



TO GET QATAR TRIBUNE'S PDF FOR FREE DAILY ON WHATSAPP

SUBSCRIBE NOW +974 77322356

QFZA and Alfardan sign strategic partnership to establish regional logistical hub **PAGE 10**



DOW	34,899.34	-905.04 PTS	QE	11,463.91	-327.07 PTS	SENSEX	57107.15	-1687.94 PTS	GOLD	1,788.10	+0.07%	
BRENT	PRICE	72.72	PERCENTAGE	-11.55%	WTI	PRICE	68.15	PERCENTAGE	-13.06%	SILVER	23.14	-1.70%

Kuwari meets with GCC secretary-general



Minister of Finance Ali bin Ahmed Al Kuwari met with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary-General HE Dr Nayef bin Falah Al Hajraf his accompanying delegation currently visiting Qatar.

Minister of Commerce and Industry meets with GCC secretary-general

TRIBUNE NEWS NETWORK
DOHA

MINISTER of Commerce and Industry HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Qassim Al Thani met with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary-General HE Dr Nayef bin Falah Al Hajraf and his accompanying delegation that is currently visiting Qatar.

The meeting featured a number of topics and issues of common interest to Gulf countries in the commercial and industrial fields. During the meeting, officials touched on the efforts exerted by the GCC states to confront the economic and trade challenges resulting from the repercussions of the coronavirus



Minister of Commerce and Industry HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Hamad bin Qassim Al Thani with GCC Secretary-General HE Dr Nayef bin Falah Al Hajraf in Doha on Sunday.

outbreak, the stage of recovery from the pandemic, and ways to enhance the process of joint cooperation for the benefit of the GCC states and their people.

Ooredoo, Nokia sign agreement to drive digital transformation



Senior officials of Ooredoo Group and Nokia at the agreement signing ceremony in Doha.

TRIBUNE NEWS NETWORK
DOHA

OOREDOO Group and Nokia have signed two agreements as part of a strategic partnership intended to drive Ooredoo's digital transformation and enhance experiences for its customers.

The partnership aims to enable exploration of future areas of collaboration, strengthen the business engagement that will support Ooredoo's strategy and boost the experience Ooredoo can deliver to its customers. Enhancements to customer experience would include access to the latest technology solutions and innovative digital product offerings such as smart home services and the Internet of Things (IoT). In addition, customers will be able to access the latest device portfolios, the highest grades of security and reliability while using Ooredoo's services, and superior connectivity and network speeds.

The new Group Framework Supply Agreement (GFS), representing the continuation of the long-standing contractual relationship that already exists between the two parties, will cover several categories in Networks for the supply of, among others, RAN, core and transport products and services, as well as Nokia's latest radio technology, the AirScale radio portfolio that Ooredoo deploys in some markets already. The new GFS will be rolled out to all of Ooredoo Group's operating companies

and will be valid for five years.

The amendment to the GFS for devices will cover customer premise equipment for 4G, 5G and fixed. The potential length of this agreement will be three years and initially include Ooredoo operating companies in Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Tunisia, Maldives and Iraq. Ooredoo Group Managing Director Aziz Aluthman Fakhroo said, "We were delighted to welcome the Nokia team to our Headquarters in Doha. Ooredoo launched the world's first commercial 5G network in 2018 and this partnership with Nokia is allowing us to keep ahead. Nokia's Fast-Mile 5G devices will allow us to extend the reach of our 5G wireless network into the home environment to enable Smart Home and IoT connectivity for customers. We believe this solution will greatly enhance our customers' internet experience across our global footprint."

Nokia President and Chief Executive Officer Pekka Lundmark said, "We are excited to continue delivering robust networks to Ooredoo's customers. We want to accelerate the benefits of Nokia's technology including 5G for consumers in the Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Asia, and enable businesses to digitalise and innovate with new services. The move to 5G will drive digital transformation and innovation across industries, communities and public services, and we are proud to continue supporting Ooredoo Group on this journey."

