which is booming in the country but has suffered a series of controversies and embarrassments. Hail, freezing rain and high winds were blamed for the deaths of the runners taking part in a 100-kilometre (60-mile) cross-country mountain race on Saturday in the northwestern province of Gansu. As authorities launched an investigation, Chinese social media erupted in mourning and outrage, questioning why organizers had not been better prepared for the extreme weather. —AFP



TUESDAY, MAY 25, 2021

## Business

## Traders in limbo after escape from China's 'shaking building'

## SEG building to remain closed until the cause of swaying is confirmed

**SHENZHEN, China:** Business owners face uncertain prospects after being shut out of a skyscraper in southern China that started to shake unexpectedly last week and sent passersby running in panic. The 300-metre (1,000-foot) SEG Plaza in the city of Shenzhen near Hong Kong began shaking last Tuesday, prompting the evacuation of the occupants and causing pedestrians to flee for safety.

Emergency management officials quickly ruled out a quake as the cause of the wobble in the tech hub's Futian district, and a probe is ongoing into the cause. One business owner told AFP he was on the fifty-third floor last week when the building started swaying.

"I saw something moved, (and) when I got up I saw everything moved," said Arman Hasanpour, an Iranian businessman based in the building. "After that we came out very fast."

He said there has been "a few shakes" since the initial wobbling of the building, which was built in 2000. "Now, we don't know how to make business and how to cope with it... everything is not clear."

The SEG Building yesterday was sealed off with red tape covering the entrances, AFP saw.

But a handful of business owners from the electronics market on the ground floor were rolling trolleys packed with taped-up goods out of the

shuttered tower. Across the road, an electronics trader surnamed Wang told AFP that he had heard people complain before that the skyscraper had swayed. "But not as serious as this time," he added.

The building's owner has said it will remain closed until the cause of the swaying is confirmed. So far, officials have found "no safety abnormalities" in the building's structure or surroundings, the local government said in a statement.

Many locals appeared nonplussed yesterday, with crowds of pedestrians and office workers walking past the skyscraper—a far cry from online footage last week that showed panicked shoppers sprinting away from the building. "They're solving the problem," shrugged one trader selling electronic cigarettes opposite the tower.

But others are still speculating whether the building will reopen. Building collapses or accidents are not uncommon in China, often linked to lax construction standards or corruption. But an incident at one of the city's tallest buildings has drawn speculation and attention.

"I saw people running across, and I was wondering what happened, then I saw the building was shaking on top," reflected an electronic cigarette trader surnamed Fang. "No matter how it falls it'll be really dangerous. It's so tall and there are so many people." —AFP



The SEG Plaza in the city of Shenzhen near Hong Kong began shaking last week, prompting the evacuation of the occupants and causing pedestrians to flee for safety.

## Jack Ma to quit as president of his business school

**BEIJING:** Chinese billionaire Jack Ma, founder of e-commerce giant Alibaba, is going to step down as president of the elite business school he founded after having been caught in a Beijing clampdown on tech titans, the Financial Times reported yesterday.

Ma, formerly one of China's most flamboyant entrepreneurs, has largely disappeared from public view since Alibaba's fintech arm was investigated and fined by regulators for alleged monopolistic practices. The Financial Times report cited sources saying that Hupan University—an elite academy for Chinese business executives established in Ma's hometown of Hangzhou in 2015 — has changed its name and will restructure its curriculum. Ma will not hold any high-level title at the restructured organization, the report said, as Beijing seeks to limit his influence. "Hupan is like an elite community, it's one of (the authorities') main targets," one person who worked with Ma was quoted as saying by the FT. Viral videos circulating on Chinese social media earlier this month showed construction workers using a blow torch to remove characters on a large "Hupan University" sign.

The FT also reported last month that Hupan University was forced to suspend new student enrolments after sustained pressure from Beijing to dismantle Ma's fintech empire. In a series of blows for the group, Alibaba was fined a record 18.2 billion yuan (\$2.8 billion) by antitrust authorities last month, and its fintech arm Ant Financial has been ordered to restructure its business after a planned listing was scuppered.

Alibaba's reprimand is widely believed to be triggered by an October speech by Ma where he criticised state financial institutions for being outdated. The crackdown has since widened to include many of Alibaba's competitors in China's ballooning tech sector, where government regulators fear their outsize influence on consumers could usurp that of Chinese state banks. Since stepping down as chairman of Alibaba in 2019, Ma—a former schoolteacher—has poured his energies into philanthropy and various education projects. —AFP

## Iraq says \$150bn stolen oil cash smuggled out since 2003

**BAGHDAD:** Iraq's president said Sunday \$150 billion from oil had been smuggled out of the country since Saddam Hussein was ousted in 2003, as he introduced a law to fight endemic corruption.

President Barham Saleh presented a draft law to parliament to fight corruption, recover stolen funds and hold perpetrators to account, a statement read. He called "on parliament to adopt this crucial piece of legislation, in order to curb this pervasive practice that has plagued our great nation". Transparency International ranks the country 21st from bottom in its Corruption Perceptions Index.

"Of the close to a trillion dollars made from oil since 2003, an estimated \$150 billion of stolen money has been smuggled out of Iraq," Saleh

## Commemorative coin marks 40th GCC anniversary

**KUWAIT:** This year marks the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). An initiative by the late Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, may Allah have mercy on him, which aimed to strengthen coordination and integration between the member states. In order to document the GCC's vital role and efforts towards stability and development in the region despite the geopolitical headwinds throughout the last four decades, and to honor the founding lead-

ers and their roles in the Council's success story, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) issued a commemorative coin to celebrate this occasion.

The center of the obverse portrays the leaders of GCC countries at the time of GCC establishment in 1981, topped with the number of years since establishment surrounded with the title of the coin in Arabic inscription, the year of establishment and year of issuance. Highlighting the obverse is the GCC's Slogan "Our Gulf is One, Our People are One".

The reverse features the GCC's logo, which contains a hexagonal shape surrounding the GCC map, with "In the name of Allah, The All-Merciful, The Ever-Merciful" on the top, and the name of Council on the bottom, along with the title in English inscription. The side also bears the official logo of the Central Bank of Kuwait and with the



nominal value of the coin. The coin is made of gold-plated fine silver in line with the world standard specifications: 38.61 mm diameter and 28.28 g. weight. Those willing to acquire the coin may visit the CBK's Banking Hall by booking an appointment through the "Meta" App, as of May 25th, 2021.

## Egypt slashes claim to \$550m over Suez blockage

**CAIRO:** Egypt has slashed millions of dollars off its compensation claim against the Japanese owner of a megaship that blocked the Suez canal in March, the canal authority chief said late Sunday.

Egyptian authorities had seized the 200,000-tonne MV Ever Given in April and lodged a claim in a local court demanding \$916 million from its owner Shoen Kisen Kaisha in compensation for the ship's release. But Suez Canal Authority (SCA) head Osama Rabie said the claim had been dropped to \$550 million in a televised interview with talk show host Amr Adib late Sunday.

"After the owners of the ship estimated the costs of the cargo loaded to be around \$775 million, we respected this and reduced the (compensation) claim to \$550 million," he said. The Ever Given became diagonally stuck in the narrow but crucial global trade artery in a sandstorm on March 23, triggering a mammoth six-day-long effort by Egyptian personnel and international salvage specialists to dislodge it.

The waterway connects the Red Sea and the

added, calling for cooperation with other governments and international bodies to recover the funds. Endemic corruption was one of the drivers of protests that shook Iraq from October 2019 to June 2020.

"Corruption is an impediment to any nation's economic and social development," the Iraqi head of state said, whose powers are limited under the constitution. "It deprives citizens of opportunities and livelihoods, and robs them of essential services and infrastructure," he added.

Saleh said violence and terrorism, which have plagued Iraq for years, "are deeply intertwined with the phenomenon of corruption".

The draft law targets those who have held positions of director general and above in both government and public companies since the establishment of a new regime in 2004. Under the law, transactions over \$500,000 would be scrutinized as well as bank accounts, particularly those that held over \$1 million, and contracts or investments obtained through corruption would be cancelled.

But security and politics expert Fadel Abo Ragheef was skeptical the law would be passed. "It's certainly one of the best pieces of legislation proposed by the executive branch since 2003. But



In this handout photo released by Suez Canal Press Service, an operation to re-float Ever Given container ship that ran aground in Suez Canal continues, in Egypt. —AFP

Mediterranean Sea and is used for more than 10 percent of world trade. Egypt lost between \$12 million and \$15 million in revenues for each day the canal was closed, according to SCA figures.

A court in Ismailia, where the SCA is headquartered, ruled Sunday the ongoing case against Shoen Kisen Kaisha would be moved to a more specialized

court on May 29.

The SCA also announced Sunday in a statement that one of its rescue workers had died during the salvage efforts, but did not provide further details.

Earlier this month, President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi approved massive expansion of the canal to avoid future blockages. —AFP



will it be adopted? I doubt it," he told AFP. "The political parties the lawmakers belong to will act to sabotage it, so it doesn't pass," he said.

"In public they will support it, but behind the scenes, they will do everything to prevent its adoption, because many of the politicians are involved in

this racket". An Iraqi banking source said politicians have smuggled \$60 billion out of the country. However, much of that was via Lebanon, a move now likely to their detriment, as the country is mired in a severe economic crisis, and it is almost impossible to get money out of its banks. —AFP



## Business

# KFH participates in virtual career fairs organized by AUM and ACK

## Al-Omar: KFH succeeds in acquiring national innovative youth talents

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Finance House (KFH) is participating in two virtual career fairs organized by the American University of Middle East (AUM) and the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) through a specialized digital platform that can be accessed by logging into the two universities' websites or through their Instagram accounts.

Group Chief Human Resources Officer at KFH, Zeyad Abdullah Al-Omar said that KFH's participation confirms the efforts it exerts on acquiring and qualifying the national talents in favor of nationalization and encouraging young people to join work in the private sector, with distinction in an effort to develop skills and refine experiences according to international standards. He added that through the fairs, a specialized HR team at "KFH" will conduct virtual job interviews and answer job-seekers' queries and educate them on KFH's sectors and departments and nature of work in the private sector.

### Awards for job replacement and Kuwaitization

As a pioneer in attracting and developing human resources, refining their skills, and establishing distinguished banking cadres, Al-Omar explained that KFH has won several awards in the field of job replacement and localization, including the "top pri-

ivate sector recruiter for national talents" award from the Public Authority of Manpower, stressing KFH's keenness to give Kuwaitis the opportunity to build distinct capabilities and expertise in various sectors, as KFH includes multiple fields of work, such as banking, commercial, real estate, investment, information technology, and others.

Al-Omar said that KFH ranked first among banks

and private sector as top Kuwaitization destination as it has the largest number of Kuwaiti employees. This confirms its successful strategy to build and qualify national competencies and excellence in terms of local labor and Kuwaitization ratio as citizens made up 97 percent - 99 percent of new hires in recent years, most of them fresh graduates.

### Digitization

Al Omar said that KFH made notable progress in adopting digitization in personal job interviews, assessment, recruiting and training to determine the

skill and professional level of candidate on one hand, and the personal side on the other, while conducting the reports and analysis to gauge the candidate's competence.

### Forsa program

He confirmed that KFH was a pioneer in launching Forsa program for outstanding Kuwaiti employees and delegated a group of its outstanding Kuwaiti employees to Silicon Valley in the USA to enhance their innovative digital mindset and creativity in digitization, IT, FinTech, AI, blockchain and cybersecurity. Al-Omar added that Forsa Program includes advanced training programs, workshops and field visits to the largest and most prominent global technology firms such as Microsoft, Google, Apple, Ripple, among others. The employees also visited laboratories of digital transformation in prominent American universities such as the University of

Berkeley in California, as well as the Innovation Center in Silicon Valley, BNP Paribas and other international institutions and prestigious FinTech companies.

He pointed out that Forsa Program with its rich content comes in line with KFH directions and its strategic plans to reinforce its leadership in digitization, which has become essential in its various activities and business, and to embrace national talents, upgrade their professional level and refine their skills according to international standards.

