



**8** WhatsApp launches court action against India curbs



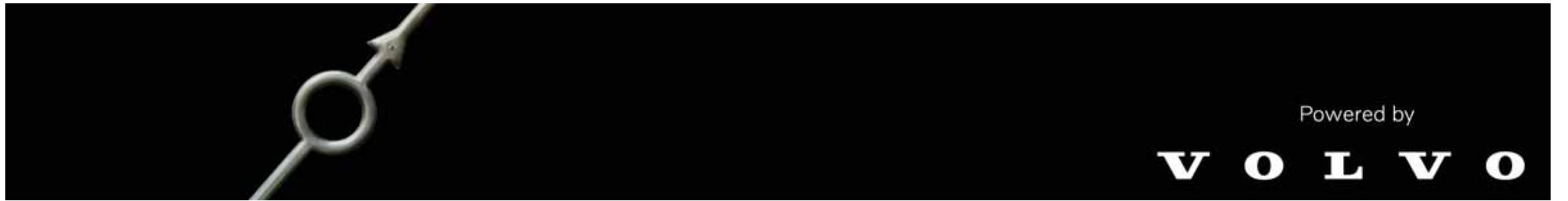
**10** US exchanges offer rich potential target for hackers



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# Three opposition MPs file to grill interior minister

Grade 12 final paper exams postponed • MoI launches English social media accounts

## Readers speak out on impact of travel curbs on expats

**KUWAIT:** Since February 2021, Kuwait has barred foreigners, including legal residents, from returning to Kuwait. Foreigners may leave but cannot return until further notice. The second lengthy period of the airport's closure to foreigners has had a devastating impact on expatriates, many of whom have family abroad or are stuck abroad.

Kuwait Times invited expatriates who have been affected by the travel restrictions related to COVID-19 to share their stories. Kuwait Times received more than a 1,000 responses via comments, direct messages and emails. (See Pages 4 & 5)

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** Three opposition lawmakers yesterday filed to grill Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah over a series of alleged violations including illegally banning public gatherings, selectivity in applying the law and failure to resolve the imbalance in the population structure.

The three lawmakers, Thamer Al-Suwait, Abdulkarim Al-Kandari and Khaled Al-Otaibi, also accuse the minister in the grilling of oppressive measures against stateless people or bedoons, failure to control a spike in crime and not respecting parliamentary questions. Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said he received the grilling, which will be added to the agenda of the next regular session on June 8.

Sheikh Thamer is the fourth minister to face a grilling by opposition MPs following grillings against the ministers of health, foreign affairs and finance. Opposition MPs have also filed three grillings against HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, but the government says he cannot be grilled because the Assembly decided on March 30 to postpone grillings against the prime minister until the end of 2022. Opposition MPs insist the decision is illegal and against the constitution.

Under the constitution, following the debate of a grilling, 10 MPs can file a vote of no-confidence against the minister. To pass, it needs 25 votes and if accepted, it means an automatic dismissal of the minister. The opposition has a sufficient strength to unseat any minister and also to declare non-cooperation with the prime minister. The government boycotted the previous two sessions of the Assembly after opposition MPs sat in seats reserved for the Cabinet. The opposition lawmakers said they will continue to do so until the prime minister accepts to be grilled.

The new grilling says that the interior minister prevented legal public gatherings from taking place, which is a violation of the constitution, laws and rulings by the constitutional court. It also alleges that the minister referred almost two-thirds of Assembly members to court for violating health precautions while he ignored similar violations by others, thus selectively applying the law.

The grilling charges that the interior ministry has adopted oppressive measures against thousands of

bedoons, thus complicating their decades-old plight, prompting a number of bedoons to commit suicide. It also charged that the minister has failed to tackle the chronic traffic problem in the country, which has resulted in the death of hundreds and also failed to curb a steep rise in the crime rate, which saw some 900 assaults on persons in 2020. The grilling also accuses the minister of failing to answer questions sent to him by a number of lawmakers. Yesterday, the interior ministry said it has launched new pages on three social media platforms to keep non-Arabic speakers informed regarding new laws, public announcements and awareness messages. The account EN\_KUW\_MOI, which is available on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, comes amid the ministry's ongoing efforts to boost its media outreach nationwide, Director of PR and Media Tawheed Al-Kandari said.

Meanwhile, the education ministry yesterday postponed the final paper-based exams for grade 12 students from May 30 to June 9. The decision came following demands from lawmakers as well as parents to allow more time for students to prepare for their finals, the ministry explained in a statement on its official Twitter account.

## Expats should have salary of KD 2,500 to hire Filipino maids

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** The Philippine Embassy in Kuwait has confirmed that expatriate employers who want to hire Filipino domestic helpers should be earning a minimum monthly salary of KD 2,500. According to an embassy source, Kuwaiti employers are not included in the new salary requirement clause as they already earn a minimum salary of more than KD 1,500, and also receive government subsidies for food and allowances for their children.

The embassy source, who wished to remain anonymous, said the requirement will be included in the new tri-party contract which will be signed between employers and workers. "This new policy protects the welfare of Filipino domestic helpers. The cost of living in Kuwait is very high and expats are also paying rent and a lot more. Even if their

salary is around KD 1,500, it will not be enough to cover everything including paying their domestic helpers," the source explained.

"We want to implement this rule to avoid non-payment of salaries, and the Demafelis case was a huge lesson for us," she added. The embassy official was referring to a case in 2018 of housemaid Joanna Demafelis, whose body was found inside a freezer in a Maidaan Hawally apartment. The convicted murderers of the maid were two expats, a Lebanese man and a Syrian woman, who fled to their respective countries after the brutal killing.

Demafelis' body was found more than a year after her expat employers abandoned their apartment in 2016. "This clause seeks to avoid the repeat of gruesome murders of our compatriots, which were unfortunately committed by expats," the embassy source added.

The official was asked if the Philippine Embassy has started processing new job orders of domestic helpers coming from the Philippines. "Yes, the Kuwaiti government has already started the processing of visas for new domestic helpers, but only returning housemaids are currently being allowed to arrive," she said.

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## Pacific 'Blood Moon' wows stargazers

**SYDNEY:** Stargazers across the Pacific cast their eyes skyward yesterday to witness a rare "Super Blood Moon", as the heavens aligned to bring a spectacular lunar eclipse. The first total lunar eclipse in two years took place at the same time as the Moon was closest to Earth, in what astronomers say is a once-in-a-decade show.

Anyone living between Australia and the central United States was able to see an enormous, bright, orange-red Moon if the skies were clear. The main event took place between 1111 and 1125 GMT - late evening in Sydney and pre-dawn in Los Angeles - when the Moon was entirely in the Earth's shadow.

The Moon darkened and turned red - a result of sunlight refracting off the Earth's rim onto the lunar surface - basking our satellite in a sunrise- or sunset-tinged glow. Unlike a solar eclipse, the phenomenon was safely visible to the naked eye. This eclipse was different because it happened during a



**KUWAIT:** The 'Super Blood Moon' rises over Kuwait City during a total lunar eclipse (not visible in Kuwait) yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

"Super Moon" when the Moon passes a mere 360,000 km from Earth. At that point, it can appear 30 percent brighter and 14 percent larger than at its farthest point - a difference of around 50,000 km.

In Sydney, where a crisp night gave onlookers a clear view, people gathered on the shoreline of the city's harbor to catch a glimpse as the Moon rose over the sails of the Opera House. "Last time there was a Super Moon, last month, we missed it," Ken

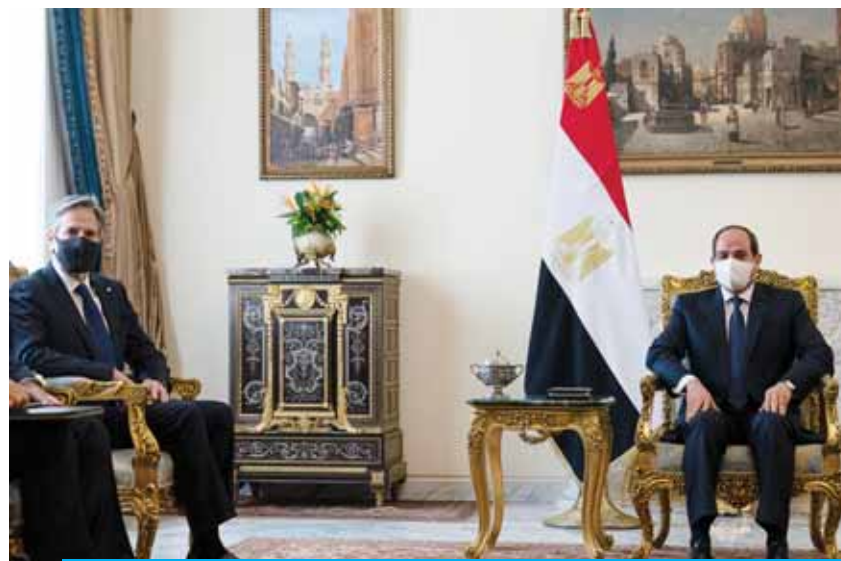
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## Blinken visits Egypt, Jordan to shore up truce

**AMMAN:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met King Abdullah II in Jordan yesterday on the last leg of a Mideast tour that aims to shore up an Egypt-brokered ceasefire between the Zionist entity and Palestinians in Gaza. After meeting Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi - whom he praised for helping bring an end to the intense violence "relatively quickly" - he flew to Jordan, where half of the 10 million-strong population is of Palestinian origin.

Blinken met King Abdullah following two-days of regional talks - including with both Zionist and Palestinian leaders - to throw Washington's support behind the truce that ended 11 days of heavy Zionist bombing of Gaza and rocket fire from the enclave into the Zionist entity. Following talks with Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas at his headquarters in the Zionist-occupied West Bank, Blinken vowed to rebuild US relations with the Palestinians by reopening a consulate in Jerusalem, as well as give millions in aid for the war-battered Gaza Strip.

The announcements signaled a break with US policy under former president Donald Trump, who had shuttered the diplomatic mission for



(Left) US Secretary of State Antony Blinken meets Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi at the Heliopolis Presidential Palace in Cairo and (right) Jordan's King Abdullah II at Bayt Al-Urdun in Amman yesterday. — AFP



Palestinians in 2019 and slashed aid to the Palestinian Authority. In the long term, Blinken evoked the "possibility of resuming the effort to achieve a two-state solution, which we continue to believe is the only way to truly assure (the Zionist entity's) future as a Jewish and democratic state, and of course to give the Palestinians the state they're entitled to".

After meeting Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, he reiterated support for (the Zionist entity's) right to defend itself against rocket attacks by Gaza's Hamas rulers, adding that they must not benefit from the reconstruction aid. Hamas political chief Yahya Sinwar vowed yesterday not to take "a single cent" of the aid, insisting that "we have never taken a cent in the past".

Yesterday, after meeting with Sisi, Blinken later said that both "believe strongly that Palestinians and (Zionists) deserve equally to live in safety and security", and that "Egypt is vital to these aspirations". Unlike the United States and many European governments, which boycott Hamas as a terror group, Egypt maintains regular contacts.

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## Local

# Kuwait's Amir receives Crown Prince, Speaker, Prime Minister



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received, at Bayan Palace yesterday, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir received

also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received

Ghanem and His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled yesterday at Bayan Palace. — KUNA

## UK's Middle East Minister visits Kuwait

KUWAIT: The United Kingdom's Minister of State for Middle East and North Africa James Cleverly arrived to the State of Kuwait on Monday. This is Minister Cleverly's first visit to Kuwait, as he looks forward to further develop bilateral relations and means of cooperation between the United Kingdom and Kuwait. Relations between the two countries were established since the signing of the Friendship Treaty in 1899. Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received Minister Cleverly on Monday evening. The two sides spoke about cooperation and common interests. The UK minister congratulated Sheikh Dr Ahmad on Kuwait's efforts to resolve the GCC dispute and went on to discuss new opportunities for UK Kuwait co-operation.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Majdi Ahmad Al-Dhafiri received Minister Cleverly on Tuesday. They spoke about the Joint Steering Group - the UK Kuwait strategic dialogue which is held twice annually; development co-operation and regional issues including Yemen, Iran, and Palestine. The two sides also discussed important regional issues and shared challenges such as the global pandemic, and the growing threat of climate change, which includes the need to integrate new, efficient and clean forms of energy. Minister Cleverly met with several Kuwaiti British Business Representatives at the British Embassy to discuss



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets the United Kingdom's Minister of State for Middle East and North Africa James Cleverly.

maintaining and developing commercial cooperation with Kuwait.

Minister Cleverly also met with Mudhawis list - a gender and democracy NGO, along with women who participated in the election in December 2020. In a roundtable discussion, the group discussed the challenges facing female politicians in Kuwait and learned about the experiences of the candidates in the last elections. Minister Cleverly emphasized UK support for initiatives which help women develop the skills necessary for political leadership.

With the UNFCCC COP talks being held later this year, the Minister was keen to hear what action is being taken in Kuwait to protect the environment and tackle the effects of climate change. Minister Cleverly

met with UK scientists who are working with partner organizations across the Gulf to tackle the shared environmental challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, enabling blue economies and protecting human health. This includes a collaboration with the six GCC states, Iran and Iraq, to publish the first coordinated regional assessments of climate risk and impacts in the Gulf region. In Kuwait, work has focused on raising climate change awareness across multiple sectors and stakeholders (Government, commercial, academia and civil society). The UK-Gulf Marine Environment Partnership (UK-GMEP) Program enables Cefas, an executive agency of Defra, to work with partner organizations in the Gulf to address the challenges of marine environmental man-

agement by strengthening regulation, developing the knowledge-base to inform management, and building capacity for long-term sustainable management.

Minister Cleverly also visited Ooredoo for the signing of a contract with one of the UK's leading telecommunications companies, BT. The meeting was attended by the British Ambassador, Director of DIT, representatives from BT joined the conference virtually. Minister Cleverly stated that, "Britain's relationship with Kuwait goes back over a century, and on the 30th anniversary of your liberation, I am honored to visit. The UK will continue to stand by Kuwait's side on all matters. I discussed with my Kuwaiti counterparts during my visit; collaborating in education, cybersecurity, climate change, health and democracy."



United Kingdom's Minister of State for Middle East and North Africa James Cleverly (center) participates in a meeting during his visit.

## Expats should have salary of KD 2,500...

Continued from Page 1

On the Kuwaiti government's directive to allow the entry of people with approved vaccines only, the official said the recent order from the ministry is only for Kuwaitis and their companions. "The order is only directed to Kuwaitis and people traveling with them, like housemaids, and not to all non-Kuwaiti residents. But with regards to our workers, I think we will clarify to them that most of the vaccines in the Philippines are from China," she said.

Meanwhile, a foreign recruitment agency owner told Kuwait Times that the salary condition can easily be skirted by unscrupulous employers. "Expats can simply ask a Kuwaiti to recruit a domestic helper for them. At my agency, we don't deal with expat employers. We only process cases depending on the embassy's approval," she noted.

Kuwait and the Philippines recently agreed to a tri-party contract agreement that will be used as basis for the reopening of recruitment of Filipino domestic helpers for their protection. Provisions in the tripartite contract include providing the housemaid with decent and appropriate housing equipped with all the necessities, providing suitable food and clothing, providing medical treatment in case of sickness pursuant to the health-care insurance system of Kuwait, salary must be

paid at the end of the month - not less than the designated amount signed by both parties, compensating the housemaid in case of injury while during work, employers must issue a valid residency for the duration of contract, handle all the expenses to bring the housemaid, and in case of death, the employer must also bear the expenses of the deceased body.

The new tripartite contract also mentions that the employer is not allowed to assign the worker outside Kuwait without an agreement from the worker. The housemaid is also allowed to use the phone outside working hours, provided that she maintains the privacy of the household and in a manner consistent with public morals. Working hours must be 12 hours daily and employers must allow the housemaid to rest for eight continuous hours.

They must have a fully-paid weekly day off, annual leave, end-of-service benefit or one full month for every year of service, plus a bonus equivalent to one month's salary annually. The employer is not allowed to keep the passport in their possession. The employer needs to provide an economy ticket to the worker at the end of their contract, and in case of conflict the case will be referred to the Public Authority of Manpower.

The Philippines sends the largest number of household workers to Kuwait after India. As of June 2020, there were nearly 680,000 domestic workers in Kuwait - 325,000 from India and nearly 150,000 from the Philippines. Local and their international partner agencies are allowed to charge employers up to KD 990 for hiring new domestic helpers.

intended to provide \$75 million in aid to the Palestinians, as well as \$5.5 million in immediate disaster assistance for Gaza, and nearly \$33 million for an emergency humanitarian appeal by the UN.

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab met with both Netanyahu and Abbas yesterday, calling on "all sides to respect the ceasefire" and urging an end to the "cycle of violence" through a two-state solution to the Zionist-Palestinian conflict. The latest military escalation started after clashes in Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site, which is also revered by Jews as the Temple Mount.

Zionist security forces had moved in on Palestinian worshippers there towards the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. They had also sought to quell protests against the threatened eviction of Palestinian families from homes in the east Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah to make way for Jewish settlers. Zionist air strikes and artillery fire on Gaza killed 254 Palestinians, including 66 children, and wounded more than 1,900 people in 11 days of conflict from May 10, the health ministry in Gaza says. — AFP

## Syria votes to extend Assad's grip on power

DAMASCUS: President Bashar Al-Assad dismissed criticism of Syria's presidential election as voters cast ballots yesterday in government-held areas despite Western accusations it was neither "free nor fair". "Your opinions have zero value," Assad said, after voting with his British-born wife Asma in the Damascus suburb of Douma, a key rebel stronghold until its recapture by government forces three years ago.

On the eve of the election, the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Italy said the poll was "neither free nor fair", and Syria's fragmented opposition has called it a "farce". But they will watch powerless as few doubt Assad will trounce his two virtually unknown challengers to win a fourth term, in a war-battered country mired in economic crisis.

The controversial vote is the second election since the start of a decade-long civil war that has killed more than 388,000 people and displaced half the pre-war population. Huge election posters glorifying Assad have mushroomed across the two-thirds of the country under his control. State television showed long queues forming outside polling stations as voting got underway amid tight security.

Hundreds of students clamored to vote outside Damascus University. "I came to vote for Bashar al-Assad because he is the only man who withstood 10



DOUMA: Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and his wife Asma cast their votes at a polling station near Damascus yesterday. — AFP

years of war," said 26-year-old Kinan Al-Khatib. Around him, students chanted the slogan used to express support for strongmen across the Arab world: "With our blood and with our souls, we sacrifice our lives for you, Bashar."

The result is not expected before Friday evening, 48 hours after polls close. The election takes place amid the lowest levels of violence since 2011 - but with an economy in freefall. More than 80 percent of the population live below the poverty line, and the Syrian pound has plunged in value against the dollar, causing skyrocketing inflation.

