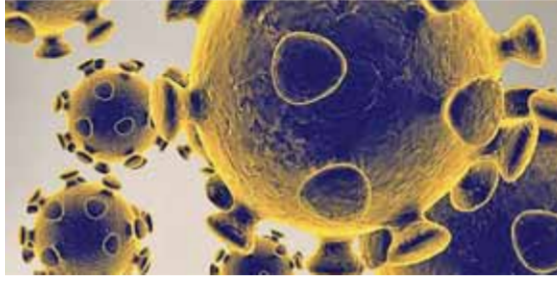




**5** Scientists scramble to assess mutated virus



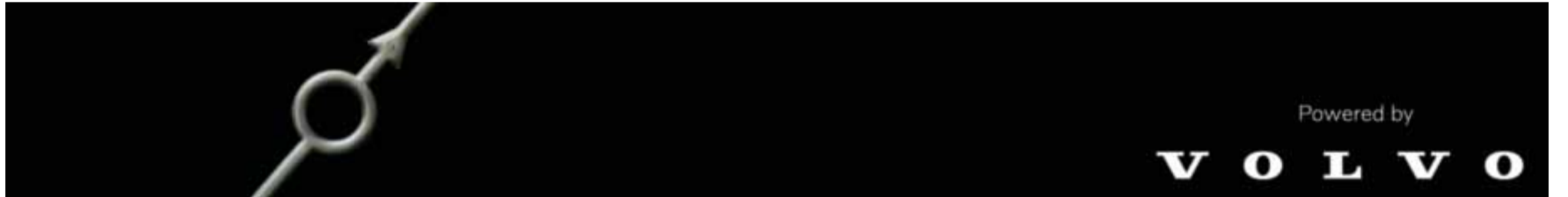
**8** Climate change ravages Kashmir's saffron crop



**13** Baghdad watch repairman is a timeless treasure



**16** Rizwan-inspired Pakistan stop N Zealand T20 sweep



# COVID vaccines arrive today, shots begin at the weekend

## BioNTech says can make mutation-beating vaccine in six weeks

### Opposition MPs take control of most committees

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Lawmakers who are members of an alliance of opposition MPs yesterday took control of most of National Assembly panels, including the key committees of legal and legislative and the interior and defense. But pro-government MPs wrested control of the important financial and economic affairs committee and health and labor panel. Most of the committees were however elected unanimously, as the government appears to have decided not to intervene in the election of the panels, which study and approve bills and discuss key issues. The alliance of opposition MPs last week lost the speaker's election battle after Marzouq Al-Ghanem was elected for a third term with strong backing from the government and after a dozen members of the alliance changed their minds and voted for Ghanem.

Continued on Page 2



KUWAIT: Lawmakers attend a special parliamentary session at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah yesterday said the first shipment of COVID-19 vaccines will arrive at dawn today, and the vaccination process will begin at the weekend. According to a press statement by the health ministry, vaccinations will be held in four stages according to priority - first for healthcare workers, those above 65 years of age, frontliners and then the rest of the society. Sheikh Basel said 73,700 people have registered online to receive the vaccine, adding that inoculations will continue until everyone is vaccinated.

Member of the vaccine committee at the health ministry Khalid Al-Saeed had earlier said the first batch of coronavirus vaccines includes around 150,000 doses enough for 75,000 individuals, as each person will get two shots. About the vaccination process, he said messages will be sent to those who have registered, including the time they will receive the vaccine at the Mishref fairgrounds.

Kuwait yesterday reported 298 COVID-19 cases over a 24-hour period, taking the total number of infections to 148,507, while one death was recorded, raising the death toll to 923. Active cases amounted to 3,228, with 53 in intensive care units. Health authorities conducted 5,641 swab tests in 24 hours to take the total to 1,228,818. Earlier, the health ministry confirmed 214 fresh recovery cases, taking total recoveries to 144,356.

Continued on Page 2

### News in brief

#### US nuke sub crosses Hormuz

WASHINGTON: A US nuclear submarine crossed the Strait of Hormuz Monday in a new show of force directed at Iran. The USS Georgia can carry 154 Tomahawk cruise missiles and 66 special forces soldiers, according to a statement from the US Navy. The statement is illustrated with photos showing the USS Georgia at the surface, escorted by the cruisers USS Port Royal and USS Philippine Sea. — AFP

#### French citizenship for frontliners

PARIS: Hundreds of foreigners in France whose jobs expose them to high COVID-19 risks will be naturalized quickly for their commitment during the health crisis, the interior ministry said yesterday. Of the nearly 3,000 people who responded to apply for fast-track naturalization, 74 had already obtained citizenship and 693 more were in the final stage of the process. Immigration authorities have been ordered to reduce the residency period needed for citizenship to two years from the usual five. — AFP

#### Turkey reports gold discovery

ISTANBUL: Turkey has discovered a major gold deposit holding an estimated 3.5 million ounces (99 tons) of the precious metal valued at around \$6 billion, the Anadolu state news agency reported yesterday. The find in the midwestern town of Sogut was reported by Fahrettin Poyraz, who heads the Agricultural Credit Cooperatives of Turkey and the Gubretas fertilizer production firm. — AFP

#### Jazeera targeted by spyware

NICOSIA: Dozens of journalists at Qatar's Al-Jazeera broadcaster had their mobile communications intercepted by sophisticated electronic surveillance, a cybersecurity watchdog said. Interceptions of 36 journalists' phones were revealed in a report by the Citizen Lab research center at the University of Toronto on Sunday, after they monitored journalists' devices for suspicious activity. Their report said the hack used Pegasus spyware developed by Israel's NSO Group. — AFP

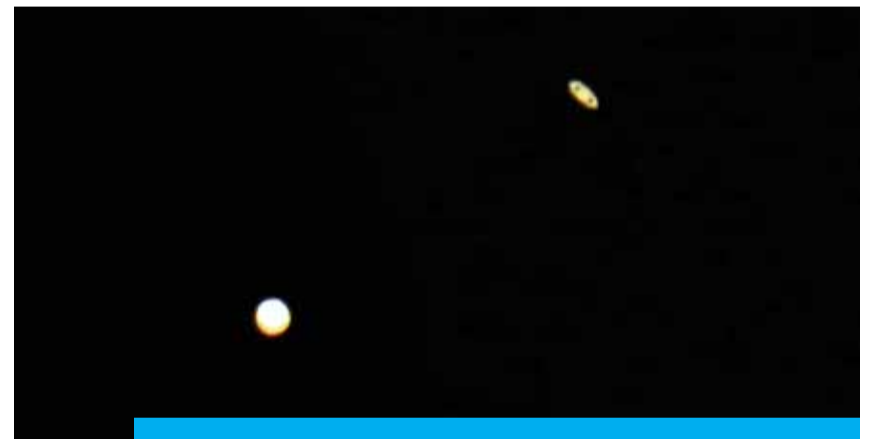
### Jupiter, Saturn cheek-to-cheek in celestial jig

PARIS: The solar system's two biggest planets, Jupiter and Saturn, came within planetary kissing range in Monday's evening sky, an intimacy that will not occur again until 2080. This "great conjunction", as it is known to astronomers, occurred fortuitously on the winter solstice for those in the Northern Hemisphere and the beginning of summer in the

global south. The two planets were, in fact, more than 730 m km apart. But because of their alignment in relation to Earth, they appeared to be closer to each other than at any time in almost 400 years.

Optimal "conjunction" took place at 1822 GMT. The best viewing conditions on Monday were in clear skies and close to the Equator, while people in Western Europe and along a vast swathe of Africa had to train their sight to the southwest. In Kuwait, astrophotographers travelled into the desert west of Kuwait City to capture the once-in-a-lifetime event.

Continued on Page 2



KUWAIT: A picture taken on Monday in the Salmi desert shows the great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

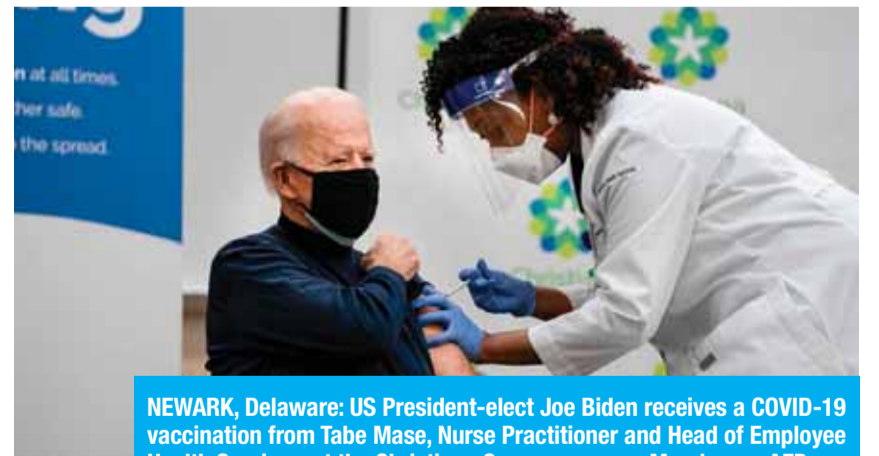
### Biden receives COVID vaccine live on TV

NEWARK: US President-elect Joe Biden received a COVID-19 vaccine live on television Monday in a campaign to boost Americans' confidence in the jabs - and in marked contrast to President Donald Trump's mixed messaging. The 78-year-old incoming president got the Pfizer vaccine at the Christiana Hospital in Newark,

Delaware. His wife Jill received the shot earlier, the presidential transition team said.

Biden told Americans "there's nothing to worry about" when they get vaccinated and that in the meantime they should keep wearing masks and "listen to the experts". He and the future first lady were the latest high-profile political figures publicly joining the first wave of vaccinations aimed at stopping a pandemic that has killed almost 318,000 Americans. Vice President-elect Kamala Harris and her husband will be vaccinated next week.

Continued on Page 2



NEWARK, Delaware: US President-elect Joe Biden receives a COVID-19 vaccination from Tabé Mase, Nurse Practitioner and Head of Employee Health Services, at the Christiana Care campus on Monday. — AFP

### Kushner joins Israel-Morocco direct flight

RABAT: The first Israel-Morocco direct commercial flight landed in the North African kingdom yesterday to mark the latest US-brokered diplomatic normalization deal between the Jewish state and an Arab country. US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and White House advisor Jared Kushner was on board along with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu's National Security Advisor Meir Ben Shabbat.

The US-Israeli delegation was welcomed at the airport by Moroccan officials, ahead of a program that includes a meeting with King Mohammed VI at the royal palace, and a visit to the grave of Mohammed V. The trip aimed to showcase the Trump administration's achievements in Middle East diplomacy, weeks before Trump is replaced at the White House by President-elect Joe Biden.

Morocco became the third Arab state this year, after the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, to normalize ties with Israel under US-brokered deals.

Continued on Page 2



RABAT: Governor of Rabat Mohamed Yacoubi welcomes US presidential advisor Jared Kushner and Israeli National Security Advisor Meir Ben Shabbat upon their arrival yesterday. — AFP

## Local

# Amir congratulates MPs on committee membership

## Defense Minister takes oath during parliament session

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulation yesterday to MPs after elections for committee membership, wishing them success in serving their fellow citizens and country. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables on the occasion.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah swore in at the beginning of yesterday's parliamentary session according to article 91 of Kuwait's Constitution. The aforementioned article stipulates that before assuming duties in the assembly or its committees, a member of the National Assembly shall take oath before the assembly in a public sitting. The rest of the members of the National Assembly took oath in the first session of the 16th legislative term last week. On December 14, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah issued a decree forming the new Cabinet.

In the meantime, the National Assembly and Cabinet mourned the late Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah — former first Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, as well as Abdulaziz Al-Shaya, former Minister of Electricity and Water. Addressing a special session of parliament, Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah delivered separate statements, which spoke of the late Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad and Nasser Al-Shaya. The two



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah takes oath at the beginning of the parliament session yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem speaks during the session.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah attends the session.

officials commended the late ministers' efforts on the new Kuwait vision, which focused on transforming the country economically. Regarding Shaya, Ghanem and Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled commended the contributions of the late official, saying that he

was one of the important figures in Kuwait who contributed to the development of the nation. Speaker Ghanem and Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled expressed prayers of peace for both late figures and their families. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah receives the letter from Qatari Ambassador to Kuwait Bander bin Mohammad Al-Attiya. — KUNA

## Foreign Minister receives letter from Qatari Amir

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received yesterday a written letter from Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani that is intended for His Highness the Amir

Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The letter was delivered to Sheikh Dr Ahmad during a meeting with Qatari Ambassador to Kuwait Bander bin Mohammad Al-Attiya. — KUNA

## Many caught off guard by new flight suspension

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: With the suspension of commercial flights to and from Kuwait, passengers who were supposed to fly back to Kuwait were caught off guard. Many rushed to the airport to get the last available seats before the 11 pm deadline on Monday.

Kuwait Times IT Manager Islam Al-Sharaa, who went to Dubai last week for a short break, was scheduled to fly back to Kuwait today, but it looks like he will have to stay for some more days in Dubai. "When I heard the news, I rushed to the airport knowing that the travel ban will be imposed at 11 pm. I noticed not only me, but many other passengers going to Kuwait were all trying to secure seats. But we were unable to get new tickets or rebook our tickets, as they said the remaining flights were all booked and no

extra seats were available," he said.

Kuwait's Cabinet on Monday announced the closure of all ports and suspended all commercial flights from Dec 22 to Jan 1 after a new fast-spreading strain of coronavirus was detected in Britain. On Sunday, Kuwait banned passenger flights from Britain.

"I immediately took a PCR test so I could catch a flight back to Kuwait, but the result would only be available after two hours. This was very close to the deadline set by the Kuwait government, so I went back to my hotel, still shocked," Sharaa said. He considered going back to his home country Jordan, but all passengers who enter Jordan need to quarantine for 14 days. "So it's really not a good idea to travel to Jordan. Kuwait has suspended flights only until January 1, so I better wait here. I hope it will not be extended. My problem is hotel accommodation - if they charge too much, maybe I will join my brother who is working here in Dubai," he added.

Norman, who was invited by his brother to spend Christmas and New Year in Dubai, was scheduled to leave Kuwait on Dec 23. "I had the ticket to Dubai, but I canceled it today morning when I heard



the news. I had the visa as well, so it is very unfortunate that I cannot be with them this Christmas and New Year," he said. On the other hand, he noted this is better than to be stuck outside Kuwait and spend most of his savings. "If the suspension had come a bit later, I would've been stuck in Dubai. I don't want to be stuck outside Kuwait because I have lots of pending jobs," Norman added.

## Kushner joins Israel-Morocco...

Continued from Page 1

while Sudan has pledged to follow suit. Speaking at Israel's Ben Gurion airport before his departure, Kushner said Israel's recent string of breakthrough deals marked a step towards a more normal co-existence between Jews and Muslims.

"The state we have lived in for the last 75 years, where Jews and Muslims have been separated, is not a natural state," he said before getting on the plane which was painted with the Hebrew, Arabic and English words for "peace". Both sides expected to sign agreements paving the way for direct air links, and on water management, connecting their financial systems and on a visa waiver arrangement for diplomats, said an Israeli official source.

Morocco has North Africa's largest Jewish community of about 3,000 people, and Israel is home to 700,000 Jews of Moroccan origin. Up to now, up to 70,000 Israeli tourists a year have visited Morocco, but they have had to travel via third countries.

As part of the Morocco-Israel deal unveiled earlier this month, Trump fulfilled a decades-old goal of Rabat by backing its contested sovereignty in the

disputed region of Western Sahara. The move infuriated the Algerian-backed pro-independence Polisario Front, which controls about one fifth of the desert territory that was once a Spanish colony. Negotiations included pledges to open a US consulate in Western Sahara, and for US investment which Moroccan media described as "colossal".

Israel and Morocco are meanwhile due to reopen diplomatic offices. Morocco closed its liaison office in Tel Aviv in 2000, at the start of the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising. Mohammed VI has said Morocco will remain an advocate for the Palestinians. Alongside the announcement of the resumption of relations with Israel on Dec 10, the king assured Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas of Morocco's "continued and sustained commitment to the just Palestinian cause".

But the Palestinians - like the Polisario - have cried foul and condemned the normalization announcement between Rabat and the Jewish state. Two pro-Palestinian demonstrations were banned last week in Rabat, and about 30 groups and far-left parties yesterday denounced the visit by the "Zionist delegation", demanding Morocco "resist normalization".

Morocco has sought to temper the anger by insisting that relations with Israel are not new. "The new agreement is merely the formalization of a de facto partnership between Morocco and Israel dating back 60 years," said Moroccan media boss Ahmed Charai. —AFP

Meanwhile, the co-founder of BioNTech said yesterday it was "highly likely" that its vaccine against the coronavirus works against the mutated strain detected in Britain, but it could also adapt the vaccine if necessary in six weeks. "Scientifically, it is highly likely that the immune response by this vaccine also can deal with the new virus variant," said Ugur Sahin. But if needed, "in principle the beauty of the messenger technology is that we can directly start to engineer a vaccine which completely mimics this new mutation - we could be able to provide a new vaccine technically within six weeks". Sahin said the variant detected in Britain has nine mutations, rather than just one as is usually common.

Nevertheless, he voiced confidence that the vaccine developed with Pfizer would be efficient because it "contains more than 1,000 amino acids, and only nine of them have changed, so that means 99 percent of the protein is still the same". He said tests are being run on the variant, with results expected in two weeks. "We have scientific confidence that the vaccine might protect but we will only know it if the experiment is done... we will publish the data as soon as possible," he added. — Agencies

## Jupiter, Saturn cheek-to-cheek...

Continued from Page 1

Hundreds of space fans also gathered in Kolkata to watch - through a telescope at a technology museum in the city, or from surrounding rooftops and open areas.

Looking with a telescope or even a good pair of binoculars, the two gas giants were separated by no more than a fifth of the diameter of a full moon. But with the naked eye, they would merge into a "highly luminous" double planet, said Florent Deleflie from

the Paris Observatory. "The Grand Conjunction refers to the period when two planets have relatively similar positions in relation to Earth," said Deleflie. "With a small instrument - even a small pair of binoculars - people can see Jupiter's equatorial bands and its main satellites and Saturn's rings."

The last time Jupiter and Saturn nuzzled up this close was in 1623, but weather conditions in regions where the reunion could be seen blocked the view. Visibility was apparently better the time before that during the Middle Ages, on March 4, 1226 to be precise. Jupiter, which is the larger planet, takes 12 years to revolve around the sun, while Saturn takes 29 years. Every 20 years or so, they appear to observers on Earth to come closer to each other. — AFP

## Biden receives COVID vaccine...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, the serving vice president, Mike Pence, and his wife got vaccinations last week. Trump, however, has yet to take part in the drive. The Republican leader - who has become consumed by pushing conspiracy theories that his

election loss to Biden was the result of mass fraud - cites the natural immunity he is believed to enjoy after recovering from a bout of coronavirus.

Surgeon General Jerome Adams reinforced that argument at the weekend that, saying that due to the antibodies the president received from his infection, "that is actually one scenario where we tell people maybe you should hold off on getting the vaccine".

However, he has done little, even in terms of issuing statements, to support the campaign to overcome Americans' vaccine skepticism. — AFP

## COVID vaccines arrive today...

Continued from Page 1

Elsewhere in the region, Qatar received its first novel coronavirus vaccines on Monday, just hours after regulators approved the jab for use in the Gulf state, which says it will inoculate all residents free of charge. A shipment of 14 boxes of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine landed at Doha's Hamad International Airport aboard a Qatar Airways passenger Boeing 787 from Brussels shortly after 2000 GMT, according to AFP correspondents on site. Authorities have not said how many doses arrived in the first shipment. Abdullatif Al-Khal, Chair of the National Health Strategic Group on COVID-19, said during a speech on state TV Monday that vaccinations would begin from today. "The priority will be the elderly, those with chronic conditions and medical staff," he said. Vaccinations will be administered on a voluntary basis and provided free of charge, he said.

## Opposition MPs take control of...

Continued from Page 1

Alliance members were in a majority in the permanent committees for legal and legislative, interior and defense, housing, public funds defense, foreign affairs, budgets and public utilities. They also took control of temporary panels for human rights, stateless people (bedoons), women and family, agriculture and food security and environment affairs. The Assembly however refused to form a temporary committee for oil affairs, after some MPs said the financial affairs committee is already entrusted with the issue.

At the start of the session, Ghanem and the government paid tributes to late Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the former defense minister and eldest son of former Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who died on Monday, and late Abdulaziz Al-Shaya, a senior Kuwaiti busi-

nessman who was also a former electricity and water minister.

