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V O L V O



# 60+ residency ban scrapped

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## Local

# The other victims of COVID-19

By Chidi Emmanuel

As the health and human toll of the COVID-19 pandemic grows, so does the financial fallout. The economic consequences of the pandemic have resulted in unprecedented job losses across the globe. The repercussions of the pandemic are widespread, but Kuwait's foreign workers have been particularly impacted.

COVID-19 affected businesses and disrupted trade, which exacerbated the hardships of expats, who constitute almost two-thirds of the population of Kuwait. "Job and income losses have been particularly severe for foreign workers, triggering a substantial adverse impact on expats in Kuwait. The coronavirus has sparked one of the worst unemployment crises since the Great Depression. The crisis has increased poverty and widened inequalities with huge negative impacts," Prof N Jonathan of American International University Kuwait said.

"I was in the office when my manager informed me that my services were no longer needed. I was not angry - I don't blame anyone. I only blame COVID for destroying the economy. Actually, we were not getting customers and the employer couldn't manage it anymore. Since then, life has been very tough for me and my family," said Godwin Fernandes, who worked at a firm in Hawally.

Many businesses couldn't operate in the usual way because of the disruption caused by the pandemic. As a result, many workers lost their jobs or part of their income. Businesses that were hit the hardest include

travel agencies, hotels, schools and construction companies.

"2021 is the worst year of my life. It has never been this bad. I was stuck in Egypt for months, only to come back and get fired. The pandemic hit our company so hard, they had to sack almost 80 percent of the staff," Magidy Mohammed, an Egyptian who worked at a travel agency in Kuwait City, told Kuwait Times.

Kuwait's labor market lost an estimated 200,000 foreign workers during the 12 months from March 2020 to March 2021. The real estate sector lost the most workers at 53,000 people, followed by the wholesale, retail and auto repair sectors, which lost around 37,000 workers.

Due to the lockdown, some companies were unable to pay their employees, causing a further increase in hardship. "I haven't received any salary since the lockdown. We have been going from bad to worse. I hope they at least renew my visa, otherwise I will be forced to go home. I am sitting at home now, doing nothing. It has been difficult," said Matha, a Filipino nursery teacher.

Migrant workers in Kuwait are especially susceptible to both COVID-19 and unemployment because of the economic downturn, along with Kuwaitization and workforce nationalization policies that gained traction amid the outbreak. Foreign workers have few options against layoffs as residency permits are tied to employment, meaning that workers who lose jobs risk losing their residency.

"I am done here. I worked at Kuwait University for over 18 years and got fired a



Police detain foreign workers with expired work permits in this recent file photo.

few months ago. My visa (government visa) is not even transferable, so I will be leaving soon. Many of my colleagues also received termination letters," Sulaiman, an African resident, said in dismay.

As for Valentine and his colleagues, it is not an issue of employment anymore. "We can't even see our sponsor. We wanted to resume work after the lockdown, but the office was closed. His phone cannot be reached until now. We can't even renew our visas or find another job because our passports are with him," he said. When asked why

they haven't reported the matter to the authorities, they said they are afraid they will be jailed and deported.

On Aug 1, 2021, Kuwait started allowing legal residents to enter the country as long as they have received two doses of approved COVID vaccines, ending a seven-month entry ban. But despite the return of some expatriates with the resumption of flights, the exodus of foreign workers from Kuwait continues as a result of the economic repercussions of COVID-19 and Kuwaitization of jobs.

## Hunt on for alternate routes before highway delivery ban

By Ben Garcia

A decision to ban motorbike delivery riders from almost all major roads was pushed back from Oct 3 to Nov 7 to give authorities more time to prepare an app that helps riders find suitable routes while avoiding restricted roads. The ban, which includes the First, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Ring Roads, as well as Highways 30, 40, 50, 60 and 80, comes amid a rising number of traffic accidents involving motorcycles.

Reportedly, an agreement was reached with the union of restaurants and delivery companies to install special devices on each motorcycle on the path to take. In case of any violation, a text message or automatic notification will be sent to the company from the traffic department to take legal measures.

Reaction from motorists has been mixed. Marilyn Doroja, a Filipina motorist, thanked

the government for considering the ban. "I use either the Fourth Ring Road or the Fifth Ring Road daily to commute from my home in Salmiya to my workplace in Shuwaikh. Delivery riders are a nightmare for many of us on the road. A motorbike will suddenly appear on your side or even in front of you - it's really dangerous," she said.

Kuwaiti motorist Noof, however, said she is against implementing the ban as it violates the basic rights of the delivery driver, who is a road user too. "It is a discriminatory law, and maybe our government officials must study the issue further. The riders are part of the economy and should be protected too," she said. "The government should provide them motorbike lanes so they can continue using highways, like in other countries. Even bicycle lanes must be provided. This is a more sensible way of addressing the problem. Banning them means lesser business for them and the company owners," she said.

According to Noof, delivery during the



pre-pandemic era was limited to food and some other items, but nowadays, it's available for almost all items. "If you order ice cream or something fresh for example, how will you make sure it is delivered on time to customers," she asked.

For motorbike drivers, the government decision is harsh as it directly affects not only the riders, but businesses and customers too. "Customers will have to wait

longer because we will have to look for alternative roads to reach their places. Most areas in Kuwait are connected by highways, so it's difficult to not use them," said Allan, a Filipino motorbike driver working for a well-known delivery company in Kuwait.

Delivery by motorcycle, once a rarity in Kuwait, has boomed during the pandemic, with thousands of motorcycle delivery riders on the roads now.

# Kuwait Times

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# Moving with the times



## Exploring ASCC

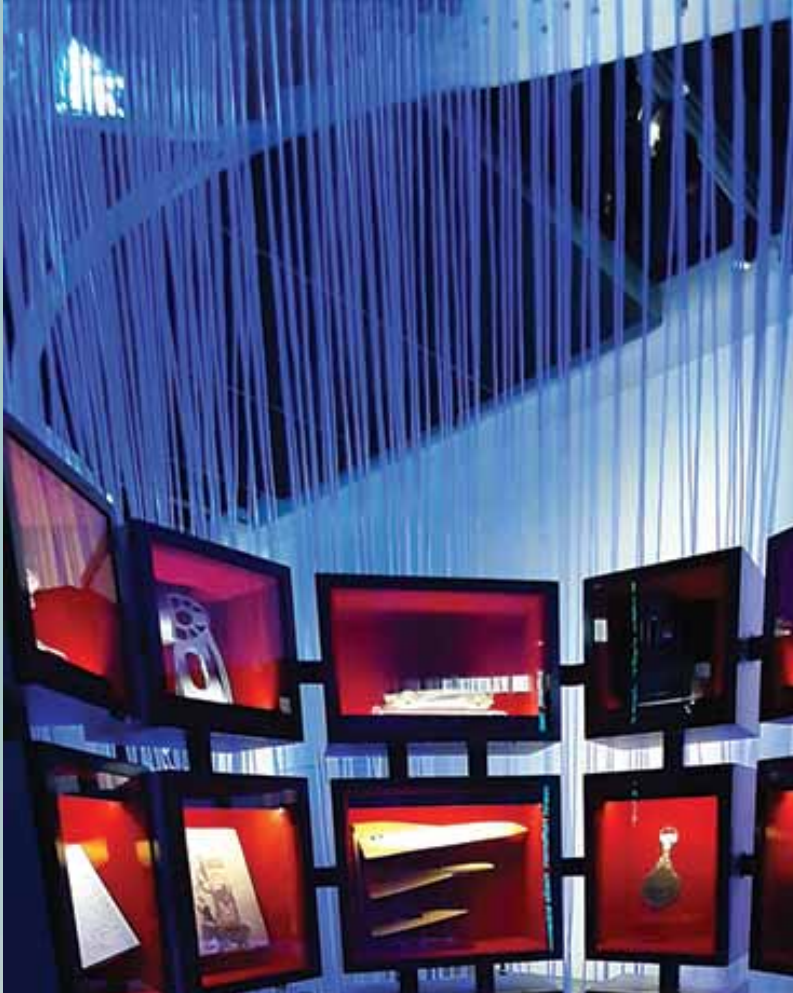
Photos by Shakir Reshamwala

The Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Centre (ASCC) is the largest museum complex in the world. It comprises of six museums related to natural history, science and technology, Arab and Islamic science and space. The center is home to some 22 world-class galleries, with over 3,000 exhibits.

This week we head to the Transportation and Robots museum, which showcases the evolution of transport through the centuries, from hot-air balloons to supersonic jets, horse-drawn carriages to cars and small boats to oil tankers. Visitors can also learn about Kuwait's maritime heritage and its long history of boatbuilding.







Exploring **ASCC**



Children can interact with a giant robot and a variety of robotic and scientific displays. They can experiment with exhibits on various forms of energy, viscosity of liquids and the periodic table. What better way to learn about science than getting hands on with it!

PHOTO FEATURE



## Local

# Amir congratulates Crown Prince on first anniversary of post assumption

**KUWAIT:** HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Wednesday congratulated HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the first anniversary of assuming his post. In a letter sent to HH Sheikh Mishal, HH Sheikh Nawaf extolled the achievements of HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince in the first year. He praised Sheikh Mishal's hardwork and devotion to serving the dear homeland.

HH the Amir wished HH the Deputy Amir everlasting wellness and success in his mission. In a reply letter, HH the Deputy Amir thanked HH the Amir on his noble sentiments. He wished HH the Amir everlasting wellbeing and prayed to Almighty Allah to bless HH the Amir's efforts to lead Kuwait to greater welfare and progress.

Meanwhile, HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal received a congratulatory cable yesterday from Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah on the occasion of the first anniversary since he took office. In the cable, the minister wished him success in permanently supporting HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf. HH Sheikh Mishal also received a congratulatory cable yesterday from the chief of

the Crown Prince's Diwan Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. In the cable, he wished him success in supporting HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf in his national development march.

HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal also received a congratulatory cable from National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. He received a similar cable from HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. He also received a cable from Head of Kuwait National Guard HH Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah on the same occasion. HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince also received a congratulatory cable from HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

HH Sheikh Mishal received similar cables from Deputy Head of Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. In their cables, they expressed to HH Sheikh Mishal their sincere congratulations and wished him success in permanently supporting HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf in his national development march. HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince sent a reply to the top officials, in which he expressed his appreciation for their sincere sentiments and wishes. — KUNA



HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs a Cabinet meeting at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex. — KUNA

## Kuwait to assign parks, open spaces for investment

**KUWAIT:** The Cabinet, in its extraordinary meeting on Wednesday, instructed the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) to work out a plan to open public parks and spaces in residential areas for investment. The Cabinet also ordered the PAAAFR to coordinate with other relevant bodies to allocate plots of lands for organizing entertainment activities and events in the agricultural areas of Wafra in the south and Abdaly in the north, said Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohamad Al-Sabah in a statement following the Cabinet meeting.

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chaired the Cabinet meeting at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex. At the advent of the meeting, the Cabinet congratulated HH the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-

Sabah on the first anniversary of his assumption of the post. They wished him everlasting wellbeing and success in his mission. The prime minister and the ministers then toured the recently-inaugurated tennis complex. Several officials of the Public Authority for Sports (PAS) and the tennis complex briefed the premier on the different facilities and amenities of the complex.

They pointed out that the complex houses 18 tennis courts, two courts with the ability to host spectators and a world-class tennis academy. They also informed the ministers about the other ongoing PAS projects. HH the Prime Minister expressed admiration of the complex, which would be of great benefit to national tennis teams and players. He also lauded the effective role played by the private sector to execute state development projects and improve the performance of the national economy. PAS officials made a presentation in front of the Cabinet members about the authority's roadmap to make the best use of youth clubs across the country to hone the skills of youth in a wide array of domains. The Cabinet hailed PAS' sincere efforts to empower youth and increase their contributions to nation building and societal development, urging the authority to persist with their endeavors to serve national youth. — KUNA

## Senior journalists commend KUNA's professional role

**KUWAIT:** Senior Kuwaiti journalists have commended the "leading" role of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) as a "national professional institution", which conveys Kuwait's voice to the entire world. The journalists, in statements to KUNA a day after the agency celebrated its 45th anniversary, said the national news agency is a "media icon". They said they get "reliable" news, specially local stories, from KUNA, which made it a "trusted source" which publishes accurate and objective stories.

Abdullah Boftein, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Kuwait Times, said KUNA has contributed to the documentation of Kuwait's history in the Arabic and English languages. Kuwait was established by an Amiri decree on Oct 6, 1976. Fatma Hussain, Chairperson of Kuwait Journalists Association (KJA), said she was proud of KUNA's contribution to the media since its establishment 45 years ago. Hussain said the national agency is keen on conveying a "national and responsible" message to the public as well as highlight Kuwait's achievements on political, cultural, artistic and sport levels.

Ahmad Al-Jarallah, Editor-in-Chief of Al-Seyassah daily, said KUNA started with modest and limited capabilities, but developed into a full-fledged agency. He said KUNA is distinguished with its photo service, and has been excelling in photo features, reports and features. Waleed Al-Jassem, Editor-in-Chief of Al-Rai daily newspaper, said relations between KUNA and the local press were "old and deep-rooted", since the agency is the official source of government news. Jassem said KUNA played a big part in reporting

Waleed Al-Nesf, Editor-in-Chief of Al-Qabas daily, said KUNA has been witnessing and was part of many local and regional events since its establishment. KUNA, he added, helped cover many events around the world through its bureaus and correspondents in major capitals. Nesf commended the state-owned agency for the services it was providing to local newspapers before the introduction of the Internet and social media.

Editor-in-Chief of Al-Anbaa newspaper Yusuf Al-Marzouq said KUNA "has been a major part of our official media which we are proud of, and it is an added value to honest and objective reporting". Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Al-Jarida newspaper Nasser Al-Otaibi said the anniversary of KUNA reflects 45 years of "seriousness, dedication and the desire to constantly improve; a history of credible news and objective reporting". He said KUNA emerged stronger following the Iraqi invasion in 1990, and worked hard during the coronavirus pandemic despite the difficult conditions. Dr Zuhair Al-Abbad, Editor-in-Chief of Kuwaitiya newspaper and Chairman of Kuwait Journalists Union, said KUNA is the facade of Kuwaiti media, whether conventional or electronic. KUNA is an important medium which offers many services to the audience, he said. — KUNA



## Local

# Legal department scraps 60+ expat residency ban decision

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** The government's legal body, the Fatwa and Legislation Department, yesterday announced that a decision to ban expats aged 60 and above without university degrees from renewing work permits is "illegal", and accordingly, older residents can renew their work permits and residencies as usual. Head of the Fatwa Department Salah Al-Mesad said in a ruling to Commerce Minister Abdullah Al-Salman that the ban decision was issued from an unauthorized official, and as a result is null and void.

Director General of the Public Authority for Manpower Ahmad Al-Mousa issued the decision last year stating that residents aged 60 years and above who do not hold university degrees are not permitted to renew their work permits, which is a precondition to renew the residency. The decision, affecting tens of thousands of expats who spent most of their lives in Kuwait, was harshly criticized by many MPs and local human rights bodies as "inhumane", who repeatedly called on the government to cancel it.

But it was seen by some as a means to reduce the number of foreign residents, who form close to 70 percent of Kuwait's population of 4.5 million. Two weeks ago, the minister of commerce and industry sent a letter to the fatwa department asking for a legal viewpoint on the validity and legality of the decision.

The department wrote back yesterday explaining the decision was issued by unauthorized personnel, adding decisions regarding work permit regulations must be issued only by the board of directors of the manpower authority chaired by the minister himself. It added that Mousa, the director general, is not authorized to issue such decisions, and as such it is illegal and holds no legal status.

The ruling means that procedures regarding issuance and renewal of work permits for expats will return to the way they used to be before the decision was issued 14 months ago. But before the return to regular procedures, the commerce minister must issue an official decision scrapping the old decision, which should be a formality.



KUWAIT: An elderly vendor is seen at a shop in Souq Mubarakia. — Photo by Hussain Assad

## Stable weather during weekend

**KUWAIT:** Stable weather is expected in Kuwait City during the weekend, with high temperatures during the day and moderate weather at night, Kuwait Control and Meteorological Center (KCMC) said yesterday. In a statement to KUNA, weather forecast supervisor Abdulaziz Al-Qarawi said the change of seasons from autumn to winter is witnessing some stability in weather with a slight decline in temperatures.

Yesterday, Qarawi expected relatively hot and humid weather in coastal areas with moderate to northwesterly winds with a speed of 30 to 80 km/per hour. The highest temperature expected during the weekend is between 39 and 42 Celsius, and lowest temperature between 25 and 23 Celsius, with light northwesterly winds and low sea waves between 2-4 feet.— KUNA

## Flu shots for over-60s at 58 clinics nationwide

**KUWAIT:** Some 58 clinics opened from yesterday to vaccinate people over the age of 60 and other vulnerable groups against seasonal respiratory illnesses, the health ministry said on Wednesday. These vaccines will be available to both groups upon receiving a third COVID-19 vaccine dose, ministry spokesman Dr Ahmad Al-Sanad said in a statement.—KUNA



DUBAI: Traditional dancers and musicians delight the crowd at Kuwait's Expo 2020 pavilion.—KUNA

## Sustainability efforts highlighted at Expo; troupe spreads joy

**DUBAI:** Kuwait's pavilion at Dubai Expo, the first world fair in the region, organized on Wednesday workshops demonstrating the country's sustainability efforts, including measures it has taken to limit greenhouse gas emissions. These workshops are highlighting Kuwait's "path towards sustainability", chronicling the nation's history of solar energy projects, the first of which came to light in 1970, said Basem Al-Meslem, an engineer at Kuwait's electricity and water ministry.

A separate workshop by Khaled Nasser,

another ministry engineer, revolved around measures Kuwait has taken to cut greenhouse gas emissions, a main climate policy action. The country's geographical landscape, coupled with meteoric advances in technology, are very conducive to the use of solar power as a renewable energy source, the workshop showed.

To meet soaring power demand, Kuwait has completed the first phase of its Shagaya renewable energy complex, a marquee project seen as the cornerstone of renewable energy plans.

To the sounds of traditional Kuwaiti music, the Television Group, a troupe of traditional Kuwaiti dancers and musicians, delighted large crowds visiting Kuwait's pavilion on Wednesday. Filling the air with joy, the performers received a rapturous applause from the diverse group of onlookers at the global exhibition, hosted by Dubai until the end of March 2022.—KUNA

## Kuwait plane makes emergency landing over bomb warning

**ANKARA/KUWAIT:** A Jazeera Airlines passenger plane made an emergency landing at Turkey's Trabzon airport yesterday after a bomb warning, the airline and the local governorate said. Turkish security officials evacuated the passenger aircraft, which took off from Kuwait and was bound for Trabzon on the Black Sea coast of northeastern Turkey, Governor Ismail Ustaoglu told reporters.

A total of 51 passengers and six staff of the Airbus A320 aircraft were evacuated and their luggage was being checked, he added. Extensive security measures were taken at the airport, where the fire brigade and ambulances were waiting. The bomb alert was made to the airline's headquarters in Kuwait, which issued a warning for all their planes in the air, including the one traveling to Trabzon, the governor said, emphasizing that the alert did not only cover the plane that had landed in Turkey.

In a statement, Jazeera Airways dismissed any potential security threat to their flights, saying it contacted Kuwaiti authorities to check the planes as a further precaution. "Earlier today, Jazeera Airways received a communication indicating a potential security situation. This communication was evaluated and deemed to be not credible," the airline said.

However, due to an abundance of caution, Jazeera engaged with authorities in Kuwait and in its network to protect passengers and crew, and all flights have been provided with additional screening measures as a precaution, it added. Jazeera Airways said its security team was closely monitoring the situation, apologizing for any delays that passengers might have experienced during this time.— Agencies



Duterte nemesis, drug-war critic bids for Philippine president

## Afghan Hazaras live in fear under Taleban rule



HARNAI, Pakistan: Residents bury the body of a victim following an earthquake in the remote mountainous district of Harnai yesterday. —AFP

# 20 killed as quake hits Pakistan

## Despair as families sift through rubble of deadly earthquake

**HARNAI, Pakistan:** A young man with a jet-black beard crouches, grief-stricken, next to the body of his baby, swaddled in a blanket, as his other children look on in shock. "I tried to take out my children, but the jolt was so strong," Rafiullah, a farmer in the mountainous Pakistani district of Harnai, told AFP.

The roof of his mud house collapsed and knocked Rafiullah unconscious when the 5.9-magnitude earthquake struck Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province in the early hours of yesterday. "When I regained consciousness, I pulled out two of my sons," he said. But his youngest boy, only around one, had been struck by a wooden beam, and "had already died". A one-year-old boy was among the victims, killed when a beam crashed on top of him in the darkness. At least 20 people, including six children, were killed in the quake that hit just after 3 am (2200 GMT Wednesday).

It was felt across at least six cities and towns

but the remote district of Harnai was worst-affected, with landslides triggered by the jolt blocking some roads and hampering rescue efforts in the area. Images published by the Balochistan Levies law enforcement agency showed men clearing fallen rocks from a blocked road, with only the headlights of cars parked nearby to cut through the darkness.

### 'Screaming for help'

"It was a strong earthquake. The jolt was very powerful," Zaman Shah told AFP in Harnai. "As we ran to save our lives, some people fell," he said. "Our homes have suffered damage, and lives were also lost."

Provincial officials said dozens if not hundreds of people were injured, while hundreds of mud brick houses were damaged. As day broke, Harnai residents were sifting through the yellow-brown rubble that once constituted their homes. Some desperately pulled away

bricks and rocks with their bare hands, while one man struggled to lift a door flattened on top of the debris. Children with smudged faces and bandaged heads sat in stunned silence on stretchers, as ambulances wailed by and army helicopters roared overhead. They were evacuating those worst injured from remote areas to Quetta, the nearest major city. When the shallow quake shook the ground in Gharibabad village in Harnai district, "everybody rushed to save their lives," 27-year-old villager Rahamatullah said.

