



**5** Trump will go, but trauma of 2020 may haunt Biden



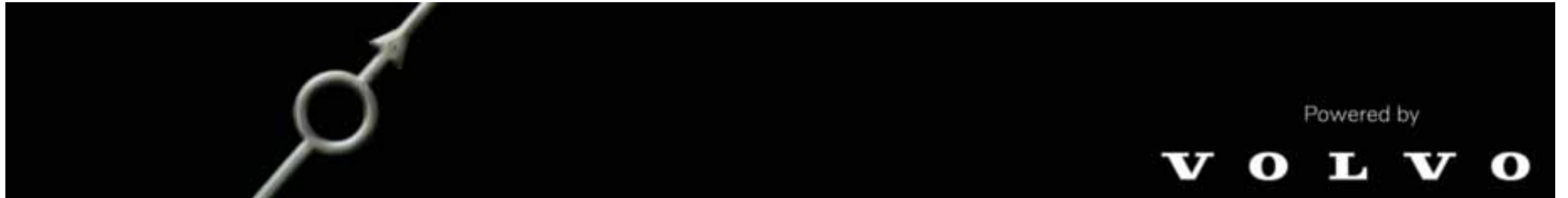
**9** Ant Group told to return to online payment roots



**13** Anime epic 'Demon Slayer' Japan's top-grossing film



**14** Kohli and Perry named cricketers of the decade



# MPs press govt for fair bedoon solution after 'suicide attempt'

## Lawmakers demand debate on coronavirus vaccination

### Amir receives invitation for GCC summit



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives an invitation from Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud to attend the Gulf Cooperation Council's 41st summit in Riyadh on January 5. GCC Secretary General Nayef Al-Hajraf delivered the invitation during a meeting with HH the Amir at Seif Palace yesterday. - KUNA (See Page 2)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Lawmakers yesterday warned they will grill HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah if the government does not provide a durable and fair solution to the issue of thousands of stateless people after another young bedoon tried to commit suicide by setting himself on fire. The interior ministry said in a statement that it rescued a young bedoon after a fire broke out at a house in Sulaibiya, adding the man was receiving treatment at the intensive care unit in hospital. It did not say the man set fire on himself.

But a number of lawmakers said the man was trying to commit suicide because of the horrific living conditions of more than 100,000 bedoons, accusing the government of refusing to find a fair solution for their plight. MP Marzouq Al-Khalifa, who was elected rapporteur of the committee for bedoons in the Assembly, said the number of suicide cases among bedoons has increased in the past few months, but the government is only forming panels.

Khalifa yesterday submitted a draft law offering bedoons civil rights prepared by the Lawyers Association. He called on the government to cooperate with the Assembly to approve the law. Five lawmakers submitted a motion calling on the legal and legislative committee to speed up its debate of the draft law.

Khalifa and MP Bader Al-Dahoum warned they

will grill the prime minister if the government does not cooperate on the issue. MP Saleh Al-Mutairi said a young bedoon committing suicide is a crime against the country, adding MPs will submit legislation to resolve their plight. MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari called on the Assembly's human rights panel to investigate suicide cases of bedoons and review if the interior ministry statements on the cases were correct.

Meanwhile, a number of MPs yesterday demanded a brief debate on the coronavirus vaccination during the National Assembly's next session on Jan 5 to illustrate "precautions and concerns" on the safety of the vaccine. Kuwait last week launched its vaccination program, which gave priority to frontline workers and people aged 65 years and above. The health ministry plans to offer the vaccine to the entire population, including expatriates.

The request for debate submitted by five MPs states that despite assurances made by the prime minister and top officials that the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is safe and has no side effects, a number of international experts and doctors have raised concerns that it has some negative effects in the medium and long term.

Over 130,000 people have already registered for vaccination at the health ministry's special website. Kuwait received its first shipment of the vaccine

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### Cabinet: Flights resume, borders reopen from Jan 2

KUWAIT: The Cabinet decided during its weekly meeting yesterday to end the suspension of commercial flights and reopen land and sea borders from Saturday, Jan 2, 2021, after the health ministry confirmed no new strains of the coronavirus were found in the country.

Kuwait suspended all commercial flights and closed its borders from Dec 21 until Jan 1 after a particularly infectious coronavirus variant emerged in Britain. The Cabinet yesterday decided not to extend its decision to suspend flights beyond Jan 1 and open land and sea ports daily as of Jan 2 from 9 am to 3 pm. These decisions will be reviewed according to developments regarding the spread of coronavirus, the Cabinet added. — Agencies

### Vaccine drives grow as virus spreads faster

BRUSSELS: Belgium yesterday joined a growing list of countries to launch COVID-19 vaccination campaigns, while a new coronavirus variant believed to be more infectious spread further and other nations ramped up restrictions. Just as vaccination drives gather pace, global infections have raced past 80 million with nearly 1.8 million deaths.

Fears have been raised by a new strain of COVID-19 first detected in

Britain and believed by experts to be potentially more transmissible. After it spread to several European countries as well as Japan and Canada, South Korea became the latest nation yesterday to detect the virus variant, in three individuals from a London-based family who arrived in the country last week. Five cases were also identified in Spain's southern Andalusia region.

Itself hard hit by the strain, South Africa became the first African nation to log one million cases, official data showed Sunday. Authorities there considered re-imposing restrictions to battle the second wave of infections, with leaders worldwide facing similar dilemmas over unpopular and economically damaging lockdowns.

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### Iran warns Israel not to cross Gulf 'red lines'

TEHRAN: Iran warned Israel yesterday not to cross its "red lines" in the Gulf in the final days of Donald Trump's presidency and following a reported Israeli submarine deployment. Foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh stressed the Islamic republic would defend itself against any American military "adventure" in the run-up to the Jan 20 handover of power in Washington. The statement came a week after the US Navy announced a

nuclear submarine was being deployed to the Gulf, in a new show of force directed at Iran.

Media in Israel have since reported that an Israeli submarine has crossed the Suez Canal also headed for the Gulf, a report that has not been officially confirmed or denied. "Everyone knows what the Persian Gulf signifies for Iran," Khatibzadeh told an online news conference. "Everyone knows the policies (of Tehran) regarding security and national security... Everyone knows very well how high the risk is raised if the red lines of Iran are crossed."

Tehran accuses its regional foe Israel of responsibility for several anti-Iranian operations, including the assassination last month of nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrazadeh. The United States, for its part, has accused Iran of involvement in a rocket attack last week near its Baghdad embassy, as Tehran pre-

pares to mark the first anniversary of the killing of top Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani in a US drone strike in January.

"We have sent messages to the US government and our friends in the region (warning) the current US regime not to embark on a new adventure in its final days at the White House," said Khatibzadeh. He said Iran was not seeking to increase tension and called for "rational people in Washington" to take the same line until President-elect Joe Biden replaces Trump in the White House. Decades-old tensions between Washington and Tehran have soared since 2018, when Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from the Iran nuclear deal. The archenemies have twice come to the brink of war since June 2019, especially following the killing of Soleimani. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Saudi extends flight ban

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia has extended its suspension of commercial passenger flights by at least one week and possibly two amid concerns over a new variant of the coronavirus. Saudi Arabia will however allow flights in "exceptional cases", an interior ministry official said according to the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) on Sunday. Foreigners will be allowed to depart the kingdom and cargo movement will be permitted. — AFP

#### Saudi activist Hathloul jailed

RIYADH: A Saudi court yesterday handed prominent activist Loujain Al-Hathloul a prison term of five years and eight months for terrorism-related crimes. Hathloul was convicted of "various activities prohibited by the anti-terrorism law", online outlet Sabq and other media allowed to attend her trial cited the court as saying. The court suspended two years and 10 months of the sentence "if she does not commit any crime" within the next three years, and banned the activist from leaving the kingdom for five years. — AFP

### Trump, under pressure, signs stimulus bill

WEST PALM BEACH, Florida: After delaying for nearly a week and under pressure from all sides, US President Donald Trump finally signed a massive \$900 billion stimulus bill Sunday, in a long-sought boost for millions of Americans and businesses battered by the coronavirus pandemic. The package "providing coronavirus emergency response and relief" is part

of a larger spending bill that, with Trump's signature, will avoid a government shutdown today.

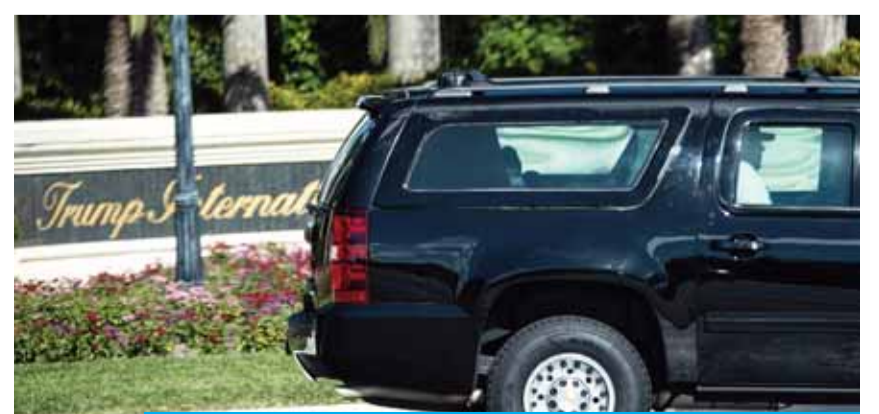
"I am signing this bill to restore unemployment benefits, stop evictions, provide rental assistance, add money for PPP (Paycheck Protection Programs), return our airline workers back to work, add substantially more money for vaccine distribution, and much more," the president said in a statement from his Christmas vacation at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida.

The turnaround came after a day marked by calls from all sides of the political spectrum for action to avert an economic and social disaster.

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PUURS, Belgium: Jos Hermans, 96, who was the first to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, gives a thumbs-up to journalists at the Woonzorgcentrum Sint-Pieters rest home yesterday. — AFP



WEST PALM BEACH, Florida: US President Donald Trump rides in the back of an SUV as his motorcade departs Trump International Golf Club on Sunday. — AFP

## Local

# Amir receives Saudi King's invitation for GCC summit

## Summit marks beginning of new chapter for GCC: Hajraf



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf.



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday an invitation by Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud to attend the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) 41st Summit, due in Riyadh on January 5. GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf delivered the invitation during a meeting with His Highness the Amir at Seif Palace. Hajraf briefed His Highness the Amir about ongoing preparations for the summit.

"I had the honor to personally deliver King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud's invitation to His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of Kuwait, to attend the 41st GCC Summit taking place in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on January 5, 2021," Hajraf said. "I would like to take this opportunity to thank His Highness for his unequivocal efforts to strengthen the cooperation council and broaden its horizon."

"The 41st Summit marks the begin-

ning of a new chapter for the GCC as it enters its fifth decade," Hajraf added. "The GCC's focus today is on meeting the ambitions of the region's

“ Meeting ambitions of youth ”

young and digital population, and enabling them to compete and lead in a globally-connected post-pandemic world, through joint efforts to restore economic growth, resume free trade negotiations, and strengthen strategic partnerships with friendly countries."

The meeting was attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan Sheikh Ali

Jarrah Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah, head of Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Al-Sabah, Deputy Amiri Diwan Minister Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Sabah, Amiri Diwan Undersecretary and Director of His Highness the Amir's office Ahmad Al-Fahad and head of Amiri Diwan Protocols Sheikh Khaled Abdullah Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received Hajraf yesterday.

Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and the Crown Prince Office Director Lt Gen Jamal Mohammad Al-Thayab attended the meeting. Furthermore, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received Hajraf, in a meeting that was attended by Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf.

Al-Mohammad, and Assistant Foreign Minister of GCC Nasser Al-Muzayyen. Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad held a separate meeting with Hajraf later yesterday as

well. Assistant Foreign Minister of GCC Nasser Al-Muzayyen and Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for the Minister's office Ahmad Al-Shuraim attended the meeting.

## Informatics Award honors late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad

KUWAIT: His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah Informatics Award announced yesterday that the late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah won the Informatics Medal in its 20th edition, in recognition of his humanitarian leadership and in honor of his memory with the historical and pivotal role he played.

The Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the Award Sheikh Aida Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah said in a press statement that this award is still "unable to express the appreciation over the amount of work the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad provided to the world in various fields."

In this way, the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad gained the highest international institutions' appreciations, also the right and merit of leading humanity and the principality of humanitarian work.

Sheikha Aida added informatics was one of areas at forefront of late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad's priorities and interests, based on an insightful vision, anticipation of the future, an understanding of movement of history and an ambition to see Kuwait possessing all elements of modernity and comfortable living, recalling his saying that the striving strategic vision for Kuwait is to be a regional center, as well as

advancing in trade, financial services and information technology services.

She commended the major technical achievements that the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad pioneered at the national level, establishing basis for his digital strategic vision, including the Singapore and Kuwait collaboration on an e-government, which led to the establishment of the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT) in 2006 and the establishment of the Communications and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA), in addition to the issuance of electronic legislation in 2014.

The Informatics Award received his unprecedented historical patronage in 2006, therefore it was the first patronage of a head of state for an information award and lasted 14 years throughout his reign, as this sponsor-

ship included all the award's activities, including the Global Informatics Forum, she explained.

The late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad's high patronage also included the Informatics Academy, offering free courses to encourage students, as he also sponsored Hackathon competitions implemented by the award to stimulate creativity and innovation skills among students of public and private universities, she added.

She recalled the words of the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad who said that their most valuable wealth was their children, and their best investments were to invest in developing their capabilities and skills, as they were the focus, purpose and means of any development, underlining that this guidance had a great impact on the energies of the participants in this

competition and the emergence of their technical talents, which were embodied in innovative projects that dazzled their supervisors.

The late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad's merits did not stop at sponsoring the previous award's activities, but was also embodied by honoring winners of Informatics Medal at global level, in addition to honoring winners of information prize presented by the award at level of Arab world annually, she said.

The award, under the patronage of the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad, became one of the most prominent Arab and international awards in its field in a short period, given that it had encouragement and guidance so that it topped its peers at Arab and international levels, she emphasized. — KUNA

## MPs press govt for fair bedoon...

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this month and will receive similar shipments every month for a year, according to Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah.

In other parliamentary news, the Assembly office in its first meeting decided to form a committee to investigate the events that took place during the Assembly's inaugural session on Dec 15. The committee is headed by deputy speaker Ahmad Al-Shuhoumi and includes MPs Farz Al-Mutairi, Osama Al-Shaheen and Hesham Al-Saleh. Shuhoumi said the committee will be highly transparent and called on MPs who have any complaints or views on the issue to provide

them to the committee within two weeks.

But opposition MPs were quick to reject the move. MP Dahoum charged that the move is an attempt to "hide facts", adding that the Assembly must debate the issue and refer the "assailants" to the public prosecution. He said he has sent a letter to the Assembly detailing what happened during the session to be debated in the next session. MP Kandari said the Assembly office has no authority to investigate the issue because it has not been assigned by the Assembly.

Opposition MPs have demanded a full investigation into what happened during the session, including allowing dozens of supporters of Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem to attend the session in violation of Assembly rules. The lawmakers also charge that those supporters insulted MPs during the session and outside the chamber. Opposition MPs also want a criminal investigation into allegedly fake ballot papers during the election of the speaker.

spelled out in the bill to be more than tripled, and argued the legislation included too much excess spending on unrelated programs. He has not said why he waited until the bill was already approved to make his views known. The new stimulus package extends federal aid to the unemployed until mid-March, and provides guaranteed loans and billions of dollars in aid to small businesses, restaurants, hotels, airlines and other companies. It extends the moratorium on evictions of people unable to pay their rent, suspends foreclosures and provides funds for the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

The aid is essential to the world's largest economy, hit hard by restrictions put in place to halt the spread of COVID-19. "I applaud the President's decision to get billions of dollars of crucial COVID-19 relief out the door and into the hands of American families," tweeted Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell. House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi called the bill "a down payment on what is needed to crush the virus, put money in Americans' pockets & honor our heroes". "We must quickly take further action," she added in a tweet. Romney was not the only politician to have urged the president to change course Sunday. "I understand he wants to be remembered for advocating for big checks, but the danger is he'll be remembered for chaos and misery and erratic behavior if he allows this to expire," Republican Senator Pat Toomey told Fox News on Sunday. — AFP

## Vaccine drives grow as virus...

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Israel, where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has boasted of a "world record" vaccination drive that inoculated 380,000 of its 8.7 million people by yesterday, began issuing shots to soldiers at 17 centers nationwide. While the IDF is "one of the first militaries in the world to launch a vaccination campaign for its soldiers," it will be "months" before all are protected, doctor Yael Arbel of the army medical corps said.

The Middle Eastern country began its third coronavirus lockdown on Sunday, while Poland yesterday entered three weeks of new restrictions. Most European countries began their vaccination campaigns over the weekend, boosting hopes of an end to the pandemic, especially in some of the hardest-hit parts of the continent. "Today is a big moment when you think back to all that we have been through," said Isabella Palazzini, an Italian nurse in Cremona who lost three colleagues to COVID-19.