Ghanem rejected requests by opposition MPs to debate issues related to last week's session and their motions to launch an investigation into allowing crowds loyal to the speaker to attend the inaugural session in violation of rules. The speaker insisted that the internal charter and the constitution do not allow debating any issue outside the agenda, because it was a special session.

Opposition MP Mohammad Al-Mutair said the internal charter does not distinguish between special and ordinary sessions and what the speaker did is wrong. MP Thamer Al-Suwait charged that Assembly officials replaced the cameras and destroyed evidence about violations committed last week during the opening session. MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari said in case of a dispute over interpreting legal issues, the Assembly should be allowed to vote on such issues.

Meanwhile, MP Mohammad Al-Huwailah yesterday submitted an amendment to the nationality law stipulating that Kuwaiti citizenship cannot be revoked by authorities without a court ruling.

Local

# Kuwait Amir receives new ambassadors' credentials

## Sheikh Nawaf receives condolences from Saudi King



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of France to Kuwait Anne-Claire Legendre. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Thailand to Kuwait Rooge Thammongkol.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in a ceremony held at Bayan Palace yesterday, received credentials of a number of newly assigned foreign ambassadors to the State of Kuwait. His Highness the Amir received papers of the new envoys of France Anne-Claire Legendre, Thailand Rooge Thammongkol, the Philippines Mohd Noordin Pendorina Lomondot, South Africa M P Genge, Kazakhstan Azamat Berdybay, Tunisia Al-Hashemi Ajeeli and Malta Raymond Sarsero.

The ceremony was attended by Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Head of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Saud Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Amiri Diwan Undersecretary and Director of the Amir Bureau Ahmad Fahad Al-Fahad, and the head of the Amiri Protocols Sheikh Khaled Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah Al-Nasser Al-Sabah. Separately, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday.

**Condolences**

In other news, His Highness the Amir



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of the Philippines to Kuwait Mohd Noordin Pendorina Lomondot.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of South Africa to Kuwait M P Genge.

Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received a cable of condolence yesterday from Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud in which he expressed his sincere condolences over the demise of late Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. In his cable, King Salman offered his condolences to Al-Sabah family as well. His Highness the Amir, sent a reply cable to the King, expressing sincere thanks and appreciation for his kind words and sincere sentiments. His Highness the Amir received a similar cable from Saudi Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Prince Mohammad bin Salman Al-Saud in which he expressed his

sincere condolences over the demise of late Sheikh Nasser. His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable for his kind words and sincere sentiments.

Furthermore, His Highness the Amir received a cable of condolence from Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in which he expressed his sincere condolences over the demise of Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad. In his cable, the Omani leader offered his condolences to Al-Sabah family as well. His Highness the Amir sent a reply cable to the Omani leader, expressing sincere thanks and appreciation for his kind words and sincere sentiments. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Malta to Kuwait Raymond Sarsero.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Kuwait Azamat Berdybay.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Tunisia to Kuwait Al-Hashemi Ajeeli.

**News in brief**

**Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf mourns Sheikh Nasser**

KUWAIT: The National Guard Deputy Chief Lieutenant General Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah mourned yesterday the late Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. He stated that Sheikh Nasser was a prominent figure in the field of work and responsibility and one of the visionaries for a prosperous future for Kuwait. He praised his efforts, particularly regarding the New Kuwait Vision 2035 strategy and major projects such as the Silk City as well his focus on transforming Kuwait into a global financial center. — KUNA

**Jordan suspends flights with Kuwait**

AMMAN: The Jordanian airlines announced yesterday suspending flights to and from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UK as a precaution after breakout of a new strain of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Royal Jordanian said in a statement the decision was taken toward Kuwait after the Kuwaiti authorities closed its air, sea and land exits as of Monday night until January 1, 2021. Saudi Arabia has also declared closing its borders for a week. Riyadh has also stopped flights to London as of Monday until January 3, 2021. — KUNA

**Kuwait oil price sheds 85 cents**

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil dropped 85 cents to reach \$49.91 per barrel (pb) Monday after it was at \$50.76 pb Friday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. In global markets, Brent crude fell \$1.35 to settle at \$50.91 pb, the same case with West Texas Intermediate crude contracts, which went down \$1.36 to reach \$47.74 pb. — KUNA

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.



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### Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti astrophotographers Mohammad Al-Obaidi (right) and Abdullah Al-Harbi from the ASPD team of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) follow the great conjunction between Jupiter and Saturn in Al-Salmi district, a desert area 120 kms west of Kuwait City, on Monday. The observation took place as part of the 45th International Book Fair, held virtually by the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, jointly with KFAS. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

### Crimes

#### 22,142 citations in one week

**KUWAIT:** Traffic campaigns that were carried out last week (between Dec 12 and 18) resulted in issuing 22,142 citations for phone use, reckless driving and safety violations. The campaigns resulted in arresting 69 people who committed grave violations and 41 juveniles for driving without a license, while 23 vehicles and motorcycles were impounded.

### Fatal crash

A Kuwaiti, 31, was transferred to hospital but succumbed to his injuries after he was involved in a car accident. The deceased's twin brother told West Sulaibkhat police that his brother was accompanied by another person, who was injured. He said three others were injured in the other vehicle. All were taken to hospital by paramedics.

### Cables stolen

A security source said a Kuwaiti, 27, working for an oil company, told Subiya police that 21 well cables were stolen from well no. 0090-bh, and the same number from well no. 0092-bh at Bahra field. He said the estimated value of the stolen cables is KD 2,478.

### Fugitive arrested

An American suspected of taking photos of a facility in Salmiya was found wanted over a debt and sent to concerned authorities. As for the photographing, nothing suspicious was found. — Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Anbaa

## Zain partners with Maharat Min Google in collaboration with INJAZ

### 50 Zain employees take part in training young people on essential digital skills

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its partnership with Maharat Min Google, an initiative launched by Google in collaboration with INJAZ. 50 Zain employees have taken part in the program to train young people on a variety of the most essential digital skills demanded by jobs in the Arab world today.

Zain's support to this initiative, launched by Google - one of the world's biggest technology companies - comes in line with the company's ongoing strategic partnership as an Innovation Partner with INJAZ Kuwait. Zain's participation also comes under the umbrella of its Corporate Sustainability and Innovation strategy, through which the company aims at contributing to the development of the youth and education sectors by offering such world-class programs to develop their skills, especially digital ones, given their importance in today's workplaces.

Fifty Zain employees have volunteered to take part in the program, where they were further recognized as certified trainers by both Google and INJAZ to offer virtual training workshops to help young people learn about different digital channels and tools, create and promote digital content, learn digital marketing skills, build a strategy for their presence on digital platforms, and much more.

Maharat Min Google, which translates from Arabic to "Skills from Google", offers flexible training workshops for Arabic speakers - especially women and young people - to present them with essential digital skills needed to help them grow their business or career path at their own pace. The program features a variety of free learning content specifically designed to help young people develop their businesses or start their careers, while giving them the freedom and ease of choosing between enrolling in an entire course or selecting individual modules.

Zain continues its strategic partnership with INJAZ, through which the company seeks to support and inspire youth from across Kuwait's universities and schools. Through their partnership, Zain and INJAZ organize a number of educational initiatives all year long to foster the energies of Kuwait's youth and support them to further develop and prosper.

INJAZ Kuwait was founded in 2005, as a non-profit, non-governmental organization, driven by Kuwait's private sector. Through strategic partnerships with Kuwait's business and education sectors, and with the help of qualified and dedicated volunteers, INJAZ delivers educational programs on entrepreneurial and leadership skills aimed at inspiring and educating future generations. INJAZ Kuwait



is operated by INJAZ Al-Arab.

Since 2005, INJAZ-Kuwait reached over 70,000 students through over 6,000 volunteers at over 200 schools and universities in Kuwait to provide students with knowledge and experience that will assist them in their personal and career development.

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## Christmas celebrations in Kuwait somber, go virtual

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** Christmas will be celebrated in Kuwait this year in a much somber and subdued mood, as gatherings are banned and hotels and halls are closed due to the coronavirus pandemic. Some companies have sent invitations to celebrate their Christmas parties virtually, a first-ever Christmas gathering without the physical presence of invited guests. Other companies in Kuwait will not hold Christmas gatherings or parties this year.

"We will celebrate Christmas, but it will be online. It will be live on Facebook and on apps like Zoom," said Marissa, an HR employee of a retail company in Kuwait. "The problem is we cannot assemble or gather in one place to celebrate. We can only gather in small numbers. Since our employees are many, it will

be prudent to avoid mass gatherings. We can still have fun even if we are online," she said.

Mina, an Egyptian Coptic Christian, said the church has cancelled all gatherings related to Christmas. "Our Christmas will be on January 7. But we were informed that no gatherings are allowed by the church and the community. So this year will come to pass without Christmas celebrations. We usually also celebrate with friends on December 25, but that celebration is also cancelled. So I guess we can only stay at home," Mina told Kuwait Times.

"We also hold celebrations for our employees every Christmas, usually a few days before December 25. We have a mix of nationalities in our company, but since gatherings are not allowed, we cannot celebrate this time," said Mina, who is also an HR employee.

Peter Ibrahim, an Indian expat, said only his family will gather this year. "We are going to celebrate the way we celebrate every year; maybe it will be less fun, but we will try harder. Our usual celebration is full of happiness and great joy, but we should respect the strict rules implemented by our host government. No gatherings and social distancing is a must in this time of pandemic," Ibrahim said.

## Kuwait embassy in London urges citizens to contact it

**LONDON:** Kuwait's Embassy in London urged citizens in the UK to contact it if they need any further help. The calling came after the World Health Organization's (WHO) declaration of a new COVID-19 variant that is now prevalent in the UK. The embassy said in a statement that due to closure of Kuwait International Airport as a precautionary measure, numbers are put to contact the embassy. Citizens can contact 00447883456313 for WhatsApp texts. Students could contact the following 00447883456035 and 00447883424789, while those receiving treatment could contact 00447909900355 for help. Other emergency numbers are 00442075903400 and 00447988329622

(available 24 hours), according to the statement.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's embassy in the Netherlands has urged Kuwaiti citizens who have travel plans to contact it if they need any help after the Kuwaiti government's decision to suspend all commercial flights from and to Kuwait from Monday until January 1, 2021. The embassy encouraged citizens to call it on the emergency number (0031639374157) or embassy number (0031703123409).

In the meantime, Kuwait's embassy in Washington urged Kuwaiti citizens who have travel plans to contact it if they need any help after the Kuwaiti government's decision to suspend all commercial flights from and to Kuwait. In a press statement, the embassy encouraged citizens to call on the following numbers: Kuwait embassy in Washington 2022620758; the Consulate General in New York 9172426688; the Consulate General in Los Angeles 3102793644; the Cultural Office in Washington 2023642104; Washington Health Office 2023202415; Washington Military Office 2023903416; and Los Angeles Cultural Office 4246664214. — KUNA



Prison doctors among five killed in bombing

## China vows to take measures against US' visa restrictions

Page 6

Page 7



MAINZ, Germany: This video grab taken from a livestream by German biotechnology company BioNTech during their press conference to provide an update on their COVID-19 vaccine development program yesterday at their headquarters shows (from left) Chief Business and Commercial Officer Sean Marett, BioNTech co-founder and scientist Ozlem Tureci, CEO and BioNTech co-founder Ugur Sahin and CFO Sierk Poetting. — AFP

# Scientists scramble to assess mutated virus

## Dozens of countries block the flow of people and goods from UK

**PARIS:** As dozens of countries blocked the flow of people and goods from Britain to avoid a new and more contagious strain of coronavirus, scientists raced to understand how it emerged and the scope of its threat. Here are some of the key questions they are asking, and the answers that have emerged so far.

### How often do viruses mutate?

All the time, but some viruses do it more than others. A two-dose vaccine against measles, for example, can last a lifetime, whereas the cocktail in flu shots changes every year to keep up with genetic shape-shifting. Coronaviruses are somewhere in between, and the one that has ravaged the globe this year, known as SARS-CoV-2, is no exception. "Viruses constantly change through mutation and the emergence of a new variant is an expected occurrence and not in itself a cause for concern," The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) said Sunday in a threat assessment report of the new strain.

As for the pathogen that causes COVID-19, "even by March, there were eight major lineages that were all separating," Susan Hopkins, a senior lecturer in infectious diseases at Imperial College London, told journalists in a Zoom press conference Monday. The more critical question is where in the virus such mutations occur, and whether they will make it more infectious and/or deadly. Before the emergence in Britain of this more contagious strain, other genetic variations were mostly benign.

### How has new strain changed?

Whether a variant of SARS-CoV-2 finds a host to infect is significantly determined by the interface between a virus's so-called spike protein and a specific receptor on the surface of many human cells known as ACE2. The easier it is for the virus to latch on to a receptor, the more likely it is infection will follow. The new mutation, known as the 501Y variant, may have changed in ways that enhance its chances of a successful docking.

"There is an really unusual cluster of mutations

associated with this variant - 22 coding changes across the whole virus genome," said Wendy Barclay, head of the department of infectious disease at Imperial College London and a member of NERVTAG, a group of scientists advising the British government on the threat posed by emerging respiratory diseases. Mutations observed in the spike protein, she told journalists, "would make it easier for the virus to enter cells, and could biologically explain an increase in transmission." Bits of missing genetic code in other regions, compared with the previous generation of SARS-CoV-2 from which 501Y emerged, could also boost its ability to spread, she said.

### How much more infectious?

In announcing more stringent lockdown measures over the Christmas holiday, British Prime Minister



**Viruses constantly change through mutation**

Boris Johnson said on Saturday the new viral strain "may be up to 70 percent more transmissible than the original version of the disease." That assessment was based on preliminary data from sequenced virus genomes gathered from London and parts of south-eastern England. In early November, scientists found the new variant was responsible for just over a quarter of infections in these areas. By the week ending on December 9, it accounted for more than 60 percent of all new cases.

Since Johnson's shock announcement, which triggered commercial flight bans and border closings, scientists in Britain have crunched even more data.

"We now have high confidence that this variant does have a transmission advantage over other virus variants that are currently in the UK," said Peter Horby, a professor of emerging infectious diseases at the University of Oxford and chair of NERVTAG. The latest calculations, he added, suggest 501Y is 50 to 70 percent more infectious.

Another indicator of its ability to spread is the variant's reproductive number, or "R rate" - the average number of new cases generated by a single infected person. Anything above 1.0 means that a virus is continuing to find new hosts and is expanding across a community, county or country. "Even during the (recent) lockdown in England, this virus had an R-number that was about 0.4 larger than non-variant strains," said Neil Ferguson, director of the MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis and a member of NERVTAG. "The non-variant strains had an R number of about 0.8, but this variant had an R of 1.2 or even higher."

That could be bad news for efforts to curb the spread of Covid-19, which has already claimed more than 67,000 lives in Britain and 1.7 million worldwide. "I think it is highly likely to become the dominant strain across the UK given the trends we have seen so far," Ferguson said. The World Health Organization (WHO) on Tuesday said that "initial analysis indicates that the variant may spread more readily between people," but said more research was needed to assess its impact on treatments and vaccines.

### Where did new strain emerge?

Scientists are not sure where the more contagious variant - officially known as SARS-CoV-2 VUI 202012/01 - first appeared, but many suspect Britain is ground zero. The first known case there was sampled on September 20. "It is very likely that it emerged here, but it is also likely that it is in other countries," said Hopkins of Imperial College London. Denmark, The Netherlands, Australia and Italy have all reported cases, she said.

A variant with some of the same genetic deletions has also been identified in South Africa, but is

thought to have evolved separately - bolstering the idea that the mutations confer a "transmission advantage". It is also possible, scientists say, that 501Y is already more widespread than thought, but has simply not been detected. The only way to spot a mutated version of SARS-CoV-2 is to sequence the virus's entire genome, but Denmark and Britain are the only countries in Europe that do so on a routine basis.

"The UK may be victims of their own technical success in highlighting the emergence of the 501Y variant," said London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine Professor Brendan Wren, noting that Britain may be treated "as the lepers of the world." Horby and other NERVTAG scientists said Monday they are unlikely to trace the strain back to a "patient zero", but have an idea of how it might have emerged. "The hypothesis would be that this passed through somebody immunosuppressed who therefore had circulation of live mutations over a long period of time," he said.

### Is 501Y more virulent?

"There is no indication at this point of increased infection severity associated with the new variant," the ECDC said in its threat assessment. This conclusion, however, "is challenged by the fact that the majority of cases were reported in people under 60 years old, who are less likely to develop severe symptoms." At the same time, "there is a hint that it has a higher propensity to infect children," said Ferguson.

Even if proven true, that does not mean that the virus is "targeting" children, who up to now have been less prone to infection and, when they do catch the bug, severe symptoms, said Barclay. "The previous virus had a harder time binding to ACE2 and getting into (human) cells," she explained. That made adults - with more abundant ACE2 receptors in their nose and throats - an easier target compared to children. "If the new strain is having an easier time of entering and binding to cells, that would put children on a more level playing field," Barclay added, noting the additional impact of young people mixing socially, especially in school. — AFP

## Europe tries to fend off UK's virus strain amid travel chaos

**BRUSSELS:** Europe was trying to forge a coordinated response yesterday to the threat of a coronavirus variant that has swept the UK and spurred global panic about an unpredictable turn in the pandemic just as vaccines are being rolled out worldwide. The new strain of the virus, which has also been detected in small numbers elsewhere, appears to spread more easily than other types but there is no evidence it is more lethal or resistant to vaccines, according to experts.

Its discovery has nevertheless heightened fears that led more than two dozen countries around the world suspend flights from the UK out of precaution. With the bans unleashing travel chaos during the holiday season, EU ambassadors met yesterday to try to nail down a unified approach and work out how to eventually lift the border restrictions with Britain-possibly by imposing a requirement for tests on all arrivals.

The World Health Organization in Europe said it would also convene its members to discuss how to handle the outbreak and cautioned that "limiting travel to contain spread is prudent until we have better info." WHO's regional director for Europe Hans Kluge said in a post to Twitter that the organization



MUMBAI: Health workers keep vigil as passengers exit Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport upon their arrival from London yesterday. — AFP

would "discuss strategies for testing, reducing transmission & communicating risks." Around the world, the death toll from the virus surpassed 1.7 million yesterday, according to an AFP count, with the highest number of daily fatalities reported in the US, Germany and Russia.

### Vaccine can adapt

Germany yesterday extended its ban on arrivals from the UK-as well as South Africa, where a similar variant has been found-until January 6. Health Minister Jens Spahn said that "as long as it is possible", Germany aimed to prevent "potentially dangerous virus mutations from spreading in continental Europe". The border closures come as the European Union prepares to start rolling out the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine on Sunday, following similar vaccination campaigns in the UK and the US. The co-founder of

BioNTech assured yesterday it was "highly likely" that its vaccine against the coronavirus works against the mutated strain detected in Britain.

And if not, the vaccine could be adapted in six weeks, said Ugur Sahin, adding that tests are already being run on the variant. In the US, the world's worst-affected country, 78-year-old President-elect Joe Biden received a Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine live on television to boost Americans' confidence in the shots. And after a long delay, US lawmakers finally approved a \$900 billion relief package to help Americans struggling to stay afloat in the pandemic-hit economy. In an increasingly isolated Britain, one of the biggest concerns remains France's move to cut freight traffic as part of a 48-hour blockade on the movement of people across the English Channel. — AFP



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Walk in Interview on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> December 2020 from 9 am to 4 pm. Location: ISCO Head Office, Mina Abdulla.

Kindly bring the following documents during the interview  
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 - Civil id copy  
 - Work permit copy  
 - Authorized signatory page copy

Candidates must have valid transferable residencies.

## International

# China vows to take measures against US' visa restrictions

## US restricts visas for Chinese officials suspected of rights abuses

BEIJING: Beijing said yesterday it would take "legitimate and necessary" measures against the United States in response to Washington's latest visa restrictions on Chinese officials suspected of human rights abuses. The US has toughened entry rules for Chinese officials and students in recent months as part of its campaign against Beijing, which has in recent years become its main strategic adversary. The State Department has also cancelled visas for more than 1,000 Chinese students and researchers suspected of espionage.



### US warship sails by China-claimed Spratly Islands

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Monday that the latest restrictions were directed at Chinese officials believed responsible for "policies or actions aimed at repressing religious and spiritual practitioners, members of ethnic minority groups, dissidents" and other civil society targets. In response, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin accused the US of weaponising its visa policy and interfering in China's internal affairs. "China firmly opposes this and strongly condemns it," he told a regular press briefing yesterday.

Wang added that China would "continue to take legitimate and necessary measures to resolutely safeguard its own legitimate interests". China earlier this month said it would sanction US officials who "performed badly" over Hong Kong issues, in a tit-for-tat response against US restrictions that banned inbound travel from officials accused of involvement in Beijing's crackdown on Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement. Washington has also banned inbound travel from Chinese officials allegedly involved in the mass internment of the country's Muslim Uighur minority and drastically restricted US entry for members of the Chinese Communist Party.