"Women and children were screaming for help." He said no one from his family was injured, but that they had been terrified to see big cracks in the walls. When a second jolt rocked the area around two hours after the first quake, "nobody dared to go inside his home," he says. "People stayed out of their house for the rest of the night."

Authorities are also contending with phone

and electricity outages after pylons were damaged. "We are receiving information that 20 people have been killed due to the earthquake," said Balochistan's home minister Mir Zia ullah Langau, adding that 100 people were injured.

Army helicopters were helping to evacuate the injured from remote areas to Quetta, the nearest major city. Naseer Nasar, the head of Balochistan's Provincial Disaster Management Authority, warned the death toll could rise. A second jolt rocked the area around two hours after the first quake.

"Our rescue teams have cleared 50 percent of the roads leading to Harnai while remaining roads will be cleared in the next two to three hours," Balochistan's home minister Langau added, highlighting the strain rescue teams were under. The quake caused electricity to fail in the area, with health staff working until dawn without lights in the district's poorly equipped government hospital. — AFP

## International

# Over 600,000 affected by heavy flooding in South Sudan: UN

## Torrential rains, ongoing violence forcing many to flee their homes

**JUBA:** Severe flooding since August has affected at least 623,000 people in South Sudan, forcing many to flee their homes with the situation further exacerbated by ongoing violence, the UN's emergency-response agency said yesterday.

Torrential rains have caused rivers to overflow, deluging homes and farms in eight of South Sudan's ten states, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in a briefing note. Emergency workers are using canoes and boats to reach cut-off populations, with over two-thirds of the affected areas now facing the risk of hunger as food prices shoot up, recording a 15-percent jump since August, the agency said. "Schools, homes, health facilities and water sources were inundated, impacting people's access to basic services."

Some families have been able to flee to the capital Juba, while others have set up makeshift camps along highways, grabbing what few possessions they could from the ruins of their flimsy thatched huts.

In some parts of the country, violence between rival communities has forced tens of

thousands of people to leave their homes while also complicating emergency workers' efforts to help flood-battered communities. UN teams have struggled to get aid to Warrap, a north-western state plagued by ethnic violence, which is now battling a measles outbreak.

Meanwhile, around 80,000 people have been uprooted from their homes in Western Equatoria state in the country's southwest as a result of the fighting which erupted in June, OCHA said, with some fleeing to the Democratic Republic of Congo. The agency last month warned of limited supplies and a funding shortfall, saying that it had only received 54 percent of the \$1.7 billion (1.4 billion euros) required to pay for programs in the country. Funding shortages have also forced the UN World Food Programme to suspend food aid to over 100,000 displaced people in South Sudan, the agency said last month, warning of further reductions unless it received more cash.

Four out of five of South Sudan's 11 million people live in "absolute poverty", according to the World Bank in 2018, while more than 60 percent of its population suffers from severe hunger from the combined effects of conflict,



Torrential rains have caused rivers to overflow, deluging homes and farms in eight of South Sudan's ten states, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said.

drought and floods. Since achieving independence from Sudan in 2011, the young nation has been in the throes of a chronic economic and political crisis, and is struggling to recover from the aftermath of a five-year civil war that left nearly 400,000 people dead.

Although a 2018 ceasefire and power-sharing deal between President Salva Kiir and his deputy Riek Machar still largely holds, it is being sorely tested, with little progress made in fulfilling the terms of the peace process. —AFP

## India to re-open for tourists from October 15

**NEW DELHI:** India will re-open for tourists from October 15 after being closed for more than a year due to the coronavirus pandemic, the government said yesterday. The country famous for the Taj Mahal, desert palaces, tiger reserves, elephants and beaches had barred all foreign tourists in March 2020 in a strict lockdown when the pandemic took off.

But after a horrendous spike in COVID-19 cases earlier this year, the number of cases has since fallen sharply and the government, under pressure from an industry that is an important pillar of the economy, on Thursday announced a loosening. Tourist visas will be granted for foreigners arriving on charter flights from October 15, and on other flights from November 15, the home ministry said in a statement. It stressed that all COVID-19 protocols "should be adhered to by the foreign tourists, carriers bringing them into India and all other stakeholders at landing stations".

### Hospitals overwhelmed

India initially banned all foreign arrivals. The restrictions were gradually eased for businesspeople, diplomats and others but borders remained shut for holidaymakers. In April and May this year the country of 1.3 billion people was hit by a severe wave of coronavirus infections with about 400,000 cases and 4,000 deaths every day.

Hospitals were overwhelmed as more than 200,000 people died in a period of around 10 weeks, according to official numbers that are widely seen as an underestimate. The spike was blamed on new virus variants and the government having lifted restrictions too soon and allowing sporting events and major celebrations for religious festivals to take place.



A camel owner waits for tourists in the sand dunes of Thar Desert at Sam village in India's Rajasthan state yesterday. —AFP

But cases have since slowed sharply to around 20,000 new daily infections and 200 to 300 deaths in recent weeks. More than 250 million people have been double-vaccinated, although this equates to only around 20 percent of the population, and experts warn that India could suffer another wave.

### Tourism staggers back

Tourism is beginning to pick up in Europe and the Americas, with some 54 million tourists crossing international borders in July, the most since April 2020, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) said on Monday. That was up 58 percent compared with the level recorded in July 2020, but was still a drop of 67 percent from July 2019. International arrivals were down 80 percent in January-July compared to 2019. The UN body said it was expecting to see a "rebound" in 2022 although global tourism is not expected to reach pre-pandemic levels until 2023 or 2024. —AFP

## 6.1-magnitude quake shakes Tokyo region

**TOKYO:** A 6.1-magnitude earthquake shook the Japanese capital Tokyo and surrounding areas yesterday evening, but no tsunami warning was issued, the Japan Meteorological Agency said. The quake sent buildings swaying and an emergency warning blaring from the phones of local residents, intended to give them time to take shelter.

Initial information from the JMA put the epicenter of the quake in Chiba prefecture, east of Tokyo, and said it struck at 10.41pm (1341 GMT) with a depth of 80 kilometers. There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage. The US Geological Survey put the quake's strength at magnitude 5.9 with a depth of 61 kilometers.

Some bullet and local train services were halted as a precaution after the quake, but local media reporting from locations in and around Tokyo said there did not appear to be any serious impact from the tremor.

Checks were also underway at regional nuclear plants, but there were no reports of abnormalities.

Several hundred Tokyo homes were also reportedly without power after the earthquake struck. The quake was comparatively strong compared to recent quakes in Tokyo, which like much of Japan regularly experiences seismic activity.

Newly elected Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in a tweet urged residents to "please take action to save lives while checking the latest information." —AFP

## International

# Northwest Nigeria now facing 'brewing humanitarian crisis'

## Gangs of heavily armed criminals terrorize people in Sokoto

**SOKOTO, Nigeria:** Maryam Aliyu and her six children were lying next to each other fast asleep when gunmen broke into their home in northwest Nigeria.

"Suddenly I saw light all over me. I came out of the mosquito net and there were four men with AK-47s," the 25-year-old said. "They pointed their guns to my chest and ears and told me to hand over everything I had." Gangs of heavily armed criminals known locally as bandits have terrorized northwest and central states of Africa's most populous nation for years.

But violence has spiraled in recent months, forcing thousands of already vulnerable people like Aliyu to flee their homes in a situation that aid agencies fear risks becoming a humanitarian crisis. When gunmen attacked her village of Danjiro in Sokoto state's Goronyo district last month, Aliyu had only 400 naira (\$1), as was the case most days.

The men in balaclavas took her cash along with half a bag of rice. "They even stole the wrapper on which my children were sleeping," said Aliyu, tears rolling down her cheeks. Another resident, Fatima Sal'Hatu, said that "if they don't kidnap you, they molest you, they steal what you have." "They usually try to rape us," said the 35-year-old mother of five, who survived a separate attack in Goronyo. "We fled without anything, not even our shoes."

### Hunger and insecurity

Both women now live in a congested camp for the displaced about five kilometers (three miles) from their village. More than

1,600 people have arrived at the camp in recent weeks, according to UNICEF, in desperate need of food, protection, shelter and clothes. "We send the children to get firewood to sell and buy food, but if we don't sell any, we don't eat," said Sal'Hatu.

"We sometimes sleep without having had food that day."

Even water was unavailable, she said, until a non-profit organization repaired a well. "What we are watching in the northwest is a situation that will soon blow up in our faces," said Maulid Warfa, chief of UNICEF'S field office. Insecurity has worsened an already dire situation, Warfa said, for residents among the poorest in Nigeria and with the highest infant and maternal mortality rates.

Yet the region attracts much less attention than the country's northeast, where jihadist groups are fighting a 12-year conflict that has displaced two million people. There is a "tendency from the international community to rush" to where "the situation is more sexy," Warfa said.

"If donors and the international community are not interested in doing what needs to be done today, in a few years we will be dealing with a situation that a lot of people will regret," he said. "I am worried about this brewing humanitarian crisis." At a nutrition clinic supported by UNICEF in Sokoto North, outside the city, more than 50 women with small children waited to receive a small pack filled with nutrient paste designed for acute malnutrition.

Among them was Zara'u Dahiru, 22. Bandits raided her vil-



**SOKOTO, Nigeria:** Twenty five-year-old mother Maryam Aliyu narrates her ordeal with the bandits at Bini Primary health clinic, Wamako district of Sokoto, northwest Nigeria.—AFP

lage of Tudun Kosai in Tangaza district last month, killing her neighbor and abducting two others. "We hid in the crops and when day broke, we came here," she said. Dahiru and others fled to safety but now, far from their farmlands, eating has become a problem.—AFP

## Sixteen soldiers killed in central Mali attack

**BAMAKO:** Sixteen soldiers were killed and 10 wounded in an attack in central Mali on Wednesday, security and health officials in the war-torn Sahel state said. In a statement, Mali's army said the troops had been the target of a "complex IED attack"—referring to an improvised explosive device—and then came under heavy gunfire shortly before 11.30 am.

The army blamed the attack on suspected jihadists, and said that after pursuit, 15 of the assailants were killed and 20 motorcycles seized. According to the army, the provisional toll on its side was nine soldiers killed and 11 wounded. It also said three of its vehicles were destroyed. However, a health official working in central Mali said the death toll had risen to 16, with the bodies in the local morgue. A security source, who requested anonymity, also confirmed the higher toll.

Mali has been struggling to contain an Islamist insurgency that first erupted in the north in 2012 and has since claimed thousands of military and civilian lives. Despite the presence of thousands of French and UN troops, the conflict has engulfed central Mali and spread to neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. Central Mali has become one of the most violent hotspots of the Sahel-wide conflict, where ethnic killings and attacks on government forces are frequent. Laying roadside bombs-or IEDs-is a common tactic of jihadist groups in the region.—AFP

## EU says Facebook, YouTube remove less hate speech

**BRUSSELS:** The EU said yesterday that Facebook and YouTube took down less of the hate speech reported to them in 2021 than 2020 as pressure mounts to impose tighter regulation on social media platforms.

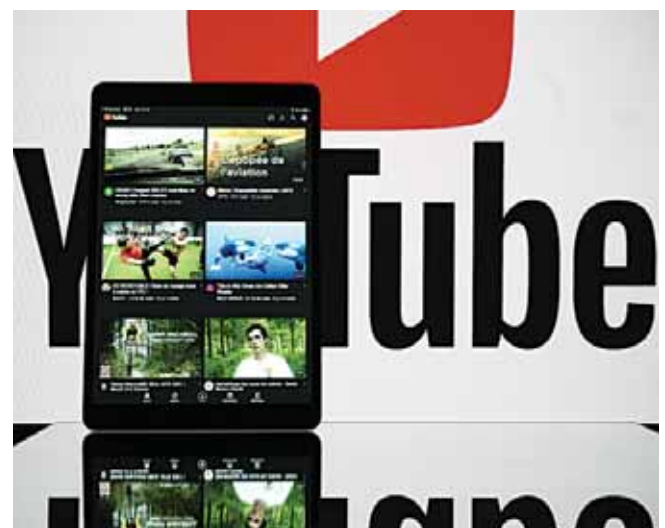
The EU's annual review of social media platforms that have signed up to its voluntary hate speech code — signatories also include Twitter, Instagram and TikTok — found that the overall removal rate had fallen below two-thirds. Signatory platforms removed an average of 62.5 percent of content reported by 35 anti-discrimination groups from 22 member states between March and April.

This is lower than the 71 percent average over the same six-week period in both 2019 and 2020. The code, which LinkedIn joined in June, is based on a voluntary approach, but the EU is currently preparing a wide-ranging regulation, known as the Digital Services Act, which would give the bloc beefed-up powers.

Once passed, social media companies would face hefty fines for turning a blind eye to illegal material, including hate speech, as well as impose greater transparency on how specific posts were displayed in user feeds.

The law is under discussion between the European Parliament and the Council of the bloc's 27 member states. EU officials said the plan to regulate was bolstered by the recent revelations of Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen.

"We need to provide rules and make platforms more accountable, not rely on voluntary schemes alone," said European Com-



mission Vice President Vera Jourova, who is in charge of values and transparency, tweeted on Wednesday after speaking with Haugen. Haugen told US lawmakers Tuesday that Facebook fuels division, harms children and urgently needs to be regulated, drawing pledges Washington would take up long-delayed action.

The EU's annual review showed the removal of hate speech decreased on Facebook and YouTube and increased on Twitter and Instagram.

TikTok, which was evaluated for the first time, removed 80 percent of the content reported. Hate speech based on sexual orientation and xenophobia were the most frequently reported, the EU said. In total, some 4,500 reports were sent to platforms during the monitoring period this year, led by Facebook, followed by Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Jeuxvideo.com and Tik Tok.—AFP

## International

# Algeria urges Morocco to quit W Sahara buffer zone

## UN appoints Western Sahara envoy after two-year search

**ALGIERS:** Algeria, the main backer of Western Sahara's Polisario Front independence movement, called on Morocco yesterday to withdraw from a key buffer zone, after the United Nations named a new envoy. The UN on Wednesday named veteran diplomat Staffan de Mistura as its point man on the decades-old conflict, a job that had remained vacant for nearly two and a half years as the Polisario and Morocco rejected a dozen other candidates. The Algerian foreign ministry noted "with interest" Mistura's appointment, and called for the removal of Moroccan troops deployed late last year in the Guerguerat area in the far south of the territory.

They had been sent to reopen a key highway leading into Mauritania after it was blocked by Sahrawi activists who see it as violating a 1991 ceasefire deal. The "demilitarization of this zone... is the cornerstone of any credible political process aiming to find a peaceful solution to the conflict," the Algerian ministry said. It said Algeria supported UN peace efforts and voiced hope that De Mistura could "relaunch direct, serious negotiations between the Polisario Front and the Kingdom of Morocco in order to reach a solution guaranteeing the Sahrawi people can freely and authentically exercise their inalienable right to self-determination."

The UN sees the Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony, as a "non-autonomous territory", but Morocco regards it as an integral part of its territory and insists its claim to sovereignty be recognised under any peace deal.

The kingdom controls some 80 percent of the largely desert territory, which has mineral reserves and access to rich Atlantic fisheries, as well as providing a potentially strategic trade route linking Morocco with West African markets. Rabat has proposed a plan for autonomy but the Polisario insists on an independence referendum as called for under the 1990 ceasefire deal. Morocco's

tense relations with Algeria have deteriorated since Rabat last year won Washington's recognition of its sovereignty over Western Sahara in exchange for normalizing ties with Zionist entity.

United Nations veteran diplomat Staffan de Mistura was named Wednesday as the organization's envoy to the Western Sahara conflict, nearly two and a half years after the post had become vacant as a dozen other candidates were rejected by either Morocco or the Polisario Front rebel movement.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric called Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's nomination of the 74-year-old Italian a "positive signal," after such a long selection process. Dujarric said De Mistura would be set to take over the position, which has been empty since May 2019, on November 1.

Morocco had initially rejected De Mistura—the thirteenth name floated for the job—as envoy in May before finally accepting the nomination under pressure from the United States, according to diplomats. He will be based in Brussels, where he already lives, according to the UN.

He will succeed former German president Horst Kohler, who stepped down in 2019 after making little progress on ending the conflict despite having restarted talks between Morocco, the Polisario Front and regional powers Algeria and Mauritania.

The United States "warmly welcomes" De Mistura's appointment, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement, offering support for a political process to bring a "durable and dignified" end to the conflict. "We will actively support his efforts to promote a peaceful and prosperous future for the people of Western Sahara and the region," the statement said.

"It suits them. They cannot annul Trump's decision without altering the relationship created in the exchange between Morocco and the Zionist entity," this official said. "And they cannot confirm



GENEVA: In this file photo, UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura arrives to a press conference. —AFP

it as they would go against UN resolutions," the official said, adding that remaining on the fence allows the US to keep pressuring Morocco. The UN considers Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony, a "non-self-governing territory," with the question of its control up in the air for decades. The issue has pitted Morocco against the independence-seeking Polisario Front, which is backed by Algeria.

Rabat, which controls 80 percent of the vast soil-rich desert territory—bordering rich fishing grounds—has proposed a plan for Western Sahara self-governance under Moroccan sovereignty. —AFP

## 15 years on, editors warn time up for justice in Politkovskaya murder

**MOSCOW:** Russians commemorated yesterday the killing of investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya 15 years ago on President Vladimir Putin's birthday, while her newspaper warned time had run out to punish the masterminds of the murder. Politkovskaya, a fierce critic of Putin and the Kremlin's wars in Chechnya, was gunned down on October 7, 2006, in the entrance hall of her apartment block in central Moscow. She was 48 years old.

Falling on Putin's birthday, the killing of a top investigative reporter—who worked for Russia's leading independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta and contributed to Western publications including the Guardian—sent shockwaves around the world. "Fifteen years after the murder of our journalist, the statute of limitations on the crime has expired. By law, only a court can extend it," Novaya Gazeta wrote on the eve of the anniversary. "Otherwise, the masterminds will go unpunished." The commemorative events at Novaya Gazeta's editorial offices come amid an unprecedented crackdown on the opposition and independent media, with authorities imprisoning Russia's top opposition



MOSCOW: In this file photo, a woman holds a portrait of slain Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya during a rally marking the 10th anniversary of her murder in Moscow. —AFP

politician Alexei Navalny. After all this time, investigators have yet to say who ordered the apparent contract killing, and Novaya Gazeta says the authorities have no real interest in pursuing the investigation any further for political reasons.

Putin's spokesman said yesterday it was "very difficult" to investigate contract killings. "We would all of course like for the instigators of this crime—both who ordered and executed it—to be punished," Dmitry Peskov told reporters. Asked if the Kremlin would be in favor of extending the statute of limitations for Politkovskaya's murder, Peskov said that the "inevitability of punishment" for such crimes was paramount. —AFP

## Gunmen kill 24 people in northern Nigeria

**KANO, Nigeria:** Gunmen raided two villages in northwest Nigeria killing 24 people, police and residents said yesterday, in the latest attacks by gangs of criminals. Northwest and central Nigeria have for years been plagued by heavily-armed gangs called bandits who raid villages, kidnap residents and loot and burn homes. Military operations are ongoing in the region, with the army saying last week it had "neutralized" nearly 300 bandits, but attacks have continued.

On Tuesday, motorcycle-riding bandits stormed two villages in Katsina and nearby Zamfara in separate attacks, killing residents and burning homes, according to the police and residents. In the first attack, dozens of bandits rode into Yasore village in Batsari district around 0500 GMT, opening fire on residents and torching homes, said Katsina's police spokesman Gambo Isah. "The bandits killed 10 people and wounded many others in the attack on the village," Isah said.

"They burnt houses and shops after stealing

provisions," he added. News of the attack was slow to emerge as Batsari is one of 13 districts affected by a telecom shutdown that local authorities have imposed in an effort to disrupt criminal activities. Later the same day, around 100 bandits on motorcycles besieged Kuryan Madaro village in neighbouring Zamfara state, killing people and seizing money and mobile phones from residents. "The bandits came in around 9:00 pm (20:00 GMT) and laid siege on the village, making escape difficult for the people," resident Hamisu Malami said.

"Some of them went door-to-door asking people to surrender their mobile phones and money and those who resisted were shot, including those who tried to flee," said Malami.

"They killed 14 people and injured many others," he said. Malami spoke from the state capital Gusau where telecom service was restored last week. His account was supported by another resident Bashiru Maiwada. Police and officials in the state have not responded to inquiries about the incident.

Authorities suspended telecommunications last month in Zamfara, where most of the attacks take place, and parts of Katsina, Sokoto and Kaduna states, to disrupt the criminal networks. The gangs, who maintain camps in Rugu forest straddling those four states, have been increasingly targeting schools where they kidnap students for ransom. —AFP

## International

# South Africa's 'moral compass' Tutu feted on his 90th birthday

## Tutu lauded 'as a fighter for equality and social justice'

**CAPE TOWN:** Desmond Tutu, South Africa's anti-apartheid icon, Nobel peace laureate and a man dubbed the "moral compass of the nation," marked his 90th birthday yesterday with a rare public appearance. The jovial Tutu, who even today speaks out against injustice, attended a special thanksgiving service at St George's Cathedral in Cape Town, where he was appointed South Africa's first black Anglican archbishop.

The service opened with a rendition of "Happy Birthday." Tutu, wearing his trademark purple shirt and white collar, under a black suit, waved in acknowledgement, from a wheelchair.

He sat next to his wife Leah. Tributes and well-wishes for the revered anti-apartheid icon have poured in from presidents, individuals and organizations from around the globe. President Cyril Ramaphosa lauded Tutu "as a fighter in the cause for human rights, for equality and for social justice" throughout the 59 years since his ordination.

