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# Kuwait mourns passing of Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

## Sheikh Nasser held several senior positions during his illustrious career



Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

**KUWAIT:** Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the eldest son of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, passed away in Kuwait yesterday. He was 72. A former defense minister and head of the Amiri Diwan, Sheikh Nasser held several senior positions during his career, including Chief of the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development as well as Chief of Development of Silk City and Boubyan Island.

He was also known for his passion for culture and history, as he established Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyah, and for his business acumen that helped him lead a successful business career and later use his vast experience in directing major government projects. Sheikh Nasser will be laid to rest today morning.

Born on April 27, 1948 in Kuwait City,

Sheikh Nasser began his career in politics by being appointed advisor to HH the Crown Prince and HH the Prime Minister on Dec 7, 1999. He then held the Minister of Amiri Diwan post from Feb 11, 2006 to Dec 11, 2017, when he was named Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister. He served in that position until Nov 18, 2019.

SEE PAGE 3

Sheikh Nasser led a government committee responsible to implement the New Kuwait 2035 vision, spearheading various ambitious developmental ventures in Kuwait including the Silk City mega project with investments estimated at more than \$100 billion.

Sheikh Nasser was an honorary member on the board of trustees of the

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Chairman of the board of trustees of both Abdullah Al-Salem and Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centers, Head of the Committee for Common Development Enterprises between Kuwait and Iran, founder and member of Kuwait Red Crescent Society, founder and member of the Kuwaiti Association for the Protection of Public Funds, founder and member of the Kuwaiti Hunting and Equestrian Club, honorary chief of the Kuwaiti Arts Association, honorary chief of the Kuwait Pharmacists Association and honorary chief of Kuwait Legal Society.

During his career, he received high-ranking medals from the President of Mongolia, an honorary PhD degree from the University of Mongolia, and the Gloria Artis Medals, the highest ranked cultural medals from Poland.

## Kuwait set to receive first batch of COVID vaccines

**KUWAIT:** Member of the higher advisory committee and vaccines committee at the health ministry Prof Khalid Al-Saeed said the first batch of coronavirus vaccines will arrive in Kuwait tomorrow or on Wednesday, adding that it includes around 150,000 doses enough for 75,000 individuals, as each person will get two shots. He said over 60,000 people have registered on the online vaccine platform.

Saeed said the first stage of inoculation will be to protect the most vulnerable, including frontliners such as doctors and nurses, the elderly and those who suffer from chronic diseases. He said pregnant women and children will be vaccinated later.

Saeed said the vaccine is safe and effective, noting that around 1.2 million people have been vaccinated around the world so far and no one had any complications that required hospitalization and there have been no deaths. He added there have been allergic reactions in a very few number of cases.

Continued on Page 2

## Kuwait bans UK flights as virus strain 'out of control'

**KUWAIT/LONDON:** Kuwait's civil aviation authority added the United Kingdom to its high-risk list of countries yesterday, meaning all flights from it are banned, the authority wrote on Twitter. Commercial flights to 34 other countries remain banned due to the spread of the coronavirus. European countries also banned flights from the UK yesterday and the WHO called for stronger containment measures as the British government warned that a potent new strain of the virus was "out of control".

As the World Health Organization urged its European members to

strengthen measures against the new variant of COVID-19 circulating in Britain, the Netherlands imposed a ban on UK flights from 6:00 am (0500 GMT) yesterday and Belgium said it would follow suit from midnight with ban on planes and trains from the UK.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the infectiousness of the new strain had forced his hand into imposing a lockdown across much of England over the Christmas period. "Unfortunately the new strain was out of control," UK Health Secretary

Continued on Page 2

## Rare Christmas sales in Saudi

**RIYADH:** Christmas trees and glittery ornaments are for sale at a Saudi gift shop, a once unthinkable sight in the cradle of Islam where all public non-Muslim worship is banned. In recent years, festive sales have gradually crept into the capital Riyadh, a sign of loosening social restrictions after Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman pledged to steer the conservative Gulf kingdom towards an "open, moderate Islam".

"I didn't ever imagine I'd see this" in Saudi Arabia, a Riyadh resident told AFP at the shop selling trees, Santa Claus outfits as well as tinsel, baubles and other ornaments. "I am

surprised," said the resident, declining to be identified. Until barely three years ago, it was almost impossible to sell such items openly in Saudi Arabia, but authorities have been clipping the powers of the clerical establishment long notorious for enforcing Islamic traditions.

For decades, Christmas sales were largely underground, and Christians from the Philippines, Lebanon and other countries celebrated behind closed doors or in expat enclaves. "It was very difficult to find such" Christmas items in the kingdom, said Mary, a Lebanese expat based in Riyadh who preferred to be identified by her first name. "Many of my friends used to buy them from Lebanon or Syria and sneak them into the country," she said.

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LIVERPOOL: UK newspapers are photographed yesterday, showing front page headlines reporting on Prime Minister Boris Johnson introducing new COVID-19 restrictions and cancelling Christmas gatherings. — AFP

## Ghanem urges MPs to stay away from personal disputes

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, who last week won a third term as speaker, yesterday called on lawmakers to stay away from personal disputes and cooperate to achieve the aspirations of the Kuwaiti people. Ghanem also said that he has invited MPs for a meeting tomorrow to elect members of the Assembly's permanent and temporary committees.

But five MPs opposed to Ghanem yesterday filed a second request calling for an investigation into incidents that happened during the speaker's election, including allowing a group of Ghanem supporters to enter the house gallery. MPs Mubarak Al-Hajraf, Marzouq Al-Khalifa, Osama Al-Shabeen, Abdulkarim Al-Kandari and Thamer Al-Suwait said that some MPs posted on social media ballot papers for the speaker's election that looked fake, as they did not carry the Assembly's official stamp.

They demanded a comprehensive investigation into this matter and the role of the Assembly's secretariat in this affair. The lawmakers claimed that a group of unauthorized people were allowed into the Assembly building and the chamber days before the speaker's election, and they were accompanied by members from the Assembly secretariat. They called to review the cameras in the Assembly building to track down those people.

Continued on Page 2

## 'Ice man' sets new record in freezing cabin

**WATTRELOS, France:** Frenchman Romain Vandendorpe on Saturday set a world record for sitting immersed in ice cubes for the longest time, enduring the extreme challenge to raise money for childhood cancers. The 34-year-old health worker remained buried up to his neck in ice in a plexiglass cabin for two hours, 35 minutes and 43 seconds, breaking the previous record by 40 minutes in the northern French town of Wattrelos.

He said he trained to "overcome human limits" by neuro-cognitive techniques based on "imagination and concentration" to put himself in "a state of day-dreaming". The feat was performed before some 50 people and Vandendorpe's mantra for success was simple. "If we train, if we give our all, we can advance (and) obtain results that can improve things."

His training techniques including sitting in an ice-cold jacuzzi, training in a 500-litre freezer and then remaining buried in snow in the French ski resort of



WATTRELOS: Frenchman Romain Vandendorpe tries to break the world record for the longest full body contact with ice cubes on Saturday. — AFP

Chamonix. He aims to donate the money raised through his feat to the Wonder Augustine association founded in Wattrelos following the death of a four-year-old girl called Augustine two years ago from brain cancer. — AFP

## Singapore gets shot in arm from drug demand

**SINGAPORE:** Scientists in protective clothing work in a high-tech laboratory at a pharmaceutical plant in Singapore, whose coronavirus-hit economy has received a shot in the arm from robust global drug demand. The city-state is on course for its worst ever recession this year but factory activity has held up, thanks partly to countries rushing to stockpile medicines during the pandemic.

The nation just half the size of Los Angeles has become a center for drug makers and is home to more than 50 factories, owned by big players including Pfizer, Roche, GlaxoSmithKline and Takeda. Singapore's drug sector "plays an important role in the global pharmaceutical industry supply chain", Rajiv Biswas, Asia Pacific chief economist at

Continued on Page 2



RIYADH: Christmas decorations are displayed for sale at a gift shop in the Saudi capital on Dec 7, 2020. — AFP



## Local

## Amir, Crown Prince receive state officials



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 at Seif Palace yesterday.



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



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. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos

## Kuwait bans UK flights as virus...

Continued from Page 1

Matt Hancock told Sky News after Johnson U-turned on his previously stated policy of easing containment measures over the festive season. Hancock also warned that a strict lockdown imposed on London and southeast England may last for months.

Alarm bells were ringing across Europe - which last week became the first region in the world to pass 500,000 deaths from COVID-19 since the pandemic broke out a year ago - after it appeared that a new, even more infectious strain of the virus was raging in parts of Britain. Germany, too, was considering a similar move as "a serious option" for flights from both Britain and South Africa, where another variant was discovered, according to a government source.

Italy will join the ban in order to protect its citizens, Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio wrote on Facebook, without specifying when the measures would come into force.

Austria's health ministry told the APA news agency that it would also impose a flight ban, the details of which were still being worked out. A spokeswoman for WHO Europe told AFP that "across Europe, where transmission is intense and widespread, countries need to redouble their control and prevention approaches."

French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and EU chiefs Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel held a conference call yesterday about the matter, according to the Elysee palace in Paris. Scientists first discovered the new variant - which they believe is 70 percent more transmissible - in a patient in September. And Public Health England notified the government on Friday when modeling revealed the full seriousness of the new strain.

But Britain's chief medical officer Chris Whitty pointed out that while the new strain was greatly more infectious, "there is no current evidence to suggest (it) causes a higher mortality rate or that it affects vaccines and treatments, although urgent

work is underway to confirm this". The novel coronavirus has killed at least 1,685,785 people since the outbreak emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP at 1100 GMT yesterday. And with the onset of colder winter weather in the northern hemisphere where respiratory diseases flourish, countries are bracing for new waves of COVID-19 with tighter restrictions, despite the economic damage such lockdowns wrought earlier this year.

The Netherlands is under a five-week lockdown until mid-January with schools and all non-essential shops closed to slow a surge in the virus. Italy also announced a new regime of restrictions until Jan 6 that included limits on people leaving their homes more than once a day, closing non-essential shops, bars and restaurants and curbs on regional travel. In Russia, health authorities said that the number of people who have died from the coronavirus has surpassed the 50,000 mark and now stands at 50,858.

The rapid rollout of vaccinations is now seen as the only effective way to end the crisis and the economically devastating shutdowns used to halt its spread. Europe is expected to start a massive vaccination campaign after Christmas following the United States and Britain, which have begun giving jabs with an approved Pfizer-BioNTech shot, one of several leading candidates.

Russia and China have also started giving out jabs with their own domestically produced vaccines. The United States on Friday authorized Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use, paving the way for millions of doses of a second jab to be shipped across the hardest-hit country in the world. It is the first nation to authorize the two-dose regimen from Moderna, now the second vaccine to be deployed in a Western country after the one developed by Pfizer and BioNTech.

The Wall Street Journal reported that US lawmakers had agreed on pandemic spending powers for the Federal Reserve late Saturday, clearing the way for a vote on a roughly \$900-billion COVID-19 relief package for millions of Americans. The deal would maintain the central bank's ability to set up emergency lending programs without congressional approval, the Journal said, but the Fed would require approval to restart existing CARES Act programs once they expire at the end of this year. — AFP

turing sector, according to risk consultancy Fitch Solutions. Singapore, with a population of 5.7 million, is one of the few countries that exports more pharmaceuticals than it imports - in 2019 it shipped pharma products worth US\$8.1 billion while importing US\$3.1 billion-worth, according to Fitch.

Authorities have promoted cutting-edge research to grow the economy, committing to invest nearly US\$20 billion in research and innovation for the next five years. Amid a network of stainless steel pipes and storage tanks, Takeda's facility grows cells from hamster ovaries to make ingredients for drugs to treat haemophilia, a rare disorder that affects the blood's ability to clot.

The final product is flown to Switzerland, Vienna or California where it is mixed with other ingredients and put in vials, before being sent to Belgium for packing and then shipped worldwide. "Overall, the pharma industry in Singapore has not been adversely impacted by the pandemic," George Lam, who heads the company's Singapore manufacturing site, told AFP during a visit. "Because we are not affected we continue to manufacture, we continue to export our drugs to the global markets... A number of pharma companies in Singapore are doing life-saving medicines."

It has not been all smooth sailing for the company's Singapore operation. Some of its workers got stranded in neighboring Malaysia when borders were closed, although the site managed to continue operating. The health of Singapore's drug sector is a rare bright spot for the city's economy, and also for trade worldwide.

The value of global trade is set to fall by up to nine percent on-year in 2020, the United Nations has forecast, and leaders in the export-dependent city-state remain nervous about the outlook. "We expect recovery next year to be gradual and uneven because of recurrent waves of infection in other countries, and the uncertainties associated with the pace of vaccine production, distribution and vaccination," said Trade Minister Chan Chun Sing. "We will not return to the pre-COVID world." — AFP

## Kuwait set to receive first batch ...

Continued from Page 1

About the vaccination procedure for those registered on the platform, he said messages will be sent to them including the time they will receive the vaccine at the Mishref fairgrounds. When the person arrives, their temperature will be checked and social

## Ghanem urges MPs to stay...

Continued from Page 1

They also demanded a probe into how invitations for the Assembly's inaugural session were distributed and the role of the Assembly secretariat and Assembly guards in this matter. Last week, five MPs filed a similar request to launch an investigation into what happened during the inaugural session of the new Assembly. MP Suwail later described the inau-

## Rare Christmas sales in Saudi...

Continued from Page 1

But in a sign of the changing times, the Riyadh shop manager, Omar, who declined to provide his surname, said his store sold not just Christmas items but also outfits for Halloween - widely seen by arch-conservatives as an American tradition that is a deviation from Islam. Saudi Arabia is the custodian of Makkah and Madinah, Islam's two holiest sites.

The Arab kingdom has long been accused of exporting its ultraconservative Wahhabist Sunni doctrine around the world but has been slowly pushing for inter-religious exchange. It has even hosted officials linked to the Vatican as well as Jewish figures in recent years. Local officials say

distancing will be maintained. Nurses will scrutinize every person's information and they will get the vaccine in the left arm.

Saeed said the dose will be around 0.3 ml at room temperature at the time of administration. He said the vaccinated person will remain in the waiting room for between 15 to 20 minutes to make sure there are no allergic reactions. He said specialized doctors will supervise the vaccination process to deal with any emergency that may occur, in addition to having an emergency department at the site. He concluded that the process will be preceded by an awareness campaign. — Al-Jarida

gural session as a "Black Tuesday", arguing that the will of the nation was forged in the speaker's election.

He said opposition MPs have agreed to prepare a blacklist of names of the "gang" that entered the Assembly chamber on the inaugural day. Opposition MP Bader Al-Dahoum called on the Kuwaiti people to come to the Assembly tomorrow to attend the session and to "regain the seats of the people that were the subject of a conspiracy".

Meanwhile, the constitutional court yesterday received the eighth challenge against the National Assembly election. The petition calls on the court to nullify the results of the election because people were not asked to remove their masks to establish their identities while casting their ballots.

school textbooks, once well-known for denigrating Jews and other non-Muslims as "swines" and "apes", are undergoing revision as part of Prince Mohammed's campaign to combat extremism in education.

The heir to the Saudi throne has curbed the influence of the once-powerful religious police, as he permits mixed-gender music concerts, cinemas and other entertainment, but temples and churches are still forbidden. Earlier this month, the United States reconfirmed Saudi Arabia's place among a list of countries on a religious freedom blacklist. The countries are accused of engaging in or tolerating "systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom", according to the US State Department.

Last month, Prince Mohammed pledged to strike extremists with an "iron fist", after a bombing against a gathering of Western diplomats at a non-Muslim cemetery in the Red Sea city of Jeddah that was claimed by the Islamic State group. — AFP

## Singapore gets shot in arm from...

Continued from Page 1

consultancy IHS Markit, told AFP. And in 2020, "governments and private-sector firms have been building up inventories of critical drugs as a result of the severe supply chain disruptions in many countries during the pandemic", he added. Data highlights the benefits for the trading hub - biomedical manufacturing, which covers pharmaceuticals, has grown strongly, with output expanding 90 percent on-year in September alone.

Exports also defied expectations of a collapse and posted growth most of the year, helped by drug shipments, although they slipped back in October and November. While much attention has focused on vaccine development, strong demand for medicines to treat illnesses ranging from asthma to epilepsy has underpinned the continued good fortunes of the pharmaceutical giants in the city, industry players and analysts say.

It is a much-needed boost after Singapore's economy shrank more than 13 percent in the second quarter when the country introduced tough virus curbs. With borders largely closed, the key tourism sector has been particularly hard-hit with arrivals falling to just 13,400 in October from 1.7 million in January. Singapore's outbreak has been relatively mild, however, with the city-state recording around 58,000 cases and 29 deaths, while the economy began recovering in July-September as restrictions were eased. The city had long been a major exporter of electronics, from microchips to computer hard disks, but has sought to diversify its manufacturing sector.

The biomedical industry - which also covers making high-tech medical devices such as pacemakers - now employs more than 24,000 people and accounts for about 20 percent of the manufac-



BEIRUT: Lebanese firefighters stand yesterday in front of a Christmas tree created by Lebanese artist Hayat Nazer and decorated with uniforms of firefighters and rescuers as a way to pay tribute to those who died in Beirut port explosion. — AFP



# Sheikh Nasser remembered as generous contributor to Kuwait

Minister of Defense between 2017 and 2019



KUWAIT: Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah attends a parliament session on June 25, 2019. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and KUNA



This January 28, 2018 file photo shows then Amir His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receiving Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



WASHINGTON: This September 18, 2020 file photo shows Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah with US President Donald J Trump during a ceremony to award the Legion of Merit, Degree Chief Commander, to then Amir of Kuwait His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who passed away at the age of 72 yesterday, will be remembered for his generous contributions to the nation over a broad range of spectrums. The eldest son of the late Amir His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, was born on April 27, 1948, to later occupy several positions, most recently First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense between 2017 and 2019. Other posts include Special Adviser to His Highness the Crown Prince and Prime Minister in 1999 and Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs in 2006 in addition to being the founder of the Kuwait Association for the Protection of Public Funds. In the fields of trade and investment, he founded the Al Futtooh Holding Co and the Kuwait Projects Holding. His admiration for history and culture was also a prominent feature, as he established Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah, a Kuwaiti foundation dedicated to the collection and preservation of ancient artifacts and manuscripts comprised by the Al-Sabah Antiques Group. Sheikh Nasser was also an honorary member of the Board of Trustees of the New York-based Metropolitan Museum. — KUNA



This May 1, 2019 file photo shows Kuwait's then First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meeting with Prince Charles of Wales.



This June 5, 2018 file photo shows Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah decorating a new officer with his military badge.



In this December 19, 2017 file photo, Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah gestures during a parliament session.



This January 16, 2018 file photo shows Kuwait's then First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah attending a military drill at the Adaira shooting range.



Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah speaks during a session at the 2018 Kuwait Investment Forum.



In this March 5, 2018 file photo, Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah addresses members of the supervisory committee of the Kuwait's Achievers For Future Opportunities (KAFO) program.



In this April 2, 2019 file photo, Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with children participating in a gallery at the Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah.



Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets Lord Mayor of London Peter Estlin in this archive photo.

## News in brief

### Palestinian embassy offers condolences

KUWAIT: Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait Rami Tahboub offered his condolences on the sad demise of Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. "On behalf of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, myself and members of the Palestinian community in Kuwait, I offer deepest condolences on the demise of Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah," the ambassador said in a statement. "I offer condolences 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, Al-Sabah family and the Kuwaiti people."

### Indian embassy sends condolences

KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Sibi George expressed heartfelt condolences on the sad demise of Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. "On behalf of the government and the people of Republic of India, including the Indian community in Kuwait, I express my sincere and heartfelt condolences on the sad demise of Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, former First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, State of Kuwait," a press release issued by the Indian embassy said yesterday. "Our thoughts are with the esteemed Al-Sabah family and the people of the State of Kuwait. [Sheikh Nasser] shared a strong connect with India. He was a great friend of India, who had contributed immensely in the growth of India-Kuwait relations. We, at the Embassy and the Indian Community in Kuwait, join the people of the State of Kuwait, in praying for the departed soul. May his soul rest in eternal peace."

### Peru embassy pays respects

KUWAIT: The charge d'affaires at the Peru Embassy Rolando Lozada expressed condolences on the sad demise of the Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. "In my name and on behalf of the government of the Republic of Peru and members of the Peruvian embassy in Kuwait, I extend my deepest condolences to the State of Kuwait, its Amir and its people, on the demise of Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah," reads a statement released by the embassy yesterday.



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## Daily briefings resume as Kuwait lists 204 new cases, 3 deaths



KUWAIT: Health Ministry spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad during a previous daily press conference. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health will continue holding its daily COVID-19 press conference updates from Jaber Hospital tomorrow, spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. The announcements will be broadcast live on state television and ministry social media outlets as the deadline for the initial stage of coronavirus vaccinations fast approaches, the official said in a statement. Meanwhile, Kuwait confirmed 204 new coronavirus infections yesterday to raise the total to 147,979, while three new deaths were recorded as the death toll reached 921, the health ministry said.