## US daily apologizes for decades of racist coverage

WASHINGTON: The editor of the Kansas City Star apologized Monday on behalf of the American daily newspaper for decades of racist and discriminatory coverage of the Black minority. The police killing of Black man George Floyd in May, which sparked protests across the US, had forced the paper to grapple with its historic coverage, editor in chief Mike Fannin told CNN.

"We never put ourselves under the microscope to better understand how the Star had covered the Black community for years," he said. Fannin on Sunday published a long editorial in which he called the influential Midwestern paper's history "the story of a powerful local business that has done wrong". The apology from the publication, where legendary American author Ernest Hemingway once served as a cub reporter, comes as the US reckons with its history of slavery, segregation and systemic racism after the mass protests.

"For 140 years, it has been one of the most influential forces in shaping Kansas City and the region," he wrote. "And yet for much of its early history - through sins of both commission and omission - it disenfranchised, ignored and scorned generations of Black Kansas citizens." The paper, whose readership is largely white, on Sunday published a series of investigations that showed its coverage had for years ignored the region's Black community except for when its members were accused of criminal activity. —AFP

## UN probe in Mali sees war crimes

UNITED NATIONS: UN investigators into violence in Mali have told the Security Council of evidence that security forces committed war crimes, and jihadists and other armed groups perpetrated crimes against humanity. The allegations are made in a massive 338-page report compiled by the International Commission of Inquiry, a three-member panel that probed events in Mali from 2012-2018. The inquiry, whose conclusions



WENCHANG, China: People watch a Long March-8 rocket, the latest China's Long March launch vehicle fleet, lifting off from the Wenchang Space Launch Center in Hainan province yesterday. — AFP

### US warship sails

In another development, an American warship sailed through waters off the contested Spratly Islands in the South China Sea on Thursday, in the latest challenge to Beijing's sweeping territorial claims in the region. Guided-missile destroyer USS John S. McCain "asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the Spratly Islands," the US Seventh fleet said in a statement. "This freedom of navigation operation... upheld the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea recognized in international law by challenging restrictions on innocent passage imposed by China, Vietnam, and Taiwan," it added. China claims nearly all of the South China Sea, including the Spratly Islands, though Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam

all claim parts of it. The region is believed to have valuable oil and gas deposits.

Further angering those countries, and the US, Beijing has moved aggressively to build reefs into artificial islands capable of hosting military planes. The move came amid a rise in US-China tensions over the coronavirus epidemic, in which Washington has accused Beijing of hiding and downplaying the initial outbreak detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan late last year. Relations between both countries have been strained on multiple levels since Donald Trump took office in 2017. A trade war launched by Trump has infuriated Beijing, as did his authorization of a \$1.3 billion arms sale to Taiwan, which China considers a rebel province. — Agencies

## Thai seafood market COVID infections top 1,000 cases

BANGKOK: A coronavirus outbreak linked to a seafood market in Thailand passed 1,000 cases yesterday, as authorities weighed whether to introduce a wider lockdown. Thailand has been on tenterhooks since Thursday following the positive virus test of a 67-year-old prawn seller from Mahachai market, Samut Sakhon province, about 40 minutes southwest of Bangkok. As of yesterday morning, there were 1,063 confirmed positive cases out of 6,156 tested - a major outbreak for a country which previously had 4,300 infections. The majority of the new cases are workers from Myanmar, who toil on shrimp boats and in processing factories linked to the multi-billion-dollar Thai seafood industry.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha yesterday vowed legal action against people bringing illegal migrant workers into Thailand. "They must be prosecuted without any leniency whatsoever," he said in a televised address to the nation. "This latest flare up of infections in Samut Sakhon is primarily due to such illegal immigrants and they have brought much grief to the country." Migrant Workers Rights Network coordinator Suthasinee Bik said Myanmar workers in quarantine were feeling anxious and stressed.

"They want people who have been infected to be separated from everyone else. It's a very crowded area," Suthasinee said. Initially, they did not have enough food but supplies were now sufficient, according to the rights

have not yet been made public, recommends setting up a court that specializes in prosecuting international crimes.

"The Commission has reasonable grounds to believe that the Malian defense and security forces committed war crimes, including violence to the life and person of civilians and persons hors de combat suspected of being affiliated or cooperating with extremist armed groups," says the report, acquired by AFP yesterday. The landlocked Sahel country descended into violence in 2012 when ethnic Tuareg separatists launched an insurgency in the north of the country, which was then overtaken by an armed campaign by jihadists.



BANGKOK: A woman wearing reindeer-themed hair accessories carries a cat wearing a Santa Claus outfit as they pose amid decorations for Christmas and the New Year outside a shopping mall yesterday. — AFP

group. Samut Sakhon governor Veerasak Vijitsaengsr said the infection rate linked to the market is at about 28 percent, down from earlier figures of 40 percent. "We are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel," he told reporters. The market and its vicinity have been on lockdown since Saturday with the thousands living there barred from leaving.

Thai deputy prime minister Prawit Wongsuwan said authorities were yet to make a decision on further lockdown measures and the fate of New Year's Eve countdown celebrations was also undecided. "If it becomes more serious, it is necessary," he told reporters. Thailand shares a porous 2,400-kilometre border with Myanmar, which has seen an alarming spike in cases since August and is still recording around 1,000 cases per day. Thailand's tally of known infections was 5,716 as of yesterday. — AFP

France, the colonial power, launched a military operation in 2013 that scattered the jihadists. They then regrouped and expanded their campaign into central Mali, inflaming a region with ethnic rivalries, before advancing into neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. Thousands have died and hundreds of thousands have been forced to flee their homes. "The Commission considers that extremist armed groups committed crimes against humanity and war crimes," the report said.

These include "murder, maiming and other cruel treatment, rape and other forms of sexual violence, hostage-taking and attacks against personnel of humanitarian organizations and MINUSMA," the UN peacekeeping force in Mali. The report was drawn up by a commission comprising Lena Sundh of Sweden, Simon Munzu of Cameroon and Vinod Boolell, a Mauritian, who were appointed by the UN secretary general in January 2018. They handed their report to UN chief Antonio Guterres in mid-2020, and he sent it last week to the 15-member Security Council. The investigation details the scale of bloodshed, including inter-ethnic violence, that engulfed troubled country.

It highlights an attack that took place in volatile central Mali on June 17, 2017. Members of an armed group called Dan Na Ambassagou, which is drawn from the Dogon community, retaliated for the death of one of their members by attacking several hamlets of ethnic Fulani, also called Peuls, killing at least 39 civilians, including children. The raids marked the beginning of "systematic" attacks on the Fulani in Koro, the report said. "The Commission has reasonable grounds to believe that those acts amount to murder that constitutes a crime against humanity," it said. Unlike other UN reports, the conclusions of the International Commission of Inquiry can be used as a legal basis for possible prosecution. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Modi awarded 'Legion of Merit'

NEW DELHI: The US president conferred the country's highest decoration, The Legion of Merit, Degree Chief Commander, to India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday. The award is in recognition of the Prime Minister's steadfast leadership and vision for India's emergence as a global power, and exemplary contribution made by him for the advancement of the India-US strategic partnership and promoting global peace and prosperity. The Legion of Merit, in the highest degree of the Chief Commander, is a prestigious award conferred by the US president, typically upon heads of state or heads of government of other countries. The award was received on behalf of the Prime Minister by the Ambassador of India to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu. — AFP

#### Spain summons Morocco envoy

MADRID: Spain has summoned the Moroccan ambassador to explain comments by its prime minister over the Spanish north African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, which are claimed by Rabat. The spat comes at a sensitive time in relations between the two countries, in particular over the Western Sahara region, a former Spanish colony claimed by Morocco. US President Donald Trump earlier this month fulfilled a decades-old goal of Morocco by backing its contested sovereignty over the region. Rabat in return agreed to normalize ties with Israel under US-brokered deals. Spain has called for respect of the UN resolutions on the Western Sahara which call for a referendum on self-determination for the region. In comments on the Saudi network Al-Sharq on Saturday, Moroccan Prime Minister Saad-Eddine El Othmani proposed opening the issue of sovereignty over Ceuta and Melilla. — AFP

#### Mali seizes \$8.5 million of gold

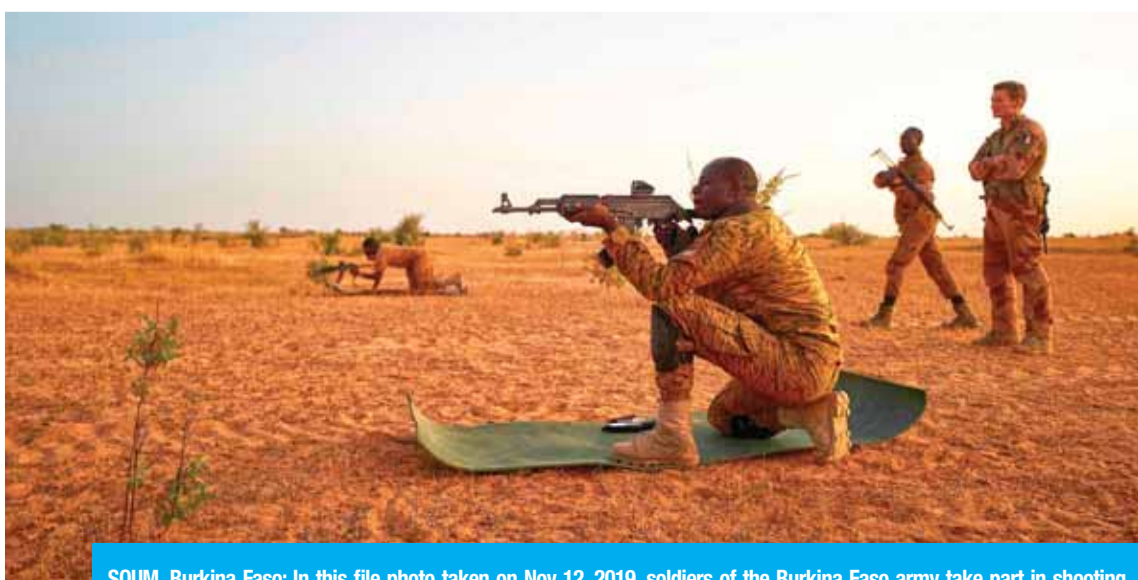
BAMAKO: Customs officers in southern Mali have seized gold estimated to be worth seven million euros (\$8.5 million) hidden in a car, officials said Monday. The 143 kilograms of gold was en route to neighboring Guinea. Mali's borders are porous and seizures of gold are frequent. The 88 bars discovered overnight Saturday were "destined to be exported without the knowledge of customs officers, which would have disrupted our economy", said Amidou Fakourou Bakagha, deputy director general of the customs service. The poor and landlocked country in western Africa is the fifth-biggest gold producer on the continent, according to the World Bank. Its industrial and small-scale mining makes the precious metal the country's biggest export product, according to the same source. — AFP

#### Construct 'beautiful' buildings

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump, with only a month left in office, issued an order Monday that future federal buildings must be "beautiful" and preferably built in the Greco-Roman classical style. The executive order stopped short of an earlier draft that drew the ire of some architects in seeking to ban construction not done in the neo-classical style, typified by the White House, Capitol and Lincoln Memorial in Washington. Instead, the order on "promoting beautiful federal civic architecture" decrees that classical and "other traditional" styles "should be encouraged instead of discouraged." Trump's order takes aim at federal buildings built after the 1950s, saying that the capital Washington, now features a "discordant mixture" and that the government has "largely stopped building beautiful buildings." — AFP

#### Night curfew in Mumbai

MUMBAI: The Indian state of Maharashtra has imposed a night curfew on cities including the country's financial hub Mumbai because of fears about the new coronavirus strain from Britain, the local government said. In addition, Mumbai airport said Tuesday that all air passengers from anywhere in Europe or the Middle East will have to go into institutional quarantine upon arrival and then be tested. The announcements come even though daily numbers of new coronavirus infections has fallen sharply in India in recent weeks, including in Maharashtra, whose capital Mumbai is home to one of Asia's biggest slums. India is yet to confirm any cases of the new strain. The Maharashtra government said that the night curfew beginning yesterday would last until January 5. The restrictions will put a dampener on New Year's celebrations in Mumbai and elsewhere in the western state of around 120 million people, which has seen the most COVID-19 cases and deaths in India. — AFP



SOU, Burkina Faso: In this file photo taken on Nov 12, 2019, soldiers of the Burkina Faso army take part in shooting exercises during a joint operation with the French army. — AFP

## International

# Millions across China facing power shortages in below-freezing winter

## Coal supply squeezed; provinces impose curbs on electricity use

BEIJING: Tens of millions across China are facing power shortages in below-freezing winter temperatures, as three provinces impose curbs on electricity use due to surging demand and a squeezed coal supply. Residents, factories and businesses in Hunan, Zhejiang and Jiangxi provinces have been ordered to ration electricity with some areas citing a shortfall in coal supplies, according to local media reports and government notices. China's rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic has been driven by energy intensive industries such as construction, heaping pressure on the power grid and coal supplies, said Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

Earlier this month, Hunan authorities ordered all

billboards and outdoor lighting on buildings to power off for long periods each day and a temperature cap on indoor heating at entertainment venues. Hunan faces a shortfall of 3-4 million kilowatts of electricity this winter, local officials admitted last week, as demand soars due to unusually cold weather that will hit as low as -10 degrees Celsius. Office workers in provincial capital Changsha complained on social media about being forced to climb dozens of flights of stairs and freezing indoor temperatures as a result of frequent power outages.

"My office heating has already been stopped, and there were blackouts on December 1, 3 and 5. Temperatures will drop to minus 8 degrees around New

Year's Day, will I freeze to death in Hunan?" one Weibo user wrote last week. Meanwhile in Zhejiang province, factories in the manufacturing hub of Yiwu have been told to stop operations and streetlights have been turned off at night as part of an emissions-saving drive by the local government, according to media reports and photos circulated on Weibo.

### Supply 'largely stable'

China's top economic planner, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), on Monday sought to reassure the public by saying the electricity supply is "largely stable", and pledged to increase generation capacity and coal procurement. The power crisis points to the challenges fast-growing China faces in balancing the needs of its vast population with strict carbon emissions targets promised by its leadership.

China - by far the world's biggest consumer of coal - is pivoting to renewable energy sources to meet a pledge to peak carbon emissions by 2030 and reach carbon neutrality by 2060. Speculation has swirled online that the power shortages may be self-inflicted wound as a result of China's embargo of Australian coal, which has left ships stranded at ports, unable to offload large quantities of coal.

However, Australian coal only made up about three per cent of last year's total coal imports of 265 million tons, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics. "The Aussie ban only had little impact on China's thermal coal supply," said Yan Qin, carbon analyst at financial data service Refinitiv. "But China-Australia tensions have caused significant worries in the commodities markets, driving up domestic coal prices." — AFP

President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied that Navalny's claims could discredit the FSB, adding the opposition politician also exhibited "traits of megalomania." Peskov added.

### 'Political Chernobyl'

Observers said it was hard to predict the fallout from Navalny's revelations. "This is a political Chernobyl," said prominent commentator Yulia Latynina, referring to the 1986 nuclear disaster in Soviet Ukraine. "After this the system cannot exist in its current form," she wrote in the opposition newspaper Novaya Gazeta. Authorities hit back against Navalny's supporters. His top ally Lyubov Sobol spent hours at a police station and was questioned overnight before being released.

Ivan Zhdanov, the head of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Fund, told AFP that they planned to launch a formal complaint with the FSB yesterday. The FSB described the phone call as "fake" and said it would not have been possible without "the support of foreign intelligence services. Last week Putin rejected reports that the FSB had poisoned Navalny, saying that if the security services had wanted to poison the opposition politician, "they would have taken it to the end." Putin, himself a former KGB officer, over the weekend hailed Russia's "courageous" spies and thanked them for protecting the country from "external and internal threats."

But some analysts said Navalny's revelations raised new questions about the professionalism of Russia's security services. "Intelligence 101: always insist on calling back, never simply take a call from someone you do not recognize," said Wolfgang Ischinger, chairman of the Munich Security Conference. This, he quipped, was "apparently not being taught in FSB graduate school". — AFP



BEIJING: An elderly man rests on a bench at a park yesterday. — AFP

## US charges Libyan 'bombmaker' over Lockerbie attack

WASHINGTON: The US Justice Department announced charges Monday against a Libyan former intelligence agent who allegedly built the bomb that exploded aboard Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland exactly 32 years ago. Attorney General Bill Barr said that "Abu Agela Mas'ud Kheir Al-Marimi" helped build the device that blew up the aircraft-killing 259 people including 190 Americans aboard the US-bound flight, and 11 people on the ground. The man, more widely known as Abu Agila Mohammad Masud, is currently being held by the Libyan government. Barr told a press conference, voicing confidence he would be handed over to the United States for trial. "At long last, this man responsible for killing Americans and many others, will be subject to justice for his crimes," Barr said. In Scotland officials applauded the move, underscoring that the investigation into the December 21, 1988 bombing remains ongoing.

"For 32 years the families of the 270 people murdered in this atrocity have shown extraordinary and enduring dignity in the face of the loss they suffered on the terrible night of 21 December 1988. Today, our thoughts are with them once again," said Lord Advocate James Wolffe, the country's most senior law officer. Kara Weipz, whose brother died aboard Pan Am Flight 103, said the continued push to find the culprits by families of those killed had been vindicated. "Our patience and persistence has proved fruitful with this decision today," said Weipz. "The motto of the family members over the past 32 years has been, the truth must be known," she said.

### Strong evidence

US and Scottish investigators have been building a case for years against Masud, alleged to have been a top bombmaker for the late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. Michael Sherwin, the acting US attorney in Washington, said strong evidence tied Masud to the bombing, from records of his travels with two others named earlier in the case, to a 2012 interview he gave to Libyan intelligence in which he admitted to building the bomb. In the interview Masud also admitted taking part in the 1986 bombing of a discotheque in Berlin, killing two US servicemen and a Turkish woman. US and Scottish authorities only obtained the interview in 2017, solidifying the evidence they needed to charge Masud, said Sherwin. The evidence together "really proves beyond a reasonable doubt Masud's role in this conspiracy," he said.

### Bombing anniversary

The bombing, branded by the US and Scotland as a terrorist attack, shattered the New York-bound aircraft after it had taken off from London and reached 31,000 feet. The main fuselage plunged to the ground in Lockerbie but debris was spread over a wide area in Scotland. Two Libyans were eventually tried in the Netherlands for their alleged roles in the attack. One of them, Abdelbaset Mohmet Al-Megrahi, was convicted in 2001 and sentenced to life in prison. Diagnosed with irreversible prostate cancer, Megrahi was released in 2009 and died in 2012. His family has lodged a posthumous appeal in Scotland against his conviction, claiming he was innocent. The other man, Lamin Khalifah Fhima, was found not guilty in the Netherlands case, but is still under indictment in the United States. — AFP



WASHINGTON: US Attorney General William Barr speaks during a news conference to provide an update on the investigation of the terrorist bombing of Pan Am flight 103 at the US Department of Justice on Monday. — AFP

## Russia sanctions EU over poisoning of 'delusional' Navalny

MOSCOW: Russia said yesterday it was hitting EU officials with sanctions for their response to the poisoning of opposition figure Alexei Navalny, who the Kremlin said was suffering from "delusions of persecution". The foreign ministry in Moscow summoned several senior EU diplomats before announcing the new travel bans. In response to "confrontational" sanctions imposed by the bloc in October, Russia "decided to expand the list of representatives of EU member states and institutions who will be denied entry to Russia."

The announcement on Tuesday came a day after Navalny, 44, said in a report he had impersonated an official in the Kremlin's Security Council and extracted an admission of guilt from a toxins expert with the FSB security service. In a video of the conversation published by Navalny, the alleged FSB agent says agents placed poison in Navalny's underwear this summer. The anticorruption campaigner was flown for treatment to Germany where labs concluded he was poisoned with Novichok, a Soviet-designed nerve agent.

Navalny's video of his conversation with the man named Konstantin Kudryavtsev racked up more than 12 million views in less than 24 hours and social media were abuzz with memes about Navalny's underpants. The Kremlin on Tuesday described Navalny as a "sick" man who was suffering from "delusions of persecu-



KABUL: Municipal workers clean up debris at the site of a bomb attack yesterday. — AFP

## Prison doctors among five killed in bombing

KABUL: Four doctors who worked at an Afghan prison with hundreds of Taliban inmates were among five people killed yesterday by a bomb attached to their car, police said. The blast happened in a southern district of the city as the doctors travelled to the Pul-e-Charkhi prison where they worked, Kabul police spokesman Ferdaws Faramarz said. Four doctors and a passer-by were killed when a "magnetic bomb" attached to the car detonated, Faramarz said, adding that another two people were wounded. Hundreds of Taliban fighters and other criminals are incarcerated at Pul-e-Charkhi, located on the eastern outskirts of Kabul.

