

6 Biden joins battle for Senate as top Republican accepts win



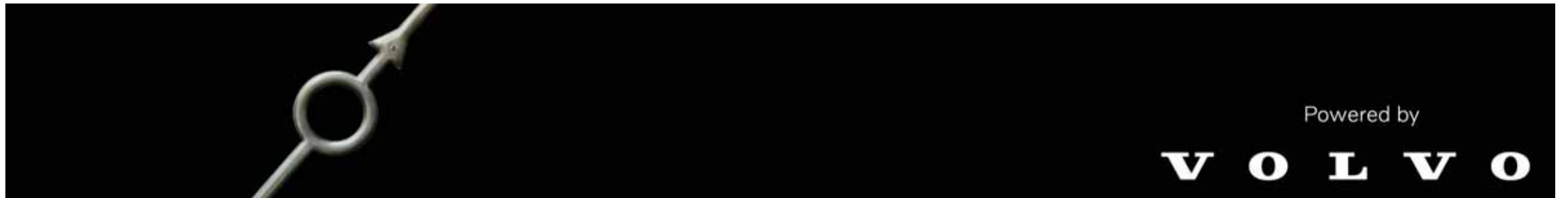
8 Saudi cuts spending as budget deficit soars due to pandemic



13 Pandemic keeps German model trains chugging along



16 Doha to host 2030 Asian Games, Riyadh 2034 edition



MP files amendment to end secret voting for speakership

Lawmakers file law for general amnesty for political activists



KUWAIT: Opposition MPs react after the re-election of incumbent speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem during the National Assembly's inaugural session on Tuesday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari yesterday filed amendments to the National Assembly internal charter to end secret voting for the speaker and other office bearers, apparently in a bid to make MPs comply with their pledges. During the Assembly's opening session on Tuesday, incumbent speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem was re-elected with a comfortable majority, although over 40 MPs out of the 50 elected members had pledged publicly not to vote for him.

The same thing happened in 2016, when Ghanem was elected with an overwhelming majority, although at least 28 MPs had said they would not vote for him. Kandari proposed changes to two articles in the internal charter, which stipulate secret ballots for the election of the speaker, his deputy, secretary and supervisor of the Assembly.

Kandari said in the request that public voting for the speaker's post is the right way for a transparent beginning of the new Assembly, adding that the people have the full right to know how the lawmakers they elected have voted. The outcome of the speaker's election was shocking to a number of opposition lawmakers, some of whom cried betrayal and said they will ask for an investigation.

Opposition MP Bader Al-Dahoum said at least eight MPs who publicly pledged to vote for

Ghanem's only rival MP Bader Al-Humaidi changed their mind. Three other ballots were invalid. MP Marzouq Al-Khalifa said the outcome of the speaker's election was disappointing, adding that those who changed their mind will be exposed during voting on crucial laws and issues.

MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri charged "foul play" in the election, and said the Cabinet's support for Ghanem calls for non-cooperation with the government. MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf said he will demand the formation of an investigation committee next week into allegations of violations into the election of the speaker.

But new MP Fayez Al-Jamhour said that the election of the speaker "is behind us and the Assembly should look forward". He said lawmakers have not come to trigger crises or for confrontation with the government, but for cooperation to approve essential laws. Jamhour said a bloc of MPs will be formed to propose new legislation and call for the cancellation of others, and called on Ghanem to understand the message that as many as 28 MPs did not vote for him.

Meanwhile, five opposition lawmakers filed a draft law calling for a general amnesty for political activists convicted over cases related to freedom of speech. The law was rejected by the previous Assembly, but opposition lawmakers believe that their number has increased and they are capable of forcing it through.

News in brief

Bitcoin above \$20,000 for first time

LONDON: Leading virtual currency bitcoin yesterday traded above \$20,000 for the first time following a sustained run higher in recent weeks. Just 12 years old, bitcoin reached a record-high \$20,398.50 before pulling back to \$20,145, which was still an intra-day gain of nearly four percent. It has seen a meteoric rise since March, when it stood at \$5,000, spurred by online payments giant PayPal, saying it would enable account holders to use cryptocurrency. A number of central banks have meanwhile responded to the rise of cryptocurrencies and the dwindling global use of cash by announcing plans for bank-backed digital units. — AFP

Pakistan approves anti-rape laws

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has approved the chemical castration of rapists as part of sweeping new legislation sparked by outcry over the gang rape of a mother on a motorway. Under the new laws, special courts will be established to try cases of rape and sexual abuse against women and children, which must be completed within four months. They also create the country's first national sex offenders register, establish anti-rape cells across the country for conducting initial investigations and medical examinations within six hours of filing a police complaint - while abolishing an invasive medical examination known as the two-finger virginity test for rape victims. — AFP

Lab-grown meat to make debut

SINGAPORE: Lab-grown chicken meat will make its debut at a Singapore restaurant in a culinary first this weekend after the company behind the product announced its inaugural sale yesterday. US start-up Eat Just said earlier this month that its product had been approved for sale in the city-state as an ingredient in chicken nuggets after Singapore became the first country to allow meat created without slaughtering any animals to be sold. Yesterday, the company said it had made its first commercial sale of the product to 1880, a restaurant in Robertson Quay, a posh riverside entertainment center. — AFP

Record German deaths, US cases; Europe tightens curbs

BERLIN: Several European countries tightened restrictions yesterday, as Germany set a record for daily deaths and the United States broke its own daily high for infection numbers. The tougher measures came as EU countries agreed to rollout vaccinations on the same day. "To get to the end of the pandemic, we will need up to 70 percent of the population vaccinated," European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen told MEPs.

Pressure has been mounting on the bloc since Britain and the United

States both started their programs, using a vaccine developed in the EU by Pfizer and BioNTech. The World Health Organization's European wing yesterday warned of a resurgence of the virus on the continent early next year, urging special precautions over the holiday season. "It may feel awkward to wear masks and practice physical distancing when around friends and family, but doing so contributes significantly to ensuring that everyone remains safe and healthy," the health agency said.

Continued on Page 2



BOGOTA: Smoke comes out of a mannequin's mouth to show how viruses can spread in the air during a campaign to raise awareness for the prevention of the novel coronavirus on Tuesday. — AFP

Al-Sadu, couscous listed as intangible world heritage

PARIS: UNESCO has placed Kuwait and Saudi Arabia's traditional Al-Sadu weaving on the world's intangible cultural heritage list, a Kuwaiti diplomat said yesterday. The achievement comes partly due to the efforts of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letter's Department of Antiquities and Museums, Kuwait's representative to UNESCO Adam Al-Mulla told KUNA.

It becomes the second cultural practice to be added to the list for Kuwait after date palm production and related cultural activities. Al-Sadu is a conventional textile hand woven by Bedouin women, using natural fibers found in their environment and characterized by embroidery in geometrical shapes. In Kuwait, the Al-Sadu Weaving Co-operative Society was launched in 1978 to preserve, document and promote this rich and diverse textile heritage.

Meanwhile, couscous, the Berber dish beloved across northern Africa's Maghreb region and beyond, also joined the UN list of the world's intangible cultural heritage. The countries that submitted the listing to UNESCO - Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania - may have their differences, but their common love of the grain staple runs deep.

"Couscous, present at every social or cultural



A woman makes a traditional Sadu weaving.

event, is at once ordinary and special," their joint presentation argued. "Ordinary because of the frequency of its use in a family setting, and special because of the unifying and propitiatory role it plays at convivial community occasions at which food is shared."

Bland by itself, couscous is served with meat or fish, spicy stews, chickpeas and vegetables in a mouth-watering variety of dishes. Moroccan restaurant owner Hicham Hazzoum was among the couscous connoisseurs who applauded UNESCO's honor. "I think we are the only Arab countries to have a high regard for this dish," he said. "It is impossible not to eat it every Friday. Moroccans are crazy about couscous and even children love it. It shows that the couscous flame will never go out."

Continued on Page 2

Baghdad booze attacks: Turf war or vice squads?

BAGHDAD: Escalating attacks on the Iraqi capital's few liquor stores have terrified shop-owners who fear hardline Islamists are flexing their muscle against alcohol consumption. But there may be a bigger story behind the Baghdad booze bombings, as some suspect turf wars for control of the lucrative niche trade in the Muslim majority country.

Over the past two months, at least 14 alcohol shops across the city have been firebombed in the middle of the night or just before dawn, with three simultaneous attacks in different districts Monday night alone. Most businesses are run by Christians or Yazidis, minorities who for decades have been granted the licenses required to sell alcohol in broadly conservative Iraq.

Andre, an Iraqi Christian, said his shop was firebombed a few weeks ago by two people on a motorcycle just before dawn, according to the store's security camera footage. He said it had cost him thousands of dollars to replace the lost merchandise and repair the shop. "These groups want the last of the Christians to leave the country."

Continued on Page 2

Local

New traffic amendment allows Kuwaitis to work as driving trainers

Opportunity for retired and unemployed citizens, ministry official says

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: A new amendment to the traffic law 81/1976 was recently issued by ministry decree no. 1067/2020 and published in the Kuwait Al-Youm official gazette. The amendment included new changes related to driving schools and instructors.

The amendment allows Kuwaitis to become driving trainers after obtaining a license and fulfilling certain conditions. "One of the conditions is that they should work full-time for this job. This addition to the law was made for retired or unemployed Kuwaitis to benefit from this opportunity," Brig Gen Tawheed Al-Kandari, Director General of Relations and Security Media at the Ministry of Interior, told Kuwait Times.

This condition was not mentioned for non-Kuwait trainers, as they are already employees of driving schools and their work permits and residen-

cies are tied to their companies. "So if a driving instructor is caught by police providing training, and his residency is on a different institution other than the driving school, he will be sanctioned," Kandari said.

Kuwaiti trainers also have to undergo annual medical checkups. "Non-Kuwaiti trainers working at driving schools have to undergo medical tests every two years or during their license renewal, so it's not mentioned in this amendment. The medical checkup is essential, as trainers may pose a danger to trainees in case of emergencies such as hypoglycemia or others," stressed Kandari. The direc-

tor general of the traffic department is authorized to withdraw the training license in case of violation of any of the conditions. "There should be serious reasons for withdrawing the license, such as ophthalmological problems, committing accidents repeatedly, and so on," he explained.



'Temporary' permit to train family members



The amendment also allows issuing a temporary driving training permit to Kuwaitis who wish to train a family member. "This temporary permit is not limited to a certain timeframe, but to one person of the family. So the trainer can't train other members with this permit. Also, the trainer should meet the condi-

tions for training, such as having a vehicle with two steering wheels if they want to drive on roads. But if they are only training in a yard, then it's OK. The trainer should also have a valid driving license issued at least five years earlier," concluded Kandari.



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah is seen during the tour. — KUNA photos

Foreign Minister visits Consular Affairs Department

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, accompanied by Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador

Khaled Al-Jarallah, visited yesterday the Consular Affairs Department. During the visit, Sheikh Ahmad said that the consular department represents the direct link between the foreign ministry and citizens, praising its cadres' efforts, especially during the last period in light of the outbreak of COVID-19. Furthermore, he praised all the facilities provided by the department, calling on those in charge to take the initiative to develop work, especially with regard to digital transformation and the use of modern technologies. — KUNA

Embassy in Rome celebrates Kuwaiti officers' graduation

ROME: Kuwait's embassy in Rome hosted yesterday a ceremony to celebrate the graduation of four Kuwaiti officers from the Italian Marine Academy to join the Kuwaiti Army. During the ceremony attended by Kuwait Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Azzam Al-Sabah, the four officers swore an oath of loyalty and redemption before the military attache in Italy Brigadier General Engineer Muhammad Al-Fadhli, who read an Amiri Decree and appointed them to the rank of lieutenant in the Kuwaiti naval force, the embassy said in a statement.

The Ambassador congratulated the officers on their success in acquiring their knowledge from one of the oldest naval academies in the world, praising them for being a good example for Kuwaiti youth in dedication and ambition, wishing them the best in their military and professional career.

He stressed the importance of scholarships at prestigious universities and institutes such as the Livorno Academy, for their contribution to refining scientific and practical skills. The four officers successfully completed a four-year specialized course in marine military science at the Italian Naval



ROME: A Kuwaiti Army officer is decorated during a ceremony at Kuwait's embassy in Italy. — KUNA

Academy in Livorno, with other colleagues from Italy, Europe and a number of countries around the world. The Academy was established in 1881, and was rebuilt upon the end of World War II after being completely destroyed. — KUNA

Record German deaths, US cases...

Continued from Page 1

Germany, which dealt with its first wave relatively smoothly, closed non-essential shops and schools yesterday as its daily death toll soared to 952. The country has struggled to contain a surge in recent months and has joined calls for the European Union's health regulator to approve the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine "before Christmas".

China is also looking to stock up on the Pfizer vaccine with one company agreeing to buy 100 million doses subject to local approval - the country is mixing its vaccination strategy between locally developed drugs and imported ones. Britain's government said yesterday it had delivered the first jabs to 137,000 people, but high infection numbers still forced London to join large parts of England under tough restrictions yesterday.

Pubs, bars, restaurants and other hospitality sites will close, as will theatres and other entertainment venues. "The hospitality business needs this week, and it's devastating. It is devastatingly awful," said Lesley Lewis, owner of The French House, a London pub. "But if this is what it takes to save lives, that's what we have to do." Denmark, France, Turkey and the Netherlands have all tightened their coronavirus restrictions and Spain's prime minister expressed alarm at rising infection numbers there.

Hopes for an end to the pandemic have been boosted by positive assessments of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. The US Food and Drug

Administration on Tuesday issued an upbeat briefing about Moderna ahead of a meeting of experts on whether to grant it emergency approval. The United States has already started using the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and on Tuesday the FDA also approved the country's first rapid at-home test for COVID-19.

The United States remains the hardest-hit nation, setting a record for new daily infections on Tuesday with more than 248,000 cases. The Washington National Cathedral rang its bells 300 times Tuesday in memory of the more than 300,000 people who have lost their lives to coronavirus.

In California, officials ordered 5,000 extra body bags as Los Angeles was left with fewer than 100 available intensive care beds for a county of 10 million people. "I don't want... to scare folks," said Governor Gavin Newsom. "But this is a deadly disease, and we need to be mindful of where we are." President-elect Joe Biden has said he will be vaccinated in public.

Worldwide, more than 73.4 million infections and over 1.6 million deaths have been recorded so far. But with wealthy nations reserving more than half of next year's potential doses, there are fears the poorer parts of the world will be left behind. Even if the drug makers all produce effective, safe vaccines and meet their maximum global manufacturing targets, a study published yesterday by Johns Hopkins University warned that "at least a fifth of the world's population would not have access" until 2022. Indonesian President Joko Widodo said yesterday he would be the first person in the country to be vaccinated for COVID-19, and said the jabs would be free for everyone. — AFP

Al-Sadu, couscous listed as intangible...

Continued from Page 1

Across the region, couscous - also known as seksu, kusksi and kseksu - is as elementary as rice or noodles are to Asian cuisine, the staple without which no meal is complete. Arabic dictionaries have documented "kuskusi" since the 19th century, though it is known to be far older. The regional pride in couscous found full expression in the countries' joint nomination for the "knowledge, knowhow and practices pertaining to the production and consumption of couscous".

"Women and men, young and old, sedentary and nomadic, from rural or urban communities or from

immigrant backgrounds all identify with this element," it gushed. "The ethos of couscous is the expression of community life."

Couscous is prepared from wheat or barley, and sometimes from maize, millet or sorghum, which is ground into semolina. This is rolled into pellets which are sieved and later soaked and repeatedly steamed. "Women, in particular, play a fundamental role in the preparation and consumption of the dish, and in practicing and preserving the related symbolic value systems," said the paper.

The girls learn not only the techniques, but also "the songs, gestures, characteristic oral expressions and ritual organization" that go along with the process. Algerian chef Rabah Ourrad said about making his couscous dishes: "I didn't learn this in a cooking school. It's decades of observing the mother, the sisters and all North African women who are experts in this." — Agencies

Baghdad booze attacks: Turf war...

Continued from Page 1

"They're targeting us," Andre told AFP, as his brother stacked new bottles of whisky on restored shelves. He blamed security forces for negligence, saying a police patrol that had been deployed nearby left its post for hours, which gave the attackers a window of opportunity. "Why doesn't the government arrest them?" Andre asked angrily, saying he had even provided authorities with the license plate number of the attacking vehicle from their CCTV footage. The attackers had "time to place the explosives, take pictures before and after and publish them on Facebook", he said. "You really can't pursue these guys?"

Another business owner, speaking on condition of anonymity in fear of reprisal attacks, said it was an attempt to crush the shrinking community of Iraqi secularists. "We are all that's left of a liberal lifestyle. There are attempts to kill this ancient side of Baghdad - if they win, Baghdad will have lost its liberal side," he said.

In recent weeks, an array of Islamist groups have ramped up their rhetoric against Baghdad's liquor stores and other establishments that they insist are violating religious edicts against drinking and other trades considered sinful. One such group, "Rubu Allah" or "God's gang," claimed responsibility for raiding a massage parlor in the heart of Baghdad and physically assaulting the women inside. Another group calling itself "Ahl al-Qura" or "The Village People", said it had bombed an underground nightclub.

Despite being formed earlier this year, these groups are already well-known for claiming rocket

attacks on the US embassy in Baghdad, attacking a TV station broadcasting cheerful music during a religious holiday and setting the offices of a Kurdish party alight. While the groups claim to have no formal political link, those protesting or storming establishment have carried the flag of the Hashed al-Shaabi, a state-sponsored network of armed groups, many of which have close ties to Iran.

Others say it's money, not morality, that is behind the recent spate of attacks on liquor stores. For years, their owners have paid protection fees to armed Islamist groups to guarantee they can keep selling. "The top dogs of these groups don't get involved in the extortion but smaller figures are individually extracting protection money," said a senior member of one such group. He even accused state security forces of being involved, asking for thousands of dollars a month to protect a shop.

Some Christian and Yazidi shop-owners pointed to new competition from Muslim businessmen seeking a stake in the spirits market without legal licenses. Those newer establishments, the minority store-owners pointed out to AFP, had not been targeted by bomb attacks. Iraqi federal police and even army troops have deployed in force along the main streets hosting the liquor stores, including the riverside road of Abu Nuwas.

Their presence is meant to reassure shop-owners, but they have also been shutting stores, nightclubs and massage parlors that don't have operating licenses. At least 91 unlicensed alcohol shops and nightclubs have been shut in the last two months, a statement by Iraq's intelligence agencies said. Businessmen in the neighborhood fear the wave of attacks could take Baghdad back to bloodier days, when multiple roadside bombs would rock the capital each day. "I live in a state of constant fear," said Saad Mohammad, who operates a grocery store near several liquor shops. "Every minute, I think that there will be an explosion that will destroy everything." — AFP

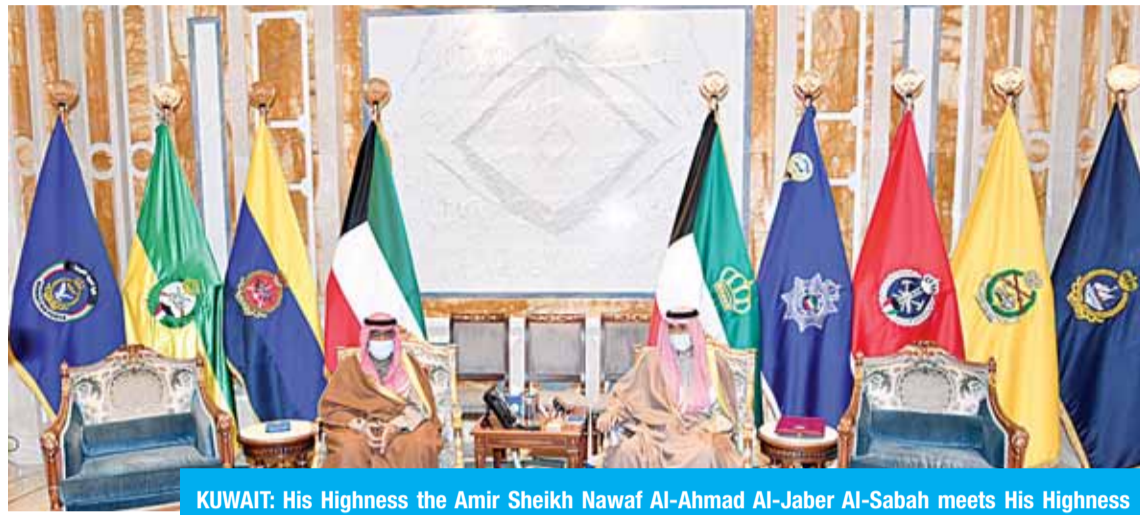


MOSCOW: A man wearing a facemask walks in front of light sculptures of polar bears set up for the upcoming New Year and Christmas holidays yesterday. Russia confirmed 26,509 new COVID-19 cases yesterday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Amir receives calls from Saudi King, Crown Prince

Sheikh Nawaf receives state officials at Bayan Palace



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. —Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Tuesday a phone call from Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. During the call, the Saudi King congratulated His Highness the Amir on holding the first regular session of the 16th legislative term of the National Assembly, and the formation of the government. King Salman lauded His Highness the Amir's speech, wishing the new government success to achieve the aspirations of the Kuwaiti people, under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The Saudi leader touched upon the sisterly and historical distinguished ties between the two countries, looking forward to further progress and development of these relations. Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir expressed great gratitude to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz for his call and sincere sentiments which embodied the bonds of deep-rooted and historical relations between the two countries and their nations. His Highness the Amir prayed to Allah Almighty to bestow everlasting wellness on Saudi King and wished Saudi Arabia further progress and prosperity under the King's wise leadership.