Total recoveries reached 143,926 after 285 new ones were announced yesterday. The number of patients hospitalized stood yesterday at 3,132, with 60 of them in intensive care units, according to Dr Sanad, who revealed that 4,242 swab tests were conducted over the same period, bringing the total up to 1,218,389. Dr Sanad went on to urge the public to follow social distancing rules and other health precautions to help limit the spread of the virus. —KUNA

# 'Shlonik' wins Salem Al-Ali Informatics Award 2020

## Zain developed app in collaboration with MOH, CAIT

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, proudly announced that 'Shlonik' App received His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Informatics Award 2020. The app was developed by Zain early this year in joint collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT) to fight the spread of COVID-19 in Kuwait.

This prestigious award has had immense patronage from His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and continues to receive generous support from its founder His Highness Chief of the Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah. The fact that 'Shlonik' has received this award reflects the fruitful unified efforts of Kuwait's public and private sectors.

'Shlonik' was developed by Zain's team in joint collaboration with the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT) and under direct supervision from the Ministry of Health. The app's development and launch came in a relatively short period of time that coincided with the beginning of the country's evacuation plan to return thousands of Kuwaiti citizens back home at the beginning of the pandemic.

During April, specifically during the beginning of the evacuation plan's first phase, Zain developed 'Shlonik' (which translates to 'how are you' in the Kuwaiti dialect) app for smartphones to support the enormous efforts exerted by the authorities to tackle the pandemic. The app was designed with world-class standards in mind, with direct and continuous supervision from the Ministry of Health's team.

'Shlonik' utilizes the latest tech solutions to monitor the compliance of citizens who returned to Kuwait as part of the government's evacuation plan in home quarantine instructions. The app is also an essential tool to pair with the smart wrist bracelet that was distributed at Kuwait International Airport to anyone who underwent home quarantine.

As of today, 'Shlonik' was downloaded over

623,000 times, where the Ministry of Health's teams monitored over 390,000 home-quarantined users via the app. Over 114,000 COVID-positive cases were recorded via the app, where they were successfully prevented from coming into contact with others. In addition, the app is currently monitoring over 42,000 active users who are undergoing home quarantine.

'Shlonik' can be downloaded from Apple's App Store, Google's Play Store, and Huawei's App Gallery, and is available in five different languages: Arabic, English, Urdu, Tagalog, and Bengali. Users can sign up via their phone and civil ID numbers. The app features an interactive COVID-19 assessment agent to help each user know what to do next.

When home quarantined individuals first arrive home from Kuwait International Airport, they are required to complete the first check-in process via the app to notify MOH's team of their arrival and the commencement of their home quarantine period. They then enter their home quarantine location on the map, record a voice note, and take a picture of themselves that clearly shows their face. The app will use this data to verify their identity during future check-ups using Artificial Intelligence (AI).

'Shlonik' is the main communication method between quarantined individuals and the Ministry of Health's team responsible for monitoring their commitment in home quarantine instructions. The team will reach out to the user at least two times daily, and request some vitals like their body temperature and overall health. The app also allows audio and visual communication if needed.

The Qualification Committee and Judging Panel of HH Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Informatics Award held various virtual sessions to study a total of 308 projects from Kuwait and the Arab World. The sessions have resulted in the nomination of 25 projects to the judging panel, which consisted of many specialists and experts from eight different Arab countries to select the winners. 9 tech projects won the award for their creativity and innovation.

Over  
620,000  
downloads



In my view

## What will Trump do?

By Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri

local@kuwaittimes.com



In his best-selling book, *Disloyal: A Memoir: The True Story of the Former Personal Attorney to President Donald J. Trump*, Michael Cohen forecasts that President Trump would do everything in his power to avoid federal criminal prosecution if he loses the 2020 US presidential election to Democratic opponent Joe Biden.

Released in September 2020, Cohen believed Trump would resign from office sometime during the 11 weeks between losing the election and Biden's inauguration, hand over the Presidency to his Vice President, Mike Pence, and obligate a President Pence to pardon him.

"My theory is that if he loses, there's still the time between the election and the time that the next president will take office. And during that time my suspicion is that he will resign as president, he will allow Mike Pence to take over, and he will then go ahead and have Mike Pence pardon him," Cohen said in an television interview earlier this year with MSNBC's Rachel Maddow.

"It's a very Nixon type of event," said Cohen, who is serving out the rest of his three-year prison sentence after pleading guilty to lying to Congress about his pursuit of a Trump real estate deal in Moscow during the 2016 campaign cycle.

As expected, the White House and President Trump himself have dismissed Cohen's comments about the president as the words of a "desperate" man who lost all credibility after he was convicted and sentenced for lying to the United States Congress in 2017.

As American history reminds us all, the pardon of Richard Nixon was issued by US President Gerald Ford on September 8, 1974. By it, Ford granted Nixon, his predecessor, a full and unconditional pardon for any crimes that he might have committed against the United States as president. In particular, the pardon covered Nixon's actions during the Watergate scandal.

American opinion writer and columnist Brent Budowsky views this in a very similar fashion. "A presidential pardon by Pence would not offer protection from cases originating in states, but those cases will be far more manageable if they are not sunk into a morass of federal cases that only a federal pardon can protect him from."

Without a federal pardon, Budowsky continues, Trump will almost certainly spend his coming years stuck in federal cases that not only threaten his freedom, but also his ability to secure lucrative multibillion-dollar business deals capitalizing off of his presidency and media savvy. Moreover, this could even dim his chances to run for the White House again in 2024. This could even affect the chances of his son Donald Jr or daughter, Ivanka to run if they are caught up in this as well.

If there is one thing that is real and constant nowadays: it's the fact that President Trump does not like to lose or admit defeat.

Even now, a month after the recent presidential election, President Trump has yet to clearly concede his election defeat despite the fact his own US Attorney General Bill Barr acknowledged that if there was an election fraud it would not have affected the final outcome of a victory for President-elect Joe Biden. Rather than accepting defeat, the president continues to flood American courts with civil lawsuits and theories about how his re-election was stolen away from him by claims of fraud and conspiracies by Democratic operatives, opponents, the media and both Republican and Democratic state officials.

Others have even surmised and speculated that President Trump would himself pardon members of his family, himself, and others who may be caught up in any federal inquiry.

In doing this, Donald Trump and his hallmark "Art of the Deal" would save himself and those remaining loyalists that matter to him.

Finally and it is important to remember that the Manhattan, New York District Attorney's office has launched its own separate investigations into President Trump and the Trump organization. Will Trump take his case to Twitter and mobilize a campaign of denial in the state that made him or will this break him? As a private citizen, will Twitter censure Trump's tweets? The best is yet to come. Never a dull moment in Trump world! It is going to be an interesting five weeks until the inauguration of President-elect Biden.

Will Trump resign the day before a Biden Presidency to dominate the news of the day and take away the headlines from President Biden? Who really knows.

Al-Anjeri is founder and CEO of Reconnaissance Research.

## Kuwaiti charity delivers aid to Syrian refugees

AMMAN: Kuwait's Al-Najat Charity launched a campaign to aid 375 Syrian refugee families in Jordan, as part of its 2021 humanitarian campaigns. The aid packages include blankets, tents, food and other necessary material, head of the campaigns department at the Charity Omar Al-Shaqra said yesterday. The packages were delivered to Syrian refugees in different Jordanian governorates and cities including the capital Amman, he added. Shaqra also noted that the society will deliver aid to those in need in Yemen, Turkey and other countries in the coming weeks. —KUNA



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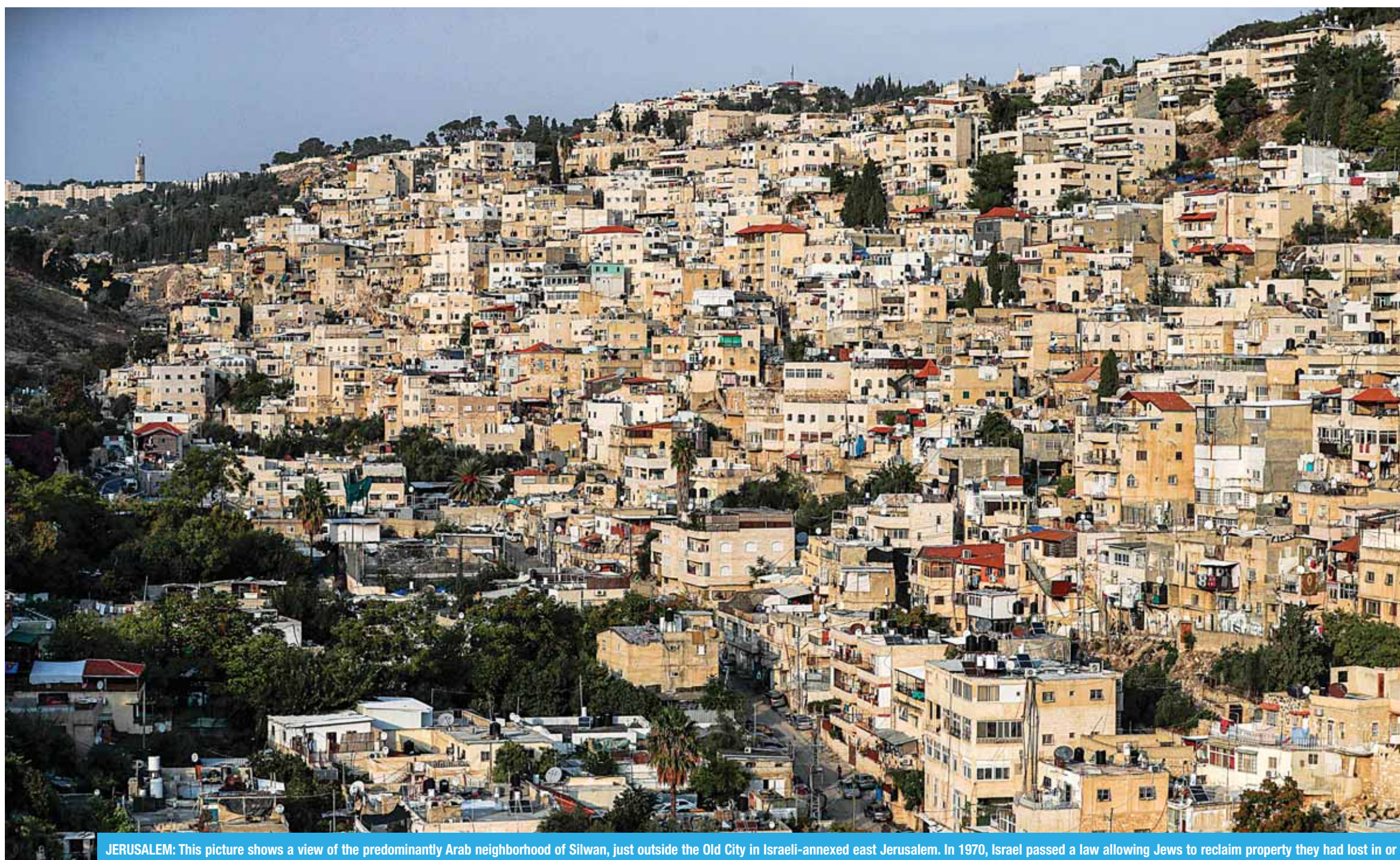
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Biden backs son Hunter after tax probe revealed

## Years after 'collective punishment,' Libyans trickle home



JERUSALEM: This picture shows a view of the predominantly Arab neighborhood of Silwan, just outside the Old City in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem. In 1970, Israel passed a law allowing Jews to reclaim property they had lost in or before 1948, the year of Israel's creation which also saw authority over east Jerusalem pass from British to Jordanian control. —AFP

# Jerusalem: A battle over 'every inch' of land

## 'We're doing ideological real estate'

**JERUSALEM:** The television in Zuheir Rajabi's lounge does not show films or the news: the only footage projected on its huge flat screen is from 10 surveillance cameras installed around his modest east Jerusalem home. Rajabi lives in Silwan, a poor neighborhood just outside the Old City in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, made up of dusty trash-strewn alleys, with electrical cables dangling low off their poles. The moustached 49-year-old Palestinian told AFP that the surveillance footage offers him a sense of protection in case Jewish settlers harass him or clashes with Israeli police erupt again outside his door.

"This piece of paper proves my father bought this land from a Palestinian in 1966," Rajabi said, waving an Arabic document from the Jordanian authorities who controlled east Jerusalem until 1967, when Israel seized it in the Six Day War. "But the Israeli courts don't want to hear about it," the father of four said with a grunt, seated in his living room with its orange and grey walls.

Rajabi has been locked in a five-year legal battle with three Israelis—Yitzhak Ralbag, Avraham Sheferman and Mordechai Zarbiy—who represent a trust registered in the name of Rabbi Moshe Benvenisti that claims ownership of the land where his home sits. The Benvenisti trustees have cited 19th-century documents from the Ottoman Empire, which controlled Jerusalem before the British mandate era began in 1920, showing that Silwan land was owned by the trust. The trust rented plots to Yemeni Jews, who lived in the area until they were forced out by Arab riots in 1929 and 1936.

In 1970, Israel passed a law allowing Jews to reclaim property they had lost in or before 1948, the year of Israel's creation which also saw authority over east Jerusalem pass from British to Jordanian control. In cases where former east Jerusalem Jewish landowners or their heirs were unavailable, Israel granted administration of the land rights to a government entity called the General Custodian. In 2001, the General Custodian declared the Benvenisti trust the rightful owner of two plots in Silwan, including one that Rajabi calls home.

Rajabi, who heads the local branch of a Palestinian community organization that runs recreational activities, is due to face Ralbag, Sheferman and Zarbiy in court again on December 22. As with most homes in Silwan, the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the southern Old City Wall can be seen from Rajabi's house, which has been extended over the years from its original two rooms. He claims he has been offered

a substantial cash payout to leave the property, where he has lived since the late 1960s. He also told AFP that the Israeli state had "offered to build us a home in other areas of east Jerusalem, and we refused".

### City of David

Rajabi's case is not unique in the Silwan neighborhood. Like all of east Jerusalem, it is considered occupied Palestinian territory by much of the international community. Israel's annexation of east Jerusalem has not been recognized by most nations. In the 1980s, settlers began moving into Silwan, which sits on land where—according to Jewish tradition—King David established his capital some 3,000 years ago, making the area hallowed ground in Jewish history.

There are now several hundred settlers in Silwan, living among some 50,000 Palestinians. The area's Jewish homes are recognisable by Israeli flags flying on their roofs and modern facilities like a fully-enclosed basketball court that poorer Palestinian residents would struggle to afford. Although not all cases are documented, anti-occupation group Peace Now says that 700 Palestinians in east Jerusalem are threatened with eviction. Settler expansion in the area does not appear to be simply the result of individual families seeking to live in what Jews call the City of David. Critics of Silwan's settler movement allege that it is backed by a spectacularly well-funded campaign aimed at transferring Palestinian-owned land to Jews.

### 'Ideological real estate'

A thick binder planted on Rajabi's dining room table documents an Israeli legal process he blasts as biased against Palestinians. "It's a political issue and all the branches of the Israeli government are conspiring together," he said. Israeli anti-occupation groups claim the Benvenisti trustees are agents of the well-funded settler organization Ateret Cohanim, which states its mission is making "Jewish life flourish in Jerusalem." A 1992 report by Israel's then Labor-led coalition government found that collaboration between the General Custodian and groups like Ateret Cohanim was plagued by "conflicts of interest."

The report made recommendations to address those conflicts, which activists say have been ignored. Ateret Cohanim rejects any suggestion that it is working to force out Palestinians. The group is simply focused on one particular type of transaction, its head Daniel Luria told AFP. "We're doing ideological real estate.

We're not forcing anyone to sell, we're not doing door knocking (but) if an Arab wants to sell, we're not going to say we're not interested," Luria said.

### Turkish support

It is taboo among Palestinians to sell to settlers. But the head of Peace Now, Hagit Ofran, said that for Palestinians in east Jerusalem "it is very, very hard to compete with the endless budget of groups like Ateret Cohanim" or the hard-line settler organization Elad. Pro-settler groups are ready to give "millions for a small piece of land", nearly impossible sums for Palestinians to pay, she said. According to a September investigation by the BBC, Russian oligarch and Chelsea football club owner Roman Abramovich controls companies that have donated an estimated \$100 million to Elad.

Abramovich—who was granted Israeli citizenship in 2018 - has not publicly discussed his reported contributions and Elad declined to comment on its donors. While the Palestinians are financially overmatched, they are not fighting alone. Turkey's international development agency (TIKA) has, according to its website, "restored numerous local homes and shops in an effort to ease the hardships faced by east Jerusalem's Muslim community as a result of Israel's ongoing policy of Judaization." Contacted by AFP, TIKA declined to provide details about its east Jerusalem activities, but Ankara has become an active global player on behalf of the Palestinians.

### Battle for 'every inch'

Abdelhalim Shaloudi received an eviction order at his 70-square-metre Silwan home in 2003. "I don't sleep at night any more," the father of four told AFP. Shaloudi said the lawyers recommended by the Palestinian Authority-based in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank—cannot match the high-priced settler legal effort in Israeli courts. But for now, he has no option but to wait it out and hope. One organization attempting a grassroots push-back against settlers is the Wadi Hilweh Information Center-Silwan, founded by Jawad Siam.

Its offices are just a few metres away from the City of David's archaeological centre, a site controlled by Elad that packed the area with tourists before the coronavirus pandemic. "I created this centre to keep the name 'Silwan' alive," Siam said. "We are trying to adopt the same (real-estate) strategy as them," he said, meaning steering Palestinians to fill vacancies in Silwan immediately, in the



JERUSALEM: Palestinian Zuheir Rajabi, sitting in front of a flat-screen displaying live footage from 10 surveillance cameras set up around his home, shows a document from the Jordanian authorities proving his ownership of the house in the east Jerusalem predominantly Arab neighborhood of Silwan on Nov 9, 2020. —AFP

hope of limiting places for settler expansion. "But we are no match," he conceded. "They track us down on every inch, on every empty square of land."

### Never 'give up'

Settlers generally reject the premise that Jews have taken control of land that historically belonged to Palestinians. Jewish mother of seven Nira Rabinowicz, 36, who is Rajabi's neighbor, referring to the year Yemeni Jews arrived. "So if they claim they were there before the Yemenis came, let (them) have the audacity or the arrogance to say so," he told AFP. "They don't have any facts. I have the facts... The only people who can claim (land) titles are the Jews."

Disputes over historical or even ancient land claims are perpetual features of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But history aside, it is not clear that the modern settler strategy of expanding

the Jewish presence in east Jerusalem at the expense of Palestinians is destined to succeed. Daniel Seidemann, a lawyer who founded the Israeli anti-occupation group Ir Amim, highlighted what he termed the legal strategy's moral bankruptcy.

He noted that the 1970 law only applies to Jews making land claims in east Jerusalem. It does not offer any recourse to Palestinians who may have lost land, notably those who lost their homes in west Jerusalem upon the creation of Israel and the conflict that followed. He also emphasised that much of the world regards east Jerusalem as occupied. Under international law, "the transfer of a civilian population of the occupier and the displacement of the occupied is illegal," he said.

Bar-Ilan University political scientist Menachem Klein noted that despite the inferior services and poor infrastructure, Palestinians remain committed to east Jerusalem. Their insistence that the area be the capital of their future state is unwavering, he said. Israelis may want Palestinians "to leave the city," but that wish ignores the fact that Jerusalem is part of the Palestinian "identity," Klein said. "This is their city." And Rajabi made clear he is not going anywhere. "I'm going to defend myself until the last possible moment. I cannot imagine for a second anyone else living in the house," he said. "I would rather die here than give up." —AFP



## International

# In camps, Palestinians prepare for post-Abbas power struggle

## Rivals seeking to build up a power-base

**BALATA CAMP:** In Palestinian refugee camps in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, some residents are preparing weapons for a potential power struggle when president Mahmud Abbas finally leaves the stage. Abbas, 85, leader of the dominant Fatah movement and of the Palestinian Authority (PA), has promised legislative and presidential elections in 2021, for the first time in almost 15 years. Rivals are already seeking to build up a power-base. In Balata camp, outside the city of Nablus, walls are plastered with posters picturing Hatem Abu Rizq, regarded as a "martyr" of Palestinian infighting.