It is worth noting that the ACK's career fair continues until May 27, while the AUM's career fair continues until May 25. The two virtual exhibitions are witnessing a large turnout from university students who wish to join the KFH family, as well as those interested in learning about the opportunities available to them to join the banking industry.



Zeyad Abdullah Al-Omar

## Liberty Steel to sell UK assets after Greensill folds

**LONDON:** British-based steelmaker Liberty Steel yesterday launched a major restructuring to sell part of its UK assets following the collapse of financier Greensill. Liberty, which is owned by GFG Alliance, said in a statement that it will look to sell its steel plant in Stocksbridge, northern England, and other facilities which together employ about 1,500 staff.

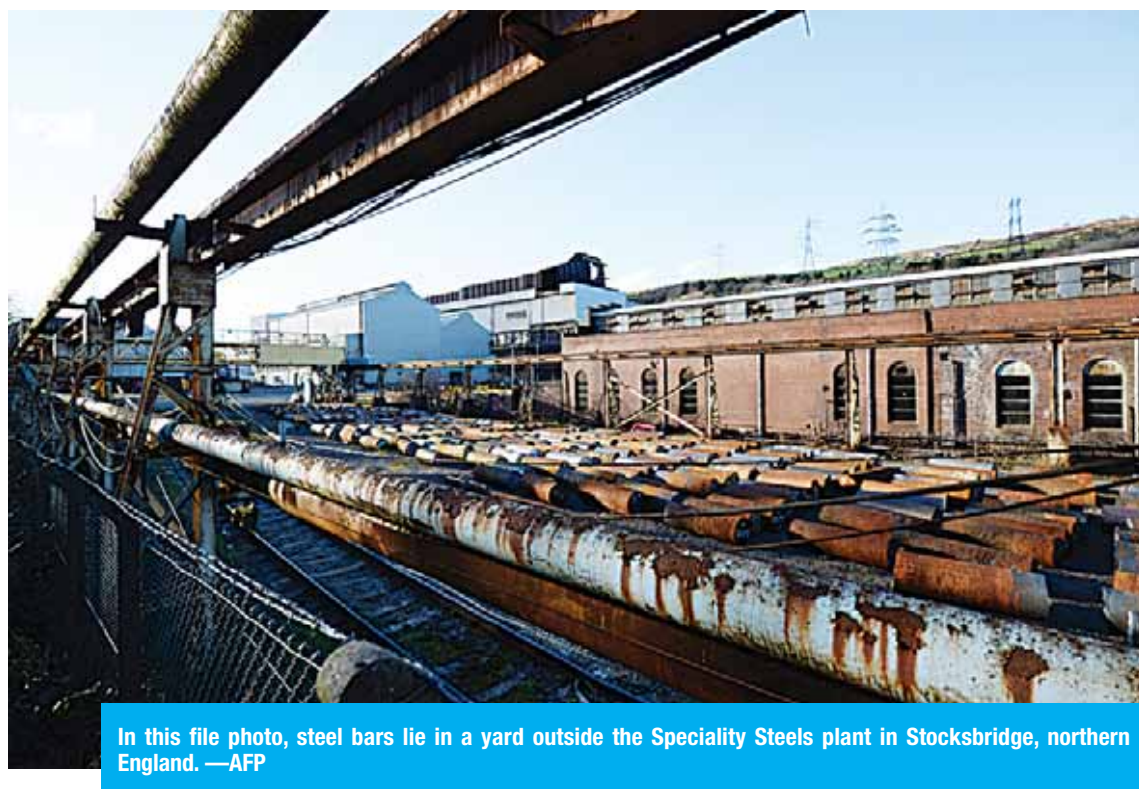
Greensill's dramatic demise sparked fears over the future of GFG's 35,000 staff worldwide—which includes 5,000 at Liberty Steel in Britain. GFG, owned by Indian-British billionaire Sanjeev Gupta, had been Greensill's biggest customer at the time of the finance giant's notorious collapse in March.

Yesterday announcement followed weekend meetings in Dubai between Gupta and major lender Credit Suisse. The pair reached a so-called standstill agreement over Liberty Primary Metals Australia, according to yesterday's statement.

Regarding the UK operations, Liberty wants "to complete.... restructuring and refinancing" to protect thousands of jobs, it said.

"As part of this restructuring Liberty will look to sell its aerospace and special alloys steel business in Stocksbridge." It has also started a formal sale process for Liberty Pressing Solutions in Coventry, central England, and Liberty Aluminium Technologies, which has sites in nearby Kidderminster and in Essex in the southeast.

Liberty has also put up for sale its manufactur-



In this file photo, steel bars lie in a yard outside the Speciality Steels plant in Stocksbridge, northern England. —AFP

ing facilities in West Bromwich in central England and in Brinsworth in the north. The sprawling steel giant GFG Alliance has operations in more than 35 nations worldwide, while Gupta's business affairs face heightened scrutiny in Britain.

Earlier this month, the Serious Fraud Office launched a probe into GFG Alliance, focusing partly on links with Greensill. The Greensill affair shone a

light on Gupta's business practices, with the UK government describing the GFG structure as "very opaque" after declining to rescue it earlier this year.

Greensill Capital, which bypassed strict regulations forced upon traditional banks, specialised in short-term corporate loans via a complex and opaque business model that ultimately sparked its declaration of insolvency in March. —AFP

## Swiss to host global virus hub laboratory

**GENEVA:** Switzerland signed a deal with the World Health Organization yesterday to host a global repository for viruses with pandemic potential to bolster international defenses against emerging threats. The BioHub laboratory will store and analyze pathogens from across the globe and enhance the rapid sharing of information between labs around the world.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said it would be a "reliable, safe, and transparent mechanism for member states to voluntarily share pathogens and clinical samples".

The memorandum of understanding was signed at the WHO's headquarters in Geneva, as the UN health agency kicked off its annual main assembly of member states. The facility will be hosted at the

Swiss defense ministry's biological safety laboratories in the lakeside town of Spiez. "Close international collaboration to ensure the timely sharing of epidemiological and clinical data as well as biological materials is of utmost importance," Swiss Health Minister Alain Berset told the World Health Assembly. "We hope to contribute to the establishment of an international exchange system for SARS-CoV-2 and other emerging pathogens."

Currently, most pathogen sharing is done between individual countries in an ad hoc way, which can be slow and leave some states out of the loop.

The BioHub will allow the WHO's 194 member states to share biological materials with the facility under pre-agreed conditions to ensure timeliness and predictability when responding to potential outbreaks. "The COVID-19 pandemic and other outbreaks and epidemics have underscored the importance of rapidly sharing pathogens to help the global scientific community assess the risk and develop counter-measures such as diagnos-



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (left) and Alain Berset after signing the BioHub Initiative in Geneva yesterday. —AFP

tics, therapeutics and vaccines," said Tedros. "The BioHub system is an important step towards facilitating this flow of information."

A pilot scheme using the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 will test whether it is feasible to share biological materials with manufacturers for the development

of medical products for even allocation among countries. "Following results from the pilot project, the BioHub will expand from SARS-CoV-2 and its variants, to other pathogens, and connect partners with other repositories and laboratory networks in 2022," the WHO said in a statement. —AFP

### 'Wake-up call

The overwhelming majority (99.2 percent, or \$3.63 trillion) of estimated total costs inflicted by alien species came from removing invasive weeds from crops. Weeding cereal crops accounted for 72 percent (\$2.61 trillion) of this, the authors found, while weeding maize and root crops accounts for 14 percent (\$508 billion) and weeding vegetables accounts for 3.3 percent (\$120 billion).

Rene Eschen, corresponding study author from Switzerland's CABI research institute, said the research highlighted the hidden economic and social costs of having to weed crops across the continent.

"The removal of invasive alien weeds is largely unpaid work and is primarily carried out by women and children, reducing the amount of time they are able to spend on income-generating and community activities or education," he said. The species found to cause the most crop losses was a moth known as *Phthorimaea absoluta*, which affects tomato plants, at an estimated cost of \$11.4 billion annually. Other insects were estimated to inflict more than \$21.5 billion worth of crop losses each year to maize, cas-

sava and mango and citrus crops. The authors cautioned that their findings may in fact underestimate the true economic cost of invasive species to Africa's agriculture sector, as they didn't include costs related to chemical herbicides used to control pests and disease. Kat Kramer, climate change lead at Christian Aid, said Thursday's research showed an additional "often overlooked" challenge for Africa that should feed in to G7 discussions next month. "One of the drivers of invasive species is a changing climate as new plants threaten the established crops which people rely on for both food and income," she told AFP.

"This report should be a wake-up call to leaders preparing to meet for the G7," Mohamed Adow, director of the Nairobi-based think tank Power Shift Africa, said the research showed "the huge battle that Africa faces to bring prosperity to its people". "This is yet further evidence for the need for greater support from richer nations to help Africans, be that through strengthening aid budgets, cancelling unpayable debts and delivering on climate finance to help people adapt to these challenges," he said. —AFP

### Oil rises again

Oil prices extended Friday's rally as the reopening of economies narrative outshone worries about the impact on demand from a possible Iran nuclear deal that would see more of the commodity hit the world market. A storm in the Gulf of Mexico that could develop into a hurricane has also raised the prospect of some production facilities being taken offline. "There's a lot of vaccine-driven demand optimism in the US and Europe that's likely to be further boosted by the summer driving season next month," said Kim Kwangrae, of Samsung Futures. —AFP

## Invasive species costing Africa \$3.66tn a year

**PARIS:** Invasive species introduced by human activity are costing African agriculture some \$3.66 trillion every year—around 1.5 times the combined gross domestic product of all African countries—new research showed.

Non-native species of weed, insect or worm can have catastrophic effects on farming, with just a single bug capable of reducing yields of staple crops across the continent. Now researchers based in Ghana, Kenya, Britain and Switzerland have sought to estimate the annual economic hit caused by invasive species to African agriculture.

The team studied open source and peer-reviewed



## Business

## NBK Economic Report

# Kuwait spending solid despite lingering pandemic uncertainty and restrictions

## Good vaccination progress, gradual reopening could underpin consumer spending

**KUWAIT:** Consumer spending was strong in 1Q21, helped by a combination of generally looser virus restrictions from late last year but still strict travel curbs during the February holiday, which boosted domestic outlays. The outlook for 2Q21 looks solid, especially with the lifting in mid-May of the partial curfew that had been re-imposed in March as well as the encouraging progress of the vaccination program. Indeed, this positive view was supported by a surge in spending growth in April, albeit benefiting from a large favorable base effect but also the deferral of loan repayments for Kuwaiti borrowers. On the other side, risks to the outlook include a further weakening in the labor market and an ongoing increase in inflation (due to global factors), which could weigh on spending in the period ahead.

### Spending growth jumps

Amid hopes that the worst of the pandemic's impact may have passed, the start of the vaccine rollout and the earlier lifting of most restrictions, consumer demand started 2021 strong. In fact, spending growth accelerated to 33 percent y/y in 1Q21 from 20 percent in the previous quarter, even with the imposition of a partial curfew in early March. Moreover, despite a slight month-on-month drop, spending growth surged in April to a record 90 percent y/y, reaching KD2.1 billion. However, this jump was due mainly to a base effect following weak spending a year ago due to pandemic restrictions (a similar effect should be seen in May, too). The solid underlying trend in spending seems well placed to continue, especially with the recent lifting of the partial curfew and potentially further loosening measures given good progress in vaccinations and a trend decline in new COVID case numbers from mid-May.