He paid tribute to "The Arch," as he is fondly called in South Africa, "for a life that has been well-lived in honesty, integrity, fearlessness and service to humanity."

US President Joe Biden said he was "inspired by his personal commitment to championing human rights and to always speaking out for what is right." "The world first came to know Archbishop Tutu as he modeled the highest tenets of his faith in challenging the injustice of apartheid in South Africa," said Biden in a statement. "And in the years since, the world has continued to learn from Archbishop Tutu's message of justice, equality, and reconciliation."



**CAPE TOWN, South Africa:** Archbishop Emeritus and Nobel Peace Laureate Desmond Tutu, attends a service at St George's Cathedral to celebrate his 90th birthday in Cape Town, yesterday. —AFP

### 'Voice of conscience'

A tireless activist, Tutu has in recent years slammed even the ruling African National Congress (ANC) — the vanguard of the fight against white-minority rule-for cronyism and nepotism after apartheid ended in 1994. In the past, he has confronted homophobia in the Anglican Church, challenged Nelson Mandela over

generous salaries for cabinet ministers and stridently criticized the corruption that mushroomed under ex-president Jacob Zuma. "At times when we have found ourselves losing our way, you have taken us well to task," said Ramaphosa.

"For nearly three decades, yours has been a voice of conscience, guiding us and motivating us to do better by our people," he said. Ordained at the age of 30 and appointed archbishop in 1986, Tutu lobbied for international sanctions against apartheid, and later for human rights on a global scale.

He turned his focus on the thorny issue of reconciliation in the post-apartheid era as head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He retired in 2010 and rarely appears or speaks in public now. He was last seen in public in May, when he and his wife got their COVID-19 vaccinations. Tutu was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1997 and has undergone repeated treatment.

### Leading figures

After the service, the archbishop emeritus and his wife Leah will spend the day at home with daughters Naomi and Mpho, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The day will culminate with on-line speeches from the Dalai Lama, former UN rights chief Mary Robinson, Mandela's widow and campaigner Graca Machel, and South Africa's ex-ombudswoman Thuli Madonsela, who is widely respected for her exposure of corruption. The line-up of speakers is a reminder of Tutu's values, surrounding himself with rights advocates at a time when South Africa's current leaders are better known for lavish lifestyles and billion-dollar bank accounts. —AFP

## Merkel meets pope, Draghi in farewell visit to Rome

**VATICAN CITY, Holy See:** German Chancellor Angela Merkel discussed climate change and clerical abuse with Pope Francis yesterday in a farewell trip to Rome that included talks with Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi. Merkel, who is bowing out after 16 years in power, also visited St Peter's Basilica and will lunch at a restaurant in central Rome before giving a speech at a peace conference at the Colosseum. She was honored with a ceremonial welcome by the Swiss Guards at the Vatican before meeting and exchanging gifts with the pope, whom she has met several times before.

She said afterwards they discussed climate change—an issue on which Francis has been outspoken—and the sexual abuse by children of clergy, a problem that has rocked the Catholic Church in Germany and elsewhere. "We had important discussions about child abuse," Merkel, the daughter of a Lutheran clergyman, told reporters.

"I wanted to underline with my visit that we think that the truth must come to light, and the topic must be dealt with." Earlier, Merkel visited the site of a new institute within the Vatican's Gregoriana university dedicated to child protection and met with Hans Zollner, the Vatican's leading expert on measures to safeguard minors. She was later due to meet with Draghi, with whom she has worked closely for years, notably when he was head of the European Central Bank—and where they did not always see eye-to-eye. — AFP

## Ex-Nazi guard, 100, refuses to discuss atrocities at trial

**BRANDENBURG:** A 100-year-old former concentration camp guard who became the oldest person to be tried for Nazi-era crimes in Germany will not speak about his time at the site, his lawyer said at the trial opening yesterday. Josef Schuetz is accused of "knowingly and willingly" assisting in the murder of 3,518 prisoners at the Sachsenhausen camp in Oranienburg, north of Berlin, between 1942 and 1945.

Allegations include aiding and abetting the "execution by firing squad of Soviet prisoners of war in 1942" and the murder of prisoners "using the poisonous gas Zyklon B". However, Schuetz "will not speak, but will only provide information about his personal situation" at the trial, his lawyer Stefan Waterkamp, told the court.

Antoine Grumbach, 79, whose father was killed at the camp, said he wanted the accused to acknowledge "the possibility of guilt". Thomas Walther, a lawyer representing several camp survivors and victims' relatives, said he hoped Schuetz would change his mind.

### 'Not made of stone'

"A man is not made of stone, not a machine," he said. "Maybe he will still say something." Despite his advanced age, a medical assessment in August found Schuetz fit to stand trial, although his hearings are limited to a couple of hours a day. Schuetz arrived with a walking aid for the proceedings, held in a sports hall given the huge interest in the case. The bespectacled man



**BRANDENBURG:** Defendant Josef Schuetz gets help from his lawyer Stefan Waterkamp (left) to hide his face behind a folder as he arrives for his trial in Brandenburg an der Havel yesterday. —AFP

answered the judge with a clear voice when asked about his name, age and home address.

A widower since 1986, he was visibly proud when he replied that he will "celebrate (his) 101st birthday, on November 16". More than seven decades after World War II, German prosecutors are racing to bring the last surviving Nazi perpetrators to justice, and have in recent years increasingly focused attention on lower-ranking staff. The case comes a week after a 96-year-old German woman, who was a secretary in a Nazi death camp, dramatically fled before the start of her trial, but was caught several hours later. She, too, has been charged with complicity in murder. Her trial resumes on October 19. — AFP

## International

# Germany repatriates 8 women and 23 children with ties to IS

## Women from Syria deported in biggest transfer since 2019

**BERLIN:** Germany has repatriated eight women who joined the IS terror group and 23 children from northern Syria in the biggest such transfer since 2019, the foreign ministry said. “The children are not responsible for their situation... the mothers will have to answer for their acts,” Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said in a statement issued overnight from Wednesday to Thursday.

“He said many of them were held in custody on arrival in Germany”. Federal prosecutors said three of the women were arrested on arrival at Frankfurt airport and charged with membership in a terror organization and for neglecting the care and upbringing of their children.

One of the accused, Romiena S, had allegedly showed her daughter IS execution videos as she raised her with the radical Islamist teachings of the group. She is also accused of keeping watch on a Yazidi woman enslaved by the IS and requiring her to say Muslim prayers.

The other two arrested were named as Solale M and Verena M. Denmark also brought three women and 14 children to its territory as part of the same operation, carried out with US military

support, Berlin said. Maas said he was “happy” to have brought back to Germany people, especially children, identified “as being in particular need of protection”.

“They are mostly sick children or those with a guardian in Germany, as well as their brothers and sisters and their mothers,” the foreign ministry said. The group was repatriated from the Roj camp in Kurdish-controlled northeastern Syria. Tabloid-style daily Bild reported that foreign ministry and police officials landed in the region early Wednesday on a US military plane, which then brought the group to Kuwait before they boarded a flight to Frankfurt. The women are aged between 30 and 38 and come from several regions around Germany, Der Spiegel weekly reported.

Countries have been wrangling over how to treat captives linked to IS since the group’s fall in March 2019. Most European countries carry out repatriations on a case-by-case basis. Germany’s last joint repatriation alongside Finland in December 2020 brought back five women and 18 children. — AFP



**ESBJERG, Denmark:** Attorney Mette Grith Stage (left) talks with journalists as she arrives for a court hearing yesterday at the court in Esbjerg, Denmark, where she is representing one of three women that have been repatriated to Denmark from Syria. — AFP

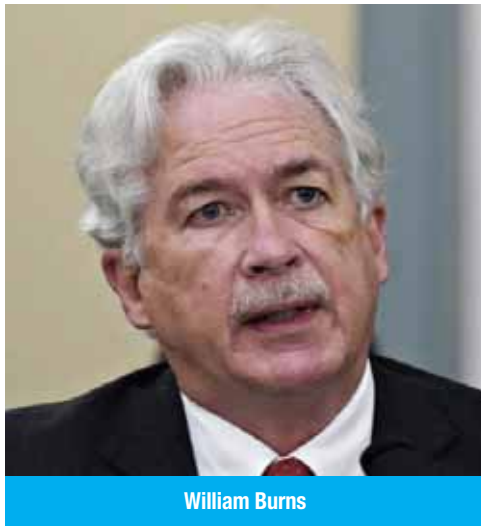
## CIA steps up spying contest with China with new unit

**WASHINGTON:** The US Central Intelligence Agency announced yesterday a new China-focused unit that underscored its view of Beijing as the country’s toughest long-term adversary. CIA Director William Burns said in a statement that the new China Mission Center will address the challenge China poses to all of the US spy agency’s mission areas.

“CMC will further strengthen our collective work on the most important geopolitical threat we face in the 21st century, an increasingly adversarial Chinese government,” Burns said. The announcement parallels the broader shift of the administration of President Joe Biden to confronting China as its leading “strategic competitor.”

In June Biden announced a new task force at the Pentagon to assess and respond to Beijing’s military challenge. Burns’ announcement came after the CIA and FBI have unearthed dozens of cases of China recruiting US citizens to supply it classified or corporate proprietary information, and using Chinese citizens working in the United States as intelligence collectors as well.

It also comes as US intelligence sees their Chinese rivals making use of their strength in the global electronics market and in hacking to penetrate US government and private computer networks. Underscoring the challenge from Beijing as well as other rivals like Pakistan,



William Burns

the CIA recently sent a memo to its arms around the world admitting that it had lost dozens of its own covert informants in other countries, some captured or killed, according to the New York Times and Washington Post. “Throughout our history, CIA has stepped up to meet whatever challenges come our way.... And now facing our toughest geopolitical test in a new era of great power rivalry, CIA will be at the forefront of this effort,” Burns said.

Burns, a veteran diplomat who became CIA director in March, also announced a new position, CIA chief technology officer, and a new Transnational and Technology Mission Center. The center will address global issues critical to US competitiveness, the statement said, such as emerging technologies, economic security, climate change and health challenges. —AFP

## French police cause misery for migrants in Calais: HRW

**PARIS:** French police are inflicting misery on migrants in the northern port of Calais, routinely tearing down their tents and forcing them to wander the streets as part of a deterrence policy, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a report yesterday. The 75-page report documents methods used by authorities to prevent the emergence of another major migrant settlement in Calais, five years after the demolition of the sprawling “Jungle” camp which housed up to 10,000 people at its peak.

Calais has for years been a rallying point for migrants from the Middle East, Asia and Africa trying to sneak across the English Channel to Britain. Faced with growing public anti-migrant sentiment, President Emmanuel Macron’s government has waged a campaign to prevent new camps emerging.

Police tactics include systematically tearing down migrants’ tents in the woods, on wasteland or under bridges, regularly confiscating their belongings and harassing NGOs trying to provide them with aid, according to New York-based HRW. “The authorities carry out these abusive practices with the primary purposes of forcing people to move elsewhere, without resolving their migration status or lack of housing, or of deterring new arrivals,” it said in the report

entitled “Enforced Misery: The Degrading Treatment of Migrant Children and Adults in Northern France”.

### ‘Harass and abuse’

NGOs estimate the number of migrants currently living around Calais at between 1,500 and 2,000, including numerous families. Local authorities estimate that only 500 remain in the area. Last week, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin ordered the eviction of a camp housing 400 migrants near a hospital in Calais, which was presented as a danger to the hospital’s patients and staff.

On that occasion the migrants were taken to temporary shelters but often they are left to wander the streets. “When the police arrive, we have five minutes to get out of the tent before they destroy everything,” a Kurdish woman from Iraq told HRW. The interior ministry did not respond to AFP’s request for comment on the report. The government argues that the camps are havens for people smugglers, who command extortionate fees to help migrants cross to Britain, either in a small boat crossing the Channel in the dead of night or stowed away on a truck crossing by ferry or through the Channel Tunnel.

NGOs argue that the tactics do nothing more than make migrants already difficult lives even more miserable. The report quoted the Calais-based Human Rights Observers group as saying that in some cases cleaning crews cut migrants’ tents while people are still inside, in order to force them out. “If the aim is to discourage migrants from gathering in northern France, these policies are a manifest failure and result in serious harm,” Benedicte Jeannerod, France director at Human Rights Watch, said. —AFP

## International

# 'No more hope': Afghan Hazaras live in fear under Taleban rule

## Reports of abductions and murders amid repression of minorities

**BAMIYAN, Afghanistan:** A black and white Taleban flag flies over the blown-up statue of a revered Hazara chief at the entrance to Bamiyan in central Afghanistan. Since the radical Islamists swept to power seven weeks ago they have repeatedly promised a more moderate, inclusive brand of rule than during their last stint, when minorities were brutally persecuted. But members of the Hazara community here don't believe them. "Everyone is terrified," says Najwa, a 26-year-old local journalist now out of work. "It is impossible to believe them. For the Hazaras, and especially for us women, there is no more hope." She and other Hazaras fled into the mountains when they first heard the Taleban were coming, but a week later they returned. As a member of the Bamiyan Film Academy, Najwa could have been evacuated to France like many of her peers but, hidden in the wilderness, she missed a vital call. "And now it is too late," she says.

### 'Abductions, murders'

Afghanistan's new rulers have declared a general amnesty and promised reform. But fears abound that they will repeat the brutal repression of minorities and women seen during their former reign from 1996 to 2001. "We know that there have been abductions, murders," Najwa says.

The Hazara, who make up as much as a fifth of Afghanistan's around 38 million people, have been persecuted in the country for centuries. They have

suffered massacres during the rule of several Afghan governments in recent decades, but especially under the Taleban-Sunni hardliners who see the mainly Shiite ethnic minority as heretics. The Islamists have carried out several mass killings of Hazaras, including in the city of Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998, where Human Rights Watch says at least 2,000 mainly Hazara civilians were executed.

While nothing on that scale has been reported since the Taleban takeover on August 15, an Amnesty International investigation published this week found Taleban forces had killed 13 Hazaras, including nine surrendering former government soldiers, in Daykundi province on August 30, in what "appear to be war crimes".

### 'Not enemies'

But Musa Nasrat, Bamiyan's acting governor and new chief of police, insists Hazaras have nothing to fear. "It is true that in the beginning, people were afraid," he tells AFP, claiming that all those who initially fled had returned.

"We told them: 'Return to your normal life. We are here to protect you'," he says, insisting that "we are not enemies of the Shiites." The Taleban's enemy, he says, was "the corrupt government" of ousted president Ashraf Ghani. But now, "we have won. Peace will reign." In a bid to reassure the Hazaras, the new rulers have made a Shiite, Mahdi Mujahid, the intelligence chief in Bamiyan province. "My community



**BAMIYAN, Afghanistan:** Hazara ethnic children walk to a river from their village near the cliffs pockmarked by caves where people still live as they did centuries ago in Bamiyan. —AFP

has nothing to fear," he said, in his first statement on the job. But more than words will be needed to calm the community's fears.

"We cannot trust them," says Abdul Danesh Yar, a 33-year-old private school principal. "Our coun-

try's history is full of massacres and deportations of Hazaras." Yar, like so many others here, says he feels betrayed by the United States and its allies over their hasty withdrawal in August after 20 years of fighting. —AFP

## Peru president names environmentalist as new premier

**LIMA:** Peru swore in an environmental activist as prime minister Wednesday, replacing a controversial leftist figure in the politically tumultuous South American nation. The country's current leftist leader Pedro Castillo came to power in July facing a lengthy to-do list, including constitutional reform, but battled to get his cabinet approved and narrowly staved off political collapse earlier this year. He gave no reason over his decision to remove Guido Bellido—a hardline leftist and political novice, whose appointment was controversial from the start—and replace him with Mirtha Vasquez.

Hours later, Castillo swore in the environmental and human rights activist as his new PM, a move seen as a sop to the moderate wing of the informal leftist coalition that supports him. "For God, for this country of women and men who everyday fight to live with dignity, without discrimination, and who promote real changes, yes, I swear!" Vasquez, 46, said during the ceremony which was not attended by her predecessor. Under Peruvian law, the prime minister's resignation automatically triggers that of the entire cabinet. The president's reshuffled government brings together politicians across the political spectrum from the radical Peru Libre, to the more moderate Juntos por el Peru. Vasquez—who headed Con-



**LIMA, Peru:** Mirtha Vasquez, an environmental and human rights activist, posing for an official photograph after her swearing-in ceremony, in Lima, on Wednesday. —AFP

gress between November 2020 and July 2021 — belongs to the leftist Frente Amplio. Castillo, a former rural schoolteacher, called for "unity" from the country's economic, political and social sectors to "achieve common objectives"—such as reactivating the economy. He later tweeted, "The new stage in the #GobiernoDelPueblo seeks to promote dialogue, governance and teamwork. Our great objective is to fight for the most vulnerable and we are going to achieve it." Castillo's July appointment of electronic engineer Bellido was immediately tricky. Peruvian media reported the 41-year-old was investigated by prosecutors for allegedly defending terrorism with statements made shortly after taking up his seat in parliament in June. In comments to the Inka Vision online news outlet, he appeared to defend people who supported the Shining Path Maoist guerrilla group that fought the state between 1980-2000 and is designated a terrorist organization by Lima. —AFP

## Russia to invite Taleban to talks in Moscow Oct 20

**MOSCOW:** Russia will invite the Taleban to international talks on Afghanistan scheduled for October 20 in Moscow, the Kremlin's envoy to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, said yesterday. In response to a question from Russian journalists on whether representatives of the hardline group would be invited to negotiations involving China, India, Iran and Pakistan, Kabulov said: "Yes".

The talks will follow a G20 summit on Afghanistan on October 12 that will seek to help the country avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in the wake of the Taleban takeover. Kabulov was also asked whether Russia would deliver aid to Afghanistan, where the humanitarian crisis is growing worse, a top UN official warned Wednesday. Russia would do so, but the details were still being decided, Kabulov said.

"This is being worked out," he told journalists, saying "cargo" was being collected.

Moscow has moved to engage with the Taleban but stopped short of recognition of the group, which is banned as a terrorist organization in Russia. On Monday, Kabulov said Moscow would not "exclude" revising the UN sanctions regime against the Taleban. "But at this stage we believe it is not expedient to rush," he said.

The Kremlin has in recent years reached out to the Taleban and hosted its representatives in Moscow several times, most recently in July. Unlike Western countries that rushed to evacuate diplomats after the Taleban swept to power in August, Russia has kept its embassy in Kabul open.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has criticized the foreign involvement in domestic Afghan affairs and said Moscow had "learnt lessons" from the Soviet Union's invasion of the country. In the 1980s, Moscow fought a disastrous decade-long war in Afghanistan that killed up to two million Afghans, forced seven million more from their homes and led to the deaths of more than 14,000 Soviet troops.

Putin has also warned about members of extremist groups exploiting political turmoil in Afghanistan to cross into neighboring countries as refugees. In the wake of the Taleban takeover, Russia held military drills with ex-Soviet Tajikistan—where it operates a military base—and in Uzbekistan. Both countries share a border with Afghanistan. Moscow also said it received orders for new arms and weapons from the Central Asian nations.

While the Taleban has said it does not pose a threat to Central Asian countries, the ex-Soviet republics in the region have previously been targeted by attacks attributed to allies of Afghan Islamists.

The Taleban were initially in power in Afghanistan from 1996 until they were toppled by the 2001 US-led invasion following the September 11, 2001 attacks that were plotted by Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden from Afghan soil. —AFP



# Duterte nemesis and drug-war critic bids for Philippine president

## Robredo becomes leading opposition candidate in a crowded election field

**MANILA:** Philippines Vice President Leni Robredo, an arch-rival of President Rodrigo Duterte and staunch critic of his deadly drug war, said yesterday she will run for the top job, becoming the leading opposition candidate in a crowded election field. Robredo has been under pressure from supporters and opposition groups to join the 2022 presidential race, but she has been well behind the front runners in opinion polls. Analysts say the even-tempered former congresswoman could struggle. "I will fight, we will fight," Robredo, 56, said, declaring herself a presidential candidate.

"We will defeat the archaic and rotten style of politics." President and vice president are elected separately in the Philippines. Robredo quit Duterte's cabinet less than six months after he was sworn in, after a presidential aide told her she had been barred from its meetings. Her decision comes after her nemesis Ferdinand Marcos Jr, son and namesake of the country's former dictator, said Tuesday he would run for the top job. Robredo narrowly defeated Marcos Jr for the nation's second-highest office in 2016, dealing a blow to the political aspirations of the powerful clan as they sought to rehabilitate their image.

Marcos Jr-an ally of Duterte and a defender of the narcotics crackdown that has killed thousands of people-fought a nearly five-year legal battle challenging the vote, but lost in February

when the Supreme Court rejected the protest. Marcos Jr was in second place behind Duterte's daughter, Sara, in a recent Pulse Asia Research poll of voter preferences for president, though she has denied plans to run. Robredo was a distant sixth, trailing boxing great Manny Pacquiao and celebrity mayor Francisco Domagoso, who have confirmed they will seek the presidency; and Senator Grace Poe, who has not. Most of the top candidates have supported the drug war, which is being investigated by the International Criminal Court as a possible crime against humanity.

### 'All my strength'

Robredo, originally a lawyer for the disadvantaged, rose to fame as the wife of Jesse Robredo, a respected cabinet member in former president Benigno Aquino's administration. When her husband died in a plane crash in 2012, public clamor encouraged her to enter politics. Robredo, who has three daughters, served a single term in the House of Representatives before her successful bid for the vice presidency. "My promise is to give all my strength, not only until the election but until the very end to fight for the Philippines that we dream of," Robredo said yesterday, before registering as an independent candidate. University of the Philippines political science professor Jean Franco told AFP: "It is going to be an uphill climb

separate street shootings within 90 minutes. The killings drew wide condemnation from politicians and on social media both within Kashmir and outside. A statement attributed to the militant group issued Wednesday accused the slain men of collaborating with Indian security forces. The veracity of the statement, issued only in English, could not be independently verified. On Saturday two civilians were shot dead in a similar fashion in Srinagar, sending alarm bells ringing in the security establishment. Police chief Dilbag Singh said the assailants would be caught soon.

