



2 Vaccination of health workers begins today



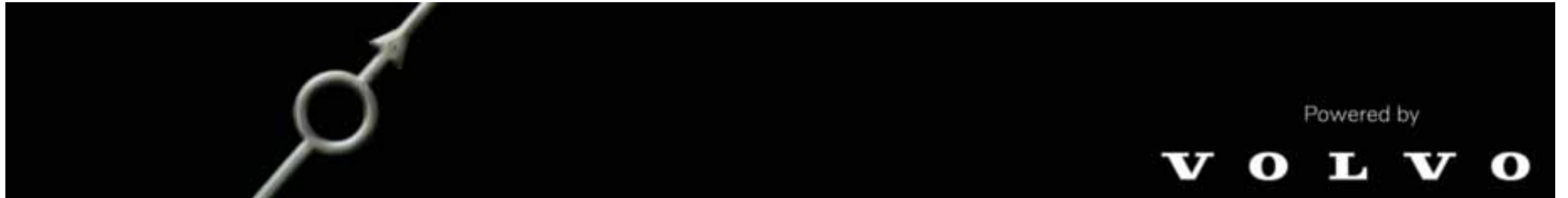
5 Breakfast, freezers, Lego: On the vaccine trail in Germany



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16 Breaking the ice: Israel-UAE hockey match makes history



Kuwait arrests 3 'extremists' with weapons, ammunition

Two juveniles among those arrested • Suspects recruited online

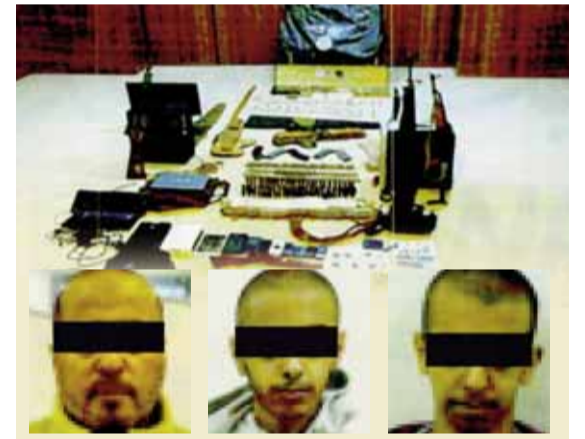


KUWAIT: A policeman stands guard as Christians pray on Friday in front of the Holy Family Cathedral, which was closed by authorities. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: The interior ministry yesterday announced authorities have arrested two juveniles (aged 15 and 16) and another man with unlicensed weapons and ammunition, who had adopted extremist ideology. It said following cooperation between security departments, one of the suspects was arrested, who confessed he became acquainted with a person on social media, and exchanges between them revealed they both shared the same extremist ideology.

The ministry said two other persons were later arrested, one of whom is a juvenile. Their homes were searched and firearms, ammunition, extremist paraphernalia and cameras were found. The suspects were referred to concerned authorities for further legal action.

On Thursday, a statement on Twitter by Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah said the ministry "has deployed foot patrols of fully equipped special forces units inside residential complexes and shopping malls" in a "step aimed at imposing discipline and observing the law". The statement did not give the immediate reason for the security alert, but the measure coincided with the disclosure by local media of what was said to be a plot by the Islamic State terrorist group to use Kuwaiti teenagers to carry out attacks in the country.



The cache of weapons and extremist paraphernalia recovered from three suspects who were arrested.

On Wednesday, Kuwait's state security arrested six Kuwaiti teenagers linked to IS, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported. Quoting a source at the state security, the newspaper said the arrests were made after

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News in brief

Turkish minister in Libya

TRIPOLI: Turkey's Defense Minister Hulusi Akar made a surprise trip to Libya yesterday, two days after strongman Khalifa Haftar urged his fighters to drive out Turkish forces from the oil-rich country. The Turkish defense ministry said Akar would inspect Turkish forces in Libya during the visit, while Libyan officials said talks would focus on military cooperation between Tripoli and Ankara. Turkey also has a large military base in Al-Watiya region on Libya's border with Tunisia. — AFP

Egypt hospital fire kills 7

CAIRO: A fire at a hospital north of Cairo yesterday killed seven coronavirus patients, security and judicial sources said. The blaze in the intensive care unit of the hospital in Obour district, on the outskirts of Cairo, also injured five other people, the sources said. Firefighters were dispatched to the facility and stopped the blaze from spreading, local media reported. Egypt has so far registered 130,126 COVID-19 cases, including 7,309 fatalities. — AFP

Bibi invites Morocco king

JERUSALEM: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Morocco's King Mohammed VI held a telephone conversation during which the Israeli premier invited the king for a visit, Netanyahu's office said Friday. The phone call comes three days after an Israeli delegation signed a US-sponsored normalization agreement with Morocco in Rabat. During the "warm and friendly" conversation, Netanyahu invited Mohammed VI to visit Israel, the statement from the prime minister's office said. — AFP

Don't squander sacrifices: WHO

GENEVA: The sacrifices made to protect people during the coronavirus pandemic must not be squandered over the festive period, the World Health Organization's chief said in a Christmas message. Millions were making "heart-wrenching sacrifices" by staying away from loved ones on Christmas Day, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a video clip posted to Twitter, while others will have a missing face at the family table. — AFP

Nazaha refers MoE supervisor to prosecution

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) referred a former supervisor at the ministry of education to the public prosecution on charges of squandering public funds. In a press statement yesterday, Nazaha said the referral of the supervisor to the public prosecution comes as a

Major blast hits Nashville after bomb warning

WASHINGTON: A huge blast tore through a section of downtown Nashville early Friday, after police responding to reports of gunfire discovered a parked motorhome blaring a warning that it carried a bomb. The powerful explosion shattered windows and ripped apart trees, wounding several people when it detonated at 6:30 am (1230 GMT) in a section of the southern US city that was largely deserted due the early hour and the Christmas Day holiday.

Police chief John Drake told reporters there were no confirmed fatalities, but authorities were examining tissue found at the blast site that they believe could be human remains. He added the city - known as a hub for American country music - had not received any threats, and a possible motive for the attack was unknown.

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EU readies vaccination rollout

PARIS: Countries around Europe were yesterday preparing to roll out their first coronavirus vaccines even as a reputedly more contagious variant spreads around the world, forcing some nations back into lockdown. The impending inoculation campaigns have boosted hopes that 2021 could bring a respite from the pandemic, which has killed more than 1.7 million people since emerging in China late last year.

First doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine arrived in EU countries including hard-hit Italy, Spain and France early yesterday, ready for distribution to retirement homes and care staff. "We'll get our freedom back, we'll be able to embrace again," Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said as he urged his countrymen to get the shot. But polls show only 57 percent of Italians intend to get the job whereas scientists estimate herd immunity can only be reached if 75 to 80 percent have it.

Vaccinations in all 27 European Union countries are set to begin today, after regulators approved the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine on Dec 21.

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NASHVILLE: Damage is seen on a street after an explosion on Friday. — AFP



RIYADH: A handout picture provided on Friday shows Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman receiving his first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. — AFP

Local

Kuwait begins first stage of COVID-19 vaccination today

Trial vaccination a success: Ministry Spokesman

KUWAIT: Health Ministry personnel completed preparations at the Kuwait International Fairground in Mishref yesterday to start the first stage of vaccination against COVID-19 today, targeting health workers at the frontlines and who are exposed to the virus. Director of Public Health Department Dr Fahad Al-Qimlas was present and met with health workers who are covered by the first stage of the vaccination. Meanwhile, Ministry Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad noted that the ministry's vaccination plan focuses mainly on giving priority to medical personnel in the first phase of the campaign. Furthermore, he affirmed that the ministry's health cadres were invited via text messages with the vaccination date and place.

Dr Sanad had earlier announced the success of the trial vaccination campaign against the novel coronavirus. "There were no unexpected side effects recorded by those who had the first dose" on Thursday, Dr Sanad said in a press statement. "The campaign will commence its work officially on Sunday according to the registered appointments on the ministry's website using the QR code, and the medical staff will have a priority," he noted.

The trial vaccination campaign began on



KUWAIT: Health workers listen to instructions ahead of the start of the first stage of vaccination against COVID-19, at Kuwait International Fairground in Mishref yesterday. — KUNA photos

Thursday at Kuwait International Fairgrounds in presence of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah. "We start this campaign upon the arrival of the Pfizer vaccine to

Kuwait, and will continue over the upcoming few months until everyone in the country is vaccinated," said the Prime Minister in a press statement. A large number of elderly people and health workers

have joined the campaign in its early hours, and with the cooperation of the authorities which helped ease the process, the campaign seeks to defeat this pandemic. — KUNA

Saudi King requests formal invitations to GCC Summit

RIYADH: The General Secretariat of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) announced yesterday that the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has requested from GCC Secretary General, Dr Nayef Falah Al-Hajraf, to invite their Majesties and Highnesses, the leaders of the GCC states to attend the 41st GCC Summit being held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on January 5, 2021.

Dr Hajraf, said: "I had the honor today to personally deliver King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud's invitation to the President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan to attend the 41st GCC Summit taking place in Riyadh on January 5, 2021. The invitation was received by the Vice-President of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum today in Dubai."

Dr Hajraf said: "The commitment by Gulf leaders to hold the summit on an annual basis, and especially in these exceptional times, is a testament to the strength of the GCC, to their belief in their duty to the people of the Gulf, and their devotion to increasing cooperation and integration among member countries."



Today, as the GCC enters its fifth decade with a global pandemic in the backdrop, the institution's mission to facilitate trade and economic integration among member states is more relevant than at any time in its history. The GCC remains focused on meeting the ambitions of the Gulf people, increasing integration, interconnectedness, and trade among member states and the international community. I am grateful to their Majesties and Highnesses, the leaders of the GCC states, for their tireless efforts to further strengthen Gulf cooperation."

The GCC has held an annual meeting of the Supreme Council to discuss coordination, integration, and interconnection between the member States and their citizens in economic development, commerce, education, and culture. The GCC's focus today is on meeting the ambitions of the region's young and digital population and enabling them to drive the region forward while remembering their shared heritage.

Minister rules out police academy exemptions

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah said that Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences allows no exemption in the enrolment of new cadets. "As a prestigious scientific institution producing well-trained security cadres, the academy selects the new students based on scientific rules, fairness and equal opportunities for all away from any exemptions," he affirmed during an inspection tour of the academy Thursday.

Sheikh Thamer, accompanied by senior security officers, was welcomed by the academy's director General Maj Gen Nasser Bouresli, according to a press release from the General Directorate of Security Relations and Media.

He noted that the academy spares no effort in providing quality training for the cadets and building their capacity with a view to creating an integrated security system able to ensure the security and stability of the country.

The minister conveyed to the academy's leaders, teaching staff, personnel and cadet the greetings and best wishes of the higher political leadership of the country. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah (center) is seen during the tour. — Interior Ministry photo

Kuwait arrests 3 'extremists'...

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it was found the teenagers were lured to embrace IS ideology through online games. A squad of security officers raided the house of one of the teenagers in Ahmadi after obtaining permission from the public prosecution.

They arrested the teenager and referred him to the juvenile investigation office, where he admitted he has been in contact with IS for some time. The teenager told interrogators that a person communicated with him through a popular online game, and deliberately joined his team during the game. The IS man then communicated with him through social media platforms and

asked him to embrace the ideology of IS. He was also asked to convince his friends to join IS. The teenager said he succeeded in convincing five others.

During the raids, firearms and several computers containing correspondence with the terrorist group were confiscated. Official investigations related to the case of the arrested juveniles revealed IS members had tasked these juveniles with targeting places of worship and commercial complexes on New Year's Eve.

Al-Qabas quoted sources as saying that the ring-leader of the arrested juvenile suspects was the son of a former member of the National Assembly. The sources said "security forces had clear and explicit orders to take all precautions and to deal promptly and decisively with any suspect, and to report everything that is going on moment by moment to security leaders".

According to a report in Al-Anbaa Arabic daily, a security source said authorities had foiled a plan by

two juveniles that targeted a place of worship of an Asian community in Ardiya (the building is currently closed). The source said the youths were recruited through online games allegedly by members of IS.

The source said interior ministry operations received a call about a juvenile who left an AK-47 machinegun in front of the house of an officer following an argument with another juvenile. The juvenile who left the weapon was identified and questioned. He said another person of his age contacted him and asked him to carry out a terrorist act against an Asian community's place of worship.

The youth said he thought it was a joke, but was surprised when the other youth, who lives in Fahaheel, handed him a firearm and asked him to accompany him to the place of worship in Ardiya. But he did not oblige after he realized it was a serious matter. The source said state security raided the Fahaheel juvenile's home and found another weapon and IS flags.

Major blast hits Nashville after...

Continued from Page 1

The explosion could be felt miles away and damaged dozens of businesses - scattering glass, debris and bricks as well as provoking the collapse of one building in an area with numerous bars, restaurants and shops. In a dramatic sequence of events that shattered the Christmas morning calm, police rushed to the area after getting reports of gunshots and noticed the vehicle as they arrived on the scene.

A recorded message playing from the motorhome warned that a bomb would detonate within 15 minutes - enough time for a bomb squad to clear the area before the explosion, Drake and police spokesman Don Aaron told reporters earlier Friday. Witnesses told the Tennessean newspaper the warning, spoken in a woman's voice, counted down to the blast. "Evacuate now. There is a bomb. A bomb is in this vehicle and will explode," one recalled the chilling recording saying.

Pictures shared on social media from the immediate aftermath showed thick plumes of black smoke rising from the burning RV and storefronts that had been torn apart. The blast happened near an AT&T facility, knocking out phone service for many in the area. The telecommunications company said that "given the damage to our facility it will take time to restore service". The Nashville International Airport announced it had temporarily

halted flights due to "telecommunications issues" associated with the blast.

Officers began knocking on doors and evacuating residents due the bomb warning, not knowing if or when the detonation could come. A dog walker had been heading towards the vehicle just before the blast, the Tennessean newspaper said, but police turned him back, potentially saving him from serious injury or death. The blast knocked an officer to the ground, the paper said, and gave another officer hearing loss.

Both President Donald Trump and President-elect Joe Biden were briefed on the incident, which is being investigated by the FBI and the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. "This appears to have been an intentional act. Law enforcement is closing downtown streets as investigation continues," the Metro Nashville Police Department tweeted.

Firefighters said at least three people were taken to the hospital with minor injuries, according to local media. The damage was "limited but it is dramatic," Nashville mayor John Cooper said, adding that the city was "lucky" the blast had occurred on Christmas when few people were downtown. "It's unfortunate but any other morning I think it would have been a much worse story."

Biden issued a statement saying he and his wife Jill Biden "thank all the first responders working today in response to the incident, and wish those who were injured a speedy recovery". Trump's spokesman Judd Deere tweeted that the president is "grateful for the incredible first responders and praying for those who were injured." — AFP

EU readies vaccination...

Continued from Page 1

But a new strain that emerged in Britain and spread rapidly has sent jitters through already overstretched health services as countries from Sweden to Japan have reported cases. Austria began its third national lockdown yesterday and millions also woke to tougher restrictions in Britain, where the vaccine rollout has already begun.

France, Spain and Sweden are among the countries confirming that the new virus strain has reached their shores. French officials said late on Friday that a Frenchman living in Britain had tested positive after arriving from London, adding that he was not showing symptoms and was isolating. Four cases were confirmed in Madrid yesterday, though the patients were not seriously ill, the Madrid regional government's deputy health chief Antonio Zapatero said, adding "there is no need for alarm".

The new strain, which experts fear is more contagious, prompted more than 50 countries to impose travel restrictions on the UK. Thousands of trucks backed up in southern England, but the bottleneck eased after France lifted a 48-hour entry ban for drivers with a negative coronavirus test. South Africa has detected a virus mutation in some infected people but on Friday denied British claims its strain was more infectious or

Two caught with 4,075 liquor bottles

KUWAIT: Ahmadi police arrested two men who had 4,075 bottles of homebrewed liquor in their possession, the Interior Ministry announced yesterday. Patrolmen had stopped the two after noticing they were behaving abnormally, and arrested them after finding the bottles. The suspects were sent to concerned authorities for further action.

dangerous than the one originating in the UK.

In Asia, China's communist leadership issued a statement hailing the "extremely extraordinary glory" of its handling of the virus, state news agency Xinhua reported. Japanese capital Tokyo reported a record 949 new daily cases while Thailand has seen a new outbreak linked to a seafood market near Bangkok infect almost 1,500 people.

In Australia, there was little sign of the usual rush to the Boxing Day sales in Sydney, with residents largely heeding the state premier's request they stay home faced with a new virus cluster. "Even when we entered the store there were less than 10 people," shopper Lia Gunawan told The Sydney Morning Herald.

Across the world, people are being urged to respect social distancing guidelines. "Vaccines are offering the world a way out of this tragedy. But it will take time for the whole world to be vaccinated," said World Health Organization Tedros chief Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Friday. In the Vatican, Pope Francis pleaded for "vaccines for all" in his traditional Christmas message on Friday, urging leaders from politics and beyond to find a solution "especially the most vulnerable and most in need".

In authoritarian post-Soviet Turkmenistan, where the government says no coronavirus cases have been detected, President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov claimed that licorice root could cure COVID-19. Without citing any scientific evidence, former dentist Berdimukhamedov claimed that "licorice stops the coronavirus from developing". — AFP

Local

Major events concerning Kuwait's Amir in 2020

KUWAIT: In 2020, Kuwait witnessed several major developments including the passing away of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the ascension of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to power. Those are the major events connected with the leadership this year:

Jan 1: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah ordered the hoisting of flags at half-mast on public and governmental buildings across Kuwait in three days of mourning due to the death of Sultan of Oman Qaboos bin Said.

Jan 12: His Highness the Amir headed to Oman to pay respect to late Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

Jan 28: His Highness the Amir attended the flag hoisting ceremony at Bayan Palace.

