

## Business

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## Zain ranks first as 'Best Mobile Operator' in Kuwait during 2020

Company recognized by Service Hero Index for ninth time

KUWAIT: For the ninth time, Zain - the leading digital service provider in Kuwait - ranked first in the 'Best Mobile Operator' category in Kuwait for the year 2020 by Service Hero, the Arab World's only 100 percent consumer powered customer satisfaction index. The announcement came during the virtual awards ceremony held over video conferencing technology to adhere to the health guidelines posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Zain ranked first for achieving the highest customer satisfaction scores by providing the best quality service standards to the Kuwaiti market. The award came after an in-depth evaluation by Service Hero's independent advisory council, which recognized Zain's leadership in offering the best innovative digital services, as well as its relentless pursuit of excellence and innovation with the aim of achieving superior digital lifestyle transformation for its customer base, considered the biggest in Kuwait.

Zain received the award for achieving high rates of customer satisfaction. The recognition from Service Hero for the ninth time demonstrates Zain's commitment in providing its customers with the highest levels of service, further reinforcing its efforts in maintaining the values of its brand. The company is motivated to continue its pledge in providing innovative services to meet the needs of its customers as well as to facilitate their personal, professional, and business needs.

Last year, Zain received 'Kuwait's Fastest Fixed Broadband Network' award for Q1-Q2 2020 from Speedtest by Ookla, the global leader in transparent Internet testing applications, data and analysis. The award reflected Zain's efforts in offering the largest and most powerful 5G network in Kuwait since commercially launching fifth generation wireless technology back in June 2019.



Zain Kuwait Service Hero Award 2021

Zain was the first operator to offer 5G technology in the GCC region via the Kuwaiti market with nationwide coverage of all areas. The company succeeded in designing the first integrated network for 5G services built on a world-class infrastructure, ultimately transforming the telecom sector across the country and region. Service Hero's assessment method is statistically rigorous, robust, and relevant. From representative sample sizes to service quality checks and ratings scales, Service Hero's Index provides a rigorous annual snapshot of consumer feelings.



Zain headquarters

Based in Kuwait, Service Hero is the only consumer powered customer satisfaction index in the Middle East. The company is a member of ESOMAR (European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research) and adheres to the global organization's principles and guidelines for self-regulation and ethical practice. Service Hero is overseen by an Independent Advisory Council to assure results that are impartial, objective, and accurately reflect consumers' preference, making the company's findings a credible benchmark that offers transparent and

relevant insight for companies.

It is comprised of academics and business professionals representing leading institutions and corporate establishments in Kuwait and the UAE, including the American University of Kuwait, Australian College of Kuwait, Gulf University for Science and Technology, Abu Dhabi University, and Zayed University.

Since 2010, Service Hero has measured around 330,000 validated consumer assessments covering more than 600 private sector companies.

## Brexit clouds life in Spanish sun for British second home owners

MADRID: After retiring from her teaching job in 2019, Jane Pennington-Fryer looked forward to spending the cold, damp British winters at her home in southeast Spain each year. But since Britain's exit from the EU came into effect on January 1, she can no longer stay as long as she would like at the duplex she bought with her husband in 2018 in Puerto de Mazarron, a resort on Spain's Mediterranean coast.

The couple arrived at their home in Spain in October and had hoped to stay until the end of April, as in other years. Post-Brexit rules, however, mean they will have to leave by March 31. "We are gutted really because we have worked all our lives towards getting a property abroad in the hope we could spend time there," Pennington-Fryer, from northwest England, said.

## 'Very unfair'

Between 800,000 and one million Brits own property across Spain, mainly along its sun-baked, southern coast. The roughly 370,000 Britons registered as residents can still come and go as they please but British tourists and those

who have not taken residency—even those with a home there—can now only spend a maximum of 90 days in the country during any 180-day period.

If they want to stay longer they have to apply for a long-stay visa, with no guarantee of success.

"This doesn't work for somebody who wants to spend all winter or all summer in Spain," said Andrew Hesselden, a 40-year-old communications consultant who divides his time between London and the island of Majorca. Hesselden heads a group representing some 900 people lobbying Madrid to allow Brits to use their homes for 180 days in any 365-day period.

Spaniards and other European Union nationals can currently stay in Britain for up to 180 days without a visa, he pointed out—a situation he called "very unfair".

The limit on the length of time Brits can now stay affects retired people as well as young people looking to telework from Spain for extended periods. And that also means lost business for Spanish firms, he argued. "It doesn't make sense for Spain, it doesn't make sense for British people."



Plymouth fishing boat trawlerman Nick Hampshire prepares the net of the stern trawler 'Nicola Anne' for the first trawl of the day, at sea off the southwest coast of England. —AFP

## 'Hate to leave'

Chris Robinson, a 68-year-old retired manager, estimates he spends around 30,000 euros (\$36,000) a year when he and with his wife stay at their villa in Almeria, southern Spain. The money goes on eating out, playing golf, building maintenance and other expenses.