His Highness the Amir also received a phone call from Saudi Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. During the call, the Saudi Crown Prince congratulated His Highness the Amir on holding the first regular session of the 16th legislative term of the National Assembly, and the formation of the government. Prince Mohammad bin Salman wished Kuwait and its people everlasting progress and prosperity, under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince. Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir voiced his great gratitude to Saudi Crown Prince for his call and sincere sentiments. His Highness the Amir wished the Saudi Crown Prince good health and Saudi Arabia further progress and prosperity, under the wise leadership of King Salman bin Abdulaziz.

In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince received a telephone call from his Saudi

counterpart, who congratulated him on holding the first regular session of the 16th legislative term of the National Assembly and the formation of the government, wishing them success to achieve the aspirations of Kuwaiti people. The sisterly and historical relations between the two countries were reviewed during the call. Prince Mohammad wished His Highness the Crown Prince everlasting well-being and Kuwait progress and prosperity, under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince expressed his great gratitude to Saudi Crown Prince for his call and sincere sentiments. His Highness the Crown Prince wished Prince Mohammad good health and Saudi Arabia further progress, growth and prosperity, under the wise leadership of King Salman bin Abdulaziz.

Prince Mohammad bin Salman also phoned Kuwait's new Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, congratulating him on earning the trust of the political leadership and being named to his new post. Furthermore, he expressed eagerness to boost cooperation with Kuwait in the military field, wishing Sheikh Hamad success in carrying out his duties. Sheikh Hamad thanked Prince Mohammad on the call, wishing him good health and Saudi Arabia further progress under the wise leadership of King Salman.

In other news, His Highness the Amir received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal, in addition to National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh. Separately, His Highness the Crown Prince received Speaker Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled and minister Saleh at Bayan Palace yesterday.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh.

News in brief

Amir expresses sorrow over Eswatini PM's death

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent, Wednesday, a cable of condolences to King of Eswatini Mswati III on the death of Prime Minister Ambrose Dlamini. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. —KUNA

Arab parliament congratulates speaker

CAIRO: President of the Arab Parliament (AP) Adel Al-Assoumi on Tuesday congratulated Marzouq Al-Ghanem on being re-elected as Speaker of the Kuwaiti National Assembly. In a statement, Assoumi lauded the confidence Ghanem gained from the Kuwaiti lawmakers, wishing him success to serve the Kuwaiti people. Assoumi affirmed keenness of the AP on enhancing and cementing the cooperation and coordination ties with the Kuwaiti parliament as well as developing them to the highest levels so as to serve the Arab world's issues and achieve the aspirations of its nations. He wished the Kuwaiti people everlasting security, safety, progress and prosperity, under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. —KUNA

Kuwait oil price drops

KUWAIT: Kuwait oil dropped 38 cents during Tuesday's transactions to close at \$49.81 per barrel (pb), Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Benchmark Brent however rose 47 cents to \$50.76 pb and the West Texas Intermediate gained 63 cents to \$47.62 pb. —KUNA

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.



Local

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

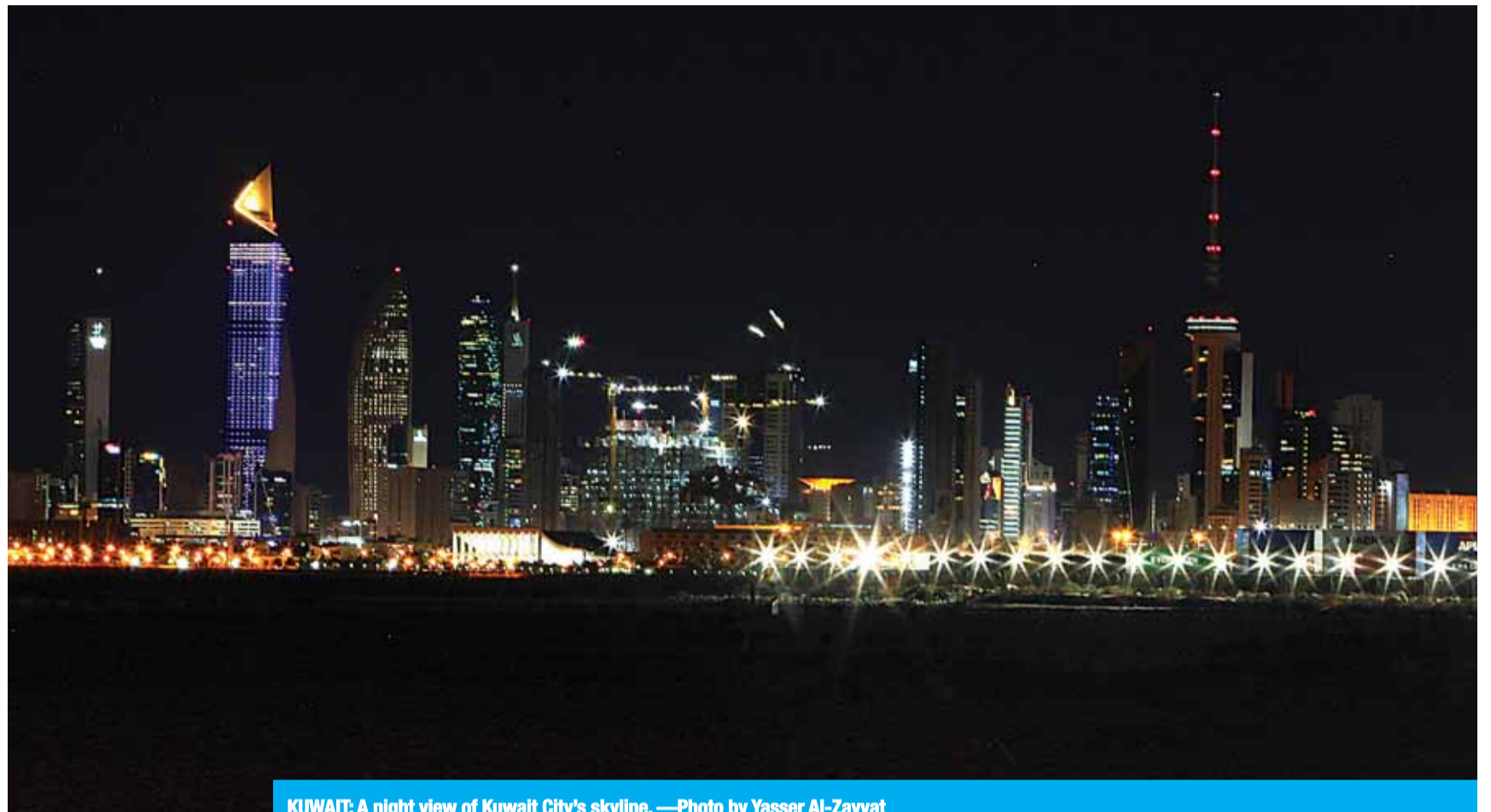
P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan down

TOKYO: Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan fell 21.9 percent from a year earlier to JPY 22.2 billion (\$214 million) in November, down for the 8th month due to weak exports, government data showed yesterday. However, Kuwait stayed in black ink with Japan for 12 years and 10 months, as exports still offset imports in value, the Finance Ministry said in a preliminary report. Overall Kuwaiti exports to Japan went down 20.0 percent year-on-year to JPY 38.0 billion (\$367 million) for the eighth straight month of decline. Imports from Japan shrank 17.1 percent to JPY 15.9 billion (\$153 million), down for the 7th month. Middle East's trade surplus with Japan also tumbled 59.1 percent to JPY 199.9 billion (\$1.9 billion) last month, with Japan-bound exports from the region diving 45.9 percent from a year earlier. Crude oil, refined products, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and other natural resources, which accounted for 93.2 percent of the region's total exports to Japan, decreased 47.6 percent.

The region's overall imports from Japan went down 15.8 percent, due to declining sales for automobiles, manufactured items and electric machinery. The world's third-biggest economy posted a global surplus of JPY 366.8 billion (\$3.5 billion) in November, marking the fifth straight month of black ink. Exports dropped 4.2 percent from the year before, as the coronavirus pandemic continued to batter overseas demand, especially for mineral fuels, steel and vehicles. Imports fell 11.1 percent on falling energy bills, mainly crude oil, LNG and coal. China remained Japan's biggest trade partner, followed by the US. The trade data are measured on a customs-cleared basis before adjustment for seasonal factors. —KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A night view of Kuwait City's skyline. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

stc receives 6 awards during Arab Media Forum

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that it received 6 awards during the 8th edition of the Kuwait Creativity Award 2020 forum. The awards were presented by the Arab Media Forum in appreciation of stc's unique TVC productions, creative advertising concepts, as well as other initiatives introduced while implementing its effective CSR agenda.

The company released a statement indicating that the honoring was officially announced during the ceremony held by the forum's organizing committee. Held under the patronage of Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, creative individuals, sponsors, participants, and volunteers were honored, with stc amongst the top of the list.

stc added, "These recognitions come in appreciation of the various initiatives and continuous support stc has projected towards the Kuwaiti community

throughout 2020. Despite the unprecedented circumstances witnessed locally and worldwide due to the novel Coronavirus outbreak, stc continued to implement and adapt its effective CSR agenda."

The Company highlighted that the honorable recognition was accepted by Danah Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, on behalf of the company. The award also served as a token of appreciation for the innovative and creative ideas implemented through the company's CSR program, which included a range of sponsorship and community-based initiatives.

In her role, Jasem said, "Accepting the awards this year felt unlike the previous years since this recognition was the first of its kind under our new identity, stc, following our rebranding exercise. The awards come as a testament to the dedication and hard work placed forth by stc throughout the year, in addition to the steps taken to implement the digital transformation strategy and enhance the range of innovative offerings to both individual and corporate customers."

Jasem added, "During 2020, we were keen to enhance our leadership role in the local market by offering an array of new-to-market and pioneering telecom services, leveraging the strong infrastructure and wide coverage of stc's 5G network. Throughout this time, we did not overlook our vital role of sup-

porting and giving back to the Kuwaiti community."

In relation to stc's CSR agenda, Jasem said, "In line with our CSR strategy, we focused, in our various activities, on the diversity and breadth of what we offer to the community. Our goal was to blend innovation in all that we do by collaborating with creative agencies, having said that, we are keen to continue supporting our society, as well as various sectors, such as healthcare, sports, technology, and education, in addition to implementing our internal initiatives that engage the stc family." In her concluding statement, Jasem extended her gratitude to the Arab Media Forum organizers, with a special thanks to Madhi Al-Khamees, General Secretary of the Ara Media Forum.

stc launched several community-based initiatives and awareness campaigns during 2020. These included joining the people of Kuwait in welcoming the holy month, sponsoring the Kuwaiti Football Association in its various activities, supporting the Kuwaiti Association for Learning Differences (KALD), and launching 5G LIVEBUS, a safe and innovative bus supported by super-fast 5G connectivity. The Company also released several TVCs throughout the year that were recognized during the forum, which included a TVC introducing stc's new brand identity, "Her Love is Known" produced by Doors Production in celebration of Kuwait's national day, and "Ramadan Lives On" produced by Wunderman Thompson.

Celebration of Victory Day of Bangladesh

Victory Day is celebrated on December 16 to commemorate the victory of allied forces over Pakistani forces in the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. In 1971, Bangladesh fought against Pakistan to become an independent country, which resulted in the secession of East Pakistan from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and established the sovereign nation called Bangladesh.

On March 7, 1971, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh, gave a speech at the Ramna Race Course in Dhaka to a gathering of over one million people. It was delivered during a period of escalating tensions between East Pakistan and the powerful political and military establishment of West Pakistan.

In the speech, Bangabandhu proclaimed: "This time the struggle is for our freedom. This time the struggle is for our independence." The speech inspired the Bengali people to prepare for a war of independence amid widespread reports of armed mobilisation by West Pakistan. On October 30, 2017, UNESCO added the speech in the Memory of the World Register as a documentary heritage.

On the night of March 25, 1971 the Pakistan Armed Forces launched Operation Searchlight in the capital of East Pakistan. Tanks rolled out on the streets of Dhaka. The troops massacred students and intellectuals in Dhaka University, as well as many civilians in other parts of the city. It set major cities ablaze and crushed resistance from the police and the East Pakistan Rifles (EPR).

Just before his arrest on the night of March 25, 1971 Sheikh Mujibur Rahman sent a message about attacks on EPR and police barracks in Dhaka, and declared the independence of Bangladesh. This message was broadcast from Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendro (Independent Bangla Radio Centre) on March 26, 1971, and was widely reported in newspapers all around the world.

The war pitted East Pakistan and later India against West Pakistan, and lasted for a duration of nine months. The war was one of the most violent wars of the 20th century: it witnessed large-scale atrocities, the exodus of 10 million refugees and the killing of 3 million people by the Pakistani armed forces. After nine months of bloody war, Bangladesh was liberated on December 16, 1971.

The celebration of Victory Day has been taking place since 1972. The Bangladesh Liberation War became a topic of great importance in cinema, literature, history lessons at school, the mass media, and the arts in Bangladesh. The ritual of the celebration gradually obtained a distinctive character with a number of similar elements: Military parade by the Bangladesh Armed Forces at the National Parade Ground, ceremonial meetings, speeches,



lectures, receptions and fireworks displays.

Victory Day in Bangladesh is a joyous celebration in which popular culture plays a great role. TV and radio stations broadcast special programs and patriotic songs. The main streets are decorated with national flags. Different political parties and socioeconomic organizations undertake programs to mark the day in a befitting manner, including the paying of respects at Jatiyo Smriti Soudho, the national memorial at Savar in Dhaka District.

The day's highlight is the national holiday parade on Dhaka's National Parade Ground, hosted by the Bangladesh Armed Forces and involves personnel from paramilitary forces such as the Bangladesh Police, Border Guard Bangladesh, Bangladesh Jail and Bangladesh Ansar and also freedom fighters. The parade is reviewed by the President of Bangladesh in his capacity as Commander in Chief.

Kuwait recognized Bangladesh on November 4, 1973. Since then, the two friendly countries have been maintaining excellent bilateral relations in the field of trade and economic cooperation, export and import, education and cultural cooperation, labour market and defence cooperation. We deeply acknowledge the contribution of Kuwait in the natural calamities and making socioeconomic development in Bangladesh through Kuwait Fund and hosting around 350,000 migrant workers.

Similarly, whenever situation demanded, Bangladesh stood shoulder-to-shoulder with our time-tested friend Kuwait. Participation of Bangladesh Army as a part of coalition forces during liberation of Kuwait in 1990, presence of Bangladesh Military Contingent since 1991, sending of a 100-man emergency medical team during this COVID-19 period are worth mentioning.

On this joyous Victory Day, we convey our best regards and gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the beautiful people of Kuwait. May Bangladesh and Kuwait friendship live long. —Embassy of Bangladesh



Kuwait lists 261 new COVID cases, no deaths

KUWAIT: Kuwait listed 261 new coronavirus infections yesterday, which raised the total number of cases to 146,971, while no deaths were recorded over the past 24 hours as the death toll remained unchanged at 913, the health ministry said. The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood yesterday at 3,149, with 54 of them in intensive care units, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, who revealed that 6,633 swab tests were conducted over the same period, bringing the total up to 1,196,920. The ministry had earlier reported that 310 patients had recovered from the virus within a 24-hour span, raising total recoveries to 142,909. Dr Sanad urged the public to abide by health precautions, mainly following social distancing rules, which he said is instrumental to halting the spread of the virus. —KUNA



The multilingual forum of Indian poets and writers residing in Kuwait held a meet up recently via Zoom to bid farewell to members Madhulika Mohta and S Qamar Minto, who are leaving Kuwait for good.

Taiba Hospital featured in int'l COVID-19 response recognition program



KUWAIT: Taiba Hospital was recognized at the International Hospital Federation Beyond the Call of Duty for COVID-19 Program for its response action plan along with over 100 hospitals from 27 countries. Taiba Hospital received the recognition badge after a thorough review of an international review committee consisting of 16 industry experts from the healthcare industry.

Recognized hospitals of the International Hospital Federation Beyond the Call of Duty for COVID-19 Program are featured in an extensive international media campaign honoring hospitals and health service providers worldwide in their fight against COVID-19.

Taiba Hospital procedures included the following:

- Triage and examination using pathological identification of cases, signs and symptoms, temperature measurement at all hospital entrances.
 - Separating suspected cases from other patients and preventing them from being together in waiting rooms.
 - Provide isolation rooms to isolate suspected patients.
 - Commit to personal protective equipment and hand hygiene.
 - Continuous sterilization and cleaning throughout the hospital in line with international standards.
- IHF Chief Executive Officer Ronald Lavater said the outstanding work in response to the pandemic is transforming the future of healthcare. "One of our motivations in creating this recognition program is to highlight the diversity and agility of the hospital industry in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic forced hospitals to develop, implement and adopt new ways to operate and many of these changes have accelerated positive transformation in the delivery of care."

The International Hospital Federation Beyond the Call of Duty for COVID-19 Program is sponsored by the Ashikaga - Nikken Group and the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA).



Rohingya man reunites with 'dead' family

Terror, then safety: How a boy survived Nigeria abduction

Page 6

Page 7



TEHRAN: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei meets the family of slain Iranian top general Qasem Soleimani yesterday. — AFP

Rouhani: Iran 'very happy' Trump leaving

Khamenei says US 'enmities' towards Iran will not end with Trump

TEHRAN: President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday that Iran was "very happy" over the looming departure from office of US counterpart Donald Trump, who led a campaign of "maximum pressure" against the Islamic republic. President-elect Joe Biden, who defeated Trump at the ballot box in November, has signaled a willingness to return to diplomacy with Iran after four tense years under the outgoing president.

"Some say you are overexcited by the advent of Mr Biden. No, we are not, but we are very happy to see Trump leave," he said in televised comments at a cabinet meeting. "Thank God, these are his final days," Rouhani added, calling Trump a "tyrant", "the most unruly, lawless president" and a "terrorist and murderer".

The Electoral College confirmed Biden as the next US president on Monday even as the incumbent continues to refuse to accept defeat. The formal handover of power will take place on Jan 20 when Biden is sworn in. Tensions between Tehran

and Washington soared during Trump's presidency as his administration sought to bring Israel and the Gulf Arab states closer together with a hard line against Iran.

In 2018, Trump pulled Washington out of a landmark nuclear deal with Tehran and reimposed punishing unilateral sanctions. This January, Trump ordered an air strike near Baghdad airport which killed senior Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and drew retaliatory Iranian strikes targeting US troops in Iraq. Trump "creates obstacles for us purchasing (COVID-19) vaccines, (that is) how much this person is bereft of all ethical and human principles," Rouhani said.

Iran is the Middle Eastern country hardest-hit by the coronavirus pandemic with 52,670 deaths from more than 1.1 million cases, according to official figures. Vaccines and other humanitarian goods are supposed to be exempt from US sanctions but in practice few if any banks are willing to risk processing Iranian transactions for fear of incurring

heavy penalties in the US courts.

Since Biden's victory, Rouhani's government has repeatedly signaled its openness to the incoming US administration, although Iran's supreme leader has cautioned against hopes of an opening with the West. Rouhani said the outcome of the US election showed the American people's desire for a "law-abiding" president and called on the Biden administration to live up to the expectation. "If it wants to be on the correct path, it's there, and if it wants the wrong one, it's also there," he said.

Later yesterday, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said US "enmities" towards Iran will not cease with the looming departure from office of Trump. He reiterated his position that Iran should bolster itself to "nullify" sanctions imposed by the Trump administration, but should "not delay" in the event they can be lifted.

"You witnessed what Trump's America and Obama's America did to you," he was quoted as saying on his official website. "Enmities are not lim-

ited to Trump's America and will not end just because he has left office," Khamenei added, addressing the family of Soleimani. "Do not trust the enemy, this is my explicit advice."

Tensions between Tehran and Washington soared during Trump's presidency, especially after 2018, when he pulled Washington out of a landmark nuclear deal and reimposed punishing unilateral sanctions. Khamenei has on previous occasions cautioned against hopes of an opening with the West. Khamenei underlined that if sanctions "can be lifted, we should not delay it for even an hour."