Jan 16: Amiri decree issued appointing Dr Khaled Al-Fadhel as Minister of Oil, Maryam Al-Aqeel as Minister of State for Social Affairs and Minister of State for Economic Affairs, Mubarak Al-Sheetan as Minister of Finance, and Mohammad Bushehri as Minister of Water and Electricity.

Feb 17: His Highness the Amir attended the graduation ceremony of Ali Al-Sabah Military academy's 46th batch of officers.

March 2: His Highness the Amir ordered the honoring of staff tasked with countering the coronavirus (COVID-19) spread.

March 17: His Highness the Amir tasked authorities to help Iran, Iraq, and Palestine in their efforts to counter COVID-19.

March 22: His Highness the Amir addressed citizens and residents in a speech, calling for cooperation and solidarity to face the COVID-19 pandemic.

March 23: His Highness the Amir headed an exceptional meeting for the cabinet.

March 26: His Highness the Amir allocated KD 10 million to fund the emergency program tasked with curbing the spread of the coronavirus.

April 1: His Highness the Amir ordered, on behalf of Al-Sabah family, the donation of KD 5 million for the coronavirus response fund.

April 19: His Highness the Amir addressed the citizens marking the start of nationals' repatriation from abroad, sharing families of the returnees' jubilation with their loved ones' return.

May 9: His Highness the Amir, in his statement marking the last 10 days of the fasting month of Ramadan, urged the Cabinet and National Assembly, amidst the coronavirus crisis, to work out a program for rationing expenditures and minimizing dependence on a "sole virtually depleting resource so our children and next generations may enjoy a prosperous future."

May 22: His Highness the Amir addressed the citizens and residents on Eid Al-Fitr, calling for decent publicity rhetoric and media message that backs up efforts against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

July 18: An Amiri Diwan decree empowered His Highness the Crown Prince with some constitutional jurisdictions of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah temporarily.

July 18: Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah announced that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was admitted to the hospital for a medical checkup.

July 19: Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah announced that His Highness the Amir underwent a successful surgery.

July 23: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad flew to the US for follow-up medical treatment.

Aug 4: His Highness Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah ordered the dispatch of medical aid to Lebanon immediately in aftermath of a huge explosion at Beirut port.

Aug 23: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince, in an address to the citizens, emphasized the necessity of the rule of law and national unity. He also urged for refraining from irresponsible acts that threaten the homeland, fomenting discords, addressing sources of corruption, tackling hefty spending, reforms in the educational, youth, economic and demographical sectors.

Sept 18: Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah announced that US President Donald Trump granted the Legion of Merit, Degree Chief Commander, to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, at a ceremony held at the White House.

Sept 29: The Amiri Diwan, addressing the Kuwaiti people, Arab and Muslim nations, announced the demise of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Sept 29: The State of Kuwait declared 40 days of national mourning, with three-day closure of government departments for the passing of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad.

Sept 29: The Cabinet proclaimed His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as the Amir of the State of Kuwait according to the Constitution and the Emirate Inheritance Law.

Sept 30: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah took the oath at an extraordinary session of the National Assembly.

Sept 30: The late Amir, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, was laid to rest after

Feb 13: Former governor of Farwaniya Abdulhameed Haji passed away at age 82.

March 29: Theater actor and arts pioneer Suleiman Al-Yaseen passed away at age 71.

March 30: Former Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs as well as former Islamic Affairs and chairman of the Islamic Charitable Society Yousef Al-Haji passed away at age 97. He was a leading figure in Kuwaiti charity scene.

May 17: Researcher and writer Mohammad Al-Ibrahim died at the age of 84. He was renowned for contributing to the establishment of the first Kuwaiti school, Al-Mubarakiya School.

June 2: Retired Major General Salem Al-Srouer passed away. He was 74. He would be remembered as a hero of the Kuwaiti resistance against the Iraqi occupation and commander of the famous Al-Josoor battle.

June 12: The Adviser at the Amiri Diwan and the former finance minister, Abdulrahman Al-Atiqi, passed away at the age of 92.

June 12: The eminent media personnel Faisal Al-Ginaee passed away. He was 70. He was deemed the pillar of the Arab and Kuwaiti press.

June 16: The former minister of transports Habib Johar Hayat died at the end of 86.

June 17: The former deputy chairman of Kuwait News Agency and the honorary chairman of Kuwaiti Journalists Association Ahmad Bahbahani died at the age of 79.

Sept 29: The Amiri Diwan mourned death of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, renowned for his great givings, achievements and good deeds throughout his life, capped with his designation by the former UN sec-



KUWAIT: In this Sept 30, 2020 file photo, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah takes oath at an extraordinary session of the National Assembly. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

he was brought to the homeland by air from the US.

Sept 30: The Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council held a eulogy session for Kuwaiti Amir His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad while the UN flew its flags to half-mast at its headquarters in New York.

Oct 7: Minister of the Amiri Diwan Sheikh Ali Al-Jarrah said Al-Sabah family blessed nomination by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah of Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as Crown Prince.

Oct 20: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, in his address during the inauguration of the National Assembly's regular session of the fifth legislative term, affirmed adherence to the Constitution and the state of law. He also underscored the necessity of commitment to the deep-rooted national principles with respect to unity, solidarity and cooperation.

Oct 26: Justice Ahmad Al-Ajeel took the oath before His Highness the Amir on his appointment as head of the supreme judicial council and the court of cassation.

Nov 2: His Highness the Amir visited the ministry of defense headquarters, praising the personnel for their efforts in combating the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Dec 6: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah issued decree calling for commencement of the 16th legislative term of the National Assembly on December 15.

Dec 6: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad issued decree approving the resignation of the cabinet led by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. He assigned him as head of the care-take government until the formation of a new incarnation.

Dec 8: His Highness the Amir issued a decree assigning His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled as Prime Minister and tasked him with the formation of a new cabinet.

Dec 14: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad issued a decree forming the new 15-ministers government and charged His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled with leading it.

Dec 15: His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad inaugurated the first session of the 16th legislative term of the National Assembly.

Dec 15: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, in his Amiri address to the opening session of the 16th legislative of parliament, stressed that the imperativeness of addressing challenges facing the country, focusing on efforts to prioritize reforms and boost development. — KUNA

Kuwait lost Sheikh Sabah, ex-ministers, other VIPs in 2020

KUWAIT: Kuwait suffered the heavy loss of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, a number of former ministers and senior officials throughout the passing year. Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad had experienced Kuwait's development since pre-independence times in the 1960s till his last day. His life was also marked with his designation by the UN as Leader of Humanitarian Action for his renowned contributions to aiding nations in need. Within a short period of time after Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad's demise, Kuwait mourned the death of Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, a former deputy prime minister and minister of defense, a farsighted leader that contributed to Kuwait's development and acted diligently to uproot corruption. The following report chronicles the 2020 demise of His Highness the Amir, several ex-ministers and leaders; survived by their works and contributions to Kuwait's development:

Jan 19: Sadoun Al-Jassem, a former Information Ministry undersecretary, passed away at age 88.

Jan 28: Former footballer for Qadisiya club and the Kuwaiti national team Mohammad Al-Masoud passed away at age 75.

Feb 12: Former chairman of Kuwait Football Association (KFA) and the Qadisiya sports club Abdulaziz Al-Mekhlid passed away at age 85.

Feb 13: Former governor of Farwaniya Abdulhameed Haji passed away at age 82.

March 29: Theater actor and arts pioneer Suleiman Al-Yaseen passed away at age 71.

March 30: Former Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs as well as former Islamic Affairs and chairman of the Islamic Charitable Society Yousef Al-Haji passed away at age 97. He was a leading figure in Kuwaiti charity scene.

May 17: Researcher and writer Mohammad Al-Ibrahim died at the age of 84. He was renowned for contributing to the establishment of the first Kuwaiti school, Al-Mubarakiya School.

June 2: Retired Major General Salem Al-Srouer passed away. He was 74. He would be remembered as a hero of the Kuwaiti resistance against the Iraqi occupation and commander of the famous Al-Josoor battle.

June 12: The Adviser at the Amiri Diwan and the former finance minister, Abdulrahman Al-Atiqi, passed away at the age of 92.

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KUWAIT: The funeral prayer is performed on the coffin of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in the Bilal bin Rabah mosque on Sept 30, 2020. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

retary general Ban ki-Moon as Leader of Humanitarian Action.

Oct 24: The former undersecretary of social affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mazroui passed way. He was 83.

Dec 4: Former Minister of Electricity and Water and businessman Abdulaziz Al-Shaya passed away

at age 49. He was a well-known figure who contributed to the development of Kuwait in several sectors.

Dec 20: The Amiri Diwan mourns the death of former first Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at age 72. — KUNA

Major events connected with Kuwait's Crown Prince in 2020

KUWAIT: The Crown Prince position saw an integral shift during 2020 with the ascension of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to power after the passing away of His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The following are the major activities and events carried out by the Crown Prince:

Feb 10: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, representing His Highness the Amir, patronized the 2019 awards for the Kuwait Foundation for Scientific Advancement (KFAS).

Oct 8: His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah took the oath before the National Assembly. In his statement after swearing-in, Sheikh Mishal pledged to be a solid supporter and sincere adviser to His Highness the Amir and a faithful citizen to attain Kuwait's prosperity, sponsor national interests and unity of the people.

Oct 13: His Highness the Crown Prince received the chairman and Secretary General of Kuwait Red Crescent Society, and commended KRCS's noble contributions to alleviate suffering of ill-fated people and spreading awareness about importance of volunteering.

Oct 19: His Highness the Crown Prince, while receiving board members of Kuwait Chamber of



KUWAIT: His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah greets His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah after taking oath as Kuwait's Crown Prince. — KUNA

Commerce and Industry, called for boosting integration between public and private sector to contribute to sustainable development.

Nov 3: His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad underlined importance of direct investment to transfer knowledge and technology, and achieve economic sustainability, create jobs and diversify income to honor New Kuwait 2035 Vision.

Nov 15: His Highness the Crown Prince received Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shukri and reiterated deep-rooted relations with Cairo. Nov 18: His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad called for further promotion of role of Kuwait stock market to economic development. — KUNA

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Local

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Established 1961
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THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

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ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
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CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
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Kuwaiti loan to Palestinian health sector

GAZA: The Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR) announced that it has delivered a new set of medical equipment to the European Gaza Hospital by the support of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development's (KFAED) loan of \$2.8 million. The council's head of board Mohammad Abu Awad said in a press statement that this loan by KFAED is to support the Palestinian Health sector. Abu Awad expressed his gratitude to Kuwait for this aid and to the support of KFAED and the Islamic Bank for their efforts to facilitate the purchase of the medical equipment needed to enable the Palestinian health sector to face the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). —KUNA

Japan hails Kuwait's efforts to end dispute

TOKYO: Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi on Friday hailed Kuwait's efforts to solve the Qatari diplomatic issue, expressing hope for improved relations among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. "We are aware that there are positive movements such as a statement issued by the Kuwaiti government that a final agreement has been reached to solve the Qatari issue. The Japanese government highly appreciates the efforts of Kuwait and other related countries, and hopes that these efforts will lead to the solution of the issue," Motegi told a press conference. Motegi said there are reports that the Qatar diplomatic issue will be taken up at the coming GCC summit. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: People spend time outdoors in front of the Holy Family cathedral in Kuwait City on December 25, 2020, as the church was closed by the authorities in a bid to avoid the spread of the novel coronavirus. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Zain sponsors virtual talk hosted by GUST and ASCC

Featuring former NASA Engineer Aisha Bowe

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its sponsorship of a virtual lecture hosted by Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) in partnership with Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem Cultural Centre (ASCC). The event, held on Instagram Live, featured Aisha Bowe, a former engineer at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and focused on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields.

The first Spheres of Knowledge episode, moderated by Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem Cultural Centre, and joined by former NASA engineer Aisha Bowe, centered on the topic of "NASA, Entrepreneurship and the Importance of STEM Education". During this discussion, Bowe shared with the viewers her personal experiences at NASA, addressed the challenges that come with diversifying Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields, and discussed how she started her own STEM-related business.

Bowe also provided valuable and actionable tips and advice for women looking to enter or advance



in the field of engineering and technology. This was then concluded with a lively Q&A session. Her participation was facilitated in coordination with the US Embassy in Kuwait.

Commenting on Zain's sponsorship, Waleed Al-Khashti, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer said: "Our main goal in supporting this initiative is to inspire the younger generation to look beyond what is traditionally available to them in terms of academics and career prospects. We hope for them to pass by the challenges that come along their education and career journeys, and follow a path that speaks to them and achieve what is fulfilling to them personally - as that is the true motivator for success."

Dr Albaraa Altourah, Assistant Professor of Mass Communications and Chair of the Global Studies Centre at GUST, said, "The Spheres of Knowledge collaboration with the prestigious Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem Cultural Centre highlights our joint mission as educational institutions that strives to enlighten and expose the public and our students to topics they would not normally come into contact with, and therefore to stimulate their minds to ignite a spark for knowledge that would otherwise go undisturbed."

Since its launch, Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem Cultural Centre has strived to elevate the role and standing of science in Kuwait. As an institution



Waleed Al-Khashti



Dr Albaraa Altourah

with a vested interest in the cultivation of young minds, this collaboration with GUST blossomed as a natural progression to move closer to its goal.

The Spheres of Knowledge event continues the university's tradition of bringing together experts, scholars, and industry professionals from a variety of fields to its campus through the many academic centers it hosts, such as the Centre for Teaching Learning and Research (CTLR), and the Global Studies Centre. Zain's sponsorship to this initiative comes under its comprehensive strategy to support sustainability, entrepreneurship, and innovation. The discussion was hosted on GUST's Instagram account, and can be watched in its entirety on its IGTV tab (instagram.com/gust_official).

KRCS honors Alghanim for COVID-19 donations

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) awarded Kutayba Yusuf Alghanim, Executive Chairman of Alghanim Industries, a trophy and certificate of appreciation for his company's generous donations towards COVID-19 relief efforts during recent months. Alghanim was awarded by Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, Chairman of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, and Anwar Al-Hasawi, Deputy Chairman.

During his visit, Dr Sayer lauded the longstanding relationship between the KRCS and Alghanim Industries, valuing the charitable donations of the company to help KRCS in its activities to confront repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic across Kuwait. He noted: "Alghanim Industries, under the leadership of Kutayba Alghanim, spared no effort in supporting the various activities of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, an expected action from a pioneering Kuwaiti business figure, reflecting the true Kuwaiti values of generosity and solidarity."

Commenting on receiving this award, Kutayba

Alghanim praised the KRCS relief efforts during the pandemic, adding: "It is an honor to be recognized by a reputable leading organization such as the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, who will always have our unwavering support. It is also an honor for Alghanim Industries to be among the leading private sector organizations recognized for their contribution to the various KRCS campaigns in fighting this pandemic. In these trying times, though, we mustn't forget those who deserve the true honor: our daughters and sons on the front lines, who have been working tirelessly for months to contain the spread of this virus. They deserve our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude."

Alghanim Industries, one of the largest privately-owned companies in the region, is one of the main donors to the KRCS. It finances a student fund in collaboration with the KRCS and the Arab Open University to provide underprivileged youth access to higher education, enabling them to expand their career opportunities in the future. The students under this fund are nominated and awarded through a competitive selection process led by the KRCS. Alghanim Industries reiterated its commitment to this initiative, underscoring the importance of supporting education, which opens career opportunities and helps members of underserved communities achieve financial independence.



KUWAIT: Executive Chairman of Alghanim Industries Kutayba Alghanim receives the award from KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer.

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Modi makes fresh appeal to farmers protesting new laws

British Cold War double agent George Blake dies in Moscow

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On the vaccine trail in Germany

'Mittelstand' companies, manufacturing and logistics experts prove crucial

BERLIN: It was over breakfast on the wintry morning of Jan 24 that Ozlem Tureci and her husband Ugur Sahin decided, "we need to fire the starting gun on this". Sahin "had concluded from a publication describing coronavirus cases in Wuhan... that there was a high probability that a pandemic could be imminent", Tureci recounted. The decision by the couple, founders of a small German company called BioNTech, gave birth to Operation Lightspeed - in which the scientists in the company diverted all their resources from cancer therapy research to finding a vaccine to stop COVID-19.

"Since that day... there has not been a day when we took a break from working on this project," said Tureci. Four days later, on Jan 28, Germany confirmed its first case of coronavirus infection - also the first known human-to-human transmission on European soil. What was an epidemic hitting China hardest soon morphed into a global health crisis, forcing governments to close borders, schools and offices and keep their populations at home to halt the spread.

As BioNTech and other pharmaceutical companies leapt into action in search of the winning formula, Germany's army of "Mittelstand" companies and other bigger manufacturing and logistics experts would soon prove crucial.

Genie in a bottle

Just a few minutes' drive away from BioNTech's headquarters in the city of Mainz, one such company quietly ramped up production. Little known to the rest of the world, the 130-year-old firm Schott is in fact a major player in the

pharmaceutical industry because of its little glass vials designed to hold life-saving vaccines. Three-quarters of the more than 100 coronavirus inoculation trials across the world would end up using Schott products.

The company alone aims to produce enough vials to hold two billion doses of a coronavirus vaccine by the end of 2021, head of communications Christina Rettig told AFP. Schott itself had an early scare with the virus at its Mitterteich plant in Bavaria. The town became one of Germany's first coronavirus hotspots in March after a beer festival, and Rettig said several Schott workers from the Czech Republic ended up "not seeing friends and family for weeks" as borders slammed shut.

Freight steps up

With passenger flights mostly grounded, the buzz at Frankfurt airport's terminals all but vanished to a hush in the spring. Its freight area however kept humming. Tens of thousands of boxes of urgently needed surgical gowns and masks were transiting through. The head of freight infrastructure at Fraport, Max Philipp Conrady, knew that was just the beginning for his division in the pandemic battle.