Qatar sees stability in rents as FIFA World Cup boosts housing demand

Almost 13,600 hotel keys are in the pipeline to be delivered in the next 15 months: ValuStrat

SATYENDRA PATHAK
DOHA

AN increase in demand associated with hosting a global event such as FIFA World Cup in 2022 has brought stability to Qatar's rental market, leading international consulting group ValuStrat has said in a report released on Sunday.

According to ValuStrat's third-quarter analysis of Qatar's real estate market, the median monthly asking rent in Qatar experienced no change in the third quarter of 2021 compared to the second quarter of 2021, indicating market stabilisation.

Eskan leases administered by Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy have also reduced the oversupply in the short term, the report said.

While the median monthly asking rent for apartments was QR6,200 registering a marginal QoQ fall, the report said, the median monthly asking rent for villas witnessed a slight increase to QR10,400 compared to the last quarter.

The Pearl Qatar, Al Sadd and Lusail saw rents increase in single digits, the report said.

With the marginal addition of 700 units during the third quarter of 2021, the total housing stock in the country reached 307,215 units, the report said.

As many as 600 apartments were delivered from completion of Abraj Bay Tower 2 in The Pearl Qatar and three residential Towers in Lusail's Entertainment district, Al Kharaej and Erkyah.

Notable projects launched during the 9th edition of Cityscape Qatar included Crystal Residence comprising 15 mixed-use buildings in Gewan Island (The Pearl), apartment and mixed-use buildings in Qetaifan North, 1,700 villas in Furjan Wadi Lusail, Al Yusem townhouses 2 in Yasmeen City Lusail and apartment complex 'Milos' in Legtaifiya.

The projection for the fourth quarter of 2021, how-



The Pearl Qatar witnessed rents increase in single digits during the third quarter of this year.

ever, was adjusted downwards as the majority of the projects have shifted delivery to 2022.

The residential transaction volumes reduced by 25 percent compared to 2020 but expanded by 60 percent compared to 2019, the report said adding that the median transacted ticket size for houses was QR2.7 million, rising by 8 percent year-on-year and no change was witnessed compared to the second quarter of 2021.

"Muaither, Al Wakrah and Al Khor had the highest volume of transactions for residential houses. As many as 52 residential building transactions were recorded as Umm Ghuwailina and Rawdhat Al Khail had the highest volume," the report said.

During the third quarter of 2021, the report said, the volume and value of transactions in The Pearl and West Bay Lagoon reduced by 26 percent and 27 percent respectively compared to 2020.

About hotel supply in the country, the report said that approximately 13,600 keys are in pipeline to be delivered in the next 15 months.

There was no addition of hotels during the third quarter of 2021 and the total hospitality supply remained at 29,688 keys.

The expected supply for 2021 has been adjusted downward due to a delay in the opening of new hotels because of COVID-19, it said.

The report also revealed that Katara Hospitality, owning 42 hotels and 25,000 rooms, announced plans to expand to 60 hotels by 2030.

The report said that office stock amounted to 5.6 million sq m GLA with no addition to supply during the quarter.

As of the third quarter of 2021, the report said, 60 percent of office stock is located in primary locations and is of premium quality.

According to the report, 1.26 million sq m office space is projected to be delivered in the next 15 months with 65 percent concentrated in Lusail and remaining distributed in Msheireb Downtown, Al Dafna, Onaiza, Umm Ghuwailina and Salata/Al Mirqab.

The citywide median asking rent for offices was QR74

per sq m, declining by 2.6 percent compared to the second quarter of 2021.

New demand for office space has been dominated by companies working in financial and insurance activities, administrative and support services and arts, entertainment and recreation.

The median monthly asking rent in Lusail was QR82 per sq m, registering no change compared to the second quarter of 2021.

About the retail supply, the report said that the organised retail stock comprised 1.96 million sq m GLA with the addition of Abu Sidra Mall (30,878 sq m GLA).

Lulu hypermarket unveiled its 15th store in Abu Sidra Mall spanning over 24,000 sq m, it said adding that Lulu hypermarket is working to open in Giardino Mall covering 13,000 sq m and Lulu supermarket in Gewan Island across 700 sq m by 2022.