But he warned: "Do not rely on (others') promises to solve the people's problems (and) do not forget enmities. I will support the country's authorities on the condition that they remain true to the nation's goals." Khamenei's meeting with the slain general's family was his first public engagement since an official close to his office moved to squash rumors about his health last week. — AFP

Erdogan calls US sanctions 'attack on sovereignty'

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday called US sanctions against Ankara over its purchase of a Russian missile defense system an "open attack" on the NATO member state's sovereignty. The United States made good on months of threats to punish Turkey for buying the S-400 system under a 2017 law known as CAATSA, which aims to limit Russia's military influence and punish it for its behavior abroad.

The sanctions were lighter than feared, but Erdogan noted that they had never before been used against a fellow member of NATO. "Sanctions are imposed on our country, a NATO member. What kind of an alliance is this?" Erdogan asked during a televised speech in Ankara. "This decision is an open attack on our sovereignty," he added. Washington had already punished Ankara in July by barring it from developing parts for and acquiring America's next-generation F-35 fighter jets.

This week's punitive measures included a ban on all US export licenses and loan credits for Turkey's

military procurement agency. Its president Ismail Demir and three other executives were also barred from travel or holding assets in the US. The State Department said the sanctions "are not intended to undermine the military capabilities or combat readiness of Turkey... but rather to impose costs on Russia in response to its wide range of malign activities".

'Sanctions trigger'

But in his first public comments about the sanctions, Erdogan called them unjust. He repeated Turkey's claim that Washington would not sell the US equivalent to the S-400, the Patriot, to Ankara. US officials say Turkey was offered the system, but that negotiations broke down after Ankara demanded to also obtain proprietary production and operations data about the Patriots. "The more Turkey grows, the more Turkey inches closer to its goals, the more it stands up for its sovereign rights, the more it is subjected to attacks," Erdogan said. "Because we met our needs somewhere else, they pulled the sanctions trigger."

Washington says the S-400 system would put the security of US military technology and personnel at risk, as well as providing funds to the Russian defense industry. Erdogan said Turkey offered to resolve the issue through diplomacy and would now redouble its efforts to developing its own arsenal.

(IDEA), 61 percent of countries had by the end of November 2020 implemented measures to curb COVID-19 "that were concerning from a democracy and human rights perspective". "These violated democratic standards because they were either disproportionate, illegal, indefinite or unnecessary in relation to the health threat," it said in a report. IDEA said that while such troubling developments were less common in democracies they were "still quite widespread".

'Cover for violations'

UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet has also warned that while many states had adopted justifiable and temporary measures "there have also been deeply worrying cases where governments appear to be using COVID-19 as a cover for human rights violations". Paris-based press freedom group Reporters Without Borders said in a report on 2020 that emergency measures adopted to tackle the pandemic "visibly contributed to a news and information lockdown" and resulted in journalists being detained and sometimes jailed.

According to US NGO Freedom House, "the condition of democracy and human rights has grown worse in 80 countries" since the pandemic began. As an example of global trends it cited Sri



ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks during a televised address yesterday. — AFP

"To make our defense industry independent, we will work twice as hard, we will accelerate our defense industry agency's projects, we will give more support to our defense-related companies," he said.

The sanctions are the latest thorn in US-Turkey relations, with the NATO allies at loggerheads over Syria, Libya and the eastern Mediterranean Sea. But with a month before the swearing in of President-elect Joe Biden, who once described Erdogan as an "autocrat", Ankara's language has generally softened towards Washington. — AFP

Freedom: Another casualty of COVID

PARIS: Measures imposed by governments to fight the COVID-19 pandemic have squeezed civil liberties worldwide, with authoritarian regimes seeking to exploit the restrictions as a way to shore up their sometimes shaky control on fast-changing societies, rights groups say. Demonstrations have been outlawed, elections postponed, and activists subject to even greater repression in a health emergency the political impact of which will still be felt when the pandemic is over.

In Guinea in west Africa, the government has banned all demonstrations until further notice, citing the fight against COVID. Hungary in central Europe is under a state of emergency until February. In Nigeria, a crackdown on protests against restrictions left several dead. Bolivia postponed its general elections for several months. In France, citizens had to fill out a form before being allowed to leave their homes during two lockdowns that lasted over three months in total.

According to the Sweden-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

Lanka, where the government "accelerated its authoritarian agenda... stepping up efforts to control independent reporting and unfavorable speech by ordering the arrest of anyone who criticizes or contradicts the official line on the coronavirus."

"We've seen in the last few months the President (Gotabaya Rajapaksa) consolidating power," Bhavani Fonseka, senior researcher at the private Centre for Policy Alternatives think-tank in Colombo, told AFP decriing a "weakening of checks and balances". In China, where the virus first emerged but has now largely been held in check, the authorities have adopted extremely coercive measures, with strict lockdowns of very large areas, massive screening and surveillance by drones.

In Egypt, where President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi is accused by activists of leading an authoritarian regime that has locked up tens of thousands of opponents, the pandemic was a chance to further squeeze liberties. The pandemic "merely offered the president a new guise within which to pass and enact oppressive legislation that either further entrenches preexisting practices already or introduces new, harsher conditions upon ordinary citizens," researcher Hafsa Halawa said in a joint report by the US Atlantic Council and Italian ISPI think tanks. — AFP

Iran nuclear deal parties try to defuse tensions

VIENNA: The remaining parties to the faltering 2015 Iran nuclear accord met yesterday after Tehran announced plans for a new breach of the deal, and as uncertainty reigns ahead of US President-elect Joe Biden's January inauguration. The meeting of the so-called "joint commission" includes China, France, Russia, Iran, Germany and Britain and is chaired by senior EU foreign affairs official Helga Schmid.

The meeting is being held virtually because of the coronavirus pandemic. The 2015 deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), has disintegrated steadily since US President Donald Trump withdrew from it in 2018 and went on to impose crippling economic sanctions on Iran.

Tehran has retaliated by progressively abandoning limits on its nuclear activity laid down in the deal, most recently planning to install advanced centrifuges at Iran's main nuclear enrichment plant in Natanz. Last week France, Germany and Britain - collectively known as the "E3" - condemned the plan as "deeply worrying".

Meanwhile, the assassination last month of prominent Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrazadeh has heightened tension in the region, with Iran blaming the killing on Israel. In the wake of Fakhrazadeh's death, Iranian MPs passed a bill calling for further expansion to Iran's nuclear program and an end to inspections of nuclear facilities by the UN watchdog International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The Iranian foreign ministry said it did not agree with the bill and President Hassan Rouhani has suggested he will not sign it into law. Rouhani has defied criticism from Iran's ultra-conservatives to state his determination to seize the "opportunity" presented by the change of US president in January.

Rouhani has said Iran is ready to come back into compliance with the deal as soon as other parties fulfill their commitments. President-elect Biden has said he is willing to return to the deal but has revealed little else about forthcoming US strategy on the question. — AFP

International

Biden joins battle for Senate as top Republican accepts win

Russian, Brazilian, Mexican leader congratulate president-elect

ATLANTA: President-elect Joe Biden threw his weight behind the Democratic battle for control of the US Senate on Tuesday, as his White House win was finally acknowledged by top Republicans and holdout foreign leaders. Biden flew into Georgia—a southern state he won in an upset against President Donald Trump—to host a rally for two Democratic candidates in runoff races that will determine the Senate's balance of power.

"Honk for your next United States senators Jon Ossoff and Rev. Raphael Warnock," Biden told the crowd at the drive-in event in Atlanta as he urged voters to turn out in force on January 5.

"Send me these two men, and we will control the Senate!" One day after the Electoral College affirmed Biden's victory, attention shifted to the looming Senate battle—and to the shape of the incoming administration, as Biden also announced he had nominated Pete Buttigieg, a former mayor and presidential rival, as secretary of transportation.

Buttigieg would be the first openly gay person confirmed by the Senate to a presidential cabinet post-in line with Biden's pledge to usher in the most diverse cabinet ever when he takes office on January 20. And while Trump still refuses to concede—continuing to tweet baseless allegations of mass fraud that have been rejected in dozens of lawsuits—top Senate Republican Mitch McConnell finally broke his silence with a message to the president-elect.

"The Electoral College has spoken. So today I want to congratulate President-elect Joe Biden," McConnell said on the Senate floor, adding Americans can also "take pride" that they will have their first female vice president in Kamala Harris.

Biden told reporters before flying to Georgia that he had a "good" phone conversation with McConnell, a longtime Senate colleague.

"I told him that while we disagree on a lot of things, there are things we can work together on," Biden said. The Electoral College confirmation triggered an acknowledgement of Biden's win from Russian President Vladimir Putin, who said he was "ready for collaboration" with the Democrat. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and Mexico's Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador—who had both waited until now to recognize the president-elect—also sent their congratulations.

Turn the page

Trump, in unprecedented fashion, has yet to acknowledge his defeat in the chaotic election that will see him exit the White House after a single four-year term. In the wake of McConnell's message to the president-elect Tuesday, Trump suggested he would continue to fight the results and aired unproven claims that November's poll was "rigged".

"Too soon to give up," he said in a second tweet. "Republican Party must finally learn to fight. People are angry!" But Biden urged the divided country to "turn the page" as he welcomed the Electoral College vote on Monday, saying US democracy proved "resilient" against Trump's "abuse of power."

He praised voters for casting ballots in record numbers despite fears of COVID-19 and "enormous political pressure, verbal abuse and even threats of physical violence."

The White House transition is occurring with the coronavirus pandemic surging, pushing US



WILMINGTON, Delaware: US President-elect Joe Biden waves as he arrives at Newcastle Airport in Wilmington, Delaware on Tuesday. — AFP

COVID-19 deaths above 300,000. While critical winter months lie ahead, a bright spot has emerged with health care workers receiving the first doses of the coronavirus vaccine distributed in the nation.

And with top infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci recommending Biden and Harris quickly take the vaccine, the president-elect said they would receive the shot in public view.

Although the door has all but shut on his efforts to overturn the vote results, Trump has remained defiant. In a threatening move against Republican leaders in Georgia, where he has made baseless claims of massive voter fraud, he retweeted a pro-Trump lawyer who posted a picture of Georgia's governor and secretary of state, saying "they will soon be going to jail." — AFP

News in brief

27,000 artefacts seized in France

PARIS: French authorities have seized a "priceless" haul of over 27,000 archaeological artefacts ranging from Bronze Age bracelets to Roman coins that had been secretly amassed by a single person in the east of the country, customs said yesterday. The seizure of the 27,400 objects was the result of a year-long investigation conducted by French customs, Belgian authorities and the French culture ministry. The hoarder, who has not been named and now faces a criminal probe, had built up the collection for personal and trading purposes, the French customs service said. He had amassed the collection himself using metal detectors as well as what appears to be a deep archaeological knowledge. — AFP

EU okays more Belarus sanctions

BRUSSELS: EU ambassadors agreed yesterday further economic sanctions on Belarus over its brutal crackdown on opposition protesters, targeting 29 individuals and seven firms or organizations, diplomats said. The measures, to be formalized with the publication of the list today, will be the third round of sanctions the European bloc has imposed on the regime of Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko. Lukashenko, his son, and more than 50 Belarus officials are already under EU sanctions. — AFP

EU members to start vaccine jabs

BRUSSELS: The EU's 27 member countries aim to start COVID-19 vaccinations on "the same day" in a sign of unity, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said yesterday. Her statement to the European Parliament came as pressure mounted on the bloc to catch up with the United States and Britain, which have already started inoculating people with a vaccine made by Pfizer and BioNTech. "To get to the end of the pandemic, we will need up to 70 percent of the population vaccinated. This is a huge task, a big task. So let's start as soon as possible with the vaccination together, as 27, with a start at the same day," von der Leyen told MEPs. — AFP

Russia frees jailed activist

MOSCOW: A Russian opposition activist who was jailed for repeatedly violating protest laws during mass anti-Kremlin demonstrations last year was released from detention yesterday. Konstantin Kotov, an activist and computer programmer, was convicted in September last year under a 2014 law that introduced stiffer sentences for anyone caught taking part in unsanctioned demonstrations more than twice in six months. "I'm delighted that my detention is over," he said. "We need to continue working on protecting human rights in Russia, one way or another," he said. — AFP

Ban on 'conversion therapy' sought

LONDON: More than 300 religious leaders from 35 countries yesterday called for a ban on "conversion therapies" which attempt to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. The call for an end to the practice, often done in the name of a religious faith, was issued in a statement by the British Ozzanne Foundation before a London conference. — AFP

Lovesick Scot jailed for breaching COVID rules on jet-ski odyssey

LONDON: A lovesick Scottish man who bought a jet-ski so he could evade lockdown measures to visit his girlfriend in the Isle of Man has been jailed for breaching coronavirus restrictions, reports said.

Dale McLaughlan from Ayrshire in southern Scotland met his girlfriend while working as a roofer on the island in the Irish Sea in September, the BBC reported Tuesday. Coronavirus restrictions on the tax haven-famous for the annual Tourist Trophy motorcycle race-mean non-residents currently require special permission to land on the island.

But after returning to Scotland when his contract ended, McLaughlan was denied permission to re-enter the island, the BBC said. Undeterred, the 28-

year-old bought a jet-ski and set off last Friday to make the 40-kilometre (25-mile) sea-crossing by stealth. He had never ridden a jet-ski before and expected the journey to take around 40 minutes, prosecutors told a court in Douglas, the island's main town, according to the BBC.

But the journey across the choppy waters—which have an average December temperature of around eight degrees Celsius (46 degrees Fahrenheit) according to Ireland's meteorological service—took over four hours. He then had to walk 24 kilometers (15 miles) to his girlfriend's home.

On Sunday he was arrested by police after they found out he had arrived illegally and visited night-clubs with his girlfriend. Deputy High Bailiff Christopher Arrowsmith said McLaughlan had made a "deliberate and intentional attempt to circumnavigate" the border restrictions, and jailed him for four weeks, the BBC said. McLaughlan's defense lawyer said he had suffered from depression at not being able to see his partner. — AFP



A photo posted on the internet of McLaughlan arriving in Ramsey harbor, Isle of Man, after a four-hour trip by jet ski across the chilly and choppy Irish Sea, before walking 24 kilometers to see his girlfriend. — AFP

Terror, then safety: How a boy survived Nigeria abduction

ANKARA, Nigeria: Gunmen arrived late Friday at his school in Kankara, northwestern Nigeria, just as he and his classmates were about to go to bed. Their first thought was that the men were vigilantes-civilians who take on a policing role—"so, we were not scared," the 18-year-old told AFP.

But then, heavy firing started. "We became terrified. Some of us ran to the perimeter fence trying to escape, while others hid inside." "They kept shouting we should come back, that they were in the school to rescue us. And most of us came back."

In an operation that left the country reeling, hundreds of students were rounded up that day at the all-boys Government Science secondary school and taken away. The disappearance was initially blamed on so-called bandits-criminal groups in the region who for years have terrorized

communities by killing and abducting people for ransom. But on Tuesday, Boko Haram, the dreaded group that kidnapped hundreds of schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014, claimed responsibility.

The abduction took place hundreds of miles (kilometers) away from Boko Haram's stronghold in northeast Nigeria, sparking fears of a massive advance in the jihadists' decade-long insurgency.

Lanky and soft-spoken, Ahmad explained how the students were rounded up under a tree, split into three groups and led through the forest. "We had no footwear," he said, his feet swathed in black socks after they became riddled with thorns. The teenager said the group trekked for hours, heading towards neighboring Zamfara state.

"They flogged us with tree branches and the flat side of their machetes,"



KANKARA: Parents wait outside the government science secondary school where gunmen abducted students in Kankara, in northwestern Katsina state, Nigeria. — AFP

he recalled. But then came a stroke of luck. He and a friend were able to hide behind a bush. They waited for complete silence to prevail before they retraced their steps back home to safety. The government has not immediately reacted to Boko Haram claim or confirmed its authenticity, and the

number of missing students remains unclear — 320 or 333, according to two accounts by officials, while locals in Kankara put it at more than 500. Among parents of missing students, many said they had long feared an attack, given the grip on the region by criminal gangs. — AFP

Hostile climate has LGBT Hungarians eyeing emigration

BUDAPEST: As Hungary intensifies its crackdown on gay rights, including an effective ban on same-sex adoption, some LGBT Hungarians are close to quitting the country while others have already left.

"It motivates me to leave, that I may not be able to have the life with my partner that we dream about, to maybe have family in the future," Barbara Pongracz, a 31-year-old recruitment consultant, told AFP.

"I am just fed up with this negative environment," said Pongracz, who also DJs at LGBT events. Prime Minister Viktor Orban has enacted a socially conservative policy agenda in recent years, shaping Hungary into what he calls a bastion against liberal ideologies. On Tuesday, parliament passed a constitutional amendment declaring that "the mother is a woman, the father is a man" as the government doubles down on traditional definitions of family and marriage.

Another new law says that only married couples can adopt children, practically excluding LGBT Hungarians as gay marriage is not permitted in Hungary. The legislative wave this year has been accompanied by rising anti-gay sentiment in the media, sometimes voiced by senior politicians.

Orban himself urged gay people to "leave our children alone" in October. Only weeks later, Jozsef Szajer, a co-founder of Orban's ruling Fidesz party and the main author of Hungary's rewritten 2012 constitution, resigned as an MEP after Belgian police caught him fleeing from a gay orgy in Brussels that breached lockdown rules. "I'm not surprised that there are gays in Fidesz," said Pongracz. "That makes it all the more disturbing how they talk about LGBT people."

Polarization

"The LGBT community has become a scapegoat," said Marcell Lenart, a 39-year-old freelance translator, who says attitudes on the street have "polarized" recently. "If I hold hands with my partner in public people now either demonstrate their progressiveness or they are openly homophobic," Lenart said. "But we just want to be left alone," he said.

Faced with the raft of legislation, especially the ban on same-sex parenting and the recent dissolution of an equality authority that handled workplace and housing discrimination cases, Lenart has also considered leaving Hungary. "I'm not thinking of adopting right now, but if that changed soon it is upsetting that basically I cannot do that here," he said.

Harassment

Ivett Ordog, 40, made her decision to emigrate shortly after another law was passed in May that reversed regulations allowing transgender citizens to



A woman takes part in an LGBT Pride Parade in Budapest

change the gender listed on legal documents. Previously a spokesperson for the "Drop 33" campaign that opposed the legislation, she moved to Berlin in August, where she works as an engineering manager.

"I feel more calm here, before moving I started developing psychological issues," she told AFP. Ordog says the new law puts trans people at risk of getting harassed in situations when they must show their identity papers, forcing them to come out as trans for example when collecting a package at the post office or accessing public services. — AFP

International

Rohingya man narrates his incredible reunion with 'dead wife and daughter'

In-depth probes reveals shocking human trafficking of the Rohingya

LHOKSEUMAWE, Indonesia: Weeks after a funeral for the wife and daughter he thought had died at sea trying to reach him, Nemah Shah was stunned when he saw online images of them emerging from a refugee boat in Indonesia.

What followed was an incredible reunion story retold during an in-depth investigation into human trafficking of the Rohingya, a stateless Muslim minority group driven out of Myanmar. As he was still grieving the loss of his family, Shah said he was astonished to see his wife and daughter among a boatload of 100 Rohingya refugees who landed near the Indonesian town of Lhokseumawe in June. "When I recognized my wife and daughter," Shah said, referring to the online images, "it was the happiest day of my life."

Video and photos taken of the landing by international media, including AFP, showed Shah's wife and daughter among those getting out of a rickety boat pulled to shore by concerned locals.

Shah was in Malaysia, where at least 100,000 Rohingya people live as refugees, working as a laborer in the construction industry earning the equivalent of \$500 a month. The arrival of the boat was huge news in the Rohingya community there and Shah, 24, watched the footage online.

Through the Rohingya network, Shah was eventually able to connect with his wife, Majuma, by mobile phone. The call lasted just a few minutes. It was enough for Shah to promptly quit his job and start making plans to get to Indonesia.

Months later, and against all odds, Shah was reunited with Majuma and their six-year-old daughter Fatima, living together in their new home—a makeshift cubicle in former school buildings in Lhokseumawe that Indonesian authorities have turned into a camp for the refugees.

Never see her again

Rohingya have for decades endured persecution in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, where they are not recognized as citizens, and smuggling routes out by land and sea have long existed. Shah said he fled Myanmar six years ago, ending up in relatively affluent and Muslim-majority Malaysia.

He left behind Majuma and his then infant daughter. They too soon escaped Myanmar, but only across the border into neighbouring Bangladesh where they joined a million Rohingya living in dire conditions in refugee camps.

After years of saving tiny amounts that Shah was able to send back to Bangladesh, Majuma was able to pay people smugglers for a spot on a boat to Malaysia. But while traffickers promise their passengers will make the roughly 4,000-kilometre (2,500-mile) journey to Malaysia in a week, the reality can be months at sea, without even making it there—or worse. More than 200 are believed to have died at sea this year, according to the UN's refugee agency, with starvation, illness, dehydration and beatings by the smugglers among the reasons. Majuma and Fatima left in February. But after Shah



Rohingya migrant Nemah Shah (left) with his six-year-old daughter Nosmin Fatimah and his wife Majuma (right) after being reunited at a temporary shelter in Lhokseumawe in Aceh province. —AFP

did not hear from them for months, he gave up hope and held a funeral ceremony.