Belgium became the latest EU member to join the bloc's coordinated immunization drive. With old-age home residents first in line, followed by carers, medical staff and social workers, "I think it's a relief... COVID was a true trial for residents and staff," Brussels region health minister Alain Maron said.

But pharmaceutical company Pfizer warned of delays to some shipments of the vaccine to eight nations from its factory in the country's north. A "minor logistical issue" meant some vaccine deliveries were "rescheduled", Pfizer spokesman Andrew Widge said, but insisted the problems had been "resolved".

In the United States, the world's worst-hit country, known coronavirus infections surged past 19 million on Sunday after adding a million cases in less than a week. US cases have been surging at an alarming rate in recent months. The world's largest economy has added at least one million new cases per week since early November, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

But there was some relief for Americans Sunday when President Donald Trump finally signed a \$900 billion stimulus bill, a long-awaited boost for millions of people whose livelihoods have been battered by the



MONS, Belgium: Nurse Joan Darck receives a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at La Bonne Maison de Bouzanton care home yesterday. — AFP

pandemic. While the US has also begun vaccinations, top government scientist Anthony Fauci warned Sunday that the worst of the pandemic may be yet to come, driving the country to a "critical point" as holiday travel spreads the coronavirus.

About two million Americans have been vaccinated so far, well below the 20 million the Trump administration has promised by year-end. But Fauci played down the shortfall as a normal hiccup in a massively ambitious project, saying he was "pretty confident" that by April, all higher-priority people would be able to get vaccinated, clearing the way for the general population.

Vaccination campaigns have also begun in China, Russia, Canada, Singapore and Saudi Arabia, and there was hope for one more successful vaccine on the horizon. But there are worries over vaccine hesitancy or outright refusal among the public - especially because of anti-vaccine misinformation campaigns. Polls have shown many Europeans are unwilling to take the vaccine, which could impede efforts to beat the virus and reach widespread immunization.

A young German pilot found a unique way to raise awareness, tracing a giant syringe in the sky to mark the start of his country's rollout of vaccines. "I wanted to give people food for thought for the day the vaccine became available," 20-year-old Samy Kramer, a student and amateur pilot, said Sunday. — AFP

## Trump, under pressure...

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especially for America's vulnerable populations. Two federal unemployment benefit programs approved in March as part of an initial COVID-19 relief plan expired at midnight on Saturday, cutting off an estimated 12 million Americans, according to The Century Foundation think tank.

The relief package, which was first passed by Congress on Dec 21, extends those benefits as well as others set to expire in the days ahead. But for days, Trump had refused to put his signature on it, calling the bill a "disgrace" and catching both Democrats and Republicans off guard with his complaints, which came after months of negotiations.

Influential Republican senator Mitt Romney said he was "relieved" at the signing. "Help is now on the way to workers, families, and small businesses across the country who are desperately in need," he tweeted. Earlier Sunday, he had urged Trump to "immediately sign or veto the COVID-19 relief package so Congress can act before it's too late".

In his statement Sunday, the president continued to push for the \$600 direct payments to US taxpayers

Local

# Kuwait's MoH put most resources at disposal of fighting COVID in 2020

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Ministry of Health put the bulk of its resources at the disposal of combating the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The ministry kept the public abreast of daily casualty tolls while, and led frontline activists in facing the virus' spread in 2020. The following are highlights of the MoH activities namely in fighting COVID-19 in 2020:

Feb 9: The Abdulrazzaq Al-Zalzala health center was opened in Dasma area. The KD 1 million facility includes eight various-specialty clinics.

Feb 16: The Ministry of Health opened a blood transfusion facility in Al-Ahmadi medical area. The five-storey facility cost around KD 7 million and was built on an area of 14,000 square meters.

Feb 24: The Health Ministry announced the first cases of COVID-19 infections of three individuals returning from Iran.

March 5: The Health Ministry announced the first recovery of COVID-19 patient in Kuwait.

March 11: The Health Ministry erected a facility in Mishref's exhibitions ground to screen COVID-19 for in the expatriate community.

March 20: Chinese medical supplies arrived in Kuwait help the country face the COVID-19 pandemic.

March 23: The Health Ministry announced the arrival of DNA-based COVID-19 screening tools, the first of its kind in the region.

April 4: The Ministry of Health declared recording the first coronavirus case. He was an Indian resident, aged 46.

April 8: Kuwait Central Blood Bank began preparing anti-COVID immunity plasma.

April 19: The Ministry of Health inaugurated "Shlonak" website for returnees to observe those subjected to lockdown and mingling.

May 16: MoH announced the death of 11 people due to COVID-19, the highest number in the year.

May 17: The MoH inaugurated rapid examination for COVID-19 at Al-Jazeera Airways offices.

May 19: MoH announced the infection of 1,073 people with COVID-19, the highest number in the year.

May 30: MoH announced the death of 11 people due to COVID-19, repeating the number reached on May 16.

June 1: MoH announced the recovery of 1,513 people from COVID-19, the highest number in the year.

Aug 7: The Ministry of Health dispatched a plane-load of medical supplies to Lebanon to help the country in the aftermath of the Beirut port bombing.

Nov 13: The Danish Dr Gunhild Waldemar took the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Prize for research in Health Care for the Elderly for her researches in the treatment of Alzheimer's patients. Her honoring happened during a ceremony organized by the World Health Organization.

Nov 23: A Kuwaiti medical team at the Chest Diseases Hospital conducted cardiac catheterization for a 40-year patient, using technology employed for the first time in the whole Middle East.

Nov 24: The Ministry of Health declared that the first shipment of vaccinations against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) would arrive in the country by the year-end.



**KUWAIT:** Health Ministry personnel receive citizens returned from abroad following airspace closures around the world due to the spread of COVID-19. — KUNA

Nov 25: A Kuwaiti medical team conducted liver implanting for the first time in the country. The operation was conducted for a female citizen in her 60s at Al-Dabbous Center of Al-Adan Hospital.

Dec 10: Dasman diabetes center, a Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS)-affiliate, won the Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashed Al-Maktoum's prize of medical science.

Dec 10: The MoH launched the online registration for the COVID-19 vaccination campaign.

Dec 13: The MoH issued license to use the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine.

Dec 23: The COVID-19 trial vaccination period starts at the Kuwait Vaccination Center in Kuwait International Fairground in Mishref.

Dec 26: The COVID-19 vaccination campaign kicks off officially with the vaccine administered to health care workers. —KUNA

## Kuwaiti defense, interior forces' tasks in 2020

**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti defense and interior personnel were very much active throughout the passing year: primarily involved in logistics of combating the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and clamping down on smugglers. The following are highlights of record activities by the defense and interior personnel in 2020:

Feb 12: Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) announced the death of six people and the injury of three others in a landslide at Mutla housing project.

Feb 27: The Interior Ministry suspended the use of civil ID cards temporarily as part of the efforts to counter COVID-19.

March 7: A fire in Sabah Al-Ahmad residential area killed eight children.

March 15: The Ministry of Defense converted a camp in Sabhan to a field hospital for COVID-19 quarantine.

April 2: The Directorate General of Civil Defense revealed that 25,000 persons volunteered to join efforts against the novel coronavirus.

April 8: The Ministry of Defense declared that a Kuwaiti military plane boarding medical supplies arrived from China.

April 11: Kuwait Army declared a plane of the Indian Air Force arrived with medical teams and equipment onboard.

April 19: The Ministry of Defense declared the arrival of a Jordanian military plane with medical teams and equipment onboard.

April 26: The Ministry of Defense declared a Jordanian aircraft boarding medics and medical devices arrived in the country.

May 3: The Ministry of Defense declared a



**KUWAIT:** In this November 23, 2020 file photo, the coffin of a Kuwaiti martyr who was imprisoned by Iraqi soldiers during the 1990/91 Iraqi Invasion is taken to his final resting place. — KUNA

military aircraft that flew from China arrived with medical equipment on its board.

May 11: The Ministry of Interior declared arresting a person with one million pills of the addictive drug Captagon in his possession.

May 11: The Ministry of Defense declared that a Kuwaiti military plane coming from China arrived with a cargo of medical supplies on its board.

May 12: The border Al-Nuwiseeb border checkpoint witnessed the passing back of the first returning Kuwaitis from Saudi Arabia.

July 2: The Ministry of Interior declared finding a fugitive dead at his house in Sabah Al-Salem district. The wanted committed suicide inside the home.

Oct 16: Huge fire erupted at the one million square meters' Al-Shagaya tires dumping site. Firefighters put out the blazes that raged within a 25,000 square meter part of the place. No casualties were inflicted.

Oct 12: An Amiri Decree appointed Lieutenant General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah as Kuwait Army Chief of Staff and Major General Fahad Al-Nasser as Deputy Chief of Staff and promoting him to the Lieutenant General rank.

Oct 26: The electoral department of the

Ministry of Interior declared the start of nomination for membership in the National Assembly's 16th legislative term. Registration would proceed until November 4.

Nov 4: The Ministry of Interior declared aborting a plot to smuggle into the country 270 kilograms of narcotic pills 'shabo'.

Nov 12: The MoI opened the center for traffic transactions for citizens of special needs.

Nov 23: Kuwait held a funeral for seven martyrs who had sacrificed their souls during the 1990/91 Iraqi Invasion, after their remains were handed over and their identities were verified.

Dec 2: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh indicated that over 417 companies were referred to court due to violations of residency laws for workers and other mishaps.

Dec 17: The Kuwaiti Army announced the arrival of the first batch of H225M Caracal helicopters into Ali Al-Salem Air Base. The order included 30 aircrafts.

Dec 17: The Interior Ministry foiled the smuggling of two million amphetamine pills, arms, and liquor into the country. — KUNA

## Kuwait adopted long-distance teaching in 2020

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait along with many countries adopted digital teaching in the shadow of the novel coronavirus' outbreak, and took other extraordinary measures to cope with the pandemic in 2020. The following is a report highlighting the Kuwaiti education authorities' tasks in 2020:

Feb 26: The Ministry of Education suspended studying at public and private schools and universities in Kuwait as a measure to counter the spread of COVID-19.

March 19: The Ministry of Education said studying for the 12th grade will resume on August 8 and the rest of the grades on October 4.

March 19: The Ministry of Education declared that universities would resume operations on August 9.

March 30: The Ministry of Education approved a proposal to graduate final-year medical students to help the efforts to counter the spread of COVID-19.

May 3: Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Sciences declared arrival of breathing apparatuses and protective gear from China.

July 16: Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr Saud Al-Harbi declared concluding the 2019-2020 scholastic year and delaying unstudied chapters of the curriculum to 2020-2021.

Aug 25: Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr Saud Al-Harbi decided that studies would be online in the first semester of the 2020-2021 scholastic year.

Sept 23: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) declared earning a patent from the US Patent and Trademark Office for its invention that measures dust impact on solar cells.

Oct 3: The Ministry of Higher Education declared acceptance of 2,848 students in scholarships' plan for the new academic year (2020-2021).

Oct 4: The Ministry of Education launched the 2020-2021 scholastic year virtually for all grades.

Oct 10: General Secretariat of Private Universities declared acceptance of 6,045 students in scholarships' scheme for 2020-2021.

Oct 28: The Ministry of Education declared Alyaa Al-Ajmi from Umm Al-Haiman School for Girls won the top award of the "Arabic Reading Challenge" competition (2019-2020) in its fifth edition. It was the largest Arabic language competition organized by the Deputy UAE President, Prime Minister and Dubai Governor Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al-Maktoum, intended to encourage reading Arabic.

Oct 29: Kuwait University declared acceptance of Kuwaiti students and children of Kuwaiti mothers for the academic year 2020-2021 at a rate of 7,566 male and female students for the first semester, 480 students for the second semester, with an increase of 2,345 students as compared to the enrolled in the past year.

Nov 24: The Ministry of Education declared that Kuwait won four prizes of Hamdan bin Rashed Al-Maktoum competition for distinguished teaching, in its 22nd session.

Nov 29: The Ministry of Education declared that 450,000 students and 73,000 teachers would use the 'Office 365' applications for virtual learning.

Nov 30: Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Sciences published an Arabic scientific encyclopedia about the moon.

Dec 2: Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr Saud Al-Harbi said in a ministerial event that his ministry prepared 500 sites and connected 250 schools via fiber optics to boost online services for the ministry.

Dec 2: Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr Saud Al-Harbi said in a ministerial event that the new school year required 1,243-recorded classes and the activation of 457,222 students, 73,721 teachers, 29,902 schools administrators' online accounts. Statistics had shown there were over 316,000 active students' accounts and over seven million virtual classes viewed for 292,362 hours by pupils. The daily average of messages in online classes had reached 844,904.

Dec 5: The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) accepted 15,323 students during the 2020-21 semester.

Dec 7: Kuwait Scientific Center's Falcon-9 rocket was launched from the Kennedy Space Center in the United States, carrying with it an experiment designed by Kuwaiti students to be delivered to the astronauts on International Space Station (ISS).

Dec 13: The Ministry of Higher Education allowed the completion of the 2020-2021 semester for scholarship students outside of Kuwait according to regulations set up by their universities abroad. — KUNA

## Kuwait's major foreign policy events in 2020

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait continued in 2020 to maintain its strong foreign policy based on defending the rights and interest of the Arab and Islamic nations. The country also continued the role as a humanitarian center and supported peace worldwide. The following are the most important foreign policy events and steps, which Kuwait undertook in 2020:

Feb 10: UN renewed its trust in Chairman of Kuwait's International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) and Amiri Diwan advisor Dr Abdullah Al-Matouq as a special advisor for the Secretary-General for a new period of four years.

Feb 20: Kuwait opened a military coordination office in India to bolster defense cooperation.

March 5: Kuwait donated \$3 million to China to help in the efforts combating the spread of COVID-19.

March 13: Kuwait and Saudi Arabia handed the United Nations a copy of the agreement on the neutral zone and submerge nearby between the two countries.

March 17: Kuwait donated \$4 million to support the World Health Organization's (WHO) efforts against COVID-19.

March 25: Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah launched the first phase of Kuwaitis repatriation from abroad amid the coronavirus crisis.

May 29: The European Union declared that Kuwait donated \$100 million for international efforts aimed at producing a vaccine against the novel coronavirus.

Aug 10: Kuwait and Guyana inked an agreement for mutual visa exemption for holders of diplomatic, special and service passports.

Sept 16: The Foreign Ministry declared receiving human remains presumed to belong to Kuwaiti prisoners who were missing during the



**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti and Iraqi officials sign an agreement by which Kuwait receives human remains presumed to belong to Kuwaiti prisoners who were missing during the 1990/91 Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait. — KUNA

1990/91 Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait. The Kuwaiti embassy in Iraq declared, earlier in the day, receiving remains of 21 persons from the Iraqi Government.

Sept 16: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah affirmed Kuwait's unwavering support for Yemen in a virtual statement addressed to a ministerial meeting on Yemen, held on sidelines of the UN General Assembly's 75th session.

Sept 21: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah affirmed during the virtual general conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Kuwait's unwavering advocacy of rendering the Middle East free of nuclear arms and weapons of mass destruction, underscoring the necessity that Israel join the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Oct 22: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah declared, during the conference for supporting the Rohingya, affirmed Kuwait honored its pledge toward this cause, contributing \$5 million.

Oct 15: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah declared, during the conference for the third strategic dialogue for the UNRWA, presenting \$1.5 million for backing up the UN refugee agency.

Nov 22: The commission for the prisoners and missing at the foreign ministry declared that the identity of seven persons' remains that were brought from Iraq were identified.

Nov 24: Foreign Minister, Acting Information Minister and Chairman of Kuwaiti Fund for Arab Economic Development, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, signed a memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the American agency for international development. He made the announcement on the sidelines of an official visit to Washington where he headed the Kuwaiti delegation at the fourth session of the Kuwaiti-US strategic dialogue held on November 9-24.

Nov 27: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah declared, during the 47th meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, donating \$150,000 for a special fund for a suit filed with the International Court of Justice on the plight of Muslim Rohingya.

Dec 4: Foreign Minister and Acting Minister of Information Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah revealed that "fruitful" negotiations on the Gulf crisis had occurred. The dialogue aimed at achieving Gulf and Arab stability. Saudi Arabia expressed gratitude towards Kuwait's efforts to resolve the Gulf crisis. — KUNA

## Local

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## News in brief

## Former officials sentenced for embezzlement

**KUWAIT:** The criminal court issued an arrest warrant for two former undersecretaries of the ministry of health and three employees of the ministry of awqaf and Islamic affairs for embezzling public funds. The two ex-ministers were sentenced to seven years in prison, ordered to return euro 4.8 million, fined euro 9.6 million, dismissed from their jobs and prohibited from holding any public office position in the future. As for the employees from the awqaf ministry, one of whom is an expat, they were sentenced to 10 years in prison, obligated to return KD 207,000 and fined twice the amount requested to be returned. The first accused was also ordered to be dismissed from his position for misappropriating public funds, while the third accused (the expat) will be deported after implementing his punishment.