The city has been hit by a wave of deadly violence in recent months despite the Taliban and the government engaging in peace talks. Targeted killings of prominent figures, including journalists, politicians and rights activists have also become more common recently in

Kabul and other provinces. The jihadist Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for some of the recent attacks in Kabul, which have killed dozens of people. Yesterday's attack came just two days after a car bomb targeting a lawmaker killed 10 people and wounded more than 50 in Kabul.

Lawmaker Khan Mohammad Wardak was wounded in the blast. Days before that incident, deputy Kabul province governor Mahbullah Mohebi was killed in a similar attack. And on Monday, an Afghan journalist was shot dead by gunmen in the eastern city of Ghazni in what appeared to be a yet another targeted killing. Rahmatullah Nekzad had contributed to the Associated Press news agency since 2007 and had also previously worked with the Al-Jazeera broadcast network.

The same day, Afghan officials said security forces beat back a Taliban assault further north in Faryab province. The insurgents detonated a car bomb that severely damaged a bazaar and caused several casualties in Dawlat Abad district, according to provincial governor Naqibullah Faiq. Officials in northern Kunduz province also reported sporadic clashes after two separate checkpoints were attacked by the Taliban, with authorities providing differing figures on casualties. — AFP

## US reinstates Sudan sovereign immunity over terror attacks

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers on Monday backed legislation granting Sudan legal immunity for past militant attacks, a final step in a historic deal removing Khartoum from Washington's blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism. The text restores Sudan's sovereign immunity with the exception of litigation already pending in US federal courts related to the September 11, 2001 attacks, and earmarks hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to Khartoum.

The legislation was part of the massive omnibus bill to fund the government for the coming year, which is also due to include a new aid package to help millions of Americans and businesses hit hard by the pandemic. Sudan was removed from the US state sponsors of terrorism blacklist a week ago, less than two months after the Arab nation pledged to normalize ties with Israel. The move also promises aid, debt relief and investment to a country going through a rocky political transition and struggling under a severe economic crisis exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

As part of a deal, Sudan agreed to pay \$335 million to compensate survivors and victims' families from the 1998 Al-Qaeda twin attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and a 2000 attack by the jihadist group on the USS Cole off Yemen's coast. Those attacks were carried out after now ousted president Omar Al-Bashir gave then Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden sanctuary in Sudan. Adoption of the legislation is a key, final step to unblocking the money, which Sudan has already put in an escrow account.

Sudan's justice ministry Tuesday hailed the US move as a "great event". It "effectively means the end, once and for all, of the repercussions of a dark period in the history of its (Sudan's) relations with the United States and the world," the ministry said in a statement carried by official news agency SUNA. "This legislation opens the path for Sudan to expand economic and financial cooperation with the United States and other countries with peace of mind, without fearing exposure of its money or goods to confiscation or seizure," it added.

### 'Re-enter global economy'

Before the bill was passed, Senator Chris Coons said the legislation would help Sudan "reenter the global economy... promote foreign investment and economic growth in the country, and support the civilian-led transition to democracy." Senators Chuck Schumer and Bob Menendez, who represent respectively the states of New York and New Jersey, had wanted to ensure language that would not block the right of 9/11 victims or their families from suing Sudan for its past role as a backer of Al-Qaeda.

The justice ministry said Sudan was committed to defending itself in US courts against "baseless accusations" concerning the country's involvement in the 9/11 attacks. President Donald Trump's administration, which hands power to Joe Biden in January, has been pushing for a conclusion in part to show its support for Sudan's transition two years after the revolt that brought an end to Bashir's rule.

The Trump White House was also aiming to remove any issues that could put in doubt Khartoum's historic pledge to normalize relations with Israel. Sudan recently warned that delays in the US Congress regarding its immunity could slow the implementation of the Israel deal. — AFP

## Contradicting Trump, Justice Chief fingers Russia in hacking

WASHINGTON: US Attorney General Bill Barr said Monday that Russia was behind the massive hack of US government computer systems, contradicting President Donald Trump's suggestion that China could be involved. Two days after Trump downplayed what intelligence experts have called the most devastating break in US computer security in years, Barr said he agreed with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's attributing the hack to Moscow.

"From the information I have, I agree with Secretary Pompeo's assessment. It certainly appears to be the Russians," he said, declining to add any details. Last week the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) said US government agencies, critical infrastructure entities, and private sector organizations had been exposed in the months-long cyberattack, in which hackers broke through a widely used piece of security software created by the US company SolarWinds.

Officials are still combing their systems to see what kind of information could have been stolen - including possibly from US spy agencies - and whether they are still vulnerable. While CISA did not identify the attackers, private security consultants, senior US legislators briefed by intelligence officials, and Pompeo all pinned the blame on Russia. Trump, who over four years has steadfastly avoided criticizing Moscow - particularly its alleged sweeping interference in the 2016 election on his behalf - on Friday again refused to finger Russia in the hacking case. — AFP

# Business

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2020

## UK mulling virus tests for truckers to get freight flowing with France

### British rail freight ready to relieve road gridlocks

**LONDON:** The British government said yesterday it was considering tests for truckers as part of talks with French authorities to allow the resumption of freight traffic suspended due to a new more infectious coronavirus strain. Britain was plunged into fresh crisis last week with the emergence of a fresh strain of the virus, which is believed to be up to 70 percent more transmissible than other forms.

The government rolled back plans to ease restrictions over Christmas, instead making them more stringent, and is now looking for a way to get goods flowing back into the country after many countries imposed travel bans. If not, experts have warned that Britain may be facing shortages of certain fresh foods over the Christmas period. Tests in ports "are absolutely part of the discussion," British Home Secretary Priti Patel told Sky News yesterday, adding that "we have to do everything we can." France decided late Sunday to suspend all arrivals from the United Kingdom for 48 hours over the new strain that has resulted in a third lockdown for London and much of southeast England. Other countries also imposed flight bans, but the French restrictions also included freight routes.

Andrew Opie, director of food and sustainability at the British Retail Consortium, said the "borders really need to be running pretty much freely from tomorrow to assure us that there won't be any disruption". "There is a problem potentially directly after Christmas and that is really in fresh produce, so we're talking here about things like salad, vegetables, fresh fruit, of which the vast majority come from Europe at this time," he told BBC Radio 4.

#### Spread in children

Discussions between Paris and London on finding a way to resume traffic continued yesterday. "We're in



**KENT:** Freight lorries are parked at a truck stop off the M20 leading to Dover near Folkestone in Kent, south east England yesterday after France closed its borders to accompanied freight arriving from the UK due to the rapid spread of a new coronavirus strain. — AFP

discussion with our French counterparts... and we will find a resolution" said Patel. Around 650 trucks are currently blocked on the motorway leading from London to the port of Dover, the main cross-Channel port closed to outgoing traffic since Sunday evening, added the minister.

More than 800 more trucks are parked at a nearby disused airport. "The empty lorries which are now stuck in Kent, they need to get back to places like Spain to pick up the next consignment of raspberries and strawberries," said Opie. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said at a press conference late Monday that he had discussed the situation with French President Emmanuel Macron, who said he wanted to "resolve the situation in the coming hours".

The head of government, criticized for his manage-

ment of the pandemic which has caused nearly 68,000 deaths, one of the highest death tolls in Europe, argued that the risks of transmission by truck drivers was "really very low". According to the World Health Organization, transmission of this new variant is 40 to 70 percent higher. British scientists advising the British government also observed a higher transmission in children compared to other strains, and are working on this hypothesis to explain its fast spread.

#### Freight movement

Britain's resilient rail freight industry, while much smaller than the road haulage sector, might play a key role in keeping vital, but stranded goods on the move. Lorries are stuck in long lines heading to and from the Channel port of Dover on England's south coast, as com-

working diligently with its partners in the capital market apparatus and across the investment community to ensure the success of this day, which is the fruit of many years of market enhancements and developments."

She added, "Strategic partnerships, like the one we've established with MEIRA and its Kuwait chapter in order to raise the standards of investor relations practices for listed companies as well as those who are looking to list, will be valuable on our journey to further enhance the Kuwaiti capital market and the company." Mohammad Abdal, MEIRA Kuwait Chapter Head and Board Member and Zain Group Chief Communications Officer added, "The recent MSCI upgrade represents a great opportunity not only for the issuers, but for the overall Kuwaiti and regional market. In MEIRA, we work very closely with the exchanges and regulators to promote the IR function and greater transparency in the financial markets. This milestone proves how important it is to continue working towards a more efficient market ecosystem and demonstrates how much potential the Kuwaiti market has as an investment destination".

The MEIRA Kuwait Chapter has recently also celebrated the appointment of Dalal Al-Dousari, Investor Relations Deputy General Manager at Gulf Bank, as a new MEIRA Board Member. With two Kuwaiti representatives on the MEIRA Board, the Chapter will be in a stronger position to continue delivering even more value and initiatives in 2021.

## MEIRA Kuwait Chapter raises awareness about MSCI upgrade

**KUWAIT:** The Middle East Investor Relations Association (MEIRA) and its Kuwait Chapter successfully held an online seminar to raise awareness of the key implications for Kuwaiti listed companies in light of the recent inclusion of the Kuwait capital market in the MSCI Emerging Markets Indices.



The session, which was organized in collaboration with Boursa Kuwait and the Union of Investment Companies, was attended by around 100 representatives from local issuers and investment firms. Guest speakers, Noura Al-Abdulkareem, Boursa Kuwait's Head of Markets Sector, and Oliver Schutzmann, CEO at Iridium Advisors, jointly explained what this mile-

stone means for the Investor Relations (IR) professionals in Kuwait and shed light on how other regional markets responded to the upgrade, including key lessons learned during the journey.

During the session, Noura Al-Abdulkareem stated, "The recent inclusion of seven listed companies in the



MSCI Emerging Markets Indices on 30 November resulted in unprecedented inflows into the Kuwaiti capital market and was a key contributor to the historic total of 961.6 million Kuwaiti Dinars traded that day. Throughout the pandemic, Boursa Kuwait has been

## Iraqis protest after currency value slashed

**BAGHDAD:** Hundreds of angry Iraqis protested Monday in several cities against a currency devaluation that has slashed their purchasing power amid a pandemic-fueled economic crisis.

The Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) at the weekend devalued the currency by over a fifth against the US dollar, officially re-pegging the dinar at a bank rate of 1,460 to the greenback. On Monday, hundreds gathered in Baghdad's Tahrir Square, demanding the government change tack, furious at the first devaluation in a half-decade. "The government should collapse before the dinar," one sign held by a young protester read.

Many of the protesters were elderly, who said the value of their pensions had been cut. Riot police with shields and helmets stood guard at Tahrir, but the protest was peaceful. Tahrir Square had been occupied round-the-clock for a year by a protest movement demanding an end to government corruption, but the demonstrators were cleared out in an army-led operation in October.

Iraq, which relies on oil sales to finance more than 90 percent of its budget, is set to see its economy shrink by 11 percent this year, while poverty doubles to 40 percent of the country's 40 million residents, according to International Monetary Fund estimates.

#### 'Struggling to shop'

"If we hadn't changed the currency rate or adjusted our expenditures, our (foreign currency) reserves could have run out in six or seven months," Finance Minister Ali Allawi told local reporters on Sunday. The devaluation sparked panic, as people rushed out after its announcement to buy dollars or stock up in super-



**BAGHDAD:** Iraqi policemen stand guard outside the Central Bank of Iraq headquarters along Rashid Street in the center of the capital Baghdad yesterday. — AFP

markets before price rises hit.

Elsewhere on Monday, hundreds marched in the eastern city of Kut, near the border with Iran, where traders said imports would be hit as they used dollars to buy goods from outside. Prices at food markets and wholesalers in the southern city of Nasiriyah rose by around 20 percent, an AFP correspondent said. "We're struggling to shop," said Saadi Sahib, a pensioner. "Basic foodstuffs have become more expensive after this sudden change in

the price of the dollar." In the southern port of Basra, the head of the city's human rights commission Mehdi Al-Tamimi said the jump in food prices was a "shock" to consumers. CBI governor Mustafa Ghaleb Mukhif told state media in a rare interview on Sunday that the bank agreed to the devaluation on the condition the finance ministry carry out reforms. The draft 2021 budget includes plans for an income tax, lower tariffs on electricity and other ways to try to cut spending, in addition to the devaluation. — AFP

panies try to stockpile goods before the Brexit transition period ends on December 31.

The situation has been exacerbated by countries shutting their borders to Britain to contain a fast-spreading variant of the coronavirus. Freightliner Group, a leading rail company that picks up large containers from UK ports and transports them by train to inland terminals, is waiting in the wings.

The company could be called upon to transport extra produce across Britain should businesses caught up in the Dover queues decide to ferry their goods to other ports. "What we may start seeing is the impact of goods being moved to other deep seaports around Britain," Freightliner's Head of Rail Strategy Peter Graham said.

Its longest trains, which are 775 meters (2,500 feet) long and carry around 60 containers, are currently transporting goods north from the English port of Southampton. While lockdown restrictions have sharply curtailed Britain's passenger rail traffic, freight trains are running at around pre-pandemic levels with vital goods such as protective equipment needed by hospitals.

Freight trains have been affected "less than the passenger rail sector, thankfully", said Maggie Simpson, director general of trade body Rail Freight Group, though she added that the petro-chemical sector was still "a bit volatile". "Global oil use isn't what it was. It's come back up a bit now but we're not moving as much aviation fuel for example," she said. Simpson said that with the first UK lockdown in late March, Britain's rail freight volume "dropped pretty much overnight to about 50 percent" of what it would normally have been.

"But there was quite a resilient" recovery, said Graham. And regardless of the situation at Dover, post-Brexit processes will allow trains that come from France through the Channel Tunnel to clear customs at an inland UK terminal. — AFP



**PAMPORE:** In this picture taken on November 1, 2020, a boy sits near a bag filled with saffron flowers in a saffron field as farmers work nearby in Pampore, south of Srinagar. — AFP

## Climate change hits Kashmir's 'red gold' saffron crop

**PAMPORE, India:** On sweeping fields once blanketed in lush purple, a thin and bedraggled crop of flowers is all farmers in Indian-administered Kashmir's saffron-growing region Pampore have to show for this year's harvest. Dry conditions blamed on climate change have seen yields of the world's most expensive spice halved in the past two decades, threatening the future of a cash crop that has brought wealth to the region for 2,500 years.

"These fields used to be like goldmines," said Abdul Ahad Mir in Pampore, just south of Indian-administered Kashmir's main city Srinagar. Saffron has long thrived there, and Mir's family was reared in the delicate work of plucking the lucrative but tiny crimson threads from purple crocus flowers.

"In my childhood we needed 80 men over a week to pick the flowers," Mir said. "Today our family of six finish it in a day." Warming temperatures caused by climate change have made rainfall erratic, depleting the thirsty saffron fields of water. Shrinking glaciers across the Himalayan region have also cut water flows to the foothills downstream.

It takes around 160,000 flowers to yield one kilogram of the precious spice, which will sell for around \$1,350 in local markets. But official figures show that harvests of the so-called "red gold" were just 1.4 kilograms per hectare in 2018 — half the figure recorded in 1998.

Mohammad Ramzan Rather says his acreage in Pampore only produced around 30 grams of the crop this year, down from two kilograms 12 years ago.

The harvest season—which lasts for just two weeks at the end of autumn—has also been devastated by the coronavirus pandemic, as well as recent security lockdowns in response to a long-running insurgency in the disputed territory, claimed by both India and arch-rival Pakistan. — AFP



## Business

# Fears of fresh food shortages mount as UK faces isolation

## Tortuous Brexit talks linger and more countries shut borders

**LONDON:** Britain could face a shortage of fresh produce and greens due to transport chaos at the border as tortuous Brexit talks linger and more countries shut borders after the emergence of a more contagious COVID-19 variant in England.

France on Sunday decided to prevent freight travelling through the key port of Dover, through which 10,000 heavy goods vehicles pass each day. The decision, initially set to last for 48 hours, caused Britain to bring forward "Operation Stack", the contingency plan drawn up to deal with anticipated freight tailbacks on roads around Dover in the event of a no deal Brexit.

"Retailers have stocked up on goods ahead of Christmas which should prevent immediate problems. However, any prolonged closure of the French border would be a problem," said Andrew Opie, director at the British Retail Consortium. The giant Sainsbury's supermarkets chain sought to strike a reassuring note, saying: "All products for the Great British Christmas lunch are already in the country and we have plenty of these."

But it warned that "if nothing changes, we will start to see gaps over the coming days on lettuce, some salad leaves, cauliflowers, broccoli and citrus fruit—all of which are imported from the continent at this time of year."

James Sibley, head of international affairs at the UK's Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), said: "This morn-

ing we heard evidence which pointed, even in the event of a Brexit deal, to potential food shortages and price rises." As the clock ticks down to Brexit, the country has already had a taster: a logjam at seaports has lasted several weeks, disrupting supply chains.

"The closure of France to UK traffic, including accompanied freight poses difficulties for UK capacity to import and export key goods during the busy Christmas period," Opie said.

"While goods can enter from France, few haulage firms will be willing to send trucks and drivers across to the UK without a guarantee they can return to the EU in a timely manner," he said.

Only 10 days are left until January 1 when Britain will leave the EU single market and customs union and hopes of securing a new arrangement suffered a blow as another deadline went by with negotiators still unable to reach a deal.

### 'Serious disruption'

"Yesterday's suspension of accompanied freight traffic from the UK to France has the potential to cause serious disruption to UK Christmas fresh food supplies - and exports of UK food and drink," said Ian Wright, CEO of the Food and Drink Federation. Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said 20 percent of the UK's dai-

ly imports came through Dover and Folkestone. He told the BBC: "6,000 lorries that would have been expected at Dover today or the Eurotunnel. Those lorries won't be crossing but there's probably 32,000 lorries coming by all means of transport," he said. "The shops are well stocked. In the short term this is not an issue in terms of supply but we are very keen to get it

of a high-profile trial of Catalan separatist leaders over Catalonia's failed 2017 bid to break away from Spain. "Sanchez has shown throughout his career that he never admits defeat," said Paloma Roman, politics professor at Madrid's Complutense University.

After two inconclusive general elections in 2019, Sanchez in January 2020 formed a minority coalition government with Podemos. He initially tried to win support for his 2021 budget from Ciudadanos.

But after that failed, he controversially turned to several smaller regional nationalist parties, including Bildu, the heirs of the former political wing of armed Basque separatist group ETA. Sanchez took office in 2018 with the backing of these parties, but the pact with Bildu sparked an outcry from the right and even criticism from within his Socialist party. Given the make-up of parliament, "there was no other possible majority" to help pass the budget, said Bartomeus.

### 'Not be easy'

In exchange for the support of these parties for his budget, Sanchez agreed a series of measures, including a moratorium on evictions for poor families which cabinet is set to approve yesterday.

While approval of the budget ensures Sanchez's government will last, he faces "years of permanent negotiations within his government and in parliament" to approve laws, said Cristina Monge, a political scientist at the University of Zaragoza. The Socialists and Podemos, their junior coalition partners, are divided over many issues such as migration, the future of the monarchy and the need to raise the minimum wage.

Sanchez's ties with its Catalan ally ERC also risks become more tense as Catalonia's regional election on February 14 nears. "It will not be easy for the government to resist these tensions, but neither of the two (coalition partners) has any real interest in separating" and bringing down the government, said Bartomeus. Monge said Podemos is falling in the polls and the Socialists do not have enough support to govern alone so the "price they would pay" if they split would be "too high". — AFP



Twenty percent of the UK's daily imports come through Dover and Folkestone

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resolved." Paul Mummery, a spokesman for the Road Haulage Association (RHA), told Sky News: "We are urging people not to panic buy because the supply chain is resilient." "There is plenty of stuff to go around at the moment, there will be plenty of toilet roll, pasta, flour" but added: "If this goes beyond 48 hours it will be more of an issue." — AFP

## Spain poised to pass budget in boost for government

**MADRID:** Spain's Senate was poised to approve Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's budget for 2021 later yesterday, boosting his minority Socialist-led government after years of political instability.

The spending plan, which channels billions of euros in European Union pandemic recovery funds into the economy, was approved by the lower house on December 3. Barring a last-minute surprise, the Senate is expected to give final approval for the fiscal program as lawmakers have already signaled their support in recent weeks. Its passage increases the chances that Sanchez will hold on to power until the next general election set for 2023.