Marza hypermarket opened its 4th store in J Mall in Hazm Al Markhiya and as many as 40 new retail and F&B brands have opened in

The Pearl in 2021 as reported by United Development Company.

According to the report, 518,000 sq m GLA including six malls distributed across Lusail, The Pearl, Msheireb, Umm Salal and Al Maamoura is in pipeline till 2022.

"Eid holidays, shopping festivals, re-opening of schools and further removal of social mobility restrictions have led to a boost to footfall across all malls compared to the second quarter of 2021," it said.

Doha Festival City announced 35 new stores across fashion, leisure, entertainment, jewellery, café and pharmacy areas.

As per the report, the median monthly asking rent of street retail dipped marginally by 0.7 percent QoQ and 8.2 percent YoY. Within Doha, median rents stood at QR160 per sq m and outside Doha QR152 per sq m.

There has been an increase in take-up of retail outlets across Lusail, Fereej Bin Mahmoud, Ain Khaled, Al Aziziya and Najma compared to last quarter, it said.

Dukhan Bank net profit up 12% to QR900 million in third quarter

TRIBUNE NEWS NETWORK
DOHA

DUKHAN Bank on Sunday released its financial results for the third quarter of 2021, recording a net profit of QR900 million, thus implying a 12 percent robust growth compared to the same period of last year.

The total income for the nine-month period ending September 30, increased to QR2,943 million resulting in a growth rate of 5 percent compared to QR2,805 million during the same period in 2020. The total expenses, including finance costs, reduced from QR730 million in 2020 to QR636 million in 2021 by 13 percent.

The bank's robust financial performance in the third quarter has also resulted in its total assets to increase to QR103.5 billion, representing a significant growth of 29 percent compared to the same period in 2020 and a growth of 20 percent compared to December 2020.

Financing assets continued to grow steadily, reaching QR78.5 billion with a growth of 40 percent compared to the same period in 2020 and an increase of 34 percent compared to December 2020. Further, customers' deposits balance raised to QR72.9 billion, which equally supported the growth, increased by 56 percent compared to the same period in 2020 and by 35 percent compared to December 2020.

The bank's total equity

soared to QR13.7 billion from QR11.5 billion at end of December 2020 whereas the total capital adequacy ratio stands at 18.3 percent as of 30 September 2021, in accordance with the Basel III guidelines, maintaining a sufficient buffer above the minimum supervisory ratio as specified by the Qatar Central Bank and Basel Standards.

Moreover, the Bank has been affirmed rating of 'A' by Fitch Ratings, and "A2/Prime-1" with a stable outlook by the international rating agency Moody's.

In line with its robust digital transformation strategy, Dukhan Bank has released a series of products and services that seek to enhance the value for its customers. During 2021, Dukhan Bank launched its Dukhan Pay (D-Pay) platform that enables contactless payments with Apple, Fitbit and Garmin Pay as well as with Dukhan Bank wearable bracelets.

Moreover, Dukhan Bank has also launched the e-wallet service, the Qatar Mobile Payment service (QMP), that aligns with Qatar Central Bank's Qatar Mobile Payments initiative and allows customers to make instant transfers and transactions with other wallets registered under QMP freely and hassle-free at any time.

The bank also offers one of the most user-friendly mobile applications that provide a uniquely customer-centric banking experience.

DPS GROUP ANNOUNCES BOARD OF DIRECTORS



DPS Group of Institutions' Board of Directors continues for another period of four years following an election recently conducted by the school's council. From left (standing), Gopi Varadhan, Rocky Fernandez, and Sreedharan Kunjiramat. From left (sitting), George Thomas, Yasir Nainar, Hassan Chougule and Harish Kanjani. (TNN)

Lulu bags top retail awards

TRIBUNE NEWS NETWORK
DOHA

LULU Hypermarket has set a new benchmark in the MENA retail industry by winning two key awards that span its achievements not just in terms of in-store innovation, but also its reinvention of sourcing and marketing of the core staple of the hypermarket business - food and grocery.

The awards were given at the prestigious Images RetailME Awards 2021 and showcased why LuLu is a favourite with shoppers across 22 countries and has a growing business footprint.