## Domestic violence

Detectives are searching for a man who injured his mother and sister after he beat them and disappeared. The incident took place in Jahra. Police received a report from Jahra Hospital about the injuries suffered by a woman and her daughter, who told them they were caused by her son.

## Theft charge

A Kuwaiti man accused a Sri Lankan helper of stealing his wife's jewelry. The citizen told police his wife discovered a broken cupboard in her room with the jewelry missing. He accused the helper because she has disappeared and is not answering his calls. Police are working on the case.

—Translated by Kuwait Times  
from Al-Rai and Al-Anbaa



**KUWAIT:** Vaccination against COVID-19, currently reserved for health workers and people on the frontlines, continued yesterday at the Kuwait Vaccination Center in Kuwait International Fairground in Mishref. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

## Numerous yearend sales, but targets barely achieved

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** Yearend sales are everywhere these days to attract customers, but many companies will miss their sales target, even as others are doing well. "Even if you try to attract people by holding sales, if they have no money, how can they buy goods," asked a retail manager, who spoke to Kuwait Times on the condition of anonymity. "Normally we reach 125 to 135 percent of our sales target by the end of the year, but now we are short by 15 to 25 percent," she said.

MarketResearch.com said household spending in Kuwait will return to growth in 2021, after the COVID-19 pandemic led to a contraction in consumer spending in 2020. MarketResearch.com, the most comprehensive collection of market intelligence products and services on the web, said Kuwait's improving economic growth in 2021 will support household disposable incomes, along with ongoing government stimulus

measures. As such, the market research projected household spending in the country to grow by a real rate of 5.0 percent y-o-y over 2021, a significant improvement from the estimated -4.0 percent y-o-y contraction in 2020.

"Even in food, we have several restaurants which did not do well after the lockdown because of the COVID scare and prolonged closure. Also, customers are coming in smaller numbers unlike before. Some of the food which we ordered has expired, so the store has no choice but to throw it away. Some of the nearly-expired food was given to our staff or sold at a discounted price," the manager said.

Other retail stores have recorded higher sales compared to last year. "Maybe because we sell luxury products and people who can afford these are those who have money - mostly locals," another retail manager said. "Many citizens, when they come back from studies abroad, are given money by the government. And we get a share of the money when they buy something from us," the manager told Kuwait Times.

Consumers are also benefiting from promotions and sales by hypermarkets. "We already achieved our sales target in July and August. The reason is a no-brainer - the only shops open during the lockdowns and curfews were grocery stores and supermarkets. There is an increased demand for food items," said a hypermarket

# YEAR END SALE

manager. "The promotions and sales we are doing now are mostly 'giveaways' to help people who are struggling, because some companies are still closed. Even before the pandemic, we used to organize yearend sales," he added. Some expats have yet to go back to their jobs. "I worked for the entertainment section of my company, but children's arcades are closed till now. In September, our management decided to let us go. Throughout the months without work, we did not receive any salary. Only in November I got a new job and started paying back money I had borrowed from people to survive, so how can I enjoy the yearend sales," said Bok, who previously worked as an entertainment supervisor.

## WFP, Kuwait assess threat of rising global hunger

**KUWAIT:** The UN World Food Programme (WFP) has been honored with the Nobel Peace Prize for 2020. In the following report, WFP Executive Director David Beasley joins Kuwait's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah in assessing the threat of rising global hunger.



### Will We Face a Hunger Pandemic?

Most hunger today is a self-inflicted wound. Six out of 10 of the world's hungry live in countries at war with themselves - more than 400 million people. Conflict causes hunger and hunger causes conflict in a vicious circle. The resulting tide of hungry refugees and economic migrants threatens to destabilize entire regions.

The World Food Programme has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2020 for "its efforts to combat hunger, for its contributions to bettering conditions for peace in conflict-afflicted areas, and for acting as a driving force to prevent the use of hunger as a weapon of war and conflict."

Kuwait is an important humanitarian partner to WFP. The late Amir, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, was awarded the title of "Humanitarian Leader" by the United Nations Secretary General in recognition for his outstanding contributions and support to humanitarian work. His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is committed to fulfilling Kuwait's and the late Sheikh Sabah's humanitarian vision and providing life-saving assistance to vulnerable populations in critical need. Kuwait has long been a donor to the World Food Programme and has contributed over \$140 million to its operations over the last five years and the Kuwait Red Crescent Society has also supported WFP.

Regrettably, ending hunger is the UN Sustainable Development Goal on which we have made the least progress. There are so many drivers behind hunger: poverty, discrimination, environmental degradation, insufficient investment in agriculture. With each passing year, climate change inflicts more harm on our farmers as they struggle to cope with rising temperatures and cruel cycles of flood and drought. After harvest, an astonishing 1.3 billion metric tons of food simply go to waste each year all over the world.

Add COVID-19 to the global hunger equation and we could soon see another pandemic - a hunger pandemic as brutally relentless as the virus itself. COVID-19 has taken 1.5 million lives already. If we allow it to create a second pandemic of hunger and malnutrition, the cost in lives lost will be far more devastating.

The COVID-19 pandemic has eaten into

harvests, disrupted supply chains, and decimated the incomes of tens of millions of households. Where food is available, each day more people lack the money to buy it. All told, 270 million people may find themselves in an extreme hunger crisis in 2021 including some 30 million people who are already at the brink of starvation.

### What do we need to do?

First, all parties should honor the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. If most hunger stems from politics, we need political solutions. Second, we must pre-position food in the most vulnerable regions. This is not just a task for governments. The private sector and the world's billionaires should step up to help, both with funds and their expertise. During the COVID-19 pandemic the profits of leading technology and online marketing companies exploded, while the world's 2000 plus billionaires now control a phenomenal \$10.2 trillion in assets. If there was ever a time to share that bounty, it is now.

Third, we must take a more strategic approach to aid working more in tandem and with a true spirit of collaboration. "Smart funding" through multi-year and multi-sector donations can help donors have a broad impact beyond containing emergencies. It is not enough for us to save lives, if we don't change lives.

Finally, we must build resilience in societies so they can better withstand shocks like COVID-19. And we have to start with the young. School closures have ended meals for 370 million children and WFP is already providing food assistance to help strengthen nutrition and prevent disease among these children. We cannot let a generation in the developing world become collateral damage in this pandemic - malnourished and uneducated, with little hope of leading productive lives.

If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it has taught us empathy. Even in wealthy nations, families with jobs one day find themselves relying on government aid or food banks the next. Perhaps in the shared pain COVID-19 has thrust on us we can finally come together and build a world without hunger.

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Sri Lanka welcomes first tourists despite new virus strain

## Poles losing faith in once mighty Catholic Church



WILMINGTON, Delaware: US President-elect Joe Biden is followed by Secret Service agents as he departs after Mass the day after Christmas from St Joseph on the Brandywine Catholic Church on December 26, 2020. —AFP

# Trauma of 2020 may haunt Biden

## Trump will be gone, but no quick return to normal seen in 2021

WASHINGTON: COVID and a traumatic presidential election left the US reeling in 2020, but even with Donald Trump gone and Joe Biden promising to heal the nation there'll be no quick return to normal in 2021. For many in the world's richest country, 2020 was the year that seemed never-ending - an infinite series of horror movie sequels shaking the economy, politics and society itself.

Biden, an old-school Washington politician who believes in traditional US diplomacy and what he refers to as "decency," got elected on a promise to stop the chaos. "It is time to turn the page," he said earlier this month. The shift in mood at the White House after Inauguration Day on Jan 20 will be remarkable. Out goes the most attention-seeking president imaginable, and in comes a mild-mannered leader who says he seeks "to lower the temperature".

But Trump clearly has no intention of giving up the limelight - or allowing the United States to forget the nationalist and populist passions that his administration worked so hard to stoke. His extraordinary decision to deny that he lost the election, more than a month after it happened, is just part one in what he hopes will be yet another

Trump-centered drama, possibly culminating with a new presidential run in 2024.

And Biden will have another, tougher foe breathing down his neck: COVID-19. Even though vaccines are now coming online, the virus is at its most deadly, killing thousands of Americans a day. It's forecast to get even worse before winter is over. Trump has tried to take credit for the ultra-fast development of the vaccines - one of the few good news stories of 2020.

But it will largely fall to Biden next year to oversee the unprecedented logistical task of getting doses administered across 50 states. And while Trump can blame the catastrophic disruption to the economy on the coronavirus, it will be Biden who finds himself being remembered for what happens during the hoped-for recovery in 2021.

### 'Death Star'

With Trump running for a second term, perhaps it was always inevitable that 2020 was going to be a wild year. The rules-breaking Republican began his year with acquittal along party lines in a Senate impeachment trial. Emboldened, he then stormed out onto the reelection trail, holding rally after rally in front of large crowds.

The Trump campaign machine was so well-funded and so single-minded that its then manager, Brad Parscale, likened it to the Death Star in "Star Wars", a weapon ready to annihilate everything in its path.

The Democrats, meanwhile, began the year eyeing a long, perilous primary season featuring a staggering two dozen candidates. Clearly, Trump fancied his chances. Unemployment was at rock bottom, the stock market at historic highs and in January Trump reached a truce - which he spun as a huge win - in his trade war with China.

Yes, he was historically unpopular, but what made him reviled by the left, like his anti-immigrant rhetoric, won adoration on the right. He even joked to his crowds that he'd not only win four more years but an unconstitutional extra eight, 12 or more.

### Invisible enemy

What no one knew in the first days of the year was that the COVID-19 virus, at first an unknown disease in faraway China, was about to upend the landscape. By the end of January, the Chinese city of Wuhan was under severe lockdown and Trump had stopped travel from China. Yet for months

he and many others in the United States did not appear to understand or at least accept what was happening. Trump called COVID the "invisible enemy."

It was an unseen force which would kill more than 300,000 Americans by mid-December and wreck Trump's entire reelection message of success and strength. Biden, whose campaign rested heavily on his claim to be the safe pair of hands for a crisis-ridden America, will now face the monumental task of steering the country to recovery. He'll do this with Trump sniping from the sidelines and an opposition Republican party which has moved far to the right over the last four years, embracing Trump's scorched earth brand.

Biden's own party may also not prove an easy partner, with the Democrats' left wing in no mood to toe the line. Two runoff races in Georgia for the Senate on January 5 will decide who controls the upper house - and to a large extent how much room Biden will have to maneuver. Yet Biden, 78, has insisted he goes into this new era hopeful. As he said in August, accepting the Democratic nomination: "History will be able to say that the end of this chapter of American darkness began here tonight." —AFP

## 17 fishermen feared dead after trawler sinks in Arctic Russia

MOSCOW: Seventeen fishermen were missing and feared dead yesterday after a Russian trawler capsized during a storm and sank in the freezing waters of the Barents Sea. Officials said that two people had been rescued by a passing vessel but hopes were quickly fading that more survivors could be found during a snowstorm over the Arctic waters.

At a government meeting yesterday Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin expressed his condolences to families of the victims and tasked officials with providing them with necessary support. "A tragedy struck today in the Barents Sea," Mishustin said. "People died," he added, without

providing further details.

Officials said that a search-and-rescue operation was underway but that poor weather conditions had complicated the task. "There is a heavy snowstorm, waves are up to four meters high and temperatures are at around 20-25 degrees Celsius below zero," Alexei Barinov, spokesman for the emergency ministry in the northwestern region of Murmansk, told AFP. "We are hoping for a New Year's miracle," he added.

However a source familiar with the details of the search efforts told AFP that there was little hope of finding survivors. "A person cannot last for more than 15 minutes in these conditions," the source said. The privately-owned boat, called Onega, sank near the Novaya Zemlya archipelago in the Barents Sea at around 6:20 am (0330 GMT), said Ruslan Nazarov, head of the emergency ministry's Murmansk branch. Ten minutes later a passing vessel rescued two fishermen, Nazarov told reporters.

## Egypt security officials in rare visit to Libya

TRIPOLI: Egyptian security officials met Sunday with representatives of Libya's Government of National Accord, a first delegation in nearly six years from Cairo, considered a backer of a rival camp in the conflict-hit country. Interior minister for the UN-recognized GNA, Fathi Bachagha, held "a high-level meeting" with the Egyptian delegation, which included the deputy intelligence services chief, his office said. Imed Trabelsi, head of the Libyan general security body, also attended the meeting. The talks cov-

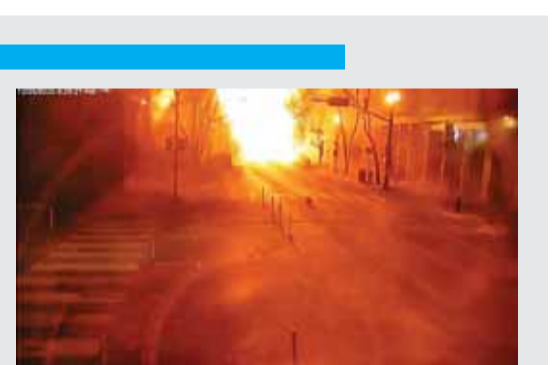
ered "ways of strengthening security cooperation" and support for a ceasefire signed in October between rival Libyan sides under UN auspices, the ministry added. Libya has been riven by violence since a 2011 NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed dictator Muammar Gaddafi. Two rival administrations have vied for control of the oil-rich country for years, with the Tripoli-based GNA - supported by Turkey - pitted against forces loyal to eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar, backed by Egypt, Russia and the United Arab Emirates.

Turkish support for the GNA earlier this year helped repel a 14-month offensive against the capital by Haftar launched in April last year. The ceasefire the two sides struck in October has set the stage for elections at the end of 2021. Sunday's visit was the first made by an official Egyptian delegation to Tripoli since 2014, when Egypt closed its embassy in the Libyan

capital due to violence. The delegation also met with the GNA's foreign minister, Mohamed Taha Siala.

The aim of the talks was to work to "normalize diplomatic relations" between Tripoli and Cairo and to discuss "cooperation in various areas", said Mohammad Elgeblawi, spokesman for the GNA foreign ministry. According to Elgeblawi, the delegation pledged to reopen the Egyptian consulate "as soon as possible" and to re-establish air links between the two capitals, which have been interrupted for several years.

The visit comes days after Haftar said in a speech that his forces would "prepare to drive out the occupier by faith, will and weapons," referring to Turkish troops operating in support of the GNA. Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar was in Tripoli on Saturday and vowed that any attack by Haftar on Turkey's personnel in Libya would be met with force. —AFP



NASHVILLE: An image grab made on Dec 25, 2020 from footage of a security camera and released by Nashville police shows the moment a bomb was set off that ripped through the southern US city's downtown on Christmas morning. —AFP

## Investigators name Nashville bomber, say he died in blast

WASHINGTON: The man suspected of setting off a bomb in Nashville that ripped through the southern US city's downtown on Christmas morning was named by authorities on Sunday as they confirmed he died in the blast. "We've come to the conclusion that an individual named Anthony Warner is the bomber, he was present when the bomb went off, and that he perished in the bombing," federal prosecutor Don Cochran told a press conference. The special agent in charge of the FBI's Memphis field office, Doug Komeski, said that there was "no indication that any other persons were involved", although he added they were still following leads. Authorities at the press conference said that with the investigation ongoing they could not give details on any motive, but said Warner had not been on their radar prior to the blast.

Police had reportedly identified Warner, 63, on Saturday as a "person of interest" in connection with the explosion, which came from a parked motorhome that blared a warning minutes before it blew up. They had searched a house in Antioch, a neighborhood in the Nashville area, but declined to confirm at the time if they had a suspect. Friday's explosion in historic downtown Nashville, the United States' country music capital, damaged about 40 buildings and injured at least three people, with the streets largely abandoned at the early hour. Authorities found human tissue at the blast site, which Tennessee Bureau of Investigations chief David Roush confirmed at the press conference was a match to DNA found in a vehicle Warner had used.

Police said at the time of the blast that it was an "intentional act" but the motive remained unclear, and FBI behavioral analysts were involved in the investigation. Tennessee senator Marsha Blackburn on Twitter praised the law enforcement officers who responded to and are investigating the bomb, and said she had asked President Donald Trump to grant Nashville a federal disaster declaration, a technical move that triggers federal assistance in repairing damage and providing aid.

According to a timeline provided by the authorities, police were called to the area to respond to gunfire at 5:30 am, and officers spotted the motorhome at 6:00 am. Fifteen minutes later, they heard an audio countdown coming from the vehicle warning of a bomb - interspersed with music - and the need to evacuate. —AFP

## International

# Poles losing faith in once mighty Catholic Church

## Negative media reports and documentaries hurt Church's image

**WARSAW:** Once all powerful in Poland, the Catholic Church has been under severe pressure this year from a series of abuse scandals and a perceived association with the country's right-wing government. Negative media reports and documentaries have hurt its image, as has criticism from the Vatican itself.