Assad's campaign slogan, "Hope through work", evokes the colossal reconstruction needed to rebuild the country, requiring billions of dollars in funding. Assad, a 55-year-old ophthalmologist by training, was first elected by referendum in 2000 after the death of his father Hafez. — AFP

## Blinken visits Egypt, Jordan...

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Last week, Sisi pledged \$500 million to help reconstruction efforts in Gaza.

Egypt was also the first Arab country to sign a peace treaty with the Zionist entity in 1979, with Jordan following suit in 1994. Cairo has sent delegations to both Tel Aviv and Gaza to watch over the implementation of the ceasefire, and has also been coordinating international relief and reconstruction aid for the enclave, which has been under Zionist blockade for nearly 15 years.

Blinken said yesterday the US was in the process of providing more than \$360 million in assistance to Palestinians, including \$250 million announced in March and April. On top of that, the administration

## Pacific 'Blood Moon' wows...

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Loi, 50, said. "This time it's with the eclipse as well, so you've got a double whammy so you better catch it before it's too late."

"Interest has been high," said Andrew Jacobs, curator of astronomy at Sydney Observatory, which hosted a viewing event with telescopes and expert speakers. Australian airline Qantas performed a one-off, two-and-a-half-hour "Supermoon Scenic Flight" heading east from Sydney over the Pacific for an unobstructed view of the southern sky.

In Hong Kong however the view was partially obscured by clouds. "It's not as red as I thought. I saw a photo and the Moon was very red, but now it's not that red," said primary school student Chui Yiu-

chun, who was trying to catch a glimpse from the city's harborfront. Jacobs earlier predicted the best view would be in "Australia, New Zealand, and large parts of the Pacific. New Guinea also gets a good view. The Americas see it in the early morning, but they don't necessarily see all parts of the eclipse," he said. "Europe and Africa and the Middle East are missing out completely, on this particular one."

Lunar eclipses have not always been so warmly received in history. In many cultures both lunar and solar eclipses were seen as harbingers of doom. The Inca believed a lunar eclipse occurred when a jaguar had eaten the Moon. Some Aboriginal Australian groups believed it signaled someone on a journey had been hurt or killed.

In "King Lear" William Shakespeare warned that "eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us". But so far no apocalyptic consequences have been recorded from these celestial shows. The next Super Blood Moon is expected to take place in 2033. — AFP



## Local

# Kuwait to back outcomes of UNHRC session on Palestine

## KRCS aid convoy heads to Gaza's border crossing



CAIRO: Trucks carrying aid from Kuwait en route to the Rafah border crossing to enter Gaza yesterday. — KUNA



Kuwait Red Crescent Society's team on site.

GENEVA/CAIRO/KUWAIT: Kuwait is keen to push forward the outputs of an upcoming United Nations Human Rights Council emergency session on the implications of the humanitarian and human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, a senior Kuwaiti diplomat said yesterday. The session aims to highlight the need to adopt a Human Rights Council draft resolution to establish an international investigation committee and activate accountability mechanisms for the Zionist occupation's attacks on Gaza, Kuwait's permanent United Nations and international organizations in Geneva representative Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim said. The remotely-held session, which comes to fruition after pressure by Kuwait and several Islamic countries, are being held in the wake of the Zionist entity's violations of the Geneva Convention provisions, said the diplomat in a statement.

Stemming from its commitment to defending the humanitarian and human rights conditions of the Palestinian people, Kuwait's Foreign Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah will make an intervention during the session, the statement mentioned. The intervention will give impetus to the work of this session and its outputs in support of the just Palestinian position, Ambassador Al-Ghunaim added. The move's significance is also due to it being the first intervention of a Kuwaiti foreign minister at the Human Rights Council, since it was established in 2006. The session will also be an opportunity to review and document the Zionist entity's violations, and to prevent further aggravating the humanitarian conditions of the Palestinian people. The emergency session will be the ninth held by the Human Rights Council to discuss

the Zionist entity's grave violations in the occupied Arab territories, including East Jerusalem.

### Kuwaiti aid

Meanwhile, a Kuwaiti aid convoy headed yesterday from Cairo to the Rafah crossing in preparation for entering the Gaza Strip to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people. In a statement to the press, Head of the Kuwaiti delegation, Director of Disaster and Emergency Department at Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), Yousef Al-Maraj, said that the Kuwaiti Red Crescent is "the first volunteer team to enter the Gaza Strip." Maraj added that KRCS responded urgently to provide support, food, and medical supplies to Gaza Strip, in addition to providing materials to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

He noted that medical aid will be

delivered to the Palestine Red Crescent Society for distribution to hospitals suffering from a lack of medical supplies. The Kuwaiti convoy was carrying 85 tons of aid, including nearly 1,000 food baskets that were bought from the Egyptian local market, he said. The relief aid will focus on those affected by the Zionist aggression, including orphans, shelters and health centers, he noted. Maraj added that the KRCS team will make a field visit to the affected areas and hospitals to assess the damage and urgent humanitarian needs in Gaza. He called on citizens, residents, businessmen and the private sector to make a donation to support the Palestinian people.

### Media Day

In the meantime, Kuwait Radio and Arab stations will stream together in a joint Kuwaiti-Arab Media Day today in

solidarity with the Palestinian cause, said the Acting Assistant Undersecretary for Broadcasting in the Information Ministry, Saad Al-Fandi. In a statement to the press, Fandi noted that as a support for the Palestinian cause Kuwait Radio adopted a proposal to specify a joint Kuwaiti-Arab media day under the supervision of the Arab Broadcasting Union to show solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The joint media day takes place from 2:00 pm to 8:00 pm, in cooperation with the Palestinian Radio and the participation of Arab stations. He affirmed the support of the Minister of Information and Culture and the Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, and with continuous follow-up by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information Munira Al-Huwaidi, in order to harness Kuwaiti media efforts to support the Palestinian cause. — KUNA

## Kuwait Deputy FM receives US ambassador

KUWAIT: Kuwait Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri met yesterday with US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski. During the meeting, both sides discussed mutual relations besides regional and international developments. Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Foreign Minister's office Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar was present at the meeting. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri meets US Ambassador Alina Romanowski. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George met recently with Sheikhna Mona Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Head of Center for Historical Document and Museums Center, Amiri Diwan. Discussions covered cultural relations between India and Kuwait in the context of the 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations.

### News in brief

#### Kuwait, Libya ministers talk

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah discussed over a phone call late Tuesday with Libyan Foreign Minister Dr Najla Al-Mangoush the bilateral ties between the countries. The two sides also touched on Libyan happenings and continuous efforts to strengthen the desired political process.

#### Kuwait off list

KUWAIT: The Republic of Ireland has lifted the hotel quarantine condition for arrivals from Kuwait as long as they are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (Pfizer-BioNTech, Oxford-AstraZeneca, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson). Non-vaccinated arrivals must stay in home quarantine for 14 days, or five days if they produce a negative PCR test result.

#### MPs' trip delayed

KUWAIT: MP Faraz Al-Daihani said that a lawmakers' delegation has decided to postpone until further notice its trip to Turkey where they were supposed to meet with Kuwaiti opposition activists, due to new COVID-19 restrictions imposed there.

#### Oil price up

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by 61 cents to \$68.29 per barrel on Tuesday, as oppose to \$67.68 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. The prices of the Brent crude and West Texas Intermediate, globally, went up by 19 cents to \$68.65 per barrel, while the latter went up by 2 cents to \$66.07 pb respectively.

## Kuwait Airways launch Farwaniya sales office

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) launched its new sales office in Farwaniya recently in a different location with a new look, as part of KAC's efforts to provide best services and simplify communications with clients. The office will welcome customers from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm from Sunday to Thursday.

KAC PR and Media Manager Fayez Al-Anezi said KAC is glad to launch the new sales office in its new location, which has an easier approach than the previous one. "Also, this new branch is spacious and has a special parking lot for KAC's clients for their convenience. It's also in line with the importance of KAC as a leading local brand," he said.

The new office will offer various services. "This branch will issue commercial tickets and reservations, government tickets, including for treatment abroad for patients and their companions, tickets for official duties of government employees, tickets of Oasis Club members and tickets of KAC staff," explained Anezi.

"The office will allow upgrading tickets to higher classes, whether Business Class, First Class or Royal Class. It will also offer services to change the travel dates and cancel tickets. It will also deal with all complaints. Also, disabled and elderly clients have priority in a special area to be served quickly," he added.



"COVID-19 has negatively affected the travel and tourism sector, which caused the shutdown of operations to many destinations where KAC was flying in the past. We want to assure that KAC is

ready for next phase, and is waiting for the return to normal operations of commercial flights to provide the highest possible number of destinations, especially during the summer season," concluded Anezi.

## Kuwait registers 1,408 COVID-19 cases, five deaths

KUWAIT: At least 1,408 people have been diagnosed with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) over the last 24 hours, taking the total

infections to 301,863, Spokesman for the Ministry of Health Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said on Tuesday. The number of those recovered from the disease hit 1,158 over a 24 hours period, raising the overall recoveries to 287,357, he noted in a statement. Five patients succumbed to the disease, he noted, indicating that the death toll has risen so far to 1,746. Up to 12,760 patients were receiving treatment at hospitals as of Tuesday, in addition to 146 cases at intensive care units, he stated. Overall

medical swabs rose to 2,545,841 after health workers conducted 10,812 in the same period, Al-Sanad made clear. The ratio between recoveries and swabs is 13.02 percent. Dr Sanad renewed public calls to abide by health precautions and physical distancing as well as avoid gatherings. He also appealed to people to follow up the official accounts of the ministry and the state's bodies to be briefed on guidelines and recommendations in order to control the spread of the coronavirus. — KUNA





# Readers Speak Out

## Impact of Kuwait's 'travel restrictions' devastating for country's expatriate community

Since February 2021, Kuwait has barred foreigners, including legal residents, from returning to Kuwait. Foreigners may leave but cannot return until further notice. The second lengthy period of the airport's closure to foreigners has had a devastating impact on expatriates, many of whom have family abroad or are stuck abroad. Kuwait Times invited expatriates who have been affected by the travel restrictions related to COVID-19 to share their stories. Kuwait Times received more than a 1,000 responses via comments, direct messages and emails. Over several days, we will be sharing in print and online a selection of these responses (names withheld) to illustrate the breadth and depth of the impact the travel restrictions have had on Kuwait's 3.2 million+ expatriate community. You can read more on our social media @KuwaitTimes.

"I was brought up in Kuwait, lived here my whole life, started a family here and know no other home. I was stuck during last year's travel ban and suffered being abroad with my two kids. My husband got approval to come back because his mum is Kuwaiti, but not his wife and kids. He had to come back for work. I lost my job and had to pay all the costs of being stranded when all my stuff and my whole life was in Kuwait. Had to buy everything again for my newborn. I am now in Kuwait but can see people suffering again. As an HR manager, I have 155 employees stuck abroad; some are away from family, most are financially suffering and the business is suffering. A place we once felt was home is now a place that is against us. It is no longer home. People can't even leave to see their newborns or bury their loved ones or say goodbye to very sick family or reunite with their family because they don't know if they can get back. And it's for no logical reason."

years. Due to COVID, we are stuck here not able to travel for risk of losing jobs or being stuck abroad and not able to come back, but still having to pay rent here. It is especially hard as I lost an uncle to COVID, and my wife lost her dad, and we have not been able to travel to see family. It is also hard during lockdowns and curfews, living in fear that if we are stuck at work or delayed in getting home, we will get stopped and be deported because of unfair rules that oppress expats. Especially as we rely on taxis to get to and from work that were also stopping early to give themselves time to get home for the same reasons. The strain on our mental health around the rules has been very difficult. We follow the rules, and even get told by Kuwaiti friends and managers that we don't need to follow them and that they don't follow them. We then feel like slaves in a country that doesn't care about us, and if we leave, we end up with huge debts trying to move back to our own country at extremely high travel prices and no stable future to go to another country."

"Our parents left for Pakistan in 2020 to attend our sister's wedding and it's been a year and half; they are still stuck there. Due to our jobs we (three brothers including me) couldn't go with them. It was the beginning of COVID so it was fine with the lockdowns/curfews/closing of airports. But the government should have allowed the expats to return to their families within the period of six months. They could have put them in quarantine. They are quite old and can't take proper care of themselves. All of my sisters are married. We were the only ones looking after them. Many people have lost members of their family. They couldn't even attend their funerals. Imagine the pain they had to go through not being able to see their beloveds one last time. Why only expats have to go through this? It's not fair at all. Kuwaitis are allowed to travel, they are allowed to enter and exit the country. Why impose your policies only on expats? The restrictions that you're imposing on us expats, seems like you want all of us to just leave. No need to use underhanded means."

.....

"I was born here in Kuwait and my father worked in the government for 37 years. We love Kuwait as our own country. My parents have been on my iqama for more than a decade, but because of the pandemic I was unable to renew their residence online and I am worried terribly about them since they are elderly and need my care. I wish I could go see them but I know this will be a one-way trip. I wish there was a way to bring them back as by the grace of God they got vaccinated with both doses of the Oxford vaccine. I understand the other side a little bit as well. There is fear, but at least let vaccinated expats return. I miss my parents and am praying for a solution. I ask God to bless Kuwait and the world and rid us from this awful pandemic."

"I'm a teacher at an American school here in Kuwait. I'm from Germany, my family and friends live there and I haven't seen them in two years, especially my 70- and 80-year-old parents. I tried to get a tourist visa for my parents (German citizens) to visit me here, but the Kuwaiti embassies refused that request. No other country is banning people from traveling based on their nationalities if

they have valid residencies. How is it that travel to and from the UAE has been allowed since August last year and we, despite being advanced with the vaccination process, still can't decide?"

to our inability to leave Kuwait. Not being able to attend my sister's wedding will be devastating for my father and I. We are hoping that Kuwait will find a solution for expats like us and allow travel with whatever quarantine conditions. Being far from the family has made this pandemic much harder than it already is."

"Currently living in Toronto. My three siblings, mom and myself have not seen my dad who works in Kuwait for two years. People should be able to fly at least from certain countries with low case counts and obtain negative PCR tests, regardless of the vaccine. People are suffering financially and mentally."

.....

"I have been unable to travel since February 2020, when I saw my family is South Africa last. It's been very hard and most difficult. This has left me with a divorce case coming up. So this hasn't been easy but I do understand the travel restrictions are there for our safety."

"I am currently in India. I had to travel to India for my final university exams. Although everybody back home in Kuwait were reluctant to have me travel owing to the pandemic conditions, it was an unavoidable option. It's been more than seven months now. I haven't been able to travel back to my family. Time passes slowly every day with us keeping checks on any updates in hopes of new regulations that would make it possible for me to travel back to my family and also start working. I personally think that the current laws do not make sense, especially when it's different for Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis. Things have bettered now and they should also normalize airport operations while taking measures like 14-day institutional quarantine and double PCR tests for individuals travelling from any country, which will not only be a huge relief for people like me stuck away from family but also boost revenue for Kuwait and maintain its reputation, which has been tarnished for imposing unfair circumstances. I wish that the current laws are taken into consideration as soon as possible and amended for the better of both citizens and expats."

"I am a Lebanese expat in Kuwait. I've been in the country since February 2020 and have not been able to leave because of the travel restrictions. My father and I are the only ones living here while my older siblings are in Lebanon. We haven't been able to see each other due to the travel ban. My sister is planning on getting married this summer, which she already postponed last year due



In this May 6, 2020 file photo, police look on as people line up at Kuwait International Airport to leave Kuwait.

.....  
"We have been in Kuwait for a few



Local

"I am a biomedical engineer working in a private company for MoH. Almighty Allah gave me a daughter in September 2019. At the end of February 2020, I did all the paperwork to bring my family here, but I was not able to get the visas for them due to the lockdown. Now my daughter is a year and eight months old, and till now I haven't seen her. I am not able to travel; if I travel I am not able to come back. Without this job I can't take care of my family. We all expats are really greatly thankful to Kuwait because they are allowing us to live here and allowing us to earn money to take care of our families. May Allah give afiyah to the rulers of Kuwait and all the Kuwaitis. But please think about our situation - without seeing our wives, children and parents, we are mentally down. Please open visit visas or family visas. Let us see our family. We will follow all health-related measures by the Kuwait government while bringing our families. Please, at least give us an option."



"I'm an expat and I've been stuck outside Kuwait since January 2021. I've been away from my friends and family, work, home and pet. It's not fair that we haven't been treated how residents should be treated. No updates, no official news. We're not given any useful information and we haven't been taken into consideration at all. I booked twice and my tickets had to be cancelled. This has affected me emotionally and mentally. I feel extremely discriminated. It's very sad when you can't access your own home. This is cruelty."



"I am a 14-year-old expat who is stuck outside Kuwait, unable to come back. I have been struggling with depression and anxiety ever since I was stuck outside Kuwait. I miss my friends and family so much - they are the only people I have. I also need to go back to school, since I am starting IGCSE next year. I have not been able to focus on my studies because of the fact that I miss my family and friends so much. It has gotten to the point where I am unable to sleep sometimes, or I just have to cry myself to sleep. Please, let the MoH know about our pain. Not just my pain, but every other expat that has been suffering silently. Please give us a voice. Thank you for reading this."



"For all those expats who don't know how to speak English or what Instagram is: Traveling is something that happens once in two years and for so many of our cleaning staff, helpers, workers etc, that has just increased because of COVID and especially the ban on expats' entry. So many have lost family members back home and have had to grieve here alone. It's not fair for the rules to be this partial towards citizens when expats are the ones who will be traveling mostly to see their families back home and not a leisure trip. Kuwait is so loved by those without



“Last year my wedding was set for July 12, but because of COVID we postponed it. My fiancée is stuck in India, her mother and my mother and family are here in Kuwait. Because of the travel ban on expats, we aren't able to set any date. Everything is in limbo. My fiancée hasn't seen her mom or me in three years, and this is affecting us a lot emotionally. I am all set to leave Kuwait for good, but my sister and mom and my fiancée's mom don't want to risk losing their jobs in Kuwait. All of us have been raised and lived our entire lives in Kuwait. This ban on expats feels really unfair and unreasonable.”

its nationality and it's sad to see the country not love them back."



"I got married and came to Kuwait and haven't seen my family since 2019. Now I have a baby (I was pregnant and gave birth alone) and need them to see him."



"Our story - my husband's and mine - is not as bad as many other stories. Fortunately, we are from Portugal, and despite a short period of time when the numbers escalated there, Portugal did and is doing quite well battling COVID-19. Usually we travel twice a year to see our family, parents, children, siblings and



KUWAIT: In this May 6, 2020 file photo, people wait in line at Kuwait International Airport to leave Kuwait. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Fouad Al-Shaikh

extended family. Family is really, really important to us - I guess this is our Arab heritage. Because of the travel restrictions from Kuwait, we didn't go "home" for Christmas. On purpose I wrote "home" in quotes, because home now is Kuwait. That's where we live, that's where we work, that's where my husband has his company, that's where we have our second family, we have our belongings. We don't even own a house in Portugal. So, when Kuwait doesn't allow people like us, residents for so many years in Kuwait, or when it doesn't allow families to get together, it seems not fair on those who call this (beloved) country "home". Now we are facing another situation. We registered to get the vaccine since the first day! Although we are in our 40s, we have not been called yet because we don't fit in any categories of people being vaccinated. And the worst thing is that a lot of people that didn't even bother to register already got their vaccines! Maybe it would be time to look at those who registered since the beginning. Those are the ones who care for others! We appreciate that the vaccine is free and equality of treatment in this regard, but we are now feeling desperate because after six months, we are still waiting. And no vaccine, no traveling again! Our elderly

how we are unable to see our own parents due to these travel restrictions."