"Killing innocent civilians including teachers is a move to attack and damage the age-old tradition of communal harmony and brotherhood in Kashmir," Singh told reporters at the school. Officials say 25 people including workers with pro-India political parties have been killed by suspected rebels this year so far. —AFP

"The airport is not in operation at the moment," an AENA spokeswoman told AFP, saying "some cleaning work needs to be done" on the runways before it would reopen. But the closure "may not last very long" she added. On Wednesday evening, local airline Binter had said it was cancelling all flights in and out of La Palma, one of Spain's Canary Islands archipelago in the Atlantic, just off the northwestern coast of Africa. "This suspension will last until conditions improve and we can fly safely," Binter tweeted, with rival airline CanaryFly also suspending flights. —AFP



**PASAY, Philippines:** Philippine Vice President Leni Robredo gestures to a crowd of people supporting her candidacy to join the 2022 presidential race outside the Cultural Center of the Philippines in Pasay, Metro Manila yesterday. —AFP

but her running sends a strong statement in itself that there is a genuine opposition to Duterte and the return of another Marcos to the presidency."

Election season kicked off this month, the candidates flocking to the offices of the elections commission to file their nominations. The

process launched a typically noisy and deadly seven months of campaigning for more than 18,000 positions, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic downturn caused by lockdowns expected to dampen the atmosphere. —AFP

## Two teachers shot dead in Indian Kashmir

**SRINAGAR:** Suspected anti-India militants shot dead two teachers in Indian-administered Kashmir yesterday, police said, taking to seven the number of people killed in the region in less than a week. The gunmen barged into a government-run school in the Eidgah area of the main city of Srinagar, killing the pair, including the principal, on the spot. No students were present at the time. The incident came two days after militants from a relatively new rebel group The Resistance Front (TRF) killed three civilians, including a prominent pharmacist, in three

## Volcanic ash cloud closes airport in La Palma

**LA PALMA:** Clouds of thick ash from the erupting volcano on La Palma yesterday forced the island's airport to close for the second time since the September 19 eruption, Spain's airport authority said.

## S Korea court backs transgender soldier who killed herself

**SEOUL:** A South Korean court yesterday ruled it was unfair for the military to forcibly discharge a soldier over her gender-reassignment surgery, months after she took her own life over the decision. South Korea remains deeply conservative about matters of sexual identity and is less tolerant of LGBT rights than some other parts of Asia, with many gay and transgender Koreans living largely under the radar. Byun Hee-soo, formerly a staff sergeant and in her 20s, enlisted voluntarily in 2017. She went on to have gender-reassignment surgery in 2019 in Thailand.

The defense ministry classified the removal of her male genitals as a mental or physical handicap, and a panel ruled in January last year that she would be compulsorily discharged. Her case was the first of its kind in South Korea, and she filed an administrative suit against the decision in August last year.

But she was found dead at her home about seven months later. The Daejeon District Court ruled in her favour, saying the

military should have officially accepted her as a woman post-surgery. "Immediately after her reassignment surgery, the court had accepted" her request to be legally recognized as a woman, the court said according to South Korea's Yonhap News Agency. Had she been officially recognized as female, the court added, it would have been impossible for military authorities to conclude that she had "a mental or physical handicap" and discharge her.

Seoul's defense ministry told AFP that "we respect the court's decision", but it has yet to decide whether to appeal. South Korea has a conscript army to defend itself against the nuclear-armed North, with all able-bodied male citizens obliged to serve for nearly two years. But Byun was a volunteer non-commissioned officer and said at her press conference last year that serving in the military had always been her childhood dream. Her death has triggered an outpouring of grief and calls for South Korean MPs to pass an anti-discrimination bill.

International rights groups have expressed concern about the way the country treats gay soldiers, who are banned from engaging in same-sex acts and can face up to two years in prison if caught—even though such actions are legal in civilian life. —AFP

## International

# Biden and Xi planning 'virtual bilateral' meeting by year-end

## Xi unlikely to attend the upcoming G20 gathering of leaders in Rome

**WASHINGTON:** President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping are planning to meet by video link before the end of the year, a senior US official said Wednesday. There is an "agreement in principle" for the "virtual bilateral," the official told reporters on condition of anonymity.

"The president said how nice it would be to see Xi which he has not done for some years," the official said. "We would expect them to have the ability to see one another, even if only virtually." The official cited news reports that Xi will not attend the upcoming G20 gathering of leaders in Rome, which would have been a natural place for Biden to arrange a bilateral. The virtual meeting was announced after US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met in Zurich with China's top diplomat, Yang Jiechi. The senior official said those talks lasted six hours. During that meeting Yang called for the two countries to work together, according to Chinese state-run news agency Xinhua. "When China and the United States cooperate, the two countries and the world will benefit; when China and the United States are in confrontation, the two countries and the world will suffer seriously," he said, according to the Xinhua report.

He said that Beijing "attaches importance to the positive remarks on China-US relations" made by Biden recently. Sullivan's trip continues an uptick in contact between Beijing and Washington, as Biden argues for establishing "guardrails" for the growing contest between the two powers.

Tension is rising over China's aggressive posture toward Taiwan, the US decision to sell nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, trade disputes and human rights violations against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Yang reiterated China's position on Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and others to Sullivan, and urged the US to "stop using the above issues to interfere in China's internal affairs," Xinhua said. On Monday, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said she would soon be talking to her Chinese counterpart, as a massive trade dispute rumbles on with no end in sight. After the Zurich meeting, Sullivan is due to visit Brussels and Paris, where he will also "debrief his meeting with Director Yang to our European allies and partners," the White House said. Biden, who has known Xi for years, has held two phone calls with the Chinese leader since becoming president. The second, lasting 90 minutes, took place last month. —AFP



WASHINGTON: This file combination of pictures shows US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping. —AFP

## China to kick off UN biodiversity summit, virtually

**PARIS:** China will on Monday launch a crucial biodiversity summit to build political momentum to halt and even reverse the destruction of nature by man. As the human population climbs toward nine billion by mid-century, animals are being crowded, eaten, snared, poisoned, poached, hawked and hunted out of existence.

Forests have been burned to the ground to grow commercial crops, and ecosystems that sustain life on the planet ravaged. The virtual opening of the COP15 summit will transfer leadership from Egypt, which presided over the last gathering in 2018, to China.

During the talks, Beijing will orchestrate high-level online meetings with ministers from scores of countries in a drive to build political momentum. China-by far the world's biggest emitter of carbon pollution that drives global warming and harms the environment—will also issue a "Kunming Declaration" that will set the tone for its leadership, observers say.

"This declaration, we hope, will further underline and recognize the importance of biodiversity for human health," said Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, executive secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), a treaty ratified by 195 countries and the European Union.

"It will also recognize the importance of mainstreaming biodiversity in decision-making and will serve also as a tool to create the political momentum," she said. Since gathering in person in Rome last year, delegates have negotiated across cyberspace.

Next week's online meet will be followed by in-person talks in Kunming from April 25 to May 8, with an intermediate session, also face-to-face, in Geneva in January. The November COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, meanwhile, will seek to tame the increasingly devastating effects of global warming. —AFP

## French senator calls Taiwan a 'country' in visit China protests

**TAIPEI:** The head of a French delegation of senators yesterday called Taiwan a "country" during a visit to Taipei, risking fury from China which has strongly protested against the trip. Alain Richard, a former defense minister, arrived on Wednesday for a five-day visit despite repeated warnings from the Chinese embassy in Paris.

In a speech after he was conferred a top medal of honour by President Tsai Ing-wen, Richard said Taiwan's de facto embassy in Paris has been doing "a very good job in representing your country". France, like most countries, officially recognizes China which claims self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory. Beijing tries to keep the island isolated on the world stage and balks at the use of the name Taiwan or any reference to it as a country.

It has ramped up pressure on Tsai's government since her 2016 election win and has aggressively tried to dissuade politicians from visiting in recent years. The Chinese embassy in Paris warned that the visit would damage the interests of China, Chinese-French relations and "the image of France", in comments on its website. Beijing's ambassador wrote a letter to Richard in February, saying the visit would "clearly violate the one-China principle and send the wrong signal to pro-independence forces in Taiwan". Taiwan's foreign ministry has hailed the trip as "symbolizing the insistence of Taiwan and France, as democratic partners, in upholding free and democratic values".

"We are very moved that Senator Richard is undaunted by the pressure... to make his third visit to Taiwan," Tsai said yesterday. She called a resolution Richard proposed in support of Taiwan's international participation, passed by the French senate in May, a "milestone" in relations. Richard chairs the French senate's Taiwan Friendship



TAIPEI: Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (right) greets French Senator Alain Richard (left) at the Presidential Office in Taipei yesterday. —AFP

Group and visited the island in 2015 and 2018.

Taipei has accused China of using "wolf warrior" diplomacy to try and scupper trips by foreign politicians. "Wolf warrior" is a label given to China's more aggressive posturing under President Xi Jinping that has been embraced by many Chinese diplomats. Last year, Beijing called a visit to Taiwan by the president of the Czech Senate, Milos Vystrcil, a "provocation" and vowed he would "pay a high price". Taiwan's defense minister said Wednesday that military tensions between the island and China are at their highest in four decades, after around 150 Chinese warplanes—a record number—made incursions into Taiwan's air defense zone in recent days. —AFP

Friday Times

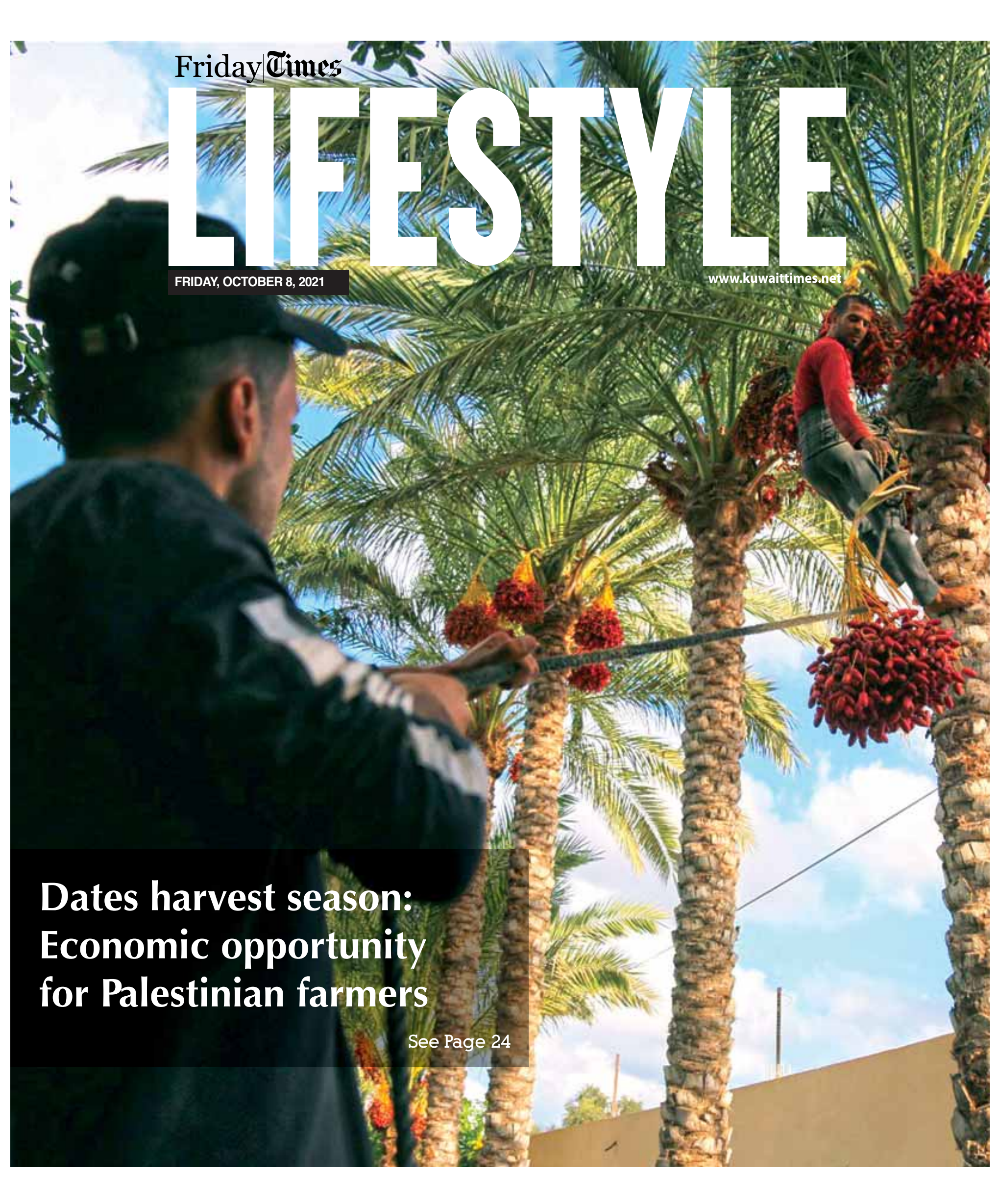
# LIFESTYLE

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2021

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**Dates harvest season:  
Economic opportunity  
for Palestinian farmers**

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People sit on paddle boats for a ride at the Band e-Amir lake in the Bamiyan Province. The stunning azure waters of the Band-e Amir lakes are once again attracting Afghan tourists, who brave bumpy roads to experience the so-called Grand Canyon of Afghanistan. — AFP photos

A youth closes his cabin next to the Band e-Amir lake in the Bamiyan Province.

# Azure waters, limestone cliffs: Tourists return to Afghanistan's 'Grand Canyon'

The stunning azure waters of the Band-e Amir lakes are once again attracting Afghan tourists, who brave bumpy roads to experience the so-called Grand Canyon of Afghanistan. The six lakes at the heart of the Hindu Kush mountain range were—according to legend—a miracle creation of Ali, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet of Islam, Mohammed (PBUH).

Their striking color is down to the rich mineral content of the waters, thanks to the surrounding limestone cliffs. After the Taliban seized power, the site in Bamiyan province was deserted, but seven weeks later tourists have begun to return. They rent paddle boats in the shape of swans imported from Iran, paying the equivalent of eight dollars an hour. Taliban guards brandishing

rocket launchers have also taken trips out on the water. “We have come from Kabul for the first time,” said 23-year-old teacher Asal Walizada.

“The route was safe and we had no problem. It’s beautiful here,” she added. Visiting with friends, 17-year-old Hadi cried out with joy as he plunged into the brisk waters in bathing shorts reaching below his knees.

“I’ve lived here for four years and each day when the water is warm enough I swim in the lake,” he said. Bamiyan was long one of the safest regions in Afghanistan and for the souvenir and craft merchants who line the route to the main lake, the return of local tourists is uplifting. — AFP



People visit the Band e-Amir lake in the Bamiyan Province.

People sit on paddle boats for a ride at the Band e-Amir lake in the Bamiyan Province.

## Lifestyle | Features

# French Vogue marks 100 years but still in fashion?

French Vogue has been setting trends for a century, from the post-war 'New Look' of Christian Dior through the sexual liberation of the 1960s to the dangling-cigarette waifs of the 2000s. But as a new exhibition in Paris marks the magazine's 100th birthday, times are troubled at the fabled magazine. Just last month, it was confirmed that its editor of 10 years, Emmanuelle Alt, was out and wouldn't be replaced.

She was not alone. Looking to cut costs, owner Conde Nast International has axed editors across Europe over the past year, and put international Vogue editions under the direct control of global editorial director, Anna Wintour, in New York. Like much of the media industry, Vogue is struggling with tumbling sales and ad revenue in the digital era. But the latest twist is also part of the endless push and pull between New York and Paris going back to its early days.

"The whole history of French Vogue is one of back-and-forth with Conde Nast in New York-growing more independent for a while, then being reined back in," said Sylvie Lecallier, curator of the new exhibition, "Vogue Paris 1920-2020", which opened this weekend after a year's delay due to the pandemic. The Paris edition was often the loftier, more bohemian sibling to its more hard-nosed New York version. But it was also the hotbed in which much of 20th century style and womanhood came to be defined. "Paris was the place to hunt out talent and content and bring it to New York," said Lecallier.

The exhibition charts the evolution from art deco drawings of the 1920s through the erotic image-making of photographers like Helmut Newton in the 1960s and 1970s. Its last peak was under editor Carine Roitfeld in the 2000s, who brought back a provocative Gallic identity by ridding the newsroom of foreign staff and

becoming a fashion icon in her own right. Her successor, Alt, was a quieter presence, though she still oversaw key moments including its first transgender cover star, Brazilian Valentina Sampaio, in 2017.

## 'Everyone's a threat'

But internet culture has created "a perfect storm" for Vogue, says media expert Douglas McCabe of Enders Analysis. "The first 80 years of Vogue's life, it had the market to itself, it was the bible for fashion," McCabe told AFP. "But online today, there are so many other ways to get your information. Influencers, Instagram, YouTube-everyone's a threat."

In a world where new fashion trends can blow up around the world in seconds, it has become much harder for a monthly magazine to set the pace. "It's not that they can't survive for another 100 years-but they will be differently sized," McCabe said. Vogue has tried to branch out into different areas, including events. "I used to work for a magazine, and today I work for a brand," Alt said on the eve of French Vogue's 1,000th issue in 2019. But the big money was always in print, and Vogue Paris sales are dropping steadily from 98,345 in 2017 to 81,962 to 2020, according to data site ACPM.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the new top job in Paris, redefined as "head of editorial content", went to Eugenie Trochu, who was key to building the magazine's online presence. She declared herself "thrilled to be part of Vogue's international transformation". For the curator of the exhibition, it is ironic timing. "We had no idea it would end like this when we started work on the exhibition," said Lecallier. "Who knows where it will go from here."—AFP



American producer Shawn Carter, known professionally as Jay-Z, (left) speaks to media on arrival to attend the world premiere of the film 'The Harder They Fall' on the opening day of the 2021 BFI London Film Festival in London on October 6, 2021. — AFP

## Jay-Z western 'The Harder They Fall' fires up London Film Festival

With Idris Elba leading an impressive all-black cast and Jay-Z among the producers, the premiere of Netflix's reimagined western "The Harder They Fall" opened the London Film Festival with a bang on Wednesday. The movie, a directorial debut for Londoner Jeymes Samuel, showcases an array of black talent portraying real-life historical characters from the Old West in a fictional plot, set to a reggae and beats-laden soundtrack.

Samuel, who co-produced and co-wrote the original screenplay, left longtime friend Elba with little choice but to play Rufus Buck, a violent and feared outlaw of the era. "(It was) 'you're doing it'... we grew up together... and here we are making a Western," Elba joked, as the pair discussed the film at a news conference with other cast and crew ahead of the premiere.

Samuel, also a singer-songwriter and music producer who worked with Jay-Z on tracks for "The Great Gatsby" in 2013, said collaborating again reaffirmed the rap star's talents go well beyond music. "The interesting thing is he's super cine-literate," the 42-year-old film-maker said. "People think (of) the name Jay-Z and they automatically assume... music," he added, noting he was vastly knowledgeable about both Westerns and "film in general".

## 'Alluring' genre

Samuel said he landed a "dream cast" for "The Harder They Fall" which also includes actor-director Regina King as Buck's sidekick "Traacherous" Trudy Smith, and Jonathan Majors as his rival outlaw Nat Love. LaKeith Stanfield, Zazie Beetz and Edi Gathegi also star in a story of revenge on the plains of Texas scored with pulsing music that features Nigerian icon Fela Kuti, among others. The novice director, who grew up watching Westerns on British

television, explained "the genre of the Old West was always alluring" but that he wanted to "do more with it".

"The scope that they showed those stories through was very narrow... women of all colors were always subservient. If you were a person of color, you were less than human," Samuel said. Apart from three screenings at the London Film Festival and some showings in select US theatres, "The Harder They Fall" will get its global release on Netflix on November 3.

The streaming platform is "the right place" for the highly cinematic film, according to co-producer James Lassiter, who persuaded Samuel of its virtues. "The goal if we're going to tell a story like this, with this cast, is to have as many people around the world (with) access to it," Lassiter said. "Sometimes when you do a theatrical release, there's these built-in biases, like no one wants to see an all-black cast," he added, noting "in certain territories they will tell the studios 'this movie's not for us'."

## 'Life-changing'

Meanwhile for Elba, who contracted Covid-19 last year, the global health crisis had a profound impact on him and his mindset during filming. "The pandemic has shown that we're all human and the race thing is pretty stupid," he said. "Obviously, there's systematic racism that sits in our system which is going to take time to get out, but in terms of story-telling, it's a great day for us. "It's a great day for everyone." The 49-year-old actor noted his own personal battle with the virus helped him harness "compassion" in his portrayal of the dislikeable and brutal Buck. "It really gave me a life-changing perspective. So I think I ended up injecting some of that maturity... into that character," Elba said.

"We encouraged each other to get deeper, under the skin with these characters." Before hitting the small screen, "The Harder They Fall" got its cinematic unveiling at London's Southbank Centre on Wednesday evening, with Jay-Z making an appearance on the red carpet to kickstart the 12-day film festival. Now in its 65th year, it will close with "The Tragedy Of Macbeth", starring the Oscar-winning Frances McDormand, whose husband Joel Coen directs, and fellow Academy Award winner Denzel Washington.—AFP



Editor in Chief of Vogue and Global Chief Content Officer for Conde Nast Anna Wintour and British journalist Hamish Bowles pose for photographs as they present creations for Balenciaga during the Women's Spring-Summer 2022 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show in Paris. — AFP



Local and foreign tourists snorkel in the Red Sea waters above a coral reef near Egypt's Red Sea resort city of Sharm El-Sheikh at the southern tip of the Sinai peninsula. The Red Sea is home to some 209 different types of coral reefs, according to Egypt's environment ministry. — AFP photos

# IN EGYPT'S RED SEA, CORALS FADE AS OCEANS WARM



Scuba divers dive in the Red Sea waters by a coral reef near Egypt's resort city of Sharm El-Sheikh at the southern tip of the Sinai peninsula.