"I told myself I would never get married again and always remember them," he said.

Inside the Lhokseumawe refugee camp, hundreds of Rohingya anxiously wait for news about their future. Like the others, the newly reunited

family is reliant on handouts and unable to travel—far cry from the hoped-for life in Malaysia.

"Sometimes it upsets me because I had freedom in Malaysia. I could work," Shah said. But reuniting with his wife and daughter trumped all else. "By the grace of God, I found them here at the camp and we're now reunited." —AFP

Rohingya women face odyssey of misery

KUTUPALONG, Bangladesh: Stay in a squalid refugee camp—hopeless, starving, and made to feel a burden—or leave, risking death, rape, human trafficking and months at sea to reach a husband you've never met. This is the bleak choice many Rohingya women, already scarred from fleeing violent persecution in Myanmar, are now facing.

As conditions deteriorate in increasingly overcrowded Bangladeshi refugee camps, desperate parents are marrying off their daughters to Rohingya men thousands of kilometers (miles) away in Malaysia. Wed by phone or video apps, the girls have little say in such unions and rely on occasional calls to build a relationship with their new partners as they begin treacherous journeys to reach them. "My parents kept asking me to find a way to reach Malaysia—living with them, I was just an extra mouth to feed," explained Jannat Ara, talking about her marriage to Nur Alam, a Rohingya man who lives in Kuala Lumpur.

She has seven other siblings, and the family had to share and survive on twice-monthly 25-kilogram (55-pound) rations of rice. Ara has never met the man she married via phonecall from the refugee camp but, after mounting pressure from relatives to seek him out, decided to leave.

She is one of the thousands of Rohingya, who are



In this file photo, Rohingya women wait in line to have their fingerprints taken as they go through identification procedures by Indonesian police at the immigration detention center in Lhokseumawe in Indonesia's North Aceh Regency. —AFP

stateless and cannot travel abroad legally, forced to put their faith in husbands they don't know and the people smugglers paid to transport them.

Her clandestine route took her via rickshaw to port, and from a small boat to a packed, dilapidated trawler. But Malaysia denied it entry and "after floating at sea for two months and seeing many people die, we returned to the place where we started," the 20-year-old told AFP from the Bangladeshi camps. Arranged marriages are part of Rohingya custom, but in the Bangladeshi refugee

camps, families have little income and struggle to afford the traditional dowries required.

Virtual weddings and international betrothals can seem an ideal solution. At just 18, Somuda Begum was regarded as getting "too old" for marriage by relatives, and while proposals came from some families within the camp, they all demanded "a lot of money". "My parents couldn't fix my marriage as my old father barely had any money to pay for a wedding. So he thought it would be better to send me to Malaysia instead," she said. —AFP

Careless talk costs lives: A North Korean execution

SEOUL: As a teenager in North Korea, Lee Soon-keum bitterly resented her prisoner-of-war father as his status meant she would have to toil in coal mines like him. Years later, she says she was forced to watch him and her brother executed by firing squad.

After the Korean War ended in 1953, North Korea kept tens of thousands of the South's captured troops, putting them to work in its mines and construction sites. Escapees and activists say their descendants have inherited their fate, condemned to labor digging coal—a major earner for Pyongyang until sanctions blocked exports. Growing up in Kyonghung in the country's far northwest, Lee knew from an early age that like almost all POW daughters—she would be sent to the mines for seven years after she left school.

"When I was 13, I found out that my father was a POW and I really resented him for it," she said.

"I asked him why he didn't get killed in the war so that he wouldn't have met my mother and given birth to us," Lee, who defected to the South in 2010 and now lives in Seoul, told AFP that her father's longing to return to his South Korean home town of Pohang proved his undoing.

He regularly sang its praises to her and her siblings, telling them that they would be welcomed there as "the children of a hero" when the peninsula was reunified. But her brother—also assigned to work in the mine—repeated his boasts at a drinking session with workmates, one of whom reported them to authorities. One evening six months later, security personnel arrived at the family home and dragged away Lee's brother. A few weeks later they returned for her father.

She heard nothing more, until one day guards took her—without explanation—to a patch of wasteland by a bridge where a crowd had been assembled. A jeep arrived carrying the two men, who looked weak and as if they had been beaten. "My brother had shrunk like a child and my father had dried up like a twig," Lee said. An official denounced them as traitors before they were tied to two posts set up in the earth.

Teams of three executioners shot both of them



North Korean defector Lee Soon-keum, daughter of a South Korean POW, says she bitterly resented her father for being a Southern prisoner of war because she would have to toil in coal mines like him. —AFP

dead. Lee's mind has blocked out the moment when they were killed, but she locked eyes with her father in the last seconds of his life, and breaks down at the memory. "As my father stared at me," she said, "it seemed like he was telling me to go back to his hometown." —AFP

Fijians told to seek shelter as super cyclone closes in

SUVA: Fijians living in the path of an approaching super cyclone were told to hunker down at home or flee to emergency shelters immediately yesterday, as authorities warned the storm has the potential to uproot buildings and cause mass destruction.

The Fiji Meteorological Service said Cyclone Yasa had intensified to a top-of-the-scale Category Five storm, with devastating gusts of up to 280 kilometers per hour (174 miles per hour). It was on track to hit Fiji late today and the National Disaster Management Office said around two-thirds of the island nation's population of 900,000 are in its path.

In the capital Suva yesterday, residents tried

their best to board-up windows and storefronts, while others lugged bags filled with vital provisions through already flooded streets. National Disaster Management Office director Vasiti Soko urged anyone who doubted their home's structural integrity to prioritize survival over protecting their property and escape right away.

"If you need to move to an evacuation center, we are pleading that you move before it gets dark," Soko said. "If you know that your house cannot survive strong winds, let alone the cat five cyclone that is on the way, please take yourselves, your children and your valuables to the evacuation centre."

Soko said Cyclone Yasa was likely to have a larger impact than Cyclone Harold in April this year, another Category Five storm that gouged a trail of destruction across the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga.

Category Five cyclones were once rare but have become more common in recent years, with Fiji Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama among those blaming the trend on climate change. "We can see



Fijians living in the path of an approaching super cyclone were told to hunker down at home or flee to emergency shelters immediately yesterday.

the eye (of Cyclone Yasa) and the area that's of concern—it's not just part of Fiji like Harold, it's the whole of Fiji," Soko said. —AFP

News in brief

HK civil servants make loyalty oaths

HONG KONG: Hong Kong civil servants swore a new pledge of allegiance to the government yesterday in the first ceremony overseen by the city's leader to enforce greater loyalty in the governing class after last year's huge democracy protests. Chief executive Carrie Lam stood before a group of senior officials at a closed-door ceremony for the pledge, which all the finance hub's 180,000 civil servants will be expected to make in the coming weeks. Those taking the oath promise to uphold Hong Kong's mini-constitution and "bear allegiance" to the city and its government. A government spokesperson said the oath-taking would "strengthen the public's confidence in political-appointed officials".

Fosun to buy 100m BioNTech doses

BEIJING: A Chinese pharmaceutical company said yesterday it had agreed to buy at least 100 million doses of the coronavirus vaccine from German company BioNTech, subject to Beijing approving its use. China has been rapidly developing its own Covid-19 vaccine candidates and ramping up production facilities, but local firms have also been partnering with foreign developers to supply the world's most populous country. Shanghai Fosun Pharmaceutical Group said its subsidiary had entered into an agreement with the German firm aimed at ensuring "an adequate supply" of vaccines in China, adding it will make an initial payment of 125 million euros (\$152 million) before year-end for 50 million doses. —AFP

El Salvador implementing migration rules

WASHINGTON: The US Department of Homeland Security said Tuesday that El Salvador has begun implementing an immigration scheme that allows people seeking asylum at the US border to be transferred instead to that dangerous Central American nation. The controversial measure known as the Asylum Cooperative Agreement (ACA) helps establish a "regional approach to migration" while also offering "protection to those migrants who are victims of persecution," said Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Chad Wolf. The measure affects "certain migrants requesting asylum or similar humanitarian protection at the US border," who then "will be transferred to El Salvador" according to a DHS statement. —AFP

US sets new 24-hour record infections

WASHINGTON: The US set a new daily record of COVID-19 cases Tuesday, with more than 248,000 infections registered in the past 24 hours, the Johns Hopkins University virus monitor reported. In the same period, 2,706 new deaths were recorded, according to data compiled by AFP based on information released by the university. Coronavirus infections have increased dramatically over the past month in the United States—new daily cases have been recorded at or above the 200,000 mark in 10 of the past 13 days. The number of hospitalized COVID patients — 113,000 — is also at its highest level since the beginning of the pandemic in March, according to data from the US Department of Health and Human Services. —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2020

Saudi cuts spending as 2020 deficit soars

Deficit to hit \$79bn as kingdom reels from low oil prices and pandemic

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia on Tuesday projected its 2020 budget deficit will soar to around \$79 billion, as the world's top crude exporter reels from low oil prices and a coronavirus-led economic downturn. Passing its budget for 2021, the kingdom also announced it was slashing government spending in a bid to reduce the shortfall during the year ahead, as it faces an eighth consecutive annual deficit.

Saudi Arabia expects to post a deficit of 298 billion riyals (\$79 billion) this year, or 12 percent of GDP, but expects it to fall next year to 141 billion riyals (\$37.6 billion), or 4.9 percent of GDP, the finance ministry said in its budget statement. The latest projection for the 2020 deficit dwarfs the \$50 billion that the kingdom had originally forecast going into this year, and the estimated \$35 billion recorded in 2019. "The (economic) crisis has been managed with great care and effectiveness, which led to the mitigation of the negative effects on the Saudi economy," Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was quoted as saying by state media.

"2020 was a difficult year for the whole world due to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, but the kingdom's economy has proven its ability to withstand its impact." The kingdom projects its economy—the largest

in the Arab world—will grow by 3.2 percent next year, largely recovering from a projected 3.7 percent contraction this year, the budget statement said.

The International Monetary Fund expects the kingdom's economy to shrink by 5.4 percent this year. Saudi Arabia has failed to balance its books since the oil price rout of 2014, prompting the petro-state to borrow heavily and draw from its reserves to plug the shortfall. The fiscal plans passed on Tuesday indicate a hard road to recovery for the kingdom—before the pandemic, it had bullishly predicted that the annual budget would be balanced by 2023. Saudi central bank reserves are expected to drop to 280 billion riyals (\$74.6 billion) next year from a projected 346 billion riyals (\$92 billion) this year, the finance ministry said.

Belt tightening

The kingdom is tightening its belt and pressing ahead with austerity measures amid low oil prices. Saudi Arabia plans to spend 990 billion riyals (\$263.91 billion) in 2021, according to the budget statement, a drop of about seven percent compared to this year. Oil income generates more than two-thirds of Saudi public revenues. In November, energy giant Aramco-Saudi

Arabia's cash cow—posted a 44.6 percent slump in profits for the third quarter, as the coronavirus pandemic weighs heavily on the global demand for crude oil. Saudi Arabia needs a crude price of about \$80 a barrel to balance its budget, economic experts say, higher than the current price of around \$50.

A drop in state revenues is expected to hinder Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ambitious "Vision 2030" reform program to overhaul the kingdom's energy-reliant economy. The austerity measures so far announced are expected to only partially rein in the yawning budget deficit.

In July, Saudi Arabia tripled its value added tax (VAT) to 15 percent, an unpopular measure that has weighed on household income, pushed up inflation and hit consumer spending. But the government has been careful not to cut public jobs and salaries amid already high youth unemployment. Nearly two-thirds of all Saudis are employed by the government, and the public sector wage bill accounts for roughly half of all government expenditure. In recent years, the petro-state has pushed other aggressive campaigns to diversify its income, hiking fees on expatriate workers and raising fuel and electricity prices. — AFP



RIYADH: A handout picture provided by the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) on Tuesday shows Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz giving a speech after signing the 2021 state budget during a virtual cabinet meeting in the capital Riyadh. — AFP



SYDNEY: Trade Minister Simon Birmingham denounced Beijing's 80 percent surcharge on Australian barley shipments as "not underpinned by facts and evidence", and suggested further WTO action could be in the pipeline.

Australia takes China to WTO as trade war deepens

SYDNEY: Australia called yesterday for the World Trade Organization to investigate Chinese tariffs on barley imports, turning to an "independent umpire" to adjudicate one of several bitter politically tinged disputes between the two nations. Trade Minister Simon Birmingham denounced Beijing's 80 percent surcharge on Australian barley shipments as "not underpinned by facts and evidence", and suggested further WTO action could be in the pipeline.

"We have continued to raise our concerns with China on numerous occasions," Birmingham said, lamenting that efforts to reach a negotiated settlement had failed. "We now believe that calling in the independent umpire is the most appropriate course of action to resolve this dispute," he added, admitting the process of arbitration and appeals could take years.

Australia's barley exports to China had been worth around \$1 billion a year before a recent drought, used most notably in brewing. It is the first time Australia has taken legal action against China at the WTO over what commentators have dubbed "shadow trade war" between Beijing and Canberra.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said an informal ban on Australia's multibillion-dollar coal exports, if confirmed officially, "would obviously be in breach of WTO rules". Beijing has rolled out a series of economic sanctions against Australian products, as diplomatic relations with Canberra have reached their lowest ebb since the deadly 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown. Many in Canberra believe the sanctions are punishment for Australia pushing back against Beijing's influence, rejecting Chinese investment in sensitive areas and publicly calling for an investigation into the origins of coronavirus. Each trade dispute has been billed as a technical issue, and in the case of barley China argues that Australian farmers produce the grain with government subsidies and sell it below cost, so should be subject to anti-dumping duties. Industry body GrainGrowers Australia welcomed the move to the WTO and said Chinese tariffs could cost the sector around \$1.9 billion over the next five years in lost exports. Experts say Beijing has been considering restricting Australian barley imports since 2018 owing to worries that China—which produces only around 20 percent of what it needs of the crop—is overly dependent on imports.

Escalation

Australia had until now shied away from taking the disputes to the Geneva-based organization, fearing resolution could take years, open Australia up to retaliatory claims and worsen relations further. At least 13 Australian sectors have been subjected to Chinese tariffs or some form of disruption, including beef, coal, copper, cotton, lobsters, sugar, timber, tourism, universities, wine, wheat and wool.

But Birmingham said: "We have a series of different actions that China has taken during the course of the year and each come with slightly different criteria for how you might respond at the WTO." The tensions have called into question Australia's highly successful economic model based on supplying the raw materials for China's breakneck emergence as a modern economy. — AFP

EU, UK narrow gaps on post-Brexit trade but no deal yet

BRUSSELS: British and EU negotiators were closing in yesterday on a deal to oversee fair competition in a post-Brexit trade deal, but remained deeply divided over fishing. As intense talks continued in Brussels, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said "the next days are going to be decisive". Many supposed deadlines have already been missed, the EU chief admitted. But, with two weeks until Britain leaves the EU single market, time is finally running out.

In London, all eyes were on parliament's lower House of Commons, which will have to decide when to meet to vote through any trade agreement reached by EU negotiator Michel Barnier and UK counterpart David Frost. Britain left the European Union on January 31 and, if no trade deal is agreed before the end of the year, EU-UK trade will revert to bare-bones World Trade Organization rules.

In practice, this will mean a return to tariffs and quotas that will disrupt commerce and supply chains and drive up prices, a fate both sides say they want to avoid. But trade talks have stumbled over how to ensure fair competition between EU and UK businesses once London is free to diverge over time from Brussels' regulations. And there is a bitter dispute over fishing, which represents a tiny part of the economy but has taken on totemic political significance for several member states, and which the EU has linked to the broader trade deal.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson insists that when Britain leaves the EU single market at the end of the year it will resume full control over access to its waters. Some EU member states—led by France and the Netherlands—are holding out to preserve quotas for their crews in UK waters and a long-term arrangement to provide stability. Addressing the European Parliament, Von der Leyen said: "The good news is that we have found a way forward on most issues." She added that she and Barnier can now see a "narrow path to an agreement".

Very difficult

"But this is now a case of us being so close, and yet being so far away from each other, because two issues still remain outstanding, you know them: a level playing field and the fisheries," von der Leyen said. A UK official

Russian economy hit hard despite shunning lockdown

MOSCOW: As the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic pummeled Russia over recent months, the Kremlin stopped short of bringing back a nationwide lockdown in an effort to save the economy.

Authorities in Moscow may have expected a rising virus toll as a result, but the move has not saved it from facing down an economic crisis it tried to avoid. "These aren't jokes. Unemployment is rising, wages are falling, basic goods are becoming more expensive by magnitudes," President Vladimir Putin said during a cabinet meeting last week. The magnitudes he was referring to are stark. Between January and November the price of sugar jumped by 70 percent. The cost of sunflower oil rose by 24 percent and pasta by 10 percent. After months of rising inflation—the effects of which have been compounded by the pandemic—Putin instructed ministers to introduce emergency measures to cap prices.

"It's unacceptable," he told them during the meeting. With economic and social discontent a growing weak point for Putin after two decades in power, analysts said the move may be cost-effective way to placate the public ahead of the holidays.

Political 'theatre'

"Money is becoming scarce. Life is getting more difficult," said Igor Nikolayev, director of the FBK Grant Thornton Institute of Strategic Analysis, who described

close to the talks confirmed that "we've made some progress, but we are still very far apart in key areas". Separately, ambassadors from EU member states approved a contingency plan to keep road and air traffic moving between Britain and the continent in the event of a "no deal".

This would allow trucks and planes to operate for an additional six months after January 1 — but only if Britain agrees reciprocal terms. They also backed a plan to authorize fishing to continue—again on a reciprocal basis—until the end of 2021, but London has already said it will assume full sovereignty over its waters on January 1. The European Parliament is now expected to approve these plans on Friday.



Anti-Brexit activist Steve Bray (right) holds placards and displays a banner as he stands on Whitehall in central London yesterday. — AFP

Von der Leyen said that Barnier and Frost had made progress towards resolving rules for state aid to businesses and that questions over how the deal will be governed "are largely being resolved".

She said Britain had agreed not to undercut the labor, social and environmental standards it already upholds under EU law. "That's a big step forward," she said. Now, however, the two sides must agree a mechanism to allow them to respond if standards diverge after Brexit.

Britain insists that it must be able to make its own laws in future and not necessarily follow new EU regulations. Brussels therefore wants a mechanism to impose penalties if this leaves EU firms at a disadvantage. On fishing, von der Leyen warned "the discussion is still very difficult". "We do not question the UK sovereignty on its own waters, but we asked for predictability and stability for our fishermen and our fishermen," she said. "And in all honesty, I sometimes feel that we will not be able to resolve this question." — AFP

'No-deal' Brexit will force up prices: BMW

FRANKFURT: A no-deal Brexit will make BMW and Mini cars in Britain and Europe more expensive, the German automaker's finance chief warned yesterday. If Britain and the European Union do not reach a post-Brexit trade agreement, a 10-percent customs tax would be applied to cars crossing the Channel, costing BMW hundreds of millions of euros, Nicolas Peter said in a conference call.

"The only way to mitigate some of that is to raise prices," he said. "Minis in Europe and BMWs in Britain will become more expensive."

BMW produces cars for export into the UK from the EU, while it assembles some Mini models for European customers at its plant in Oxford. Britain is BMW's fourth largest market, Peter said, and a no-deal would cost the car maker a "mid three-digit million amount".

Higher prices would lead to lower sales, he added, "which is why we are still hoping that a reasonable solution will be found". European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Wednesday said "the next days are going to be decisive", adding that there remained a "narrow path to an agreement" on post-Brexit trade. The UK, which officially left the EU on January 31, will abandon the single market and customs union on December 31.

Without a trade agreement, its business with the EU will be governed solely by World Trade Organization (WTO) rules. A solution may not arrive before Christmas, the BMW finance chief said. But he said he was still hoping a deal will be agreed "before the clock strikes midnight". The Brexit fallout is already making itself felt. Last week, Japanese carmaker Honda was forced to announce a production break at its British plant in Swindon because of a lack of spare parts, blocked by congestion at British ports as a result of Brexit preparations.

Even without an agreement, Peter expects logistics flows to stabilize quickly—possibly after "a few weeks" of turbulence. BMW added that it was "prepared" for all outcomes and "does not foresee any interruption" in production at the beginning of January. — AFP



MOSCOW: Cars slowly move in a traffic jam in Moscow. Authorities in Moscow have eased lockdown restrictions to help the businesses, but the move has not saved it from facing down an economic crisis it tried to avoid. — AFP

Putin's price control as a "political" move. He explained that staple foods are at record high prices globally, making the problem not just a Russian one. Putin's cabinet meeting was a piece of "theatre", said Andrei Movchan, a nonresident scholar in the Economic Policy Program at the Carnegie Moscow Center.

He explained that prices had fallen in previous years and were now stabilizing to their "normal inflation curve". But that may not matter to a Russian president who has to defend a mixed record on the economy and health at his annual marathon press conference today.