On October 31, Palestinian media reported one dead and others wounded in Balata, where 30,000 people are crammed into one quarter of a square kilometer. This time, the casualties were not the result of a clash with Israeli forces, although Abu Rizq spent almost 10 years in Israeli jails for his part in the Palestinian uprising of 2000 to 2005. At the age of 35, he died in the eruption of intra-Palestinian violence in October. Palestinian officials said he was killed by the premature explosion of a bomb he was about to detonate. "But in truth he was killed by shots from the Palestinian Authority," says his mother, Um Hatem Abu Rizq, in the family's tiny apartment in a dilapidated concrete building. "He was looking to fight corruption within the Palestinian administration, that's why they didn't like him," she weeps, kissing a giant poster of her son. Was he working for exiled former Fatah Gaza security chief Mohammed Dahlan, as alleged by PA officials? "If Hatem were with Dahlan, he would not live in such an apartment," said his mother, whose two other sons are in hiding, fearing for their lives.

### Dahlan's shadow?

In the Palestinian territories, Dahlan's name comes up repeatedly in connection with the normalisation agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, announced in August and signed in Washington in September. He fell into disgrace in Fatah after his security forces in Gaza were routed by Hamas in 2007. Four years later, he was kicked off Fatah's central committee on charges of "subversion".

He went into exile in Abu Dhabi where he became an adviser to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed and a key player in the Israel normalization accord bitterly opposed



NABLUS: Palestinian security forces in balaclavas stand by an armored vehicle at the entrance to Balata camp near this occupied West Bank city on Dec 15, 2020. — AFP

by the PA. Following the announcement of the UAE's pact with the Jewish state, Palestinians in the West Bank publicly trampled posters of "traitor" Dahlan. But his name has been mentioned as a possible contender for a "successor" to the 85-year-old Abbas, who has headed the Palestinian Authority since 2005 after the 2004 death of Yasser Arafat.

Inside the Palestinian political establishment however, the post-Abbas future is a taboo subject. "In this region, we don't like to talk about life after death," an influential Fatah figure said recently. The PA's governor of Nablus, Ibrahim Ramadan, has no doubt about Abu Rizq's loyalties. "Hatem Abu Rizq was with Dahlan," he told AFP, adding that since his death, 14 members of the government security forces have been wounded in attacks in Balata. "These people only understand the language of force and need to understand that we are strong," he said.

### Anti-Abbas uprising?

At the entrance to Balata camp, Palestinian security personnel in balaclavas stand by an armoured vehicle,

sipping coffee, while their sniper colleagues keep watch from the rooftops. "Dahlan gives money to unemployed youth to throw stones and Molotov cocktails at Palestinian forces," senior PA officer General Wael Shitawi said angrily.

"Their aim is to create unrest and show that the Palestinian Authority does not control the camps," he told AFP in his apartment ringed by surveillance cameras. "They want to instigate a revolution from the camps, then say that Dahlan must come back to solve the problem." Dahlan sympathizer and Fatah member Dimitri Diliani says the PA sees the hand of Dahlan in what is simply the anger of refugees who feel downtrodden and ignored. "This is Dahlanphobia, a phobia that the PA is suffering," he said. "This is a pandemic worse than Covid-19. It is a reaction to political harassment that has been carried out by the Palestinian Authority," he added. The United Nations envoy for the Middle East, Nikolay Mladenov, told AFP he was "deeply concerned" about growing tensions between residents of Balata camp and the Palestinian security forces, and called for "all parties to show restraint". —AFP

## Years after 'collective punishment,' Libyans trickle home

**TRIPOLI:** When Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi was toppled, people took revenge on those they saw as his supporters - including the entire town of Tawergha, whose 40,000 residents were forced to flee. Now, almost a decade after militia forces rampaged through the town, torching homes, destroying buildings and leaving farms in ruins, the people of Tawergha are coming home.

Around a third of the original population of the town have returned - among them is Abdelghani Omar, who has opened a barber shop. "At first it was tough," Omar said. "My relatives convinced me to get into hairdressing." People are trickling back to Tawergha after years living in makeshift tent camps, to try to turn the page on a brutal chapter of their lives. Omar's family persuaded him he was doing the right thing and providing a "useful" service for the battered community.

Tawergha, about 200 kilometers east of the capital Tripoli, is close to the port city of Misrata. At the end of the 2011 NATO-backed uprising that ousted and killed Gaddafi, Tawergha endured brutal reprisal attacks by fighters from Misrata. Militias from Misrata were key in defeating Gaddafi and, seeing Tawergha as the enemy, they laid siege to the town, pounding it with artillery. Most of the town's population was violently displaced, according to Human Rights Watch, which denounced what it called "collective punishment" and a "possible crime against humanity".

### 'Mirror image of Libya's chaos'

For several years, militias blocked people from returning. The people were banished, living in grim des-

titution in basic shelters on a windswept desert plain. But after a reconciliation deal - backed by the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) - was signed between the former bitter enemies in 2018, people slowly began to go back to the town. Their return has not been easy. "Many would like to return, but they hesitate," said Omar, 35, as he cut the hair of a customer in the desolate town's only barber shop.

Tawergha's infrastructure was devastated, buildings are gutted and the streets full of potholes. The scars of war are everywhere. But after the reconciliation deal and promises by the Tripoli-based GNA that they would receive compensation, some decided it was time to go back. Mahmud Abu al-Habel, a grey-haired grandfather in a bright red felt hat, was among the first. The 70-year-old painstakingly rebuilt his house and helped nurture back to health hundreds of date-bearing palms and olive trees on his farm that had been torched during the attacks.

Abu Al-Habel, accused of being a staunch supporter of Gaddafi, was forced to flee Tawergha, along with 26 members of his family. But today, people should not hesitate to return home, he said. "We should be here," insisted Abu Al-Habel. But political tensions between the rival administrations that emerged in the chaos after Gaddafi's death are delaying the disbursement of compensation to residents to rebuild their lives. The "absence of a (central) government" is responsible for this, said Tawergha's mayor Abdelrahman Shakshak.

Jobs must be created and homes rebuilt, but the government is busy with "conflicts and divisions", he added. Shakshak said that requests for the construction of 1,500 houses in neighborhoods destroyed in the fighting "have fallen on deaf ears". Tired of waiting, some residents like Tahani Khairi have found new lives elsewhere in Libya. "It'll take 10 years at least for the town to get back to its former self," said Khairi, a widow and mother of four, who now lives in Tripoli. "Tawergha is a mirror image of Libya's chaos," she added. "Stability will not return unless there is a strong and united state." — AFP



TAWERGHGA, Libya: A youth climbs the rubble of a destroyed building on Dec 12, 2020. — AFP

## N Korea to redevelop flagship tourist resort

**SEOUL:** Pyongyang plans to redevelop its flagship Mount Kumgang tourist complex into an international resort, a year after leader Kim Jong Un ordered South Korean-built buildings there demolished, state media reported yesterday. The resort - once a prominent symbol of inter-Korean economic cooperation - was built by South Korea's Hyundai Asan on one of the North's most scenic mountains, drawing hundreds of thousands of Southern visitors. But last year Kim condemned the

development with the South as an eyesore and described facilities there as "shabby" and built like "makeshift tents in a disaster-stricken area or isolation wards", ordering their removal.

Yesterday, the official Korean Central News Agency reported that Kim Tok Hun, the North's premier, stressed "the need to build the tourist area our own way" to turn it into a "cultural resort envied by the whole world", during his visit to the area. He also called for pushing ahead to turn the area into a "modern and all-inclusive international tourist" resort, it added. The Mount Kumgang complex was once one of the two biggest inter-Korean projects, along with the now-shuttered Kaesong Industrial Complex, where Southern companies employed North Korean workers while paying Pyongyang for their services.

But its tours came to an abrupt end in 2008 after a North Korean soldier shot dead a tourist from the South

### News in brief

#### 8 dead in Philippine floods

**MANILA:** Nearly 10,000 people were evacuated from their homes in the northeastern Philippines as heavy rain across the country left at least eight people dead, authorities said yesterday. The storm - which has inundated villages and destroyed scores of houses in recent days - is the latest to batter the disaster-prone archipelago. Floodwaters reached waist-deep in 14 towns in the Cagayan Valley in the northeast of the main island of Luzon - which saw the worst flooding in decades last month - regional civil defense officer Francis Joseph Reyes said. That forced nearly 10,000 people to seek shelter in emergency centers. The rain, which was intensified by the northeast monsoon, has filled Magat dam near to its critical level and the release of water threatens to aggravate the flooding, Reyes said. Authorities said at least six people drowned in two provinces on the major southern island of Mindanao, which was also hit by torrential rain in recent days. — AFP

#### Dozens of children freed

**KANO:** Local vigilantes rescued dozens of schoolchildren abducted by bandits in the northern Nigerian state of Katsina after a gun battle, police said yesterday. Gunmen had abducted about 80 children on Saturday as they returned to Mahuta village after having attended a religious ceremony, said police spokesman Gambo Isah, of Katsina state police. The incident came barely 48 hours after the release of 344 schoolboys kidnapped from a boarding school by bandits and held for six days. According to local people, the number of children rescued following Saturday's attack came to 113. When the news spread across Mahuta, residents and vigilantes mobilized and went after the kidnapers, said Abdullahi Sada, leader of a local vigilante group. They set off in pursuit of the gunmen, who had been identified as ethnic Fulani herders. "We laid siege on the area we knew they were holding the children and also took some Fulani settlements in the area hostage, warning that if anything happened to our children no Fulani would live in the area henceforth," said Sada. — AFP

#### Thailand to test 10,000

**BANGKOK:** Thailand will test more than 10,000 people for coronavirus after an outbreak linked to its biggest seafood market, officials said yesterday. Nearly 700 new infections have been linked to Mahachai market and port since a 67-year-old female prawn seller tested positive on Thursday - most cases among Myanmar workers who toil in the kingdom's multi-billion-dollar seafood industry. Authorities ordered Myanmar workers around the market not to leave their residences. "We are locking and banning them from moving," the health ministry's permanent secretary, Kietphum Wongit, said Sunday - adding authorities would provide them with food and water. By yesterday, officials had confirmed 689 cases linked to Mahachai. "The (Department of Disease Control) will do active tracing in several communities of about 10,300 people," said Taweasin Visanuyothin, a spokesman for Thailand's COVID-19 taskforce. — AFP

#### Cyclone sparks disease fears

**SUVA:** Disease threatens to worsen an already desperate situation in Fiji, an official warned yesterday, where thousands of lives have been devastated in the wake of the deadly super cyclone Yasa. Agencies rushed food and clean water to areas where the storm smashed into the northern islands of the South Pacific nation on Thursday night, forcing more than 23,000 people to flee their homes. Four people died and entire villages were wiped out, with crops and livestock destroyed. Agriculture officials are being sent to hard-hit areas to help farmers dispose of dead livestock to reduce the risk of disease, National Disaster Management Office director Vasiti Soko said. Fiji is prone to violent storms at this time of year, with Cyclone Winston killing 44 people when it slammed into the islands in 2016. "We're going to be doing a lot of work around shelter and the provision of clean water because we have seen the diseases that follow these cyclones... leptospirosis, diarrhoea, dengue, and especially if access to hospitals is limited," Ilisapei Rokotumidau, the Fiji Red Cross director general, told AFP. — AFP



RAMAT GAN: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gets ready to receive a coronavirus vaccine at the Sheba Medical Center near Tel Aviv on Saturday. — AFP

## Netanyahu gets COVID-19 jab, starting Israel rollout

**RAMAT GAN:** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu received a COVID-19 vaccine jab on Saturday, kicking off a national rollout over the coming days. Netanyahu, 71, and Israel's health minister were injected with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine live on TV at Sheba Medical Center in Ramat Gan, near Tel Aviv. "I asked to be vaccinated first, together with Health Minister Yuli Edelstein, to serve as personal examples and encourage you to be vaccinated," Netanyahu told the television audience. Each recipient must receive a booster shot in three weeks for optimal protection from the novel coronavirus. Latest Israeli health ministry figures reported over 370,000 people had tested positive for the virus since the Jewish state, a country of around nine million, confirmed its first case in February.

Just over 3,000 people have died. The vaccine will be rolled out at 10 hospitals and vaccination centers around Israel for healthcare workers from Sunday, according to the health ministry. During the course of the week, a ministry statement said, vaccinations will be extended to the general public, starting with those aged over 60. Netanyahu spent Monday to Friday in self-isolation after coming into contact with a confirmed coronavirus patient, despite testing negative for the virus on Sunday and again on Monday.

Ten days ago, he was at Israel's Ben Gurion airport to welcome a first batch of the vaccine. The shipment was the first of eight million doses Israel has ordered from US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech. The vaccine needs to be stored at the ultra-low temperature of -70 degrees Celsius (-94 Fahrenheit), posing handling and storage challenges. Other countries have begun rolling out the vaccine already. Britain started inoculating its citizens with the same vaccine on December 8.

It has since been approved by the United States, Canada and, on Saturday, Switzerland. US Vice President Mike Pence got the jab live on television Friday, while President-elect Joe Biden is set to receive his shot today. President Donald Trump has made it clear he is not planning to take the vaccine imminently, citing the belief that his recovery from a brief but severe bout of COVID-19 has given him immunity. Israel has also contracted to buy six million Covid-19 vaccine doses from US biotech firm Moderna, which are expected to be delivered in 2021, giving a total of 14 million shots. — AFP

who strayed off an approved path, and Seoul suspended travel. The reclusive North has long wanted to resume the lucrative visits, but they would now violate international sanctions imposed on Pyongyang over its nuclear and ballistic weapons programs - although the South's President Moon Jae-in has long championed engagement with Pyongyang.

In June, the North blew up a liaison office with the South on its side of the border - paid for by Seoul - saying it had no interest in talks. "The Kim regime will struggle to find the resources to redevelop Mt. Kumgang and needs outside investment, but is signaling it will downgrade South Korean partners and stakeholders," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "By holding Seoul's hopes for engagement at risk, Kim is pressuring the Moon administration to find ways of resuming financial benefits for the North." — AFP



## International

# COVID-19 pandemic sends US single mothers into poverty

## A vicious cycle of poverty, unpaid bills and reliance on food banks

WASHINGTON: When the coronavirus pandemic shuttered restaurants in California, Aleida Ramirez lost her job as a waitress, plunging her - along with many other single mothers - into a vicious cycle of poverty, unpaid bills and reliance on food banks. The pandemic has been particularly hard on women who work in the service sector, which has been crippled by the economic crisis.

And more than 12 million Americans who are unemployed or without income face losing their benefits the day after Christmas, when the aid package passed by Congress in the spring expires - barring a deal in high-stakes talks this weekend. Ramirez had to quit her second job as a delivery driver for food service Instacart in order to take care of her 11-year-old daughter and her 21-year-old nephew, who has autism, when her husband was arrested in July for domestic violence.

Since October, she has not paid rent on her apartment in a housing complex in Concord, northeast of San Francisco. "I was like, 'I can't - I have to choose what do I cover: is it food or rent?'" she said. To support her household, she received meal tickets from her daughter's school, as well as vouchers from a local church that she can redeem at a corner store. In order to pay for internet service - an essential tool for her daughter's remote classes - Ramirez counts on her nephew's salary from a part-time job at McDonald's. She also regularly skips meals.

Ramirez said she felt "guilty" for her situation: "I felt that I was being like a bad mom, I was irresponsible." But then she realized she wasn't alone. Ramirez got together with neighbors and they organized to

negotiate with landlords. "This is all of us in the same boat, many of us single moms," she said.

### Depression

On the other side of the country, in Washington, Maria Lara is worried she will soon be evicted from her shabby apartment after falling far behind on her rent. A nationwide moratorium on evictions is set to end after Christmas. Lara, who is Salvadoran and has a young daughter, worked as a hotel housekeeper



Over 12 million unemployed, lose benefits

before the pandemic. She found work as a laborer on construction sites but only works "two, three days, sometimes four, every two weeks."

Her building, meantime, is infested with mice that get stuck in sticky traps. "We live with (the mice) because when we tell the owner that it smells bad, that there are animals, they say they will come to fumigate - they say they came, but they don't come," said Lara. Further north, in New York, Marisol Gonzales lost her job in the spring when the



LOS ANGELES: Protesters wearing Santa hats hold signs as they demonstrate in front of the Amazon Book Store at the Waterside shopping center in the Marina Del Rey neighborhood during a Black Lives Matter rally to demand social justice on Saturday. — AFP

pandemic struck Corona - the neighborhood in the city's Queens borough where she lived - and then her apartment, which cost her \$2,200 per month, in October.

The 47-year-old massage therapist from El Salvador found a room in a shared apartment; she lives there with her 20-year-old daughter. Small jobs allow her to pay for the room (\$850), the electric bills

and her subway card. She goes once a month to a food bank. But for the past month, she has faced an even heavier toll from the pandemic: her daughter was hospitalized for depression. A student, she couldn't stand the confinement and gradually withdrew into herself until she stopped her studies. "I pray to God that she will recover soon so that she can return home," said Gonzales. — AFP

## Nine killed in Kabul car bomb targeting Afghan MP

KABUL: A car bomb targeting an Afghan lawmaker killed nine people and wounded more than a dozen in Kabul on Sunday, officials said, the latest attack to rock the capital. Kabul has been hit by a wave of deadly violence in recent months despite the Taliban and government engaging in peace talks to end the country's long conflict. Yesterday's bombing targeted parliamentarian Khan Mohammad Wardak who was injured in the attack, officials said.

"Nine people were killed and 20 others were wounded in the car bomb," Interior Minister Masoud Andrabi told reporters, adding that all the casualties were civilians. The ministry said in a separate statement that women and children were among those wounded by the "terrorist attack". A security source said the car bomb detonated in the west of the capital. "It was a powerful explosion that has caused a lot of damage to houses in the vicinity," the source said. Television footage showed at least two cars on fire, with plumes of thick black smoke billowing into the sky.

An aide to lawmaker Wardak said the attack occurred when he was travelling in his convoy, and five of his bodyguards were among the wounded. "The enemies of Afghanistan carried out a terrorist attack on Khan Mohammad Wardak," President Ashraf Ghani said in a statement condemning the bombing. "Terrorist attacks on civilian targets and facilities will endanger the opportunity for peace," he added.

No group has so far claimed responsibility for the attack. The jihadist Islamic State has claimed responsibility for some of the recent attacks in Kabul. Dozens of people, mostly students, were killed when IS jihadists attacked two education centres, including one at Kabul University that saw gunmen open fire on classrooms. The group has also claimed a series of recent rocket attacks in and around the capital.

### 'Pressure tactic'

Kabul has seen a spate of targeted assassinations of prominent figures in recent months, including top officials,



KABUL: Damaged cars are seen at the site of an attack yesterday. — AFP

journalists, clerics, politicians and rights activists. Last week a deputy governor of Kabul province was killed when a bomb attached to his vehicle detonated while he was on his way to office. Vice President Amrullah Saleh, a strong opponent of Taliban, was appointed in October to lead a task-force to curb the violence in Kabul. Saleh's program was popular with people in the capital and that had prompted the Taliban to launch new attacks in an attempt to discredit him, said Sayed Nasir Musawi, an inde-

pendent Kabul-based political analyst. Sunday's car bomb comes just two days after 15 children were killed and many more wounded when a motor-bike laden with explosives blew up near a religious gathering in a remote part of the eastern province of Ghazni, officials said, blaming the Taliban. The Taliban denied involvement and said the blast occurred when "unexploded ordnance" detonated near the children. Violence has also surged across several provinces in Afghanistan this year. — AFP

## Biden backs son Hunter after tax probe revealed

WASHINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden has expressed full confidence in his son Hunter, a frequent target of Republican attacks, after it was revealed last week that he was under a federal tax investigation. During his unsuccessful re-election campaign, President Donald Trump launched repeated accusations against Hunter and said the Bidens were a "corrupt" family and a "criminal enterprise." "We have great confidence in our son," Biden said, sitting next to his wife Jill, in an interview on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," which aired Thursday on CBS.

"I am not concerned about any accusations that have been made against him. It used to get to me. I think it's kind of foul play but... as long as he's good, we're good," he said in his first full remarks on the issue since the tax probe became public. Trump and his allies have regularly assailed Hunter for his business dealings in Ukraine and China. From 2014 to 2019, while his father was vice president, Hunter, a lawyer and lobbyist, served on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian gas company. Trump has accused Biden of seeking the removal of Ukraine's top prosecutor to protect Burisma - and his son - from a corruption investigation.

Hunter, 50, now an artist based in Los Angeles, has admitted to displaying "poor judgment" in some of his business dealings, but denied any wrongdoing. Colbert asked Biden if there was anything he could "sincerely" thank Trump for accomplishing during his time in the White House. After a short pause, Biden responded: "There are some things... Getting the vaccine moving has been positive, but by and large, he has been a president who's decided that the way he succeeds is by dividing us." Biden also said he believes by next Christmas, life in the US will be "awfully close" to normal, "if not there." — AFP



WARRENPOINT, United Kingdom: The border town of Warrenpoint is seen besides Carlingford lough, with Northern Ireland on one side and the Irish Republic on the other, on Dec 15, 2020. — AFP

## Years of brinkmanship at Northern Ireland's Brexit border

WARRENPOINT: As the UK braces for the end of the Brexit transition period, the Northern Irish town of Warrenpoint reflects on four years at the heart of Britain's turbulent departure from the EU. A port hub humming with ferries and freight, Warrenpoint sits on the Irish border and was the site of the deadliest attack on British troops during "The Troubles". Since the 2016 vote to leave the EU, all those elements became shuffling pieces in the intractable puzzle of Britain's bid to split with the bloc.

