

# Friday Times

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V O L V O



## Kuwait enters post-pandemic era

Digital transformation begins 'within a week'

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## Local

## A solution to the visit visa problem



SCRIBBLER'S NOTEBOOK

By Jamie Etheridge

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Since the pandemic began here in March 2020, Kuwait Times has received thousands of queries and requests asking when Kuwait will reopen visit visas. Visit visas are a lifeline for expatriates. They are necessary for bringing family from abroad to visit, are often the first step in obtaining dependent visas for family who plan to live here and also for children who are born abroad but whose parents live in Kuwait.

Another category of people utilize visit visas as a way to find jobs in Kuwait. Though there are no published statistics, it is widely known that people often come to Kuwait on visit visas to search for work. Quite often these people are low skilled or do not have job offers in place and instead are trying their luck after arriving in the country.

Kuwait needs foreign labor, despite government Kuwaitization efforts to the contrary. There are a growing number of fields and roles locals can and will take on but there is still a need for foreigners, at least in the short term, if the economy is going to keep pace with the rest of the region.

But the circuitous visit visa path job seekers use to find work here does not serve anyone. It does not serve Kuwait's businesses because it does not focus on providing a population of skilled labor for the market. It also does not serve the job hunters themselves, who often pay recruiters in their home countries for the privilege of access to Kuwait via a 'visit visa' but who arrive here with limit chance of finding a job.

Finally it creates a problem for all those who legitimately fall into the visitor category. Husbands and wives who want to visit their spouses here, parents who want to visit children all face additional hurdles to obtain a visit visa because the mechanism has been abused and exploited.

Kuwait's current solution to this problem of abuse of the visit visa system is to simply close it. Full stop. No visit visas are issued at all. This, unfortunately, has resulted in the separation of families in some cases now for almost two years. It also means that mothers with valid residency who have delivered babies abroad find difficulty in bringing their child to Kuwait before obtaining the necessary dependent visa.

One solution that might be considered is creating a new category of visa: job seeking visas. Many countries like Canada, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Spain, Thailand and others have a visa specifically for those looking for a job. This allows the government to help businesses by encouraging skilled, qualified candidates into the country for a specified period of time where they can openly and legally apply for jobs.

Streamlining the process so that job seekers can search for work here legally would benefit employers also by providing them with a vetted, larger pool of potential applicants. Theoretically, the government could also make it easier for businesses by allowing transition from job seeker to work visa (visa 18) status after the three-month probation period.

It would also separate out 'real' visitors – those who want to see family or tour the country – from those who are searching for employment and this would open the way for the government to reopen visit visas and allow families to be reunited. After all the chaos and suffering of the last nearly two years, surely that should be a priority.

### PHOTOS OF THE DAY



Eurasian hoopoe bird is seen at Salmi desert, 150 kilometers from Kuwait City, on Wednesday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat/Kuwait Times.

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## Saving money for our children's education



JUST KIDDIN', SERIOUSLY

By Sahar Moussa

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If you are a new parent, you will want to do one thing right now, if you have not already—think of 'saving plans' to guarantee your children's future and save money for school and college.

As a new parent, I have many things to learn while I am cruising in this new life — trying my best to float. As a parent, you want the best for your children by all means—you want them to have the best nutrition, education, clothes and best life in general. When my son was born, I was overwhelmed and got a bit paranoid about everything that concerned him. I got obsessed about his sleeping and feeding hours, diaper changing and the type and sound of his cries. I cannot deny the fact that I dedicated all my energy to this newborn baby and made him the center of my universe — and I would not change it for the world.

I might have thought about many things, but did not think to save money for him—for preschool and school — until he turned two. It suddenly hit me, and I was shocked about how expensive private schools in Kuwait can be.

Parents in Kuwait spend a lot of money on their children's education— on top of the high tuition fees, additional costs may include textbooks, bus transport services, uniforms, extracurricular activities and sometimes an initial non-refundable admission fee. You can end up paying between KD 1,500 and KD 4,000 per year for a good school for KG1 and KG2 (yes, this is expensive). However,

it will add up gradually from grade one until grade 12 — then you will have to think about college.

For parents who have more than two children, paying school fees is a nightmare. For Kuwaitis, they have the option to place their children in public schools, which are free of charge, but most Kuwaitis opt to send their kids to private schools in order to guarantee a better education and secure better jobs in the future.

Unfortunately, nowadays the economic situation worldwide is very tough, and it is very hard for expats who earn a low salary to save money for their children's tuition fees. Some of them are living paycheck to paycheck and are not able to meet their financial obligations—they can barely make it to the end of the month after paying for rent, food and basic needs. Expats are known to have a culture of saving money to send it to their families back home. Kuwaitis do not have a culture of saving and love to spend money on their pleasures— until reality hits them when they have to pay a big amount of money for their children's education.

You can start by opening a savings account for your children to secure their future education fees; my advice is to start with small amounts on a monthly basis, as soon as they are born. Even if you have not opened an account yet, it is never too late to start saving for education. Personally, I have informed all my friends and family that in case they want to gift something to my son, I prefer they transfer money directly to his account. Some people might think it is rude or impolite to ask for money, but I think it is a very efficient and smart thing to do for the child's benefit.

I do understand the dilemma of living with limited or no savings at all, but we have to be keen and financially squeeze ourselves in order to save money, even if it means sacrificing eating out or buying expensive clothes that we like — after all, isn't parenting about sacrifices?

# Kuwait Times

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## Local



# Tackling the tire mountain: Recycling plants in Salmi get to work

By Ben Garcia

One hour and 45 minutes west of Kuwait City lies the biggest tire graveyard in the world. 42 million tires - at least that's the official count. There may be more. Kuwait recently removed the last of old tires from a dump near Mutlaa further west to Salmi. Now the process of

reducing the total waste by recycling has begun.

From the main highway, you see a black sea of rounded rubber in the middle of the flat, beige desert. Next to these are a new crop of recycling firms established to tackle the mountain of rubber. One of these companies is EPSCO Global for General Trading Company. Set up in 2019, the recycling plant stands on a 50,000 square meters

lot near the Salmi tire dump.

Using machines imported from Denmark, EPSCO Global for General Trading aims to draw down the massive of unwanted tires and create an exportable product. "The machine recycles, shreds, granules and powders the tire along the process, depending on your need and wants," explains Fuad Akbar, Chief Project Officer EPSCO Global for Trading Company.



KUWAIT: These pictures show used tires that were transported from a landfill in the north of Kuwait to Al-Salmi border region near the country's industrial area, where they will be cut or repurposed for local use or for export, on Wednesday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Local



"In 2019, we started several trials. Then the commissioning of leaky pipe machine and molded press commenced as well. This allows EPSCO recycling plant to produce recycled rubber leaky pipes used in farms as well as rubber mats interlock tiles, and various molds and products," he said.

Last year, the company started the supply in local market to various gyms, schools and as of this year, has begun exporting to countries like Qatar, supplying foreign markets with much-needed rubber granules. "We have now tens of recycled products that can be supplied to both local and international markets," Akbar said.

Kuwait had announced last Sunday clearing out the two-square-kilometer tire dump with plans to transform it into a new residential city. "We have moved from a difficult stage that was characterized by great environmental risk," Oil Minister Mohammed Al-Fares said at the now empty landfill some five kilometers from Al-Jahra province. Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah, director general of the Environment Public Authority, confirmed meanwhile that Kuwait plans to recycle all the tires and avoid the need for another landfill.



## Local

# Police probe man's alleged stab murder of sister in Taima

## More details emerge in deadly shooting case

**KUWAIT:** Police arrested a man after he allegedly killed his sister in Taima, local reports said yesterday. The victim reportedly called police to seek help, saying that she had been held captive inside her home for two months. When her brother found out, he attacked her with a knife before police made it to the scene, and she was dead by the time they arrived, Al-Qabas Arabic newspaper reported. The suspect was placed under arrest following resistance, then taken to the concerned authorities for further action.

### Gunshot wound

Separately, a report emerged yesterday with more details on a shooting that took place in the same area and left one person dead. The victim died of a gunshot wound in the abdomen fired from a policeman's weapon while he was resisting arrest, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported quoting a police source. "Two policemen were manning a check point in the Taima district of Jahra when they saw a vehicle driving in the wrong direction in an attempt to escape, but it ran into a blocked street," the report reads, quoting the source. "One of the cops walked towards the vehicle, while the other remained in the patrol vehicle.

Once near the suspects, the policeman asked them to stop, but one of them attacked him." This triggered a response from the officer, who pulled his pistol and fired a gunshot in the air. "But the suspect came close to the policeman instead and grabbed the gun, then a round discharged and hit him during the struggle," the source said. The man was taken to Jahra hospital where he was pronounced dead.



The source said the deceased is a Kuwaiti citizen in his 30s, adding that the second suspect, who had escaped at the time, turned himself in later on and was transferred to the concerned authorities to face drug-related charges. The source noted that both suspects, including the man who died, have a criminal record. "Police found suspected drugs and a sensitive scale in the suspects' vehicle," said the source who spoke on the condition of anonymity. Detectives will review the patrol's tapes, said the source, adding that the case will probably be classified as 'involuntary manslaughter' unless new findings emerge during investigations.

### Man drowns near Green Island

In other news, firemen recovered the body of a man who drowned while swimming near the Green Island yesterday, while another person was rescued safely. Kuwait Fire Force responded to an emergency call reporting that two people went missing while swimming near a yacht on the island's beach. When they arrived to the scene, firemen found out that people on a leisure boat had already rescued one of the two persons, before they found the body of the other person. A case was filed for investigations.

In the meantime, firemen battled a blaze reported yesterday in a Jahra building. Firefighters rushed to the scene in response to an emergency call reporting a fire on the second floor of the building. All residents were evacuated to safety before firemen managed to put out the flames, Kuwait Fire Force said. No injuries were reported as an investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire.



**KUWAIT:** This photo released by Kuwait Fire Force yesterday shows a Kuwait Fire Force boat near the Green Island beach where a person had drowned yesterday.



This photo released by Kuwait Fire Force yesterday shows fire engines and an ambulance outside a building in Jahra, where a fire was reported.

## UAE tumor society awards Kuwaiti oncologist

**ABU DHABI:** The Emirates Oncology Society has granted Kuwaiti consultant Dr Khaled Al-Saleh the Gulf Excellence Award in recognition of his relentless struggle to treat cancer patients and spur scientific research. The Kuwaiti oncologist was honored during the 2nd Emirates Oncology Society Annual Conference 2021, held in Dubai.

Speaking to the press about the award, Dr Saleh, who is Secretary-General of the Gulf Union for Fighting Cancer (GUFC), hailed this award as honoring to all those doctors who have contributed to scientific research and awareness campaigns to treat cancer patients in the Gulf region. He highly lauded the UAE and the Emirates Oncology Society for organizing this successful conference and supporting the great efforts of doctors and researchers in the region and the world to fight cancer.

The Kuwaiti doctor has been granted several Kuwaiti, Gulf, Arab and international awards in recognition of his great efforts to combat and



**ABU DHABI:** Kuwaiti consultant Dr Khaled Al-Saleh (second right) receives the Gulf Excellence Award during the 2nd Emirates Oncology Society Annual Conference 2021. —KUNA

treat cancer. The conference was held at the Intercontinental Hotel Dubai Festival City, in exclusive scientific collaboration with eminent faculty from MD Anderson Cancer Center and other International renowned oncology institutions. The conference aims to bring the latest advances in the management of various types of cancer, as well as the most efficient models of implementing these updates into clinical practice. —KUNA

## Kuwait sends relief aid to Sudan's victims

**KHARTOUM/ADEN:** Kuwait's Embassy in Sudan facilitated yesterday the delivery of relief aid to those affected by the floods in the capital Khartoum. The Kuwaiti charge d'affaires in Khartoum Mohammad Ghazi said that this campaign, funded by Kuwait's Al-Rahma (mercy) International Association, is destined for the victims of recent floods that engulfed many swaths of the Sudanese territories. "The relief material was sent according to instructions by His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to help the Sudanese brothers cope with the floods' catastrophe, and as part of continuing the humanitarian role of the late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah," he said. Meanwhile, director of the Al-Rahma International Association Abulsalam Younis said that the Kuwait Embassy facilitated this project, and it targets 1,000 families affected by the floods in different areas in Sudan through providing nutritional and materialistic aid.

In other news, the Kuwait-based International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) on Wednesday



**KHARTOUM:** The Kuwaiti charge d'affaires in Khartoum Mohammad Ghazi (center) inspects the relief aid convoys before they were sent to people affected by the floods. —KUNA

laid the foundation for a new village for refugees and a water project both in the Yemeni war-ravaged Al-Hodaydah Governorate. In statements to the press on the sidelines of the ceremony held on this occasion, Al-Hodaydah Governor Al-Hassan Taher pointed out that the IICO village will have 50 housing units, a medical center, a school and a water well for the internally displaced people. He also noted that the IICO launched a project to dig a water well, build a water pumping station and extend 20,630 meters-long water pipes to Hays district in Al-Hodaydah. Taher expressed deep appreciation and gratitude to Kuwait for its humanitarian contributions to alleviate the suffering of Yemeni people. —KUNA

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## Local

# Kuwait's Amir, US President hail distinguished bilateral ties

## Biden grateful for helping people's safe transit from Afghanistan

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah discussed Kuwait's close and distinguished bilateral relations with the United States during a phone conversation with US President Joe Biden on Wednesday. The US president commended these historic ties, and the two countries' keenness to boost them, underlining his country's unwavering support for the security and stability of Kuwait, according to a statement by the Amiri Diwan. He also expressed his country's gratitude for Kuwait's "humanitarian role" in facilitating the safe transit of people from Afghanistan, and thus the success of US evacuation plans. Biden also wished His Highness the Amir good health, and Kuwait growth and prosperity under His Highness



### Amir congratulates US on largest-ever evacuation

the Amir's wise leadership. Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir was grateful for the warm sentiments expressed by the president, emphasizing the strength of the bond between the two nations, "whom throughout history have proven to be friends and allies." He also congratulated the president on the success on what he described as the "largest-ever evacuation," and said he appreciates the continued communication between both countries, which reflects their close relationship.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable of congratulation to Estonia's new president Alar Karis, wishing him best of luck and good health, in addition to closer relations between both friendly coun-

tries. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



US President Joe Biden

Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent the newly elected president a similar cables. Friday, September 3, 2021

## Kuwait's oil minister hails 'prudent' OPEC+ policies

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's oil minister praised the "prudent" policies of OPEC and its allies as they sought to rein in crude output in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, saying such efforts helped balance the global oil market. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies have agreed, amid virtual talks on Wednesday, to release 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) to the market in October, with Kuwait contributing a share of 27,000 bpd, Dr Mohammad Al-Fares said in a statement on Wednesday. The minister applauded his country's efforts to get leading global oil producers on the same page, which triggered "landmark" decisions that served the best interests of oil producers and consumers alike, he added. Stability and balance in the oil market will pave the way to a global economic rebound that will bring oil demand to pre-pandemic levels, the minister underlined.

OPEC+ countries had decided on Wednesday to maintain their plans for a gradual increase in oil production. The oil ministers' agreement to increase collective production by 400,000 barrels per day keeps with earlier commitments made in April 2020 and July 2021. The "high conformity" of member nations to these commitments was commended, with the attendees agreeing to reconvene next month. "Market fundamentals have strengthened and OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) stocks continue to fall as the recovery accelerates" amid the COVID-19 pandemic, read a statement by the oil cartel. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Oil Minister Dr Mohammad Al-Fares attends a virtual meeting for OPEC+ member states on Wednesday. — KUNA

—KUNA

## Kuwait FM affirms support for Bhutan

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah affirmed yesterday Kuwait's support for boosting developmental projects in Bhutan through Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED). This came in his speech as he headed Kuwait's delegation to a virtual meeting with Bhutan's government and its partners. The Kuwaiti official, addressing his Bhutanese counterpart Dr Tandi Dorji, praised Bhutan's efforts in providing vaccines for 90 percent of the population, which makes it the 4th highest country in vaccination rates. He also expressed his sincere condolences to the victims of the coronavirus, and wished those infected by the



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah addresses a virtual meeting with Bhutan and its development partners. — KUNA

virus a speedy recovery. Sheikh Dr Ahmad thanked Bhutan for the invitation for the meeting and stressed on the historical relations between the two countries. — KUNA

## Kuwait joins IDB meeting in Tashkent

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti Ministry of Finance partook in the 46th annual ministerial meeting of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Board of Governors, held in Tashkent between September 2-4. The finance ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states, including Kuwaiti Finance Minister and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Khalifa Hamada, participated in the 46th gathering, the Ministry of Finance said in a press release. The gathering, which also attracts representatives from national, regional and international finance organizations, focused on major global economic issues, according to the release. During the meeting, the State of Kuwait was elected member of the Board of Directors of the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector, representing the



Finance Minister Khalifa Hamada

Arab group between 2021 and 2024, it added.

This year's annual meeting is taking place against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, causing the global economic downturn. With this in mind, the event will mainly discuss measures to ensure the availability of vaccines against coronavirus, ways to solve the current economic problems caused by the pandemic and mechanisms to facilitate a comprehensive economic recovery both in member countries and at the global level. A number of issues will be addressed during thematic workshops and events held in the framework of the annual meeting. Topics such as enhancing resilience in the face of COVID-19, restoring sustainable global value chains as a path to a global economic revival, inclusive youth development, job creation and a number of other interesting topics will be covered. — KUNA



## Local

# Kuwait health situation stable, but preventive measures 'still needed'

## Premier touts digital transformation; Sahel app launches in one week

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah affirmed yesterday that the health situation in the country is "stable," calling for caution, adhering to health instructions, and vaccinations to move to "a safe situation." This came during a presentation by His Highness the Prime Minister at Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center, in the presence of senior state officials, and under the title 'Kuwait Post-Pandemic.' His Highness the Prime Minister recalled remarks of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, at the beginning of the pandemic, calling for everyone to be responsible, "which made our mission sacred," he said.

His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said that the launch of the electronic application Sahel (Easy), within a week, will mark the first step in the government's digital transformation, stressing that returning to paper work and the failure of the application to achieve its goals "are not acceptable." Moreover, His Highness the Prime Minister stressed that he directed the Civil Service Commission to set new regulations of supervisory jobs. He also asked the Civil Service Commission to submit a study regarding bonuses, and linking it to performance and achievement, not just attendance.

### Global indicators

His Highness the Prime Minister also affirmed that "Kuwait's position must be improved in global indicators and in all sectors. Our country spends generously on all sectors, but the indicators are not reflected on the ground." He also affirmed that executives are required to present a time plan for their work and the sectors affiliated, and to cooperate with the regulatory authorities, address vio-

lations, and adhere to the government's procedures for digital transformation.

Furthermore, His Highness the Prime Minister said, "We are open to meet our brothers, the National Assembly members, to cooperate and work with them to serve Kuwait." He also affirmed that the government will not hesitate to hold any official accountable and bring him to court whenever it is proven that this official was involved in violating the law and undermining public fund. He also stressed the executives must preserve Kuwait's foreign relations, reputation, balanced policy and its vision of peaceful solutions to conflicts.

### New paths

The government of Kuwait is seeking new paths and ways to implement Kuwait's 2035 Vision, His Highness the Prime Minister said, affirming that the government took steps to speed up development and economic progress in cooperation with private sector entities.

He called to overcome obstacles preventing more collaboration with the private sector, indicating that this would contribute to the betterment of Kuwait's economy. He pointed out that a ministerial committee was established to follow up on execution of the development plans, stressing that there would be no compromise in this regard. The committee will report back to the Cabinet in case of violations or hindrance in executing such plans.

### 15,000 jobs

Kuwait's Cabinet had on Wednesday discussed progress related to ongoing state projects, including the country's massive new airport terminal. This came after ministers, led by His Highness the Prime

Minister, toured the construction site of Kuwait International Airport's new Terminal 2 building.

The new terminal will provide 15,000 job opportunities to young Kuwaiti nationals, Minister of Public Works Rana Al-Fares revealed. The construction of the first phase out of three for Terminal 2 reached 54 percent in August, said Fares, who doubles as Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology Affairs. The minister described T2 as a facility that will provide a major boost to aviation services in the country, in line with international standards.

The massive project is being built in accordance with 'green building standards', a certification proving its conformity to environmentally-friendly practices, leadership in recycling and classification as one of the most sustainable buildings in the world, she added. "We plan to take the project to a grade A ranking in terms of services by the International Air Transport Association (IATA)," said the minister. Upon completion, the terminal will contain 5,000 car parks, with a capacity to receive 25 million passengers annually. It will also feature 30 fixed bridges to accommodate 51 aircraft simultaneously, in addition to a modern hotel in the transit area, she pointed out.

### Development stages

The ministers discussed during Wednesday's meeting the development stages up until June 2021, alongside challenges and obstacles it faces. The efforts of ministries and the civil aviation authority on the matter were commended for the significant progress witnessed in regards to the project. As part of plans to prioritize recreational projects given their significance towards overall



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah speaks during a presentation at Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center yesterday. —KUNA

development plans, the Cabinet discussed a public services committee suggestion to provide such facilities across the country's six governorates. It tasked Kuwait's Public Authority for Youth to follow up on the progress of these planned endeavors, with the aim of building entertainment centers that cater to family needs. On other development projects in the works, the Cabinet tasked the country's agriculture and fisheries body, in conjunction with other state institutions, to invest in a scheme aiming to improve the country's community gardens, which are mostly located in residential areas. The Cabinet also discussed laws dealing with a pair of mega city projects, particularly the northern 'Silk City' that aims to diversify the national economy and an economic zone planned for the same region as well. — KUNA

## Kuwait, EU officials coordinate on COVID vaccine certificates

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah and EU Ambassador to Kuwait Cristian Tudor discussed yesterday precautionary measures for Kuwaitis eager to travel to the European Union's member states. A statement by the Ministry of Health said that the two officials exchanged data on COVID-19 vaccine certificates via approved digital platforms. The two sides agreed on bolstering efforts to implement COVID-19 countermeasures according to international standards in this regard, added the statement. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah (right) meets EU Ambassador to Kuwait Cristian Tudor. —KUNA

## Kuwait's e-payment transactions jump by 122 percent

**KUWAIT:** The coronavirus pandemic triggered e-payment in State of Kuwait, primarily during the lockdown, to skyrocket by 122 percent in July 2020 year-on-year with more than 11 million transactions compared to five million in same month 2019. "The first six months since the outbreak of the pandemic witnessed a dramatic change, and what happened during the first half of 2020 is similar to the change of behavior of individuals and institutions in normal conditions in half a century," The Shared Electronic Banking Company, KNET, said in a study about e-payment during the pandemic.