"Came to my father's funeral in December. But before I could go back, the airport closed to all expats. Still paying rent in Kuwait and having salary cuts as well, as well as having to live in a different country."

grew up in Kuwait, after going to university my dad stopped renewing my residency, so I would visit them using a visit visa. I went on vacation in February 2020 and I have not been able to enter Kuwait since. I have not seen my family for over a year and a half. For reference, I am very close to my family and visit them on average every 3-4 weeks. My mental health has declined, as while Kuwait isn't my home, it is a land that feels most like home. One which I have not visited since February 2020. Due to my inability to stay with



In this April 16, 2020 file photo, people wait in line to register to leave Kuwait during a grace period the Interior Ministry had announced for expatriates with expired visas.



"Thanks a lot for sharing our stories on your platform. Will share the story of my dad who served Kuwait for more than 40 years. He was a government employee who retired. He is currently suffering from heart problems and can't be operated on because he doesn't have a valid civil ID and we can't renew it since he's over 60 years old. On March 6 my dad got his first dose of the vaccine. Just two days later he suffered a heart attack and almost died, but alhamdulillah he survived. The doctors said he has multiple arteries clogged and a bypass surgery is essential. It's been over two months he's at home on medications only. They're asking KD 12,000 for his surgery. But because he doesn't have a valid civil ID, they're refusing to do the surgery. If we pay them the amount, they'll do it, but the amount is a lot and we can't pay. So even after serving Kuwait this many years, he doesn't deserve to live? Where is humanity? We're praying that the rules change, at least for those who are sick and are not able to travel during the pandemic."

my family, I have had to crash with distant relatives I barely knew and lived a very isolated year and a half away from not only my close family, but also my closest friends."



"I'm a British expat teaching in a British international school here in Kuwait. I've lived in Kuwait for four years and nine months. I had a normal stay until the past one year - for obvious reasons. I got married in December 2019 after 10 years of being divorced. My wife and I were excited about starting our new life together here. I applied and got a visa for her to join me in March 2020. Before we could conclude the necessary documentations to enable her travel, the airports were shut and the subsequent lockdown happened. My biggest anguish is that I have been unable to see her since December 2019. We have only spent a week together as a married couple. We have survived on WhatsApp calls and she has been crying, hoping, praying that we can see again. Her visa is expired now. I am hoping to see her during the summer holidays and if I am not allowed back into the country afterwards, so be it."



"I was the fourth generation to be raised in Kuwait! My family knows no other home but Kuwait. I moved out for school and my parents would visit me every year because I am not eligible to get a visa based on my nationality. I last saw my parents in 2019 and my grandfather who is 80+ in 2017. I really miss them and would like to go see them and my family. I miss home!"



"I'm an expat living in Dubai currently, because I can't come to see my family in Kuwait. My parents and my siblings are all in Kuwait, while I'm here. I have a dependent visa under my dad, not a work visa, and I'm unable to travel an hour and 20 minutes to see my family. I have been vaccinated with the Pfizer jab already, in order to avoid any issues with respect to COVID. I wish to somehow be let into the country for as little as a few days."



"I am a 20-something female. My family are expats and have lived in Kuwait their whole lives (they sought refuge from Palestine during the second Nakba). While they are expats and I



Police and volunteers help passengers at Kuwait International Airport in this April 21, 2020 file photo.

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WhatsApp goes to court against India's social media clampdown

## 'World's leading bank robbers': North Korea's hacker army

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BEIRUT: University student Mira Krayem, 24, tells children stories of Palestinian history and culture at the Palestinian refugee camp of Shatila in Lebanon's capital Beirut. —AFP

# Palestinians pin hopes on Gaza solidarity

## After years of crushing defeat, Palestinian refugees now feel energized

**SHATILA CAMP, Lebanon:** From marching in rallies to posting live updates on social media, Palestinian refugee Mira Krayem has barely slept since conflict gripped her ancestral homeland earlier this month. But the 24-year-old university student, who lives in Lebanon, said she felt solidarity messages for the Palestinian cause from across the world have made her and fellow activists feel reenergized after years of crushing defeat. "It makes us feel like we have a voice," said Krayem, on a rooftop overlooking Shatila, the tightly packed refugee camp in Beirut where she was born, one of some 475,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

In 11 days of violence before a ceasefire was declared last week, Zionist jets and artillery pounded Gaza, the blockaded Palestinian coastal enclave of two million ruled by Islamist group Hamas, who fired thousands of rockets towards Zionist state. With graphic images of Zionist bomb blasts and Hamas rocket attacks broadcast live on television networks, supporters of each side took to social media to express their anger.

The United States and other states stressed

Jewish entity's right to defend itself against rockets fired by Hamas, but rights groups spoke out against the destruction wreaked on the enclave. As the death toll mounted—especially on the Palestinian side, given Zionists' air superiority and its Iron Dome missile defense system stopping most Hamas rockets—there were growing expressions of solidarity for the people of Gaza as thousands were made homeless with entire tower blocks blasted into dust.

### 'Makes you feel alive'

During the bombardments, hundreds of Palestinians and Lebanese marched in Beirut, echoing similar rallies of support for Gaza held in countries across the world. British pop star Dua Lipa and models of Palestinian descent Bella and Gigi Hadid posted messages of support for Palestinian rights in turn prompting solidarity messages from those backing the Jewish state's right to defend itself.

It has given the impetus to Palestinian refugees to keep pushing their cause. "It is tiring, but it's tiring in a beautiful way," Krayem said, a Palestinian flag drawn on her black jumper.

"It makes you feel alive and close to Palestine." Krayem's energy is emblematic of a generation born long after what Palestinians call the Nakba—the "catastrophe"—when more than 700,000 Palestinians fled or were forced from their homes by the 1948 war that led to the creation of the Jewish state.

Nearly three-quarters of a century later, their number has grown to millions scattered around the world. Most live in the surrounding regional nations of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria—countries all bordering the Zionist state — where they are often marginalized. Recent normalization deals between the Zionist regime and Arab states looked like another nail in the Palestinian cause's coffin. But the tragedy of the recent crisis has brought people together. "Everyone in the camp is looking for a way to help... and discussions about Palestine haven't stopped," said Krayem, who also works as a volunteer teaching children Palestinian history and culture. "All these people, who were so distracted with the economic crisis or the coronavirus pandemic in Lebanon, they all

started talking about return again," she added. "You can hear people saying things like 'tomorrow, when we return'".

### 'Our time is up'

For elderly grandmother Rahma Abdul Qader in the Syrian capital Damascus—one of some 438,000 Palestinian refugees in the country — she fears it may be too late for her to ever return. Qader left Jaffa—now a mixed Arab-Jewish quarter of Tel Aviv—in 1948, when she was nine.

"Even after all these years, the image of this place is fresh in my mind," she told AFP, surrounded by her family. "I tell my grandchildren about it all the time." Unlike Krayem, she is not hopeful she will see her homeland again. "Our time is up," she said. "But maybe my grandchildren will return one day, because justice always prevails in the end."

Her 55-year-old daughter Iman said she was touched by messages of support. "The Palestinians used to feel isolated in recent years," said. "But after everything that happened, there is a feeling that we have people on our side." —AFP

## Mali president and PM resign after arrest

**BAMAKO:** Mali's interim president and prime minister resigned yesterday, a top junta aide said, two days after they were detained and stripped of their powers in what appeared to amount to the country's second coup in nine months. President Bah Ndaw and Prime Minister Moctar Ouane, tasked with steering the return to civilian rule after a coup last August, resigned in the presence of mediators visiting the military base where they were being held, said Baba Cisse, special advisor to junta boss Assimi Goita.

However a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union and UN mission MINUSMA mediation mission told reporters that the leaders had in fact resigned before they arrived. The delegation then went to speak to Goita—who holds the rank of vice president in the transitional gov-

ernment—again after seeing him late Tuesday. "We saw the vice president again to express our dissent," the member told reporters on condition of anonymity.

Cisse said negotiations were under way for the pair's release and the formation of a new government in the poor Sahel country. Their detentions triggered widespread international condemnation and the threat of sanctions. The UN Security Council was set to hold an emergency meeting later Wednesday at the request of former colonial power France and others, with French President Emmanuel Macron likening the recent events to a second coup.

The ECOWAS mediators met with Ndaw and Ouane at the Kati military camp around 15 kilometers (nine miles) from the capital Bamako. A member of the delegation headed by former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan had warned that ECOWAS "could quickly announce sanctions" if the crisis is not resolved.

France was also prepared to impose "targeted sanctions", Macron said after a European Union summit.

Macron, whose country has committed more than 5,000 troops to



In this file photo taken on March 20, 2021 Malian Prime Minister Moctar Ouane and his delegation attend the inauguration of the new river port of Konna in central Mali. —AFP

Mali's fight against jihadism in the Sahel, condemned the arrest of Ndaw and Ouane as a "coup d'etat in an unacceptable coup d'etat". On Monday, the United Nations, African Union, ECOWAS, the EU and United States issued a rare joint statement, attacking the detention and demanding the pair be released.

That demand was echoed on Tuesday by Britain and Germany. A

senior Malian military official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Tuesday that Ndaw and Ouane had "spent the night in good conditions," adding: "The president saw his doctor."

A member of Goita's team said that during the talks with the ECOWAS mediators, they had "explained their reasons" for pushing the two men out, and insisted that elections would still be held next year. —AFP

## Tigray at 'serious risk' of famine, warns UN official

**THE UNITED NATIONS:** A senior UN official has warned the Security Council that urgent measures are needed to avoid famine in the war-torn region of Tigray in Ethiopia, in a briefing seen by AFP. "There is a serious risk of famine if assistance is not scaled up in the next two months," wrote Mark Lowcock, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent troops into Tigray in early November to disarm and detain leaders of the regional ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). He said the move

came in response to TPLF attacks on federal army camps. More than six months later, Lowcock said, the fighting and abuses continue in Tigray, where the spectre of a famine has been hovering for several months. "Concrete measures are urgently needed to break the vicious cycle between armed conflict, violence and food insecurity," Lowcock said in his two-and-a-half page note Tuesday.

"I urge members of the Security Council and other Member States to take any steps possible to prevent a famine from occurring," he said. "Today, at least 20 percent of the population in that area face emergency food insecurity," he said, adding that "destruction and violence against civilians continue even now across Tigray." "In the six and a half months since the start of the conflict in Tigray in early November 2020 an estimated two million people have been displaced. Civilians are being killed and injured," he added. "Rape and other forms of abhorrent sexual violence are widespread and systematic. Public and private infrastructure and



An Ethiopian soldier rests in his tent at the Um Gargour refugee camp in eastern Sudan where they have found interim sanctuary. —AFP

objects indispensable to the survival of civilians have been destroyed, including hospitals and agricultural land," he warned. —AFP

## Children left behind as Moldova battles depopulation

**CHISINAU, Moldova:** Although Aura Mutruc was promised toys that other children in her village in Moldova could not have, what she longed for most was her mother. "Mum told me that I had fits every time she left. She told me that she was going to bring me dolls but I didn't care, I just wanted her to stay with me," said Mutruc, now 23, adding that growing up without her parents had left a "huge hole".

She is among many children left behind in Moldova, one of the poorest countries in Europe, as it struggles to stop an exodus of parents leaving to find work abroad. Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union 30 years ago, about one million Moldovans—roughly a third of the population—have left, many due to a lack of economic opportunity exacerbated by corruption.

Faced with such mass emigration over decades as well as a falling birth rate, the United Nations says that Moldova has one of the world's largest population declines.

An estimated 100,000 young Moldovans are currently growing up in the country without their parents, the government office in charge of the diaspora says. They are among the millions of children "left behind" globally by one or both parents because of migration, according to UNICEF. "Limited job opportunities in communities of origin and the promise of remittances encourage parents to move for work," the UN's children's agency said in a working paper last year.

Mutruc's mother Lilia said that leaving her daughter in the care of her own parents from the age of two and a half was "the only solution to make ends meet". "I knew how much she was in pain. For many years, her crying echoed in my head," the 49-year-old told AFP by phone. She still sells clothes and household items at an open-air market stall in neighboring Romania, the destination of many Moldovans. —AFP



## International

# 'World's leading bank robbers': North Korea's hacker army

## Cyberwarfare more dangerous than Pyongyang's weapons programs: Analysts

SEOUL: Nuclear-armed North Korea is advancing on the front lines of cyberwarfare, analysts say, stealing billions of dollars and presenting a clearer and more present danger than its banned weapons programs. Pyongyang is under multiple international sanctions over its atomic bomb and ballistic missile programs, which have seen rapid progress under North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

But while the world's diplomatic focus has been on its nuclear ambitions, the North has been quietly and steadily building up its cyber capabilities, and analysts say its army of thousands of well-trained hackers are proving to be just as dangerous.

"North Korea's nuclear and military programs are long-term threats, but its cyber threats are immediate, realistic threats," said Oh Il-seok, a researcher at the Institute for National Security Strategy in Seoul.

Pyongyang's cyberwarfare abilities first came to global prominence in 2014 when it was accused of hacking into Sony Pictures Entertainment as revenge for "The Interview", a satirical film that mocked leader Kim. The attack resulted in the posting of several unreleased movies online as well as a vast trove of confidential documents.

Since then the North has been blamed for a number of high-profile cyberattacks, including a \$81 million heist from the Bangladesh Central Bank as well as the 2017 WannaCry global ransomware attack, which infected some 300,000 computers in 150 nations. Pyongyang has denied any involvement, describing US allegations over WannaCry as "absurd" and a foreign ministry spokesman declaring: "We have nothing to do with cyberattacks."

But the US Justice Department in February indicted three North Koreans on charges of "participating in a wide-ranging criminal conspiracy to conduct a series of destructive cyberattacks". In its 2021 Annual Threat Assessment Report, Washington acknowledged that Pyongyang "probably possesses the expertise to cause temporary, limited disruptions of some critical infrastructure networks" across the United States.

The North's cyber program "poses a growing

espionage, theft, and attack threat," said the document from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. It accused Pyongyang of stealing hundreds of millions of dollars from financial institutions and cryptocurrency exchanges, "probably to fund government priorities, such as its nuclear and missile programs".

### The best defense

North Korea's cyber-program dates back to at least the mid-1990s, when then-leader Kim Jong Il reportedly said "all wars in future years will be computer wars". Today Pyongyang's 6,000-strong cyberwarfare unit, known as Bureau 121, operates from several countries including Belarus, China, India, Malaysia and Russia, according to a US military report published in July 2020.

Scott Jarkoff of cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike rates them highly: "They are extremely sophisticated, dedicated, and capable of conducting advanced attacks." Bureau 121 recruits are trained in different coding languages and operating systems at special establishments such as Mirim University, said former student Jang Se-yul, who defected in 2007. Now known as the University of Automation, it takes in only 100 students a year from among the North's highest-scoring schoolchildren.

"We were taught that we had to be prepared against America's cyberwarfare capabilities," Jang told AFP. "Ultimately, we were taught that we had to develop our own hacking programs since attacking the enemy's operating system is the best defense."

Cyberwarfare is particularly appealing for small, poor countries like the North that are "outgunned in terms of equipment such as planes, tanks and other modern weapons systems", said Stimson Center researcher Martyn Williams. "Hacking just requires a computer and Internet connection."

### Keyboards over guns

Most state-sponsored hacking groups are mainly used for espionage purposes, but experts say North Korea is unusual in also deploying its cyber capabilities

It said current SAR policies and practices in the central Mediterranean enable violations and abuses against migrants more so than ending them.

### Suffering preventable

Responding to the report, UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet called on Tripoli and Brussels to urgently reform their SAR policies. "The real tragedy is that so much of the suffering and death along the central Mediterranean route is preventable," the former Chilean president said.

"Every year, people drown because help comes too late, or never comes at all. "Those who are rescued are sometimes forced to wait for days or weeks to be safely disembarked or, as has increasingly been the case, are returned to Libya which, as has been stressed on countless occasions, is not a safe harbor due to the cycle of violence," she added.

The report said EU states had slashed their SAR operations, while humanitarian organizations have been obstructed from conducting rescues. It added that private vessels increasingly avoid helping migrants in distress due to stand-offs over disembarkation. It said Europe had encouraged the Libyans to take on more SAR duties.

In 2020, at least 10,352 migrants were intercepted by the Libyan coast guard and returned to Libya, compared to at least 8,403 in 2019. However, when migrants are returned to Libya, they face a range of serious human rights violations and abus-

Lukashenko-often dubbed "Europe's last dictator"-is facing some of the strongest international pressure of his 26-year rule of ex-Soviet Belarus.

The strongman and his allies are already under a series of Western sanctions over a brutal crackdown on mass protests that followed his disputed re-election to a sixth term last August. European leaders are now accusing authorities in Minsk of essentially hijacking the passenger flight, and they agreed this week to cut air links with Belarus and told airlines to avoid the country's airspace.

### Video 'confessions'

The Belarusian opposition has called for further and stronger measures, and the UN Security Council was set to meet behind closed doors later. The Athens-to-Vilnius flight was diverted over a supposed bomb scare, with Lukashenko scrambling a MiG-29 fighter jet to accompany the aircraft.

Belarus has released a transcript of communications between Minsk air traffic control and the Ryanair flight, in which the crew was told "you have a bomb on board" and urged to land in Minsk.

Lukashenko yesterday denied that the fighter jet had forced the airliner to land, calling such claims an

this." Iran's candidate-vetting Guardian Council on Tuesday approved seven hopefuls to run in the June 18 poll to succeed Rouhani, a moderate who under the constitution must step down after his second consecutive term. The body disqualified moderate conservative Ali Larijani, the long-time parliament speaker and a Rouhani ally, as well as his first vice president, Eshaq Jhangiri, among other well-known names. It was a surprise move that could clear the way for a strong run by ultraconservative judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi. Raisi won 38 percent of the vote in the 2017 presidential election but was defeated by Rouhani, making him the expected frontrunner this year.

### Fears of low turnout

Rouhani said the supreme leader had "seldom intervened" in the candidate approvals for previous elections,



PYONGYANG: In a photo taken on June 14, 2018, students wearing Korean People's Army (KPA) uniforms sit before computer screens as they attend a class at the Mangyongdae Revolutionary School outside Pyongyang. —AFP

ties for financial gain. Pyongyang has blockaded itself to protect against the coronavirus pandemic, adding to the pressure on its economy, and has for years sought to earn foreign currency by multiple means. And Williams added: "Stealing it is a lot faster and potentially more lucrative than doing business, especially if you have skilled hackers."

