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V O L V O

# Govt denies reports claiming resignation of health minister

## Health ministry allows mixing of vaccines for some cases

### Jordan ex-officials jailed in 'coup plot'

AMMAN: A Jordanian court yesterday sentenced two former officials to 15 years in jail after finding them guilty of a coup plot that sparked a rare crisis in a kingdom seen as a pillar of stability in the region. Former royal court chief Bassem Awadallah and an ex-envoy to Saudi Arabia, Sharif Hassan bin Zaid, had been convicted of conspiring to topple King Abdullah II in favor of his half-

brother Prince Hamzah.

The former crown prince himself was not charged in the trial, but the charge sheet said he was "determined to fulfil his personal ambition to rule, in violation of the Hashemite constitution and customs". The trial took place behind closed doors at the State Security Court, a military tribunal that also includes civilian judges.

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By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Government spokesman Tareq Al-Mazrem yesterday denied reports claiming that Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah has resigned. "Reports on social media claiming that the health minister has resigned are untrue," Mazrem said on Twitter, without providing any further details. The minister has been for months under pressure from opposition lawmakers and some social activists for allegedly failing to handle the coronavirus crisis.

Opposition MPs have filed to grill him over the coronavirus issue and allegations of financial irregularities during the pandemic. The grilling was not debated

because opposition MPs had insisted to grill the prime minister first. A hike recently in the number of coronavirus cases and reports that the country could go back to closures and partial curfews ignited sharp criticism against the minister.

The health ministry meanwhile yesterday permitted some people to mix different vaccinations based on medical necessity. The ministry said in a statement that people who received a first dose and have a medical issue that prevents them from taking the same vaccination, will be allowed to take a different vaccine dose.

The same applies to pregnant women whose condition requires that they take a different second vaccine. The ministry said it will also accept mixed vaccinations

taken outside the country, provided both vaccines are approved by Kuwait.

Meanwhile, opposition MP Marzouq Al-Khalifa yesterday said an investment company owned by the Public Institution for Social Security, a public body, may have acquired a tower in the capital under suspicious circumstances. He said he had asked Finance Minister Khalifa Hamada about the purchase of the building by the state investment firm and received an incomplete reply intended to hide information. He said the private company that sold the tower is building a new skyscraper next to it, which after completion will negatively impact the value of the tower. He called on the minister to cancel the deal.

### News in brief

#### Eid holidays from Sunday

KUWAIT: To mark the Day of Arafat and Eid Al-Adha, the official holiday will commence on Sunday, July 18 and end on Thursday, July 22, the Cabinet said yesterday. According to the official Twitter account of the Cabinet, all state bodies and ministries will cease operations during the official holidays. — KUNA

#### COVID triggered rise in hunger

PARIS: The COVID pandemic caused an estimated 18 percent increase in the number of people facing hunger, a UN report released yesterday found. "Nearly one in three people in the world (2.37 billion) did not have access to adequate food in 2020 - an increase of almost 320 million people in just one year," the report said. — AFP

#### Schools shut in 19 nations

PARIS: Schools remain shut in 19 countries due to the pandemic, affecting 156 million children in what risks being "a generational catastrophe," two UN agencies warned yesterday. — AFP

#### UAE to launch digital currency

DUBAI: The UAE will launch its first digital currency by 2026, the central bank of the oil-rich Gulf state said yesterday. The central bank said its plans include "issuing a digital currency and driving digital transformation in the UAE's financial services sector, by utilizing the latest artificial intelligence and big data solutions." — AFP

#### Lebanon to probe baby's death

BEIRUT: The health ministry said Sunday it will investigate the death of a baby girl whose family said she was not able to access proper hospital treatment amid Lebanon's severe medical shortages. Jouri Al-Sayyid, 10 months old, died on Saturday in the village of Mazboud three days into a high fever that caused lung inflammation. — AFP

