



**3** Residents stranded abroad face back rent, accumulated debts



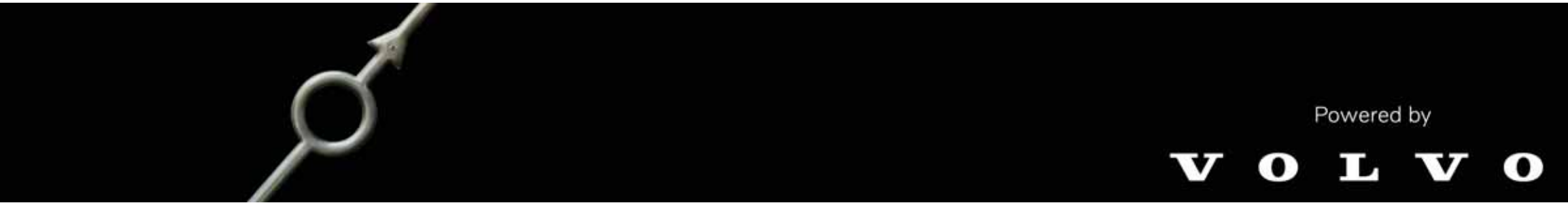
**5** Taliban make themselves at home in Dostum's mansion



**12** Beauty pageants, races spur demand for cloned camels



**15** US Open champ Raducanu gets epic qualifier Slam win



# MP demands reasons for 'crazy' air ticket prices

## Lawmaker rejects reported Kuwaiti aid for Lebanon gas project



KUWAIT: People queue to receive the COVID-19 vaccine at the Kuwait Vaccination Center at the Mishref Fairgrounds yesterday. — Xinhua

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Hisham Al-Saleh yesterday sent a series of questions to the finance minister asking why airfares to and from Kuwait have sharply increased since the summer holidays started. Saleh told the minister in his questions that "the prices of air tickets to the country have recorded a crazy rise since Eid Al-Adha and the summer vacation".

He added that airlines have cited limitations on the number of seats due to the reduction in the capacity of Kuwait airport as a result of the measures against the coronavirus pandemic. Saleh pointed out that despite increasing the capacity of Kuwait airport, the prices of air tickets have not dropped, especially after allowing vaccinated expats to return to the country from August 1.

The lawmaker asked the minister about the reasons for the continued hike in airfares despite boosting the airport's capacity. He also asked if the government has any plan to bring down the price of tickets and questioned why state-owned Kuwait Airways does not make competitive offers.

Airfares to Kuwait and other countries have more than doubled on many routes due to limited seats available for booking. Prices on the Kuwait-Dubai route more than tripled at one stage and still continue to be extremely high.

Meanwhile, MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf yesterday warned the government against going ahead with reported plans to fund Lebanon's part of the so-called Arab gas pipeline, which will bring natural gas from Egypt to Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Hajraf said he will send questions to the government shortly about visits made by the foreign minister to Egypt and if these visits were linked to the Arab gas pipeline and statements by the new Lebanese prime minister about a pledged Kuwaiti loan to fund Lebanon's portion of the project.

The lawmaker called on the government to resign for failing to manage the national economy and for talking about offering foreign loans while the country faces fiscal problems and officials speak about raising fuel and electricity prices and cutting subsidies.

## Iran surveillance deal keeps nuke talks hopes alive



TEHRAN: Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Mohammad Eslami delivers a speech next to Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Rafael Grossi following their meeting yesterday. — AFP

TEHRAN: Iran and the UN atomic agency yesterday announced the IAEA will keep up surveillance of Tehran's nuclear activities, soothing a sore point in talks to resuscitate a 2015 deal to curb its program. With negotiations in Vienna between Iran and world powers deadlocked, the steps hashed out with International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi on a visit to Tehran leave a chink of hope for US President Joe Biden's ambition to restore the agreement, known as the JCPOA.

Since Donald Trump's administration walked away in 2018, Iran has since also retreated from many of its commitments. In a joint statement yesterday, Grossi and Iranian Atomic Energy Organization (AEOI) chief Mohammad Eslami - one of the country's vice presidents - hailed a "spirit of cooperation and mutual trust", while noting that surveillance was an issue to be treated "exclusively in a technical manner".

Eslami welcomed "good and constructive negotiations with Mr Grossi," while again insisting on the "technical" nature of the bargain, Iran's official IRNA news agency reported. Their deal relates to limits Iran has imposed on the IAEA's ability to monitor various of its nuclear facilities. Iran has refused to provide real-time footage from cameras and other surveillance tools that the UN agency has installed in these locations.

Under a compromise deal, the monitoring equipment remains in the agency's custody but the data is in Iran's possession, and must not be

Continued on Page 2

## Qatar FM visits Kabul, meets Taliban PM

KABUL: Qatar's foreign minister, who is also the country's deputy premier, was briefly in Afghanistan yesterday, becoming the most senior diplomat to visit the country since the Taliban's takeover on August 15. A Taliban official tweeted that Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani met senior officials of the new Afghan regime, although details of their talks were not disclosed.

The group released pictures of Sheikh Mohammad meeting new Prime Minister Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund, while photographs of him with former president Hamid

Karzai were circulating on social media. Qatar has long acted as a mediator on Afghanistan, hosting the Taliban's talks with the United States under former president Donald Trump, and then with the now deposed Afghan government of president Ashraf Ghani.

It is also supporting tens of thousands of Afghans who were evacuated in the final weeks of the US-led occupation as they are processed before heading to other nations. No country has yet formally recognized the new Taliban government - and only three did during the first rule of the hardline Islamists from 1996-2001.

Meanwhile, Afghan women will be allowed to attend university as long as they study separately from men, the Taliban's new higher education minister said yesterday. Women's rights in Afghanistan were sharply curtailed

Continued on Page 2



KABUL: Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani boards a car upon his arrival at the airport yesterday. — AFP

## Bangladesh schools reopen after 18 months

DHAKA: Children in Bangladesh flooded back into classrooms yesterday as schools reopened after 18 months, one of the world's longest coronavirus shutdowns. The resumption came after UNICEF warned that prolonged school closures during the COVID-19 crisis were worsening inequities for millions of children across South Asia.

In the capital Dhaka, students at one school were welcomed with flowers and sweets, and told to wear masks and sanitize their hands. Some hugged each other in excitement. "We are really excited to be back at school," 15-year-old Muntasir Ahmed told AFP as he entered the campus. "I am hoping to physically see all of my friends and teachers, not through a laptop window today."

At the gate, school officials checked the body temperatures of students before allowing them to enter. The school's vice principal, Dewan Tamziduzzaman, said he "didn't expect such a big number to be turning up on the first day".

Continued on Page 2



DHAKA: A guard checks the temperature of a student upon her arrival at Rajuk Uttara Model College yesterday. — AFP

## Saied calls to amend Tunisia constitution

TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied has announced plans to form a new government and said the constitution should be amended, weeks after he sacked his premier and suspended parliament in moves his critics called a coup. Speaking to two television channels after a late Saturday evening stroll in central Tunis, Saied said he would

form a new government "as soon as possible" after selecting "the people with the most integrity". But he declined to give a specific timeline.

Saied also told the television stations that "the Tunisian people rejected the constitution". He added that such charters are "not eternal" and stated that "we can introduce amendments to the text". His comments, which confirmed earlier media speculations on his plans, were dismissed by the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party, the largest bloc in parliament.

The party in a statement expressed "its categorical rejection of the attempts of some parties that are hostile to the democratic process... to push for choices that violate the rules of the constitution". Ennahdha added that it would oppose "an intended

suspension of the application of the constitution and a change to the political system, possibly through a referendum".

The influential UGTT trade union confederation, which has so far backed Saied, also rejected any "suspension of the constitution" and called for early legislative elections so that a new parliament could look into potential constitutional changes.

Saied, a legal theorist and former law professor, was elected in 2019 and has billed himself as the ultimate interpreter of the constitution. He invoked that power on July 25 to fire the prime minister, freeze parliament and strip MPs of their immunity, and assume all executive powers.

Continued on Page 2



## Local

# Kuwait's Amir receives Crown Prince, local figures

## Sheikh Nawaf offers condolences over former portuguese President's death



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



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Ahmad Al-Shohumi.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Transparency Enhancement Abdullah Al-Roumi.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ministers of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Al-Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy

Speaker of the National Assembly Ahmad Al-Shohumi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, and Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Transparency Enhancement Abdullah Al-Roumi. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince

received His Highness Sheikh Al-Sabah Al-Khaled, Shohumi, Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali and Roumi yesterday at Seif Palace. His Highness Sheikh Mishal also received Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. In other news,

His Highness the Amir sent yesterday a cable of condolences to the president of Portugal Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa over the death of former President of the country Jorge Sampaio. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables. — KUNA

## Saied calls to amend Tunisia...

Continued from Page 1

His power grab came amid chronic legislative infighting that had crippled governance. It was followed by a sweeping anti-corruption drive that has included detentions, travel bans and house arrests of politicians, businessmen and judicial officials.

Saied has yet to appoint a new government or reveal a roadmap towards normalization, despite repeated demands by political parties. His moves have been criticized by judges and opponents, in particular Ennahdha. But some Tunisians, exasperated by their political class and its perceived corruption, impunity and failure to improve living standards more than a decade since the country's protests launched the Arab Spring, see them as a necessary evil.

The chants of "Dignity!" and "Work!" that filled the air during the revolution have again started to sound at demonstrations. In images posted around midnight on the Tunisian presidency's Facebook page, Saied was seen walking down the capital's Bourguiba Avenue as a crowd sang the national anthem, before he stopped to speak with the TV channels.

Earlier that day on the same central thoroughfare, a man had set himself on fire and later died of his burns - a desperate act that followed another self-immolation a week before protesting living conditions. According to Tunisian media reports, the man who died Saturday was struggling with economic issues and had come to Tunis from Djerba to



TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied (right) greets people as he walks in the capital's central Habib Bourguiba Avenue late Saturday. — AFP

seek solutions to his plight.

The deaths recall that of the street vendor who burned himself alive on Dec 17, 2010 and launched both Tunisia's popular revolution and the wider Arab Spring that toppled several autocratic leaders in the region. Tunisia, hailed as a rare democratic success story in the Middle East and North Africa, was struggling with dire economic woes and the COVID-19 pandemic before being plunged into the latest political crisis.

Saied's comments came a day after he received in Tunis the EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell who expressed the bloc's concerns over the power grab. "I communicated to the president Europe's apprehensions about the preservation of democratic gains in Tunisia," Borrell said after talks with Saied. "The free exercise of legislative power and the resumption of parliamentary activity are part of these gains and must be respected," he added. Earlier this month, diplomats from the G7 nations - Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US - called on Saied to return Tunisia to "a constitutional order". — AFP

for an earliest resumption of #ViennaTalks on restoration of #JCPOA."

The surveillance issue had heightened tensions at the time the new government of Iran's ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi was taking charge in Tehran. Iran has also boosted its stocks of uranium enriched above the levels allowed in the 2015 deal, the IAEA has said. A meeting of the UN agency's board of governors is scheduled for today. "We have decided to be present at the next meeting and to continue our talks on the sidelines," Iran's Eslami told IRNA.

Raisi argued in a statement on Wednesday that his country was "transparent" about its nuclear activities, which Iran has always insisted are peaceful. "Naturally, in the event of a non-constructive approach by the IAEA, it is unreasonable to expect Iran to respond constructively," he said. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken cautioned last Wednesday that, faced with the impasse, the United States was "close" to abandoning its diplomatic efforts.

Zionist Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Friday charged that the IAEA report "proves that Iran is continuing to lie to the world and advance a program to develop nuclear weapons, while denying its international commitments". — AFP

## Iraq receives over 100K vaccine doses

BAGHDAD: Iraq yesterday received a donation of more than 100,000 AstraZeneca doses against COVID-19 from Italy via vaccine-sharing facility Covax, the UN children's agency UNICEF said. More than four million people in Iraq, or around 10 percent of its 40 million inhabitants, have received at least one coronavirus vaccine jab, according to the health ministry.

Healthcare workers say they are battling not just the coronavirus but also widespread skepticism over vaccines, as a result of misinformation and public mistrust in the state. Iraq yesterday received "100,800 (doses) of the AstraZeneca vaccine... the

first delivery from a pledge of 15 million doses to be donated to Covax by Italy", according to a statement from UNICEF, which works jointly with the World Health Organization (WHO).

Covax is backed by WHO, the Gavi vaccine alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), and it aims to ensure equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, particularly to low-income countries. It is Iraq's third vaccine delivery under the Covax program. Iraq's public health system, already worn down by decades of war, under-investment and corruption, has struggled to cope with the pandemic.

"In WHO, we believe that we are only safe when we all are safe, and we will control this pandemic only when all people eligible for the vaccine have been vaccinated," said Ahmed Zouiten, WHO's Iraq representative. — AFP

## Qatar FM visits Kabul, meets...

Continued from Page 1

under the Taliban's 1996-2001 rule, though since returning to power last month the hardline Islamists have claimed they will implement a less extreme rule. But speaking to reporters about the new regime's plans for the country's education, Minister Abdul Baqi Haqqani was unapologetic about bringing an end to mixed sex classes. "We have no problems in ending the mixed-education system," he said. "The people are Muslims and they will accept it." The Taliban announced earlier this month that women could still study at university if they wore an abaya robe and niqab covering most of the face, with classes segregated by sex - or at least divided by a curtain.

Haqqani said that Afghanistan's education system

had changed greatly since the Taliban's last time in power, when women were effectively barred from schools and universities. "Compared to the past the number of educational institutions have increased dramatically," he said. "This gives us hope for a future, prosperous and self-sufficient Afghanistan... we will continue from where they were left."

Some fear the new rules will exclude women because the universities do not have the resources to provide separate classes. But Haqqani insisted there were enough female teachers and, where they were not available, alternatives could be found without breaching rules. "It all depends on the university's capacity," he said. "We can also use male teachers to teach from behind a curtain, or use technology."

The Taliban say they want to distance themselves from the harsher policies of old, when half the population was excluded from work and education. Under new rules, women may work "in accordance with the principles of Islam", the Taliban have decreed, but few details have yet been given as to what that exactly might mean. — AFP

## Iran surveillance deal keeps nuke ...

Continued from Page 1

erased as long as the arrangement remains in force. Initially agreed for three months, the compromise was extended by another month and then expired on June 24. With no word on next steps, the IAEA said in a statement last Tuesday that its "verification and monitoring activities have been seriously undermined" by Tehran's actions.

But under yesterday's agreement, "IAEA's inspectors are permitted to service the identified equipment and replace their storage media which will be kept under the joint IAEA and (Iran's) AEOI seals in the Islamic Republic of Iran," the joint statement said. "The way and the timing are agreed by the two sides."

Russia's ambassador to the UN in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, welcomed the results of the Tehran visit and called for a resumption of negotiations with Iran. "We welcome the results of Mr. Grossi's visit to #Tehran," he tweeted. "We call

statement. "As a result, children have suffered enormous setbacks in their learning journey."

In India, 80 percent of children aged 14-18 years said they learnt less than when they were in a physical classroom, according to UNICEF. Among children aged between six and 13 years, 42 percent said they had no access to remote learning. "Their future is at stake," Deepu Singh, a farmer in India's Jharkhand state, said last week of his children aged nine and 10. The pair have not been to school in a year and have no Internet access at home, Singh told AFP, adding: "I do not know English. I cannot help him (my son), even if I want to."

Students in the rest of the region were similarly impacted, UNICEF reported. In Pakistan, 23 percent of young children had no access to any device for remote learning. Some towns in Nepal have been broadcasting radio lessons due to the lack of internet access. "We are (in) a dangerous situation," Nepalese schoolteacher Rajani K C told AFP last week. "If the pandemic continues and the academic sector loses more years, what kind of human resource will the country have in the future?" — AFP

## Bangladesh schools reopen...

Continued from Page 1

Only 41 percent of Bangladesh's 169 million population have smartphones, according to the country's telecom operators' association, which means millions of children cannot access online classes. Even with smartphones, students in many of Bangladesh's rural districts do not have the high-speed Internet access usually required for e-learning.

UNICEF warned in a report released Thursday that the pandemic has accentuated "alarming inequities" for more than 430 million children in the region. "School closures in South Asia have forced hundreds of millions of children and their teachers to transition to remote learning in a region with low connectivity and device affordability," UNICEF's regional director, George Laryea-Adjei, said in a



## Local

# 56K drop among non-Kuwaitis in first half of 2021: Report

## Population reached 4.6 million by June's end; labor force at 60%

KUWAIT: Kuwait's population saw an estimated drop of 56,300 non-Kuwaiti residents in the first half of 2021, according to a report released yesterday. Kuwait's total population has reached approximately 4.628 million by the end of June 2021, according to the latest demographics and labor force statistics issued by the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI). This means that the population decreased semi-annually by 0.9 percent (1.8 percent on annual basis), Al-Shall report reads.

The total population decreased by 2.2 percent in 2020 versus growth rates of 3.3 percent, 2.7 percent, and 2.0 percent in the years 2019, 2018 and 2017 respectively. The absolute semi-annual increase in population reached about 43,000 compared to an annual decline of 105,700 for the year 2020, the report adds.

According to the report, Kuwaitis increased by 13,300 during the first half of 2021, 0.9 percent growth rate (1.8 percent on annual basis) bringing the total to 1.473 million. As such, Kuwaitis' percentage out of the total population slightly increased from 31.3 percent at the end of 2020 to 31.8 percent according to the latest figures. Kuwaiti females, (751,600), outnumber males (721,700). The number of non-Kuwaitis declined slightly by 56,300, a 1.8 percent decline rate, bringing their total to 3.154 million with an annual compound growth rate of 2.5 percent over the years 2010 - June 2021.

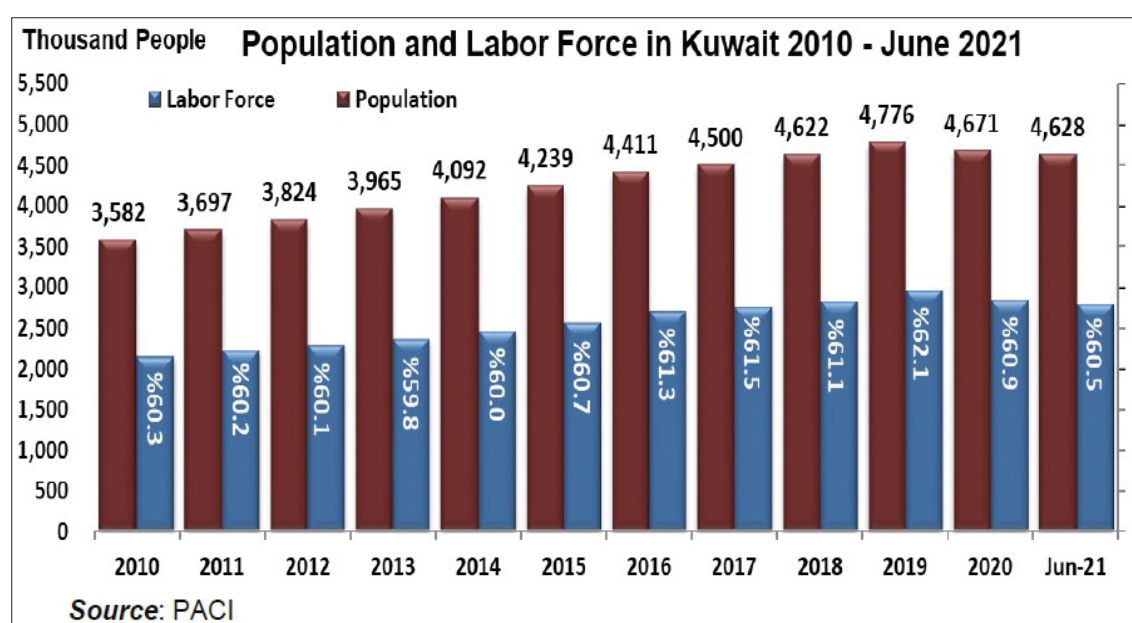
**Labor force**  
Labor force in Kuwait reached approximately 2.80 million workers, or about 60.5 percent of the total population. This percentage reached 30.9 percent for Kuwaitis of the total Kuwaiti population, while non-Kuwaiti workers' percentage out of non-Kuwaiti population is 74.2 percent. The Kuwaiti labor force percentage out of total number of work-



**Kuwaitis' ratio to population at 31.8%**

ers in Kuwait increased to 16.3 percent by June 2021 versus 15.8 percent in December 2020.