The February US indictment accused the three North Koreans of stealing more than \$1.3 billion worth of money and cryptocurrency from financial institutions and companies. When it was issued Assistant Attorney General John Demers called North Korea's operatives "the world's leading bank

robbers", adding they were "using keyboards rather than guns, stealing digital wallets of cryptocurrency instead of sacks of cash".

The rise of cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin have presented hackers globally with a whole new range of increasingly lucrative targets. In addition, said Jarkoff, their decentralized networks were a particular bonus for the North, offering a way to circumvent financial sanctions. "This allows North Korea to easily launder money back into the country, outside the control of the global banking system," he said. "Cryptocurrency is attractive because it is uncontrolled, borderless, and relatively anonymous." —AFP

## UN urges Libya, EU to revamp Med migrant rescue

GENEVA: The United Nations urged Libya and the EU to overhaul their search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea, saying current practices robbed migrants of their lives, rights and dignity.

A UN Human Rights Office report on SAR operations and the protection of migrants in the central Mediterranean found that policies and practices "fail to prioritize the lives, safety and human rights of people attempting to cross from Africa to Europe. The report, released yesterday, said evidence suggested that the lack of human rights protections was "not a tragic anomaly, but rather a consequence of concrete policy decisions and practices by the Libyan authorities, the European Union member states and institutions, and other actors".

The 37-page report, entitled "Lethal Disregard: Search and rescue and the protection of migrants in the central Mediterranean Sea", covers the period from January 2019 to December 2020. It concluded that Libya was not a safe place for the disembarkation of migrants rescued at sea.

## Lukashenko slams critics, defends plane diversion

MINSK, Belarus: A defiant President Alexander Lukashenko yesterday defended Belarus's diversion of a European flight and arrest of a dissident on board, lashing out at critics at home and abroad. In his first public statement since the Ryanair flight was diverted and opposition journalist Roman Protasevich arrested on Sunday, Lukashenko dismissed the international outcry the incident provoked.

"I acted lawfully to protect our people," Lukashenko said in an address to parliament, the Belta state-run news agency reported. The criticism was nothing more than another attempt by his opponents to undermine his rule, he said. "Our ill-wishers at home and abroad have changed their methods of attacking the state," Lukashenko said. "They have crossed many red lines and crossed boundaries of common sense and human morality."

## Iran's Rouhani urges greater 'competition'

TEHRAN: Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday he had asked the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to ensure greater "competition" in June elections after many prominent hopefuls were barred from running. "The heart of elections is competition. If you take that away it becomes a corpse," Rouhani said at a televised cabinet meeting.

"I sent a letter to the supreme leader yesterday on what I had in mind and on whether he can help with



In this file photo, migrant minors wait to be tested for COVID-19 upon their arrival to the Spanish enclave of Ceuta. —AFP

es, the report said.

"No-one should feel compelled to risk their lives, or those of their families, on unseaworthy boats in search of safety and dignity," said Bachelet. "But the answer cannot be simply preventing departures from Libya or making the journeys more desperate and dangerous."

"Until there are sufficient safe, accessible and regular migration channels, people will continue to try to cross the central Mediterranean, no matter what the dangers or consequences." —AFP



MINSK: Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko speaks during his meeting with parliamentarians, members of Constitutional Commission and representatives of public administration bodies in Minsk yesterday. —AFP

"absolute lie". Protasevich-the 26-year-old co-founder of opposition Telegram channel Nexta-and his Russian girlfriend Sofia Sapega were arrested after the plane landed. —AFP

but said "there have been times when he added someone back in with an order". This happened in 2005, when he reversed the Guardian Council's decision to bar two reformist figures, Mostafa Moein and Mohsen Mehralizadeh, the latter of whom is also an approved candidate this year. But Larijani, who some media believe was named by Rouhani in the letter, has already conceded his disqualification. "Dear nation of Iran, now that the election was decided to be so, I have fulfilled my duty," he tweeted on Tuesday. "I am content with God's will."

In his remarks, Rouhani also warned of the consequences of a possible low turnout next month and said the system's "continued legitimacy" is at stake. A record 57 percent of Iranians stayed away from legislative elections in February last year in which thousands of candidates, many of them moderates and reformists, were disqualified. —AFP

### News in brief

#### S Africa's Zuma pleads not guilty

PIETERMARITZBURG, South Africa: South Africa's former president, Jacob Zuma, pleaded not guilty yesterday in a much-postponed corruption case dating back more than two decades. The 79-year-old faces 16 charges of fraud, graft and racketeering relating to a 1999 purchase of fighter jets, patrol boats and military gear from five European arms firms for 30 billion rand, then the equivalent of nearly \$5 billion. Zuma—who at the time was president Thabo Mbeki's deputy—is accused of accepting bribes totaling four million rand from one of the firms, French defense giant Thales. —AFP

#### Two dead in Burundi attacks

NAIROBI: At least two people have been killed and several injured in a series of near-simultaneous attacks in Burundi that targeted popular venues in the economic capital, government sources said yesterday. The Ministry of Interior described the attacks in Bujumbura at around 7:00 pm (1700 GMT) Tuesday as "terrorism by throwing grenades" and said an investigation had been launched. It confirmed on Twitter that two people had died, adding that one of the attackers was also injured in the blast and has been detained. "The wounded were taken to health care facilities," the ministry said. — AFP

#### Court hears Navalny complaints

PETUSHKI, Russia: Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny appeared in court via video link yesterday for the start of hearings into complaints against conditions at his penal colony. Navalny, 44, was jailed in February and is serving two-and-a-half years at a facility outside Moscow on old fraud charges he says are politically motivated. His detention, which came months after he survived a near-fatal poisoning attack, was met with sharp condemnation from Western countries which slapped fresh sanctions on the Kremlin in response. —AFP

#### Pfizer for youths: Ruling tomorrow

THE HAGUE: The European Medicines Agency will announce tomorrow whether it has approved the Pfizer/BioNTech coronavirus jab for 12- to 15-year-olds, the regulator said. If approved it will be the first vaccine to get the green light for young people in the 27-nation European Union. Pfizer is currently authorized for people aged 16 and older. The EMA will give a briefing on Friday to "cover the outcome of the extraordinary meeting of EMA's human medicine committee... to discuss the paediatric indication for Comirnaty", it said in an email yesterday. —AFP



## International

# WhatsApp goes to court against India's social media clampdown

## Tensions grow in India between government and social media giants

**NEW DELHI:** WhatsApp has launched legal action to stop India enforcing new social media rules effective yesterday that the tech firm says will break its privacy guarantees. The regulations come amid growing tensions between the government and social media giants, with police investigating a move by Twitter to brand a tweet by a spokesperson for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party as "manipulative". The new rules demand that social media companies give details of the "first originator" of posts deemed to undermine India's sovereignty, state security or public order. They also require platforms to take down posts depicting nudity or manipulated photos within 24 hours of receiving a complaint.

Facebook-owned WhatsApp is alarmed at the bid to trace messages as well as a threat of criminal action if it fails to comply. Its case, filed to the Delhi High Court and obtained by AFP, said the government campaign "infringes upon the fundamental rights to privacy and free speech of the hundreds of millions of citizens using WhatsApp" in India. "Citizens will not speak freely for fear that their private communications will be traced and used against them," it added. A first hearing could be held this week. WhatsApp, which claims 500 million users in India, calls upon the court to declare the rules unconstitutional. The company has said it will still cooperate with "valid legal requests" for information from authorities. Facebook and Google have said they are working

towards complying with the guidelines though they have sought talks with the authorities.

Indian business groups have also called on the government to delay implementation of the rules, which authorities say are necessary to make social media companies more accountable and to stop the spread of "fake news".

### Privacy 'restrictions'

The government said in response that privacy is a "fundamental right" but was subject to "reasonable restrictions". "Any operations being run in India are subject to the law of the land. WhatsApp's refusal to comply with the guidelines is a clear act of defiance of a measure whose intent can certainly not be doubted," the IT ministry said in a statement. It added that the regulations were meant to prevent, investigate or punish serious offences relating to India's sovereignty and integrity, national security, rape, sexually explicit material or child sexual abuse material.

"It is in the public interest that who started the mischief leading to such crime must be detected and punished," the ministry added. In a separate letter to social media companies, the ministry also asked for proof that they were observing the new rules, including the contact details of compliance officers. Authorities have been accused of seeking to crack down on criticism. Police this week visited Twitter's New Delhi offices as part of an investigation into the company's move to mark a tweet by a



**NEW DELHI:** In this photo illustration the icon of the mobile messaging service application WhatsApp is seen on the screen of a smart phone, in New Delhi. — AFP

spokesman for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party as "manipulated media". Sambit Patra had shared a document that purported to be a plan from the opposition Congress party to malign the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Congress said the document was a fake.

The government last month ordered Twitter and

Facebook to remove dozens of posts critical of Modi's handling of the coronavirus crisis. Twitter had earlier agreed to a government request to ban some accounts criticizing new agricultural laws that have sparked six months of protests by disgruntled farmers. The platform reversed the ban in February, drawing attacks from government MPs. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Myanmar barred from WHO meeting

**GENEVA:** Faced with the dilemma of who to recognize as Myanmar's legitimate representative following February's coup, World Health Organization members opted yesterday to exclude the country from their annual assembly. The 74th World Health Assembly had received requests from both Myanmar's ousted civilian authorities and the military junta that seized power nearly four months ago to represent the country. This year's gathering of the WHO's main decision-making body, which began Monday and lasts through June 1, is considered one of the most important ever as the COVID-19 pandemic rages on. —AFP

#### Taiwan man sentenced to death

**TAIPEI:** A Taiwanese court yesterday sentenced a man to death for killing a scooter driver in a random knife attack that has reignited debate about capital punishment. Taiwan is one of Asia's most progressive democracies and markets itself as a regional bastion of human rights. But it has drawn criticism from the international community and local rights groups for continuing to enforce the death penalty. Wang Ping-hua, 24, was convicted of murdering a man riding a scooter after quarrelling with his wife over where they should eat as the couple sat in a parked car. —AFP

#### Suspected ADF militia kill 13

**BENI, DR Congo:** Thirteen people in the eastern DR Congo have been killed in a suspected attack by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a militia that the US says is linked to the Islamic State group, local officials said yesterday. The massacre occurred late Tuesday in the village of Kisima-Vutotolia, 30 kilometers (18 miles) from the city of Beni on the highway leading to Uganda, said territorial administrator Donat Kibuana. "The situation in Kisima is very tragic. There was a raid by the ADF around 7:00 pm last night. Thirteen people lost their lives," he said. "Several inhabitants are missing," he added. —AFP

#### Macau bans Tiananmen vigil

**HONG KONG:** Macau has banned a vigil marking China's deadly Tiananmen crackdown for the second year in a row, with authorities this time saying the event would "incite subversion", in the latest sign of withering political freedoms there. Like neighboring Hong Kong, Macau is a former colony and a semi-autonomous Chinese city granted certain freedoms unseen on the authoritarian mainland. Chinese authorities have long maintained a more robust grip on Macau which has witnessed none of the widespread democracy protests that have engulfed Hong Kong over the years. —AFP

#### Japan fish boat, Russian ship collide

**TOKYO:** A Japanese fishing boat collided with a Russian ship off the northern island of Hokkaido yesterday, killing three crew members, Tokyo said. Japan's coast guard was informed that five crew members from the fishing boat were recovered by a Russian cargo ship, government spokesman Katsunobu Kato told reporters. "We have been told that three were confirmed dead, while the remaining two suffered non-life threatening injuries," he added. —AFP

## Three dead as another cyclone batters India

**DIGHA, India:** At least three people died yesterday as howling winds and waves the height of double-decker buses belted eastern India in the COVID-stricken country's second cyclone in as many weeks. Cyclones are a regular menace in the northern Indian Ocean but many scientists say they are becoming more frequent and severe as climate change warms the waters of the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea. Barely a week after Cyclone Tauktae claimed at least 155 lives in western India, Cyclone Yaas has forced the evacuation of more than 1.5 million people in the eastern states of West Bengal and Odisha.

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee said that the seaside town of Digha had been "swamped" by waves up to four meters (13 feet) high. She said two people had been killed, including one dragged into the sea by the waves in Digha and another crushed when his house collapsed. The storm packed lashing rain and winds gusting up to 155 kilometers (95 miles) an hour, the equivalent to a category-two hurricane.

"I have never seen such a storm ever in my life," said Purnendu Jana, a Digha resident. "The water may cross the main road for the first time." Local hotel owner Shiuli Das said: "Many of us are here,



**DIGHA, India:** Indian army personnel wades through the flooded village roads carrying people to safety as Cyclone Yaas barrels towards India's eastern coast in the Bay of Bengal. — AFP

all of us are really scared." Nearly 20,000 houses were damaged and more than a dozen river islands were flooded with a number of embankments breached, Banerjee said. In Odisha there was also extensive damage with hundreds of trees uprooted although there was minimal damage to power infrastructure, relief official Pradeep Kumar Jena said. "We have received reports regarding the death of two people... Local officials are investigating the two incidents," Jena said.

In neighboring Bangladesh one man was killed by a falling tree as the waves smashed through water defenses and inundated thousands of homes, officials told AFP. Locals feared the situation would worsen in the evening as the tide rises to a higher level than normal because of a full moon. "My house is already submerged under four feet of water. I don't know what will happen during the full moon tonight," Mostak Ahmed told AFP by phone from Khulna, in the country's south. —AFP

## Sri Lanka battles fire on ship loaded with chemicals

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lankan authorities battled yesterday to put out a fire raging for a week on a stricken container ship loaded with chemicals to avoid a potential marine environmental disaster. The Singapore-registered vessel, within sight of the shore, is carrying 25 tons of nitric acid as well as other unspecified chemicals and cosmetics, the navy said.

Eight of its nearly 1,500 containers fell overboard on Tuesday, one of which washed ashore at the Negombo tourist beach 40 kilometers (25 miles) north of Colombo. Strong winds associated with a cyclone hitting eastern India hampered efforts to put out the blaze as a huge cloud of black smoke rose from the MV X-Press Pearl. Sri Lanka's airforce used helicopters to drop about 425 kilograms (935 pounds) of fire retardant chemicals on the ship yesterday. Dharshani Lahandapura

from the Marine Environment Protection Authority said containment measures were being prepared in case chemicals or fuel oil are spilled from the ship's engine and fuel tanks. "Computer modeling showed any spill from the ship will reach the Negombo beach and we are ready to tackle it," Lahandapura told reporters in Colombo.

"Given the monsoon wind pattern, we are concentrating on this area and we are moving equipment to deal with a spill," she said. Navy spokesman Captain Indika de Silva said the 25-member crew had been evacuated safely but one had been hospitalized with minor injuries. The container ship was on its way to Colombo from Gujarat in India when the fire broke out on deck on May 20 around 14 kilometers (7.5 nautical miles) offshore.

Residents in Negombo were seen



**COLOMBO:** This handout photograph shows flames and thick smoke billowing from the Singapore-registered container ship MV X-Press Pearl, which has been burning for the seventh consecutive day, in the sea off Sri Lanka's Colombo Harbor. —AFP

scavenging plastic raw materials that washed ashore yesterday morning. Tugs and naval ships were leading the efforts to douse the blaze and three Indian coastguard vessels were expected to join the effort. India already sent another ship and an aircraft on Tuesday to assess the dam-

age and coordinate fire-fighting efforts, the Sri Lanka navy said. In September, a crude oil tanker caught fire off Sri Lanka's eastern coast after an engine room explosion that killed a crewman. That fire was put out after more than a week with the help of India's coastguard. —AFP

## Kyrgyzstan bars passengers from Tajikistan

**BISHKEK, Kyrgyzstan:** Kyrgyzstan said yesterday that scores of passengers flying from neighboring Tajikistan had been barred from entering the country weeks after border clashes between the Central Asian nations left dozens dead. The incident is likely to further sour relations between the impoverished former Soviet republics whose disputed border witnessed its worst fighting in three decades of independence erupt at the end of April. Kyrgyzstan reported 37 deaths from the clashes that saw border troops open fire on each other and led to the destruction of dozens of homes on both sides.

The dead were mostly civilians, including two children, Kyrgyzstan said. Tajikistan said 19 of its citizens died in the violence. A representative of the Manas airport in the capital Bishkek told AFP that the plane operated by Tajik carrier Somon Air had been asked to return to Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe after landing on Tuesday night because Kyrgyzstan's border service had "temporarily closed the border for citizens of Tajikistan". Kyrgyzstan's border service confirmed the restrictions on "entry, exit, stay, travel and transit" for Tajik citizens had been put in place from May 21, in a statement that did not refer to the incident.

### Tajikistan says not notified

Kyrgyz authorities also "restricted passage of goods and vehicles to and from the Republic of Tajikistan", the border service said. Foreigners and diplomatic personnel would still be able to cross the border, it added. But a

spokeswoman for Tajikistan's embassy in Kyrgyzstan told AFP that Kyrgyzstan had given Tajikistan no prior notification of the border closure. "Less than ten people, not citizens of Tajikistan, were allowed into Kyrgyzstan," the spokeswoman said of the approximately 200 passengers on the plane.

The spokeswoman claimed that a further 70 citizens of Tajikistan had been unable to fly from Bishkek to Dushanbe. Those Tajik citizens were expecting to take a pre-scheduled charter flight using the same plane that the nearly 200 passengers had touched down in, she said. "If Kyrgyzstan had officially notified us, these two flights would not have been scheduled," she added. The two countries that are both members of Russia and China-backed security blocs retained high level contacts throughout the three days of fighting at the border that saw Moscow and neighboring Uzbekistan offer to mediate. —AFP



# Business

THURSDAY, MAY 27, 2021

## Amazon to buy MGM studios, bolstering streaming ambitions

### \$8.45 billion deal to give US tech giant a vast library

WASHINGTON: Amazon has agreed to buy the storied MGM studios for \$8.45 billion, the companies said yesterday, giving the US tech giant a vast library to further its ambitions in streaming.

The deal bolsters Amazon Prime Video, which competes with Netflix and others in the fast-evolving market, with some 4,000 films — including the James Bond franchise — and 17,000 television shows. “The real financial value behind this deal is the treasure trove of IP in the deep catalog that we plan to reimagine and develop together with MGM’s talented team,” said Mike Hopkins, senior vice president of Prime Video and Amazon Studios.

The deal comes with Amazon experiencing surging growth in online retail and cloud computing, while making a push into entertainment as consumers turn to streaming media. It gives Amazon the fabled Metro Goldwyn Mayer studios, an iconic name in Hollywood which has been through a series of ownership changes and bankruptcy in recent years.