"Unfortunately we are very much in Warrenpoint right at the centre of a whole plethora of issues, historic and recent, around Brexit," said Mark Kelly, the head of the town's chamber of commerce. As co-owner of a hardware wholesaler stocking around 70 percent of goods from the EU, he has spent more time than most musing on the future after January 1. On that date, the Brexit transition

period freezing EU-UK relations will end and the full effect of the split will be felt. "We just have to make the very best of it," Kelly told AFP.

### Borderline problems

Britain voted to leave the EU in June 2016 but talks between London and Brussels immediately stalled over the thorny issue of the Irish border, which bisects the estuary of Warrenpoint. The 500-kilometre boundary between Northern Ireland and EU member state Ireland was largely dissolved as a sectarian conflict known as "The Troubles" wound down. But up until 1998, some 3,500 were killed by bombs and bullets as unionists, republicans and security forces battled over the destiny of the British province.

The border was a flashpoint in killings, and there were fears that resurrecting infrastructure to police the new frontier of the EU could unravel a fragile peace. In Warrenpoint, those fears were freighted with a dark significance. On August 27, 1979, two Irish Republican Army bombs killed 18 British soldiers at "Narrow Water", which marks the border - the deadliest attack on troops in the conflict. Outside the town, the spot remains marked by a rank of well-tended poppy wreaths. — AFP

## Black Uruguayans still marginalized in country of 'inclusion'

MONTEVIDEO: Deborah Rodriguez sprinted down a track that shimmered under a down-pour; running is a refuge for the athlete in Uruguay, where her dark skin makes life difficult outside of sport. The South American 800 meters champion said she has been subjected to racial slurs for as long as she can remember. "All my life I've had to deal with that," said Rodriguez. Uruguay has long been held up as an example to the rest of Latin America, scoring lowest on inequality and poverty ratings, and having one of the best social inclusion statistics in the region.

However, people of African descent - the largest ethnic-racial minority, accounting for at least eight percent of the population, according to the latest census - are victims of casual racism and "are more likely to be excluded," a recent World Bank study said. Poverty among black Uruguayans is twice the national rate at 20 percent, the study showed. They also earn an average 11 percent less than the rest of the 3.45 million population for the same work, and are 20.7 percent less likely to complete secondary education.

Uruguay is home to Manchester United soccer star Edinson Cavani, who recently caused outrage for using a Spanish term for black people deemed a racial slur in Britain, saying it was intended as an affectionate greeting to a friend. In Uruguay and much of Latin America it is used as a term of endearment, regardless of skin color. Amanda Diaz, head of the Department of Afro-descendants at the Ministry for Social Development, said that despite social strides as a nation, equality in Uruguay is a myth.

Uruguay is "extremely racist" and uses the "idea of we are all equal" to hide it, she said. Being black "has a negative connotation," and that is why people of African descent are believed to be under-represented in the national statistics, said Diaz.

"When it comes to defining oneself, if one can get away with it, one does so... That eight percent is certainly 12 or 14 percent."

### Back to her roots

Until a few months ago, Rodriguez wore her hair straight, but she now sports tight curls under a headband. "I needed to cut my hair because I need to return to my origins, to return to my identity," the 28-year-old said. "I've been getting my hair straightened since I was 12" in order to fit in. Romina di Bartolomeo, 29, also spent years striving to fit in with the demands of the fashion industry, straightening her hair to fit conventional beauty standards. "The situations of racism that I experienced in fashion were related to my physical appearance: my curls, my features, my skin color," said Di Bartolomeo.

The model hosts a weekend radio program dedicated to "la plena," a style of tropical music. Its Afro-Latino rhythm is often mocked, she said. Pablo Perez, a former basketball player who now earns his living looking after cars for tips in Montevideo's city center, said he doesn't pay too much attention to people's motives. "It's not racism," he said. "Maybe they see you differently... Some people respect you as you are, others look at you sideways. I was never damaged by it," he said. — AFP



# Business

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2020

## Fisheries row threatens to sink Brexit deal

### EU, UK dig in their heels over access to UK's rich fishing waters

**BRUSSELS:** Negotiations for a post-Brexit trade deal were deadlocked and threatened by failure yesterday, as both sides dug in their heels over access to the UK's rich fishing waters. The European Parliament had fixed yesterday as the last moment it could accept a text of any accord if MEPs are to ratify it before Britain leaves the EU single market in two weeks.

But both sides of the intense negotiations in Brussels now expect the talks to blow past what is only the latest in a series of missed deadlines, and both insist that the other must back down over fish.

Without a deal, Britain's participation in the European project would end with a new cross-Channel tariff barrier to sharpen the shock of unraveling a half-century of ever deeper political and economic partnership. "We're continuing to try every possible path to an agreement, but without a substantial shift from the (European) Commission we will be leaving on WTO terms on 31 December," a British government source said.

But a European diplomat had told AFP that Brussels had made its best offer and it was down now to UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson—now distracted by a worsening coronavirus crisis at home—to decide whether he wants a deal. "It could well continue over Christmas, now the UK is still making up its mind whether it is willing to pay the price for unprecedented access to the internal market," he said.

"The EU has been clear this weekend that it is willing to compromise on fish. But it will bail at put-

ting EU fishermen structurally out of business. The narrow path to a deal has now become a single goat track, about to peter out." The tough talk came as the negotiators scramble to secure a pact before December 31. No deal would risk chaos at EU and UK borders, where a pre-deadline rush of freight trucks has already caused long tailbacks.

Britain intends to assume control over its waters on January 1, but is ready to allow continued access to EU fishing fleets for a transitional period under new terms.

UK negotiator David Frost wants Britain to take back more than half the fish currently assigned under the EU quota system, under a three-year agreement. The European side insists the UK cannot have tariff-free access to the EU single market as a whole unless it agrees to take back only a quarter of the fish quota—and that the transitional period would last seven years.

#### Fishermen 'sold down the river'

The issue is highly charged for both Britain and EU members with northern fishing fleets like France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark, and diplomatic sources admit the whole trade package could collapse. "We cannot accept a deal that doesn't leave us in control of our own laws or waters," the UK government source said, arguing that the EU was "continuing to make demands that are incompatible with our independence".

EU fishermen fear losing any access to the rich UK fishing waters will threaten their livelihoods.



A fishing boat is seen in the border port town of Warrenpoint, sitting beside Carlingford lough, with Northern Ireland on one side and the Irish Republic on the other. — AFP

"We are in the throes of being sold down the river," the European Fisheries Alliance said in a statement, urging EU negotiator Michel Barnier to stick by them.

Time is very short to reach an accord. The European Parliament had highlighted a deadline of midnight (2300 GMT) on Sunday to receive a deal for review if MEPs are to ratify it before the end

of the year.

Their UK parliamentary counterparts are in recess, but can be recalled within 48 hours to do likewise.

But EU capitals have not acknowledged any deadline—and officials say they could provisionally ratify the agreement to avoid the economic shock of a no-deal divorce. — AFP

## Al-Safat Investment wins Best Health and Safety Workplace Environment Award

**KUWAIT:** Al-Safat Investment Co received lately the 'Best Health and Safety Workplace Environment Award' from International Finance Magazine. This comes in recognition of its success in implementing various health procedures and requirements set by Kuwait Ministry of Health for staff, investors, customers and visitors.

The award is a testimony to the company's awareness and education efforts from the onset of the pandemic. This includes using flyers and ads around the building, preparing Al-Safat Tower offices and floors for the return of employees and visitors, through periodic disinfection, daily testing of employees and visitors, in addition to observing social distancing in offices, lifts and closed places.

Saheb Khajah, Manager of Supporting Services Department at Al-Safat Investment Co said that the aim of these efforts was to serve the public good in Kuwait. Al-Safat is an integral part of this country that has

done its utmost, from the onset of the crisis, to maintain the health and security of its citizens and residents alike. We will continue to adhere to the international workplace safety practices until life is back to normal. He added that the role of the company was to transform Al-Safat Tower into a building that implements approved health and precautionary procedures, educate employees about the importance of social distancing and continuous disinfecting, as well as provide staff with the necessary cleaning and sanitizing materials and a continuous supply of face masks.

Khajah went on to say: "Al-Safat Tower's compliance with the comprehensive plan of health protective measures to combat the pandemic, was part of our corporate social responsibility towards our employees and leaseholders who showed great cooperation and evident compliance with the building's new rules. The award we received was a confirmation of the soundness of the plan and its



Saheb Khajah

strict conformity to the sanitary guidelines of the Health Ministry."

It is worth noting that Al-Safat Investment Co. sought the help of and cooperated with, its various subsidiaries, such as the Middle East Chemical Manufacturing Co., to serve the country amidst the pandemic. Thousands of liters of hand sanitizers and cleaning agents were donated to several ministries and state facilities each according to their needs and requests. The company also contributed through its subsidiary, Carpet Industry to refurbish housing and evacuation facilities of the Public Authority for Housing Welfare, in addition to the printing services provided by the Al-Assriya Printing Co to the Ministry of Interior.



## Long way before Africa's single market moves at full steam

**JOHANNESBURG:** Touted as the world's largest single market in terms of the number of member nations, Africa's ambitious blueprint for free trade kicks into gear on January 1, bringing together more than 50 economies from Algeria to South Africa. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was supposed to become technically operational months ago, but the launch was delayed by complications blamed on the coronavirus pandemic and the slow pace of negotiations.

But disappointment lies in wait to anyone hoping that African trade will enjoy a barrier-free Big Bang come New Year's Day.

Jakkie Cilliers, head of African Futures and Innovation at the Pretoria-based Institute for Security Studies, says it will be a long way before tariffs are scrapped, red tape is slashed and much-trumpeted gains are realized. A brainchild of the African Union, AfCFTA has been signed and ratified by all 55 AU states except Eritrea since its ceremonial birth in July 2019 after 17 years of haggling.

Internal trade within the continent of 1.2 billion people currently stands at a meager 16 percent, while 65 percent of their commerce is with European countries. AfCFTA's plan is to boost intra-African trade by 60 percent by 2034 by eliminating almost all tariffs, creating an economic bloc of \$3.4 trillion. If fully implemented, the AfCFTA will lift 30 million Africans out of extreme poverty and 70 million from moderate poverty, according to World Bank estimates.

But in an interview with AFP, Cilliers cautioned about the grinding task of scrapping duties and



Touted as the world's largest single market in terms of the number of member nations, Africa's ambitious blueprint for free trade kicks into gear on January 1, bringing together more than 50 economies from Algeria to South Africa.

other impediments to trade. This means it will be a long time before tangible results are felt in the world's poorest continent, he said.

"There are considerable tariff requirements that still need to be agreed on between the various countries," Cilliers said. "The intention is that the agreement be fully operational in actual effect by 2034 when something like 97 percent of all tariffs will be eliminated."

Nigeria, Africa's largest economy, only deposited its ratification instrument on December 5 after having signed it a few weeks earlier. Integrating over 50 markets that are at very different levels of development will be daunting, Cilliers said. "There is still a significant amount of negotiations that have to occur," he warned. "Trade negotiations are incredibly complex because every individual tariff line needs to be negotiated and agreed upon." Another problem "is that the relationship between the AfCFTA and many of the existing" eight regional blocs needs to be sorted out. —AFP

## Saudi and Russia express unity ahead of oil meet

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia and Russia on Saturday said they backed each other ahead of a key OPEC+ oil summit, following a tumultuous year of differences over oil production and volatile prices.

Earlier this month, the 13-member Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), plus allies including Russia—a group known as OPEC+—said that from January 2021 they would raise production by 500,000 barrels per day. Saudi Oil Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said the OPEC+ cooperation charter had brought the group together, producing "good results".

"That's why it should be perpetuated," he told reporters in a broadcast on state-run Al Ekhbaryia TV. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said Moscow "once again confirmed our loyalty" to existing agreements.

"We plan to work together in order to achieve a balanced situation... and to propose solutions aimed at stabilizing the market," Novak said. OPEC+ will hold an online summit on January 4, while Riyadh and Moscow are due to hold talks in March, a meeting hoped to be "in person", Prince Abdulaziz said.

At the start of the year, a price war had pitted Saudi Arabia against Russia, the third and second largest oil producers respectively, as the oil market was hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic.

But faced with Moscow's refusal to reduce production in line with OPEC cuts, Riyadh had sharply increased its own, causing prices to plummet. Earlier this month, the OPEC+ group struck a deal to increase production over coming months. —AFP

## Tech stars quit Silicon Valley

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Silicon Valley is seeing departures of some of its high-profile stars as a pandemic-linked shift to remote work and political polarization have dulled the allure of the key tech industry hub. Nightmarish traffic and high living costs were already causing disenchantment even before the pandemic spoiled the serendipity of the northern California destination for top talent. Droughts and rampant wildfires have also taken a toll.

Those leading the exodus include Tesla chief Elon Musk and Oracle founder Larry Ellison along with Palantir co-founder Peter Thiel and the data analytics firm's chief executive Alex Karp. Some companies are also packing up and moving their headquarters including Silicon Valley stalwarts Oracle and Hewlett Packard Enterprise, both headed for Texas.

Founded in 1977 in Silicon Valley, Oracle said in December it was moving to position the company "for growth and provide our personnel with more flexibility about where and how they work." HPE, a spinoff of the historic Silicon Valley firm Hewlett-Packard, said it was moving to Houston "to meet customers where they are in their digital transformations in these extraordinary times."

"There was always a risk over California that a critical mass of people would say there is no sense doing business there because people can't live here," said independent tech analyst Rob Enderle, a native of the state who left it for Oregon some six years ago. States where taxes and living costs are lower are courting tech companies that can negotiate for incentives to move there.

Meanwhile, Oracle co-founder and chief technology officer Larry Ellison told employees that he is moving to the Hawaiian island of Lanai, which he bought eight years ago, and will telecommute.

The move comes with increasing numbers of technology firms allowing workers to do their jobs remotely due to the pandemic, diminishing the need for campus-style headquarters for which the region is known. Twitter for one has said employees may work remotely indefinitely.

Tesla co-founder and chief executive Elon Musk has confirmed that he left California for Texas after a heated squabble earlier this year with authorities over his efforts to defy a state shutdown of his factory to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Musk justified the move by saying he needed to be closer to two of his biggest projects: the development of rockets by his company SpaceX in the southern part of the state, and construction of a Tesla automobile plant near state capital Austin. "How many people have the option of moving to their island?" Creative Strategies analyst Carolina Milanesi said, cautioning against viewing the latest departures as sign of a mass exodus. "These people have different motivations, some of it is political." — AFP



Business



Nikos Argirakis walks in his olive grove in village Aghios Andreas, about 300 kilometers from Athens. — AFP

The olive harvest is set to last an extra month without seasonal workers on Nikos Argirakis' farm. — AFP

# COVID labor shortage makes Greek olive harvest a traditional family affair again

Greece is world's fourth largest olive oil producer behind Spain, Italy and Tunisia

KALAMATA, Greece: Nestled amid ancient ruins over-run by vegetation, Nikos Argirakis' estate in Greece's main olive growing region usually has dozens of foreign workers toiling around his 1,000 olive trees. This year, the 40-year-old had to ask his sister and elderly mother to lend a hand because of labor shortages brought about by Greece's coronavirus restrictions.

"It's how our grandparents used to do it," he muses. "The harvest was always a family affair." Greece last month closed its border with Albania, the main source of its seasonal agricultural labor. Fortunately, Argirakis found an Albanian couple and two Bangladeshi men who were in the country before the new restrictions were imposed. Argirakis' one-hectare (2.5-acre) estate is in the Peloponnese peninsula near the city of Kalamata.

Usually completed at the end of November, the harvest will now drag on until the end of December says Argirakis, who moonlights as a waiter in a Kalamata cafe. Olives are stripped by hand, falling into nets beneath the trees. It is an arduous task few Greeks sign up for.

### 'What if we are infected?'

In the nearby village of Messini, Panayiotis Outsikas also has to rely on his family to help him bring in the harvest. "There are no workers, we will have to harvest ourselves," laments the shepherd, surrounded by his sheep.

"Many estates are family owned and the population is old, it is difficult to harvest the olives and the harvest time is likely to triple," says Ioannis Andriopoulos, who works at a local agricultural cooperative. He also notes that in the midst of a pandemic that has claimed over 4,000 lives in Greece, many seasonal workers—who are often undeclared and fear deportation—steer clear of Covid-19 tests.

"It's hard to trust undocumented workers. They haven't been tested for fear of being arrested, but what if

you're infected?" the 50-year-old wonders.

Up to half of the seasonal agricultural workers are illegally in the country, according to industry insiders.

### Greece's 'green gold'

As far as the eye can see, thousands of olive trees stretch to the sea in the Peloponnese's Messinia peninsula. Olive oil, also called Greece's "green gold", fetched 790 million euros (\$957 million) in 2019, according to data from EU agency Eurostat. But because of the lockdown, a fall to around 650 million euros (\$796 million) is expected this year. With a production of 275,000 tons last year, Greece is the world's fourth largest olive oil producer behind Spain, Italy and Tunisia. Around 60 percent of its output is exported, mainly to Italy.

Giannis Pazios, the local cooperative's general secretary, says the closure of restaurants nationwide earlier this year, and again from November 7 onwards, has dealt a blow to demand for olive oil, a staple cooking ingredient in Greek cuisine. "We can't sell to restaurants or grocery stores, and exports will slow down this year," says Dimitris Karoumpalis, who owns an olive press.

"We have some room for manoeuvre but we must succeed in turning to new markets, such as Russia," he adds. The sector counts some 600,000 small-scale producers, who are fragmented and poorly organized. Many producers prefer quick cash to a longer-term strategy requiring marketing and promotion costs.

"The olive oil culture in Greece is more of a family tradition, an amateur practice rather than an economic activity," says Vassilis Zambounis, a publisher, website operator and co-author of a 700-page tome on olive oil. "Olive oil jerry cans are passed out between families and friends. Greeks trust homemade brands more than those sold in the supermarket," he says. — AFP

## Pandemic made 2020 a wild year for Wall Street

NEW YEAR: Quincy Krosby, chief market strategist at Prudential Financial, does not hold back in describing 2020 on Wall Street: "a year of extreme extremes." From the start of the coronavirus pandemic that sent stocks crashing, to their resurgence after the approval of vaccines holding the best hope for eradicating the disease, here's a look back at the year in US stocks:

### March: Historic crash

After a rather quiet January and February, Wall Street suddenly collapsed in March, frightened by the arrival of COVID-19 and its consequences for the world's largest economy. The major New York indices took on water, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average experiencing its third-worst session in history on March 16, with a 13 percent fall that was exceeded only by the 1929 Great Depression and the 1987 crash.

That marked Wall Street's transformation into a "bear" market—meaning it had declined more than 20 percent from its recent highs—as investors grappled with fears of a paralyzed American economy and a liquidity crisis. "If companies cannot raise money to sur-

vive, they go bankrupt, they lay people off, the unemployment rate skyrockets," Krosby said.

But the malaise didn't last long. Traders found a second wind when the Federal Reserve launched a massive asset purchase program and cut its lending rate to zero, and when Congress passed a huge stimulus package later in March.

### April to September: Recovery

Wall Street's recovery continued in the spring and intensified over the summer, with the market in August nearing its pre-pandemic levels. Driving this growth were tech giants, which experienced a meteoric rise: between April and September the share prices of Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft, Apple and Google parent Alphabet climbed, with the iPhone manufacturer gaining more than 80 percent.

The "rationale behind going into the mega-cap tech companies was that these were known companies, they were the best of breed and their goods and services were in demand," Krosby said.

Other companies saw their fortunes boom because of the pandemic, including video conferencing platform Zoom, which spiked in popularity. Companies selling cleaning products to virus-wary consumers, like Clorox and Procter & Gamble, as well as food companies like Hormel and Hershey, have also gained. Small investors, many of whom found themselves at home with lots of time on their hands, also made their presence known in the markets, pushing up the shares of fashionable companies like Tesla. —AFP



A freight lorry passes through the border town of Warrenpoint, sitting beside Carlingford lough, with Northern Ireland on one side and the Irish Republic on the other. A port hub humming with ferries and freight, Warrenpoint sits on the Irish border and was the site of the deadliest attack on British troops during "The Troubles". — AFP

## EU, UK demand concessions as talks stall

BRUSSELS: British and EU negotiators had dug in their heels and were each demanding more concessions from the other as post-Brexit trade talks dragged on into yesterday, deadlocked on fishing rights. Sources from both sides said that unless the other backed down on access to UK waters, Britain would leave the single market at midnight on December 31 without a follow-on deal on cross-Channel commerce.