The study, jointly conducted with KPMG Audit and Assurance and made available to the press, said economic activities ceased from March until partial reopening in June 2020, but total transactions surged in July 2020 to KD 616 million (around \$2 billion), compared with the same month in 2019. It said categories that witnessed high demands in the January-August 2020 period were

grocery and consumption materials, an increase by 6.6-fold. They were followed by health care by 3.6 fold. The study showed that volume of remittance between March and May 2020 rose by 2.7-fold, finance, insurance and real estate by 2.3-fold, retail trade by 1.9 fold. Travel and transportation however declined by 0.7 fold.

The e-payment growth was not restricted to Kuwait. In a report released on the end of June, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) said digital economy in general and e-trade in specific played an important role in global sustainable economic development. It said countries that developed their digital economies would have more competitive edge in terms of movement of goods and services. UNCTAD noted that online exchange of goods and services was taking place through different platforms and service providers in all continents.

It said the coronavirus pandemic forced a shrink of global economy but triggered e-trade coupled with many institutions adopting online employment. The number of Internet users was 29.3 percent of the world's population in 2010 and skyrocketed to 53.6 percent in 2019. UNCTAD said pre-pandemic projections showed that retail would grow by 4.4 percent in 2020 or \$26.4 trillion, of them \$4.1 trillion for e-trade. However, the pandemic forced contraction of global retail by 10 percent and e-trade grew by 16 percent. — KUNA

# Friday|Times International

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Zelensky seeking US' help against Russia

Eight dead in New York City as Ida brings flash flooding

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ADEN: Photo shows the damage at the Al-Anad airbase, some 60 kilometers north of Yemen's second city Aden, after it was reportedly targeted by Houthi rebels. —AFP

## 65 dead as Yemen's fighting rages

### Houthi rebels renew an offensive on Marib

**DUBAI:** Sixty-five combatants have been killed in fighting after Yemen's Houthi rebels renewed an offensive on Marib, the last government stronghold in the country's oil-rich north, a military official said yesterday. The Iran-backed rebels attacked pro-government positions south of the strategic city, making progress despite losing dozens of fighters in coalition air strikes. It was the Houthis' first major offensive on Marib, the key to controlling the region, since June, when 111 fighters on both sides died in three days of clashes.

"Twenty-two pro-government (forces) were killed and 50 others were wounded, while 43 Houthi rebels were also killed in the last 48 hours," a government military official told AFP. The figures were confirmed by other military and medical sources. The resurgence in fighting comes after strikes on Yemen's largest airbase, in the country's south, killed at least 30 pro-government fighters on Sunday in the deadliest incident since December. It also comes just days before the United Nations' new special envoy for Yemen, Swedish diplomat Hans Grundberg, takes up his duties.

Yemen's internationally recognized government-backed by a Saudi-led military coalition—and the Houthis have been locked in war since 2014, when the insurgents seized the capital Sanaa. In February, the Houthis escalated their efforts to take Marib in fighting that has killed hundreds on both sides. Control of the oil-rich north would strengthen the Houthis' bargaining position in peace talks. While the UN and Washington are pushing for an end to the war, the Houthis have demanded the re-opening of Sanaa airport, closed under a Saudi blockade since 2016, before any ceasefire or negotiations.

#### Alleged war crimes

As well as the bloody offensive in Marib, the Houthis have also stepped up drone and missile strikes on Saudi targets, including its oil facilities. Eight people were wounded on Tuesday in the latest such drone attack that also damaged a civilian plane and the entrance to Abha airport in southwest Saudi Arabia. In June, then UN envoy for Yemen Martin Grif-

fiths told the Security Council that his efforts over the past three years to end the war had been "in vain".

The fighting has killed tens of thousands and left some 80 percent of Yemenis dependent on aid, in what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The war has also displaced millions of people and left many on the brink of famine. On Monday, lawyers representing victims of the conflict made a submission to the International Criminal Court for an investigation into alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity by pro-government forces.

The allegations centre on a 2016 coalition air strike that killed 140 people at a funeral in Sanaa, and a 2018 air strike on a school bus in northern Yemen that killed at least 40 children. The coalition has admitted that "mistakes" were made, and said it would put on trial military personnel suspected of being behind strikes on civilians, including the school bus strike. The ICC, in The Hague, has no obligation to consider complaints filed to the prosecutor by individuals or groups. —AFP

## International

# Most Afghan allies left behind as US describes haunting choices

## Many who worked for US fear retribution

**WASHINGTON:** Most Afghan allies seeking to flee with the US withdrawal were unable to do so, an official acknowledged Wednesday, as the United States began to wrestle with painful choices in the chaotic final days of the war. President Joe Biden's administration says the victorious Taliban have promised to keep letting Afghans leave—but many who worked for the United States over its 20-year mission fear retribution.

"These have been incredibly emotional and trying days, and indeed years," said General Mark Milley, the top US military officer. "We are all conflicted with feelings of pain and anger, sorrow and sadness, combined with pride and resilience," he said. A senior State Department official vowed to keep working to help everyone leave. "Everybody who lived it is haunted by the choices we had to make and by the people we were not able to help depart," he said on customary condition of anonymity.

The last American soldier left Afghanistan just before a deadline set by President Joe Biden of August 31, closing more than two decades of war that began with the US-led invasion in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks and ended with the Taliban back in power. The United States in the final days of the war airlifted more than 123,000 people out of Kabul's airport, including US citizens and interpreters and others who supported the US mission and are eligible for a special visa to immigrate.

Biden has hailed the airlift as unprecedented, but the State Department official acknowledged that most Afghan visa applicants and their families did not make it. "I would say it's the majority of them," the official said. He declined to give exact numbers. The White House said in early Au-

gust that some 20,000 Afghans were seeking to emigrate through the visa program, meaning more than 100,000 people including families.

### Children separated

Despite multiple reports of the Taliban beating and harassing Afghans trying to reach Hamid Karzai International Airport, which was seized by US forces, the official said that they cooperated, generally letting people through. But he said the crowd at the gates became unruly, with the credentials issued by US forces quickly proliferating.

"It's not a criticism of the people who were desperate to leave," the official said, adding that the crowds were "on the verge of slipping to a mob at any given moment." Security fears gave edge to the chaotic effort. On August 26, a suicide bombing claimed by the Islamic State extremist group killed more than 100 Afghans and 13 US soldiers. One veteran State Department official who was sent to the airport said, more than 30 children, including babies, were separated from their parents each day in the "horrendous" effort to reach the facility.

She recalled a boy of 13 or 14 years old who came with blood on his clothes. "I asked him what happened, how he got separated from his family, and he said that somebody was killed right in front of him and his whole family dispersed," she said. Norway initially set up a center to reunite children with their parents and US troops took turns playing with traumatized youngsters, she said. Not all children were reunited, she said. Remaining youngsters were flown to Doha where UNICEF has taken charge of them.

Stanikzai—a hardliner in the first Taliban administration—told BBC Pashto in an interview that while women could continue working, there "may not" be a place for them in the cabinet of any future government or any other top post. In the western city of Herat, some 50 women took to the streets in a rare, defiant protest for the right to work and over the lack of women's participation in the new government.

"It is our right to have education, work and security," the protesters chanted in unison, said an AFP journalist who witnessed the protest. "We are not afraid, we are united," they added. Herat is a relatively cosmopolitan city on the ancient silk road near the Iranian border. It is one of the more prosperous in Afghanistan and girls have already returned to school there. One of the organizers of the protest, Basira Taheri, told AFP she wanted the Taliban to include women in the new cabinet.

"We want the Taliban to hold consultations with us," Taheri said. "We don't see any women in their gatherings and meetings." Among the 122,000 people who fled Afghanistan in a frenzied US-led airlift that ended on Monday was the first female Afghan journalist to interview a Taliban official live on television. Speaking to AFP in Qatar, the former anchor for the Tolo News media group said women in Afghanistan were "in a very bad situation". "I want to say to the international community—please do anything (you can) for Afghan women," Beheshta Arghand said.

Women's rights were not the only major concern in the lead-up to the Taliban's announcement of a new government. In Kabul, residents voiced worry over the country's long-running economic difficulties, now seriously compounded by the militant movement's takeover. "With the arrival of the Taliban, it's right to say that there is security, but business has gone down below zero," Karim Jan, an electronic goods shop owner said. —AFP



**KABUL:** Taliban fighters wave as they patrol in a convoy along a street in Kabul yesterday. —AFP

Among those reportedly left behind in Afghanistan is an interpreter who helped then-senator Biden escape a snowstorm in Afghanistan in 2008, according to *The Wall Street Journal*. Hundreds of staff members of family members also remain from Radio Azadi, the US-backed broadcaster in Dari and Pashto that continues to operate despite past attacks. Jamie Fly, president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty which oversees the service, said the United States had a "moral duty" to help Afghan journalists. "The US government needs to step up and work with other governments to create safe passage for those who want to leave," he said. —AFP

## Afghan women hold rare protest; Taliban try to form new govt

**KABUL:** The Taliban said yesterday they were close to forming a new government, as dozens of women held a rare protest for the right to work under a new regime that faces enormous economic hurdles and deep public mistrust. The Islamist militants, who have pledged a softer brand of rule than during their brutal reign of 1996–2001, must now transform from insurgent group to governing power. The announcement of a cabinet, which two Taliban sources told AFP may take place on Friday following afternoon prayers, would come just days after the chaotic pullout of US forces from Afghanistan, ending America's longest war with an astounding military victory for the Islamist group.

In one of the most symbolic moments since the takeover of Kabul on August 15, the militants paraded Wednesday some of the military hardware they had captured during their offensive, even flying a Black Hawk helicopter over Kandahar, their movement's spiritual heartland. Now, all eyes are on whether the Taliban can deliver a cabinet capable of managing a war-wracked economy and honor the movement's pledges of a more "inclusive" government.

### 'We are not afraid'

Speculation is rife about the make-up of a new government, although a senior official said Wednesday that women were unlikely to be included. Senior leader Sher Mohammad Abbas

## South Africa 'unable' to take in Afghan refugees

**JOHANNESBURG:** South Africa said it has declined a request to host Afghans who have fled into Pakistan to escape the Taliban, as it is already accommodating "a substantial number" of refugees from other countries. The government said it had been approached "to consider receiving a number of Afghanistan refugees who have sought refuge in Pakistan."

"The request is that they be accommodated in South Africa en route to their final destinations," the foreign ministry said in a statement late Wednesday. "The South African Government is unfortunately not in a position to accommodate such a request." It said the country "is already home to a substantial number of refugees and is seized with addressing their needs. "Most of them already benefit from the Social Assistance and free medical health programs offered by our country."

The most industrialized nation on the continent, South Africa is a major destination for economic migrants from neighboring countries and beyond. The country also boasts one of the world's most progressive refugee policies, which helped attract more than a million asylum-seekers between 2007 and 2015. But the processing of their paperwork was backlogged even before the pandemic and most find themselves stuck in limbo after applications are rejected, according to rights groups. The Taliban celebrated Tuesday after the last US troops left the country, ending 20 years of war. —Agencies

## International

# Eight dead in New York City as Ida brings flash flooding

## Storm Ida wreaks havoc, forces flight cancellations

**NEW YORK:** The remnants of Hurricane Ida triggered spectacular flash flooding and a rare state of emergency in New York City overnight into yesterday, killing at least eight people in what was called a historic weather event. Streets turned into rivers while water cascaded down subway platforms, flooding tracks, as the Metropolitan Transportation Authority effectively shut down services.

"I'm 50 years old and I've never seen that much rain ever," said Metodija Mihajlov whose basement of his Manhattan restaurant was flooded with three inches of water. "It was like living in the jungle, like tropical rain. Unbelievable. Everything is so strange this year," he told AFP. Hundreds of flights were cancelled at LaGuardia and JFK airports, as well as at Newark, where video showed a terminal inundated by rainwater.

Flooding closed major roads across multiple boroughs including Manhattan, The Bronx and Queens. Ida slammed into the southern state of Louisiana over the weekend, bringing severe flooding and tornadoes as it blazed a trail of destruction north. New York state governor Kathy Hochul declared an emergency as the remnants of the storm caused massive flooding in the country's financial and cultural capital, leaving the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens badly hit.

The New York City victims ranged from the

ages of 2 to 86, police said. They were found at various homes in Queens and Brooklyn. New Yorkers woke to beautiful blue skies yesterday as the city slowly edged back to life. Residents moved fallen tree branches from roads as subway services resumed. But around 98,000 homes in Pennsylvania, 60,000 in New Jersey and 40,000 in New York were without power, according to the website poweroutage.us.

State governor Phil Murphy also declared a state of emergency in neighboring New Jersey, where CNN reported at least one person was killed in the city of Passaic, bringing the confirmed death toll from Ida to 16. "We're enduring an historic weather event tonight with record-breaking rain across the city, brutal flooding and dangerous conditions on our roads," New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said in a tweet as he declared a state of emergency in the city. The city earlier issued a rare flash flood emergency warning urging residents to move to higher ground.

As footage showed cars submerged on streets across the city, authorities urged residents not to drive on flooded roads. "You do not know how deep the water is and it is too dangerous," the New York branch of the National Weather Service (NWS) said in a tweet. The US Open was halted as howling wind and rain blew under the corners of the Louis Armstrong Stadium roof. The NWS recorded 3.15 inches of rain in Central



**NEW JERSEY:** A pick-up truck drives through a flooded River Drive as water gushes out of a man hole yesterday in Passaic City. —AFP

Park in just an hour—beating a record set just last month during Storm Henri.

It is rare for such storms to strike America's northeastern seaboard and comes as the surface layer of oceans warms due to climate change. The warming is causing cyclones to become more powerful and carry more water, posing an increasing threat to the world's coastal commu-

nities, scientists say. "Significant and life-threatening flash flooding is likely from the Mid-Atlantic into southern New England," the NWS said in a bulletin, adding that three to eight inches of rain could drench the region through yesterday. In Annapolis, 30 miles from the US capital, a tornado ripped up trees and toppled electricity poles. —AFP

## Far-right veteran Jean-Marie Le Pen in hate speech trial

**PARIS:** The 93-year-old founder of France's main far-right party, Jean-Marie Le Pen, went on trial once again on Wednesday over allegations of inciting racial hatred, this time with comments targeting a Jewish pop singer. He already has a string of hate speech convictions that eventually became too much for his daughter Marine Le Pen, who expelled him from the National Front's leadership in 2015 in a bid to achieve mainstream respectability.

Le Pen senior, however, has continued to relish the outrage prompted by his statements regarding Jews, Muslims, black people and immigrants. The latest trial stems from a 2014 video on the party's website in which Le Pen railed against artists who denounced his extremist stances, including Madonna and French tennis star-turned-singer Yannick Noah. Asked about the French singer and actor Patrick Bruel, Le Pen referred to his Jewish origins with a pun evoking the Holocaust—"I'm not surprised. Listen, next time we'll do a whole oven batch!"

The taunt sparked a torrent of indignation including from leaders of his own party, with Marine Le Pen criticizing what she called a "political error". Jean-Marie Le Pen claimed the comments carried no anti-Semitic connotations "except for my political enemies or imbeciles". —AFP

## At top Confederate Gen's home near Washington, enslaved voices elevated

**ARLINGTON:** Statues of Robert E. Lee have been toppled as the United States grapples with its racist past but on a hill overlooking the nation's capital, the top Confederate general's house has been totally revamped. As Washington embarked on its usual humid, sweaty summer, "Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial," as the home is officially called, began welcoming visitors once again in early June after three years and more than \$12 million in renovations.

The house's most impactful changes, however, were not just matters of brick and mortar: The home reopened with an aim of providing a more inclusive historical interpretation, its caretakers say. Lee is a highly controversial figure: As the best-known Confederate general during the Civil War from 1861 to 1865, he helped lead the secessionist Southern states against the Union, in particular to preserve slavery. Walking across the estate in late August, Aaron LaRocca, a ranger with the National Park Service, said that telling "a more holistic and inclusive story," by elevating the voices of those enslaved here, was a major point.

Unlike stone-cold statues, the mansion and its grounds—which are part of the National Park Service and located inside Arlington National Cemetery—reflect the real lives of actual people. Telling the story of the more than 100 enslaved residents meant not only better incorporating their stories inside the mansion, but also creating new exhibits that fill two large buildings that were slave quarters. It also meant featuring particular individuals' histories.

### Descendants and ancestors

Steve Hammond is a descendant of one of the enslaved families and has been volunteering at the house for approximately eight years, helping to tell the story of the residents "who many people are not familiar with." Understanding Arlington House not only means tangling with the complicated history of Lee, but dipping a toe in the entire American saga.

At the base of the hill where the house sits is the late president John F. Kennedy's grave. The iconic Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is also nearby, as are hundreds of thousands of buried veterans. The house itself was first built by George Washington's adopted grandson, George Washington Parke Custis, as an homage to the former president. His daughter, Mary Anna Custis, married Lee. However, it is through Parke Custis' enslaved daughter, Maria Carter, whom he fathered with an enslaved woman, that Hammond is connected to Arlington House. He is a descendant of her husband's family.

Today, the descendants of those who lived at the house—both the enslaved and the Lees—meet routinely. For many involved in expanding the site's narrative, a major sticking point remains Arlington House's official status as "The Robert E. Lee Memorial." "The fact that we recognize it as a memorial to Robert E. Lee seems really out of date, especially in terms of where we are as a country today," said Hammond, 65, who is also a trustee for the Arlington House Foundation.

US congressman Don Beyer, whose district includes Arlington House, says he plans to reintroduce legislation nixing the house's Lee memorial status this session after a previous failed attempt, while philanthropist David Rubenstein, who funded the renovations, has urged the redesignation. During the Civil War, the Union buried soldiers on Lee's property no doubt to deter his return, giving rise to Arlington National Cemetery, where more than 400,000 veterans and their dependents are buried today. Congress officially recognized the site as a Lee memorial in 1955, citing his efforts after the war to reunify the country and authorized its current name in 1972. "Memorials are a problem because a memorial is never about history, a memorial is about memory," said Denise Meringolo, a professor of history at University of Maryland, Baltimore County. —AFP

## International

# US wasted 15.1 million doses of COVID vaccines

## North Korea rejects Chinese vaccines

**WASHINGTON:** The United States has thrown away at least 15.1 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines since March 1, according to a report by NBC News. The figure is far higher than previously thought and probably still an undercount, because it is based on self-reported data from pharmacies, states and other providers, NBC said, quoting a response it received to a request for public data. At least seven states are missing from the figures, as well as major federal agencies.

Reasons for dose wastage vary and include cracked vials, errors in diluting vaccines, freezer malfunctions and more doses in a vial than people who want them, with a limited window of a few hours to use a vial once it is punctured. The news comes as less-developed countries struggle to vaccinate their populations due to supply constraints, with the continent of Africa just 2.8 percent fully vaccinated, according to public data collected by Our World in Data.

The United States, on the other hand, has administered some 440 million doses and vaccinated 52 percent of its population—a figure that could have been much higher but for lingering vaccine hesitancy among a large segment of people. More than a million Americans have received a third dose on the basis of weakened immunity, and the country plans to make third shots available to everyone eight months after their second, beginning later this month.

“It’s an equity issue,” Tim Doran, professor of health policy at the University of York told NBC. “You’ve got a very wealthy

country with good access to vaccines essentially throwing vaccine away.” The United States has pledged around 600 million doses to middle- and lower-income countries, and had donated 110 million as of early August.

In another development, North Korea has rejected around three million doses of a Chinese COVID-19 vaccine, suggesting they should be given to countries in greater need, Unicef said yesterday. The impoverished North was the first country to impose a strict lockdown when it sealed its border in January last year to stop the virus spreading from neighboring China, where it first emerged before sweeping the world. Pyongyang insists it has yet to see any cases of the virus—a claim that analysts doubt—but it has paid a huge economic price for the blockade, with the regime admitting in June it was tackling a “food crisis”.

Regardless, the isolated country told UNICEF—which distributes vaccines under the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (Covax) program for low-income countries—that the Chinese-made vaccines could be given to others, the UN agency said. North Korea’s public health ministry “has communicated that the 2.97 million Sinovac doses being offered to DPR Korea by Covax may be relocated to severely affected countries in view of the limited global supply of COVID-19 vaccines and recurrent surge in some countries”, a UNICEF spokesperson told AFP.

Pyongyang would “continue to communicate” with COVAX “to receive COVID-19 vaccines in the coming months”, they added. In July, a South Korean think tank affiliated with Seoul’s spy

any other country and almost three times the ratio in the United States, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Since the epidemic began, Havana has sent some 4,000 health professionals abroad to help tackle coronavirus outbreaks in some 40 other countries.

But at home, residents have taken to social media in a desperate search for medicines for loved ones struck down by COVID-19, and there have been reports of patients being intubated without sedation. Doctor Pedro Julio Miranda told AFP how desperation has inspired innovative use of limited resources at his hospital in the central province of Villa Clara.

On a day in July, he had four critical COVID-19 patients with trouble breathing, and only three oxygen cylinders. “Imagine having to play God, deciding who lives and who dies. I thought if I didn’t do something one of the four would definitely die,” he recounted. He looked around for a tube split on one side with which to connect two patients to a single tank, and then inspiration struck. “I had the solution all along but I was unable to see it because it was around my neck,” the doctor said—it was his stethoscope tube.

Last month, President Miguel Diaz-Canel said the magnitude of the outbreak had “surpassed the capacities of the health system.” Health Minister Jose Angel Portal said the average of daily cases in the first three weeks of August was 39.2 percent higher than at the end of July.

For weeks now, “Cuba has had a positivity rate of about 20 percent” among people tested, four times the level considered alarming by the WHO, said Perez-Riverol. But there may be cause for optimism. In Havana, where the entire adult population has been fully inoculated, there have been no reports of overstretched hospitals or an increase in funerals, suggesting the Cuban vaccines are working well, said Perez-Riverol. Due to the American sanctions, Cuba has a long tradition of making its own vaccines—some 80 percent of those used today. —AFP



**HARTFORD:** In this file photo, needles preloaded with the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines sit in baskets awaiting patients at the vaccine clinic at Hartford Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut. —AFP

agency said Pyongyang had also rejected shipments of AstraZeneca’s vaccine offered by the Covax scheme, apparently over concerns about side effects. The Institute for National Security Strategy added at the time that the North was not equipped with sufficient cold chain storage for the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, while being sceptical about the effectiveness of Chinese vaccines.—Agencies

## Cuba’s vaunted health system straining under COVID-19 cases

**HAVANA:** Cuba’s vaunted public health system, which boasts more doctors per capita than any other country, has been pushed to the brink in recent months by the arrival of the coronavirus Delta variant. In a country long left relatively unscathed by the global pandemic, doctors are now battling to get their hands on oxygen and drugs, and patients can wait up to 24 hours for a hospital bed.