On a more detailed level, growth in ATM cash withdrawals reversed its one-year contraction trend,

Chart 1: Knet IPoS, POS, ATM & Kpay transactions (% y/y)

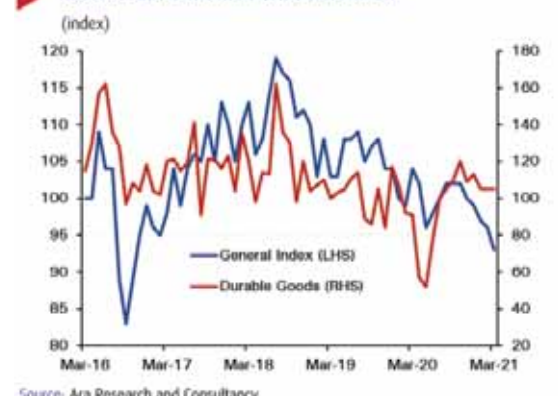


increasing for the second month in a row by 24 percent y/y in April following a drop of 8.2 percent in 1Q21. Growth in point-of-sale transactions reached a record high of 162 percent in April, thanks mainly to a favorable base effect. Growth in online spending remained very strong at 93 percent, pushing the amount of online transactions to a record KD 0.81 billion, which accounts for 38 percent of total spending.

Although spending remains solid, uncertainty surrounding the pandemic and more difficult labor market conditions have dented consumer confidence. Ara's consumer confidence index continued its slide from 96 in February to 93 in March, the lowest level since November 2016. Most index subcomponents, including current employment (108) and durable goods (105), remained robust, though the current economic situation (82) and current personal income (74) segments trended lower.

After decelerating in 2020 from very high levels due to the pandemic and the fading of an earlier boost from regulatory changes, personal consumer loan

Chart 2: ARA Consumer confidence index (index)



growth stabilized at around 9 percent in 1Q21. This strong growth in loans for consumption purposes has supported the rebound in consumer spending, underpinned also by pent-up demand. Meanwhile, total household debt (which includes loans for home purchases) continued to grow strongly, reaching 8.1 percent y/y by end-March, driven mainly by housing loans (+8.7 percent). Looking ahead, the six-month deferral of household credit installments for Kuwaiti borrowers should provide continued support for consumer spending, by freeing up households' disposable incomes. All else equal, it will also mean that consumer loans remain on banks' books for longer, supporting credit growth.

According to the Public Authority for Civil Information, more than 130,000 expatriates left the country in 2020 (mainly low-paid and low-skilled expatriate workers), as the pandemic hit economic activity, saw firms cut jobs and as lockdowns and travel restrictions reduced international mobility. This resulted in a drop of 2.2 percent in Kuwait's popula-

tion and 4.2 percent in employment. More expat workers are expected to leave in the coming quarters, on the back of proposed changes to the residency law, continued enforcement of Kuwaitization policies, and as companies are forced to shed workers amid the sluggish economic climate. Ongoing weakness in the jobs market could weigh on consumer spending in the near-to-medium term, although the low-income profile of most of the departing workers would limit the overall impact.

Meanwhile, total wage growth decelerated slightly to 3.5 percent y/y in 4Q20 from 3.6 percent in the previous quarter, according to LMIS data. However, this was still higher than the growth of 2.2 percent recorded in 2019, reflecting perhaps the departure of thousands of low income expatriate workers over the past year which may have boosted 'average' wage levels. The slowdown in wage growth in 4Q20 was seen among both expatriates and Kuwaiti workers, amid low oil prices and a weaker economic climate.

With the continued successful progress of the vaccine rollout - which should also support an improvement in consumer confidence - as well as a potential gradual further reopening of the economy and businesses, consumer spending is expected to remain solid as suggested by signs so far this year. Indeed, spending growth could accelerate further in May on the anniversary of last year's very weak number when restrictions were at their most severe (these base effects should start to fade from July). However, the outlook will also remain contingent on workers' incomes and job security, worries about which could linger if another virus wave materializes or the economic rebound disappoints, especially if for example oil prices fall back. Also, the easing of travel restrictions coupled with a gradual reopening of borders will encourage Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis to spend their summer holiday outside Kuwait, diverting more spending overseas.

## Kamco Investment Fund recognized in 2021 Refinitiv Lipper Fund awards

**KUWAIT:** Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, announced that the Kamco Investment Fund was recognized by the 2021 Refinitiv Lipper Fund awards for its consistent risk-adjusted performance relative to its peers. The fund received two awards based on Lipper's quantitative and proprietary methodology, reflecting a truly independent and uncompromised assessment of the fund's performance.

The MENA market awards were announced on May 18th, 2021, recognizing funds with outstanding performance based on Refinitiv's rigorous assessment process. Kamco Investment Fund was named the Refinitiv Lipper Fund Awards Kuwait 2021 Winner in the categories of "Best Equity Fund Over 5 Years", and "Best Equity Fund Over 10 Years".



Commenting on the awards, Salah Al-Wuhaib, Senior Executive Director of Equity and Fixed Income at Kamco Invest, said, "We are proud to have received these recognitions that highlight the consistent performance of the Kamco Investment Fund based on our diligent investment philosophy and active fund management style. These results were

achieved by consistently placing our clients' interests at the forefront of our management style and continuously seeking to offer innovative and premium quality products and services."

He added, "The fund outperformed its respective benchmarks during the mentioned periods with Kamco Investment Fund achieving 57.1 percent over 5-years (Benchmark 42.6 percent), and 31.5 percent over 10-years (benchmark 12.4 percent) as of 31 December 2020."

"This year's Refinitiv Lipper Fund Awards recognized the steadfast resolve of award-winning managers and firms who successfully navigated one of the sharpest market downturns and recoveries on record enabling investors to maintain a level of economic confidence amidst a backdrop of uncertainty."

In a year that endured the impacts of an unprecedented global humanitarian crisis, in which markets reflected investors' emotions of shock and optimism, there was a degree of solace in having one's financial fortunes overseen by the stewardship of professional money managers.

We congratulate the 2021 Refinitiv Lipper Fund Award winners and wish Kamco Invest continued success." Robert Jenkins, Head of Research, Lipper, Refinitiv.

Al-Wuhaib concluded by congratulating the Asset Management Team, whose efforts and hard work paid off with the positive performance achieved by most of Kamco Invest's funds in outperforming their benchmark marks. It is worth mentioning that Refinitiv is one of the world's largest providers of financial markets data and infrastructure, serving over 40,000 institutions in approximately 190 countries. It provides leading data and insights, trading platforms and open data and technology platforms that connect a thriving global financial markets community - driving performance in trading, investment, wealth management, regulatory compliance, market data management, enterprise risk and fighting financial crime.

## Lack of response to value-chain risks represents 'ticking cyber-bomb'

**KUWAIT:** Supply chain attacks have proved very successful in recent years. Amid increased digitization, including at government and public services, organizations are more vulnerable to these types of threats than ever before. However, there is still no global policy response to fix value-chain risks, which represents a hazardous cyber-vulnerability. To address this issue and find possible routes to a solution, Kaspersky has held a special panel discussion within the RSA Conference 2021.

The panel, titled: 'The ticking 'cyber-bomb' and why there's no global policy response to fix value-chain risks?' gathered the following experts:

- Craig Jones, Director of Cybercrime, INTERPOL
- Jon Fanzun, Special Envoy for Cyber Foreign and Security Policy at the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA)
- Serge Droz, Chair of FIRST - the Forum for Incident Response and Security Teams (FIRST)

Digital transformations make every organization a software company, which relies on a multitude of external vendors, adding to difficult-to-manage third-party threats. Their services contain codes that may have vulnerabilities, which put their interconnected users - industries, societies, countries - at risk. Nevertheless, due to various disagreements between states, the global community has not yet developed a global policy response to value-chain risks.

At the same time, Kaspersky researchers have been



tracking several threat groups that focus on highly targeted supply-chain attacks - their findings indicate that threat actors target and exploit vulnerabilities in the updates and build systems for software, so users, who are asked to install patches, might reveal backdoors into their IT systems. One recent high-profile example includes Sunburst, which was used to compromise numerous public and private organizations around the world.

At the panel discussion, its participants highlighted that increasing information sharing and improving trust between actors is vital for building a constructive dialogue to create a global policy response to value-chain risks. "When the attack happens, people don't dial 911 or call the police, we're normally a second or third call after their IT security, but we should be among the first to investigate it - together with CERTs, private partners and across borders," said Craig Jones, Director of Cybercrime at INTERPOL. To reinforce the need for a clear, collaborative and effective response process, Director Jones continued, "it's in everyone's interest to thoroughly investigate incidents, as well as get and share as much information as possible to ensure IT security of the critical infrastructure."

"Cybercriminals love 'divide and conquer' - if we're divided, criminals flourish. That's why this is our biggest challenge - much bigger than a technical challenge is to decide on how we all work better together," pointed Serge Droz, Chair of Forum for Incident Response and

they enjoy a FullView experience on the stunning digital display, whether they are editing documents, reading articles or watching videos.



### 2. Seamless user experience

Digital nomads don't only work from their notebooks. They need to stay in contact with colleagues over mobile messaging apps and demand an increasing level of flexibility when working across multiple platforms. When working in a tight space like a coffee shop, however, it is not always practical to have multiple devices on the go at once. Solving this issue, Huawei MateBooks are part of Huawei's seamless product ecosystem which enables a unique feature called Multi-screen Collaboration. This allows digital nomads to work effortlessly across multiple devices by connecting with a simple tap.

Compatible with suitable Huawei smartphones, Multi-screen Collaboration allows digital nomads to control their phone using their notebook. After tapping to connect instantaneously, users can enjoy the benefits of wireless projection, file sharing, cross device collaboration and shared communication.

There are myriad benefits of Multi-screen Collaboration for digital nomads, as Huawei MateBooks save time and simplify their lives. Thanks to wireless pro-

Security Teams (FIRST).

"First of all, as the global community we need consensus - on how exactly international law applies in cyberspace, how human rights should be protected online, how norms of responsible state behavior should be implemented and what the role of other stakeholders is. Second, we also need to implement what we agreed on and to hold those who violate agreements accountable for their actions," noted Jon A. Fanzun, Special Envoy for Cyber Foreign and Security Policy, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA).

In this regard, the Geneva Dialogue on Responsible Behavior in Cyberspace, led by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), and implemented by DiploFoundation, is an example of building greater trust and closer community, particularly, within industry to shape a joint vision regarding the digital security and global policy processes for a trusted, secure, and stable cyberspace.

### Planning ahead

Kaspersky believes that a safer world for everyone can only be built on mutual trust and collaboration. The company sees a need for a global incident response mechanism to address large-scale and significant cyber-incidents affecting UN Member states and their critical infrastructure. "This mechanism can be based on providing recommended technical and operational national points of contact in the event of an attack. These would serve as a 'final station' in reaching out to a national CERT, law enforcement agency or cybersecurity professionals, where needed, to exchange technical information. It is important that incident responders remain neutral. Such a mechanism would not only ensure the means for a timely and coordinated global response and incident mitigation but would also help to enhance technical and operational capacities of the global community, thus contributing to greater cyber-stability," says Anastasiya Kazakova, Senior Public Affairs Manager at Kaspersky.

jection, users can answer a video call on their smartphone and simply tap their notebook to go hands-free and continue the call from their MateBook. With easy file sharing, they can simply drag and drop attachments from their smartphone to notebook or vice-versa, removing the time-consuming process of bringing over files shared on messaging apps to their laptop. Users can even drag files directly into presentations, for example. And with cross device collaboration and shared communication, it doesn't matter whether the user receives a message on email on their smartphone or laptop, they can easily reply on the device that's most convenient for them.

### 3. Stunning design

Digital nomads are typically from a younger demographic. They see their technology products as extensions of their personal style and individuality, and they demand stylish designs as a form of self-expression. When it comes to notebooks, however, the designs from many brands don't meet their expectations. There is a distinct lack of interesting colors and form factors. Huawei MateBooks buck this trend by delivering truly beautiful and eye-catching notebooks that look just at home in a boardroom as they do in a creative studio or coffee shop. You might not naturally think of the glitz and glamour of the fashion world when thinking about laptop design, but Huawei's product designers clearly do. The new Huawei MateBook X, with its wafer thin, ultra-light design and striking color options like Forest Green, is a style icon in its own right.

Processed with glitter techniques, the MateBook X reflects splendid and vibrant colors under natural lighting. It reflects the colors of the natural world around it as it simultaneously reflects the glamour of the high fashion its designers were inspired by. The Huawei MateBook X comes in four shades: Silver Frost, Interstellar Blue, Forest Green, and Sakura Pink. Through innovations and improvements in color and processing, Huawei MateBook X offers high-end consumers with great quality and experience.