#### Egypt steps up penalties

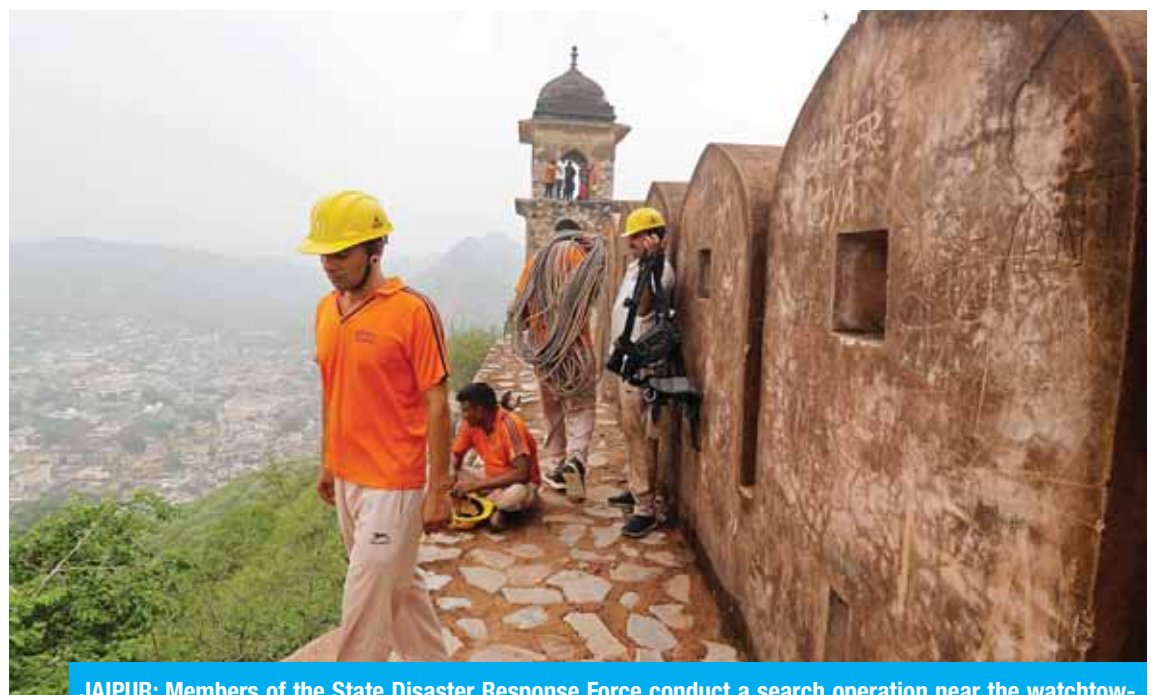
CAIRO: Egypt's parliament on Sunday passed a law toughening sentences for sexual harassment to at least five years in prison. The amendment makes sexual harassment a criminal offence and raises the minimum penalty from a year and half in prison plus a fine. — AFP

## Lightning kills 76 in India, including fort selfie-takers

NEW DELHI: Several people reportedly taking selfies near a historical fort in northern India were among nearly 80 killed by lightning strikes during the early stages of the annual monsoon season, officials said yesterday. Deadly lightning strikes are common in the vast Asian nation during the June-September deluge, which bring respite from the summer heat across the northern Indian plains.

Of the 76 killed, at least 23 people died in the mostly desert state of Rajasthan, including a dozen who were watching the storm cross Jaipur city from watch towers near the famous 12th-century Amer Fort late Sunday, a state disaster department official told AFP. "It was already raining when the people were there. They huddled in the towers as the rainfall intensified," a senior Jaipur police officer, Saurabh Tiwari, added.

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JAIPUR: Members of the State Disaster Response Force conduct a search operation near the watchtowers of Amer Fort yesterday. — AFP

## UK agonizes over abuse of football stars

LONDON: Political leaders and footballing chiefs in Britain expressed disgust yesterday at racial abuse targeting England stars, including three black players who missed penalties in the Euro 2020 final against Italy. But as Facebook vowed anew to look into abuse on its

Instagram platform, Prime Minister Boris Johnson himself came under stinging criticism for earlier refusing to condemn fans who had booed English players' campaign against racism.

England manager Gareth Southgate said the online invective was "unforgivable". "Some of it has come from abroad, we have been told this, but some of it is from this country," he told reporters. "We have been a beacon of light to bring people together and the national team stands for everybody."

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LONDON: National newspapers lead yesterday with the reaction of England after they lost the penalty shootout in the final of the UEFA Euro 2020 football tournament. — AFP

## Iraqis skeptical of COVID jabs as cases rise

BAGHDAD: War-scarred Iraq is seeing thousands of new COVID cases a day but few people wear facemasks and even fewer are vaccinated, sparking fears of an "epidemiological catastrophe". Healthcare workers say they are battling not just the pandemic but also a widespread skepticism over vaccines, borne of misinformation and public mistrust in the state.

"I don't like the vaccine or the mask,"

said Nehad Sabbah, 36, speaking on a Baghdad street and reflecting a widely held view. "I'm not afraid of getting sick." Even as she acknowledged the risk of catching the novel coronavirus that is now infecting some 8,000 people a day in Iraq, she stressed that "I'm not going to take the vaccine".

Since the vaccine rollout began in March, Iraqi health authorities have fully inoculated only around one percent of the country's roughly 40 million people. Iraq - where the oil-reliant economy is still recovering from decades of war and insurgency and many people live in poverty - has recorded over 1.4 million COVID cases and more than 17,000 deaths.

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BAGHDAD: An Iraqi shopkeeper arranges facemasks at a stall on a market street yesterday. — AFP