No one knew then which company would find a vaccine or when it would be ready, but Frankfurt is already Europe's largest hub for transporting pharmaceutical goods. And so planning had to begin for the unprecedented logistical challenge of transporting millions of life-saving vaccine doses worldwide. Fraport's vast temperature-controlled hangar handled 120,000 tons of vaccines, drugs and other pharmaceutical

products in 2019. The operator anticipated the demand for cold storage, and boosted investments in high-tech refrigerated "dollies" that would do the transporting from hangars to planes. It now has 20, so several freighters can be loaded at the same time.

Cold is hot

Fraport was not the only one upping investments in solutions to keep things cool. As it became clear that BioNTech's vaccine would need to be stored at minus 70 degrees Celsius the expertise of cold chain management became the next hot commodity in town. Amid the global scramble to solve the problem of keeping vaccines at the right temperature as they get transported across the world, it would appear that there is a German company for every obscure application.

Binder in Tuttlingen has its "super freezers" which were already tapped as early as March to chill coronaviruses used in laboratory research by BioNTech and another German vaccine developer, CureVac. But demand further grew as BioNTech advanced in the race. "It started really in August, when we received these requests from logistics companies... they knew we must fit our cold storage... with freezers in order to distribute the vaccines around the world," said Binder spokeswoman Anne Lenze.

While Binder ensured static refrigeration of up to minus 90 degrees, another company Va-Q-Tec makes moving boxes with an ultra-cool function for the actual transportation process. Using a silica particle technology, the containers can maintain temperatures ranging from



FRANKFURT: This photo taken on Nov 19, 2020 shows Ugur Sahin, scientist, CEO and co-founder of German biotechnology company BioNTech, displayed on a computer screen in Frankfurt during an interview with AFP as he speaks via Zoom from Mainz. — AFP

one similar to a fridge to polar chills for up to 10 days "without the need for energy input", chief executive Joachim Kuhn told AFP.

On Nov 18, BioNTech and its partner Pfizer finally announced that their Phase III study showed around 95 percent efficacy against the virus. The news sent stock markets into euphoria and was hailed as a watershed, a light at the end of a very long, dark tunnel. By then, the logistics sector was raring to go. As Fraport's Conrady put it: "We've been ready since August."

'Champagne isn't our thing'

Celebrating in their understated manner, BioNTech's founders knew it was too early to rest on their laurels. "Champagne is not our thing. We sat

down and enjoyed a cup of tea and used the time to reflect on what had happened so far and what will come next," Sahin told AFP. Several hundred kilometers away in the German capital, 66-year-old Albrecht Broemme was placing a bunch of Lego figurines here and there as he visualized how to transform Berlin's old airports into centers for the unprecedented vaccination drive.

An ex-firefighter and former head of civil protection agency THW, Broemme had been called out of retirement to help in the pandemic battle. Early on, he was pivotal in designing emergency sites in case patient numbers were to soar above hospital capacities. In the autumn, he was tapped again to conceptualize the vaccination drive for the German capital. — AFP

JCI REACCREDITED TAIBA HOSPITAL FOURTH TERM IN A ROW

We are proud to end this year with a reaffirmation of our standard of excellence in healthcare by the Joint Commission International Accreditation (JCIA). In addition, our Orthopedic Department received their Second recertification by JCIA as Centre of Excellence for "Total knee Replacement and Lumbar Decompression and Fixation" program.

Taiba Hospital... a Decade of continuous excellence.



International

Millions celebrate Christmas under shadow of pandemic

Pope Francis calls for vaccines for everyone

VATICAN CITY: Hundreds of millions across the world celebrated pared-down Christmas festivities on Friday due to coronavirus restrictions, as Pope Francis called for vaccines for everyone, describing them as “glimmers of hope in this period of darkness and uncertainty”.

The pandemic has claimed more than 1.7 million lives and is still running rampant in much of the world, but the recent launching of mass vaccine campaigns has boosted hopes that 2021 could bring a respite. Like so many across the globe, the pope was forced to break with normal Christmas tradition, holding his annual “Urbi et Orbi” speech by video from the apostolic palace, to prevent a crowd from gathering in St Peter’s Square.

“I call on everyone, on leaders of states, on businesses, on international organisations, to promote cooperation and not competition, to find a solution for everyone: vaccines for all, especially the most vulnerable and most in need in all regions of the planet,” he said. In her own annual Christmas speech, Britain’s Queen Elizabeth II also spoke of hope during “difficult and unpredictable times”.

“Of course, for many, this time of year will be tinged with sadness: some mourning the loss of those dear to them, and others missing friends and family members distanced for safety, when all they’d really want for Christmas is a simple hug or a squeeze of the hand,” she said. “If you are among them, you are not alone,” she added, saying she was proud of those in the UK and around the world who have “risen magnificently to the challenges of the year”.

Britain has been through a particularly difficult time after the discovery of a new strain of coronavirus believed to spread much faster. It had already been one of the hardest countries in Europe, which passed a total of 25 million confirmed cases on Friday. Last week it became the first global region where more than 500,000 people have died of the virus.

‘A way out of this tragedy’

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a video message that “vaccines are offering the world a way out of this tragedy” but one that will “take time”. Tedros hailed the “heart-wrenching sacrifices” millions were making by staying away from loved ones on Christmas Day.

“We must not squander their sacrifices,” he said, calling for people to keep up infection control measures. In Asia, churches across South Korea stood largely empty, with worshippers congregating online as the country reported a new daily caseload record.

“It really is heartbreaking to see,” said Park Jae-woo, a member of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul which



THE VATICAN CITY: This handout photo taken on Friday and released by the Vatican press office, the Vatican Media, shows Pope Francis (center) delivering his streamed Urbi et Orbi blessing from the Vatican Blessing hall. — AFP

would usually expect up to 10,000 worshippers, but on Friday was only able to welcome 15 staff and choir members. And in Catholic-majority Philippines, services were rocked when a 6.3-magnitude earthquake struck the country, capping off a troubled yuletide already muted by bans on parties and carol singing. “Sad, very sad. Seeing everyone in masks, even the priest and altar servers, reminded me that the world as I know it is not the same,” said Manila resident Kyen Quimpo Mallonga after watching Christmas Eve mass on television instead of attending her local church.

Despite warm weather, the usual picnicking crowds also avoided the sands of Sydney’s Bondi Beach, while the waves were empty of surfing Santas and patrolling police officers enforced social distancing rules.

Thin crowds in Bethlehem

Bethlehem, where Christians believe Jesus was born, prepared for a Christmas unlike any in its recent history. Christmas Eve mass at the Church of the Nativity is traditionally the highlight of a holiday season that sees hundreds of thousands of visitors flock to the Palestinian city in the occupied West Bank. The service was held online this year, with only clergy and select individuals allowed inside the basilica.

“Everyone feels darkened, tired, exhausted, oppressed for too long under the heavy burden of this pandemic

that besieges our lives,” said the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Pierbattista Pizzaballa.

In war-ravaged northeast Syria, hundreds of residents of a predominantly Christian neighbourhood in the town of Qamishli ditched face masks and donned Santa hats, throwing caution to the wind to celebrate a Christmas tree lighting ceremony. “We were concerned celebrations would be cancelled this year due to the novel coronavirus, but as you can see everyone is here celebrating and we are happy,” said Maria Danhou, a 36-year-old mother of two.

Holiday isolation

Germany has been forced to cancel its famous Christmas markets, while in Kuwait, churches were closed until January 10 despite being home to a large Christian community. For many, the isolation that has defined the past year will continue beyond Christmas Day—such as in Belgium, where residents are largely limited to welcoming a single visitor. Britons, meanwhile, were cut off from swathes of the world due to the emergence of the new COVID-19 strain. Some UK border restrictions have been temporarily relaxed for the holidays, but thousands from other European countries are still stranded in England. “Home for Christmas? Forget it,” said Laurent Beghin, a French truck driver who delivered his cargo but was still stuck days later. — AFP

Israel attacks sites in Gaza

JERUSALEM: Israel has targeted a number of sites in Gaza after Palestinian militants fired rockets into the south of the country, the army said yesterday. The Israeli Defense Force said that three Hamas targets—including a rocket manufacturing site, underground infrastructure, and a military post—had been struck. “Hamas will bear the consequences for all terror emanating from Gaza,” the IDF said in a tweet.

Sirens had sounded earlier in the southern port city of Ashkelon and the area surrounding the Gaza Strip, according to the army statement. “Two rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip towards Israeli territory,” a statement from the army said on Friday, adding that they were intercepted by the Iron Dome Aerial Defense System. There were no reports of damage as a result of the interceptions.

Israeli emergency medical services said a few people were treated for going into shock. The latest fire from the Hamas-ruled Palestinian enclave came over a month after one rocket was fired from the coastal strip



GAZA CITY: A Palestinian man checks damage caused by an Israeli air strike on Gaza City yesterday. — AFP

into Israel. Hamas, considered a terrorist group by Israel, seized control of Gaza from the rival Palestinian movement Fatah in 2007 in a near civil war.

Since then Hamas has fought three devastating wars with Israel in the coastal territory where about two million Palestinians live. Israel has since maintained a crippling blockade on the Gaza Strip to prevent Hamas from arming. — AFP

Prefecture, and in Bakouma, in the southern Mbomou Prefecture, it said, without providing further details. Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN Secretary-General, strongly condemned the latest incident, and called on the CAR authorities to investigate the “heinous” assaults. He also warned that “attacks against United Nations peacekeepers may constitute a war crime.”

Ahead of the presidential and legislative elections to be held today, 63-year-old incumbent President Faustin Archange Touadera has accused his predecessor Francois Bozize of plotting a coup.

Bozize—who is under UN sanctions and barred from running—denies the charges. On Tuesday a militia briefly seized the country’s fourth biggest town, before it was retaken by security forces backed by UN peacekeepers. Meanwhile the Constitutional Court yesterday rejected final appeals by the opposition to postpone today’s vote. At least six candidates had filed appeals arguing that insecurity in the country, and the recent withdrawal of one of the candidates, justified delaying the polls.

Broken ceasefire

Rebel groups launched an offensive a week ago threatening to march on the capital Bangui, in what the government described as an attempted coup, but their progress was halted with international help. However, a three-day ceasefire brokered ahead of the elections fell apart Friday with the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) announcing that it would resume its push for the capital.

The CPC—whose components are drawn from militia groups that, together, control two-thirds of the country—was created on December 19 by armed groups who accused Touadera of trying to fix the vote. Clashes resumed on Friday in Bakouma, about 800 kilometers (500 miles) northeast of Bangui, according to Vladimir Monteiro, spokesman for the UN’s MINUSCA peacekeeping force. MINUSCA said Thursday that a 300-strong contingent of Rwandan reinforcements had arrived in the country. Russia, which recently signed a military cooperation agreement with Touadera’s government, has also sent at least 300 military instructors to bolster the CAR’s forces ahead of the polls. — AFP



In this file photo, new recruits for the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) march in formation during an award presentation in Berengo. Russian military consultants have set up training for the Central African Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces after delivering weapons to the country. — AFP

UN peacekeepers killed in C Africa ahead of elections

BANGUI: Three UN peacekeepers have been killed by unidentified combatants in the Central African Republic, the United Nations said, as the country prepares for a general election and fighting continues between rebels and government forces. The news came after a rebel coalition called off a ceasefire and said it would resume its march on the capital, as well as the arrival of troops from Russia and Rwanda to shore up the government of the resource-rich country.

“Three peacekeepers from Burundi were killed and two others were wounded” following attacks on UN troops and Central African national defense and security forces, the UN said in a statement Friday.

The assaults took place in Dekoa, central Kemo



This file picture taken on June 28, 2001, shows George Blake, a former MI6 officer who worked as a double agent for the Soviet Union, walking in Moscow. George Blake died aged 98, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) has reported. — AFP

British Cold War double agent Blake dies in Moscow

MOSCOW: George Blake, a famous “mole” in British intelligence who spied for the Soviet KGB during the 1950s before fleeing across the Iron Curtain, has died aged 98, Russian news agencies reported yesterday.

“The legendary intelligence officer George Blake has passed away today,” the spokesman for Russia’s SVR foreign intelligence service Sergei Ivanov told the TASS state news agency. “He sincerely loved our country and admired our people’s achievements during World War II,” Ivanov added. Russian President Vladimir Putin, himself an ex-KGB agent, yesterday expressed his “deep condolences” to Blake’s family and friends.

In a message published on the Kremlin website, the Russian leader noted Blake’s “invaluable contribution to ensuring strategic parity and maintaining peace on the planet”. A former member of the Dutch resistance during World War II then an agent of the British foreign intelligence service MI6, Blake offered his services to the Soviets in the 1950s after witnessing US bombings against the civilian population during the Korean War.

He provided the names of hundreds of MI6 agents to the KGB and revealed the existence of a secret tunnel in East Berlin that was used to spy on the Soviets. In 1961, Blake was discovered as a double agent and was sentenced to a record 42 years of imprisonment in England.

Five years later, he broke out of prison using a rope ladder with the help of three cell mates. After the escape, Blake was smuggled across the Iron Curtain into East Germany and travelled to the Soviet Union where he lived until his death. Blake received a hero’s welcome in Moscow and was awarded the rank of colonel by the Russian intelligence service.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the country to which he dedicated his life, he said he never regretted his actions. Blake was among the last living British double agents that the USSR recruited during the Cold War.

The bearded spy, however, trod a very different path to becoming a Soviet agent than that taken by the establishment insiders of the infamous Cambridge spy ring: Kim Philby, Donald Maclean and Anthony Burgess, all recruited while at the British city’s prestigious university. — AFP

News in brief

Tunisia extends emergency

TUNIS: The Tunisian presidency on Friday announced a six-month extension of the country’s state of emergency, in place since a 2015 attack on a presidential guard bus claimed by the Islamic State group. President Kais Saied “decided on the six-month extension of the nationwide state of emergency, from December 26, 2020, to June 23, 2021,” a statement said. The measure, extended continuously since late 2015, grants exceptional powers to the country’s security forces. It allows measures to “ensure the control of the press” and for strikes and meetings that “create disorder” to be banned. Tunisia has seen political and social instability in recent weeks, along with protests in several regions. — AFP

Algeria seeks tougher jail for activist

ALGIERS: Algerian prosecutors have requested a tougher two-year jail sentence for prominent anti-government activist Amira Bouraoui during her trial on appeal, a prisoners’ rights group said Friday. Bouraoui, a 44-year-old gynaecologist, is a prominent in the “Hirak” protest movement that secured the resignation of former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika in April last year. She came to prominence in 2014 when she opposed Bouteflika running for a fourth term. She was sentenced to a one-year jail term in June over a string of charges, including insulting the president and Islam. — AFP

26 dies in Lake Albert boast capsizes

KAMPALA: At least 26 people died when their boat sank on Lake Albert, which marks the border between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ugandan officials told AFP on Friday. The boat was carrying passengers between two Ugandan locations in the lake’s northeast on Wednesday when it “hit a strong wind” and “went under water”, local official Ashraf Oromo said. “The boat had over 50 people on board, 26 bodies have been recovered, 21 people were rescued,” Oromo said. “A search is ongoing and no more survivors are expected.” A regional police marine officer, Samuel Onyango, confirmed the accident. — AFP

Jordan journalist held over vaccine report

AMMAN: Jordan has arrested a journalist over an article alleging the coronavirus vaccine had arrived in the kingdom and that officials had received the jab, a judicial source said yesterday. “The state security court prosecutor ordered the arrest Thursday of journalist Jamal Haddad, editor of news website Al-Wakaai, for writing that government officials had been vaccinated against the coronavirus,” the source said. Haddad had been accused of “endangering public security and causing sedition and public disorder”, the source told AFP, declining to be identified. He was to be detained for 15 days while awaiting trial. — AFP

Malian oppn chief Cisse dies of COVID

BAMAKO: Malian opposition leader Soumaila Cisse died of coronavirus on Friday aged 71, his family and party said, after being held hostage for six months by jihadists earlier this year. Cisse “died in France, where he had been taken for Covid-19 care,” a member of his family said. “I can confirm this terrible news. He’s dead,” a leader of Cisse’s URD party told AFP, saying the politician’s wife had let him know. Interim Prime Minister Moctar Ouane expressed his condolences, tweeting that “all of Mali as well as the African continent mourns one of its brave sons”. Mali has reported 6,347 coronavirus cases as of Wednesday, with 229 deaths, as the country tackles a second wave of infections. — AFP

Russia probes Navalny ally

MOSCOW: Russian authorities on Friday launched a criminal probe into an ally of Kremlin foe Alexei Navalny after she tried to doorstep the apartment of a man Navalny said took part in his poisoning.

Investigators accused Lyubov Sobol of trespassing “with the use of violence or a threat to use it” after she rang the doorbell of the alleged agent from Federal Security Service (FSB), the country’s main security agency. The charges carry a maximum penalty of two years in jail.

Sobol was initially taken in for questioning as a witness in the probe, but later on Friday Navalny ally Ivan Zhdanov said she became a suspect in the case. “Lyubov Sobol is now officially a suspect in the criminal case, her status has changed,” Zhdanov wrote on Twitter, adding that she was being taken into police custody for 48 hours.

Sobol’s lawyer Vladimir Voronin confirmed this information to AFP without providing further details. Russia’s Investigative Committee—which probes major crimes—said in a statement on Friday that Sobol and several others repeatedly tried to enter the “apartment of an elderly woman” in eastern Moscow, adding that they were wearing uniforms of the country’s consumer watchdog. — AFP

International

207 killed in Western Ethiopia attack by gunmen: Rights body

Ethiopia's election commission sets polls for June 5

ADDIS ABABA: A total of 207 people were killed in a Wednesday attack by gunmen in western Ethiopia, the country's Human Rights Commission (EHRC) said, more than doubling a previous count. The independent government body had on Wednesday said 100 people were killed in their sleep and crops burned in a pre-dawn assault in the Metekel area of the Benishangul-Gumuz region.

"133 of the victims were adult men and 35 were adult women. Seventeen children, one of whom a six-month-old baby, and 20 elderly persons were killed," the EHRC said in a statement posted to Twitter late Friday. Mostly inhabited by ethnic Shinasha, Oromo and Amhara people—the last two making up Ethiopia's most numerous groups—the Metekel area has suffered a string of deadly attacks in recent months.

