

## Business

# Mexico City plastic ban poses challenge for virus-hit firms

## City generates about 13,000 tons of solid waste every day

**MEXICO CITY:** Mexico's ban on single-use plastic in its capital, one of the world's most populous metropolises, has delighted environmentalists but dismayed some businesses struggling to cope with the coronavirus pandemic.

Home to around nine million people, Mexico City generates about 13,000 tons of solid waste every day. The new rules, which are being phased in, ban the use of disposable plastic items such as cutlery, plates, cups, straws and food trays, in addition to a year-old ban on plastic bags.

The move poses yet another challenge for Celina Aguilar, whose restaurant has had to close twice due to the pandemic and like others now relies on takeout or home delivery. "We still haven't recovered from the losses (of the first closure). Now everyone must change to biodegradable packaging or they fine you," Aguilar complained. Since December 18, Mexico City has banned non-essential activities including dining in restaurants in an attempt to curb the soaring number of coronavirus infections.

The plastics ban "affects us a lot because right now we're doing takeaway only, and how can we give it to the customers?" said food vendor Martin Matias. "It's a daily battle in this situation."

Environmental group Greenpeace Mexico argues that businesses in the city have had plenty of time to prepare for the change. "It's been under discussion for 15 years, and in all this time the companies have done nothing to find a solution," said Ornella Garelli, an activist with the group.

### 'False solution'

Images of discarded plastic items littering the countryside and clogging the world's rivers and

oceans have raised global awareness about the problem. Greenpeace argues that biodegradable or compostable products are not the answer and companies should seek to avoid creating waste altogether.

"We see the use of any type of disposable material as a false solution because it replaces plastic pollution with other problems," Garelli said. "Most of these compostable or biodegradable items need to reach industrial composting plants, and many of these don't exist in Mexican cities," she added.

Mexico City authorities warn that people breaking the new law risk a fine of up to 150,000 pesos (around \$7,500) and the closure of their premises. The ban "not only promotes a change in the type of disposables or bags but also seeks to raise awareness of the amount of domestic waste we generate," said Andree Lilian Guigue, a senior official in the city's environment department.

She acknowledged that the change poses a challenge for businesses.

"The ban is difficult not only because of the dependence on plastic we have created, but also because of the pandemic," Guigue added. But her department said that it had informed more than 1,400 food establishments about the new law in the six months before it took effect.

"Many of them not only continued to use disposables, but also increased their use," Guigue said.

The law authorizes the use of packaging made of compostable materials like corn starch and avocado seeds. "But the world's compostable capacity is not even enough to cover the needs of Mexico," a country of nearly 129 million people, said Aldimir



**MEXICO CITY:** A restaurant worker packs food in a biodegradable and compostable container after receiving a call to order delivery food in Mexico City. After years of discussion, single-use plastics were banned in Mexico City. —AFP

Torres, president of Mexico's national plastic industry association.

Torres warned that the ban would be devastating for the industry and could result in the loss of between 20,000 and 50,000 jobs. Despite the many challenges he faces, Edgar Lopez said he

supports the change and tries to persuade customers coming to his small food stall to bring their own containers. "I know it's a very difficult step for everyone, but we need to start right now, in the middle of a health and economic crisis," he said. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Ireland may get 1bn euros fund

**BRUSSELS:** The EU yesterday unveiled plans to divide up a four-billion-euro tranche of post-Brexit funds, with Ireland getting a quarter of the money to help hard-hit businesses. The Brexit Adjustment Reserve, worth five billion euros in total, is aimed at supporting the bloc's 27 nations weather the immediate impact of Britain's departure from the EU's single market and customs union. The funds are being allotted according to how integrated each member was with the UK economy. How big a blow reductions in access to British waters will be to their fishing industries is also being taken into account. —AFP

#### Telefonica sells mobile phone masts

**MADRID:** Spain's Telefonica said yesterday it will sell its telephone masts in Europe and Latin America to US-based telecom infrastructure firm American Towers for 7.7 billion euros (\$9.4 billion) in cash. The sale of the nearly 31,000 mobile phone masts which its Telxius unit owns in Spain, Germany, Brazil, Peru, Chile and Argentina will generate a capital gain of 3.5 billion euros, the heavily indebted Spanish telecoms giant said in a statement. Telefonica president Jose Maria Alvarez-Pallete said the deal would allow the company to focus on its "most ambitious goals" such as the merger of its O2 mobile business with Virgin in Britain, the purchase of Oi mobile in Brazil and debt reduction. —AFP

#### WB emergency aid for Lebanese

**LEBANON:** The World Bank Group on Tuesday approved a \$246-million aid package to help 786,000 vulnerable Lebanese reeling under the country's worst economic crisis in decades and the coronavirus pandemic. Lebanon, a country of more than six million, is grappling with its worst economic downturn since the 1975-1990 war. A spiralling coronavirus outbreak has compounded the crisis, forcing businesses shut and denying daily wage earners an income in a country where more than half the population lives in poverty. —AFP

## Polish businesses to defy COVID lockdown, re-open

**WARSAW:** Ski slopes, restaurants and hotels in Poland's tourist-reliant mountainous south have announced they will defy anti-virus restrictions and reopen Monday, as small business owners nationwide grow increasingly weary of lockdown. A couple of hundred entrepreneurs have joined the so-called "Highlanders' Veto" movement, whose leader Sebastian Piton announced the disobedience campaign while clad in the traditional outfit of the Tatra mountains.

"The entrepreneurs are this determined because they realize they won't survive another month—so they have no choice," said Piton, who has called coronavirus a "minor, pleasant illness".