On top of rising prices, unemployment has jumped from 4.7 percent in March—just before a strict stay-at-home regime was introduced—to 6.3 percent in October. While Russians increasingly found themselves out of work, their real disposable incomes fell by 4.3 percent between January and September—when the second wave surged. In the second quarter of the year, the number of Russians living below the poverty line increased by 1.3 million compared to the first quarter, according to federal statistics agency Rosstat. By October, nearly 20 million people were living in poverty, Labour and Social Protection Minister Andrei Kotyakov has said. — AFP

Business

Gig economy workers say they can no longer survive

Meager earnings from jobs leave workers increasingly vulnerable

PARIS: Whether in Paris, Kuala Lumpur or California, gig economy workers fear they can no longer survive on meager earnings from jobs that leave them increasingly vulnerable. The term "gig" stretches back a century to jazz musicians who used it to refer to a one-off show but now the "gig economy" involves millions of people in all sorts of jobs, from Uber drivers to Deliveroo delivery teams.

Algorithm slaves

Wissem Inal does more than 700 kilometers (450 miles) a week on his scooter, delivering up to 10 takeout meals in the Paris suburbs every evening. "At the moment, with the lockdown I end up with 500 euros (\$600) a month net," said the 32-year-old who has driven for Deliveroo since 2017 but also takes jobs for Uber Eats and Stuart.

Inal has trouble seeing the "good side" of his job at the moment and criticizes calculations by Deliveroo's algorithm that decide how much to offer him for jobs. "A delivery that's worth six euros at noon is worth just three euros in the evening. You can't earn a living with this job, unless you're willing to live like a slave."

He recently joined an association of gig delivery drivers that seeks to improve working conditions. "We should be able to defend ourselves," he maintains.

'Flexibility' or 'on demand'?

When Erica Mighetto began driving with Lyft three years ago, "I just loved it", she said. Her grown son had left the house and she thought it would be a great move until she found a job in bookkeeping or property management. "I really enjoyed, you know, choosing my own hours," she told AFP. "I thought life was good."

Mighetto lived in Sacramento but would drive more than an hour to the San Francisco area on weekends because there was more work in the richer towns. She slept in her car or shelled out \$25 for a room. Mighetto was pulling in \$60-\$80 an hour before expenses in 2017 but a series of rate cuts caused that to fall to \$20 at the beginning of the year and to less than \$10 in March.

She finds the algorithms opaque and pernicious. "So it knows me personally," said Mighetto. "And the bonus offers were changed, you know, based on what I was willing to accept." If friends were getting bonus offers of \$50 for doing 20 rides per week, the algorithm would offer her \$350 — but for 120 rides a week.

To get enough jobs and claim the bonus, drivers would accept lower fees. "You're in this like, vicious cycle black hole," said Mighetto. She does not buy the argu-



The "gig economy" involves millions of people in all sorts of jobs, from Uber drivers to Deliveroo delivery teams.

ment that gig work is flexible. "I personally call it on demand work... there's no flexibility—you have to work when there's demand. You're going to work late nights, long weekends and every single holiday."

In the spring, she gave up driving for fear of catching COVID-19 but had to fight for unemployment benefits of \$450 per week instead of the \$167 paid to gig workers. She received a \$600 per week supplemental federal benefit that the US introduced as part of its COVID-19 stimulus measures but it ran out after four months.

Mighetto is bitter about a California referendum-backed by Uber to overturn a state law that would have forced gig firms to recognize their drivers as employees, and pay them minimum wages and benefits. California voters approved the measure with 58 percent of the vote.

"We shouldn't be stripping workers of basic labor protections so people can get cheap rides," she said.

Juggle the platforms

Twenty-seven-year-old Devon Gutekunst delivers for DoorDash, which just took in almost \$3.4 billion in its stock market debut. His smartphone offers him a job — \$5.50 for a 4.6-mile delivery in 30 minutes.

"That's the equivalent of \$11 an hour, that's too little," said Gutekunst. "My personal minimum is \$18 an hour. I often make more than that, because I have a strategy." Part of it is to be selective and focus on western Los Angeles and the beach towns of Marina Del Rey and Santa Monica. But mostly it consists of playing different

platforms off against each other. Gutekunst's job acceptance rate for DoorDash was 12 percent that day but he said it can often be just two percent. "To make decent money... you really have to juggle, to play with all the offers to make your living."

\$27 for 14-hour shift in Malaysia

Amal Fahmi, 24, keeps his eye glued to his cell phone and the Grab delivery app popular in Southeast Asia. He is one of many Malaysians who makes a living delivering food, medication and shopping by motorcycle in Petaling Jaya, an affluent suburb of Kuala Lumpur. Before COVID-19 hit, he was a driver for Grab in Johor, southern Malaysia. "I could easily make a comfortable living. But after the virus outbreak, life became tough as many people lost their jobs and my income was reduced," Amal said as he waited outside a department store for his ninth order of the day. Given the bleak prospects in Johor, he headed to the capital.

"There were no job opportunities in my home town as I lack academic qualifications," he explained.

Amal earns a little more than \$700 a month if he puts in long hours. That day he reached his daily average of \$27 after a grueling 14 hours. "Look around, there are so many of us doing delivery. It is getting tough," he said. Amal would prefer a steady job but does not completely regret the path he has chosen. What motivates me is I am the boss... I can manage my time and most importantly, no one scolds me," he laughed. —AFP

Rise of rural telework in Spain hit by digital divide

VILLALBA DE DUERO, Spain: Tired of Madrid's crowds, Antonio Linaje took advantage of the shift to telework sparked by the pandemic to move back to the village where he spent his holidays as a child.

The 28-year-old political consultant settled in October in a house he inherited from his grandparents in Villalba de Duero, a village of around 700 people about 170 kilometers (105 miles) north of the bustling Spanish capital. "I always dreamed of returning home," he said, stressing that the move was only possible thanks to the availability of high-speed fiber optic internet broadband in the village.

But for many Spaniards looking to make a similar move to the countryside during the pandemic, a lack of good internet access often stands in the way. Just over one in four Spaniards—some 13 million people—do not have decent internet access, according to Spanish trade union UGT.

This digital divide is the legacy of years of a lack of investment in Spain's depopulated interior, which has been emptied out by the flight of young people to cities since the 1950s in search of better job opportunities. Some parts of Spain have just two people per square kilometer—the same density as in Siberia. Carmen Rogado, a 36-year-old bank employee, said she abandoned her plan to move back to her home village of Arabayona de Mogica in western Spain because she could only get slow internet access there.

"You want to come back and in the end circumstances force you to stay in big cities," she said.

The problem is not unique to Spain. Two thirds of school-age children worldwide have no internet at home, according to a UN report published earlier this month, even as pandemic-induced school closures have made online access vital to getting educated.

The Spanish government has promised an ambitious European Union-funded program to provide "adequate" internet connectivity to 100 percent of Spain's population by 2025 as part of its efforts to revive the countryside. —AFP

Opinion

Rethinking energy projects' status quo

By Badar Chaudhry

A constant rush to build as much infrastructure and curate as much talent as possible is a narrative that has long pervaded the fossil fuel boom. But the energy transition — especially its surprising acceleration this year — is changing that. Now the burgeoning push to find project financing for new types of greener energy projects and innovations, notably renewables, nuclear and liquefied natural gas (LNG), is raising a very pressing question. How to avoid a potentially financially crippling surge in stranded fossil fuel assets, notably coal and oil?

A \$900bn red flag

The cost of writing off stranded assets could reach \$900bn worldwide — or one third of the current value of big oil and gas companies — if governments aggressively tried to meet the limit of 2°C, according to the Financial Times' Lex. Consider the financial burden of this figure amid lower oil prices, the economic strain of the Covid-19 pandemic, plus the cost of the energy transition. Wood Mackenzie expects a minimum of \$30-\$40trn of investment is needed to put the world on a 2°C or lower pathway.

Of course, the potential financial strain will differ region-to-region. For example, oil and gas will remain a central part of the Middle East's energy basket up to 2050. This is not a failure, but key to sustaining energy security as the world finds its greener footing. That the 'fast drop of commercial oil' will very likely be from a Middle Eastern well reduces the region's immediate risk of stranded assets, but the risk must still be factored in as the renewable portfolio matures. The combined shares of oil and gas as part of the region's energy mix will fall from 98 percent in 2018 to 61 percent in 2040 with a Rapid scenario, 37 percent in a Net Zero scenario, and 79 percent in a Business as Usual (BAU) scenario, according to BP Outlook.

Pick your path

So, how to mitigate the risk of losing the billions of dollars invested in existing fossil fuel infrastructure, much of it based on multi-decade contracts and multi-decade debt packages? One route is to continue business as usual and risk the hyperbole image of stranded assets — a bleak landscape with rusting infrastructure en masse creaking in the wind — becoming an expensive reality in the next few decades.

Another route is one of proactivity, which sees legacy infrastructure getting a reboot to make it more aligned with the Paris Agreement goals. Broadly speaking, this means embracing a circular

carbon economy (CCE), which in turn, includes bolstering energy efficiency within legacy infrastructure, updating human resources skillsets, and applying the digital tools of the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) to help maximize value and relevance.

This is an undeniably vast and complex task, but it is our best chance at stabilizing the environmental and economically human-induced elements of climate change. Improving energy efficiency and switching to renewable energy will address 55 percent of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, detailed the Ellen McArthur Foundation. But by adopting circular practices, the world can reduce a significant proportion of the remaining 45 percent.



The systems-based approach of a circular carbon economy combines economic opportunity with better environmental and societal outcomes by addressing the multitude of facets of the energy transition — i.e. water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, packaging pollution and more. All parties in all industries must zoom their lower carbon microscopes on their supply chains — both linear and interconnecting — to redefine environmental efficiency from production through to the end user. And back again. Climate finance plays a vital role in this positive disruption, starting with educating stakeholders about what greener finance means and how to leverage it.

Plus, the price tag of this route is far less than that of stranded assets or the catastrophic impacts of unmitigated climate change. Payback margins are increasingly appealing in today's economic environment. For example, the Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA) calculated that every dollar invested in building climate resilience could result in between \$2-\$10 in net economic benefits.

Domino effect

Let us not forget that the value of a circular carbon economy goes far beyond ticking sustainability boxes in the energy transition. It also directly links to lower resource scarcity and geopolitical tensions. The Ecological Threat Register 2020 results show that 141 countries are exposed to at least one ecological threat between now and 2050. The 19 countries with the highest number of threats have a population of 2.1bn. This means a minimum of 20 percent of the global population by mid-century would be significantly affected.

The economic fallout alone of this global ricochet of disruption — something the world has already witnessed with Covid-19 — would be life-changing for many more billions of people. We have the solution for reducing the risk of stranded assets via a circular carbon economy at our fingertips. Now we just need to proactively reach for it.

Note: Badar Chaudhry is senior vice president, unit manager, Energy Sector, Mashreq Bank

SOPHOS

The realities of ransomware: Five signs you're about to be attacked

By Peter Mackenzie, incident response manager, Sophos

Whenever we work with ransomware victims, we spend some time looking back through our telemetry records that span the previous week or two. The telemetry sometimes records behavioral anomalies that (on their own) may not be inherently malicious, but in the context of an attack that has already taken place, could be taken as an early indicator of a threat actor conducting operations on the victim's network.

If we see any of these five indicators, in particular, we jump on them straight away. Any of these found during an investigation is almost certainly an indication that attackers have poked around on the network prior to the attack: to get an idea of the network layout, and to learn how they can get the accounts and access they need to launch a ransomware attack.

Attackers use legitimate admin tools to set the stage for ransomware attacks. Without knowing what tools administrators normally use on their machines, one could easily overlook this data. In hindsight, these five indicators represent investigative red flags.

A network scanner, especially on a server

Attacks typically start when an attacker gains control of one machine they can use as a foothold, from which they begin to profile the target organization: is this a Mac or Windows workstation; what's the domain and company name; what kind of admin rights does the computer have. Next, attackers will want to know what else is on the network and what can they access. The easiest way to determine this is to scan the network. If you detect a network scanner, such as AngryIP or Advanced Port Scanner, query the admin staff to make sure they weren't responsible for leaving it there. If no one

recalls using the scanner, it's time to investigate.

Tools for disabling antivirus software

Once attackers have admin rights, they will often try to disable security software using applications created to assist with the forced removal of software, such as Process Hacker, IOBit Uninstaller, GMER, or PC Hunter. These types of commercial tools are legitimate, but in the wrong hands, security teams and admins need to question why they have suddenly appeared.

The presence of MimiKatz

Any detection of the password extraction tool MimiKatz anywhere should be investigated. If no one on an admin team can vouch for using MimiKatz, this is a red flag because it is one of the most commonly used hacking tools for credential theft. Attackers also use Microsoft's Process Explorer, one of the Windows Sysinternals tools, that can dump LSASS.exe from memory, creating a .dmp file. They can then extract the passwords right on the foothold machine, or take the memory dump to their environment and use MimiKatz to safely extract user names and passwords on their own machine. Patterns of suspicious behavior

Test attacks

Occasionally, attackers deploy small test attacks on a few computers in order to see if the deployment method and ransomware executes



successfully, or if security tools stop it. If the security tools block the attack, they change their tactics and try again. This will show their hand, and attackers will know their time is now limited. It is often a matter of hours before they launch a much larger attack.

Sophos' next-gen cybersecurity solutions to stop Ransomware

Sophos offers layered IT security for defending against the latest ransomware. Sophos not only provides best protection at every point, but also provides threat intelligence sharing between all these security points with synchronized security.

Sophos XG Firewall prevents attacks from getting onto a network. In the event ransomware does happen to get onto a network, Sophos XG Firewall can automatically stop ransomware dead in its tracks thanks to integration with Sophos Intercept X.

Sophos Intercept X Advanced with EDR includes anti-ransomware technology that detects malicious encryption processes and shuts them down before they can spread across network.

The Sophos Managed Threat Response (MTR) service adds human expertise to an organization's layered security strategy. An elite team of threat hunters proactively look for and validate potential threats, and then take action to disrupt, contain and neutralize attacks.

Business

Kutayba Alghanim launches bold effort to support next generation of Kuwaiti architects

\$10,000 for winner of Kutayba Alghanim Architecture Prize

KUWAIT: Kuwait-based multinational corporation Alghanim yesterday announced the launch of the Kutayba Alghanim Architecture Prize, a new competition to support young Kuwaiti architects and designers and advance the country's innovation economy, especially the creative and arts sectors.

Named for the company's executive chairman who conceived the idea, the competition will award a \$10,000 prize to its winner. The competition is open to Kuwaiti architects and designers under the age of 30, based in Kuwait or abroad, including students.

"Kuwait has an extraordinarily rich history of arts, culture and creativity. It's a legacy for which I feel great pride, and so should every Kuwaiti," said Sir Kutayba Alghanim. "But it's also important to know that rich tradition lives on today. I am so inspired by the talented young Kuwaitis in the

creative industries, including architecture. My goal is to shine a bright light on that talent. I want to encourage more young Kuwaitis to jump into the innovation economy, the industry sectors where creativity and science come together."

Among the best-known examples of modern architecture in Kuwait are its water towers, which dot the country's landscape. Their iconic status makes them an ideal subject for the inaugural Kutayba Alghanim Architecture Prize. Competitors are asked to redesign and repurpose the water tower which was built in 1966, located



Sir Kutayba Alghanim

in one of the company's projects in Shuwaikh.

"Water towers are the perfect starting point for this competition, said Alghanim. "They blend function and form, the practical and the beautiful. They remind us of our country's history and traditions. But they also remind us to look skyward - to continue, ever upward. This is a message that's especially important as we continue to grapple with a global pandemic and economic challenges. Despite our troubles, the future is bright." The first round of the competition will open for submissions today, 17 December 2020, until 24 January 2021. Competitors can participate alone or in teams of up to four members. To find out more about the award, eligibility and the application process, visit competition.alghanim.com.

Alghanim is one of the largest, privately-owned companies in the MENA region. Founded at the turn of the century in Kuwait, the company today

employs more than 15,000 people in 30 businesses across 40 countries in the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia.

Alghanim is a market leader in almost every major sector of its operations, which include: engineering, retail, automotive sales and service, insulation and pre-engineered steel building structures, logistics and warehousing, fast moving consumer goods, food & beverage, office automation, advertising, insurance, consumer credit and travel. The company is actively growing its brand portfolio, with a focus on top-tier global partners. Among them: Avis, British Airways, British Petroleum, Cathay Pacific, Daewoo, Honda, Saint-Gobain and Toshiba. Additionally, Alghanim Industries has created a number of successful regional businesses, including X-cite (consumer electronics), and Safat Home (lifestyle and home furniture).

Gulf Bank winner Al-Azmi claims cash prize worth 12 times his salary

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced the winner of its eleventh monthly Kuwaiti Salary Account draw of the year. This month's lucky winner, Salem Braidan Rajaa Al-Azmi, will take home a cash prize worth 12 times his salary. The Kuwaiti Salary Account draw took place at Gulf Bank's Head Office in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce.

Gulf Bank proudly welcomed the winner, Salem Braidan Rajaa Al-Azmi, at the Bank's main branch to award him his prize. During the visit, the winner noted, "The monthly Salary Account draws were among the many reasons that encouraged me to transfer my salary to Gulf Bank, so I was very happy to hear that I won this exciting prize! I encourage everyone to take advantage of the many opportunities, draws, and prizes offered by Gulf Bank."

With the 2020 Kuwaiti Salary Offer,



new customers who transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank are automatically enrolled in the monthly draws, giving them the chance to win cash prizes of up to 12 times their salary. Customers are also enrolled in a yearly draw of Kuwait's largest salary prize, a cash prize of up to 100 times the winner's salary. Gulf Bank's Salary Account also gives new customers the opportunity to receive either a KD 100 cash gift upon transferring their salaries to

Gulf Bank, or an interest-free loan of up to KD 15,000. Customers must have a minimum salary of KD 500 and are eligible for the offer following their first salary transfer to Gulf Bank.

Customers can also enjoy additional benefits like a Visa or MasterCard credit card free of charge for a year. They can also apply for a loan of up to KD 70,000 with a repayment period of 15 years, or a consumer loan of up to KD 25,000.

ABK offers travel benefits for Visa Infinite cardholders

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK), as part of its ongoing commitment to elevate the customers' banking experience, yesterday announced the launch of its enhanced suite of benefits for Visa Infinite credit cardholders through its strategic partnership with Pearl Assist.

As travel corridors slowly open, and customers start planning for trips, ABK Visa Infinite credit cardholders can benefit from two new exclusive free services - 'Family COVID-19 travel insurance' and advance slot booking at the Pearl Lounge in Kuwait International Airport. The 'Family COVID-19 travel insurance' service provides medical coverage, expenses for medicine abroad, dental emergency care abroad, coverage on personal accidents, and much more. With the new ABK Pearl Assist Service 'Lounge Slot Booking' customers can avoid the wait by booking their lounge slot

in advance when their travel plans are confirmed.

The program also offers a free 'Meet and Assist' service upon arrival and departure through Kuwait International Airport, Terminals 1 and 5; and free baggage delivery upon arrival to Kuwait International Airport, Terminal 1. To enjoy ABK Pearl Assist services, customers are required to visit <https://abk.pearlassist.com>, enter their civil ID and choose the service.

ABK's Visa Infinite card is pre-equipped with free Lounge Access for two persons across 1000+ Airport Lounges worldwide. In addition, complimentary travel insurance can be availed when purchasing airline tickets using the card. Using Tap-n-Go and ABK SecurePay, ABK Visa Infinite cardholders can benefit from faster and safer payments while simultaneously earning up to 6 miles per KD 1 spend during their travel.

LuLu Exchange earns 'Best Employer' tag in EY survey

KUWAIT: In an age where employee engagement drives the overall wellbeing of an organization, LuLu Exchange - a leading financial services provider in Kuwait, has ranked high in an internal employee engagement survey, conducted by the global audit firm Ernst & Young.

The Survey which considered the views of the company's employees across all branches and departments, revealed a conducive work environment built on a foundation of engagement and productivity. "Through several best practices and leadership exercises, LuLu Exchange is committed to developing rounded, proficient teams that can play a big role in the growth of the organization. The survey was undertaken to ascertain the true



pulse of our employees, and we are happy to find that the voice of our employees resonates with our aspiration to build a support system that lets them perform to their full capacity," said Adeeb Ahamed, MD, LuLu Exchange.

To make the survey as transparent as possible, EY covered aspects of state engagement (how employees feel), behavioral engagement (how employees feel) and performance context (how employees perceive they are enabled). The overall engagement level among employees was at a remarkable 95 percent, and according to EY, this score places LuLu Exchange Kuwait in the 'Best Employer Zone'. In addition, the overall engagement score for women employees recorded an astonishing 99 percent, highlighting the company's focus on

inclusion and diversity.

"The survey results are a testimony to our constant efforts to create a positive work environment, irrespective of nationality, gender or tenure of service. We intend to keep people at the forefront of our growth and plan to roll out several more initiatives to engage our employees better," added Mr. Shaiju Mohandas, General Manager, LuLu Exchange. LuLu Exchange presently operates 24 branches in Kuwait in addition to its digital offering, LuLu Money, and provides remittances, foreign currency exchange and other allied payment services to a cross-section of society, powered by a robust network, reputed partners and high standards of customer care.