Local leaders blame ethnic Gumuz people for the violence. Following Wednesday's attack, "effort is underway to identify the victims with the help of survivors and identity cards," the EHRC said.

The body repeated its appeal for "relevant authorities to provide urgently humanitarian assistance to the victims and persons displaced by the attack."

It added that around 10,000 had fled the Bekuji Kebele area and made for the city of Bulen, around 40 kilometers (25 miles) away, which is already sheltering "thousands of displaced persons". "Bulen city is overwhelmed. The roads leading to the city are still teeming with displaced persons and their herds of cattle," one eyewitness told the commission. Regional authorities said on Thursday that

troops had killed 42 armed men alleged to have taken part in the massacre, without giving details about their identities.

"The massacre in the Benishangul-Gumuz region is very tragic," Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said in a Twitter post on Thursday, conceding the government's efforts to solve the problem "had not yielded results". In October, he had said that fighters "armed and trained" in Sudan's neighbouring Blue Nile state were behind the violence and urged Khartoum to tackle the problem.

Abiy claimed that the latest attack had been aimed at "dividing the significant force" deployed to the country's dissident northern Tigray region. There is no known link between the violence in Benishangul-Gumuz and military operations in Tigray.

Thousands have been killed in the Tigray conflict, according to the International Crisis Group think tank, and more than 50,000 people have fled over the border into Sudan.

Elections

Ethiopia will hold legislative and regional elections on June 5 next year, the electoral commission said Friday after polls scheduled for 2020 were delayed by the coronavirus pandemic. The cancelled elections were a factor that stoked tensions between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the dissident northern Tigray region, which ultimately saw him dispatch federal troops there in a November military offensive that left thousands dead and created tens of thousands of refugees. The elections in



In this file photo a man stands in front of his destroyed house in the village of Bisober in Ethiopia's Tigray region. A total of 207 people were killed in a Wednesday attack by gunmen in western Ethiopia, the country's Human Rights Commission (EHRC) said, more than doubling a previous count. — AFP

Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous country with some 110 million people, are largely seen as an important political transition process announced by Abiy, last year's Nobel Peace prize winner.

Abiy, who came to power in 2018, had promised free, fair and democratic elections in 2020.

The elections were scheduled for August 29 but the election commission deferred them indefinitely after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. The tenure of both the parliament and Abiy—which was due to expire in October—was then extended. —AFP

News in brief

COVID vaccine in France

PARIS: France's first doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine were delivered early yesterday to the Paris hospital system's central pharmacy outside the capital, an AFP journalist saw. After more than 62,000 COVID-19 deaths in France, shots are set to begin with people in two elderly care homes today, the same day the rest of the EU begins injections. A refrigerated truck brought the roughly 19,500 doses from the Pfizer factory in Puurs, northeast Belgium, to Paris, the capital's APHP hospital authority said, with pharmacy chief Franck Huet calling it a "historic" moment in the pandemic. After repackaging in Paris, the vaccines will be delivered to a long-term care unit at a hospital in Sevran, outside the capital, and an old-age care home in Dijon, in eastern France. — AFP

Russia tops 3 million infections

MOSCOW: Russia yesterday passed three million confirmed coronavirus infections, as authorities hold out against reimposing a national lockdown while the country is battered by a second wave. Official figures showed that a total of 3,021,964 cases have been detected, with 54,226 deaths. In the past 24 hours, 29,258 new infections and 567 deaths were registered in Russia, fourth on the list of hardest-hit countries worldwide. Since winter began, each week has brought new records for new cases and deaths, with epicenters in capital Moscow and second-largest city Saint Petersburg. — AFP

Spain receives first vaccine doses

MADRID: Spain received its first doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine yesterday, a day before the country is set to begin its immunization campaign. A refrigerated truck arrived at Pfizer's warehouse in Guadalajara in central Spain with the shipment, three days after it left the company's factory in Puurs in northeast Belgium, the health ministry said in a statement. After repackaging, the vaccines will be redistributed to Spain's 17 autonomous regions so that vaccination can begin across the country as planned on Sunday, it added. Spain will receive 4.5 million Pfizer vaccine doses over the next 12 weeks, enough to vaccinate some 2.3 million people, according to the ministry. — AFP

Licorice can cure COVID

ASHGABAT: Well-known for his baffling botanical pronouncements, Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov claimed yesterday that licorice could cure coronavirus, the latest supposed miracle cure in a country still claiming zero cases. "Scientists from every country are looking for effective cures, running various studies, and one of them could be licorice root," the leader of the authoritarian ex-Soviet country told ministers. Without citing any scientific evidence, former dentist Berdimukhamedov claimed that "licorice stops the coronavirus from developing" and "even a weak concentration of a water-based extract has a neutralizing effect." Turkmenistan has "sufficient reserves" of licorice, he added, ordering the national academy of sciences to study the plant's supposed health effects. — AFP

Indian PM makes fresh appeal to farmers

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday offered to hold fresh talks to end a stalemate over new agricultural reforms, in his latest push to win over farmers protesting for almost a month against the move.

Tens of thousands of farmers have been camping out near several entry points to New Delhi since November 26 against three new laws they say will lead to dismantling of regulated markets.

They also fear the government would stop buying wheat and rice at guaranteed prices, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates. In a speech beamed live to millions of farmers across the country, Modi sought to allay their misgivings, insisting the laws, passed in September, would give

them the freedom to sell their produce "anywhere and to anyone they like".

"Lies are being spread that the local mandis (markets) will shut down, the minimum support price will be stopped... don't be misguided by those having political motives," Modi said. "I am saying this with humility that we are ready to discuss every issue of the farmers, even with those (political parties) who are against us, for the sake of our farmers."

Modi also released \$2.5 billion to 90 million farmers under a financial scheme that his party launched last year. Under the direct cash transfer scheme, small farmers get 6,000 rupees (\$82) in four instalments in a year.

Modi also interacted with seven farmers from different states via a video conference in which they praised the government's various farm schemes. Agriculture employs about 70 percent of India's 1.3 billion people and accounts for 15 percent of its \$2.7 trillion economy.

But in recent decades farm incomes have stagnated, and experts

Russia says intercepted IS attack plot

MOSCOW: Russia's FSB security service said yesterday it had foiled an attack planned by a cell loyal to the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group in the country's unstable southern republic of Dagestan, arresting four people. "Members of the group

planned to detonate an explosive close to an administrative building belonging to security services, followed by an armed attack against interior ministry employees" in regional capital Makhachkala, the FSB said in a statement.

As well as arresting four "members of the international IS terrorist group", investigators found "firearms and bladed weapons, a large amount of ammunition and an explosive device", it added, along with mobile phones containing "exchanges with organizers located abroad".

On December 17, police killed two attackers targeting security forces in Russia's neighboring

republic of Chechnya. Six people were also killed during an October "counter-terrorism" operation in Chechnyan capital Grozny, including two members of the security forces.

Russia's territories in the Caucasus were ravaged by two wars between federal troops and Chechen separatists in the 1990s and 2000s. Increasingly Islamist in character, the insurgency spread to other republics in the region and declared allegiance to IS in 2015. While the jihadist group's influence remains limited, occasional attacks against the authorities persist in Chechnya, Dagestan and neighboring Ingushetia. — AFP

HK 'speedboat fugitives' to face trial in China

HONG KONG: Ten of 12 Hong Kong pro-democracy activists arrested as they tried to flee the territory by speedboat to Taiwan will face trial in mainland China on December 28, campaigners and family members said Friday. Relatives of the detainees have been told by Chinese government-appointed lawyers that a video hearing will take place Monday afternoon at Yantian District People's Court in the southern city of Shenzhen, according to

the Save 12 HK Youths campaign.

China has a history of putting on trial dissidents around the Christmas and New Year period to avoid Western scrutiny. In a video hearing, defendants appear from the detention centre instead of going to court, explained Lu Siwei, a mainland Chinese human rights lawyer working on the case despite a ban and threats from the authorities.

Families of the detainees called on mainland authorities to live broadcast the trial, as they are unlikely to be able to attend given Shenzhen's current COVID-19 quarantine requirements, and to allow their representatives, lawyers, reporters and diplomats to be present at the proceedings. —AFP



LONDON: Pro-democracy activists take part in a 'Save 12 HK Youths' rally at Potters Fields Park beside Tower Bridge in London. — AFP



NEW DELHI: This handout photograph taken on Friday and released by the Indian Press Information Bureau (PIB), shows Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi releasing the next instalment of financial benefit under PM Kisan Samman Nidhi through video conference in New Delhi. — AFP

say the sector badly needs investment and modernization. Farmer unions have demanded a total repeal of the laws and warned of a bigger agitation

if their demands are not met. Several rounds of talks between ministers and farmer leaders have failed to produce a breakthrough so far. —AFP

Recruitment open day!

Reaching out to all jobseekers in Kuwait for the following positions

An ISO-certified company operating engineering, operations and maintenance activities in industrial sectors with enormous potential for growth wishes to recruit relevant experienced persons for the following positions:

- **Mechanical Helper:** Should have experience in industrial plants of a minimum of 5 years.
- **Pipe Fabricator:** Fabrication of pipes, plates and structures for mechanical projects with minimum 10 years of experience.
- **Pipefitter:** Installation and repair works of various grades of pipes such as carbon, steel, alloy steel, etc with minimum 5 years of experience.
- **Arc Welder:** Carry out all kinds of welding activities of pipes, plates and structures.
- **Hydro Jetter:** Carry out high-pressure hydro jetting with a maximum pressure of 500 bar with a minimum of 5 years of experience.
- **Plasterer/ Painter:** Should have experience in blasting tanks, piping and structures using sand, grit and garnet. Experience in spray/brush/painting of tanks, piping and structures, with minimum 5 years of experience.
- **Auto mechanic:** Experience in troubleshooting earthmoving equipment, all types of LD and HD vehicles, air compressors, generators, etc. Capable to carry out all types of maintenance/repair/overhauling jobs independently.

Interested candidates are requested to bring the following documents during the interview (qualification, experience certificate, passport copy, civil ID copy, work permit copy, authorized signatory page copy). Candidates must have valid transferable residencies.

Walk-in interview on Wednesday and Thursday December 30 - 31, 2020 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm
Location: Farwaniya, block 6, building 288
Contact no.: 60907825

Business

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2020

Britain faces major challenges after last-minute post-Brexit trade deal

EU officials promise to support their fishing sector through painful cuts

LONDON: Britain is set for a new chapter Friday after securing a hard-fought post-Brexit trade deal with the European Union as EU envoys gave the accord, reached only after months of tortuous negotiations, a sober welcome. "There was no great joy because a divorce is not really good news," one EU diplomat told AFP.

Member state envoys to the EU were "sober enough" in their response, the diplomat said, and the text—all 1,200 pages and in English—"will now be examined to make sure there are no hidden details which could cause a problem".

The envoys are expected to meet again tomorrow to get the ratification process started, the diplomat added. As for Britain, the accord means the country will now not tumble off a trade "cliff-edge" come January 1, avoiding a mountain of harmful tariffs and quotas.

But major changes are inevitable as London definitively quits the EU single market and free movement with the bloc comes to an end after nearly half a century of integration. "We shouldn't underestimate the economic shock Britain will experience," another European diplomat said.

Britain has been in a standstill transition period still subject to the bloc's rules since

formally leaving the EU on January 31. Standing in front of a Downing Street Christmas tree in a video message late Thursday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson vaulted the hundreds of pages of text as "a good deal for the whole of Europe" and a "present" for Britain.

The address was "a victory speech", Anand Menon, director of the UK in a Changing Europe think-tank, told AFP. "Boris Johnson was elected Prime minister to get Brexit done, he has now definitively got Brexit done," Menon said.

Johnson has come under fierce criticism for his management of the country's coronavirus outbreak, which has so far left almost 70,000 dead, the heaviest toll in Europe. In recent days, thousands of trucks have been backed up at Channel ports, after France and other European partners blocked crossings over rising cases of a new virus variant believed to spread faster. With ferry and tunnel crossings unusually staying open on Christmas Day and British soldiers carrying out virus tests, there were signs of the logjam clearing on Friday.

Some had pointed out that the transport chaos, which raised fears of shortages of fresh produce, could be a glimpse of what awaited the country if it crashed out of the EU single market without a deal.

Fishermen's fears

The EU has offered Britain unprecedented tariff- and quota-free access to its single market of 450 million consumers. But it has in return secured London's commitment to respect its always-evolving rules in some areas such as environmental protection, labor regulation and tax, aiming to avoid Britain undercutting companies inside the bloc. The UK has also signed up to guarantees that it will not abuse state aid to firms to seek an unfair advantage. It was the question of fish that emerged as the last stumbling block this week when London pushed to reduce EU fishing fleets' share of the estimated 650-million-euro (£586 million, \$790 million) annual haul by more than a third. The final agreement settled on a 25-percent cut to be phased in over a five-and-a-half year period.

EU officials have promised to support their fishing sector through the painful cuts, a major downside of a deal European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen called "fair and balanced" overall.

For Britain, "that a deal has been agreed at all is in many respects a remarkable achievement," the Times newspaper said. Nevertheless, the final package is "a source of relief rather than celebration", it added, with new restrictions including an end to



BRUSSELS: EU Chief Negotiator for Brexit Michel Barnier (center) is watched by a Greek representative carrying a folder containing the 2000 page 'Brexit Trade Deal' as he arrives ahead of a special meeting of The Committee of the Permanent Representatives of the Governments of the Member States to the European Union (Coreper) at the European Council in Brussels on Friday. — AFP

free movement into the UK for European workers and into the EU for Britons.

Young people will be hit by Britain's withdrawal from the continent-spanning Erasmus student exchange program, to be replaced by a home-grown scheme named

after pioneering computer scientist Alan Turing. "The deal is hardly the end of the process. Now that (Johnson) has delivered on his promise to get Brexit done, his challenge is to make a success of it," the Times warned. — AFP

DHAMAN opens third Primary Healthcare Center in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) yesterday inaugurated its Primary Healthcare (PHC) Center in Dhajeej that will serve residents of Farwaniya Governorate and other governorates. The healthcare facility is the third center to be inaugurated by DHAMAN and is part of its network of PHC Centers covering all governorates in Kuwait. This inauguration is a significant step towards achieving the company's strategy to serve areas with high population density to facilitate beneficiary access to healthcare services.

Today, DHAMAN already operates two other PHC Centers in Hawalli and Farwaniya, and plans to open two additional PHC Centers in Ahmedi and Jahra, which results in covering all governorates in Kuwait during the first phase with a total of five main PHC Centers. The new health center in Dhajeej will offer primary healthcare services to citizens and expatriates residing in Kuwait starting during the beginning of January 2021. Spanning over 2,770 sqm, the center features 16 Family Medicine Clinics, 6 Dental Clinics and a Panoramic Dental X-Ray Room, 5 Pediatric Clinics, 5 Procedure Rooms, 3 Observation Rooms, a Laboratory and a Pharmacy.

DHAMAN Board Chairman Mutlaq Al-Sanea said: "Established by a Ministerial Decree, DHAMAN is the first Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) healthcare organization in the Middle East and a key component of Kuwait's National Development Plan (New Kuwait 2035). As an integral part of Kuwait's national healthcare strategy, we are pleased to announce the opening of our third healthcare facility in the country to meet the growing healthcare needs of the population. We are also currently developing a network of hospitals, three in total, in addition to 15 healthcare centers to provide healthcare services to residents across all of Kuwait's six governorates to achieve Kuwait's national strategy for healthcare."

On his part, DHAMAN Acting CEO Dr. Mohammad Al-Qenai: "The inauguration of Dhajeej Center is a positive addition to Kuwait's PHC services as DHAMAN's strategy revolves around focusing on and investing in primary healthcare due to our role in enhancing the quality of healthcare services and managing the health system. To ensure this, DHAMAN paid special attention to recruiting professionals in medical, administrative, and technical fields who have the relevant experience and notable qualifications to ensure the provision of high-quality services. This center in Dhajeej is our third PHC Center as part of a network of healthcare facilities that will be inaugurated soon. We have dedicated effort to the selection of locations that have high density of population in terms of the targeted group of individuals to facilitate access to healthcare services. Along those lines, DHAMAN is working to ensure that all our centers obtain the necessary international accreditations for quality service while our



DHAMAN celebrates opening of PHC Center in Dhajeej.



DHAMAN Board Chairman Mutlaq Al-Sanea and DHAMAN Acting CEO Dr Mohammad Al-Qenai with the Board members.

medical and technical staff are under continuous development through constant training courses. In conclusion, I would like to express appreciation to the Licensing Department at the Ministry of Health (MOH) for their cooperation in this national initiative that will contribute to developing the level and quality of health services in Kuwait, as well as alleviate MOH from administrative and financial burdens by transferring over two million individuals from the Ministry's facilities to DHAMAN's centers without placing any cost on the MOH for their primary and secondary medical treatment."

In full compliance with the COVID-19 regulations set by the Ministry of Health and official

government bodies in Kuwait, the inauguration of the DHAMAN PHC Center in Dhajeej was attended by DHAMAN board members and executive management.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Measures

DHAMAN's healthcare facilities remained operational during all stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Company is taking various measures to continue to provide safe healthcare services to residents throughout Kuwait. During December 2020, DHAMAN introduced an alternative to invasive COVID-19 tests and provides the saliva COVID-19 test in Kuwait.

US Congress fails to agree to boost stimulus checks

WASHINGTON: Republicans blocked an effort to amend the hard-won pandemic relief package to more than triple direct payments to struggling Americans, something demanded by President Donald Trump. After months of partisan bickering, legislators late Monday finally approved a \$900 billion stimulus package to help families and businesses struggling to survive the hit to the economy from the coronavirus before millions lose their benefits.

The legislation includes one-time payments of \$600 to most taxpayers, but Trump dropped a bombshell on the celebrations this week, hinting he might veto the bill unless the amount was increased to \$2,000. Democrats, who have been pushing for months to increase pandemic support, cheered his statement, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi challenged Republicans to support an amendment to boost the dollar amount.

