

Business

From crab balls to cars, Biden's hometown feels inflation pinch

Wave of inflation sweeps US as COVID vaccines help businesses reopen

WILMINGTON: A pizzeria in President Joe Biden's hometown Wilmington recently took sparkling water off the menu because it got so pricey managers figured no one would buy it. At the car dealership that Biden's presidential motorcade occasionally passes when he comes to town, sales people have had trouble keeping new vehicles in stock, while prices for their used models have climbed ever higher in recent months.

"Each day is a new day. We're not really sure what's going to happen in the business or in the economy when we wake up in the morning," said Jim Ursommarso, vice president of Union Park Automotive.

The wave of inflation that's swept the United States this year as COVID-19 vaccines have helped businesses reopen and consumers spend has spared no part of the country—not even Wilmington, the city that has provided a backdrop for much of Biden's political career.

Voters in the Mid-Atlantic city gave Biden seven times more votes than his predecessor Donald Trump in last year's election, but business owners now fret as prices rise and public approval in his administration falls. "Here in Delaware, he's loved. But as time has gone by, we have been lacking the reciprocity," said Serena Kelley Jefferson, co-owner of Serena's Soulfood, whose mother cooked for Biden, and who recently took crab balls off her menu because they became too costly to serve profitably.

Inflation spreads

Inflation was predicted to increase as the US economy recovered in 2021, but a Wednesday report from the Labor Department showing the consumer price index last month experienced its biggest year-on-year

gain in more than three decades was an unwelcome surprise. This year's initial price spikes were most severe for products like used cars and airplane tickets. The latest data, however, showed them extending into groceries and gasoline, with ripple effects across the economy.

"After the pandemic, this was the worst thing that could happen to small businesses, especially restaurants," said Gianni Esposito, whose eponymous pizza parlor has received Biden repeatedly, including on the day he began his latest presidential campaign in 2019.

"Now you cannot find a lot of employees. Everything you have to buy, it's 30, 40, 50 percent more expensive." As of Friday, poll amalgamator FiveThirtyEight put Biden's approval rating at 42.8 percent, lower than all other presidents at this point in their terms except for two.

"I didn't vote for him, but I wasn't against him like I am now," said Candice Gronski, 50, an accountant living just over the state line in Pennsylvania who typically votes Republican but felt like Biden nonetheless failed to meet her expectations.

Not to blame

The US inflation rate has been muted for years, and the latest price increases are driven by a mix of factors that might not have occurred without the pandemic. Supply chains are snarled worldwide thanks to the disruptions caused by COVID-19, while energy costs have risen over global oil prices briefly went negative in 2020. In the United States, American consumers are flush with cash and spending it with the help of three rounds of stimulus checks and an expanded government social safety net that both Trump and Biden approved.



WILMINGTON: Gianni Esposito serves pizza at his restaurant Gianni's Pizza in Wilmington, Delaware. Inflation was predicted to increase as the US economy recovered this year. — AFP

But businesses haven't been able to keep up, since many people who could work have decided not to. Meanwhile, the global semiconductor shortage has slowed down production across a range of industries, including the auto sector, driving prices higher. The increases may well hamper Biden's push for an expansion of the country's social services costing \$1.85 trillion over 10 years.

Following the latest inflation report, Joe Manchin, a centrist senator whose vote is crucial to getting the bill

through Congress, warned, "the threat posed by record inflation to the American people is not 'transitory' and is instead getting worse." As he filled up his car with gasoline that was upwards of a dollar more expensive per-gallon then it was a year ago, Phil Johnson said inflation wasn't affecting his life.

Biden "inherited a lot of this when he took office in January," the 32-year-old worker in the financial sector said. "The stimulus checks won't last forever and inflation can't stay at six percent." — AFP



Naqeab Amin honoring fresh AUB employees

AUB holds training program for its employees for 2021

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) received the 5th batch of its fresh employees for the year 2021. This program is part of the Bank's strategy seeking to attract the best young staff to enhance its human wealth which the bank considers a key factor in its unique position and continuous success.

In this context, the Bank has introduced its comprehensive induction programs to the new employees. These programs aim to make the new employees familiar with the work systems at the Bank and to identify the nature of the work of the Bank's different departments and their functions.

They also aim to train the new employees on customer service skills. Through these programs, trainees receive a detailed explanation on the excellent products and services the bank provides to its customers. Moreover, they seek to explain the basis and rules of the Islamic banking system. The key objective of these programs is also to help the trainees quickly integrate into work and build fellowship relationships with the bank's team. On this occasion, Naqeb Amin, HR

General Manager at Ahli United Bank said that the provision of good professional training and preparation for the bank's new employees, to form their first professional launch in the banking sector, is one of the factors that make the work environment at AUB most attractive to fresh graduates who seek to work within a unique system that helps them improve their skills and achieve their professional aspirations.

At the same time, the bank's management is concerned to design the training programs for young staff who have recently joined the bank. These programs raise their efficiency and readiness for banking work. Furthermore, these programs are in line with the bank's vision to provide the best banking services that gain customers' satisfaction.

Amin added: The great concern that AUB attaches to training and development reflects the vision of the bank's senior management, which always emphasizes the attention the bank pays to its employees, especially young ones. The Bank also aims to provide all forms of necessary support, and open up horizons of creativity and excellence for them to truly be an added value to our human wealth which we are proud of. Amin praised the interaction of the fresh employees with the induction training programs. He stressed that they consistently met expectations, demonstrated seriousness and great enthusiasm to acquire more skills and experience. Moreover, he said that those fresh employees have a high willingness to start the banking career.