Despite having rolled out its own, home-grown COVID-19 vaccines—Latin America’s first—Cuba has seen infections skyrocket since July, especially in remote parts of the country, and deaths have soared too. Of the 5,300 coronavirus deaths recorded on the communist island of 11.2 million inhabitants since the outbreak started, nearly half were in the last month alone, as were almost a third of all reported cases.

The pattern is symptomatic of an expansive and well-trained public health system being let down by a lack of investment in patient care, said Amilcar Perez-Riverol, a Cuban virologist at the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil’s FAPESP Research Foundation. Under the yoke of nearly six decades of US sanctions, Cuba’s hospital infrastructure has been degenerating, and it has a constant shortage of medicines, diagnostics tools and medical equipment. As a result, “when an explosion of this magnitude occurs, if the first barrier of containment is breached, the situation worsens very quickly,” Perez-Riverol told AFP.

Four patients, three cylinders

Cuba counts 84 doctors per 10,000 inhabitants—more than

## Volunteer army rebuilds flood-stricken German towns

**DERNAU:** Instead of the shouts of noisy children, the halls of the primary school in the German town of Dernau are filled with the deafening sound of a dozen drills. The workers on site are an army of unpaid volunteers who have taken on the colossal task of rebuilding towns that were devastated by deadly floods in western Germany seven weeks ago that washed away homes, offices and infrastructure.

Some are locals, or helpers at public organizations like the Red Cross or the fire brigade, but many others have travelled in from across the country, helping to clear up debris by day and sleeping in makeshift camps by night. Although the government has pledged 30 billion euros (\$35 billion) to fund the reconstruction work, residents say most of the help they receive comes from private people like the volunteers in Dernau.

With less than a month to go before general elections, politicians are “having a mud fight, but the real mud fight is here—and they’re not,” says one volunteer, Christine Jahn. Before the floods, Dernau was a picturesque town, framed by steep valley slopes covered in vineyards. Today, entire streets in the worst-hit areas are no longer inhabitable. The school can no longer be used either: its pupils are now taking their classes elsewhere. Inside the school, volunteers are working to strip flood-damaged walls, chipping away at a mural painted by the schoolchildren depicting the globe. —AFP

## International

# US Supreme Court refuses to block Texas law banning most abortions

## 'Texas Heartbeat Act' makes no exceptions for rape or incest

WASHINGTON: The United States' top court formally refused Wednesday to block a Texas law banning almost all abortions, less than a day after the nation's most restrictive reproductive rights legislation took effect in the southern state. The law, known as the "Texas Heartbeat Act," bans abortion once a fetal heartbeat can be detected, which usually takes place at six weeks—before many women even know they are pregnant. It makes no exceptions for rape or incest. The only exemption is if there is a danger to the woman's health.

While similar laws have passed in a dozen Republican-led conservative states, all had been stymied in the courts. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Planned Parenthood, the Center for Reproductive Rights and other groups filed an emergency request with the Supreme Court on Monday asking it to stop the Texas law from taking effect. But the court late Wednesday formally refused to block the legislation. The court, which was sharply divided with four of its nine justices opposing the decision, did not rule on the constitutionality of the law, but cited "complex and novel procedural issues."

Liberal Justice Sonia Sotomayor called the court's order "stunning," saying her colleagues had "opted to bury their head in the sand" over a "flagrantly unconstitutional law engineered to prohibit women from exercising their constitutional rights." President Joe Biden vowed to de-

fend abortion rights after the law took effect. "This extreme Texas law blatantly violates the constitutional right established under *Roe v Wade* and upheld as precedent for nearly half a century," Biden said in a reference to the landmark 1973 Supreme Court case that legally enshrined a woman's right to an abortion.

### 'Scared, confused, angry'

Vanessa Rodriguez, senior manager for the contact center of Planned Parenthood of Greater Texas, said patients were "scared, confused, angry." "Texas politicians are taking away their right to make the decision" about terminating a pregnancy, Rodriguez said.

Amy Hagstrom Miller, chief executive of Whole Woman's Health, said a clinic in Fort Worth, Texas, had performed abortions until 11:56 pm on Tuesday. "Our waiting room was filled with patients," she said. "I woke up feeling deep sadness. I'm numb." The ACLU said the impact of the bill will be "immediate and devastating." "Access to almost all abortion has just been cut off for millions of people," the powerful civil rights association said. According to the ACLU, "approximately 85 to 90 percent" of the women who obtain an abortion in Texas are at least six weeks into pregnancy.

Anti-abortion activists, however, were jubilant: "This is an historic moment in the fight to protect women and children from abortion," said



NEW YORK: People gather for a reproductive rights rally at Brooklyn Borough Hall on September 01, 2021 in downtown Brooklyn in New York City. NOW-NYC and Planned Parenthood of Greater New York Action Fund organized a rally for reproductive rights after a Texas law that has been dubbed the "Heartbeat Bill" went into effect. —AFP

Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the anti-abortion nonprofit Susan B Anthony List. The other states that have sought to enact restrictions on abortion in the early stages of pregnancy have been barred from doing so by rulings that cited protections granted in *Roe v Wade*. That decision guaranteed the right to an abor-

tion in the US so long as the fetus is not viable outside the womb, which is usually the case until the 22nd to 24th week of pregnancy. Texas' law is different from those of other states because it allows the public—rather than state officials such as prosecutors or health departments to bring private civil suits to enforce the ban. —AFP

## Twitch video gamers go offline to protest 'hate raids'

SAN FRANCISCO: Users of Twitch, the world's biggest video game streaming site, staged a virtual walkout on Wednesday to voice outrage over barrages of racist, sexist and homophobic abuse on the Amazon-owned platform. The extent of the protest remained unclear, but a TwitchTracker website indicated that there were nearly 4,000 fewer channels streaming at Twitch than the daily average for the week. In recent months the phenomenon of "hate raids"—torrents of abuse—has been making life increasingly unpleasant for minority users of Twitch. The protest organized using the social media hashtag #ADay-OffTwitch was intended to get Twitch to do more to protect streamers from attacks.

"You won't see anything on Twitch from us today," tweeted esports organization @skelpeports. "The platform has a hate raid problem and it needs (to be) fixed." A Twitch spokesperson said the platform is working to improve tools for protecting accounts from abuses. "We support our streamers' rights to express themselves and bring attention to important issues across our service," the spokesperson said in response to an AFP inquiry. "No one should have to experience malicious and hateful attacks based on who they are or what they stand for," the spokesperson added. Twitch plans to meet with streamers it partners with as "ambassadors" next week regarding the situation. —AFP

## Facebook invests in new partnerships with the Argentine press

BUENOS AIRES: Social media giant Facebook will invest \$1.5 million in Argentine media to train journalists and promote online development, a first in Latin America. The agreement signed last week with almost 150 media outlets will allow 3,000 journalists to be trained, while also helping Facebook develop commercial agreements. It's part of the "Facebook Journalism Project" that involves collaboration with media all over the world.

The three-year Argentine investment aims "to support almost 150 media of every size and region in the country," Julieta Shamma, Facebook's head of strategic media partnerships in Latin America, told AFP. The agreement involves commercial commitments with around 30 Argentine outlets including Clarin, La Nacion, Pagina12 and Infobae to attract more links to the Facebook platform. "We're collaborating with media to try different forms of helping people find news on Facebook and connect with them," said Shamma. Facebook will offer training in themes such as product development, format experimentation and using statistics, amongst others. —AFP

## US aiming new lawsuit at Google over adverts

SAN FRANCISCO: US officials are preparing a new antitrust lawsuit against Google over its power in the online advertising market, Bloomberg reported Wednesday. Bloomberg cited an unnamed person familiar with the matter as saying the Justice Department could file the litigation by the end of the year. The internet titan reiterated its position on Wednesday, saying it competes fairly in an online market where people have many options.

"Our advertising technologies help websites and apps fund their content, enable small businesses to grow, and protect users from exploitative privacy practices and bad ad experiences," Google said in response to an AFP inquiry. "There is enormous competition in advertising tools, which has made online ads more relevant, reduced fees, and expanded options for publishers and advertisers."

Justice department officials last year sued Google over its dominance in online search and ads, and similar cases have been filed by groups of US states. US lawmakers advanced blockbuster legislation in June aimed at curbing the power of Big Tech firms with a sweeping reform of antitrust laws, setting the stage for a tough floor fight in Congress. House Judiciary Committee members approved six bills that take aim at the business practices of Google, Apple, Amazon and Facebook. One of the bills limits the ability of tech platforms to leverage their control across multiple business lines, potentially opening the door to breaking up some of the giant firms. The bills are headed to the full House of Representatives, where a contentious debate is expected amid fierce opposition from the tech sector and allies. —AFP

# Ukraine's Zelensky seeks Biden's support on NATO

## US remains firmly committed to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden assured Ukraine's leader Volodymyr Zelensky on Wednesday that the United States opposes "Russian aggression" but he showed no sign of moving on requests to open NATO to the eastern European country. "The United States remains firmly committed to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of Russian aggression and our support for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations," Biden told the Ukrainian president in the Oval Office. Zelensky, who spent Tuesday at the Pentagon pressing for military assistance to combat Russia and Russian-backed separatists, is only the second European leader to get a White House meeting so far under Biden.

The coronavirus pandemic and a hectic first seven months of the administration mean Biden has had few foreign visitors. Even Zelensky's meeting was delayed by two days due to the tense US withdrawal from Afghanistan, completed Monday. "President Zelensky and Ukraine have gotten as much, if not more, attention from this administration than any other European country," a senior Biden administration official told reporters, asking not to be identified.

The White House visit was undoubtedly a triumph for Zelensky, who has been trying to line one up since he took office in 2019. A former comedian virtually unknown in the West, he found himself caught in a US domestic political firestorm when then-president Donald Trump asked him to launch a spurious corruption probe into Biden's family ahead of the 2020 US presidential election. Accusations that Trump tried to block military aid to Ukraine to pressure Zelensky sparked an impeachment of the Republican.

### Plea to join NATO

The hard reality facing Zelensky, however, is that his most ambitious goals for the US-Ukrainian relationship face slow going. In the

Oval Office, he raised his government's top strategic dream-membership in the NATO military alliance. "I would like to discuss with President Biden his vision, his government's vision of Ukraine's chances to join NATO and the timeframe," he said.

But Biden has made clear he considers Ukraine far from ready to join—and the United States far from ready to step over what Russia sees as a bright red line. White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki insisted the White House continues "to support and we continue to call for ensuring that NATO's door remains open to aspirants." However, she then enumerated the daunting conditions for membership: rule of law reforms, defense sector modernization and a vibrant economy.

"There are steps that Ukraine needs to take. They're very familiar with these," she said. Zelensky has also been hugely disappointed by Biden's decision to waive US sanctions intended to block completion of Russian state energy behemoth Gazprom's Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline. But Zelensky later told reporters Biden had assured him the United States would impose sanctions on the pipeline if there were "violations" from Russia after the start of Nord Stream 2 operations that would create problems for Ukraine's energy security. The White House says it remains concerned by the geostrategic implications of the pipeline, which will funnel energy directly from Russia to Germany, bypassing the previous route through Ukraine. However, Biden argued the project had already been nearly finished by the time he got into office and could not be stopped. The limitations on the relationship were neatly illustrated in June, when Zelensky's bid to meet with Biden first before the US leader held a June summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva was rejected.

Focusing on more concrete, near-term deliverables, Zelensky



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden listens while Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky speaks to the press before a meeting in the Oval Office of the White House September 1, 2021, in Washington, DC. — AFP

met Tuesday with Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to request help in Ukraine's unequal struggle with Russia. Their talks came the day after the last US troops left Afghanistan, ending America's longest-ever war after the nearly 20-year-old US-backed Afghan government collapsed to the Taliban. Austin told Zelensky that the United States is committed to demanding that Russia "stop perpetuating the conflict" in eastern Ukraine and leave Crimea, the peninsula Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014. He highlighted a new \$60 million package for Ukraine that includes Javelin anti-armor systems. — AFP

## US judge approves deal dissolving Purdue Pharma in opioid saga

NEW YORK: Purdue Pharma, manufacturer of the OxyContin drug that has been blamed for the US opioid crisis, will be dissolved under a plan approved by a federal judge on Wednesday. However, the Sackler families that founded and profited from the company will largely be shielded from further penalties, though they will pay \$4.5 billion to settle the many lawsuits over the sale of opioids.

"Purdue will cease to exist, and substantially all of its operating assets will be transferred to a newly formed company with a public-minded mission of addressing the opioid crisis," the drug maker said in a statement. Facing an avalanche of litigation, Purdue in October pled guilty to three criminal charges over its aggressive drive to push sales of the highly addictive prescription painkiller, which stoked a nationwide addiction crisis and caused more than 500,000 overdose deaths in the United States over the past 20 years.

The company will be sold by 2024 to be replaced by a new entity managed by a trust, which will be required to "restrict the promotion of opioid products, and... ensure that all of its products, including all opioid products, are provided in a safe manner that reduces the risk of diversion." Purdue also will be required to create a repository for tens of millions of documents detailing its sales and marketing practices.

Purdue CEO Steve Miller hailed the agreement that

brought the saga to an end, and will provide billions of dollars to National Opioid Abatement Trust (NOAT) and other organizations to deal with the consequences of the addiction crisis. Instead of years of destructive litigation, the deal "ensures that billions of dollars will be devoted to helping people and communities who have been hurt by the opioid crisis," Miller said in a statement. But the order says the Sacklers "shall have no liability" for costs or fines "except to the extent resulting from fraud or willful misconduct."

New York Attorney General Letitia James hailed the agreement, highlighting the documents that will reveal the company's role "in igniting the opioid epidemic." "No deal is perfect, and no amount of money will ever make up for the hundreds of thousands who lost their lives, the millions who became addicted, or the countless families torn apart by this crisis, but these funds will be used to prevent future death and destruction as a result of the opioid epidemic," James said in a statement.

However, Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson announced he will appeal the plan, calling it "flawed" and "inadequate." "This order lets the Sacklers off the hook by granting them permanent immunity from lawsuits in exchange for a fraction of the profits they made from the opioid epidemic—and sends a message that billionaires operate by a different set of rules than everybody else," Ferguson said.

The Sacklers, like many American billionaires, have made donations to prestigious institutions such as the Met Museum in New York. Many of the institutions now ban their donations. The family's fortune diminished amid the crisis, but was still estimated at around \$10.8 billion late last year, according to Forbes, which said much of that wealth came from Purdue. — AFP

## Crisis-hit Bulgaria to hold presidential vote November 14

SOFIA: Bulgaria's presidential elections will take place on November 14, parliament decided yesterday, as the Balkan country navigates a protracted political crisis that has left it without a government for months. The EU member state's president has a largely ceremonial role as head of state and chief commander of the armed forces, but outgoing Socialists-backed President Rumen Radev has seen his profile increase during the crisis.

His popularity shot up after he backed massive anti-corruption rallies last summer against conservative prime minister Boyko Borisov, who headed the country virtually uninterrupted for close to a decade. A caretaker administration appointed by Radev in May to lead the country until a new government is formed has also proven efficient, further boosting his popularity ratings. Bulgaria has voted in legislative polls twice so far this year, but both elections have returned fragmented parliaments so that no party has been able to form a government to succeed that of Borisov.

Radev has already announced that he will seek a second five-year term in office. He has the backing of the Socialists and the anti-establishment ITN party of showman Slavi Trifonov, which came first in the most recent polls in July with just over 24 percent of the votes. Other parties are yet to announce their candidates. The Socialists are currently trying to cobble together a coalition after the July parliamentary polls, but it is widely expected this will fail, as have previous attempts by other parties. Radev is expected to announce shortly a date for a new parliamentary election, which could coincide with the presidential one. — AFP

## International

# Out-trumping Trump: US governors bidding to seduce ex-president's base

## Trio of pugilistic Republican governors embrace 'culture war' issues

**WASHINGTON:** With the Afghan crisis, a resurgent pandemic and a defeat on abortion rights roiling Democratic politics, Republicans are already setting their sights on Joe Biden in 2024 - knowing their chances of being the next president depend on winning kingmaker Donald Trump's approval first. The deposed president is said to be considering a third White House bid himself. But even if he declines to run, he remains an outsized influence among hopefuls betting on their ability to remake themselves in his image to inherit his hyper-loyal base.

Among them, a trio of pugilistic Republican governors has embraced so-called "culture war" issues such as critical race theory (CRT) and transgender rights to cement their status as Trump's heir apparent. "The question is not who will be the next Trump, but who is in the best position to appeal to the Trump voter," Republican strategist John Feehery told AFP. "Who can best connect with working class voters who feel like they have been disrespected by the political establishment? Who can win the Fox viewer primary?" The men in charge of America's two largest red states, Florida's Ron DeSantis, 42, and Texas governor Greg Abbott, 63, have spent much of the past year promoting populist initiatives that have bolstered their Trumpist credentials. Both have railed against COVID-19 curbs and loudly supported Trump's border wall while also restricting the teaching in schools of CRT—an arcane academic discipline investigating how racism has shaped public policy.

### 'Trump's good side'

Abbott sparked fury among reproductive rights activists by signing a bill enacted on Wednesday that bans abortion once a fetal heartbeat can be detected, typically in the sixth week of pregnancy. Not to be out-done on the culture wars, DeSantis has banned transgender athletes in female school sports and advocated for prohibiting "sanctuary cities" that protect undocumented immigrants.

On COVID-19, DeSantis issued an executive order pardoning Floridians arrested for violating pandemic curbs and has mocked top government infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci with "Don't Fauci My Florida" merchandise. From the smaller red states, South Dakota's first female governor Kristi Noem has emerged as a credible rival to her southern counterparts. Lacking the advantage of governing a state that captivates the nation every election cycle, the combative 49-year-old has been appearing regularly at Republican gatherings and on conservative cable news.

Initially declaring an emergency and ordering schools shut, Noem pivoted as the COVID-19 outbreak became politicized, resisting lockdowns and presenting herself as a champion of "more freedom, not more government." She has questioned the "grit and instinct" of fellow Republican governors who took steps to shut down parts of their economies during the pandemic—widely seen as a passing shot at DeSantis. For Feehery, the Republican with the



**WASHINGTON:** In this file photo taken, US President Donald Trump meets with Texas Governor Greg Abbott in the Oval office of the White House in Washington, DC. —AFP

greatest chance of winning the presidential nomination will the one best able to "stay on Trump's good side and not alienate the Trump voter."

All three rivals are up for re-election next year, and Trump has boosted Abbott's campaign by endorsing the Texan as "a fighter," with an immaculate record on border control, gun rights and fighting crime. But DeSantis—lauded by the former president

as "a great guy"—appears best-positioned if Trump does not run in 2024, topping several straw polls of non-Trump party favorites for the nomination. Feehery sees DeSantis as the frontrunner—with a resurgence in COVID-19 among Floridians the only potential threat to his political fortunes—but believes Republican internal rivalries may end up being academic. —AFP

## Nigeria gunmen kidnap 73 students from high school in northwest

**LAGOS:** Nigerian gunmen on Wednesday kidnapped 73 students after storming a high school in the northwest of the country in the latest in a series of mass abductions targeting pupils. Kidnapping for ransom by armed gangs known locally as bandits has become a grim trend in northwest and central Nigeria, with around 1,000 students snatched this year—most of them later released.

A large group of gunmen invaded the secondary school in Kaya in the Maradun region of Zamfara State late Wednesday morning, abducting the 73 students, the state police said in a statement. "The abduction followed the invasion of the school by large numbers of armed bandits," police spokesman Mohammed Shehu said. He said police rescue teams were working with the military to try to release the students.

Zamfara State officials imposed some night-time road travel restrictions, and primary and secondary schools were temporarily closed, state information commissioner Ibrahim Dosara said. Northwest and central states have for years been troubled by tit-for-tat attacks and community raids between nomadic herders and local farmers who clash over water and land. But violence has escalated sharply with the emergence of large criminal gangs who steal cattle, raid and loot villages and kidnap for ransom. —AFP

## Marseille's drug crime in spotlight as Macron visits

**MARSEILLE:** Residents in some of Marseille's poorest crime-ridden districts pleaded with French President Emmanuel Macron for help on Wednesday as he visited the Mediterranean port following a spate of drugs-related murders. France's second-biggest city has long been known for its run-down streets and desolate housing estates, as well as its gritty charm and fierce local pride.

But with the April 2022 presidential elections approaching, a surge in deadly shootings has put its long-standing social problems on the political agenda. "I've suffered so much, I can't put it into words. I want to leave," one woman on the verge of tears told Macron as he met residents of the Bassens estate in northern Marseille at the start of his visit. Others asked for more police, public investment and better housing as they described their daily encounters with drug dealers, as well as the decrepit local schools and high-rise blocks.

### Turf war

"We're scared on this estate," one 63-year-old social worker from Bassens told AFP ahead of Macron's arrival. "When I get back from work at 10 pm, it's deserted and sometimes you hear shooting like it's a Western film." The three-day trip by Macron, accompanied by seven members of his cabinet, is intended to make a statement about his investment in security and education, just eight months from presidential elections. "It's a city that has been emitting a number of warning signals," a presidential aide admitted on Tuesday. Macron is well aware that his far-right challenger Marine Le Pen is expected to campaign next year on a law-and-order platform.

Marseille's northern districts, some of the most deprived urban areas

of France, serve as the hub for the city's vicious narcotics trade, which Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin has already promised to tackle. "We won't give up," Macron told police officers on the frontline of the battle during a visit to a station on Wednesday. "We have improving results. We'll carry on, to the end, in making sure drug-dealing spots close permanently." Two people died in northern Marseille last weekend in another drive-by shooting, while the week before a 14-year-old was killed in automatic gunfire near one of many dealing points where marijuana and cocaine are openly sold.

During the same period, another man was forced into a car and burned to death when the vehicle was set on fire. Twelve people have been killed over the last two months in what appears to be a drugs turf war that is sparking tit-for-tat murders, say police, but the levels remain below 2016 and to the particularly violent periods in the 1980s. "Nobody cares about what happens here," one local resident told AFP in the desolate Les Rosiers housing estate this week. "I get the sense that they (politicians) think 'let's leave these paupers and foreigners to kill each other out there.'"