The LuLu Group higher management who represented the company at the awards ceremony held at Conrad Dubai were James Varghese, Director of LuLu Hypermarkets Dubai and Northern Emirates; Thamban KP, Regional Director of LuLu Hypermarkets Dubai and Northern Emirates; Huzefa Rupawala, Regional Manager of LuLu Hypermarkets Dubai and Northern Emirates; and Rahul Saxena, Head of Marketing of LuLu Hypermarkets Dubai and Northern Emirates.

LuLu Hypermarket Abu Sidra Qatar won the award for the 'Most Admired In-Store Innovation of the Year' for the way the hypermarket management elevated the whole shopping experience in the store by stacking up some of the latest trends and conveniences into what is reputed to be the region's largest hypermarket. Clearly though, the retail giant's focus is still very much on underscoring the best range of products, the



Lulu Group officials at an award function in Dubai recently.

healthiest ideas and the most sustainable presentation and packaging with the LuLu promise of top-quality customer care.

As LuLu Group Chairman and Managing Director Yusuf Ali MA said, "What we are really focused on is that we should deliver the same level of excellence in customer service and quality to our valued customers. That is the LuLu promise we are striving to keep in every LuLu retail outlet."

The Abu Sidra hypermarket will pump up its retail scene in time for Qatar's FIFA 2022. The

store is a reaffirmation of the Group's confidence in the vision and energy of Qatar's leadership and part of a global expansion plan that has already put the Group in the Deloitte Top 150 list of Global Retailers for 2021.

The second award that LuLu won was 'Most Admired Retailer of the Year - Food & Grocery', given in recognition of the state-of-the-art management of the Group's sourcing, its efficient tapping of a vast global network of professionally managed food sourcing

offices in 22 countries and the imaginative way in which LuLu makes food and produce trends accessible to customers.

Be it through trade council partnerships, through supporting local food production and farmers or celebrating world cuisines and culture with mouth-watering in-house food festivals and year-round national celebrations, LuLu makes the whole shopping experience a joyful, healthy and meaningful one. The retail giant also enables the most convenient facilities for shoppers through

a network of local food delivery partnerships and online channels.

LuLu has also creatively developed its own collection of grocery and non-food items that are labeled under its unique and homegrown brands. Since 2003, more than 5,000 products have been introduced in stores to cater to the specific needs of its customers of various nationalities. The well-patronized products are sourced and made from LuLu Group's manufacturing plants and partner distributors.

"We are honoured to be awarded these two prestigious accolades at the RetailME Awards 2021 and thank our customers who have inspired us to always strive to deliver the very best," said LuLu Group Executive Director Ashraf Ali MA.

"In the fast-changing world of the hypermarket business, LuLu has stayed ahead by investing in continuous upgrading of all facilities and especially in always keeping in focus our mantra of customer service excellence. Our objective is to keep updating our catalogue so that shoppers can continue to find shopping at LuLu a richly satisfying and exciting experience."

The RetailME awards recognise the achievements of retailers from the region who have had the courage to think out-of-the-box and bring innovative retail concepts and experiences equipped with emerging technologies and data that the world has access to today. RetailME Awards aims to serve as a benchmark in the Middle Eastern retail industry.

Qatar participates in UNCITRAL sessions

QNA
VIENNA

THE State of Qatar, represented by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, participated as an observer in the 41st session of the Working Group 3 on Investor-State Dispute Settlement Reform of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), which was recently held in Vienna.

The mission of UNCITRAL (the principal legal body of the United Nations system in the field of international trade law) is to update, develop and harmonize rules relating to international business.

The delegation of the State of Qatar was headed by the Director of the Legal Affairs Department at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Hilal bin Mohammed al Khalifa, and Majid bin Khalid al

Ghanim, a legal specialist from the same department.

The Working Group discussed the note on possible reforms in the area of investor-State dispute settlement, which included a draft code of conduct. The delegation presented a set of observations on the recommendations contained in the draft code under discussion.

The delegation also participated in the meetings of the 62nd session of the Working Group 4 on E-Commerce of the same committee, which was held November 22 - 26.