Some Poles are even beginning to question the legacy of the late Polish pope John Paul II. A poll published earlier this month found that only 41 percent of Poles have a positive view of the Church, a decline of 16 percentage points since March. The opinion poll found that nearly half of Poles (47 percent) have a negative view of the Church. The change "is considerable in such a short space of time," Katarzyna Zaleska, a sociologist at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, told AFP. The trend of growing secularization seen in Poland in recent years "has visibly accelerated", she said.

### Losing faith

A Constitutional Court ruling in October aimed at imposing a near-total ban on abortions was particularly damaging for the Church, prompting a public outcry and unprecedented demonstrations across the country. Some of the criticism was aimed at the religious hierarchy and the reaction has been so strong that the government has held off on enacting the ruling.

Official figures show Poles are also taking their children out of religion classes in schools in ever greater numbers, and some are even formally renouncing their Catholic faith—a process known as apostasy.

Two out of three Poles now want religious education to be the responsibility of parishes, not schools, according to an opinion poll published last week. A website for people applying to give up their faith—licznikapostazji.pl—tallied up more than 1,000 applications in the space of just two weeks.

Another site, apostazja.eu, said more than 30,000 people had filled out apostasy forms online—ready to be



Some Poles are even beginning to question the legacy of the late Polish pope John Paul II. — AFP

printed and submitted to their parishes. "It has pretty much exploded" since the abortion court ruling, said the site's creator, Krzysztof Gwizdala. While the numbers are small in what is still a predominantly Catholic country of 38 million, there are signs the Church is beginning to take notice. After a 10-year break, the Church's statistics office has decided to once again keep track of the number of apostasy declarations it receives.

In 2010, there were just 459 cases. "Operating in a different system" - Marcin Kaczmarek, a sociologist at the University of Poznan, said the decline in influence of the Church in Poland was not so much the result of sex-

ual abuse scandals, but "above all its reaction to them". "It seems torn between its corporate interest... and respect of its own teachings," he said. Zaleska said the Church appears to "not hear the signals" and is acting "as if it was operating in a different system" in which it feels it does not have to react and is convinced of its unshakeable position.

Zaleska said the abuse scandals could accelerate secularization—as happened in Ireland in the 1990s. But she said it was also possible that the difficult times brought on by the coronavirus pandemic could help restore Poles' faith in the Catholic Church. — AFP

## Joy, hope as staff at Italy's virus epicenter gets first jabs

**CREMONA, Italy:** Less than a year ago, doctors in northern Italy were so overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients that they were carrying out triage in hastily erected tents. The hospital at Cremona was at the heart of the unfolding tragedy. On Sunday, its nurses carried out the first vaccinations against the disease that has claimed some 72,000 lives in Italy, nearly 25,000 of them in the northern Lombardy region.

The arrival of the vaccine has sent hopes soaring in Cremona among healthcare workers at the frontline of the tragedy back in late February. "Today is a big moment when you think back to all that we have been through... especially during the first wave of the pandemic," said Isabella Palazzini, a nurse who was among the first to get the jab on Sunday.

"They were very difficult times, both for the patients and for us, the care givers," said Palazzini, three of whose colleagues died of COVID. Fifty of Italy's first lot of 9,750 doses arrived in Cremona, an hour's drive from Milan, aboard an ambulance escorted by two police vehicles. The delivery of the precious cargo took place with great fanfare, with the mask-wearing mayor and local administration chief in attendance. The uniformed police and hospital workers broke out in spontaneous applause.

### 'Moment of great happiness'

Armed police then accompanied the vaccines packed in a grey container similar to a picnic cooler and loaded it onto a trolley to be transferred into waiting refrigerators where they will be kept under lock and key. "It is a moment of great happiness," said Monia Betti, head of the hospital's pneumology department.

"It is the hope of a change that has finally materialized after 10 months in which we have assisted very seriously-ill patients." Before the pandemic, Cremona was best known as the home of the Stradivarius violin. The town of some 70,000 residents boasts 160



ROME: A healthcare worker receives the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at the Tor Vergata hospital in Rome yesterday. — AFP

luthiers, who already faced foreign competition before the pandemic struck, devastating the economy and bringing cultural life to a standstill.

The outbreak started on February 21 in northern Italy, when it became the new epicenter of the pandemic after China where it originated. By February 22, Italy counted 79 deaths from 2,500 cases. Within a month, Lombardy alone had recorded more than 2,500 deaths. The arrival of the vaccines comes after Italy, fearing a third wave, reimposed restrictions just before Christmas to avoid an explosion of cases after the holidays. The country now hopes to launch a mass vaccination program in early January with 470,000 injections scheduled each week.

In the meantime, Angelo Pan, head of the infectious diseases department at Cremona, stressed the importance of Italians remaining vigilant.

"It will take time before the percentage of the population vaccinated has reached a level that seriously limits the spread of the virus," he said. "This is not the end of the story, but we are on the right track." The government estimates that this proportion should be between 75 and 80 percent, while fewer than 60 percent of Italians say they intend to have the jab.

Enrico Sorti, head of Cremona's intensive care unit, did not hesitate and was one of the very first to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Nothing, he said, supports "the thesis that the path taken to arrive at the vaccine was less effective, less efficient and less prudent". — AFP

Zhang Zhan, a former lawyer, was sentenced at a brief hearing in a Shanghai court for allegedly "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" during her reporting in the chaotic initial stages of the outbreak. Her live reports and essays were shared on social media platforms in February, grabbing the attention of authorities, who have punished eight virus whistleblowers so far as they defang criticism of the government's response to the outbreak. Beijing has congratulated itself for "extraordinary" success in controlling the virus inside its borders, with an economy on the rebound while much of the rest of the world stutters through painful lockdowns and surging caseloads a year on from the start of the pandemic in Wuhan.

## Small delay in Pfizer vaccine deliveries to 8 EU nations

**MADRID:** Pfizer has postponed the delivery of new batches of its coronavirus vaccine to eight European nations including Spain, the Spanish health ministry said yesterday, a day after the EU began its immunization campaign. The Spanish branch of Pfizer informed Madrid on Sunday night of the delay in shipments to the eight nations due to a "problem in the loading and shipment process" at its plant in Belgium, the health ministry said in a statement.

It did not specify which European nations aside from Spain were affected, but said Spain's next delivery would be today, a day later than expected. "Due to a minor logistical issue, we have rescheduled a limited number of our deliveries," Andrew Widger, Pfizer's director for media relations said.

"The logistical matter has been resolved and those deliveries are now being dispatched. There are no manufacturing issues to report." Asked about the delay during an interview with radio station Cadena Ser, Spain's Health Minister Salvador Illa said it was due to a problem "linked to the control of the temperature" of the shipments which was "apparently fixed".

The vaccine must be stored at ultra-low temperatures of about minus 70 degrees Celsius (-112 Fahrenheit) before being shipped to distribution centers in specially designed cool boxes filled with dry ice. Once out of ultra-low temperature storage, the vaccine must be kept at two Celsius to eight Celsius to remain effective for up to five days. Spain is scheduled to receive 350,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine per week over the next three months. Most European Union nations began their immunization campaigns against the virus this week-end with the Pfizer-BioNTech jab, beginning with the elderly, health care workers and politicians. Meanwhile, the United States surpassed 19 million coronavirus cases Sunday, figures from Johns Hopkins University showed, adding one million new cases in less than a week. — AFP

Controlling the information flow during an unprecedented global health crisis has been pivotal in allowing China's communist authorities to reframe the narrative in their favour, with President Xi Jinping being garlanded for his leadership by the country's ruling party.

But that has come at a serious cost to anyone who has picked holes in the official storyline. The court said Zhang Zhan had spread "false remarks" online, according to one of her lawyers Zhang Keke, but the prosecution did not fully divulge its evidence in court. "We had no way of understanding what exactly Zhang Zhan was accused of doing," he added, describing it as "a speedy, rushed hearing." In return the defendant "didn't respond [to questions]... She refused to answer when the judge asked her to confirm her identity." The defendant's mother sobbed loudly as the verdict was read out. Ren Quanniu, another member of Zhang's defence team, told reporters who were barred from entering the court.

Concerns are mounting over the health of 37-year-old Zhang, who began a hunger strike in June and has been force-fed via a nasal tube. Her legal team said her health was in decline and she suffered from headaches, dizziness and stomach pain, and that she had appeared in court in a wheelchair. "She said when I visited her (last week): 'If they give me a heavy sentence then I will refuse food until the very end...' She thinks she will die in prison," Ren said before the trial. "It's an extreme method of protesting against this society and this environment." China's communist authorities have a history of putting dissidents on trial in opaque courts between Christmas and New Year in an effort to minimize Western scrutiny. — AFP

## Chinese citizen journalist jailed for Wuhan reporting

**SHANGHAI:** A Chinese citizen journalist was jailed for four years yesterday for her reporting from Wuhan as the COVID-19 outbreak unfurled, her lawyer said, almost a year after details of an "unknown viral pneumonia" surfaced in the central China city.



HONG KONG: Democracy activist Lee Cheuk-Yan speaks outside China's Liaison Office in Hong Kong yesterday during a protest calling on China to free a group of Hong Kong democracy activists facing trial in China, after they attempted to flee the territory by speedboat to Taiwan last August, as well as Chinese citizen journalist Zhang Zhan (top left poster) who was jailed for four years for her livestream reporting from Wuhan as the COVID-19 outbreak unfurled. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Jordan detects virus variant cases

**AMMAN:** Jordan on Sunday confirmed two cases of a particularly infectious coronavirus variant in a man and his wife who had arrived from Britain. Health Minister Nazir Obeidat said the Jordanian couple travelled to the kingdom on December 19 and were found to be infected with the new strain of the virus after being tested and isolated. The couple were still in quarantine and being monitored by medical experts according to virus protocols, Obeidat said, adding they were both in "excellent health" condition. — AFP

#### Lebanon to get first vaccines in Feb

**BEIRUT:** Lebanon will receive its first shipment of coronavirus vaccines in February from Pfizer-BioNTech, the health ministry said Sunday. "Lebanon will receive the vaccine in mid-February in instalments," it said in a statement. "It will cover 15 percent of the population." The ministry said it would later secure "additional vaccines" to cover another 20 percent of the population as part of an agreement with COVAX, without specifying which brand. COVAX is an international initiative that aims to ensure equitable access to coronavirus vaccines for all countries. — AFP

#### 10 killed in Boko Haram attack

**KANO, Nigeria:** The jihadist group Boko Haram killed at least 10 people including four security personnel in raids on three villages in northeast Nigeria, local and security sources told AFP on Sunday. Fighters in six trucks attacked the villages of Shafa, Azare and Tashan Alade in Borno state on Saturday and set fire to homes and public buildings while firing sporadically at residents. "They killed 10 people and burnt homes, shops and churches, said Sani Mohammed, head of an anti-jihadist militia. The assailants went from village to village. — AFP

#### Lebanon arrests 8 for camp blaze

**BEIRUT:** Lebanon's army said Sunday it had arrested eight people after a dispute led a group of Lebanese nationals to set fire to an informal refugee settlement in the country's north. The army said it "arrested two Lebanese nationals and six Syrians over a personal dispute... between a number of Lebanese men and Syrian workers," according to a statement. "The Lebanese men fired bullets in the air and torched the tents of Syrian refugees," it added, without elaborating on the cause of the altercation. The fire on Saturday night tore through the tented shelters of some 75 families near the town of Bhanine in the north Lebanon Miniyeh region, leaving only a charred wasteland. — AFP

#### Journalist wounded in Uganda clash

**KAMPALA:** A journalist covering an election rally of Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine was hospitalized on Sunday after being injured during a clash between security forces and the candidate's supporters, police said. The unrest occurred near the southern town of Masaka, some 130 kilometers (80 miles) from the capital Kampala. Police said Ashraf Kasirye, who works for a YouTube channel devoted to Wine's campaign, was in "serious condition". Wine, 38, is a pop star and lawmaker who is seen as the main challenger to incumbent President Yoweri Museveni in the January 14 polls. — AFP

## Sudan to deploy troops in Darfur after clashes

**KHARTOUM:** Sudan is to send troop reinforcements to the south of its Darfur region after 15 people were killed in tribal clashes, the official news agency SUNA said. The governor of South Darfur state, Musa Mahdi, announced "the deployment of a large number of military forces in order to arrest those involved in the clashes and to collect the arms", it reported Sunday.

"The era of reconciliation conferences is over and the era of implementing the law has started," Mahdi said, referring to talks in recent months, as quoted by SUNA. A local official, also cited by the agency, said a dispute between the Massalit and Fallata tribes in the Gereida area had led to armed clashes in which two members of the Fallata were killed. The Fallata mounted reprisal attacks that left 13 dead and 34 wounded among the Massalit, SUNA said, without specifying when the violence broke out. Gereida has been the frequent scene of deadly clashes between the rival tribes over the past two years, but this was the first since a reconciliation meeting held in October.

It comes less than a week after the United Nations Security Council agreed to end the UN and African Union's long-running peacekeeping mission in Darfur, UNAMID, when its mandate expires on December 31. Conflict in the vast Darfur region of western Sudan has largely eased in recent years apart from confrontations, mostly over land and water resources, between nomadic tribes and farmers. — AFP

## International

# Bangladesh begins moving more Rohingya to flood-prone island

## Bhashan Char island '100 times better' than the camps: Minister

COX'S BAZAR, Bangladesh: Bangladesh yesterday started moving a second group of Rohingya refugees to a controversial flood-prone island in the Bay of Bengal despite opposition from rights activists.

More than 1,600 of the Muslim minority from Myanmar were taken to Bhashan Char earlier this month, and Foreign Minister A K Abdul Momen said just under 1,000 were in the latest batch heading for what he called a "beautiful resort". Buses took the Rohingya from camps in Cox's Bazar, where nearly one million refugees are packed, to Chittagong port where they will be taken to the barren island.

"They are going voluntarily. They are very eager to go Bhashan Char because they have heard from their relatives, those who have gone to Bhashan Char, that (it) is an excellent place," Momen told AFP.

He claimed the island was "100 times better" than the camps, and that the refugees had "appealed" to be taken there. "Bhashan Char is a beautiful resort. It is an excellent resort. And once anybody goes there, they will love it," the minister added. Two Rohingya men in the latest group said they were going to the island willingly. Nur Kamal, a

Rohingya from the giant Kutupalang refugee camp, said he was going to be with relatives already at Bhashan Char: "What is the point of staying here (in the camps) without them?"

Serajul Islam said he was going with five family members and was not being forced. "The way the international community is handling our issue, I don't see any future in the camps," he told AFP from the bus taking him to Chittagong.

"It is better I go and live the rest of my life there in better housing. At least I won't have to think about floods during the rainy season and unbearable heat in the summer." More than 700,000 Rohingya packed the camps in Bangladesh in 2017 after a deadly Myanmar military clampdown that the United Nations has said could be genocide.

After the first transfer on December 4, several Rohingya said that they were beaten and intimidated to agree to move. The Bangladesh government eventually wants to put 100,000 Rohingya on the 13,000-acre (56 square-kilometer) island, despite criticism from rights groups because Bhashan Char is so isolated. The UN said it has not been involved in the process.

"Allegations from within the community about cash incentives being offered to Rohingya families



A convoy of buses carries Rohingya refugees being relocated to a controversial flood-prone island in the Bay of Bengal, in Ukhiya yesterday. — AFP

to relocate to Bhashan Char as well as use of intimidation tactics are making the relocation process questionable," said Amnesty International's South

Asia campaigner Saad Hammadi. Foreign minister Momen said critics of the policy were "making up stories". — AFP

## China trial of 'Hong Kong 12' begins as US decries 'tyranny'

SHENZHEN, China: The trial in China of a group of Hong Kong pro-democracy activists who tried to escape the city by speedboat for sanctuary in Taiwan opened yesterday, as the United States urged the immediate release of dissidents it says "fled tyranny". Ten of the so-called "Hong Kong 12" were in court in the southern city of Shenzhen to face charges linked to an illegal border crossing.

Chinese authorities took them into custody after their boat was intercepted on August 23. The hearing began as scheduled yesterday afternoon and a convoy of vehicles were seen departing around four hours later. The Yantian District People's Court said sentencing will be at a later date.

Court officials stayed tight-lipped about the case, and the trial-like many in China's opaque legal system was not open to foreign reporters or diplomats. At least two of the group could face around seven years in jail for organizing the attempted escape from a city where democracy activists last year led massive protests against Beijing's rule.

Some of the group were already facing prosecution in Hong Kong, where a draconian national security law imposed by China has largely stamped out the city's protest movement. "I would like to urge the Yantian court to hand down the verdict as soon as possible... With a verdict I can set off for Shenzhen. I just want to meet my son," activist Wong Wai-Yin's mother said yesterday evening.

Activist Lester Shum added that "none of the families we know got to hear the trial", despite the court's statement saying relatives were present. "Their so-called 'crime' was to flee tyranny," a US embassy spokesperson told AFP, ahead of the detainees' scheduled court appearance.