## Business



# Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Sons, Toyota unveil new iconic Camry

## New Camry brings elevated style and sophistication to sedan segment

KUWAIT: Further strengthening the appeal of one of the Middle East's best-loved vehicles, Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Sons and Toyota have launched the latest version of its iconic Camry model in the region. Featuring an imposing yet elegant silhouette and spacious, high-quality interior, the new Camry combines engaging performance with thoughtful technology to help drivers and passengers get the most out of every journey.

exceptional quality, durability, and reliability. I would like to thank all of our customers for their cherished support, which continues to inspire us on our path to developing ever-better cars."

### Comfortable ride

The new Camry provides a comfortable and stable ride with superior handling characteristics thanks to the Toyota New Global Architecture (TNGA), the compa-

styling, and impeccable craftsmanship. The dash design has a sporty, cockpit-like feel, while treating both the driver and the front passenger to wider visibility. The exciting interior's distinctive design offers comfort and convenience with a layer of luxury and hosts a range of advanced features. These include a panoramic moonroof, a floating 7-inch or 9-inch multimedia touch screen that comes integrated with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, a wireless charging system for smartphones, dual-zone automatic air conditioning, a six-speaker sound system, multi-adjustable power front seats, and 60/40 split and reclining rear seats.

The new Camry is available with a choice of three powertrain options, including a 2.5-liter four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine that produces 204 hp and 243 nm of torque and is paired with an eight-speed Direct-Shift automatic transmission; a 3.5-liter V6 engine with D-4S fuel injection system that produces 298 hp and 356 nm of torque and is mated to an eight-speed automatic transmission; and an electrified hybrid system, which combines a petrol engine and two electric motors that produce 176 hp and 118 hp, and 221 nm and 202 nm of torque respectively. The combined power of the two power sources is 215 hp. It is also paired with an Electronically Controlled Continuously Variable Transmission (ECVT) that simulates a six-speed sequential shift transmission, delivering heightened driving pleasure.

The class-leading hybrid-electric vehicle (HEV) model can be driven entirely by electrical power with zero-fuel consumption and carbon emissions, or with a combination of the petrol engine and two electric motors depending on the vehicle speed and customer's driving behavior. The batteries in the hybrid electric drivetrain are automatically charged by either the petrol engine or when braking and decelerating, eliminating the need to plug in a power cord. The new Camry HEV does not require special fuel, yet drives like any conventional vehicle. Visits to petrol stations will also be significantly reduced thanks to its top-class fuel efficiency.

As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the new Camry. The vehicle's advanced safe-

ty system is complemented by Toyota Safety Sense, an advanced safety technology package that includes Pre-Collision System (PCS), Dynamic Radar Cruise Control (DRCC), Lane Departure Alert (LDA), Lane Tracing Assist (LTA), and Automatic High Beam (AHB). In addition, the vehicle features a comprehensive array of safety features to protect its occupants such as six SRS



airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Traction Control (TRC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Electronic Brake Force Distribution (EBD), Brake Assist (BA), and a rear-view camera, among many others.

The new Toyota Camry allows customers to express their individuality through a choice of eleven distinctive exterior colors. The sporty grade with a V6 engine is also available in two-tone color schemes that accentuate the Camry's sculpted shape, setting it apart from the competition. The interior comes in a range of four complementary color schemes including Gray, Black, and Beige, while customers of the V6 sporty grade can also opt for the exclusive Red color. In addition, the new Camry can be fitted with 17-inch or 18-inch alloy wheels that feature two intricate designs, with a special bright machined and black finish available exclusively for the sporty grade.

Since its debut in 1982 and evolution over eight generations, the Toyota Camry has been embraced around the world for its outstanding performance, alluring coupe-inspired design and renowned quality and value. As one of the Middle East's most popular vehicles, it has established an unshakeable presence in the mid-size sedan market and a special place in the hearts of drivers in the region. The new model introduces a level of refinement that exceeds expectations, further cementing the Camry's reputation as a class-leading vehicle that offers an unparalleled driving experience.

"We are excited to bring drivers in the Middle East a refreshed version of the Toyota Camry, a vehicle they already know and love," said Kei Fujita, Chief Representative, Middle East and Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation. "From the sleek new design and premium interior to its impressive performance and fuel efficiency, the new Camry adds excitement to every trip while maintaining its

ny's groundbreaking strategy in terms of how it designs, engineers, and packages its vehicles. TNGA retains all of Toyota's traditional values of superlative build quality and safety while injecting a fun driving experience.

The latest evolution of the Camry's styling gives the vehicle a bold look that engages the senses more strongly than ever. A new front fascia incorporates a more defined lower-intake area, with grille bars extending dynamically to the sides creating a refined look that is enhanced by chrome-plated ornamentation for a premium feel. The sportier grades wear a noticeably different body style than the premium grades, with a bold redesigned lower fascia shape featuring a powerfully expressive gloss black mesh grille and larger side vents. This athletic look is further emphasized with new 18-inch bright machined-finish alloy wheels. A subtle rear spoiler lip is paired with a unique rear bumper with distinctive corner lines, as well as new-look combination lamps.

The new Camry's interior melds functionality, elegant



## KIB ramps up its support for impactful awareness campaigns

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) once again reaffirmed its ongoing support and participation in the financial awareness campaign, Diraya, which is being run by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) in collaboration with Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) and local banks throughout 2021. The Bank's participation in the campaign comes as part of its ongoing efforts to actively engage with the public on matters of financial literacy, as KIB continuously strives to educate and raise awareness about key financial topics, solutions and services.

It serves to note that this campaign seeks to shed light on a number of important topics in the realm of financial literacy and education, mainly via the social media channels of CBK, KBA and the participating banks - as well as all designated digital platforms for the campaign. These topics include: defining the role of banks as a financial intermediary; the importance of saving, investment and the products provided by banks in this field; awareness of customer rights when obtaining personal finance - whether consumer or housing finance; services for people with disabilities; as well as the mechanisms for complaints; in addition to understanding the various card options being provided by banks; as well as the most important steps to be followed to avoid exposure to frauds, awareness of the dangers of "leveraging loans", high-risk investments and much more.

On his part, Nawaf Najia, Executive Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, said: "We at KIB are always keen on participating in campaigns and community initiatives that help us engage directly with our customers and the general public, in order to drive forward our social respon-



Nawaf Najia

sibility message of promoting positive change in society through financial literacy. Our support for such initiatives stems from our strong belief in the importance of raising awareness amongst the public of key financial services and solutions that can cater to their financial needs, as well as our keen interest in educating people about protecting their financial interests and knowing their financial rights."

Najia further noted that, through its participation in this campaign, KIB is focusing on providing tips and advice to clients through its various media outlets and social media platforms. Among the topics the Bank has spoken about recently is how customers can protect their banking data from cyber-crime, fraud and electronic fraud. Moreover, KIB has focused on introducing customers to the various products and solution is has to offer, such as credit cards that meet their financial needs in a practical and safe way without the need to carry large amounts of cash, as well as sharia-complaint financing solutions, which help them achieve their goals and facilitate their purchasing needs with the added benefit of flexible monthly payments.

Concluding his statement, Najia lauded the positive impact of the Diraya campaign so far, given that it is a national-scale financial awareness and financial literacy initiatives that seeks to educate as many people in society as possible. He also praised the active participation of all local banks, which underscores how the banking sector as a whole is invested in safeguarding the best interest of its customers, by protecting their financial rights and educating them about financial matters. According to Najia, this will serve to boost consumer trust in financial institutions and promote financial stability nation-wide.

## ABK highlights services for special needs customers

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK), as part of the 'Let's Be Aware' program launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association, highlighted the importance of ensuring Special Needs Customers are aware of the services available to them.

A number of instructions have been issued by the Central Bank of Kuwait, specifying that there must be a dedicated branch in each governorate of Kuwait with customized facilities for special needs customers. The branch should have at least one wheelchair accessible ATM and an easily accessible private glass chamber equipped with headphones. Every branch should have reserved parking spaces, wheelchair access into the branch, and where necessary, elevators to facilitate easy entry and exit, in addition to a number of wheelchairs in each branch.

Every customer must be able to access all the information they need, and for this reason, each branch must therefore have an employee proficient in sign language and the ability to print documents in Braille. Bank websites must also feature voice guidance services.

## Burgan Bank offers 'Mega Hit' on Huawei FreeBuds 3

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank's prepaid and credit cardholders can now benefit from the exclusive monthly 'Mega Hit Offer' through its partnership with 'Best Al-Yousifi', the leading electronics store in Kuwait. The bank's valued customers will be given the chance to purchase "Huawei



Ali Bo Hamad

Ali Bo Hamad, Manager of the Complaints and Customer Protection Unit at ABK, reaffirmed the Bank's commitment: "The 'Let's Be Aware' is a timely and important initiative that is raising awareness of banking services as well as the obligations of both customers and financial institutions on all fronts. The latest campaign to ensure the rights and equal access to services for special needs customers is of the utmost importance. We have seen many changes in the banking industry over the last 18 months, with a large uptake of digital services, and it is absolutely vital that all services remain equally accessible to everyone. We have also incorporated sign language into our social media videos for this campaign, to ensure all our clients have full knowledge of all our products and services as well as ensuring they know their rights."

Since the onset of the global crisis, the Central Bank of Kuwait, with the support of the Kuwait Banking Association, has helped mitigate the economic impact on the nation, and this latest initiative adds to the Central Bank's track record of ensuring financial and economic stability in Kuwait.

FreeBuds 3" for a special discounted price on Tuesday, 25th of May, 2021. The offer provides limited quantities of the highly demanded wireless earphone and is valid for 24 hours only. Customers can benefit from the 'Mega Hit Offer' while making other purchases only through the "Best Al-Yousifi" website or mobile application.

As the only bank in Kuwait to provide this special offer, the selected product's price can also be viewed on Burgan Bank's social media platforms on the same day of the offer. To learn more about Burgan Bank's latest offers or any of its products and services, customers can visit any of the bank's branches or Burgan Banks Instagram page on @BurganBankKuwait, contact the call center or via WhatsApp at 1804080.



## Lifestyle | Features

## C. Tangana: From rap to flamenco, with a Latin twist

Spanish rapper C. Tangana was taking a big risk when he started mixing old-fashioned influences like flamenco and bossa nova into his hip-hop but it's this eclectic sound that has turned him into a phenomenon on both sides of the Atlantic. The 30-year-old has emerged as one of the world's biggest Spanish-language stars since his third album "El Madrilenio"-the Madrilénian-came out in February. That ranks him alongside his superstar ex-girlfriend Rosalia, the Grammy-winning Catalan singer with whom he has co-written several hits.

C. Tangana, whose real name is Anton Alvarez Alfaro, has come a long way since a decade ago when he became known as a voice of disillusioned Spanish youth in the wake of the financial crisis. These days his rap is infused with everything from reggaeton and rumba to deeply traditional styles from Spain and Latin America, with a voice often digitized by autotune. "It's incredible that just when



**C. Tangana's rap is infused with everything from reggaeton and rumba to deeply traditional styles from Spain and Latin America.—AFP**

my music is at its most popular is exactly when I'm doing something a bit more complex, more experimental and less trendy," he told AFP in an interview. And he is unashamed to be appealing to a wider audience than previously: his dream is now to make music "that a

young person can enjoy in a club or someone older can enjoy at home while cooking".

#### 'People are tired'

The rapper, who sports a severe semi-shaved haircut and a pencil moustache, has worked with Spanish flamenco greats including Nino De Elche, Antonio Carmona, Kiko Veneno, La Hungara and the Gipsy Kings. In April he brought some of them together for a performance on NPR's popular "Tiny Desk Concert" series, which has already drawn nearly six million views on YouTube. Shifting away from trap, one of rap's most popular sub-genres, and venturing into a more traditional repertoire was a dangerous move-especially for someone with a young fanbase to whom rumba, bossa nova and bolero sound old-fashioned.