### Kalashnikovs

Over the course of his visit, Macron is expected to build on recent announcements for Marseille: An extra 300 police have been promised for the city, as well as extra magistrates. He is also expected to announce support for the Socialist mayor's plan to renovate the city's public schools, some of which are in a "woeful" state, according to head of the local education board. Newly elected mayor Benoit Payan has promised to invest 1.2 billion euros to renovate and rebuild 200 of the city's 472 public schools and is looking for backing from the central government. "The schools are unworthy of the republic," he told AFP this week, adding that housing in Marseille was also "not in keeping with the world's sixth-largest power". Payan has given multiple interviews in recent weeks to sound the alarm about drug-related crime. —AFP



## International

Friday, September 3, 2021

# Tunisia urged to probe ‘kidnapping’, disappearance, expulsion of refugee

## Algerian disappeared ‘in mysterious circumstances’

**TUNIS:** Rights group Amnesty International has called on Tunisia to investigate the “extremely serious” return to Algeria of political activist Slimane Bouhaf, who it said had refugee status in Tunisia. Late Wednesday, an Algerian rights group said he had been placed under a judicial committal order. According to Amnesty and some 40 other rights groups, the Algerian disappeared from his home in Tunis on August 25 “in mysterious circumstances”. Citing Algerian media, the groups said Tunisian authorities had handed the 54-year-old over to Algeria to face court.

Amnesty’s Amna Guellali said Bouhaf reappeared in Algiers on August 28 or 29, “several days after his forced disappearance”. She told AFP it was imperative Tunisia carry out an “impartial and thorough” investigation into “the circumstances of the kidnapping, forced disappearance and expulsion of Slimane Bouhaf to Algeria, despite his political refugee status”. Bouhaf was a “prisoner of conscience” who had spent two years in prison “simply because he wrote things on his Facebook page that the Algerian authorities

didn’t like”, she said.

She said the matter was “extremely serious” as it impacts a person who had obtained political refugee status, demonstrating “that he faced persecution in his country”. Bouhaf was sentenced to jail in 2016 for “insulting Islam”. He has also been active in the Movement for Self-determination of Kabylie (MAK), which Algeria considers a “terrorist” organization. Algeria’s CNLD prisoners’ rights group said later Wednesday that Bouhaf had been placed under a committal order.

Separately, Algeria’s Human Rights League (LADDH) has called on the UN refugee agency in Algiers to intervene in the matter, adding that Bouhaf should benefit from “the protection of the international convention on the rights of refugees, ratified by Tunisia and Algeria”. Tunisian rights groups said the UN gave Bouhaf refugee status in September last year. “The Slimane Bouhaf affair is an ominous sign for rights and freedoms in Tunisia, given that he is a political refugee whose rights have been completely violated,” Guellali said.—AFP



**TUNIS:** Amna Guellali, Deputy Director for the MENA region of Amnesty International, poses for a photograph during an interview with AFP in her home in the Tunisian capital Tunis, on September 1, 2021.—AFP

## Tech conference dumps virus-hit Malaysia, stays in Hong Kong



**KUALA LUMPUR:** A vendor waits for customers at his fruits stall in Kuala Lumpur.—AFP

**KUALA LUMPUR:** A major tech conference has dropped plans to move to Malaysia and will remain in Hong Kong, organizers said yesterday, as the Southeast Asian nation faces a serious coronavirus outbreak. The annual RISE Conference brings together CEOs, startups and investors and has already been held in Hong Kong for five years. Organizers said last year they would move the Asia-focused conference to Kuala Lumpur in 2022, as tech firms fretted over Beijing’s accelerating crackdown on dissent in Hong Kong. But yesterday they did a U-turn, announcing the conference would be returning to Hong Kong for its next edition, as an in-person event in March.

“We always intended to come back to Hong Kong at some stage. RISE has grown to what it is today after five successful years in the city,” said CEO of RISE Paddy Cosgrave. Hong Kong officials added

that the event would remain in the city until 2026. A spokesperson for the company behind RISE said it was “no longer feasible” to hold the conference in Malaysia. The firm did not give further details, but the country is facing its worse COVID-19 wave yet, reporting about 20,000 cases and hundreds of deaths a day.

Hong Kong, in contrast, has kept virus cases low through maintaining some of the strictest quarantine rules in the world. The return of RISE is a boost for the financial hub’s efforts to attract tech talent. But it comes as major tech firms grow increasingly worried about China tightening its grip over Hong Kong since the imposition last year of a sweeping national security law. Hong Kong has long enjoyed greater online freedoms than mainland China, where content is frequently censored, but the law has given authorities new controls including internet takedown powers.—AFP

## US student shot and killed at high school

**WASHINGTON:** A student was shot and killed Wednesday at a high school in North Carolina, authorities in the southern US state said. Police dispatched to Mount Tabor High School in Winston-Salem found one student who had been shot. The student was transported to a local hospital, where he “succumbed to his injuries,” police department chief Catrina Thompson said during a press conference. The shooting suspect, believed to be another student at the school, fled the scene.

He was later apprehended “without incident,” Winston-Salem police said on Twitter. After a year of largely remote learning due to the pandemic, US students returning to in-person school this month face a renewed risk of mass shootings, which have plagued the American education system for years. Wednesday’s shooting was already the second at a North Carolina high school just this week.

“For the second time this week, we have seen a shooting in a North Carolina school,” state governor Roy Cooper said in a statement posted to Twitter. “We must work to ensure the safety of students and educators, quickly apprehend the shooter and keep guns off school grounds.” Such incidents are reported by local media but often fail to garner national headlines when relatively few students are involved—it can seem that only a massacre, such as the 2018 shooting that saw 17 students killed in Parkland, Florida, is remarkable enough to amass wider attention.—AFP

## International

# Kashmir's separatist leader buried in night-time funeral

## Authorities impose lockdown across the disputed Himalayan region

**SRINAGAR:** Kashmiri separatist leader Syed Ali Geelani was buried in a tightly controlled pre-dawn ceremony yesterday as Indian authorities imposed a lockdown across the disputed Himalayan region. The uncompromising campaigner against Indian rule in Kashmir died late Wednesday at the age of 92 following a long illness. Wary of his influence across the Kashmir Valley, security forces were deployed soon after, mobile internet and phones were cut and residents were told to stay in their homes.

Geelani's family said they were not allowed to attend the burial at 4:30 am at a cemetery near his home in the main city of Srinagar. Geelani, who had spent much of the last five decades in jail or under house arrest, had wanted to be buried at the Martyrs Cemetery in Srinagar along with other Kashmiri separatists. But authorities rejected the request, the police source said. "At about 3:00 am, police barged inside our home and took our father's body," one of his sons, Naseem Geelani said.

"We insisted that we would perform his funeral after morning prayers and bury him according to his wish at the Martyrs Cemetery." Police officers "snatched my father's body and did not allow anyone from our family to participate in the burial", the son added. "We heard later that police undertook washing rituals for

my father's body and had him buried." The police source acknowledged that security forces "took control of the arrangements".

The official said the family were given choices but did not respond. He said two sons were present but did not name them. Residents said authorities feared that any mass mourning could turn into unrest. "Troops are everywhere, there are barbed wire blockades on every main road," said one. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan was among the first to pay tribute to Geelani, who had been under house arrest for most of the past 11 years and been ill for several months with heart and kidney problems. Khan said that Geelani had "struggled all his life for his people and their right to self-determination. He suffered incarceration and torture by the occupying Indian state but remained resolute." He declared a day of national mourning in Pakistan.

### Separatist thorn

Geelani had been a thorn in India's side since the early 1960s when he began campaigning for the Muslim-majority territory's merger with Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. The veteran politician was jailed for nearly 10 years after 1962 and was often restricted to his home after that. Since his youth, Geelani had been a member of Jamaat-i-Islami, the territory's largest political-religious or-

altitude. "Usually you can recover a stall... if you have altitude, if you're way up, but in this case it doesn't have altitude," said Zagala, without specifying which part of the aircraft failed.

National Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana told a congressional committee hearing he had been informed the crash was caused by a "confluence of many events". They included "defective instruments or systems, plus of course the reaction of the pilot was not also appropriate for the emergency," he said Wednesday. The military said previously the C-130 was in "very good condition" when it crashed in sunny weather. The full results of the investigation have not been made public. It is not clear if the findings were also based on information recovered from the flight data recorders, which were sent to the United States for analysis.

Witnesses and survivors told investigators shortly after the crash that the plane landed "hard" and then bounced twice before taking off again, Lieutenant General Corleto Vinluan, then chief of the Western Mindanao Command, told AFP days after the crash. "Then at the right side of the airport it hit a tree—that's the account of the injured," Vinluan said. At least three civilians who were not on the flight were also killed as the plane ploughed through coconut trees and houses.

C-130s have been the workhorses of air forces around the world for decades, used to transport troops, supplies and vehicles. The second-hand Hercules that crashed was acquired from the United States and delivered to the Philippines earlier this year. — AFP



**KASHMIR:** In this file photo, Kashmiri separatist leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani addresses a public rally in Sopore, about 48 kms northwest of the capital Srinagar. Indian authorities imposed a security clampdown in disputed Kashmir late September 1, 2021, after the death of Geelani at the age of 92, residents said. —AFP

ganization that was banned by India's Hindu nationalist government in 2019. He rejected any direct talks with the New Delhi government until it "accepts Kashmir as a disputed territory". Indian governments of all political colours have since independence in 1947 insisted on sovereignty over

all of Kashmir. Geelani was also a staunch critic of failed attempts by India and Pakistan to agree the territory's future. The neighbors fought two of their three wars over Kashmir and came close to a fourth in 2016. His headline stance also had critics in Kashmir. — AFP

## Philippine military aircraft crashed after 'unrecoverable stall'

**MANILA:** A Philippine aircraft carrying soldiers crashed in July after an "unrecoverable stall", killing more than 50 people in one of the country's worst military air disasters, the armed forces said yesterday. The C-130 Hercules transport plane was loaded with nearly a hundred people, most of them fresh army graduates, when it overshot the runway while trying to land on the southern island of Jolo in Sulu province.

Most of the dead were soldiers being deployed to the island—a haven for Islamist militants—as part of a counter-insurgency effort. Dozens were injured. "Based on the investigating team's report, no single factor can be attributed to have exclusively caused the accident," the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) said in a statement.

"The aircraft component, the environmental condition and aircrew response led to (an) unrecoverable stall in a critical phase of the aircraft operation," it said without providing details. Armed forces spokesman Colonel Ramon Zagala told AFP a component "failure" triggered a light that "caused the pilots to concentrate on that instead of recovering the stall or doing the turnaround". The plane stalled after losing "thrust and lift" at low

## Taiwan receives first batch of politically charged vaccines

**TAIPEI:** Taiwan received its first batch of Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccines yesterday, a delivery organized by two tech giants and a charity because of diplomatic pressure from China. The 930,000 doses are the first of 15 million jabs acquired by Foxconn and Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), as well as Buddhist charity Tzu Chi foundation, in deals with a China-based distributor after months of wrangling. Despite donations of several million doses from the United States and Japan in June, Taiwan has been struggling to secure enough vaccines for its 23.5 million population and its precarious political status has been a major stumbling block.

As Taipei and Beijing accused each other of hampering vaccine deals, the companies stepped in with a face-saving solution: buying the Pfizer-BioNTech doses from Chinese distributor Fosun Pharma and donating them to Taiwan. Health Minister Chen Shih-chung, who was at the airport to receive the ship-

ment, thanked the donors for "working very hard to overcome all difficulties" to help acquire the vaccines. TSMC charity foundation chairwoman Sophie Chang also noted there were "many difficulties" in the process.

Taipei had tried to secure Pfizer-BioNTech jabs from Germany but hit a roadblock: Shanghai-based Fosun has the distribution rights for China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. Attempts to sign a direct deal made little headway, with Taiwan blaming Beijing. In return, Beijing accused Taiwan of refusing to deal with Fosun Pharma and politicizing its vaccine search. Beijing's authoritarian leadership views democratic self-ruled Taiwan as part of China's territory and has vowed to one day seize the island, by force if needed.

China tries to keep Taiwan internationally isolated, including blocking it from the World Health Organization. Taiwan was hailed for keeping Covid-19 at bay for the first year of the pandemic. But an outbreak detected in April forced the island to implement economically painful social-distancing measures. In recent months, case numbers have fallen dramatically and restrictions have eased. A previously lacklustre vaccination campaign has also picked up. Around 43 percent of Taiwan's people have had at least one dose so far, according to the health ministry. Until now, the island had acquired AstraZeneca and Moderna jabs. — AFP

# LIFESTYLE

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## 'Zorba the Greek' composer Theodorakis dies aged 96

See Pages 20-21

Greek composer and former politician, Mikis Theodorakis . — AFP

# Theodorakis: 'Zorba the Greek' composer who personified Greek music

**C**elebrated composer Mikis Theodorakis, who has died aged 96, wrote the music for the classic film "Zorba the Greek" and was an icon of resistance to Greece's 1967-1974 military junta. A prolific talent who personified the modern face of Greek music, he was perhaps best-known around the world for his film title scores which also included "Z" in 1969 and "Serpico" in 1973. Back home, he was equally adulated for his resistance to the seven-year rule of the Colonels in a long political career.

His work ranged from operas to choral music and popular songs, providing a soundtrack to the life of his country. "Today we lost a part of Greece's soul," said Culture Minister Lina Mendoni. "Mikis Theodorakis, our Mikis, the teacher, the intellectual, the radical passed away." The country will mark three days of mourning to honor his long career and cultural contribution. Theodorakis made the high art of Nobel prize-winning poets like Odysseas Elytis and George Seferis accessible to everyone through music, his biographer Gail Holst-Warhaft said. "When I first went to Greece, you could go and put some money into a jukebox and you could hear the finest poets of Greece set to his music," she told NPR, the US radio network, in 2018.

## Resistance and torture

Born into a family of Cretan origin on July 29, 1925 on the northern Aegean island of Chios, Theodorakis joined the resistance against the German and Italian occupation of Greece when he was 17, during World War II. Liberation in 1944 was followed almost immediately by civil war between the communists and royalists. By the time he graduated from Athens Conservatory in 1950, Theodorakis had already been sent to deportation camps on several occasions. At one point, he was sent to the dreaded Makronisos island prison off the eastern coast of Attica, where he was tortured as a "red".

After completing music studies in the Paris Conservatory, Theodorakis was elected to parliament as a leftwing deputy in 1964. That year he also scored the theme of "Zorba the Greek", to which Anthony Quinn danced the popular "sirtaki" that went on to be known as the "Zorba dance". In 1969 he wrote the score for "Z", a film based on the assassination of Greek peace activist Grigoris Lambrakis which won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film that year.



In this file photo Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis gestures during a demonstration to urge the government not to compromise in the festering name row with neighboring Macedonia, at the Syntagma Square in Athens. — AFP photos

## Hero's welcome

When a dictatorship seized control of the government in a 1967 coup, Theodorakis was among the first leftwing politicians to be arrested. Pardoned a year later, he was involved in setting up the clandestine Patriotic Front, which led to another detention and a ban on his works. But with his health sapped by tuberculosis and international pressure mounting, the dictators were forced to release him again in 1970 and he returned to Paris.

"This taste of freedom is still bitter because left in Athens are my wife and my two children and because so many of my comrades are suffering," Theodorakis said in a statement reported by the New York Times. Four years later the dictatorship imploded and Theodorakis returned home to a hero's welcome. On July 24, 1974, an immense crowd broke down police barriers to greet him at the airport, many chanting his name.

He was back in parliament in 1981 on a Greek Communist Party (KKE) ticket, joining another icon of democratic resistance-popular actress Melina Mercouri. Theodorakis changed sides in 1990, joining the conservative New Democracy government. He briefly retained the post of minister without portfolio until 1992, when he retired from politics.

## Controversial comments

Even in old age, he maintained an active interest in Greece's politics and its slide into economic crisis, living largely out of the public eye in a home beneath the Acropolis. He made headlines with outspoken comments, likening former US president George W. Bush to Adolf Hitler and asserting that Jews were "little people" at the root of evil. Theodorakis was also an early proponent of rapprochement between Greece and Turkey, which came close to war following the 1974 invasion of Cyprus by Turkish forces.

In 2012 he was tear-gassed by riot police during an anti-austerity demonstration outside parliament after Greece sank into debt and was bailed out by the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. In 2018 he campaigned against an agreement between Athens and Skopje to rename Greece's northern neighbor North Macedonia, ending a three-decade dispute. He warned that if Greece dropped its objections to North Macedonia joining NATO and the EU, Skopje "(will) threaten us from a stronger position tomorrow".

He was highly critical of then prime minister Alexis Tsipras, whom he accused of betraying his leftwing roots by agreeing to impose EU-mandated austerity reforms after coming to power in 2015. Along with lifelong wife Myrto, Theodorakis is survived by his daughter Margarita and son George.-AFP

## Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis: Key dates

Here are key dates in the life of Mikis Theodorakis, most known for scoring “Zorba the Greek” but also a hero of the resistance against Greece’s 1967-1974 military junta, who died yesterday:

- **July 29, 1925:** Born into a family of Cretan origin on the northern Aegean island of Chios.
- **1942:** Joins resistance against the German occupation of Greece during World War II.
- **1947-49:** Sides with the communists during Greece’s civil war. He is arrested and deported several times, including to the Makronisos island prison where he is tortured.
- **1950:** Graduates from Athens Conservatory, the oldest educational institution for the performing arts in modern Greece.
- **1953:** Marries Myrto Altinoglou, a doctor with whom he will have a son and a daughter.
- **1964:** Writes the theme music for the film “Zorba the Greek”. The same year he is elected to parliament as a leftwing deputy.
- **1967:** Arrested shortly after a military junta takes power, he is pardoned a year later then takes charge of the Patriotic Front, a clandestine resistance movement. Is once again detained and his works banned.
- **1970:** Released under international pressure, he moves to France.
- **1974:** After the dictatorship ends, he returns to Greece to a hero’s welcome.
- **1981-1986:** Holds a seat in parliament for the Greek Communist Party.
- **1990:** Joins the conservative New Democracy government as minister without portfolio until 1992 when he retires from politics.
- **2012:** Joins one of many anti-austerity protests rocking the capital at the height of the economic crisis and is tear-gassed by riot police alongside wartime resistance hero Manolis Glezos.
- **2018:** Joins large protest on central Syntagma Square against the name deal with North Macedonia, calling Greece’s northern neighbor “illegitimate”.
- **September 2, 2021:** Dies in Athens — AFP

# ‘Zorba’s Dance’, Greece’s trademark theme music

Probably the best-known piece of Greek music in the world, the theme tune for the 1964 film “Zorba the Greek” was penned by celebrated composer Mikis Theodorakis, who has died aged 96. An instrumental, it is played and danced to around the world even today, coming to symbolize Greece almost to the point of cliché and contributing to the popularity of Greek culture. Commonly referred to as “Zorba’s Dance”, it is the signature tune of the film in which an uptight English writer travelling in Crete finds his life changed forever when he meets the gregarious Alexis Zorba.

In the famous final scene, Anthony Quinn, as Zorba, dances on the beach the “sirtaki”, also referred to as “Zorba’s Dance”, to the strains of the traditional guitar-like bouzouki. The dance was choreographed specially for the film and is a combination of slow and fast rhythms and of two styles of Greek folk dance, the hasapiko and the zeibekiko. It is usually done in a line, dancers placing their



Greek composer and former politician, Mikis Theodorakis

hands on the shoulders of the person alongside them. The composer said filmmaker Michael Cacoyannis had asked for an increasingly fast pace in the music ending the film, which is based on the 1946 novel by Nikos Kazantzakis.

“Cacoyannis came one day to say to me: tomorrow we will shoot the final scene. For it I need a slow dance, a hasapiko, which will become faster and faster,” Theodorakis recounted on a website about himself and his work. The theme was a phenomenal success and contributed to the popularity of the bouzouki around the world and to a growing interest in Greek music and its slow and sad “rebetiko” style. Like another emblematic title-Manos Hadjidakis’s 1960 “The Children of Piraeus” which later became known as “Never on Sunday”—it accompanied the surge in tourism to Greece as it opened up after the 1967-1974 military dictatorship, called the Regime of the Colonels. —AFP

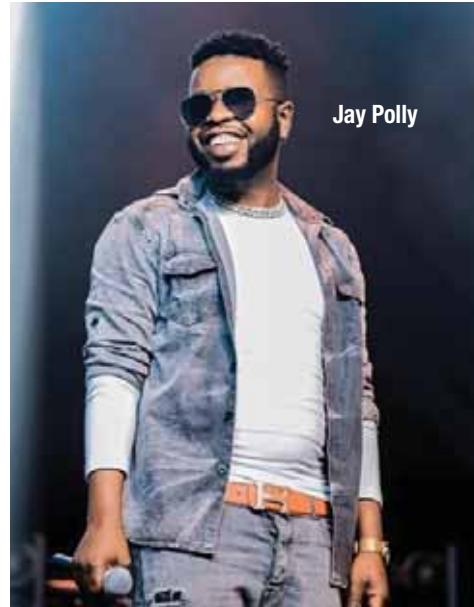


Mikis Theodorakis’ daughter, Margarita (second left) with relatives and friends escort the coffin of the legendary Greek composer outside of his home in Athens, yesterday.

## Popular Rwandan rapper dies in custody

A popular Rwandan rapper known as Jay Polly died in custody early yesterday, officials and media reports said, the second detained musician to die in mysterious circumstances in less than two years. Polly, whose real name was Joshua Tuyishime, was being held on drugs charges and had just found out that he was due to stand trial in December. The 33-year-old was taken to Muhima hospital in the capital Kigali at around 3:00 am (0100 GMT), its director Pascal Nkubito told AFP. "He was in a bad shape and unresponsive. Doctors tried to revive him but he unfortunately died shortly after," he said.

"The cause of death is not something I want to speculate about. We will know that after the post-mortem." The musician was arrested at his home in April for hosting a party in violation of COVID regulations and was later paraded along with other suspects in front of the media. Police said Tuyishime and other defendants were found to be drinking and in possession of marijuana and fake negative Covid certificates. He had denied the charges but requests for bail were rejected. Parties are strictly prohibited in Rwanda because of the coronavirus pandemic and thousands of people have been detained for breaking restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of the disease. Some have been forced to spend the night in open-air stadiums and to listen to Covid-19 guidelines on loudspeakers, while others have been held for weeks in detention facilities.



### 'Cultural icon'

Rwandans took to Twitter to pay tribute to Tuyishime, with one describing him as a "cultural icon who contributed so much to our music." In February last year, Kizito Mihigo, whose music was banned by the regime of President Paul Kagame, was found dead in his cell, just days after he was caught trying to flee the country. Police said Mihigo, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide whose gospel songs angered Kagame's government, had committed suicide by hanging himself from

his cell window using bedsheets. Mihigo, who was sentenced to 10 years in jail in 2015 for conspiracy against the government but later released on pardon, was captured trying to cross the border in Rwanda's south.