Urging their immediate release, the spokesperson said: "Communist China will stop at nothing to pre-



HONG KONG: Family members of a group of Hong Kong democracy activists, who tried to flee the city by speedboat to Taiwan last August, hold a press conference in Hong Kong yesterday, the first day of their trial across the border in the Chinese city of Shenzhen. — AFP

vent its people from seeking freedom elsewhere." The US has used Hong Kong's evaporating freedoms as a stick to beat China with in recent months. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs went into a familiar attack mode over the US comments.

Washington must "immediately stop interfering in China's internal affairs through the Hong Kong issue and immediately stop interfering in China's judicial sovereignty," spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters.

### Secret trial

Families of the accused—the youngest of whom is just 16 — have called for the hearing in the Shenzhen court to be broadcast live, after they were unable to attend due to the short notice for the trial and COVID-19 requirements. They were only notified of the trial date on Friday, while their lawyers have been barred from meeting with the detainees. Authorities instead have appointed state-approved legal representation.

In a joint letter over the weekend, the families

said they "strongly condemn" the authorities' decision to hold the trial in "de facto secret". "We urge governments to send embassy personnel to the hearing to guarantee a proper and fair trial by the courts in Shenzhen," they said, noting that those detained include British, Portuguese and Vietnamese nationals. The security law that now blankets Hong Kong gives authorities sweeping powers of prosecution for acts deemed terrorism, secession, subversion or collusion with foreign entities.

The city had enjoyed unique freedoms since its handover from former colonial power Britain in 1997, with a deal promising a "one country, two systems" arrangement for 50 years. Beijing says the new security law was needed to restore peace and stability but critics have condemned it as a fatal attack on Hong Kong's freedoms. China has a history of putting dissidents on trial around the Christmas and New Year period to avoid Western scrutiny. Amnesty International said there was little chance the group would receive a fair trial. — AFP

## S Korea detects first coronavirus variant cases

SEOUL: Three cases of a particularly infectious coronavirus variant that recently emerged in Britain have been confirmed in South Korea, health authorities said yesterday.

The three individuals are members of a London-based family who arrived in the country on December 22, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency. They have been placed in isolation since testing positive for COVID-19 on arrival, the KDCA statement said.

The new strain of the virus emerged earlier this month in Britain and has already reached several European countries, as well as Canada, Jordan and Japan. Last week London said another new variant of the virus was found in the country in cases linked to South Africa, which is the first African nation to record one million coronavirus cases.

The new strain, which experts fear is more contagious, prompted more than 50 countries to impose travel restrictions on Britain. South Korea was among them and has barred flights from Britain until January 7. In addition, the country will make it mandatory for passengers travelling from Britain or South Africa to submit negative Covid-19 test results before departure, KDCA chief Jung Eun-kyeong said.

Authorities are also looking into the case of an elderly South Korean man who tested positive for COVID-19 after his body was returned from Britain earlier this month.

The announcement came as a third wave of the virus grips the country, with a resurgence centered on the greater Seoul area seeing daily cases climb to over 1,000 several times this month despite stricter distancing measures. South Korea reported 808 new cases yesterday, raising its national total to 57,680 with 819 deaths. — AFP



MATTALA: Ukraine passengers arrive at Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, in Mattala yesterday. Sri Lanka welcomed its first foreign tourists in nine months yesterday even as a new deadlier strain of the coronavirus gripped the island. — AFP

## Sri Lanka welcomes first tourists despite new virus strain

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka welcomed its first foreign tourists in nine months yesterday even as a new deadlier strain of the coronavirus gripped the island. A charter flight carrying 185 passengers from Ukraine landed at a little-used airport south of the capital, which has been stricken by a surge in COVID-19 cases and deaths.

In less than three months, the official number of coronavirus fatalities has risen from 13 to 191, while the number of infections has gone from 3,300 to more than 41,000. Still, authorities hope the Ukrainian arrivals will be the first of thousands of

foreigners to visit-easing pressure on the tourism-reliant economy that was shut down in March.

The visitors, who had to produce coronavirus-free certificates before departure, were tested again on arrival at Rajapaksa International airport. They will be confined to their hotels for the duration of their holiday. "This is a pilot project to test our systems," government spokesman Ramesh Pathirana said, adding that there would be a review after one month.

Sri Lanka's international borders remain closed, with the exception of repatriation flights and charters approved by local health authorities.

But Sri Lanka is also scheduled to host a two-Test cricket tour by England next month. The moves come despite authorities announcing a deadlier coronavirus strain. Minister for COVID Disease Control, Sudharshini Fernandopulle, said the strain was more infectious than one which spread in Sri Lanka between January and October. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Guinea clashes leave 11 dead

CONAKRY, Guinea: Two days of communal clashes in southeast Guinea have left at least 11 people dead and more than 40 wounded, officials said Sunday. The violence between mostly Muslim Tomas Mania and mostly animist Tomas was sparked Saturday by the unveiling of a new house for the Tomas patriarch in the town of Macenta, local sources said. Police reinforcements from neighboring towns failed to stop the fighting Sunday and several of their number had been injured, a prefectural source said. Witnesses said many residents had fled and taken shelter in the surrounding forest. — AFP

#### Croatia hit by 5.2 magnitude quake

ZAGREB, Croatia: An 5.2-magnitude earthquake rattled central Croatia and the capital Zagreb early yesterday morning, the European-Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) said, with initial reports indicating no casualties. The tremor was felt at 530 GMT in Zagreb, with an epicenter some 50 kilometres south outside the town of Sisak, home to some 35,000 people, EMSC reported. "We have not yet been informed of damage," Kresimir Kuk, head of the Croatian Seismological Institute, told the national television (HRT). Local media reported some damage to building facades in Sisak. In March, Zagreb was struck by a 5.3-magnitude quake, the strongest in decades, which badly damaged buildings in the capital. — AFP

#### Seven die in China knife attack

BEIJING: A man armed with a knife killed seven people and wounded seven others in north-eastern China on Sunday, state media reported. The attack—which police said appeared to have been "random"—reportedly took place at 8.14 am local time (0014 GMT) in the city of Kaiyuan in Liaoning province. The attacker was later arrested in a local bath house, they added. An inquiry has begun, the Kaiyuan public security office said in a post on the Twitter-like Weibo website. Stabbings are relatively common in China, where firearms are banned, and are often used in random attacks by angry citizens who see themselves as victims of injustice and seek revenge on society. — AFP

#### Seven Pakistani troops killed

ISLAMABAD: Seven Pakistani paramilitary troops were killed by militants in an attack on a check post in the country's restive southwest, the military said Sunday. The incident took place Saturday night in the town of Harnai, around 170 kilometers (105 miles) east of Quetta, capital of the Balochistan province which borders Afghanistan and Iran. The Pakistani military has been fighting a low-level insurgency for decades in the province. "During the intense exchange of fire, seven brave soldiers embraced shahadat (martyrdom) while repulsing raiding terrorists," the military said in a statement. — AFP

#### China ramps up virus controls

BEIJING: Temperature checks, queues for tests and inspections at airports—Chinese authorities have stepped up health checks to snuff out the threat of a coronavirus resurgence, China, where the virus first emerged around a year ago, largely contained its outbreak, and its economy has roared back to life. But Beijing is taking few risks with coronavirus cases skyrocketing in many parts of the world and the threat of a new variant experts believe could be more transmissible. Strict checks have been imposed across neighborhoods in the capital Beijing, where suspected virus cases have been detected. — AFP

# Business

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2020

## Zain introduces its virtual Zain Great Idea accelerator program

Biggest business initiative of its kind to develop and accelerate tech startups



Eaman Al-Roudhan, Al-Khashti and Al-Mana with ZGI entrepreneurs during a previous event.

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the launch of the sixth edition of its Zain Great Idea (ZGI) tech startup accelerator program, which comes this year in an all-virtual format to adhere to the health guidelines posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The program comes in joint collaboration with Brilliant Lab, a startup Accelerator Service from Kuwait, and Mind the Bridge, a global organization based in Silicon Valley that bridges the world through entrepreneurship education for startups, enterprises, and investors to succeed in global markets.

ZGI offers a refreshed opportunity for local talents and Kuwait's entrepreneurial community, as it has been one of the most successful initiatives Zain presented to the Kuwaiti market as part of its comprehensive innovation and entrepreneurship strategy. Throughout five successful editions, ZGI empowered, trained, and invested in hundreds of creative and driven Kuwaiti youth, of which many now own thriving and active Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to this day in local and regional markets.

Commenting on the program's launch, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti said: "We are delighted to announce the official launch of the sixth edition of our Zain Great Idea tech startup accelerator program. This year's edition comes in an all-virtual format in an effort to abide by health guidelines and restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic".

Al-Khashti explained: "The pandemic was not a barrier that prevented us from renewing our commitment to Kuwait's entrepreneurial community. On the contrary, we took it as a challenge to reintroduce the program more exceptionally than ever. We at Zain are the first to believe in technology's excellence as an effective and high-efficient tool to develop skills and train talents".

Al-Khashti continued: "After 10 years of continuous feats achieved by this initiative, we have succeeded in pushing forward hundreds of brilliant entrepreneurs who own thriving businesses and SMEs that operate not only in the local market, but even across regional and international ones as well".

Al-Khashti unveiled: "In this virtual edition, all participants will have a chance to receive a cash investment of \$50K to fund their tech startups' operational and commercial costs. Participants will be able to apply for this funding by pitching their startups to the investment committee we created along with our partners at Rasameel Investment Company and Brilliant Lab". Al-Khashti expressed his appreciation to the teams at Zain, Brilliant Lab, and ZGI partners who work tirelessly and around the clock to make this initiative a success amid exceptional circumstances to redesign the entire program in an all-virtual format while maintaining the program's known high-quality level.

Zain Kuwait's Sustainability, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship Department Manager Haya Al-Mana said: "Our ZGI finalists will be able to benefit from Zain's leading experiences across many areas that are essential to any startup, including marketing, advertising, customer care, public relations, digital partnerships, business/consultancy/legal services, and much more".

Al-Mana continued: "Any entrepreneur who gets accepted into the program's first phase will join our



Waleed Al-Khashti



Haya Al-Mana



Neda Al-Dehani

bootcamp, which will be completely virtual this year and will continue for four weeks. The bootcamp will feature workshops, training sessions, panel discussions, and more, facilitated by world-class experts, academics, and trainers from top international educational institutions such as IE Business School, MIT, Stanford, and more. In addition, we will offer one-to-one sessions with top experts in various fields for every finalist".

Neda Al-Dehani, Founder and CEO of Brilliant Lab commented: "Today, the Zain Great Idea program has become a reference for the local startup market.

- **Waleed Al-Khashti:** The pandemic was not a barrier, but rather a challenge for us to reintroduce the program more exceptionally than ever.
- **Entrepreneurs have a chance to get \$50K cash funding.**
- **Haya Al-Mana:** Panel of world-class experts from top international institutions to facilitate virtual bootcamp.
- **Neda Al-Dehani:** Previous ZGI startups attracted promising investment opportunities to Kuwaiti market.

The program's previous editions featured many startups that continued to develop and attract promising investment opportunities to the Kuwaiti market". Al-Dehani added: "Many of the unique startups that were a part of ZGI received investment interests recently, including, for example, three of last year's ZGI 5 alumni: Armada (order & delivery solutions), HOT (online training and workouts), and Baims (e-learning platform)". Al-Dehani also mentioned that the year 2020 witnessed a new startup

their business skills and produce a productive workforce based on world-class experiences".

Zain is well aware of the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects. Springing from its growing commitment towards practicing its social responsibility, the company is committed to printing a positive impact through all its activities. This has led Zain to embrace the most influential issues in the community, including the support of youth, entre-

preneurship, and innovation.

### Terms and conditions

Applying for the Bootcamp and the investment committee is open to persons from all nationalities, aged 21 and above. Noting that priority goes to Kuwaiti startups. The applicant must be the founder or co-founder of the startup. Team submissions are acceptable, but only two persons who are nominated by the team may participate in the Zain Great Idea Bootcamp. Startups may be implemented in Kuwait or in any other country, and they may be implemented within the tech and digital transformation industry.

The investment committee consists of members from Rasameel Investment Company, Brilliant Lab, and Zain's management. 10 startups from the ZGI Bootcamp will be selected to advance to Phase 5 - The Zain Media and Business Support. Candidates will be provided with both Arabic and English versions of the Terms & Conditions of the program for their information and acceptance. In case of any ambiguity between the two versions, the Arabic version shall prevail.

### How to apply

After agreeing to the terms and conditions, applicants should apply their tech startup idea by filling out the online form at [zaingreatidea.com](http://zaingreatidea.com) and attach any supporting documents or videos (if available).

### Virtual Bootcamp

Eligible applicants will participate in the virtual Bootcamp phase. Throughout four weeks, they will learn the essentials of accelerating their tech startups via workshops, training sessions, and panel discussions featured by world-class facilitators and trainers from top international institutions, including IE Business School, MIT, Stanford, and more.

### Zain co-developing and services

If the startup passes the judging panel, entrepreneurs will have the opportunity to benefit from Zain's leading experiences in areas that are essential to any startup, including marketing, advertising, customer care, public relations, digital partnerships, business/consultancy/legal services, and much more.

### Virtual Zain Demo Day event

At the end of the program, all finalists will be hosted at a virtual Zain Demo Day event, through which they will present and pitch their final startups to investors, business partners, and others, giving them the opportunity to transform their ideas and startups into a profitable business.





## Business

# Bolstered by pandemic, tech titans face growing scrutiny

## Tech giants tighten grip on billions of customers' lives amid COVID-19

PARIS: Accelerating the transition to an ever more digital existence, the coronavirus pandemic has tightened tech giants' grip on billions of customers' lives. Governments and users are belatedly coming to terms with the power held by the likes of Apple and Amazon, particularly in focus this year thanks to their role in everything from setting up video meetings to doing our shopping for us.

Most of the planet has spent at least part of 2020 in lockdown, and as Western consumers clicked through Google and Facebook, hundreds of millions of Chinese users turned to Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent or Xiaomi. These "superstars" of online capitalism "have given the impression, in this world where so many things that seemed solid are now fragile, that they are above it all and even invincible," said Paris-based economist Joelle Toledano.

While governments are spending trillions of dollars to avoid widespread bankruptcies and mass unemployment, shares of these companies have been rising since January: Facebook's stock is up 35 percent, Amazon 67 percent and Apple 68 percent.

Zoom, created in 2011 by a Californian engineer, has watched its share price jump 600 percent in 2020, while Airbnb's share value doubled on the day of its IPO. Meanwhile Chinese apps, long confined to the local market, are exploding in app stores around the world: notably TikTok but also SHEIN for clothes shopping and another video sharing platform, Likee.

### Taking back control

The pandemic may have strengthened these high-flying digital giants, but it has also energized calls to regu-



late the conglomerates which continue to expand through hundreds of acquisitions. "Until 2017, the benefits, especially in terms of innovation, were considered to outweigh the damage," said Toledano, who has written a book about taking control back from Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple.

That has changed, however, as they now stand accused of not paying enough taxes, unfair competition, stealing media content and spreading fake news. The European Union has unveiled an ambitious set of new rules to clip their wings, ranging from limits to their power over the market to cracking down on hate speech and requirements for transparency over algorithms.

Drawing lessons from past failures—delayed and drawn-out procedures and weak penalties—the Digital

Services Act could see companies face crippling fines or even bans from the EU market for breaches. The bloc's competition chief Margrethe Vestager has said the draft laws would bring "order to chaos" online, reining in the massive "gatekeepers" who dominate markets.

The United States is also acting on competition concerns, with US federal and state antitrust enforcers filing suits against Facebook on December 9 seeking to overturn its acquisitions of Instagram and WhatsApp. "For nearly a decade, Facebook has used its dominance and monopoly power to crush smaller rivals and snuff out competition, all at the expense of everyday users," Letitia James, New York's attorney general, said.

In October the Justice Department and 11 states launched proceedings against Google, accusing it of having illegally strengthened its monopoly on online searches and advertising.

In China, meanwhile, authorities have been tightening regulation of content for several months, and recently announced new rules for e-commerce. November's dramatic suspension of the IPO for online payment giant Ant Group—which was expected to raise a record \$34 billion—was interpreted by many observers as a shot across the sector's bows from the Chinese government.

And last week, market regulators launched an anti-monopoly investigation into Ant parent company Alibaba shortly after Communist Party leaders vowed to crack down on "disorderly capital expansion".

### Little economic damage

Despite public outcry over their failings to rein in misinformation or hate speech, among other things, tech

companies have seen little impact on their bottom line. In the US, Facebook was boycotted in July by a hundred or so advertisers against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter movement, without any major economic damage. Ride-hailing platforms Uber and Lyft, which refused to take on their thousands of drivers as employees as required by California law, managed to convince voters there to support them in a crucial referendum in November. And in France, Amazon is accused of destroying small business, exploiting its employees and promoting over-consumption with disregard for the environment—yet the French branch of Jeff Bezos' company made record sales during the "Black Friday" sales bonanza.

