

## Grand Mosque drops distancing

**MECCA** The Grand Mosque in the Muslim holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia operated at full capacity yesterday, with worshippers praying shoulder-to-shoulder for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic began.

Workers removed floor markings that guide people to social distance in and around the Grand Mosque, which is built around the Kaaba, the black cubic structure towards which Muslims around the world pray.

"This is in line with the decision to ease precautionary measures and to allow pilgrims and visitors to the Grand Mosque at full capacity," reported the official Saudi Press Agency.

Pictures and footage yesterday morning showed people praying side by side, making straight rows of worshippers that are formations revered in performing Muslim prayers, for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic took hold last year.

While social distancing measures were lifted, the authorities

said visitors must be fully vaccinated against coronavirus and must continue to wear masks on mosque grounds.

Also, the Kaaba remained cordoned off and out of reach.

Saudi Arabia announced in August it will begin accepting vaccinated foreigners wanting to make the umrah pilgrimage.

The umrah can be undertaken at any time and usually draws millions from around the globe, as does the annual hajj, which abled-bodied Muslims who have the means must perform at least once in their lifetime.

In July, only around 60,000 inoculated residents were allowed to take part in a vastly scaled down form of the annual hajj.

The COVID-19 pandemic hugely disrupted both Muslim pilgrimages, which are usually key revenue earners for the kingdom that rake in a combined US\$12 billion annually.

Hosting the pilgrimages is a matter of prestige for Saudi rulers, for whom the custodianship of Islam's

holiest sites is their most powerful source of political legitimacy.

The once-reclusive kingdom began issuing tourist visas permitting foreign visitors to undertake more than just the pilgrimages for the first time in 2019 as part of an ambitious push to revamp its global image and diversify income.

Between September 2019 and March 2020, it issued 400,000 of them – only for the pandemic to crush that momentum as borders were closed.

But the kingdom is slowly opening up, and has started welcoming vaccinated foreign tourists since August 1.

Saudi Arabia also announced that fully-inoculated sports fans will from yesterday be allowed to attend events at all stadiums and other sports facilities, reported SPA.

It has also said that masks in most open spaces are no longer mandatory.

Saudi Arabia has registered over 547,000 coronavirus cases and 8,760 deaths. **AFP**

## WORLD HIGHLIGHTS

### ► Italy

**ROME** Italians began voting yesterday in a two-day run-off for the local governments of 65 large cities and smaller towns, including the capital Rome.

### ► Egypt

**CAIRO** Prominent Egyptian activist Alaa Abdel Fattah is to appear in court today after spending more than two years in pre-trial detention, a lawyer and family members said.

### ► Russia

**MOSCOW** A Russian MiG-31 fighter jet has been scrambled to escort a US B-1B strategic bomber over the Sea of Japan, TASS news agency reported yesterday, citing the Russian military, just days after an incident with a US naval destroyer in the same region.

### ► France

**PARIS** France paid tribute to school teacher Samuel Paty on Saturday, one year after he was beheaded by an extremist after showing his class cartoons of the Muslim prophet Mohammed.

### ► US

**WASHINGTON** UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Saturday welcomed the announcement by the Central African Republic's president of a nationwide ceasefire in a long-running conflict with rebels, and urged all parties to respect it. **AGENCIES**

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## Probe into port blast should not be stopped

**BEIRUT** The leader of Lebanon's largest Christian bloc, the Free Patriotic movement (FPM), said on Saturday the investigation into last year's deadly blast at Beirut's port should not be stopped.

Gebran Bassil's stance is in contrast to that of the Iran-backed Shiite Hezbollah group, an FPM ally that opposes the investigation and has called for its lead investigator to be removed.

Bassil was speaking two days after a spasm of violence that erupted over the inquiry. Seven Shiite Muslims were killed as crowds were on their way to a protest against Judge Tarek Bitar in a demonstration called for by Hezbollah and its Shiite ally Amal.

"The Free Patriotic movement is with (for) continuing the probe, revealing the truth and putting those responsible on trial," Gebran Bassil said in a speech.

Bassil, who is President Michel Aoun's son-in-law, was hit with US sanctions last year for alleged corruption and his ties to Hezbollah. Bassil has denied the allegations.

Hezbollah's leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah has said the investigation is biased and politicised.

On Saturday, Bassil said that there was some evidence pointing to some bias in the course of the investigation but that there was no evidence yet that the judge

was politicised.

Thursday's street violence was the worst in over a decade and stirred memories of the country's ruinous 1975-90 civil war.