He fell foul of the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front in 2013 after composing songs that questioned the government's tight control of the legacy of the 1994 tragedy. His music, once popular among the ruling elite, was swiftly banned. Two years later he was accused of terrorism and raising support for an opposition political movement and sentenced to 10 years in prison. His lawyers said prosecutors had little evidence to jail him. He was released on presidential pardon in September 2018. Mihigo and Polly are not the first figures to die in mysterious circumstances while in police custody in Rwanda. Last year, a former director-general in Kagame's office was found dead in a military jail after being sentenced to 10 years for corruption.

In 2015, Kagame's personal doctor, Emmanuel Gasakure, was shot dead in custody by police. Kagame, who has been in power since 1994, has been accused of ruling with an iron fist, clamping down on all forms of dissent and jailing or exiling opposition politicians. Human Rights Watch (HRW), among other groups, has accused Kagame's regime of summary executions, unlawful arrests and torture in custody. — AFP

are also part of the plans.

### Sleepy hamlet

The glittering vision is a far cry from the existing sleepy hamlet of Mbodiene, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of the capital, where pigs roll in the muck and donkeys amble along the road. Locals interviewed by AFP said they knew little about Akon City, nor why construction had been delayed. The ceremonial stone was laid on August 31 2020 and construction was scheduled to begin early this year. A hospital, school, shopping mall, homes, police station, waste center and solar power plant are supposed to be completed in 2023 — and the whole city by 2030.

Speaking on an untarmacked road as horned cattle grazed behind him, 25-year-old student Ahmeth Deme wondered whether the project had been cancelled. Badara Diakhate, the deputy mayor of the local commune, said he was unaware of the exact reason for the delay but that "people want things to get going." He welcomed investment in the village and said that delays were common, especially given the pandemic.

### Disillusioned

At \$6 billion, the planned cost of Akon City is huge—it is not much smaller than Senegal's overall 2020 budget of about \$7.5 billion. The pomp and size the project elicited skepticism

in Senegal at first, where developers and politicians often tout the merits of pet building works. About 40 percent of Senegal's 16 million people live below the poverty line, according to a World Bank metric. A lack of clarity regarding Akon City's funding also raised questions. Paul Martin, from the US-based firm KE International which won the Akon City construction contract, said that Kenyan entrepreneur Julius Mwale is the lead investor. He added that he could not disclose information on other investors for confidentiality reasons, but said more than \$4 billion in funding had been raised.

Construction of Akon City will start in October, Martin said, after a similar Mwale-funded city is completed in Kenya. "The first 12 months incorporated planning, approvals, procurement and recruitment of sub-contractors," Martin said by email, referring to Akon City. But tourism worker Thiamane said that he'd grown disillusioned, pointing to earlier failed development projects in Mbodiene. "What is shared in the village at the moment is the beginning of disappointment," he said. Akon's team, and the Senegalese state tourism agency SAPCO, which is managing the project on the government's behalf, did not respond to repeated solicitations by AFP for comment. — AFP



everything that was announced, I don't think we have seen much yet." Akon—a Senegalese-American singer-songwriter best known for his R&B hits such as "Smack That"—launched his eponymous city in September 2020, to great fanfare and international media attention. The city's otherworldly design is partly inspired by Wakanda, he said at the time, referring to the fictional African city of the "Black Panther" Marvel movie and comic series.

Akon City's planners also say it will be a "beacon of innovation and human development" that will boost industry in the West African state of Senegal. A stadium, casino, luxury high-rise apartment complexes, and an education district that will "accommodate the most prestigious universities in the world"



## Elton John to release album recorded under lockdown

Elton John said on Wednesday that he is to release an album of songs recorded during lockdown, when he made music with stars including Stevie Wonder while observing social distancing. The 74-year-old British singer said in a video on Instagram that The Lockdown Sessions album grew out of a series of one-off collaborations with musicians including Gorillaz, Miley Cyrus and Wonder.

"Never in a million years did I think this was going to be a year where I put an album out," said the star, who spent lockdown in Los Angeles and England. Some of the recordings were made "under very stringent safety regulations: working with another artist, but separated by glass screens", he said. "To have fun during lockdown is a privilege," he said. The album will be released in October, said John, who is currently on a long-running farewell tour set to run till 2023. — AFP

## Singer Akon's Senegalese city unstarted, locals left in dark

A year after singer Akon laid the first stone of the \$6 billion futuristic city he vowed to build for his native Senegal, the site remains grassland. The stone itself sits at the bottom of a dirt track in a field; a small placard advertising the megaproject has fallen off it. Construction of "Akon City," a project due to feature ultramodern twisting skyscrapers, was already meant to have begun near the Atlantic Ocean village of Mbodiene.

But building work is yet to start, prompting residents who were hoping for jobs to wonder about its future. "They laid the foundation stone with a lot of speeches and promises," said Jules Thiamane, a 35-year-old local who works in the tourism industry. "Compared to



In this file photo taken on October 2, 2012 Madame Tussauds waxwork models of Swedish pop group Abba are displayed at a roller disco in the Renaissance Room in London. — AFP photos



In this file photo taken on April 6, 1974 Swedish band representing Sweden with the song 'Waterloo' (from left to right, up) Bjorn Ulvaeus, music producer, writer and manager Stig Anderson, Swedish record producer, composer Sven-Olof Walldoff and Benny Andersson, (from left to right, down) Anni-Frid Lyngstad (Frida) and Agnetha Faltskog, hold the trophy as they celebrate on stage after winning the final of the Eurovision Song Contest 1974 Grand Final in Brighton, on the south coast of England.

# Swedish superstars **ABBA** set to unveil 'sensational' musical comeback

**T**hey famously vowed never to reform, to the disappointment of their legions of fans. But nearly four decades after disbanding, Swedish superstars ABBA were yesterday expected to announce a "sensational comeback" collaboration. Almost as famous for their over-the-top sparkly outfits as their music, the group notched up over 400 million album sales over 50 years. They enjoyed phenomenal success with a string of chart hits in the 1970s and early 1980s after winning Eurovision in 1974 with "Waterloo".

Since parting ways in 1982 they have steadfastly resisted all offers to work together as a foursome again. But yesterday they were expected to delight fans with news on a fresh collaboration. The now septuagenarian stars of pop classics such as "Dancing Queen", "The Winner Takes It All" and "Take a Chance on Me", said they will make an "historic" announcement at 5.45 pm UK time (16:45 GMT). Details are still under wraps, but the group is expected to announce the release of their first new songs since the 1980s and the launch of a new theatrical show in which they will perform as hologram "Abbatars".

Last week, the group-Anni-Frid Lyngstad,

75, Agnetha Faltskog, 71, Bjorn Ulvaeus, 76, and Benny Andersson, 74 — announced on Twitter: "Thank you for waiting, the journey is about to begin." A website promises an "historic livestream" and Universal Music Group was to hold an event at the ArcelorMittal Orbit observation tower in east London's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.



In this file photo taken on September 5, 2008, Bjorn Ulvaeus (left) and Benny Andersson of the Swedish group Abba pose upon arrival for the opening ceremony of the 34th US Film Festival with the screening of "Mama Mia", in Deauville, on the French northwestern coast.

## 'Sensational comeback'

The group is to release a whole album's worth of new songs in a "sensational comeback", according to British tabloid The Sun. This comes after the Swedish pop icons announced three years ago they were returning to the studio to record new tracks. "We all four felt that, after some 35 years, it could be fun to join forces again and go into the recording studio. So we did," the group said.

Earlier this year, Ulvaeus told Australia's Herald Sun: "There will be new music this year, that is definite. It's not a case any more of it might happen, it will happen." Ulvaeus told The Times in April he wrote lyrics for new songs with Andersson composing the music, and the group "still sounds very much Abba". The group has mentioned five new songs, including "I Still Have Faith in You" and "Don't Shut Me Down". The Sun reported they have recorded at least eight songs together.

## 'State-of-the-art show'

The tabloid also reported that the group will voice holograms of themselves in their heyday for a "stage-of-the-art" show called "Abba Voyage" to be staged at a 3,000-

capacity theatre in London's Olympic Park. The show will launch next May and run eight times a week, featuring a blend of previously filmed and projected content and live performers. The plan is for the show to run to 2025 and then transfer to Stockholm or Las Vegas. Building work on the theatre has begun, The Sun reported.

## 'Breaking up is never easy'

The group has not released any new music since 1981 and broke up the following year after both of the quartet's married couples divorced. They steered clear of a reunion despite their music's enduring popularity, fuelled by a hit compilation album in 1992 and the "Mamma Mia" musical and later spin-off films starring Meryl Streep, Colin Firth and Pierce Brosnan.

"There is simply no motivation to regroup. Money is not a factor and we would like people to remember us as we were," Ulvaeus said in a 2008 interview. According to Celebrity Net Worth, each member of Abba is worth between \$200-300 million. In 2000, the band turned down a \$1 billion offer to perform a 100-show world tour. — AFP



## Paralympian, nurse, musician: Manami Ito, Japan's show-stealing violinist

**H**aunting notes stream from Manami Ito's violin as she gracefully draws her bow back and forth, claspings it with her specially designed prosthetic arm. The Japanese musician enthralled a nation with her brief but show-stealing performance at the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Paralympics, and playing violin isn't even her day job. The 36-year-old is a qualified nurse and a former Paralympian swimmer

who has spent the years since she lost her right arm in a motorbike accident defying her naysayers and overcoming every obstacle before her.

"There were always people who told me: 'No, you can't do it. It's impossible,'" she told AFP at her mother's home by a lush green riverbank. "Every time I faced that kind of wall, I thought to myself: 'They are saying that because no one has done it before. So I will do it.'" But that wasn't always the way Ito felt, particularly in the dark days after her accident at the age of 20. "I thought I would confine myself at home for the rest of my life," she admits. "I didn't want my friends or neighbors to see my body, I didn't want them to know what happened to me."

**Japanese musician Manami Ito, puts on her prosthetic arm before playing the violin during a photo session in Shizuoka.**



**Japanese musician Manami Ito, who is also a qualified nurse and former Paralympic swimmer, plays the violin using her prosthetic arm during a photography session in Shizuoka. —AFP photos**







Japanese violinist Manami Ito (top right), poses with her husband Yuki and their two daughters Miu and Mei at their residence in Shizuoka.



Japanese violinist Manami (left), interacts with her daughters Miu and Mei, and husband Yuki while her prosthetic arm is seen on a table at their residence in Shizuoka.

Japanese violinist Manami Ito (second left), plays with her daughter Mei (left) while her husband Yuki (second right) interacts with their other daughter Miu (right) at their residence in Shizuoka.

It was the sight of her parents “in real pain” at her state that made her rethink her stance. “I thought, I cannot make them smile if I don’t smile myself,” she said. Ito had been encouraged by her mother to play the violin when she was a child, and after her accident she decided to give it another try. At first she tried to play by taping the bow to her foot. But it took years before she was able to receive a special prosthetic arm and master the fluid tones she now produces. And having been a child who “hated losing or failing”, she didn’t dare to play in public for a long time. But in the end, her determination won out. “I want to show to the world that just because no one else has done it, it doesn’t mean I can’t do it,” she said.

#### ‘What is normal can be different’

Ito had been a nursing student at the time of the accident, and was determined to return to training. But the first prosthetic she was given was more like a shop mannequin arm than a functional limb. “At first I was very happy, because when I put it on and went outside, no one stared at it,” she said. But she soon realized that “it didn’t do anything to help me”, and fought hard to swap it for a new one that moved and allowed her to work. In 2007, she became the first qualified nurse in Japan using a prosthetic arm and took a posting in the western city of Kobe, choosing to move far from her family home in order to live independently.

It was there she rediscovered another childhood passion—swimming. She began training after work for para-sports competitions before going on to swim at the Beijing Paralympics in 2008 and London 2012, reaching the finals three times under her maiden name Nomura. And though she had once tried to hide her scars, Ito said she chose swimming precisely because it revealed her as she is. “I never wanted anybody to look at my scars, the scars were the most vulnerable part of my body,” she said. “But I began to think about exposing them to the world, because otherwise I would never be strong.”

Ito quit nursing in 2015 after getting mar-

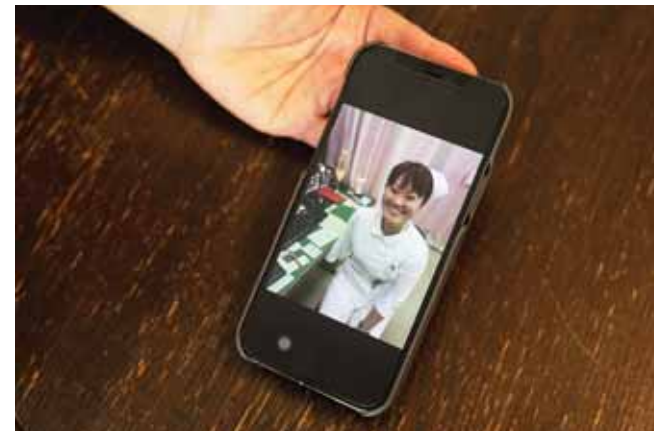
ried, and is now mostly focused on raising her daughters, aged two and five, though she continues to give talks about her life. She plans to watch Sunday’s Paralympic closing ceremony at home with her husband and children, who she is teaching to appreciate diversity. “When my daughter gets older, there will be a day when her friends tell her that her mum looks strange,” Ito said. “I want to hear her saying this is her mother, and that what is normal can be different for each person and each family.”— AFP



Japanese musician Manami Ito, puts her violin into its carrying case following a photography session in Shizuoka.



Photographs of Japanese violinist Manami Ito, who is also a qualified nurse and former Paralympic swimmer, are seen in a picture frame at her residence in Shizuoka.



Japanese violinist Manami Ito, shows a mobile phone photograph of her in her nurse uniform during an interview at her residence in Shizuoka.

## Lifestyle | Features

## Star US podcaster Joe Rogan says he has COVID



Comedian Joe Rogan

Comedian Joe Rogan, whose podcast racks up millions of listens but who has faced criticism for suggesting young people need not get vaccinated against COVID-19, said Wednesday he had tested positive for the virus. In a post on Instagram, Rogan said he was tested after showing mild symptoms following a trip to Florida, which is currently battling surging cases of the highly infectious Delta variant.

He said he had taken a number of drugs to treat the virus, including antiparasitic medicine ivermectin, demand for which has surged in the United States despite scant evidence of its effectiveness against COVID. "A wonderful heartfelt thank you to modern medicine for pulling me out of this so quickly and easily," Rogan said. Rogan's podcast is one of the world's most popular, often featuring fellow comedians as well as academics, journalists and athletes discussing everything from fitness to UFOs and psychedelic drugs.

He signed a reported \$100 million deal with Spotify last year, giving the music streaming giant exclusive rights to his show. But the podcast has long drawn criticism for giving a platform to conspiracy theories and disinformation, with Rogan publicly rebuked by the White House this year for suggesting young people do not need to receive COVID jabs. "If you're like 21 years old and you say to me, 'Should I get vaccinated?' I'll go, 'No,'" he said. "If you're a healthy person and you're exercising all the time and you're young and you're eating well, I don't think you need to worry about this." Rogan has not stated publicly whether he received a COVID vaccine. — AFP

## Japan princess to wed, reject payout after controversy

The course of true love never did run smooth, but after public controversy and a wedding delay, Japan's Princess Mako is reportedly set to tie the knot and move to America. The daughter of Japan's crown prince and niece of Emperor Naruhito has endured years of sniping and stalling over her plans to marry sweetheart Kei Komuro.

The pair have now decided to wed without some traditional ceremonies and reject a payout that usually goes to female royals marrying out of the royal family. Japan's imperial succession rules mean that 29-year-old Mako will lose her title after marriage to a commoner. But Komuro has still been heavily scrutinized over allegations that his mother borrowed money from a former fiancé and failed to repay it.

After tabloid reporting on the claims, a furore erupted around the young couple in a country where the royal family is held to an exacting standard. The pair postponed their wedding, and Komuro moved to the US for law school in a move that was widely seen as a bid to defuse the negative attention. Crown Prince Akishino last year said that he supported his daughter's marriage, but that she needed to win the public's "understanding". But she has apparently decided to get around the issue by marrying without the usual ritual ceremonies that accompany a royal wedding, and declining a lump sum payment given to female royals who marry commoners.

The size of the payment is unknown, though reports put it at 137 million yen (\$1.2 million) or more. She is also said to be planning to move to the United States after her wedding, drawing inevitable comparisons with another controversial royal couple: Britain's Prince Harry and Megan Markle. Mako is sister to Prince Hisahito, 14, currently the only eligible male heir to the throne other than his

father as Japan's Chrysanthemum Throne can pass only to male members of the family, and the children of female royals who marry commoners are not included.



Japanese Princess Mako, the eldest daughter of Crown Prince Akishino and Crown Princess Kiko, and her college boyfriend Kei Komuro announce their engagement during a press conference at the Akasaka Palace in Tokyo. — AFP

There has been no official confirmation of Princess Mako's plans, but reports have topped news bulletins and sparked a social media frenzy. Opinion online was split, with some insisting it was still "too early" for the marriage to go ahead. "I think there are very few Japanese who can celebrate this marriage from the bottom of their heart. I'm so worried about Princess Mako," wrote one Japanese Twitter user. But others lauded the pair's determination, with the Mainichi Shimbun saying their "strong will bore fruit". "This is the decision Princess Mako made, standing firm for her life," added another Twitter user. "Wonderful."—AFP



Italian actor and director, Roberto Benigni jokes as he poses for photographers after receiving a Golden Lion for lifetime achievement, following the opening ceremony of the 78th Venice Film Festival, on Wednesday at Venice Lido. — AFP

## China bans reality talent shows in showbiz crackdown

China banned reality talent programs yesterday and ordered broadcasters to promote more masculine representations of men, in a wide-ranging crackdown on "immoral" pop culture Beijing believes is leading young people astray. Talent shows

that put hundreds of aspiring young performers through rigorous boot camps and subject them to public votes have become massively popular in China, sparking criticism over obsessive fans and poor role models.

"Broadcast and TV institutions must not screen idol development programs or variety shows and reality shows," China's broadcast regulator, the National Radio and Television Administration said, in a raft of new regulations. The regulator ordered broadcasters to resist "abnormal aesthetics" such as "sissy" men, "vulgar influencers", stars' inflated pay and performers with "lapsed morals".

Faced with falling birth rates, Chinese authorities have tried to instil traditional masculine values in the country's youth by ramping up gym classes and criticizing male entertainers who model the effeminate looks

of Korean pop idols. Instead, broadcasters were urged to "strongly promote outstanding traditional Chinese culture... and advanced socialist culture."

Popular Chinese blogger Feng Xiaoyi had his account suspended by Douyin-China's version of TikTok last week for "promoting unhealthy values", after some users complained about his "sissy" videos. Video streaming site iQiyi last week said it would cancel all future idol talent shows that are in development. Authorities began a wide-ranging crackdown on dodgy financial practices and "immoral" conduct in the entertainment sector after numerous scandals implicated some of the nation's biggest entertainers in recent months.

Chinese actress Zheng Shuang was fined the equivalent of \$46 million for tax evasion

last week, while Chinese-Canadian pop star and former idol Kris Wu has been detained on rape allegations. At the same time, regulators have vowed to curb the behaviors of China's "chaotic" fandoms, such as what they deem to be irrational celebrity worship.

Beijing TV regulators abruptly took the massively popular idol talent show "Youth With You 3" off air in May, after fans resorted to buying and dumping massive quantities of yoghurt to vote for their favourite contestants. Such shows often urge fans to buy sponsored products in order to vote, but the new regulations ban this practice. — AFP

# COLONIAL-ERA ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AT RISK IN TUNIS

In the center of Tunisia's capital, dilapidated colonial-era art deco and art nouveau buildings face demolition as heritage preservation falls prey to a lack of planning and eager developers. Imed Tahenti is the only remaining tenant of a building surrounded by Haussmann-style architecture just a stone's throw from Tunis' main thoroughfare. Since 1956, his family has rented the ground floor apartment, an art deco gem featuring high ceilings, artisanal tiling and winding staircases. Tahenti is the last resident to have resisted the pressure to leave.



are 12,305 foreign-owned properties in Tunisia, according to official statistics, with 7,645 of them ceded to the state under French-Tunisian property contracts. Local associations have called for strategies to "preserve the historic architectural landscape".



inal inhabitants were mainly colonial residents or Jewish Tunisians, many of whom left after the country's independence in 1956 and the 1967 Israeli-Arab conflict. Built by Italian and French architects and businesspeople, such buildings are associated with colonialism.

But "you can't talk about the Arab city without evoking at the same time the European city that makes up the center of Tunis," said architect Dhouha Al-Jalasi. At least 160 dilapidated buildings that belonged to foreigners are at risk of collapse across the country, according to the last official survey in 2019. Some residents have carried out repairs that have changed buildings' architectural heritage, while others are used as squats or rubbish dumps.

In Tunis, neighborhoods have also been threatened by a draft law that sought to destroy dilapidated buildings, potentially affecting some 5,000 structures. The legislation was presented to parliament in 2018, but civil society pressure eventually led to a deferral.

### 'Not a priority'

Europeans made up a large part of the Tunisian population at the start of the 20th century. The 1857 constitution allowed them to own land and buy houses, and European neighborhoods developed in several cities.

In the capital, these included the Lafayette and Monfleury areas, and what is now the iconic Habib Bourguiba Avenue, named after the father of Tunisian independence. There

Amel Zribi, head of a government agency for heritage and culture, said it would be a "crime" not to look after places that are part of the "collective memory".

But the prospects are bleak at a time when Tunisia is facing one of the worst economic and political crises in its history. Bertrand Ficini, from French development agency AFD, is also pessimistic. Fundraising for heritage initiatives has been low in recent years, he said. Late last year, the agency committed 12 million euros (\$14 million) for a restoration project involving old cities, including European neighborhoods, Ficini told AFP. All the same, "the preservation of heritage, particularly European, is not a priority for our partners", he lamented. — AFP

A broker recently announced he now wants the building vacated ahead of selling it, after buying it decades ago. "I've held out for a long time," said Tahenti, a baker in his 60s, expressing fear that the owner would demolish the building and put up offices. Tahenti said he should have been informed about the sale, adding that under the law he would have had priority to buy his apartment as a resident.