The Working Group discussed the note on draft provisions on the use of cross-border identity management and trust and recognition services, and attached to the note a draft instrument entitled "draft provisions on the use of cross-border identity management and trust services and recognition".

PwC EXPANDS OFFICE IN QATAR



PwC Middle East in Qatar has further grown its 40+ years presence in the country and has therefore made investment into a new office expansion hosting over 350 consultants and experts. PwC in Qatar started its investment in digital capabilities over five years ago with strides being made across digital services and upskilling its people in the digital field.

This comes in line with the organisation's worldwide commitment to an investment of \$20 million to upskill its people in the region. These areas of digitisation and industries to profile include healthcare, transportation and cybersecurity. During the office expansion tour, Bassam Hajhamad, Qatar Country Senior Partner, PwC Middle East, reinforced PwC's commitment to investing in Qatar aligned with PwC's global strategy "The New Equation" that was rolled out this summer and focused on building the right skills to deliver solutions that are human-led and tech powered.

He said, "The New Equation splits into two interconnected needs that clients face in the coming years. Trust and building sustained outcomes for our clients to support organisational culture, the way executives think and to also suit an environment that has a risk of disruption more intense than ever. And lastly, to ensure our people are future ready to support significant changes as part of the new equation, we have committed to 6,000 new jobs in the Middle East over the next 5 years with a focus on digital, emerging technologies and ESG." (TNN)

Saudi Tadawul prices IPO at top of range, raises \$1.01 bn

AGENCIES
DUBAI

SAUDI Tadawul Group raised 3.78 billion riyals (\$1.01 billion) on Sunday via an initial public offering (IPO) that was priced at the top of the indicated range and 121 times oversubscribed.

The company, which operates the kingdom's stock exchange, sold 36 million shares at 105 riyals apiece, it said in a statement after market hours. The price range given earlier had been 95 riyals to 105 riyals per share.

The total order book was 458 billion riyals, it said.

The IPO of Saudi Tadawul, which is backed by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund PIF, is one of a flurry of deals in

the kingdom following the 2019 listing of Saudi Aramco 2222, the world's biggest flotation, which raised \$29.4 billion.

Prominent IPOs this year have been ACWA Power International's \$1.2 billion flotation and Saudi Telecom Co's 7010 IPO of Arabian Internet and Communications Services Co, which raised about \$966 million.

The Saudi stock market is the Arab world's largest. Its listed companies have a total market capitalisation of nearly \$2.7 trillion.

Tadawul has converted itself into a holding company, with the bourse, called Saudi Exchange, its securities clearing and depository businesses and technology services becoming subsidiaries.



The signing ceremony was attended by HE Ahmad al Sayed, Minister of State and Chairman of QFZA, Omar Hussain Alfardan, President and CEO of Alfardan Group, and several senior officials from QFZA and Alfardan Automotive.

QFZA and Alfardan Automotive sign strategic partnership to establish regional logistical hub in Qatar Free Zones

The qualitative collaboration represents a new addition to the many partnerships QFZA has orchestrated with the private sector in Qatar

TRIBUNE NEWS NETWORK
DOHA

QATAR Free Zones Authority (QFZA) and Alfardan Automotive, a subsidiary of one of the leading local and regional conglomerates, Alfardan Group, announced the signing of a strategic collaboration agreement to establish a regional logistical hub for different vehicles, means of transport, spare parts and others.

The collaboration is an addition to the many partnerships QFZA has orchestrated with leading private sector entities in Qatar. It also marks the beginning of a close collaboration between QFZA and Alfardan Automotive, and paves the way for future joint projects in the free zones, QFZA said in a statement on Sunday.

The signing ceremony was attended by HE Ahmad al Sayed, Minister of State and Chairman of QFZA, Omar Hussain Alfardan, President and CEO of Alfardan Group, and several senior officials from QFZA and Alfardan Automotive.

The agreement was signed by Lim Meng Hui, QFZA CEO, and Omar Hussain Alfardan, President and CEO of Alfardan Group. The signing was followed by an introductory tour of Ras Bufontas Free Zone and the Business Innovation Park.



