

## Business

# Australia's coal country looks to a less sooty future

## In Newcastle, locals are preparing for a life beyond fossil fuels

**NEWCASTLE, Australia:** Australia's conservative leaders have defied calls for urgent climate action, boasting they will sell coal for as long as anyone is buying. But in the country's carbon heartland, locals are already preparing for life beyond fossil fuels.

Two-hundred-and-thirty years ago, among the verdant outcrops that flank the southeastern coastal town of Newcastle, a band of escaped convicts made the first recorded discovery of coal on the Australian continent. It would begin Australia's long love affair with the sooty fuel that now nets the country tens of billions of dollars a year and has made Newcastle the world's largest coal-exporting port. Nathan Clements was born and raised in the nearby town of Singleton, which he described as "very much the heartland of coal mining here." "I don't want to say coal is everything, but it's a lot," he said.

"My older brother worked in a coal mine, my dad worked in a mine and still does to this day. When it was my turn, it was the norm to walk into that industry," said the 26-year-old, who for the last seven years has worked as an electrical fitter fixing mine equipment. Around Singleton and the broader Hunter region, evidence of the vast scale of the coal industry is obvious. Coal trains rumble through the countryside, each engine dragging a writhing column of rusty wagons from far into the distance.

From the air, open cast mines pock the bush with jet-black scars. Off the coast, an armada of vessels waits, ready to load up and return to China, India, Japan or South Korea with mountains of millennia-old rock.

And Australia's government would like to keep it that way. When dozens of countries, meeting at COP26 talks in Glasgow, recently agreed to phase out coal, Australia balked.

"We are not closing coal mines and we are not closing coal-fired power stations," said resource minister Keith Pitt, using the opportunity to boast about the quality of Australian coal and 300,000 Australian jobs linked to the sector.

### 'A change in attitudes'

But unlike the government, workers in Singleton and towns across the Hunter are gradually coming to terms with King Coal's demise. "I still need to work. I still need a job," said Clements, but "it is inevitable. There is an inevitability to it." For him, there was a slow realization that he might not be able to follow the career path of his father, who will retire in his coal job next year when Muswellbrook-Australia's oldest open cut coal mine-closes after almost 115 years of operation.

Clements said discussing the industry's future has become markedly less taboo and skepticism more mainstream with catastrophic events of the last few years. "For a lot of people, I noticed a



**SINGLETON, Australia:** This picture taken on November 4, 2021 shows a train transporting coal through the valleys of Singleton, some 70km (43 miles) from Newcastle, the world's largest coal exporting port.— AFP

change in attitudes around the 2019-2020 bushfires," he said, referring to the climate-worsened disaster that tore through much of southeastern Australia. And despite the government's bravado, the market is voting with its feet. The very largest mining firms, such as Australia's own BHP and Rio

Tinto, are already sprinting for the exits, rapidly offloading coal assets to smaller risk-embracing outfits. Official figures show the number of people directly employed in the coal industry is more like 44,600 — less than half the number of Australians employed by McDonald's. —AFP

## DHAMAN sponsors first Kuwait PPP conference

**KUWAIT:** As the first healthcare organization in the Middle East in partnership between the public and private sectors and one of the strategic projects in the development plan of Kuwait, Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) announced its golden sponsorship of the first Kuwait Public-Private Partnership.

Conference (PPPKW), is to be held virtually under the patronage of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on 15-16 November, 2021.

DHAMAN's sponsorship of this conference is in alignment with its strategic role in contributing to the development of healthcare systems in Kuwait and a reflection of its plans to establish and operate an integrated health network that will benefit the Kuwaiti citizens and residents of the community, as well as achieve investment returns for shareholders from government bodies and Kuwaiti citizens.

On this occasion, Director of Public Relations and Corporate Communications at DHAMAN Ali Al-Hamad, said that sponsoring the conference represents an opportunity to present the Company's progress in completing its proj-

ects and facing challenges as a pioneering model in partnership between the public and private sectors, where DHAMAN was able to achieve remarkable progress in the construction of its hospitals in Ahmadi and Jahra, while also preparing to open two new health centers, bringing the number of centers to five throughout Hawally, Farwaniya and Dajeej, which were previously opened, as well as the Ahmadi and Jahra centers that are under construction.

Al-Hamad noted that the expected full operation of DHAMAN during the year 2022 will contribute to the development of the healthcare sector in Kuwait, stimulate an effective environment for the application of quality elements in health services, provide the opportunity to focus on community prevention and health programs, as well as enhance public awareness, which lead to improving the level of services provided to citizens and residents alike.

Al-Hamad added that the conference is an opportunity to exchange views and discussions on the implementation of the development plan and the vision of a New Kuwait 2035, stressing the efforts of DHAMAN to cooperate with various bodies in order to encourage and promote partnerships and other ambitious projects that work to progress the Kuwaiti economy.

Al-Hamad expressed overall gratitude and appreciation to His Highness the Prime Minister for sponsoring this conference, as well as the event's organizer Nouf Expo and all participants.



Ali Al-Hamad

## Hungary caps petrol prices as inflation soars

**BUDAPEST:** Hungary announced a cap on petrol pump prices yesterday as inflation soared to a nine-year-high, an issue that Prime Minister Viktor Orban's opponents have seized on ahead of elections next year.

Petrol and diesel prices have climbed over 500 forints (1.37 euros, \$1.57) per liter at many stations in Hungary in recent weeks. Prices at the pump have also hit record highs elsewhere in Europe, including France and the UK.

"The government has decided that from November 15, the price of petrol and diesel will be capped at 480 forints per litre," said Orban's cabinet chief, Gergely Gulyas. "This means that the price of diesel and petrol may be cheaper than HUF 480, but not more expensive," Gulyas told a press briefing, pointing to a "leap in fuel prices" in the past year.

Orban, who faces an election slated for next April, has come under increasing pressure from an opposition six-party alliance over soaring inflation. After three landslide wins since 2010, polls predict that the nationalist premier will face his closest contest since he last lost a general election in 2006.

The price cap measure, which would be reviewed after three months, comes as annual inflation reached 6.5 percent in October, its highest level since 2012. "We trust that (the price cap) will support the economy and contribute to a reduction in inflation," Gulyas said.

The price limit will not apply to premium vehicle fuel products, and the government will not compensate retailers for the measure, he said. The share price on the Budapest stock exchange of Hungarian energy giant MOL fell around 3.5 percent on the news. — AFP