In addition to the James Bond franchise, MGM owns the rights to film productions including “Rocky”, “Legally Blonde” and “Tomb Raider”, and television shows such as “The Handmaid’s Tale” and “Real Housewives Of Beverly Hills”. “MGM has nearly a century of filmmaking history and complements the work of Amazon Studios, which has pri-

marily focused on producing TV show programming,” a statement from the companies said.

“Amazon will help preserve MGM’s heritage and catalog of films, and provide customers with greater access to these existing works. Through this acquisition, Amazon would empower MGM to continue to do what they do best: great storytelling.”

#### Streaming gains steam

The tie-up marks a new twist in a fast-evolving media landscape increasingly dominated by streaming giants such as Netflix, a trend which has accelerated during the coronavirus pandemic. The deal could increase scrutiny for Amazon, one of the Big Tech firms gaining unprecedented economic power in recent years and in the crosshairs of antitrust enforcers around the world.

Amazon was sued this week by US capital city Washington for allegedly abusing its dominance of online retail.

Last week, telecom giant AT&T said it was spinning off its WarnerMedia division — owner of the Warner Bros studios — in a combination with Discovery, creating a new entity to focus on streaming and competing with the rapidly growing Disney+ and new entrants such as Apple TV+. Amazon has said its Prime Video is used by some 175 million people worldwide. Its “Manchester by



In this file photo the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) headquarters is pictured in Century City, California. —AFP

the Sea” in 2017 became the first film from a streaming service to be nominated for a best picture Oscar. MGM studios, which has struggled to

gain box office hits in recent years, is not connected to the MGM Resorts group which owns hotels and casinos around the world. —AFP

## Facebook adapts defenses as deception campaigns go stealth

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook said yesterday that it has disrupted more than 150 deceptive influence schemes since 2017, with Russia the biggest single source, as culprits strive to stay “under the radar.”

The number of coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB) campaigns derailed at the leading social network ramped up each year since a Russia-linked operation to sway the outcome of the 2016 US presidential election put Facebook on the defensive. While those behind influence operations (IO) went unchecked on the playing field in 2016, Facebook has invested in hiring, automated systems, and industry alliances over the ensuing years. “These efforts have pressed threat actors to shift their tactics,” Facebook head of security policy Nathaniel Gleicher said during a briefing on the report. “They have - often without success - moved away from the major platforms and increased their operational security to stay under the radar.”

As tactics have gone more stealthy, the decep-

tion campaigns have seen their reach shrink since, by design, they are trying not to be noticed by the social network, according to executives.

From 2017 through the middle of this year, Facebook has exposed and taken down more than 150 covert operations that violate its policy against coordinated inauthentic behavior, according to the report. “These operations have targeted public debate across both established and emerging social media platforms, as well as everything from local blogs to major newspapers and magazines,” Gleicher said.

“They were foreign and domestic, run by governments, commercial entities, politicians, and conspiracy and fringe political groups.” The campaigns originated in more than 50 countries overall, with Russia the largest single source accounting for 27 of the deceptive networks, the report indicated.

Iran was the source of 23 CIB campaigns, second to Russia, according to the report. Meanwhile, the United States was the most common target as well as home to nine such influence operations by fringe political characters, conspiracy pushers, and consulting or public relations firms.

Influence campaigns continue to “push the boundaries of acceptable online behavior” and blur lines between deceit and free speech, Gleicher said. Those behind IO campaigns were expected to con-

## Ford says 40% of sales to be electric vehicles by 2030

NEW YORK: Ford once again is ramping up investment in zero-emission cars and by 2030 expects 40 percent of its vehicle volume to be comprised of fully electric vehicles, the company announced yesterday.

The US automaker said it will increase investment in electric vehicles, components and infrastructure to more than \$30 billion by 2025, boosting the amount from the \$22 billion target set in February. The company last week unveiled an all-electric version of its bestselling F-150 truck in an eco-friendly reinvention of a flagship American car brand, and said it has received 70,000 reservations from customers in just one week.

“This is our biggest opportunity for growth and value creation since Henry Ford started to scale the Model T, and we’re grabbing it with both hands,” Ford CEO Jim Farley said in a statement. Farley and other executives presented the plans in a virtual meeting with financial analysts and other stakeholders.

Besides the battery-powered F-150, called the Lightning, Ford has begun selling the electric Mustang Mach-E sport utility vehicle and will soon bring the E-Transit cargo van to showrooms.

The company also is investing in producing its own batteries, and recently announced a joint venture with South Korea’s SK Innovation. Manufacturers have joined the growing move towards zero-emission vehicles to help address global

warming. Ford’s main rival General Motors pledged in January to stop making diesel- or gasoline-powered cars by 2035.

German automaker Volkswagen also intends to offer 70 electric models by 2030 and sell 26 million units in 10 years.

#### Tesla at the top

Elon Musk’s Tesla remains the dominant force in the electric car market, with a valuation of \$580 billion compared to Ford’s \$51 billion. But with growing public interest for emissions-free vehicles, new entrants have joined the market including start-ups Rivian and Lucid.

However, electric cars still only accounted for 2.5 percent of all US sales in the first quarter, according to the specialist firm Cox. US President Joe Biden has made the development of electric cars a pri-

ority. His plan for massive investments in infrastructure currently under discussion provides several incentives, including the construction of a national network of 500,000 charging stations by 2030 and the conversion of 20 percent of school buses to run off electricity. Ford also is taking on Tesla, setting a goal of “having about one million vehicles that are capable of receiving over-the-air system updates on the road by the end of this year, exceeding Tesla’s volume by July 2022.”

Among the initiatives presented Wednesday as part of the “Ford+” plan to boost growth, the company also announced creation of Ford Pro, a global vehicle services and distribution business devoted to commercial and government customers. The company also has teamed up with Google to employ its cloud computing platform and also will employ Amazon’s voice program and other services from Apple and Microsoft. Ford shares gained 5.1 percent in early trading. —AFP



In this file photo, Ford Motor Company unveils their new electric F-150 Lightning outside of their headquarters in Dearborn, Michigan on May 19, 2021. —AFP



Logos of US social networks Facebook and Instagram on the screens of a tablet and a mobile phone. —AFP

tinue to try to “weaponize” moments of uncertainty worldwide, amplifying division around crises such as the pandemic and civic protests. The US 2020 election campaign brought to the forefront the complexity of separating bad actors behind covert influence operations from unwitting people they co-opt or local folks whose interests are in synch with the deceptive messaging, according to Gleicher. —AFP

## British Land logs more losses on COVID fallout

LONDON: UK real estate group British Land yesterday posted another large annual net loss on the back of pandemic fallout. Losses after tax hit £1.0 billion (\$1.4 billion, 1.2 billion euros) in its financial year to March, during which the UK imposed multiple virus lockdowns.

The performance compared with a similar loss in the prior year, British Land added in a results statement. The firm slashed the value of its property portfolio by almost 11 percent to £9.1 billion, as a boom in both homeworking and online shopping dented demand for offices and shops.

“Our performance this year clearly reflects the impact of COVID-19,” said Chief Executive Simon Carter. “But we have further strengthened our finances through timely asset sales and are well positioned for the opportunities that lie ahead.” Revenues collapsed by almost a quarter to £468 million. Stripping out exceptional items, however, underlying annual profit fell by about a third to £201 million. British Land’s share price sank 4.6 percent to 495.80 pence in afternoon deals on London’s falling FTSE 100 index.

“There is no mistaking the challenge British Land is facing,” said analyst Susannah Streeter at stockbroker Hargreaves Lansdown. “It’s not only being threatened by the rising tide of homeworking, but like a sandcastle, it faces fresh erosion from the heavy spade of e-commerce.”

The group meanwhile sold off £1.2 billion of assets during the year, comprising £556 million in retail real estate and £643 million in offices. “The company is recognizing that the working from home revolution brought about by COVID, isn’t likely to be reversed any time soon,” added Streeter. Corporate giants including HSBC and KPMG are offering staff hybrid or flexible work — split between home and offices — as Britain eases lockdown curbs. —AFP

## Shell ordered to cut emissions in Dutch climate case

THE HAGUE: A Dutch court ordered oil giant Shell yesterday to slash its greenhouse gas emissions targets in a landmark victory for climate activists. Dubbed “the People versus Shell”, the case was launched in 2019 by the Netherlands branch of Friends of the Earth, and is backed by six other groups and more than 17,000 Dutch citizens.

“The court orders Royal Dutch Shell... to reduce its CO2 output and those of its suppliers and buyers by the end of 2030 by a net of 45 percent based on 2019 levels,” the court said.

“Royal Dutch Shell has to implement this decision at once.” The climate groups had asked the court to impose the target, saying that Anglo-Dutch multinational Shell should meet emissions targets in the 2015 Paris climate accords. Shell said in February it had set new targets to reduce its net carbon footprint compared to a 2016 baseline by 20 percent by 2030, 45 percent by 2035 and 100 percent by 2050.

Its previous targets were 30 percent by 2035 and 65 percent by 2050. Shell had argued that it is making serious efforts to cut gas emissions, but that there is no legal basis for the case and that governments are responsible for meeting Paris targets. Friends of the Earth Netherlands, one of the groups leading the case, said in a statement ahead of the verdict that it was “unique because it is the first time in history that judges have been asked to order a company to emit less CO2.”

The case is one of a series around the world in which citizens and campaigners frustrated with inaction on climate change have hauled governments and big polluters before the courts.

#### ‘Historic opportunity’

The 2015 Paris accords committed all nations to cut carbon emissions to limit warming to two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels and encouraged them to go down to 1.5 degrees. ActionAid Netherlands executive director Marit Maij said that “big polluters like Shell have an outsized responsibility to help tackle climate change.”

Maij said the case was a “historic opportunity to hold Shell accountable for its actions and ensure it cuts its emissions in line with the Paris Agreement”. The group said Shell’s “strategy is to keep polluting while offsetting their emissions with vast tree plantations.” “This will require land the equivalent of three times the size of the Netherlands, which risks driving conflicts over food and land in the Global South”, she added. —AFP





## Business

# US exchanges offer a rich potential target for hackers

## Worries becoming more acute after US pipeline hack

## Opinion

### Energy urgently needs stronger cyber defenses

By Badar Chaudhry

**A**larm bells in the global energy market rightfully rang in May when a cyberattack forced a six-day shutdown of the Colonial Pipeline - critical infrastructure in the US, the world's biggest oil consumer and producer. The rising impact and effectiveness of cybercrime is the flipside to the widely lauded and strengthening adoption of digitalization in our increasingly globalized energy market. Global cybercrime costs are expected to climb by 15 percent per year over the next five years, reaching \$10.5trn per year by 2025, according to Cybersecurity Ventures. This could represent the greatest transfer of economic wealth in history.

And the threat has only intensified amid the surge in remote working and decentralized systems amid COVID-19. For example, when the UAE announced movement restrictions in March 2020, the total number of brute force attacks against remote desktop protocols (RDP) jumped from 467,115 in February 2020 to 1.3mn in March 2020 - a 193 percent rise in one month, Kaspersky revealed.

## Finding a new balance

Digital tools are one of the vital keys to unlocking the greatest puzzle in today's energy markets: how to affordably meet rising energy demand while increasing environmental protection? This means that the growing risk of cybercrime cannot translate into a retreat from digitalization - it just means being a lot smarter about protection. Consider this viable scenario: a wave of simultaneous attacks on energy infrastructure in multiple countries essentially holds swathes of energy security hostage, impacting billions of people and millions of businesses. Clearly, cybersecurity demands more serious and significant action.

State-owned energy companies - those acting as social champions as well as commercial ventures - can face particular risk. For one, attacks on such entities can trigger security and economic dislocation and throw healthy competition between operators into array. Cyber criminals can also leverage the often-siloed nature of companies' physical and cyber operations. This is being further exacerbated by energy companies changing their portfolios to support decarbonization, such as exploring renewable energy markets. These upheavals only make it easier for cybercriminals to expose down vulnerabilities.

## Middle East's next steps?

Some energy companies' antiquated security systems - perhaps borne in the 'easy cash' era of \$100/bbl+ oil prices - need urgent reviews. It is excellent progress to see that 59 percent of Middle East CEOs plan to double digit investments in digital transformation, according to PwC's 24th CEO Survey. But that just 41 percent of Middle East CEOs are extremely concerned about cyber threats is more surprising considering the red flags. For example, the number of users of Kaspersky software worldwide in 2019-2020 who encountered targeted ransomware - malware used to extort money from high-profile targets, such as corporations and government agencies - soared by 767 percent.

Still, the good news is that awareness and measures are improving - and investments are flowing. The post-Covid-19 market size for the Middle East's cybersecurity market is projected to grow from \$15.6bn in 2020 to \$29.9bn by 2025, with a compound annual growth rate of 13.8 percent, according to MarketsandMarkets.com. Plus, the UAE recently established a Cybersecurity Council and Saudi Aramco, Siemens Energy, and the World Economic Forum (WEF) have launched a co-lead report on cyber resilience in the oil and gas industry.

But there is still a lot of work to do. Based on IBM and Ponemon Institute's 2020 analysis, the cost of all data breaches - not just energy-related ones - in Saudi Arabia and the UAE climbed by 9.4 percent over the last year. These incidents cost companies studied in the region up to \$6.53mn per breach on average - 70 percent higher than the global average of \$3.86 million. And notably, the average time for companies in the Kingdom and the UAE to first identify a data breach has only decreased by just 10 days, from 279 to 269 days, not including the 100 days to contain the breach.

## Winning the power play

Right now, cyber criminals largely have the upper hand. For example, some common criminal businesses can be operated for as little as \$34 month with a \$25,000 return. Others may routinely require \$3,800 a month yet reap up to \$1mn per month, detailed Deloitte. How to shift the balance so that energy companies have the right steps are being taken to not only keep their operations as safe as possible, but also investors' money. Whatever route energy companies opt to take, they must act soon and collaboratively. Together, we can build stronger digital defenses - proverbial brick by brick.

*Note: Badar Chaudhry is senior vice president, Sector Head -Energy, Mashreq Bank*



**NEW YORK:** Cyberattacks have long been seen as a threat to financial markets, but worries are becoming even more acute following a US pipeline hack that set off a public panic and forced the company to pay a ransom.

Financial exchanges that manage daily transactions of tens or hundreds of billions of dollars are an appealing target for hackers. Major stock exchanges insist they are on top of the issue, but remain mum about what steps they are taking to safeguard their networks.

"Technology and operational resiliency sits at the heart of everything we do," a Nasdaq spokesperson told AFP. Likewise, the Chicago Board Options Exchange "takes cybersecurity very seriously and does not discuss our cyber defenses publicly," an exchange spokesperson said.

New York Stock Exchange President Stacey Cunningham told CNBC the exchange is "constantly working not only with our own teams but with others in the market, with the regulators and other exchanges on ensuring that markets are secure." The Chicago Mercantile Exchange, a key trading venue for energy and agricultural products, declined comment entirely.

Recent history shows the hacking risk is far from a theoretical problem at financial exchanges. Last August, New Zealand's NZX was crippled for four days following a digital siege. The episode, a "distributed denial-of-service" attack, is a common type of cyberincident in which hackers saturate a system by sending a huge flood of requests, overwhelming the system and slowing or freezing operations.

"NZX has been advised by independent cyber specialists that the attacks ... are among the largest, most well-resourced and sophisticated they have ever seen in New Zealand," said NZX Chief Executive Mark Peterson said following the incident. Such a calamity has yet to befall an exchange or major financial firm in the United

States. But the worry has preoccupied US finance and government at the highest levels. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell told the news show "60 Minutes" last month that a cyberattack poses risks to financial markets even more severe than the liquidity freeze-up in the 2008 financial crisis. "There are scenarios in which a large payment utility, for example, breaks down and the payment system can't work," Powell said. "Payments can't be completed."

"There are scenarios in which a large financial institution would lose the ability to track the payments that it's making," Nasdaq employs resources to counter cyberthreats, but warns that "these measures may prove insufficient depending upon the attack or threat posed," the company said in a securities filing, adding that it "may be required to devote significant additional resources to the effort."

## Range of motivations

The most typical means used by hackers to extort victims is to infiltrate a computer network with ransomware, which encrypts the system's data that can be lifted after the ransom is paid. Earlier this month, Colonial Pipeline, which provides gasoline to much of the US East coast, ultimately paid some \$4.4 million to hackers after the network was completely taken down for several days, sparking panic buying and a fuel shortage in some areas.

But money is not the only motivation for groups that might seek to take hostage a high-profile institution like a stock market, experts say. "They may want to make money, damage the ability of the target to conduct business, steal sensitive information, or ruin their reputation," said Sean Cordero, a security advisor at Netenrich, a California cybersecurity company.

"Or, it could be all of the above and more." The group's motivation also will determine the nature of the attack. "If they are driven by espionage or are purely interested in gathering information, they



**NEW YORK:** Cyberattacks have long been seen as a threat to financial markets, but worries are becoming even more acute following a US pipeline hack that set off a public panic and forced the company to pay a ransom.

would likely lay quiet and move discretely so that they may maintain access for as long as possible," said Alec Alvarado, a cyberintelligence specialist at Digital Shadows, a San Francisco company.

But groups seeking a large ransom payment may opt to inflict maximum immediate harm to elicit a quick response. The range of motivations means firms should aim to make themselves "the hardest target" possible to thwart attacks, Alvarado said. "Unfortunately, with ever-expanding attack surfaces, if a threat actor is willing to take the time to find a way in, chances are they probably will."

Cordero said frequent updates of security systems are needed to counter cyberattacks, requiring systems to be temporarily taken offline. "This is ultimately a risk-based decision that can have major implications if not treated as such," Cordero said. "Unfortunately, these decisions tend to be relegated to the 'to-do' list and may go for months or years without action." —AFP

## Norwegian Air exits bankruptcy protection

**OSLO:** Low-cost carrier Norwegian Air Shuttle emerged from bankruptcy protection yesterday following a massive restructuring that included a vast fleet reduction and dropping of its long-haul business. In financial difficulty even before the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic-which aggravated its problems further by paralyzing global air traffic-Norwegian was in December placed under bankruptcy protection in Ireland, where several of its subsidiaries are based, and in Norway.

With its creditors and aircraft leasing companies, the company has negotiated a reduction of its debt and financial obligations by between 63 and 65 billion kroner (6.2-6.4 billion euros, \$7.5-7.8 billion), to between 16 and 18 billion kroner. In addition, Norwegian, once Europe's third-biggest low-cost airline, has also dropped its loss-making long-haul business, cancelled many of its aircraft orders, slashed its fleet from 156 to 51 planes, and raised six billion kroner in a new share issue.

It is also expected to have reduced its number of employees from around 10,200 at the end of 2018 to some 3,300 by the end of the restructuring, according to financial news site e24.no.

With its restructuring plan approved by



Norwegian and Irish courts, the company can now emerge from bankruptcy protection. "It's a relief to be a normal airline again," chief executive Jacob Schram told reporters at a press conference.