"We're continuing to try every possible path to an agreement, but without a substantial shift from the (European) Commission we will be leaving on WTO terms on 31 December," a British government source said. But an EU diplomat told AFP that Brussels had made Britain its last offer on fishing and it was down now to UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson to decide whether he wants a deal. "If Britain doesn't accept the latest EU offer it will be a 'no deal' over fish," he warned. A European official said: "It's very blocked."

The tough talk came as both sides are engaged in intense—and tense—negotiations to secure a pact before the end of the month. No deal would risk chaos at EU and UK borders, where a pre-deadline rush has already caused long tailbacks of lorries. Observers, however, noted that the fishing issue was about finding middle ground between offer and counteroffer in an economically small sector, while the much bigger other main issue, on guaranteeing fair trade competition rules is closer to settlement.

"It's all down to numbers now," the European diplomat said. The EU's pointman in the negotiations, Michel Barnier, has proposed EU fishermen giving up nearly a quarter of the value of the fish they currently catch in UK waters. Britain is understood to be holding out for getting back much more than half. The UK has suggested this compromise last for three years before it is renegotiated, whereas Europe is holding out for double that. "We cannot accept a deal that doesn't leave us in

control of our own laws or waters," the UK government source said, arguing that the EU was "continuing to make demands that are incompatible with our independence".

### Fishermen 'sold down the river'

EU fishermen fear losing any access to the rich UK fishing waters will threaten their livelihoods.

"We are in the throes of being sold down the river," the European Fisheries Alliance said in a statement, urging Barnier to stick to protecting them. "The shape of a deal, as currently stands would give a huge blow to the European seafood sector which is made up of more than 18,000 fishermen and 3,500 vessels with an annual turnover of 20.7 billion euros." Time is very short to reach an accord. The European Parliament has highlighted a deadline of midnight (2300 GMT) on Sunday to receive a deal for review if MEPs are to ratify it before the end of the year. Their UK parliamentary counterparts are in recess, but can be recalled within 48 hours to do likewise. But EU capitals are not binding themselves to the European Parliament's deadline. France's European affairs minister, Clement Beaune, said talks will not be called to a halt if they drag out past Sunday night. "We won't do that because what is at risk is whole sectors like fishing, like sustainable competition conditions for our businesses," he said.

### 'Concerns' Britain not ready

The urgency of reaching a deal is seen in long lines of trucks at the freight rail link through the Channel tunnel as British companies frantically stockpile. A group of UK MPs warned on Saturday that Britain has not installed the complex IT systems and port infrastructure needed to ensure trade with the EU runs smoothly. Some disruption is inevitable, deal or no deal, with British and European firms needing to fill out import-export, health and tax forms to send and receive goods to each other.

A deal would avoid tariffs but there would still be traffic snarls as checks on truck loads and drivers' papers are carried out. Even truck drivers' lunches will come under border scrutiny: the British government warned packed ham and cheese sandwiches are banned from entry into Europe under meat and dairy restrictions that apply to non-EU arrivals. — AFP

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## Business

# Ooredoo Kuwait and Comviva constitute strategic partnership

## Services to support Ooredoo post-paid, prepaid and fixed line services campaign

**KUWAIT:** Ooredoo Telecom, the first to launch innovated digital services in Kuwait, declared its strategic partnership with Comviva, the global leader in mobility solutions. As part of this Data Science and Managed CVM engagement, Comviva will support Ooredoo Kuwait in delivering its campaign program with MobilYtix(tm) Real Time Marketing, a Machine-Learning driven Real-time Interaction management platform.

The solution uses advanced analytics and leading real-time technology that will enable the company to fully leverage "micro moments" of engagement with its customers to build customer life-time value. The Machine Learning models improve decisioning quality to drive customer experience, reduce churn and boost the operator's revenue. Manoranjan Mohapatra, Chief Operating Officer, Comviva said: "Globally, to keep pace with the demands of customers, organization are increasingly leveraging digital technologies to offer seamless and Omni-channel experience to their customers. Customer Value Management,



Manoranjan Mohapatra

Tapan Tripathi

coupled with advanced analytics is fast evolving and our industry experience, along with services that complement technology solutions sets us apart. This strategic partnership will enable Ooredoo Kuwait to provide an optimal experience for existing customers, while driving business opportunities."

Tapan Tripathi, Chief Marketing Officer,

Ooredoo Kuwait said: "Currently, a key focus area for us is the convergence of digital and analytics. We are looking forward to build this capability with Comviva, by leveraging its data science and managed CVM capabilities. Their Machine Learning driven solution along with the Managed CVM engagement will help us differentiate from the competition."

Comviva's MobilYtix is a next generation Real-time Interaction Management platform that leverages advanced artificial intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning algorithms to drive incremental revenue for enterprises. It delivers AI driven contextual insights that provide customers the "next best offer" in real-time and at scale. The AI-driven platform leverages real-time transactional data in conjunction with a rich unified customer profile to build customer life-time value. MobilYtix enables service providers to maximize the value of individual customers and their micro-moments of interaction using advanced machine learning analytics and contextual real-time decisioning.



## Pharma chief urges transparency in vaccine rollout

**TOKYO:** Pharmaceutical firms must be "very transparent" about the risks and benefits of vaccines in efforts to end the coronavirus pandemic, the head of Asia's largest drugmaker has said.

Takeda, one of the world's biggest pharmaceutical companies, is not developing its own vaccine but has contracts with several firms to distribute their jobs in Japan and is also testing a virus treatment.

"We have to manage the situation well, be very transparent and extremely educative in the way we introduce products," chief executive Christophe Weber told AFP in an interview. "Medicines or vaccines are never perfect... there are always some side effects," said Weber, who joined Takeda in 2014 and took the top job a year later after nearly two decades at Britain's GlaxoSmithKline.

But he is optimistic the industry can explain the risks and benefits properly.

The Frenchman even sees a chance that the inoculation could help push back the growing tide of uncertainty and outright opposition to vaccination worldwide. "It will be interesting to see. Vaccine hesitancy is strong, especially in some countries, but many vaccines are protecting against diseases that people never see," he said. "Here it's different, everybody is seeing the impact of the coronavirus... so it could actually re-demonstrate the value of vaccines."

Takeda inked a deal with the Japanese government and US firm Moderna Therapeutics in October to import and distribute 50 million doses of its vaccine in Japan from the first part of 2021.

The US Food and Drug Administration on Friday granted emergency authorization for the Moderna jab—the same permission already granted to the Pfizer/BioNTech version. Takeda has also signed a deal with US biotech firm Novavax to produce and deliver its vaccine in Japan, if ongoing clinical trials prove successful.

But the firm—which became one of the world's largest pharma companies after its 2019 purchase of Ireland's Shire—has decided not to develop its own coronavirus jab. "When we assessed the situation and the technology that we have in-house, we felt we did not have the best technology to develop a vaccine," Weber said.

### COVID-19 treatment

Japan's pharmaceutical sector has moved comparatively slowly in the race to end the pandemic, and while companies including AnGes, Shionogi and Daiichi Sankyo are now developing vaccines, they are not expected to be available before 2022 at the earliest. The country has however secured doses from players abroad, including Pfizer and AstraZeneca.

"There is no leading vaccine player in Japan," said Weber, adding that Takeda hopes to develop in that direction, including with plans for a dengue vaccine. He believes Japan's biotech sector is less developed than that in the US because the country lacks the "vibrant spin-off mechanism" to help scientific research groups grow into successful start-ups. "In Japan, scientific research and academia is strong, but there is much less in the way of spin-offs and venture capital," he said. "We need to make more efforts to generate this ecosystem in Japan," he added, pointing to an open innovation research facility Takeda founded in 2018 that houses 70 companies, including young biotech firms.

And while it has shied away from coronavirus vaccines, Takeda has been working on a plasma therapy to treat the new respiratory disease in collaboration with an international alliance of drug manufacturers. Called CoVlg-19, the treatment uses concentrated and purified antibodies taken from patients who have battled the coronavirus. Weber expects clinical trial results for the treatment to be published early next year and says a timeframe for it to hit the market "will all depend on the data". —AFP

## China says economic recovery 'not yet solid' after pandemic

**BEIJING:** China said its economy had yet to fully bounce back from the coronavirus pandemic and pledged financial support for recovery efforts at the end of a key annual policy meeting on Friday. The country suffered its first contraction in decades this year in the wake of a public health crisis that prompted drastic lockdowns in Wuhan—the central industrial city where the virus first emerged late last year—and sent factory activity into a nosedive.

Its economy has since improved after authorities managed to largely contain the infection, and China is likely to be the only major world power to record positive growth this year. But officials at this week's Central Economic Work Conference, presided over by President Xi Jinping, said the global recovery would be "unstable and uneven" and signalled a fiscal policy focused on maintaining economic stability. "We must be clearly aware that there are many uncertainties in the evolution of the pandemic and external environment, and the foundation for our country's economic recovery is not yet solid," said a statement from the three-day summit published by state broadcaster CCTV.

## Germany's largest COVID job site ready for business

**HAMBURG:** Spaces to queue up are already marked out on the way to the 64 miniature doctors' offices where thousands of people per day will be vaccinated against COVID-19 in Hamburg.

Only the green light from the European Union is needed for Germany's largest single vaccination site to spring into action, the brand-new equipment sitting ready in the vast congress center of the northern port city. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) is expected to rule today, the final step before Brussels can give the go-ahead, and Germany hopes to start vaccinating on December 27.

"We're ready. The procedures have been tested... the only thing we need now is the vaccine," says Melanie Leonhard, the city's senator for health and social affairs. Germany's second-largest city with two million inhabitants, Hamburg has opted for a large-scale solution to get the vaccine out as fast as possible. Spread over 11,000 square meters (118,000 square feet), the spaces in the congress center will be able to handle 7,000 daily inoculations, with a large staff of doctors and care personnel supervised by six senior physicians. Vaccination will be voluntary in Hamburg

## Benin traders, drivers anxious for Nigeria's borders to reopen

**SEME-KRAKE, Benin:** The main border crossing between Benin and Nigeria was buzzing following the announcement it would reopen after more than 16 months, relieving thousands who suffered from the closure. Nigeria said it was lifting the closure of its borders with neighboring Benin and Niger imposed in August 2019 in a move it said would curb the smuggling of rice and other commodities and bolster domestic agriculture.

Traders, taxi-drivers and goods carriers amassed on both sides of the Seme-Krake border, located along the Atlantic Ocean. "I am so emotional I want to cry," said Jacqueline Watchinou, a reseller who had to pick up work as a house cleaner to support her family.

"Last night we had a party to celebrate," she

and at the more than 400 other sites spread across the country of 80 million.

Those opting for the jab will need about an hour to get past the registration desk and into one of the injection cubicles, with a rest stop afterwards where they will be watched for side effects or allergic reactions. The city has also laid on translators and interpreters to surmount any language barriers, while there will be a fast-track queue for less-mobile people.

### 'Create trust'

To cut down on risks of the virus spreading at the vaccination center itself, visitors will have their temperature taken before entering and mask-wearing and distancing will be required once inside. "We want to create trust among the public... let them know that it's serious and really professional," says Walter Plassmann, the director of Hamburg's doctors' federation, who manages the center.

Health senator Leonhard points out that every cubicle "looks like an examination room" at an everyday medical practice. As elsewhere around Europe and worldwide, suspicions and unfounded conspiracy theories that have sprouted online about the vaccines in Germany.

But Dirk Heinrich, one of the 1,400 doctors who have volunteered to vaccinate their fellow Hamburgers, has seen first-hand what the virus can do.

"I've already seen people with COVID-19 in my practice, and unfortu-

said, hoping the reopening would put an end to her financial troubles. In the town's small restaurants, people cheered joyfully, as women nearby draped in colorful clothes brought wooden chairs to sit on and wait. A handful of people were able to cross but "this morning, Nigerians apparently stopped letting people through," said a worried trader, Brice Biokou.

A Beninese border official told AFP they were waiting for "an official notification" to fully reopen. Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari stunned his country's neighbors when he unexpectedly closed the borders, saying the time had come to crush the contraband trade.

### Major impact

The unilateral move was criticized for violating commercial and freedom of movement treaties signed under the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The closure had a major impact on Nigeria, heavily reliant on imports to feed a booming population of some 200 million people. Huge quantities of frozen chicken, rice, fabric but also cars that arrive in Cotonou are shipped

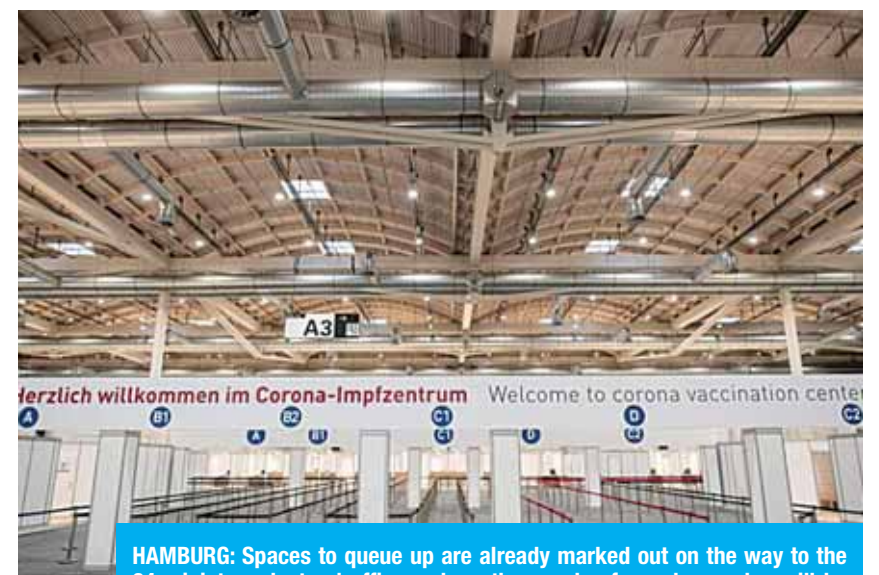


BEIJING: Workers tend to a roof at a park in Beijing on Saturday. —AFP

would be seen as having such an effect.

The announcement comes nearly a year after China's new foreign investment law came into force, promising to give local and foreign companies equal treatment in the Chinese market. The NDRC said the rules, which will take effect on January 18, were intended to "effectively prevent and dissolve national security risks while actively promoting foreign investment".

China said Friday it was in the last stretch of talks on a landmark investment agreement with the European Union that would allow the bloc's member states greater access to the lucrative Chinese market. —AFP



HAMBURG: Spaces to queue up are already marked out on the way to the 64 miniature doctors' offices where thousands of people per day will be vaccinated against COVID-19 in Hamburg.

nately some of them have died," the ear, nose and throat doctor said, wearing a white hoodie printed with the slogan "Hamburg is vaccinating". The virus "is a real disaster, and the vaccine is the only chance to put an end to it," Heinrich adds.

Just like other places around the world, the extreme low temperatures needed to preserve the BioNTech-Pfizer vaccine—around -70 Celsius (-94 Fahrenheit)—are proving a headache for Hamburg authorities. "There are very, very tricky conditions for handling the

vaccine," Plassmann acknowledges, adding that "we haven't yet been able to test" every step.

Germany is also expecting a slow start to its vaccination campaign, with just 400,000 doses initially slated for delivery—likely meaning only a few thousand will reach Hamburg. Only people in higher-risk categories will receive their two injections in the first weeks. And those aged over 80 won't need to visit the vaccination center, with mobile teams fanning out across Hamburg to inject them at home or in care homes. —AFP

or smuggled into Nigeria.

For its part Benin relies heavily on cheap oil imports from its neighbor, sold across the country in jerry cans along the roads. The shutdown also had an impact on traders in Benin, a key exporter of foodstuffs to Africa's most populous country. With a recession on its hands, falling oil prices and an economy hit by the coronavirus pandemic, Nigeria was under pressure to reopen its borders. Four border crossings were to "open immediately", Finance Minister Zainab Ahmed said Wednesday: Seme, Ilela, Maitagari and Mfun.

"The remaining borders are directed to be reopened on or before 31st of December, 2020," Ahmed said in a statement. Under the new instructions, the ban on rice and poultry imports remains in place.

But even so, many in Seme-Krake, are hopeful that business will soon resume. "I'm eager to start shipping my goods to Nigeria," Midonignon Agbogninoi, who has been transporting goods across the border for 22 years. "I'm thrilled. I've heard everything would be in order by the end of the day." —AFP



# Classifieds

Monday, December 21, 2020

**Kuwait Times**  
 Now you can browse  
[www.kuwaittimes.net](http://www.kuwaittimes.net)  
 e-mail: info@kuwaittimes.net

الطيران المدني  
**Civil Aviation**  
 State of Kuwait - دولة الكويت



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 66819 - 66817  
 Fax: (+965) 24331579  
[www.met.gov.kw](http://www.met.gov.kw)

## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY DAY:** Fair with light variable wind to light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 08 - 30 km/h.

**BY NIGHT:** Cool to cold with light variable wind to light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 06 - 28 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

WEATHER WATCH			Fog	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 20/12/2020 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	18 °C	12 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	20 °C	11 °C		
ABDALY	20 °C	08 °C		
BUBYAN	17 °C	11 °C		
JAHRA	19 °C	11 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	21 °C		
SALMIYAH	17 °C	12 °C		
AHMADI	- °C	- °C		
NUWAISIB	20 °C	12 °C		
WAFRA	21 °C	11 °C		
SALMY	20 °C	06 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Monday	12/21	Fair with a chance for fog forming at night	19 °C	09 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 30 km/h
Tuesday	12/22	Fair with a chance for light fog forming at night	20 °C	09 °C	VRB-NW	06 - 28 km/h
Wednesday	12/23	Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery later on	22 °C	10 °C	SE	12 - 40 km/h
Thursday	12/24	Cloudy to partly cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery	20 °C	13 °C	SE-NW	25 - 45 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:13
Sunrise	06:38
Zuhr	11:45
Asr	14:35
Sunset	16:53
Isha	18:16

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	19 °C
MIN. Temp.	11 °C
MAX. RH	100 %
MIN. RH	53 %
MAX. Wind	N 36 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

## Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

## Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

## CHANGE OF NAME

I, **Ameena**, D/o Esa Amir Perwaz, holder of Indian Passport No. Z3827496 issued in Kuwait on 3/7/2017, R/o 16-3-528/B, Chanchalguda, Hyderabad, Telangana 500024, have changed my name to Ameena Esa Amir Perwaz for all purposes vide Affidavit dated 17/11/2020.

## Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635

Automated enquiry  
 about the Civil ID card is  
**1889988**

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**Call MSALHOTLINE 128**

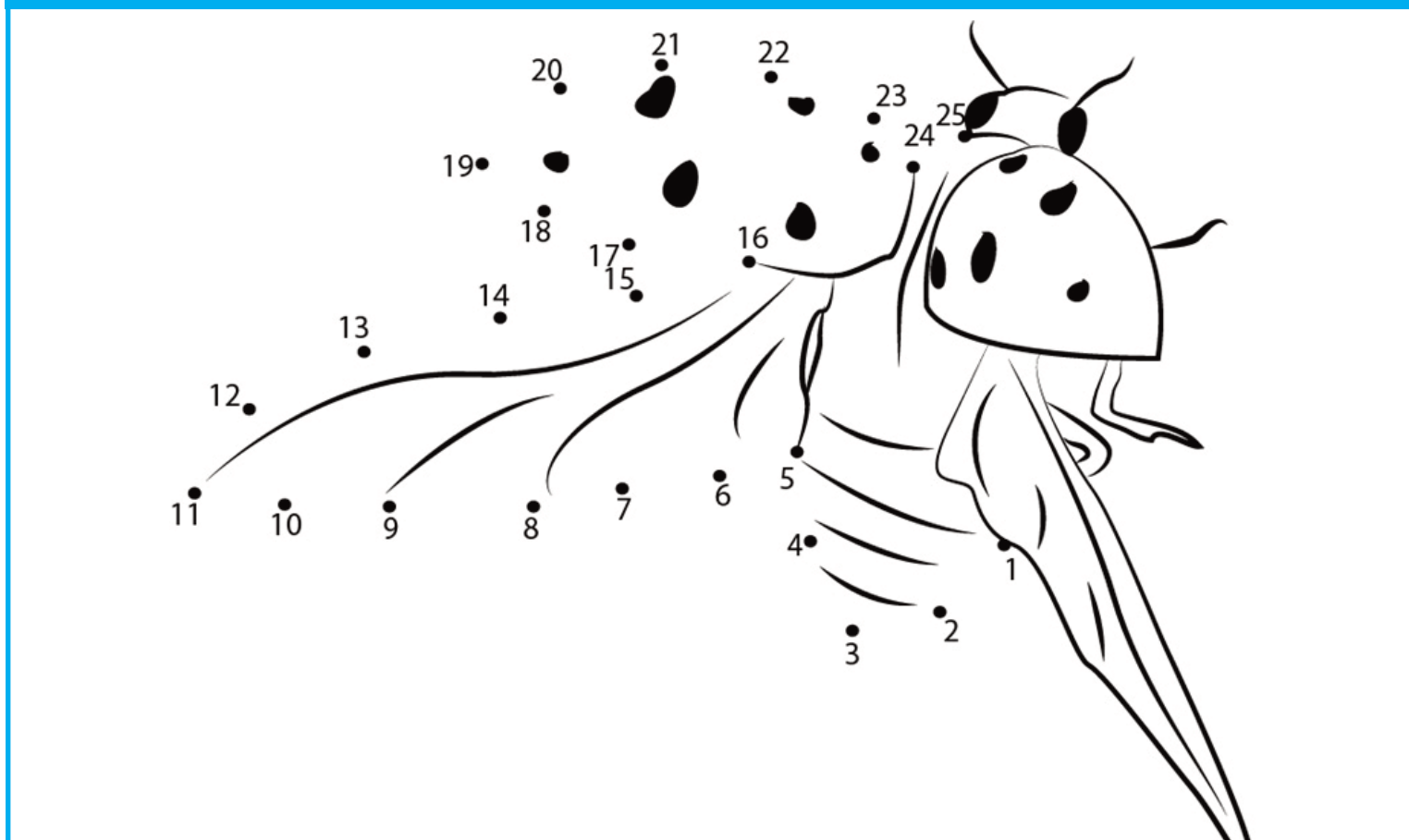
## Word Search

### Birthday Party

DIRECTIONS: Fill in the puzzle grid with the name of each item following the number and direction indicated. Use the word bank if you get stuck.