### Two sides of the city

Built just outside Tunis's traditional Arab medina during the French colonial period of the 19th and 20th centuries, such buildings were meant to "modernize" the city. Their orig-



These pictures show a view of balconies of a building dating back almost a century, at risk of collapse due to deteriorating conditions, in Tunisia's capital Tunis. — AFP photos

Kids Page

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Color It



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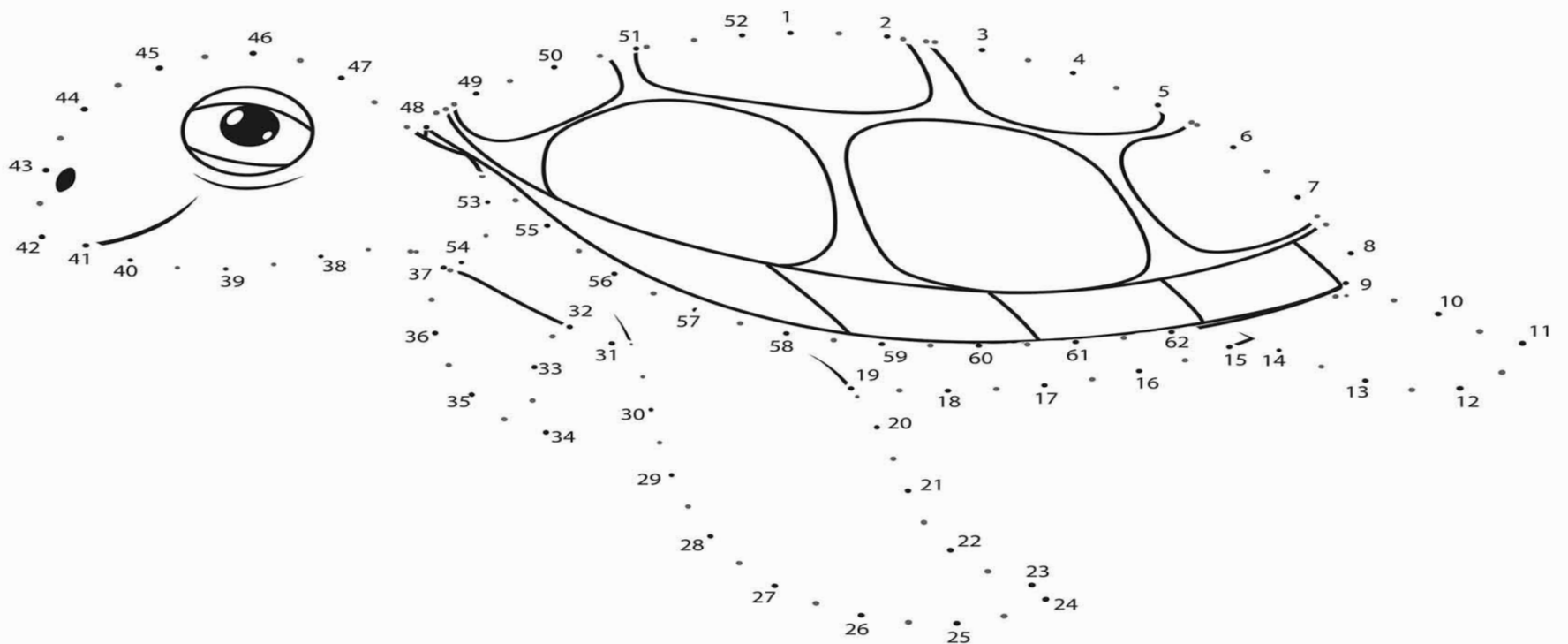
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Find 10 objects in the picture



### Join the dots



# Business

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**35** Ireland slaps 225m euros fine on WhatsApp for breaching laws



SAN PEDRO, US: In this file photo, container trucks make their way past stacked containers at the Port of Los Angeles in San Pedro, California. —AFP

## US trade gap falls as demand surge ebbs

### Despite Delta, jobless claims hit new pandemic low

**WASHINGTON:** The US trade deficit fell in July for the first time in three months, the Commerce Department said yesterday, as the vaccine-fueled surge in American consumer demand ebbed and exports picked up. The trade deficit was \$70.1 billion in July, according to the report, 4.3 percent lower than the previous month's downwardly revised figure and a bigger drop than analysts expected. Imports fell very slightly to \$282.9 billion, while exports picked up 1.3 percent to \$212.8 billion, in what Mahir Rasheed of Oxford Economics described as trade flows reverting after the United States' vaccine-fueled spring bounceback.

"We expect the deficit to narrow further as foreign consumption gains momentum and domestic demand decelerates," he said in an analysis. "The pandemic will continue to pose a downside risk to trade flows, but we expect a gradual normalization in trade dynamics as vaccinations increase and supply disruptions slowly ease."

The decline in the overall goods and services deficit was fueled by a drop of \$5.5 billion in the goods deficit to \$87.7 billion, while the services surplus fell \$2.4 billion to \$17.7 billion. Compared to July 2020, when the pandemic had badly hit global commerce and American consumer demand, the deficit was 37.1 percent, or \$131 billion, higher. Services ex-

ports increased marginally while goods exports made up the bulk of the overall jump, with capital goods seeing a \$1 billion increase, while consumer goods and automobiles and parts rose by smaller amounts. Goods made up most of the decline in imports, with consumer goods falling \$2.1 billion and industrial supplies dropping \$1.7 billion even as cars and parts rose \$1.1 billion.

Meanwhile, new US unemployment benefit filings dropped to a fresh pandemic low last week, government data showed yesterday, a positive sign for the labor market as it faces renewed disruptions from the Delta variant. The Labor Department reported a seasonally adjusted 340,000 new filings for aid in the week ended August 28, 14,000 less than the previous week's upwardly revised level and the lowest since COVID-19 caused millions of layoffs in March 2020.

Another 102,405 filings, not seasonally adjusted, were made under the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program to aid freelancers not normally eligible for aid, about 14,000 less than the week prior. While the new claims were fewer than analysts expected, Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics warned that they may not indicate job growth, since firms may simply be slowing hiring as they

wait to see how bad the surge of the fast-spreading Delta variant of the virus will be.

"This is a new cycle low and the trend in claims is still falling, despite the surge in COVID cases across the southeastern quadrant of the country. But claims tell us nothing about the pace of hiring, which appears to be bearing the brunt of the Delta hit," he said in a note. Shepherdson predicted the Labor Department's August employment report due out Friday would show job growth slowing. The data come ahead of the September 6 end of the PUA and the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) programs, both of which Congress created as emergency measures at the pandemic's start and will finally expire. As of August 14, the most recent week for which data is available, more than 5.4 million people were receiving PUA benefits and 3.8 million receiving aid under PEUC—most of whom will not receive jobless aid after next week. "Today's Labor Department report comes as millions of Americans are bracing themselves for extreme hardship, faced with losing pandemic benefits as the Delta variant surges across the country," said Andrew Stettner of the progressive think tank The Century Foundation, which has been tracking the impact of the benefits' end. —AFP

## Business

# Ahli United Bank appoints Jehad Al-Humaidhi as CEO

**Humaidhi, one of the most experienced and distinguished Kuwaiti banking professionals**

**KUWAIT:** Ahli United Bank has announced the appointment of Jehad Saud Al-Humaidhi as the CEO as of September 1st, 2021, after obtaining the approval of the Central Bank of Kuwait.

Jehad Al-Humaidhi is one of the most experienced and distinguished Kuwaiti banking professionals, with more than 36 years of wide experience in banking business. She has achieved great successes through her leadership and supervisory skills, in addition to her clear strategic vision in leading the bank's business, which contributed to attaining robust operational performance and good growth indicators in 2020 and H1 2021, despite the hard conditions posed by COVID-19 pandemic.

Jehad Al-Humaidhi has worked as AUB Acting CEO since December 2019 to date. She began her career at Ahli United Bank upon her graduation from university in 1984. Over these many years, she held several supervisory and leadership positions at the Bank. In 2011, she was appointed as General Manager - IT & Operations, to be promoted to Senior General Manager in 2016. Jehad Al-Humaidhi also served

as Deputy CEO - Banking Support Group since 2018, entrusted with the responsibilities of supervising the business of the financial, administrative and legal sectors, and Regulatory Compliance Department plus central operations and IT departments, and Treasury, bank cards and trade finance operations.

Jehad Al-Humaidhi is also board member and Vice-Chairman of K-NET, Ci Net, Al Hilal Takaful Insurance and Al Hilal Life. Jehad holds a degree of Bachelor of Science - Mathematics, Minor Economics from Kuwait University with a distinction grade.

Jehad Al-Humaidhi was awarded the "Women Entrepreneur of the Year 2017" in the field of IT by the prestigious International Finance magazine, in recognition of her distinguished career in banking business, and her leading role in implementing the Bank's plan for digital transformation, in addition to her effective role which contributed to the Bank's obtaining several prestigious awards.

On this occasion, Dr Anwar Ali Al-Mudhaf, AUB Chairman said, "We are pleased with the

appointment of Jehad as AUB CEO, confirming that she is a distinguished banking professional with notable leadership qualities. She has a long history of banking achievements, and a great experience that empowered her to attain several successes in her work."

Dr Al-Mudhaf added, "On behalf of the Bank's BoD, I extend my sincere congratulations to Jehad, stressing that the BoD has full confidence in her abilities and capabilities in leading the Bank in the next phase and that her assumption of the Executive Management will be an additional and qualitative value for the Bank, especially as she has been in step with the Bank's growth and development journey, and is closely informed of all details of its business progress.

Dr Al-Mudhaf pointed out that choosing Jehad for this position is in line with the Bank's strategy of relying on national leaders and professionals who possess distinguished qualifications and experiences to assume leadership positions in the Bank for the next phase of growth and development. Jehad Al-Hu-



Jehad Saud Al-Humaidhi

maidhi expressed her sincere gratitude to the AUB's BoD and the Central Bank of Kuwait for their precious confidence. Jehad Al-Humaidhi added, "I am very proud of belonging to AUB wherein I devoted my professional career. I am also proud to be one of the Bank distinguished team, and I am fully confident that our continuous cooperation will enable us to achieve more successes for this leading banking institution.

## Oil producers uphold small output increase

**LONDON:** The world's leading oil producers on Wednesday upheld a deal reached just over a month ago to boost output gradually despite US pressure to go further. After weeks of wrangling, members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries along with allies such as Russia-known collectively as OPEC+—agreed in July to raise output by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) from August.

The move is aimed at supporting a global economic recovery, which has been battered by the coronavirus pandemic—a crisis that sent oil demand plummeting last year. The videoconference on Wednesday of the 23 members of OPEC+ lasted less than an hour to "reaffirm the decision" taken in July, according to a statement by the group. "While the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to cast some uncertainty, market fundamentals have strengthened," it said, adding the next meeting would be held on October 4.

US national security adviser Jake Sullivan said last month that the production boost agreed in July was "simply not enough" to fuel a global recovery. But analysts had widely predicted a meeting with no surprises. Before the meeting, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said the OPEC+ deal had succeeded to eliminate the excess supply, which "had accumulated during the period of falling demand".

"It is now important to maintain this balance and to coordinate production and demand as the market recovers," he was quoted by the TASS news agency as saying. Kpler analysts said the latest decision "makes sense". "Given that policy is unchanged, we continue to expect that the gradual return of OPEC+ oil supply in the coming year will put downward pressure on prices," —AFP

## Apple plans to loosen App Store payment policy

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Apple announced it will loosen some of its App Store policies, allowing media apps to steer customers directly to their websites without paying commission. The change, to be implemented early next year, is being introduced to end an investigation by the Japan Fair Trade Commission.

The modification will spare so-called reader apps that provide digital content such as newspapers, books, music or video from having to use the App Store payment system and thus avoid paying a 30 percent commission. "We have great respect for the Japan Fair Trade Commission and appreciate the work we've done together, which will help developers of reader apps make it easier for users to set up and manage their apps and services, while protecting their privacy and maintaining their trust," Apple Fellow Phil Schiller said in a blog post.

Developers of the digital content apps will be able to link to their websites where users can create or manage accounts, according to Apple. While the change resulted from an agreement with the JFTC, it will apply globally to all reader apps at the App Store, the Silicon Valley tech giant said.

Apple has come under fire for its tight control of the App Store, where developers are required to use its payment system. Apple charges a commission of as much as 30 percent on sales of digital content or subscriptions at the App Store, with the payment system making certain the company



LOS ANGELES: This illustration photo shows the Apple app store logo reflected from an iPhone onto the back of an iMac in Los Angeles. —AFP

gets its piece of the action.

"Because developers of reader apps do not offer in-app digital goods and services for purchase, Apple agreed with the JFTC to let developers of these apps share a single link to their website to help users set up and manage their account," Apple said in a post. Apple last week agreed to loosen payment restrictions on its App Store, a major change announced in a settlement with small developers as the US technology giant faces growing scrutiny and legal challenges over its tightly controlled online marketplace. The change will allow small developers to inform their customers of alternative payment options beyond the official App Store.

In a class-action lawsuit, the developers had accused Apple of monopolistic distribution practices by operating the sole gateway to get apps or other content onto iPhones and other devices powered by iOS software. The proposed settlement is pending court approval. —AFP

## Business

# JPMorgan pays 25m euros to settle French fraud probe

## Bank accused of helping top Wendel executives set up a profit-sharing entity

**NEW YORK:** US banking giant JPMorgan Chase has agreed to pay a fine of 25 million euros (\$30 million) to settle charges of aiding tax fraud at France's Wendel investment group, prosecutors said in a statement yesterday.

French authorities suspected the bank of helping top Wendel executives set up a profit-sharing entity that let them avoid taxes on 315 million euros of investment gains in 2007 and 2008.

A trial still looms for the 14 executives, which include Wendel's former chairman Jean-Bernard Lafonta and Ernest-Antoine Seilliere, a former head of the main employers' lobby group, Medef.

At a hearing in Paris, JPMorgan's lawyers said they would not contest the settlement, putting an end to the inquiry against it.

The bank "gained no fiscal benefit" from setting up the investment vehicle and providing financing for the executives, Stephane Noel, president of the Paris judicial court, said at the hearing.

An appeals court had dropped the case against JPMorgan in 2018, but tax authorities and some of the defendants renewed their push to have the bank charged as well, a request that was denied last month.

"The bank had only a very limited role" in the scheme, JPMorgan's lawyer Thierry Marembert said at the hearing.

The investigation against JP Morgan was launched in 2012 after tax authorities discovered a financial instrument called Solfur, which yielded a net 315 million euros for its shareholders-including three Wendel board members and 11 top managers at the firm—for an initial investment of just 996,250 euros.

The gain was "completely tax-free", according to a 2015 document by France's financial fraud squad. —AFP



**NEW YORK:** The JPMorgan Chase & Co World headquarters. The US banking giant has agreed to pay a fine of 25 million euros (\$30 million) to settle charges of aiding tax fraud at France's Wendel investment group, prosecutors said in a statement yesterday. —AFP

## Sri Lanka raids sugar stocks as food shortages bite

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lankan government officials on Wednesday raided private warehouses to seize thousands of tons of sugar, a day after a state of emergency was declared over food shortages caused by a currency crisis. A military officer put in charge of efforts to bolster food stocks said at least 13,000 tonnes of white and brown sugar were found in the raids. "The objective is to prevent hoarding," Major General Senarath Niwunhella, who was named commissioner general of essential services on Tuesday, told AFP.

He denied the sugar was being confiscated. "The government will pay a reasonable price to the importers based on the valuations provided to customs." The general said importers had stockpiled sugar while market prices rose sharply. "Today we started with sugar and will expand this action to other commodities like wheat flour and rice too if importers do not release their stocks to the market," he said.

The raids were concentrated on warehouses just outside the capital. Experts have blamed the food crisis on a shortage of foreign exchange to import and maintain buffer stocks. Authorities have increased penalties for food hoarding. Sugar was not easily available at the state-mandated price of 135 rupees (\$0.67) a kilo (2.2 pounds), but could be bought in the black market for double the price.

Niwunhella said the seized stocks will be given to state-owned retail stores to sell for below the open market price. There have also been sharp price rises for rice, onions and potatoes, while long queues have formed outside stores because of shortages of milk powder, kerosene oil and cooking gas. The shortages come as the country of 21 million battles a fierce coronavirus wave that is claiming more than 200 lives a day. The economy shrank by a record 3.6 percent in 2020 because of the pandemic.

Last year, the government banned imports of vehicles and other items, including edible oils and the widely used spice turmeric in a bid to save foreign exchange. —AFP

## Briton charged in Singapore in Wirecard fraud

**SINGAPORE:** A British man has been charged in Singapore over a fraud linked to collapsed German payments firm Wirecard, authorities said yesterday, as the fallout from the scandal continues to spread. Wirecard filed for insolvency last year after admitting that 1.9 billion euros (\$2.2 billion) missing from its accounts did not exist, revelations that stunned Germany.

James Henry O'Sullivan, 46, was charged at a Singapore court Wednesday, a court official said. A charge sheet seen by AFP said the Briton in March 2017 got company director R. Shanmugaratnam to issue a letter showing his firm held 86.4 million euros (around \$100 million) in escrow for Wirecard.

In reality Shanmugaratnam's company, Citadelle Corporate Services, "did not maintain the said account", according to the charges. O'Sullivan could be jailed for up to 10 years, or fined, or both, if convicted. Citadelle, a Singapore business administration firm, has been at the centre of investigations in the city-state related to Wirecard's collapse. Shanmugaratnam, who was alleged to have falsely claimed in letters in 2016 and 2017 that the firm held large amounts in accounts on behalf of Wirecard, was charged last year.

Wirecard's woes began in January 2019 with a series of Financial Times



articles alleging accounting irregularities in its Asian division, headed by chief operating officer Jan Marsalek.

Marsalek remains at large after failing to turn himself in to German investigators. The Wirecard implosion, which has drawn comparisons with the Enron accounting scandal in the United States in the early 2000s, has been described as "unparalleled" in Germany by Finance Minister Olaf Scholz.

The company's former chief executive Markus Braun and several other top executives have been arrested on fraud and money laundering charges over the massive scam. —AFP

## Canada trade surplus shrinks

**TORONTO:** Canada's trade surplus shrank in July as shipments to and from the United States soared to new highs and trade with other nations — notably China — decreased, the national statistical agency said yesterday.

The surplus narrowed to Can\$778 million (US\$617 million) from Can\$2.6 billion the previous month, as total imports increased 4.2 percent to Can\$53.0 billion, outpacing a 0.6-

percent rise in exports to Can\$53.7 billion. Prices continued to have a "significant impact" on trade, Statistics Canada said in a statement, noting that export values have risen almost 17 percent since December 2020. Measured in volume, the July uptick in imports was smaller and exports actually edged down.

Shipments of motor vehicles and parts accounted for more than two-thirds of the increase in total imports in July. Imports of cellphones and laptops were also up, but vaccine purchases from foreign suppliers fell — with two-thirds of the population fully inoculated against COVID-19. There were increases in exports of motor vehicles and

parts, crude oil and natural gas, as well as electronic and electrical equipment and parts, aircraft and other transportation equipment and parts, basic and industrial chemical, plastic and rubber products, industrial machinery, equipment and parts, and consumer goods.

Those increases, however, were almost entirely offset by a decrease in exports of lumber and other sawmill products.

Trade with the United States — Canada's neighbor and biggest trading partner — hit record levels, with imports of Can\$34.1 billion and exports of Can\$40.8 billion. Meanwhile trade with other nations decreased. —AFP



## Business

# US factory activity expands but employment contracted

## Manufacturers struggling with ongoing supply chain snarls

WASHINGTON: US factory activity continued to expand in August but manufacturers struggled with ongoing supply chain snarls while employment contracted again, according to an industry survey released Wednesday. Defying expectations for a modest decline, the Institute for Supply Management (ISM) reported its manufacturing index rose slightly from July to 59.9 percent last month, extending the sector's recovery from last year's downturn caused by the pandemic.

However, "companies and suppliers continue to struggle at unprecedented levels to meet increasing demand," ISM manufacturing survey chair Timothy Fiore said. "All segments of the manufacturing economy are impacted by record-long raw-materials lead times, continued shortages of critical basic materials, rising commodities prices and difficulties in transporting products," he said in a statement.

The impact of the supply chain snarls was seen in the data, with the order backlog index rising about three percentage points to 68.2 percent. Otherwise the report was generally positive, with new orders climbing about two points to 66.7 percent, production gaining a similar amount to 60 percent and inventories crossing the 50-percent threshold indicating expansion with a 54.2 percent reading in August.

The data also showed supplier deliveries were speeding up, an indication that an end to the backlogs and delays may be coming. "Business is strong. Part shortages are our largest business constraint. We cannot fulfill orders to customers in reasonable lead times," an electrical equipment, appliances and components firm told the survey.

However, employment declined nearly four points to 49 percent, returning to contractionary territory after a single month of expansion. Fiore said "companies are still struggling to meet labor-management plans" but said there were signs the situation will again improve, as a large majority of companies say they are recruiting, and fewer are expressing issues filling open positions.

Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics said although supply chain problems are not likely to worsen further, he believed manufacturing was primed for a pullback, pointing to surveys from China which tend to predict the path of US industry and show the sector contracting.

"Stepping back from the COVID noise, the underlying rate of growth of manufacturing output probably is slowing, both in the United States and elsewhere, but this was inevitable, given the unsustainable strength of the initial rebound," Shepherdson wrote in an analysis.—AFP



MIAMI: In this file photo, employees work as they make respiratory masks in a family-owned medical equipment factory in north Miami, Florida. —AFP

## Brazil economy contracts 0.1% in Q2

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's economy performed worse than expected in the second quarter of 2021, contracting 0.1 percent in the latest sign the Latin American giant's pandemic recovery has lost steam. Analysts had forecast growth of around 0.2 percent, but the economy appeared to take a hit from high unemployment, surging inflation and a bad drought that is raising concerns about electricity supply from crucial hydropower plants.

The reversal from the first quarter's surprisingly strong 1.2 percent growth is bad news for President Jair Bolsonaro as he battles slumping popularity in the build-up to elections in October next year. Hit hard by the drought in the south and central-west, the agribusiness sector registered the worst output contraction for the April-June period, shrinking 2.8 percent, said the national statistics institute, IBGE. Industry retreated 0.2 percent, while the service sector expanded 0.7 percent, it said. Analysts had been upbeat on Latin America's biggest economy after Brazil's better-than-expected first quarter.

But the outlook has recently turned bleaker, with unemployment stubbornly high at 14.1 percent, inflation soaring to 8.99 percent — well above the central bank's target ceiling of 5.25 percent — and the worst drought in nearly a century fueling fears that electricity shortages could be on the horizon. Brazil depends on hydro power for around two-thirds of its electricity capacity. But low water levels mean its dams produce less energy. That has forced the national electricity agency, ANEEL, to hike customers' rates in a bid to curb consumption. However, the sharp rise in electric bills — with an average increase of 6.78 percent predicted for September — is only fueling other price increases, economists say.