Proportion of female workers out of total Kuwaiti workforce rose to approximately 49.8 percent in the first six months of the current year (49.5 percent in the end of last year), forming 27.7 percent out of the total labor force in Kuwait. The number of Kuwaiti workers increased by 5,900 to reach 455,700 in the first half of 2021, up from 449,800 workers at the end of 2020, of which 360,600 of



them are employed in the government (79.1 percent of total Kuwaiti workers).

About 944 jobs decreased for Kuwaitis outside the public sector, a decline rate by 1.5 percent (3.0 percent on annual basis). It is believed that Kuwait's unveiled unemployment rate increased to about 32,900 workers, 7.21 percent of total Kuwaiti

workers on June 30, 2021, versus 26,000 workers (7.16 percent in the end of 2020). Total workers (Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti) in the government sector reached about 476,600 workers, about 10.3 percent of the total population. Kuwaitis' percentage - out of total labor force in government sector - formed 76.0 percent.

## Residents stranded abroad now face back rent, accumulated debts

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Thousands of residents who were stranded abroad for the last eight months are now slowly trickling back into Kuwait. Many return to jobs and family but also problems that will plague them for months, possibly even years to come. While stranded abroad, these residents continued to hold apartments, and faced other financial responsibilities in Kuwait including loan and car payments. But most were not earning a salary. Now that they are back, many are confronting massive debts and landlords demanding urgent recompense for delayed payments.

Bako, a Nigerian resident, traveled home in January 2021 and was stuck there without a salary for most of the year. Upon his return, however, his landlord demanded immediate payment of back rent for all the months he was not in Kuwait.

"I am obliged to pay the whole eight months of unsettled rent during my absence. Its KD 1,600, because I pay KD 200 monthly for the flat. I told them I will settle the amount gradually. I'm broke since my company did not pay me when I was out of the country. How can you pay when you have no work, no money?" said Bako. "I told the haris (building caretaker) that I cannot pay immediately, so the next day I was slapped with a court case."

Luckily for Bako, the building owner agreed to a settlement. "Just yesterday, I was told by the haris that the building owner agreed to accept half of my



eight months' back rent, which should be paid immediately. The remaining half can be settled gradually," he said. "I will go with this option since battling this situation in court will only prolong my agony. I will try to raise half of the rent by borrowing money from friends. I don't want another headache, as the building owner said he will remove the case the moment I settle half of my rental bill," he added.

Similarly, Hamad went to Cairo in March 2021 and didn't return to Kuwait until early September. "My building owner is a very understanding guy - he is a real Muslim. He has the sense of humanity in him. He told me I could pay half of my back rent - KD 100 per month. I was really thankful and agreed. I borrowed KD 600 from a friend and paid. What else could I do? I don't want to stay outside in this weather," he quipped. Hamad works as security guard in Kuwait City, earning KD 250 per

month, but he was not paid during his absence.

An Indian from Kerala was thankful Kuwait did not revoke his visa during the eight months he was stranded abroad. "Thank God I don't have any issues with regards to the payment of my rent. I regularly paid my rent even while we were in India. I even renewed my children's visas online easily. I have three children and they were all with me and my wife. We left Kuwait in January 2021 for a family vacation. I thought we would come back soon, but we got stuck in India," he said.

The Indian resident runs a maintenance and cleaning business. "I worked from home when I was stuck in India. I have several clients who refused to pay when I was away, so my mission now is to get the payments for all the unpaid contracts. Some contracts were cancelled too. These are my struggles, but I believe they will be resolved now that I am here," he said.

## School canteens to remain closed

KUWAIT: School canteens will not reopen when students return to class next month. The Ministry of Education released a statement yesterday in which it announced that canteens will remain closed when schools welcome students again for the first time in nearly a year and a half on October 3. Furthermore, the ministry released a list of food items that children are allowed to bring in with them to school, and another list for

food items that are banned for health reasons.

The list of allowed food items includes low-fat and zero-fat dairy products, juices, fruits and vegetables (fresh and dried), in addition to sandwiches containing white or yellow cheese (low in fat and salt), falafel, labnah, cheese with zaatar and labna with zaatar. As well as nuts and biscuits.

Foods that are prohibited from school include energy products including energy drinks, caffeinated drinks, all types of soda drinks, iced tea, full-fat dairy products, pure chocolate, jelly, ice cream, all fried foods, cakes, donuts, croissant, items containing trans fats, spicy foods such as liquid and dried chili, as well as food items with added sodium glutamate.

## Jaber Hospital closes more wards as COVID-19 patient numbers down 90%

KUWAIT: After the number of COVID-19 patients admitted to Jaber Hospital dropped by 90 percent and as pandemic indicators are improving, the hospital is continuing to close COVID wards and ICUs. As local statistics indicate that the Delta variant's wave is receding and total cases continue to drop, the hospital continues to close coronavirus wards, with only five out of 18 now open. Chest disease and ICU consultant at Jaber Hospital Dr Abdullah Al-Mutairi said five ICUs were closed because of a drop in the number of admissions, adding only two ICUs remain open and occupancy is not full.

The number of admissions to ICUs is very small and cannot be compared with what it was in June and July, as admissions dropped by 90 percent, Dr Mutairi said in statements quoted in an Al-Rai Arabic daily report published yesterday. He said the factors that contributed to the pandemic's decline include the intense vaccination campaign, besides changes in behavior and compliance with health protocols, adding that people's behavior decides that of the virus.

Children's admission to wards and ICUs at Jaber Hospital has also dropped by 90 percent. Pediatrician Dr Khalid Kalandar said children's admission to hospital is low and most of those admitted are those with risk factors such as obesity, diabetes or breathing problems.

### 12-17 age group

Meanwhile, health sources said the percentage of those who received the COVID-19 vaccine in the age group of 12-17 years is likely to reach 80 percent by the start of the school year. The sources said the percentage of vaccinated 16-17-year-olds



KUWAIT: An employee of Kuwait's Ministry of Health shows a vaccination card issued to vaccinated people at the Kuwait Vaccination Center in Mishref yesterday. — Xinhua

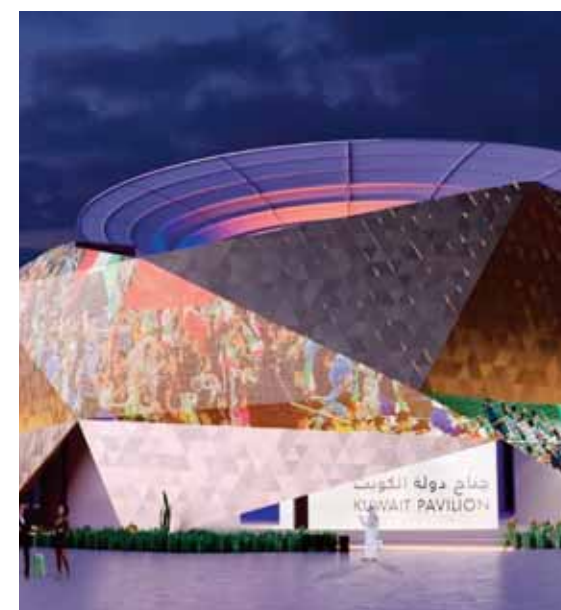
reached 81 percent of the total population of this group of citizens and residents, adding that the actual percentage of vaccination in the age group of 12-17 has reached around 71 percent.

They said the rise in the percentage of vaccinated 16-17-year-olds is due to the priority of vaccinating this category before they return to school. They said the vaccination campaign continues to serve all those desiring to receive the jab.

Kuwait had announced only 41 new COVID-19 cases on Saturday, the lowest daily rate in over a year and a half. Total cases reached 410,734 while deaths increased by one to 2,430, the health ministry said. Meanwhile, the number of people hospitalized with the virus at COVID-19 wards stood at 84 as of Saturday, with 37 of them in intensive care units, ministry spokesperson Dr Abdallah Al-Sanad said, adding that another 1,303 are receiving regular treatment. Total recoveries reached 407,001 as 146 fresh recoveries were registered in the same period, he added.

## Official hails Kuwait's large participation in Expo 2020 Dubai

KUWAIT: Kuwait's participation in Expo Dubai 2020 next October is the largest of its kind and reflects Kuwait's civilizational and cultural heritage in various fields, Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information Muneera Al-Huwaidi said yesterday. In a statement to the press, Huwaidi, who is the Commissioner-General of Kuwait at Expo 2020, affirmed Kuwait's keenness to participate in international forums to present its strategic projects and initiatives to achieve development goals, in addition to attracting investments, and highlighting its humanitarian contributions. The final preparations for the participation is "in full swing" for opening the pavilion, which covers 5,500 square meters, with design inspired from Kuwait water towers, she said. The Kuwaiti pavilion is located in 'Sustainability Axis' under the title 'New Kuwait, New Investment Opportunities for Sustainability', she said, adding that the latest audiovisual and sensory technology industry was used in participation



content. The six-month Expo will be hosted by Emirate of Dubai, entitled 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future' as an exceptional platform that allows the global community to cooperate to discuss global development factors of sustainability, mobility and opportunities. — KUNA



## Local


Kuwait Times  
Established 1961  
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT  
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF  
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher  
**YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN**

Editor-in-Chief  
**ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN**

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432  
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7  
FAX : 24835620/1  
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163  
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125  
COMMERCIAL : 24835618  
P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.  
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com  
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

## Kuwait-British steering group meets Thursday

**LONDON:** The State of Kuwait's Ambassador to the United Kingdom Khaled Al-Duwaisan affirmed yesterday the importance of the Kuwait-British Joint Steering Group meeting in London on Thursday. Those meetings would enhance relations and also discuss issues of international importance, Ambassador Duwaisan said. Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Majdi Al-Dhefiri and UK Minister for Middle East and North Africa James Cleverly will head the Kuwaiti and UK delegations. Both sides agreed that current year meetings would be held remotely, further submitting recommendations Thursday. Duwaisan also pointed out that both sides would sign the upcoming six months' work policy in various fields. Kuwait is seeking the best British experiences in cyber security, he added. The Kuwait-British Joint Steering Group established on the sideline of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's official visit in 2012, Duwaisan said. He also highlighted the achievements of the joint steering groups' meetings in most vital fields, aiming to strengthen both sides' collective efforts in future. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Ambassador of Tajikistan to Kuwait Dr Zabidullah Zabidov speaks during a press conference on the occasion of his country's National Day.

## Tajik president, foreign minister to visit Kuwait this year: Ambassador

**KUWAIT:** Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, Ambassador of Tajikistan to Kuwait Dr Zabidullah Zabidov affirmed the development of a high-level of political relations between Tajikistan and Kuwait, which he described as "distinguished and continuous". He also highlighted his country's aspiration to deepen partnership and expand bilateral cooperation between the two countries in all fields, and especially in economic and food security domains.

During a press conference held at the embassy on the occasion of the celebration of his country's National Day, Zabidov indicated that about 18 agreements in various fields have been signed in recent years between his country and Kuwait, and that a number of other agreements are planned to be signed in the near future.

Revealing an upcoming visit to Kuwait by the Tajik president and foreign minister that is slated to take place before the end of this year, the ambassador clarified that the visit would aim to deepen relations between the two sides, especially in the sectors of economy, investment and tourism.

Regarding the latest developments on granting visas to those wishing to travel to his country, the envoy explained that there is nothing new in granting visas, except that his country planned to exempt Kuwaitis from obtaining a visa as soon as possible. He also added that there was no problem for residents wishing to travel to his country, as they can receive a visa in a very short time.

He reassured all those wishing to travel to his country of the stability of the health situation in Tajikistan and the very low rate of infections, explaining that there are no conditions for arrivals except for a negative PCR before arrival, noting also that there is no quarantine for those vaccinated with two doses of approved vaccines.

Expressing his disappointment at the relatively low level of Kuwaiti investment in his country, the ambassador said he hoped to boost them, given the huge potential for investments in Tajikistan, especially in the tourism sector which is a high priority in the country's economic policies, and has the potential to attract a large number of tourists from around the world.

### Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** The sun sets behind electricity pylons in Kuwait City yesterday. - Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (To have your picture featured in the Kuwait Times' 'Photo of the Day' section, please send your high resolution, unedited photos to local@kuwaittimes.com, along with the full name and Instagram account, in addition to a description showing the picture's location and date taken)

## Kuwaiti army chief, US general discuss common interests

**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti Army Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah met yesterday with the visiting United States Commander of the Central Land Forces Lieutenant General Ronald Clark and his accompanying delegation. A statement by the chief of staff indicated, during the meeting, they discussed issues of common interest, especially related to military aspects and the deep ties between the two countries. The meeting was attended by Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Army, Lieutenant General Fahad Al-Nasser, and Commander of the Land Force, Major General Mohammad Al-Dhafiri, and the Director of Joint Plans General Fawaz Al-Harbi. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** This handout photo released by Kuwait's Ministry of Defense yesterday shows Kuwaiti Army Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah (right) presenting a memento to the United States Commander of the Central Land Forces Lieutenant General Ronald Clark.

## Kuwait offers medical assistance to Kurdistan

**IRBIL:** Kuwait's Consul General in Irbil Dr Omar Al-Kandari yesterday announced that his country offered more than 10 tons of medical supplies to Kurdistan region, north of Iraq, to help the region stem the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The assistance is part of the "Kuwait Is By Your Side" campaign, organized by Kuwait Society for Relief, Kandari said. The campaign is keeping with the instructions of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, he noted, voicing hope that the Kuwaiti contributions would help the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) address the impacts of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, KRG Minister of Health Saman Hussein Muhammad thanked the State of Kuwait and its fund-raising agencies for their continuous support to the region. The medical assistance includes ventilators for coronavirus patients and anesthesia materials, which could play a crucial role in the combat against the pandemic, the minister



**IRBIL:** Kuwait's Consul General in Irbil Dr Omar Al-Kandari (center) attends a ceremony to announce Kuwait's donation of medical supplies to Iraq's Kurdistan region. — KUNA

said. The State of Kuwait maintains its long-standing humanitarian role in Kurdistan and offered a lot of assistance to the internally displaced people in the region, he noted.

In the meantime, Irbil Governor Omed Khoshnaw expressed gratitude to Kuwait for their assistance. In similar statements to the press, he highlighted the need of sustainable assistance for Kurdistan with a view to alleviating the suffering of the sick people.

Launched in 2015, the "Kuwait Is By Your Side" campaign played a remarkable humanitarian role in supporting the health and educational sectors of Kurdistan and other parts of Iraq. The Kuwait-based International Islamic Charity Organization set up 26 medical centers and mobile clinics supplied with the ambulances and essential equipment including artificial limbs. It has offered more than 600 tons of medical supplies to Kurdistan so far. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Participants receive their awards during the ceremony. — KUNA

## API commends Kuwait award for sustainable consumption, production

**KUWAIT:** Director of the Arab Planning Institute (API) Dr Bader Malallah said Kuwait award for sustainable consumption and production was in harmony with the government efforts to rationalize spending and consumption. The award aims to maximize benefit and cut the costs of the production operations, thus alleviating the burdens on the state and the citizens alike, he told reports during

the award-giving ceremony yesterday. The ceremony was organized in collaboration with Kuwait program for social responsibility, an affiliate of the regional social responsibility network. The award falls in the framework of the combat against extravagance and misuse of resources: it helps enhance positive consumption styles of life, which will, in turn, will impact positively the domestic trade movement, he said. "This is the first such award organized by API," Malallah said, noting that the regional social responsibility network is made up mainly of the Gulf Cooperation Council member states.

Meanwhile, Dr Shihab Al-Othman, head of the higher organizing committee of the award, said the government and NGOs of the member countries

work together to realize the objective of the slogan of 'responsible consumption for sustainable life.' "This slogan reflects how far the societies are civilized and have the spirit of responsibility," Othman said, noting that the award is part of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Kuwait New Vision 2035. The winners of the award are Kuwait Oil Company's project for oil waste treatment, the Green Hands Team's 'plant a seed, leave a trace' initiative, Al-Dhow for Environmental Projects Company's industrial waste treatment plant, and the food recycling project of the faculty of engineering and petroleum - Kuwait University, and consumer protection society's single system to control the cooperative sector and enhance food security. — KUNA





Yemen: The 7-year war with no peace in sight

Page 7

Page 7

## Kabul airport women brave fears to return to work



BUDAPEST: Pope Francis greets faithful as he arrives in an open vehicle for a Holy Mass at the end of an International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest yesterday during his papal visit to Hungary. —AFP

# Pope meets Orban in worldview clash

## Pro-Orban media, political figures launch barbs at pontiff

**BUDAPEST:** Pope Francis met yesterday with Hungarian premier Viktor Orban-whose tough views on migration clash with those of the pontiff-at the start of a brief visit to Budapest where he will also celebrate a mass. The head of 1.3 billion Catholics in Hungary to close the International Eucharistic Congress-met Orban, accompanied by his deputy and the president, behind closed doors in Budapest's grand Fine Arts Museum.

On the one hand, the Hungarian prime minister is a self-styled defender of "Christian Europe" from migration. On the other, Pope Francis urges help for the marginalized and those of all religions fleeing war and poverty. The pope's approach to meet those who don't share his worldview-eminently Christian according to the pontiff-has often been met with incomprehension among the faithful, particularly within the ranks of traditionalist Catholics. "I asked Pope Francis not to let Christian Hungary perish," Orban posted on his Facebook page following a photo of the two shaking hands. The Vatican in a statement after the meeting described it as "cordial".

"Among the various topics discussed were the role of the church in the country, the commitment to the protection of the environment, the protection and promotion of the family," the statement said. Over the last few years, there has been no love lost between Orban supporters in Hungary and the leader of the Catholic world. Pro-Orban media and political figures have launched barbs at the pontiff

calling him "anti-Christian" for his pro-refugee sentiments, and the "Soros Pope", a reference to the Hungarian-born liberal US billionaire George Soros, a right-wing bete-noire.

### 'Work together'

Eyebrows have also been raised over the pontiff's whirlwind visit. His seven-hour-long stay in Hungary will be followed immediately by an official visit to smaller neighbor Slovakia of more than two days. In his first address during his visit to Christian and Jewish leaders after meeting Orban as well as the country's bishops-Pope Francis warned of "the threat of anti-semitism still lurking in Europe and elsewhere". "This is a fuse that must not be allowed to burn. And the best way to defuse it is to work together, positively, and to promote fraternity," the pontiff said seated. Hungary's 100,000-strong Jewish community is one the largest in Central Europe.

The 84-year-old pontiff's 34th foreign trip comes two months after a colon operation that required a general anaesthetic and a ten-day convalescence in hospital. "Sorry if I spoke sitting down. I'm not 15,"

the pope said. The Argentinean regularly reminds "old Europe" of its past, built on waves of new arrivals. In contrast, Orban's signature crusade against migration has included border fences and detention camps for asylum-seekers. Orban's supporters point instead to state-funded aid agency "Hungary Helps" which works to rebuild churches and schools in war-torn Syria, and sends doctors to Africa.

Orban's critics, however, accuse him of using Christianity as a shield to deflect criticism and a sword to attack opponents while targeting vulnerable minorities like migrants. Days before the pope's arrival posters appeared on the streets of the Hungarian capital-where the city council is controlled by the anti-Orban opposition-reading "Budapest welcomes the Holy Father" and showing his quotes including pleas for solidarity and tolerance towards minorities.

### 'Not here for politics'

Orban-who is of Calvinist Protestant background-and his wife-who is a Catholic- attended the Pope's mass later to close the 52nd International



BUDAPEST: Pope Francis, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban (left) and Hungarian President Janos Ader (back center) exchange gifts during their meeting in the Romanesque Hall of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest. —AFP

Eucharistic Congress at the vast Heroes' Square in Budapest. Around 75,000 people have registered to attend the event, with screens and loudspeakers placed the length of a main boulevard near the square to allow others to follow the ceremony. "We are not here for any politics, but to see and hear the pope, the head of the Church. We can hardly wait to see him. It is wonderful that he is visiting Budapest," Eva Mandoki, 82, from Eger, some 110 kilometers east of the capital said. It is the first papal trip to Hungary since Pope John Paul II in 1996. —AFP

## Taleban take over Dostum's mansion

**KABUL:** Taleban fighters have taken over the glitzy Kabul mansion of one of their fiercest enemies - the warlord and fugitive ex-vice president Abdul Rashid Dostum. Now in the hands of rank and file Taleban fighters, the opulent villa has given the austere Islamists a peek into the lives of Afghanistan's former rulers, and they say the luxury is the proceeds of years of endemic corruption. Along an endless corridor with a thick apple-green carpet, a young fighter sleeps slumped on a sofa, his Kalashnikov rifle resting against him, as exotic fish glide above him in one of seven giant tanks.