"I think people are tired. They've had enough of the predominant aesthetic values that have previously defined pop and urban music," he said. Parts of his latest

album were recorded in Latin America with Cuban guitarist Eliades Ochoa of Buena Vista Social Club, Uruguayan singer-songwriter Jorge Drexler, Mexican folk artist Ed Maverick and Brazil's Toquinho, one of the bossa nova greats. "What struck me most everywhere I went was the sense of tradition and the way people experienced the most popular music, and I don't mean pop," he said.

#### A new direction

C. Tangana started out in 2006 rapping under the name Crema. When the global economic crisis swept Spain a few years later, hard-hitting trap was the perfect way to voice the angst of his generation. But after more than a decade of rapping, things changed. "When I was heading for my 30s, I hit this crisis, I was a bit fed up with what I was doing... and decided to give voice to all these influences that I never dared express as a rapper," he said.

The shift began in 2018 with "Un

veneno" ("A poison") which came out a year after his big hit "Mala mujer" ("Bad woman"). And there was a return to the sounds of his childhood when he used to listen to Spanish folk songs at home, raised by a mother who worked in education and a journalist father who liked to play the guitar. The Latin American influences came later.

"It started when I was a teenager with reggaeton and with bachata which were played in the first clubs I went to, which were mostly Latin," he said. Studying philosophy at the time, he wrote his first raps between stints working in call centers or fast-food restaurants. As to what comes next, he doesn't know. But one thing he hopes to do is collaborate with Natalia Lafourcade, a Mexican singer who dabbles in folk, rock and pop-another jack of all musical trades.—AFP

## SECOND-PLACE FRANCE SEEKS 'TRANSPARENCY' ON EUROVISION DRUGS FLAP

France's Europe minister yesterday called for "total transparency" over speculation that one of Italy's victorious Eurovision contestants used cocaine during the song contest, saying it should be grounds for disqualification if confirmed. Damiano David, the outlandish vocalist for Italian rockers Maneskin, has agreed to take a drug test after video footage appeared to show him snorting

something from a table backstage during Saturday's contest.

"I think there needs to be no doubt here, and total transparency," Europe Minister Clement Beaune, who attended the show in Rotterdam, told RMC radio. "If there is a problem, there are penalties... Provisions are made for sanctioning measures, including potential disqualification in case of problems," he said.

French hopes had been riding high on singer Barbara Pravi, who was a book-makers' favorite to end France's 44-year Eurovision drought with her moody ballad "Voilà." But she was edged out at the last minute by a surge in public votes for Maneskin, with a final tally of 524 to Pravi's 499.

"I don't want to be a sore loser," Beaune said, but "in terms of image, we can't let people think that such competitions can result in such behavior." The president of France's public broadcasting group, however, said yesterday that France would not contest its second-place finish, no matter the speculation over David's backstage antics. "France has absolutely no intention to lodge an appeal," France Televisions chief Delphine Ernotte told the Parisien newspaper. "The vote was quite clearly in Italy's favour-it didn't steal its victory and that's what matters," she said. Pravi herself said she was not interested in the speculation. "What's true is that they were chosen by both the public and the jury. Afterwards, if they use drugs or they put their underwear on backwards or whatever... it's not my problem," she told France 2 television on Sunday. — AFP

**Italy's Maneskin pose for pictures on stage with the trophy after winning the final of the 65th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest 2021, at the Ahoy convention center in Rotterdam. — AFP**



## 'Charlie Bit My Finger' video fetches \$760,000 at NFT auction

Another classic piece of internet culture has been auctioned off for a six-figure sum, the latest viral sensation from the 2000s to be eagerly snapped up by digital collectors of "non fungible tokens" or NFTs. The home video "Charlie Bit My Finger" sold for almost \$761,000 on Sunday, the 14th anniversary of its debut. In the 55-second YouTube clip from 2007, a British toddler named Harry holds his baby brother Charlie. But the adorable domestic scene takes a sudden turn when Harry puts his pointer finger into his brother's mouth, and to his surprise, Charlie clamps down, spawning the much-memed lines: "ouch, Charlie" and "Charlie, that really hurt".

With more than 883 million views, it's one of YouTube's most popular videos, though it will soon be removed from the platform. The Davies-Carr family announced they would delete it following Sunday's auction, saying the highest bidder would become "the sole owner of this

lovable piece of internet history", though of course it has been copied, shared and reposted numerous times across the web. The auction drew offers from 11 accounts and sparked a bidding war between users "mememaster" and "3fmsic", the latter of which eventually won with a \$760,999 offer.

NFT collectibles, essentially digital assets with a certificate of authenticity created by the blockchain, have exploded in popularity over the past year. While the idea of buying something endlessly reproducible may bewilder some, a manic appetite for NFTs has taken hold in markets all over the world as buyers vie for bragging rights to a certified original. Early internet memorabilia, including memes, GIFs, photos and videos, have done particularly well. In March, Twitter boss Jack Dorsey sold his first tweet, from 2006, which reads "just setting up my twtr," for \$2.9 million to a Malaysia-based businessman.

An anonymous buyer snagged Nyan Cat, a 10-year-old animation of a flying, rainbow cat with a popart body, for \$590,000 the month before. And "Disaster Girl", a 16-year-old photo of a slyly smiling toddler with a house on fire in the background, was bought by a Dubai-based music studio for 180 Ethereum last month, the equivalent of almost \$500,000 at the time. — AFP



**'Charlie Bit My Finger' got more than 883 million views.**

## Brazilian architect da Rocha, who won the Pritzker, dies aged 92

Paulo Mendes da Rocha, who was widely considered Brazil's greatest living architect and who won some of architecture's most prestigious awards, died Sunday in Sao Paulo, his family announced. He was 92. No cause of death was given. Da Rocha was "one of the biggest names in Brazilian and worldwide architecture," though most of his work was done in Sao Paulo, said the ArchDaily website. Brazil's Council of Architecture and Urbanism said he would be remembered as an "audacious iconoclast."



**Brazilian architect da Rocha**

A leader of Brazil's brutalist and modernist Paulista school, which emphasized geometric lines, bulky masses and rough finishes, da Rocha won the 2006 Pritzker Prize, considered architecture's closest equivalent to the Nobel Prize. He was only the second Brazilian to win the Pritzker, after legendary architect Oscar Niemeyer, the man behind the futuristic design of Brasilia. Niemeyer won in 1988. Da Rocha, who taught architecture at the University of Sao Paulo, was banned from teaching for much of the 1970s by the military government, which opposed his "opinions on the social role that architects should have," according to ArchDaily. —AFP

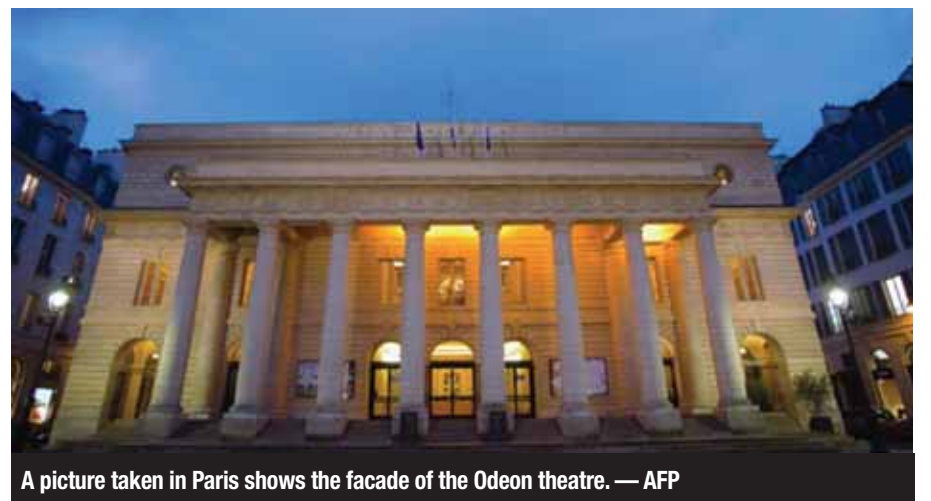


**In this file photo a California black bear sits in an oak tree behind a home in San Anselmo, California. — AFP**

## Bear cub causes trouble in Montreal

A black bear cub caused havoc for several hours Sunday in a Montreal neighborhood, requiring three doses of tranquilizer before authorities could finally capture it. Alerted to the cub's presence in the early afternoon, police cordoned off several streets in Dorval, a municipality to the west of Montreal's airport, according to police spokesperson Raphael Bergeron. Residents were asked to stay indoors while dozens of police officers, firefighters, wildlife ministry agents and volunteers from Sauvetage Animal Rescue searched for the bear.

The cub, only several months old, was initially trapped in a residential yard before climbing a tree, according to Bergeron. Game wardens used rifles to administer "three doses of sedative, but the bear remained alert and climbed down the tree before fleeing into another yard," Animal Rescue said in a Facebook post. The cub finally climbed another tree, where it dozed off. Firefighters put airbags on the ground in case it fell. The bear was captured several hours later. "We managed to catch him with a pole and lower him to the bottom of the tree, where he could be secured," Animal Rescue said. The cub will be released "in an environment that will be more suitable for him." According to Bergeron, the presence of a bear so close to Montreal, especially in an urban area near an airport, is "very rare." — AFP



**A picture taken in Paris shows the facade of the Odeon theatre. — AFP**

## Top Paris theatre reopens as COVID occupy movement ends

French actors, stage technicians and other members of the performing arts ended a more-than-two-month occupation of the famous Odeon theatre in Paris yesterday, allowing the show to go on after this week's easing of COVID-19 curbs. The protesters took down the banners they had slung across the facade of the venue in the Left Bank as they left at dawn, leaving just one inscribed "See you soon". "We're reopening!", theatre director Stephane Braunschweig exclaimed on the venue's website, adding that it was "a relief and a great joy to be able to finally celebrate the reunion of the artists with the public."

The Odeon, one of France's six national theatres, was one of around 100 venues that were occupied in recent weeks by people working in arts and entertainment. The protesters are demanding that the government extend a special COVID relief program for "intermittents"-performers, musicians, technicians and other people who live from contract to contract in arts and entertainment. With theatres shut since October due to the pandemic, the occupations

had gone largely unnoticed by the general public until this week when cultural venues were finally cleared to reopen.

The Odeon, which was inaugurated by Marie-Antoinette in 1782, had planned to mark the reopening in style, by staging Tennessee Williams' masterpiece "The Glass Menagerie", with cinema star Isabelle Huppert as a former southern belle mourning the comforts of her youth. But the protests scuppered the first five performances, with management saying the venue was blocked-a claim the protesters denied. "What we wanted was for it (the performance) to go ahead, along with an occupation allowing us to speak out and hang our banners. We don't want to stop the show," Denis Gravoil, head of the performing arts chapter of the militant CGT union, said yesterday.

Two other major theatres-the Colline theatre in eastern Paris and the National Theatre of Strasbourg-have also been affected by the protests. France has one of the world's most generous support systems for self-employed people in the arts and media, providing unemployment benefit to those who can prove they have worked at least 507 hours over the past 12 months. But with venues closed for nearly seven months, and strict capacity limits imposed on those that reopened this week, the "intermittents" complained they could not make up their hours. The government had already extended a year-long deadline for them to return to work by four months. The "intermittents" are pushing for a year-long extension instead. — AFP





Samir Mansour, Palestinian owner of the eponymous bookstore and publishing house which had the largest collection of English literature in Gaza, poses on the rubble of the bookshop after it was destroyed by Zionist state air strikes, in Gaza City.



A horse cart is parked as Palestinians stand by the rubble of the Samir Mansour bookstore, a publishing house and bookshop which had the largest collection of English literature in Gaza.

# Gaza bookshop owner's dreams buried under the rubble

For decades, it was the place to go for books in the blockaded Gaza Strip, from school texts to the Quran to Arabic translations of European literary classics. But last Tuesday, owner Samir Al-Mansour watched in disbelief as the bookshop and publishing house he had poured his life into went up in smoke. "Forty years of my life were obliterated in less than a second," said the man in his 50s, a cigarette between his fingers, staring at a mound of concrete, paper and squashed plastic chairs. "There are 100,000 books under this rubble," he said.