This will be the first budget to be approved since that of the previous conservative government of Mariano Rajoy in 2018. Sanchez has until now relied on prolonging the 2018 spending plan.

The rise of new parties such as far-left Podemos and market-friendly Ciudadanos has fractured parliament, making it difficult to pass legislation. This has led to a cycle of political instability that has taken Spain, the euro zone's fourth largest economy, to four elections between 2015 and 2019.

"This is a very, very important stage because it allows Pedro Sanchez to gain time and stability," said Oriol Bartomeus, a political scientist at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

### 'Sanchez never admits defeat'

Sanchez came to power in June 2018 but was forced to call fresh elections early the following year after Catalan separatist parties voted down his draft budget. The budget vote came on the heels of the start



In this file photo, the building of the Washington Post newspaper headquarter is seen on K Street in Washington DC. — AFP

## Washington Post to expand newsroom staff, add foreign hubs

**WASHINGTON:** The Washington Post announced plans on Monday to expand its newsroom staff to over 1,000 and add breaking news hubs in Europe and Asia to create a bigger global footprint.

The move by the Post, owned by Amazon chief executive and billionaire Jeff Bezos, comes in stark contrast to much of the industry which has been retrenching amid economic turmoil and a shift away from print. The Post, which said in 2018 it had become profitable but which does not release financial data, plans to create breaking-news hubs in Europe and Asia for more robust 24-hour news coverage.

"The Post intends to ensure that its readers everywhere can rely on a full, timely news report at any hour, including rich, multi-faceted coverage during the critical early-morning window in North America," a

statement said. The daily has been seeking to boost the number of its digital subscribers as it seeks to keep pace with the rival New York Times, with a newsroom staff of at least 1,700 and an increased focus on global readers. The Post will establish new foreign bureaus in Sydney and Bogota, bringing the number of foreign bureaus to 26, after having created a Europe-based operation focusing on covering global conflicts.

The hubs in London and Seoul will include a total of 19 reporters and editors including a visuals editor, an audience editor and at least one multiplatform editor. In total the newspaper will be adding 44 journalists to boost the newsroom staff to 1,010, the most ever, including eight for its personal technology team. "We're hugely excited to be expanding so dramatically," said Marty Baron, executive editor of The Post. "Readers will get journalism that is richer, deeper, faster, more wide-ranging and more innovative. It signals overwhelming confidence in The Post's future." The expansion highlights the divergent fortunes of an industry roiled by economic changes and more recently, the global pandemic. Many local and regional publications have struggled in recent years, with the number of newspaper jobs cut in half in the past decade, according to the Pew Research Center.—AFP

## Nigeria telecoms given more time to register users

**LAGOS:** Nigeria extended a deadline for telecom operators to register mobile phone users, amid concerns that unregistered SIM cards are being used by criminals and insurgents, the government said. As part of a drive to increase the use of ID cards, the Nigerian Communications Commission announced last week that telecoms operators would be given until December 30 to block subscribers who fail to link their mobile SIM cards with their national identity numbers.

With only about 20 percent of people in Africa's most populous nation carrying ID cards, the announcement was met with widespread anger across the country and industry analysts argued that the deadline was too short. In a statement released on Monday, the ministry of communications and digital economy said the deadline was therefore being extended.

People with a valid national identification number have until January 19 to send the number to mobile operators to register their lines.

And people without a national identification number will have until February 9 to obtain one and link their mobile phones to it. "The President appreciates Nigerians for their patience and commitment to update their identities," and "urges all stakeholders to take advantage of the extension to link their SIM card with their national identification number," the ministry statement said.

There are nearly 200 million mobile phones in use in Nigeria and the government registering them will help tackle insecurity and build a unified database.

In 2015, Africa's biggest wireless operator MTN was sanctioned after failing to disconnect 5.1 million subscribers in Nigeria, amid concerns the lines were being used by Boko Haram insurgents.—AFP



Turkey breeders Katharina (left) and her husband Reinhard Bauer load in a box 12-weeks-old turkey chicks at their farm in the Upper Austrian village of Weibern. — AFP

## Austrians press EU to talk turkey, raise farm standards

**WEIBERN, Austria:** As Katharina and Reinhard Bauer show off cosseted turkey chicks they highlight standards that they-and the Austrian government-would like the rest of the EU to adopt as well.

"On our farm the birds have lots of space," Katharina explains on the organic farm the pair run together in Weibern, northern Austria. They stress how delicate the business of raising turkey chicks is given their fragile state immediately after hatching.

According to Reinhard they're "very sensitive, curious and affectionate". The couple says the birds, brought to Europe from the Americas by Spanish colonists in the 16th Century, must be raised in an environment as close to nature as possible to be fit for Christmas tables.

It's a view shared by the Austrian government, which is aiming to get EU partners on board in raising standards for turkey farming across the bloc. Agriculture Minister Elisabeth Koestinger recently boasted that "the 'World Animal Protection' organization has put Austria in first place in its animal welfare rankings, in comparison with 50 countries worldwide."

In November Green Austrian MEP Sarah Wiener launched a petition, backed by the government, calling for sector regulations at the European level in line with Austrian practices.

### Human scale

After chickens and pigs, turkeys are the third most commonly reared animal in the EU, with around 190 million slaughtered annually. But while the 27-member bloc has set rules and minimum standards for raising chickens and pigs, there is no such set of requirements for turkeys. Austria's roughly 120 turkey farms are by and large organized on a more human scale than larger operations found in Germany, Poland or Hungary. Mostly family-run, Austria's farms are subject to regular inspections and usually contain no more than 6,000 birds.

With an average of two adult males per square meter, the density they are raised in is the lowest in Europe. Even on farms with comparatively lower standards, chicks can move freely in daylight and enjoy beds of straw or wood shavings.

Those on farms on the next higher rung have winter gardens, and on organic farms they are raised in the open air. Better conditions come at a price, however.

An average package of Austrian turkey costs 14 euros (\$17), as opposed to eight euros for imported equivalents. As a result, domestic turkey only represents 40 percent of total sales in Austria.

"I would be in favor of all of Europe seeing to it that animals have good conditions," Katharina says as she gazes at her chirruping chicks. And the push for higher standards has been taken on by some distributors too. A few months ago, a major supermarket chain said it would only sell meat raised and slaughtered within Austria. It set a flat price of 10 euros per turkey breast, without cutting what it paid farmers.—AFP

## German consumer confidence dips on lockdown woes

**BERLIN:** German consumers' mood darkened at the end of 2020 due to new restrictions to tame a punishing second wave of coronavirus infections, a closely watched survey showed yesterday. The GfK institute's forward-looking survey of consumer confidence heading into January dipped to minus 7.3 points, down 0.5 points from its December level, which was revised to minus 6.8 points based on new data.

It was the third decline in as many months for the survey as the economic toll of increasingly strict measures to curb the virus outbreak hits Germans' pocketbooks. "The lockdown and the closure of most shops really hit consumer confidence," GfK's Rolf Buerkl said in a statement.

In mid-December ahead of the crucial holiday shopping season, Germany shuttered all "non-essential" stores until at least January 10 to stem a sharp rise in new infections and deaths. Europe's top economy had already closed all bars, restaurants and entertainment venues in November as well as hotels for tourists in a so-called "lockdown light" that failed to get the outbreak in check. The GfK survey, based on around 2000 interviews, found that German shoppers' expectations for economic growth improved, to 4.4 points from minus 0.2. But the institute noted that because the polling was conducted December 3-14, the effects of the latest restrictions had not yet been felt. Personal income expectations fell by one point to 3.6 points and more than three in four Germans — 78 percent — said they thought Covid-19 represented a "large or very large threat".

The German government has forecast a 5.5-percent contraction in gross domestic product for this year ahead of a 4.4 percent rebound in 2021 and 2.5 percent growth in 2022. — AFP

## Business

# Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer unveils the all-new Lexus IS

## A new dimension of attractive luxury

**KUWAIT:** Striking a perfect balance between sportiness and sophistication that embodies the aspirations of customers in the region, the 2021 Lexus IS has been launched in Kuwait by Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Sons in the presence of Mubarak Naser Al-Sayer CEO and Mahmoud Abou Zahr Business Director Lexus Division. The latest version of the popular vehicle remains true to its foundation as a front-engine, rear-wheel-drive sports sedan, while expanding on the qualities that have built its loyal following.

Since the debut of its first generation in 1999, the IS has been renowned for its exhilarating driving performance and sporty styling and has sold more than a million units over two decades. With the unveiling of the 2021 model, it is clear that careful craftsmanship and countless hours of testing have gone into developing the best IS to date.

"What we had foremost in mind when developing the new IS was to create a vehicle that excelled in communicating with the driver, regardless of the road conditions or driving situation," said Chief Engineer Naoki Kobayashi. "We retained the well-received compact body, and set out to deliver exceptional ride comfort while offering a high level of control. The longer the new IS is driven, the more one can experience the fun of driving - we wanted people to feel the aspirations of the team who created it."

"We are excited to launch the new Lexus IS in the region, a vehicle that combines luxury and performance in perfect harmony," commented Kei Fujita, Chief Representative, Middle East and Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation. "Previous generations of the IS already enjoy a strong reputation among drivers, and we are confident that the many refinements our design and engineering teams have made, created a performance that everyone can be passionate about. I'd like to thank our loyal customers in the region for continually inspiring us as we strive



**KUWAIT:** Mubarak Naser Al-Sayer CEO (right) and Mahmoud Abou Zahr, Business Director, Lexus Division, during the launch of the 2021 Lexus IS by Mohamed Naser Al-Sayer & Sons in Kuwait.

to create Amazing Experiences by transforming performance into passion and technology into imagination."

One of the first things that Lexus' engineers targeted was to enhance the IS's body rigidity. This not only helps to reduce unwanted noise and vibration, but also improves ride comfort and contributes to dynamic driving performance through enhanced steering response. To complement these enhancements, multiple refinements were made to the suspension setup. The new IS features coil springs that are 20 percent lighter than the outgoing model, as well as new forged aluminum A-arms that offer an 18 percent weight reduction. The suspension stabilizer bar has also been optimized using a new material to provide a 17 percent weight reduction.

The new bold exterior styling and athletic silhouette of the 2021 IS signifies the agile changes that have taken place below the surface. The new IS evokes lower, wider proportions with muscular fenders, reflecting the vehicle's high performance. The sleek lines are also complemented with aggressive sharpness carved into the side and shoulder char-

acter lines.

The 2021 IS's newly designed spindle grille features an intricate pattern that emphasizes a sense of presence, while the slender headlamps and daytime running lights with a sharp L-shape signature have been redesigned to complement the low-profile hood. New rocker panels accent a side profile that features a sharper contour and carries into the muscular shoulders over the rear wheel wells. At the back of the vehicle, the rear fenders blend into the extended, lowered rear deck, creating a low stance and emphasizing the L-shaped full-width rear light.

The new model's distinct personality is completed by its exquisite interior, which invites drivers and passengers to enjoy a range of advanced features for a refined cabin experience. These include a new 10.3-inch touchscreen multimedia system featuring Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility, a 4.2-inch color multi-information display (MID), and a dual-zone automatic climate control system with touch-sensitive controls. The vehicle also offers SmartAccess with push-button start, a power moonroof, 8-way adjustable power and ventilated front seats, as well as ample luggage space thanks to the 60:40 split-folding rear seats.

The new Lexus IS's eye-catching looks are complemented by its balanced, linear and confident driving signature. Owners can choose from two engine options: an updated 2.0-liter, turbocharged and intercooled inline four-cylinder engine delivering 241 hp and 350 Nm of torque, and a sophisticated 3.5-liter V6 engine that produces 311 hp and 380 Nm of torque. The two engines are paired with an eight-speed sport direct-shift automatic transmission that offers superb drivability, together with outstanding fuel efficiency and quietness even at high speed.

As with any Lexus vehicle, safety is a



Mubarak Naser Al-Sayer CEO behind the wheel of the all-new 2021 Lexus IS



top priority for the new Lexus IS. Drivers can enjoy complete peace of mind thanks to the Lexus Safety System+, an advanced safety technology package that includes Pre-Collision System (PCS) which includes Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB) and Emergency Steering Assist (ESA), Daytime Pedestrian Detection (DPD), all-speed range Dynamic Radar Cruise Control (DRCC), Lane Departure Alert (LDA), Lane Tracing Alert (LTA), and Adaptive High-beam System (AHB).

The vehicle also includes comprehensive safety features designed to protect its occupants, such as 8 SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Traction Control (TRC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) with Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD), Brake Assist (BA), Blind Spot Monitor (BSM), Parking

Support Alert (PKSA), Rear Cross-Traffic Alert (RCTA), Active Cornering Assist (ACA), and Hill-start Assist Control (HAC), among many others.

Further adding to its stylish visual appeal, the 2021 Lexus IS comes in a refined range of color options that allow discerning owners to customize their vehicles according to their tastes. Customers can choose from seven distinctive exterior colors, including the newly developed Sonic Chrome and Sonic Iridium options. Meanwhile, the interior comes in three elegant colors: Ocher, Dark Rose, and the universal Black, which evokes a sense of calm within a gorgeous atmosphere. Newly developed wheel design have also been introduced in 19-inch sizes to further express the driving feel pursued by the Lexus brand.



## English fishing boats forced to remain in port

**SCARBOROUGH, United Kingdom:** Fishing boats in the north of England were forced to remain in port on Monday because of the disruption to supply chains caused by French border closures following the discovery of a new coronavirus variant in the UK.

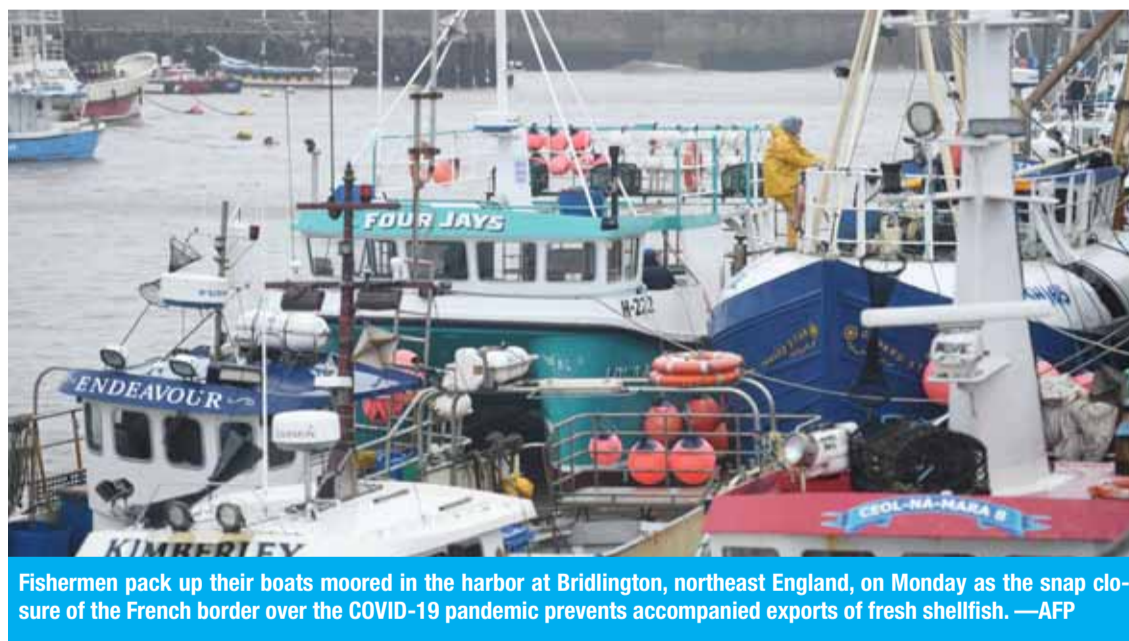
Matthew Barnes, a fisherman who catches scallops off the port of Scarborough, told AFP that being prevented from going out to sea for the second time this year could potentially spell calamity for the sector. "When COVID first struck we had exactly the same thing, we had to stop fishing for over a month, which was a financial disaster," he explained. Barnes, who might expect to bring in a catch of three tons, and others like him, have been prevented from fishing at the close of the normally prosperous Christmas season because they cannot sell their shellfish to processing plants that ship on their produce to Europe. "We had to stop fishing because they can't shift our product," the 33-year-old who began fishing at the age of 10 and whose father was also a fisherman explained.

Following the discovery of a new, more transmissible variant of the coronavirus, dozens of countries have suspended travel from the UK. On Sunday, France made a snap decision to shut its borders to UK hauliers for 48 hours in a bid to contain the spread of the virus, disrupting supply chains particularly through the key port of Dover on which Britain is reliant.

The blockage of trade across the Channel has had an acute knock-on effect on seafood exporters that have been prevented from shipping their perishable produce to the continent, where it is in particular demand during the festive season.

### 'Disaster' for crews

Barnes said the immediate impact on his bottom line could be limited. Monday would have been his last day of fishing before the start of a winter break



Fishermen pack up their boats moored in the harbor at Bridlington, northeast England, on Monday as the snap closure of the French border over the COVID-19 pandemic prevents accompanied exports of fresh shellfish. —AFP

lasting till January.

However, if the gridlock at Britain's ports and the disruption to the supply chain continues into next month then the implications could be significantly worse. "I just hope it can be resolved in the two weeks," he said, explaining regretted the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, which has caused a fall in prices and may continue at the end of the fast-approaching Brexit transition period.

"The Christmas and New Year market is always a huge market for the entire UK seafood sector but the prices and demand just go through the roof. This year it just hasn't." Britain and the European Union are engaged in the final stages of freight negotiations to reach a trade agreement before the deadline of December 31 when the UK will exit the single market and the customs union.

Few issues in the discussions have been more difficult to finalize than fishing rights and access to British territorial waters. According to Seafish, the British association representing the seafood industry, exports to France for human consumption reached 7,417 tons in December 2019, a value of £63 million (\$85 million, 68 million euros).

"Europe is an important market for some of our high value UK seafood, including shellfish which is exported live and highly perishable," Aoife Martin, Seafish's Operations Director said.

"We know many seafood businesses are affected, particularly in Scotland." The Scottish Seafood Association called on the government to compensate its members "who will lose millions of pounds" because of the closure of the French border. Jimmy Buchan, the association's managing director said on Twitter that the losses were a "disaster" for companies that had already been hit hard by the first wave of the pandemic in March.

Sam Crowe, a crab fisherman in Scarborough, also reluctantly gave up on a lucrative Monday fishing trip. "I've got not much money in our bank to live on. We were expecting a good Christmas trip which could have brought us a bit of good money. Obviously that has all stopped," he said.

The 26-year-old explained his income was dependent on the export market. "No way on earth is the English population going to be able to eat, nevermind buy, what we catch. It has to be exported," he said. —AFP

## Norway's top court rejects challenge to Arctic oil exploration

**OSLO:** Norway's Supreme Court yesterday struck down a challenge from environmental groups trying to stop oil exploration in the Arctic, after a historic battle over the country's climate change commitments. By a vote of 11 to four, the top court rejected the argument of two organizations—Greenpeace and Young Friends of the Earth Norway—which said that the granting of 10 oil exploration licences in the Barents Sea in 2016 was unconstitutional.

Referring to the Paris Agreement, which seeks to limit global warming to less than two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, the organisations argued that the oil licenses violated article 112 of Norway's constitution, guaranteeing everyone the right to a healthy environment.

Their claims have already been rejected in two instances and hopes were finally dashed by the Supreme Court, which delivered the verdict by videoconference. The majority of the court did agree with the activists that article 112 could be invoked if the state failed to meet its climate and environmental obligations—but they did not think it was applicable in this case.

The court also held that the granting of oil permits was not contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights, in part because they did not represent "a real and immediate risk" to life and physical integrity.

"We are outraged with this judgement, which leaves youth and future generations without constitutional protection," Therese Hugstmyr Woie, head of Young Friends of the Earth Norway, said in a statement. "The Supreme Court chooses loyalty to Norwegian oil over our rights to a livable future," she added. —AFP

# Classifieds

Wednesday, December 23, 2020

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[www.met.gov.kw](http://www.met.gov.kw)

## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY NIGHT:** Rather cold to cold with light variable wind with speed of 06 - 22 km/h.