HE Ahmad al Sayed, Minister of State and Chairman of QFZA, Omar Hussain Alfardan, President and CEO of Alfardan Group,

Alfardan Automotive's regional center will be located in the mobility industries cluster in Umm Al Houl Free Zone, located near Hamad Port – a greenfield mega port – enhancing trade through the port and increasing the volume of goods passing through it. The centre will cover an area of more than 67,000 square meters and will utilise the latest logistics systems and processes to import vehicles, heavy equipment, motorcycles, and spare parts to meet markets demand, as well as develop human capital.

Ahmad said: "We welcome our partnership with the leading Alfardan Group and the establishment of a regional hub for vehicles in the free zones. This partnership will enable us to further support our national champions who have enormous potential to support the supply chain."

"The free zones offer outstanding opportunities and benefits for local businesses seeking to expand regionally, supported by an advanced infrastructure and business-friendly environment. We are keen to enable local compa-

nies and their global partners to benefit from our offerings to achieve the mutual goal of bolstering Qatar's position as a global and regional hub for trade."

Alfardan said: "This logistical hub offers a qualitatively elevated level of logistical services, which will play an important role in upgrading the relevant trading sectors, more specifically the automotive one. We are proud to work together with Qatar Free Zones Authority (QFZA) in establishing this state-of-the-art automotive logisti-



cal hub, which provides a complementing platform to our diverse well-established trading and economic activities in the state of Qatar and beyond. This partnership embodies the true spirit of a collaboration between QFZA and Alfardan Group, which is expressed in their genuine desire to develop the various economic sectors in the country through providing a world class level of services."

The mobility industries cluster in Qatar Free Zones has community leaders and innovators in the sector, including Gaussin Advanced

Mobility, Zoomcar, ABB E-Mobility, Volkswagen and other international companies. QFZA expects more local and international companies from the industry to join them soon.

To best support investors, QFZA has created specialized clusters within the zones for specific sectors, including maritime, logistics and emerging technology, allowing companies in those industries to grow by providing advanced infrastructure and facilities. The growing mobility industries cluster represents a special addition to these clusters,

providing the free zones with an integrated ecosystem that supports Qatar's economic development.

Qatar Free Zones are designed to provide investors with a global competitive advantage across various key sectors, in addition to providing a business-friendly environment and world-class services that contribute to enhancing the financial and operational performance of companies. Qatar Free Zones continue to play a vital role in advancing the Qatari business ecosystem through the localization of supply chains.

Easyjet to reveal billions in losses after travel curbs

DPA
LONDON

EASYJET is set to reveal losses hit more than \$1 billion last year as Covid wreaked havoc on the travel industry.

The airline group has suffered a turbulent 12 months on the back of fluctuating travel restrictions across Europe, which caused the business to cut flight numbers heavily as holidaymakers stayed in the UK.

Bosses will be looking to reassure investors on Tuesday that plans to ramp up flights will go ahead as it enters the

first restriction-free Christmas period in two years.

In a trading update last month the group said pre-tax losses for the 12 months to September are expected to be between 1.13 billion pounds and 1.17 billion pounds, slightly lower than analyst predictions.

Chief executive Johan Lundgren said a surge in demand across Europe and a return of bookings to winter sun destinations like Egypt and Turkey had allowed it to ramp up flight capacity to nearly 60 per cent of pre-pandemic levels.

New restrictions will be beyond the control of bosses, but investors will be on tenterhooks for reassuring noises as to how EasyJet could mitigate the impact of further disruption to flights

He said: "October half-term bookings have been strong, particularly to the Canary Islands, where we have increased our capacity to around 140 per cent of full-year 2019 levels." But investors will be eager to hear whether plans

to increase capacity to 70 per cent of pre-pandemic levels will go ahead as fears rise over a new Covid variant and a return in travel restrictions in the UK.

Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell, said the new variant was "the worst possible news for airline operators" as they were starting to see a rebound in demand.

He said: "These companies have been under significant financial stress and will want to avoid having to go back to shareholders yet again to ask for more money to help see them through bad times,

should we get new widespread travel restrictions."