### 'No big recovery'

The situation has left economic policy makers with no good op-



Unemployment has soared in Brazil due to the coronavirus pandemic.— AFP

tions. "We're seeing high inflation across the board, which is forcing the central bank to raise interest rates.... But that makes the economy slow down," said Paula Magalhaes, chief economist at consulting firm A.C. Pastore & Associados.

Uncertainty over the impact of the coronavirus Delta variant on the country with the world's second-highest COVID-19 death toll — 580,000 — is also weighing on the economy. Analysts polled by the central bank are currently forecasting Brazil's economy will grow 5.22 percent this year, after shrinking 4.1 percent in 2020, battered by the pandemic. With the weak second-quarter growth figure, this year's outlook is now likely to be revised down again, said Ettore Sanchez, chief economist at Ativa Investimentos. "This contraction surprised the market," he said. "We're not really seeing any big recovery in the economy. It's going to be very gradual and slow." The weakening economy could hurt Bolsonaro, whose approval rating has fallen to the lowest of his term, 23 percent, according to a poll last month by XP/Ipspe. —AFP

## Shell plans 50,000 UK electric car charging points

LONDON: Anglo-Dutch oil giant Royal Dutch Shell unveiled plans Wednesday to install up to 50,000 electric car charging points in Britain in the coming years. Shell said in a statement that its Ubitricity subsidiary aims to reach the target by late 2025, under the company's transition toward green energy.

Ubitricity, which was founded in Germany in 2008 and purchased by Shell earlier this year, provides on-street electric vehicle charging across Europe. It already has 3,600 charging points in Britain, using existing street infrastructure such as bollards and lamp posts. "The move is part of a wider effort to bring more electric vehicle charging availability to the millions of UK drivers without private parking and help local authorities get their charging networks up and running as quickly as possible," Shell said.

The UK government's Office of Zero Emission Vehicles currently pays 75 percent of the cost for installation of on-street electric car charging. The oil giant is prepared to pay remaining costs for local authorities to install Ubitricity charge points.

Britain plans to ban sales of high-polluting diesel and petrol cars from 2030 as part of efforts to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. That has helped spark a raft of investments in electric car manufacturing facilities and also in charging infrastructure.

Rival UK oil major BP had bought EV charging firm Charge-master in 2018, as it also bet on booming demand in the coming decades. Shell had said in June that it would accelerate plans to cut carbon emissions following a court order in the Netherlands.

The court in The Hague ordered Shell to slash its greenhouse gas emissions by 45 percent by 2030 in a landmark victory by climate activists with implications for energy firms worldwide. —AFP

## Business

# What can central banks do to address climate risks?

## Central banks are less than unified when it comes to addressing climate change

**WASHINGTON:** The world's main central banks were seen as saviors of the global economy in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and when the coronavirus pandemic hit last year, but they are less than unified when it comes to addressing climate change.

The start of central bank involvement in climate action is sometimes attributed to a 2015 speech by the Bank of England's (BOE) then-governor Mark Carney entitled "Breaking the tragedy of the horizon—climate change and financial stability."

While not directly involved in addressing global warming, central banks do have to be alert to its impact on the economy and the financial system. Amid increasing public concern, the institutions are factoring considerations about climate into their policies and watching for threats to their main mandate for price stability, implications for banking supervision and economic growth more broadly.

### What can they do?

One tool at their disposal are bank stress tests, which can gauge how financial institutions would hold up in the face of climate shocks. While the European Central Bank (ECB) has only just launched a climate stress test initiative, the Bank of France by May had already examined nine banking groups and 15 insurance companies, revealing a moderate risk for these establishments.

The ECB also could take climate risk into consideration when buying corporate bonds or accepting those used for collateral, giving preference to assets of firms not involved in polluting activities.

The People's Bank of China also is considering climate stress tests, while the BOE started in June, reviewing banks such as HSBC and Barclays. It also should announce before the end of the year its program of greening its asset buybacks. Many central banks have joined the Network of Central Banks and Supervisors for Greening the Financial System (NGFS), which currently com-

prises 95 central banks and regulators, including those in China, India and Brazil.

Another member, the Bank of Japan (BOJ), in June offered zero-interest financing to lending institutions that fund environmental projects. The BOJ also will buy green bonds denominated in foreign currency. In the United States, the Federal Reserve has been wading into the issue, but Chair Jerome Powell said in June that "climate change is not something that we directly consider in setting monetary policy."

However, "climate-related financial risk" is in its purview, he said, so the Fed is looking at the implications for bank supervision and regulation of the US financial system. Mary Daly, president of the Fed's San Francisco branch, explained that the central bank "does not have the tools or nor is it the appropriate body to think about climate change and mitigating climate change." But "we are absolutely involved in thinking about climate risk" including issues like how severe weather, fires and hurricanes can impact property values and the ability to get insurance, as well as how those could affect economic growth.

### Are they acting with sufficient urgency?

Actions so far have been "fast and slow," said Eric Dor, director of economic studies at the IESEG School of Management in France. While there is no shortage of ideas, "putting them into practice is very complex, you have to convince many stakeholders," he said.

But whether that means imposing financial constraints on institutions during stress tests, or the selection of green assets to buy, "you have to be progressive." Central bankers of the richest nations are urging governments to take the lead in addressing climate issues, as they did in the two most recent economic crises. "It is governments, not central banks, who are primarily respon-



**LONDON:**The world's main central banks were seen as saviors of the global economy in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and when the coronavirus pandemic hit last year. —AFP

sible for facilitating an orderly transition, and who control the main required tools," ECB President Christine Lagarde said in July. Roman Svartzman, economist at the Bank of France and co-author of a report entitled "The Green Swan" which examines the climate risks to the financial system, says central banks have a role to play, "but trying to solve it on their own will get nowhere." "There is no point in a central bank moving on its own in a country where the government does nothing, and vice versa." —AFP

## Record drop in Spanish joblessness as tourists return

**MADRID:** Spain posted yesterday a record drop in jobless figures in August as the labor market was buoyed by recovery of the tourism sector thanks to a relaxation of pandemic restrictions. The number of people registering as jobless fell by 82,583, or 2.42 percent, from July, the sixth consecutive monthly decline and the sharpest reduction in the month of August since the statistical series began in 1996, the labor ministry said.

The total number of unemployed stood at 3,333,915 million people. "This is great news, which confirms that we have overcome the worst of the crisis," Labor Minister Yolanda Diaz tweeted, adding the government must now "ensure that the recovery is fair and balanced".

While employment rose across all sectors except for construction, the bulk of those who found a job, 46,224, work in the service sector which is dominated by tourism. The arrival of foreign tourists to Spain jumped by 78.3 percent in July over the same time last year to 4.4 million, although the numbers remain far from the levels reached in the same month in 2019 before the pandemic.

Official figures for the month of August are not yet available but several sector leaders have said there was a sustained recovery in tourism activity as Spanish holidaymakers made up for the absence of foreign visitors. The Spanish government has said it was hoping to attract around 45 million tourist visits this year, ap-



**MADRID:** The number of people registering as jobless fell by 82,583, or 2.42 percent in Spain. —AFP

proximately half the figure for 2019.

Before the pandemic hit in spring 2020, Spain was the world's second-most popular tourist destination after France, and the sector accounted for around 12 percent of the economy. Spain's unemployment rate fell in the second quarter to 15.3 percent from 15.9 percent in the first quarter, according to National Institute of Statistics, which uses a survey method that catches people who are not registered for unemployment benefits.

The Spanish economy contracted by 10.8 percent in 2020, one of the worst results among industrialized countries, but it returned to growth in the second quarter this year. The government expects growth of 6.5 percent this year overall. —AFP

## Twitter tests Safety Mode to block Internet trolls

**PARIS:** Twitter on Wednesday announced it is testing a new feature that automatically blocks hateful messages, as the US site comes under increasing pressure to protect its users from online abuse. Users who activate the new Safety Mode will see their "mentions" filtered for seven days so that they don't see messages flagged as likely to contain hate speech or insults.

The feature will initially be tested by a small number of English-speaking users, Twitter said, with priority given to "marginalized communities and female journalists" who often find themselves targets of abuse. "We want to do more to reduce the burden on people dealing with unwelcome interactions," Twitter said in a statement, adding that the platform is committed to hosting "healthy conversations". Like other social media giants, Twitter allows users to report posts they consider to be hateful, including racist, homophobic and sexist messages.

But campaigners have long complained that holes in Twitter's policy allow violent and discriminatory comments to stay online in many cases. The platform is being sued in France by six anti-discrimination groups that accuse the company of "long-term and persistent" failures to block hateful comments. Safety Mode is the latest in a series of features introduced to give Twitter users more control over who can interact with them. Previous measures have included the ability to limit who can reply to a tweet. Twitter said the new feature was a work in progress, mindful that it might accidentally block messages that were not in fact abusive. —AFP

## Business

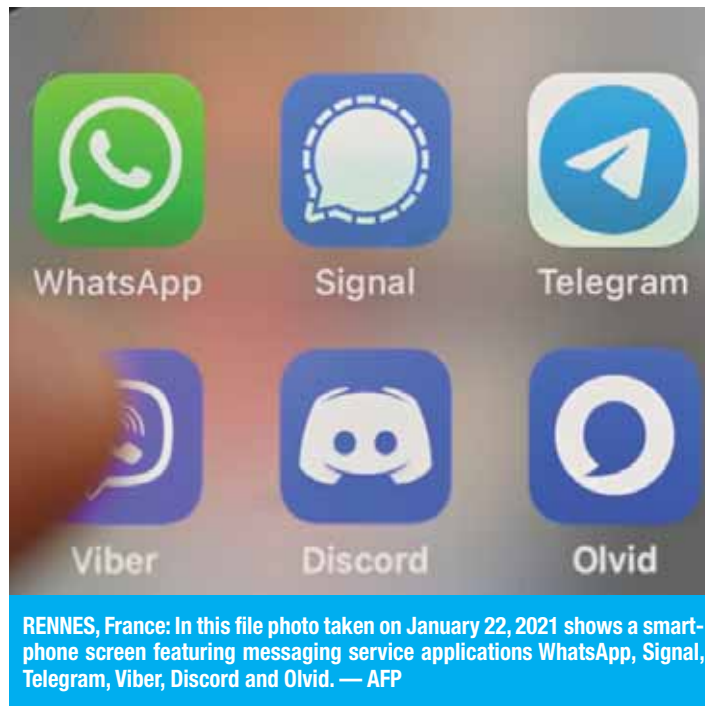
# Ireland slaps 225m euros fine on WhatsApp for breaching EU laws

## Actions after regulators demanded increased penalty

**RENNES, France:** Ireland yesterday imposed a 225-million-euro fine on Facebook-owned messaging service WhatsApp for breaching EU data privacy laws after European regulators demanded the penalty be increased. Ireland was asked to “reassess and increase its proposed fine on the basis of a number of factors ... and following this reassessment the DPC has imposed a fine of 225 million euro on WhatsApp,” said Ireland’s Data Protection Commission (DPC). The fine, the equivalent of \$267 million, was handed down by the DPC as the country hosts the European headquarters of Facebook.

As Ireland hosts the regional headquarters of a number of major tech players such as Apple, Google and Twitter, the DPC has been largely responsible for policing adherence to the EU’s landmark GDPR data rights charter.

The agency launched the WhatsApp probe in December 2018 to examine whether the messaging app “discharged its GDPR transparency obligations” with regard to telling users how their data would be used. This included information provided about the processing of information between WhatsApp and other Facebook companies. The DPC submitted its initial decision to other European regulators (CSAs) — whose approval is required—in December 2020 but received objections from eight of them. Unable to reach consensus, a dispute resolution process was launched in June. The European Data Protection Board (EDPB) adopted a binding decision last month that instructed the DPC to increase the fine. The DPC also “imposed a reprimand along with an order for WhatsApp to bring its processing into compliance by taking a range of specified remedial actions.” —AFP



RENNES, France: In this file photo taken on January 22, 2021 shows a smartphone screen featuring messaging service applications WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, Viber, Discord and Olvid. — AFP

## Tax fraud denunciation website causes an uproar in Germany

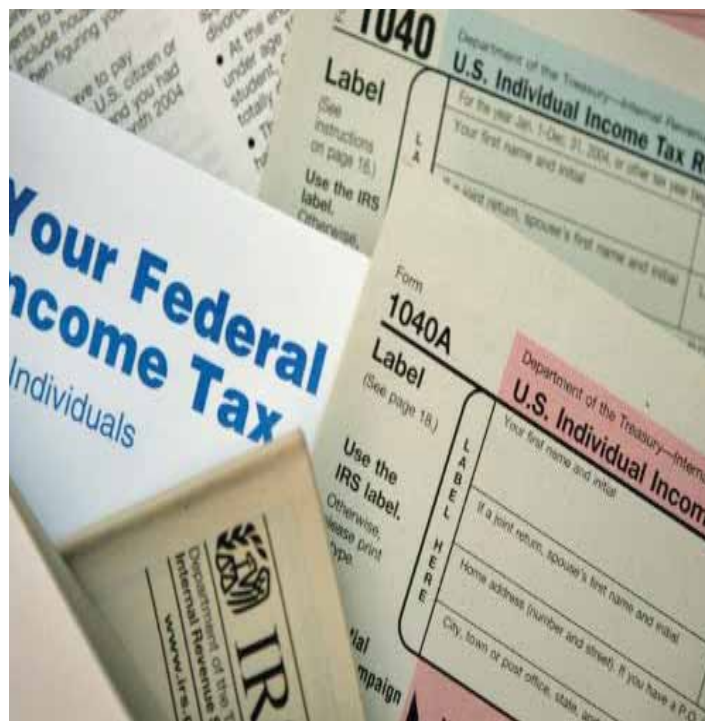
**BERLIN:** A proposal by Germany’s center-left Greens to roll out an online tax fraud denunciation platform has prompted sharp criticism from opposition parties in the run-up to elections later this month. The initiative, first introduced by the Green-led state of Baden-Wuerttemberg this week, gained the backing of the party’s candidate to be chancellor, Annalena Baerbock, who told TV channel ProSieben on Wednesday “we need to create places where significant fraud can be reported, when cases are known”.

The backlash has been swift in a country where anonymous denunciations recall the dark period of Nazi rule and mass surveillance under the communist government of East Germany.

The best-selling Bild daily slammed plans to create what it called a “tax Stasi”, a reference to the feared East German secret police who used a web of informants to keep tabs on citizens.

The Greens have “once again shown their true face”, the deputy leader of the Baden-Wuerttemberg conservatives, Thorsten Frei, said in a statement, despite his party being part of the ruling coalition in the state. “Every hard-working and tax-paying citizen” would now be under suspicion, he added.

While digitizing the tax system was important, “beginning with denunciations between neighbors is baffling”, the leader of the pro-business FDP party Christian Lindner told the Frankfurter Allgemeine newspaper. The initiative creates an “atmosphere of mistrust” said Bernd Goegel, the leader of the extreme-right AfD in Baden-Wuerttemberg. Baden-Wuerttemberg’s finance ministry brought the website online at the beginning of the week, promising a “secure and discreet” means of reporting potential tax crimes.



“Tax evasion is a slap in the face to all those who honestly pay their taxes,” said Danyal Bayaz, the state’s Green finance minister. A few weeks before the September 26 general election, the new initiative by Germany’s only Green-led state has stirred up debate in a country where tax fraud has been estimated at 50 billion euros (\$59 billion) a year.

Germany has a “big problem”, said chancellor candidate Baerbock, rejecting comparisons with the Stasi as “mocking” its victims. —AFP

## US regulator sues crypto platform over \$2bn fraud

**WASHINGTON:** The US markets watchdog on Wednesday sued an online cryptocurrency lending company and its top executives over allegations of fraudulently raising \$2 billion in investments. The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has charged BitConnect, its founder Satish Kumbhani, its top US promoter Glenn Arcaro and his company with offering “a fraudulent and unregistered offering and sale of securities in the form of investments in a ‘Lending Program,’” an SEC statement said.

The complaint says the defendants claimed the company’s “proprietary ‘volatility software trading bot’” would “generate exorbitantly high returns” on investors’ money. But the SEC has charged that, in fact, investors’ funds were siphoned off and transferred into digital wallets controlled by the defendants.

To attract investors, the SEC alleged BitConnect and Kumbhani—an Indian national—created a network of promoters who were paid on commission, “a substantial portion of which they concealed from investors.” Arcaro, the leading promoter of the lending program in the United States, has been accused of establishing the firm Future Money to “lure investors.”

“We allege that these defendants stole billions of dollars from retail investors around the world by exploiting their interest in digital assets,” said Lara Shalov Mehraban, the associate regional director of SEC’s New York office, in the statement. The defendants have been charged with violating federal antifraud and registration provisions laws, and could face “injunctive relief, disgorgement plus interest, and civil penalties.” The SEC filed a related civil suit in May against five other BitConnect promoters and has settled with two of the defendants. Arcaro also on Wednesday pleaded guilty to criminal charges in a parallel suit, according to the US Justice Department. —AFP

## Sports

# How a horse and an elephant helped India to first Test win in England

**LONDON:** England and India met at the Oval for the fourth Test yesterday, and it was just over 50 years since India's triumph at the south London ground saw them to a first match and series win on English soil. The story of how India fans borrowed Bella the elephant from Chessington Zoo and brought her to the Oval mid-match — something the 1971 team saw as a lucky omen as it coincided with the festival of Ganesh, the elephant-headed Hindu god — has gone down in cricket history.

But an animal of a different kind may have had a bigger influence on the game, according to India leg-spinner Bhagwat Chandrasekhar. With a bowling arm withered by childhood polio, Chandra was a unique proposition and his superb 6-38 in the second innings left India with a target of 173, which they chased down with four wickets to spare.

"I was walking back to my run-up and Dilip Sardesai shouted 'Hey Chandra, bowl him 'Mill Reef'," said Chandrasekhar in a video message to an audience at London's Taj St James Court Hotel celebrating the 'Golden Jubilee' on Wednesday. "There was a horse called Mill Reef in England, which was winning all the big races (including the 1971 Epsom Derby) and it had tremendous speed," added Chandra, whose quicker ball deceived many a batsman in a career that yielded 242 wickets in 58 Tests. "I had the idea of bowling my googly to John Edrich but then I thought 'Dilip Sardesai is a good student of the game.'"

## 'Freak bowler'

Chandrasekhar bowled Edrich, one of the mainstays of England's top order, for a duck. "Before he could lift the bat, the ball hit the stumps," added the 76-year-old, as he joyfully recalled Edrich's exit. Farokh Engineer, India's wicketkeeper in 1971, was in no doubt of Chandrasekhar's quality.

"Chandra, with due respect I think he is the greatest spin bowler India has produced," said Engineer, who also kept superbly to such outstanding spinners as Erapalli Prasanna, Bishan Bedi and Srinivasaraghavan Venkataraghavan.

"But half the time, he didn't know which way the ball was going," added Engineer speaking in London with Indian cricket journalist Ashis Ray. "He was a freak bowler. He was a polio victim, and hats off to him, he made his defect into a great asset."

## Saints move season-opener to Florida after Ida carnage

**NEW ORLEANS:** The New Orleans Saints will play their season-opening game against the Green Bay Packers in Jacksonville as Louisiana struggles with the aftermath of Hurricane Ida, the NFL team confirmed on Wednesday. The Saints were due to host the Packers at the Superdome but were forced to move operations to Dallas last week after evacuating before Ida slammed into the US Gulf Coast.

Although the Superdome escaped serious damage in the storm, New Orleans is still assessing the impact of the disaster with more than a million properties across Louisiana without power as of late Tuesday. Saints coach Sean Payton said earlier this week that the team may spend the first

month of the season on the road as a result of Ida.

The Saints had investigated the possibility of playing their season-opener at the Dallas Cowboys AT&T Stadium in Arlington, but that option was ruled out because of a schedule conflict at the venue. Saints owner Gayle Benson thanked the Jacksonville Jaguars for making their TIAA Field home available for the rearranged September 12 game.

"It is never easy to make a decision that involves not playing a Saints home game in the Caesars Superdome, but I am confident that this is the right decision for our city at this juncture," Benson said. "Collectively, we have a monumental task ahead of us in cleaning up the after effects left by Hurricane Ida, but it has been inspiring to see people getting right to work and starting the process."

"Our staff is working diligently to prepare for the game and we anticipate many Saints fans from across the region will be there to support Coach Payton and the Saints players." The Saints' second and third games of the season are away at Carolina and New England. They are due to return to the Superdome to host the New York Giants on October 3. —AFP



**LONDON:** (From left) England's Jonny Bairstow, England's captain Joe Root and England's Rory Burns appeal unsuccessfully during play on the first day of the fourth cricket Test match between England and India at the Oval cricket ground in London yesterday. —AFP

Engineer, 28 not out when Abid Ali hit the winning runs, had little time to enjoy the victory as the next day he was playing for English county Lancashire in Manchester. "The motorways weren't as good in those days, I got home at about four o'clock in the morning (0300 GMT) and at 10:30 am, I am striding out to open the innings with David Lloyd," the now 83-year-old Engineer recalled. "To my surprise, I got a standing ovation from the predominately English crowd. "I thought 'this is real sportsmanship — I've just shafted their country the day before and hear they are giving me a standing ovation. I had a tear in my eye.'"

England's John Jameson who made a fine 82 in the first innings, told the London audience of an event supported by the ICICI Bank, East African Foods and West Midlands India Partnership: "I am the only one here who has got a foot in both camps. "I'm a Bombay (Mumbai)-wallah — I was born in Byculla," added Jame-

son, who revealed he had rejected an approach to play for India as "my home was in England".

## Shastri 'inspired'

For India head coach Ravi Shastri, who later became a successful Test match all-rounder, the game was a key moment in his life. "I was nine years old, listening to it on Test Match Special from the BBC on 9.74 metres wavelength on the 31 metre band," Shastri said. "I listened to every ball in that game... and of course Farokh, he is from my school, my college, we go a long way back. For a nine-year-old, it inspired me no end. One day when you play cricket you want to win a series in England. It happened for me as a player (1986) and as a coach (in 2007)." And, with the current five-match series all square at 1-1, it could still happen again. —AFP

## Embiid slams Simmons rift reports

**LOS ANGELES:** Philadelphia 76ers star Joel Embiid on Wednesday denied reports of a rift with team-mate Ben Simmons amid reports that the Australian star is seeking to leave the franchise. USA Today reported that an increasingly unsettled Simmons wants to leave Philadelphia and had informed president of basketball operations Daryl Morey and coach Doc Rivers he planned not to report for training camp.