Standing on a boat bobbing gently in the Red Sea, Egyptian diving instructor Mohamed Abdelaziz looks on as tourists snorkel amid the brilliantly colored corals, a natural wonder now under threat from climate change. "If they disappear, we'll disappear with them," he says of the vibrant corals on the reef, a species-rich ecosystem just below the turquoise waters that is beloved by diving enthusiasts worldwide.

Coral reefs - often dubbed the "rainforests of the oceans" for their rich biodiversity - are under threat everywhere as rising sea temperatures and acidification cause catastrophic "bleaching" events. Along with pollution and dynamite fishing, global warming wiped out 14 percent of the world's coral reefs between 2009 and 2018, says a new survey by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, the biggest ever carried out.

Some studies have suggested that many species of coral in the Red Sea - which is also bordered by the Saudi peninsula, Sudan and

Eritrea - are unusually heat-resistant, but local professionals say they have already witnessed the damage. "We can see the effects of global warming before our eyes," said Islam Mohsen, 37, another local diving instructor at the resort town of Sharm El-Sheikh. "We can see the coral discoloring and turning white."

## Biodiversity hotspots

Coral reefs cover only a tiny fraction - 0.2 percent - of the ocean floor, but they are home to at least a quarter of all marine animals and plants. The Red Sea and Gulf of Aden boast the most biologically diverse coral reef communities outside of Southeast Asia. The Red Sea - with just over five percent of the world's coral reefs - is home to 209 types of coral, according to Egypt's environment ministry. The new global survey said that live hard coral cover in the region fluctuated over recent decades but declined overall, from 36.1 percent in 1997 to 34.3 percent in 2019.

Causes for the degraded reefs varied by location but included tourism activities, coastal development, land runoff and overfishing, the report said. Steps have been taken in Egypt to protect reefs and marine life that are crucial to the local tourism sector. Egypt's Chamber of Diving and Water Sports - which oversees 269 diving centers and over 2,900 professional divers - has protected fragile areas with buoys to keep boats from mooring. It has also suspended beginners' diving classes in some areas to allow damaged reefs to recover. But the largest looming threat, far harder to fix, is global warming.



Photo shows a view of a coral reef near Egypt's Red Sea resort city of Sharm El-Sheikh at the southern tip of the Sinai peninsula.

#### Marine heatwaves

Oceans absorb more than 90 percent of the excess heat from greenhouse gas emissions, shielding land surfaces but generating huge, long-lasting marine heatwaves. These are pushing many species of corals past their limits of tolerance. "When the temperature of the ocean goes up, it absorbs more carbon dioxide, which creates carbonic acid," said Cairo-based climate change consultant Katherine Jones.

"So not only will the temperature increase, but the PH level will change too," affecting all animals with shells, she said. "We will lose a lot of wildlife, and the ecosystem will be changing in a way that affects us as humans in terms of resources. "The coral reefs are nurseries to baby fish and a feeding ground to bigger fish ... it's an essential part of the ecosystem." Sharm El-Sheikh hosted a United Nations agencies conference in 2018 that called for the protection of coral reefs "before it's too late". Egypt also plans to host the Climate Conference of the Parties (COP27) in November next year.

A report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has warned that up to 90 percent of coral reefs "may be gone by mid-century" even if the rise in temperatures stabilizes below 1.5 degrees Celsius. Jones warned that, as things stand now, climate change and its impacts can no longer be reversed - only slowed - to prevent the worst consequences. "Even if humans completely disappear from Earth tomorrow or we stopped producing any kind of emissions," she said, "the temperature will continue to rise by itself." — AFP

Scuba divers dive in the Red Sea waters by a coral reef near Egypt's resort city of Sharm El-Sheikh.



## Dates harvest season: Economic opportunity for Palestinian farmers

**D**ates harvest season began in the Gaza Strip where there are thousands of fruitful palm trees. Harvest season is an opportunity for Palestinian farmers' to increase their income in light of the market recession and the rise of unemployment rates caused by the Zionist blockade. During harvest season Palestinians achieve self-sufficiency amidst expectations that total production could reach 14,000 tons out of the total area of palm trees estimated at around 9200 Dunam (A Dunam is 1000 m<sup>2</sup>) and around 185,000 fertile palm trees. — KUNA







## Abdulrazak Gurnah: Accidental author and voice of displaced

**A**bdulrazak Gurnah, the Tanzanian-born author awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, has been a sharp observer of colonialism and immigration during a critically acclaimed 35-year career. He was born on the Indian Ocean island of Zanzibar, off the coast of east Africa, in 1948, and began writing after moving to Britain as a refugee.

"It was in the first few years of living in England, when I was about 21, that I began to write," he told the Guardian in 2004. "In a sense it was something I stumbled into rather than the fulfillment of a plan. "In a larger part, it was to do with the overwhelming feeling of strangeness and difference I felt there." But it was almost another 20 years before he released his debut novel, "Memory of Departure", in 1987. "Pilgrims Way" followed a year later, and "Dottie" in 1990. All three explored the experiences of immigrants in contemporary Britain, including racism and identity.



Books by Tanzanian-born novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah are on display at the Swedish Academy in Stockholm after the author was announced as the winner of the 2021 Nobel Prize in Literature yesterday. — AFP

### Dislocation

Critical recognition came with his fourth novel, "Paradise" (1994), which was set in colonial east Africa during World War I. It earned him a place on shortlist of the prestigious Booker Prize for Fiction, although he lost out to the Scottish author James Kelman. Gurnah's 1996 work "Admiring Silence" recounts the tale of a young man who returns to Zanzibar 20 years after leaving for England, where he married an Englishwoman and worked as a teacher. Academic Luca Prono said Gurnah's works were "dominated by the issues of identity and displacement and how these are shaped by the legacies of colonialism and slavery.

"Gurnah's narratives are all premised on the shattering impact that migration to a new geographical and social context has for his character's identities," he wrote on the British Council's website. Of his own work, Gurnah told The Guardian that "the questions I am raising are not new questions. "But if they are not new, they are firmly inflected by the particular, by imperialism, by dislocation, by the realities of our times. "And one of the realities of our times is the displacement of so many strangers into Europe," he added. —AFP

Mats Malm, Permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy, speaks during a press conference to announce the winner of the 2021 Nobel Prize in Literature at the Swedish Academy in Stockholm yesterday. Tanzanian-born novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah wins the 2021 Nobel Literature Prize. — AFP

# Tanzanian-born novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah wins Nobel Literature Prize

**T**anzanian-born novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah, whose work focuses on colonialism and the trauma of the refugee experience yesterday won the Nobel Literature Prize. Gurnah, who grew up on the island of Zanzibar but who arrived in England as a refugee at the end of the 1960s, is the fifth African to win the Nobel Literature Prize. The Swedish Academy said Gurnah was honoured "for his uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fate of the refugee in the gulf between cultures and continents."

writer when he was living in Zanzibar, but once in England he felt overwhelmed by the sense of 'a life left behind'.

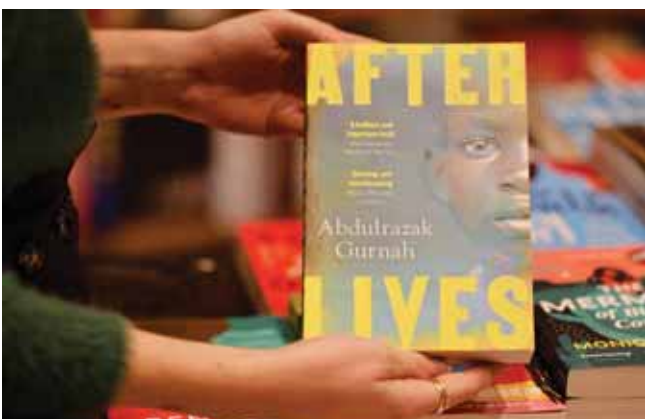
"If one way of seeing distance as helpful to the writer pictures him or her as a closed world, another argument suggests displacement is necessary, that the writer produces work of value in isolation because he or she is then free from responsibilities and intimacies that mute and dilute the truth," he wrote. Gurnah has until his recent retirement been Professor of English and Postcolonial Literatures at the University of Kent in Canterbury, focusing principally on writers such as Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Salman Rushdie. The Nobel Prize comes with a medal and a prize sum of 10 million Swedish kronor (about 980,000 euros, \$1.1 million). Last year, the award went to US poet Louise Gluck.

### Western dominance

Ahead of the announcement, Nobel watchers had suggested the Swedish Academy could choose to give the nod to a writer from Asia or Africa, following a pledge to make the prize more diverse. It has crowned mainly Westerners in its 120-year existence. Glaringly, 102 men have won and only 16 women. The Academy long insisted its laureates were chosen on literary merit alone, and that it did not take nationality into account.

But after a #MeToo scandal that rocked the Academy-prompting it to postpone the 2018 prize for a year-the body said it would adjust its criteria towards more geographic and gender diversity. "Previously, we had a more Eurocentric perspective of literature, and now we are looking all over the world," the head of the Nobel committee, Anders Olsson, said in 2019. Two women have since got the nod: Polish novelist Olga Tokarczuk clinched the delayed 2018 prize, and little-known American poet Louise Gluck won in 2020.

Sandwiched between them in 2019 was Austrian writer Peter Handke-a hotly contested pick due to his support of Serbia's former president Slobodan Milosevic, who died while on trial for genocide in 2006. But at the end of the day, "literary merit" is still "the absolute and the only criterion" for the Academy, Olsson reiterated in an interview with The New Republic published this week. The Nobel season continues Friday in Oslo with the Peace Prize, followed next Monday by the Economics Prize. — AFP



An employee holds a copy of 'Afterlives' by Tanzanian-born novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah at Waterstones bookshop in central London yesterday. — AFP

"His novels recoil from stereotypical descriptions and open our gaze to a culturally diversified East Africa unfamiliar to many in other parts of the world," the Nobel Foundation added. Gurnah has published 10 novels and a number of short stories. He is best known for his 1994 breakthrough novel "Paradise", set in colonial East Africa during World War I, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction.

The theme of the refugee's disruption runs throughout his work. Born in 1948, Gurnah fled Zanzibar in 1968 following the revolution which led to oppression and the persecution of citizens of Arab origin. He began writing as a 21-year-old in England. Although Swahili was his first language, English became his literary tool. In an article he wrote for The Guardian in 2004, Gurnah said he hadn't planned to be a

## Lifestyle | Feature



France's Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates Xavier Chatel (left) stands next to a cage with mynah bird Juji, that was brought from Afghanistan by a girl fleeing the Taliban yesterday. — AFP

## Rescued Afghan bird learns to say 'bonjour'

A mynah bird that was brought from Afghanistan by a girl fleeing the Taliban has learnt to say "bonjour" after finding a new home with France's ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. Ambassador Xavier Chatel said he was moved by the little girl, who arrived "exhausted" and carrying the bird, named Juji, at the Al-Dhafra airbase in the UAE during the chaotic evacuations from Kabul.

The girl was left in tears after being told she could not take her pet on the onward journey to France for "sanitary reasons", Chatel said in a series of tweets. "She had fought all the way at Kabul airport, to bring the treasured little thing with her," he wrote. "She cried silently. I was moved. I promised to take care of the bird at the residence, feed him. She could visit him anytime and take him back. I won't forget her look of desperate gratefulness."

Juji now has a "girlfriend", a dove that visits him daily, and after much coaxing finally said "bonjour"—a moment that "went straight to my heart", Chatel said. "Today, from Paris, the bird's owner, 'Alia', found me on



Mynah bird Juji, that was brought from Afghanistan by a girl fleeing the Taliban is pictured at France's ambassador to the United Arab Emirates' residence in Abu Dhabi yesterday. — AFP

Twitter. She was so happy to see her bird thus cared for," he wrote, using a pseudonym for the girl. "She wanted me to teach him French. Alia, your bird has become the embassy's mascot, but he is here for you, and if I can, I'll take him personally to you one day." — AFP

## Winnie-the-Pooh bridge fetches over £130,000 at auction

A bridge depicted by author AA Milne in his children's books about honey-loving teddy bear Winnie-the-Pooh has sold at auction for more than twice its estimated price, a UK-based auctioneer said yesterday. Built in 1907 in Ashdown Forest in southern England but later replaced and restored, the bridge fetched £131,625 (\$179,167, 154,830 euros) in a sealed bid, auctioneer Summers Place Auctions said.

Originally known as Posingford Bridge, it captured the imaginations of generations of children as "Poohsticks Bridge" where the bear protagonist invented a game dropping sticks and pinecones into the water below. Milne's son Christopher Robin, who inspired the books and shared his name with the boy who joined Pooh in his adventures, played on the

bridge in the 1920s before it appeared in the books, illustrated by EH Shepard.

Though the lot attracted global bids, the bridge was ultimately claimed by local aristocrat William Sackville, whose Buckhurst Park estate is located just a short distance from where the bridge was built. Sackville, whose lands encompass the area recreated in the Pooh books as the "Hundred Acre Wood" said he was "delighted" with the purchase. "It will take pride of place on the estate close to its original position and I hope that many children (and adults) will be able to admire the original bridge which inspired one of the most famous games still played by children in the UK and abroad—'Poohsticks'," he said. — AFP



This undated handout photograph shows a wooden bridge, originally known as Posingford Bridge, that was constructed in 1907 in Ashdown Forest and which inspired Winnie the Pooh author AA Milne to write the books following a game of 'Poohsticks' with his son Christopher. — AFP

## Nestle to trial plant-based eggs and shrimp

Nestle is offering plant-based alternatives to eggs and shrimp as the Swiss food giant expands its menu in the growing vegan market, the company said yesterday. Nestle, owner of everything from chocolate to coffee and baby food brands, has for several years been reorganizing its activities to focus more on health and wellness.

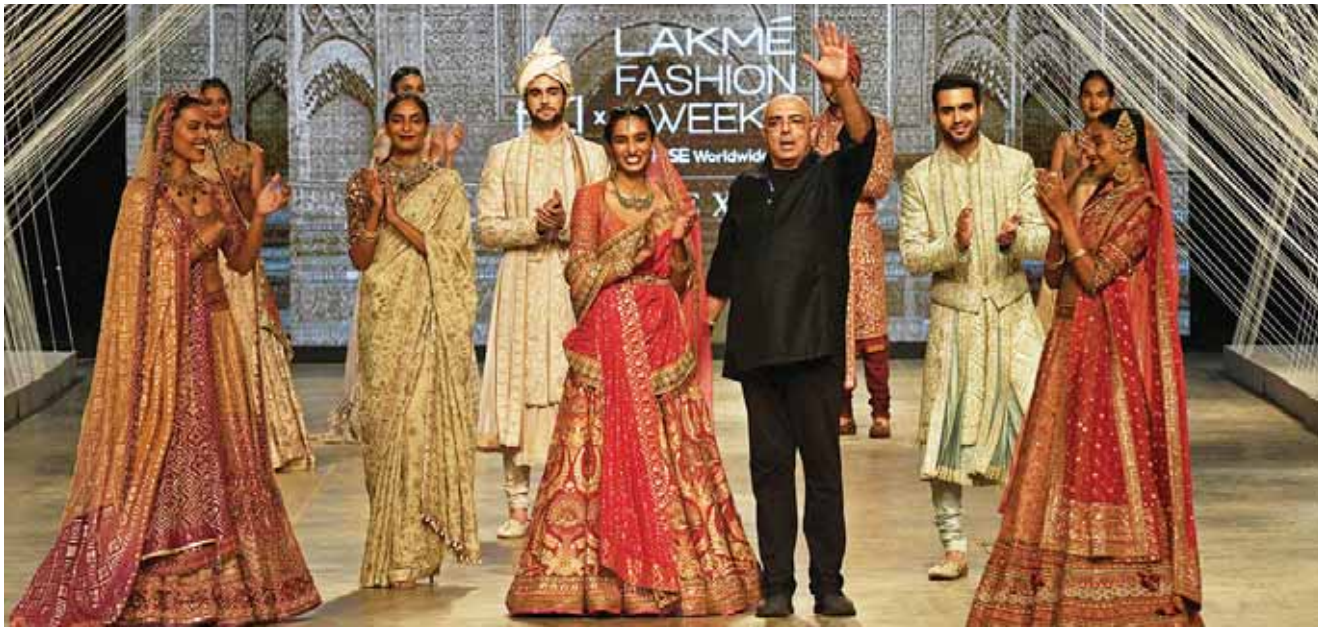
The Swiss company has among other things been making a major push in vegetarian and vegan products. Its latest offerings are the "vEGGie" and "Vrimp". The egg substitute is made from soy protein and omega-3 fatty acids. The product "can be scrambled like real eggs, used in a frittata and pancakes or even as an ingredient when baking cakes or cookies," the company said in a

statement. The "Vrimp" is made from mixing seaweed, peas and konjac root, and "has the authentic texture and flavor of succulent shrimps," according to Nestle.

The two products will be offered in a "test-and-learn" launch at a limited number of stores in Switzerland and Germany. The market for alternative meat and dairy amounts to \$14 billion, according to a June

study by Swiss bank Credit Suisse. The market could mushroom to a whopping \$1.4 trillion by 2050, the bank forecast. More than 600 companies, from startups to the biggest food companies, are developing such alternative foods, Credit Suisse said. — AFP

## Lifestyle | Feature



Models present creations by Indian designer Tarun Tahiliani (wearing black) during the 'FDCI x Lakme Fashion Week' fashion show in Mumbai yesterday. — AFP photos

## Wrong number: Squid Game card triggers call deluge

Global streaming giant Netflix has edited a phone number that appears in its global hit series "Squid Game" after South Koreans who use it or similar combinations were deluged with calls—some asking to join the show's life-or-death games. The South Korean-made series has topped Netflix popularity charts in more than 80 countries since its launch last month and is on track to become its most-watched series ever.

The nine-episode drama-incorporating uncompromising violence and addressing widening economic inequality—sees hundreds of cash-strapped people compete in a series of children's games to win the final reward of 45.6 billion won (\$38 million), with the losers

killed. To take part, they have to call a number on a business card printed with symbols. But while film- and television makers usually use fake numbers in such circumstances, adding 010 - the standard prefix for South Korean mobiles—to the eight digits on the card generated a real phone number.

It belongs to a South Korean who complained they had received "non-stop" calls and text messages, they told the Money Today newspaper. "I'm receiving calls and text messages non-stop after Squid Game was launched, disrupting my daily life," the person said, whose identity was withheld. Other South Koreans with similar numbers also complained of prank calls. Some callers said in the dead of night that

they "wanted to join Squid Game" before hanging up.

With complaints growing, Netflix said Wednesday it would edit out the phone number. The company was "working to resolve this matter, including editing scenes showing the phone number where necessary", Netflix said in a statement. The eight-digit number that appears in the first two episodes had been replaced with a six-digit version. When called, an automated response said: "The number you have dialled is not available." - AFP

## World's tallest people get that shrinking feeling

While the rest of the world literally looks up to the Dutch, the tallest members of the loftiest populace on earth insist it's not easy being big. So an official study by the Dutch national statistics office finding that they appear to be shrinking might be construed as good news—even if it could threaten the Netherlands' number one spot. At a meeting of the Klub Lange Mensen, or Tall People's Club, the lowlanders say there are drawbacks to towering over most of the rest of humanity.

"I've always struggled with my height. When I was 12, I was already the tallest in the class, also taller than my teachers," club chairman Helen Keuken, 57, tells AFP. "And when I came in contact with the club it was a revelation. I felt like an outsider and now I belong somewhere," says Keuken, who is 1.90 meters tall. In a bar in the Dutch town of Aalsmeer near Schiphol airport, members of the club dance and chat over a drink, glad to have a place to gather where they don't stand out.

Even by Dutch standards they are tall, with male club members needing to measure at least 1.90m and women at least 1.80m (five foot 11). "We can have a conversation at eye level. You don't have to bend, you can look straight," said club secretary Rob Leurs-Kout, an imposing 2.11m tall. "That's very nice." Many of the members say that being tall in the Netherlands has become "less exceptional" than when they were younger, notwithstanding the study by the national statistics office, CBS.

### 'A lot of milk'

Dutch men born in 2001 are 1.829m tall on average, one cm shorter than the generation born in 1980, the CBS says, while women born in 2001 measure on average 1.693m (five foot seven), 1.4cm less than 1980. Even so, the Dutch remain the world's tallest—they still surpass on average the men of Montenegro, Estonia and Bosnia and the women of Montenegro, Denmark and Iceland, says the CBS—but that could change. At the start of the 19th century the Dutch were small by European standards and only started to shoot up in the 1840s, before finally becoming the tallest with the generation born in the 1950s. The reasons are "very difficult to pinpoint", says Gert Stulp of the University of Groningen's faculty of behavioural and social sciences. "We know if a country gets wealthier with better healthcare and better nutrition and fewer diseases that increases height, as it has done for the Netherlands," says Stulp, who stands two meters tall.

"Our diets are believed to be one cause, the Dutch drink a lot of milk." A widely quoted theory that natural selection is responsible—with taller Dutch people having more children than shorter people, and their children then repeating the pattern—leaves Stulp "not convinced". As for the shrinkage? Migration to the Netherlands is one main cause, with people from non-Western backgrounds generally being shorter, both the CBS and Stulp suggested.