New restrictions will be beyond the control of bosses, but investors will be on tenterhooks for reassuring noises as to how EasyJet could mitigate the impact of further disruption to flights.

The news of a return in restrictions caused shares to slide across the sector.

Shares in easyJet fell by as much as 14 per cent at points on Friday, while Wizz Air and British Airways owner International Consolidated Airlines both dropped by around 18 per cent at times.



QT Economy & Business

Will flight restrictions help as new virus variant emerges?

The US said on Friday it will ban travel from South Africa and seven other African nations by non-US citizens beginning Monday

AGENCIES
LONDON

A NEW coronavirus variant identified in southern Africa is leading to a new round of travel restrictions just as many had finally begun to ease.

The risks of the variant, called omicron, are largely unknown. But the World Health Organization has called it a "variant of concern" and governments around the world are not waiting for scientists to better understand the variant to impose flight bans and other travel restrictions.

The US said on Friday it will ban travel from South Africa and seven other African nations by non-US citizens beginning Monday. European Union nations agreed earlier in the day to impose a ban on travel from southern Africa to counter the variant's spread. The UK, Canada and other countries have imposed similar restrictions.

The moves have renewed a debate over whether flight bans and other travel restrictions work to prevent the spread of new variants. Some say at best the restrictions can buy time for new public health measures to be put in place. At worst, they do little to stop the spread and give a false sense of security.

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention said it strongly discouraged imposing travel bans on people coming from countries where the variant was reported.

DO TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS SLOW THE SPREAD OF THE VIRUS?

They might buy countries more time to speed up vaccination and introduce other measures, like masking and social distancing, but they are highly unlikely to prevent the entry of new variants, said Mark Woolhouse, a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Edinburgh. "Travel restrictions can delay but not prevent the spread of a highly transmissible variant," he said.

Johns Hopkins University infectious disease specialist Dr. Amesh Adalja says the travel restrictions only give the public a false sense of security and should stop being the "knee-jerk" reaction by public officials. Adalja noted imposing restrictions makes politicians "look as if they're doing something" but doesn't make sense when countries now have countermeasures such as rapid tests and vaccines.



Travellers queue at a check-in counter at OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg on Saturday. (AFP)

Meanwhile, Sweden's chief epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell told a local news agency said he does not believe that a travel ban would have any major effect, other than for countries with direct flights to the affected areas.

"It is basically impossible to keep track of all travel flows," Tegnell told the *Expressen* newspaper.

COULD IT BE DIFFERENT THIS TIME?

Jeffrey Barrett, director of COVID-19 Genetics at the Wellcome Sanger Institute, thought that the early detection of the new variant

could mean restrictions taken now would have a bigger impact than when the delta variant first emerged.

"The surveillance is so good in South Africa and other nearby countries that they found this (new variant), understood it was a problem and told the world very fast about it," he said. "We may be at an earlier point with this new variant so there may still be time to do something about it."

However, Barrett said harsh restrictions would be counter-productive and that the South African officials should not be punished for alerting the world to the new variant.

"They've done the world a service and we must help them, not penalize them for this."

WHAT DOES THE SCIENCE SAY?

Sharon Peacock, who has led the genetic sequencing in Britain at the University of Cambridge, said any decisions to restrict travel were political decisions, not scientific ones. She emphasized that there was still great uncertainty about the new variant, including whether it is actually more infectious or deadly. Although some of the mutations detected appeared worrying, she said there is

still no proof that the new variant is any more lethal or transmissible than previous versions.

"It's possible to keep infection out, but you would need very, very severe restrictions and only some countries would be willing to do this," she said.

"Buying time is important and worthwhile, but this is a decision for policymakers," she said. "At the moment, we won't have any definitive scientific answers for a few weeks."

WHAT ABOUT ECONOMIC IMPACTS?

If there's anything the global

economy didn't need, it's more uncertainty.

A new highly transmissible coronavirus poses an economic as well as a health risk, threatening to disrupt the global economic recovery and worsen supply chain bottlenecks that are already pushing prices higher. Markets plummeted around the world over worries about the variant — and reaction from political leaders.