The fighter is part of the personal security detail of Qari Salahuddin Ayoubi - one of the new regime's most powerful commanders - who installed his company of 150 men in the mansion on August 15, the day Kabul fell. The luxury AFP saw on a tour of the mansion would be unimaginable for most ordinary Afghans. Huge glass chandeliers hang in cavernous halls, large soft sofas furnish a maze of lounges and an indoor swimming pool is

finished with intricate turquoise tiles.

It even boasts a sauna, a Turkish steam bath and a fully equipped gym. It is an out of this world experience for the new occupants, who for years sacrificed creature comforts for rebellion - living on their wits in the plains, valleys and mountains of rural Afghanistan. But the new head of the household - now the military commander of four provinces - makes it clear his men will not get used to the luxury. "Islam never wants us to have a luxurious life," Ayoubi told AFP, adding luxury comes in paradise, "the life after death".

### 'The thieves' quarter'

The mansion's owner, Dostum, is a notorious figure woven into the fabric of Afghanistan's recent history. A former paratrooper, communist commander, warlord and vice president, he was the very definition of a cunning political survivor who weathered over four decades of conflict in war-torn Afghanistan.

Despite a series of war crimes linked to Dostum's forces, the former Afghan government hoped his military acumen and seething hatred of the Taleban would help them survive. But his stronghold was overrun and the greying 67-year-old fled across the border to Uzbekistan. Dostum is widely suspected to have hugely profited from the corruption and embezzlement that discredited the former government.



KABUL: Taleban fighters sit inside the home of the Afghan warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum in the Sherpur neighborhood of Kabul. —AFP

Several officials illegally took land to build luxurious mansions in one neighborhood, earning it the nickname "Thieves' Quarter" among locals. In one wing of the enormous house, Taleban fighters relaxed in a massive tropical greenhouse of several hundred square meters under a huge glass roof. That is overlooked by a mezzanine dominated by a dark wood bar - a testament to the reported decadent tastes of a general renowned for a penchant for late nights and strong liquor. The Taleban have good reason to hate Dostum. — AFP

## REQUIRED

### SCHOOL IN KUWAIT REQUIRES FULL-TIME MAIDS

Working schedule:

- 6 days/week - 6:30 AM - 4:00PM
- One month paid annual leave.
- Residency #18.

For more information  
please contact this number on whatsapp:

**+965 60985146**



# Impossible grief: Black US mother mourns sons lost to gun violence

## Gun violence on the rise in United States

**WASHINGTON:** One by one, Seditra Brown, a concierge who lives in one of Washington's poorest neighborhoods, lost her three sons to gun violence: Paris in 2018, Montray in 2019, and Kalif last month. "There is never really a way to protect your children," says Brown, 49, who is African-American. "When they're outside of your presence, who knows, it can happen to anybody."

Gun violence is on the rise in the United States, official statistics show, and African-Americans living in underserved, high-crime communities are affected the most. The trend comes as Americans have rushed to buy more guns in the past year, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-racism protests and turmoil linked to last year's presidential election.

### 'It just can't be true'

First it was Brown's youngest child, Paris, a 19-year-old high school student, who was killed on a sidewalk. Then it was her eldest son, Montray, a 28-year-old father, who was shot at an apartment. Last month it was Kalif, her only remaining son, who was killed as he drove through the streets of Washington. When

Brown got the call about Kalif's death, she could not believe it. "I was just-it just can't be true. It just can't be," Brown said in a calm, almost mechanical voice, her grief hidden deep inside her.

Brown is left with three daughters and 14 grandchildren, eight of whom are now fatherless. "I have just got to be strong for my girls, so they won't break down, my grandkids... they go off of my ener-



### Americans rush to buy more guns

gy," Brown said. "The minute I break down, the whole family is going to break down." As she grieves, Brown tries to find solace in her faith. "I just looked to God for my help and my peace," Brown said. "I believe that God is not going to take me through all this and not have nothing good at the end."

### 'More black victims than white'

Instances of gun violence have increased both in the US capital and across the country. Washington has recorded 144 homicides since January 1, compared to 127 over the same period in 2020, an increase of 13 percent that is identical to the increase on the national level, according to official data. Owning a gun is a constitutional right in the United States, where a third of the population possesses at least one. And Americans have bought more weapons since 2020, in the wake of social justice protests, political turmoil and the pandemic.

African Americans are much more likely to fall victim to gun violence than whites, and Brown says that racial inequity is a big factor. "It's more Black victims than white," she said. "I don't like to put race in it... but it's just like this society and the environment that we grow up in." Contrary to calls to defund the police, which have grown loud since last year's killing of African American George Floyd by a white policeman, Brown would like to see more police action.

"It should be more police, more investigators, more of people taking the time



WASHINGTON: DC resident Seditra Brown, 49, stands next to a mural depicting her son Paris Brown in Washington, DC. — AFP

out to-the police to visit the families or the mayor and all that," Brown said. No arrests have been made in any of her sons' deaths, despite a bounty of \$25,000 for information. Brown says she doesn't know why her sons were killed and inves-

tigators are not in contact with her. While she wants those killings solved, she prefers to focus on moving on with her life. "For me knowing is half the battle," Brown said. "I just battle with what I'm battling with, just their death." — AFP

## The foreign legion of YouTubers defending China

**BEIJING:** With YouTube videos "debunking" allegations of human rights abuses and diatribes on Western "conspiracies" against China, an unlikely set of foreigners are loudly defending Beijing from its international critics. They are teachers and business owners from Britain, Colombia and Singapore, a collage of YouTubers garnering fame for their video takedowns of what they say are unfair accusations against Beijing.

Videos alternate between praise of China's rapid development and rebuttals of negative foreign reports about the country. Experts say they are being deployed as a weapon in the information war against China's critics, with hundreds of videos reaching millions of viewers. "I am trying to reach the people that have been brainwashed," Fernando Munoz Bernal, a Colombian English teacher in southern China's Dongguan and the owner of the "FerMuBe" channel said.

Bernal, who came to China in 2000 and has nearly 30,000 YouTube followers and 18,000 subscribers on the Chinese platform Bilibili, was among the vloggers who rebutted allegations of human rights abuses in Xinjiang this year. In an April video, he accused foreign media of distorted reporting on Xinjiang and defended local businesses' reluctance to speak to correspondents against "whatever lies and rumors journalists concoct". Western media seek to deflect from problems in their parts of the world by "creating enemies out of thin air" in China, he said.

He is not alone. "Does this look like oppression? Take a look at this buffet!" says Brit Jason Lightfoot, with 173,000 subscribers, in another video of the same genre as he visits a restaurant in Guizhou province. The United States and other governments allege genocide is taking place in Xinjiang while rights groups say Chinese authorities have imposed mass detention and forced labor in the region. Beijing denies the allegations and has gone on the offensive against governments, individuals, media groups as well as companies that have promised probes into their Xinjiang supply chains.

### Paid stooges? Not us

The vloggers deny being paid mouthpieces for the Chinese government, instead claiming to be on self-appointed missions to clear up misconceptions about a country they love. Their backgrounds are often in fields unrelated to current affairs or politics, while their videos blend footage of everyday life with passionate commentaries defending China. Bernal, who speaks some Chinese, said he was motivated by fear of a conflict between China and the West sparked by what he calls a "disinformation campaign" against Beijing.

"If there is a war, it's my life at risk," he told AFP. YouTube is inaccessible inside China without special VPN software. Yet like the other YouTubers, Bernal's subtitled videos get a warm reception on Chinese social media platforms including Bilibili, while state media frequently republishes their content and features the vloggers online. The same media often rips into unfavourable reporting by accredited foreign journalists. "Where possible, the propaganda system is bound to integrate them into their own propaganda efforts," Florian Schneider, politics researcher and director of the Leiden Asia Centre, told AFP. — AFP

## Tunisian man sets himself ablaze in protest

**TUNIS:** A Tunisian man suffered major burns yesterday after he set himself on fire, witnesses and medics said, days after another burned himself alive to protest living conditions. Both acts recall the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, the street seller whose suicide by fire on December 17, 2010 launched Tunisia's revolution which in turn sparked the Arab Spring that toppled several autocratic leaders in the region.

Yesterday, a 35-year-old man "set himself on fire on Habib Bourguiba Avenue" in the centre of Tunis, the civil defense said. The man, whose motives are still unknown, "suffered third degree burns and was rushed to hospital", a civil defense spokesman added. A witness, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the man had arrived at the iconic avenue in central Tunis accompanied by a younger man and tried to attract the attention of some journalists who were present there.

The man then doused himself with flammable material which he set on fire with a lighter, the witness said. Police set up barricades in the area, and an AFP reporter saw a pair of burned shoes behind them shortly after the incident. Last week a young man wounded in the 2011 revolution burned himself alive after the government failed to provide compensation, his family said. Neji Hefiane, 26, died in a hospital on the southern outskirts of Tunis on September 4 after having set himself alight in front of his family, his father said.

Hefiane suffered gunshot wounds to the head during anti-regime protests in the early days of the revolution, according to his family, and although he was on an official list of people entitled to government aid, he received no compensation. "It was the injustice and marginalization he suffered that pushed my son to kill himself," his father, Bechir Hefiane, said on Monday. He said he wrote to



TUNIS: A man, who set himself on fire, is helped by a passerby in the Habib Bourguiba avenue in the capital Tunis, before being taken to hospital for treatment. — AFP

President Kais Saied explaining his son's case and asking him to intervene on behalf of the struggling family that

lives in a working-class Tunis district. "We've got no reply, even after my son's death," he added. — AFP

## Hidalgo: Crusading Paris mayor eyeing presidency

**PARIS:** Anne Hidalgo, the Socialist mayor of Paris, has sought to transform the French capital with a crusade against cars but now faces an even tougher challenge of expanding her profile nationally to become France's first female president. Hidalgo, 62, was a virtual unknown seven years ago when she succeeded her former mentor and boss, Bertrand Delanoe, as mayor of Paris—a position seen as a stepping stone to the presidency. The reserved former labor inspector, dismissed by critics as an "apparatchik", struggled to emerge from his shadow.

But Hidalgo, who grew up in a housing estate near Lyon in a family of Spanish immigrants that fled dictator Francisco Franco's rule when she was two, is used to being underestimated. Responding to polls that show her winning only between seven and nine percent of the vote for president, she told Paris Match magazine last month: "All my life I've proved the polls wrong." Announcing her candidacy yesterday, she credited her rise from humble beginnings to France's egalitarian school system, saying it had "liberated" her from "class prejudices". "I want all children in France to have the same opportunities I had," she added.

### Attacks, floods, fire

Since winning the mayor's office in 2014, she has had to steer the city through a multitude of crises, from a string of terror attacks to the "yellow vest" revolt of 2018 and 2019 and the fire that nearly destroyed Notre-Dame cathedral. Yet her first term as Paris supreme-Hidalgo handily won re-election in 2020 — will probably best be remembered for the battle over her decision to pedestrianise a busy road running along the right bank of the Seine, and the chaotic rollout of a bike-sharing scheme.

Hidalgo makes no bones about her anti-car stance. Her naysayers, she said in 2016, were in "complete denial about the climate emergency" that had brought nearly 200 countries together in Paris a year earlier to combat global warming. But no sooner had one controversy died down than another flared. Her critics accused her of failing to get tough on petty crime, of letting swarms of rats invade public parks, and generally allowing the world's most-visited city to become dirty and unsightly.



ROUEN: The mayor of Paris, member of the French Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste - PS) Anne Hidalgo waves in Rouen, western France yesterday after announcing that she plans to stand as a PS candidate in next year's presidential elections. — AFP

Residents used the #saccageparis (Trashed Paris) hashtag to post pictures of rubbish piling up on the streets, of dilapidated public benches and scooters discarded on the pavement, among other ills. Hidalgo has blamed the disorder on a lack of civic spirit and accused her critics of mounting a smear campaign. Responding to accusations of authoritarianism in her 2018 book "Respirer" (Breathe), the mother-of-three remarked: "What passes for authority in a man becomes authoritarianism in a woman."

### 'Time for a woman'

Among her achievements she points to a cycling revolution, brought about by the doubling of Paris's network of cycle lanes since 2015. Despite her disputed legacy Hidalgo has emerged as one of the few figures capable of uniting the fractured left around an environmentalist platform. "Through her diligence and the way she has managed France's biggest city she has shown that she could be the one," Socialist party leader Olivier Faure said in June.

"And maybe the time for a woman has also come." Hidalgo has also argued the case for having a woman as president. She is not the only woman eyeing the Elysee Palace—far-right leader Marine Le Pen and centre-right politician, Valerie Pécresse, have also thrown their hats into the ring. Alluding to record low levels of voter turnout in recent elections, Hidalgo says: "A woman can change the relationship (of the French) with people in power." —AFP

## UK drops plan for vaccine passports in England

**LONDON:** The UK government has dropped a plan to make people in England show vaccine passports to enter crowded events such as nightclubs, the health minister said yesterday. The government had previously said these would be introduced at the end of this month, despite opposition from businesses in the sector and from some Conservative MPs.

Health minister Sajid Javid announced the U-turn, saying the government does not view the move as necessary in the current virus situation, citing high vaccine uptake. "We've looked at it properly and whilst we should keep it in reserve as a potential option I'm pleased to say that we will not be going ahead with plans for vaccine passports," Javid told the BBC. The UK has given two vaccine doses to more than 80 percent of over-16s and is expected to announce shortly whether it will extend vaccination to those aged 12 to 15.

### Rise in vaccine uptake

The health minister said that the idea of compulsory showing of documentation at leisure venues made him uncomfortable, as some opponents have called this a potential violation of civil liberties. "I've never liked the idea of saying to people you must show your papers or something to do what is just an everyday activity," Javid said. The abrupt change came after Vaccines Minister Nadhim Zahawi told parliament last week that the plan was going ahead at the end of September, when all over-18s would have had time to receive both jabs.

Javid told Times Radio that a key deciding factor was that unlike some other countries that have introduced vaccine passports, England has "seen a steady increase in our rate of (vaccine) uptake". "People have talked about certification as a tool to increase vaccination. I'm not certain that we need to do that," he added. The announcement came after Scotland's devolved government on Thursday approved the introduction of vaccine passports from next month for those attending nightclubs and music festivals. Asked to comment on media reports that the government will also scrap travel restrictions including costly PCR tests before departure and on return from trips abroad, Javid told Sky News he wanted to do this "as soon as we possibly can". — AFP



## International

# Yemen: The 7-year war with no peace in sight

## War plunges Yemen into world's worst humanitarian crisis

**DUBAI:** Seven years have passed since Houthi rebels seized the Yemeni capital Sanaa in September 2014, sparking a war that has plunged the already impoverished country into the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Despite diplomatic efforts to stop the fighting between the Iran-allied rebels and Saudi-backed government, there is no end in sight to a conflict that has put millions on the brink of famine. Here are some of the key questions and answers about the war in Yemen.

### Who has the upper hand?

Analysts say the balance has tilted in favor of the Houthi rebels against the Saudi-led military coalition. Riyadh has been leading the coalition on behalf of the Yemeni government since March 2015, and its air strikes had allowed loyalists to reclaim southern territories from the rebels, who control much of the north and large swathes of the west. But the Houthis now appear stronger than ever, inflicting painful strikes on government forces as well as on targets in Saudi Arabia with a never-ending supply of ballistic missiles and drones.

"After seven years, we are witnessing a great shift in the balance of power, with the (anti-Houthi) camp fragmented due to the state's political leadership," Maged Al-Madhaji of the Sanaa Center think-tank told AFP. The rebels rule areas under their control

with an iron fist, while disputes remain rife among members of the anti-Houthi camp, which includes the government - unable to provide basic public services - and the southern separatists demanding a greater political role.

### Where is the biggest battle?

Despite heavy losses in recent months, the Houthis are again renewing their attempt to seize the city of Marib, the government's last northern stronghold. The rebels first stepped up their campaign for Marib in February, leaving hundreds dead on both sides. Taking over the city in the oil-rich province would strengthen their bargaining position in UN peace talks. According to Peter Salisbury, an analyst at the International Crisis Group, a lot has changed in the past seven years.

"The Houthis have gone from being a relatively contained rebel movement to de facto authorities who (control) the capital and territory where more than 20 million people live," he said. The Houthis are battle-hardened after fighting six wars against Yemen's then-government between 2004 and 2010 and cross-border clashes with Saudi Arabia in 2009 and 2010.

"As long as there is an ongoing battle for Marib, fighting in most of the country will continue, along with increased tension and deterioration of the situation," said Madhaji.

## A great shift in the balance of power



**HODEIDAH, Yemen:** Displaced Yemeni children attend class in a dilapidated school building, in the war-torn western province of Hodeidah. Many schools in Yemen have been destroyed in the conflict between the government and the Houthi rebels or turned into refugee camps or military facilities. — AFP

### What is the UN doing?

Swedish diplomat Hans Grundberg, the UN's new envoy for Yemen, assumed his duties this week after his predecessor, Martin Griffiths, admitted his efforts over three years in the post had been "in vain". Elisabeth Kendall, researcher at the University of Oxford's Pembroke College, said Grundberg's "main challenge will be finding a formula for a ceasefire that the Houthis can accept so that a peace process can begin". While the United Nations and the US are

pushing to end the grinding conflict, the rebels have demanded the reopening of Sanaa airport before any ceasefire agreement. The last talks took place in Sweden in 2018, when the opposing sides agreed to a mass prisoner swap and to spare the city of Hodeida, where the port serves as the country's life-line. But despite agreeing to a ceasefire in Hodeida, violent clashes have since broken out between the rebels and pro-government troops around the strategic city. — AFP

## Kabul airport women brave fears to return to work

**KABUL:** Less than a month after the Taliban rolled into the Afghan capital, Rabia Jamal made a tough decision-she would brave the hardliners and return to work at the airport. With the Islamists saying women should stay at home for their own security the risks were all too clear, but the 35-year-old mother of three felt she had little choice. "I need money to support my family," said Rabia, wearing a navy-blue suit and make-up. "I felt tension at home... I felt very bad," she said. "Now I feel better."

Of the more than 80 women working at the airport before Kabul fell to the Taliban on August 15, just 12 have returned to their jobs. But they are among very few women in the capital allowed to return to work. The Taliban have told most not to go back until further notice. Six of the women airport workers were standing at the main entrance on Saturday, chatting and laughing while waiting to scan and search female passengers taking a domestic flight.

Rabia's sister, 49-year-old Qudsiya Jamal said the Taliban takeover had "shocked" her. "I was very afraid," said the mother of five, who is also her family's sole provider. "My family was scared for me-they told me not to go back-but I am happy now, relaxed... no problems so far."

### 'Take me to Paris'

Women's rights in Afghanistan were sharply cur-



**KABUL:** A Taliban fighter sits in front of an Ariana Afghan Airlines aircraft on the tarmac at the airport in Kabul yesterday. — AFP

tailed under the Taliban's 1996-2001 rule, but since returning to power the group claims they will be less extreme. Women will be allowed to attend university as long as classes are segregated by sex or at least divided by a curtain, the Taliban's education authority has said, but females must also wear an abaya, an all-covering robe, and face-covering niqab veil.

Still, Alison Davidian, a representative for UN Women in Afghanistan, warned on Wednesday that the Taliban were already neglecting their promise to respect Afghan women's rights. At the airport,

which is returning to action after the hurried US withdrawal left it unusable, Rabia says she will keep working unless she is forced to stop.

Under new rules, women may work "in accordance with the principles of Islam", the Taliban have decreed, but few details have yet been given as to what exactly that might mean. "My dream is to be the richest girl in Afghanistan, and I feel I am always the luckiest," said Rabia, who has worked since 2010 at the terminal for GAAC, a UAE-based company providing ground and security handling. — AFP

## Iraqi PM visits neighbor Iran for economic talks

**TEHRAN:** Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi met Iran's recently-elected President Ebrahim Raisi yesterday to discuss the neighbors' economic relations, official sources said. Kadhemi is the first foreign leader to visit the ultra-conservative Raisi, and brought along a "high level political and economic delegation," Iran's official IRNA news agency said.