The Democratic-controlled House of Representatives held a Christmas Eve "pro forma" session, normally a brief affair with little business, in an effort to win bipartisan approval to send the revised payments to Trump's desk for signature. But Republicans refused to agree to the change.

"So we do not have unanimous consent," said Michigan Democrat Debbie Dingell, who was acting as speaker pro tempore. Pelosi immediately lambasted Republicans and vowed to call the House back on Monday to approve the amendment in a regular session. "Today, on Christmas Eve morning, House Republicans cruelly deprived the American people of the \$2,000 that the President agreed to support. If the President is serious about the \$2,000 direct payments, he must call on House Republicans to end their obstruction," she said in a statement.

Later Thursday, Pelosi said the bill has been sent to the White House and called on Trump to sign. "The House & Senate are now sending this important legislation #ForThePeople to the White House for the President's signature. We urge him to sign this bill into law to give immediate relief to hard-working families!," Pelosi tweeted.

The stakes are high, especially if Trump vetoes the bill: About 14 million jobless workers will lose their pandemic unemployment benefits right after Christmas, and millions more face losing their homes when an eviction moratorium expires at the end of the year. And the stimulus measure is wrapped up with a \$1.4 trillion funding bill, meaning the government will be forced to shut down at midnight Monday if Trump does not sign the bill. The chaos comes in the final weeks of Trump's presidency, as he continues to insist without evidence that the election of President-elect Joe Biden was fraudulent, attacking Republicans who refuse to back his false claims. —AFP

Business

Kuwait economic indexes remained largely positive despite COVID-19

Key economic highlights of economic and financial sectors in 2020

KUWAIT: Various economic indices showed that Kuwait is in the safe zone with regards to repercussions of the new coronavirus on the economic sector, amid recurrent bonds' issuance by the Central Bank of Kuwait in the year 2020.

Following are some of the key economic news highlights at the economic and financial levels in 2020:

Jan 5: Boursa Kuwait- the stock exchange - said that liquidity of trades in the first session of the year reached KD 71.4 million (\$235.6 million).

Jan 15: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) joined the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), becoming the 63rd member of the Switzerland-based institute.

Jan 22: Central Statistical Bureau said that inflation in Kuwait reached 1.5 percent in 2019 when compared to 2018.

Feb 10: The Arab-British Chamber of Commerce (ABCC) chose Chairman of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) Ali Al-Ghanim as an honorary head.

March 8: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the formation of a banks-backed KD 10-million financial fund to help the government's fight against COVID-19.

March 11: Kuwait's banks' union suspended work at banks nationwide, allowing one branch for each bank to operate throughout Kuwait. The measure was taken to curb the coronavirus spread.

March 12: Boursa Kuwait-the stock market - halted operations as part of the nationwide coronavirus countermeasures.

March 24: Kuwait's bank union announced that local banks would suspend the collection of loans for citizens and small to medium size enterprises due to coronavirus.

March 27: Standard and Poor's (S&P) lower the credit rating for Kuwait from (AA) to (AA-), but the outlook remained stable.

March 30: Moody's maintained a credit rating of Kuwait at (Aa2).

April 2: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) took a package of oversight measures warranted by repercussions of the novel coronavirus; decreasing solvency requirements by 2.5 percent, liquidity criteria, forecast risks for small and medium enterprises from 75 percent to 25 percent and hiking maximum funding from 90 to 100 percent.

April 6: Kuwait Chamber of Industry and Commerce Board elected without contestation Mohammad Jassem Al-Sagr as chairman.

April 7: Fitch Rating maintains Kuwait's sovereign credit rating for 2020 at AA, portraying the state steady and solid credit status.

April 7: Central Statistical Bureau said that inflation reached its lowest rate by 1.67 percent per month in the first 10 months ending last February of 2020.

April 20: The Central Bank of Kuwait issued conventional bonds and tawarruq bonds worth KD 240 million.

May 30: The Ministry of Commerce added 14 food items to the list of subsidized commodities.

July 12: Minister of Finance Barrak Al-Sheetan ordered delay of collecting due installments of clients of the Defaulters and Family Support Fund.

July 13: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) declared issuing bonds and tawarruq bonds, worth KD 240 million (\$792 million), for three months with a projected proceed of 1,250 percent.

July 26: Boursa Kuwait-the stock exchange-said that liquidity registered its lowest rate, hitting KD 9.9 million (\$34.6 million). This was attributed to natural profit gaining operations.

July 29: Kuwait Ports Authority declared reaping KD 50.1 million (\$161 million) for the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

Aug 13: The finance ministry declared a KD 5.6 billion deficit (\$18.4 billion) actual deficit in the fiscal year that ended on March 31, with a 68 percent rise on annual basis and lower by 31.8 percent of the budget projected deficit.

Aug 22: The Governor of the Central Bank declared that the gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 0.4 percent in 2019 reaching KD 39.4 billion (\$130 billion), against KD 39.2 billion (\$129.3 billion) in 2018.

Sept 3: Kuwait General Administration of Customs (KGAC) declared posting KD 363.44 million (\$1.1 billion) in the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

Sept 7: Governor of the Central Bank Mohammad Al-Hashel declared cutting the discount rate three times, dropping to the record level of 1.5 percent for the fiscal year (2019-2020).

Sept 12: Kuwait Credit Bank declared reaping net profits worth KD 72.5 million (\$239 million) in the fiscal year (2019-2020), increasing by KD 12.9 million (\$42.5 million) for the abovementioned financial year.

Sept 14: The central bank declared issuing bonds and tawarruq bonds worth KD 290 million (\$957 million) for three months with a 1,250 percent proceed.

What is Global Britain?

Brexiters argue the EU has held Britain back through onerous regulation and it can now embark on a buccaneering new mission to support free trade around the world-"God's diplomacy", according to a February speech by Prime Minister Boris Johnson. But if heaven was listening, it had other plans in mind: a month after Johnson's speech, Britain was forced into national lockdown by the coronavirus pandemic. If the world ever gets back to normality, the idea is that Britain will not shrink inwards after Brexit but will look outwards, as far afield as a free-trade pact with Pacific Rim countries. "Now Global Britain is back, it is time for the makers, the doers and the innovators to help us write our most exciting chapter yet," International Trade Secretary Liz Truss declared in October, touting UK exports of everything from clotted cream to robots.

Truss has already signed a post-Brexit trade deal with Japan and Canada, Singapore and Switzerland, among others. It is also eyeing a deal with India, and negotiating others with the United States, Australia and New Zealand-Britain's partners in the "Five Eyes" collective of English-speaking intelligence powers.

Further deals in the pipeline will cover 80 percent of overseas trade by 2022, according to the government, which has shaken up the Foreign Office to integrate aid and development into Britain's diplomatic agenda.

What about at home?

Johnson's pitch to voters in last December's general election was to "get Brexit done" and focus both money and attention on parts of the country that have failed to benefit from London's finance-driven growth. That "levelling up" agenda to bring new investment such as high-speed rail to northern England has been side-tracked by the pandemic. But the government insists its long-term goals remain in place and that membership dues sent to the EU will be better spent at home. Some Brexiters want a radical overhaul of Britain's economic model, to turn the country into "Singapore on Thames"-a lightly regulated, lightly taxed rival to supposedly sclerotic Europe. Yet the government stresses that any free-trade deals won't sacrifice its "red lines": the state-run National Health Service, food standards and UK farming.—AFP

After EU, what's next for 'Global Britain'?

LONDON: A brave new world or a dangerous leap into the unknown? After nearly 50 years of integration with Europe, Britain starts an uncertain new chapter on January 1.

What changes on January 1?

Britain formally quit the European Union in January this year but has continued to observe all its rules during a transition period. That half-way house ends at 2300 GMT on December 31. So from 2021, it will stand on its own, for better or worse.



A new trade deal, agreed Thursday, will smooth the path by lifting the prospect of tariffs and quotas for cross-Channel goods, from cars to lamb. Without a deal, imports and exports would have faced serious disruption with the abrupt return of barriers that have not existed for decades.

There are fears that certain foodstuffs and medicines could run short. Britain got a glimpse of what that might look like when France shut its borders to freight in response to the discovery of a new variant of the coronavirus.

But even with a deal, the future won't be seamless. UK exporters will still need to file reams of new customs paperwork to prove their goods have authorization to enter the EU's single market.

Britain has urged business to be ready either way, but industry players say the government has failed to deliver vital IT systems and support staff in time, heightening the risk of chaos after January 1.



Sept 21: The central bank issued bonds and tawarruq bonds valued at KD 200 million (\$660 million) for three months with a 1,250 percent proceed.

Sept 28: The central bank issued bonds and tawarruq bonds valued KD 240 million (\$792 million) for six months with 1,375 percent returns.

Oct 26: The Central Bank of Kuwait declared issuance of bonds and tawarruq bonds worth KD 200 million (\$660 million).Nov 2: The CBK issued bonds and

tawarruq bonds worth KD 240 million (\$792 million).

Nov 4: Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) disclosed in a report luring, during the fiscal year (2019-2020), KD 115.8 million (\$378 million) worth of direct investments.

Nov 9: The Central Bank of Kuwait issued bonds and tawarruq bonds worth KD 160 million (\$528 million).Nov 16: The CBK issued bonds and tawarruq bonds worth KD 240 million (\$792 million).

Nov 30: Kuwait bourse witnessed unprecedented trades valued at KD 961 million (\$3.3 billion) in the first day of trading in stocks of seven companies listed in the bourse premier market in the MSCI indices for emerging markets.

Nov 30: The CBK issued bonds and tawarruq bonds worth KD 360 million (\$1.1 billion).



Dec 1: The Kuwait stock exchange (Boursa Kuwait) announced the highest liquidity figure for this year at KD 961.6 million (\$3.3 billion), attributing the number to promotion of the bourse to the MSCI index for emerging markets.

Dec 2: The Ministry of Commerce said in a statement that it had worked hard to improve business atmosphere in Kuwait, leading to the country to become one of the world's top 10 improvers amongst 190 economies in the World Bank Group's Doing Business 2020 study. Kuwait's ranking in the Ease of Doing Business jumped from 97 in 2019 to 83 in 2020, the study concludes.

Dec 7: Central Statistical Bureau announced the highest inflation rate of 2.25 percent in the first ten months of the year ending last October.

Dec 7: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the issuing of bonds worth KD 280 million (\$942 million).

Dec 14: CBK announced the issuing of bonds worth KD 290 million (around \$957 million). — KUNA

Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN)
One of the Strategic Projects in Kuwait National Development Plan
(New Kuwait 2035)

**INVITATION FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI)
CONSTRUCTION WORKS
FOR 12 PRIMARY HEALTH CENTERS (PHCs)**

Ref: RFI # DM135 24/12/2020 Date: 27th December 2020

Since its establishment in 2015, Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) is the first Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) healthcare organization in the Middle East, and the Company has a mandate to provide primary and secondary healthcare services in Kuwait.

DHAMAN is providing integrated healthcare services for a target market of mainly expatriates serving a projected population of approximately 2 million by 2026.

Achieving these goals requires the provision of minimum 15 primary healthcare centers (of which three are currently complete) and any necessary supporting services/facilities relevant to each center, with the centers being distributed regionally across governorates in Kuwait.

There are 12 new primary healthcare centers DHAMAN required to be constructed, commissioned, and operated in Kuwait.

The 12 Primary Healthcare Centers are classified to three types (A, B & C) according to their areas and components.

Built up Area:

- Type (A) 5,000 m²
- Type (B) 3,500 m²
- Type (C) 2,000 m²

DHAMAN is delighted to invite reputed construction firms to submit their prequalification documents for the Rehabilitation and Refurbishment Works at DHAMAN's Prospective Primary Healthcare Centers.


As the first step in the pre-qualification process, DHAMAN is requesting potential Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) 2nd and 3rd ranked contractors to provide a Letter of Interest with supporting information in healthcare facility.

- Project description and client reference of primary or secondary care healthcare projects accomplished as per FGI and JCI standard for either local or international professional in the last 10 years.
- Proposed team structure and resumes for key team members with their accomplishment in healthcare projects.
- Certified Financial Statements of the last three years and bank references for company's credit facilities.

All valuable responses are invited to submit on or before 2PM, 6th January 2021, to the addressee: Department of Procurement, Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) through softcopy submission at procurement@dhaman.co

Note: This package will be utilized to develop the list of pre-qualified bidders for the next step in the procurement process.

Sharq | Khaled ibn Al-Waleed Street | Al-Dhow Tower | P.O. Box: 353 Safat 13004 Kuwait
Tel: +965 22966642 | Fax: +965 22966601
Email: procurement@dhaman.co



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Business

UK farmers face double uncertainty with Brexit and subsidy overhaul

Brexit deal perceived as a damage-limiting exercise

CHRISTS HOSPITAL, UK: David Exwood's glossy, chestnut-brown Sussex cattle are brought in during the winter months and, apart from the bellowing that comes from their barns, his 1,000 hectare farm is quiet. But while the inaction on his farm, near Horsham, southeast England, is typical of many in the colder months, it belies tensions across British agriculture as the sector braces for the New Year.

"Brexit is just all about damage limitation, really," Exwood said just days away from Britain's departure from the European Union single market and customs union on December 31. "It's damaging our reputation as a country, our economy. Now I've just got to try and prevent it damaging my business."

Since Britons voted to leave the EU in 2016, farmers have had to contend with four years of uncertainty. Would tariffs be placed on goods exported to the bloc? What changes might be made to farming subsidies previously decided by Brussels through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Britain's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs answered some of those questions as Britain's trade deal with the EU was being finalized. The UK's £5 billion (\$6.8 billion, €5.6 billion) in animal exports to the continent would continue after Brussels said it had met the necessary animal health standards.

Certainty and unknowns

Exwood, whose farm holds 600 cattle and 800

hectares of arable crops, has been better insulated against the prospect of a no-deal Brexit and the tariffs on livestock exports that would follow. His beef is sold in the UK. British sheep farmers, who sell almost a third of their meat to the EU, had warned the market would evaporate overnight if 50 per cent tariffs were imposed in the event of a "no-deal".

Despite greater certainty, there are still many unknowns. Britain has been granted "national listed status", allowing the continued export of meat, fish and dairy. That means exporters will require a health certificate signed by a recognised vet to continue trade after December 31. "We've prepared as much as we can," Exwood said.

"We know about the paperwork, we know about the extra cost, we know about the delays at the ports, but it's the things we don't know about that will probably do the most damage."

Closer to home, UK farmers are grappling with changes to subsidies which have been laid out in the Environment Land Management Scheme. The government has called the change the most fundamental shift in UK farming policy for 50 years.

Under the scheme, CAP subsidies for areas of land farmed or numbers of livestock will be phased out by 2024 and removed completely in 2028 — in favor of more environmentally friendly payments. Farmers will be rewarded for restoring natural wildlife habitats to their farms, improving animal welfare and



Farmer David Exwood, whose beef is sold in the UK, has been better insulated following a Brexit deal. — AFP

cutting pesticides, among other conservation efforts.

Richard Benwell, a former government advisor on environmental policy and chief executive of the Wildlife and Countryside Link coalition, said the decision to use the money from subsidies for land management was "entirely the right one".

The new policy was aimed at "rewarding the farm-

ers who do the most for nature", he said. Across England, changes to farms like lower stocking of cows and sheep, and more trees and hedgerows grown alongside crops are expected post-Brexit. "The overall impression will be one where, instead of intensifying production in farmed areas, we integrate nature better in the farmed environment." — AFP

LuLu Hypermarket launches Choco Week 2020

KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket, the leading regional retailer, has launched its enticing 'Choco Week' promotion to celebrate the upcoming holidays of Christmas and New Year. The Choco Week 2020 festival that launched on 23 December at all LuLu Hypermarket outlets in the country, showcases chocolates in an array of delectable forms. The promotion is supported by the Kuwait representatives of global food and confectionary brands, Nestle and Mars. All programs were conducted with participants following coronavirus protocols and regulations.

Marking the launch event at the Al-Qurain outlet on 23 December, and at the Al-Rai outlet on 24 December, was the cutting of a 10-meter long cake that was witnessed and shared by an excited gathering of shoppers at both venues.

Top officials from LuLu Hypermarket in Kuwait, along with management at Nestle Kuwait, jointly inaugurated the cake-cutting ceremony at the Al-Qurain outlet, while officials from LuLu and representatives of Gulf Trading and Refrigeration Co, the sponsors of Mars in Kuwait, were on hand at the ceremony in Al-Rai branch.

Bringing the festival spirit to the launch event was a visit from Santa Claus to distribute gifts and chocolates to the young visitors at its outlets. Another highlight of the ceremony, again in keeping with the Xmas theme, was a Santa Claus fancy dress competition for kids organized on 24 December at the Al-Rai outlet.

Kids in various red-suited, pot-bellied, bearded versions of Santa drew loud applause from onlookers. Winners and participants in the fancy dress competition were awarded main and consolation prizes by LuLu management. With a customer-centric focus and a commitment to



enhance the shopping experience for patrons, LuLu Hypermarket holds various promotions to celebrate popular festivals throughout the year. The Choco Week promotion, which celebrates the upcoming

holiday season of Xmas and New Year will bring promotions for 2020 to a befitting close, with promises of even more exciting promotions and value propositions in the year ahead.

Channel logjam eases for truckers blocked in Britain

CALAIS, France: More than a thousand lorries arrived at the French port of Calais on Friday as authorities scrambled to ease a bottleneck in Britain, where thousands of drivers have been stuck for days after France imposed tougher coronavirus rules.

The port remained open despite the Christmas holiday so that ferries as well as the trains bringing trucks through the Channel Tunnel could operate—but only for trips from Britain to France.

"Yesterday, we had 1,000 lorries cross over from Dover. As of 6:00 pm (1700 GMT) we had 1,400 lorries from Britain," Benoit Rochet, head of the Calais port operator, said. "At this rate, the situation should be completely taken care of by tomorrow," he said.