Norwegian said yesterday in a statement it has liquidity of seven billion kroner. "This war chest can keep us afloat long after summer next year," Schram said. "We are strong enough to cope with a total reopening of society," he told news channel TV2 Nyhetskanalen. But the company, which has had just nine aircraft in operation since December 2020, continues to operate at a loss. In the first quarter, when it transported just 210,000 passengers, the company posted a pre-tax loss of 1.19 billion kroner, compared to a loss of 3.29 billion a year earlier.

Now focused on Europe and in particular the Nordic countries, Norwegian plans to have 70 aircraft in operation next year, when travel is expected to resume as the pandemic wanes. The company's share price, which has been highly volatile of late, was up by almost 30 percent on Oslo's stock exchange in midday trading. —AFP

## EU wants more from Big Tech against disinformation

**BRUSSELS:** The EU yesterday tasked tech giants such as Facebook, YouTube and TikTok to do more against disinformation and provide much better access to their algorithms as well as beef up fact-checking. The proposal is the EU's effort to strengthen its existing code of conduct against disinformation, which was launched in 2018 after revelations that platforms had facilitated and amplified false information in the ramp up to the Brexit vote and elections in the US in 2016.

It was signed by Google, Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and in June 2020 by TikTok, as well as players in the advertising sector. In the wake of the COVID pandemic, the EU executive is now asking the signatories to go even further in their commitments, which are non-binding and voluntary, at least for now. The pressure on the companies to deliver is great, given that the EU is also hammering out its Digital Services Act (DSA) that will give Europe power to slap penalties on Facebook and others when they fail to demonstrate strong action against disinformation. European Commission Vice President Vera Jourova said the stricter and more detailed code of conduct was necessary to better root out "systemic risks" on platforms.

Jourova said that it was time for big tech companies "to stop policing themselves alone and stop allowing to make money on disinformation." "After the DSA will come into force, this code of practice will become semi-obligatory," she warned. Among the many proposals, the EU is calling for messaging platforms such as Facebook's WhatsApp to



**OAKLAND, CA:** Apple CEO Tim Cook (left), followed by Apple security personnel Jimmy Taranto, makes his way to court after arriving at the United States District Court in Oakland, California. —AFP

also be included, given the vast disinformation campaigns seen in India and elsewhere.

The Commission is also asking platforms for regular reports with clear benchmarks to assess the measures put in place. In addition, the EU executive is seeking to create a designated task force composed of the code's signatories, representatives of the EU diplomatic service and media regulators from the member states.

The proposals will be discussed with the signatories, who will have to submit a first version of the revised code late this year so that it can be operational by the beginning of 2022. Marisa Jimenez Martin, Facebook's director of EU Affairs, said that "the reality is that we think the code works".

"It just needs to be now strengthened and we will work with the other stakeholders to make that happen in the next months," she told reporters. The code is one of the many EU workstreams to limit the reach of Big Tech. The DSA, along with a companion law, the Digital Markets Act, are currently under negotiation at the European Parliament and among the 27 member states in wrangling that could take at least another year. —AFP

## Turkmenistan begins capital expansion

**ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan:** Authorities in Turkmenistan broke ground on what they say will be a major expansion of the capital Ashgabat on Tuesday, state media showed, despite the Central Asian country's long-running economic crisis. The secretive authoritarian state is almost wholly dependent on natural gas exports and has struggled to recover from the global energy price slump in 2014 that battered the local manat currency and plunged many citizens into poverty.

But a state newspaper on Tuesday carried a pledge from autocrat leader Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov to continue investing "huge sums of money" to turn the capital into "one of the most prosperous cities in the world". The grandiose project gets underway despite Berdimukhamedov noting in a rare admission earlier this year that the country was struggling to pare down foreign debt, and authorities have not disclosed a price tag or timeline for Ashgabat's expansion.

Berdimukhamedov acknowledged at the groundbreaking ceremony that sourcing materials could be challenging "because of the situation with the coronavirus"-a disease his country has yet to acknowledge any cases of. The ceremony took place the same day the capital-whose name translates as "city of love"-marked its 140th anniversary.

A Tuesday evening state television report showed Berdimukhamedov signing an order on the building of a new district, which will be called "Ashgabat City" and is expected to house more than 100,000 people-some ten percent of the city's current population. He was then shown shovelling the first cement of the new project. Plans for the northern district shown on state television include a giant white and gold yurt as its centerpiece-a symbolic reference to the Turkmen people's nomadic past.

Ashgabat holds the world record for "highest density of buildings made from white marble" along with several other obscure records that the regime has harnessed for propaganda purposes.

Human Rights Watch warned in 2020 that fallout from the pandemic had "drastically exacerbated Turkmenistan's pre-existing food crisis", which is particularly acute in the regions outside the capital.

In recent weeks, black market prices for the dollar in local currency have exceeded the official rate of 3.5 manats to the dollar by a factor of eight or nine. The International Monetary Fund said Turkmenistan's economy grew 0.8 percent in 2020, a figure well short of the government's own estimate of 5.9 percent. —AFP



Business



KUWAIT: James Cleverly, Belinda Lewis, Abdulaziz Al-Babtain and the company's top management pose for a group photo during the event.



A tour at the data center



# Ooredoo Kuwait reaches a reseller agreement with BT

## Scope of services includes cloud-based security services and consultancy

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, yesterday announced it has entered a reseller agreement with BT, a leading provider of global communications services and solutions. The scope of services includes managed connectivity and voice services, collaboration and contact center solutions, as well as cloud-based security services and consultancy.

Due to the rapid development of the cyber threat

The partnership was announced at a signing ceremony held at Ooredoo Kuwait's Headquarters and witnessed by MP James Cleverly - Minister of State for Middle East and North Africa at the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO); Belinda Lewis - British Ambassador to the State of Kuwait; Shikha Tiwari - Director of Trade and Investment, Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain - Chief Executive Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait; Dave Disley -

Through partnership with BT, Ooredoo will help organizations achieve not only best-in-class visibility, detection and remediation of threats and incidents, but also the ability to do so rapidly and flexibly.

With a subscription-based model that requires no capital investment, and BT's accredited security team providing 24x7 monitoring and in-life support, customers are able to increase flexibility in their operations and predictability of costs. The newly available SIEM service meets local regulatory and compliance requirements by hosting and processing data locally.

"In today's business environment, attacks can be even more difficult to identify and detect, organizations are faced with the challenge of balancing the risk of decentralized working with the opportunity for digital transformation," says Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, CEO, Ooredoo Kuwait. "I am personally happy to be collaborating with a world leader like BT, in which our shared vision will enable us to provide the most efficient communications services and solutions."

Belinda Lewis, Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, said: "I congratulate BT and Ooredoo Kuwait on the announcement of their business partnership today. I am delighted to see a British household name like BT working with the Kuwaiti company Ooredoo who will resell BT services and products in Kuwait. My Department for International Trade (DIT) team will continue to support BT and Ooredoo Kuwait as they bring BT services in managed connectivity, contact center solutions, cloud-based security services and consultancy to businesses in Kuwait."

Dave Disley, Global Telecommunications Director, BT, commented: "We look forward to working with our new reseller in Kuwait to offer local businesses access to the same services that are available to our global



multinational customers. The world's leading banks, healthcare providers, energy companies and governments put their trust in us to connect and secure their operations. Our services are designed with our customers' objectives and requirements at their heart and meet the most demanding standards for reliability and security." BT is one of the world's leading cyber security providers, with 3,000 cyber specialists around the globe offering a full range of managed security services.

**Al-Babtain:** Today, we live in a constant changing environment which requires consolidating efforts to crystallize a shared vision to provide the best digital services

**Belinda Lewis, British Ambassador to the State of Kuwait:** This partnership is yet another milestone for the strong relationship between the two countries

**Disley:** Our partnership with Ooredoo Kuwait affirms the depth harmony in visions, goals and perception between the two companies

landscape, the tremendous growth in remote workers and the acceleration of the adoption of cloud services, security has become one of the key priorities for businesses and governments.

BT's cloud-based Security Incident and Event Management (SIEM) service combines the leading technologies with BT's unparalleled track record in securing leading global organizations. The service collates and analyzes the vast amounts of threat information available, providing customers with real-time insight on their network, and actionable intelligence that increases their protection.

Global Telecommunications Director; Fadi Kawar - Chief Operating Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait; Chief Finance Officer Stephen Collins, Mijbil Alayoub - Senior Director, Corporate Communications; Nazem Al-Ghabra - Manager, Corporate Relations; Bilal Agha - Director, B2B Marketing; Arz Naim - Head of B2B Sales, and Zainab Al-Shammari - Manager, B2B Marketing, Ooredoo Kuwait.

While, Vipul Narula - Head of Indirect Channel, AMEA; Yves Nahas - Head of Sales, MENA, India, Japan; and Beda Nykanen - Account Director, Telecom; attended from BT.



## NBK reveals winner of KD 125,000 in Al-Jawhara draw

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to reward its customers with an outstanding array of draws, prizes and offers all year round. In this context, the bank announced Ahmad Abdulrahman Alabduljader as the winner of Al-Jawhara monthly prize worth KD 125,000 for May 2021.

On the other hand, NBK announced the names of the winners of Al-Jawhara weekly draws worth KD 5,000 each including: Wilson Xavier Castelino, Mosaab Ahmad Khalaf and Mohammad Faisal Hajeyah. The draw was held at NBK Head Office in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as representatives from NBK, noting that Al-Jawhara monthly and quarterly draws are conducted in the presence of a representative from Deloitte.

Al-Jawhara Account gives customers the opportunity to enter draws and win prizes of KD 5,000 weekly, KD 125,000 monthly as well as the grand prize of KD 250,000 quarterly. Every KD 50 deposited into Al-Jawhara Account gives the customer a chance to be one the next lucky winners, and if no withdrawal or

transfers occur on the account during the holding period, customers will receive an additional chance to enter the draw for every KD 50 held in the account, doubling their chance to win.

On this occasion, Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "Rewarding our customers is one of our top priorities, as we consider it a fundamental part of our strategy to enrich their banking experience. Therefore, we are keen to provide a variety of draws and prizes, in addition to our top-notch banking products and services." As part of the efforts to achieve financial inclusion, we encourage our customers to make savings and provide them with a variety of integrated banking products that meet their needs and suit all their segments, he added.

Al-Nusif affirmed that NBK ensures a quick and easy process for opening Al-Jawhara Account by visiting the nearest NBK Branch, or simply through NBK Mobile Banking or NBK Online Banking, in line with our Digital Transformation Strategy that provides our customers with integrated banking experience by enabling them to make all their banking transactions without visiting branches. Since 2012, National Bank of Kuwait has rewarded loyal customers with a total worth of prizes amounting KD 2,200,000 in Al-Jawhara weekly, monthly and quarterly draws. In addition to providing top-notch, cutting-edge and highly secure banking services, NBK is keen to give customers a variety of offers, rewards and prizes that suit their expectations all year round.

## The popular red Huawei FreeBuds 4i back in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Due to the high demand for the Huawei FreeBuds 4i in red color, Huawei Consumer Business Group (CBG) is once again bringing the Huawei FreeBuds 4i in your favorite color to the Kuwait market again.

### Huawei FreeBuds 4i

The Huawei FreeBuds 4i comes with three colors, red, white and black, customized components built-in to its compact body that contribute to the overall high-quality sound. This includes a 10mm dynamic driver that delivers high quality sound with accurate audio details, not matter what kind of content you are listening to.

With Huawei FreeBuds 4i you can get up to 10 hours of continuous music playback or 6.5 hours of voice calls, with the Active Noise Cancellation turned off, once you fully charge up your Huawei FreeBuds 4i. Having Active Noise Cancellation on will give you 7.5 hours of continuous music playback and 5.5 hours of voice call. Alternatively, if you use the charging case with it, users get a total of 22 hours music playback or 14 hours of voice call. Charging speeds are quite fast as well. For instance, a simple 10 minutes of charge can give up to 4 hours of use, taking away the concern of charging speeds.

Active noise cancellation is an important feature if you want to tune out the ambient noise around you. On the other hand, Awareness Mode will let surrounding sound in, so that you don't miss out on any announcements around you or if you want to have a conversation without taking your earphones off. Turning on and switching between the two is quite simple. All you have to do is simply long press the stem of the earphone and you will turn on or switch between both modes easily.



Connecting the Huawei FreeBuds 4i with your smartphone is pretty simple. For instance if you have a Huawei smartphone with EMUI 10.0 or above, all you have to do is pop open the case and you will get a quick prompt on your screen to connect. Once you are done, you can also view battery life and connectivity information with ease.

With the Huawei FreeBuds 4i, enjoying music or entertainment, gaming on-the-go or even attending regular calls, is all made easy. Simply pair it up with your smartphone and all you have to do is find the right tune, movie or game to enjoy on-the-go. With its high quality sound and active noise cancellation features, you are guaranteed an immersive experience, all at a friendlier price point.

This charging and battery life data come from the Huawei laboratory. It only applies to wired charging, or wireless charging when the charging case has no less than 80 percent battery left. The data comes from Huawei labs with conditions by default: volume at 50 percent, AAC mode enabled, and ANC turned off. The actual condition may vary due to the volume, audio source, environment and user habits.





A man pulls camels at the beach in the Tunisian Mediterranean resort of Sousse. — AFP photos



Tunisian health workers control European tourists upon their arrival at Enfidha-Hammamet International Airport near the Mediterranean town of Sousse.

# TUNISIA PINS TOURISM HOPES ON 'UNAFRAID' RUSSIANS

With its economy hit hard by the pandemic, Tunisia is counting on Russians and eastern Europeans to salvage its tourist sector whose employees fear hunger more than COVID-19. "The need to work is stronger than the fear of being contaminated," said lifeguard Aymen Abdallah, glancing at a half-empty beach in the Mediterranean resort of Sousse where Russians are making a comeback. "If we don't work, we'll starve to death," added Abdallah, donning sunglasses and a mask. The lifeguard is relieved to be back at work after an idle eight months. But "normally, the beach would have been full at this time", he sighed.

The North African country reopened its borders to tour operators in late April but then ordered a new week-long partial lockdown at the start of May because of a spike in coronavirus cases. Up to 10 flights a week, mostly from Russia and eastern Europe, have in the past month been touching down at Enfidha, an airport serving Tunisia's tourism towns. But revenues are down more than 60 percent on 2019, before the pandemic hit. Hotels are authorized to operate at 50 percent of



Tunisian police on a quad bike (all terrain vehicles or ATVs) patrol a beach in the Tunisian Mediterranean resort of Sousse.

capacity but are struggling to reach that level. "There's not much profit with just 30 percent hotel occupancy," lamented Adel Mlayah, deputy director of the high-end Mouradi Palace in Sousse. The hotel normally employs at least 260 staff, but this year no more than 120 are working.

#### 'Not scared'

Eastern Europe also came to the res-

cue after the 2015 jihadist attacks on the capital's Bardo Museum and in Sousse that killed 60 people, all but one of them tourists, bringing the crucial sector of Tunisia's economy to its knees. While visitors from most West countries are deterred from travel by their governments, those from Russia, the Czech Republic and Poland appeared to have few such qualms. "There are not that

many countries where we can go," said Andrej Radiokove, newly arrived from Moscow.

"Turkey closed its borders—that's why we chose Tunisia." Like most of the others in his tour group, he has not been vaccinated. "We had COVID two months ago, so we're not scared," he said. Only around two percent of Tunisia's population has so far been vaccinated. The pandemic has claimed more than 12,000 lives in the country of 12 million people. But the high local toll does not appear to have deterred the sun-seekers. Around the pool of the Mouradi Palace, a clutch of them swayed to the rhythm of Russian electronic music.

"Customers from eastern Europe are less than reticent, less concerned about the pandemic," said Zied Maghrebi, marketing director of the nearby Movenpick hotel. "We have fallen back on these customers because they're not afraid to travel."

#### Battered economy

Serafim Stoynovski, a 22-year-old Bulgarian law student, explained that he chose Tunisia because "restrictions here

are not as strict" as in other countries. "We can go out for a walk, go to a restaurant or have a coffee if we want," he said. Unlike other tourists who have to self-isolate for five to seven days in government-assigned hotels at their own expense, those in tour groups only need a negative PCR test.

Excursions, however, are restricted to tours organized by travel agents who adhere to health protocols, said Sousse tourism commissioner Taoufik Gaied. He is holding out hope for one million tourists in 2021, still just a fraction of the nine million who came two years ago. A decade since its 2011 revolution, Tunisia's economic woes have been compounded by the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown measures. The International Monetary Fund expects the country's economy will grow 3.8 percent this year, making up little of the ground lost by an unprecedented 8.9 percent contraction in 2020. — AFP



This photo shows Vicky Lau, the only female chef in Asia with a double Michelin star, posing with her award during a portrait session at her restaurant Tate Dining Room in Hong Kong. — AFP photos

## How Hong Kong chef Vicky Lau embraced her 'role model' label

Despite the institutional status bestowed by her double Michelin star, Vicky Lau says the battle to improve gender parity in the male-dominated world of professional kitchens is a long way from won-but small victories bring her hope. In the fiendishly competitive arena of Hong Kong's fine-dining scene, few have had as remarkable an ascent as Lau. In little more than a decade she has gone from opening a small cafe to running one of the finance hub's most lauded restaurants. Earlier this year Tate Dining Room was awarded two Michelin, a belated breakthrough first for Asia's all-too-overlooked female chefs.

Many chefs love to insist in interviews that awards don't mean much. Lau, 40, is refreshingly upfront. "I didn't get in the industry because I want to have all these accolades. But over time, it did become a goal," she told AFP. Asked whether the gender watershed moment of the double Michelin mattered, she replied: "I think it does make a statement, because it encourages a lot of people in our industry to power on." A former graphic designer who switched mid-career to retrain, Lau said she "really didn't think twice about being a female and a chef" when she entered the trade. "It's kind of ignorance was bliss at that time," she smiled, recalling how many at her Cordon Bleu training



This photo shows Vicky Lau, presents her dish "marinated sweet shrimp with caviar and tomato jelly", during a portrait session at her restaurant Tate Dining Room' in Hong Kong.

in Bangkok were women.

Once in the business, she saw how men dominated, especially when it came to ascending ranks or owning top establishments. As she won attention for her dishes, she initially found it exhausting to continually be asked about her gender, the example she was setting, the role model she had become. But over time she said she came to embrace the reality that her success could encourage others. "It actually became one of my motivations to go to work," she said.

#### Different personalities

Alongside contemporaries such as Peggy Chan and May Chow, Lau is part of a new generation of female Hong Kong chefs who have become examples of successful and vocal entrepreneurs. Global culinary award programs have long been overly fixated on both Western cuisine and male chefs. It's a charge brands are now alive to. Slowly, winners' lists are starting to look a little more representative of the world itself. The "Me Too" movement also brought some limited reckoning over the type of alpha-male behavior once lauded by food critics and television shows. But



This photo shows a dish called "zucchini flower with snow chrysanthemum, diplomat cream, guava sorbet and local honey mousse" after being presented by Vicky Lau.