At around 5:00 am on Tuesday, Mansour was at home watching television when the channel reported the Zionist air force was about to hit the building housing his bookshop. Mansour rushed over, but came to a dead stop some 200 meters (220 yards) away from the building, just in time to see a missile obliterate his life's work. The latest deadly clashes lasted 11 days and saw Zionist launch air strikes in response to a rocket barrage by Hamas, which rules Gaza, and other Islamist groups. "I have nothing to do with an armed group, a political faction," Mansour told AFP. "It's an attack on culture."

**'Never happened before'**

Mansour started working in his father's bookshop in the 1980s, when he was just 14 years old, then took over in 2000 and soon branched out into publishing. As rescue workers continue to look for bodies and survivors in the rubble after the

military conflict, Mansour was mourning all that he has lost. Buried in the rubble were copies of Islamic religious texts, children's picture books and a copy of Fyodor Dostoevsky's "The Brothers



Books are scattered amid the rubble of the Samir Mansour bookstore, a publishing house and bookshop which had the largest collection of English literature in Gaza, after it was destroyed by the Zionist state air strikes, in Gaza City.—AFP photos

Karamazov". Zionist strikes on Gaza since May 10 have killed 248 Palestinians, including 66 children, and have wounded over 1,900 people, the Gaza health ministry says.

Rockets and other fire from Gaza have claimed 12 lives in Zionist state, including one child and an Arab teenager, a Zionist soldier, one Indian, and two Thai nationals, medics say. Some 357 people in Zionist state have been wounded. There

is controversy about how many of those killed in Gaza were combatants, and how many were civilians. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Zionist's state bombing campaign had killed "more than

200 terrorists" in Gaza. Mansour said he had lived through two Palestinian uprisings and three Gaza wars. "But this had never happened, my bookshop was never destroyed," he said.

His son-in-law Montasser Saleh had arrived in Gaza from Norway to visit the family just before the conflict started, and was with him when his life was turned upside down. "We were at home, watching television," Saleh said.

**'More than a bookshop'**

He recounted how on the TV channel Al Jazeera "they said there had been a warning shot on the building containing the bookshop". He too said they immediately rushed over to the building. "Samir wanted to go and grab some papers, his computer, but he was too scared to go in and be hit by a missile, so we stayed outside," he said. Mosaab Abu Toha, a poet and the founder of the Edward Said library started after the Gaza war in 2014, said the Gaza Strip had lost "one of its main cultural resources".

"Mansour was more than a bookshop," he said. "It was a publishing house publishing Gaza writers. "The books were printed in Egypt-some to come back to Gaza, but others to stay there and be circulated around the Arab world. "It was a way to lift the siege on Gaza through literature," he said of the blockade on the Palestinian territory in place since 2007. For Gaza readers, the publishing house had printed around 1,000 copies of the works of local authors such as Ghareeb Askalani or Yusri Al-Ghoul. Mansour is not the only book or stationery shop destroyed in the latest Zionist bombing campaign. Nearby Iqraa was also leveled, and the Al-Nahda stationery and bookshop was reduced to a pile of pulverized cinderblocks. In front of what remains of Al-Nahda, a poster assured loyal customers it would re-open soon. "Ideas do not die," it read. — AFP

## Japan premium melons go for \$24,800 after virus slump

In what might be the unlikeliest indicator of a post-pandemic recovery, a pair of premium Japanese melons have sold for \$24,800 at auction, over 22 times more than last year's virus-hit price. The 2.7 million yen price tag at the season's first auction for the famed Yubari melons is still a snip compared to records for the prized produce. "This year's recovery in price can be seen as a result of buyers looking to encourage people by putting in higher bids," a wholesale market official told AFP.

The successful bidder was a local manufacturer of baby food, whose president said he hoped the purchase would spread a bit of a good cheer. "Although there's still plenty of negative news, I hope this can help people smile and overcome the coronavirus pandemic," he told national broadcaster NHK. Seasonal fruit offerings in Japan routinely attract massive sums from buyers seeking prestige and plenty of free publicity.

In 2019, a pair of Yubari melons went for a record five million yen but the price plunged to just 120,000 yen last year, with growers blaming the virus for keeping away rich bidders eager to outdo each other. The melons come from Hokkaido, the country's northernmost main island and a popular tourist destination. The region is currently under a virus state of emergency along with nine other areas including the capital Tokyo. — AFP



A man shows a pair of Yubari Melons which was sold for 2.7 million yen (about \$25,000) during the season's first auction at Sapporo Central Wholesale Market in Sapporo City, Hokkaido Prefecture. — AFP

# Afghan war displaced settle in the ruins of a lost city

Once the winter residence of sultans from illustrious Islamic dynasties, the ruins of a thousand-year-old royal city in southern Afghanistan have become home to hundreds of people who have fled Taliban clashes. The astonishing ochre clay complex juts from the cliffs along the Helmand River, threatened by decay and encroaching urban sprawl as



In this photograph men walk along a pathway near an old palace where internally displaced families live, at the Qal-e-Kohna.

well as the makeshift constructions that have grown within it. Thousands of people have been displaced across Helmand since October following a surge in Taliban attacks, and while many have resettled in the capital Lashkar Gah-one of the few areas in the province still under government control-some have joined other refugees in the ruins.

Qala-e-Kohna, as it is known locally, or Lashkari Bazar to archaeologists, has garnered international attention for its scale, remarkable architecture and murals. Spread over 10 kilometers (eight miles), the site is the only known winter residence of the Ghaznavid and Ghurid sultans-two dynasties that ruled a region covering present-day Afghanistan

between the 10th and 13th centuries and responsible for spreading Islamic art as far as north India. "There is no place in the Islamic world where we have something like it-a site as coherent, elaborate, and despite everything still relatively well preserved," said Philippe Marquis, the director of the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan (DAFA). "It is

important to preserve it because we are sure that it will teach us a lot about this period," he told AFP.

**'A place for ghosts'**

Among the ancient towers, doors and windows have been added and crumbling walls coated with a clay and straw mixture to strengthen them and plug gaps. A blue wrought-iron door leads into Agha Mohammad's cramped two-room quarters that house 11 people, a makeshift cradle for his infant son hanging from a bamboo roof. "I want the government to give me a place to live. Look at the cracks in the roof. I'm afraid one night it will fall," said Mohammad, a 33-year-old policeman whose district fell to a resurgent Taliban.

Southern Afghanistan has seen renewed fighting as talks between the Afghan government and Taliban leaders have stalled and the United States prepares to withdraw the last of its troops from the country by September. "I should have the support of the government, because I lost three sons serving it," 48-year-old mother Bibi Halima told AFP from within the palace walls. "Every house is full of widows," added a neighbor.

Many of the residents are from police families who cannot afford to live elsewhere and have no access to electricity or running water. An official from the country's archaeology department in Kabul said there have been reports of land-grabbing at the site, with some families forced to pay rent to local mafias. For residents, life within the ornate arches



In this photograph the ruins of a palace is pictured near the historic fortress of Qala-e-Bost.

and adobe walls of the former royal city is a constant reminder of how the country has yet to emerge from a cycle of battles against invasion and civil war. "It is a place for ghosts, not humans," said Khudai Nazar, 54.

**Preserving the site**

First explored by DAFA in the 1950s, the site has seen no conservation work since then. At that time, archaeologists identified the palaces, mosque and other annexe buildings, such as the pottery and craft workshops, as well as ice boxes used for the preservation of fresh food. One of the most striking excavations was a series of paintings depicting court scenes, extremely rare for an era in which the realistic representation of living beings was already frowned upon in Islamic societies.

Moved to the Kabul museum, the paintings were destroyed or stolen during the Afghan civil war in the 1990s and only photographs remain. DAFA director

Marquis is now concerned about the impact looters and displaced families will have at the site-as well as the effects of global warming, which could cause the river to flood. On the flip side, reinforcements made from clay and straw that have been added to the partly collapsed towers may have also resulted in their temporary preservation. "The paradox is that in their own way people are protecting the place, because it is their home," Marquis said.

He proposes building an "archaeological park" that involves displaced people in the conservation process so they can earn a living and settle outside the palace walls. But for author Shah Mahmud Haseat, who has written a book about the citadel, the future of the largely unexplored ruins remains bleak. "I tried to convince the government to protect the site, but they did nothing. We are really afraid that our history will be destroyed."— AFP



In this photograph men walk along a pathway near an old palace where internally displaced families live, at the Qal-e-Kohna, a historic site in Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand Province. — AFP photos



In this photograph an arch of the historic fortress of Qala-e-Bost is seen in Bost on the outskirts of Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province.



In this photograph internally-displaced Afghan children walk among ruins of a palace where they live with their families.



In this photograph an internally-displaced Afghan man with his child stands inside the ruins of a palace where they live along with other families.



## Sports

# Who will challenge for Man City's Premier League crown next season?

**LONDON:** Manchester City cruised to their third Premier League title in four seasons, but Pep Guardiola's side are likely to face a tough defense of the crown next season. Liverpool and Manchester United look capable of pushing the champions, while Chelsea should be in the mix after Thomas Tuchel's impressive impact on the Champions League finalists. AFP Sport looks at how the four leading title contenders will shape up:

## Manchester City

After the midway point of the season, City were virtually untouchable as they surged clear with a record 21-game winning streak in all competitions by an English top-flight side. Revitalised by the addition of Portugese international center-back Ruben Dias and the emergence of England playmaker Phil Foden, City silenced the critics who questioned Pep Guardiola after the Spaniard suffered the worst start to a season in his managerial career.

Regaining the title from Liverpool, while also winning the League Cup and reaching their first Champions League final, suggests City are in position for a period of sustained dominance. They have few weaknesses but the close-season departure of Sergio Agüero, the club's record goalscorer, leaves a void that needs filling.

England striker Harry Kane could be top of Guardiola's shopping list after confirming he wants to leave Tottenham, but his mooted £150 million (\$213 million) price tag may convince him to look at the younger and cheaper Borussia Dortmund goal machine Erling Haaland.

## Manchester United

United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjær survived some rocky spells to establish his side as genuine title contenders heading into next season. Solskjær led United to a second place finish — 12 points behind City — and the Norwegian has a

chance to win the first trophy of his reign in the Europa League final against Villarreal on Wednesday.

Portugal star Bruno Fernandes has been the catalyst, providing on-field inspiration and dressing room leadership in equal measure, a stark contrast to the gifted but temperamental Paul Pogba. Marcus Rashford and Mason Greenwood were potent in patches and keeping Edinson Cavani was a wise move, but Kane has also been linked with a move to Old Trafford with Solskjær needing a world-class striker in his prime to really worry City.

Jadon Sancho and Jack Grealish are also reportedly targets to add extra creativity and goals from the wide areas. But bigger questions remain in defence with Harry Maguire and Victor Lindelöf not always convincing at centre-back, while Dean Henderson and David De Gea battle to be number one goalkeeper.

## Liverpool

Hamstrung by a seemingly endless injury list that deprived them of key leaders Virgil van Dijk and Jordan Henderson for most of the season, Liverpool finished outside the top two for the first time in three years. Jürgen Klopp's often tetchy demeanour reflected the stress of an arduous campaign as Liverpool failed to build on last season's first English title in 30 years.

But a strong run of eight wins in their last 10 league games earned a third-place finish, providing optimism for next term. Sadio Mané, Roberto Firmino and Trent Alexander-Arnold must improve on patchy individual campaigns, with Mohamed Salah's future also up for debate after his flirtation with Real Madrid.

While Liverpool have work to do if they are to regain their position as the Premier League's pre-eminent force, the return of Van Dijk, Henderson and Joe Gomez next season will be a significant boost to their title hopes.



**MANCHESTER:** Manchester City's Brazilian midfielder Fernandinho (center) lifts the Premier League trophy during the award ceremony after the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Everton at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, on Sunday. —AFP

## Chelsea

When Frank Lampard was sacked in January, Chelsea were languishing in ninth place as a troubled season threatened to spiral out of control. However, the decision to hire Thomas Tuchel as Lampard's replacement proved inspired and the German has fourth-placed Chelsea nicely positioned to push on next season.