Getlink, the Eurotunnel operator, said more than 1,000 trucks had transited the tunnel in both directions by 5:00 pm, two thirds of which had travelled from England to France. Most of the drivers headed straight for the highway, according to an AFP journalist at the scene.

Truckers were stranded in southeast England after France halted all travel from Britain on Sunday for 48 hours in a bid to prevent a new strain of coronavirus, which experts fear to be more contagious, from reaching its shores. The move created a



Trucks depart for England via the Channel Tunnel at the port of Calais on Friday. —AFP

massive logjam with up to 10,000 trucks parked along highways as well as on the runway of the Manston airfield, according to EU transport commissioner Adina Vaelean, who criticized the French government's decision.

Drivers fumed at having to spend Christmas in their cabs away from their families with only minimal toilet facilities because they were unable to get the Covid-19 tests that must be negative to be allowed into France. More than 10,000 tests had been carried out by Friday afternoon, of which 24 were positive, according to the British authorities.

Twenty-five French firefighters were again dispatched to Dover on Friday to

help carry out tests, following a first team sent over Thursday. France's Transport Minister Jean-Baptiste Djebbari tweeted that more than 1,000 Christmas Eve meals had also been sent to stranded drivers, distributed with the help of French Red Cross volunteers.

Britain's defense ministry said Friday that an additional 800 personnel had been deployed on top of 300 already on site to step up coronavirus tests for drivers and "help clear the backlog of vehicles." "There is a need for increased testing as more vehicles continue to arrive every hour," the ministry said on Twitter, adding that the teams would also deliver food and water to drivers waiting to return home. —AFP

ABK announces winners of the 'Talabat' draw

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced the names of the 18 winners for the month of December who won their 'spend

back' on Talabat, when paying with their ABK credit or prepaid cards. The draw took place on the 10th December 2020, under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The second and final draw will take place on the 7th January, 2021. All credit and prepaid cardholders are eligible to participate provided they have a minimum spend of KD 50 per month.

The lucky winners are:

Nasser Bader Almuhareb	Ali Abdulrahman AlHuwail
Ahmad Ali Bahman	Moath Yousef AlSanea
Khaled Ghaith AlGhaith	Abdulaziz Abdulrasool AlArbash
Fatemah Jamal AlQazweeni	AlAnoud Khaled AlDaress
Ahmad Musaed AlAmeeri	Fahad Abdulaziz AlAbdulrazzaq
Talal Mubarak Salem	Ahmad Hamed BoAbbas
Raya Yahya AlJanabi	Ahmad Mahmoud Abdelaleem
Ali Abdullah AlMuzaini	Sherif Mohammad AlBehairy
Ahmad Abdullah AlShatti	Abdulkareem Jamal AlMulla

What we know on post-Brexit trade pact

BRUSSELS: The European Union and Britain on Thursday agreed a post-Brexit trade deal after almost ten months of tortuous negotiations to govern ties when the UK exits the single market.

Here is what we know so far about the 2,000-page accord—still yet to be published—that covers areas from fishing to future competition after December 31.

Tariffs

The deal means there will be no tariffs or quotas on goods produced in the UK and EU moving between the two sides. British exports still have to comply with EU health and safety standards and there are strict rules governing products made with parts originating outside the EU or UK.

London has hailed the lack of tariffs as a major positive of the deal—but it simply helps maintain part of the benefits Britain already enjoyed as a member of the bloc.

Fishing

Future access for EU fisherman to Britain's rich water was one of the thorniest—and politically combustible—issues, and the last piece of the puzzle to fall into place before the deal could be announced. Britain had insisted it wanted to take back full control of its waters while EU coastal states sought to guarantee their fleets could keep fishing in UK waters.

In the end the two sides reached a hard fought compromise that will see EU boats gradually relinquish 25 per cent of their current quotas during a five-and-a-half year transition period. After that there will be annual negotiations on the amount of fish EU vessels can take from British waters—and if Brussels isn't happy it can impose economic measures against the UK.

Level playing field

Another major stumbling block was the so-called "level playing field" regulations that the EU insisted on to prevent British firms having an advantage over European rivals if London lowers standards in future, or subsidizes industries. The UK had fought hard to avoid having a system put in place that could see Brussels able to force it to follow its rules on such issues as environmental or labor regulations and state aid. But the UK government admitted the deal allowed for either side to impose "countermeasures if they believe they are being damaged" subject to arbitration.

Customs

Britain will leave the EU's customs union along with the single market at the end of the year, meaning that businesses face new red tape for imports and exports across the Channel. The UK said the agreement allows for the recognition of "trusted trader" schemes that could cut bureaucracy on both sides, but it is yet to be seen how widely this can be applied.

Security

The EU says the agreement "establishes a new framework for law enforcement and judicial cooperation in criminal and civil law matters". London said the deal will see the two continue to share DNA, fingerprint and passenger details and see them cooperate through the EU's Europol. Brussels says "security cooperation can be suspended in case of violations by the UK of its commitment for continued adherence to the European Convention of Human Rights".

'Big changes'

Despite the agreement, both sides warn that "big changes" are coming from January 1 for people and businesses around Europe. Citizens of the UK and EU will no longer enjoy free movement to live and work between the two. "The free movement of persons, goods, services and capital between the UK and the EU will end," Brussels said. —AFP

Classifieds

Sunday, December 27, 2020

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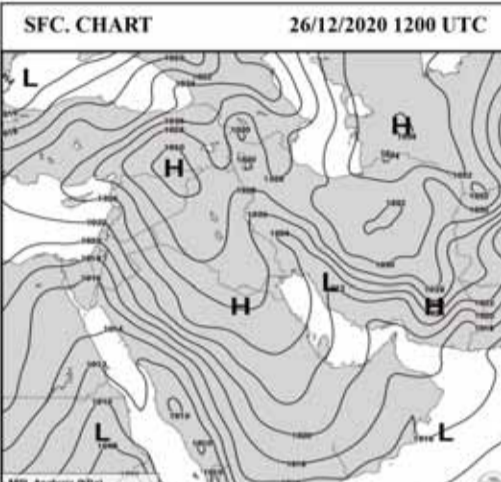


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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY NIGHT: Cold and Partly cloudy with light to moderate north westerly wind to variable wind with speed of 08 - 30 km/h.

BY DAY: Rather cold and Partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times north westerly wind with speed of 15 - 40 km/h with a chance for scattered rain.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. REC.	MIN. EXP.	SFC. CHART 26/12/2020 1200 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	18 °C	10 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	16 °C	08 °C		
ABDALY	17 °C	04 °C		
BUBYAN	16 °C	06 °C		
JAHRA	17 °C	07 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C		
SALMIYAH	16 °C	10 °C		
AHMADI	- °C	- °C		
NUWAISIB	18 °C	07 °C		
WAFRA	17 °C	05 °C		
SALMY	16 °C	04 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	12/27	Rather cold and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for scattered rain	16 °C	08 °C	NW	15 - 40 km/h
Monday	12/28	Rather cold and Cloudy to partly cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain	18 °C	10 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 35 km/h
Tuesday	12/29	Rather cold and Partly cloudy	18 °C	08 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 28 km/h
Wednesday	12/30	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	20 °C	10 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 26 km/h

TOMORROW PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:16
Sunrise	06:41
Zuhr	11:49
Asr	14:39
Sunset	16:57
Isha	18:20

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	16 °C
MIN. Temp.	11 °C
MAX. RH	80 %
MIN. RH	15 %
MAX. Wind	N 36 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Hospitals

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

Clinics

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Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
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Join the Dots



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

What a great day for you! You seem to have the innate listening abilities of a therapist or counselor. Everyone comes to you with their problems or to cry on your proverbial shoulder. They know that you will listen without judgment. Have you ever thought about doing something like this for a living? Perhaps today will make you think about it.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

What an extraordinary day for you, Cancer! The dynamic energy in the air will help you set new personal goals. The positive feedback you get from the people around you could inspire you to make some life-changing decisions for the good of you and your family. Don't hesitate to share the day's positive attitude with them.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Libra, you may have felt as if something has been changing in your family environment over the last few weeks. Today you will find out what's been going on. Someone close to you has been going through some important changes in his or her life. You feel as if you need to be there and accompany this person on a journey of self-development.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Capricorn, your lighthearted attitude has given you a reputation as an eternal teenager. But levity is also a sign of a very wise person, a person who knows how to laugh at their wisdom. Whether you realize it or not, you can get involved in a serious relationship without losing your lightheartedness. If you're already in a committed relationship, you know how true this is.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. This is your maxim for the day, Taurus. What have you done lately to improve the way you live your life? Would you consider taking off on some wild adventure without looking back? Today you may meet some people who will make you want to. They're adventurers looking for thrills and chills, with all the risks that come along with them.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

This is a terrific day for you, Leo. You will feel a greater sense of appreciation and respect for the people around you. The planning and hard work you've contributed recently is finally paying off. People are likely to arrive at your level of thinking. You'll find you can connect on a very productive level. Your emotions are under control and your thoughts crystal clear.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You tend to think of yourself as a lone warrior, Scorpio. Today your efforts over the last few weeks pay off. You've found your place in a group of people. You may even call it a family. You now have a place to come home to, whether it's to celebrate your victories or lick your wounds. If you could just open up to other people, you'd soon find that you have more than one safe haven.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

What changes have there been in your life since this time last year? Think about the events that have taken place. What have you accomplished? What decisions have you made? And most importantly, how much you have grown as a person? Try to make changes by following your intuition. Even though it seems stressful and sometimes painful, change means growth!



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Strength of character will be your partner today, Gemini. You seem to have an aura whose intensity scares some people and attracts others. Your force of character could be the cause of some wonderful feelings and emotions for the people close to you. Don't try and hide your emotions. They're the source of your creativity.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

In general, you tend to be critical of the way the government and politicians handle social issues and institutions. Your goal isn't just to criticize, however. You would also like to see some positive changes in these areas. The aura of understanding and comprehension in the air today helps you realize that if you want the world to evolve, you're going to have to get people to react.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You love the creative process, Sagittarius. Even watering your plants or painting a picture will give you a feeling of joy. If this month you get a chance to finish a project that you really care about, you will be satisfied with the results. And you will be surprised to see people react positively. It's OK to be proud of yourself.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

It may be upsetting to you, Pisces, but there's something you need to think about. You should finally get it through your head that the people you often call "brilliant" are only reflections of you. If this month you decide to have a little faith in yourself and assert yourself a little, you could be in for some very nice surprises! You'll see!



Shannon Batte unloads bins full of oyster shells at Red Bluff Road - a wasteland rented from the Port of Houston used as a curing site in Pasadena, Texas.

Oyster shells given new life as reefs off Texas coast

On the terrace of a seafood restaurant in Houston, Texas's largest city, a few ladies are enjoying a local oyster dish: the breaded mollusks are slathered in mayonnaise and served in a sandwich. Sitting in the shade of a palm tree on a warm winter's day, the diners have no idea that behind the restaurant a woman is busy giving the shells a second life. Thanks to Shannon Batte, they will soon form part of a reef in Galveston Bay, six miles (10 kilometers) away. Out of sight, the Galveston Bay Foundation employee loads seven trash cans each weighing 175 pounds (80 kilograms) onto her trailer.

The cans are full of not just oyster shells but also water, discarded oyster forks and squeezed lemons. All year round, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, she makes the rounds of the foundation's partner restaurants. "Most people like to enjoy their oysters in any month that has an 'r' in it," said Batte. "So currently, right now, it's December, so the oyster shell collection is a little more. But due to Covid there's not quite as much shell as we've normally had in the past."

"Our customers really want to know where do our oysters come from and what do you do with those shells," said Tom Tollett, owner of Tommy's Seafood Restaurant & Oyster Bar, quoted by the foundation. It was here that the first oyster shells were collected almost 10 years ago, in March 2011. The program has grown since then to include some 10 restaurants. Displayed on menus or tables, logos and diagrams show guests

the fate of the thousands of shells collected: they will simply return to the waters where they were formed. New oysters will settle and develop on these shells.

A 'coastline of life'

Galveston Bay is home to a seafood-rich ecosystem thanks to the brackish

To rebuild the ecosystem, the shells are now dumped each spring on rocks placed at the bottom of the water. Where the current is stronger, the shells are piled into nets and erected as dams. This becomes a new habitat and by breaking the waves, also helps fight soil erosion. "This is a method that we

bulkheads." To date, the foundation has used its method to protect more than 20 miles of coastline and restored 50 acres (20 hectares) of salt marshes. It collected 54 tons of shells in 2012, 125 in 2019 and 111 in 2020, despite the coronavirus pandemic. Once submerged, the shells are also perfect shelters for crabs, shrimp and small fish that will feed larger ones and contribute to the diversity of the environment.

'Curing site'

Developing the oyster population also offers another advantage: each mollusk naturally filters up to 50 gallons (190 liters) of water per day. But before taking a dip, Batte's shells stop at what the foundation calls a "curing site" between Houston and the coast. Batte, 33, empties her garbage cans in a field, removes the oyster forks and spreads the shells on the ground.

Three months later, they will be turned over using a small backhoe, and then spend at least another three months in the fresh air. This prolonged sun treatment in one of three dedicated sites sterilizes the shells by killing bacteria and parasites. The first flies arrive without delay and soon four wild boars are licking the shells and chomping on lemons. "They are less and less scared. Sometimes they don't wait until I am gone to feast. I am careful because they can attack. Luckily I have an air horn to scare them off," she said.— AFP



Shannon Batte poses next to the pick up truck used to transport the oysters shells, in front of Tommy's Seafood Restaurant & Oyster Bar.

mixture of fresh water from rivers and salt water from the Gulf of Mexico. In 1845, when Texas became a US state, the town of Galveston already had its own oyster bar. But in September 2008, Hurricane Ike, which killed 113 people in the United States, destroyed more than half of the oysters' habitat, smothering their reefs with sediment.

adapted from a sister organization in Florida, Tampa Bay Watch. It is used across the nation, particularly on the East and Gulf coasts," said Haille Leija, who is in charge of habitat restoration at the foundation.

"It allows for the establishment of a 'living shoreline' in contrast to hardened shoreline protection structures such as



Shannon Batte loads bins full of oysters shells, behind Tommy's Seafood Restaurant & Oyster Bar in Houston, Texas. — AFP photos



Oyster shells are seen at Red Bluff Road - a wasteland rented from the Port of Houston used as a curing site in Pasadena, Texas.

Square in talks to buy Jay-Z's Tidal

Digital payments company Square has held talks to acquire Jay-Z's Tidal music streaming service, Bloomberg News reported. Square chief executive Jack Dorsey, who also leads Twitter, aims to expand and diversify the company, according to the report, which was based on an unnamed source. Bloomberg said the talks may not result in a transaction. Jay-Z bought Tidal from Europe-based Aspiro in 2015 year in a deal valued at slightly more than \$56 million.

Owners include several other high-profile artists, including Madonna, Rihanna and Jay-Z's wife, Beyonce. But Tidal has struggled to compete against much larger streaming services such as Spotify and Apple. The privately-held company had three million paying subscriptions in 2016, when it last disclosed figures. Jay-Z surprised fans in December 2019 by moving his music catalogue back to Spotify after a two-year hiatus. Apple in 2016 also reportedly explored a purchase of Tidal to bolster its music streaming offerings.— AFP



STRANGE WORLD: THE WEEK'S OFFBEAT NEWS

Our weekly roundup of offbeat stories from around the world:

Y-front revolution

What is it with Russian spooks and underpants? In Soviet times foreign journalists would know they had had a visit from the KGB when they would find their underwear drawer rearranged. It was like a Kremlin calling card - "We are watching you." Now the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny claims to have tricked an alleged FSB agent into spilling the beans on the poisoning that nearly killed him by using that old trick beloved of radio hosts, the fake call. Pretending to be a Security Council official investigating why the agent had failed to kill him, Navalny got the man to divulge that they dusted the Novichok nerve agent along the seams of his underpants' crotch.

Knickers, Moscow insisted as it slapped sanctions on Germany, where Navalny was treated. But Navalny's supporters in Russia were soon waving underpants embroidered with the word Novichok in front of the world's media. Vladimir Putin is no doubt quaking in his pants at the prospect of boxer-brandishing protesters at the gates of the Kremlin. After the orange, rose and the jasmine revolutions, might there one day be a Y-front one?

It's raining iguanas

Only just recovered from the hurricane season, Floridians now face a new menace - showers of iguanas. The Sunshine State is suffering an unusual cold snap with temperatures set to fall to freezing at Christmas. Which means iguanas will start falling from trees. The cold-blooded lizards literally freeze up when the temperature drops below four degrees Centigrade and fall from on high, posing a real danger for anyone underneath. In recent years the authorities have urged Floridians to cull as many of the illegal immigrants as they can, with iguanas slipping over the Mexican border and in from the Caribbean in vast numbers. Frost can't kill them, however, and some misguided locals have been known to cover fallen lizards in towels to warm them up or even take them home - a big no-no for experts. For defrosted iguanas are particularly dangerous and can quickly turn vicious.

It's a Christmas miracle. Nuns in a French convent have gone viral with an all-dancing all-singing video in which they appeal for help to adapt their spartan cells so older sisters won't have to go to an old folks home. With rosary beads flying and woolly-stocking feet kicking, the Apostolic Sisters of Saint John shot "Together till the End" in their ancient priory in the Burgundy village of Semur-en-Brionnais. The clip ends with the oldest nun sung up into the heavens in a hot air balloon. And pennies have indeed been falling down with the nuns nearing their 100,000-euro (\$122,000) target to do the work.—AFP

Lifestyle | Features



A volunteer delivers to a member of the Iraqi security forces in the northern Christian town of Qaraqosh a Christmas gift package. — AFP photos



A volunteer delivers to a resident of Iraq's northern Christian town of Qaraqosh a Christmas gift package.



A woman reads a hand-written personalized Christmas greeting card, one of many sent from across Iraq and delivered by a group of volunteers to residents of Iraq's northern Christian town of Qaraqosh.