"The most worrying thing about the new strain at the moment is how little we know about it," said Craig Erlam, senior market analyst for the currency trading firm OANDA.

Flash mob smash-and-grabs continue at high-end stores in LA

DPA
LOS ANGELES

MORE smash-and-grab "flash mob" robberies at luxury stores have police and retailers struggling with how to crack down on the crimes.

A rash of such thefts continued in Los Angeles as organized groups descended on stores and grabbed expensive merchandise in pre-Thanksgiving raids around the city.

On Wednesday night, a security guard was attacked with bear spray as several people entered the Nordstrom store at the Westfield Topanga & the Village shopping center in Canoga Park, grabbed merchandise and ran out, according to the Los Angeles Police Department. Police are investigating a similar incident the same night in which groups struck several stores in the Beverly Center in the Beverly Grove neighborhood. The thefts came two days after an organized group broke into a Nordstrom at the Grove shopping center by smashing a window and stole thousands of dollars' worth of merchandise, police said.

LAPD Chief Michel Moore told the Los Angeles Police Commission

that the department would be stepping up patrols and dedicating additional resources to some higher-end locations to deter the wave of mob thefts.

At the Police Commission meeting earlier this week, Steve Soboroff, a retail developer and member of the commission, asked Moore what advice he had for retailers, especially smaller mom-and-pop businesses, to prevent falling victim to such crimes.

Moore recommended that businesses station employees to greet patrons as they enter stores and ask what they are seeking.

The chief said high-value items are best kept away from the front of the store and access to them limited.

Moore said security cameras can also be vital in identifying suspects. In the Nordstrom robbery, he said, one of the three suspects was captured in the store after the break-in was caught on video.

Moore said high-end retailers are increasingly using GPS location devices to track merchandise and help police locate thieves if they're stolen.

Last Friday, a mass smash-



Shoppers load their car trunk in a Walmart parking lot with two television sets and other items following Black Friday shopping in Torrance, California on Friday. (AFP)

and-grab hit luxury stores in Union Square in San Francisco, police said. And the next night, at a Nordstrom in Walnut Creek in the East Bay, some 80 people jumped out of a pack of cars just before closing time and swarmed the store's aisles,

many escaping with merchandise. Two employees were assaulted, one of them with pepper spray.

Then, shortly after midnight last Sunday, suspects used a sledgehammer to smash storefront windows at a Louis Vuitton and a

Saks Fifth Avenue in Beverly Hills, police said, but patrol cars arrived to scare the thieves off before they could get inside.

San Francisco police said additional officers would be placed in exclusive shopping areas to prevent mobs from overwhelming store security, as happened last week. Governor Gavin Newsom said the California Highway Patrol has also stepped up patrols across the state.

At the Grove in LA's Fairfax district this week, the Nordstrom robbery did not appear to be deterring shoppers.

Guadalupe Rivas extended a 12-year tradition of trekking from Bakersfield to the popular outdoor mall on Wednesday for holiday shopping the day before Thanksgiving en route to meeting family in Fullerton.

She said the smash-and-grab robbery was not going to deter her. "I've never felt scared here and I wasn't going to let that stop me," she said.

On Wednesday morning, Rivas shopped throughout several boutiques and said she felt secure with guards protecting entrances to Nordstrom and the Apple Store.

A pair of LAPD officers were also posted at the police kiosk outside the entrance to the department store.

"I might ask one of them to help me with my bags," Rivas quipped.

Nordstrom employees said they were not allowed to comment about the robbery and referred questions to a corporate spokesperson. In a statement, the company said, "Given recent incidents at two of our stores and incidents across the industry, we're heightening our in-store security presence and implementing additional protective measures to keep everyone safe." At an outdoor kiosk selling apparel, an employee named Ikar, who asked that his last name not be published, said he trusted the mall's security and was more wary of unruly shoppers.

"I wish security would protect me from Black Friday shoppers, who are rude, nasty and demanding," he said. "I don't think there's ever been a moment where I felt unsafe at the Grove." # Notebook ## Note to editors - 2021 Los Angeles Times. Visit latimes.com. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.