**BY DAY:** Fair and Clouds will increase gradually with light variable wind changing to light to moderate south easterly wind with speed of 08 - 35 km/h with a chance for scattered rain later on.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. REC.	MIN. EXP.	SFC. CHART 22/12/2020 1200 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	20 °C	13 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	20 °C	08 °C		
ABDALY	20 °C	07 °C		
BUBYAN	18 °C	10 °C		
JAHRA	20 °C	09 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C		
SALMIYAH	19 °C	14 °C		
AHMADI	- °C	- °C		
NUWAISIB	22 °C	10 °C		
WAFRA	21 °C	09 °C		
SALMY	18 °C	08 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Wednesday	12/23	Fair and Clouds will increase gradually with a chance for scattered rain later on	23 °C	08 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 35 km/h
Thursday	12/24	Fair and Cloudy to partly cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thunders at times and a rather cold and some scattered clouds will appear	20 °C	14 °C	SE-NW	10 - 42 km/h
Friday	12/25	Rather cold and some scattered clouds will appear	17 °C	11 °C	NW	15 - 42 km/h
Saturday	12/26	Rather cold and Partly cloudy to cloudy	16 °C	05 °C	NW	12 - 42 km/h

TOMORROW PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:14
Sunrise	06:39
Zuhr	11:47
Asr	14:37
Sunset	16:55
Isha	18:17

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	18 °C
MIN. Temp.	07 °C
MAX. RH	95 %
MIN. RH	42 %
MAX. Wind	N 32 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, Narayanasamy** s/o Subban, Indian passport holder No: R8107010, I am requesting my son Indian passport holder No: R8108595 issued at Kuwait on date: 16/07/2017. My son given name: Jeevadarshan, surname: Subban shall henceforth be known as Jeevadarshan, surname: Narayanasamy.

**I, Narayanasamy** s/o Subban, Indian passport holder No: R8107010, I am requesting my son Indian passport holder No: S9733945 issued at Kuwait on date: 16/09/2018. My son given name: Oli Amudhan, surname: Subban shall henceforth be known as Oli Amudhan, surname: Narayanasamy.

(C 5825) ) 22-12-2020

## 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
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4

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## Word Search

### Costume Party



I O O M F R O B O T L V  
 C S T Y I A N Y N N E A  
 B B L O R M I O U Y G C  
 W R C B E T A R I P N L  
 O I T W M S S N Y A A O  
 P E T O A E T E S J M W  
 S S E C N I R P N U E N  
 N Y E O H I O I M G C W  
 N C E A P E N A A E I N  
 S N A M E V A C A P L R  
 A E A A N M U M M Y O C  
 J V G H O S T P T F P N

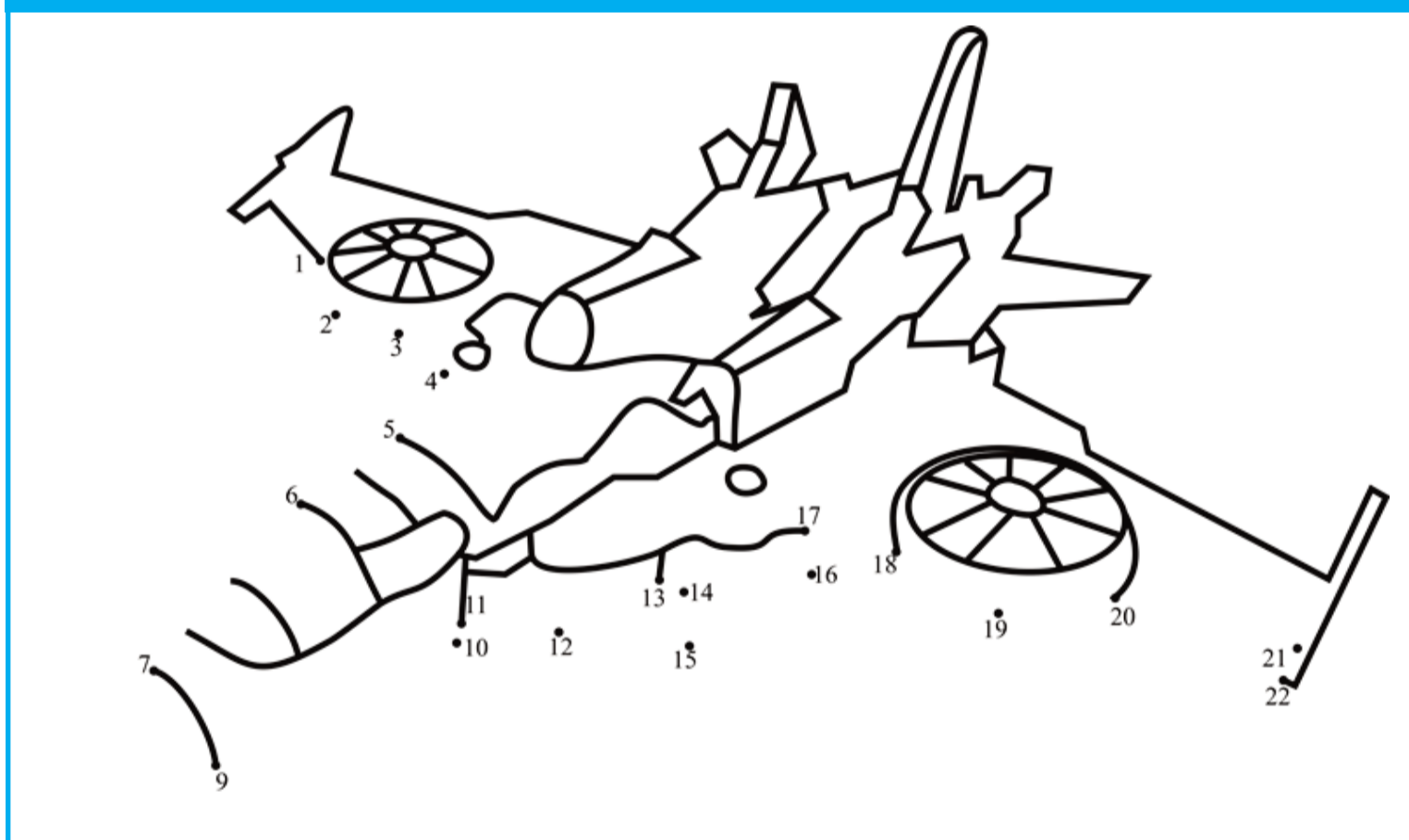
ANGEL  
 ASTRONAUT  
 CAVEMAN  
 COWBOY  
 CLOWN  
 FAIRY  
 FIREMAN

GHOST  
 MUMMY  
 NINJA  
 NURSE  
 POLICEMAN  
 PIRATE  
 PRINCESS

ROBOT  
 VAMPIRE  
 WITCH



## Join the Dots



## STAR TRACK



**Aries (March 21-April 19)**

You're conscientious where your health is concerned. You're one of the rare few who exercise and eat nutritious meals. Today you might want to expand your repertoire of medical remedies. If you've been struggling to shake a cold or allergy, consider some alternative medicines. They're moving more into the mainstream. Chinese herbs and acupuncture could just be what the New Age doctor ordered!



**Cancer (June 21-July 22)**

You're so upbeat and optimistic by nature that it's difficult for you to accept certain failures. That may be what you're thinking today as you reflect on recent humanitarian efforts. Try not to take such a short-sighted attitude. You're making a difference, even though it may not always be apparent. Continue on this path. Ultimately, you will see how worthwhile the journey is.



**Libra (September 23-October 22)**

The element of water predominates today. You will likely be aware of it by the strong tides of feeling in your household, Libra. Some family members may be unhappy. They may need more independence or look to you for more attention and affection. It's hard to strike the right balance, as you will discover. Do your best to satisfy everyone, making sure that your own needs don't get overlooked.



**Capricorn (December 22-January 19)**

You're on top of the world today, Capricorn. Enjoy the view! You're unstoppable. Friends and family alike revel in your good mood. You're materially and spiritually generous, and by day's end people could be lined up to partake of the bounty. Try to curb your enthusiasm and use some discretion. It would be better to give more to a worthy few than give less to many.



**Taurus (April 20-May 20)**

This is bound to turn into a silly day if you let it, Taurus. Your best bet is to give in to the strange patterns at work. Communication seems blocked at every turn. You can expect technical difficulties like phone malfunctions or computer crashes. You and your mate will speak in two different languages. No one seems able to get a point across. Don't fight it. Just laugh. All will be normal again tomorrow.



**Leo (July 23-August 22)**

You're usually very good at concentrating and getting your chores done, even when chaos reigns around you. This likely won't be the case today. Even you will come under the influence of the erratic. It's too hard to get much done with all the commotion. Don't fret about your lack of productivity. This is one day. Relax and have some fun. Tomorrow you can get down to work.



**Scorpio (October 23-November 21)**

There's a carefree, almost childlike atmosphere to today that suits you just fine, Scorpio. You've been working extraordinarily hard lately and need to relax and unwind a bit. This is a day for doing cartwheels across an open field. You aren't the only one who feels this way - it's positively contagious. Make the most of this wonderful feeling. This is a day for play not work.



**Aquarius (January 20-February 18)**

This dreamy day is tailor made to your sensibilities. You may find it hard to focus on the daily issues when you're caught up in your fantasies. Go ahead and give in to the day's dreamlike state. Write in your journal or spend some time rummaging around in the attic. You'll be amazed at what you find. Expect to spend hours looking through scrapbooks and reliving your childhood.



**Gemini (May 21-June 20)**

This isn't a day to make firm commitments, Gemini, especially concerning relationships. Today's atmosphere highlights unification and reconciliation, but don't take this as a sign that you're now bound for life. Proceed carefully before making any long-term decisions. If you're about to take a big step at work or in your personal life, try to delay your decision until your thoughts are clearer.



**Virgo (August 23-September 22)**

You have strong psychic vision, Virgo. Some people might say that you're prophetic, but your gift is a combination of creativity and intuition. You can use this to benefit others, and in fact have often done so. You're known for your good advice. Have some restraint today. People are listening closely to what you say. If you advise someone to do something crazy, they might do it!



**Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)**

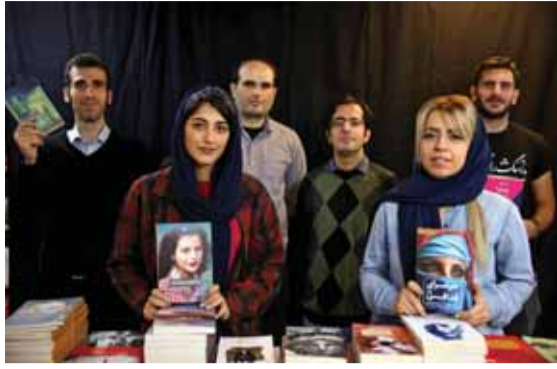
This is a day for rest and relaxation, Sagittarius. Take advantage of the calm atmosphere to center yourself and focus on what's important in your life. You've been going at full speed, and it's possible that your family feels somewhat neglected. Spend some quality time with loved ones, if possible. They miss you and will welcome your company. Other concerns come and go, but family is forever.



**Pisces (February 19-March 20)**

Your artistic side likes to communicate with people who are a shade off normal. You call them eccentric - other people call them crazy! From your viewpoint, the crazier the better! You feel such people add interest to the lives of anyone they come in contact with. Take a look in the mirror. You may see that you're such a person. Your energy and creativity add sparkle to others' lives.

## Lifestyle | Features



Employees of the Saless publishing house pose for a group picture with bestselling books in Iran's capital Tehran.



Employees of the Yassavoli Publications pose for a group picture with bestselling books in Iran's capital Tehran.



Employee Sepideh Daryan checks a bestselling book at a bookstore of the Nashre-Cheshmeh Publishing House on Karim Khan street.



Iranian bookseller Mehrani poses for a picture at a bookstore in Tehran's Enqelab (Revolution) street.

— AFP photos

## FOREIGN AUTHORS TOP SELLERS WITH LITERATURE-LOVING TEHRAN WOMEN

French authors Albert Camus and Simone de Beauvoir rub shoulders with the likes of Jewish diarist Anne Frank and Russian poet Osip Mandelstam in Tehran bookstores where the largely female readership lap up foreign writers. "Iranian women read more, translate more and write more. In general, they are more present in the book market than men," said Nargez Mossavat, editorial director of Sales publishers. "Books are a necessity for me, it's the only refuge, which sometimes makes me angry," said the 36-year-old author, without dwelling on the limitations to cultural life in the Islamic republic of Iran. As a publisher, "I choose books that speak to our society today", she said, pointing to work by Mandelstam, who died in a Gulag, or the novel "Minor Apocalypse" by Polish dissident writer Tadeusz Konwicki.

It's an "excellent book that recounts a social and political experience similar to ours", she said. "They tell us that other people have also gone through bitterness, hardship, and survived." Reza Bahrami, 32, manages the main bookstore of another publisher, Cheshmeh, which means "source", and said their "readership is 70 percent female". "There is a lot of buzz and anticipation around new publications and this drives sales," he said, surrounded by books at the Cheshmeh store on Karim Khan street. If

ensorship is present in Iranian publishing, it affects mainly content deemed licentious, and many Western best-sellers are quickly translated and made available in Iran, where copyright is not recognized. Karim Khan, along with Enqelab (Revolution) street, is one of two roads in central Tehran that readers flock to, known for being chockablock with bookshops.

## 'Freedom of expression'

Women readers are looking first for "romantic" books or thrillers, Bahrami said, such as those by Americans Sidney Sheldon and Mary Higgins Clark or prolific British crime writer Agatha Christie. But their interests go well beyond these genres, according to one browser at the Cheshmeh shop. Wearing a body-enveloping chador, the woman in her 30s said she had just earned her doctorate with "a thesis on female writers' writing" and had recently devoured de Beauvoir's seminal "The Second Sex".

A 58-year-old university professor was hunting for books to help him answer questions from his students on the murder of French secondary school teacher Samuel Paty, who was decapitated by an Islamist extremist at a school outside Paris in October after showing his pupils cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. "One of my main concerns is the issue of free-



Books are displayed for sale along a pavement on Enqelab (Revolution) street.

dom, and in particular freedom of expression," the professor said. Featured on many display tables in the Iranian capital is "Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind" by Israeli academic Yuval Noah Harari, translated into Persian. Mary Trump's tell-all "Too Much and Never Enough" published in July on her uncle US President Donald Trump has hit the shelves as well, where one can also find "The Book of Gutsy Women" by Hillary and Chelsea Clinton and former US first lady Michelle Obama's memoir.

## 'Verge of collapse'

Not all the bestselling foreign books are recent releases, however. Cheshmeh

in November saw its sales topped with 1939's "Ask the Dust" by American writer John Fante and "Troubled Sleep", published in 1949 by Jean-Paul Sartre. Also flying off the shelves were "The Suicide Shop" by French writer Jean Teule and Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami's "Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage", published in 2013. But even if Tehran's bookstores are stocked with abundant and diverse titles, "printing has slowed" since the Islamic revolution of 1979, said a 51-year-old bookseller, who asked not to be named.

"There are multiple reasons, ranging from the economic situation to censorship and brain drain," he said. The price of

books has made them increasingly prohibitive for some. In a country where some ultraconservative leaders regularly deny the reality of the Holocaust, Javad Rahimi, salesman at the Sales bookstore, noted the recent success of the "Tattooist of Auschwitz", by New Zealand writer Heather Morris, and "The Diary of Anne Frank", by the young Jewish girl from Amsterdam who died in a Nazi concentration camp in 1945.

According to Rahimi, "The Plague" by Camus and "All Men Are Mortal" by de Beauvoir "rose to the top of sales during the pandemic". Like in other countries, the outbreak of Covid-19 forced booksellers to adapt, particularly during periods when all non-essential businesses were closed by authorities to combat the virus' spread. In the spring, bookshops were "on the verge of collapse, (but) since the summer sales have been satisfactory", said Bahrami at Cheshmeh. With the novel "coronavirus, we are mainly selling our books via Instagram or websites we created" specially, he added, noting that the pandemic "led us to take online sales more seriously". — AFP

## Quiet Bethlehem Christmas means 'less business, more religion'

Deprived of its usual tourist influx by the pandemic, Bethlehem will celebrate a quiet Christmas this year that is less about commerce and more about religion, says its parish priest. In a normal year hundreds of thousands of visitors flood the Palestinian city in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, located less than 10 kilometers (six miles) from Jerusalem. Those seeking a quiet moment of contemplation in the Church of Nativity—the site of Christ's birth, according to tradition—generally have to use their elbows to manoeuvre through the crowds. While the lack of visitors has been devastating for business owners, it has also offered a rare opportunity for solemn worship, said Father Rami Asakrieh, Bethlehem's parish priest.

"Sometimes there are more than half million people who arrive in this period to visit the Nativity Church," he told AFP. But with coronavirus restrictions making travel to Bethlehem all but impossible for foreign worshippers, the Church of the Nativity has been eerily calm in the days before Christmas. Under the Grotto of the Nativity, the recitation of Armenian prayers by four monks echoed clearly through the basilica deserted of its typical throngs of visitors. The Christmas Eve mass on Thursday, regarded as the most important annual event at the church, will be closed to the public.

## 'Heartache and pain'

Not even representatives of the Palestinian Authority will come to Bethlehem on December 24, Asakrieh said. "It has never happened before," he explained, citing only past restrictions during the Palestinian intifadas, or uprisings, against Israel's occupation. "I think that this Christmas is different because people are not busy with the external manifestations of the feast," the priest said, referring to the gift-buying that has, for many, become synonymous with Christmas. "Now (people) have the time, and they are obligated, to concentrate on the essential... the theological spirit of



A Palestinian carpenter carves religious statues and figurines from olive wood at a shop near the Church of the Nativity, in the West Bank city of Bethlehem. — AFP photos

Christmas," he said. "Less business, but more religion."

In the lead-up to Christmas, the small Chapel of Saint Catherine, adjacent to the Church of the Nativity, was opened to the local Palestinian population. Many turned out in their Sunday best, including Nicolas al-Zoghbi who said that this year the joyfulness of Christmas had been replaced by "depression". He recounted the "heartache and pain" felt by those like his son who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic. "We hope the Lord will destroy corona, just get rid of it so we can return to our previous life," said Zoghbi, who is in his 70s. Bethlehem's economy is driven partly by an annual Christmas rush that benefits small shops selling postcards, rosaries carved from olive tree wood and other Nativity-related souvenirs.

## Christians in Gaza

Sitting outside his Bethlehem store on a plastic chair, Georges Baaboul told AFP

he "hadn't sold anything for nine months". "In the last few days I sold about 170 shekels (\$52) worth of goods, he said. Sixty-year-old trader Saif said he had never seen things this bad through his 60 years in business, including during the intifadas. This year, West Bank tradesmen cannot even count on Christian customers from Gaza, the coastal Palestinian enclave controlled by the Islamist group Hamas that is under Israeli blockade. Gazan Christians generally receive special permission to cross to Bethlehem for Christmas, but this year those permits have not been issued, said Father Youssef Asaad of the Latin monastery in Gaza.

Hamas has imposed strict measures to limit the spread of the virus in the strip, including the closure of mosques and the Latin Church, but masses are being broadcast online. Christian Gaza resident Issa Abou George said he could not buy gifts for his children this year, but will participate in services online. "My family and I will pray to God for the pandemic to end as well as for peace, in the Holy Land and the world," he told AFP. — AFP



A Palestinian shop-owner arranges Christmas decorations at her shop in the West Bank city of Bethlehem.



A Palestinian shop-owner arranges Christmas decorations at her shop in the West Bank city of Bethlehem.

## Kim Kardashian West is giving away \$500 each to 1,000 people

The 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians' star announced on Monday she is set to send an early Christmas gift to 1,000 people by gifting them each \$500, which she hopes will help them "put food on the table" after the coronavirus pandemic left many without work and struggling to pay bills. Kim will be sending money via CashApp, and will be picking people at random from those who share their CashApp username on social media alongside the "#KKWHoliday" hashtag. In a statement posted on Twitter, she wrote: "It's the most wonderful time of the year. I know 2020 has been really hard and people are struggling, worried about how they're going to pay rent, put food on the table, or a gift under the tree for their kids. "I want to spread the love by sending \$500 to 1000 people. "Send me your \$cashtag below with #KKWHoliday (sic)"



Kim Kardashian West

The charitable deed comes after Kim and her family - including her mother Kris Jenner, sisters Kourtney and Khloe Kardashian, half-sisters Kendall and Kylie Jenner, and brother Rob Kardashian - recently signed a multi-year content deal with Hulu following the decision to end their iconic reality series in 2021 after 14 years on E!. Kris tweeted earlier this month: "Excited to announce our new multi year partnership with Hulu and Star and what's to come in 2021." Kim, 40, confirmed the end was in sight for 'KUWTK' earlier this year. She wrote on social media at the time: "It is with heavy hearts that we've made the difficult decision as a family to say goodbye to 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians'." After what will be 14 years, 20 seasons, hundreds of episodes and numerous spin-off shows, we are beyond grateful to all of you who've watched us for all of these years - through the good times, the bad times, the happiness, the tears, and the many relationships and children.