Burgan Bank reveals 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:

- Huda Safar Safar
- Hussain Julaieed Alenezi
- Zainab Abbas Ramadhan
- Naser Abdulaziz Alawadhi
- Sajedah Ghassan Alnaqeb

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.

CBK announces winners of Al-Najma account campaign

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait conducted the weekly draws on Al-Najma Account and Salary Transfer Campaign yesterday. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Ahmed Al-Basman.

The results of the draws were as follows:

1. Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5,000 went to the winner Abboakar Aashikali Khan
2. Salary account campaign - the prize of up to KD 1,000 - went to the winner Fatemah Ali Al-Otaibi

The bank stated that the salary campaign is aimed at customers who transfer their salaries of KD 500 or more to the bank, especially Kuwaiti employees and residents working in the government, oil sectors and companies listed with the Bank as well as retirees, and take advantage of the benefits of this campaign and get an instant cash gift from KD 400 to KD 500 or an interest-free loan for a period of up to four years and up to KD 70,000, Kuwaiti pensioner, along with expatriate customers who transfer their debt to the bank will receive an instant cash gift of 2 percent from their transferred debt up to KD 1,000.

The bank stated that Al-Najma Account prizes are distinguished by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that the account offers weekly prize of KD 5,000, monthly prize of KD 20,000 and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked bank account payout of KD 1,500,000.

COP26 outcome hinged on handful of key issues

GLASGOW: Fourteen days of gritty negotiations by 20,000 diplomats from nearly 200 countries - and the hopes of salvaging a deal at COP26 - boiled down to cash, coal, compensation and the willingness to speed up the drawdown of fossil fuels. Here's a breakdown of the main sticking points that got unpicked for a deal to get hammered through. The Paris Agreement that enjoined the world's nations to reduce planet-warming greenhouse emissions does not contain the words "coal", "oil", "natural gas" or "fossil fuels".

This may seem odd, given that global warming is overwhelmingly caused by burning hydrocarbons, but it helps explain why the first-ever mention of fossil fuels in a document flowing from the 2015 treaty has been described as "historic" and "precedent-setting". An initial draft of what would become the final text called on "parties to accelerate the phasing-out of coal and subsidies for fossil fuel".

But under pressure from India, China, South Africa and Saudi Arabia, that clarion call got progressively watered down to: "accelerate efforts towards phase-out of unabated coal power and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies." "Unabated" refers to emissions from coal-fired power plants that are not syphoned off to prevent them from entering the atmosphere. And in a dramatic, last-minute change agreed across huddles in the final plenary, "phase-out" of unabated coal became a "phase-down".

The call for action in the 1992 UN climate convention rests on two pillars: mitigation to cut emissions, and adaptation to help poor and vulnerable countries prepare for climate change in the future. But since that bedrock treaty was crafted, climate impacts have become a here-and-now reality, with yearly economic cost measured in the billions. Facing that reality, the UN climate forum bolted on the concept of "loss and damage" to cover climate-driven catastrophes for which it is too late or impossible

to prepare for. "When you don't do enough mitigation you get more into the adaptation space, and when you don't do enough adaptation you have to deal with loss and damage," Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Fiji's minister for economy and climate Change, told AFP.

The loss and damage mechanism introduced in 2013, however, has remained largely an empty shell.

Developing countries drew a line in the sand in Glasgow, demanding concrete steps. But their hope for the establishment of a funded "facility" was shot down, with the United States in particular concerned that such a step could put it and other rich countries on the hook for billions, if not trillions, in damages. A compromise, laid out in the text, would be the establishment of a yearly "dialogue", running through to 2024, to "discuss the arrangement for the funding of activities".

Under the 2015 Paris Agreement nations agreed to update their emissions-cutting plans every five years. The first set of revisions came due at the end of 2020, but most were not submitted until this year because of the COVID pandemic. But with emissions still on the rise, and warnings from scientists that the world has only this decade to drastically cut carbon pollution, calls have grown for additional updates before the next scheduled reporting round in 2025. The new text "requests parties to revisit and strengthen the 2030 targets in their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) as necessary to align with the Paris Agreement temperature goal by the end of 2022." In UN jargon, "requests" is close to "must do", and many countries—China, India, Saudi Arabia among them—were not keen on accelerating the timetable.

One of the thorniest debates during recent UN climate talks has been Article 6 of the Paris agreement, which deals with cross-border trade of carbon reduction credits. The issue has dogged climate negotiations for years, with fears that if set up poorly, it would mean countries could trade dubious emissions reductions that cover up their failure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the source. Laurence Tubiana, who helped craft the 2015 Paris climate treaty as France's chief negotiator, said that the new text had "closed some of the egregious loopholes, such as double counting". "But it is not enough to stop bad faith companies and countries gaming the system," she told AFP, adding that a watchdog would need to monitor the implementation of the markets.—AFP



Thailand will host APEC 2022

KUWAIT: "Chalom" is a kind of Thai bamboo basket used to carry travel items and goods as it has become a symbol of trade in Thailand since ancient times. The interlaced bamboo strips are strong and resilient as well as tough and durable so it could bolster the regional economy and help it grow with "stability, prosperity and sustainability."

The 21 openings in between the interwoven bam-

boo strips signify all the 21 member economies in APEC.

The unique characteristics of Chalom reflect the theme of Thailand's host year "Open, Connect, Balance."

Open - Chalom is a symbol of open trade. Connect - Chalom is basketry used to carry goods or travel items, signifying connectivity.

Balance - Chalom is made of natural and environmentally friendly materials, supporting the Bio-Circular-Green Economy (BCG) Model.

The three colors of Chalom also serve as specific symbols: Convenience Blue for OPEN, Connection Pink for Connect and Sustainable Green for Balance.