Television showed the Iraqi premier welcomed by a guard of honor, before immediately beginning a meeting that IRNA said touched on "questions of mutual and international interest". The two leaders are expected to hold a news conference later, state broadcaster Iribnews reported. As Iran's neighbor to the west, Iraq has sought a mediating role between Tehran and Arab nations. Since April,

it has tried to broker talks with Saudi Arabia to soothe tensions between the regional rivals.

An Iraqi source had said Friday that Kadhemi would raise energy cooperation and Iranian-Saudi relations in the talks. Other hot topics include Iraq's six-billion-dollar debt to Iran, after shortages pushed it to turn to its neighbor to cover one-third of its gas and electricity needs. This summer Iran suspended exports for several days over the outstanding amount. Yesterday's meeting is also expected to address the issue of visas for Iranian pilgrims travelling to Shiite holy sites in Iraq.

Iraqi authorities late Thursday announced new quotas for foreign pilgrims for the Arbacen pilgrimage in the Shiite shrine city of Karbala later this



**TEHRAN:** Iran's recently-elected president Ebrahim Raisi meets with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi (left) in the capital Tehran. — AFP

month. Kadhemi's office said that 60,000 Iranian pilgrims would be allowed to attend, up from 30,000 previously announced. Arbacen marks the end of the 40-day mourning period for the killing of Imam Hussein, grandson of

the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), by the forces of the caliph Yazid in 680 AD. The number of visas issued to foreign pilgrims permitted has dropped sharply in the past two years due to the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

## Police return to work alongside Taliban at airport

**KABUL:** Afghan police at Kabul airport have returned to work manning checkpoints alongside Taliban security for the first time since the Islamists seized power, officers said yesterday. When the Taliban swept into Kabul last month ousting the government, police abandoned their posts, fearful of what the Islamists would do.

But two officers said they had returned to work Saturday after receiving calls from Taliban commanders. Yesterday, an AFP correspondent at the airport saw border police members deployed at

several checkpoints outside the main buildings of the airport, including the domestic terminal. "I came back to work yesterday more than two weeks after being sent home," one of the police force members told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"I received a call from a senior Taliban commander who asked me to come back," another officer said. "Yesterday was great, so happy to serve again." The Taliban say they have granted a general amnesty to everyone who worked for the former government-including the army, police and other security branches. Officials say they want to integrate the opposing forces, but have not spelled out how this will happen-or how they will sustain a security apparatus made up of around 600,000 people.

Kabul airport was severely damaged during the chaotic evacuation of over 120,000 people that

ended with the withdrawal of US forces on August 30. The Taliban, who swept into Kabul after routing government forces on August 15, have been scrambling to get the capital's airport operating again with Qatari technical assistance. The United Arab Emirates has set up an air bridge to deliver tons of aid to Afghanistan, with aircraft bringing in hundreds of tons of medical and food supplies.

An airport employee who handles security for a private company confirmed that the border police had been deployed around the airport since Saturday. "They are sharing the security with the Taliban," he told AFP. Qatar Airways has operated charter flights out of Kabul in recent days, carrying mostly foreigners and Afghans who missed being taken out during the evacuation. An Afghan airline resumed domestic flights last week, while Pakistan International Airlines is expected to begin flights from Islamabad to Kabul in coming days. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Typhoon drenches Taiwan

**TAIPEI:** Typhoon Chanthu unleashed powerful winds and heavy rain on eastern Taiwan yesterday, disrupting travel links and cutting electricity to some homes but sparing the island a direct hit. Downgraded from a super typhoon since its rapid formation last week, the outer edges of Chanthu pounded the eastern coastline. But the centre of the storm remained out to sea as it moved north, the central weather bureau said. The eastern regions of Hualien and Taitung have received some 200 millimetres of rain so far, the bureau added. Waves of up to seven meters were recorded on Orchid Island off Taiwan's eastern coast. A total of 159 domestic and international flights have been cancelled due to the typhoon, the central emergency operation centre said. — AFP

#### Lightning strike kills 14

**PESHAWAR:** At least 14 people were killed and another three injured when lightning struck two houses in northwestern Pakistan, officials said yesterday. The incident took place in Torghar, a mountainous region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where torrential monsoon rains and landslides have caused havoc since Wednesday. "At least 14 people from the same extended family were killed after lightning struck two adjoined houses," Kamran Bangash, the provincial spokesman said. The dead included five children and four women, he added. The monsoon, which usually lasts from June to September, is essential for irrigating crops and replenishing water supplies across the Indian subcontinent, but each year also brings a wave of destruction. — AFP

#### Two Ukraine soldiers die

**KIEV:** Two Ukrainian soldiers have been killed and 10 others wounded in the country's war-torn east, as clashes tick back up, the army said yesterday. Over the past 24 hours pro-Russian separatists fired at Ukrainian positions using large caliber artillery, grenade launchers and drones, the military said in a statement. Most of the attacks took place in the eastern Donetsk region, the statement said. "As a result of enemy fire, two members of the Joint Forces were killed," the Ukrainian military said. "There are no victims among the local population." The Ukrainian army is locked in a conflict with breakaway fighters in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions that erupted after Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula in 2014. — AFP

#### 'Armed drone' attack on Arbil

**ARBIL:** Armed drones attacked Arbil international airport, which lies near the US consulate in this northern Iraq city, Kurdish security forces said in a statement Saturday. "There are no victims in the attack carried out by two armed drones," said the statement. The airport, which is also the base for a coalition force of anti-jihadist troops, suffered no damage, according to its director, Ahmed Hochiar. An AFP correspondent heard two loud blasts and saw black smoke rising up into the sky and heard sirens around the US consulate. Security forces sealed off access to the airport zone, said witnesses. Attacks of this kind, normally targeting US troops or US interests in Iraq, have become common in recent months. — AFP



# Business

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2021

## Domestic tourism boom gives UK seaside new lease of life

### Blackpool embodies rise and fall of quintessential British seaside resort

**LONDON:** Children clutching glow sticks shrieked with delight and onlookers gazed awestruck as Blackpool's Illuminations lights festival launched to a spectacular volley of fireworks from its 158-metre Victorian tower.

The northwest English town's lights display crowns an extended tourist season as Britain's traditional seaside resorts benefit from a domestic tourism boom during the coronavirus pandemic. Expensive COVID tests, vaccine certification, quarantines and the UK government's ever-changing traffic-light system for international travel have made overseas trips less attractive and even inaccessible for British holidaymakers.

But the lifting of restrictions has helped domestic tourism, providing a boon to seaside resorts that were once Britons' favorite destinations before the advent of cheap overseas package holidays to warmer and sunnier climes.

#### Rise, fall, revival?

Blackpool, on the Irish Sea north of Liverpool and Manchester, embodies the rise and fall of the quintessential British seaside resort. After the arrival of the railways, it became Britain's premier mass tourist destination in the 19th and 20th centuries for city dwellers to escape smog and enjoy bracing sea air and cheap entertainment. But affordable air travel and holidays from the 1960s lured Britons overseas and knocked Blackpool off its perch. By 2008, it offered 40 percent fewer bed spaces than in 1987.

Once synonymous with leisure and pleasure, Blackpool became a byword for decline and poverty. A 2019 UK government study found Blackpool had eight of England's 10 most deprived neighborhoods. And its historic dependence on tourism and hospitality meant the coronavirus pandemic dealt a devastating blow to the town's economy and vulnerable social groups. But Blackpool and seaside towns like it have seen soaring domestic visitor numbers while international travel remains unpredictable. Tourists thronged its promenade on Illuminations switch-on day earlier this month, to explore its tower, piers, theme park, beach, amusement arcades and shops selling fish and

chips, ice cream and local sweet treat Blackpool rock.

Owen Wells, 23, a flamboyantly dressed welder, plumped for Blackpool instead of the hard-partying Spanish resort of Magaluf to celebrate his bachelor party. "With COVID, it's been awkward. A lot of my friends haven't been vaccinated. It's where we can go where we don't have to isolate for two weeks," he said. Administrator Michelle Potter, 55, said she was a seasoned visitor to Spain, Turkey and Cyprus but this year opted to take her nine-year-old daughter to Blackpool. "I couldn't be bothered with the hassle of going abroad and having to stick to restrictions. The UK is just as good," she added.



#### Lifting of curbs has helped domestic tourism

#### Back on the map

Surveys by Britain's tourism board have indicated that domestic holidaymakers have preferred traditional coastal towns this summer. Rail and coach companies have recorded strong demand for other classic destinations such as Brighton and Bournemouth in southern England, and Scarborough in the north. Blackpool restaurant owner Alex Lonorgan, 37, has enjoyed two busy summers in a row amid the hardship of three pandemic-enforced closures since March 2020.

"It's been amazing that so many families have had something different by having a UK holiday-Blackpool is going to be back on everybody's map," he said.

Lockdowns were also tough for 18-year-old Alfie

Hayden, a doughnut and sweets seller. His shop had to shut on multiple occasions but the future seems brighter, even if trade has not reached pre-pandemic heights. "We were losing a lot of sales and it wasn't very good. It is what it is," he said.



**BLACKPOOL, UK:** A group of women, celebrating a hen party, travel on a 'pedal pub' past the Pleasure Beach in Blackpool, north west England. — AFP

#### Great expectations

Blackpool Council leader Lynn Williams said recent regeneration work was aiming to attract private investment and retain UK tourists who would usually holiday abroad. Blackpool "has changed from when people came as a child and how it's portrayed. But we won't change in that we are a welcoming sea-

side resort," she added.

Vaccines may tame the pandemic across Europe and North America and facilitate international travel again, meaning the British seaside's revival could be a flash in the pan. But Williams believes Blackpool's renaissance will be sustainable, as Britons rediscover attractions closer to home.

"The three piers and the tower-no one else has that. To see the tower lit up in all its glory is a lovely sight," she said. Lonorgan added: "A lot of people come religiously to Blackpool every year-that group has grown. That should have a knock-on effect. The positive side of a very difficult 18 months for Blackpool is that people have seen how good it is. Long may it continue." —AFP

## Greek PM offers tax cuts, better growth in new bid

**ATHENS:** Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis promised tax cuts and better economic growth prospects in a bid to repair the political damage wrought by last month's destructive forest fires.

"I am able to announce a revised growth target of 5.9 percent" for 2021, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said in a keynote speech at the Thessaloniki International Fair. Official Greek data last week showed the economy growing 3.4 percent between the first and second quarters of 2021, and a better-than-expected 16.2 percent year-on-year, despite partial lockdowns.

And Greek authorities look forward to positive tourism takings in July and August being reflected in the third quarter data. Mitsotakis ruled out another pandemic lockdown in the fall, stressing: "The economy and society will not shut down again." The PM also announced new tax cuts, benefits for green energy and digital investment, and an initiative to encourage youth employment. "Greeks are now paying less tax across the board," he said.

Three years after Greece exited its last international bailout, nearly one in three Greeks under 24 is

#### Reshuffle

Though Mitsotakis is more popular than rival leaders, his New Democracy party's lead over the leftist Syriza party fell to 10.1 percent in August from between 12.8 and 16.5 percent in July. The latest poll, in Ta Nea daily, found nearly 55 percent of respondents disagreed with the government's policies on tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 14,000 people in Greece have died from causes related to the pandemic. Over half of the country's 11 million residents have been fully vaccinated.

There has been opposition to the mandatory COVID-19 vaccination of all health workers, who are threatened with suspension unless they comply. Over 5,000 health staff have been sidelined so far, including some 500 doctors according to the health ministry.

Tougher air, sea and rail transport restrictions also come into effect today, with the unvaccinated no longer entitled to free testing. They will also be

unemployed. Halfway through his four-year term, Mitsotakis has seen his conservative party's ratings flag after wildfires destroyed over 100,000 hectares of forest, farmland and crops around the country. Just before his speech, police fired tear gas and water cannon at anti-vaccine and anarchist demonstrators who tried to approach the fair venue.

Around 9,000 people took part in protests, police said, against the government's vaccine policy and recent labor laws on overtime and strikes.

#### 'Essentially a gesture'

"The country seeks to re-engage with the international community in Europe and the US," economist Persistence Gwanyanya told AFP. The debt payments "are positive actions that will convince the rest of the world that we mean what we say."

The West may take a lot of convincing. Mnangagwa, once a top deputy to Mugabe, is among the senior government officials banned from travelling or banking in the United States and Europe. Western countries froze his assets in protest of human rights violations, and so far have shown little inclination to ease them. In July, Britain



barred from indoor dining and entertainment unless they can furnish a negative test, or proof of recent COVID recovery. Mitsotakis has also been criticized for a recent reshuffle in which he entrusted the health ministry to a former far-right lawyer who has expressed strongly anti-migrant views.

Upon becoming minister, Thanos Plevris-the son of a prominent Greek Holocaust denier-rejected having any "anti-Semitic sentiments". Alongside the ministers for interior and development, Plevris is now the third cabinet member appointed by Mitsotakis among defectors from the far-right Laos party in 2012. —AFP



Mthuli Ncube

added new sanctions to a Zimbabwean official for fraudulently redeeming treasury bills at 10 times their official value.

But Gwanyanya said making even small payments on its debts shows the world that Mnangagwa wants to do business differently from his predecessor. "That Zimbabwe has started to do so at a time where our debt is very in excess would unlock some capital from the external world," he said. Zimbabwe's economy has swung dramatically since 2000, shrinking at a breathtaking rate during years of hyperinflation, before clawing its way back to growth in 2009. COVID-19 and a drought pushed the economy back into recession, with inflation returning to triple digits. —AFP

## Big Tech made billions during 'war on terror'

**WASHINGTON:** Tech giants made billions through contracts with the US military and other government agencies during the so-called "war on terror", according to a report released ahead of the 20th anniversary of 9/11. The "Big Tech Sells War" report, published by three US campaign groups, documented an explosion of government contracts with Amazon, Facebook, Google, Microsoft and Twitter since 2004. The tech companies' contracts were "primarily with agencies central to the War on Terror," said the report.

"From 2004 to today, Big Tech corporations have seen a huge climb in federal demand for their services, particularly from the Pentagon and Department of Homeland Security," it said.

The demand from US military and intelligence agencies for cloud computing and GPS software has surged since 2001 as the defense industry has grown increasingly digitized.

The Department of Defense alone has spent \$43.8 billion on Big Tech contracts since 2004, said the report, a collaboration between the Action Center on Race and the Economy and social justice groups LittleSis and MPower Change. Four of the five top-spending agencies on Big Tech contracts were "central to foreign policy or were established as a direct result of the Global War on Terror", it said.

"Amazon and Microsoft in particular pulled ahead in recent years, with Amazon signing nearly five times and Microsoft signing eight times as many federal contracts and subcontracts in 2019 compared to 2015," the report said. The report said Microsoft had benefited from a leap in defense contracts during the Trump administration, with a six-fold increase in the number of deals signed between 2016 and 2018.

Contracts with "traditional" military and defense contractors, such as aerospace companies Raytheon and Northrop Grumman, have meanwhile declined in recent years. AFP has reached out to the five Big Tech companies for comment, but has yet to receive a response. The report pulled its data from Tech Inquiry, an online tool that allows users to explore US government contracts.—AFP

## Seeking to change deadbeat image, Zimbabwe pays debt

**HARARE:** After 20 years of not paying its debts, Zimbabwe is taking steps to clean up its balance sheet and its image by making payments to major creditors. Even if admittedly token amounts, the government hopes they will build goodwill towards Zimbabwe.

Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube announced during a video conference this month that Zimbabwe had made its first payments in two decades to a group of rich countries known as the Paris Club.

"We have started paying them because, as a country, we ought to be known as good debtors and not bad debtors," Ncube said. In addition to the first payments in two decades to the 17 nations that are part of the Paris Club, he said Zimbabwe was also settling its debts to multilateral lenders.

"We have taken the step of beginning to pay token payments to the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the European Investment Bank," Ncube said. Clearing Zimbabwe's debts, or simply catching up on payments, is a mammoth task. The \$11 billion that Zimbabwe owes to foreign lenders amounts to about 71 percent of the coun-



## Business

# Chinese billionaire battling to save debt-mired Evergrande

## Once China's richest man, Xu Jiayin's fortunes are now down to less than \$9 billion

BEIJING: From rural poverty to real estate billions, the fortunes of Xu Jiayin tracked China's runaway growth for much of the past two decades-but now he is battling to save his Evergrande conglomerate from a quagmire of debt. The 62-year-old-also known as Hui Ka Yan in Cantonese-was at one point China's richest man, with a taste for luxury labels, exclusive yachts and a nose for praising the Communist Party that steered the economy to a home ownership boom.

But Evergrande is sagging under hundreds of billions of dollars of debt as fears mount of an imminent collapse that could ricochet across the world's second-biggest economy. "China's property developers-and their creditors-appear to be approaching a reckoning," said analysts at Capital Economics in a note. They warned Evergrande is "close to collapse" with large losses looming for banks, bondholders and home buyers.

Total liabilities had swelled to 1.97 trillion yuan (\$305 billion), the embattled group said last week, warning of the risk of default. Evergrande started to falter under the new "three red lines" imposed on developers in a state crackdown in August 2020 — forcing the group to offload properties at increasingly steep discounts. Xu's ascent mirrored China, rocketing from a largely rural and impoverished society to the gargantuan economy it is today.

The now-billionaire, whose mother died when he was a year old, recalled in a 2017 speech how he ate just sweet potato and steamed bread throughout his school years.

"The sheets I laid, the quilts I covered, and the clothes I wore were all covered with piles of patches," Xu said. "At that time, my greatest wish was to go out of the countryside, find a job and be able to eat better food." After leaving school in 1976 — the end of the decade-long Cultural Revolution-he struggled to find work.

As colleges reopened, Xu studied metallurgy and was later assigned to a state-run steel factory.

He left in 1992 for Shenzhen, the buzzing heart of China's reform and opening-up experiment in the 1990s, before founding Evergrande in 1996.

### \$60 million superyacht

All 323 apartments in the firm's first completed project sold in half a day, and raked in 80 million yuan.

Evergrande threw itself into mass development, building in-demand apartments across China and capitalizing on its rapid wealth accumulation. The group listed in Hong Kong in 2009, raising HK\$70.5 billion (US\$9 billion) in its initial public offering, making it China's largest private real estate company and making Xu the mainland's richest man with a net worth of 42.2 billion yuan.

In 2010, Xu bought the then-embattled

Guangzhou football team, renaming it Guangzhou Evergrande and pouring money into world-class players and coaches. A football novice when he bought the club, Xu helped the team win eight league championships. He also cracked down on bad behavior, reportedly fining a player who challenged the referee and introducing the "Five Musts"-including "Players must obey the referee's judgment unconditionally".

The group also invested in electric vehicles, tourism and bottled water. According to the SuperYachtFan website, Xu is the owner of a \$60 million yacht. He also has a private jet, which Australian media reported he used for scouting out Sydney development opportunities in 2014.

Xu also became known for a love of luxury labels, particularly French brand Hermes-earning the nickname "Belt Xu" after wearing a Hermes belt for the national political congress in 2012.

Some have speculated his success has come from useful close relationships, including with the brother of former premier Wen Jiabao. But Xu has attributed his success to education-and the Communist Party. "Without the resumption of the national college entrance examination, I am still in the country-



side. Without a state grant of 14 yuan, I couldn't go to university. Without the country's reform and opening up, Evergrande is not what it is today," he said.

"Everything of Evergrande is given by the Party, the state and the society." But Xu is now facing a government crackdown on extreme wealth, with President Xi Jinping leading a drive for "common prosperity" against vast wealth. In 2017, his wealth was estimated at \$43 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. But that is now down to less than \$9 billion, having lost an eye-watering \$14.5 billion since the start of the year alone as the value of Evergrande has collapsed. —AFP

## EU budget battle looms, as economy lifts out of crisis

BRUSSELS: European governments have spent hand over fist, despite ballooning public debt, to prevent the coronavirus pandemic from triggering economic calamity. Now, the European Union faces calls to loosen its budget rules to allow the largesse to continue, but the topic is a sensitive one for many member states.

The European Commission, the EU executive

that oversees the budgets of 27 nations, is doing its utmost to prevent a political fistfight that could spill into this month's election campaign in Germany.