— Bang Showbiz



Prince Jackson

## Jackson took 25 children for a Christmas shopping spree

Prince Jackson took 25 children for a Christmas shopping spree in a toy store. The 23-year-old star - who is the oldest son of the late Michael Jackson and his ex-wife Debbie Rowe - gave the kids and their families \$150 through his Heal L.A. Foundation to spend on themselves and their loved ones at the Mattel store in Los Angeles. And to match Prince's generosity, the store automatically activated a 50% discount if the children rang up a bill of more than \$150 in their shopping splurge. Prince was hands-on at the event - which was covid-safe thanks to the use of masks, social distancing and other measures - by helping the children find the coolest toys and even carrying their bags out of the store. Earlier this year, Prince and his foundation handed out free meals in Los Angeles to those in need and are currently still offering weekly grab-n-go food packs.

Prince previously admitted he wants to "expand" on the legacy of his 'Thriller' singer dad, who died 11 years ago. He said: "I am very proud to share the same name as my father, but sharing such a powerful name you are correct, there is... "I don't want to say pressure, but there is this legacy that my father worked very hard to build and to maintain and I feel that it's my position really in my life and everything that I've been given; I just want to expand that legacy." Prince admitted as he's grown up, he's been able to "unpack the wisdom" left by the late King of Pop and he's "grateful" for the time he had with his father. He added: "I feel that the older I get the more I get to unpack the wisdom that he left and all the experiences that he imparted on us. "And when I see them through a more mature perspective, I'm just extremely grateful to have the life experiences with him that I did and the knowledge that he imparted on me. "Every year I'm more appreciative of that and I miss him ever greater because that's... that's my father."

— Bang Showbiz

Lifestyle | Features

# Baghdad's wristwatch repairman is a timeless treasure

**Y**oussef Abdelkarim's storefront on one of Baghdad's most historic streets is a time capsule-literally. Thousands of wristwatches fill the tiny shop, where three generations have repaired Iraq's oldest timepieces. The dusty display window on Rasheed Street features a single row of classic watches

were my own child," he told AFP, squinting through black, thick-framed glasses. Abdelkarim began fixing watches at the age of 11, after the death of his paternal grandfather, who opened the store in the 1940s. His grandfather had already passed the trade onto his own son, who began to teach Youssef.



Watch repairman Youssef Abdelkarim presents an antique Omega pocket-watch as he sits at his workshop.



Watch repairman Youssef Abdelkarim, wearing a jewelry magnifier, repairs a watch at his workshop.

in their felt boxes right at the front, with a mountain of haphazardly piled pieces behind it and others hanging from hooks overhead. Inside, there are watches in plastic buckets on the floor, packed in cardboard boxes on shelves and stuffed into suitcases. In a far corner, behind an old wooden desk, 52-year-old Abdelkarim is hunched over an antique piece.

"Every watch has its own personality. I try to preserve it as much as I can, as if it

He has repaired expensive Swiss models, including 10,000-euro Patek Philippe, and what Abdelkarim calls "the poor man's watch"-a Sigma. And he suspects he even fixed a piece that belonged to Iraq's feared dictator Saddam Hussein. "It was a rare watch brought to me by the presidential palace, with Saddam's signature on the back," he recalled. It cost 400 Iraqi dinars to repair-more than \$1,000 in the 1980s but less than a dollar today.

**A timeless trade**

Indeed, much has changed since then. People swapped their analog wristwatches for digital models, then dropped them altogether for smart phones. But Abdelkarim insists an original timepiece isn't a thing of the past, telling AFP with a wink: "A man's elegance begins with his watch. And his shoes." That may be right: his shop is still packed with customers of all ages and styles, including former ministers in sleek suits, collectors looking for vintage classics and younger Iraqis bringing newer pieces for him to fix. "Everyone finds what they need here," he said proudly.

With his eyesight starting to falter, he fixes just five pieces a day now, compared to the 1980s when he sold and fixed hundreds every day. At the time, Rasheed Street was bustling with business during the day and the top place to be seen at night. Abdelkarim still remembers the famed theatres, movie halls and coffee shops: "They never closed!" His shop was competing with dozens of other repair stores then, but they started to shutter in the 1990s, when crippling international sanctions left many households struggling to feed themselves.

**'Something different'**

Then, the US-led invasion of 2003 toppled Saddam and opened a Pandora's box of sectarian violence, including car bombs on Rasheed Street. Abdelkarim moved to live in a safer neighborhood but still walked to the family store to keep it open. Even last year, when Rasheed



Watch repairman Youssef Abdelkarim sits at his workshop on Rasheed Street in Iraq's capital Baghdad. — AFP photos

Street was shut for months by a huge protest camp in nearby Tahrir Square, he managed to keep working. "I'd open once or twice a week, because the riot police often clashed with protesters here, but I still came," he told AFP.

All around him, the vintage clothing stores or bookshops have closed, transformed into warehouses or stores selling car accessories. "The street's features were erased and most of my friends moved. But there's just something different that sets it apart from every other

place in Baghdad," he said. He is teaching his sons, Yehya, 24, and Mustafa, 16, to take over the family business. But he insists they will preserve the store as it is, with its cracked walls framing the door, its dusty shelves and its mountains of timepieces. "This shop hasn't changed in 50 years, which is what keeps people coming back," he said. "That's what preserves its identity." — AFP

## Pop superstar Ariana Grande announces engagement

**U**S pop superstar Ariana Grande has announced her engagement to Los Angeles luxury real estate agent Dalton Gomez. The "Stuck With U" singer, 27, confirmed the news in an Instagram post Sunday showing photos of her fiancé and her diamond engagement ring, with the caption "forever n then some." "Sooo happy for u guys!" wrote Kim Kardashian West, among the many celebrities responding to the announcement. The couple publicly appeared dancing together earlier this year in the shot-from-home style music video for "Stuck With U," a bubblegum-sweet ode to isolation with close ones.

The charity track, also featuring Justin Bieber and recorded in California, was released in May and featured lyrics referring to couples living together during the pandemic. "Lock the door and throw out the key. Can't fight this no more, it's just you and me," sang Grande. Grande—who has nearly 300 million followers across Instagram and Twitter—was briefly engaged to "Saturday Night Live" comedian Pete Davidson in 2018. According to his real estate company's website Gomez, born and raised in southern California, has worked in the industry five years and boasts "one of the largest rolodexes of A-list buyers and is already connecting many high profile deals across the city."

Scooter Braun, Grande's agent, wrote: "Congrats to these two amazing souls... Dalton you are a lucky man." The timing of Grande's announcement coincides with the release of her behind-the-scenes Netflix documentary film "Ariana Grande: Excuse Me, I Love You." — AFP



In this file photo US singer-songwriter Ariana Grande arrives for the 62nd Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. — AFP



Jupiter (left) and Saturn appear about one-tenth of a degree apart during an astronomical event known as a Great Conjunction on December 21, 2020 in Santa Barbara, California. — AFP

## #MeToo rocks Turkey's literary world

**S**exual assault and harassment allegations have shaken Turkey's literary world, creating a rare #MeToo moment as women break taboos and speak out in the still largely patriarchal country. The online testimonials have led to the suicide of one author who was singled out after allegedly sending a series of lewd text messages to younger women. But while born in social media anonymity, the movement has since been joined by well-known voices, marking the first time women have dared to come forward against major authors and the first time Turkey's mainstream media have taken notice. It all started with a single tweet. A user called "Leyla Salinger" shared a video of novelist Hasan Ali Toptas—once dubbed the eastern Franz Kafka—accompanied by a caption reading: "How many of us are waiting for this man to be exposed?"

From there, accusations from 20 women mainly on social media against Toptas followed, leading many more to describe the harassment and abuse they allegedly suffered at the hands of other male writers. Ibrahim Colak, 51, another author swept up in the wave of stories of abuse, killed himself on December 10 in Ankara after tweeting a seeming apology to his family. "I had not prepared myself for such an end. I wanted to be a good person but I failed," Colak tweeted before taking his life, adding he could not "look in the faces of my wife, children and friends". Local media attributed allegations that Colak sent the lewd text messages to the same Twitter user Leyla. Her Twitter account has since disappeared.

**'Very frightening'**

Moved by the stories, author Pelin Buzluk came forward with her own allegations against Toptas in the Hurriyet daily newspaper. "I was in shock," she said, describing a "very frightening moment" in which Toptas "approached and forced" himself on her in 2011. "Well, why did you wear that dress?" Buzluk said he told her in response. Toptas issued a statement that caused further controversy and confusion, describing his actions as that of a "patriarchal perpetrator". "An individual can make mistakes without realizing, unaware of the large pain inflicted on the other party, until one understands what it is to be a patriarchal per-

petrator," Toptas said. "I sincerely apologize to anyone I unknowingly have hurt or upset," he added. Writer Buket Uzuner brushed aside Toptas's comments. "What does patriarchal perpetrator mean?" she tweeted. "It's an apology he was forced to make." Buzluk separately told a reporter. "It's not the apology of someone who regrets his actions."



A photograph taken in Istanbul shows a logo of Everest publishing house's headquarter in Istanbul. — AFP

**'May you lose sleep'**

Toptas later said his statement did not imply an admission of guilt and denied Buzluk's description of events. "Nothing like that happened at all," he told the Milliyet daily. That same day, the newspaper ran interviews with five women accusing Toptas of harassment. After the claims blew up on social media, Toptas's publishing house Everest dropped him, saying it was "against all kinds of harassment". He was also stripped of awards he received this year and in 2013. #Tacizesusma, which means "Don't be silent against harassment", began trending on Turkish Twitter.

Another writer, Asli Tohumcu, said author Bora Abdo harassed her, which he denied. "Taking courage from Buzluk, I wanted to show we're not alone," she told the Hurriyet. The Iletisim publishing house dropped Abdo after the claims surfaced. Women have also been encouraged to send their stories to an email address, uykularinkacsin@gmail.com, which means "May you lose sleep".

While the reputation of some reputable authors has been shaken, none of the allegations have yet led to criminal charges. But similar stories also hounded Turkey's main opposition parties this year, resulting in legal action. The main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) saw its deputy chairman for Istanbul's Maltepe district charged last month with rape. And the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) — the second-largest opposition parliamentary group—removed a deputy accused of rape earlier this year. It is not the first time Turkey's literary community has come under scrutiny. — AFP

## Outrage after Miss France runner-up gets anti-Semitic abuse

**F**rench prosecutors on Monday opened an investigation into a torrent of anti-Semitic social media messages aimed at the runner-up of the latest Miss France contest. April Benayoum, 21, who holds the title of Miss Provence and competed for the national crown on Saturday, became the subject of hate messages after saying at the event that her father is of Israeli origin. The insults—such as "Hitler forgot about this one" and "Don't vote for a Jew"—were posted mainly on Twitter and drew condemnation from politicians and associations.

They also prompted criticism of Twitter itself for its handling of offensive material. "I am deeply shocked by the flood of anti-Semitic insults against Miss Provence", Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said. "We will not let this stand. Shame on the authors." Paris prosecutors said Monday that they were investigating the messages for "racist insults" and "instigation of race hatred."

**'Anti-Semitic cesspool'**

The International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism (Licra) said the messages had turned Twitter into "an anti-Semitic cesspool" and called on internet users to report the offending content with a view to launching a class action suit. The contest organizers also condemned the attacks, as did the competition's winner, Amandine Petit from Normandy in northwestern France, who called the social media messages "inappropriate" and "extremely disappointing." Benayoum herself deplored "that this kind of thing still goes on in 2020," telling La Provence

newspaper: "France is a cosmopolitan country, the Miss contestants come from different backgrounds, different cultures, different regions, and that's what's great about this competition."

EU internal market commissioner Thierry Breton said Twitter and other social media platforms would have to move quicker to remove hate speech under a new Digital Services Act proposed for the bloc this month. "What we're proposing is to confirm that platforms give themselves the means to respond instantly to demands from the authorities when offences like this occur," Breton told BFM television on Sunday.

The Union of French Jewish Students (UEJF) said the number of offensive messages was so great that Twitter should have found it easy to block them via keyword filters. "We ask the big platforms to do what is necessary. They should stop thinking that their legal norms are above the norms of countries," UEJF president Noemie Madar said. Twitter did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Three associations—UEJF, SOS Racisme and SOS Homophobie—had in May filed a legal complaint against Twitter, accusing it of failing to moderate content properly. Justice Minister Eric Dupond-Moretti meanwhile said prosecution of the authors of hate messages would become easier once a draft law against extremism is approved. "Their filthy remarks sent from their living room sofas will lead them into a courtroom the very next day," he said in a tweet. — AFP



Miss Provence April Benayoum competes on stage during the Miss France 2021 beauty contest at the Puy-du-Fou, in Les Epesses, western France. — AFP

## Sports

## Photo of the Day



Matthias Dolderer of Germany at the Red Bull Air Race World Championship in Germany in 2018. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

# NBA will not 'jump the line' for COVID vaccine

## League prepares to tip off new season amid COVID surge

LOS ANGELES: NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said Monday the league would not "jump the line" for the COVID-19 vaccine as the league prepared to tip off its new season amid a surge in coronavirus cases across the United States. Speaking on a conference call ahead of the start of the 2020-2021 season, Silver emphasized that the NBA would "wait our turn" to obtain the vaccine, which began to be administered for the first time last week.

"It goes without saying that in no form or way will we jump the line," Silver told reporters. "We will wait our turn to get the vaccine." Silver said he hoped NBA players and staff would eventually play a role in helping to assure the public of the benefits of getting the vaccine. "It's my hope that when we are eligible, members of the NBA community will want to get vaccinated and it's our plan to be involved with governmental efforts in terms of public messaging as to the benefit of taking the vaccine," he said.

The NBA was shut down for four months last season as the pandemic swept across North America before resuming in July with teams based in a protective quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida. However the new season will take place with teams playing in their home markets, a move that represents myriad logistical challenges for the NBA and its 30 teams amid skyrocketing Covid-19 cases in many states.

### Season bubble 'untenable'

Silver said playing an entire season in a bubble-like campus environment was deemed to be "untenable" but insisted he was confident of health and safety protocols put in place to mitigate the risk from the virus. "I've been asked many times 'Why are you starting your season now, given the state of the pandemic?'" Silver said.

"It's a fair question and the short answer is that we're comfortable with the health and safety protocols we've designed in consultation with the players association and our medical experts. "We would not



BOSTON: A general view of the preseason game between the Boston Celtics and the Brooklyn Nets at TD Garden in Boston, Massachusetts. —AFP

be opening our season if we did not believe it was safe and responsible to do so." Silver added however that the league was preparing for disruption, referring to a sense of "trepidation" about the tip-off.

NBA chiefs have only released a schedule of games for the first half of the abbreviated 72-game season, and will finalize the second half of the calendar at a later date. "We do anticipate there will be bumps in the road along the way," Silver said. "We're waiting to see how this plays out before issuing the second half of the season. We know it's possible we may have to reschedule games along the way." Silver said only six teams would start the season with fans in attendance at their arenas and described the return of spectators as a "huge priority."

### Anthem hope

"But at the same time I recognize that until we

have mass distribution of the vaccine it's unlikely that we're going to return to the point of having full arenas," he cautioned, adding that the league estimated a 40% dip in total revenues if no fans at all were present during the season. Silver meanwhile said that after the social justice initiatives adopted last season following the death of George Floyd in May, when "Black Lives Matter" adorned every court following the restart and players kneeled for the national anthem, he hoped players would return to standing for the anthem.

"It's a national ritual of sorts that I hope, personally, isn't something that's lost," Silver said. "Because there are very few things that bring us together these days. So it's my expectation that going into the season we're going to return to the practice that's been part of this league for many decades, and that is standing for the national anthem." —AFP

## Joshua donates to boxing gyms

LONDON: Britain's world heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua has made a substantial donation to boxing gyms as the 2012 Olympic gold medalist fears many may go out of business due to the coronavirus pandemic. Numerous amateur gyms have been forced to shut temporarily through the lockdown and Joshua is concerned that many amateur boxers will have to hang up their gloves if some were to close permanently.

Joshua is the latest high-profile boxing personality to voice his fears following that of his promoter Eddie Hearn and Northern Ireland's former two-weight world champion Carl Frampton. Joshua—who retained his world title belts with a ninth-round stoppage of Kubrat Pulev earlier this month—has made his donation to clubs via the three home nations federations. "Boxing helped shape me, both physically and mentally," said Joshua.

"It is no secret that without boxing and the family created around my amateur gym, my life could have been very different. "The sport has given me a lot and I want to help highlight the issues affecting grass roots clubs and do what I can to keep the lights on for those most in need. "I am not using this as an opportunity to criticise government for its lack of funding towards boxing—these are unprecedented times—however I would like to use my platform to respectfully ask them to rethink their stance. "Without support we will lose community hubs and potentially the stars of tomorrow."

The funding will be distributed to clubs via England Boxing, Welsh Boxing and Boxing Scotland. Kevin Bell, chairman of Boxing Scotland, praised Joshua for not forgetting his roots. "It is to Anthony's great credit that he recognizes the impact of Covid-19 on amateur boxing, from loss of training among boxers to the inability to host shows that sustain clubs financially," said Bell. —AFP



## Kuwait Bowling tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Bowling Club Sheikh Talal Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah said there are plans to organize several local refresher tournaments to compensate for the lack of training camps - both locally and internationally. He added that this is due to the current situation resulting from the corona pandemic. He said the plans are within the views of the teams' technical department in order to spread competitiveness among players so as to enable them maintain their physical and technical level as they get ready for upcoming tournaments when the corona crises are over.

Meanwhile, 40 players participated in the Bowling tournament that was held under the patronage of club chairman as an alternative for training camps. The tournament included four competitions in addition to the major one. Saleh Khalid Habib won the first place of the major competition - followed by Salem Al-Hajras and Mustafa Al-Mousawi.

In the "medium oiling" competition, Mohammad Habeeb came first; Abdallah Al-Deeban (second) and Faisal Al-Salem (third). In the "short oiling" event, Saleh Habeeb took the first position - followed by Aseel Al-Roumi (second) and Abdallah Al-Deeban (third). In the "long oiling" event, Hassan Qasim came first while Salem Al-Hajras took second as Aseel Al-Roumi came third. Sheikh Talal Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah - accompanied by Bowling Club Secretary General Mohammad Al-Farsi awarded the winners their cups and prizes.

## Don Bradman's debut 'baggy green' cap sold for record \$340,000

SYDNEY: The "baggy green" worn on Test debut in 1928 by Australia's greatest batsman Donald Bradman has sold for Aus\$450,000 (US\$340,000), a record for one of the cricket legend's caps. Bradman, who retired with an all-time highest Test batting average of 99.94, wore the cap during the first match of his Test career against England.

Pickles auction house said Tuesday the baggy green had been bought by the businessman Peter Freedman, whom is the Australian founder of RODE Microphones, after initially failing to sell under the hammer. "After negotiations the final bid and highest offer was the \$450,000," Pickles executive manager Gavin Dempsey told AFP. "It's still, for a Bradman cap, on record the highest price paid on the open market."

In June, Freeman spent US\$6 million on a guitar played by grunge rock icon Kurt Cobain, making it the most expensive guitar in history. Freedman said he would put Bradman's cap on display around Australia, similar to global tour plans he previously announced for the Nirvana front man's guitar. "All too often, memorabilia such as this ends up spending its life on the wall of some board room or in some basement bar of a well-heeled sports fanatic," Freedman said in a statement. "I want as many people to enjoy it as possible."