This photo shows a dish of "marinated sweet shrimp with caviar and tomato jelly", after being presented by Vicky Lau.

improvement can feel frustratingly gradual.

"The culinary industry is a male-dominated industry, as everybody knows, but it also expects women to behave like men," said Chan, who carved out a space as one of Hong Kong's first fine-dining vegetarian chefs. "You either fit in or you get out." The slow growth of women both in professional kitchens and in owning restaurants, she said, is starting to make an impact. "There's a lot more room for different types of personalities," Chan said. Lau says her kitchen is now more than 50 percent female. Chefs with children are an asset, not a headache. Those with egos can leave them at the kitchen door. "We don't just celebrate Gordon Ramsay-style screaming in your face," she said.

#### Chinese techniques

Lau's dishes combine French and Chinese cuisine and are achingly beautiful—each presentation painstakingly plated in a vivid display of her design background. And she's determined to get wider recognition for often under-appreciated Chinese cooking techniques. One example she cites is "double steamed" or "superior" broths—the time-consuming stocks of Chinese cooking that could give any consommé a run for its money. Her business has stayed afloat during the coronavirus pandemic with catering, a take-away service and a patisserie shop.

It also opened for lunch for the first time, offering a less pricey tasting menu set around one single ingredient. "We've done rice, tofu, tea, soy sauce," Lau explained. Each course of her latest menu is built from different parts of a plant—seeds, leaves, bulbs, stems, fruit, roots and flowers. Lau says the pandemic forced her into a more creative and self-reflective space. — AFP

## Greece approves Dior shoot at key ancient sites

Greece's top archaeological advisory body yesterday approved use of several key sites including the Acropolis for an upcoming shoot by French fashion house Dior, a culture ministry source said. The photo shoots will be held for material to be presented during a runway show in Athens next month, the ministry official said. The trip will pay homage to an iconic photo session at the Acropolis 70 years ago for an haute couture collection by Christian Dior.

The official said the central archaeological council had "unanimously" approved the shoots. In addition to the Acropolis, photo shoots will be held at the Odeon of Herodes Atticus, the Ancient Agora in Athens, the temple of Poseidon at Sounio and the temple of Zeus at Nemea, the official said. A further request to shoot at the Panathenaic stadium, where the 1896 Olympics were held, will be discussed today. Dior will hold a runway show on June 17 in Athens to launch its inter-season collection.

"This is not a runway show at the Acropolis," the official emphasized. The move comes on the heels of ongoing criticism of the Greek government by the opposition over its management of the country's priceless archaeological heritage. In March, there was criticism over restoration work at the Acropolis that includes a new concrete footpath. The culture ministry has said the redesign improves wheelchair accessibility. AFP has contacted UNESCO for comment. There is also an ongoing row over the planned relocation of antiquities in Thessaloniki for metro construction. Earlier this month, dozens of intellectuals including several Byzantine experts penned an open letter, calling on the Greek state to leave the antiquities in place. — AFP

## Smoking gun: French film can't kick nicotine habit

More than half a century after Nouvelle Vague films made smoking look sexy, French cinema is still addicted to tobacco which features in nearly all domestic productions, a survey showed yesterday. With 2.6 minutes of screen time on average per film, tobacco gets an exposure equivalent to six advertising spots, the survey by Ipsos for the French League Against Cancer said based on 150 films examined. "Tobacco is quasi-ubiquitous in French films," the League said. "Between 2015 and 2019, 90.7 percent of films include at least one event, one object, or a line related to tobacco," it said.

This included a character smoking, the presence of ashtrays and of cigarettes, or a character talking about smoking, it said. More than a decade after a comprehensive indoor smoking ban came into force in France, films show people puffing away in public spaces more than ever, the League said. More than 20 percent of smoking scenes occur in offices or other workplaces, and nearly as many in cafes, restaurants or nightclubs, the survey found. A poll among young adults accompanying the survey found that nearly 60 percent considered such scenes to be an incitement to smoke, and almost as many thought the tobacco industry was involved in product placement.

"The League vigorously denounces the glamorizing of smoking in French films over the past 15 years," its president Axel Kahn said in a statement, also blaming "campaigns targeting young people, that are as aggressive as they are insidious". The study, timed ahead of World No Tobacco Day on Monday, came as the French health authority Sante Public reported that last year saw the end of a years-long downward trend in smoking in France. Blaming a "social crisis context" in a year marked by COVID, Sante Public said more lower-income people smoked than in 2019, and fewer smokers had made an attempt to quit. — AFP



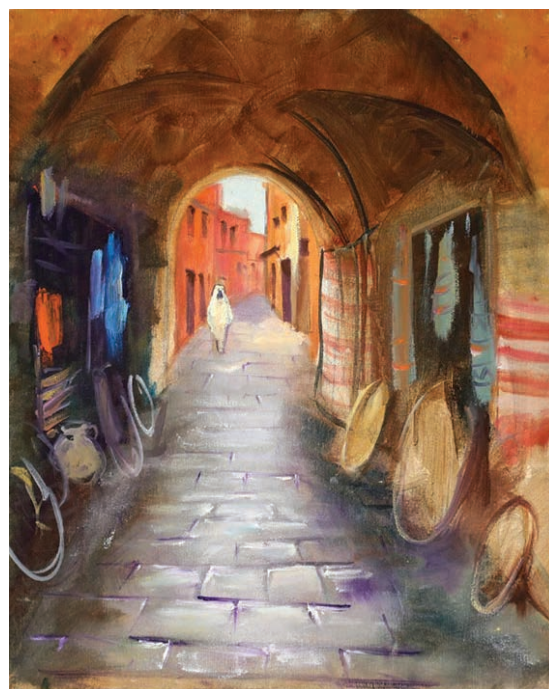
Lifestyle | Features



# Moroccan painters reflect Islamic heritage in (Painting of Hope) Expo

The Plastic Arts Exhibition (Painting of Hope) currently held in the Islamic World Organization for Education, Science and Culture (ISESCO) reflects the Moroccan painters' inspiration with more than 100 paintings as part of ISESCO's celebration of the

Heritage Month in the Islamic World under the slogan (United for Art). The Expo's income will be allocated in favor of Ibn Sina Hospital in Rabat to treat children with cancer in a beautiful humanitarian gesture. — KUNA



# Laurence des Cars to head Louvre, first woman boss in its history

France yesterday appointed Laurence des Cars, known for promoting social issues through art, as the new head of the Louvre—the first time a woman will be in charge of the world's biggest museum more than two centuries after it first opened. Des Cars currently runs the Musee d'Orsay, the Paris landmark museum dedicated to 19th-century art, where she is already the first-ever woman boss. Her legacy there includes boosting young visitor numbers and giving art and visitors more physical space.



In this file photo Orsay's national museum director Laurence des Cars poses in the museum in Paris. — AFP

During her four years at the Orsay, the 54-year old art historian has taken a stance on some controversial topics, including by coming out in favour of restituting works looted by Nazis. "A great museum must face history, including by looking back at the history of our own institutions," she told AFP in an interview in April. She was instrumental in the French government's decision for the Orsay to hand back a Gustav Klimt painting, "Roses", to the heirs of its previous owner Nora Stiasny. The Nazis had stolen it from her in Vienna in 1938. Under Des Cars's leadership, the museum's 2019 exhibition "Black Models: From Gericault to Matisse" explored racial and social issues through the representation of black figures in visual arts. A museum's shows should reflect "the big issues in society, and thus attract new generations" of visitors "of all ages and from all social-cultural backgrounds", she told AFP. —AFP

# Vienna's musicians find their voice after months of silence

Classical musicians in Vienna are preparing to return to live performances after long months without audiences which have severely tested their motivation and, for some, even thrown their careers into question. They are dusting off their instruments after Austria's easing of coronavirus restrictions allowed cultural venues to open their doors again on May 19. Singers' agent Laurent Delage likens the challenge facing the musicians to "elite athletes who have

Dervaux joined the Vienna Philharmonic six years ago, an appointment which she can hold for life. But she admitted she had gone through "very, very difficult periods" during the pandemic. "I asked myself: 'Why work, why practice scales if I don't have any concerts?'" After putting her bassoon to one side for a while, she eventually managed to find some alternative projects—particularly making records — to keep her spirits up and stop herself from getting rusty.

adds — an experience he rediscovered earlier this month playing at Milan's La Scala.

Before the pandemic, Vienna — one of the world's foremost centers of classical music—played host to some 15,000 concerts a year. Delage, the agent, has already attended the Vienna State Opera's re-opening before heading to southern Austria for a performance of Rossini's Barber of Seville. The 52-year-old explains that singers on the classical music scene "have to find sensations that have been lost for a year" in order "to launch themselves back into three-dimensional performances". Some of them have found that the pandemic has left them with "laxer muscles and nerves" while others have "lost their bearings — it's very destabilizing".

### 'Bursting point'

"The anticipation is like the first day of school," says tenor Michael Schade. "It's a whole mixed bag of emotions." On his way to his first in-person concert for a year, alongside the excitement he admits he has some trepidation about the future. "We are like coma patients that have just woken up, and nobody knows how much damage was done," he says, adding he fears "terrible" that long-term damage may have been done to the music sector. While it may be feasible for big, prestigious institutions to simply "press the button" and start up again, he points out this will be much more difficult for smaller organisations and events.

Opera director Benjamin Prins has been especially hard hit by the past year, calling it a "financial disaster". "I've lost 70 percent of my income," he says. "If I'm still going, it's thanks to making savings," he adds—not that this has spared him the devastating psychological effects of the pandemic. "I have three or four pieces which have stayed in my head. I'm at bursting point," he says. Prins fears that over the long-term, the after-effects of coronavirus may spell the end for "immense, cosmopolitan" productions which are the lifeblood of the opera industry. — AFP

### 'Finding lost senses'

Daniel Froschauer, first violinist and chairman of the Vienna Philharmonic, says that streamed concerts during the pandemic have proved "incredible musical projects that kept me musically alive" after the "shock" of the first lockdown. Many musicians found some respite in such online performances, whether they were professionally produced or organized ad hoc by musicians themselves and broadcast on social media. But even Froschauer, 55, admits that those virtual concerts were "always a little bit unsatisfactory". "When you play for an audience, the feedback from the audience, that's something you cannot underestimate," he



Members of Vienna's Philharmonic Orchestra perform during their rehearsal at Musikverein music hall in Vienna, prior to their appearance in front of an audience since November 2020, amid the novel coronavirus / COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP photos

to fire up the machine again" after a period of inactivity.

In the ornate Golden Hall of the Musikverein, considered one of the world's finest concert halls and home to a world-famous New Year's concert, one of those "athletes" is French bassoonist Sophie Dervaux. She is rehearsing a symphony by Gustav Mahler and is keen to perform in front of a live audience again for the first time since the orchestra went on tour to Japan last November. "We weren't expecting this to last virtually 200 days," 29-year-old Dervaux told AFP. After this week's concerts in Vienna, she has performances in Denmark and Norway to look forward to as travel in Europe tentatively opens up.

# Chimps learn 'handshakes' according to social group

in one group, or society, of chimps than the other.

He also found that female chimps were far more likely than males to grasp palms, while males were more likely to grasp wrists, likely due to males' desires to assert or affirm dominance. "The fact that they have developed different styles in different groups reflects that they learn the style socially within their groups," Van Leeuwen told AFP. He said the chimps appeared to have learned to perform the grasps "to some extent" as a ritual, reminiscent of secret handshakes performed by humans. "The handclasp fits into the whole social interaction that two individuals engage in sometimes, making it a special connection within an already intimate grooming bout."

### 'Some serious, some care-free'

Van Leeuwen said his study was evidence of chimps' ability to preserve "the stability of traditions", a behavior that among humans is thought of as cultural persistence. He said the behavior could not be explained by genetic or environmental factors since the composition of the two separate chimp groups was essentially identical—yet they each developed distinct grasping techniques. He said the specific gestures and their longevity within each group could be a result of "the shared trait of social learning".

With more than a decade spent observing the chimps' behavior, Van Leeuwen said he got to know the personality traits of each individual animal. "Like humans, they have their individual ways of doing-be it during play, eating or grooming," he said. "Some chimpanzees are very serious, always on the look-out for ripples in the social atmosphere," added Van Leeuwen. "Some are more care-free and interact with even high-ranking individuals in their group with light touches of play." — AFP

Chimpanzees develop specific handshake-like gestures depending on their social group, according to the results of a 12-year observational study published yesterday that sheds light on the animals' complex social structures. Chimps are often referred to as being the most "humanlike" non-human species, given their propensity to perform complicated tasks, such as tool use, which were long thought to be the sole preserve of mankind. Edwin van Leeuwen, an expert in animal behavior at the University of Antwerp and the city's Royal Zoological Society, studied dozens of chimpanzees sheltered at Zambia's Chimfunshi Wildlife Orphanage Trust over a 12-year span.

Despite a large turnover in the chimp population due to deaths and births, Van Leeuwen was able to observe specific and repeated hand gestures among chimps in two distinct groups. The gesture, known as the grooming handclasp, involves "each of the participants simultaneously (extending) an arm overhead and the other (clasping) the other's wrist or hand or both clasping each other's hand," according to the results of his study, published in the journal Royal Society Biology Letters. Through years of observation, Van Leeuwen found that palm-to-palm grasping was "substantially more pronounced"





## Sports

# Zain main partner of region's first Rafa Nadal Academy

## Company committed to supporting local sports sector per top global standards

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its main partnership with the Spain-based Rafa Nadal Academy at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber International Tennis Complex in collaboration with Tamdeen Sports, a subsidiary of Tamdeen Group. The academy is considered the first of its kind in the Middle East, and only the second branch of the most famous tennis center in the world: Rafa Nadal Academy - Majorca, Spain.

The partnership was officially announced during the signing ceremony held at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber International Tennis Complex, which witnessed the presence of Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan, Tamdeen Sports CEO Mohammed Mustafa Al-Marzouq, and officials from both partners.

During the signing ceremony, Chief Executive Officer of Zain Kuwait Eaman Al-Roudhan commented: "We are pleased today to officially announce this new partnership that will certainly contribute to elevating tennis in Kuwait and taking it to new levels. We are keen on being a part of empowering the next generation of professional Kuwaiti athletes who can compete at top international arenas, and we hope that Zain's support reflects our eagerness in contributing to sports and youth sustainability projects".

Roudhan further added: "our support to this world-class academy as a Main Partner comes under the umbrella of our comprehensive corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy. Through this strategy, we showcase our utmost commitment in supporting and progressing Kuwait's youth and sports sectors as per the highest international standards. We are keen on supporting various competitive sports, especially those that Kuwaiti youth has tremendous passion for like tennis."

Roudhan continued: "private sector companies have a pivotal and essential role in supporting and encouraging the various sports projects in the nation, which will ultimately contribute to developing the skills and talents of youth and creating a



KUWAIT: Chief Executive Officer of Zain Kuwait Eaman Al-Roudhan (left) and Tamdeen Sports CEO Mohammed Mustafa Al-Marzouq sign the partnership agreement.



Eaman Al-Roudhan and Mohammed Al-Marzouq with officials from Zain and the Rafa Nadal Academy.

new generation of professional athletes that will raise the Kuwaiti flag high at regional and international arenas. This is the main goal of the Rafa Nadal Academy in Kuwait, which we were keen on being among the first to support."

Roudhan concluded: "we strongly believe in the crucial role played by private sector organizations in achieving social development, and we aspire to make this belief a reality by supporting major sports projects in the nation, as well as sponsoring many individual Kuwaiti athletes who represent Kuwait around the world and whom we're very proud of."

During the ceremony, CEO of Tamdeen Sports Mohammed Mustafa Al Marzouq said: "We are delighted and proud to be premium partners with Zain, and to be sharing this journey together in creating an impact for the future generation in Kuwait."

Marzouq further explained: "the Academy's vision is to lead the way for tennis in the Middle East, and develop a unique, high-end sports facility with the highest level of service and care. Our

greatest asset in achieving this is our partners, and we are thrilled that Zain's leadership is playing an important role in helping us become the leading tennis Academy in the Middle East and redefine sport, fitness, health, and leisure across the region".

The Rafa Nadal Academy at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber International Tennis Complex is the first of its kind in the Middle East. The academy is also the first branch of Rafael Nadal's most famous tennis center in the world outside of his hometown of Majorca, Spain. The academy adopts the 20-Grand Slams winner's training philosophy, the same one adopted in Spain, which centers around five main pillars: tennis training, physical training, mental training, nutrition, and competitiveness.

The academy features 8 indoor courts and 8 outdoor courts. The main, multi-purpose indoor court features over 5000 seats, while the secondary outdoor court features 1500 seats. All courts are equipped with the latest world-class tools, and the facility also features a members hall that offers nutrition programs, sports shops, and more. The

hall is connected to many other facilities, such as a 5-star hotel, 360 Mall, a multi-story parking building, and more.

During early 2020, a huge opening ceremony commemorated the launch of the Rafa Nadal Academy at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber International Tennis Complex. The event was attended by many prominent figures from Kuwait's business and sports scenes, and witnessed a 'Champions Challenge' match between world tennis champions Rafael Nadal and David Ferrer, which was also the very first match to be held at the academy's courts.

Zain strongly believes in the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects, as well as further pushing the sports community's growth in the country. Springing from its growing commitment towards practicing its social responsibility, the company is committed to printing a positive print through all its activities. This has led Zain to embrace the most influential projects in the community, including the support of this world-class

## Newspaper sponsoring Olympics joins cancellation chorus

TOKYO: Japan's Asahi Shimbun newspaper, an official Tokyo Olympics sponsor, called for the Games to be cancelled yesterday, in the latest sign of opposition less than two months before the opening ceremony. The call comes with public opinion in Japan firmly against holding the Games this summer, and after prominent business leaders voiced their concern in recent weeks.

Organizers insist however that the Games are on, saying an extensive rulebook will keep athletes and the Japanese public safe. The Asahi daily's editorial urged Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga to "make a calm, objective assessment of the situation and make the decision to cancel this summer's Olympics".

The paper said it "cannot accept the gamble" of holding the event, despite organizers' assurances it will be safe. It also accused International Olympic Committee leaders, including vice-president John Coates, of being "self-righteous" and "clearly out of step" with the Japanese public. When asked last week if the Games could be held even during a virus state of emergency, Coates said "the answer is absolutely yes".

Tokyo and other parts of Japan are currently under a state of emergency, which is expected to be extended this week until June 20. "Saying 'yes' without demonstrating any clear grounds for it once again drove home the self-righteous image of the IOC," the Asahi editorial said. Tokyo 2020 CEO Toshiko Muto said it was "natural" that "different media organizations have different views", but acknowledged that people are "anxious".

"The national and local governments have put stringent measures in place to contain the spread of infections, and we believe the situation will improve as a result," he said. Muto added that executive board members had discussed cancellation and postponement, but none had "explicitly called" for it.