### 'Surveillance capitalism'

Shoshana Zuboff, a professor at Harvard Business School and the author of a book on "surveillance capitalism", has denounced the sale of personal data to advertisers. Speaking on a European Parliament panel last week, she said Google's possible acquisition of fitness wearables maker Fitbit should be blocked. "Google's assurances cannot be trusted," she said.

Some argue that targeted advertising is not new, however. Jacques Cremer, a professor at the Toulouse School of Economics in France, said it is "normal" that Facebook, Google or Twitter "use the data they have on me to show me ads". "We must regulate the platforms, but be careful not to make scapegoats of them," said Cremer, who last year advised the European Commission on proposed regulation. "They are incredibly imaginative companies, extraordinarily well managed, and offer a high quality of service." — AFP

## Ghossn case haunts Japan a year after shock escape

TOKYO: A year after Japan learned with horror that Carlos Ghossn had jumped bail to become the world's most famous fugitive, the fiasco and its repercussions continue to haunt the country. Ghossn was living in a monitored Tokyo apartment awaiting trial on financial misconduct charges when he casually boarded a train to Osaka in western Japan on December 29, 2019 with two accomplices. They smuggled him past customs at Kansai airport, reportedly in an instrument case, and a day later he emerged in Beirut, after changing planes in Istanbul. The former Nissan chief, who holds French, Lebanese and Brazilian nationality, declared in an astonishing press conference from Beirut that he had been forced to flee for fear of an unfair trial.

Stunned Japanese officials took days to respond officially to his escape, and their extradition demands were rejected by Lebanon as the countries have no applicable treaty. Facing an Interpol arrest warrant, Ghossn has remained effectively trapped in Lebanon, even as others face court over their links to his case. In mid-September, the trial began against his former Nissan colleague Greg Kelly, who was also out on bail in Tokyo when Ghossn escaped. Kelly is accused of having illegally and deliberately concealed payments of around 9.2 billion yen (\$89 million at today's rates) that were promised by Nissan to Ghossn upon retirement. Kelly, who like Ghossn denies any wrongdoing, faces 10 years in prison if found guilty, and some have claimed the escape will make prosecutors more determined to win a conviction. "Dismissal of the charges would be a devastating loss of face that would allow Ghossn to crawl from his hideout in Beirut," wrote Stephen Givens, a Tokyo-based corporate lawyer, in the Nikkei Asian Review in October. "Ghossn's escape has sent the prosecutors up a tree from which they can no longer climb down. Do not expect a happy ending," he added.

### Japan reviewing bail system

Others in the saga also face legal proceedings, including the alleged accomplices in Ghossn's escape, former Green Beret Michael Taylor and his son Peter, who are fighting extradition from the US to Japan. And in Istanbul, a court case is continuing against Turkish employees of a private jet company that was hired to assist Ghossn's escape. In Japan, the saga continues to cast a long shadow. The justice ministry has launched a review of the country's bail system with an eye to strengthening it, including possibly introducing an electronic monitoring bracelet system.

Ironically, at one point while attempting to win bail, Ghossn offered to wear a monitoring bracelet but was rebuffed as it was not yet part of Japan's bail system. There is also debate about the country's judicial system, and the claim made by critics that Japan uses "hostage justice"—lengthy detention of suspects before bringing charges, allegedly in a bid to secure a confession. Prosecutors in Japan can hold a suspect for up to 23 days for each charge they are investigating, and may interrogate a detainee without a lawyer during this period. That leaves suspects "extremely vulnerable", said Megumi Wada, a former member of Ghossn's defence team in Japan and a researcher for the Japanese Federation of Bar Associations (JFBA).

But wholesale reform looks unlikely, with the JFBA largely ignored by the government and carefully avoiding mention of the Ghossn case, instead urging the respect of rights protected by Japan's constitution. In November, Ghossn scored a victory when a UN working group on arbitrary detention concluded his arrest and detention in Japan had been "fundamentally unfair", a view Tokyo slammed as "totally unacceptable".

Ghossn is currently beyond the reach of the Japanese courts and leads a comparatively quiet life, mostly in his Beirut home, though he recently released a book setting out his side of his case. He and Nissan continue to pursue each other through various legal actions. Proceedings in a \$95 million lawsuit brought by the automaker against Ghossn opened in Japan, with Nissan seeking compensation for what it called "years of his misconduct and fraudulent activity".—AFP

## China orders Ant Group to return to online payment roots

BEIJING: Chinese fintech giant Ant Group has been ordered by regulators to drastically change its business model and return to its roots as a payment services provider, as the state squeeze continues on the once unbridled empire of tech tycoon Jack Ma. China's central bank summoned Ant executives over the weekend and demanded the company "strictly rectify" its lending, insurance and wealth management services, according to a statement released on Sunday. The edict comes just weeks after Ant Group's record-breaking IPO was halted at the last minute by Beijing, which has been ruthless in its takedown of a company once vaunted as the poster child for Chinese technology. Last Thursday regulators also launched an anti-monopoly investigation into Alibaba—of which Ant Group is a subsidiary—sending the share price of the e-commerce giant tumbling and intensifying the troubles of its billionaire founder Ma.



This file photo shows the Ant Group headquarters in Hangzhou, in China's eastern Zhejiang province. — AFP

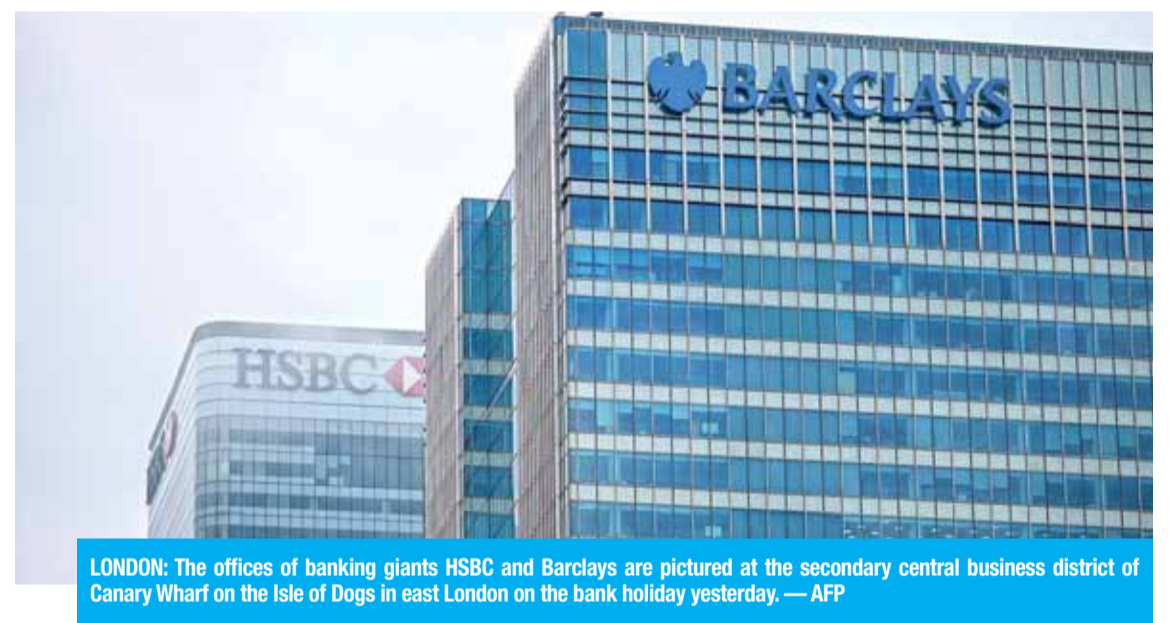
Alibaba's dropped nearly nine percent in Monday trading in Hong Kong, as investors grow increasingly nervous over a company in the teeth of Beijing's regulators. Ant Group made its name via its main product Alipay, the online payments platform and super-app that is now deeply embedded in China's economy. But the company also expanded into offering loans, credit, investments and insurance to hundreds of millions of consumers and small businesses, spurring fear and jealousy in a wider banking system geared more for supporting state policy and large corporations. Xinhua news agency reported Ant Group is now "strictly prohibited from unfair competition" and is urged to redress its "illegal" financial activities. — AFP

## 2020 emissions: Precedent-setting or bucking trend?

PARIS: For a few moments in late April of 2020, oil—normally the lifeblood of the world economy—became more expensive to store than to pay someone to take it away. Crude oil's wildly fluctuating futures prices reflected the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, with record falls in greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel demand making 2020 an unexpectedly good year for the climate.

The United Nations and the Global Carbon Project both said this month that planet-warming carbon pollution was set to fall seven percent this year, the largest single-year drop in history. As pressure mounts on governments to match action to their promises to slash emissions, such a historic drop is welcome even if it only came about due to the pandemic.

It puts 2020 roughly in line with what the UN says is needed to keep the Paris climate deal goal of limiting warming to 1.5C within reach. But with distribution of several COVID-19 vaccines ramping up in 2021,



LONDON: The offices of banking giants HSBC and Barclays are pictured at the secondary central business district of Canary Wharf on the Isle of Dogs in east London on the bank holiday yesterday. — AFP

## Brexit trade deal gets EU green light

BRUSSELS: The European Union gave the green light yesterday to its post-Brexit trade deal with the UK, clearing the way for it to come into effect in the New Year. The British parliament will have to ratify the deal later this week, but Brussels will apply it provisionally, cushioning the economic shock of the divorce. Customs and regulatory controls on cross-Channel commerce will still come into effect on January 1 after Britain leaves the EU single market.

But there will be no immediate return to a regime of tariffs and quotas that could have disrupted trade after Britain's decision to quit the club. Sebastian Fischer, spokesman for the German presidency of the EU, said: "EU Ambassadors have unanimously approved the provisional application of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement." Under EU procedure, the decision by ambassadors from the 27 member states to endorse the plan will take effect at 3:00 pm (1400 GMT) today. But there is no expectation that any EU members will now slow the adoption of the trade deal, the fruit of a tortuous 10-month negotiation.

Germany holds the rotating EU presidency and Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer said the coalition government has no objection to the text. "Germany can accept the negotiated accord," she said. The European Parliament will want to study the deal even after its provisional application

and was expected to convene a session in the first half of next year to ratify it. But yesterday, MEPs were discussing the possibility of pushing that date back further to give themselves more time to study the text and to watch how relations develop.

### 'Trust and support'

The member states' provisional approval will last until the end of February, but EU parliamentary leaders asked yesterday for a few more weeks to arrange a vote in March or April. But if London refuses this delay, they have agreed to hold a special plenary session on or around February 23. Brussels' chief negotiator Michel Barnier met the president of the European Parliament David Sassoli and the MEPs coordinating EU-UK ties yesterday.

He described the exchanges as "fruitful" and thanked the MEPs "for their trust and support throughout this extraordinary negotiation." British parliamentarians are to meet on Wednesday to debate the accord. Although the 2016 Brexit referendum that set the divorce in motion proved to be extremely divisive, the vote is expected to go smoothly. The MPs have not had long to study the 1,200-page text, but Prime Minister Boris Johnson has a comfortable majority of Conservative MPs in the Commons and has hailed the accord as a victory. The minority Scottish National Party will oppose the deal—as it opposed Brexit—but the main Labor opposition will back it to avoid further disruption.

The deal offers the British duty-free and quota-free access to its market of 450 million consumers, and gives European fishermen access to UK waters for at least another five-and-a-half years. But it provides for Europe to impose compensatory measures on British business if London backslides on standards for state aid, the environment, labor law and taxation. — AFP

enabling an anticipated global economic rebound, will 2020 be the start of an annual downward emissions trend, or just a momentary blip?

"I am afraid that if governments do not take major new policies we may well see that the decline we are experiencing in emissions this year will rebound," Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency, said. "If governments do not put clean energy policies in their economic recovery packages we will go back to where we were before the pandemic."

Birol pointed to China, the world's largest polluter, which he said was an "important test run" for how other nations power their COVID-19 recovery. "We all know China was the first country to have the coronavirus, the first where there was a lockdown and where the economy declined," he said. "But China is also the



first country where the economy rebounded and as of today Chinese emissions are higher than levels before the crisis." The UN in its annual Emissions Gap report said last week that 2020's dip in emissions would have only a "negligible impact" on long-term warming without a profound shift towards green energy.

It said emissions hit a record high in 2019 of 59.1 billion tons of CO2 equivalent—a whopping 2.6 percent higher than the year before. Yet the countries that pollute the most have prioritized sectors heavily reliant on fossil fuels in their stimulus packages.

In October, a study by manufacturer Wartsila and Energy Policy Tracker found that G20 nations had earmarked \$145 billion for clean energy solutions as part of their recovery funding. This compared with \$216 billion that had been pledged for fossil energy, the analysis showed. The UN said this month that production of oil, gas and coal needed to fall 6 percent annually through 2030 to stay on a 1.5-C course. Its Production Gap assessment showed however that countries plan to increase fossil fuel production 2 percent per year this decade. This is despite record low costs for renewable energy technology such as solar and wind. Kingsmill Bond, energy strategist at the market watchdog Carbon Tracker, said he was confident that 2019 would turn out to have been the peak in emissions, as industry wakes up to the new economics of power. — AFP

## Business

## Al-Shall Economic Report

# GCC states must reduce reliance on oil to ward off economic headwinds

## Total oil revenues expected to be about \$323 billion for current year 2020

**KUWAIT:** The oil winds have weakened; the sailing ships of the oil countries are outdated and will not reach their destinations. An "OPEC" basket barrel of oil price scored about \$109.5 for 2012 average and its production for the same year reached 30.5 million barrels per day. Therefore, its oil revenues at that time amounted to about \$1,200 billion with a barrel's average price is about \$40.5 and its production level is 25.6 million barrels per day.

Total oil revenues are expected to score about \$323 billion for the current year 2020 or about 27 percent of the 2012 production level, according to the US Energy Information Administration. Truly, the next few years will achieve a higher level of oil revenues. But the highest aspiration is for oil prices to stabilize at \$60 per barrel. Pressure will then intensify to bring prices below this rate. Parallel to this, repercussions will also intensify in direct proportion to the rise in each oil state's reliance on oil.

Therefore, the speed of the decision to disengage from oil becomes what separates the surviving oil states from the sunken ones.

Within Kuwait's neighbors, and without going into an evaluation process of the experience of each, some countries have started the disengagement project. UAE, which is less dependent on oil in forming its economy and financing its public finances, its largest Emirate Abu Dhabi has a sovereign fund close to the size of the Norwegian fund.

Recently, Saudi Arabia announced expectations of its public revenue structure, stating that the contribution of non-oil revenues will amount to about 46.5 percent of total revenues of the public budget for the year 2020. Also Qatar, whose economy is 30 percent bigger than the Kuwaiti economy, has better education, health services and infrastructure.

China broke the sanctities of "Marxist" ideology in its decision to turn around because it knew when and in which direction it would turn at the crossroads in which it found itself. On the contrary, the classical and rich Iraq was unable to break from the sanctity of quotas and became a failed state.

And when China's comrades in the Eastern Bloc failed, most of them embraced Western Europe, while there is no safety net to rescue the failed oil states from the free fall damage. Kuwait unfortunately, the most addicted to oil neighboring country, still adopts two contradictory strategies: one to gradually eliminate dependence on oil and another strategy to be more dependent on it. Its public administration is unable to extinguish the public financial fire. It is unable to reduce public expenditures, unable to increase its non-oil revenues, unable to borrow to meet its fiscal deficit because the general conviction is that its governments are unfit or unqualified to obtain borrowing money. The late "Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad" who was right in choosing China as a partner in the development project. Its peaceful rise and transformation into a great power was a precedent not repeated in the readable history. He was also right in a development project whose introduction calls for the gradual break from dependence on oil.

He was right when he reported corruption at the highest levels and as a result, he lost his position, and he was also right to break the sanctity of genes and quotas in the call for professional management of the North Project, which is supposed to be generalized to all the administration of the country. Contrary to all the aforementioned rules, Kuwait did not read nor understand the seriousness of the historical juncture it is going through. At the beginning of a new era, Kuwait adopted superiority in the number of missed opportunities and reasserted the sanctity of the governments of genes and quotas. Naturally, a government that is unable to extinguish its fire is unable to build.

### "Panama" Papers

The "Panama" Papers are very important if we understand their purpose. They are the outcome of disclosing the secrecy of one out of four offices in Panama that do the same work. They register companies and individuals in them for investment from major countries, and there are also more than 10

other tax havens that perform the same active work, such as the Cayman Islands and all of the British "Gezi" and "Virgin", and dozens of others less active around the world.