Iraqi worshippers attend Christmas mass at the Syriac Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception (Al Tahira-I-Kubra), in the predominantly Christian town of Qaraqosh, in Nineveh province, some 30 kilometers from Mosul.

CARDS FROM ACROSS IRAQ BRING CHRISTMAS CHEER TO CHRISTIANS

It wasn't Santa on a sleigh, but it was close: just before dusk on Christmas Eve, a busload of volunteers pulled into the Iraqi Christian town of Qaraqosh to deliver holiday happiness. Under a pinkish sky, they disembarked from their charter bus with cardboard boxes full of Christmas cards, bearing hand-written messages from across Muslim-majority Iraq. "A special greeting to our Christian brothers," read one card, signed in the overwhelmingly Muslim southern port city of Basra the previous day.

On foot, members of Iraq's Tahawer (Dialogue) initiative and other volunteers delivered some 1,400 cards across the northern town, which was ravaged by jihadist rule after the Islamic State group advanced east across the Nineveh Plains in 2014. "It's a beautiful initiative," said Rand Khaled, after receiving a Christmas card outside the Syriac Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception in Qaraqosh. She was dressed in her Christmas Eve finest, with a chic chocolate-coloured coat shielding her from the cold.

"We need initiatives like this every once in a while, because people who don't know these areas absolutely should get to know them," Khaled told AFP. Iraq's Christians number around 400,000 today, down from some 1.5 million before the US-led invasion toppled longtime dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003. It is a tiny minority in a



An Iraqi girl dressed as Santa Claus attends Christmas mass at the Syriac Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception in the predominantly Christian town of Qaraqosh.

country of 40 million people, most of whom are Shiite Muslims.

A special symbol

The cards came from all over Iraq: from the capital Baghdad and the Shiite shrine city of Najaf, from mainly Sunni Arab Salahaddin province in the west and the Kurdish city of Dohuk in the far north. They were packed into dozens of boxes and transported up to 950 kilometers through military checkpoints before reaching Qaraqosh. "I don't know how to describe it," said Nishwan Mohammad, Tahawer's program man-

ager. "People were ecstatic—they never expected someone to come visit them, much less bring them letters from all over Iraq," he said.

In addition to the handwritten messages, each card bore a special hand-drawn symbol of the province from which it was sent. Those from Basra—signed by sheikhs, university students and even fishmongers—featured the port city's emblematic new bridge across the Shatt al-Arab waterway with Santa and his reindeer flying overhead. Those from Baghdad showed part of the capital's much loved Tahrir (Freedom) Monument.



Iraqi priests light a fire as they hold Christmas eve mass at the Syriac Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception (Al Tahira-I-Kubra), in the predominantly Christian town of Qaraqosh, in Nineveh province, some 30 kilometers from Mosul.

And the cards from Salahaddin bore an image of the spiralled Great Mosque of Samarra, which was designed to look like the ancient Mesopotamian ziggurat—but also roughly resembles a Christmas tree. Pharmacists, tailors, a linen shop owner and a cellphone salesman were among the signatories there.

Since the jihadists of IS were pushed out of Qaraqosh in 2016, the town has slowly started to rebuild thanks to funding by international organizations and its residents' own savings. It sees few visitors, however, which is why the Christmas Eve delivery was so special.

"After the war that took place in this province, there was a kind of estrangement among the different communities," said Imad Al-Sayer, an activist from the nearby city of Mosul who helped distribute the cards. "We're taking the initiative. God willing, these letters will be constructive messages that bring positive changes to the communities of this province." — AFP



A member of the Iraqi Ground Forces Command writes a personalized message on a Christmas greeting card in Iraq's southern city of Basra.



A volunteer delivers to a resident of Iraq's northern Christian town of Qaraqosh a Christmas gift package.



A fish merchant presents a personalized message on a Christmas greeting card in Iraq's southern city of Basra, to be delivered to residents of the northern Christian town of Qaraqosh.

Sports

Photo of the Day



Canoeist, Vavrinec Hradilek seen in Wanaka, New Zealand. - Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Gutsy India bounce back to skittle Australia in 2nd Test

'We're just looking to control the controllables'

MELBOURNE: A resilient India bounced back from their embarrassing first Test exploits to bundle out Australia for just 195 and take a grip on the second Test in Melbourne after a riveting opening day yesterday. After their horror show in Adelaide last week, where they lost by eight wickets and were skittled for 36 in their second innings, the tourists were desperate to start well.

And they delivered after Australian captain Tim Paine won the toss and chose to bat in front of 27,615 socially-distanced fans, just short of the maximum allowed under coronavirus restrictions at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. On a pitch offering turn and bounce, the hosts found it hard going against a high-quality attack led by Jasprit Bumrah (4-56), Ravi Ashwin (3-35) and the impressive Mohammed Siraj (2-40), making his debut for the injured Mohammed Shami. Marnus Labuschagne top-scored with 48 but that was as good as it got.

It left Indian openers Shubman Gill, also on debut, and Mayank Agarwal needing to negotiate 40 minutes at the end of the day. Agarwal was not up to the task, trapped lbw by a Mitchell Starc inswinger in the first over. Gill was dropped on five by Labuschagne but otherwise looked comfortable, smacking five boundaries to reach 28 and help steer India to 36 for one at close with the experienced Cheteshwar Pujara unbeaten on seven. "In the first session we were just trying to bowl in the rights areas," said Bumrah, who praised Siraj for "bowling his heart out".

He added that the plan Sunday was for the batsmen to be positive, rather than conservative. "We're just looking to control the controllables, not being reckless but being confident." With Ajinkya Rahane captaining the side in place of Virat Kohli, who has returned home for the birth of his first child, India got off to a perfect start, getting Burns (0), Matthew Wade (30) and Smith (0) before lunch. It left Australia in trouble but Labuschagne rode his luck, surviving two review decisions, to lead a recovery, putting on 86 with Travis Head (38).



MELBOURNE: Australia's Travis Head (right) plays a ball to leg on the first day of the second cricket Test match between Australia and India played at the MCG in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

Head had a nervous start but grew in confidence before Bumrah enticed an edge which carried to Rahane at gully, sparking a collapse. Labuschagne looked set for a ninth half-century but a brilliant catch by Gill ended his vigil and handed Siraj his first Test wicket. Allrounder Cameron Green ground out 12 before he too fell to Siraj, then an excellent catch by Hanuma Vihari off Ashwin accounted for Paine (13). Nathan Lyon hit a cameo 20 but Australia's tail otherwise failed to wag.

Still in game

"We had probably three innocuous dismissals that we probably didn't need to, frustrating dismissals and they were guys who were set and in," said Labuschagne. "Just need to be better there ... that whoever gets in on the day, whether myself or anyone

else in the top order, we make sure we get big scores." But he added: "I think we're (still) in the game." With David Warner still injured, the hosts went into the clash unchanged, with Burns opening alongside Wade. Burns hit an unbeaten 51 in Adelaide to relieve some pressure after a long lean spell, but his performance will once more raise questions over his place in the team.

He looked tentative against Bumrah and got a nick to a delivery he should have left. At the other end, Wade had an escape on four but started finding the gaps before attempting a big hit off Ashwin, which proved his downfall for 30. Ravindra Jadeja took the catch, but only just with Gill also underneath it. The pair collided but Jadeja managed to hang on. Ashwin then claimed the crucial scalp of Smith, who was undone by an off-break with Pujara holding a catch at slip after the world's top batsman faced just eight balls. — AFP

Gritty Williamson lifts NZ after early Pakistan strike

MOUNT MAUNGANUI: An unbeaten 94 by a gritty Kane Williamson had New Zealand (NZ) at 222 for three in the face of a concerted Pakistan attack at stumps on day one of the first Test in Mount Maunganui yesterday. Henry Nicholls was the other not out batsman on 42 as New Zealand recovered from being 13 for two after Pakistan's baby-faced destroyer Shaheen Afridi removed openers Tom Latham and Tom Blundell cheaply on a green, seaming wicket. In a 120-run stand, filled with determination and concentration in difficult conditions, Williamson and Ross Taylor pulled New Zealand back into the game.

Taylor hit 10 fours and a six as he attacked the bowling while Williamson took a more conservative approach. "Obviously we're happy with where we're at," Taylor said. "You had to try and take them on or just try and get through it. You expect that on a day one wicket. It definitely flattened out and it's probably a little bit two-paced at times and I'm sure it's only going to get more uneven over the next couple of days." After Afridi split the pair with a masterful piece of bowling to remove Taylor for 70, Williamson and Henry Nicholls added a further 89.

Taylor was set up to fall by Afridi who bowled full, short then a bouncer in successive deliveries and followed with a good-length, rising ball that Taylor could not resist slashing at. But he succeeded only in feathering the ball to Mohammad Rizwan behind the stumps. The 20-year-old Afridi, standing 1.99 meters (6ft 6in) tall, also removed Latham for four and Blundell for five to end the day with three for 55. Mohammad Abbas, while not taking a wicket, kept the batsmen pinned down and conced-



MOUNT MAUNGANUI: New Zealand's Kane Williamson makes a run during the first day of the first cricket test match between New Zealand and Pakistan at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui yesterday. — AFP

ed only 25 runs off his 21 overs. Taylor, in his 104th Test, could not help but be impressed with Afridi playing his 12th. "When the ball was 50 overs old it was still swinging and he could pick and choose when he used it and he's got a slippery bumper. He's only going to get better and Pakistan are going to see a very good bowler in years to come," Taylor said. Afridi's opening onslaught had New Zealand at two for 13 before Williamson and Taylor combined in a century partnership, their 10th together. By stumps, Williamson had faced 243 deliveries after being in the middle for all but the first three balls before Latham was dismissed.

The closest Pakistan came to dismissing the New Zealand captain came before lunch with Williamson on 18 when Shan Masood spilled a difficult one-handed chance low to his left. Naseem Shah was the unfortunate bowler and the teenaged quick was to suffer again when he tempted Nicholls, on six, to hook a short ball only for Mohammad Abbas, waiting for the catch at long leg, to drop the regulation chance. — AFP

China star swimmer Sun Yang's doping ban overturned

GENEVA: Chinese swimmer and triple Olympic champion Sun Yang won a huge victory seven months before the Tokyo Olympics with Switzerland's top court overturning an eight-year doping ban. The 29-year-old—the first Chinese swimmer to win Olympic gold—will now have a chance to state his case again at a second hearing by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), based in the Swiss city of Lausanne. He is now free to compete until his case is heard again, meaning he could aim to defend his 200m title in the coronavirus-delayed 2020 Games.

Sun is accused of destroying a blood vial with a hammer when collectors visited his home in September 2018 during an out-of-competition doping test. The Swiss Federal Supreme Court said in a statement on Thursday that it had "approved the request by the Chinese swimmer Sun Yang for revision of the arbitral award of the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in Lausanne dated 28 February 2020... on the grounds of bias of one of the arbitrators of the CAS".

Sun's lawyers had previously accused CAS panel chairman Franco Frattini of bias and putting out anti-China tweets in which he protested against a dog festival held in Wuhan. "The award of the CAS is set aside. The CAS will have to render a new award in the case of Sun Yang in a different composition of the panel," the federal court said. CAS issued a statement saying "it very much regrets" the objections against Frattini were not raised by Sun's lawyers earlier. Sport's top court added: "The CAS will accept the ruling of the Swiss Federal Tribunal (SFT) and will immediately resume the procedure WADA v/ Sun Yang & FINA in accordance with the instructions given by the SFT." — AFP

News in brief

Jesus, Walker contract COVID

LONDON: Manchester City forward Gabriel Jesus and defender Kyle Walker will miss the busy festive period after contracting coronavirus, the Premier League club said on Friday. Two members of staff have also tested positive for the virus with Brasil's Jesus and England's Walker set to be sidelined until January 6's League Cup semi-final with Manchester United due to a 10-day quarantine. "All four personnel will now observe a period of self-isolation in accordance with Premier League and UK Government protocol on quarantine," City said in a statement. The players will sit out for the match with Newcastle, Monday's trip to Newcastle and January 3's visit to Chelsea. — AFP

PSG sack coach Tuchel

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain have fired their coach Thomas Tuchel with former Tottenham boss Mauricio Pochettino lined up as his replacement, according to various media reports. The French champions declined to make any comment when contacted by AFP to confirm the reports carried by L'Equipe newspaper and RMC and German tabloid Bild. The 47-year-old German arrived at the Parc des Princes on a two-year contract in 2018, and guided PSG to their first ever Champions League final last season. But now, if the reports are confirmed, less than three months on from that final against Bayern Munich in Lisbon, Tuchel has become the first PSG coach to leave mid-season since Antoine Kombouare was replaced by Carlo Ancelotti in December 2011. Pochettino left Tottenham in November 2019, six months after leading them into their first Champions League final. — AFP

'Fearless' batsman Edrich dies

LONDON: England's former "fearless" opening batsman John Edrich has died at the age of 83, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced on Friday. Diagnosed with leukaemia in 2000 the left-hander who played for county side Surrey scored 103 first-class centuries. He played 77 Tests, scoring 5,138 runs at an average of 43.54. Former England great Ian Botham wrote on Twitter: "Very sad news today to wake up on Christmas Day and to be told that John Edrich has passed away!! A wonderful man who I was lucky enough to spend some quality time with...RIP" ECB CEO Tom Harrison said: "With John's passing, we've lost a prolific and fearless batsman - one of the select few who have scored more than 5,000 runs for England." His duels with some of the world's best fast bowlers were legendary, and it's a testament to his ability that his 310 not out against New Zealand in 1965 remains the fifth highest Test score by an English batsman. — AFP

COVID affects World Cups

PARIS: FIFA has postponed next year's U-20 World Cup in Indonesia and U-17 tournament in Peru until 2023 due to coronavirus. "The COVID-19 pandemic continues to present challenges for the hosting of international sporting events and to have a restrictive effect on international travel, explained football's governing body in a statement on its website. "The global situation has failed to normalize to a sufficient level to address the challenges associated with hosting both tournaments, including the feasibility of the relevant qualification pathways." It added that FIFA looked forward to working with both host countries "to organize successful tournaments" in 2023. The two events follow other international football competitions to fall victim to the virus, with Euro 2020 held over until next June, the Copa America moved to the same date, and the Africa Cup of Nations, held over until January 2022. — AFP

Scotland women's coach quits

LONDON: Shelley Kerr, who guided the Scotland women's team to their first ever World Cup finals in 2019, is stepping down from the job, the Scottish Football Association said on Thursday. The 51-year-old leaves the role after three years having failed to secure qualification for the Euros in 2022 - a home defeat by Finland earlier this month ending their hopes. Kerr - who also coached Scotland at the Euro 2017 finals where they went out in the group stage - said it was time to confront new challenges. "I am privileged to have played a part in such an historical moment in Scottish football (reaching the World Cup finals)," she said in a statement. "That is something that will live with me forever. "I know the timing is right for me to look ahead to the next chapter, to face new challenges and to create and enjoy more amazing experiences on my journey," she said in a statement. — AFP

India to increase IPL to 10 teams

NEW DELHI: The Indian Premier League is to be increased from eight to 10 teams as the world's richest Twenty20 event seeks to cash in on its growing television audience. The Board of Control for Cricket (BCCI) in India announced the move after its annual meeting on Thursday but did not say when the two teams would start with media reports claiming it would be in 2022.

The 14th IPL is scheduled to start in March and the tournament would need one year to address tricky issues around logistics, media rights and planning for the new outfits, cricket officials were quoted as saying. A bigger tournament would almost certainly mean a longer stay in India for the top players from around the world who earn huge salaries. India captain Virat Kohli is said to have earned \$2.3 million playing 15 matches for Royal Challengers Bangalore. — AFP

Sports

NBA champion Lakers rout Mavs while Nets, Bucks and Heat roll

10th Christmas victory in 15 holiday appearances

LOS ANGELES: Anthony Davis scored 28 points while LeBron James added 22 as the defending NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers routed Dallas 138-115 in Friday's feature game of a record-setting Christmas slate. James had a game-high 10 assists and seven rebounds in 31 minutes, while Davis contributed eight rebounds, five assists and two steals and reserve Montrezl Harrell had 22 points for the Lakers, who played on the holiday for a 22nd consecutive year. "We have a lot of offensive firepower," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said.

James, who turns 36 on Wednesday, rose to second on the NBA's all-time Christmas points list with 383, passing Oscar Robertson by six to pull within 12 of matching the late Kobe Bryant's career record. It was the 10th Christmas victory in 15 holiday appearances by James, who equaled former Miami teammate Dwyane Wade for the most career Christmas NBA wins. Vogel wants to ease the workload on James after the shortest off-season break in NBA history but James is confident he can handle whatever comes.

"I train my body for whatever. I'm not your typical guy in his 18th season," James said. "If you stay ready you never have to get ready." Slovakian star guard Luka Doncic scored 27 points for Dallas, but the Mavericks were outscored in every quarter and out rebounded 53-27. "We got a really good team," Davis said. Brooklyn's Kyrie Irving and Miami's Duncan Robinson each matched an NBA Christmas record with seven 3-pointers, the Heat stretching their holiday win streak to eight games.

Irving scored 37 points, hitting 7-of-10 3-point attempts in his return to Boston, as the Nets ripped his former Celtics teammates 123-95. "I'm glad we could put on a performance for everybody," Irving said. "We're definitely going to continue to progress every day." Robinson finished with 23 points, hitting 7-of-13 from beyond the arc, in leading 2020 NBA

runner-up Miami over visiting New Orleans 111-98. "Getting more and more comfortable every day," Robinson said. "Last year was a great learning experience. We're just trying to build on it." Also rolling to a holiday triumph were the Milwaukee Bucks, who had a game-high 31 points from Khris Middleton to beat Golden State 138-99 - the second-most lopsided blowout in NBA Christmas history - thanks to a 72-43 Bucks edge in the second half.