Two prominent figures in Japanese business have also voiced opposition to the Games in recent weeks. Masayoshi Son, head of tech investment behemoth SoftBank Group, tweeted on Sunday: "Do the IOC have the right to decide if it's held or not?"

"If you think about what people have to put up with, we might have a lot more to lose" if the Games go ahead, he added. And earlier this month Hiroshi Mikitani, CEO of e-commerce giant Rakuten, called the Games "a suicide mission". "The risk is too big and... I'm against having the Tokyo Olympics this year," he told CNN.

### 'No change' on Games: US

Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto acknowledged organizers face "considerable" opposition. "There are a considerable number of Japanese people who are concerned," she told an executive board meeting.

She reiterated that the number of overseas participants would be capped and they would face tough restrictions while in Japan, and that the Games would not place extra stress on overstretched local medical system.

Muto said the number of medical staff required for the event would be reduced by around 30 percent of the original figure. Japan has seen a comparatively small outbreak of the virus, with fewer than 12,500 deaths, and has avoided the harsh lockdowns seen in some places. —AFP

## N'Golo Kante: Quiet, unassuming superstar

RUEIL-MALMAISON: He may shy away from the limelight, but there were few more popular members of France's 2018 World Cup-winning side than N'Golo Kante, who on Saturday will aim to get his hands on one of the few trophies that has so far evaded him when Chelsea face Manchester City in the Champions League final.

France supporters came up with a song for Kante during that triumphant summer in Russia, to the tune of the 1969 hit "Les Champs-Elysees" by Joe Dassin. As the song goes, "he is small, he is kind, he stopped Leo Messi".

It does take a ruthless streak to get to the very top in football as Kante has, winning two Premier League titles, the Europa League and the FA Cup as well as the World Cup. Despite that, everyone who has encountered Kante since the start of his career in the Paris suburbs seems to agree there is no other player quite like the 30-year-old. "Every time he comes back to Paris he comes to see us," Karim El-Moudkhal, Kante's former coach, tells AFP.

### Idolized

"But he doesn't just stop by, he stays to eat with us, he agrees to have

his photo taken with everyone, to play with the kids." Kante, whose parents are of Malian origin, grew up in a large family on a quiet estate in Rueil-Malmaison, to the west of the French capital.

El-Moudkhal has endless anecdotes to tell as well as recent videos of Kante playing football with children in the neighbourhood who, not surprisingly, idolize him. "In the summer, everyone comes out to play wearing the shirts of the teams he has played for: Caen, Leicester, Chelsea, France," says the coach.

Kante is widely liked and respected for his warmth and modesty, and as a player he has forged a reputation for being generous and discrete, with his on-pitch persona matching his personality off it. "He has never become big-headed, he has never changed," says El-Moudkhal. "His brothers are the same. I would like to know how they have done it."

### Never angry

When you ask his former coach if he can recall Kante getting angry during a game or showing any negative emotions, the question is met with an almost sorry response. "I am trying to think of something but I honestly can't remember any. I have never seen him



N'Golo Kante

get angry as long as I have known him. And yet if anyone could have got angry it was him given the amount of times he used to get kicked while playing at Suresnes."

It was there, in a pleasant suburb by the Seine River, that Kante played as a youngster. Unlike most modern-day superstars, Kante was never picked up by the youth academy of a professional club. He had talent, but his size and personality seemed to work against him.

"N'Golo is not somebody who tends to stand out, so at a trial he just wasn't visible," Pierre Ville, a director at Suresnes, told AFP in 2018. His career did gradually take off as he

moved to France's far north to sign for Boulogne-sur-Mer aged 19.

Soon he was playing for their first team in the third division, and he then joined Caen in 2013, helping them win promotion to Ligue 1. After just one season in the French elite, Kante moved to Leicester aged 24 in 2015 and was one of the stars of their surge to the Premier League title in 2015/16.

He then left for Chelsea where he has continued to star, right up to being the man of the match in both legs of the Champions League semi-final win over Real Madrid. "As soon as he signed for Boulogne-sur-Mer I knew his career was taking off," says El-Moudkhal. —AFP

## 'Superstar' Foden formed by love of football and fishing

LONDON: Phil Foden already has eight major trophies to his name before his 21st birthday on Friday. The following day he may have the perfect present in Manchester City's first Champions League crown. Born and raised in Stockport, just six miles (10 kilometres) from the club's Etihad Stadium, Foden is the homegrown hero among a star-studded international squad bankrolled by the Abu Dhabi owners.

The club that he first started training with as a six-year-old was very different. City had only recently returned to the Premier League after at one stage slipping down to English football's third tier. "We had limited money, limited resources and we invested in people," City's former academy manager Jim Cassell told AFP ahead of Saturday's Champions League final against Chelsea in Porto.

Manchester United were used to having their pick of local talent, while City also had to fend off interest from

Liverpool and Everton for a precocious talent nicknamed the "Stockport Iniesta" for his similarity to the wiry but silky former Barcelona and Spain midfielder, Andres Iniesta.

"Philip just looked different, he looked special," Cassell continued. "He always had magnificent agility and balance. That's what made him special — he used to manipulate the ball without touching it because of the way his body was."

The earliest City could officially register Foden was at under-nine level, but he continued to play for his local team, Reddish Vulcans, to foster his competitive spirit. "We had a very challenging culture," Cassell said. "I've heard people say 'let them play, don't look at results', but when do you turn on the tap to be a winner? I don't go along with this 'don't worry about results'. We're in an elite program. Elite is about being the best, it's about challenging yourself to be the best."

Foden's talent stood out, even to someone used to seeing the best young prospects in the world. "You are the lucky guys who saw the first game, for the first team for Manchester City, of this guy," City manager Pep Guardiola told reporters after Foden made his debut as a 17-year-old in a pre-season friendly against United in Houston.



Phil Foden

### 'Game changer'

Later that year he scored twice in the final of the Under-17 World Cup and was named player of the tournament as England triumphed in India. Despite media clamour for Foden to play more at City as a teenager or go out on loan, Guardiola has bided his time, gradually increasing his minutes over the past three years. This season he has estab-

lished himself as a regular starter, scoring 16 goals and even displacing Raheem Sterling for the latter stages of the Champions League.

"Pep's seen something in him that we did as a six-year-old and he has managed him brilliantly," said Cassell. "Everybody has been sat on their settees telling Pep Guardiola, 'Phil needs to play more, he needs to go out on loan'. —AFP



Sports

# Davis scores 34 as Lakers beat Suns to level series, Nets thump Celtics

LOS ANGELES: Anthony Davis and LeBron James delivered down the stretch on Tuesday as the NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers bounced back to beat the Phoenix Suns 109-102 and knot their playoff series at one game apiece.

Davis had said he blamed himself after scoring just 13 points in the Lakers' 99-90 defeat in game one of the best-of-seven Western Conference first-round series. He wasn't about to let it happen again. Davis scored 34 points with 10 rebounds, seven assists and three blocked shots. "I wanted to make sure I made a statement in this game, come out with more energy, more effort on both ends of the floor," he said.

LeBron James added 23 points, pulling down four rebounds and handing out nine assists as the Lakers gained the split of two games in Phoenix. The star duo scored 16 of the Lakers' final 18 points and Los Angeles turned back a late charge from a Suns team again largely deprived of veteran point guard Chris Paul — who was still clearly feeling the effects of a right shoulder injury suffered in game one and exited early.

James's basket with 2:55 to play put the Lakers up 95-92 and Davis followed with a three-pointer and a pair of free throws to stretch the lead to 100-92 as the Suns' challenge dimmed. The Lakers got off to a determined start and led 30-24 after the first quarter and 53-47 at halftime. With a 10-1

run to open the third period — launched by James's three-pointer — the Lakers threatened to run away with it.

But Phoenix fought back. Deandre Ayton's dunk put the Suns up 88-86, though James and Davis made sure the Suns couldn't hang on to their first lead since the first quarter. Devin Booker led Phoenix with 31 points and made all 17 of his free throws. Ayton connected on 11 of 13 shots from the field to score 22 points with 10 rebounds.

"That's playoff basketball," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said of the Suns' late push. "That's the team with the second-best record in the NBA, so it's not going to be a situation where it's easy to knock them out in any game. But our guys came out strong and were able to hold on."

### Doncic powers Mavs

Elsewhere, the Dallas Mavericks and Brooklyn Nets seized 2-0 series leads. Star Mavs guard Luka Doncic scored 39 points as Dallas put themselves in a commanding position with their second straight victory over the Clippers in Los Angeles, 127-121.

The Mavericks made 18 three-pointers and connected on 58.5 percent of their shots from the field as they withstood a 41-point performance from Clippers star Kawhi Leonard supplemented by 28 from Paul George. Tim Hardaway Jr added

28 points and Kristaps Porzingis chipped in 20 for the Mavs, who host game three on Friday.

In Brooklyn, the Nets ran roughshod over the Boston Celtics, leading by as many as 33 points in a 130-108 victory that put them 2-0 up. Kevin Durant headed another strong showing for the Nets' "big three" and Joe Harris excelled from three-point range to power the Nets to an early lead they had no trouble maintaining.

Brooklyn seized control in a first quarter in which they out-scored the Celtics 40-26. They led 71-47 at halftime with Harris providing plenty of fireworks. The forward connected on six of eight shots from three-point range in the first half, when his 22 points were already a career playoff high. He added one more three-pointer in the second half to tie the franchise playoff record.

Durant led the Nets with 26 points, eight rebounds, five assists and four blocked shots. Harris finished with 25 points, James Harden added 20 and Kyrie Irving 15. The listless Celtics, meanwhile, never threatened. Marcus Smart recovered from a slow start to lead the Celtics in scoring with 19 points.

Kemba Walker had 17 but star forward Jayson Tatum had just nine before departing early after taking a poke in the right eye. The Celtics will try to get into the best-of-seven Eastern Conference series when they host game three on Friday. —AFP



PHOENIX: Anthony Davis #3 of the Los Angeles Lakers reacts to a play during the game against the Phoenix Suns during Round 1, Game 2 of the 2021 NBA Playoffs on Tuesday at Phoenix Suns Arena in Phoenix, Arizona. —AFP

## Conte's Inter future uncertain amid clashes with Chinese owners

MILAN: Antonio Conte's future with Inter Milan is in doubt despite leading the club to the Serie A title for the first time in over a decade, according to reports in Italy yesterday. "Inter-Conte, divorce!" headlined the daily Gazzetta Dello Sport, reporting that the "final farewell could arrive in the next 48 hours".

"Conte ready to break away," headlined Corriere Dello Sport. The 51-year-old Italian still has a year left in his contract, but has been at loggerheads with the cash-strapped club's Chinese owners Suning over planned cost cutting which would prevent him building the team he wants to challenge at home and in Europe.

Inter registered losses of 100 million euros (\$122 million) last season mainly due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Suning Group shut down their Chinese club Jiangsu FC in February months after it won the Chinese Super League title. Five days ago, Inter secured a cash injection worth 275 million euros (\$336 million) with US investment firm Oaktree, in the form of a loan reported to be over three years.

In this context, Suning wants to save as much as possible both on the purchase of new players and salaries, and possibly selling those with the highest value, an approach that Conte believes incompatible with the club's desire to play at the highest level in Europe.

The former Chelsea and Juventus boss took



MILAN: Inter Milan's Italian coach Antonio Conte shouts instructions during the Italian Serie A football match Inter Milan vs Udinese on May 23, 2021 at the San Siro stadium in Milan. —AFP

over in May 2019 on a three-year contract worth a reported 12 million euros (\$14 million) a season. His departure had also been heralded last summer after the club's Europa League final defeat to Sevilla, and finishing runners-up

brief statement.

UEFA appointed "ethics and disciplinary inspectors" on May 12 to conduct a preliminary investigation. The other nine promoters of the Super League escaped prosecution in exchange for light financial penalties. UEFA, challenged in mid-April by the launch of the proposed private European tournament at the same time as it announced a major overhaul of its Champions League, has long preferred to negotiate the surrender of the rebels rather than crack down.

But having failed to obtain a surrender from the three holdouts, has opted for disciplinary measures without specifying what offences they have committed. UEFA's statutes prohibit any "grouping or alliance" between clubs without its authorization. Among the range of sanctions UEFA rules allow, the most severe for the

clubs are "exclusion from current and/or future competitions", as well as "banning from all football-related activities" for the directors.

By announcing their own private Super League on the night of April 18-19, the 12 clubs turned European football on its head and threatened the very existence of UEFA. The gradual withdrawal of the six English participants after 48 hours led to the project being shelved. he two Milan clubs followed and the nine agreed in early May to pay a combined 15 million euros and to forgo five per cent of their European revenue for one season.

Real, Barcelona and Juventus meanwhile retaliated through a Commercial Court in Madrid which referred the matter to the European Court of Justice, asking if UEFA was abusing its "dominant position" by seeking to block a competing tournament. —AFP

## UEFA opens disciplinary proceedings against Super League trio

LAUSANNE: UEFA on Tuesday opened formal disciplinary proceedings against Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus, the three clubs which are still refusing to give up the aborted Super League project. "Following an investigation conducted by UEFA Ethics and Disciplinary Inspectors in connection with the so-called 'Super League' project, disciplinary proceedings have been opened against Real Madrid CF, FC Barcelona and Juventus FC for a potential violation of UEFA's legal framework," said the governing body of European football in a

### News in brief

#### rPorzingis fined over 'breach'

LOS ANGELES: Dallas Mavericks forward Kristaps Porzingis has been fined \$50,000 for breaching NBA COVID-19 protocols, the league said Tuesday. NBA president of league operations Byron Spruell said in a statement Porzingis had violated rules prohibiting players from entering a bar, club or lounge. "Porzingis violated the rule when he attended a club on May 23," the NBA statement said, adding that the 25-year-old Latvian would not face a spell in quarantine following the rules breach. According to NBA regulations, players violating health and safety protocols can receive warnings, fines or suspensions depending on the severity of the breach.

#### Lille goalie to AC Milan

ROME: Lille's French international goalkeeper Mike Maignan underwent an AC Milan medical on Tuesday as he prepared to sign for the Serie A club. After the medical Maignan, who helped Lille win the French league title on Sunday, was shown on Italian TV entering AC Milan club's headquarters. An official announcement of the transfer was expected "within 48 hours", according to a source within the club. Italian media reported that Milan will pay Lille 15 million euros (18.4 million dollars) for France's third-choice goalkeeper and that he will sign a three to five-year deal. —AFP

#### Eriksen, Schmeichel lead Denmark

COPENHAGEN: Denmark coach Kasper Hjulmand named his squad featuring Inter Milan midfielder Christian Eriksen and Leicester goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel for Euro 2020 on Tuesday. The 1992 European champions face Finland, Belgium and Russia in Copenhagen in the opening phase of the delayed competition. "The first objective is to qualify from the group stage in the best shape possible to continue our mission," said Hjulmand. "Playing in front of our fans will enable us to tackle the knockout stage well-armed and from then on anything can happen. "We can beat the best, but we can also lose against them."

#### Miller extends with Ducati

PARIS: Australian rider Jack Miller has extended his contract with Ducati for the 2022 MotoGP World Championship, the Italian team announced on Tuesday. Miller, 26, joined the official Ducati team this season from the Pramac team, a Ducati satellite. He had signed for one year only, with an optional year for 2022 which has now been taken up. After a difficult start to the season, Miller came back strongly to win the last two races in Spain and France, putting him fourth in the championship with 64 points, 16 behind leader Fabio Quartararo. —AFP

# Classifieds

## HOSPITALS

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9
Maternity Hospital	24843100		
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	<b>Clinics</b>	
Chest Hospital	24849400	Kaizen center	25716707
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Rawda	22517733
Adan Hospital	23940620	Adaliya	22517144
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Khaldiya	24848075
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## Porto prepares as Portugal steps into Champions League breach once again

**LISBON:** After Lisbon last year, now it is the turn of Porto. Once again Portugal has stepped in to save UEFA by offering to host the final of the Champions League, which for the second year running was forced to move away from Istanbul due to the ongoing pandemic.

With its COVID-19 crisis receding, a proven ability to organize the biggest match in European club football and a good relationship between its national federation the FPF, and the European game's governing body, Portugal turned out to be the only real option to stage Saturday's clash between Manchester City and Chelsea.

"Once again we have turned to our friends in Portugal to help both UEFA and the Champions League and I am, as always, very grateful to the FPF and the Portuguese government for agreeing to stage the match at such short notice," said UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin.

It is unfortunate for Istanbul, which was initially supposed to stage the 2020 final only for UEFA to rearrange the latter stages of last season's Champions League in Lisbon in August, three months behind schedule.

The Turkish metropolis was told it would host this season's final instead, but that became impossible when the UK government put Turkey on its red list just after City and Chelsea ensured it would be an all-English affair.

### The only solution?

UEFA has insisted that this season's showpiece game would be played in front of a sizeable crowd after Bayern Munich beat Paris Saint-Germain in Lisbon's Estadio da Luz last year behind closed doors. But with English fans essentially banned from travelling to Turkey, and playing the game in England ruled out because of the British government's refusal to ease its own

quarantine rules for officials and media coming from abroad, another solution was required.

That solution is the Estadio do Dragao in Porto, where a total of 16,500 spectators will be able to attend Saturday's match, after Portuguese authorities said 33 percent of the stadium's capacity could be filled. There will be 12,000 English fans in the ground, split evenly between the two clubs, with Portugal the only country in the European Union currently on the British government's green list for travel.

For the government in Lisbon, the choice of Porto is being seen as "international recognition that the measures taken to combat the pandemic have produced results", according to Portugal's foreign minister, Augusto Santos Silva. He described the health context in Portugal just now as "among the best in Europe".

That did not prevent Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan slamming the decision to move the final from Istanbul as "political". With the next three finals already awarded to other cities, including Saint-Petersburg next year, UEFA has not yet promised a future final to Istanbul. However, it did say it would "urgently look into future opportunities for the city".

### Easing lockdown

Portugal, meanwhile, has come through a devastating wave of coronavirus infections at the beginning of the year and earlier this month moved into the final phase of its gradual easing of lockdown. So far there has not been any significant rebound in the number of COVID-19 cases.

Nevertheless, fans arriving from England will have to respect the usual health protocols including requiring a negative coronavirus test to enter the country. Porto was one of the main



PORTO: General view taken of the Dragao stadium in Porto, which is set to host the Champions League Final on Saturday. — AFP

venues when Euro 2004 was staged in Portugal, and the northern city on the banks of the Douro River also hosted the 'Final 4' of the UEFA Nations League in 2019.

In addition, it is also notable that FPF president Fernando Gomes is a UEFA vice-president who is close to Ceferin. "This is all possible

because the Portuguese Football Federation and its president are highly regarded by UEFA," said Jorge Nuno Pinto da Costa, the president of FC Porto, who call the Estadio do Dragao home. "When they agree to host it, because they know FC Porto so well, UEFA puts its faith in them and is happy to come here." — AFP



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