Tax havens are a legitimate and legal mechanism designed to give a competitive advantage to a country within the main countries receiving foreign investment, as an investment through these havens may greatly reduce the tax liability, compared to whether the investor invested through an investment entity in the same country, then he will be subject to the citizen tax. For any foreign entity that wishes to buy or build a property in the USA for example, its American attorney, tax advisor and auditor establish a company that owns this property and is registered in the tax haven, with the knowledge of the United States Government, its regulatory agencies and the tax authority there.

The invested money is pumped into the American economy and not into the economy of the haven or its banks, and the purpose of the American legislator is to support the growth of its economy, create job opportunities in it and support money flows to it, not favoritism or likeness in a haven or an investor.

Upon liquidation of investment, the sale money cannot be distributed except after the contribution of the law firm, the investment advisor, and the audit office in calculating the right of the lenders, and most importantly, the right of the American tax authority, that is, the US Treasury. Foreign Direct Investment in high tax countries, which does not pass through an entity in a haven, is a non-professional investment and violates the interest of the investor's client, so the majority of those investment entities are without fault. The importance of the "Panama" Papers lies in pursuing two types of investors through safe-havens, the first for developed countries with respectable tax systems, and the second for developing and emerging countries.

The charge of the first class is the failure to disclose their investment through the tax haven and their tax return not including the income resulting from it. The president of "Bayern Munich" and the father of the tennis player "Steffi Graf" was previously imprisoned for the same reason, while the case of former British Prime Minister "David Cameron" ended when he published his tax return, indicating that he invested in his father's fund through Panama, profiting £19 thousand and paying its due tax, meaning that the investment mechanism is legitimate as long as its income has been disclosed. The second class of investors from our countries and are the investors with dirty or stolen money from their countries, whether they are politicians or influential people, and because the oversight bodies are under their control, or the oversight agencies are weak, so the haven for them is a haven for money laundering. Therefore, it is assumed that the world works to strip tax havens from the characteristic of secrecy, so the investor to benefit from a tax deduction in the country of investment is not harmful to him from disclosing his name as long as the source of his money is clean, and disclosure prevents the tax evasion in his country or the corrupt money launderer from exploiting Tax haven secrecy.

And at the level of each country, including Kuwait, legislation is supposed to prohibit investment through the tax haven except after disclosure to a competent official authority of its investment, unless he does, then he has committed an offense and is treated as a money launderer, and it is possible to conclude disclosure agreements with the countries receiving the investment to disclose the names of investors.

### Boursa Kuwait

The performance of Boursa Kuwait for last week was less active, where the traded value, traded volume and number of transactions decreased, also the general index decreased (AlShall index). AlShall Index (value weighted) closed at 489.1 points as of last Thursday, showing a decline by 6.3 points or by 1.3 percent compared with its level last week. While it remained lower by 64.1 points or by 11.6 percent compared with the end of 2019

first collaboration with Batelco Bahrain, which was previously announced. Al-Babtain added: "The provision of high-quality and unique services is what distinguishes us at Ooredoo Kuwait as we constantly innovate new products and services based on the changing needs of our customers. Thus, the new ProPing packages with their different prices give customers the chance to enjoy not only higher internet speeds, but also a consistent quality that exceeds their needs."

He concluded: "For us to stay competitive in today's fast-paced business arena, we have upgraded our network infrastructure to improve speed, reliability, efficiency and scalability." ProPing gaming enthusiasts who need fast, reliable, and consistent internet service over Fiber optics, and 5G, look no further. Ooredoo Kuwait offers high internet speeds through its 5G internet bundles that will allow you to enjoy an unparalleled gaming experience starting at KD 30 and FASTtelco starting at KD 40 through fiber optics which gives ProPing speeds 50Mbps and 100Mbps.

The new gaming service will allow the heavy gamers to explore a new unreached experience that provides high speed, best quality and low latency.



Abdulaziz Al-Babtain

## Ooredoo Kuwait launches new ProPing 5G bundles

**KUWAIT:** Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, announced the launching of ProPing, the first and leading gaming platform service in the country, which was previously provided by FASTtelco through fiber optics. Ooredoo Kuwait has been persistent in developing and providing ProPing service over its 5G network, as the service has become available with guarantees, allowing customers to directly communicate with the largest global gaming systems and websites.

Commenting on the ProPing launching, Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, Chief Executive Officer, Ooredoo Kuwait said: "The launching of these new products and services was driven from the principle of working towards developing the quality of the products. The starting point of this service was the development of the company's network infrastructure. Indeed, Ooredoo is the first company in the State of Kuwait to provide a stable service to all customers through the fifth generation network without adding any additional devices."

More and above, through connecting this service to the Ooredoo Data Center - as it is the only one directly linked with the Amazon Cloud Network, the

AlShall Index is a value index, i.e. it is based on a weighted market value by 100% according to IFC formulas, with the index's basic value being 100 (as of August 1<sup>st</sup> 1990).

ALSHALL

ALSHALL INDEX	Week 51	Week 50
	24/12/2020	17/12/2020
Increased Value (# of Companies)	7	20
Decreased Value (# of Companies)	19	9
Unchanged Value (# of Companies)	6	4
<b>Total Companies</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>33</b>

Company Name	THU	THU	DIFF %	CLOSE 2019	DIFF %
	24/12/2020	17/12/2020			
1 National Bank Of Kuwait	584.7	594.6	(1.7)	706.9	(17.3)
2 Gulf Bank	177.2	179.6	(1.3)	246.2	(28.0)
3 Commercial Bank Of Kuwait	516.0	516.0	0.0	545.9	(5.5)
4 Al-Ahli Bank Of Kuwait	136.8	138.1	(0.9)	167.6	(18.4)
5 Kuwait International Bank	237.8	242.4	(1.9)	297.0	(19.9)
6 Ahli United Bank	319.2	318.1	0.3	358.5	(11.0)
7 Burgan Bank	224.4	228.8	(1.9)	328.1	(31.6)
8 Kuwait Finance Bank	2,283.2	2,301.1	(0.8)	2,492.0	(8.4)
<b>Banking Sector</b>	<b>568.4</b>	<b>575.4</b>	<b>(1.2)</b>	<b>668.5</b>	<b>(15.0)</b>
9 Commercial Facilities Company	134.2	137.9	(2.7)	156.6	(14.3)
10 International Financial Advisors	180.2	180.5	(0.2)	160.3	12.4
11 National Investments Company	169.9	176.2	(3.6)	173.7	(2.2)
12 Kuwait Projects Company (Holding)	403.6	403.6	0.0	566.1	(28.7)
13 Coast Investment & Development Co.	65.6	64.2	2.2	54.7	19.9
<b>Investment Sector</b>	<b>185.1</b>	<b>187.4</b>	<b>(1.2)</b>	<b>222.9</b>	<b>(17.0)</b>
14 Kuwait Insurance Company	88.0	89.3	(1.5)	72.8	20.9
15 Gulf Insurance Company	466.3	416.0	12.1	376.4	23.9
16 Al-Ahleia Insurance Company	189.3	187.3	1.1	160.7	17.8
17 Warba Insurance Company	71.2	64.8	9.9	50.8	40.2
<b>Insurance Sector</b>	<b>176.4</b>	<b>167.4</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>144.7</b>	<b>21.9</b>
18 Kuwait Real Estate Company	209.9	211.8	(0.9)	189.1	11.0
19 United Realty Company	102.0	100.1	1.9	125.0	(18.4)
20 National Real Estate Company	220.0	220.3	(0.1)	253.6	(13.2)
21 Salhiya Real Estate Company	1,978.5	1,978.5	0.0	1,683.8	17.5
<b>Real Estate Sector</b>	<b>229.5</b>	<b>229.7</b>	<b>(0.1)</b>	<b>221.8</b>	<b>3.5</b>
22 The National Industries	162.6	163.5	(0.6)	215.3	(24.5)
23 Refrigeration Industries Co	349.7	360.3	(2.9)	370.8	(5.7)
24 Gulf Cable & Electrical Industries	305.4	314.9	(3.0)	195.0	56.6
<b>Industrial Sector</b>	<b>184.1</b>	<b>187.5</b>	<b>(1.8)</b>	<b>190.3</b>	<b>(3.3)</b>
25 Kuwait National Cinemas	470.8	495.3	(4.9)	657.8	(28.4)
26 The Public Warehousing Co	3,990.0	4,025.4	(0.9)	4,198.3	(5.0)
27 Mobile Telecommunications Co (ZAIN)	1,162.4	1,218.5	(4.6)	1,134.3	2.5
28 Safat Energy Co	18.9	18.2	3.8	21.3	(11.3)
<b>Services Sector</b>	<b>1,421.5</b>	<b>1,462.2</b>	<b>(2.8)</b>	<b>1,460.6</b>	<b>(2.7)</b>
29 Livestock Transport & Trading Co	150.0	151.7	(1.1)	145.8	2.9
30 Danah Alsafat Foodstuff Company	10.8	10.8	0.0	14.5	(25.5)
<b>Food Sector</b>	<b>451.2</b>	<b>451.6</b>	<b>(0.1)</b>	<b>450.6</b>	<b>0.1</b>
31 Sharjah Cement Co	175.8	175.8	0.0	175.8	0.0
32 Umm Al-Qaiwain Cement Industries	544.5	544.5	0.0	490.8	10.9
<b>Non Kuwaiti Companies</b>	<b>145.8</b>	<b>145.8</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>181.7</b>	<b>(19.8)</b>
<b>AlShall Index</b>	<b>489.1</b>	<b>495.4</b>	<b>(1.3)</b>	<b>553.2</b>	<b>(11.6)</b>

### The following tables summarize Last weeks performance of Boursa Kuwait

Description	Week 51	Week 50	Difference %
	24/12/2020	17/12/2020	
<b>Working days</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>AlShall index (32 Companies)</b>	<b>489.1</b>	<b>495.4</b>	<b>-1.3%</b>
<b>Boursa All Share Market Index</b>	<b>5,569.4</b>	<b>5,642.4</b>	<b>-1.3%</b>
Value Trade (KD)	161,973,366	245,939,814	
<b>Daily average (KD)</b>	<b>32,394,673</b>	<b>49,187,963</b>	<b>-34.1%</b>
Volume Trade (Shares)	925,644,683	1,221,593,121	
<b>Daily average (Shares)</b>	<b>185,128,937</b>	<b>244,318,624</b>	<b>-24.2%</b>
Transactions	44,347	49,624	
<b>Daily average (Transactions)</b>	<b>8,869</b>	<b>9,925</b>	<b>-10.6%</b>

### Most Active Sectors & Companies

Description	Value Traded	% of Total
Sectors	KD	Market
NATIONAL BANK OF KUWAIT	22,927,208	14.2%
KUWAIT FINANCE HOUSE	17,246,364	10.6%
MOBILE TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY	13,566,956	8.4%
AHLI UNITED BANK (B.S.C)	12,089,010	7.5%
KUWAIT REAL ESTATE COMPANY	7,329,979	4.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>73,159,517</b>	<b>45.2%</b>
Description	Value Traded	% of Total
Sectors	KD	Market
BANKS SECTOR	71,753,146	44.3%
FINANCIAL SERVICES SECTOR	25,937,715	16.0%
INDUSTRIALS SECTOR	22,367,687	13.8%
REAL ESTATE SECTOR	16,593,294	10.2%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR	14,169,929	8.7%

## Gulf Bank announces winners of Al-Danah weekly draw

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank held its weekly Al-Danah draw on 27th December 2020 announcing the names of the winners for the week of 20 - 24 December 2020. The weekly draw consists of five winners who receive KD 1,000 each, every week.

### The winners this week are:

Amani Mohammad Abd Al-Sayed Alrashed  
Ibraheem Mohammed Ahmed Morad  
Sara Ali Fahad  
Emad Hasan Naser  
Ali Abdullah Khasrow

Al-Danah is now offering its biggest prize yet, with an annual draw prize of KD 1,500,000. The annual draw will be held on 14 January 2021. Gulf Bank encourages customers to increase their chances of winning with Al-Danah by depositing more into their Gulf Bank accounts using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services.

Al-Danah offers a number of unique services to customers, including the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card, which allows account holders to deposit money into their accounts at their con-

venience. Account holders can also calculate their chances of winning the draws through the 'Al-Danah Chances' calculator available on the Gulf Bank website and app. Furthermore, loyal Al-Danah customers are rewarded with loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances accumulated from the previous year, which are added to the customer's chances the following year. Therefore, the total chances earned by Al-Danah customers in 2019, have been added to their 2020 chances, and the same process will take place in 2021, and so on. Terms and conditions apply.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers require a minimum of KD 200 to open an account and the same amount should be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to their account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the weekly draw within two days.

# Classifieds

Tuesday, December 29, 2020

**Kuwait Times**  
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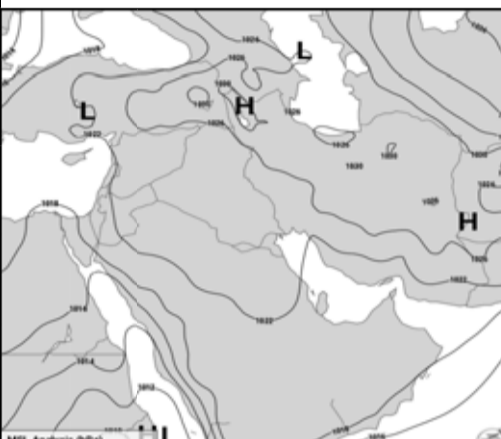


Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 66819 - 66817  
 Fax: (+965) 24331579  
[www.met.gov.kw](http://www.met.gov.kw)

## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY NIGHT:** Cold with light variable wind to light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 08 - 28 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

**BY DAY:** Rather cold and Partly cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 08 - 28 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. REC.	MIN. EXP.	SFC. CHART 28/12/2020 1200 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	17 °C	09 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	17 °C	08 °C		
ABDALY	16 °C	07 °C		
BUBYAN	16 °C	09 °C		
JAHRA	18 °C	08 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C		
SALMIYAH	16 °C	09 °C		
AHMADI	- °C	- °C		
NUWASIB	17 °C	09 °C		
WAFRA	17 °C	08 °C		
SALMY	14 °C	05 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Tuesday	12/29	Rather cold and Partly cloudy	19 °C	08 °C	VRB-NW	08 - 28 km/h
Wednesday	12/30	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	20 °C	10 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 26 km/h
Thursday	12/31	Fair and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain later on	20 °C	08 °C	VRB	06 - 20 km/h
Friday	01/01	Fair and Partly cloudy	21 °C	12 °C	VRB	06 - 20 km/h

TOMORROW PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:17
Sunrise	06:41
Zuhr	11:50
Asr	14:40
Sunset	16:58
Isha	18:20

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	17 °C
MIN. Temp.	09 °C
MAX. RH	62 %
MIN. RH	22 %
MAX. Wind	N 32 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

## Hospitals

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

## Clinics

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

## CHANGE OF NAME

I, **HUSEIN** AKBER SAJJAD HUSEN KOTHAMBAWALA, Passport No. N7016963 hereby change my name to **HUSSAIN** AKBAR KOTHAMBAWALA in all my dealings and documents. My new & correct name shall be First Name: **HUSSAIN**, Middle Name (Father's Name): **AKBAR**, Surname: **KOTHAMBAWALA**.