"We just wanted to put on a show," Middleton said. At Boston, Brooklyn's Kevin Durant scored 16 of his 29 in the third quarter and the Nets seized an 86-77 edge before pulling away in the fourth quarter. The Nets became the first club since the 2008-09 Lakers to win their first two games by 20 or more points. "We can't exceed our own expectations," Irving said. "We know this is a long journey ahead." As for his return to Boston, Irving said, "I went to war with those guys. We're going to continue to lean on each other as brothers off the floor and compete on it."

No Butler, no problem

Goran Dragic came off Miami's bench to score 18 points, and Bam Adebayo added 17 for the Heat, whose NBA-best Christmas record is 11-2 despite Jimmy Butler missing the second half with right ankle stiffness. "When he goes down, it's up to us to pick it up for him," Robinson said. "I thought we did a good job of sticking with it and getting a good win today." Zion Williamson scored 32 points and grabbed 14 rebounds to lead the Pelicans. At Milwaukee, two-time reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 15 points and grabbed 13 rebounds to spark the Bucks, while two-time MVP Stephen Curry had a team-best 19 points.

The Los Angeles Clippers beat host Denver 121-108 despite an injury to Kawhi Leonard midway



LOS ANGELES: Luka Doncic #77 of the Dallas Mavericks guards LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers in the first half at Staples Center on December 25, 2020. —AFP

into the fourth quarter when teammate Serge Ibaka struck him in the face going for a rebound, leaving him bleeding and sprawled on the court. Paul George scored 23 points and passed off nine assists for the Clippers while Leonard had 21 points, seven

assists, five rebounds and four steals. Denver's Nikola Jokic barely missed being the first player since Magic Johnson in 1982 to open a season with back-to-back triple-doubles, producing 24 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds. —AFP

Barcelona loom for expected new PSG coach Pochettino

PARIS: Mauricio Pochettino is widely reported to be Thomas Tuchel's successor as Paris Saint-Germain coach and the number one item on the Argentine's in-tray will be February's date with Barcelona. Tuchel was reportedly given his marching orders on Thursday, four months after guiding the Qatari-backed club to their first ever Champions League final, August's 1-0 defeat to Bayern Munich.

The German, whose dismissal has yet to be officially confirmed by the club, leaves the Parc des Princes having secured a last 16 Champions League clash with Barca and PSG sitting third in Ligue 1, a point shy of leaders Lyon. Pochettino's opening match in charge will be January 6's trip to Saint-Etienne on Ligue 1's resumption after the winter break. Then, on February 16, the 48-year-old has his first massive test against his compatriot Lionel Messi's Catalans, with the return leg on March 6.

Pochettino was let go after five and a half years

at Spurs in the aftermath of leading the north London side to their first ever appearance in a Champions League final against Liverpool in 2019. Although he has yet to win any silverware the former PSG defender's stock is high in managerial circles. The Parisians will be keen to complete his signing and avoid missing their man who has been linked to the likes of Real Madrid, Manchester United and Barca in recent months.

Pochettino is due to team up with Neymar, Kylian Mbappe and other well-heeled company at PSG's first post-Christmas training session on January 3. While the club refrained from making any public comment about the abrupt change in personnel, France World Cup winner Mbappe took to Instagram to note Tuchel's departure. "Unfortunately it's the law of football but no-one will forget your time here," Mbappe said. "You wrote a great line of the club's history and I say thank you coach," he added.

Ideal fit

Pochettino arrives in the French capital with his successful stint at Spurs preceded by a season at Southampton. His maiden post as a coach was at struggling Espanyol, where in 2009 his first match in charge was against his expected future foes, Barcelona. He earned plaudits for saving the

Spanish outfit, where he played under Marcelo Bielsa in 1998, from relegation.

With his expected new employers hungry to finally fulfil their Champions league desire Pochettino will have little time to settle in before getting his new team firing on all cylinders for Barca. Like Tuchel, as Mbappe's tribute illustrated, Pochettino is at ease in man-managing a dressing room crammed with a galaxy of stars. The son of a farmer from Murphy, in the north of Argentina, he is a stickler for detail, which coupled with his tactical acumen, devotion to an attractive style of play, personnel skills, and popularity amongst the PSG fans from his playing days, makes him a potentially ideal fit as the new occupant of the PSG dugout.

He will have under his wing several compatriots to count on such as Mauro Icardi, Angel Di Maria and Leandro Paredes. His anticipated arrival before the winter transfer window will allow him to bring in new faces, with French newspaper Le Parisien identifying one as his former Spurs charge, Inter Milan's attacking midfielder Christian Eriksen. And looking further ahead, given their Argentine ties and knowing each other well Pochettino may be the catalyst for six-time Ballon d'Or winner Messi to start regarding PSG as potential new employers when he is free to move from the Camp Nou at the end of the season. —AFP

Kuwait shooters win six medals

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait shooters won six various medals (one gold, two silver and three bronze) during the Gulf tournament for the 10m Air Rifle and Pistol, which was held online from 24-26 December, 2020 under the patronage of the GCC Shooting organization committee - with the participation of 77 shooters of both genders. Kuwait's Hussa Nabil Al-Zayed won the first place and the gold medal in the 10m Air Rifle, while her teammate Mariam Mohammad Irzouqi took the second place. Hussa Al-Zayed, Mariam Irzouqi and Batool Ashkanani team won the silver medal in the team's event.

As for the men's 10m Air Rifle, Ali Farhan Al-Mutairi won third place, while the team

of Ali Al-Mutairi, Abdallah Al-Harby and Bandar Al-Mutairi won the bronze medal in the team's event. The team of Hamad Al-Namshan, Ali Al-Mutairi and Saad Al-Ajmi won the bronze medal of the teams' 10m Air Pistol.

Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Secretary General dedicated the victory to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, board of directors and the entire shooting community. Al-Osaimi said he is proud of the shooters achievement in this tournament.



Talk of title is for others not Solskjaer's Man Utd

LONDON: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said on Thursday talk of Manchester United winning their first Premier League title since 2013 will remain out of bounds amongst him and his players. The 47-year-old Norwegian finds himself now being praised after guiding United into third place in the table-five points off leaders Liverpool-having been favored for the sack earlier in the season. United could move into second if they beat Leicester, who presently occupy that place, on Saturday.

Solskjaer takes them to the Foxes on the back of reaching the League Cup semi-finals-where they will meet holders Manchester City. "There is noise around Man Utd anyway, so for us it's about improving as a team, taking one game at a time-and we have to, that's the name of the game," said Solskjaer when asked about the title. "That is the only way that you are going to challenge for anything at the end of the season anyway so it's not something that we talk about."

Solskjaer-who guided United to three semi-finals last season-said being complimented added another factor for him and the players to deal with. "The only thing that we talk about and focus on is improving day by day and learning, and how to deal with certain situations," he said. "Maybe now at the moment we are getting praise and that's another thing to learn to deal with." —AFP

Skating star Hanyu makes stylish return to competition

TOKYO: Japan's two-time Olympic figure skating champion Yuzuru Hanyu made a stylish return to competition Friday after skipping the Grand Prix season over fears of coronavirus infection. Resplendent in a gold-studded black outfit, Hanyu unveiled a new short program routine set to "Let Me Entertain You" by Robbie Williams at the Japanese national championships in Nagano, and claimed the lead with a score of 103.53.

The 26-year-old star had been out of action since February after deciding his asthma made competing in this season's Grand Prix series too risky during the pandemic, but he picked up where he left off with a confident performance. "First of all, it was important just to get back to competition," said Hanyu, who

admitted to feeling "conflicted" about competing this week as infections surge around Japan.

"I had been able to do some really good practice, and although my performance wasn't worth the score I got, I managed to land all my jumps. Now I want to execute my program tomorrow," Hanyu leads 17-year-old Yuma Kagiyama, who won the NHK Trophy last month in his senior Grand Prix debut, and Pyeongchang Olympic silver medalist Shoma Uno, who is attempting to win his fifth straight national title. With Canadian coach Brian Orser unable to join him because of travel restrictions, Hanyu sat alone clutching a Winnie the Pooh soft toy as he waited for his score, after unveiling his high-tempo new routine.

He opened with a quadruple salchow before nailing a quad toe loop to triple toe loop combination, then followed with a triple axel before channeling British pop star Williams with a slide on his knees to finish. "It was a rock song so there was a rock theme," said Hanyu. "I tried to do it in the same kind of style as Robbie Williams. At first I was looking for piano music for the routine, but given all that has

gone on in the news, I thought it would be better to choose something more upbeat. I wanted to give people watching something uplifting amid all the gloomy things that have been going on."

Japan's national championships this year double as a qualifier for the world championships in Stockholm next spring. Hanyu is aiming to win the national title for the first time since 2016, having missed the event three times since then through injury or illness. "To be honest, I was a bit disappointed that I couldn't hear any cheers," said Hanyu said of his performance, in front of a crowd ordered not to yell because of virus countermeasures. "But I felt that people watching on TV and over the internet would be cheering at home, so I was able to enjoy myself." —AFP



Yuzuru Hanyu

Oldest Olympic champion Keleti to turn 100



Agnes Keleti

BUDAPEST: Hungarian gymnast Agnes Keleti, the world's oldest living Olympic champion as well as a Holocaust survivor, is still showing off as she looks forward to turning 100 next month. "I feel good, but I don't look in the mirror, that's my trick! Then I remain young!" Keleti told AFP in Budapest last month. A five-times Olympic champion, Keleti, who celebrates her birthday January 9, is also Hungary's most successful gymnast, and one of the most decorated Jewish athletes in history.

While she now has dementia that affects her short-term memory, her feisty spirit remains intact. Moving in a sprightly manner around her apartment where both her life mementoes and Olympic medals are on display, she joked about not being let perform the full-leg splits anymore. "I'm told by my caretaker that it's not good for me at this age," she laughed, while leaving through a new book "The Queen of Gymnastics, 100 years of Agnes Keleti" published to mark her centenary birthday. Keleti's life story, including Olympic glory and Holocaust escape, reads like a gripping Hollywood film script. Born in 1921, she won 10 gymnastics medals in all, most won after she turned 30 and was competing against gymnasts half her age, including five golds in Helsinki (1952) and Melbourne (1956). "I did sport not because it felt good but to see the world," Keleti told AFP in a 2016 interview. Called up to the national team in 1939, she won her first Hungarian title the next year, but later in 1940 was barred from taking part in any sporting activity due to her Jewish background.

After the Nazi German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, she escaped deportation to a death camp by getting false documents and assuming the identity of a maid girl Pirooska Juhasz. "I stayed alive thanks to Pirooska with whom I swapped not only clothes and papers, but also the way she talked," said Keleti, who kept fit while hiding in the countryside by regular running. Keleti's father and several members of her family were killed in Auschwitz, while her mother and brother were rescued thanks to the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg. —AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Leeds United v Burnley	beIN Sports HD 1	15:00
West Ham v Brighton & Hove Albion	beIN Sports HD 1	17:15
Liverpool v West Bromwich Albion	beIN Sports HD 1	19:30
Wolves v Tottenham Hotspur	beIN Sports HD 1	22:15

14 Gritty Williamson lifts NZ after early Pakistan strike



15 Oldest Olympic champion Agnes Keleti to turn 100



15 Lakers rout Mavericks as Nets, Bucks and Heat roll



Man United miss out on second

Aston Villa soar into English Premier League top six



LEICESTER: Leicester City's English striker Jamie Vardy (center) shoots to score their second goal during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Manchester United at King Power Stadium in Leicester yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: A late Axel Tuanzebe own goal prevented Manchester United moving up to second in the Premier League after a 2-2 draw at Leicester, as Aston Villa moved into the top six with victory over Crystal Palace yesterday. A share of the spoils between the sides in second and third at the King Power Stadium means Chelsea have the chance to move into second when they visit Arsenal later, with the Gunners desperately in need of a win to ease their fears of a relegation battle at the other end of the table.

United missed out on equalling a Premier League record of 11 straight away wins as for once this season they paid for not finishing strongly. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men had come from

behind in each of their previous away league games this season, but twice went in front through Marcus Rashford midway through the first half and Bruno Fernandes 11 minutes from time. "One point is not the worst result but we are disappointed we didn't get away with three," said Solskjaer.

"We had loads of big chances and we could've finished it off. They are a very dangerous side." Harvey Barnes's blistering strike leveled for Leicester before half-time and United were undone by Jamie Vardy's movement in the box late on as the veteran striker latched onto Ayoze Perez's cross and his shot deflected in off the unfortunate Tuanzebe. "It's important for the development of us as a

team and as a squad that we can come from behind against a really, really good side, a top side, and get the result," said Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers.

Villa transformed

Villa's transformation from just staying up on the final day of last season to contending for Europe continued as they held on a man down for the full second half to beat Palace 3-0.

The Eagles were thrashed 7-0 by Liverpool last weekend and got off to another dreadful start as Bertrand Traore turned in the rebound after Vicente Guaita saved Ollie Watkins's first effort. A tussle between Tyrone Mings and Wilfried Zaha resulted in a yellow card

for both and moments later when Mings blocked off Zaha, the England international was dismissed in first-half stoppage time. However, Villa soaked up the pressure and the 10 men extended their lead when Kortney Hause forced the ball home from close range after Watkins's header came off the bar.

Watkins also played a part in the third as he teed up Anwar El Ghazi to fire in off the far post for his fourth goal in four games. Fulham edged to within a point of safety with a 0-0 draw at home with Southampton.

The Londoners were without manager Scott Parker as he was isolating due to a family member testing positive for coronavirus. However, Fulham did their

absent boss proud as they matched a Southampton side flying high at the other end of the table.

Fulham needed a sensational save from Alphonse Areola to claw away James Ward-Prowse's first-half free-kick, while Shane Long and Theo Walcott had late goals ruled out for offside for the visitors, who missed the killer instinct of the injured Danny Ings. Everton also have the chance to move into second behind Merseyside rivals Liverpool later on Boxing Day when they visit winless Sheffield United. Manchester City are also in action at home to Newcastle, badly needing to win to keep their title hopes alive as they trail Liverpool by eight points with a game in hand. — AFP

Kamara runs for six touchdowns as NFL Saints rip Vikings

WASHINGTON: Alvin Kamara ran for 155 yards and an NFL record-tying six touchdowns to lead the New Orleans Saints in routing Minnesota 52-33 on Friday in an NFL Christmas contest. Kamara carried 22 times and caught three passes for 17 yards while scoring on runs of 40, 7, 6, 5, 3 and 1 yards then credited his offensive line blockers for opening holes in the Vikings defensive line. "It's a good day," Kamara said. "The O-line, kudos to them. They get the game ball for sure. I did a small part. They did the rest." Kamara matched the all-time NFL record for rushing touchdowns in a game set by Ernie Nevers of the Chicago Cardinals in 1929 in a 40-6 victory over the Chicago Bears.

The Saints (11-4) clinched a fourth consecutive NFC South division title, having already secured their place in the NFL playoffs, while the Vikings fell to 6-9 and were eliminated from post-season contention. "We still have got so much more room to grow," Kamara



NEW ORLEANS: New Orleans Saints players celebrate a touchdown during the fourth quarter against the Minnesota Vikings at Mercedes-Benz Superdome on December 25, 2020. — AFP

said. "Every week we're looking to get better. We want to do more. We're tasting greatness. We've still got a long way to go." Kamara has 21 touchdowns this season, including a team-record 15 rushing touchdowns. He opened the scoring with a 40-yard touchdown run but the Vikings answered on the next possession on Dalvin Cook's 15-yard touchdown run.

Kamara's 1-yard touchdown run capped a 66-yard Saints march and Wil Lutz kicked a 30-yard field goal to give New Orleans a 17-7 edge early in the

second quarter. Minnesota's Mike Boone responded with a 4-yard touchdown run but Kamara scored on a 5-yard run with 38 seconds remaining in the second quarter to lift the Saints ahead 24-14 at halftime.

A deflected Drew Brees pass was intercepted by the Vikings' Hardy Nickerson, giving Minnesota the ball at the Saints' 18-yard line, and that set up a 2-yard touchdown pass from Kirk Cousins to Irv Smith, although a missed conversion kick left the visitors trailing 24-20. — AFP

Breaking the ice: Israel-UAE hockey match makes history

JERUSALEM: In the world of ice hockey, the Bat Yam Chiefs and Dubai Mighty Camels are big unknowns. Yet both clubs have written a little page of history in recent days, taking part in the first sports match between teams from Israel and the United Arab Emirates. The Israeli city of Bat Yam, south of Tel Aviv, on the shores of the Mediterranean, is better known for its sandy beaches, an idyllic climate and its retired Mossad agents, than for its ice hockey club.

Indeed, Bat Yam doesn't even have an ice rink. Yet the town does have The Chiefs - the same name as the failing team that finds success in the 1970s film Slap Shot, a comedy classic for ice hockey - which played two matches last week against the Mighty Camels in Dubai. In September, the UAE became only the third Arab country to normalize ties with Israel, following Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994, signing the deal in a ceremony at the White House. Before this agreement, cyclists with dual nationality - including Israeli - had already

travelled to the Emirates. But the ice hockey clash, with two matches played on December 18 and 19, was the "first game" played by an Israeli team on Emirati soil, the organizers say.

They even received the blessing of Gary Bettman, commissioner of The National Hockey League (NHL). "We are proud of the fact that hockey can bring people together," Bettman said, in a video message, in which he sent "greetings for this most historic occasion... the first professional match between a team from Israel and a team from the Emirates." Bettman, who heads the professional ice hockey league in North America, said he hoped it would be the "first of many such events".

"The attitude was friendly because it was the first match between teams from the two countries," Josh Greenberg, co-organizer of the matches and a player for The Chiefs said. Bat Yam Chiefs won both the games. After the "first leg", the Israeli club now wants to welcome their sporting rivals for a return match. "Eventually the Dubai Camels will come to Israel to play a game here," said Greenberg, an Israeli from the United States. "There is no timeline yet - it all depending on COVID."

Israel currently has three ice hockey arenas - in Holon, where the Bat Yam Chiefs train near Tel Aviv, Metula in the north of Israel and a new ice rink in Tsvunot near Jerusalem - but Greenberg thinks even bigger. — AFP