**Word Bank:**  
 BALLOON, BOW, CAKE, CANDLE, CANDY, CHOCOLATE, CLOWN, CUPCAKE, FIREWORKS, GAMES, GIFT, ICE CREAM, MAGIC, MUSIC, PARTY HAT, POPCORN, PRIZE, PUNCH

## Join the Dots



## STAR TRACK

<p><b>Aries (March 21-April 19)</b>                      Today could be the day you've been waiting for, Aries. Realize that you have the gentle, sincere nature necessary to sweet-talk your way through any situation. Indeed, if there is something that needs resolution, now would be a good time to smooth things over. People will be more receptive to your good nature and nurturing qualities.</p>	<p><b>Cancer (June 21-July 22)</b>                      You like to give people advice and help them find direction in their lives - sometimes when they haven't even asked. But now it's your turn to feel a little lost. You may need to get away from it all to get some perspective on your life. What about taking a trip to some faraway land? Today is a good day to make your future vacation plans.</p>	<p><b>Libra (September 23-October 22)</b>                      Your thinking is clear today, Libra, and you will find that generally things are running smoothly. Your perspective on everything is very much in line with where you need to be at this time. In other words, you're doing everything exactly right. Be yourself and let other people adapt to your way of thinking. There's no need to keep hiding the truth of who you really are.</p>	<p><b>Capricorn (December 22-January 19)</b>                      You might second-guess yourself today, Capricorn. Voices in your head are louder than usual, and you could be the one putting the brakes on your own train. Your intuition is trying to break through. See what you can do to slow down the chatter that continues to dictate the narrative throughout the day. Do more feeling instead of thinking. Give your mind a rest.</p>
<p><b>Taurus (April 20-May 20)</b>                      Something is urging you to act, Taurus. You may feel a restlessness in the air that makes you want to get up and go. The problem is the place you need to go may not be obvious at first. Tender emotions may get in the way of decisive action. Realize that your destination is inside your heart. We all go through moody periods. This could be one for you.</p>	<p><b>Leo (July 23-August 22)</b>                      Try not to see the negative in everything today, Leo. Concentrate on the positive. You will pick up subtle signals from others that can be very helpful as you gather data throughout the day. As you proceed through it, keep in mind that everything need not be a race to the finish line. Enjoy where you are now. There's no reason to rush to the next activity if you're having fun.</p>	<p><b>Scorpio (October 23-November 21)</b>                      Listen to what other people say to you today, Scorpio. There are valuable experiences waiting around the corner. The important thing to do now is recognize opportunities when they arise. The road to success isn't always well marked. Take a chance on the road with no signs at all. You have the courage and pioneering spirit to pursue the adventurous route, so go for it.</p>	<p><b>Aquarius (January 20-February 18)</b>                      Today is excellent for you, Aquarius. You will find that things flow naturally in the very way you've visualized. You might even find that things actually go much better than you had envisioned! Go about your endeavors confidently. The whole world isn't out to get you. In fact, people are probably too concerned with themselves to even bother with what you're doing.</p>
<p><b>Gemini (May 21-June 20)</b>                      Nothing is simple where your family is concerned. If you've forgotten that, don't worry. Today will remind you. You may have to deal with some of your lingering problems with certain family members. You will find you have all the energy you need in order to find the solutions to the conflicts that have been eating at you for a while.</p>	<p><b>Virgo (August 23-September 22)</b>                      Try to curb your tongue today, Virgo. There's no reason to lash out. You will find that the more sensitive your approach, the farther you will get in your pursuit of your goals. Today might find you feeling moody, and your emotions could be running away with you. Get in touch with your feelings rather than push them away. They're probably trying to tell you something important.</p>	<p><b>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)</b>                      Your emotions may be more in tune with the world around you today, Sagittarius. You could even feel a bit psychic. Go with your hunches. You will find that rational thinking may not be the best way to handle situations right now. Be the sensitive one who feels things before acting. Discuss the issues with others and combine your resources for a more powerful alliance.</p>	<p><b>Pisces (February 19-March 20)</b>                      Be careful about the way your words come across to others, Pisces. You might not realize how much other people's feelings are affected until it's too late. Consider backing off for a while and taking a break from your normal performance. Practice your lines at home. You may be in a bit of a funk, but the good news is that you will snap out of it very soon.</p>



## Lifestyle | Features

## ‘Like Xanax’: In Lebanon, crisis comedy combats trauma

Lebanese comedians are bringing relief and defying taboos with jokes about dating, partying during the pandemic and how even drug dealers are considering leaving the crisis-hit country. Laughter erupts in a venue wedged between two districts devastated by a deadly August 4 explosion that ravaged the Beirut port and swathes of the Lebanese capital. The blast exacerbated a year-long acute financial crisis and political deadlock, as the country also struggled with a surge in novel coronavirus infections. “The situation is so bad that even the flea market has slashed its prices by 50 percent,” joked Nicolas Tawk.

Tawk is one of nearly a dozen comedians who took to the stage on a rainy December evening as part of an event organized by the stand-up comedy club aptly named “awk.word”. He was followed by a comedy duo who reworked the lyrics of Gloria Gaynor’s hit “I Will Survive” to sing about a multitude of frustrations the Lebanese have been struggling. And then, strumming a guitar, they belted out a popular Lebanese hit from the 1980s-Ummi Ta Nur’os (Let’s get up and dance) — the words changed to convey the challenges of partying during the pandemic. “Get up and dance, young lady, but wait for me to disinfect my hands. Don’t freak out, I’ll put on my mask,” they sang.

Salacious, deliciously irreverent and incisively sarcastic, Lebanon’s growing stand-up scene harbours no taboos. Comedians have found plenty of material in the many mishaps of Lebanon, a multi-confessional country still deeply divided after the 1975-1990 civil war.



Stand-up comedian Nour Hajjar performs onstage during a night organized by the “Awk.word” platform at the KED Beirut venue.

They take aim at the sectarian divisions of society and poke fun at traditions they feel are outdated and hypocritical, all the while taking jabs at politicians who have been in power for decades and are widely accused of corruption and incompetence.

## ‘Pain and tragedy’

Nour Hajjar, a prominent comedian, said stand-up comedy offers some “breathing room” to the Lebanese, who feel shackled by too many crises. But the jokes delivered also remind people “why they are under tremendous pres-

sure and why they are so sad”, said the 28-year-old. “The situation is so shitty that even the drug dealer is complaining that there is no market” and wants to emigrate to Canada, joked Hajjar, his brown curls bouncing as he laughs along with the crowd. Many Lebanese, particularly young ones, have emigrated in recent years because of the country’s economic crisis—the worst since the civil war.

More than half of the population is now trapped in poverty, according to the United Nations. Over the past year, the Lebanese pound has lost more than two thirds of its value against the dollar on the black market and commercial banks have halted dollar transactions to protect dwindling reserves.

Mario Mubarak worked as a bank teller before joining the stand-up scene and had a front-row seat to the country’s financial decline. One day, he said, a nun came to the bank and asked to withdraw \$300 from her account, explaining she wanted the money to help a nephew who was sick and needed treatment. Mubarak, who has since quit his job, told her there was nothing he could do and that she would be better off praying instead. “Despite everything that has happened, people just want to laugh,” Mubarak told AFP. “We’ve been through pain and tragedy and it’s still not over.”

## ‘Pure release’

Shaden, a prominent performer with a wide social media following, said comedy served a dual function. “It’s like Xanax,” she said, referring to the drug used to treat anxiety and depression.



(From left to right) Stand-up comedians Mario Mubarak, Firas Shamieh, Mohammed Baalbaki, Nicolas Tawk, Iyad Al-Hout, Georges, and Georges pose for a picture behind Shaden (on her knees) and Lama Chmayaa (carried), before taking part in a comedy night organized by the “Awk.word” platform ahead of their show at the KED Beirut venue in the Lebanese capital’s Karantina neighborhood, while mask-clad due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. — AFP photos

Shedding light on tragedies is also a way to challenge taboos and the political status quo, she added. A feminist and vocal LGBTQ activist, Shaden makes a mockery of machismo in a society that remains largely conservative. “Society has put up many barriers against women. We need to break them down,” she said.

“We talk about sex, not just to make people laugh, but also to say that women have a voice.” For many performers, Shaden included, it is still too soon to joke about the Beirut blast. But

everything else—God, sex, religion—is fair game. Joelle Jabbour sat among the audience, laughing with the others. Stand-up comedy is “pure release”, said the 24-year-old interior architect. “Laughing at what makes you sad, it lightens you up a bit,” she added. “It’s part of their (the comedians) life and our life. It’s funny to listen to them but hard at the same time, because it’s the bitter truth about Lebanon.” — AFP

## Graffiti explodes across pandemic-era New York

Graffiti-part of New York’s history for over 50 years—is flourishing during the coronavirus pandemic, a sign of decadence for some, but vitality for others. As dusk becomes nightfall, graffiti artist Saynosleep takes a quick look around and then gets to work on a luxury store closed since it was looted in June during protests over George Floyd’s death. “If you’re not painting right now, I don’t know what you’re doing,” says the 40-year-old, adding an expletive. “There has never been a time like this.” The facades of hundreds of store that have shut because of the pandemic are “an invitation” to artists, says Marie Flageul, curator at New York’s Museum of Street Art (MoSA). Walls, bridges, sidewalks and subway cars — 34 of which have been painted since the beginning of the month—are canvases.

“It’s a big surge, a renaissance of graffiti,” enthuses Saynosleep, who uses a different pseudonym for his legal artwork. Graffiti was first accepted by the art world in the 1980s when it moved into galleries. Expressive street art then captured the imagination of the general public in the 2000s when it went from illegal to legal spaces. But since March, it is the raw, illegal type of graffiti that has spread in a disorderly fashion. “Everybody wants to express themselves,” says Saynosleep, who says he has seen a woman in her 60s drawing graffiti. “People are bored. They need something to do.” The growth of the Black Lives Matter movement following Floyd’s killing at the hands of a Minnesota police officer in May has accelerated the trend, with protesters scribbling racial justice slogans and demands on buildings.

## ‘Vandalism’

In a year when socializing has virtually stopped and streets no longer throng with activity, graffiti is artists’ way of saying, “It feels like New York is dead and you don’t see us but we are still here,” says Flageul. The creative impulses are not to everyone’s taste, however. New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo said the graffiti was “another sign of decay,” along with an increase in murders and shootings in New

York City. He indirectly blamed Mayor Bill de Blasio for supposedly taking a lax attitude towards it. Critics were also angry that the city government, over budgetary constraints, axed its graffiti removal program that had cleaned almost 15,000 sites in 2019.

“I think it’s horrible,” said Darcy Weber, who has recently settled in New York. “Some say it’s art, but did they get permission for that? No, so it’s vandalism.” For some, graffiti reminds them of the dark days of the 1970s and ‘80s when New York was broke and crime was rife. “From the beginning of the shutdown, I’ve been seen by police and I kept going, multiple times,” without being arrested Saynosleep says. A spokesperson for the New York Police Department told AFP the force is “fully aware of the importance of addressing graffiti-related crime,” and said such incidents were down 17 percent from last year.

Flageul, who is also a spokesperson for the 5Pointz graffiti collective, says it’s “a bit of a cliché” to say that more graffiti means New York is regressing. Brooklyn President Eric Adams, who wants to become New York’s mayor next year, says tags spray painted onto public and private property “is quickly destroying our borough’s landscape.” “It costs home and business owners hundreds of thousands of dollars and tremendous efforts to erase it,” he added, drawing a distinction between “vandalism” and “amazing street murals.”

Ken Lovett, an advisor to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority Chairman, noted that cleaning graffiti from trains is draining resources when the MTA is facing “the worst financial crisis” in its history. New Jersey resident Emile Fu says he’s not too bothered. “There’s other things to be concerned about,” she told AFP. Bryce Graham, who lives in the Chelsea neighborhood, said the graffiti would shock him in somewhere like Ottawa “where everything is super clean.” “But here in New York, it’s a hell of a mix of what is clean and what is dirty,” he said. — AFP



In this file photo the 7 Train passes by the 5 Pointz Building in Long Island City, Queens, New York.—AFP



View of the Stabkirche, a stave church built in 1905 as part of the “Albert House” sanatorium for patients with lung diseases, in a wooded area outside the town of Stiege, Saxony-Anhalt, eastern Germany.



View of the burned down “Albert House” sanatorium for patients with lung diseases. — AFP photos



View of the wooden ceiling inside the Stabkirche.



View taken inside the Stabkirche.

## Atheists to save historic wooden German church plank by plank

Ask Hans Powalla if he is a believer and the immediate response is a firm “no”. Yet he and other villagers in and around the German town of Stiege have embarked on the Herculean task of saving a picturesque church by moving it from the middle of a forest into the center of town. Former electrician Powalla, 74, said they were driven by the “unique architecture of the building” and the “meaning that it gives to the region” in the Harz mountains. The object in question is a stave church, or wooden church, complete with dragon ornaments on the roof, built in the Nordic style in 1905.

It is one of only three such churches from that era still standing in Germany, and is classed as a monument of national significance. Unlike most churches which have prominent spots in town centres, this site of worship was built as a private sanctuary for patients recovering from lung diseases at a sanatorium located in the woods. But the sanatorium was shut, and by 2009, the church fell out of use. Its isolated location makes it a target for vandals. A fire broke out at the former lung clinic just a few meters away from the church in 2013, damaging its structure.

“From the village, we saw the black plumes of smoke and thought ‘oh no, there goes the church,’” said Regina Nowolski, 69, a member of the Stiege Stave Church Association, co-founded by Powalla. But as it turned out, the church was undamaged. “And there came the idea that something must be done now or the church will one day collapse,” said Regina Bierwisch, spokeswoman for the association. “The only solution to save the church was to take it away.”

## Like Lego

While the idea was clear-cut, it was far easier said than done. The challenges were plentiful: getting permission to move

the structure, finding a new home, and working out how to get it there. At one point, lifting the whole building with a Bundeswehr military helicopter was mullied. Linked to all those issues is the million-euro question of how to finance the project. Undeterred, members of the association took the matter to the mayor, wrote to federal authorities on conservation and made public appeals to fundraise.

“In the beginning I found it a funny idea. But I quickly noticed that they’re not giving up, they are there to see it through,”

Groundbreaking at the new site began in November and once the concrete foundation is laid, from March, the church will be taken apart from top to bottom, plank by plank. “Just like a Lego house,” said Bierwisch, noting that the wood must be rebuilt quickly at its new plot about five kilometers (about three miles) away, with completion targeted for September. There is already a community church in Stiege itself, and Bierwisch made clear the intention is “not to compete” for believers.

Rather, in its new home, the association



View of the ground laying work in the center of Stiege for the Stabkirche.

Ronald Fiebelkorn, mayor of the Oberharz am Brocken region, told AFP. Buoyed by the wave of enthusiasm, Fiebelkorn took it to state and federal authorities whose initial reaction had been “you’re crazy”. But soon, the officials also relented. With backing and funding secured, the 1.1 million euro project (\$1.3 million) to move the church is now in its last lap. A plot of land has been secured in Stiege town, offered by the regional authorities to the association at a symbolic price of one euro.

The association also purchased the private church from current owners, a real estate company in Berlin, for a single euro.

hopes the stave church will become an open space for community events as well as serve as a new attraction for visitors to the region. Pointing out that the largest stave church in Germany is located just about 60 kilometers away in the town of Hahnenklee, also in the Harz mountains region, Bierwisch said: “That can become a tourism route, with churches as the highlights.” “The conservation of what people could do 100 years ago should be shown and be seen, respected in this beautiful tourist area.” — AFP



Lifestyle | Features

# Ho ho ho and 'good to go': Fauci gives Santa virus vaccine

Santa Claus can safely deliver gifts to good girls and boys on Christmas, after a special visitor went all the way to the North Pole to deliver a coronavirus vaccine. Anthony Fauci, the top infectious disease official in the United States, said Saturday he personally gave Old St Nick his jab. "I took care of that for

you because I was worried that you'd all be upset," he said Saturday during a CNN and "Sesame Street" coronavirus town hall for families, after worried youngsters asked whether Santa could safely enter homes on December 25. "I took a trip up there to the North Pole; I went there and I vaccinated Santa Claus myself. I

measured his level of immunity, and he is good to go," Fauci declared. "He can come down the chimney, he can leave the presents ... you have nothing to worry about." Fauci's good news comes as countries around the world are experiencing a surge in Covid-19 cases, with millions in England and Italy preparing to celebrate the holiday under tough "stay at home" orders. The United States, the country that has seen the most deaths linked to Covid-19, launched its mass vaccination campaign this week. — AFP

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This combination of pictures created shows Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Anthony Fauci at the White House in Washington, DC and a man dressed as Santa Claus wearing a red face mask in Libourne, France. — AFP



Emile Saeed, a 53-year-old Iraqi Christian refugee from northern Iraq's Shikhan, sits with his wife and three children next to a decorated Christmas tree at a home in Jordan's capital Amman.



Saad Polus Qiryazoz (left), a 56-year-old Christian refugee from the town of Bartella in northern Iraq's Nineveh plain, prepares Christmas cookies with his wife at their new home in Jordan's capital Amman.



Saad Polus Qiryazoz, a 56-year-old Christian refugee from the town of Bartella in northern Iraq's Nineveh plain, sits with his wife and children by a Christmas tree at their new home in Jordan's capital Amman.

## BLEAK CHRISTMAS FOR IRAQI REFUGEES STUCK IN JORDAN

Saad Polus Qiryazoz bitterly remembers the festive Christmas season in his Iraqi hometown of Bartella before he was forced to flee to neighboring Jordan when jihadists took it over. Up until 2014, when the Islamic State group swept the Nineveh Plain in northern Iraq, Christians like Qiryazoz had pulled out the stops over Christmas with celebrations lasting a whole month, he said. "Our life was beautiful and we were happy before the jihadists seized our town and destroyed everything," said the engineer and father of three in his modest apartment in the eastern Amman suburb of Marka. "Our life has now changed forever," he added, surrounded by his wife, his son and one of his daughters, a small Christmas tree standing in a corner of the living room.

are Christians, according to Wael Suleiman, who heads the Catholic charity Caritas in Jordan.

Most of the refugees in Jordan are there awaiting clearance to emigrate to a third country and build a new life, mostly because Jordanian law forbids them from holding jobs. In 2016, two years after IS was driven out of Bartella and most of the Christian heartland in northern Iraq by Iraqi forces, Qiryazoz, who had sought refuge in nearby Arbil, returned for a visit. It was a shock, said the 56-year-old, "and there was no other option but to flee and find a safe haven for my family", so in the spring of 2017, they moved to Jordan. "So far, we have submitted four requests to emigrate to Australia, but they all have been turned down, even though we are English speakers and have family there,"

with other Iraqis because most of us are in need and we don't want to embarrass anyone," he added. Life in Jordan "is very difficult and expensive," said Saeed. "Most of us are unemployed... and there is very little aid" handed out to refugees.

His family is hoping to move to the United States where they have relatives. Until then, they have put on a brave face and placed a small decorated Christmas tree in the centre of their modest home. Father Khalil Jaar, a priest at St Mary Mother of the Church in the working-class district of Marka, knows too well the plight of refugees from Iraq. He has been catering to their needs since 2014, setting up in the church complex a school and a clinic, as well as sewing and computer workshops.