But migration doesn't account for everything, as growth has also "stagnated" among people with both parents born in the Netherlands, and people with both grandparents born in the Netherlands. Men without a migratory background have not got any taller since 1980, while there was even a "downward trend" among women in that category, the CBS said. "It might be a signal of increasing inequality, it might also be a signal we... had less healthy food," says Stulp, with fast food and high-sugar diets particularly to blame. — AFP

Kids Page

Word Search

**BIRTHDAY**

Word search



B	I	P	R	E	S	E	N	T	S
A	W	H	S	E	G	O	S	O	Q
L	P	S	P	R	E	T	D	Y	H
L	X	C	A	N	D	L	E	S	A
O	G	E	R	C	A	K	H	S	G
O	H	A	T	S	E	R	A	T	A
N	L	C	Y	T	U	S	P	Y	M
T	J	O	K	H	D	F	P	A	E
C	A	K	E	N	B	M	Y	V	S
A	B	I	R	T	H	D	A	Y	Z

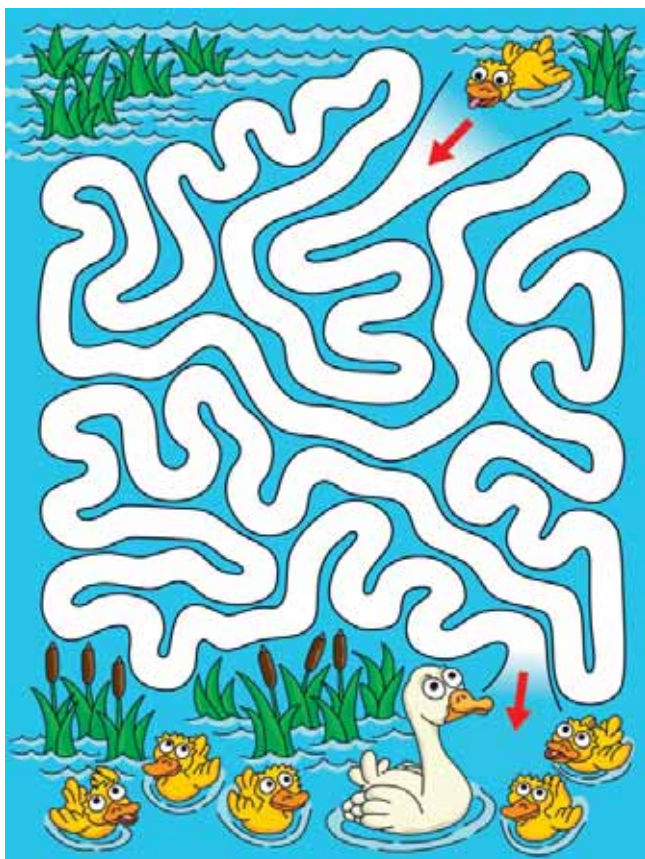


BALLOON  
PRESENTS  
CAKE  
CANDLES  
PARTY

HATS  
BIRTHDAY  
GAMES  
TOYS  
HAPPY



Kids Mazes



Color It



### Find the objects



### Word Scramble

#### THANKSGIVING WORD SCRAMBLE

REYTUK \_\_\_\_\_

PINKUMP \_\_\_\_\_

LOWERFAYM \_\_\_\_\_

NIANDI \_\_\_\_\_

NOPICAROCU \_\_\_\_\_

MILGRIP \_\_\_\_\_

SVETHAR \_\_\_\_\_

KINPMUP EIP \_\_\_\_\_



### Join the dots



# Business

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2021

**32** Stocks rally as US set to avoid debt default



**33** World Bank sees 'uneven and tenuous' Middle East recovery



**34** European and UK natural gas market soars to record heights



## 'Beach' coworking spaces

The new craze in Sao Paulo; Brazil's largest city breathing again



SAO PAULO: A man works at the terrace of a coworking space over Paulista Avenue, in Sao Paulo, Brazil. — AFP

**SAO PAULO:** After 18 months of being locked up by coronavirus pandemic restrictions, Brazil's largest city Sao Paulo is breathing again, thanks in part to open-air coworking spaces. Once the domain of internet startups, these coworking businesses have branched out to a wider client base while also moving from offices to rooftops and terraces. "Forty percent of businesses in GoWork are conventional: Lawyers, consultants, auditors," said Fernando Bottura, the young owner of GoWork, one of the first coworking businesses in Sao Paulo that now owns 14 premises covering 32,000 square meters.

"We've had a 300 percent increase in requests for estimates from traditional big businesses (since 2019) like fertilizer and plastic industry companies," said Bottura, dressed in jeans and sneakers. There are now around 200 coworking spaces in Sao Paulo, "more and more outside with rooftops," said Bottura. "It no longer makes sense for anyone to rent an office." In Brazil as a whole, coworking spaces increased six-fold between 2015 and

2019 to almost 1,500. In the metropolis of 12 million people, "beaches" with parasols are set up on rooftops and terraces, sometimes right next to cafes and even sports courts.

"We take great care of employees' well-being. We know that employees that work in good spirits develop a lot," said 38-year-old Renan Camargo, an online trader using the GoWork space on the city's prestigious Paulista Avenue. For Mateus Santos, 25, a sales representative in digital marketing, "it made sense to look for an environment that favors flexibility as much as investment." Even as face masks are compulsory, coworking spaces provide an opportunity to network and interact with people after months of working from home.

### 'Family friendly'

B2Mamy, created in 2019 by Danieli Junco, is a "family-friendly" coworking area. The 500-square-meter space, originally set up for women working in the pharmaceutical industry,

is adorned with inspirational messages such as: "Between being a mother and a CEO, choose both." Children run from one table to another, while their parents take part in videoconferences on their laptops. "We have spaces for adults, spaces for children, an innovation hub, classes, speed dating for companies to get to know one another," said Junco, 41. There are even childminders, and all for just 1,000 reais (\$180) a year.

Jessica Ulliam Ferrari Rua, 36, the CEO of a digital company, is one of the 60 women that use the coworking space every day. Lying down on a mattress, she caresses the hair of her three-year-old son Lucas, for whom nap time has arrived. "He comes to find me when it's time to sleep," she said. "For 10 minutes he's here close by and then I go back to work. It's a relief for a mother and also allows me to work." With schools closed during the pandemic, Thais Alcantara, 37, was able to teach her five-year-old daughters Paola and Bianca to read and write at B2Mamy. — AFP

# PREMIER MARKET WEEKLY TECHNICAL BULLETIN

WEEK ENDED ON 07 OCTOBER 2021

No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	955	953	958	951	7	17,828,284	0	0.00%	13.45%	951	960	23.2	2.05	2.0%	1.27
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	238	238	240	237	3	21,203,041	0	0.00%	8.68%	237	240	21.6	1.13	2.0%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	224	225	227	223	4	11,225,283	2	0.90%	8.17%	222	226	NM	0.98	0.0%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	227	230	231	227	4	6,535,004	2	0.88%	7.98%	225	230	18.1	0.93	2.1%	1.05
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	824	820	824	817	7	17,985,451	-2	-0.24%	21.12%	815	820	35.7	3.70	1.1%	1.41
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	768	767	770	766	4	1,292,619	-1	-0.13%	35.04%	761	773	63.0	4.50	0.0%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	198	191	198	188	10	8,767,245	-7	-3.54%	41.48%	188	195	6.9	0.88	5.2%	1.24
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	159	156	160	156	4	3,784,029	-2	-1.27%	-1.89%	153	159	NM	1.51	3.2%	0.59
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	135	136	142	133	9	62,295,446	0	0.00%	21.43%	132	137	NM	0.83	0.0%	0.99
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	153	156	162	153	9	76,741,756	4	2.63%	43.12%	154	159	30.2	1.14	0.0%	0.97
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	762	767	777	760	17	1,466,855	-3	-0.39%	16.74%	761	772	19.3	1.80	0.7%	1.11
501	National Industries	Financial Services	242	240	245	238	7	17,075,751	-1	-0.41%	36.36%	239	246	6.2	0.89	0.0%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	840	853	860	826	34	1,014,740	13	1.55%	12.98%	846	867	32.0	0.96	5.9%	0.93
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	900	885	905	885	20	417,885	-15	-1.67%	38.28%	880	900	25.2	2.08	6.0%	0.72
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	377	376	380	374	6	1,630,615	-3	-0.79%	11.24%	374	382	30.2	0.99	4.0%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	987	979	987	972	15	8,777,947	-6	-0.61%	44.82%	974	981	28.5	1.87	0.9%	1.49
605	Zain	Telecommunications	599	599	601	598	3	5,378,010	0	0.00%	-1.16%	597	602	13.8	2.24	5.5%	1.36
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,275	3,285	3,328	3,275	53	782,412	-13	-0.39%	-13.53%	3286	3315	6.0	3.78	12.1%	0.49
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	236	236	240	232	8	14,343,272	3	1.29%	9.26%	232	237	NM	0.75	0.0%	0.86
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	285	283	287	279	8	20,305,889	-2	-0.70%	24.67%	279	287	21.0	2.27	1.3%	1.13
821	Warba Bank	Banking	266	263	267	261	6	10,415,690	-3	-1.13%	11.44%	262	268	15.6	2.09	0.0%	0.99
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	636	632	641	626	15	2,125,775	-4	-0.63%	3.95%	625	638	20.0	1.81	2.7%	0.44
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	378	374	381	373	8	7,814,271	-2	-0.53%	2.19%	371	376	NM	1.56	0.0%	0.48
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	237	235	238	234	4	5,990,994	-2	-0.84%	-15.16%	233	238	20.3	4.92	5.1%	0.67
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,846	1,838	1,846	1,822	24	831,087	-7	-0.38%	67.09%	1820	1855	13.2	7.01	2.2%	0.76

\* As of end of week closing

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## Business

# Stocks rally as US set to avoid debt default

## Dollar down against main rivals; oil prices dropped

**LONDON:** European and Asian stock markets rallied yesterday, with the United States set to avoid defaulting on its debt, at least temporarily. The dollar was down against main rivals ahead of key US jobs data due today. Oil prices dropped on profit-taking after recent strong gains. "After a recovery in US markets last night that points towards a solid open for Wall Street, European markets are firmly on the up," noted Chris Beauchamp, chief market analyst at IG trading group.

US senators neared agreement to stave off a catastrophic credit default after Democrats said they were close to accepting an offer from the Republicans to raise the debt limit for two months. The deal would represent the first breakthrough in a partisan staring match that risked leaving the United States unable to service its debt after the estimated deadline of October 18, which would have shattered the US economy and led to a global recession.

A decision by US President Joe Biden and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping to hold a virtual meeting also provided a much-needed boost to trading floors that have been starved of good news. Economies have battled a string of problems in recent weeks, including surging inflation, an expected beginning of reduction in economic stimulus and a growing energy crisis.

But with just days to go before the United States runs out of cash, top Senate Republican Mitch McConnell proposed a truce, meaning Democrats can vote to hike the debt ceiling allowing the government to pay its bills until De-

ember. Democrats indicated their support for the move, which would mean avoiding missing US repayment obligations that many experts and top officials including Biden and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen had warned would tip the economy into recession and cause another financial crisis.

The offer removed an increasingly dark cloud hanging over markets and sent Wall Street's three main indexes jumping out of a slumber to close Wednesday in positive territory. And Asia picked up the baton yesterday with Hong Kong—which has been battered this year by China's tech clampdown, security concerns and the China Evergrande crisis—up more than three percent as bargain-buyers moved in. Tokyo also rose, having fallen for eight straight days.

London, Frankfurt and Paris were up more than one percent in European afternoon deals. Concerns about an energy crunch were also eased slightly after the US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm suggested unlocking some of the country's vast crude reserves to keep a lid on prices, which this week hit seven-year highs. The cost of a barrel of oil has roared higher as the global economy reopens from Covid-19 lockdowns, while the approaching northern hemisphere winter has led to the price of natural gas doubling from last month.

The run-up in the energy market has ramped up fears that inflation—already surging owing to the global recovery and supply bottlenecks—will continue to spike higher, forcing



**BAYONNE:** A cargo ship moves under the Bayonne Bridge as it heads out to the ocean in Bayonne, New Jersey. Global supply chain disruptions have continued to affect the US economy. —AFP

central banks to wind in their ultra-loose monetary policies earlier than envisaged to prevent prices running out of control. All eyes are on the Federal Reserve, which has signaled it will

begin tapering its bond-buying program before the end of the year, bringing an end to the easy money that has helped drive the global equity and economic rebound. — AFP

## Iraq, UAE sign deal on 5 solar electricity plants

**BAGHDAD:** Power-short Iraq inked an agreement on Wednesday for the UAE to build five solar electricity plants with a total capacity of 1,000 megawatts (MW). Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi presided over the signing in Baghdad with renewable energy company Masdar, which is based in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates capital. Iraq is rich in oil but its dilapidated grid battles daily blackouts. Iraqi authorities aim to sign several similar accords by 2023 to add 7,500 MW to its grid, a senior oil and energy ministry official told AFP.

Last month, Iraq signed a multi-billion-dollar contract with France's TotalEnergies on projects including the construction of a 1,000-MW solar plant to supply the southern region of Basra. Iraq is the second-largest producer in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and crude accounts for more than 90 percent of Baghdad's revenues. But the country faces a severe energy crisis and chronic power cuts that feed social discontent.

Decades of conflict, poor maintenance and rampant corruption have battered Iraq's energy sector. It currently produces 16,000 megawatts of electricity, far short of the estimated 24,000-MW needs of its fast-growing population which the UN says is expected to double by 2050. Iraq has grown dependent on gas and electricity imports from neighboring Iran, under exemptions to US sanctions on Tehran. —AFP

## Twitter sells app advert platform MoPub for \$1 bn

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Twitter said Wednesday it has made a deal to sell app advertising specialty firm MoPub for a little more than a billion dollars in cash. Money from the sale of MoPub to Silicon Valley-based AppLovin Corporation is to be put into building revenue-generating features at Twitter and promoting growth at the one-to-many broadcasting platform. "The sale of MoPub is all about increased focus, redirecting our resources and delivering faster growth in a number of key areas," Twitter revenue product lead Bruce Falck said in a release.

AppLovin is a mobile technology company that provides services for developers to publish, improve and make money from apps. As part of Twitter, MoPub generated approximately \$188 million in revenue last year, according to the companies. Twitter chief Jack Dorsey has made a priority of rolling out new features at a fast clip, with the aim of increasing revenue and the amount of time people spend on the platform.

MoPub's sale "demonstrates confidence in our revenue product roadmap," Dorsey said in a release. Twitter has a goal of at least doubling total annual revenue from \$3.7 bil-

lion last year to \$7.5 billion this year, according to chief financial officer Ned Segal. The site last month began allowing high-profile users to get tips in bitcoin, as the network steps up its wooing of the content creators essential to drawing crowds online. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube have built their popularity among young people in large part because of these social media stars.

Attracting and keeping creators and their audiences has therefore become crucial for the tech companies battling to attract an audience - and advertising profits. "We want Twitter to be the best place for creators to have conversations with their fans, and to monetize their audience," product lead Esther Crawford told reporters in a briefing. Twitter has been testing a tipping option that is being rolled out worldwide to Apple device-specific versions of its app, with bitcoin as a currency option. The network is also working on a system to offer verification of NFTs - non-fungible tokens - that are at the heart of a digital collecting boom.

Sales of NFTs - virtual images of anything from popular internet memes to original artwork - have swept the art world, with some fetching millions of dollars at major auction houses. Twitter said it is ramping up tools for users to keep exchanges on the platform civil, or avoid wading into unexpectedly contentious online conversations. Possible options include improving tools for filtering out comments considered offensive, and giving people a "heads up" prompt when they join a potentially heated conversation on the platform. — AFP



## Business

# World Bank sees 'uneven and tenuous' Middle East recovery

## Region's economies shrink 3.8 percent in 2020

**DUBAI:** The Middle East and North Africa are experiencing a tenuous and uneven economic recovery in 2021 as they get to grips with the coronavirus pandemic, the World Bank said yesterday. The Washington-based institution said the pandemic had seen the region's economies shrink by 3.8 percent in 2020, in part due to public health systems' lack of preparedness to deal with the health crisis. The World Bank projected 2.8 percent growth for region's economy in 2021, with total losses from the pandemic estimated to reach almost \$200 billion by the end of this year.

GDP per capita is forecast to grow by only 1.1 percent this year after declining by about 5.0 percent in 2020. The health crisis inflicted heavy job losses and a sharp increase in the number of people living below the poverty line of less than \$5.50 a day. "Stressed health systems have combined with global economic factors - such as fluctuations in commodity prices, particularly oil - to produce an uneven economic recovery for the region and a tenuous outlook," the World Bank said in a report.

"Each economy's performance depends heavily on its exposure to commodity-price

fluctuations and how well it managed the pandemic." It warned that recovery will also depend on a rapid and equitable rollout of Covid-19 vaccines, especially as new variants emerge. "While the GCC (the six-country Gulf Cooperation Council) is among the best in the world at vaccinating its citizens, the slow pace of the vaccine rollout in many developing MENA countries leaves them vulnerable to surges in COVID cases," the report said.

It added that political uncertainty and fragility in developing oil exporter countries, including Iran, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, pose additional risks to economic growth. "The pandemic's crippling impact on economic activity in the region is a painful reminder that economic development and public health are inextricably linked," said the World Bank's vice president for the Middle East and North Africa, Ferid Belhaj. "Going forward, there must be a stronger focus on building core public health functions and leveraging the power of health data and preventive health systems to accelerate the region's recovery and to prepare for future public health emergencies." — AFP



**DUBAI:** A group of traditional Emirati musicians perform at the entrance of Expo 2020, in the Gulf Emirate of Dubai, on October 6, 2021. — AFP

## Key questions on the global tax movement

**PARIS:** Ireland was set to decide yesterday whether to join a global effort to impose a global minimum tax rate on multinational corporations that Dublin has opposed so far. Here are key questions regarding the reform and Ireland's position:

### How did we get here?

In 2017, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) was tasked by the G20 group of industrialized and emerging economies to fight what is known as domestic tax base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS). In other the words, how multinational companies take advantage of different countries' tax systems to limit the amount of tax they pay, also known as tax optimization.

The talks got a boost earlier this year when the administration of US President Joe Biden backed a global minimum tax rate of at least 15 percent to put an end to "race to the bottom" between nations. The coronavirus pandemic has also added urgency to the reforms as countries need new sources of revenue to pay for huge stimulus programs that were deployed during last year's global recession. On July 1, the OECD announced that 130 countries agreed to a tax rate of "at least" 15 percent. A handful of other countries have since joined it.

### Two-pillar reform

The proposed reform is comprised of two pillars to deter companies from establishing bases in countries with low taxes to maximise profits earned elsewhere. Pillar one would give countries a share of the taxes on

profits earned there, though the tax would still be collected where the company has its fiscal base. Multinationals operate in many countries—oil giant BP is present in 85, for example—but usually pay taxes on profits only in their tax home. This provision would initially apply only to the top 100 or so companies, before expanding after seven years. Pillar two is a global minimum corporate tax rate of "at least" 15 percent to stop competition between countries over who can offer companies the lowest rate. The OECD says a global minimum corporate tax rate of 15 percent could add \$150 billion to government coffers annually.

### Why was Ireland opposed?

Ireland has attracted the likes of Apple, Google and Facebook to its shores thanks to a 12.5 percent tax rate, lower than in the United States and most other European Union countries. The country was reluctant to join the global tax movement because it talked about a rate of "at least" 15 percent, which Dublin feared could leave the door open to raising it. But Prime Minister Micheal Martin hinted yesterday that the cabinet is poised to join the reform effort, as Irish media reported that the term "at least" would be removed from the deal. Ireland would become the 135th country to join the pact.

### What now?

Ireland's approval would remove a key stumbling block, but the tax still faces a long road to becoming a reality. The OECD is holding talks Friday that could lead to agreements on the finer details of the reform. G20 leaders are expected to sign off on the deal when they meet in Rome in late October. But it does not end there. The legislatures of each signatory will then have to approve the reform, with the OECD hoping that the new tax regime could be in place by 2023. —AFP

## UK business leaders criticize PM Johnson's economic strategy

**LONDON:** British business leaders yesterday criticized Prime Minister Boris Johnson for lacking a plan to deal with a labor shortage crisis, after he called for them to pay higher wages. Johnson said on Wednesday he was committed to moving Britain away from an economy reliant on cheap foreign labor, in a speech to members of his ruling Conservatives.

But he admitted that "difficult" times lay ahead as a result, as many pointed to an end to free movement of people and tighter immigration rules post-Brexit. Supermarkets are already experiencing empty shelves, while panic buying over fears of a tanker driver shortage caused petrol pumps across Britain to run dry last week. Supply chain problems are mounting because of a lack of lorry drivers, while other sectors from hospitality to retail have also complained of a shortfall of seasonal workers, many of whom previously came from the EU.

Businesses leaders said that Johnson was unfairly blaming them for low wages and that his strategy could lead to shortages and high inflation. "The finger is being pointed at business as the bogeyman, but it's much wider than that," said Richard Walker, managing director of budget supermarket chain Iceland. "We want to pay our people as much as possible but business is not an endless sponge that can keep absorbing costs in one go," he told the Times newspaper.

"Next year we'll have a wave of higher costs from higher energy bills, extra HGV (heavy goods vehicle) drivers, packaging costs. "We can only weather so many cost increases at once." The Federation of Small Businesses said that it was now the opposition Labor party that had a pro-small business plan. "Looking at this party conference season, there was one party of the two that came out with a pro-small business policy," the federation's Craig Beaumont told Times Radio.