EU finance ministers are meeting on Friday and Saturday and will gingerly broach the topic at talks at the scenic Brdo castle in Slovenia. "We will have to find different rules, a different return to budgetary balance," French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire as he arrived for the talks.

At the heart of the issue is the EU's stability and growth pact, a set of rules on budget spending that ties member states-at least on paper-to public debt of just 60 percent of gross domestic product. Yearly deficits must stay below three percent. But the threshold has been breached by

many countries and some member states asked the commission to propose ways to bring the rules closer to reality even before the pandemic.

### Big debt

In the 19 states that use the euro single currency, the average debt is expected to reach 102 percent of GDP at the end of the year. Most alarmingly, France and Belgium have deepened their membership to the heavy-debt club with debt mountains expected to rise to 120 percent of GDP.

This nears the eye-watering levels seen in Greece (200 percent) and Italy (160 percent). But a strict application of the budgetary pact would lead to a brutal reduction in public investment for

these countries, with the risk of plunging the whole of Europe back into recession and rekindling the dark days of the eurozone debt crisis. Doing away outright with the 60 percent rule is all but impossible, but what ministers will begin to discuss is the possibility of easing up on how aggressively a government must cut spending to pare down the debt pile.

This can be politically explosive. In most countries, the biggest spending is on social programs with pensions blowing the biggest hole in the budget. Cutting down on debt means biting into voters' retirements. But richer countries, led by Germany, believe it is time for their partners to scale back welfare programs that date back to the post World War II era. —AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار  
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

## KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON  
9 SEPTEMBER 2021

Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	30,095	7,442.44	-0.2%	0.1%	23.0%	268,144,377	100,419,745	17,253	29.3	2.3	75.8%
Main Market	9,623	5,559.03	0.5%	0.9%	22.1%	766,082,057	70,025,277	26,191	21.1	3.8	24.2%
All Share	39,718	6,809.66	-0.1%	0.3%	22.8%	1,034,226,434	170,445,022	43,444	27.3	2.7	100%

Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
BANKS	23,066	1,563.43	-0.3%	0.2%	23.8%	119,390,421	50,991,319	6,133	33.4	2.3	57.42%
BASIC MATERIALS	953	1,068.53	-0.3%	-1.3%	18.9%	2,651,897	1,539,305	536	23.6	1.5	2.37%
CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY	556	1,083.25	-0.8%	-0.6%	45.1%	13,929,075	2,320,490	1,517	9.1	44.2	1.38%
CONSUMER STAPLES	227	744.43	-2.4%	0.6%	-9.1%	2,209,877	1,224,600	280	15.3	1.6	0.57%
ENERGY	284	1,364.21	-0.5%	0.2%	6.8%	9,345,660	398,828	455	14.1	1.3	0.71%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	3,562	1,286.82	1.5%	2.1%	38.4%	384,442,765	48,837,211	13,848	8.9	1.7	8.87%
HEALTH CARE	396	798.95	0.2%	0.9%	-3.3%	579,653	400,915	153	27.4	5.3	0.99%
INDUSTRIALS	4,151	1,171.57	0.1%	0.5%	31.5%	75,329,331	26,321,946	6,754	26.7	1.8	10.33%
INSURANCE	643	1,509.55	3.9%	3.4%	30.6%	9,036,362	4,350,953	332	11.0	1.3	1.60%
REAL ESTATE	2,703	1,259.35	0.3%	1.3%	32.2%	382,183,932	25,234,803	11,093	27.4	1.3	6.73%
TECHNOLOGY	10	734.78	-1.0%	0.8%	46.2%	400,698	40,021	46	-	0.9	0.02%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	3,361	1,096.93	-0.4%	-1.5%	-0.5%	29,252,632	7,481,910	1,858	15.9	2.0	8.37%
UTILITIES	262	626.32	0.4%	2.1%	-14.1%	5,474,131	1,302,721	439	20.6	5.0	0.65%

### Top Gainers

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
COAST	105	38.2	53,885,242	5,444,091	1,339
QIC	81	17.8	44,356	3,519	13
UPAC	250.0	17.4	2,028,009	494,034	390
KHOT	88	11.7	23,742	1,971	29
AMAR	57.2	10.0	10,000	572	1

### Top Losers

Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
MRC	118	-18.6	212,794	25,749	124
MADAR	111	-17.8	34,470,061	4,255,715	1,069
INVESTORS	14.8	-16.9	182,024,614	3,033,940	2,241
ALMANAR	61	-7.0	329,242	20,752	35
MUNSHAAT	48.1	-6.4	142,030	6,619	19

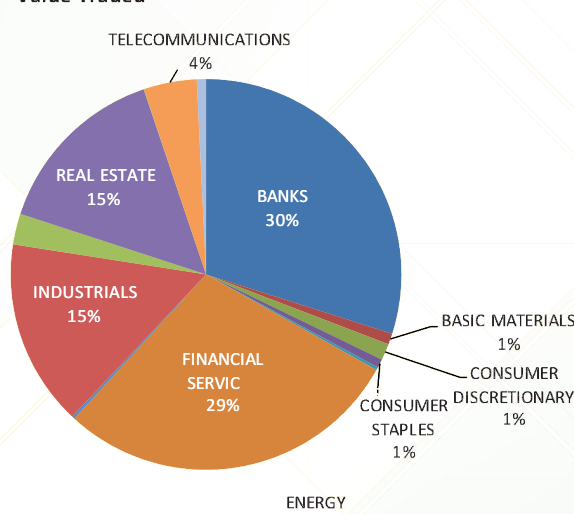
### Top Volume

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
INVESTORS	15	-16.9	182,024,614	3,033,940	2,241
MAZAYA	78	-4.0	87,168,454	6,888,569	2,062
GFH	66	-1.1	58,006,047	3,800,079	1,853
COAST	105	38.2	53,885,242	5,444,091	1,339
KRE	146	1.4	34,903,467	5,010,551	2,349

### Top Value

Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
NBK	938	-0.2	16,325,094	15,288,358	962
KFH	825	0.1	14,821,158	12,178,799	1,638
AGLT	992	-1.1	8,978,163	8,925,561	1,427
NIND	235	1.3	31,874,517	7,448,612	611
MAZAYA	78	-4.0	87,168,454	6,888,569	2,062

### Value Traded



### Market Summary:

- Both Premier and Main markets' volume had a huge drop in volume but that was due to the MSCI review which witnessed some liquidations of some selective stocks which in return affected the stocks in the Main market as well.
- Premier and Main indexes witnessed a slight drop of which they rebounded from the support level. Unless the volume increases, we might witness another drop to test the support level.
- Technically, the All-Share index support level at 6760 and 6711. Staying above 6750 will lead to 6905 passing the resistance at 6831. Premier index support levels at 7421, 7410, and 7399. Staying above 7430 will lead to 7590 passing the resistance at 7440. The Main index registered a new all-time high-level closing at 5559 creating a support level at 5550, 5495, and 5484. Staying above 5510 will lead to 5600 passing the resistance at 5555.



## Business

# Boubyan Bank launches its internal staff Hackathon with plug and play

## Hackathon helps unleash innovative ideas for new products and services

**KUWAIT:** Boubyan Bank concluded a live Hackathon for its staff that helped unleash innovative ideas for new products and services that the bank sought to test. Building on the bank's innovative DNA, 24 staff took part in the Hackathon where they researched, ideated, and built concepts presented to the bank's management for review.

The Internal Hackathon emanates from the Bank's belief that cross-functional teams are a great way of testing ideas and using the expertise seasoned bankers from different backgrounds whom over the three day Hackathon built cases for ways in which the bank can implement finch novelty in a way that would complement Boubyan Banks' offering. Adel Al-Hammad, General Manager - the Human Resources Group at Boubyan Bank stated: "We are very keen continuously to seek ways to develop and promote our internal talents giving them the tools and the platforms that allow for their innovation and growth. At its core, Boubyan Bank focuses on its ability to nurture and support the development of our talents across the bank's divisions. The human element forms the nucleus of our innovative spirit.

Speaking of the Hackathon, Fouad Al-Obaid

Assistant Manager Talent Management elaborated: "The structure of the Hackathon is a leveling field that allows for talents to emerge. With the adequate support and mentoring, we believe that our teams are able to develop innovative banking solutions for our esteemed clients. Internally, the benefit of bringing together individuals that otherwise might not work closely together has spurred countless ideas that developed into six solid concepts which were then presented to management at the end of the Hackathon."

"We aspire to build an organization that is robust where learning is at the core of our staff development. We realize that today we live in an era where the true organizational wealth lays within our teams' abilities to integrate data from multiple sources and translate them into meaningful decisions," Al-Obaid added.

### Strategy and innovation

For her part, Noora Al-Fassam - Chief Strategy Officer stated, "At Boubyan Bank we remain focused on exploring ways in which we can deliver products and services tailored to our client-base in a manner - that is both efficient and convenient. We strive to



Boubyan top management with Hackathon members

align our core value proposition with our customers' expectations, and we further aspire to anticipate their future banking and financial transaction needs to remain ahead of the banking curve in the markets we operate within."

She further adds, "To deliver on our clients' expectation, events such as the Internal Staff Hackathon help to align the bank's vision, thus ensuring that at the operational level, our teams

deliver the highest customer service possible."

### The learning organization

In the upcoming period, Boubyan Bank aims for the building of a learning organization where all staff will be encouraged across formal and informal learning tools to upskill in order to continue to innovate and deliver the expected services to the Bank's customers.

## Burgan Bank announces winners of Yawmi account draw

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

### The lucky winners are:

- \* Hazim Azmi Elashy
- \* Juzar Bankodawala
- \* Abdulaziz Mohammad Alawadhi
- \* Siham Oudah Attawy
- \* Azizah Mohammad Malek

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws. Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.



A group photo with the winner

## Al-Hammadi wins a boat in KFH summer campaign draw

**KUWAIT:** KFH announced the winners in the "Ready for Summer" campaign for the holders of KFH Visa cards, giving 13 customers the opportunity to win Sea Ray or Fliteboard boats when using KFH visa credit or prepaid cards as follows: 1 chance to enter the draw for every KD 1 of total local purchases, while debit, credit and prepaid VISA card holder will get 10 chances to enter the draw for every KD 1 of total international purchases (including online purchase transactions in foreign currency).

KFH held a monthly draw on a 21 Ft Sea Ray Boat and the winner was Ibrahim Abdullah Al-Hammadi. The winners in the weekly draws on Fliteboard were: Suad Al-Shemry and Yousuf Al-Duwailah.

They gave customers the opportunity to win the campaign prizes by using KFH Visa ATM, Credit or Prepaid Cards in any internal or external purchase transactions, through POS or online marketing and win the Sea Ray boats in the 3 monthly draws or

Fliteboard in 10 weekly draws.

In a broadcast statement, announcing the names of the winners, the Group Acting AGM - Banking Cards, Talal Al-Arbeed said that the campaign gives customers the opportunity to win sundry prizes by using KFH Visa cards inside and outside Kuwait as follows: 10 weekly draws and 3 monthly draws, giving 13 customers a chance to avail the prizes of the campaign which was launched for 3 months ending 18th August. He emphasized that KFH is keen on rewarding its customers for using the banking cards through an organized promotional campaign in addition to various qualitative advantages for the holders or users of visa cards.

Al-Arbeed stressed on moving forward with providing latest payment solutions locally and globally, adding that KFH launched the Digital Wallet service through smart mobiles and watches in cooperation with Samsung, Fitbit and Garmin. Compatible with IOS and Android apps, this service also includes Visa and Mastercard cards and POS which is compatible with NFC technology. This comes as a culmination of KFH's initiatives that aim to provide the highest level of services and new values for the market and beneficiaries in various economic conditions.

He mentioned that: "to encourage local market use of cards and boost traders' sales, KFH launched sev-

eral promotional card campaigns, most recently "Ready for summer" in collaboration with Visa Cards. This campaign provides KFH customers with unique banking experience and several chances to win Fliteboard or Sea Ray boats when using KFH Visa Cards."

On his part, KFH AM - Public Relations, Fahad Al-Saad said that the increasing participation and interaction with KFH activities reflect customer's trust in our organized campaigns and events. Rendered advantages are determined based on a thorough study and verification of customers opinions and needs. KFH is always keen on achieving customers' satisfaction, fulfil their aspirations, and achieve an added value on the bank products and services. He congratulated the winners and thanked them for choosing KFH. The campaign participates in the promotion of the usage of cards in the local market, activation of merchants' sales and represents the continued efforts, in cooperation with Visa company, to achieve customer satisfaction, increase usage ratios and expand KFH market share in the field of banking cards. The names of the winners were announced in a meeting at Q8 Pulse Radio, and they were contacted live on air under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce & Industry representative.



Al-Arbeed and Al-Saad during the program

### NBK Money Markets Report

## US markets eyeing next FOMC meeting

**KUWAIT:** Last week we saw the US dollar rebound back from 1-month lows after the disappointing jobs report. The dollar index gained as much as 0.90 percent on a weekly basis before closing the week at 92.582. The gains in the US 10-year treasury yield supported the currency as yields reached 1.3834 percent which is the highest since mid-July as investor digested the tapering possibilities and the possible implications on markets. On that note, current probabilities for a hike by the Fed in December 2022 remain around 80 percent which has been the market's expectation for some time now. The FOMC will be meeting next week and markets will be looking for clues on the next steps and potential timeline for any monetary actions to be taken by the Fed.

### Monthly final & core PPI

The monthly producer's price index (PPI), which tracks the change in price for finished goods and services provided by producers, came in at 0.7 percent versus the expected 0.6 percent. Disruptions in the supply chain have pushed production costs higher. Additionally, the yearly producer price index has increased around 8.3 percent year-to-date. There have been various challenges with increases in materials costs, a rise in labor expenses, combined with shipping bottlenecks. The core PPI, which tracks change in prices of finished goods and services by excluding food and energy prices, revealed similar figures as it rose to 0.6 percent versus an expected change of 0.5 percent.

### ECB policy meeting

In Europe, the European Central Bank (ECB) governing council held a highly anticipated meeting last week. President Lagarde stated that tapering should be implemented at a "moderately lower pace" following the "increasingly advanced" economic rebound in the Euro region. The ECB has deployed around \$95 billion of month-

ly bond purchases in the last two quarters of 2021. Therefore, such a statement from Lagarde makes the December 16 meeting highly influential to the timeline of central banks' stimulus programs. Additionally, Lagarde's balanced message has kept the market from negatively reacting.

The euro reached the 1.1900 level amid the weak US non-farm payrolls the prior week. However, throughout the beginning of last week the single currency has witnessed a decline of 0.58 percent from Friday till Wednesday. Following the ECB meeting, the euro managed to gain around 0.15 percent and has recovered from the 1.1800 lows. The single currency rose to 1.1830 after the report and closed the week at 1.1814 against the greenback.

### German economic sentiment

In Europe, German economic sentiments dropped to 26.5 versus the 30.2 expected. The figure is a large drop from the 40.4 points in the previous month. Nonetheless, this month's figure was well above the 0.0 mark, which indicates optimism in Europe's largest economy.

### RBA policy statement

Australia is one of the first developed economies to begin tapering. Initially, the RBA decreased the cash injected into the economy from \$5 billion to \$4 billion, and the plan was to start reducing its weekly bond buying program gradually. However, the RBA decided to continue extending its \$4 billion a week bond-buying until mid-February. Although the Australian economy has been able to withstand its weight, central bank officials believe assistance from the Reserve Bank of Australia is still needed.

### BOC monetary policy

The Bank of Canada (BOC) announced that they would raise interest rates before gradually reducing monetary stimulus. The BOC unveiled its intentions to retract bond-buying gradually. However, it would do so at a neutral pace without withdrawing extraordinary support from the economy. The BOC's hawkish decision to raise interest rates indicates that the central bank predicts a positive economic outlook for the country. Additionally, raising interest rates will help the BOC to curb any unwarranted increases in inflation.



## MedX to launch Kuwait's first fully digitized medical care facility

**KUWAIT:** Qatar-based MedX Group that operates the Medical Center in Fahaheel, is all set to launch a multi-speciality MedX Medical Care Center in Kuwait. The new center promises a fully digitized service using state-of-the-art infrastructure, cutting-edge diagnostic facilities and medical expertise, to offer patients in Kuwait an unprecedented health care experience.

To create awareness among the public and highlight the features and services offered by Kuwait's first fully digitized medical center, MedX held a press-briefing at the health center's auditorium in Fahaheel on 11 September. MedX Medical Care Center aims to change the mundane, conventional system of providing

health services and transform it by offering a completely digitized healthcare system, which delivers unparalleled online service and stands out from other stereotypical medical care platforms.

Right from making an appointment to getting a diagnosis and prescriptions, to obtaining medications, medical reports and case history, and on to contactless billing and payment services, the entire experience at MedX is a fully paperless, online process. In addition to the full-fledged medical services offered at its Fahaheel facility, MedX Medical Center will also provide home-care services by specialized doctors and physicians for the patient's ultimate peace-of-mind experience. Besides the atten-

dance of a specialized medical team at home, a host of other home-care services are also provided by MedX on call.

MedX Medical Care Center promises to provide expert health consultation and services by a galaxy of highly-trained and experienced doctors, nurses, medical technicians and other healthcare staff working in nearly a dozen fully-equipped medical specialty departments. Healthcare and medical services as we know it, is about to change for the better in Kuwait with the arrival of MedX Medical Care Center. The unrivaled and never-before digitization of all health services will need to be experienced in order to be acknowledged and appreciated.



Lifestyle | Gossip

THE QUEEN’S GAMBIT WINS BIG AT CREATIVE ARTS EMMY AWARDS

The Queen’s Gambit’ won seven gongs on the opening night of the Creative Arts Emmy Awards. The Netflix coming-of-age period drama – which stars Anya Taylor-Joy as an orphaned chess prodigy – won accolades in the categories of Cinematography, Costumes, Editing, Make-up, Production Design, Sound Editing and Mixing on Saturday. Michelle Tesoro, the show’s editor, said: “That team is like a family. It’s just nice when you love everybody on the team and it’s fun. It’s all about showing up to work and appreciating everything.”

Other big winners in Los Angeles included Disney’s space Western ‘The Mandalorian’, which won three gongs in total, including Outstanding Sound Mixing For A Comedy or Drama Series, Outstanding Prosthetic Make-up and Outstanding Cinematography For A Single-Camera Series. Elsewhere, NBC’s long-running comedy series ‘Saturday Night Live’ and FX’s ‘Pose’ won three awards each during the ceremony, which was held with a limited audience due to the coronavirus pandemic. The sketch series won gongs for Contemporary Hairstyling, Production Design and Contemporary Make-up in a Variety Show. Keith Ian Raywood, a production designer on ‘Saturday Night Live’, reflected on the awards being held on September 11, and the challenge of filming amid the pandemic.

He said: “Us coming back back [after 9/11] was really important, and I think us coming back during the pandemic and not knowing how long we were going to be able to hold it up or if there’d be an outbreak in the studio, it was also very important. “The show has a way of making people feel that there’s a continuity in their lives, there’s something we can count on. And I’m just very proud to have been a part of that.” Meanwhile, Apple TV+’s ‘Ted Lasso’ – the comedy series about an American who is hired to coach a professional soccer team in England – and Disney+’s WandaVision both won two awards each on the night.