Aided by Mason Mount's superb form, Tuchel has taken Chelsea to the Champions League final for the first time since 2012, with

Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid unable to solve the tactical tweaks that made the Blues solid in defense and deadly on the counter-attack.

Having healed the fractures in a squad divided by Lampard's methods, Tuchel has already masterminded two victories over City and one against Liverpool. To truly turn Chelsea into a force, the former Paris Saint Germain boss must solve the problems posed by the erratic form of expensive signings Timo Werner, Kai Havertz and Hakim Ziyech. —AFP

## News in brief

### Aguero close to Barca

**LONDON:** Sergio Agüero is close to agreeing a move to Barcelona that would unite him with fellow Argentine superstar Lionel Messi, according to Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola. City's record goalscorer, who has spent a decade at the Etihad, scored a quickfire double in the champions' 5-0 win over Everton in his final Premier League appearance for the club on Sunday. The goals took his Premier League tally to 184 — the most by any player for a single club. If the move goes ahead it would be Agüero's second spell in Spain — he made his name at Atletico Madrid before the move to Manchester in 2011. —AFP

### Ronaldo top scorer

**MILAN:** Cristiano Ronaldo made more history on Sunday becoming the first player to finish the season as top scorer in three major leagues — England, Spain, and Italy. The 36-year-old scored 29 goals this campaign, five more than second-placed Belgian Romelu Lukaku for champions Inter Milan. The Portuguese striker was top scorer in England with Manchester United in 2008, and three times in Spain with Real Madrid, 2011, 2014 and 2015. But it is the first time in three seasons the former five-time Ballon d'Or winner has scored the most goals. There has been speculation about Ronaldo's future with the club if they failed to reach the Champions League for the first time since 2012, after their nine-year league reign ended this campaign. —AFP

### Gattuso exits Napoli

**MILAN:** Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis on Sunday confirmed that coach Gennaro Gattuso will leave the club after failing to qualify for the Champions League. The southerners finished fifth, one point behind fourth-placed Juventus, after a 1-1 draw at home against Hellas Verona. A win would have guaranteed a top four finish, but Napoli miss out on a second season of Champions League football. "Dear Rino, I am happy to have spent almost two seasons with you," De Laurentiis wrote on Twitter. The relationship between the pair had been tense with the club having imposed a media boycott for months. —AFP

### Super Cup returns to Saudi

**ROME:** The Italian Super Cup will return to Saudi Arabia next season when champions Inter Milan face cup winners Juventus, the Italian League announced yesterday. "The next Super Cup will be held in Saudi Arabia, with fans, as stipulated in our contract," league president Paolo Dal Pino told Italian radio. The 2017-18 Super Cup was played in Jeddah in January 2019 and the following season was held in Riyadh in December 2019, before being staged in Reggio Emilia this season. No date has yet been set, but the Super Cup could take place in January 2022, according to Italian media reports. —AFP

### Sevilla end season on a high

**MADRID:** Sevilla finished with a 1-0 win over Alaves on Sunday as Papu Gomez scored a 92nd-minute winner in the final match of the La Liga season. Julen Lopetegui's side ended the season just two points behind Barcelona in third, after briefly joining the title race a few weeks ago. Champions League qualification had long-been secured, with Real Sociedad 15 points behind Sevilla in fifth. Alaves might have snatched a surprise win at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan had Manu Garcia's finish from Luis Rioja's cross not struck the post in the second half. But it has been a good season for Alaves too after they finished 16th, four points clear of the bottom three. —AFP

## Juventus, Milan qualify for CL, Napoli miss out

**MILAN:** Juventus qualified for the Champions League on the final day of the season on Sunday with a 4-1 win at Bologna and were joined by AC Milan who beat Atalanta 2-0. Napoli had to settle for a Europa League spot, finishing fifth, one point behind Juventus, after a 1-1 draw at home against Hellas Verona. A pair of Franck Kessie penalties at the end of either half ensured AC Milan finished the season second — 12 points behind city rivals Inter Milan — and return to the Champions League for the first time since the 2013-2014 season.

"We deserved the Champions League as well as second place," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli whose side had missed the chance to seal their berth last weekend against Cagliari. "We went through the whole championship at the top, unfortunately we had thrown away the match point last Sunday. I'm really excited, happy, I have to thank the club because they made us work in a spectacular way." Atalanta had already ensured a third consecutive season of Champions League football but missed out on a first

second-place Serie A finish days after losing out in the Coppa Italia final to Juventus. Cristiano Ronaldo was left on the bench by Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo who opted for an attacking line-up of Paulo Dybala and Alvaro Morata flanked by Federico Chiesa and Dejan Kulusevski.

"It was a shared choice, Ronaldo was tired after the fatigue on Wednesday," said Pirlo. "He made himself available to the team but I chose to have another player named Morata play, who is not the latest arrival. I have a quality team, with many choices available." A Morata brace along with goals from Chiesa and Adrien Rabiot prevented Juventus missing out on the elite European competition for the first time since 2012.

In Naples, Amir Rrahmani scored for Napoli after an hour against his former club, which would have been enough to secure a berth at the top table but Davide Faraoni pulled one back for the visitors nine minutes. Gennaro Gattuso's side were denied a return to elite European action after also missing out last season.

In a tense game in Bergamo, Milan held on despite playing without injured star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic. Kessie proved solid in front of goal taking the first penalty three minutes before the break and the second deep into injury time. Lazio join Napoli in the Europa League despite a 2-0 loss at Sassuolo



**BOLOGNA:** (From left) Juventus' Spanish forward Alvaro Morata, Juventus' Argentine forward Paulo Dybala and Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo celebrate after Juventus secured its qualification for the Champions League at the end of the Italian Serie A football match Bologna vs Juventus Turin on Sunday at the Renato-Dall'Ara stadium in Bologna. —AFP

with Roma finishing seventh after coming from two goals down to hold Spezia 2-2.

In Bologna, Italy forward Chiesa, who scored the Coppa Italia winner midweek, finishing off a Kulusevski cross into the box from close range after six minutes for his 15th goal in all competitions this season.

Dybala set up Morata to nod in the second before the half-hour mark with Rabiot adding a third before the break

at the Stadio Dall'Ara. Morata got the second just after the interval latching onto a ball Juve goalkeeper Wojciech Szczęsny blasted up the pitch. The Spaniard controlled the ball and raced forward to finish off. Riccardo Orsolini pulled a goal back for Bologna past Juve's third-choice goalkeeper Carlo Pinsoglio who got his first outing this season coming on for Szczęsny for the final quarter of an hour. —AFP

## Lille win French Ligue 1 title for fourth time

**PARIS:** Lille won the Ligue 1 title on Sunday thanks to a 2-1 victory at Angers which ensured they were crowned French champions for the first time since 2011 on the final day of the season. An early Jonathan David strike and Burak Yilmaz's penalty in first-half stoppage time ensured that Christophe Galtier's Lille finished one point ahead of second-placed Paris Saint-Germain, who won 2-0 at Brest.

Angelo Fulgini pulled one back in added time at the end of the match, but the hosts couldn't stop Lille becoming champions for the fourth time in their history. The match was played behind closed doors due to COVID-19 restrictions but fans poured into the streets of Lille to celebrate at the final whistle.

Supporters lit flares and chanted

songs in the northern city's central Place Charles de Gaulle in jubilation at a historic triumph against far wealthier opposition. "This is exceptional. It's been a long day and a lot of pressure. To beat Paris Saint-Germain to the league title is something exceptional," a jubilant Galtier said to Canal+. "The players were amazing... the credit goes to the players, they are the heroes."

The title triumph came after another away success for Lille, who finish the season unbeaten on the road since November, and ends a three-year league winning streak for PSG. It was fitting that it was David and Yilmaz who scored the crucial goals at Angers, as both have been key to an improbable run to the title that has also held significant pressure from Monaco.

Canadian young gun David latched on to a superb Renato Sanches pass to coolly slot home his 13th of the league season with nine minutes on the clock, immediately calming any nerves after last week's disappointing draw with Saint-Etienne left them needing a win to



**ANGERS:** Lille's French head coach Christophe Galtier (center) celebrates with Lille's players after winning the French L1 football match between Angers SCO and Lille OSC at The Raymond-Kopa Stadium in Angers, north-western France on Sunday. —AFP

make sure of the title.

David was the man who won the penalty that secured the points and the championship just before the break, Paul

Bernardon bringing the 21-year-old down and allowing Yilmaz to score his 16th league goal of a remarkable season for the veteran Turkey striker. —AFP

## Spain leave Ramos out of youthful Euro 2020 squad

**MADRID:** Spain coach Luis Enrique yesterday left veteran defender Sergio Ramos out of his Euro 2020 squad but called up center-back Aymeric Laporte, who recently switched his football nationality. Ramos, the 35-year-old Real Madrid captain has struggled with injury

this season and has featured just five times since the start of the year. "It was a very difficult decision but he has not been able to play this season and has hardly trained since January," Luis Enrique told the press conference as he announced a 24-man squad.

"I called him yesterday (Sunday), it was hard, difficult. I feel bad, because he is very professional and he helps the national team a lot. And he can still help it in the future. But I have to look for the best for the squad," the coach said.

The absence of Ramos means there is not a single Madrid player in the Spain squad. "It pains me not to have been able to help my team more and not to play for

Spain but, in this case, the best thing to do is rest, fully recover and come back next year like we've always done. It hurts not to represent your country, but I have to be honest and sincere," he wrote on Twitter. "I hope we have a great Euros. I'll be another fan cheering on from home."

Spain have also qualified for the Olympics where they are scheduled to kick off the tournament against Egypt on July 22 in Sapporo their Olympic July 21, ten days after the Euros end. Ramos could be selected as one of three overage players. Luis Enrique refused to comment on the possibility because he does not select Olympic squad. —AFP



Sports

# Verstappen makes most of Leclerc's misery to take championship lead

**MONACO:** Max Verstappen capitalized on Ferrari pole-sitter Charles Leclerc's cruel last-minute withdrawal to win Sunday's Monaco Grand Prix and go top of the drivers' world championship for the first time. Carlos Sainz for Ferrari took second with Lando Norris of McLaren completing the podium.

Red Bull's Verstappen displaced Lewis Hamilton at the top of the 2021 standings after the Mercedes world champion finished in seventh. The Dutch driver pitched up in the Principality trailing Hamilton by 14 points, and leaves it four points ahead. "It's so special to win. The first time for me on the podium here. It was all about looking after the tyres. I was pretty much in control," said Verstappen after taking the chequered flag waved by tennis superstar Serena Williams.

Hamilton had a low key weekend, qualifying in seventh and finishing in seventh. His teammate Valtteri Bottas was in contention to pounce on any mistake by Verstappen. But then his race came to an embarrassing end when a routine pitstop took a disastrous turn as a wheel refused to come off.

The Finn's frustration will have been nothing to the heartache Leclerc suffered just before the start when he reported a gearbox problem on his Ferrari. For the locally-born Leclerc it was a cruel end to his dream of winning his home grand prix.



**MONACO:** Winner Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates after the Monaco Formula 1 Grand Prix at the Monaco street circuit in Monaco, on Sunday. — AFP

- this year, I don't start it. It's a difficult one to take and I also feel for the team."

His last minute absence was all the more unexpected as a couple of hours earlier Ferrari had announced repairs had been carried out without a grid penalty

after Leclerc's accident in qualifying 24 hours earlier.

For the 23-year-old it was just the latest misfortune at Monaco. Despite his familiarity with the narrow, unforgiving street circuit his record at his home race remains bleak. His ill luck at the Mediterranean jewel in

F1's crown had already resurfaced on Thursday after gearbox problems ruined his opening practice session.

From then on his fortunes flipped. He topped FP2, then qualified in pole for the first time since Mexico in 2019. But his crash, which ended qualifying prematurely left him anxiously waiting for the all-clear from the mechanics working on his damaged car.