### 'Go back home'

Since 2015, Jaar has helped around 2,500 families process their documents to emigrate to a third country but, he said, "500 Iraqi Christian families are still waiting" for the green light. "Unfortunately, when we seek out help from international and local aid organizations, they tell us that the war in Iraq has ended and that the refugees should be going back home," he added. This Christmas, thanks to a donation from a wealthy Iraqi family that lives in Amman, Jaar is preparing to hand out coupons worth 50 Jordanian dinars (around \$70) to families so that they can buy new clothes for their children.

"Children should be able to rejoice. They should not pay the price for what is happening," said the priest. Suleiman, the Caritas local head, said his charity has been helping Iraqi refugees since 1990 but financial restrictions mean it can only cover the needs of 10 percent of those in Jordan. "The world thinks that the problems of the Iraqi people are over and that they should go back home," he lamented. One person who is not going back is Dalia Youssef, who was widowed in 1997 while pregnant when her husband was killed in Iraq. Five years after applying to emigrate with her son to Australia, the good news arrived. "We can't wait to start a new life. For us, nothing good ever came out from Iraq," she said. — AFP



The children of Saad Polus Qiryazoz, a 56-year-old Christian refugee from the town of Bartella in northern Iraq's Nineveh plain, decorate a Christmas tree at their new home in Jordan's capital Amman.—AFP Photos

"Back home, Christmas lasted a whole month and there would be a 15-metre (50-foot) high Christmas tree in the square near the church. We would gather there with family and friends to pray and sing hymns... Now all that is over." More than 66,000 Iraqis live in Jordan, the United Nations says. They were forced out in waves by conflict, starting with the 1990 first Gulf War, the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq and the 2014 emergence of IS. Of those, between 12,000 and 18,000

said Qiryazoz.

### 'Sad Christmas'

Ameel Saeed, 53, also a father of three, is spending another Christmas in self-exile in Jordan and, like Qiryazoz, he misses the festive celebrations they used to have in Iraq. "Christmas here is sad and different from the celebrations back home," he said. "There we had plenty to eat and drink, while here, we are on our own. No one visits us and we don't visit

## THREE FROM LAPA WIN INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARSHIPS IN PERFORMING ARTS

Three people from LAPA have won international Scholarships in performing arts. The winners were announced after the last workshop of the Eurasia workshops ended in the presence of Fareah Al-Saqqaf, The Founder and CEO of LAPA, Stefano Fardelli, The Founder and manager of Eurasia Network and Teni Matian, the head of LAPA's dance department. The First winner is Mishal Al-Roomy, who won a 50% scholarship at the contemporary Dancehaus academy, Milan for a 3-year bachelor program. The Second winner is Lynn Mousalli who won a 50% scholarship at the Contemporary Dance School of Hamburg, Germany for a 3-year bachelor program. The Third winner is Staneslas.K, A dance instructor from LAPA who won a 25% scholarship at the Dancehaus Hip Hop department, Milan for a 2-year master program.

AC continues and I believe this is the best investment in our bilateral relations with Kuwait and its people".

From her Side, Fareah Al-Saqqaf thanked the European Union Ambassador Christian Tudor for the support and sponsorship of many artistic programs and activities offered by the LOYAC Academy of Arts "LAPA" and she said: "Our relations with the EU are deep-rooted and multifaceted in the field of human rights and volunteer work in general, and Art in particular. I hope for more partnerships and achievements in the future". She continued: "our relations with the European Union and Eurasia international network aim to prepare Artistic cadres and to enrich the cultural and artistic climate in Kuwait and the region. The winning of Mishal Al-Roomy is a sign of Kuwaiti youth interest in performing arts. We have participated in the competition with 3 participants, two from LAPA and one from LOYAC Lebanon". She added: "We are serious about providing distinguished opportunities for Kuwaiti youth in the fields of arts and culture, as a cultural necessity and to create an economic sector in the field of art. Emphasizing LAPA's keenness to provide international scholarships to develop the talents of youth in Kuwait and the Arab world".

On this occasion, the European Union's ambassador Cristian Tudor said: "I am pleased to be able to address you on the new edition of the Eurasia Virtual Dance Auditions co-organized by LOYAC Academy of Performing Arts. This year is a bit different from the previous one and unfortunately, I cannot address you in person, however, I am glad that I can reach out to you at least virtually. I welcome that even during these challenging times LOYAC found the way to continue promoting cultural exchanges. I was pleased to learn that this dance project has a strong international component with more than 20 partners in 18 countries from around world through Europe, Asia, Middle East, Africa, Pacific States and Central America".

Stefano Fardelli, The Founder and Manager of Eurasia Said: "The Eurasia program offers the opportunity to study and become a professional Dancer with international dance academies, where the Eurasia International Network has partnerships with more than 20 parties in 18 different countries around the world. We seek to create bridges that qualify dancers from different cultures to the professionalism they aspire to. With approval from the Italian government, the network provides scholarships for dancers up to 50-80%".

Tudor added: "I am confident that increased cultural cooperation and exchanges between people will strengthen our relations with Kuwait. These kinds of projects contribute to creating a solid platform for inter-cultural dialogue. This is a key tool in building fair, peaceful and inclusive societies as well as promoting the value of cultural diversity and respect for human rights. It establishes common ground and a favorable environment for further exchanges. Most importantly this project is working with youth. As the EU High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell once said: "Young people are the main stakeholders in our investment in the world's future". EU has long been leading force for youth empowerment and for partnership with young people. Working with young people is "in the EU's DNA". Youth and inter-cultural exchanges are powerful engines of change, peace and development".

He added: "We are Happy for the continued cooperation with LAPA after the successful collaboration with LAPA in 2019, Eurasia is back this year with adjustments to our current situations as the auditions were virtual and we held a series of virtual workshops for a week in different dance types including jazz, hip-hop, ballet, dance and contemporary".

The EU's Ambassador concluded his speech saying: "Last but not the least, I am happy that our cooperation with LOY-

The Head of LAPA's Dance Department Teni Matian expressed her pleasure with the cooperation with Eurasia and said: "This is an important experience as it has gained Lapa youth international experience in the field of dance and performing arts. Abd-ARazzaq Abd-AIAziz (Zookie) from LAPA was previously awarded a scholarship in 2019 and We hope that in the coming seasons, the number of Participants and winners will increase".



Staneslas.K  
Eurasia 2020



Mishal Al Roomy  
Eurasia 2020



Lynn Mousalli  
Eurasia 2020



LOYAC Academy of Performing Arts, Eurasia Network, and Teni Matian.



## Sports

Photo of the day



A participant performs during the Red Bull Soapbox Race in Amman, Jordan. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## How many goal landmarks left for Lionel Messi?

**MADRID:** Lionel Messi reached a new landmark Saturday by scoring his 643rd goal for Barcelona, equaling the record held by Pele for goals recorded for the same club, but who is football's greatest marksman? Messi's latest achievement came in the 2-2 draw with Valencia when the 33-year-old headed in from Jordi Alba's cross after his first-half penalty was saved. It equaled the mark set by Brazilian great Pele for Santos before he left for New York Cosmos in 1974.

Messi's goals have come in 748 matches, an average of one every 1.16 games; Pele's came in 757 matches at one every 1.17 games. "These figures are impressive, we will never have a player so effective at this club," admitted Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman. "That's why he is the number one. What he has done for this club, it's impressive." Rarely does a season go by when Messi isn't forcing football's history books to be updated.

On July 1, in a 2-2 draw with Atletico Madrid, Messi scored the 700th goal of his professional career - club and internationals combined - with a clever 'Panenka' penalty. More than 15 years have passed since Messi opened his goal account with Barcelona. It was on May 1, 2005, against Albacete in La Liga in a 2-0 win. However, his love affair with Catalonia soured in August this year when he threatened to leave. He will still be free to quit on July 1, 2021 at the end of his current contract.

In all, he has 680 goals in 801 appearances with Barcelona, if goals scored in 'unofficial' matches are also counted. The six-time Ballon d'Or winner is comfortably the club's leading scorer, ahead of Cesar Rodriguez's 230 goals, as well as in the history of the Spanish Championship. His 450 goals are ahead of old rival Cristiano Ronaldo's 311. Messi also has won the most titles with the Catalan club - 34, including four Champions Leagues.

Matching Pele's record on Saturday has a strong resonance for the Argentinean star, coming just three weeks after the death of his compatriot and fellow icon Diego Maradona. "There is and will be only one. —AFP

## Bills clinch first AFC East divisional title in 25 years

## Buffalo Bills overpower Denver Broncos 48-19

**LOS ANGELES:** The Buffalo Bills clinched their first AFC East divisional title in 25 years on Saturday with a 48-19 victory over the Denver Broncos. Quarterback Josh Allen - who was born the year after Buffalo last won the AFC East in 1995 - passed for 359 yards and two touchdowns and ran for two scores as the Bills dominated at Mile High Stadium in Denver. The rising star said the team would savor the moment, without forgetting about the task remaining: winning a Super Bowl title.

"It's great that we're able to do it the first time in 25 years," Allen said. "To be the team and to be the quarterback on the team that does it, obviously feels really good. At the same time, that's not our end goal. We set out to do this in order to get the chance to do what we really want to do, and that's to win a Super Bowl championship. There's still a lot on the table," he said. There was no let-down for the rapidly maturing Allen and the Bills, coming off a 26-15 victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Allen connected with a nine-yard TD pass to Dawson Knox and a 22-yard touchdown throw to Jake Kumerow. He scrambled 24 yards up the middle for a touchdown in the first half and scampered one yard for another score in the second. For the second straight game the Bills defense scored a touchdown - Bills defensive end Jerry Hughes grabbing a fumble by Broncos quarterback Drew Lock on his first possession of the second half and sprinting 21 yards for the score.

"We're going to enjoy it on the flight back home, but we know the job ain't done yet," Hughes said. "We still have a lot more to accomplish." The Broncos had narrowed the deficit to 21-13 to close the first half, but the Bills responded with two touchdowns and a field goal in the third period as they turned it into a rout. The Bills had 543 yards in total offense in the third quarter. Allen accounting for 392 of them. Stefon Diggs had a big night for the Bills, catching 11 passes for 147 yards before leaving late with a foot injury.

The Bills win officially ended the New England Patriots' 11-year reign atop the AFC East. They're back on top in the division for the first time since the days of team icons Jim Kelly and Thurman Thomas, who starred as the Bills notched their sixth division title in



LAS VEGAS: Quarterback Nick Starkel (2nd left) #17 and defensive lineman Cade Hall #92 lift the championship trophy after defeating the Boise State Broncos 34-20 to win the Mountain West Football Championship on December 19, 2020. —AFP

eight years back in 1995. The Bills were a dominant force in the AFC in the early '90s, winning the conference four straight seasons from 1990 through 1993 - although they came up short in the Super Bowl each of those seasons. In Saturday's other game, Green Bay quarterback Aaron Rodgers notched another record in the Packers 24-16 victory over the Carolina Panthers.

Rodgers threw his league-leading 40th touchdown in the first quarter, becoming the first quarterback in NFL history to throw 40 touchdowns in three seasons.

"Like yesterday (Friday) it was very close. When you look at the times, you really have to be at your best," said Kilde. World Cup super-G champion Beat Feuz was third, at 0.54sec. Kilde heads the overall standings on 335 points from Swiss rival Marco Odermatt (290 pts) and France's Alexis Pinturault (276 pts) who elected to bypass these two races at Val Gardena. Down in 12th in the table sits Cochran-Siegle, whose career best performance came 24 hours after he had finished eighth to claim his first ever top-10 super-G placing.

The man from said he hadn't been focusing on a top three finish. "You have to ski clean and fast all the way through. You can't just walk on the podium, you really have to put everything together. I was just focusing on my skiing." A little while earlier, Cochran-Siegle's compatriot Breezy Johnson secured her second third-place finish in 24 hours in the women's World Cup at Val d'Isere as US star Mikaela Shiffrin sat out the two races. With no fans allowed to watch the action due to coronavirus restrictions the Val Gardena organizers placed wooden sculptures of spectators at the foot of the slope. —AFP

weight class for the fight in front of a pandemic-limited crowd at the Alamodome in San Antonio. "I feel really proud to have this," Alvarez said. "I represent not only the boxing world but my country. I did a great job after a 13-month layoff. I am the best in the world." Alvarez improved to 54-1-2 with 36 knockouts, while Smith suffered the first defeat of his pro career and dropped to 27-1, 19 knockouts. Saturday's victory rekindles the possibility of a third fight between Alvarez and Gennady "GGG" Golovkin, who lost to Alvarez in a controversial majority decision in Las Vegas in 2018.

The 30-year-old Alvarez showed he is one of the smartest fighters in the sport, adjusting on the fly and managing to get inside the long reach of Smith to

attack the body and head. "I felt great at 168 pounds. This is one of the best nights for me," said Alvarez. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, that has killed 315,000 people across the US in the past 11 months, organizers were forced to limit the crowd size but they still managed to get a permit to allow 15,000 people into the 32,000-seat venue.



VAL GARDENA: Norwegian Aleksander Aamodt Kilde competes during the FIS Alpine Ski Men's Super G World Cup event in Val Gardena. —AFP

They saw Alvarez, who goes by the nickname "Canelo", land every punch in his arsenal during the glorified sparring session with Smith whose busted up face and blood-spattered white trunks told the story. Alvarez's best punch was the right uppercut and he threw it with authority, imposing his will like he was chopping down a tree. —AFP

## News in brief

## Wizards' Bryant fined \$45,000

**NEW YORK:** Washington Wizards center Thomas Bryant was fined \$45,000 by the NBA on Saturday for "inappropriate contact" with an official in a pre-season game on Thursday. The incident occurred in the third quarter of the Wizards' game against Detroit, after Pistons big man Blake Griffin manhandled Bryant to the floor. Bryant bounced up and tried to confront a laughing Griffin, but a game official got between them. Bryant touched and shoved the official as he tried to get to Griffin, who was assessed a flagrant foul for his actions. Bryant received a technical foul. Bryant, entering his fourth season, is expected to be the Wizards' starting center. Last season he averaged career highs in points (13.2), rebounds (7.2), assists (1.8), blocks (1.1), and minutes (24.9) per game. —AFP

## Super-G: Ledeska edges Suter

**VAL-D'ISERE:** Olympic champion Ester Ledeska took the World Cup super-G in Val d'Isere on Sunday, edging Corinne Suter with Federica Brignone third. The Czech skier and snowboarder finished in 1 min, 24.64 sec, just 0.03sec ahead of Swiss Suter, who won the small globe for the discipline last year, with Italian Brignone 0.35 off the winning time. The race was the first World Cup super-G of the season after first the two scheduled races of the season in Saint-Moritz were cancelled. Victory leaves Ledeska, who won the Olympic super-G and the parallel giant slalom in snowboard in Pyeongchang in 2018, atop the World Cup standings in the discipline. Another Czech, Petra Vlhova finished sixth to increase her lead in the overall standings after her closest challenger Michelle Gisin of Switzerland came in ninth. —AFP

## Rangers extend lead to 16 points

**GLASGOW:** Rangers needed a late comeback to beat Motherwell 3-1 and stretch their lead at the top of the Scottish Premiership to 16 points. Steven Gerrard's men suffered their first defeat of the season as they were knocked out of the League Cup by St Mirren in midweek. And the hosts did not start well at Ibrox as Callum Lang converted Stephen O'Donnell's cross from close range just six minutes in to give Motherwell a shock lead. Rangers battled to force their way back into the game, but did not level until 17 minutes from time when Kemar Roofe swept home a loose ball inside the area. Substitute Cedric Itten then gave Rangers the lead from Ianis Hagi's corner eight minutes from time, before Roofe struck again four minutes into added time. Victory stretches Rangers' lead over Celtic, who have three games in hand on the leaders and are not in league action this weekend. —AFP

## Atletico Madrid beat Elche

**MADRID:** Luis Suarez scored twice from close range in a 3-1 victory for Atletico Madrid against Elche on Saturday to move Diego Simeone's side three points clear at the top of La Liga. In a tight first half at the Wanda Metropolitan, Atletico wasted a clear chance to take the lead when France forward Thomas Lemar drove the ball straight at Elche 'keeper Edgar Badia as the defense opened up. Suarez was far more clinical in the 41st minute as the Uruguayan forward got the slightest of touches to steer Kieran Trippier's cross past Badia to take the lead. The former Barcelona and Liverpool attacker then stretched to poke the lively Yannick Carrasco's pass into the net in the 58th minute. Lucas Boye's powerful header gave Elche hope in the second half but substitute Diego Costa, who has not hidden his frustration at being relegated to the bench since Suarez's arrival, fired in a penalty with ten minutes remaining to wrap up the three points for Atletico. —AFP

## Italian double for Kilde as US runner-up makes first podium in 99 tries

**VAL GARDENA:** Reigning overall champion Aleksander Aamodt Kilde added Saturday's World Cup downhill to his super-G success at Val Gardena the day before to take the lead in his pursuit of a second straight big crystal globe. He took the honours by 22 hundredths of a second from American Ryan Cochran-Siegle, who celebrated his first ever podium at the 99th attempt. "Yes, definitely, big step for me today," Cochran-Siegle, 28, said. "I have good feelings on my skiing right now, and to be able to do all the way from start to finish, it's huge," he added. It was Norwegian Kilde's sixth win on the World Cup circuit, with half of that haul coming on the same Saslong slope as he also won the downhill there in 2018.

## Alvarez overpowers Smith to claim titles

**LOS ANGELES:** Mexican pound-for-pound champ Saul Alvarez ended the longest layoff of his career on Saturday, brutally overpowering the previously unbeaten Callum Smith to capture two super middleweight titles with a unanimous decision in Texas. Three-division champion Alvarez claimed the vacant WBC title and Briton Smith's WBA version of the 168-pound belt, overcoming a stark height difference as he moved up in



## Sports

# Lewandowski double fires Bayern top of Bundesliga

## Gladbach's Thuram sent off after spitting in opponent's face

BERLIN: Newly-crowned FIFA world player of the year Robert Lewandowski scored a double, including a dramatic injury-time winner, as Bayern Munich beat Bayer Leverkusen 2-1 on Saturday to usurp their opponents at the top of the Bundesliga. Lewandowski, who beat Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi to the individual award on Thursday, scored in the 93rd minute to put the reigning champions two points clear heading into the winter break.

"What a year we have had. I hope we will continue to play like this in the New Year," Lewandowski told Sky. "It's always nice to score a goal in the last few seconds, especially to get an important victory. 'This shows that we always want to win games like these.'" Lewandowski has 20 goals in 18 games this season in all competitions, having also headed Bayern level just before the break after Patrik Schick gave Leverkusen an early lead. Second-placed Leverkusen are level on 28 points with RB Leipzig, who sit third after a goalless draw at home with Cologne.

Bayern are the first Bundesliga team to beat Leverkusen this term, having also ended Wolfsburg's unbeaten league run this season in midweek. For the seventh Bundesliga game in a row, Bayern conceded the opening goal when Leverkusen exposed the European champions' trend of weak defending at set-pieces. Schick smashed his shot past Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, voted goalkeeper of the year on Thursday, from a corner to give the hosts a 14th-minute lead. Schick had the ball in the Bayern net again on 28

minutes, but the goal was ruled out for offside.

Bayern equalized with their first clear chance in the 43rd minute after Leverkusen defender Edmond Tapsoba lost possession. The ball was worked to Thomas Mueller, whose cross flew over the defense to Lewandowski who headed home unmarked at the far post. Bayern's England Under-21 midfielder Jamal Musiala hit the post midway through the second half before Lewandowski struck. A ball flicked on by Joshua Kimmich, making his first appearance after a knee injury, put Lewandowski in behind to fire home.

### Thuram sent off for spitting

Borussia Moenchengladbach forward Marcus Thuram apologized after being sent off for spitting in an opponent's face during a 2-1 home defeat by Hoffenheim. The France forward was shown a straight red card with 11 minutes left after VAR spotted Thuram spitting at Hoffenheim defender Stefan Posch. The incident happened just after Andrej Kramaric had equalized for the away side at Borussia Park.

"Something took place today that is out of my character and must never happen again," Thuram later wrote on Twitter. "I apologize to everyone — my opponents, teammates and family. Of course, I accept all the consequences of my actions." Nine minutes after Thuram's dismissal, Tottenham loanee Ryan Sessegnon put Hoffenheim ahead when he tapped in a cross unmarked at the far post. Gladbach, who face Manchester City in the last 16 of the Champions League in February, had gone in



LEVERKUSEN: Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (left) celebrates after scoring the 1-1 during the German first division Bundesliga football match Bayer Leverkusen v FC Bayern Munich on December 19, 2020. —AFP

front when captain Lars Stindl converted a first-half penalty.