The report cited an "escalating" rift with Embiid as one of the reasons Simmons was looking for a trade following a 2020-2021 season that ended with yet another playoff disappointment. Embiid however denied any rupture in his relationship with Simmons in a series of tweets in response to the USA Today report.

"Stop using my name to push people's

agendas," Embiid wrote. "I love and hate drama. I love playing with Ben. Stats don't lie. He's an amazing player and we all didn't get the job done. It's on me personally. I hope everyone is back because we know we're good enough to win. From my own experience, y'all have no idea how much this media makes up stuff for followers and shame on you for believing them."

Simmons' future in Philadelphia has been the subject of speculation since the team lost a decisive Game 7 to Atlanta in last season's playoffs, with Simmons's offensive output shriveling in the crucial final quarter. That led to Sixers coach Rivers questioning whether Simmons could be a championship-winning point guard.

Embiid compared Simmons' current situation in 2019-2020, when he shushed fans for booing him during a poor run of form. "I haven't forgotten but 2 years ago, I got booed, people in Philly wanted me to be traded," Embiid said. "I even shushed them. Only the real ones didn't but I just put the work in that offseason to be better cuz I knew I wasn't playing up to my potential. Philly fans, y'all also gotta be better." — AFP

# Taekwondo makes Paralympic debut as Storey pedals to glory

**TOKYO:** Afghan athlete Zakia Khudadadi, who escaped Kabul after the Taliban takeover, competed in taekwondo's Paralympic debut in Tokyo yesterday, as cycling queen Sarah Storey became Britain's most successful Paralympian ever.

In the final days before Sunday's closing ceremony, Morocco prepared to take on five-a-side Goliaths Brazil in the semi-finals, and romance was in the air in the Olympic Stadium with a surprise post-race proposal.

Khudadadi, one of two Afghanistan team members evacuated from the country, fought in the Paralympics' first-ever taekwondo match, a day after badminton made its long-awaited first appearance.

She looked stoic ahead of her bout against Uzbekistan's Ziyodakhon Isakova, emerging from behind a curtain to AC/DC's "Thunderstruck". She lost the match but re-emerged for the evening repechage round, where she gave six-time world champion Viktoriia Marchuk of Ukraine a serious fright before bowing out 48-34.

"Of course I have worries and concerns about the situation in Afghanistan right now — I'm very glad that my opponent managed to come and compete with me," said Marchuk. Officials have said neither Afghan Paralympian will speak to the press in Tokyo, prioritizing the athletes' well-being.

"We've left them be for the last few days, just to focus on competition," International Paralympic Committee spokesman Craig Spence said yesterday. "We'll now start to have conversations about what happens in terms of the closing ceremony, and where they go next."

Meanwhile, British cycling legend Storey returned to the Fuji International Speedway to claim her 17th Paralympic vic-

tory in the women's C4-5 road race. The indomitable 43-year-old's golden hat-trick in Tokyo makes her the most decorated British Paralympian — dethroning swimmer Mike Kenny, who won 16 golds between 1976 to 1988.

"In that last descent I didn't touch my brakes, I just went for it," she said after the race, which went ahead in treacherous cool, wet and foggy conditions. The victory left her "overwhelmed", she told Channel 4 TV. "I feel like it is happening to someone else... but crossing the line first felt so good."

## Paralympic proposal

Japanese wheelchair tennis star Shingo Kunieda reached the finals after trouncing Britain's Gordon Reid 6-3, 6-2 in a thrilling match full of graceful rallies. Kunieda told public broadcaster NHK that his strategy had been to "hit proactively from the start, without worrying about making mistakes".

It means Japan has a chance of winning two singles golds, with Yui Kamiji due to face Dutch world number one Diede de Groot in the women's final today. Belgian wheelchair tennis player Joachim Gerard was rushed to hospital on Wednesday after he suddenly felt faint, the country's Olympic Committee said. The 32-year-old — who competed from Saturday to Monday — has regained consciousness and "first research is pointing towards a cardiac issue", it said in a statement.

The Tokyo Paralympics have so far avoided any major coronavirus clusters, although 275 positive tests have been reported by organizers overall, mostly among Japan-based staff and contractors. On Thursday they confirmed 13 new cases, all but one of whom live in Japan, as the country battles a surge



**CHIBA:** Afghanistan's Zakia Khudadadi (center) prepares to compete in the women's taekwondo K44 -49kg repechage quarter-final against Ukraine's Viktoriia Marchuk during the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games at Makuhari Messe Hall in Chiba yesterday. —AFP

in infections driven by the highly infectious Delta variant.

In the soggy Olympic Stadium yesterday, Cape Verde's Keula Nidreia Pereira Semedo failed to qualify for the women's T11 200m semifinals — but there was a surprise consolation. After the race, her guide runner Manuel Antonio Vaz da Veiga got down on one knee and proposed. Video of the magic moment showed both athletes beaming as Semedo accepted. "Now I have an additional motivation to carry on after the Games, always with him by my side," she said. —AFP

## Taliban approve Afghanistan's first Test since takeover

**KABUL:** The Taliban have approved Afghanistan's first cricket Test since their takeover, raising hopes that international matches will continue as usual under the new rule of the Islamists. "We have got approval to send the team to Australia," the chief executive of the Afghanistan Cricket Board, Hamid Shinwari, told AFP.

During their first stint in power, before they were ousted in 2001, the Taliban banned most forms of entertainment — including many sports — and stadiums were used as public execution venues. The hardline Islamists do not mind cricket, however, and the game is popular among many fighters.

They have also promised to enforce a less strict version of Islamic law this time, after seizing the capital Kabul last month. The Test match, to be played in Hobart from November 27-December 1, was scheduled for last year but was put off due to the COVID-19 pandemic and international travel restrictions. It will be Afghanistan's first Test in Australia.

Before the Australia tour, the Afghanistan

team will feature in the T20 World Cup, to be held in the United Arab Emirates from October 17-November 15. Shinwari also confirmed Afghanistan's Under-19 cricket team will tour Bangladesh for a bi-lateral series later this month.

Since the evacuation of the US and NATO forces from Afghanistan after the Taliban swept into Kabul last month there have been fears that cricket and other sports would be hit. But ACB officials categorically said that cricket was supported by the Taliban.

Afghanistan's home ODI series against Pakistan — shifted to Sri Lanka — was last week postponed until next year over logistical and COVID-19 issues. Cricket was barely known in Afghanistan until the early 2000s, and its rapid rise in popularity was linked with conflict — the sport was picked up in Pakistan by Afghan refugees who then seeded it in their home country.

But the national team has enjoyed a meteoric rise on the international scene since then, gaining coveted Test status in 2017 and now ranked among the top 10 sides in the world in the one-day international and T20 formats.

In the last 20 years, it has also emerged as a powerful symbol of national unity in a country riven by civil war and ethnic conflict. Afghanistan's star player Rashid Khan was last year named the Men's T20I Player of the Decade by the International Cricket Council. —AFP

## Hassan headlines classy Brussels Diamond League

**BRUSSELS:** Dutch all-rounder Sifan Hassan, who won two golds and a bronze in an unprecedented effort at a distance treble at the Tokyo Olympics, heads up a talent-loaded field at the penultimate meeting of the 2021 Diamond League series in Brussels today.

In the last event before the two-day Diamond League finals in Zurich on September 8-9, the men's 100m featuring Tokyo silver medalist Fred Kerley of the US will also be a highlight. Kerley will be up against compatriots Trayvon Bromell, Michael Norman and Ronnie Baker, along with Canada's Olympic 200m champion Andre De Grasse.

Kerley, fresh from a personal best of 19.79sec in the 200m in Paris last week, said: "I've got a lot of confidence in my current form and want to show what I've got in the upcoming weeks. My goal is very clear: I want to be the fastest man in the 100m, 200m and the 400m."

Kerley joined an exclusive club this year of sprinters who have broken 10 seconds in

the 100m, 20 seconds in the 200m and 44 seconds in the 400m. Only Norman and South African Wayne van Niekerk have also achieved the feat.

"I want to be the best at all three distances. What makes someone the best, maybe a world record? I know I have got the potential to break the 400m record. I want to be a legend, like Usain Bolt. I see him as a big brother. To me he will always have a spot on the podium of the greatest of all time, he is a big example." Hassan will race the mile at the King Baudouin Stadium, a venue she knows well, having broken the one-hour world record there last year. The Ethiopian-born Dutch runner is also the world record holder in the mile and, given her sparkling form, it would take a brave person to bet against her winning once again.

The women's 200m is packed full of quality, with Tokyo bronze medalist Shericka Jackson, Olympic finalist Marie-Josée Ta Lou and a handful of sprinters who have a point to prove after Olympic disappointment this summer. Outspoken American Sha'Carri Richardson missed out on a trip to Tokyo after being handed a one-month ban after testing positive for cannabis while Britain's Dina Asher-Smith was forced to pull out through injury. —AFP

## Sports

# Tsitsipas rolls after another long US Open toilet break

**NEW YORK:** Stefanos Tsitsipas took another trademark long bathroom break then credited it for advancing to the third round of the US Open on Wednesday as a storm lashing New York forced the suspension of an indoor match.

The 23-year-old Greek third seed was booed after taking more than eight minutes between the third and fourth sets but dominated after his extended toilet trip to flush Frenchman Adrian Panarin 6-3, 6-4, 6-7 (4/7), 6-0 at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"I think taking a break and going to change — I was completely wet — I was refreshed," Tsitsipas said when asked about the key to sweeping the final set in 30 minutes. "I was much more able to deliver good tennis in the fourth set. I was able to stay resilient on each and every point."

Tsitsipas, who matched his deepest US Open run, has been ridiculed by Andy Murray and Alexander Zverev for extended bathroom breaks seen as gamesmanship. French Open runner-up Tsitsipas, who says he's only following ATP rules that have no time limit on toilet breaks, fired a career-high 27 aces, five more than his previous best, in winning his ATP-best 50th match of the year. "I just felt very loose on my serve," Tsitsipas said. "My ball toss was very consistent. That helped me find a spot and have points off my serve."

High winds and water drenched the grounds and wind-blown rain entered through upper corner openings under the closed roof of Louis Armstrong Stadium to suspend a second-round match between South African Kevin Anderson and Argentina's Diego Schwartzman.

Remnants of deadly Hurricane Ida would shut down the covered court after twice interrupting the match, with the National Weather Service issuing a tornado and flash flood warnings for the area. Anderson and Schwartzman resumed in Ashe after Tsitsipas's victory, with the South American winning 7-6 (7/4), 6-3, 6-4.

## Walkover for Osaka

Defending champion Naomi Osaka advanced by walkover

while Russian second seed Daniil Medvedev breezed into the third round over Germany's Dominik Koepfer 6-4, 6-1, 6-2. Osaka reached the third round when 20-year-old Serbian qualifier Olga Danilovic withdrew due to illness. "I have been feeling unwell these past few days dealing with a non-COVID related viral illness," Danilovic posted on social media.

Osaka, seeking her fifth Grand Slam title and third US Open crown in four years, next faces Canada's 73rd-ranked Leylah Fernandez. The 23-year-old Japanese third seed could become the first repeat US Open winner since Serena Williams, absent with a torn hamstring, captured her third in a row in 2014.

Sloane Stephens, the 2017 US Open winner who could meet Osaka in the fourth round, beat 21st seed Coco Gauff 6-4, 6-2 in an all-American showdown. "I'm really pleased with how I played," Stephens said.

Medvedev, a winner last month in Toronto, also beat Koepfer on his way to the 2019 US Open final, which he lost to Rafael Nadal. "Great level from me," Medvedev said. "There were a few tight moments in the match and I managed to play them well. I'm happy to be through in less than two hours."

Russian fifth seed Andrey Rublev beat Spain's Pedro Martinez 7-6 (7/2), 6-7 (5/7), 6-1, 6-1. He next faces 50th-ranked American Frances Tiafoe, who warns, "I'm coming after him."

## Muguruza, Azarenka win

Two-time Grand Slam winners Victoria Azarenka and Garbine Muguruza booked a third-round showdown. Spanish ninth seed Muguruza, the 2016 French Open and 2017 Wimbledon winner, beat Andrea Petkovic 6-4, 6-2, taking her first win in four tries against the German.

She will next face two-time Australian Open champion and three-time US Open runner-up Azarenka, the 18th seed from Belarus who defeated Italy's Jasmine Paolini 6-3, 7-6 (7/1). "The

stappen in action on home soil will be restricted by Covid to around 70,000 fans per day. Even so, many of the 'orange army' will be there in some welcome warm dry weather after being soaked at Spa.

Verstappen will be trying to become the first Dutchman to win his home event, while seven-time world champion Hamilton will be bidding to become the first man to win 100 Grands Prix. "It wasn't a satisfying feeling to leave Belgium with just a handful of laps behind the safety car, but it is what it is," said frustrated Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff. "We need to close that chapter and quickly move on and focus on the next one."

"Zandvoort is an exciting track for the drivers because it's fast and flowing. It feels like a proper old-school track so I am sure they are looking forward to taking on that challenge. And as a team, we are relishing the challenge of tackling a new track and that means fresh opportunities to find advantage. We aim (to) hit the ground running on Friday and take the fight to our competitors."

## 'Unacceptable result'

Despite calls, led by Hamilton, to consider giving the spectators in Belgium a refund, Wolff stressed it was best to "move on", but he faced some opposition with McLaren team boss Zak Brown calling for action.

"I think there's a tremendous amount of learning to come out of that weekend, in how to handle the wet, how to handle the rules and the points, how you handle the fans," said Brown. "I'm very happy that the leader of our sport Stefano (Domenicali) shares those same views that that was an unacceptable result and has called all the team bosses together in Holland to address it, learn from it and fix it."



**NEW YORK:** Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas hits a return to France's Adrian Panarin during their 2021 US Open Tennis tournament men's singles second round match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York, on Wednesday. —AFP

next round is going to be exciting for both of us," Azarenka said.

Azarenka and Muguruza have split four career meetings. "It's going to be a very difficult match. She always plays great here," Muguruza said.

"She's one of the best players out there." Romanian 12th seed Simona Halep, a two-time major champion, beat Slovakian Kristina Kucova 6-3, 6-1. After an injury-nagged season, it's Halep's deepest US Open run since 2016. "I feel better. I'm more confident," Halep said. "Before the tournament, I was a little worried with injuries." —AFP

## After Belgian washout, Verstappen's home race could create heat

**ZANDVOORT:** Formula One hopes a return to "a proper old-school track" in the Netherlands this weekend can wipe away memories of last Sunday's farcical washout in Belgium. The first Dutch Grand Prix since 1985 is the second leg of a triple header of three races in three weeks.

The opener was a damp squib that is still causing bickering in Formula One. It ended in a controversial 'race' of two completed laps behind a safety car in a downpour at Spa-Francorchamps.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen simply led unchallenged from pole position until the race was red-flagged and abandoned and received half points for his hollow triumph. It was enough for him to trim Lewis Hamilton's advantage to three points.

The Dutch driver could take the lead before his enthusiastic fans as Formula One returns to Zandvoort, a fast circuit set in coastal sand dunes at the beach resort near Amsterdam where the last winner was Niki Lauda for McLaren in 1985.

The undulating track, which features banked corners and sea views, has retained its unique, challenging and quirky character, including the famous Tarzan corner. Even with a reduced attendance it should create a carnival atmosphere.

The circuit has a capacity of 105,000 and the race was sold out, but the attendance for a long-awaited chance to see Ver-



**ZANDVOORT:** Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen (center) walks with team members and journalists on the track in Zandvoort yesterday, three days before the race of the 2021 Formula One Dutch Grand Prix. —AFP

As the arguments over reimbursing the Belgian crowd rumble on, the noisy Dutch fans are likely to give Hamilton a difficult reception as he resumes his title scrap with Verstappen. Mercedes may have a car that enjoys the track more than Red Bull in a close contest in which McLaren and Ferrari could be a threat while, in the background, speculation about the driver line-ups for next year is likely to intensify.

Finn Kimi Raikkonen on Wednesday announced his plan to retire this year, leaving a seat vacant at Alfa Romeo, which compatriot Valtteri Bottas is expected to land if he is replaced at Mercedes by Briton George Russell of Williams. —AFP

## Sports

# History man Ronaldo saves Portugal as France held in World Cup qualifying

**PARIS:** Cristiano Ronaldo became the all-time top scorer in men's international football with two late goals as Portugal beat the Republic of Ireland 2-1, while holders France drew 1-1 with Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2022 World Cup qualifying on Wednesday.

A day after completing his return to Manchester United, Ronaldo had an early penalty saved by teenage goalkeeper Gavin Bazunu in Faro before Ireland took the lead on the stroke of half-time. John Egan's glancing header put Stephen Kenny's side on course for a famous win, but Ronaldo broke Irish hearts with an 89th-minute equaliser — a goal that took him past the Iranian Ali Daei's record of 109.

The 36-year-old Ronaldo then snatched all three points for Portugal in the sixth minute of injury time, rising highest to power in a header from Joao Mario's right-wing cross. "This record is mine and it is unique. I'm extremely happy and it's another one for my career," Ronaldo told RTP public television.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner also equalled Sergio Ramos's European mark of 180 caps. "(The motivation comes from) the desire I have to continue playing football, also from this last contract I signed (at Manchester United), in which I was happy to return home," said Ronaldo. "Scoring goals, putting on a show and winning titles, that's what I like the most."

Portugal sit top of Group A with 10 points from four matches, although Serbia are only three points behind with a game in hand. The group winners qualify automatically for next year's finals in Qatar, with the runners-up heading into the play-offs. France, playing for the first time since losing to Switzerland in the last 16 at Euro 2020, fell behind in Strasbourg when Edin Dzeko rifled in a low drive from 20 yards.

## Kounde red card

Antoine Griezmann equalized when Dzeko's header at a corner struck the France forward and bounced just over the line, but the hosts saw Jules Kounde sent off for a reckless tackle early in the second half. France hold a four-point lead at the top of Group D above Ukraine, who conceded a last-gasp goal in a 2-2 draw away to Kazakhstan. Finland are six points adrift but have two games in hand.

"Qualifying stages are difficult," said France coach Didier Deschamps, whose side go to Kiev next to face Ukraine. "We have to be satisfied with a draw given what happened. We have one point more, there are still lots more available and the match on Saturday is coming very quickly."

## Mane scores as Senegal defeat World Cup bogey team Togo

**JOHANNESBURG:** Sadio Mane scored as Senegal won and his Liverpool teammate Naby Keita created a goal as Guinea drew when 2022 World Cup group qualifying in Africa finally kicked off on Wednesday after three coronavirus-induced postponements.

Mane netted through a close-range shot on 56 minutes and Paris Saint-Germain defender Abdou Diallo scored a similar goal nine minutes from time as Senegal beat bogey team Togo 2-0 in Thies. Keita set up Francois Kamano, who gave Guinea a seventh-minute lead over Guinea-Bissau in neutral Nouakchott that was surrendered just after half-time when Joseph Mendes struck to earn a 1-1 draw.

Unlike Mane and Keita, who played as their countries are not on the United Kingdom COVID-19 travel 'red list', star Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah could not turn out for Egypt against An-



**LOULE:** Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo (right) fights for the ball with Ireland's defender Andrew Omobamidele during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 European qualifying round group A football match between Portugal and Ireland at the Algarve stadium in Loule, near Faro, southern Portugal, on Wednesday. —AFP

Erling Haaland scored his first World Cup qualifying goal in Norway's 1-1 draw against the Netherlands in Oslo. Haaland's scrappy finish gave Norway the lead on 20 minutes, but Davy Klaassen levelled before the break as Louis van Gaal began his third stint in charge of the Dutch national team.

One point separates the leading four teams in Group G, with Turkey top despite blowing a two-goal lead in a 2-2 draw at home to Montenegro. Croatia, the 2018 World Cup runners-up, drew

0-0 away to Russia and remain above their opponents on goal difference as leaders of Group H. Slovakia are a point behind after a 1-1 draw with Slovenia. Daniel Wass and Joakim Maehle scored two quick-fire goals as Euro 2020 semi-finalists Denmark swept Scotland aside 2-0 to make it four wins from four in Group F. The Zionist entity are their nearest challengers after Eran Zahavi bagged a hat-trick in a 4-0 victory in the Faroe Islands. Austria are level on points following their 2-0 win in Moldova. —AFP

gola in Cairo. Two-time African Footballer of the Year Salah faced 10 days' quarantine on his return from red-listed Egypt, potentially missing four matches, had he travelled.

In his absence, record seven-time African champions Egypt won 1-0 in Group F with Mohamed 'Afsha' Magdy converting a fifth-minute penalty kick. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang was given a boost as he captained Gabon to a 2-1 loss in Libya despite being yellow-carded, as Sanad al Ouarfali snatched an 89th-minute winner.

Aubameyang, who also skips Arsenal, suffered the humiliation of being substituted in a 5-0 English Premier League rout at Manchester City last Saturday. Victory for Libya, who levelled through Ali Salama before half-time after Andre Poko put Gabon ahead, took them to the top of Group F, ahead of Egypt on goals scored. Southampton midfielder Moussa Djenepo helped Mali edge Rwanda 1-0 in Moroccan coastal city Agadir with Adama Traore the first-half match-winner.

## Guinea slip up

Senegal are seeking to reach successive World Cup tournaments for the first time after their last attempt to do so came unstick when they lost out to shock 2006 qualifiers Togo. Boasting

a formidable 'spine' of Chelsea goalkeeper Edouard Mendy, Napoli centre-back Kalidou Koulibaly, PSG midfielder Idrissa Gueye and Mane, Senegal ensured Togo would not embarrass them again. Senegal top Group H with Namibia and Congo Brazzaville, the other contenders for one place in the final qualifying round. Namibia, along with Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Mali and Niger, have to play at neutral venues because they lack international-standard stadiums.

Guinea, expected to pose the biggest threat to Group I favorites Morocco, will be disappointed that they failed to take full advantage of Guinea-Bissau having to move a home fixture to Mauritania. To secure a place at the 32-nation finals, five-time qualifiers Morocco must not only finish first, but also win a two-leg play-off against another group winner next March.

Nigeria meet Liberia on Friday knowing victory in Lagos will take them to the top of Group C after their other rivals, Central African Republic and Cape Verde, drew 1-1 in rain-lashed Cameroonian city Douala. Julio Tavares gave Cape Verde a half-time lead with a half-volley off a cross and Tresor Toropite punished a fumble by goalkeeper Josimar 'Vozinha' Dias to equalise on 53 minutes. —AFP

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## Ronaldo saves Portugal in World Cup qualifying

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