Defence minister Maurice Selim said a stampede and a clash in Teyouneh led to gunfire by both sides, adding that the exchange of fire had preceded the sniper fire.

On Thursday, the army initially said rounds were fired on at protesters as they passed through the Teyouneh traffic circle dividing Christian and Shiite Muslim neighbourhoods. It then later said there had been an "altercation and exchange of fire" as protesters were on their way to the demonstration.

### Support for judge

The investigation into the August 4, 2020 explosion, which killed more than 200 people and devastated swathes of Beirut, has made little headway following a smear campaign against Bitar and pushback from powerful political factions.

Lebanese Justice Minister Henry Khoury said earlier on Saturday he stood by Bitar and that the judge had the right to summon whoever he wants in the case, Al Jadeed television reported.

Khoury also said he had not been asked to suggest appointing a new judge to handle the investigation. **REUTERS**

## INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

1. The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (hereinafter called "Borrower") has received a Loan from the Export-Import Bank of Korea from the resources of the Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) of the Republic of Korea in the amount of not exceeding the equivalent of Sixty Two Billion Three Hundred and Twenty One Million Korean Wons (KRW 62,321,000,000) toward the cost of Rehabilitation and Improvement of Bridges on National Highways Project (Phase 1) and intends to apply a portion of the proceeds of this loan to payments under the contract for Package XL-04: Construction of Ben Moi Bridge.
2. The Project Executing Agency now invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for Package XL-04: Construction of Ben Moi Bridge.
3. Bidding will be conducted through Competitive Bidding (CB) among eligibility contractors:
  - (i) Nationals of the Republic of Korea (including juridical persons incorporated in the Republic of Korea in accordance with its laws; hereinafter the same shall apply);
  - (ii) Foreign corporations in which nationals of the Republic of Korea hold more than 50% of shares as well as foreign subsidiaries of a foreign corporation of which nationals of the Republic of Korea reserve the management rights and are vested with the business performances; or
  - (iii) Consortiums built by nationals of the Republic of Korea with the corporations set up in accordance with the laws and regulations of the Borrower's country in which nationals of the Republic of Korea hold more than 50% of shares or have the de facto decision-making rights.

And that the single stage two-envelope procedures specified in the Guideline for Procurement under EDCF Loans, and is open to all eligible bidders that meet the following minimum qualification criteria.

- (i) Specific experience in construction: Completed at least 01 transport construction contract in which the part of work performed by Contractor in the contract has the balanced cantilever girder; Super-T girder or Prestress Reinforcement Concrete girder of  $\geq 38$  m length; bored pile diameter  $D \geq 1.0$  m; asphalt concrete pavement; PVD method for soft soil treatment and contract value performed by Contractor in the contract is not less than 13,300,000 USD (*details in Bidding documents*).
  - (ii) The annual averaged construction turnover within 3 years (from 2018 to 2020) shall be 19,000,000 USD.
  - (iii) Requirement of cash flow shall be 2,400,000 USD.
4. Interested eligible Bidders may obtain further information from Project Management Unit No. 2 (PMU.2) Address: No.18 Pham Hung Road Cau Giay District Ha Noi, Viet Nam; Mobile: +84912585383; Email: pmu2pid1@gmail.com. And inspect the bidding documents at the address above from 08:00 a.m October 20<sup>th</sup> 2021 to 02:00 p.m. December 6<sup>th</sup> 2021 (working hours from 08:00 a.m. to 05:00 p.m., Vietnam time GMT+7).
  5. A complete set of bidding documents may be purchased by any interested Bidders on the submission of a written application to PMU.2 and upon payment of a nonrefundable fee of 10,000,000 Vietnamese Dong. The method of payment will be transferred or cashed to the following specified account.

**Bank Account Name:** Ban Quan ly du an 2

**Bank Account Number:** 1462201002861

**Bank Name:** Vietnam Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development - Tay Do branch

**SWIFT Code:** VBAAVNVX

The document will be sent directly to Bidders at PID3, 5<sup>th</sup> floor, PMU.2's Office.

6. Bids must be delivered to PMU.2 at or before 02:00 p.m December 6<sup>th</sup> 2021 (Vietnam time GMT+7). All bids must be accompanied by a bid security of 380,000 USD. Late bids shall be rejected. Bids will be opened in the presence of the Bidder's representatives who choose to attend at PMU.2 at 02:00 p.m. on December 6<sup>th</sup> 2021 (Vietnam time GMT+7).
7. PMU.2 will not be responsible for any cost or expense incurred by Bidders in connection with the preparation or delivery of Bids.