**Creative Arts Emmy winners:**  
Outstanding Cinematography For A Single-Camera Series (One Hour):  
The Crown



Outstanding Contemporary Costumes:  
Pose  
Outstanding Contemporary Hairstyling:  
Pose  
Outstanding Contemporary Hairstyling For A Variety, Nonfiction, Or Reality Program:  
Saturday Night Live  
Outstanding Contemporary Make-up (Non-Prosthetic):  
Pose  
Outstanding Contemporary Make-up For A Variety, Nonfiction, Or Reality Program:  
Saturday Night Live  
Outstanding Fantasy/Sci-Fi Costumes:  
WandaVision  
Outstanding Interactive Program:  
Space Explorers: The ISS Experience  
Outstanding Main Title Design:

The Good Lord Bird  
Outstanding Multi-Camera Picture Editing For A Comedy Series:  
The Conners  
Outstanding Period And/Or Character Hairstyling:  
Bridgerton  
Outstanding Period Costumes:  
The Queen’s Gambit  
Outstanding Period Make-up And/Or Character Make-up:  
The Queen’s Gambit  
Outstanding Picture Editing For Variety Programming:  
A Black Lady Sketch Show  
Outstanding Production Design For A Narrative Contemporary Program:  
Mare Of Easttown  
Outstanding Production Design For A Narrative

Period Or Fantasy Program:  
The Queen’s Gambit  
Outstanding Production Design For A Narrative Program:  
WandaVision  
Outstanding Production Design For A Variety Special:  
The Oscars  
Outstanding Production Design For A Variety, Reality, Or Competition Series:  
Saturday Night Live  
Outstanding Prosthetic Make-up:  
The Mandalorian  
Outstanding Single-Camera Picture Editing For A Comedy Series:  
Ted Lasso  
Outstanding Single-Camera Picture Editing For A Drama Series:  
The Crown  
Outstanding Single-Camera Picture Editing For A Limited or Anthology Series or Movie:  
The Queen’s Gambit  
Outstanding Sound Editing For A Comedy Or Drama Series (Half-Hour) And Animation:  
Love, Death + Robots  
Outstanding Sound Editing For A Comedy Or Drama Series (One Hour):  
Lovecraft Country  
Outstanding Sound Editing For A Limited or Anthology Series, Movie, Or Special:  
The Queen’s Gambit  
Outstanding Sound Mixing For A Comedy Or Drama Series (Half-Hour) And Animation:  
Ted Lasso  
Outstanding Sound Mixing For A Comedy or Drama Series (One Hour):  
The Mandalorian  
Outstanding Sound Mixing For A Limited or Anthology Series or Movie:  
The Queen’s Gambit  
Outstanding Sound Mixing For A Variety Series or Special:  
David Byrne’s American Utopia



Courteney Cox recalls her supernatural encounter

Courteney Cox thinks she’s experienced a supernatural encounter. The ‘Friends’ star believes she encountered something supernatural while living at the top of a mountain in Laurel Canyon in Los Angeles. Courtney, 57, explained to US OK! magazine: “My acting teacher used to come out and she’d say, ‘It’s weird. I have a feeling in this house. I keep feeling drafts.’ “Another friend came out and they had a dream where they saw this woman in a white dress who sat down on a bed next to me. I still didn’t believe it, but one day the doorbell rang and it was a FedEx guy. He goes, ‘Are you aware that there is a spirit in this house?’ “And I go, ‘No, why are you saying that?’ And he said, ‘Because they’re standing right behind you.’ I was like, ‘Oh and then I moved house.’”

Meanwhile, Courteney previously admitted that she can be easily distracted whenever she’s sat on her own. The actress explained that her mind is very active – even when she’s not doing too much. She said: “My brain just goes. You wouldn’t believe it. “It could be anything from looking at a light to wondering if it’s the same one we’re going to get for the condo we’re building. Or is that real wood or is that wall-paper? Why is the television mounted in that corner over there? Lunch was good, but I could eat more food. Oh, look it’s cloudy outside. Why are those cabinets open? Should I get up now? I could go to the bathroom.” Courteney – who shot to international stardom as Monica Geller in ‘Friends’ – jokingly added: “I’m sure I should be medicated, but I’m not.”

Kristen Stewart ‘can’t stop thinking about’ Princess Diana

The 31-year-old actress stars as the late Princess in the psychological drama film ‘Spencer’ – which focuses on her split from Prince Charles – and Kristen has admitted to obsessing about Diana in her preparation for the role. She explained: “She means a lot to me, but it’s all relatively new because I’m from LA and didn’t grow up in England. Before this, she was not something that was at the forefront of my mind, because I lived so far away from it all. Now I can’t stop thinking about her. “I often wonder what she’d think about what’s going on in the world right now. To be honest, I’ve now consumed pretty much all there is to consume in terms of videos and interviews. “I’ve watched everything that you could hear or see. I even go to sleep with it on.” Kristen also observed that in spite of their obvious differences, they also shared some similar personality traits. And the Hollywood star – who was once the highest-paid actress in the world – thinks those similarities helped her in the role. She told The Sun on Sunday newspaper: “I’m not a very good actor. I can’t fake it. “I reveal part of myself. I don’t know how people fabricate a performance. It’s scary and weird and it’s also a bummer. “I don’t think I’m good at doing anything that isn’t coming from some real place. I’ve always had to sort of vouch for the characters that I’ve played in order to love them enough to play them.” Despite this, Kristen conceded that her own fame pales in comparison to that of the late Princess. She said: “She was the most famous woman in the world. “I have tasted a high level of that, but really kind of nowhere near that monumental, symbolic representation of an entire group of people, like an entire country – and then the world.”



Lucy Boynton is trying to follow her feelings less

The ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ actress has always been “very sensitive” but she’s now trying to strike a new balance in her decision making and become more practical, instead of relying solely on her intuition. She told Stylist magazine: “Finding a balance between heart and head is an ongoing lesson. It’s a cliché for a reason. “I’ve always been very sensitive, so I have instinctively followed my feelings, but as I get older, it becomes more important to incorporate more analysis.” The 27-year-old actress longs to have a “freakishly good memory”. Asked what talent she’d love to have, she said: “My friend has the ability to quote any movie he’s ever seen and any book he’s read. “So something along those lines of a freakishly good memory, which I think counts as a talent.” Lucy loves fashion and always makes sure she has a pair of red shoes in her wardrobe.

She said: “My patent red Mary Jane shoes [remind me of childhood]. “That’s the one item I’ve loved since I was a kid and have always had some version of. At the moment, they’re by Carel.” And asked if she could be remembered for one outfit, which would she choose, she replied: “Black polka-dot tights, patent Mary Jane shoes and a vintage mini dress. “I’ve worn a lot of iterations of that, but that recipe feels most like me.” Although the ‘Politician’ star prefers vintage clothing, she feels “really lucky” to be given gowns to wear by prestigious fashion houses. She said: “[I prefer a] vintage find. But then I feel really lucky to get to wear the couture pieces that I do for work things. “The intricacy and attention to detail is really exquisite and the hours that are put into each piece mean they are incredibly special and often feel like art pieces.”

Paris Hilton is getting married in a ‘few weeks’

The 40-year-old socialite is set to tie the knot with Carter Reum – whom she got engaged to earlier this year – later this month. Speaking to ‘Entertainment Tonight’, she said: “Yes, I have the dress. The wedding is very soon, [in] a few weeks.” And fans will be able to watch the nuptials unfold on her new show ‘Paris in Love’ as the blonde heiress is allowing the cameras into the ceremony. She



explained: “We are filming it for my new show.” Paris recently teased that her wedding will be spread over three days because the couple have so much planned for it. She said previously: “It’s gonna be like a three-day affair—we’ll have a lot happening.” Quizzed many outfits she will wear, she replied: “Lots of dresses. Probably 10 – I love outfit changes.” The ‘Stars are Blind’ hitmaker also wants her beloved pet dog Diamond Baby involved in the ceremony. She said: “You know, I’m not your traditional bride. There has to be my little Chihuahua, Diamond Baby.” Paris hailed Carter as her “prince charming” and insisted she’d never met anyone like him before. Asked how it felt to have his support, she said: “You’re going to make me cry asking a question like that. I’ve never met a man like this in my life. “I’ve never been with someone who loves and supports me so much, and lifts me up, and isn’t intimidated. “[He] is just my best friend and my prince charming all rolled into one.” Meanwhile, Paris recently laughed off reports she’s pregnant with triplets. So thank you for the congratulations, I really appreciate it, and I am just so excited for motherhood. Just kidding. I am not pregnant. Not yet. I’m waiting until after the wedding ... “I’m not yet. I will be after the wedding. I can’t wait to have children in 2022. But like I said, I’m just preparing for the wedding right now.”

Lopez and Affleck moving to Texas

Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck are temporarily moving to Texas. The ‘On The Floor’ hitmaker will reportedly set up home in a luxury apartment the 49-year-old actor has rented in Austin while he films his new thriller ‘Hypnotic’ so that they are not spending too much time apart, according to gossip website TMZ.com. However, the 52-year-old beauty won’t be in Texas for the full duration of Ben’s filming as she has her own work commitments that require her to be in Los Angeles, California. Although only temporarily, their living arrangements in Texas will be a good test for the loved-up pair – who rekindled their relationship earlier this year – as they are set to move in together indefinitely later this year after spending the last few weeks house-hunting in Southern California. Last month, Jennifer and Ben were spotted looking at a 12-bedroom, 24-bathroom Beverly Hills mansion, which is listed on the market for \$85 million, that boasts an indoor sports complex with a basketball court and boxing ring, a massive pool, as well as a guest penthouse and a caretaker’s house. They then reportedly drove over the hill to the San Fernando Valley where they viewed the late Bob Hope’s former estate – which is currently owned by Ron Burkle and priced at \$40 million – which is complete with five acres and a golf course. The news that the pair are looking for a property together won’t come as too much of a surprise to their friends as a source previously said they were planning to spend as much time with one another as

possible. An insider explained: “? “Their friends wouldn’t be surprised if they move in together and ultimately end up together. They’re spending all of their free time together and making each other a priority.” And, although things seem to be getting serious between them, the couple are not planning to tie the knot. A source said previously: “They are fully committed to each other ... They have been meshing their lives and families and don’t feel the need to get engaged yet or even tie the knot. They have both been there and don’t feel it’s necessary. They are both very secure within their relationship and Ben worships her. It’s truly meant to be and everyone around them thinks they are a perfect match.” The ‘Justice League’ star has children Violet, 15, Seraphina, 12, and Samuel, nine, with his ex-wife Jennifer Garner, whilst Jennifer has 13-year-old twins Emme and Max with her ex-husband Marc Anthony. —Bang Showbiz







Female camels are herded in a pen at the Reproductive Biotechnology Center in Dubai. —AFP photos



This picture shows a view of cloned camel calves in a pen at the Reproductive Biotechnology Center in Dubai.



Dr Nisar Ahmad Wani, checks on frozen samples at the centre's laboratory in Dubai.

# Clone your camel: Beauty pageants, races spur high demand



Dr Nisar Ahmad Wani, Scientific Director of the Reproductive Biotechnology Center, looks through a microscope while nearby a cloned camel calve preserved in formaldehyde, at the centre's laboratory in Dubai.



Dr Nisar Ahmad Wani examines a sample through a microscope at the centre's laboratory.

Cloning is in high demand in the competitive world of camel beauty pageants, leaving scientists at a Dubai clinic working round the clock to produce carbon-copy beasts. Not every animal is blessed with sought-after drooping lips and a tall, elegant neck, but technology now allows wealthy clients to replace their most beautiful camel with one just like it. At the Reproductive Biotechnology Center, with views of the UAE city's towering skyscrapers, scientists pore over microscopes while dozens of cloned camels roam outside. "We have so much demand for cloning camels that we are not able to keep up," the centre's scientific director Nisar Wani told AFP.

Beauty pageants are not the only driver of the camel cloning industry. Many customers want to reproduce racing camels, or animals that produce large amounts of milk. But "beauty queens" are the most popular order. Gulf clients will pay between 200,000 and 400,000 dirham (\$54,500-\$109,000) to duplicate a dromedary. The camels are paraded at dusty racetracks around the region and scrutinized by judges, with occasional discoveries of Botox and cosmetic fillers adding a spice of scandal to the high-stakes contests. Saud Al-Otaibi, who runs a camel auction in Kuwait, said customers' judgment of the animals' looks is key to his business.

"The price of the camel is determined according to its beauty, health, and how well known the breed is," he told AFP. When it comes to young animals, "customers are keen on seeing the mother to determine its beauty before buying the camel," he added.

## No going back

Twelve years ago, Dubai claimed the world's first cloned camel. Injaz, a female whose name means achievement in Arabic, was born on April 8, 2009, after more than five years of work by Wani and others. From the minute Injaz was born, there was no going back. "We are now producing plenty, maybe more than 10 to 20 babies every year. This year we have 28 pregnancies (so far), last year we had 20," Wani said with pride.

The centre is churning out "racing champions, high milk-producing animals... and winners of beauty contests called Beauty Queens", added Wani, sitting in a lab next to the preserved body of a cloned camel in a glass container. Known as "ships of the desert", and once used for transport across the sands of the Arab peninsula, camels are symbols of traditional Gulf culture. Now, after being replaced by gas-guzzling SUVs as the main mode of transport, they are used for racing, meat and milk.

"We have cloned some she-camels that produce more than 35 liters of milk a day," said Wani, compared to an average of five liters in normal camels. Camel milk is commonly found next to regular milk at supermarkets in the Gulf, while meat products such as camel carpaccio are served in fancy restaurants.

## 'Saddest moment'

Cloning dogs, cows and horses is popular in many countries, although animal rights groups say the process causes undue suffering to the animals that provide

the egg cells and carry embryos. With orders flying into the cloning clinics in the United Arab Emirates, the only such facilities in the Gulf, scientists have developed new techniques to keep up with the pace. Female camels only give birth to one calf every two years, including a gestation period of 13 months.

But breeding centers use a surrogacy technique to increase the number of offspring, whether from cloning or traditional breeding. "In this process which we call multiple ovulation and embryo transfer, we super-stimulate the champion females and breed them with champion males," explained Wani. "We collect the embryos from these females after seven to eight days and then we put them in surrogate mothers, which are very ordinary animals."

Alternatively, cloned camels can be created by placing DNA from cells in the desired animal's ovaries into eggs taken from the surrogate mothers. "These mothers carry the babies to term, and instead of producing one baby at a time in a year, we can produce many calves from these animals." Cloning is not just for those who want to own elite camels. Sometimes, clients simply want to reproduce a beloved animal after a sudden death. Wani, who started working at the clinic in 2003, said his proudest moment was the birth of Injaz-and the worst time was her death. "She died this year," he said. "When we came in the morning, she had ruptured her uterus. We tried to save her as much as possible. This was the saddest moment." —AFP

## 'Dune' director longing for sequel as sci-fi makes N America debut

Denis Villeneuve always planned for his wildly ambitious sci-fi "Dune" to be seen on the biggest screen possible, and the director got his wish Saturday as the much-hyped film made its splashy IMAX premiere at the Toronto film festival. Boasting terrifying giant sandworms, warring interstellar tribes and an A-list cast spanning Timothee Chalamet, Javier Bardem and

Zendaya, the long-delayed epic based on a beloved novel has already drawn strong reviews. The publicity blitz for Warner Bros studio's \$165 million gamble moved from Venice to North America's biggest festival this weekend, where Villeneuve told AFP that watching his film in the extra-large, immersive screen format was "the proper way to see the movie."

"You receive the full power and the landscape, and at the same time it's the most powerful way to increase intimacy with the characters." However, from October 22 it will be viewable on the small-screen HBO Max platform-the same day it hits regular theaters. That controversial decision-announced while the pandemic kept movie theaters closed last year-was blasted by Villeneuve himself for showing "no love for cinema, nor for the audience." More is at stake, however, than the creative vision of the Canadian auteur, who is revered critically and commercially for making big, intelligent, grown-up movies like "Sicario" and "Blade Runner 2049." His "Dune" film splits Frank Herbert's seminal 1965 sci-fi novel in two parts, but Warner has yet to officially green-light the sequel, presumably waiting to gauge its performance with the public.

And there are fears that giving viewers the option to skip the theater for the small screen could undermine the first film's box office returns, potentially spelling doom for any follow-ups. "I can say nothing! If ever it happened it would be fantastic," said Villeneuve, discussing sequel plans on the Toronto red carpet Saturday.

"Because for me, I just laid the ground-the world is explained to the audience now. 'Dune Two' would be just pure cinematic pleasure for me."

## 'Challenge'

Rebecca Ferguson, who plays royal concubine Lady Jessica, said she was in the dark about any sequel too, but would love to return. "Has he written it? I don't know. I'm hoping," she told AFP. "Unless he casts someone else!" The fact that "Dune" got made at all is in some ways remarkable, given the dire track record of previous efforts. While it profoundly influenced later sci-fi epics such as "Star Wars," the original novel-about the battle for a valuable resource called "spice" on a hostile desert planet of the future-has been considered unwieldy or even "unfilmable" for the screen.

That is largely due to its length, sprawling scale, and elaborate detail concerning the universe's various religions, technologies and "Game of Thrones"-esque feuding families. David Lynch's 1984 film flopped after producers-alarmed by its run-time-savagely chopped it down. A previous bid by cult Franco-Chilean filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky never made it past its gargantuan draft screenplay. But Villeneuve said he was not put off by any such fears. "It's a book that I've been haunted by (for) almost 40 years," said Villeneuve.

"I knew that I could try to take this challenge-when you make a movie you never know if it's going to be a success or not. It's part of the game. It's part of the risk of making art." "I didn't think about what was made before." However, that is not to say any part of making the film was easy. "It was technically by far the most difficult thing I have ever tried with a camera," said Villeneuve. The Toronto International Film Festival runs until September 18. —AFP



Canadian director Denis Villeneuve and Swedish actress Rebecca Ferguson arrive for the premiere of "Dune" at the Toronto International Film Festival in Toronto, Ontario. —AFP

## Wrapping of Arc de Triomphe begins in Christo tribute

A first giant sheet of fabric was draped down the Arc de Triomphe in Paris yesterday as work started to wrap the monument in a tribute to late artist Christo. After weeks of preparations, the final stage of the art installation has begun, with a silver-blue sheet unfurled from the top of the imposing war memorial at the top of the Champs-Elysees. Over the next few days, the entire Arc will be wrapped in fabric-the signature of Bulgarian-born Christo who died last year. He had dreamed of sheathing the monument since renting a nearby apartment in the 1960s. But despite completing other major public works during his lifetime, including wrapping the oldest bridge in Paris in 1985 and the German parliament in 1995, the Arc de Triomphe project never materialized before his death.

The completion of his vision-and that of his co-designer and wife, Jeanne-Claude-has been overseen by his nephew Vladimir Javacheff in coordination with the Pompidou museum and French authorities. More than

25,000 square meters (270,000 square feet) of fabric will encase the monument over the coming days, with an official ceremony due to be held on Thursday and completion on Saturday. The spectacular wrapping will then stay in place until October 3. "It will be like a living object stimulated by the wind and reflecting the light. The folds will move and the monument's surface will become sensual," Christo once said of his idea, for which he left sketches and photo montages.

"People are going to want to touch the Arc de Triomphe," he said. Workers have been busy for weeks putting scaffolding and protective equipment in place to protect the stonework and sculptures. The monument, which was built by Napoleon to commemorate fallen soldiers during his military campaigns, has been recently restored after being defaced by anti-government "yellow vest" rioters in December 2018. As well as the polypropylene fabric, the project will use 3,000 metres of red rope, all of which can be recycled. —AFP



Workers unravel silver blue fabric, part of the process of wrapping L'Arc de Triomphe in Paris early yesterday, designed by the late artist Christo. —AFP



The 78th Venice Film Festival

# FRENCH ABORTION FILM WINS ON BIG NIGHT FOR WOMEN AT VENICE FESTIVAL



French director Audrey Diwan poses with the Golden Lion for Best Film she received for "L'Evenement" (Happening) during the Winners' Photocall following the closing ceremony of the 78th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido.-AFP photos



French Romanian actress Anamaria Vartolomei (left) and French director Audrey Diwan arrive for the screening of the film "L'Evenement" (Happening) presented in competition during the 78th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido.



Italian director Paolo Sorrentino poses with the Silver Lion - Grand Jury Prize he received for "E stato la mano di Dio" (The Hand of God).



Spanish actress Penelope Cruz kisses her trophy after receiving the Coppa Volpi for Best Actress in "Madres Paralelas" (Parallel Mothers).



Filipino director Erik Matti poses with the trophy he received on behalf of actor John Arcilla, the Coppa Volpi for Best Actor in "On the Job: The Missing 8".



New Zealand director Jane Campion acknowledges receiving the Silver Lion for Best Director for "The Power of the Dog".

A timely film about illegal abortions in 1960s France won the Venice Film Festival's Golden Lion on Saturday, capping a strong night for women including Penelope Cruz and Jane Campion. Audrey Diwan's "Happening" arrives just as the abortion debate is raging again over new restrictions in Texas and its decriminalization in Mexico. "I did this movie with anger, with desire, with my belly, my guts, my heart and my head," said Diwan, accepting the top prize for her delicately rendered, yet gut-punching drama. It was great year for female filmmakers, with best director going to iconic New Zealand auteur Jane Campion for her emotionally complex Western "The Power of the Dog", starring Benedict Cumberbatch.