"The government should be looking at that and going: 'Well, maybe we've taken this group a bit for granted'. So now, what is that small business offer?" Johnson has historically been in favor of low taxes and free markets, but his speech on Wednesday argued for tax hikes in order to deal with the coronavirus "meteorite" that hit public finances. — AFP

## Business

# European and UK natural gas market soars to record heights

## Europe to blame for the current energy crisis: Putin

**LONDON:** European and UK gas prices surged to record peaks, energized by fears of runaway demand in the upcoming northern hemisphere winter. Europe's reference Dutch TTF gas price hit 162.12 euros per megawatt hour and UK prices leapt to 407.82 pence per therm in morning deals. However, prices later reversed as supply concerns eased somewhat. "It's panic and fear with winter just around the corner," Commerzbank analyst Carsten Fritsch told AFP. Soaring gas prices - coupled with oil which has struck multi-year highs - have fuelled fears over spiking inflation and rocketing domestic energy bills. Gas demand is also heightened in Asia, particularly from China, while key Russian exports are falling.

### Europe to blame: Putin

However, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared Wednesday that Europe was to blame for the current energy crisis, after the soaring gas prices spurred accusations that Moscow is withholding supplies to pressure the West. "They've made mistakes," Putin said in a televised meeting with Russian energy officials.

He said that one of the factors influencing the prices was the termination of "long-term contracts" in favor of the spot market. Some critics have accused Moscow of intentionally limiting gas supplies to Europe in an effort to hasten the launch of Nord Stream 2, a controversial pipeline connecting Russia with Germany. At the same time, global gas stockpiles remain worryingly low. "Natural gas prices have climbed to new peaks ... as insufficient levels of inventories ahead of the winter season drive concerns for a spike in inflation and energy prices for consumers," XTB analyst Walid Koudmani told AFP.

"These supply constraints could translate into higher costs of fuel moving into the winter months, a prospect which could further slow down economic recovery and worsen moods across markets." Europe's energy crisis has also been exacerbated by a lack of wind for turbine sites, coupled with ongoing nuclear outages - and the winding down of coal mines by climate-conscious governments. Gas demand has also galloped higher in recent months as economies reopened worldwide from their COVID-induced slumber.

"The rebound in industrial activity across the world following months of COVID-related restrictions and widespread remote working ... boosted demand for natural gas," noted UniCredit



**NORCO:** Vehicles drive past a petrol chemical plant near Highway 61 in Norco, Louisiana. Energy giant Royal Dutch Shell yesterday warned of financial hits from recent Hurricane Ida and soaring natural gas prices. — AFP

economist Edoardo Campanella. European gas futures have now multiplied by eight since April. And the market is set to shoot even higher, according to French bank Societe Generale. "Never before have power prices risen so far, so fast," wrote Societe Generale analysts in a client note. "And we are only a few days into autumn — temperatures are still mild.

"A cold winter could cause severe problems for Europe's energy markets, where politicians are already trying to contain the fallout." However gas prices eased later Wednesday as Putin, despite blaming Europe for the current situation, ordered state-controlled gas company Gazprom to maintain shipments through Ukraine. "News that Russia will boost gas supplies has steadied market nerves a little this afternoon and helped temper those



**SAINT PETERSBURG:** Gazprom logo is seen during the International Gas Forum, at the ExpoForum Convention and Exhibition Centre in Saint Petersburg yesterday. — AFP

record price hikes but businesses are worried, and investors are too," said AJ Bell financial analyst Danni Hewson.

### Brussels mulls energy crisis

European leaders are divided on how to respond to the record rise in energy prices, with France and Spain calling Wednesday for bold EU-wide action, while others urged patience. The European Commission - which is the European Union's executive arm - will next week propose measures to mitigate the price surge for consumers. Those suggestions will then be discussed by the bloc's leaders at a summit in Brussels on October 21-22. Britain is particularly exposed to Europe's energy crisis because of its reliance on natural gas to generate electricity. —AFP

## BA and Ryanair get reprieve on COVID refunds

**LONDON:** Britain ruled yesterday that British Airways and Irish carrier Ryanair were not obliged to refund customers whose flights were cancelled because of the pandemic. The Competition and Markets Authority regulator added in a statement that it had closed its probe into both airlines after finding the law unclear. "The CMA has concluded that the law does not provide passengers with a sufficiently clear right to a refund in these unusual circumstances to justify continuing with the case," it said. The watchdog had in June launched its investigation into whether the two airlines had broken the law in failing to offer refunds for flights that could not be taken during lockdown.

"Consumer protection law sets out that pas-

sengers are entitled to refunds when an airline cancels a flight, because the firm cannot provide its contracted services," the CMA added yesterday. "However, it does not clearly cover whether people should be refunded when their flight goes ahead but they are legally prohibited from taking it." The regulator added it would not pursue its investigation because it would take a long period of time in the courts to reach an "uncertain outcome".

Both airlines welcomed the watchdog's decision. However Rory Boland, editor of consumer magazine Which? Travel, described the outcome as "disappointing". "It's hugely unfair that passengers have been left to shoulder the bill for following the law and protecting public health by staying home, while British Airways and Ryanair have been allowed to hold onto their cash for flights people couldn't legally take." Aircraft were grounded worldwide as a result of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, devastating demand for air travel and sparking thousands of job cuts across the sector. — AFP

## German industrial output slumps on supply chain woes

**FRANKFURT:** German industrial production fell more sharply than expected in August, official data showed yesterday, as supply chain frictions weigh heavily on Europe's biggest economy. Federal statistics agency Destatis said industrial output slumped by four percent month-on-month, after experiencing a rebound in July, according to figures adjusted for seasonal swings. Analyst surveyed by Factset had predicted an August decline of just 0.1 percent. "Producers continue to report about the production being constrained by a shortage of supply of intermediate products," Destatis said in a statement.

Hardest hit was Germany's flagship car industry with a 17.5 percent drop in output. Like

other automakers around the world, German manufacturers are grappling with a shortage in computer chips, spurred by a pandemic-induced surge in demand for electronic devices. But the chips are also crucial components in conventional and electric vehicles, and giants like Volkswagen, BMW and Daimler have been among those forced to curtail production as they await fresh supplies.

Combined with global shortages of other key materials including timber, plastic and steel, analysts say clouds are gathering over Germany's export-driven economy. "Supply chain frictions have become a bigger threat to German industry than the pandemic," said ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski. "Disappointing industrial production in August suggests that the traditional growth engine of the German economy will again be a drag on growth in the third quarter," he added. Economic think-tank IWF recently downgraded its forecast for German economic growth for 2021 from 3.9 percent to 2.6 percent. —AFP

## Sports

# Despite Mercedes in comfort zone, Hamilton wary of threats to crown

**ISTANBUL:** Lewis Hamilton returns to the scene of a memorable triumph in pursuit of a record-equaling third Turkish Grand Prix win this weekend, but wary of more than one threat to his world championship crown. Eleven months on from a spectacular victory for Mercedes in treacherous rain-hit conditions that secured him his seventh drivers' title with three races remaining, the 36-year-old Briton is this year only two points ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen with seven to go.

That knife-edge advantage offers him little protection and he knows also that he may face a grid penalty if forced to take a fresh power unit, as the Dutchman did two weekends ago in Russia, for a contest likely to be run in similarly wet weather. Last year's event was the first at Istanbul Park for nine years and was run on a newly resurfaced and very slippery track that, like Sochi last month, conspired to deliver a high degree of jeopardy and drama.

On both occasions, Hamilton used his experience and race-craft to overcome inauspicious circumstances and deliver stunning victories rewarded by drawing level with Michael Schumacher's title tally and posting an unprecedented 100th F1 triumph. His goals this Sunday will be more prosaic as he seeks to beat Verstappen and protect, or extend, his advantage in their enthralling title scrap and to avoid a third collision between them following their crashes at Silverstone and Monza.

Verstappen, by contrast, seeks to erase the memory of a dismal race last year when after qualifying on the front row, he spun and flat-spotted his tyres on the way to sixth, his worst finish of the season. "It wasn't the best weekend for us, as a team," he said. "But I think it will be quite different circumstances this year - the track should be more 'grippy' and there will be a lot for us all to learn."

## Grosjean, Johnson take first steps to racing '22 Indy 500

**WASHINGTON:** Former Formula One racer Romain Grosjean and ex-US stock car driver Jimmie Johnson took their first steps toward competing in the 2022 Indianapolis 500 on Wednesday with a rookie orientation program. Frenchman Grosjean, a 10-time F1 podium finisher who had two runner-up efforts in his 2021 Indy-Car rookie campaign, and Johnson, a seven-time NASCAR season champion, had their session at the famed 2.5-mile (4km) Indy oval cut short by rain. Indy-Car officials deemed both drivers as having passed their rookie tests even though a downpour kept them both a few laps shy of completing their final phase of testing.

Both will complete their remaining laps the next time they drive onto the oval, which for Grosjean will be April 20-21, 2022 in an open test session at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Johnson, 46, could join Grosjean, 35, at the session if he commits to driving in next year's Indianapolis 500, set for May 29 with qualifying the

### 'Brilliant buzz' at Mercedes

Mercedes boss Toto Wolff conceded that it was "possible" that Hamilton would have a new fourth engine of the season and a grid penalty for Sunday's race, but stressed his squad were in a very positive mood. "There's been a brilliant buzz in the team over the last week or so," he said. "Being back on top of the podium was an incredible feeling, particularly after such a dramatic race. "And it was obviously made more special by Lewis's 100th race win. In the moment, milestones like this are exceptional, but I think it will take time for us to realize just how remarkable this period is and how privileged we are to be part of his journey. The final moments of the last race in Russia proved anything can happen in F1 and fortunes can change in the blink of an eye."

Having regained the momentum, Mercedes will strive to keep it, but Red Bull will want to snatch it back as a tribute to Honda, their engine suppliers, who are leaving F1 at the end of the year. The team plan to run in a special mainly white livery, which was intended for use at the cancelled Japanese Grand Prix, which has been replaced by the Turkish race.

"It always feels special to race for Honda, even without a special livery," said Verstappen. "For us and for Honda to miss out on Japan is a shame, but it's cool we can do something in Turkey instead. I'm excited to see it. Working with Honda has been a pleasure. They are super motivated every single race and super-passionate to deliver the best they can."

After his last-gasp disappointment at Sochi, where he missed out on a maiden victory by staying out on slicks in the rain while leading, Lando Norris will bid to consolidate his and McLaren's progress with another solid outing at a venue where Ferrari have been the most successful team. But with rain forecast to arrive for tomorrow and Sunday, it is difficult for anyone to make reliable plans or predictions. —AFP

weekend before. Grosjean drove a Honda-powered Andretti Autosport car after having competed last season for Dale Coyne Racing, with two runner-up efforts on the Indianapolis Motor Speedway road course but only one oval start.

"The emotions of ovals, for me, is very new," Grosjean said. "It's not something that's particularly comfortable. It's not like road courses or a street course where I know what to do and I know how to progress. "Here, I have to learn everything." Advising Grosjean on his first laps were 16-time Indy 500 starter Michael Andretti and 2016 pole sitter James Hinchcliffe. "It's funny," Grosjean said. "I wasn't that fast, but the lap was still 200 mph, which is fast, but it doesn't feel like it. It feels smooth and it flows. You can imagine during the race how can I get the momentum going. Qualifying? Yes, for sure it must be... pretty something."

Indy's rookie program has drivers take 10 laps at 205-210 mph, 15 laps between 210-215 mph and 15 laps above 215 mph. Both racers had most of the final session complete when rain hit. Johnson competed 18 times at Indy in a stock car but he went 25 mph faster than he had ever driven before at Indy. "The only thing that's similar is the fear," Johnson said. "It's way different, but I can I tell I'm not even at the limit of the car." —AFP



**ISTANBUL:** Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton talks during an interview at the paddock of the Intercity Istanbul Park yesterday. —AFP

### News in brief

#### England to have female ref in charge

**LONDON:** Kateryna Monzul will become the first woman to referee an England men's international when Gareth Southgate's team face Andorra in a World Cup qualifier tomorrow. The Ukrainian will be joined by assistant referees Maryna Striletska and Svitlana Grushko, both also from Ukraine, in an all-female on-pitch officiating team at the Estadi Nacional in Andorra la Vella. France's Stephanie Frappart - the first woman to referee a Champions League match - will be the video assistant referee, with other officiating roles filled by men. —AFP

#### MotoGP 2022 calendar unveiled

**PARIS:** The MotoGP world championship unveiled its 2022 calendar yesterday, with 21 races including first visits to Finland's KymiRing and Indonesia's Mandalika circuit. Marc Marquez, Fabio Quartararo and the rest of the field will roar into action beneath the floodlights of Qatar on March 6 in a 2022 season that runs through to Nov 6 at Valencia's Ricardo Tormo circuit. As well as the new races, there are five non-European destinations back on the itinerary after being cancelled due to COVID this year. Argentina, Japan, Thailand, Australia and Malaysia are all back in the fold. —AFP

#### Okagbare charged with doping

**PARIS:** Nigerian sprinter Blessing Okagbare has been charged after testing positive for human growth hormone and EPO, offences that forced her to pull out of the Tokyo Olympics, the Athletics Integrity Unit said yesterday. "The athlete has been charged with the presence and use of a prohibited substance following of Human Growth Hormone in a sample collected out-of-competition on 19th July in Slovakia and reported to the AIU on 30th July," the AIU said in a statement. It said Okagbare had also tested positive for the endurance-boosting drug EPO in a test in Nigeria on June 20. Okagbare denies all the charges and has requested that each of them be submitted to a disciplinary hearing, the AIU said. —AFP

## Sports

# Fury, Wilder kept apart after sparks fly at press conference

**LAS VEGAS:** Tyson Fury and Deontay Wilder were prevented from a face-off as insults and expletives filled the air at an ill-tempered final press conference on Wednesday for their heavyweight world title fight. Fury puts his World Boxing Council heavyweight belt on the line in Las Vegas on Saturday when he meets Wilder for the third time, 20 months after knocking out the American in their second fight.

Wednesday's press conference - broadcast live on US television - saw profanities and sparks fly as Fury taunted Wilder over the circumstances of his defeat to the self-styled "Gypsy King" last year. As the barbs escalated, the host of the press conference sought to bring both fighters together for a traditional face-to-face stare-down-only for Fury's promoter Bob Arum to veto the confrontation.

Fury and Wilder - who clashed at a press conference ahead of their first fight in Los Angeles in 2018 - were hustled off the stage shortly afterwards. It brought an end to a fractious encounter at the MGM Grand Garden Arena, which turned ugly when Fury confronted Wilder over the American's accusations of cheating by Fury during the last fight.

Wilder has accused Fury of tampering with his gloves for the second fight - where Fury dominated to score a seventh-round knockout - to inflict more damage. Wilder had also accused former trainer Mark Breland of spiking his own water, as well as blaming a heavy costume used during his ring walk for making him tired. Wilder stood by his various

cheating claims when quizzed on them Wednesday. "I will go to my grave believing in what I believe in," Wilder said. "I know things for a fact. I have confirmation and clarity over a lot of things. Men lie, women lie, but your eyes don't lie what they see."

### 'Weak mental person'

But Wilder's comments were dismissed by Fury as the words of an "unwell person". "He accused me of everything, accused his team, his trainer, the suit, injuries. Who else did he accuse - oh yeah, the Nevada State Athletic Commission, they were in on it as well. And the referee," said Fury (30-0-1, with 21 knockouts). "Maybe if he'd come out with one of these excuses it would have been believable - but not 15, come on. "He can believe what he wants. But what it tells me is that he's a weak mental person, who I will knock spark out on Saturday night."

Asked for his final comments, Wilder, replied: "I just tell you guys to prepare yourselves for the battlefield and get ready for war." Fury meanwhile returned to his earlier theme, zeroing in on Wilder's comments about the circumstances of his loss in the second fight. "Wilder said I only won the second fight because I cheated," Fury said.

"But then he goes and changes his whole team and training, says he's training as hard as ever. "So I have to ask the question 'If I only won because I cheated, what was the point of changing everything?' Can anyone answer that question? I know he can't because he doesn't have the brains to,"

text each other," said 18-year-old Jake McNerney. "We'll just see each other out there."

### Logjam

More than 300 personnel are involved in the emergency response to the spill, which has been traced to a pipeline near Long Beach. Dozens of container ships are anchored off the harbor there - one of the world's busiest container ports - waiting for a berth in a pandemic-sparked shipping logjam. The Los Angeles Times cited a federal investigator as saying a misplaced anchor from one of these ships was the most likely cause of the pipeline's rupture.

Officials said almost 5,000 gallons of crude have been recovered so far, and more than a dozen birds covered in oil have been rescued. Clean-up crews in protective gear could be seen on Newport Beach, further down the coastline, with weather patterns pushing oil south.

### School

Powder blue skies and warm sunshine offered perfect beach weather on Wednesday, but stores and restaurants that rely on visitors were empty. "Probably 50 percent of our business we probably lost so far," said Sakal, whose father has been selling the surfboards he makes in their family-run store for five decades. October is prime surfing time. "It's the best for surfers, and it's best for people that live here. The weather's really nice during this time," said Sakal. "It gets hot in the inland areas, so they all come to the beach on the weekends, but they can't come to



**LAS VEGAS:** British boxer Tyson Fury (left) and challenger US boxer Deontay Wilder attend a press conference for their WBC heavyweight championship fight on Wednesday at the MGM Grand Garden Arena ahead of their Oct 9, 2021 fight. —AFP

Fury said, gesturing at Wilder.

"He says he wants to do bad things to me, and hurt me and he's got all this anger and malice and aggression. I don't want to hurt Deontay Wilder. I just want to beat him in a fight. He knows what he's saying

is lies. And deep down in his soul, he knows that he lost. He lost the first time, he lost the second time and he's going to lose the third time. And afterwards he'll be back working in that fast-food chain that he was working at earlier in his career - retired." —AFP

## Surfers sidelined as California races to clean up oil spill

**HUNTINGTON BEACH, California:** Beaches normally thronged with the bronzed torsos of surfers are deserted as California races to clean up a huge oil spill. Up to 131,000 gallons of crude could have leaked into the Pacific Ocean on the west coast of the United States when a pipeline ruptured at the weekend. Authorities are investigating whether a ship's anchor could have ripped open the pipe, dragging it more than 30 m along the seafloor.

A 24-km stretch of coast has been closed to the public - including some prime surfing spots that are usually packed with boarders. "It's weird to see no surfing out there for miles. It's very strange," said Shawna Sakal, manager of a surf store just yards from Huntington Beach pier. "There's always people surfing, they're doing it year-round. The ocean is full of surfers, especially on the north and south side of the pier."

Huntington Beach revolves around surfing. Equipment rental and sales stores jostle for space with surf schools. But almost all of them are now shuttered. For the tight-knit community of surfers, that's tough. "We have a bunch of friends that just surf, so sometimes we don't even



**HUNTINGTON BEACH, California:** Surfers who planned on surfing look at oil on the beach on Oct 3, 2021, after a pipeline breach connected to an oil rig off shore started leaking oil. —AFP

the beach now because of the oil spill."

The disaster has also put a hole in the curriculum of one local school, where surf skills count as a credit towards graduation. "We had just begun our competitive season the week before the spill," says Lisa Battig of Fountain Valley School, located just minutes from the beach. "All five teams also operate as classes and students receive PE (physical education) credit. "We will

be staying out of our local waters until we receive the all clear from the agencies."

In the meantime, students will be practicing on land, she says, and traveling out of the area to surf at the weekend. But they will be doing their part to help speed along the clean-up. "When and if it is safe and reasonable, the students will also get involved with clean-up," she said. —AFP

## Sports

# Taylor walk-off homer sends Dodgers into MLB playoff clash with Giants

**LOS ANGELES:** Chris Taylor belted a two-run walk-off home run Wednesday to lift the Los Angeles Dodgers to a 3-1 victory over the St Louis Cardinals and into a Major League Baseball playoff showdown with the San Francisco Giants. Los Angeles kept their bid for a World Series repeat on track with the triumph in the hard-fought National League wild-card game at Dodger Stadium.

The reigning champions found themselves in the win-or-go-home round despite amassing 106 regular-season wins. Their reward for the victory will be a National League division series clash starting on Friday with the Giants - who snatched the West division crown from the Dodgers with 107 victories. "It's going to be fun," said Taylor. "Yeah, two of the best regular-season records of all time. We've been battling all year. I expect a hard-fought series."

It will be the first time in the 131-year history of the Giants-Dodgers rivalry that they will play each other in a post-season series. Taylor, who entered the game as a defensive replacement, ended a tense affair against the surging Cardinals when he connected on a two-run shot off St. Louis relief pitcher Alex Reyes. Reyes came in after relief pitcher T J McFarland walked Cody Bellinger with two outs.

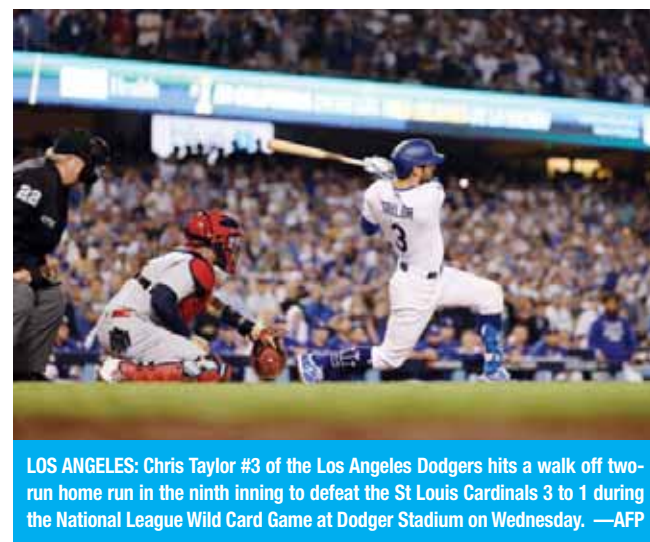
Bellinger took second on a pitch that Cardinals catcher Yadier Molina couldn't quite control and Taylor finished the

job. "Honestly, I was just trying to hit a single, not trying to do too much, and he gave me a good slider to hit and I was able to get it up in the air," Taylor said. Dodgers starting pitcher Max Scherzer wasn't at his best, giving up one run and three hits with three walks and four strikeouts in 4 1/3 innings.