The company is a part of the LuLu Financial Group, an ISO 9001:2015 certified global financial services enterprise headquartered in Abu Dhabi. The Group operates more than 220 branches across several GCC countries such as Oman, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain, as well as in India, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Australia watchdog sues Facebook over 'misleading' VPN app

SYDNEY: Australia's consumer watchdog launched legal action against Facebook yesterday, alleging the social media giant "misled" thousands of Australians by collecting user data from a free VPN service advertised as private. The platform could face a fine if found guilty of deceiving users, as Australia takes an increasingly assertive stance towards powerful US tech titans.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has accused Facebook and two of its subsidiaries-Facebook Israel and Onavo Inc-of misleading people who downloaded its virtual private network (VPN) app Onavo Protect, by collecting and using their "very detailed and valuable personal activity data". Records of which apps they accessed and the amount of time they spent using them were among the data allegedly used to support Facebook's market research.

The ACCC alleges Facebook and its two partners falsely represented the now-defunct VPN service as keeping user data "private, protected and secret" between February 2016 and October 2017. "Consumers often use VPN services because they care about their online privacy, and that is what this Facebook product claimed to offer. In fact, Onavo Protect channeled significant volumes of their personal activity data straight back to Facebook," ACCC Chair Rod Sims said.

"We believe that the conduct deprived Australian consumers of the opportunity to make an informed choice about the collection and use of their personal activity data by Facebook and Onavo."

A Facebook spokesperson said the firm had cooperated with the ACCC's investigation and would review the court filing. "When people downloaded Onavo Protect, we were always clear about the information we collect and how it is used," they said. "We will... continue to defend our position in response to this recent filing." The ACCC has previously helped draft a law that threatens Facebook and Google with millions of dollars in fines unless they agree to pay media outlets when their platforms host news content. In March, the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner also began legal action against Facebook for allegedly exposing more than 300,000 Australians to a data breach by political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica. — AFP

Strong virus response helps Vietnam's economy weather crisis

HANOI: A strong response to the coronavirus pandemic, surging exports and healthy public spending have helped Vietnam buck a global recession in 2020 and fast-track its recovery, with analysts predicting it will likely enjoy one of the highest growth rates in the world.

But the pain is not over for some sectors with containment measures and border disruptions hammering the country's tourism industry, and leaving the once-booming aviation sector limping. While many countries have suffered from high infection and mortality rates, Vietnam has recorded fewer than 1,500 coronavirus cases and 35 deaths thanks to mass quarantines, expansive contact-tracing and strict controls on movement, allowing factories to largely stay open and people to swiftly get back to work.

"The serious lockdown lasted for less than three months, so domestic activity was quickly back to normal by June," Nguyen Xuan Thanh, a public policy lecturer at Fulbright University Vietnam, told AFP. While many Western countries were imploring citizens to stay home mid-year, Vietnamese people were able to flock to scenic beaches as the government tried to give the domestic tourism industry a much-needed shot in the arm.

There were grave fears for Vietnam's export-reliant economy as demand for clothing, footwear and smartphones slumped in some of its biggest markets including the European Union, Japan and South Korea. "But it turned out that exports still helped promote growth this year," Thanh said. "That's because Vietnam has a very diversified export market-it's not dependent on any single export destination."

Shipments to China grew more than 15 percent on-



HANOI: A woman shopping inside a clothing store in Hanoi. A strong response to the coronavirus pandemic, a surge in exports and healthy public spending has helped Vietnam buck a global downward economic trend in 2020 and fast track its recovery. — AFP

year in the first nine months, according to the Vietnam General Customs Administration. Demand for many of the items made in Vietnam-such as home electronics, office furniture, computers and televisions-soared during the pandemic as people were forced to stay home during lockdowns. That has meant that while it will fall short of its target of 6.8 percent growth this year, the economy is expected to expand 2.4 percent, which the International Monetary Fund said would be among the best in the world. The Fund has forecast a global contraction of 4.4 percent.

'Tourism has died'

Observers said Vietnam had also benefited from the US-China trade war as companies such as Apple look to shift their supply chains to avoid tariffs. The country's exports to the United States rose by about a quarter to \$54.7 billion in the first nine months of the year. However, the absence of foreign travellers has dealt a severe blow to the tourism sector.

The UNESCO-recognized ancient imperial city

of Hue-which is popular with foreign visitors-now resembles a ghost town, with Thua Thien Hue province's tourism department saying 80 percent of hotels were closed while 8,000 people had lost their jobs.

"We are suffering heavily from the pandemic," the deputy head of the provincial tourism department Nguyen Van Phuc said. It is a similarly grim story in Hanoi, where hotel owner Nguyen Dinh Toi said simply that "tourism has died".

"We survived the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) epidemic, the financial storm of 2009-2010... but now the situation is unbelievable," said Toi, who runs hotels in Hanoi's old quarter, Halong Bay and Sapa. Still, Vietnam's economy is less exposed than other tourism-dependent countries in the region such as Thailand, where the IMF predicts the economy to slump by 7.1 percent this year.

The government has also helped cushion the economic blow by pouring money into infrastructure projects such as roads and bridges, said Thanh. — AFP



CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199

DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
Consultant Pediatrician

Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American Board in Pediatrics-Canadian Board in Pediatric Emergency

Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368 Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B

Dr. Hamoud Abdullah Alarouj
ENT Consultant, Laryngologist

- ◆ Kuwait Board of Otolaryngology.
- ◆ Laryngology Fellowship, McGill University- Canada.
- ◆ Fellow of the European Board of Otolaryngology – Head & Neck surgery.
- ◆ Member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.
- ◆ Member of the British Laryngological Association.
- ◆ Member of the European Laryngological Society.
- ◆ Member of the Canadian Society of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.

Experienced In:

- Management of benign and malignant vocal cord lesions.
- Vocal cord augmentation.
- Diagnosis and treatment of spasmodic dysphonia.
- Adenotonsillectomy using latest techniques.
- Myringotomy and ventilation tube insertion.
- Surgery for the deviated nasal septum.
- Endoscopic sinus surgery.
- Diagnosis and treatment of allergic rhinitis.
- Tympanoplasty.
- Diagnosis and treatment of vertigo.
- Thyroid surgery
- Diagnosis and treatment of snoring.

2536 0000
www.royalehayat.com

ROYALE HAYAT HOSPITAL

Our Doctors Provide care For the entire Family

Book your appointments today!

Dr. Kiran Turaka Ophthalmologist
Dr. Zareena Zahir Ophthalmologist
Dr. Hasan Khan Senior Cardiologist
Dr. P. Seshendra Nath Orthopedic Consultant (AUSTRIA) Specialised in Neck, Shoulder Hip and Knee

50721507
24551555
www.exircenterkw.com

EXIR MEDICAL SUBSPECIALITIES CENTER
Block No.4 Jahra - Kuwait

WE ACCEPT ALL MAJOR INSURANCES

Tel : 24568857 / 24568859 info@exircenterkw.com www.exircenterkw.com

Scope of Clinical Practice:

- ◆ General & Laparoscopic Surgery
- ◆ Single Port Surgery
- ◆ Treatment of Colo-Rectal Diseases, including Colorectal Cancer
- ◆ Surgical Treatment of Inflammatory Bowel Abscess
- ◆ Treatment of Perianal Fistula & Complex Perianal Fistula (complications)
- ◆ VAAFT Procedure (Treatment of Fistula through Fitzulscope)
- ◆ Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
- ◆ Colonoscopy & Gastroscopy
- ◆ Stomach Balloon insertion & removal
- ◆ Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
- ◆ Gallstones & Abdominal Hernias Surgery

◆ Colonic Hydrotherapy & Fecal Incontinence Treatment
◆ Laparoscopic mini bypass
◆ Transanal minimally invasive surgery

Academic Certificates, Trainings & Fellowships:

- ◆ American Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of American College of Surgery
- ◆ Canadian Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
- ◆ American Board of Colo - Rectal Surgery
- ◆ American Board of Surgical Critical Care

Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad
Surgery Department
Consultant General Surgery, Laparoscopic & Colo – Rectal Surgeon

دار الشفاء
Dar Al Shifa Hospital
Tele:1802 555

daralshifa
Email: aalhaddad@daralshifa.com

Dr. Rany Essam Mitwally
Senior Registrar

Dr. Ahmed Hosni Abd Elhamid
Consultant

Dr. Abeer Khattab
Specialist

Optthalmology Services

- Cataract Surgery
- Glaucoma
- Retina
- General Ophthalmology
- Follow-Up All Treatments

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA @hadclinicw

Tel: 1828282
Whatsapp Us +965-6000 2184

To advertise on this Page
Call: 24833199 ext:101,102 or Direct line: 24835616 / 24835617
or email: ads@kuwaittimes.com

DR. MOHAMMAD AL HAJRY
Canadian Board of Otolaryngology
Head & Neck Surgery and Facial Plastics.
Fellow of Royal College of Surgeons-Canada
A rare Subspecialty in Microscopic Ear Surgery, Cochlear implant & Ear diseases

- ◆ Diagnosis/Treatment of General Ears, Nose, and Throat conditions in adults & pediatrics
- ◆ Minimally invasive Endoscopic sinus surgery including Balloon sinuplasty
- ◆ Minimally invasive Microscopic & Endoscopic Ear surgery
- ◆ Diagnosis & treatment of Otolgy and Audiology (Hearing loss, Tinnitus & balance disorders)
- ◆ Facial Plastic and reconstructive surgeries (Rhinoplasty, Otoplasty, Fillers & Botox injections)
- ◆ Diagnosis & treatment of snoring & obstructive sleep apnea in clinic without surgery
- ◆ Diagnosis & Treatment of voice and swallowing disorders.
- ◆ Diagnosis & Treatment of Head and Neck benign & malignant tumours.

@Malhajry
Salmiya, Belajat Street, Tel: 1881122

IC INTERNATIONAL CLINIC

American Board Certified in General Surgery
Member of the Society of American Gastrointestinal & Endoscopic Surgeons (SAGES)
Higher specialization in Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary surgery & Organ Transplantation
Member of many prestigious surgical societies.

- ◆ Day case surgeries
- ◆ Diagnosis, treatment and follow up of all surgical emergencies
- ◆ Surgery for morbid obesity (sleeve, gastric bypass)
- ◆ Hernia repair
- ◆ Surgery for reflux disease
- ◆ Minor surgeries (lipoma, sebaceous cyst, ingrowing nail)
- ◆ Hemorrhoids, fistula & anal fissure surgeries
- ◆ Breast surgeries
- ◆ Thyroid & adrenal surgeries
- ◆ Cholecystectomy & laparoscopic appendectomy
- ◆ Liver, pancreas & bile ducts surgeries

Dr. Hani Haider
General Surgery Consultant

http://www.international-clinic.com Tel: 1886677

DR. FAHAD S BUHAIMED
Consultant Cosmetic Dermatologist & Hair Transplant, NY

ACADAMIC CERTIFICATES:

- o Dermatology board certified.
- o Fellowship training program in cosmetic dermatology and hair transplant, New York, USA.
- o Member of American cosmetic dermatology society.
- o Referee reviewer of International journal of Dermatology.

SPECIALIZED IN:

- o Dermatology & Cosmetic Treatments.
- o Laser Treatments.
- o Hair Transplant & Restoration.
- o Body & Face Contouring.
- o Injectable Fillers & Botox.

SHARQ, Ahmad Allaber st., Building bb, Floor 13.
Tel.: (+965) 22060777
@Drbuhaimed, @Renovabb, @dardonabb
Email: drbuhaimed@beautybeyond.com.kw
www.beautybeyond.com.kw

DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laprosopic and Bariatric Surgery

Academic Certificates – Training

- ◆ Kuwait Board of General Surgery.
- ◆ (IFSO) member .
- ◆ Faculty member of (BEST).
- ◆ Member of Kuwait Surgical Association.

Scope of clinical Practice.

- ◆ Bariatric surgeries.
- ◆ Gallbladder stones surgeries.
- ◆ Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- ◆ G.I. surgeries.
- ◆ Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- ◆ Anal surgeries.

email: wbuhaimed@gmail.com Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228 Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building

Dr. Ahmad Alaeddine
Head of Cardiology departmenat at Dar Al Shifa hospital

- Consultant Interventional and conventional cardiologist.
- Specialised in the Diagnosis and treatment of all adult cardiac diseases, including those cases that need urgent intervention in Cath lab (primary angioplasty).

دار الشفاء
Dar Al Shifa Hospital
Tele:1802 555

daralshifa

Lifestyle | Features

Boseman tipped for posthumous glory with 'Ma Rainey' swansong

Four months after his death shocked the world, trailblazing US actor Chadwick Boseman makes his heartbreaking, hotly Oscar-tipped final film appearance in 1920s blues drama "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom." The "Black Panther" star portrays a feisty, irreverent horn player struggling to make himself heard in a Chicago music world riddled with racism and exploitation, in the August Wilson play adaptation out Friday on Netflix. Boseman's role as the piece's tragic hero takes on added poignancy by his death at age 43 this August from colon cancer—a diagnosis he never publicly discussed, or even shared with his co-stars during production.

Viola Davis, who plays the real-life "Mother of the Blues" Ma Rainey, has described her co-star's role as "one of the greatest-if not the greatest-role for an African-American actor in history," distilling the historic trauma of the Black experience. "I'm looking back at how tired he always seemed," Davis told The New York Times about the film shot last year. "Now we know that the role mirrors Chadwick's life... it mirrors the life of every Black person grieving, and especially the life of a Black man," she

added. Boseman had secretly battled through his cancer diagnosis to become the first Black star with his own superhero epic in the record-breaking Marvel franchise. 2018's "Black Panther" was nominated for best picture at the Oscars and grossed over \$1 billion worldwide. Last week, Disney paid tribute to Boseman by announcing that his iconic role as T'Challa will not be recast in the sequel.

'Sharing his genius'

In his final film, Boseman's cornet player Levee has been hired to support Ma Rainey, who has traveled from the Deep South to record her hit songs on a sweltering summer afternoon in a cramped back-alley studio. As diva-esque Ma Rainey battles duplicitous producers who want to cash in on her voice and send her packing, Levee plots his own path to solo musical glory while revealing a childhood ravaged by white brutality. In a bravura performance, Boseman delivers searing monologues that vow to "make the white man respect me" and curse a God who "hates your Black ass"—interspersed with moments of impish charisma, foot-shuffling dance moves and outrageous flirting.



In this file photo Actor Chadwick Boseman arrives for the 90th Annual Academy Awards, in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos

"Ma Rainey" is the second of Pulitzer Prize-winning Wilson's 10-play "Pittsburgh Cycle" to be adapted by producer Denzel Washington, with each chronicling the African-American experience in a different 20th-century decade. In a quirk of fate, Washington once funded the studies of a group of young Black US actors attending a prestigious British summer drama program—including a then-unknown Boseman. "I'm happy that I got to be a part of sharing his genius

with the world," said Washington in the film's production notes. "I miss him and I love him. On film we'll always have him and I'll never forget him."

'Every ounce'

For Boseman, that course in Oxford was a seminal opportunity to study Shakespeare, Beckett and Pinter—but also fostered a desire to propel the works of Black playwrights into the same canon. "I always felt like black writers

were just as classical," he once told Rolling Stone. "It's just as difficult to do August Wilson, and the stories he's telling are just as epic." Academy voters may have begun to take note, awarding Davis an Oscar for Washington's previous Wilson adaptation "Fences" (2016). As "Ma Rainey"—who in real life was supported by a young Louis Armstrong and Bessie Smith-Davis dons gold teeth and a fat suit as she sashays her hips, croons country blues and pours prima-donna scorn on those around her. She is also being tipped for a repeat Oscar bid.

But Davis and director George C. Wolfe have little doubt over Boseman's credentials to become the third posthumous acting Oscar winner, after Heath Ledger (2008's "The Dark Knight") and Peter Finch (1976's "Network.") "Chadwick is my baby... (he) was just an artist," Davis recently told journalists. "Chadwick put his entire being into Levee... Levee demands that because of the Herculean scale of the role," said Wolfe. "He put every ounce of his heart and passion into it." — AFP



This combination of file pictures shows (from top left) Hong Kong martial artist and actor Jackie Chan arriving for the 2019 British Academy Britannia (BAFTA) awards at the Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills, US actor Harrison Ford arriving for Disney's "The Call of the Wild" premiere at El Capitan theatre in Hollywood, California, US actor Sylvester Stallone arriving for the Los Angeles premiere of the HBO documentary "Very Ralph" at the Paley Center in Beverly Hills, US actor Clint Eastwood at the 10th Annual Governors Awards gala hosted by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences at the the Dolby Theater at Hollywood & Highland Center in Hollywood, California, US actor Danny Trejo arriving for "Dora and the Lost City of Gold" premiere at the Regal Cinemas LA Live in Los Angeles and Austrian-US actor Arnold Schwarzenegger posing during a photo call to promote the film "Terminator: Dark Fate" in London. — AFP

Never too old: Five ageing action heroes

While other men of his age are eyeing up stair lifts, Harrison Ford is dusting down his bull whip to play all-action hero Indiana Jones one more time at 78. He is not the only superannuated male Hollywood star to be pushing the age envelope—and audiences' ability to suspend their disbelief.

Clint Eastwood, 90

Hollywood may be in strict lockdown but it hasn't stopped Eastwood directing "Cry Macho", where he stars as a tough, washed-up old rodeo rider taking a dysfunctional family by the scruff of the neck. Nor was there anything lily-livered about the octogenarian drugs smuggler working for a Mexican cartel he played in his last movie, "The Mule" (2018). The tough-talking former mayor of Carmel was pushing 80 when he made short work of gang members in "Gran Torino" in 2008 — "Make my day, punk."

Sylvester Stallone, 74

A mere stripling at 74, Stallone is rumored to be limbering up to reprise his role as a mercenary leader in "The Expendables 4". The action franchise he created has been a boon for Hollywood retirement homes, giving Bruce Willis, Dolph Lundgren and Jean-Claude Van Damme a late ironic glow to their careers. Sly is soon to play a hired gun in "Little America"—set at a time when "China owns America"—and a supervillain in the cartoonishly ultra-violent "The Suicide Squad". Last year's "Rambo: Last Blood" saw him go into combat yet again as the monosyllabic Vietnam vet, though whether Rambo can retire gracefully remains to be seen.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, 73

He may be trying to save the planet in his day job as crusading environmental campaigner and politician, but Arnie can't quite tear himself away from his swords and cyborgs past.

The Austrian returned in "Terminator: Dark Fate" last year and may be about to don his loincloth once again in the forthcoming epic, "The Legend of Conan". Not even three heart operations in four years—the last in October—can stop him. "I'm back," he quipped after his 2018 surgery, the catchphrase of his "Terminator" cyborg killer.

Danny Trejo, 76

The "Machete" star with the toughest face in Tinseltown and the grittiest backstory to go with it, is making up for all those lost years in prison with a plethora of upcoming action roles including in "Machete Kills in Space". Trejo, a former boxer, was a bit-player until he broke through thanks to his cousin Robert Rodriguez who directed him in "Desperado" in 1995, with roles in "Heat" and "Con Air" soon following. Look out soon for him in "Renegades", "The Prey", "Death Rider in the House of Vampires" and "Zombie Bride".

Jackie Chan, 66

One of the world's most beloved martial arts heroes is alive and, well, kicking—coronavirus pandemic be damned. As the virus spread early this year, reports said the Hong Kong born star who has appeared in more than 100 films was under quarantine after catching the virus. Worried fans sent him face masks. Chan took to Facebook to say he was virus free—"I'm very healthy and safe"—and would donate the face coverings to people who actually needed them. Chan's latest film, a Chinese action adventure flick entitled "Vanguard," was supposed to come out in January of this year, but this was delayed until September because of the pandemic. In this movie Chan plays a UK-based accountant forced to finance the work of a terror organization. — AFP

Sundance unveils pandemic lineup, Redford son's final film

Next month's Sundance will be the first major festival highlighting movies made during and about the coronavirus pandemic, as organizers Tuesday unveiled a lineup featuring the final film by co-founder Robert Redford's late son. Due to Covid restrictions, the indie film extravaganza will largely leave behind its usual mountain base in the western US state of Utah, showing premieres online and at nationwide drive-ins and arthouse theaters.

Among them is "Life in a Day 2020," Ridley Scott and Kevin Macdonald's follow-up to their 2011 documentary painting a "global portrait of life on our planet" using thousands of videos shot and submitted by members of the public from a single day in July. The filmmakers received 300,000 submissions, as people around the world adjusted to their radically transformed life under an unprecedented pandemic. "These windows into their

lives are really extraordinary," director of programming Kim Yutani told AFP, calling the project a "huge undertaking."