That came on Sunday morning, only for heartache to follow as he made his way around the circuit to the start when he came on the team radio reporting he had a problem, saying "No, no, no - the gearbox guys".

Back in the pits Ferrari mechanics pounced on the car to see if anything could be done to even allow him to start from the pitlane. When it became obvious that wasn't possible, a dejected Leclerc emerged from his stricken car's cockpit to head for the grid and the pre-race ceremonies, receiving a consoling hug from Prince Albert II of Monaco.

Leclerc's absence will have come as a bitter disappointment to his supporters in the 7,500 crowd allowed to watch the race from the grandstands as coronavirus restrictions are gradually lifted. Verstappen inherited pole position which takes on greater significance in Monaco where overtaking opportunities are as rare as a royal flush at Monaco's mythic Casino.

And so it proved with the Red Bull driver becoming the 12th winner from pole in the last 16 editions to enhance his claims as the main obstacle between Hamilton and a record eighth world title. The F1 circus next heads to the Azerbaijan Grand Prix in Baku in two weeks' time. — AFP



**WASHINGTON:** Patrice Bergeron #37 of the Boston Bruins shoots and scores a third period goal against the Washington Capitals during Game Five of the 2021 Stanley Cup Playoffs at Capital One Arena on Sunday in Washington, DC. — AFP

## Bruins oust Capitals from Stanley Cup

**LOS ANGELES:** Patrice Bergeron scored twice and goalie Tuukka Rask made 40 saves as the Boston Bruins clinched their Stanley Cup first-round playoff series with a 3-1 win over the Washington Capitals in game five on Sunday. David Pastrnak also scored for the Bruins, who won the series 4-1 and are seeking their first Stanley Cup title since 2011. Boston will play the winner of the Pittsburgh-New York Islanders series in the second round of the 2021 Stanley Cup playoffs. That series is level at 2-2.

Conor Sheary scored the only goal for the Capitals, who lost in the first round of the playoffs for the third straight year. The Alex Ovechkin-led Capitals powerplay struggled, going zero-for-four Sunday and was just one-for-10 in the last two contests.

Pastrnak gave Boston a 1-0 lead 2:28 into the second period at the Capital One Arena. He picked up the puck in Washington's zone and beat two Capitals defenders to put it past goaltender Ilya Samsonov. Bergeron made it 2-0 later in the period after a Washington turnover near the blue line, firing a hard shot past Samsonov with 5:55 left in the second. The 2018 Stanley Cup champions Capitals finally got on the scoreboard when Sheary scored on a rebound just 11 seconds into the third period, making it 2-1. Bergeron added the insurance with 7:35 left in the third. — AFP

## Mickelson becomes oldest major winner with epic PGA victory

**KIAWAH ISLAND:** Phil Mickelson became the oldest major winner in golf history on Sunday, the 50-year-old left-hander capturing the PGA Championship by two strokes for his sixth and most iconic major title. The age-defying American took the \$2.1 million (1.7 million euro) top prize with an epic victory for the ages, producing a dazzling shotmaking display at windy Kiawah Island's while younger rivals faded. "It has been an incredible day," Mickelson said. "Certainly one of the moments I'll cherish my entire life."

Mickelson erased the major age win mark set by American Julius Boros when he captured the 1968 PGA Championship at age 48. "I don't know how to describe the feeling of excitement and fulfillment and accomplishment to do something of this magnitude when very few people thought that I could," Mickelson said. Mickelson grinded out a final-round one-over par 73 to finish 72 holes on six-under 282 with South Africa's Louis Oosthuizen, the 2010 British Open champion, and American Brooks Koepka, a four-time major winner, sharing second on 284.

It was the first major victory for Mickelson since the 2013 British Open. "This is just an incredible feeling because I believed that it was possible but yet

everything was saying it wasn't," Mickelson said. "I hope others find that inspirational." Tiger Woods, a 15-time major winner and long-time Mickelson rival, did, tweeting: "Truly inspirational to see @PhilMickelson do it again at 50 years of age. Congrats!!!!!!"

Spectators created a surreal scene at the 18th hole, swarming around Mickelson after his second shot as he tried to walk to the 18th green, needing to three-putt from 16 feet for the epic triumph. Outnumbered security guards forced Mickelson through a throng of thousands of people who encircled the green chanting "Lefty, Lefty," and roared with delight as he tapped in for par to complete a victory for the ages. "I don't think I've ever had an experience like that, so thank you for that," Mickelson told the crowd as he accepted the Wanamaker Trophy. "Slightly unnerving, but exceptionally awesome."

The crowd, limited to 10,000 people by COVID-19 safety measures, roared with every successful swing by Mickelson, creating an electric atmosphere all day on the punishing Ocean Course, the longest layout in major history at 7,876 yards. On the front nine, Mickelson answered three bogeys with three birdies in a roller-coaster start, his most astonishing effort a 50-foot chip-in from the sand at the par-3 sixth, for a two-stroke lead at the turn.

World number 115 Mickelson sank a 12-foot birdie putt at the 10th while Koepka and Oosthuizen made bogeys to leave "Lefty" with a four-stroke edge. Koepka fell back with three bogeys in the first four holes on the back nine. When Oosthuizen made double bogey at the 13th, Mickelson owned a five-stroke lead with six holes remaining.



**KIAWAH ISLAND:** Phil Mickelson of the United States celebrates with the Wanamaker Trophy after winning during the final round of the 2021 PGA Championship held at the Ocean Course of Kiawah Island Golf Resort on Sunday in Kiawah Island, South Carolina. — AFP

Mickelson found water at the 13th and made bogey on Sunday's hardest hole, then missed a seven-foot par putt at the par-3 14th for a bogey that increased the tension, leaving Oosthuizen two adrift and the week's toughest holes remaining. But Mickelson hit his longest drive of the week, 366 yards, into the 16th fairway, then went over the green, pitched within inches from the cup and tapped in for birdie to restore his three-stroke edge. Mickelson took a bogey at 17 and drove left at 18 near a hospitality tent then put his approach on the green to spark the chaotic finish.—AFP



**WILLIAMSBURG:** Wei-Ling Hsu celebrates after putting out on the 18th hole to win the Pure Silk Championship presented by Visit Williamsburg on the River Course at Kingsmill Resort on Sunday in Williamsburg, Virginia. — AFP

## Hsu wins Pure Silk Championship for first LPGA title

**WASHINGTON:** Wei-Ling Hsu rode an eagle at the 15th hole to an emotional two-stroke victory in the Pure Silk Championship on Sunday, capturing a long-awaited first LPGA title. "I thought I wouldn't cry," said the 26-year-old, who indeed broke down in tears after a two-putt par at the final hole to seal the win. But the emotion had been building since her eagle at the par-five 15th, where her second shot kicked onto the green and she made the putt and suddenly find herself with a two-shot lead.

Playing partner Moriya Jutanugarn — who started the day tied with Hsu for the lead — had arrived at 15 with a two-stroke lead, but the Thai found a fairway bunker with her second shot and ended up with a double bogey at the easiest hole on the Kingsmill Resort course in Williamsburg, Virginia. "On 15, I knew there was a good chance," Hsu said.

"I thought, I've been waiting seven years for this, I don't want to wait anymore," added the 26-year-old, who graduated from the Symetra Tour to play her

rookie LPGA season in 2015, had 10 top-10 finishes, including one runner-up, on her resume. She padded her lead with a birdie at 16, finishing with a three-under par 68 for a 13-under total of 271.

Moriya rebounded with her fifth birdie of the day at the 17th on the way to a one-under par 70 and solo second on 11-under 273. She was one stroke in front of American Jessica Korda, who had three birdies and two bogeys — including a three-putt at the last — in a one-under 70.

Hsu became the first Taiwanese player to win on the LPGA tour since five-time major winner Tseng Yani won the 2012 Kia Classic. She said she hoped the win would offer something positive for fans in Taiwan to enjoy amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

"I don't know like what this win means for (Taiwan), but I really hope that I can give them some positive thought and a good energy to believe something," she said. "I know people are against the virus right now, sports are shut down, but there is something that the players or the people or the Taiwanese playing a different sport ... they can still cheer for."

Hsu came into the week without high expectations, exhausted from the travel from the LPGA event in Thailand two weeks ago in a journey broken by a 36-hole qualifier for the US Women's Open. "I think this is the happiest thing ever, how my caddie cried and somehow I just cried so hard the last hole," she said. "But I feel happy." — AFP

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

## Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
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## Booker shines as Suns sink Lakers

Grizzlies stun Jazz • Young silences Knicks • Sixers overcome Wizards

**LOS ANGELES:** Devin Booker made the most of his playoff debut, scoring 34 points as the Phoenix Suns beat the reigning NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers in their Western Conference series opener on Sunday.

Booker spearheaded the 99-90 win for the second-seeded Suns over the Lakers, rallying his team after an injury restricted Phoenix veteran Chris Paul's influence. Booker was backed by Deandre Ayton, who contributed 21 points and 16 rebounds, while Mikal Bridges and Cameron Johnson added 10 points apiece for Phoenix.

A physical encounter saw the Suns' Cameron Payne ejected in the fourth quarter after a shoving match which saw players and backroom staff stream onto the court as tempers flared. The Lakers, meanwhile, struggled to hit their stride throughout, with LeBron James finishing with 18 points and Anthony Davis with 13 points after making only five-of-16 from the field.

Barring an early spell in the first quarter when the Lakers led by five points, the Suns led throughout, maintaining a double-digit cushion for much of the second half and leading by 16 points early in the fourth.

"It was a big win for us," Booker said, revealing that the early injury to Paul had galvanized the Suns. "Chris went down early and I think that got our team locked in and understanding that every possession matters. We huddled up and said we've all got to give a little bit more."

### Bracing for backlash

Booker said the Suns would be bracing for a Lakers backlash in game two in Phoenix tonight. Lakers star Davis meanwhile took responsibility for the defeat following a below-par performance. "There's no way we're winning a game, let alone a series, with me playing the way I played," Davis said. "This was on me. I take full responsibility. I'll be better in game two."

In other games on Sunday, Dillon Brooks and Ja

Morant combined for 57 points as the eighth-seeded Memphis Grizzlies stunned the top-seeded Utah Jazz 112-109 in their series opener in Salt Lake City. Canada's Brooks had a team high 31 points and American Morant poured in 26 for the Grizzlies, who upset the NBA's top team just two days after making the playoffs. "They had a couple of guys that couldn't guard me," said Brooks.

Jonas Valanciunas had 15 points and 12 rebounds while Kyle Anderson added 14 points for the Grizzlies, who are in the postseason for the first time in four years. Guard Mike Conley finished with 22 points and 11 assists, and forward Bojan Bogdanovic scored 29 points for the Jazz, who were missing all-star Donovan Mitchell for the 17th straight game. The first-place Jazz rested through the play-in tournament but not the Grizzlies who had to win twice in a row to grab the final playoff spot.

In New York, Trae Young made a short jumper with one second left to lift the Atlanta Hawks to a 107-105 win over the New York Knicks in the first game of their East series. Young scored a game high 32 points, 10 assists and went nine-of-nine from the free throw line Sunday at Madison Square Garden as Atlanta edged the Knicks after losing all three games to them during the regular season.

"It's fun. In the Mecca, New York City, Times Square," said Young. "It is about letting the game come to me and reading the game as it goes." The series appears to be evenly matched as the fourth-seeded Knicks and fifth-seeded Hawks each finished 41-31 on the season.

Young was the difference Sunday, getting the last shot and draining a seven-foot floater just before the final buzzer. Bogdan Bogdanovic finished with 18 points and Lou Williams came off the bench to score 13 for Atlanta, who are a young team but have a deep bench. Also, Tobias Harris erupted for 37 points as the top-seeded Philadelphia 76ers shut down the Washington Wizards to win their Eastern Conference first round series opener 125-118. — AFP



PHOENIX: Devin Booker #1 of the Phoenix Suns shoots over Anthony Davis #3 of the Los Angeles Lakers during the second half of Game One of the Western Conference first-round playoff series at Phoenix Suns Arena on Sunday in Phoenix, Arizona. — AFP






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