He allowed at least one baserunner in every inning he pitched. But Scherzer's determination was on full display as he got his head down and kept the Cardinals off the board after a wild pitch that let Tommy Edman score from third base standing up in the first inning. Dodgers manager Dave Roberts pulled Scherzer with two on and one out in the top of the fifth inning, and reliever Joe Kelly promptly came through by inducing a ground ball out and delivering a strikeout to end the inning.

The Dodgers - kept in check early by Cardinals starting pitcher Adam Wainwright - got on the board in the bottom of the fourth when Justin Turner seized on a curveball from Wainwright for a home run into the left-field bullpen. "What a game," Turner said. "What a job by our bullpen, going out and putting up zeros. Scherz battling all night - he didn't have his best stuff, but he kept us in the game, and then that big swing by CT - just awesome."

Wainwright gave up one run and four hits in 5 1/3 innings. He struck out five and walked two. The Cardinals, who won 17



**LOS ANGELES:** Chris Taylor #3 of the Los Angeles Dodgers hits a walk off two-run home run in the ninth inning to defeat the St Louis Cardinals 3 to 1 during the National League Wild Card Game at Dodger Stadium on Wednesday. —AFP

straight games in September as they powered into the wild card spot - stranded 11 runners, finishing 0-for-11 with runners in scoring position. —AFP

## Stokes could miss Ashes after finger operation

**LONDON:** England all-rounder Ben Stokes could miss the Ashes series in Australia after undergoing another operation on his injured finger, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced yesterday. The 30-year-old has not played since July, when it was announced he was taking a break to focus on his mental wellbeing and to rest his left index finger.

"Ben Stokes has undergone a second operation on Monday 4 October to address ongoing issues with the finger that he injured in the IPL (Indian Premier League) in April," the ECB said in a statement. "Stokes had two screws and scar tissue removed from the index finger of his left hand. He will now undergo an intensive period of rehabilitation for the next four weeks under the supervision of the ECB's medical team."

The operation places his participation in England's five-Test series in Australia, scheduled to start in Brisbane on Dec 8, in serious doubt. Concerns over player welfare and Australia's strict coronavirus restrictions have led to fears the tour may not take place. The ECB is meeting this week to decide whether the Ashes can go ahead, with reports suggesting there have been positive talks with Cricket Australia.

Stokes burnished his reputation as England's talisman during the 2019 Ashes, when his unbeaten 135 helped England chase a record fourth-innings target of 359 at Headingley with one wicket remaining. The all-rounder announced himself in Test cricket in the 2013/14



Ben Stokes

Ashes, scoring his maiden Test century in tough batting conditions in Perth but Australia completed a 5-0 whitewash.

Stokes missed England's last tour of Australia in 2017/18 after his involvement in a brawl outside a Bristol nightclub. He was subsequently found not guilty of affray. The tourists missed Stokes' contributions with bat and ball as Australia eased to a 4-0 series win to regain the urn. —AFP

## Psychologists for players at T20 World Cup: ICC

**DUBAI:** Psychologists will monitor players at the T20 World Cup to help cope with the growing number of mental health cases in coronavirus safety bubbles, cricket's governing body said Thursday. Pandemic strain has become increasingly apparent in recent months with England's Ben Stokes on a prolonged mental health break, and other leading players complaining about the pressures of going from bubble to bubble in different tours and tournaments.

A number of players missed or left the conclu-

sion of the Indian Premier League in the United Arab Emirates because of bio-bubble stress. And the 16 nations at the World Cup, starting in the UAE and Oman on Oct 17, will be confined to their hotels for the majority of the month-long tournament. "Some people will be affected, their mental health will be affected by being in confined conditions again, particularly perhaps those who have done it for a prolonged period of time," Alex Marshall, International Cricket Council head of integrity and bio safety, told reporters.

"The ICC will have available 24 hours a day, a psychologist to speak to any individual who seeks help. We are also providing (a) lot of resources, so people can decide what the best way of addressing the issue is for them." Following comments by leading players, including India captain Virat Kohli, many teams have increased their psychological support for players ahead of the tournament. —AFP

## Hyderabad beat Bangalore after final-ball IPL thriller

**ABU DHABI:** Bhuvneshwar Kumar kept his nerve with the final ball as Sunrisers Hyderabad beat Royal Challengers Bangalore by four runs on Wednesday in the Indian Premier League. Kumar clinched the victory for his side after defending six runs off the final ball against AB de Villiers in a low-scoring thriller at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi. Kane Williamson-led Hyderabad are bottom of the league table but their nail-biting victory effectively dashed any chance of Virat Kohli's Bangalore finishing second.

RCB looked on course for an easy win as Glenn

Maxwell smashed 40 off 25 balls after captain Kohli (5) and Dan Christian (1) failed with the bat chasing a target of 142. But Williamson's brilliant direct hit caught Maxwell out of the crease before Kumar and Jason Holder made a strong comeback, bowling the two last overs for 13 runs. Devdutt Padikkal scored 41 off 52 balls and Shahbaz Ahmed contributed a quick 14 off 9 balls.

But Kumar (1-25) held his nerve in the final over against De Villiers, who ended unbeaten on 19, and George Garton. Sunrisers batted first after losing the toss but made a shaky start with Abhishek Sharma (13) losing his wicket to Garton in the second over. His dismissal was followed by a 70-run stand between opener Jason Roy (44) and Williamson (31) before pacer Harshal Patel knocked over the skipper. Priyam Garg scored 15 off 11, Wriddhiman Saha 10 off 8 and Holder made a brisk 16 off 13 balls. Harshal Patel finished with bowling figures of 3-33. —AFP

## Sports

# Rampant Morocco score five after Guinea-Bissau hit by medical drama

**JOHANNESBURG:** Morocco rose to the top of their African World Cup qualifying group on Wednesday with a 5-0 thrashing of Guinea-Bissau, many of whose players became ill after eating dinner on the eve of the match. Achraf Hakimi and debutant Imran Louza in the first half and Ilias Chair, Ayoub El Kaabi and Munir El Haddadi netted for the Moroccans, who are chasing a sixth appearance at the global showpiece.

But the convincing Group I win for the Atlas Lions in the top-of-the-table clash was overshadowed by the Guinea-Bissau medical drama, which affected 25 players and technical staff. Guinea-Bissau delegation head Carlos Teixeira had temporarily threatened to boycott the match, saying "I will not send the players to the field - it would be a criminal act on my part".

Head coach Baciro Cande said players and coaches "developed stomach aches about 15 minutes after dinner, followed by diarrhea and vomiting. "Twenty-five were taken to hospital and released just before dawn on Wednesday. As a precaution, we then brought our own food to the hotel." The pre-match drama took some gloss off an impressive performance by Morocco under veteran coach Vahid Halilhodzic.

Morocco have six points, Guinea-Bissau four, Guinea two and Sudan one in a section badly disrupted by a lack of international-standard stadiums and security issues. Guinea-Bissau and Sudan have been forced to stage home fixtures in Morocco due to sub-standard stadia and Guinea are currently barred from hosting qualifiers after a coup last month.

Morocco triumphed despite the absence of several stars, in-

cluding Sevilla forward Youssef En-Nesyri and Chelsea midfielder Hakim Ziyech. Consistent scorer En-Nesyri is injured while Ziyech was dropped because of "unacceptable behavior" during mid-year World Cup warm-up matches. Halilhodzic told reporters that Ziyech had arrived late for friendlies against Ghana and Burkina Faso, displayed a bad attitude, and the medical staff said the midfielder had feigned injury.

Guinea, who had been expected to pose the greatest threat to Morocco, could only draw 1-1 with Sudan in Marrakech. Mohamed Bayo, who scored for Clermont in the French Ligue 1 at the weekend, took his scoring habit to north Africa by nodding Guinea in front off a second-half corner. Saifeldin Bakhit equalized 18 minutes from time with a close-range shot to earn Sudan a first point in the group. —AFP

## Harder haunts old club Wolfsburg to rescue Chelsea

**LONDON:** Pernille Harder scored an injury-time equalizer against her former club as Chelsea escaped with a 3-3 draw against Wolfsburg in the opening game of their women's Champions League campaign on Wednesday. The Blues are aiming to go one better than last season when they reached the final for the first time, only to be thrashed 4-0 in Gothenburg by Barcelona.

Chelsea beat Wolfsburg in the quarter-finals last season, but for a long time it looked like the Germans would get their revenge at Kingsmeadow. Sam Kerr had fired the English side into an early lead, but the visitors had turned the game around by half-time as Tabea Wassmuth and Jill Roord struck for the visitors. Wassmuth scored again early in the second period as she pounced on an error from Jessica Carter.

Bethany England started the Chelsea fight-back just three minutes later when she fired home in a goalmouth scramble. But Chelsea looked destined for defeat until Harder, who moved between the clubs for a world record fee in 2020, calmly drilled home with seconds to spare. Elsewhere in Group A, Juventus got off to a flying start with a 3-0 win over Swiss side Servette. Arianna Caruso, Lina Hurtig and Valentina Cernoia were on target for the Italian champions. Real Madrid got their first ever women's Champions League campaign off to a winning start in Group B as Lorena Navarro's goal earned the Spaniards a 1-0 win over Kharkiv in Ukraine. Paris Saint-Germain are the favorites to top that section and were 2-0 winners in Iceland over Breidablik thanks to goals from Lea Khelifi and Grace Geyoro. —AFP

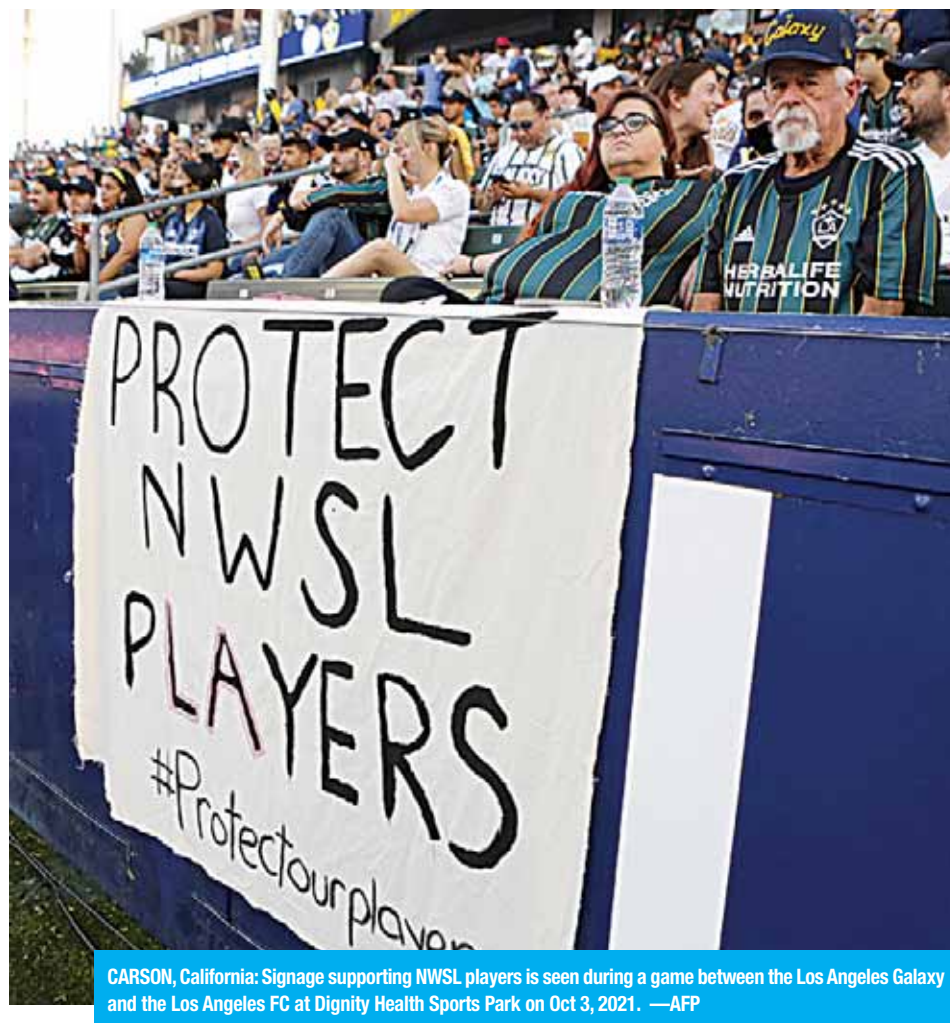
## NWSL players halt play in 'solidarity'

**WASHINGTON:** Players from the Washington Spirit and Gotham FC halted play on Wednesday, leading protests against sexual misconduct scandals that have swept across the National Women's Soccer League in recent weeks. NWSL games resumed on Wednesday with three fixtures after the league called off games last weekend following the latest revelations to hit the top professional women's league in the United States.

Washington and Gotham players halted play in the sixth minute in what was described as a gesture of "solidarity" by the NWSL Players Association, and similar protests followed at the games between the North Carolina Courage and Racing Louisville in Cary, North Carolina, and between the Portland Thorns and Houston Dash.

"Tonight, we reclaim our place on the field, because we will not let our joy be taken from us," the NWSLPA statement read. "But this is not business as usual." Spirit and Gotham players joined arms on the center-circle for the pause in play, which was timed to reflect the number of years it took for allegations against former North Carolina Courage coach Paul Riley to be addressed.

Riley was fired last week for "very serious allegations of misconduct". Two players, Sinead Farrelly and Meleana "Mana" Shim, accused Riley of misconduct during his time as Portland Thorns coach in 2015. "Players will join together in solidarity at the center circle for one minute in honor of the six years it took for Mana, Sinead and all those who fought for too long to be



**CARSON, California:** Signage supporting NWSL players is seen during a game between the Los Angeles Galaxy and the Los Angeles FC at Dignity Health Sports Park on Oct 3, 2021. —AFP

heard," the statement read.

"We call on fans to stand in silence with us. During that time, we ask you to stand in that pain and discomfort with us, as we consider what we have been asked to sit with for too long." Allegations of sexual harassment and abusive or bullying behavior by coaches and officials in the NWSL have snowballed in recent months.

NWSL commissioner Lisa Baird resigned on Friday following criticism of her

handling of the complaints. The NWSL players association statement detailed a list of demands being made by the union, which included a request for every coach and general manager to submit to the independent investigation into abusive conduct. The players union also called for an investigation announced by the NWSL on Sunday to be expanded in scope to include all 12 NWSL clubs as well as league staff. —AFP

## Sports

# Torres double ends Italy's record run to put Spain in Nations League final

**MILAN:** Ferran Torres put Spain into the Nations League final yesterday with a brace in a 2-1 win that ended Italy's world record unbeaten run at 37 matches in front of their own fans. Torres struck twice in the first half to make sure that Luis Enrique's Spain won the Final Four clash at the San Siro in Milan, where they will face either France or Belgium in Sunday's final.

Lorenzo Pellegrini pulled a goal back with seven minutes left but the European champions failed to complete what would have been a memorable comeback after a spirited second-half performance with 10 men. Italy, who beat Spain in the Euro 2020 semi-finals, had to play over half the match with one man fewer after Leonardo Bonucci was sent off in the 42nd minute for picking up a second yellow card for elbowing Sergio Busquets in the face during an aerial challenge. "The first half could have easily finished 1-1... It's a shame because we would have stayed with 11 men were it not for an error which you can't commit at this level," Italy coach Roberto Mancini told RAI. The match was played in a strange atmosphere as AC Milan fans in the stadium harangued Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma throughout his return to the San Siro following his move to Paris Saint-Germain.

Donnarumma, who is considered one of the world's best goalkeepers and won the Player of the Tournament award at the Euro, left Milan as a free agent in the summer and his departure left a bad taste in the mouth of supporters who loudly booed and whistled his every touch of the ball. "It upset us, because it was Italy playing, it wasn't a club match. They could have put it to one side for one match," Mancini told reporters later. "Italy

is Italy and I think it should come above everything else."

## Fans attack Donnarumma

Donnarumma was barracked by the home fans both when he came out for the pre-match warm-up and when the teams were read out, with the boos and whistles loud enough to drown out the announcements over the stadium's speakers. He was even whistled by some home supporters on his first touch of the ball in the fourth minute although by that point others in the crowd had started to applaud him in an attempt to cover up the criticism.

However boos persisted every time he got the ball and in one bizarre moment Bonucci took a goal kick, only to roll the ball a couple of meters to Donnarumma, who again had to try to block out a wave of anger from the stands. They clearly started to have an effect on his performance, first reacting sluggishly to Torres' flick which put Spain one goal ahead in the 17th minute.

Only two minutes later, Donnarumma then fumbled an innocuous shot from Marcos Alonso onto the post and had to thank Bonucci for getting back in time to clear the ball off the line. After a period of Spain dominance, Italy responded and should have at least been level 10 minutes before the break, Federico Bernardeschi having a 34th-minute shot pushed onto the post before Lorenzo Insigne fluffed the easiest chance of the half.

Emerson Palmieri was sent charging behind the right side of the Spanish defense and rolled a perfect low cross to the unmarked Insigne, who sliced wide a side-footed finish. However the hosts' task was made much harder just before the break when



**MILAN:** Italy's defender Alessandro Bastoni (left) fights for the ball with Spain's forward Ferran Torres during the UEFA Nations League semifinal football match at the San Siro stadium on Wednesday. —AFP

Bonucci was sent off and Torres all but killed off their hopes of extending their record with his deft header from another Mikel Oyarzabal cross. Down to 10, Italy gave a good account of themselves and Pellegrini cut the deficit with seven minutes remaining largely thanks to Federico Chiesa. Juventus forward Chiesa nicked the ball after a Spanish corner was cleared and charged down the field unopposed before laying on the Roma midfielder to tap into an open goal which briefly gave Italy fans hope. —AFP

## Saudi takeover of Newcastle set to go ahead

**LONDON:** A Saudi-backed takeover of Newcastle is set to get the green light from the Premier League. A consortium featuring Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF), PCP Capital Partners and billionaire brothers David and Simon Reuben struck a deal worth a reported £300 million (\$408 million) to buy the club from unpopular owner Mike Ashley in April 2020.

However, the controversial takeover bid hit the rocks last year after an outcry from Qatar-based beIN Sports, a major television rights holder of the Premier League. The broadcaster, which extended its rights to the English top-flight for the Middle East and North African region earlier this year until 2025 at a cost of \$500 million, was banned by Saudi Arabia in 2017 at the start of a diplomatic and transport blockade of Qatar, which ended in January.

Tensions between the states have eased significantly this year and Saudi's ban on beIN is set to be lifted, with Riyadh also seeking to settle Qatar's \$1 billion arbitration claim over pirate broadcasts to Saudi audiences by the BeoutQ network. The PIF, chaired by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, widely known as MBS, is reportedly set to take an 80 percent stake under the proposed deal.

The takeover could transform the Magpies' fortunes - despite regular attendances of 50,000 at St James' Park, Newcastle have not won a major trophy since 1969. Current owner Mike Ashley has been deeply unpopular in his 13 years in charge, during which time the club have twice been relegated from the Premier League before bouncing back into English football's lucrative top flight.

Newcastle, currently managed by former Manchester United defender Steve Bruce, are without a win in their opening seven games of the Premier League season and sit second-bottom of the table. "Under this ownership there has been no ambition, effectively no in-



vestment and no hope for a sporting entity that hasn't been a sporting entity. It's been there to survive and nothing more," a spokesman for the Newcastle United Supporters Trust (NUST) told AFP.

A recent poll by the NUST found 93.8 percent of fans were in favor of the takeover. The transformation of Manchester City since a 2008 takeover from Sheikh Mansour, a member of the Abu Dhabi royal family, is the template for Newcastle to follow. Prior to Abu Dhabi's investment, City had not won a major trophy since 1976 but the English champions have now won five of the past 10 Premier League titles.

Huge investment into Newcastle would only intensify the battle at the top end of the Premier League for the title and lucrative Champions League places. A competition tribunal case brought by Ashley ruled last month that the Premier League had been "improperly influenced" by other clubs when rejecting the takeover last year. —AFP

## Werner under pressure to maintain goal-scoring run

**HAMBURG:** Germany can edge closer to qualifying for the 2022 World Cup by beating Romania in Hamburg today with Chelsea striker Timo Werner under pressure to maintain his goal-scoring run for the national team. The Germans have struggled to find a reliable striker since Miroslav Klose retired in 2014 after setting an all-time record of 16 goals at World Cup finals. "You need a killer instinct up front," former Germany striker Mario Gomez told AFP subsidiary SID.

"If you don't have a robust center-forward, you have to think of other solutions," Gomez added, "and that's what (Germany head coach) Hansi Flick is doing." Werner has managed only two goals in eight Chelsea games this season, but is on a good run for Germany having hit the net in all three September internationals. A clinically taken close-range goal against Liechtenstein, a tap-in against Armenia, and a scrappy effort which went in off the post late on against Iceland boosted Werner's record to 19 goals in 45 internationals.

Yet his tally of 14 goals in 60 games for Chelsea is a poor return compared to the 95 he scored in 159 matches for previous club RB Leipzig before last year's transfer to Stamford Bridge. Germany are on the verge of punching their ticket to next year's World Cup in Qatar. They are four points clear at the top of their qualifying group after winning their last three games under Flick, beating Liechtenstein, Armenia and Iceland by scoring 12 goals in the process and conceding none. Wins over Romania in Hamburg and away to North Macedonia next Monday could secure a World Cup berth before November's final qualifiers against Liechtenstein and Armenia. —AFP

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## Hamilton wary of threats to crown

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