"Not only is it the 10-year anniversary, this is such a significant year," she added. Also on show will be "In the Earth," a virus horror film shot in 15 days in August by Ben Wheatley, and documentary "In the Same Breath" which claims to explore the Chinese government's efforts to "turn pandemic coverups in Wuhan into a triumph for the Communist Party."

Several films also address racism following this year's mass protests against police violence, including "Summer of Soul," musician Questlove's first movie about the huge, forgotten "Black Woodstock" festival that took place in 1969 Harlem. Rebecca Hall's directorial debut "Passing," based on a 1929 novella about two African-American women struggling with their race and gender identities in New York, will also appear. Other highlights among 72 feature films include Nicolas Cage's supernatural action-horror "Prisoners of the Ghostland," and cult musical biopic "The Sparks Brothers" from Edgar Wright. With the Oscars submissions deadline delayed by coronavirus, Sundance movies will this year be eligible to compete for April's Academy Awards.—AFP



Robert Redford

2020 in records: K-pop and the planet get super-hot

Records tumbled across the board in 2020, from the warming planet to the humble rowing machine.

Hot...

Meteorologists recorded a temperature of 130 degrees Fahrenheit (54.4 degrees Celsius) in California's Death Valley in August—likely the hottest ever measured with modern instruments.

Hot...

Antarctica, home to enough frozen water to lift global sea levels dozens of meters, smashed its temperature record too with a high of 20.75 degrees Celsius (69.35 Fahrenheit) — the first time the continent has broken the 20C barrier.

Hot...

Average global temperatures in January, April, May, September and November were the hottest ever on record.

Priciest pigeon

A Chinese buyer paid a world record 1.6 million euros (\$1.9 million) for a Dutch female homing pigeon called New Kim who was put up for auction for just 200 euros.

Longest lockdowns

Half of the planet was locked down in March, just three months after the virus was detected. But the prize for the longest lockdown goes to Buenos Aires where residents were officially confined from March 20 until November 8 — 234 days.

Foreign language first

Trailblazing South Korean boyband BTS became the first group to have a foreign-language song enter the US Billboard chart at number one, in the latest musical record claimed by the K-pop sensation.

Craziest climb

A 53-year-old British man climbed (and descended) the equivalent of the height of Mount Everest, 8,850 vertical meters, over the course of four days using the stairs in his home to raise money for charity.

Most F1 wins

In October British driver Lewis Hamilton overtook Michael Schumacher with a record-breaking 92nd Formula One victory in the Portuguese Grand Prix.

Accidental achievement

The aptly-named Australian Georgie Rowe broke a world record for indoor rowing while she was training at home during lockdown.

Germany's blackest day

In what Germany coach Joachim Loew said was a "black day", Spain beat the four-time World Cup champions 6-0 in the Nations League, handing them their worst defeat in 89 years.

Deepest dive

Slovenian Alenka Artnik, 39, broke the world freediving record after a dizzying descent to 114 metres with a monofin, spending three minutes and 41 seconds underwater.

Ugandan track master

Ugandan Joshua Cheptegei broke the 10,000m track world record in October with a time of 26 mins 11 seconds. In August, he had shattered the much-vaunted 5,000m world record that had stood for 16 years. — AFP



Boyband BTS



A handout picture shows curatorial assistant Abeer Eladany posing with pieces of cedar wood originally discovered in 1872 inside the Great Pyramid at Giza in Egypt. — AFP photos

5,000-year-old Great Pyramid artefact found in Scotland

One of only three artefacts ever recovered from inside Egypt's Great Pyramid has been found in a misplaced cigar tin in a Scottish university collection, academics revealed yesterday. The fragment of cedar wood, which has been found to date back 5,000 years to the building of the pyramid at Giza, was first discovered in the late 19th century but had been missing for more than 70 years. A record discovered in 2001 appeared to show the fragment-found alongside a ball and a bronze hook thought to be used for construction — had been donated to the University of Aberdeen.

But the trail ran cold and the ancient artefact disappeared almost without a trace until the end of last year when an assistant curator at the university, Abeer Eladany, originally from Egypt, made a



A handout picture shows pieces of cedar wood originally discovered in 1872 inside the Great Pyramid at Giza.

chance discovery in its Asia collection. Knowing that a small cigar tin she found there bearing an old Egyptian flag did not belong with the other pieces, she cross-referenced it with other records.

"It has been like finding a needle in a haystack," Eladany said after discovering the fragment of wood among hundreds of thousands of items. "I'm an archaeologist and have worked on digs in Egypt but I never imagined it would be here in northeast Scotland that I'd find something so important to the heritage of my own country." The fragment-initially measuring five inches or around 13 centimetres but now in several pieces-was first discovered in the Great Pyramid's Queen's Chamber in 1872 by engineer Wayman Dixon.

It made its way to the Scottish city because of a link between Dixon and a medical doctor named James Grant who studied in Aberdeen and went to Egypt to treat cholera in the mid-1860s. More evidence that the lost piece of wood, as well as the other items known as the

"Dixon relics", could have been used in the construction of the Great Pyramid has come to light following modern tests on the artefact. Carbon dating results, delayed by coronavirus restrictions, placed the wood at somewhere between 3341 and 3094 BC, long before the construction of the pyramid.

This supports the theory the items were left behind by builders rather than by later explorers. Neil Curtis, head of museums and special collections at the University of Aberdeen, called results from the carbon dating a "revelation". "This discovery will certainly reignite interest in the Dixon relics and how they can shed light on the Great Pyramid," he added. — AFP

Flipping the script: China school reforms spark Mongolian writing revival

In a classroom in Mongolia's capital, students pass over the Soviet-era Cyrillic alphabet they grew up with and turn their copybooks sideways to practice the traditional, vertical Mongolian script that dates back to the empire of Genghis Khan. Teacher Batbileg Lkhagvabaatar leads the class, tracing lines of the flowing, dotted characters on a whiteboard and explaining grammar rules to the group of young men and women and a smattering of children. They are among a growing number inspired to learn the ancient letters after protests by their kinsfolk in China's Inner Mongolia region against reforms replacing Mongolian with Mandarin as the language of instruction in schools for core classes.



This photo shows calligrapher Ganzorig Gulguu, who earns money by selling his calligraphy art work mainly to Inner Mongolia, writing Mongolian scripts at his home.

he said. "But now I see from the students that they are thinking more about our national values... they want to promote the Mongolian script which has been used by our people for over a thousand years."

Mongolia's government adopted Cyrillic eight decades ago when it was ruled by a Soviet-dominated regime, but now it is also backing the revival of the archaic script that had been left as the preserve of the elderly or language specialists. The state broadcaster now includes captions in both scripts and the government has said all official announcements will be written in both Cyrillic and Hudum from 2025. Even the country's president-and former sambo wrestling champion-Battulga Khaltmaa has launched his own Hudum lessons on television to encourage citizens to take up the traditional writing. Mongolians in Mongolia had become "careless about our traditional language", said Zayabaatar Dalai, head of Mongol Studies at the Mongolian National University.

"Inner Mongolians made us understand how our native language and script is priceless... we must care for our language." But there are challenges ahead, as much of the script uses archaic language which is not familiar to modern Mongolians, and there have also been grammar changes ushered in by the use of Cyrillic alphabet. There is no gender in the Hudum script-in contrast to Cyrillic grammar-and in Hudum, words and prepositions are written separately, where Cyrillic merges them together. School students are currently only required to study the Mongol script for one year, though under the new government plan, textbooks for subjects such as history and literature must also be converted into the traditional script.

Into the digital era

The fresh wave of popularity is also giving Hudum a modern facelift, with activists hoping to make it easier to use on computers and social media-and to help connect ethnic Mongolians spread out across Russia, China and Mongolia. Mongolian tech developers are working to incorporate the vertical script into new apps, language translators and social media platforms.

Ulaanbaatar-based software company Bolorsoft LLC told AFP it is creating a program to turn audio speech files into Mongolian script. Another programmer, Ulzii-Orshikh Dashkhuu, said he is creating a social media open platform similar to Facebook, where users can learn and download the vertical script. "Today we communicate with each other in the digital domain," he told AFP. "If we can transfer our vertical writing into digital platforms, we will preserve our traditional language for the next generation." — AFP

'We must care for our language'

Batbileg started teaching the script-also known as Hudum-for free in September after he saw coverage of the protests. "We live in a fast-changing era of globalization, where people have no time to sit and think about the issue of identity,"



This photo shows teacher Batbileg Lkhagvabaatar (center) teaching traditional Mongolian scripts in a school in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia. — AFP photos



Model train enthusiast Gerhard Berndt explains details of his layout in his living room in Berlin.



Model train enthusiast Gerhard Berndt poses with one of his locomotives in his living room.



A likeness of East Germany's longtime leader Erich Honecker waves to wellwishers from a train in model train enthusiast Gerhard Berndt's "train cabinet".



Model trains and other vehicles are seen in model train enthusiast Gerhard Berndt's "train cabinet".

Pandemic keeps German model trains chugging along

Gerhard Berndt's model railway has been three decades in the making, but this year it's really been full steam ahead for the 72-year-old Berliner. The retired carpenter has had more time on his hands in 2020 because of coronavirus restrictions-and he has dedicated it to building up an intricate small-scale village in his living room. "This stuff takes time. And I have used that in this corona situation," said Berndt, who would otherwise be too busy jetting off to railway conventions to spend hours a day working on his hobby. Berndt is one of many Germans who have turned to model railways and other analogue toys this year as restrictions to curb the spread of Covid-19 leave them looking for ways to entertain themselves and their families at home.

As a result model train sales have surged. Forecasts from the Association of German Toymakers (BVS) predict total turnover for the toy industry will be 3.7 billion euros (\$4.5 billion) in 2020, an increase of eight percent on last year. The boost is being driven by board games and puzzles, outdoor toys and construction kits, according to the BVS.

Toy market boom

The country's toy market grew 11 percent, or 172 million euros, on-year in January-October, according to the market research company npd Group. Germany has the largest toy industry in Europe in terms of both employment and turnover, accounting for a quarter of all people employed in the EU toy industry. Demand for toys has soared with bars, restaurants and leisure facilities closed for large parts of the year and social gatherings limited in the country, which has seen more than 1.3 million cases of the virus so far and more than 22,000 deaths. The model railway market in particular has seen a boost after years of stagnating sales.

The pastime is especially beloved in

Germany, which has the world's largest model railway system-the Miniatur Wunderland in Hamburg-and whose Interior Minister Horst Seehofer is a self-confessed fan. Market leader Maerklin saw orders jump 50 percent on-year in November as Germany entered a second round of restrictions to combat the virus. "We are one of the few industries that have been given a small boost by corona," company CEO Florian Sieber told AFP. "This is certainly due to the fact that many people are staying at home and trying to think of meaningful activities they can do at home without getting infected," he said.

Hobby for life

Orders also rose during Germany's first lockdown in March and April, though not as sharply since the spring is traditionally not a popular time for railway building. Overall, Maerklin is looking at increase in orders of 10 percent

compared to 2019, according to Sieber. Maerklin has employed an extra staff member to help with an increase in enquiries to its help centre, though it is not predicting a substantial increase in earnings since restrictions have also forced up production costs.

But Sieber hopes the higher demand will continue after the pandemic. "We suspect that those who start now will stay with the hobby for a few years or even longer. This is not a hobby that you start today and stop tomorrow," he said. That is certainly true for Berndt, who bought a starter kit for 30 deutschmarks with his first paycheck and has never looked back. Today, his model with 30 trains, 300 figures and fully functioning miniature street lamps takes up the whole of his living room-but if virus rules are eventually lifted, it can be winched up to the ceiling to make space for normal life. — AFP



Model train enthusiast Gerhard Berndt explains details of his layout in his living room in Berlin. — AFP photos

Sports

Photo of the day



Coco Zurita performs at Ritoque, Chile in 2019. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Masked, muted Olympics will still dominate crowded 2021 in sports

Tokyo organizers, government struggling with increased costs

PARIS: The rescheduled Tokyo Olympics will be the centerpiece of a crammed sporting year in 2021 as sports administrators who had their calendars wiped away by the coronavirus pandemic try to fill the gaps even as a second wave hits. While the Games will still be called the 2020 Olympics, they have been changed by COVID-19. Tokyo organizers and the Japanese government are struggling with increased costs and, despite the growing possibility of vaccination, whether to allow foreign visitors and what safeguards and restrictions will apply to spectators and participants.

In early December, organizers said the delayed Games will cost at least an extra \$2.4 billion as the unprecedented peacetime postponement and a raft of pandemic health measures inflate a budget that was already over \$13 billion. Enthusiasm appears to have waned in Japan. A poll in July showed that just one in four people wanted to see the Games held in 2021 - and a majority backed either further delay or cancellation.

"Whether it's seen as too much or that we have done well to contain the costs, I think it depends on how you look at it," said Tokyo 2020 CEO Toshiro Muto. Organizers have reduced the number of free tickets, scaled down the opening ceremony and made savings on mascots, banners and meals, but so far have cut just \$280 million. "It will be simple rather than festive, but I hope it will be something moving that encourages people through the power of sport," he said.

The organizers are determined to go ahead next

year, even if the pandemic has not receded. They want to welcome foreign spectators and plan to waive quarantine requirements. They plan to require fans to wear masks, to refrain from cheering and keep their ticket stubs for contact tracing. Athletes will be asked to arrive late and leave early, minimize their time in the Olympic village, refrain from speaking loudly, avoid physical contact and wear masks when not competing or training. They will be screened on arrival and undergo tests every four to five days.

"I think the Games will go off," World Athletics president Sebastian Coe said this month. "What nobody is clearly across at the moment, is... whether we are going to have a stadium populated by good, noisy, passionate fans." The challenge for the organizers is considerable, since the Games bring together 11,000 athletes from 206 countries, accompanied by at least 5,000 officials and coaches, 20,000 media representatives and 60,000 volunteers.

Lost time

Meanwhile, other sports, desperate to make up for lost time are, for the most part, manoeuvring to minimize overlaps between their revamped schedules and the Olympic behemoth. The National Basketball Association, which only finished its coronavirus-hit 2019-20 season on October 12, agreed with its players union to start the new season on December 22, cut the regular season by 10 games and end it on May 16.

This was partly to allow players to compete in Tokyo, although since the playoffs are scheduled to continue until July 22, the day before the Games start, some of the biggest stars could still miss Tokyo. One event that has not, so far, publicly rethought its plans is the other marquee casualty from the summer's sporting wipeout: the European football championships. Still called Euro 2020, they are scheduled to stick to the planned 12-city format but some member nations have reportedly been urging UEFA to put all the matches in one country.

The significance of the Olympics goes beyond sports. Following on from the diplomatic gestures at the PyeongChang Winter Games in 2018, there is talk of inviting North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to the Tokyo Games and holding a summit with South Korea, China, the United States and host Japan. Another dominant theme in 2020, opposition to racism, threatens to cause friction in Tokyo.

In early December, Coe pointedly gave the World Athletics President's award to Tommie Smith, Peter Norman and John Carlos, the three 400m runners who raised a fist in a black power salute on a medal podium protest at the 1968 Mexico City Games. "Sadly, their cause and what they so bravely stood for has not been consigned to the history books," said Coe. Thomas Bach, the head of the International Olympic Committee, quickly responded with irritation, saying any gestures opposing racism, such as taking a knee, would be against his rules prohibiting "political and religious marketing" at the Games. —AFP

Kuwait Club win fifth Super Cup

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Sports Club met Arabi Club on Tuesday evening to launch the new football season with the Super Cup. Kuwait were determined from the onset for an attack as they kicked off with the attacking squad - Ahmad Al-Zanki, Faisal Zayed, Jumaa Saeed and Akaishi. 10 minutes into the match, defender Fahad Humoud headed the ball but missed, then five minutes later, Talal Al-Fadhel shot the ball that was handled by goalkeeper Suleiman Abdelghafour with difficulty. Akaishi threatened Arabi's goal in the 20th minute, and later scored in the 30th minute but was disallowed due to offside. Arabi meanwhile felt the pressure and adopted a defensive position though there were some attempts to move forward and attack. The second half started with a bang as Kuwait's forwards were in the Arabi's box and the ball was being tossed between players of both teams, until it



reached the head of Arabi's defender Ahmad Al-Saleh who headed it into his own net in the 47th minute.

Kuwait players kept attacking after which Faisal Zayed tried to double the score in the 63rd minute but his shot missed the goal. Arabi had a chance to equalize in the 92nd minute but forward Juma About squandered the chance following a corner kick. This is Kuwait's fifth Super Cup win, while Qadisiya has six and Arabi (2). The Super Cup match started in 2008, and is usually between the Amir Cup winner and the League winners.

ahead of next Dakar in January. However, if there is extra performance to be found the Spaniard will do all he can to find it. "We still want to make a few minor changes, in order to be as well prepared as possible for the start of the Dakar." - Carlos Sainz. 13-time Dakar winner Peterhansel completed the overall podium in Hail after fighting back from 10 lost minutes on day one caused by a flat tyre. The Frenchman's tenacious spirit was in evidence as he fought back from this misfortune to finish third overall.

"I didn't push to the max, as I don't want to take any big risks with the car I will be using at the Dakar." - Stéphane Peterhansel. Meanwhile, race winner Al-Attayah's fellow Toyota Hilux driver KubaPrzygonski lost his chance of challenging for a podium position after fuel-related issues on stage one. However, the Polish driver and his German co-driver Timo Gottschalk came back strongly on stage two to set the fifth fastest time of the day.

Now the convoy's attention turns to the Hail Baja 2 which covers 479 kilometres between December 14 and 15. This will be the last competitive distance raced before the 2021 Dakar Rally gets started on January 2 next year. Hail Baja 1 overall results - Car race Top 3 - (1) N Al-Attayah (QAT)/M Baumel (FRA) Toyota - 6h 14m 27s (2) C Sainz (ESP) / L. Cruz (ESP) MINI JCW Buggy - 6h 20m 37s (3) S. Peterhansel (FRA) / E. Boulanger (FRA) MINI JCW Buggy - 6h 23m 26s.

Al-Attayah blasts over the dunes, wins Hail Baja 1

KUWAIT: Nasser Al Attiya wasted no time showing his speed over the dunes as he took a stunning victory at Hail Baja 1. Qatar's sand racing specialist demonstrated his competitive edge as he fended off fellow Dakar supremos Carlos Sainz and Stéphane Peterhansel to take the win. Al-Attayah and French co-driver Mathieu Baumel made their intentions plain from the start line in Hail as they set the opening day's fastest time. The duo backed up this performance on the second day with another stage win, and ultimately overall victory.

"We believed in our speed and we're happy to win Hail Baja 1." - Nasser Al-Attayah With less than a month to go until the start of the 2021 Dakar Rally, competition at the back-to-back Hail Baja races is intense. Staying on Al-Attayah tail throughout the first Hail Baja were the MINI JCW Buggy crews of Carlos Sainz/Lucas Cruz (both ESP) and Stéphane Peterhansel/Edouard Boulanger (both FRA).

Reigning Dakar car class champion Sainz came home in second place and is happy with how his car is running



Antetokounmpo seals a record deal with Bucks

LOS ANGELES: Milwaukee Bucks superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo ended speculation about his future on Tuesday after agreeing a new long-term deal reported to be the biggest in NBA history. Antetokounmpo, who would have been able to enter free agency next year, said in a statement on Twitter he had agreed a five-year deal with the Bucks.

"This is my home, this is my city," the 26-year-old two-time NBA MVP said. "I'm blessed to be able to be a part of the Milwaukee Bucks for the next 5 years. Let's make these years count. The show goes on, let's get it." ESPN reported that Antetokounmpo's contract extension was worth \$228 million. The deal allows an opt out after four years. ESPN reported that the contract was the biggest in NBA history, eclipsing the \$206.8 million five-year deal agreed between Russell Westbrook and the Oklahoma City Thunder in 2017.

The deal will also see Antetokounmpo pocket the highest average annual salary in the NBA over the length of the contract, ESPN reported. Antetokounmpo will earn an average \$45.6 million a year. LeBron James earns \$44.5 million a season with the Los Angeles Lakers. The eye-watering contract marks the latest chapter in the rise of Antetokounmpo, who was born in Athens to Nigerian immigrants and once earned money hawking watches, bags and sunglasses as a street vendor. After taking up basketball as a youth, he was eventually spotted by NBA scouts and drafted with the 15th overall pick by the Bucks in 2013. He made his league debut as an 18-year-old later that year.