Having made his France debut in November, this was the first time Thuram — the son of 1998 World Cup winner Lilian Thuram — had been sent off for Gladbach in his two seasons in Germany. Despite bringing in Dutch veteran Huub Stevens on Friday

as their third coach this season, Schalke are now 29 Bundesliga games without a win after their 1-0 defeat at home by Arminia Bielefeld. Elsewhere, Werder Bremen's 19-year-old striker Eren Dinkci enjoyed a fairytale Bundesliga debut, scoring their 90th-minute winner with a superb header to seal a 1-0 victory at Mainz. —AFP

## Arsenal slump; Fulham edge out of relegation

LIVERPOOL: Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta admitted his players were in a "big fight" after slipping to an eighth defeat of the Premier League season at the hands of high-flying Everton on Saturday. Carlo Ancelotti's side moved five points behind leaders Liverpool after beating the Londoners 2-1 in front of 2,000 delighted fans at Goodison Park. At the other end of the table, the Gunners remain 15th after just one win in their past 10 league games, putting Arteta's position under intense scrutiny just four months after they won the FA Cup.

After red cards undid Arsenal in their previous two games, much of the damage was again self-inflicted as Rob Holding's own goal opened the scoring. Nicolas Pepe's penalty briefly leveled the scores, but Yerry Mina's header on the stroke of half-time secured a third consecutive win for Everton. Arteta

said the game hinged on two key moments. "We reacted really well," he told Sky Sports. "We dominated the game. We created enough chances at least to not lose. We hit the bar. We don't have the luck." "The boys are absolutely still fighting," he added. "They're hurt right now."

Arsenal were dealt a major blow before kick-off, losing captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang to a calf injury. He had just re-found his scoring touch with a first goal from open play in the Premier League since September in a 1-1 draw at home to Southampton on Wednesday. That point briefly stemmed the spiral of decline for Arsenal but the club, who have been in English football's top flight since 1919, find themselves in uncharted territory, facing a relegation battle.

### Relegation fight?

Should results go against them on Sunday and Monday, Arteta's men could be just two points above the drop zone, with Chelsea to come on Boxing Day. Dominic Calvert-Lewin was usurped by Liverpool's Mohamed Salah as the Premier League's top scorer earlier in the day and while the England interna-



LIVERPOOL: Everton's English defender Mason Holgate (2nd left) and Arsenal's French striker Alexandre Lacazette (2nd right) compete during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Arsenal on December 19, 2020. —AFP

tional failed to score for the third straight game, he did have a big part to play in the opening goal. Former Arsenal winger Alex Iwobi's cross was headed towards goal by Calvert-Lewin, but his effort was going off target until it was turned in by Holding's thigh.

"We have fantastic players on set-pieces, we score lots of goals," Ancelotti told the BBC. "We work on this because

we are very dangerous. "We are pleased. The position in the table is really good. But as I said last week, it is not the end of the season, we have to keep fighting." In the late game Fulham, who were reduced to 10 men at St James's Park, edged out of the relegation zone after Newcastle's Callum Wilson scored a penalty to cancel out a Matt Ritchie own goal in a 1-1 draw. —Agencies

## L AFC cruise into CONCACAF final

MIAMI: Carlos Vela scored twice as Los Angeles FC (LAF) defeated Club America 3-1 Saturday to book a CONCACAF Champions League final showdown against Tigres UANL. LAF became the first Major League Soccer Club since Toronto FC in 2018 to reach the final of the elite club competition in the North and Central America and Caribbean region.

Now they'll try to do what Toronto — and the Montreal Impact and Real Salt Lake before them — were unable to do and beat a Liga MX team for the crown. Tigres, with a brace from France's Andre-Pierre Gignac, defeated Olimpia of Honduras 3-0 to reach their fourth final in five years. The second match of the night at Exploria Stadium in Orlando, Florida — where the final stages of the tournament are being held to mitigate risks of disruption from the coronavirus pandemic — was a contentious affair that saw both teams reduced to 10 men by the end.

Mexico international Vela bagged his second brace of the tournament as LAF beat their third Mexican opponent of the competition. Club America struck first, taking a 1-0 lead in the 11th minute when Sebastian Caceres slotted home a corner kick. With tension mounting in first-half stoppage time, LAF's Colombian midfielder Eduard Atuesta was shown a red card for contact with Club America goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa after Atuesta appeared to be fouled in the penalty area by Richard Sanchez. —AFP

## Kuwait Football League roundup

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The 13th round of Kuwait Football League (ranking phase) brought in a little surprise on Saturday as Arabi's young player led his team to victory against Kuwait 3-1. Salman Ashkanani scored twice, though Arabi lost to Kuwait earlier in the week in the Super Cup. Kuwait and Arabi now have 21 points each. The match started with Kuwait taking control over midfield — as Arabi relied on counter attacks. Salman Al-Awadhi scored when he received a pass from Bader Tareq in the 22nd minute. Kuwait players worked hard to get an equalizer, and in less than 10 minutes, Kuwait's forward Ahmad Hizam scored just before the first half ended.

The second half continued like the first half, as most young players who replaced

the starters due to injuries and suspensions wanted to prove themselves. The referee later issued a red card to Arabi's Kita in the 67th minute. Kuwait's manager found himself compelled to have Jumaa Saeed and Ahmad Akashi enter the field in order to strengthen his team's attacks, but Bader Tareq of Arabi scored a second goal in the 66th minute. Kuwait tried hard to score an equalizer but failed — then Salman Al-Awadhi of Kuwait scored an insurance goal for Arabi in the 86th minute.

In the second match — (Fahaheel v Tadhamon) — Fahaheel boost their hope in the premier league after defeating Tadhamon 2-1. Fahaheel now has 15 points (9th place). Both teams entered the match knowing that they must win to have any chance to remain in the premier league. Fahaheel's goals were scored by Fawaz Al-Rashidi in the 36th minute and Abdallah Al-Shami towards the end of the first half, meanwhile Tadhamon's goal was scored by Mohammad Al-Qabandi in the 53rd minute.

## Kadewere helps 'magnificent' Lyon go top of Ligue 1

PARIS: Lyon climbed to the top of Ligue 1 as Zimbabwe attacker Tino Kadewere scored a goal and set up another in a 4-1 win at Nice on Saturday. Kadewere made an impact either side of half-time to move his side a point above Lille who entertained third-placed Paris Saint-Germain yesterday. "We understand each other on the field when we play together," he told Canal+ of his teammates.

"If you play with players like my teammates it's magnificent, we have a lot of good players. "We need to work further to finish the season with a lot of points to get back to the Champions League." The visitors'

boss Rudi Garcia handed Belgium defender Jason Denayer his 100th Lyon appearance as Memphis Depay returned to the starting line-up after scoring off the bench in the midweek draw with Brest. Nice attacker Jeff Reine-Adelaide was ineligible for the fixture against his parent club as Alexis Claude-Maurice came into Adrian Ursea's side on the right wing.

Depay opened the scoring just after the half-hour mark with a 'Panenka' penalty before Kadewere took his tally for the season to six goals on 39 minutes. He intercepted a Hicham Boudaoui pass and beat home goalkeeper Walter Benitez with ease. Kadewere turned provider in the 63rd minute as he set up Cameroon striker Karl Toko Ekambi with a squared pass into the box. The three points were secured with less than 30 minutes to go as France playmaker Houssem Aouar fired home from close range for his first goal since late October.

Earlier, Andre Villas-Boas said Marseille's 1-1 draw with Reims was a



NICE: Nice's Brazilian defender Robson Bambu (left) fights for the ball with Lyon's Zimbabwean forward Tino Kadewere during the French L1 football match between OGC Nice and Olympique Lyonnais on December 19, 2020. —AFP

"missed opportunity" as they failed to move into the top three for the first time this season. Japan's Yuto Nagatomo scored an own goal before Florian Thauvin grabbed an equalizer at the Stade Velodrome. Villas-Boas'

men, who lost to Rennes on Wednesday when Pape Gueye was sent off, stay fourth in the table, five points behind leaders Lyon, albeit with at least one game in hand on all their title rivals. —AFP

## Norwich stretch lead in Championship; virus forces postponement

LONDON: Norwich stretched their lead at the top of the English Championship to five points on Saturday as Rotherham's match with Derby was postponed due to a coronavirus outbreak. Daniel Farke's men beat Cardiff 2-0 at Carrow Road thanks to goals from Emi Buendia and Todd Cantwell, for a fifth consecutive win. They pulled further clear of second-placed Bournemouth, who could only draw 0-0 at Luton. "I can't hide the fact I am pretty pleased with our form," said Farke, whose side were relegated from the Premier League last season, along with Bournemouth.

"We are pleased with our points so far and our position in the league but there is a long way to go. This is the toughest league in the world and we just have to maintain the standards we have shown so far." Swansea moved up to third following a 2-0 win over Barnsley. The Swans made the perfect start on a poor pitch, with Jamal Lowe side-footing home in the second minute. They doubled their lead in the 66th minute when Barnsley substitute Victor Adebayo nodded a Matt Grimes corner past his own goalkeeper. Brentford are fourth after two superb strikes from Bryan Mbeumo helped them to a 3-1 win against Reading.

Aitor Karanka suffered a heavy defeat against his former club as Birmingham were beaten 4-1 by Middlesbrough, who moved into the play-off places. Blues took a 15th-minute lead but Britt Assombalonga equalized for Middlesbrough and further goals from George Saville, an own goal from goalkeeper Neil Etheridge and a strike by Lewis Wing sealed a comprehensive victory. Huddersfield claimed a 2-0 win against Watford, with a goal from Fraizer Campbell and an own goal from Etienne Capoue. Sheffield Wednesday beat Coventry 1-0 while Stoke saw off Blackburn by the same scoreline.

Bottom side Wycombe scored a late equalizer to earn a point in a 1-1 draw with QPR and Millwall and Nottingham Forest also played out a 1-1 draw. Rotherham's clash with Derby was postponed following a positive Covid-19 test for a member of Paul Warne's squad. The match, which had been due to take place at the New York Stadium, was called off less than 90 minutes before the scheduled 1500 GMT kick-off. An English Football League statement said: "The circumstances surrounding the postponement will now be the subject of an investigation in accordance with EFL regulations. "A revised date for the rearranged fixture will be confirmed in due course." —AFP

Live		Matches on TV (Local Timings)	
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE			
Burnley v Wolves	beIN Sports HD 1	20:30	
Chelsea v West Ham	beIN Sports HD 1	23:00	



**14** Bills clinch first AFC East divisional title in 25 years



**15** Arsenal slump; Fulham edge out of relegation

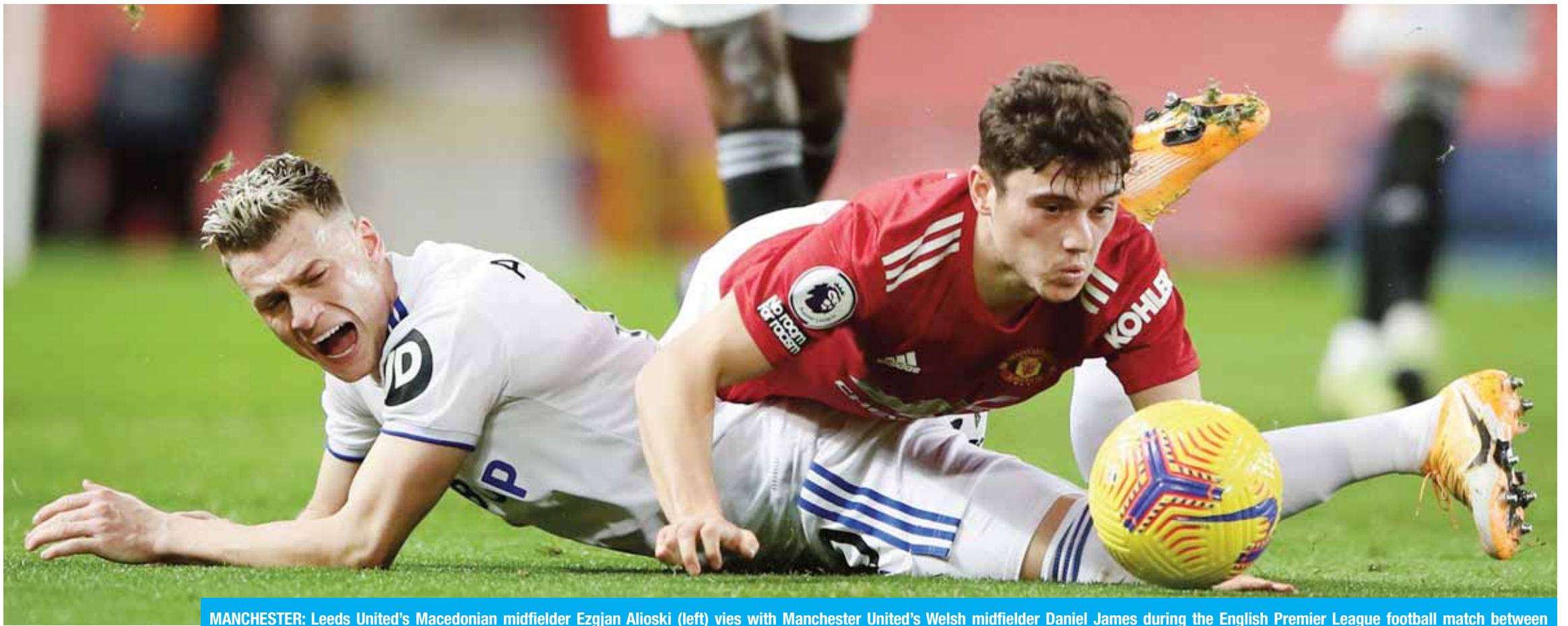


**15** Lewandowski double fires Bayern top of Bundesliga



## Man United hammer Leeds 6-2

United state Premier League title credentials; Leicester dent Spurs hopes



MANCHESTER: Leeds United's Macedonian midfielder Ezgjan Alioski (left) vies with Manchester United's Welsh midfielder Daniel James during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Leeds United yesterday. — AFP

**LONDON:** Manchester United blitzed Leeds 6-2 to climb to third in the Premier League yesterday as Leicester put a major dent in Tottenham's title challenge. The first top-flight battle in 16 years between bitter rivals United and Leeds was keenly anticipated but Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men proved far too strong at an empty Old Trafford. United, who made a stuttering start to the season, now have 26 points—five behind leaders Liverpool with a game in hand. They are a point adrift of second-placed Leicester, who beat Spurs 2-0 in the earlier kick-off to complete a miserable few days for Jose Mourinho.

United have won all six of their away games in the Premier League this season but had won just one match at home before yesterday. Leeds were expected to provide a stern examination of United's rickety defense but the visitors were 2-0 down as early as the third minute—with both goals scored by midfielder Scott McTominay. Bruno Fernandes and Victor Lindelof made it 4-0 before Liam Cooper pulled one back for Marcelo Bielsa's team. United were back on the rampage in the second half. Daniel James made it 5-1 and Fernandes scored a penalty before Stuart Dallas scored again for Leeds.

Spurs were top of the table until a

last-minute winner for Liverpool gave the champions a 2-1 victory on Wednesday. They now find themselves back in fifth spot—six points adrift of the champions after a damaging defeat. Jamie Vardy put away-day specialists Leicester ahead from the penalty spot deep into first-half stoppage time after Serge Aurier barged Wesley Fofana over. Spurs had a huge escape early in the second half as James Maddison had a goal ruled out for the most marginal of off-sides. But Leicester doubled their lead just before the hour mark via an own goal. Vardy capitalized on some bad defending by Moussa Sissoko and

his header across goal deflected off Toby Alderweireld and into the net.

Leicester boss Brendan Rodgers described his team, who have won six of their seven away games this season, as "outstanding". But he told Sky Sports: "We have to start winning at home. The group is learning all the time and that's why we're nowhere near the finished product." Mourinho must now lift his team after a miserable few days. "It is not a good week in terms of results," said the Spurs boss. "We could be here as the ones that broke Liverpool's record at Anfield and going into this game on a high.

"We started this game from the low of that disappointment and not getting what we deserved from that match, but Leicester also lost in their last match but came with a positive attitude. It's a game that we've lost with the penalty and the own goal."

In the early kick-off, 10-man Sheffield United were cruelly denied a first Premier League win of the season as Brighton's Danny Welbeck cancelled out Jayden Bogle's opener in a 1-1 draw. Struggling West Brom, with new manager Sam Allardyce at the helm, host local rivals Aston Villa in the late evening kick-off. — AFP

## AC Milan's Leao scores fastest-ever Serie A goal

**MILAN:** AC Milan forward Rafael Leao scored the fastest-ever goal in Serie A history yesterday when he netted after just six seconds in a 2-1 win at Sassuolo which kept his side top of table ahead of city rivals Inter Milan. Milan, chasing a first Serie A title since 2011, launched straight into attack from kick-off, with Turkish midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu setting up Leao to slot home the rapid opener.

The previous fastest goal in the Italian top flight had been Paolo Poggi's for Piacenza against Fiorentina in December 2001 after eight seconds of play. Milan have a one-point advantage on Antonio Conte's Inter who beat promoted Spezia 2-1, with champions Juventus four points behind the leaders in third after a 4-0 win over Parma on Saturday.

"We wanted to start the game well because we missed out in the last few," said coach Stefano Pioli whose side had been held 2-2 in both their last two league games against Parma and Genoa. "We have four-five kick-off patterns.

Yes, he (Leao) was prepared. It was an important moment. I often tell young players, there are points that are worth more because they come in delicate moments. "This match weighed a lot from a mental point of view, we wanted to win and having succeeded gives us a lot of satisfaction."

Portuguese Leao, who usually plays on the left wing, started at centre-forward with star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic still out with a leg muscle problem and his replacement Ante Rebic also injured. It was the 21-year-old's third league goal this season and fourth in all competitions. "We had prepared it in training," revealed Leao. "This game was important for us, because we had lost some points in the previous matches." Calhanoglu thought he had scored a second after nine minutes when he put home a Leao cross but



SASSUOLO: AC Milan's Portuguese forward Rafael Leao (center) celebrates after opening the scoring during the Italian Serie A football match Sassuolo vs AC Milan yesterday. — AFP

the goal was disallowed for offside after a VAR review.

However Alexis Saelemackers doubled Milan's lead in the 26th minute following good work from Theo Hernandez. Domenico Berardi pulled a goal back late for Sassuolo, who sit sixth on 23 points after the defeat. At the San Siro, Inter Milan extended their winning league run to six matches with Achraf Hakimi getting the first five minutes after the break. Romelu Lukaku slotted in a penalty after 71 minutes for his 11th league goal this season after a M'Bala Nzola handball. Roberto Piccoli got a goal back for Spezia, who are just above the relegation zone, deep into injury time.

**Juventus thrash Parma 4-0**

Meanwhile, Cristiano Ronaldo scored a double as Juventus thrashed Parma 4-0 on Saturday to move within a point of Serie A leaders AC Milan. The Turin

giants, chasing a 10th straight league title this season, remain unbeaten after 13 matches this term. Ronaldo, who missed a penalty in the midweek 1-1 draw with Atalanta, made amends with his third brace in four games. "Ronaldo was quite rightly angry with himself after missing a penalty," Juve coach Andrea Pirlo told DAZN.

"But fortunately he didn't have much time to stew over it and immediately got the chance to show just how much he loves to score goals." Third-placed Juve sit level on points with Inter Milan, who welcomed Spezia to the San Siro yesterday. "We're slowly getting to what we all want, not just me, but also the players," added Pirlo, whose side drew five of their first nine league games of the season. Ronaldo started up front alongside Alvaro Morata in Parma, with Paulo Dybala not even on the bench after suffering a muscle injury. — Agencies

## Monaco end losing streak; Rennes move level with Marseille

**PARIS:** Germany striker Kevin Volland scored his sixth Ligue 1 goal as Monaco battled to a 1-0 win at bottom club Dijon yesterday to snap a three-match losing streak. Successive defeats by Lille, Marseille and Lens had seen Monaco slip nine points behind previous leaders Lille heading into the weekend. Their win yesterday moved the seventh-placed principality club within seven points of current leaders Lyon, although Lille and Paris Saint-Germain will both be eyeing top spot when they meet later in the day. Former Bayer Leverkusen forward Volland slotted in the only goal on 15 minutes, with both sides seeing later efforts ruled out by VAR.

"After four straight wins and then three defeats on the bounce, the most important thing was to win," said coach Niko Kovac. "It was not the best Monaco but we showed lots of character and that's the best way to move forward." Rennes are two points ahead Monaco in fifth after strolling to a 3-0 win at Lorient, who sit second-from-bottom after their 11th defeat of the season. Damien Da Silva opened the scoring with a deflected close-range effort midway through the first half, and Benjamin Bourigeaud doubled the away side's lead with a fine first-time strike with 20 minutes remaining.

Martin Terrier completed the scoring six minutes later when he cut in from the left before curling home past Paul Nardi. Rennes are level with Marseille on 28 points, five behind Lyon, although they have played two games more than the team from the south coast. — AFP