And best screenplay went to Maggie Gyllenhaal for her directorial debut "The Lost Daughter", an unflinching look at the difficulties of balancing career and motherhood starring British Oscar-winner Olivia Colman. "There is a change in the air," Campion said, regarding the MeToo movement and its effect on film. "It's like the Berlin Wall coming down for women. It was like the end of Apartheid. There's a new feeling for what women are thinking, what they're saying, what they're doing."

#### Roaring back

With a plethora of stars and high-calibre selection of films, the glitzy festival on Venice's beachfront Lido roared back to life this year after the pandemic sucked the

glamour out of the 2020 edition. The second-place Silver Lion went to beloved Italian director Paolo Sorrentino for his strikingly personal "The Hand of God" about his youth in the gritty southern city of Naples, which also earned the newcomer award for young star Filippo Scotti. But gender issues felt dominant. The festival closed with "The Last Duel", playing out of competition, a medieval jousting drama starring Matt Damon and Ben Affleck that went heavy on its message of historical injustice towards women.

"I think any reasonable humane, empathetic, conscionable person would have to be a feminist," Affleck told AFP in an interview. Edgar Wright's "Last Night in Soho", meanwhile, turned the misogyny of Swinging Sixties London into a slasher horror flick. One woman who seems destined to grab the headlines in the coming months is Kristen Stewart, who picked up Oscar buzz with her turn as Princess Diana in "Spencer". But it was Spanish megastar Penelope Cruz who took home the best actress award for her latest collaboration with veteran auteur Pedro Almodovar.

"Parallel Mothers" is a surprisingly political turn for the flamboyant filmmaker, exploring the trauma of the 1930s Spanish civil war alongside the tale of two mothers sharing a maternity ward. "Thank you Pedro. This is 100 percent yours. Thanks for once again trusting me, for inspiring me every day with your search for truth, outside and inside," Cruz said, accepting the



US director and actress Maggie Gyllenhaal poses with the Award for Best Screenplay she received for "The Lost Daughter".

award. The best actor gong was less expected, going to Philippines star John Arcilla for crime thriller "On the Job: The Missing 8".

#### Celebs

The Golden Lion was selected by a jury led by "Parasite" director Bong Joon-Ho. Success at Venice has become a key launchpad for Academy Award campaigns in recent years. The last four winners-

"Nomadland", "Joker", "Roma" and "The Shape of Water"-have all gone on to Oscar success. Pandemic precautions-including mandatory masks, vaccine passes and 50-percent capacity in the cinemas-continued to take some of the shine off this year's festival. But the glamour was certainly back, with a dazzling Hollywood guest list capped by the appearance of Affleck with his old/new girlfriend Jennifer Lopez to the delight of gossip mags everywhere.—AFP

## Venice Film Festival Winners

The Venice Film Festival wrapped up Saturday after 21 films from around the world competed for the top prize. Here are the winners.

#### Golden Lion: 'Happening'

The festival's award for best film went to French director Audrey Diwan's "Happening". The film follows a 23-year-old university student who desperately tries to get an abortion in 1960s France.

#### Grand Jury Prize: 'The Hand of God'

The runner-up prize went to Paolo Sorrentino's autobiographical film set in the Naples of his youth, when football legend Diego Maradona delivered big hopes to the gritty southern city.

#### Best Actress: Penelope Cruz

Penelope Cruz won for her work in Pedro Almodovar's "Parallel Mothers", an uncharacteristically political film that sees the Spanish actress as a single mother who faces a mystery surrounding her baby's identity.

#### Best Actor: John Arcilla

Philippine actor John Arcilla won for his star turn in "On the Job: The Missing 8", playing a radio host forced to rethink his support for the government after a series of assassinations.

#### Best director: Jane Campion

Jane Campion won the top directing prize for "The Power of the Dog", her first film in more than a decade, starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Kirsten Dunst. Set in Montana in the 1920s the drama follows two brothers who feud after one comes home with a new wife.

#### Screenplay: Maggie Gyllenhaal

Maggie Gyllenhaal's screenplay for her directorial debut, "The Lost Daughter" was based on a novel by Elena Ferrante. The film starred Olivia Colman as a woman obsessed with another mother and daughter.—AFP

## Spain's film queen Penelope Cruz wins best actress in Venice

Penelope Cruz took home the best actress award at the Venice Film Festival, the latest success for the all-conquering queen of Spanish cinema. Cruz won for her starring role in "Parallel Mothers", her latest collaboration with legendary Spanish director Pedro Almodovar. It was a surprisingly political turn for the flamboyant filmmaker, exploring the trauma of the 1930s Spanish civil war alongside the tale of two mothers sharing a maternity ward. It marks a departure into dark historical territory for the director, while still focusing on the themes of motherhood and female relationships that have been central to many of his films.

Cruz described Almodovar as "my safety net" in a press conference ahead of their red carpet appearance in Venice. "He can ask me to do something that can really scare me but I know he will be there waiting to sustain me," she said, adding that she was grateful to the director for giving her "so many different, challenging characters". Cruz has appeared in seven of Almodovar's movies, including "All About My Mother" and "Volver". She had a busy fortnight in Venice, also starring in the well-received "Official Competition", a comedy about ego-maniacs in the film business that saw her in a rare appearance alongside her

Spanish megastar Antonio Banderas.

#### Young talent

Born in Madrid in 1974, she appeared destined for a career in the entertainment, initially studying ballet at Spain's National Conservatory before winning an acting competition that led to roles on TV and in music videos. Her break into film came in Spanish director Bigas Luna's "Jamon, Jamon" in 1992, which received critical acclaim and was notable for its erotic scenes featuring a 16-year-old Cruz and Javier Bardem, who would much later become her husband.

That was followed soon afterwards by "Belle Epoque", which won the Oscar for best foreign film, and featured Cruz as one of four sisters vying for the love of an army deserter. The next milestone came in 1997, when she was cast in her first film by Pedro Almodovar. "Live Flesh" marked the beginning of a decade-long collaboration between Almodovar and the actress which has included roles in another foreign language Oscar-winner, 1999's "All About My Mother".

#### Hollywood struggles

Cruz struggled to establish herself in mainstream Hollywood. She achieved a rare but unwanted feat in 2001 when she received three nomi-



Spanish actress Penelope Cruz arrives for the closing ceremony of the 78th Venice Film Festival.

nations in the "Golden Raspberries" Oscars spoof for "Captain Corelli's Mandolin", "Blow" and "Vanilla Sky". The latter cast her alongside Tom Cruise, whom she ended up dating for three years. Other flops followed including "Gothika" and "Sahara". But she bounced back, picking up an Oscar nomination for the 2006



(From left) Spanish businessman and producer Jaume Roures, Argentine director Mariano Cohn, Spanish actor Antonio Banderas, Spanish actress Penelope Cruz, Argentine actor Oscar Martinez and Argentine director Gaston Duprat arrive for the screening of the film "Competencia Oficial" (Official Competition) presented in competition during the 78th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido. —AFP

Almodovar film "Volver". And she made history by becoming the first Spanish actress to win an Oscar in 2009 for her part in the Woody Allen comedy "Vicky Cristina Barcelona". She was again paired with Bardem in that film, triggering a romance that led to their marriage in 2010. The fiercely independent Cruz

is also wary of being type-cast simply for her striking physical beauty. "The most difficult thing in the world is to start a career known only for your looks, and then to try to become a serious actress," she has said. "No one will take you seriously once you are known as the pretty woman." —AFP



## Sports

# New starts abound as Europe's elite chase Champions League glory

## Barca vs Bayern, Liverpool vs Milan, Inter vs Real highlight first week matchups

**PARIS:** After a summer of eye-catching moves across Europe, the continent's top clubs begin the long road to Champions League glory this week as fans return after a 2020-21 competition held largely behind closed doors.

A flurry of transfer activity, headlined by Lionel Messi ending his long association with Barcelona and Cristiano Ronaldo returning to Manchester United, guarantees plenty of fresh intrigue. The opening round of group stage fixtures doesn't disappoint either, with Barcelona taking on Bayern Munich for the first time since a humiliating 8-2 defeat in the quarter-finals two years ago. Liverpool and AC Milan, clubs with a combined 13 European Cups between them, square off at Anfield in just their third competitive meeting — after the 2005 “Miracle of Istanbul” and Milan's revenge in the 2007 final.

Holders Chelsea bolstered their squad by re-signing striker Romelu Lukaku, pried away from cost-cutting Italian champions Inter Milan where he was voted Serie A player of the season last term. That deal was indicative of Premier League clubs again exerting their financial power over the rest of Europe, topping £1 billion (\$1.4 billion) in spending for the sixth straight summer despite a dip in revenues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chelsea and last season's runners-up Manchester City will be among the favorites to go all the way, but 2020 finalists Paris Saint-Germain added Messi with the express aim of getting their hands on the Champions League for the first time. “I have said many times my dream is to win another Champions League and I think I'm in the ideal place to have that chance and to do it,” said Messi. Rested at the weekend after a long trip back from a World Cup qualifier in Bolivia, Messi could finally make his first start for

PSG against Club Brugge.

The Belgian champions will be viewed as makeweights in a group that features City, PSG and RB Leipzig, surprise semi-finalists in 2020 and runners-up to Bayern in last season's Bundesliga. City eliminated PSG in the semi-finals last May, while Leipzig were already in a group with the French giants last season, the two sides qualifying for the last 16 ahead of Manchester United.

### Ronaldo rejoices

Ronaldo's last match in his first spell at Old Trafford was the 2009 Champions League final loss to Barca, the second of three finals the club reached in the space of four years. Since Alex Ferguson's retirement in 2013, only twice have United reached the last eight.

“We have a fantastic team, a young team, with a fantastic coach,” said Ronaldo, who scored twice Saturday against Newcastle on his return to United. “I belong to Manchester. I arrived here at 18 and they treated me unbelievably. This is why I've come back. I'm so proud to be here and I want to win.”

Ronaldo is the Champions League's record scorer with 134 goals, 14 clear of long-time rival Messi. United start Group F against Switzerland's Young Boys. Villarreal, the team that beat them in the Europa League final, are in the same section.

Chelsea begin Group H against Zenit, whose Krestovsky Stadium in Saint Petersburg is the venue for next year's final. They also come up against a reeling Juventus side that must fill the goalscoring void left by Ronaldo.

The last team to lift the European Cup that did not play in England, Germany, Spain or Italy was Jose Mourinho's Porto in 2004. The Portuguese side have their work cut out to advance from a brutal section



**LONDON:** Chelsea's Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku celebrates scoring his team's third goal during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Aston Villa at Stamford Bridge in London on Saturday. —AFP

including Spanish champions Atletico Madrid, Liverpool and Milan — back in the competition for the first time since 2013/14 after coming second in Serie A last season.

Other famous names among the 32 hopefuls are Ajax and Benfica, while Sheriff Tiraspol of Moldova are the only debutants. Their reward for making it through four qualifying ties, where they knocked out Red Star Belgrade and Dinamo Zagreb, is a group with Real Madrid and Inter.

Madrid, the record 13-time European champions, have been drawn alongside Inter and Shakhtar

Bayern Munich and Barcelona. In three of the eight seasons since Ferguson departed, United failed to even qualify for the Champions League.

### No excuses for Solskjaer

However, the recruitment of the competition's greatest ever goalscorer, added to the signings of Jadon Sancho and Raphael Varane, leaves Ole Gunnar Solskjaer with few excuses left for failure in Europe. The Norwegian landed the job as United manager largely based on the folklore of him scoring United's most famous Champions League goal to beat Bayern Munich in the 1999 final.

But as manager, he has failed to win the Europa League with by a distance the biggest budget in the competition in the past two seasons and crashed out at the group stage of last season's Champions League. United's latest European campaign gets underway in Switzerland on Tuesday against Young Boys with Solskjaer's men in need of a winning start with tougher tests against Villarreal, who beat United in last season's Europa League final, and Atalanta to come.

“We have a fantastic team, a young team, with a fantastic coach but we have to build up confidence,” said Ronaldo after his dream double against Newcastle. “The team needs to be mature if we want to win the league and the Champions League, but we are in a good way, and I am here to help the team.”

Ronaldo is just the latest weapon in an attacking

the burofax stating his desire to leave and while he insisted it had nothing to do with the Bayern defeat, he also said they “had given off a very bad image. It was wrong.”

And so, for the first time in almost two decades, Barca begin a Champions League campaign this week without their best ever player, who registered his first Champions League goal in 2005 and went on to score 120 in 149 games for them, against 41 different opponents, including seven hat-tricks.

Messi won four Champions Leagues in 10 years at Camp Nou but none in his last six and while he was far from blameless, every failure enhanced the sense of a historic career being wasted. Whether the theory Messi's absence will liberate others has merit remains to be seen but there is certainly less pressure now to succeed, even less than last season, when a gallant draw with PSG in the second leg came as something of a relief after a 4-1 loss in the first. Dampened expectations could at least offer a more forgiving platform for Barca's youngsters to thrive and others, like Memphis Depay and Ousmane Dembele, to step forward. “Memphis can mark a new era at Barca,” said Koeman this week. “He has the things you need to be a success here: personality and character.”

If new blood was needed, Koeman has helped accelerate the transition as the likes of Pedri, Frenkie de Jong, Sergino Dest and Ronald Araujo have risen in prominence, ready

Ferraris but strikes from Maya Yoshida and Tommaso Augello earned a draw for Roberto D'Aversa's Sampdoria, who sit 13th with two points. “It's a game we should have and could have won,” Inzaghi told DAZN. “We have to look at what happened, because when a team like ours goes ahead twice we really should win.” Dimarco gave Inter the lead against the run of play in the 18th minute when the academy product lashed home a powerful free-kick, and Martinez almost doubled the away side's lead on the half-hour mark when his low shot was pushed away by Emil Audero. However, Samp drew level almost immediately through Yoshida, whose weak shot following a corner clipped Edin Dzeko and rolled past Samir Handanovic.

Martinez did have his second goal of the season just before the break thanks to brilliant play from Italy midfielder Nicolo Barella, whose pinpoint

Donetsk of Ukraine for the second straight season. Erling Haaland's Borussia Dortmund will fancy their chances in Group C, where Portuguese champions Sporting, Ajax and Besiktas await.

Ronald Koeman's Barca embark on a first Champions League campaign since the departure of Messi, with whom they last lifted the trophy in 2015. “Despite losing the world's best player in Leo Messi, players being out with injuries, or the financial issues, you simply have to get on with it,” Koeman told Spanish media. “I turn it into a challenge, which motivates me even more.” —AFP



**MANCHESTER:** Manchester United's Portuguese striker Cristiano Ronaldo leaves after the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Newcastle at Old Trafford in Manchester, England, on Saturday. —AFP

artillery that makes Solskjaer's squad the envy of most coaches across the continent. Mason Greenwood and £73 million signing Sancho flanked the five-time Ballon d'Or winner on Saturday with Bruno Fernandes and Paul Pogba providing the ammunition from midfield. Anthony Martial, Jesse Lingard and Donny van de Beek started on the bench with Marcus Rashford and Edinson Cavani still to return from injury. —AFP

perhaps to lead themselves. There have been departures too, 20 of them since the final whistle blew in Lisbon, not to mention the coach, with Quique Setien being swiftly replaced by Koeman. Five of those that played against Bayern in 2020 have gone. It was the board Pique was targeting most and there has been wholesale change there as well, with Joan Laporta taking over as president and installing Mateu Alemany as the new director of football. But Laporta's first six months has been so consumed by keeping the club afloat, there have been precious few decisions aimed at taking it forward.

Last month, Laporta indicated the club's total debts amounted to 1.35 billion euros, with player salaries 103 per cent of income, a figure now closer to 80 per cent after the transfer window. Saving, not improving, has been the priority.

The result is perhaps a club with better hopes for the future but a team that looks even worse than the one before and it would be a huge surprise if Barcelona troubled either the Champions League's latter stages or primary contenders.

When Pique said they were “no longer able to compete in Europe” last year, there was anger in his voice but there is more of an acceptance now, an awareness that for now the pinnacle is almost certainly out of reach. For Barcelona, the worst may be over, but it could be a while before the good times return. —AFP

cross was expertly volleyed home by the Argentina forward. However, Augello earned Samp a point with a special volley of his own almost straight after half-time when he met Bartosz Bereszynski's cross with a powerful left-footed strike that left Handanovic motionless.

Inter had good chances to take the points through Edin Dzeko, Hakan Calhanoglu and Joaquin Correa but it was Samp who came closest to snatching a win with 15 minutes left. Denmark winger Mikkel Damsgaard managed to sneak behind the Inter defence and let off a low shot which beat Handanovic, but just as it looked to be crossing the line Danilo D'Ambrosio rushed back to clear the ball and save his team's blushes. Inter host Real Madrid at the San Siro on Wednesday in their first Champions League group match of the season. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Lukaku scores at Stamford Bridge

**LONDON:** Chelsea striker Romelu Lukaku scored at Stamford Bridge for the first time as his double sealed a 3-0 win against Aston Villa on Saturday. After scoring on his second Chelsea debut in the win at Arsenal in August, Lukaku made it three goals from three appearances with a pair of predatory strikes. The 28-year-old had never netted in front of Chelsea's home fans before, but he ended that drought in the first half to the delight of the 40,000 capacity crowd. Mateo Kovacic scored Chelsea's second goal and Lukaku struck again in the final moments as the European champions made it three wins from their first four league games. Chelsea are only the second club, after Manchester United, to win 600 Premier League games. —AFP

#### PSG stay perfect

**PARIS:** Ander Herrera scored twice as Paris Saint-Germain defeated promoted Clermont 4-0 on Saturday in the absence of Lionel Messi and Neymar, both rested after their exertions this week in World Cup qualifying. The Spanish midfielder nodded PSG in front at the Parc des Princes on 19 minutes and then fired in a second from close range on the half-hour. Kylian Mbappe, who shook off a calf injury picked up on international duty with France, raced clear of the Clermont defense to add PSG's third before Idrissa Gueye headed in a fourth. Pochettino left Argentina duo Messi and Angel Di Maria, and Brazil star Neymar out of the squad to allow them extra time to recover ahead of Wednesday's Champions League opener at Club Brugge. —AFP

#### Lemar saves Atletico

**MADRID:** Thomas Lemar drove in a 99th-minute winner as Atletico Madrid came from behind to beat Espanyol 2-1 yesterday and ensure Antoine Griezmann's first game back with the club ended with a victory. The excellent Lemar struck in the ninth of 10 minutes of added time at the RCDE Stadium to sink an exhausted Espanyol and give La Liga's reigning champions a third victory from their opening four games. Griezmann was replaced by Joao Felix in the 58th minute, an underwhelming return for the Frenchman symptomatic of a lethargic Atletico, who only sprung into life late on. Yannick Carrasco was the catalyst, firing in with 11 minutes left of normal time before Lemar completed a dramatic comeback by surging through midfield and finishing into the far corner. —AFP

#### Lewandowski strikes again

**LEIPZIG:** Robert Lewandowski chalked up his sixth goal in just four Bundesliga games as Bayern Munich swept aside RB Leipzig 4-1 on Saturday to go second in the table behind early leaders Wolfsburg. Lewandowski netted a first-half penalty before 18-year-old Jamal Musiala and Leroy Sane added quick-fire goals just after the break in front of 34,000 fans at Leipzig's Red Bull Arena. The hosts clawed back a stunning goal when midfielder Konrad Laimer hit the top corner before Lewandowski's replacement Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting scored Bayern's late fourth. Earlier, Erling Haaland scored a brace to seal thrilling 4-3 win for Borussia Dortmund at Bayer Leverkusen. Wolfsburg stayed top with a 2-0 win at newly-promoted Greuther Fuerth. —AFP

## Can Ronaldo return make Man Utd a European force again?

**MANCHESTER:** Cristiano Ronaldo surpassed even his own expectations as he delivered on the hype of his return to Old Trafford as a Manchester United player by scoring twice in a 4-1 win over Newcastle on Saturday. A full house reverberated to a chorus of Ronaldo chants and songs from long before kick-off as he took his tally for the club to 120 goals, 12 years on from swapping Manchester for Madrid.

The final game of the Portuguese's first spell with the Red Devils was a Champions League final defeat to Barcelona in 2009 that signaled a changing of the guard in European football in which Ronaldo played a large part. Barca were crowned champions of Europe again in 2011 and 2015, while a Ronaldo-inspired Real Madrid won the competition four times between 2014 and 2018.