Bradman had gifted the cap to his neighbor, accountant Peter Dunham, who local media reported was jailed in May for eight years over a multimillion-dollar fraud. Pickles said the cap was sold on behalf of an insolvency firm seeking to recoup some of the investors' losses. The latest sale exceeds the Aus\$425,000 (US\$321,000) paid for the cap worn during his final Test in 1948 by Bradman, who died in 2001 aged 92. However, it fell well below the Aus\$1 million (US\$756,000) paid for spin legend Shane Warne's baggy green when it was auctioned off to help Australian bushfire victims earlier this year. —AFP

### News in brief

#### NFL sack king Greene dies

LOS ANGELES: Kevin Greene, who amassed the third highest number of sacks in NFL history during a 14-year playing career, died Monday. He was 58. The Pro Football Hall of Fame said in a statement Greene had died at his home in Florida. No cause of death was given. "The entire Pro Football Hall of Fame family mourns the passing of Kevin Greene," Hall of Fame president and CEO David Baker said in a statement Monday. "I regarded him as a personal friend and a true Hall of Famer in every sense. He possessed the most incredible can-do attitude of anyone I ever met. He was a great player, but more than that, he was a great man." Greene entered the NFL after being chosen by the Los Angeles Rams with the 113th overall pick in the 1985 draft. The defensive end's 160 career sacks are the third highest tally in NFL history, with only Reggie White (198) and Bruce Smith (200) accumulating more during their careers. —AFP

#### European Golfer of the Year

LONDON: Veteran Lee Westwood has been named European Golfer of the Year for the fourth time, over 20 years after he first won the award. The 47-year-old Englishman rediscovered his old form in 2020, beginning when he won the Abu Dhabi Championship in January to make him the first active golfer to win a tour event across four separate decades. He rounded off the coronavirus-affected season by winning the Race to Dubai after finishing runner-up to Matt Fitzpatrick in the World Tour Championship earlier this month. He was the oldest ever winner of the Race to Dubai at 47 years, seven months and 20 days. The one thing Westwood still lacks is a Major. Ryder Cup captain Pádraig Harrington said based on his form this year, Westwood could entertain dreams of playing in next year's Europe v USA contest which would be his 11th appearance. —AFP

#### Zenhausern wins tight battle

ALTA BADIA: Switzerland's Ramon Zenhausern won a tight battle in the first World Cup men's slalom race of the season on Monday in Alta Badia. The 28-year-old, who had been eighth after the first run, edged out Austrians Manuel Feller and Marco Schwarz by 0.08sec and 0.12sec respectively. It was Zenhausern's fourth World Cup win and second in the slalom. His last victory in that event came in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia in March 2019. "I was a bit nervous, this being my first race of the season," said Zenhausern. It has been 10 months since the last slalom race was hosted in Chamonix, France before the coronavirus pandemic forced the ski season to be cancelled. "It's great to see that I have a good level and I'm looking forward to racing again tomorrow in Campiglio!" he said. Feller came out best in the battle behind the winner for second spot, claiming his first podium finish since March 2019. "It's the most emotional moment of my career," said Feller. —AFP

## Sports

# Abraham hits double as Chelsea sink West Ham

## Burnley find cutting edge to beat Wolves and escape bottom three



LONDON: West Ham United's Spanish midfielder Pablo Fornals (right) vies with Chelsea's Italian midfielder Jorginho during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and West Ham United on December 21, 2020. —AFP

LONDON: Tammy Abraham hit a quickfire late double on Monday as Chelsea beat West Ham 3-0 to reignite their Premier League challenge after a consecutive defeats. The Hammers proved tricky opponents at an empty Stamford Bridge but lacked the firepower to hurt Frank Lampard's men, who led early through Thiago Silva's bullet header. Chelsea enjoyed a strong start to the season before losses to Everton and Wolves checked their progress but the victory at the London Stadium lifts them into fifth spot.

Champions Liverpool have opened up a five-point gap at the top of the table but behind them, just seven points separate second-placed Leicester from 11th-placed Wolves. "It was nice to see that at the end because we had a period at 1-0 where it was tough, we dealt with that well," Lampard told the BBC. "We dropped off slightly and it was important tonight we came back," he added. "There were loads of things for the team to show their character—we want more."

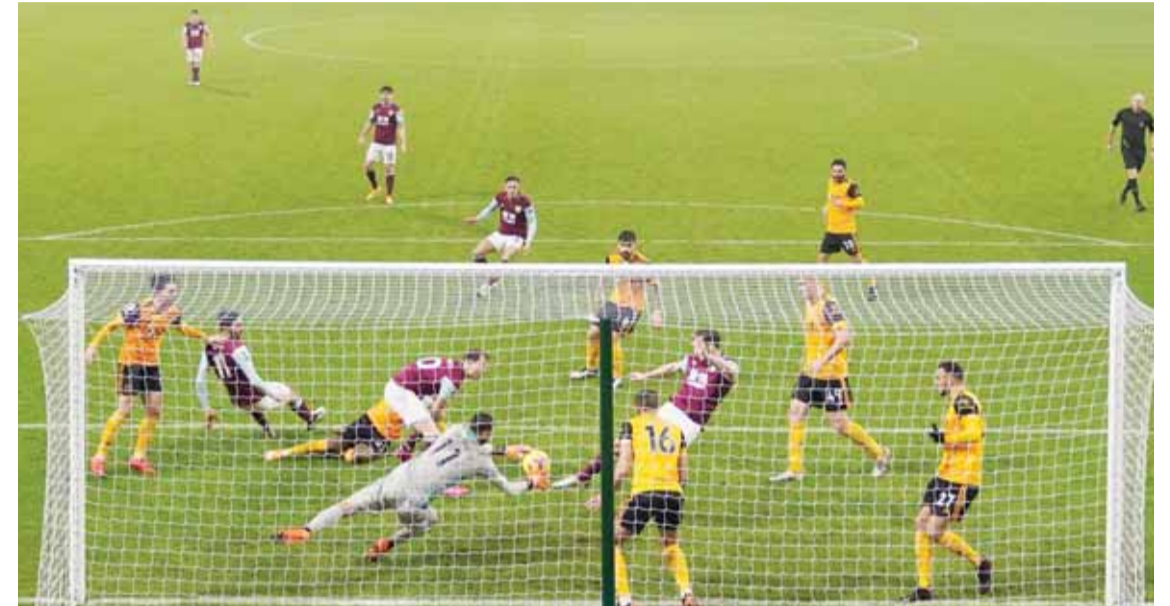
"Christmas has been changed for everybody this year. For the lads we just have to prepare for Arsenal, it's a busy time of year for us."

West Ham had the ball in the net in the seventh

minute after a cleverly worked free kick but Declan Rice was denied by the off-side flag after an impressive finish from a tight angle. Three minutes later Chelsea were in front when Silva powered home a header from Mason Mount's corner. The Brazilian found the net from close range after a well-timed run, leaving West Ham goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski rooted to the spot. Chelsea enjoyed the lion's share of possession after their goal without creating much of note but West Ham worked their way into the game as the half wore on.

### Werner goal drought

Timo Werner, who has not scored for Chelsea since early November, had a golden chance to double their lead in the closing minutes of the first period but got the ball caught under his feet and Fabianski saved comfortably. David Moyes's team made life uncomfortable for the home side after the break but did not make the most of their regular forays forward despite the introduction of forward Said Benrahma. They were made to pay when Abraham, back in the starting XI, doubled Chelsea's lead with 12 minutes to go, settling their nerves and ending his own drought. Werner cut inside and saw



BURNLEY: Burnley's New Zealand striker Chris Wood (center) scores their second goal during the English Premier League football match between Burnley and Wolverhampton Wanderers at Turf Moor in Burnley on December 21, 2020. —AFP

his scuffed shot tapped in by the England international, who was played inside by Aaron Cresswell.

Two minutes later Chelsea were 3-0 up when Abraham fired home from a tight angle after Fabianski had done well to keep out Christian Pulisic's header. That made it the eighth time Chelsea have scored at least three goals in a Premier League match this season—and they nearly had a fourth when Werner struck the crossbar with two minutes left. The win lifts Chelsea to 25 points—one behind fourth-placed Everton—while West Ham stay in 10th place.

### Burnley beat Wolves

Earlier, Burnley rediscovered their sharpness in front of goal to beat Wolves 2-1 on Monday and climb out of the Premier League's relegation zone. Scoring has been a headache for Sean Dyche's men, who had netted just six goals in 12 top-flight games before the match. But goals from Ashley Barnes and Chris Wood extended their unbeaten league run to four matches, lifting them to 16th in the table. Wolves started brightly at Turf Moor, with Pedro Neto testing Burnley goalkeeper Nick Pope after a driving run midway through the first period, but the

threat from the home side grew as the half wore on.

Barnes put Burnley ahead in the 35th minute after a quick counter attack, heading home at the far post after a cross from Charlie Taylor. It was his first goal in the Premier League since November 2019, ending a run of 970 minutes played in the competition without finding the net. Burnley continued to threaten and Josh Brownhill hit the crossbar with a right-footed shot from outside the box shortly after the restart. But they doubled their lead in the 51st minute after Wolves failed to deal with Ashley Westwood's free-kick.

Ben Mee headed the ball back into the danger zone where it came off Rayan Ait-Nouri before Wood blasted it into the roof of the net from point-blank range. Wolves boss Nuno Espirito Santo threw on Adama Traore and Fabio Silva as he sought a way back into the game. The away side dominated possession but could not find a way through the disciplined Burnley rearguard. Wolves earned themselves a lifeline when teenager Silva scored from the penalty spot in the 89th minute after he was brought down by Josh Benson. But despite late pressure from Wolves, Burnley held on to secure all three points. —Agencies

## Milan clubs jostle to end the year top of Serie A

MILAN: AC Milan and Inter Milan will be vying to end the year top of the Serie A table today as the city rivals push to deny Juventus a 10th consecutive "Scudetto" this season. Leaders AC Milan's unbeaten league run, which stretches back to March, faces a stiff test against Lazio in the San Siro. "We have one game left against Lazio and we might be able to achieve our first objective (staying top of Serie A) on December 23," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli. "It would add to our success in the Europa League this season, so we'd end a very positive year."

But Antonio Conte's Inter Milan are just one point behind in second before their trip to ninth-placed Hellas Verona. Inter last won the Serie A title

in 2010, with Milan taking the honors the following year. Since then Juventus have dominated. Andrea Pirlo's champions are third, four points behind AC Milan, and have a chance to pile the pressure on their northern rivals at home against struggling Fiorentina. Cristiano Ronaldo has been clinical as always, leading all Serie A scorers with 12 goals.

Juventus can also take advantage of injury worries among their rivals. Zlatan Ibrahimovic remains out for a sixth consecutive league match for Milan with a leg muscle injury, even if Pioli's side have shown they can win even without the towering presence of the 39-year-old Swede. But Pioli also has a crisis in midfield with Ismail Bennacer out, Franck Kessie suspended, and Sandro Tonali, Ante Rebic and Simon Kjær in doubt. "I'd like to have more options to choose from but we'll make the best of the situation as always," said Pioli.

"The squad has always done well in turning difficulties into a chance to



SASSUOLO: AC Milan's Portuguese forward Rafael Leao (left) and Sassuolo's Brazilian defender Marlon go for the ball as AC Milan's Italian coach Stefano Pioli (Rear right) looks on during the Italian Serie A football match Sassuolo vs AC Milan at the Mapei stadium in Sassuolo. —AFP

show something different and better. "But we still have a very difficult match to play, probably with few players available but we have the right mental-

ty and character. "We'll try and do it today against a difficult opponent. We have to grit our teeth and dig deep and then enjoy Christmas." —AFP

## Kuwait's Football League roundup

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The 14th round of Kuwait Football League (ranking phase) kicked off with an exciting match between two teams jockeying for a better place on the ranking table. The match ended with Qadisiya topping the table with a win against Kazma 3-1. Qadisiya's first goal came early in the

11th minute when Abdelaziz Wadi scored. Just 5 minutes later, Ahmad Al-Dhafiri doubled the score, while Bader Al-Mutawaa scored a third goal in the 81st minute from the penalty spot. Bandar Bouresli scored Kazma's only goal in the 88th minute. Qadisiya now have 31 points while Kazma have 25 (in third place).

The second match was between Yarmouk and Sulaibkhat, who are guaranteed to drop to the lower league. The match ended with Yarmouk defeating Sulaibkhat. Sunami Doof scored two goals and Athby Shihab scored one to raise their team's point total to 8, while Sulaibkhat remained stuck at 5.



## Tokyo Olympics unveil a budget of \$15.9 billion

TOKYO: The coronavirus-delayed Tokyo Olympics will cost at least 1.64 trillion yen (\$15.9 billion), organizers said yesterday, unveiling a final budget swollen by the unprecedented postponement and a raft of pandemic measures. The extra costs - up 294 billion yen (\$2.8 billion) from figures released a year ago - come as officials work to build enthusiasm for the first Games postponed in peacetime. A poll last week showed that a majority of Japanese oppose holding the Tokyo Games next year, favoring a further delay or outright cancellation of the massive event, and the latest budget could make the Tokyo Games the most expensive Summer Olympics in history.

Organizers, who have ruled out another delay and insist the Games can be held next year, defended the increased costs. "Whether you see this budget as expensive or not depends on how you look at it," said Tokyo 2020 CEO Toshiro Muto. "You can look at it from a cost perspective or an investment perspective. If you look at it purely in terms of cost, it doesn't make sense. But if you look at it as a positive investment, I think there are areas where it can be identified as such."

Organizers have tried to scale back elements of the Games in a bid to save money, scrapping athlete welcome ceremonies and scrimping on the all-important "look" of the event. But these savings - along with an expected 76 billion yen (\$735 million) in extra revenue from sponsors and insurance payments - have been outweighed by a plethora of extra costs, from rebooking venues and transport to retaining the huge organizing committee staff. —AFP

## Live Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH LEAGUE CUP  
Stoke City FC v Tottenham Hotspur 20:30  
beIN Sports  
Everton v Manchester United 23:00  
beIN Sports HD 2

SPANISH LEAGUE  
Real Valladolid v FC Barcelona 00:00  
beIN Sports HD 3  
Villarreal CF v Athletic de Bilbao 00:00  
beIN Sports HD 5  
Getafe CF v Celta de Vigo 19:30  
beIN Sports HD 1  
Real Madrid CF v Granada CF 21:45  
beIN Sports HD 1  
Deportivo Alaves v SD Eibar 00:00  
beIN Sports HD 3  
Real Betis v Cadiz CF 00:00  
beIN Sports HD 5

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE  
Hellas Verona FC v Inter Milan 20:30  
beIN Sports HD 4  
Bologna FC v Atalanta 22:45  
beIN Sports  
AC Milan v SS Lazio 22:45  
beIN Sports HD 4  
SSC Napoli v Torino FC 22:45  
beIN Sports HD 5  
AS Roma v Cagliari Calcio 22:45  
beIN Sports HD 8  
UC Sampdoria v US Sassuolo Calcio 22:45  
beIN Sports  
Spezia Calcio v Genoa CFC 22:45  
beIN Sports  
Udinese Calcio v Benevento 22:45  
beIN Sports

FRENCH LEAGUE  
Stade Rennais v FC Metz 21:00  
beIN Sports HD 10  
Bordeaux v Stade Reims 21:00  
beIN Sports HD 6  
Racing Club v Stade brestois 21:00  
beIN Sports HD 3  
OGC Nice v Lorient 21:00  
beIN Sports HD 7  
Nimes Olympique v FCO Dijon 21:00  
beIN Sports HD 9  
AS Monaco FC v Saint Etienne 23:00  
beIN Sports HD 9  
Angers v Olympique Marseille 23:00  
beIN Sports HD 7  
Paris Saint-Germain v RC Strasbourg 23:00  
beIN Sports HD 6  
Olympique Lyonnais v FC Nantes 23:00  
beIN Sports HD 10  
HSC Montpellier v LOSC Lille 23:00  
beIN Sports HD 3

**14** NBA will not 'jump the line' for COVID vaccine



**15** Milan clubs jostle to end the year on top of Serie A



**15** Abraham hits double as Chelsea sink West Ham



## Pittsburgh Bengals stun Steelers

Bernard scores two touchdowns in a 27-17 victory



CINCINNATI: Avery Williamson #51 and Minkah Fitzpatrick #39 of the Pittsburgh Steelers tackle Samaje Perine #34 of the Cincinnati Bengals at Paul Brown Stadium on December 21, 2020. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Cincinnati Bengals running back Giovani Bernard scored two touchdowns in a 27-17 victory as the Pittsburgh Steelers slid to a third consecutive defeat in a hard-fought divisional battle on Monday. The Steelers, looking for a win to clinch the AFC North after suffering back-to-back defeats, never recovered after a disastrous first half which saw the Bengals race into a 17-0 lead. Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger looked out of sorts

throughout as the Pittsburgh offense combined for a paltry 40 yards in the first two quarters with three turnovers and only two first downs.

The Bengals, meanwhile, long since eliminated from playoff contention with only two wins against 10 losses heading into Monday's game, were on the front foot from the outset. An Austin Seibert field goal put the Bengals ahead in the first quarter, before Bernard scored the first of his two touchdowns in the second

quarter after rushing into the end zone from four yards. Roethlisberger then coughed up an interception on the Steelers' next possession, when his pass intended for Juju Smith-Schuster was picked off by Cincinnati cornerback Mackensie Alexander.

From the ensuing drive, Bengals quarterback Ryan Finley connected with Bernard for a 14-yard touchdown to make it 17-0 at halftime. The Steelers rallied after the interval with 10 unanswered

points in the third quarter, Roethlisberger picking out Diontae Johnson for 23 yards and a touchdown before Chris Boswell's field goal from 25 yards made it 17-10. But Cincinnati continued to cause problems for the Steelers defense, and a clever play fake sent the entire Pittsburgh cover the wrong way to allow Finley to sprint clear into the end zone for a 23-yard rush that made it 24-10.

Although Benny Snell Jr. cut the Bengals lead to seven points with a

touchdown with just over five minutes remaining, Pittsburgh's chances of forcing overtime vanished when they turned over on downs with just under two minutes left. Seibert's second field goal of the night with 12 seconds remaining sealed the win. The defeat means the Steelers now face a nervous finale to the regular season, with the Cleveland Browns just one game behind in the divisional standings on 10-4. The Steelers lead the division on 11-3. — AFP



NAPIER: Pakistan batsman Mohammad Rizwan gains his ground to avoid a run-out during the third T20 cricket match between New Zealand and Pakistan at McLean Park in Napier yesterday. — AFP

## Rizwan-inspired Pakistan stop New Zealand sweep

NAPIER: Mohammad Rizwan celebrated his elevation to the Pakistan Test captaincy in style yesterday, smashing a career-best 89 to stop New Zealand claiming a series sweep in the third Twenty20 in Napier. Pakistan reached New Zealand's target of 174 with two balls to spare, ending on 177 after Ifkhar Ahmed sealed the win with a six in the final over. But it was Rizwan's 89 from 59 balls, with support from 41-run Mohammad Hafeez, that inspired the victory.

It was a hard-fought win for the tourists, who suffered heavy defeats in the two opening matches after a rocky preparation

that included Covid-19 quarantine in Christchurch with no training. The win was particularly sweet for Rizwan, who was named on Monday as captain for the first Test against New Zealand starting December 26 after regular skipper Babar Azam was ruled out with a broken thumb. "I never thought I'd be made the captain of Pakistan and I can't explain my happiness," he said after his man-of-the-match T20 performance.

Rizwan said the T20 victory was an important morale booster ahead of the two-Test series against the Black Caps. "We

want to take momentum from this into the Test match, so this is very important for us," he said. After two losses when batting first, Pakistan changed tactics and opted to bowl when they won the toss, restricting New Zealand to 173 for seven, with Devon Conway top-scoring on 63. Faheem Ashraf was the pick of the Pakistan attack, taking three for 20. The strategy of chasing down New Zealand's total paid off as Rizwan and Hafeez forged a 72-run partnership that laid the foundation for the win.

Hafeez, who was stranded on 99 in Hamilton, made 41 from 29 balls including three sixes. Rizwan's innings, the sixth-highest by a Pakistan batsman in T20s, included a booming six that bounced off the roof of a stand and out of the ground, forcing the umpires to select a replacement ball. — AFP

## Will cricket's bubble burst in 2021?

LONDON: International cricket found a way through this year's coronavirus pandemic but the strain of 'bubble life' was evident by the end of 2020. The women's Twenty20 World Cup, won by Australia in front of a Melbourne crowd of more than 86,000 on March 8, escaped the ravages of Covid-19 but the men's game soon ground to a halt during an Australia-New Zealand series.

In a perfect summary of the topsy-turvy cricket year, India eventually went to Australia and were bowled out for 36 in a humiliating first Test defeat. After the March lockdown, international cricket, sustained by the broadcast income from tours and tournaments, did not resume again until the England-West Indies Test series in July. That month also saw the International Cricket Council announce it was postponing this year's men's World Twenty20 in Australia until 2022.

The England-West Indies series, played at the 'bio-secure' venues of Southampton and Manchester, established a template for cricket amid the

pandemic and spared the England and Wales Cricket Board, one of the wealthier national governing bodies, from a crippling financial hit. But the ECB still postponed its new domestic Hundred tournament, a 100 balls per side competition for men and women, while announcing 62 redundancies and pay cuts for players.

The ECB also forecast a loss of more than £100 million (\$135 million) this year, potentially rising to £200 million in 2021. West Indies won the first Test but lost the series. Together with Pakistan, another of world cricket's financially poorer leading sides, the West Indies spent much of 2020 on the road, the two teams travelling to both England and New Zealand. West Indies captain Jason Holder, who played in another bubble during a lucrative Indian Premier League moved to the United Arab Emirates on health grounds, articulated the stresses of cricket in confinement.

### Room gets smaller

"Going from bubble to bubble, being isolated in a room, sometimes the room just gets smaller and smaller by the second," said Holder following the second of West Indies' two innings defeats in New Zealand earlier this month. Meanwhile England's Tom Banton and Tom Curran both withdrew from Australia's Big Bash League after citing bubble fatigue. — AFP