"This is our last chance to veto this government policy, which is ruining us," he told the Polish news agency PAP. On Monday, Poland's government extended most of the anti-virus restrictions through the end of the month, requiring ski slopes, gyms and hotels to remain closed to the general public and restaurants to only do takeaway service. —AFP

## ABK congratulates winners of weekly Samsung Visa draw

**KUWAIT:** Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced the winners of the "Samsung Visa" weekly draw campaign, which started in November 2020.

The campaign will run through to 27 January 2021, awarding three lucky winners a Samsung Galaxy Watch3 every week when using an ABK

VISA credit or prepaid card on Samsung Pay.

To enter the draw, customers must spend a weekly minimum of KD 20, locally or internationally using their ABK Visa credit or prepaid card through Samsung Pay on any POS terminal. Each KD10 spent automatically earns ABK cardholders one entry point for the draw. ABK's

Samsung Pay offers users a better way to pay, offering a quick and contactless payment solution. The bank will continue to introduce innovative digital solutions, supporting a shift towards a cashless future.

1 <sup>st</sup> Draw	2 <sup>nd</sup> Draw	3 <sup>rd</sup> Draw	4 <sup>th</sup> Draw	5 <sup>th</sup> Draw
KHALED YAKHLEF	SAMAR ABDULBAKI	SEAN MENEZES	MOHAMED ALNEMS	FAISAL MANDALI
MAJED ALMUTAIRI	KHALED ALGHAIS	AHMED HAMZA	SAOUD SHAWKAT	ABDULSAMAD ALSARRAF
RANJITH CHANDRAN	FAHAD ALMUBARKI	GHANEM ALGHANEM	MOHAMAD ALJHAIL	JEHAD JUBARAH



## Australian cheese rebrands after long racism battle

**SYDNEY:** An Australian cheese company called "Coon" will rebrand to "Cheer" after an Indigenous activist spent two decades fighting for the racist name to be changed. Saputo Dairy Australia announced the new name yesterday, saying replacement products would hit supermarket shelves in July. It follows a 20-year campaign by Indigenous advocate and author Stephen Hagan to rebrand the product. Although purportedly a reference to a US cheese factory worker, the former name is also an

offensive slur for black people.

Hagan had petitioned previous company owners over the name but failed to sway executives until now. Saputo said the change came after "careful and diligent review to honor the brand-affinity felt by our consumers while aligning with current attitudes and perspectives".

"Treating people with respect and without discrimination is one of our basic principles and it is imperative that we continue to uphold this in everything we do," CEO Lino Saputo said in a statement.

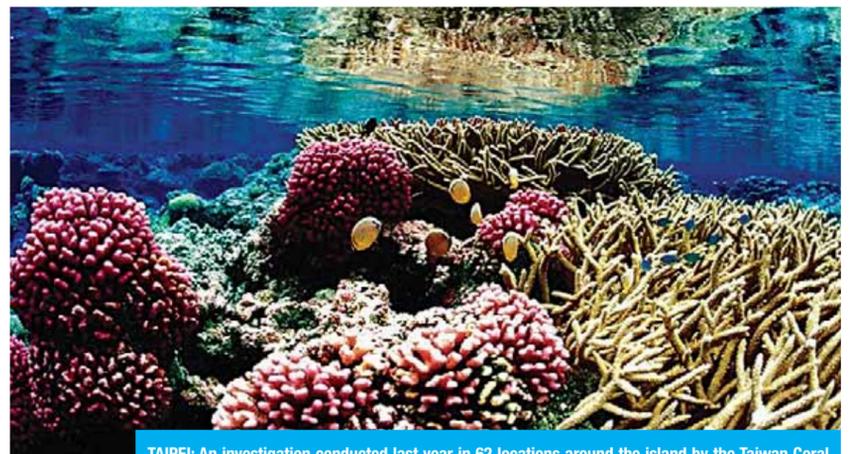
The announcement comes two months after Nestle said it would rename Australian sweets called 'Red Skins' and 'Chicos' amid a global backlash over racist branding. —AFP



## 'Corals are being cooked': A third of Taiwan's reefs are dying

**TAIPEI:** Nearly a third of Taiwan's corals are dying from bleaching caused by warming oceans in an alarming phenomenon that poses a severe threat to the island's delicate underwater ecosystem, conservationists warned yesterday. An investigation conducted last year in 62 locations around the island by the Taiwan Coral Bleaching Observation Network (TCBON) showed bleaching had reached its worst recorded levels. Half of Taiwan's reefs have been hit by bleaching with 31 percent so badly impacted that they are dying and probably beyond saving. "It's like the corals are being cooked," said Kuo Chao-yang, a postdoctoral scholar at the Biodiversity Research Center at Taiwan's leading research institute, Academia Sinica. Coral reefs cover less than one percent of the ocean floor but support a quarter of all marine species, providing them with food and shelter.

Warming waters due to climate change cause corals to expel the food-producing algae living in their tissues, breaking down their symbiotic relationship and leading to loss of colour and life in a process known as bleaching. The lack of typhoons last summer—which could have stirred up cooler waters from the deep—aggravated the bleaching, Kuo, a member of TCBON,



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told AFP. Much of the ocean they surveyed last summer was above 30 degrees Celsius for three months. The worst area was in Little Liuqiu, a coral island off the southwest coast in the Taiwan Strait where 55 percent of corals have now been seriously bleached. Another alarming sign was bleaching in Yehliu, off the colder northeast coast, for the first time since 1998.

"Coral reefs are the rainforest in the ocean. A coral reef without corals is just like a forest

without trees and the reef-associated creatures will have to leave because there is no shelter or food," Kuo said. "If corals are dead, the coral reef ecosystem will start to collapse as its root is cut." Mingo Lee, a diver who helps document coral health in Taiwan, described the level of bleaching as like "snow in the ocean". "It was white everywhere... I have never seen anything like that in my 20 years as a diver," he told reporters. —AFP