Under the post-Brexit rules "there is going to be 60, 70 days where we want to be in Spain but we can't be," he told AFP by telephone from his home in Sheffield, England. Robinson said he now

regrets selling a property he owned in Florida where he could stay for 180 days continuously. He is considering selling his Spanish villa if there is no change in the post-Brexit rules in the next year. "It is a wonderful place where we are, we like it, we have a lot of friends there and I would hate to have to leave," he said. Like all those who spoke to AFP, he said he opposed Brexit because he understood the threat it posed to their life in Spain. "I actually consider myself to be European. I am totally anti-Brexit." —AFP

## Spend 'big,' Biden says in push for massive package

MILWAUKEE, United States: President Joe Biden sidestepped a divided Congress and went straight to the nation Tuesday with a primetime televised town hall in Wisconsin seeking support for his \$1.9 trillion economic rescue package. "Now is the time we should be spending. Now is the time to go big," Biden told the live CNN audience in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

With lawmakers reeling from the aftermath of Donald Trump's impeachment acquittal, Biden used his first official trip away from Washington as president to address ordinary voters.

His stimulus package would more than double the previous measure passed by Congress, after intense debate, in December. The administration says massive injections of money, including \$1,400 checks sent to many Americans, are vital to preventing a sluggish economic recovery from stalling altogether.

Another major goal of the spending spree is

to boost the COVID-19 vaccine rollout—a logistical, medical and financial challenge upon which Biden's entire first term may hang. But the stimulus bill's price tag, as well as some of the spending details, leaves most Republicans in Congress skeptical.

## Support from country

Biden's choice of Wisconsin for the town hall was no coincidence: he won the battleground state by just 20,000 votes against Trump in November and it will feature prominently again in the 2022 midterms and 2024 presidential race. Today, he will go to another swing state when he tours the Pfizer plant in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where coronavirus vaccines are being manufactured.

And on Friday, Biden will pursue his stimulus bill pitch on the international stage when he addresses the virtual G7 leaders' meeting and the Munich Security Conference. The White House says he will stress "the importance of all industrialized countries maintaining economic support for the recovery and collective measures to build back better."

With slim majorities in both the House and Senate, Democrats could force through Biden's package without Republicans at all. But Biden

took office insisting he would seek cross-party solutions, turning the page on Trump's ultra-divisive style. So he is keen to break through to at least some Republicans.

Last week, Biden met in the Oval Office with a group of Democratic and Republican governors and mayors to discuss the COVID relief package. As local and regional officials most immediately caught up in the consequences of the twin health and economic crisis, they were a relatively receptive audience.

"You folks are all on the front lines and dealing with the crisis since day one," Biden noted.

In Wisconsin, he insisted that only the "fringes" are keeping the country apart, where in reality "it's not nearly as divided as we make it out to be." His efforts seem to be paying off—among voters at least, if not yet with congressional Republicans.

A Quinnipiac poll this month showed nearly 70 percent of Americans support the stimulus package, while a CNBC poll reported 64 percent believe the price tag is sufficient or not even enough. Only 36 percent said it was too much. Biden himself is on a solid footing with nearly 55 percent average approval ratings. Trump may still hold a powerful grip over the Republican voter base but his final average approval rating on leaving office was a measly 38.6 percent. —AFP

## Analysis

## New WTO chief's pile of problems

GENEVA: The coronavirus pandemic, log-jammed trade talks and a long-delayed meeting of member states are just a few of the crises awaiting Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as she takes the helm of the World Trade Organization next month. The WTO needs a kiss of life—and fast—and the first female and first African director-general of the global trade body will have to hit the ground running as she takes on the job in the middle of a major global recession.



Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

## Revive the ministerial conference

The WTO's top decision-making body meets once every two years, usually at the end of the year. Many countries use it as a deadline to get trade negotiations moving forward. After the December 2017 conference in Buenos Aires, the next meeting should have taken place in Nur-Sultan in June 2020 — having been put back six months to avoid the bitter winter in Kazakhstan's capital. But the COVID-19 pandemic forced it to be postponed indefinitely. Okonjo-Iweala wants the meeting held before the end of the year, but the WTO's 164 member states will have to reach a consensus on the date and location, most likely during the WTO general council meeting on March 1 and 2.

## Reboot stalled trade talks

For years, the WTO has made virtually no progress on major international trade agreements. Negotiations on cotton and fishing subsidies are stalling, while others such as electronic commerce, launched in January 2019, are struggling to take off—all of which risks leaving the WTO looking like an institution stuck in yesterday's problems.

"I think the WTO is too important to allow it to be slowed down, paralyzed and moribund," she told AFP in an interview. "That's not right." Okonjo-Iweala, 66, has raised environmental issues and has made the fishing subsidies talks one of her immediate priorities, to show that the WTO can still produce results.

Her predecessor Roberto Azevedo watched on helplessly as trade hostilities brewed between the United States, China and the European Union. Washington and Brussels are urging the WTO to revise China's status in the organization, with the United States accusing Beijing of taking advantage of its developing economy classification to motor ahead. Some hope Okonjo-Iweala's more political interpersonal skills rather than trade background can help inject some confidence back into the system. "She can contribute to strengthening multilateralism by using her influence," Peter Ungphakorn, a former WTO secretariat staff member, said. —AFP