Antetokounmpo has dominated the NBA in recent seasons, winning the season MVP honors this year as well as the defensive player of the year award, averaging 29.5 points and 13.6 rebounds per game. However Antetokounmpo's dominance has not translated into championship success for the Bucks, who were eliminated in the Eastern Conference finals by Toronto last year before falling to Miami in the early rounds of this year's playoffs. —AFP

News in brief

Iniesta sidelined for months

MADRID: Former Barcelona star Andres Iniesta broke a bone in his leg while playing for Japanese club Vissel Kobe in the Asian Champions League and will be out for four months, his club said yesterday. Iniesta, 36, underwent successful surgery in Barcelona. The injury occurred in last week's ACL quarter-final against Suwon. Iniesta said in a statement on Instagram accompanied by a photo of himself in a hospital bed that he had broken the "rectus femoris of my right leg". "After many tests I took the advice of my medical team and we have considered that the best option for me was to get surgery and speed up the recovery. "The surgery has been a success and I am feeling very well." —AFP

Lyon see off Juventus

D'CNES-CHARPIEU: Lyon cruised into the last 16 of the women's Champions League on Tuesday after beating Juventus 3-0 to claim a 6-2 aggregate victory. The seven-time European champions dominated the second leg in France from start to finish after only squeezing past the Italians 3-2 in the first leg in Turin. Dzenifer Marozan gave the holders, who were missing Wendie Renard, Sakina Karchaoui and Eugénie Le Sommer, a two-goal aggregate advantage when she opened the scoring midway through the first half. The tie remained in the balance until two minutes from the end when France forward Melvine Malard doubled the hosts' lead on the night. Belgium international Janice Cayman made sure the score reflected the balance of play in stoppage time. —AFP

India bids to host Asian Cup

NEW DELHI: India yesterday joined a five-nation race to host the 2027 Asian Cup, the continent's biggest football tournament, as it steps up efforts to secure international sporting recognition. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have already officially entered the fray and an All India Football Federation (AIFF) spokesman said the country's documents would be sent to the Asian Football Confederation this week. Iran and Uzbekistan have also said they will bid. India, once called a "sleeping giant" of football by former FIFA president Sepp Blatter, has stepped up its interest in hosting international events in recent years. It put on the 2017 under-17 men's World Cup and will host the 2022 women's Asian Cup and the 2021 under-17 women's World Cup. India is also considering a bid for the 2032 Olympics. AIFF president Praful Patel said the Asian Cup bid would further the country's reputation as an emerging football nation. —AFP

Foo Kune banned for 2 years

GENEVA: Mauritian badminton player Kate Foo Kune, her country's flag-carrier at the 2016 Rio Olympics, was banned for two years for doping on Wednesday after failing to prove her drink was spiked. Foo Kune, 27, tested positive for a banned steroid last year but she escaped a ban when the Badminton World Federation's anti-doping panel accepted her explanation that she was the victim of sabotage. But after a BWF appeal against its own panel's decision, the Swiss-based Court of Arbitration for Sport said there was no evidence of foul play. Foo Kune, the world number 105 in singles, tested positive at last year's African Badminton World Championships in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. "The CAS panel found the athlete's assertion of intentional spiking during the 2019 African Badminton World Championships devoid of supporting evidence," said a statement from the court, announcing a two-year ban from December 15. —AFP

Sports

Dortmund's new caretaker coach gets a winning start

Gladbach snatch late draw as Stindl claims hat-trick

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund's new caretaker coach Edin Terzic made a winning start Tuesday after club captain Marco Reus netted a late winner to seal a 2-1 victory at Werder Bremen. The 38-year-old Terzic replaced Lucien Favre, who was sacked Sunday less than 24 hours after a 5-1 thrashing at home by Stuttgart. "It's always important to come back with a win after such a brutal defeat," match-winner Reus told Sky.

"After a change of coach, the team knows it has let itself down. We were up against it and hopefully we have got ourselves on the right track," Terzic has a contract for the rest of the season and inspired Dortmund to their first win in four league games while Bremen now have four straight defeats. "It was important we showed a reaction," said Terzic, who was Slaven Bilic's assistant coach at West Ham from 2015-17. "We lost a few balls in areas where we can't afford to do that, so there are lots of things to work on."

Dortmund took the lead in Bremen as Raphael Guerreiro was fastest to stab home with 14 minutes gone after Jadon Sancho had a shot charged down. Bremen equalized on 28 minutes when Josh Sargent pounced on a mistake by Dortmund defender Manuel Akanji and the ball was worked to Kevin Moehwald who fired home. Akanji made amends when he won the penalty from which Reus scored at the second attempt 12 minutes from time after Jiri Pavlenka saved the initial spot-kick. The away win lifts Dortmund to fourth, three points behind league leaders Bayer Leverkusen, who were at Cologne yesterday.

Stindl hat-trick

Union, who host Dortmund on Friday, were held to a 2-2 draw at VfB Stuttgart, whose two-metre tall striker Sasa Kalajdzic came off the bench to score two late goals. Union were 2-0 up with five minutes left thanks to goals by defender Marvin Friedrich and Liverpool loanee Taiwo Awoniyi. However Kalajdzic scored with a header, then chested down and fired home, his shot surviving scrutiny for a handball from the VAR, to claim a point.

Hertha Berlin remain in mid-table after their goalless draw at second-from-bottom Mainz. Earlier, Borussia Moenchengladbach captain Lars Stindl completed a hat-trick with an equaliser in the fifth minute of added time to snatch a point in their 3-3 draw at Eintracht Frankfurt. Stindl's late heroics saved a point at Frankfurt, but Gladbach, who have drawn Manchester City in the last 16 of the Champions League, are winless in their last five games in all competitions.

After Stindl opened the scoring by curling in a 14th minute free-kick, Frankfurt roared back with three unanswered goals including two by Portugal striker Andre Silva. Leading 3-1, Frankfurt played the last 10 minutes with 10 men after captain David Abraham was sent off for a second booking. With 90 minutes almost up, Gladbach won a penalty and Stindl stepped up to convert. Then he netted a last-gasp header to seal the draw. The point leaves Gladbach eighth, one place and four points ahead of Frankfurt. —AFP



BREMEN: Bremen's German midfielder Maximilian Eggstein (left) vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match Werder Bremen v Borussia Dortmund on December 15, 2020. —AFP

Premier League strugglers West Brom sack Bilic

LONDON: Slaven Bilic became the first Premier League manager to lose his job this season when he was sacked by struggling West Bromwich Albion yesterday. The 52-year-old Croatian's sacking comes with the side 19th in the table but on the back of an encouraging 1-1 draw with Manchester City on Tuesday. Bilic had been at the club for only 18 months but had earned the admiration of the fans after leading West Brom to automatic promotion from the Championship last season. Although results had been generally poor this term Bilic had been given little funding to bring in players in the close season. His budget for transfers was limited at

£20 million (\$27 million).

West Brom have garnered seven points from their 13 matches so far and have the worst defensive record in the Premier League, having conceded 26 goals. Bilic's relations with the board appeared tense from the start of the campaign with no discussions talking place about extending or renewing his contract which was due to run out at the end of this season. "West Bromwich Albion have today parted company with Head Coach Slaven Bilic," read a club statement. "Albion would like to thank Slaven and his coaching staff for their efforts in achieving promotion last season and wishes them all well in the future.

"The club will make no further comment at this time." Former England manager Sam Allardyce is among the favorites to fill the vacancy. The 66-year-old's last managerial post was with Everton, who he left in 2018.



West Bromwich Albion's Croatian head coach Slaven Bilic

Media reports suggest Allardyce will be offered an 18-month contract. In a sign that his appointment may be imminent, he has cancelled scheduled work with a radio station. Bilic's sacking

makes him the latest first managerial departure in a Premier League season for six years, since it took 18 games for Cardiff City to dismiss Neil Warnock in the 2014-15 season. —AFP

Lazio, Benevento share spoils in Inzaghi derby

MILAN: Lazio continued their patchy Serie A form with a 1-1 draw at Benevento on Tuesday as the Inzaghi brothers faced off on the sidelines. Simone Inzaghi's Lazio qualified for the knockout stages of the Champions League for the first time in over two decades midweek but have been wildly inconsistent domestically and sit eighth on 18 points after 12 matches.

Promoted Benevento, led by former AC Milan, Juventus and Italy striker Filippo Inzaghi, move up to 13th after the draw, six points above the relegation zone. Lazio's star striker Ciro Immobile gave the away side a deserved lead with a superb strike in the 25th minute, last season's European Golden Shoe winner hooking Sergej Milinkovic-Savic's cross past Lorenzo Montipò.

That goal came four minutes after Luis Alberto had struck the upright with a low shot as Simone Inzaghi looked set to come out on top in the pitch-side sibling rivalry. Benevento pulled level on the stroke of half-time when Pasquale Schiattarella volleyed home after Lazio failed to clear Gianluca Caprari's corner. The hosts were unlucky to not take all three points when in the final minutes Riccardo

Improta failed to keep his header down after Pepe Reina had pushed out Giuseppe Di Serio's shot. Reina had to be a his best again moments later to keeper out Improta's powerful shot.

Home hero Schiattarella then ruined his good work in stoppage time when a wild tackle on Joaquin Correa earned a straight red card. Crotona remain bottom of the league after a goalless draw at Udinese in Tuesday's early match. They are level on six points with Genoa and Torino, and three behind Fiorentina, who host Sassuolo on Wednesday having not won a league match since late October. Yesterday, leaders AC Milan traveled to Genoa, while champions Juventus hosted Atalanta and title chasers Inter Milan and Napoli faced off at the San Siro. —AFP

MLS teams struggle in CONCACAF Champions League exits

MIAMI: Montreal Impact and New York City FC were dumped out of the CONCACAF Champions League quarter-finals on Tuesday in a blow to Major League Soccer's hopes of ending a 20-year wait for victory in the competition. New York's campaign was snuffed out in clinical fashion by Mexican side Tigres UANL, who are aiming to finally land the continental crown after three losing final appearances in 2016, 2017 and 2019. Tigres, runners-up to Monterrey last season, cruised to a 4-0 victory, 5-0 on aggregate, after goals from French striker Andre-Pierre Gignac, Leonardo Fernandez, Rafael Carioca and Javier Aquino.

Gignac fired Tigres into the lead with a superb header in the 30th minute before Uruguayan midfielder Fernandez added a second with a cheeky backheeled finish in the 49th minute. Brazilian veteran Carioca then headed home Luis Quinones cross on 64 minutes before Aquino netted five minutes from time to complete the scoring on a grim night for New

York, the MLS affiliate of Premier League giants Manchester City.

The rout marked a difficult few days for City, who had only arrived in Orlando earlier Tuesday after three players tested positive for COVID-19 in the past week. The premier continental competition for clubs in North America, Central America and the Caribbean, the CONCACAF Champions League's final stages are taking place at a neutral venue in Orlando, Florida, in order to mitigate risks of disruption from the coronavirus. Tigres will now face Olimpia of Honduras in Saturday's semi-finals. The Central American club were beaten 1-0 by Montreal in Tuesday's early game but advanced on the away goals rule.

Olimpia had beaten Impact 2-1 during the first leg in Montreal in March before the pandemic brought sport in North America to a standstill. Montreal, coached by former France, Barcelona and Arsenal star Thierry Henry, struggled to break down a resilient Olimpia side, who defended in depth for long periods. The



ORLANDO: Deybi Flores #20 of CD Olimpia tackles Orji Okwonkwo #18 of Montreal Impact during the CONCACAF Champions League quarterfinal game at Exploria Stadium on December 15, 2020. —AFP

Canadian side were given a lifeline on 57 minutes, when German midfielder Amar Sejdic punished a poor clearance by Olimpia defender Carlos Pineda to curl home a low finish from the edge of the area.

But Henry's side were unable to carve out clear chances after that as Olimpia held on to reach the last four. Tuesday's defeats for New York and Montreal lengthened the odds on an MLS team

finally lifting the Champions League. The last MLS team to win the continental title crown was Los Angeles Galaxy in 2000. With Atlanta United trailing 3-0 from the first leg heading into their second leg game against Mexico's America, MLS's last chance of ending the title drought is likely to rest with Los Angeles FC. Los Angeles faced Mexico's Cruz Azul in yesterday's other quarter-final game. —AFP

Role of heading in football has to be reexamined

LONDON: The role of heading in football should be "seriously considered" amid concerns of a link to an increased risk of dementia, according to the outgoing Professional Footballers' Association chief executive Gordon Taylor. Taylor will step down from his role at the end of the season after 40 years in charge after criticism of his perceived failure to act to tackle the issue of dementia in the game.

Last week a group of former international rugby players announced they were taking legal action against the English and Welsh governing bodies over the brain injuries they have suffered. Former England striker Gary Lineker is among those who have called for a complete ban on heading in training at all levels of the game. "We've got areas of research. We are looking at the number of players who are getting dementia and trying to establish a causal link," Taylor told Sky Sports.

"That's why it's so important that we look at the treatment of concussion and the number of times in training players are heading the ball and to seriously consider the role of heading in the game. "I don't know any footballer who regrets his career, but we also have a duty of care and I think it is incumbent on the authorities that we don't put off any youngster coming into the game because of worries about the future." England World Cup winners Nobby Stiles and Jack Charlton have both died from dementia earlier this year, while Bobby Charlton has also been diagnosed with the disease.

The FIELD study published last year found footballers were three-and-a-half times more likely to die of neurodegenerative disease than age-matched members of the general population. In 2002, an inquest recorded a verdict of death by industrial disease in the case of former England striker Jeff Astle caused by repeated heading of the ball. Dr Willie Stewart, who led the FIELD study, carried out a new examination on Astle's brain in 2014 which concluded that the 59-year-old had died from chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). —AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Aston Villa v Burnley	beIN Sports HD 1	21:00
Sheffield United v Man United	beIN Sports HD 1	23:00
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
AS Roma v Torino	beIN Sports HD 4	22:45

14 Masked, muted Olympics will still dominate crowded 2021 in sports



15 Dortmund's new caretaker coach gets a winning start



15 Role of heading in football has to be reexamined over risk of dementia



Chelsea lose 2-1 at Wolves

'We are not machines,' wasteful Man City slip up again



WOLVERHAMPTON: Chelsea's French striker Olivier Giroud (center) takes a shot at goal during the English Premier League football match between Wolverhampton Wanderers and Chelsea at the Molineux stadium in Wolverhampton on December 15, 2020. — AFP

WOLVERHAMPTON: Frank Lampard believes Chelsea have become complacent after the Blues blew a lead to lose 2-1 at Wolves and suffer back-to-back Premier League defeats for the first time during his reign in charge. Twice in four days Chelsea have wasted the chance to move top of the Premier League after losing for the first time in 18 matches at Everton on Saturday. Lampard himself called into question his side's title credentials after a 1-0 loss at Goodison Park at the weekend and believes his players may have got carried away with their unbeaten run.

"Performance is what gives you results. We were playing very well, on a long unbeaten run and then maybe the lads think 'we're playing well'. The minute you think you're playing well, things like this can happen," said a visibly irked Lampard after Pedro Neto broke clear to win the game in the 95th minute. "If you're not playing well which we weren't tonight, hang on to the 1-0. Play, control the game, and don't allow counter attacks like we did."

There was more evidence that Chelsea

are still a team in transition after a £220 million (\$294 million) transfer spending spree as two of their big money signings, Timo Werner and Kai Havertz, again failed to sparkle. Lampard's men remain in fifth, three points adrift of Tottenham and Liverpool at the top, ahead of a clash between the top two at Anfield on Wednesday. Victory was no more than Wolves deserved as they bounced back from two consecutive defeats since losing top scorer Raul Jimenez to a fractured skull. "We reacted well," said Wolves boss Nuno Espirito Santo. "I think we were always in the game. We were well organized and second-half we played really well."

Chelsea disappoint

Other than bursts from Christian Pulisic past the struggling Nelson Semedo, Chelsea created precious little from open play. Set-pieces caused Wolves more problems as Olivier Giroud headed over when he should have hit the target before Kurt Zouma crashed a header from another corner off the crossbar. Giroud was razor sharp four

minutes into the second-half as he volleyed Ben Chilwell's cross towards goal and the ball slipped through Rui Patricio's grasp and just over the line. Going behind awakened Wolves and Fabio Silva was denied his first Premier League goal since a 40 million euro (\$47 million £36 million) move from Porto by an offside flag.

Wolves had not scored in two games since losing Jimenez to a sickening head knock suffered in a 2-1 win at Arsenal. But Daniel Podence produced a moment of magic as he twisted and turned inside the Chelsea box to find space for a shot and his effort deflected off Reece James and inside Edouard Mendy's near post. Chelsea's record signing Havertz had another night to forget. The German international was replaced by Mateo Kovacic, while Tammy Abraham replaced the injured Giroud as Lampard went in search of a winner.

Yet, it was Wolves who looked the more likely winners in the closing stages. Neto thought he had won a penalty when driving past James, but after a VAR review referee Stuart Attwell overturned his original deci-

sion as there was no contact on the Portuguese winger. However, Neto was not to be denied on the counter-attack deep into stoppage time as he accelerated past Zouma and drove low into the far corner to move Wolves into the top half of the table and within three points of the top four.

Wasteful Man City slip

Meanwhile, Ilkay Gundogan blamed a congested calendar in a unique season for Manchester City's failure to match the standards they have set under Pep Guardiola after a 1-1 draw with West Brom dealt another blow to their title challenge. Gundogan appeared to have opened the floodgates on the half hour mark, but Ruben Dias's own goal two minutes before half-time proved costly as City's problems in front of goal continued in a goalless second-half. City have won just five of their opening 12 league games of the season, a far cry from the combined 198 points they registered in two title-winning campaigns under Guardiola in 2017/18 and 2018/19.

Even last season when finishing distant

runners-up to Liverpool, City scored 102 league goals, but the stale domination that has characterised a lacklustre campaign was in evidence all night as they struggled to break through West Brom's deep-lying defense. "We had great years where we played great football in the past so we set the level high," said Gundogan. "All over Europe all the big teams are struggling with the tight fixtures and it's not going to be easier in the next weeks."

"That's an explanation why it is not always as easy as the expectations people have for us. We are not machines but we also know when we have not played our best game." City could have moved to within three points of leaders Tottenham and Liverpool, who met yesterday. Instead Guardiola's men edge up to fifth on goal difference, still five points off the top. "These games you have to win, we know it, so we drop points," admitted Guardiola. "It's not far away the top of the league, but you have to win games. Still we are in early December and there are a lot of games to play." — Agencies

Benzema fires Real level with Sociedad

MADRID: Karim Benzema spared Real Madrid's blushes on Tuesday with the winning brace which shot the reigning champions to a 3-1 win over Athletic Bilbao that draws them level on points with La Liga Leaders Real Sociedad. Frenchman Benzema headed home a cross from Dani Carvajal with 16 minutes remaining to put Real ahead against battling Bilbao, who had fought back to level earlier having lost Raul Garcia to two quickfire bookings in opening minutes. Toni Kroos had given the hosts the lead in Madrid with a thumping strike on the stroke of half-time, but Ander Capa rocked the capital club six minutes after the break when he shot past Thibaut Courtois at the second time of asking.

The 32-year-old Benzema had other ideas however, putting his team in front before making sure of the points in stoppage time with a clinical finish after collecting Luka Modric's pass. Third-placed Madrid gained their fourth straight win in all competitions and are equal on 26 points with Sociedad, who faced troubled Barcelona at the Camp Nou yesterday, and local rivals Atletico Madrid. Tuesday's match was the game in hand which Real had on Sociedad, while



MADRID: Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema (left) challenges Athletic Bilbao's Spanish defender Yeray Alvarez during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and Athletic Club Bilbao on December 15, 2020. — AFP

Atletico have played two games fewer than their two title rivals. Barca are nine points back but play one of their two games in hand in the hope of giving some momentum to what has been a miserable season so far. — AFP

Doha to host 2030 Asian Games; Riyadh 2034 edition

MUSCAT: Doha will host the 2030 Asian Games, the Olympic Council of Asia announced yesterday, while Riyadh was named as host of the 2034 edition under a compromise agreed between the rivals. An executive board meeting of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) unanimously approved the proposal to name the runner-up in the two-horse race for the 2030 games as 2034 hosts. "I can now announce... that the city who had the highest vote and will host 2030 is Doha," said OCA president Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah. "The second hosting city, for 2034, is Riyadh."

Voting was delayed by hours after technical problems with the online system, in place to allow some national olympic committees to participate remotely because of the coronavirus pandemic. "I apologize for the technical problem we are facing during our voting," said Sheikh Ahmad. "Today the difficult things have been solved and the easy things have

been problems." "I will be glad to have two games in west Asia, to be honest," added Sheikh Ahmad. Saudi and Qatar are locked in a bitter dispute after an alliance of countries led by Riyadh cut diplomatic, economic and transport ties with Doha in 2017, accusing it of backing radical Islamists and Iran.

'A national priority'

Qatar denies the charges and there has been progress to reconcile the dispute in recent weeks with all sides praising Kuwaiti-led mediation. Ahead of the vote, the OCA's president said he was seeking a "win-win" situation for Doha and Riyadh. Doha hosted the Asian Games in 2006 while Saudi Arabia has never organized an OCA multi-sport event.

"Our goal is simple. We want to see more Asian athletes in the future, on future Olympic podiums," said Qatar Olympic Committee chief Joao bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani ahead of the vote. "We want that to be part of your national sports history, not just ours. And we want to support you in the efforts to get there." Qatar is also participating in the bidding process for the 2032 summer Olympics. A video showcased Qatar's raft of sporting and transport infrastructure being prepared ahead of the 2022 football World Cup that would be repurposed for the 2030 games. The games will have a \$1.3 billion budget. — AFP