That balance of power between La Liga and the Premier League has swung again with two all-English Champions League finals in the past three years. But they have not featured United in a sign of the club's decline since Alex Ferguson's retirement as manager in 2013.

The best the English giants have done since reaching a third final in four years in 2011 is two trips to the quarter-finals, where they were comprehensively dispatched by

## Barcelona face Bayern again, without Messi

**MADRID:** “We need change from top to bottom,” Gerard Pique said but even he could not have predicted what followed as Barcelona, without Lionel Messi, reunite with Bayern Munich tomorrow, a year on from the defeat that changed everything. After the 8-2 loss by Bayern in the Champions League quarter-finals, Pique said Barca needed change of all kinds, “not just players and coaches, but structurally”, insisting “new blood” was needed. “We are not able to compete in Europe,” he said.

The humiliation felt like rock bottom, a brutal confirmation of mediocrity delivered by a club about to reach the summit of Europe against one no longer anywhere near it. Pique demanded revolution but little has improved in the year since, the club's financial horrors laid bare by Messi's departure to Paris Saint-Germain, which has been harder to stomach for the fans than any thrashing on the pitch.

Ten days after the loss in Lisbon, Messi sent Barcelona

## Inter's 100 percent start ends with Sampdoria draw

**GENOA:** Inter Milan's perfect start to the defense of their Serie A title ended yesterday when they were held to a 2-2 draw at Sampdoria but still moved up to second place. The champions are two points behind leaders Napoli - who had beaten Juventus a day earlier - after failing to beat a spirited Samp side in Genoa following two wins in their opening two fixtures of the campaign.

Federico Dimarco and Lautaro Martinez twice put Simone Inzaghi's side ahead at the Stadio Luigi



## Sports

# Teen US Open champ Raducanu gets epic first qualifier Slam win

## First British woman in 44 years to win a Grand Slam

**NEW YORK:** British teenager Emma Raducanu completed the greatest underdog title run in tennis history on Saturday, becoming the first qualifier to capture a Grand Slam crown by defeating Canada's Leylah Fernandez in the US Open women's final.

The 18-year-old was the first British woman in 44 years to win a Slam crown after beating 19-year-old left-hander Fernandez 6-4, 6-3 to take the \$2.5 million (2.1 million euro) top prize. "I knew I would have to dig deep," Raducanu said. "It was an incredibly difficult match, but I thought the level was really high. I had to play some of my best tennis."

It was a stunning achievement for the unheralded 150th-ranked teen, who didn't drop a set in three qualifying matches and seven main-draw matches over two weeks in producing a stunner for the ages. Raducanu is the youngest Slam champion since Maria Sharapova at 17 in 2004 at Wimbledon. Not since Virginia Wade in 1977 at Wimbledon had a British woman taken a Slam singles title, with Raducanu the first Briton to claim the US Open crown since Wade in 1968.

Queen Elizabeth II was among the first to pay tribute to Raducanu's incredible triumph. "It is a remarkable achievement at such a young age, and is testament to your hard work and dedication," the British monarch said in a statement.

Wade and British men's tennis legend Tim Henman were among a sellout crowd of 23,700 that created an electric atmosphere at Arthur Ashe Stadium in the first-ever women's Slam final between unseeded players. "It means so much to have Virginia here and also Tim and to have such British legends and icons, to follow in their footsteps and it gave me the belief I could actually do it."

Raducanu has had the fewest Slam starts of any women's Slam winner, reaching the fourth round in July at Wimbledon in her only prior Slam appearance. Fernandez, ranked 73rd, had ousted defending

champion Naomi Osaka, second-ranked Aryna Sabalenka and fifth seed Elina Svitolina in her epic run to the final.

"I'm very proud of myself the way I played the last two weeks," Fernandez said. "I hope to be back here in the finals and having the right trophy," added a tearful Fernandez, who paid tribute to New York as the city marked the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. "I know it's especially hard on this day for New York," she said. "I just want to say I hope I can be as strong and resilient as New York has been the past 20 years."

Raducanu is the youngest US Open champion since 17-year-old Serena Williams in 1999 and the first US Open women's champion not to drop a set since Williams in 2014. The prodigy showdown was the first all-teen Slam final since Williams beat 18-year-old Martina Hingis for the 1999 US Open title.



**Queen Elizabeth hails "incredible triumph"**

"Both of us were playing fearless tennis for two weeks," Raducanu said. "I hope we play each other in many more tournaments and hopefully finals."

### Blood, sweat and tears

After an early exchange of hard-fought breaks, Raducanu broke in the 10th game to take the first set, blasting a forehand winner after 58 minutes. In the second set, Fernandez broke to 2-1 but Raducanu blasted a backhand cross-court service return winner to equalize 2-2 and later



**NEW YORK:** Leylah Annie Fernandez of Canada (left) holds the runner-up trophy as Emma Raducanu of Great Britain celebrates with the championship trophy after their Women's Singles final match on Day Thirteen of the 2021 US Open at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center on Saturday in the Flushing neighborhood of the Queens borough of New York City. — AFP

whipped a forehand passing winner by the Canadian to break for 4-2.

Fernandez saved two match points in the eighth game and held to 5-3, then earned a break chance at 30-40 in the ninth. But on the point, Raducanu skidded on her left knee and opened a bleeding cut. The match was halted while a trainer bandaged the wound as Fernandez spoke with the referee.

"I didn't know how serious her fall was, so that's why I went to see the official," Fernandez said. "It

was just too bad it happened in that specific moment with me, with the momentum. But it's sports, it's tennis. Just got to move on."

When play resumed, Fernandez sent a forehand long to squander the break chance and Raducanu won after an hour and 51 minutes on her third ace, leaving Fernandez in tears. "I was going for that serve the whole match. I can't believe I finally hit it," Raducanu said. "I was just praying not to double fault." — AFP

## Raducanu is teenage star in vogue

**NEW YORK:** Emma Raducanu's journey to US Open champion at the age of 18 is even more remarkable given the Briton was the shy youngster who felt she was always "the odd one out." Raducanu, who became the first qualifier in history to win a Grand Slam singles crown with victory over Leylah Fernandez in New York on Saturday, has enjoyed a year beyond her wildest dreams.

When she played Wimbledon in July, it was the first time she had ever appeared in the main draw of a Grand Slam. A virtual unknown at the start of that tournament, she became the youngest British woman to reach the third round for 19 years. Even before she travelled to New York, she appeared on the front cover of British Vogue. At Flushing Meadow her poise and nerveless play belied her age as she became the darling of fans and media.

As a child though, the drive instilled in her by her Romanian father Ian and

Chinese mother Renee, who insisted she try a range of activities including go-karting, ballet or horse riding, made her feel a bit of an outsider. "When I was younger, I was the only girl in my group karting or doing motocross, and I thought it was pretty cool," she explained in Vogue. "For example, one time, my motocross teacher was like, right, we're going to do press-ups. I was the only one who could do it, so I was proud of myself for that."

It was tennis, though, that her teachers identified from the age of five as the sport in which she would shine. Her primary school teacher Rebecca Rodger said that when the school held tennis coaching, most of the children had difficulty even making contact with the ball. "But there was Emma having a rally with the coaches. We couldn't quite believe it. Even then I remember thinking that we were going to see her at Wimbledon," Rodger told The Times.

Her instinct was spot-on as Raducanu lit up Wimbledon, with a mix of deft stroke play and power hitting far from what one would expect of an international novice. Also striking was the maturity she showed in fielding questions from the media. In the end, breathing difficulties forced her to retire from her fourth-round match at the All-England Club.



**NEW YORK:** Britain's Emma Raducanu reacts during her 2021 US Open Tennis tournament women's final match against Canada's Leylah Fernandez at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York on Saturday. —AFP

### 'An invigorating brand'

However, showing an extraordinary strength of character she has put that behind her to become the first qualifier to reach a Grand Slam final. She credits her parents for this trait. "For me, having a Chinese mum, she definitely instilled in me from a young age a lot of discipline and respect for other people into me," she said. "I think having parents like I do, they always push me.

They have high expectations. I've always tried to live up to that."

Fulfilling those high expectations will bring with it unthinkable riches. The £181,000 (\$250,000) she earned at Wimbledon for reaching the last 16 — her then richest payday — is loose change beside the \$2.5 million she earned at being crowned US Open champion and the endorsements that come with it. — AFP

## Belfort humbles Holyfield with 1st round TKO

**MIAMI:** Former heavyweight world champion Evander Holyfield looked all of his 58 years in a first-round technical knockout loss to mixed martial arts star Vitor Belfort on Saturday. With former US President Donald Trump providing ringside commentary for the spectacle at Seminole Hard Rock casino in Hollywood, Florida, Brazil's Belfort unleashed an early flurry that ended with Holyfield slipping through the ropes.

The American ring great regained his feet only to be sent to the canvas by a combination from Belfort. He beat the count, but after he absorbed another flurry of blows without throwing any the referee stopped the fight despite Holyfield's objections. "I wasn't hurt," insisted Holyfield, who called the decision to stop the fight "kind of sad."

"It is what it is," he said. "I think it's a bad call." Holyfield was fighting for the first time since he defeated Brian Nielsen in 2011 to cap a glorious ring career. Holyfield won 1984 Olympic gold as a light heavyweight and went on to dominate the professional cruiserweight division before entering prize fighting lore as a heavyweight.

He's best known for a championship heavyweight run that included two wins over Mike Tyson, one of them the infamous "Bite Fight," a win



**HOLLYWOOD:** US former professional boxer Evander Holyfield (left) falls during a fight against Brazilian martial artist Vitor Belfort during a boxing fight at Hard Rock Live in Hollywood, Florida on Saturday. — AFP

over George Foreman, and one win over Riddick Bowe in their punishing trilogy.

Holyfield (44-10 with two drawn and 29 knockouts, accepted the Belfort fight on eight days' notice after Oscar De La Hoya tested positive for COVID-19. Holyfield said he was ready, having been preparing for a proposed comeback bout against Kevin McBride that didn't come off. Asked after the fight if he was still interested in making a rematch with his old nemesis Tyson, Holyfield said, "Of course."

### 'Not the same'

But even Trump, who tirelessly boosted Holyfield throughout his undercard commentary, seemed taken aback by the ex-champ's performance. "No, he's not the same," Trump said. "Right from the beginning he was not the same fighter. He lost a lot. It was not Evander Holyfield."

Trump received a rapturous welcome from fans at the Florida venue, where he arrived after visiting New York on the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. He got in a dig at President Joe Biden and a plug for his

friend Dana White, promoter of mixed martial arts brand Ultimate Fighting Championship, in low key commentary alongside his son Donald Trump Jr. The former president is no stranger to boxing, his hosting of major fights at his hotels and casinos having earned him a place in New Jersey's boxing Hall of Fame.

Trump's commentary for the card put together by Triller, the music video app that is trying to break into boxing with its Triller Fight Club streaming platform, included remembrances of fights and fighters past along with random observations on the sport. "It's like elections, it could be rigged, too," Trump noted of some questionable fight results he's seen in the past.

On the undercard, Britain's former cruiserweight and heavyweight world champion David Haye carried his buddy Joe Fourier, a business magnate turned mid-life boxer, over eight easy-going two-minute rounds on the way to a unanimous decision victory.

Haye, 40, hadn't fought in three years, when he retired from the ring with a record of 28-4 with 26 knockouts. He said before the bout that he had no intention of making a "traditional comeback" to the ring, but couldn't resist calling out fellow Brit Tyson Fury, the reigning World Boxing Council heavyweight world champion, after his victory. "There's one man I'll come back to professional boxing to fight... Tyson Fury," said Haye, who twice pulled out of fights against Fury. "I know his kryptonite. The old man's coming for the big dossier." — AFP

## Japan eyes football revival as first women's pro league kicks off

**TOKYO:** Japan's first professional women's football league kicked off in upbeat mood yesterday, despite COVID fan restrictions, looking to make "heroes" of its players and inspire a new generation. A decade after winning the 2011 Women's World Cup, Japan has fallen behind in the women's game which is becoming more popular and lucrative around the world.

But organizers of the 11-team WE League believe it can provide a platform for talent to blossom and tap into growing enthusiasm for the game across the Asia-Pacific region ahead of the 2023 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand. "The WE League is the stage where everyone becomes a hero," league chairwoman Kikuko Okajima said during a speech before Tokyo Verdy Beleza took on Urawa Reds Ladies in one of the opening day's five fixtures.

Games were subject to attendance limits, with Tokyo and other parts of Japan still under a virus state of emergency. Only home fans were allowed to attend Belez's match against Urawa, and cheering and chanting were strictly banned, with mask-wearing mandatory. But almost 2,500 turned up to watch the game at Belez's small but cosy stadium, and the mood before kick-off was one of anticipation.

"I want people to see that women's football can be more dynamic than men's," 11-year-old Beleza supporter Yui Tamai told AFP before the match. "Men's football gets all the attention, but I think women's football will gradually start to get more interest." Fans were treated to a lively, end-to-end encounter, with eight players from Japan's Tokyo Olympics squad among the starting line-ups.

### Women empowerment

Beleza took the lead midway through the first half, but Urawa — the final champions of the league's previous non-professional incarnation — equalized shortly after the interval. Yuzuho Shiohoshi then crashed home an 88th-minute shot from the edge of the box, giving Urawa a dramatic 2-1 win over their arch-rivals. "More than it being the opening game of the WE League, we were playing against Beleza, and they beat us in the cup so there was a lot of frustration left over," said Urawa manager Naoki Kusunose.

Japan's 2011 World Cup win made household names out of players like Homare Sawa and turned the team into national heroes. But only 3.3 percent of registered Japanese players are women, and the number of female players has stayed roughly the same over the past 10 years.

Japan have also slipped to 13th in FIFA's world rankings and failed to reach the quarter-finals at the last World Cup. The WE League — short for Women Empowerment — aims to lay the foundations for change on and off the pitch. All clubs are required to have at least one female coach, while half the staff and one decision-maker must be women. — AFP



## Elliott injury overshadows Liverpool win



LEEDS: Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah chases the ball during the English Premier League football match between Leeds United and Liverpool at Elland Road yesterday. — AFP

**LEEDS:** Liverpool moved alongside Chelsea and Manchester United at the top of the Premier League table with a 3-0 win at Leeds overshadowed by serious injury suffered by teenage star Harvey Elliott. The hosts' midfielder Pascal Struijk was sent-off for a challenge that appeared to break the 18-year-old's left leg midway through the second-half. By that point Liverpool were already comfortably ahead thanks to Mohamed Salah's 100th Premier League goal and Fabinho's 50th minute strike.

Sadio Mane rounded off the scoring in stoppage time. However, the loss of Elliott cast a dark cloud over a positive performance for Jurgen Klopp. Elliott, who made his Premier League debut as a 16-year-old for Fulham, had broken into the Reds side with impressive early season displays against Burnley and Chelsea. Liverpool's title defense was blown off course last season by a series of long-term injuries to key players such as Virgil van Dijk, Joel Matip, Joe Gomez and Jordan Henderson.

Van Dijk's return from cruciate knee ligament damage has made a massive impact with Liverpool conceding just once in their opening four games. However, Salah aside, there remain questions over whether Liverpool have the firepower at the other end to match their rivals for the title in Chelsea, United and defending champions Manchester City.

The visitors should have been out of sight before half-time as they quietened the Elland Road crowd, enjoying just their second sight of a Premier League games in 17 years. Salah rounded off a brilliant team

move to open the scoring and bring up his century in just 162 games in the English top-flight as he and Matip exchanged a one-two before Trent Alexander-Arnold's cross picked out the Egyptian for a tap in.

Mane's form remains a concern for Klopp despite his late strike as the Senegalese missed a series of golden chances, including when he spooned over an open goal from Diogo Jota's cross. After Mane then failed to convert a one-on-one with Meslier minutes into the second-half, Liverpool finally doubled their lead from the resulting corner. Fabinho swept home a loose ball after Van Dijk failed to connect cleanly with a free header from a corner.

Unfortunately, the major talking point was still to come as Struijk won the ball in a sliding challenge but the momentum of the Dutchman's trailing leg took him through the back of Elliott. The incident took place right in front of the Liverpool bench and Klopp was involved in an angry exchange of words with Leeds fans, who had initially been angered that the game was stopped.

Naby Keita, Curtis Jones and Ibrahima Konate were among the Liverpool substitutes to cover their eyes in shock at the injury. However, Elliott was able to applaud the Leeds support as he was carried from the field as they gave the England under-18 international a rousing reception. Rather than make the man advantage

### Salah scores 100th Premier League goal



LEEDS: Liverpool's English striker Harvey Elliott (left) suffers a serious leg injury following a tackle by Leeds United's Dutch defender Pascal Struijk (back) yesterday.

count, Liverpool were slack in the final quarter and could have paid when Patrick Bamford's effort from nearly halfway had to be tipped over by Alisson Becker. Mane also missed two more

glorious chances before finally scoring his second goal of the season when he span onto Thiago Alcantara's pass and blasted into the car corner. — AFP

## Ricciardo wins F1 Italian GP as Hamilton, Verstappen crash out

**MONZA:** Daniel Ricciardo won the Formula One Italian Grand Prix yesterday as the Australian took advantage of Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen's dramatic crash which eliminated both championship rivals. Ricciardo was followed by his McLaren teammate Lando Norris in the British team's first win since the 2012 Brazilian GP, while Valtteri Bottas inherited third, despite starting in last place, due to a five-second time penalty for Sergio Perez.

Red Bull's Verstappen still leads seven-time world champion Hamilton by five points at the top of the drivers' standings as they both finished in the gravel following their crash halfway through the race. Ricciardo, whose father is from Italy, was delighted with not only his first win since Monaco in 2018 but also McLaren's first one-two finish in 11 years, greeting the fans in Italian with a huge smile on his face.

"To lead literally from start to finish, I don't think any of us expected that. There was something in me on Friday, I knew something good was to come," said Ricciardo. "To not only win but to get a one-two, it's insane. For McLaren to be on the podium it's huge, let alone one-two... For once I'm lost for words."

The 32-year-old promised "total attack" after starting second on the grid and capitalized on the most dramatic moment of an eventful race when Hamilton re-entered the Monza track from the pit lane. Verstappen tried to dart past Hamilton just after

the Briton's pit stop but ended up with his back wheel rolling over the top of his rival's Mercedes, narrowly missing Hamilton's head.

Both drivers then slid into the gravel and were forced to retire from the race, which Hamilton was hoping to make his 100th Grand Prix victory. Verstappen was reportedly furious at Hamilton, saying his rival gave him "no space" in a crash which will be investigated by officials after the race. The pair then gave each other the blame in their post-race comments, with Hamilton saying he had given way in a similar position to Verstappen earlier while the Dutchman insisted Hamilton "pushed" him into the trackside sausage kerb.

'Awesome weekend'

Ricciardo then powered to victory backed up by his teammate Norris who was also in good spirits after an impressive second-placed finish. "We've had a pretty awesome weekend," the British driver said. "We've been working towards this, and we got a one-two finally. I'm happy for of course Daniel for getting the win." Verstappen started the race on pole after finishing second behind Bottas in Saturday's sprint but dropped back to second at the start as Ricciardo pipped ahead. Hamilton made an immediate move from fourth, overtaking Norris and then trying to get at Verstappen, only to finish off the track before quickly re-entering back in fourth. The real drama started just as the drivers started making



MONZA: Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton (left) reacts in his car following a collision with Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen (unseen) during the Italian Formula One Grand Prix at the Autodromo Nazionale circuit in Monza yesterday. — AFP

their first pit stops.

First Ricciardo went to the pits, giving up the lead, before Verstappen dropped back to 10th after a long pit stop on lap 23 which gave Hamilton the chance to push past Norris and take the lead. Hamilton then pitted himself on lap 25 before clashing with Verstappen almost immediately after his exit, the two cars meeting in a chicane and then finishing in a mess at the side of the track.

With the title-chasing duo gone and chaos on the

track, Hamilton's teammate Bottas, who will join Alfa Romeo next season, completed a hugely impressive weekend by finishing fourth, promoted to third after Perez's penalty. He had started at the back of the grid despite winning Saturday's sprint race as punishment for taking on power unit components in qualifying on Friday. "Starting from the back, it's never easy," said Bottas. "I'm glad we get more points than Red Bull, we maximized and from my side, it was good fun." — AFP