(C 5827) 28-12-2020

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## EMERGENCY ☎ 112

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

For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call **MSALHOTLINE 128**

## Word Search

### Cinderella Word Search



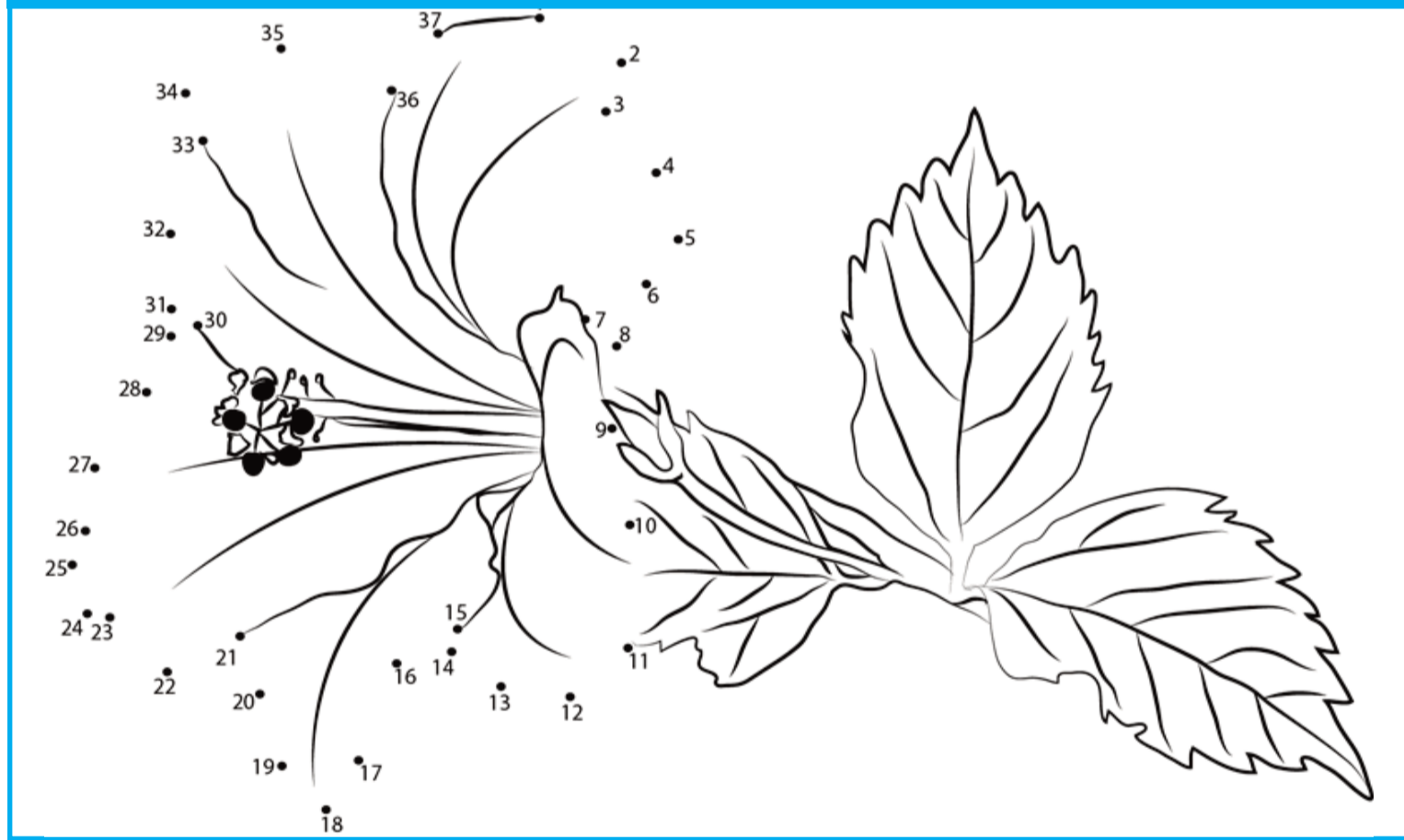
BALL  
CASTLE  
CHARMING  
CINDERELLA  
COACH  
DANCE  
FAIRY

GODMOTHER  
GOWN  
MAGIC  
MICE  
MIDNIGHT  
PRINCE  
PUMPKIN

RAGS  
SLIPPER  
STEPMOTHER  
STEPSISTERS  
WAND



## Join the Dots



## STAR TRACK



### Aries (March 21-April 19)

You are very interested in all kinds of professions that concern humans, Aries - medicine, psychology, or any kind of spiritual therapy. You will be very sensitive to the great opening toward the future that comes along today. The planetary alignment initiates progress in all areas of human existence. Keep your eyes and ears wide open.



### Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Do you help the world evolve, Cancer? You may ask yourself this kind of delicate question today. Even if you're a person of action who knows how to react to situations, you should be careful not to be too impulsive. You have a specific role to play. Don't get thrown off track by emotional circumstances.



### Libra (September 23-October 22)

The events of the day depend on your ability to put things into question today, Libra. In general, you're good at analyzing situations when things aren't going well in your relationships. Now someone in your family may have a problem acting responsibly. It's up to that person to take care of things, but you could understand the message the person is trying to send other people with his or her behavior.



### Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Today is an inspirational day for you, fast thinking Capricorn. Let those visions come to you, process them, and try to verbalize them. A lot of information and electricity is in the air, and you should have no problem picking up on it. Open up your channels for the best reception. Have a notepad handy to jot down all your insights.



### Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You may surprise the people around you over the next few days, Taurus. You're a responsible person and others can count on you. But just like anybody else, you're sensitive to your desires. You should expect your desires to be so strong today that they may be irresistible. If this is a positive experience, you may need to do some planning in your personal life.



### Leo (July 23-August 22)

You may tend to be overprotective of the people closest to you, especially children. You may feel you live in a dangerous world in which people don't care about responsibility to one another. But the people you're trying to protect are probably better prepared and adapted to the world than you think, Leo. They might try to tell you this even if your support is indispensable.



### Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

The planetary aspects are going to have a big impact on you today, Scorpio. This isn't the time to fear the future. Rather, it's a time to make it happen. The action you take right now will be instrumental in your future. Will there be enough of us walking toward the future? Scorpio will be at the head of the pack in any case, as always.



### Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

You're usually good at bringing people together. Your greatest strength is giving identity to those people who seek it. In fact, you're so aware of the differences between people that you resist the changes that come about as people evolve. Today's planetary alignment confronts you with issues that concern your future. Your position will help you accept things and go forward.



### Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You may have to stand by certain difficult, worrisome decisions today, Gemini. You may feel a kind of urgent need for stability in your personal life. What is really behind this feeling? Is it possible that you're just afraid of your desire to put everything into question in order to make a fresh start? Today you may find the answer to this question. Stay tuned.



### Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You probably need society's or other people's approval in order to feel good about yourself, Virgo. But your original personality and way of thinking are often hard for others to accept. You may need to make your ideas less crazy and a little more down to Earth and practical. This should be your goal over the next few days if you don't want to feel left out of things.



### Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

People are more alike than we think, especially on days like today that mean virtually the same thing to everyone. Some incredible changes have taken place in the world and its economic and social systems. Now is the time to think about what the next few years have in store. Do you have any ideas? Try to articulate them.



### Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Some of you still let individuals from other Zodiac signs do all the creating for you. The planetary configuration today pushes you to free yourself from the ties that bind you. It's time for you to show more creativity. Show the gems that you usually hide. Express yourself fully, without hesitation. Show others who's really in charge.

## Jennifer Aniston's pandemic-themed ornament



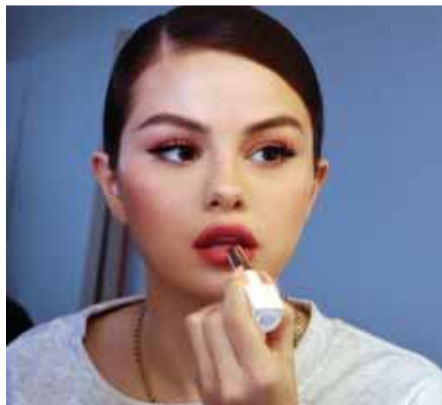
**J**ennifer Aniston put a pandemic-themed ornament on her Christmas tree. The 'Friends' star marked the recent festive season with a nod to the coronavirus pandemic, which has plagued the majority of 2020 for people across the world. She shared a picture of the ornament on her Instagram story, a circular wooden ornament which had the words, "Our first pandemic 2020", engraved onto it. Meanwhile, Jennifer previously admitted she has been thinking about retiring. The 'Morning Show' actress shared: "I would

have to say the last two years that has crossed my mind, which it never did before. A different unprepared project ... sucked the life out of me. I don't know if this is what interests me, [I remember thinking]." And if the 51-year-old actress did quit her full time job as an actress, she would definitely consider going into interior design. When asked what she'd be doing instead, she added: "Interior design, probably. I love it. It's my happy place. It's really a happy place for me." Jennifer has starred in many great movies and television shows over the

year. She recalled: "I loved, well, obviously 'Friends', That's a no brainer ... I would have to say that would be number one ... I always love shooting with [Adam] Sandler. 'Just Go With It' was super fun. We've known each other since we were 19 ... "[Cake] was an experience that was creatively fulfilling. Everything I imagined as an actor I'd be completely afraid of and suck at, I didn't feel so bad."

## SELENA GOMEZ GOOGLES HERSELF TO LOOK BACK ON HER OUTFIT CHOICES

**T**he 28-year-old megastar has confessed she sometimes cringes when she stumbles on a snap of herself wearing something "horrendous", but she knows that in the moment she felt "cool". She told Into The Gloss: "Sometimes I Google myself and look at what I wore last year - it kind of sucks to see when you got it wrong, but it's nice to have that instant yearbook. Oh my God - there was this time when I went to the Teen Vogue Young Hollywood party and I wore a shirt that said 'Hotter than' something, and a belt with these weird net-y tights and boots, and like, a sock - it looked horrendous and then I



put a blue streak in my hair. And I remember, I looked in the mirror and I was like - 'I feel so cool.' And I mean, that's awesome that I felt so good. But I cringe looking at it now." The 'Lose You To Love Me' hitmaker insisted that as long as what she's wearing makes her feel "happy", that's all that matters, whilst she explained that it's impossible to define her style because it changes all the time. She added: "But I never wear anything for any purpose other than making myself happy. So I love dressing up, I like trying new things. I'm inspired by music constantly, too - you can get away with more daring looks, like a ton of glitter that'll look awesome in certain lighting. I don't think you should ever have to 'define your style' because when you're 22, you probably aren't going to dress the same way you did when you were 16. You can define it for maybe a year at a time and that's it."

## A\$AP ROCKY SPENT CHRISTMAS WITH RIHANNA'S FAMILY

**A**\$AP Rocky spent Christmas with Rihanna's family in Barbados. The 32-year-old rap star recently started dating the chart-topping singer, and a source close to the celebrity couple claims spending Christmas together was an "obvious step" in their relationship. The insider told 'Entertainment Tonight': "Spending Christmas together was an obvious step for Rihanna and A\$AP. "They've known each other for so long as friends and in a work setting, which makes it so easy for them to get along, travel together and be involved in each other's lives to the full extent. They always have such a good time together and definitely seem in love." Rihanna, 32, was born and raised on the island, while



## Josh Brolin has become a father for the fourth time

**T**he 'Deadpool 2' star welcomed his second child with wife Kathryn Boyd on Christmas Day, who Kathryn branded their "little Christmas evening angel". Sharing the happy news, Kathryn - who also has Westlyn, two, with Josh, wrote on Instagram: "Chapel Grace Brolin. Born at 6:20 pm on 12/25/20. Our little Christmas evening angel. (sic)" Josh and Kathryn confirmed the happy news their family was growing in July. Kathryn wrote: "The Brolin's are a growin' !! Our little December babe is on the way.... (sic)" The happy news comes after the couple welcomed their daughter in November 2018. At the time of Westlyn's birth, Josh wrote on social media: "Mama Kathryn was stellar during this miracle birth and Bean is a flawless gem through and through. "We are blessed to the core and appreciate so much the love and support during this pregnancy from ALL who have partaken in our journey, directly and/or indirectly. (sic)" Whilst Kathryn added: "Our family's newest (and tiniest) member. Nothing compares to this... nothing. My heart is totally different forever. @joshbrolin thanks for this little life of ours. (sic)" The actor previously said he was feeling "appropriately nervous"

about becoming a dad again, though he was thrilled about the new arrival because he loves the company of youngsters. He said: "I'm always excited about kids. I prefer being around kids."



You know, they have the imagination. They're fun. I've heard other people be like, 'Kid's sitting there, he's staring at nothing, he's slobbering, like, what's the point?' "The point is to sit there and slobber with him. That's the point." Josh is also a father to Trevor, 32, and Eden, 26, who he has with his former wife Alice Adair.

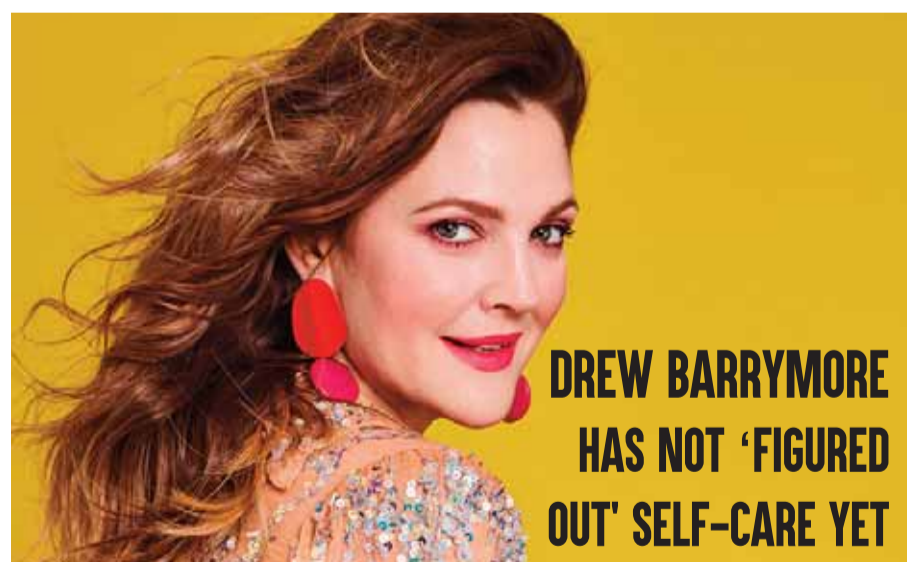
## Hilton's family wanted her to reject Simple Life

**P**aris Hilton's parents warned her not to sign up for 'The Simple Life'. The 39-year-old star became a household name when she and best friend Nicole Richie appeared in the long-running reality show from 2003 to 2007 but she revealed her sister, Nicky Hilton Rothschild was also approached to take part and refused, and her parents advised her to do the same. She said: "I'm so happy I did that show. "They asked my sister and I to do it but she said, 'There's no way I'm doing a reality show. You're crazy!' "My parents also said, 'Do not do this!' "I was 21. I



didn't know what I was getting myself into, but it was my first start in the industry. "I don't regret anything because it was my platform to build a brand." However, Paris admitted the show gave people a lot of misconceptions about her. She said: "There are many misconceptions but I think the first one is that

A\$AP's dad is also from Barbados. In fact, their connection to the island is said to have helped bring them closer together over recent months. A source previously explained: "Rihanna relates to A\$AP and it feels natural, easy and fun." She feels very comfortable around him since they've known each other for such a long time and also feels a connection to him because his dad is from Barbados." Last month, meanwhile, the celebrity duo were described as being "inseparable". Rihanna was also said to be "very happy" with the rap star. Speaking about their burgeoning romance, a source explained at the time: "They've been inseparable the past few weeks. "It's a new relationship, but they both seem very into it. They've always seemed to have a great time together. They have a lot in common. "They both are very much about helping out in the communities where they grew up A\$AP is generous, and so is Rihanna. A\$AP is known for being a great guy. "Rihanna seems very happy dating A\$AP."



**DREW BARRYMORE HAS NOT 'FIGURED OUT' SELF-CARE YET**

**T**he 45-year-old actress - who has eight-year-old Olive and six-year-old Frankie with ex-husband Will Kopelman - took to Instagram to discuss her relationship with making time to focus on herself after taking a "rare" bath and admitted it's something she's hoping to feature on her eponymous chat show. Speaking on an IGTV video titled '2021 personal goals come play with me!' she admitted: "I don't know about that whole self-care and taking more time for yourself. I have not figured that out. I am trying to meet balance where she is at and sometimes I do and sometimes I don't." Sharing some of her goals for next year, she added: "Healthy is going to be the mission of 2021 and I had a lot of practice with it in 2020 - I will say that. "Mental, physical, heart, diet, exercise, trying to navigate the new world. Give, see, listen, all of it." Meanwhile, the '50 First Dates' star previously revealed she wants her older daughter, Olive, to take



## Pink is in 'awe' of her 'superhero' son Jameson

**T**he 'Raise Your Glass' hitmaker paid a gushing tribute to her son to mark his fourth birthday. She wrote: "Superheroes. They go all over the world making it a better place. "They shine their light and spread joy. There isn't a room that this little boy has ever walked into that he didn't leave lighter and more joyful. I am in awe of you, Jameson Moon, and I feel lucky every day to witness you and be your Mama. Thank you for making us better and always reminding us to smile. Happy birthday buddy." Pink confessed she

had a "panic attack" when her son Jameson was fighting coronavirus. The 'Funhouse' singer and her three-year-old son Jameson - whom she has with her husband Carey Hart - were both diagnosed with the infectious virus earlier this year, and Pink has now said watching her tot battle the illness was so heart-breaking. During an Instagram Live, she explained: "I think this is really important for people right now with coronavirus - you know anxiety is rampant and panic attacks and just, we feel like the rug is being pulled out from under us a little bit right now and different people on different levels. "I was on the phone with you and I was having one of my very first panic attacks and it was during the time where I was really afraid for Jameson and just exhausted from my adrenaline for 10 weeks of taking my temperature and wondering if I was gonna die."

I'm like the girl I was on 'The Simple Life'. In real life, I'm a businesswoman who runs an empire." This year, the 'Stars are Blind' hitmaker let the cameras back into life with her YouTube documentary 'This Is Paris' and she hopes it finally allowed people to see who she is behind her public persona. She said: "I talk about things I've never discussed before. People are going to see a different side to me - the real Paris. "For so long I've played this character that I first created back on 'The Simple Life'. "I think a lot of people assume that's who I am in real life, but I'm actually quite the opposite. People have never seen me like this before. "This is completely different to anything I have ever done. This is a real film. This is following my real life. Anything I've ever done before has been more me just playing that character again."



## Chuck D believes politicians should retire at 65

**T**he 60-year-old rapper insists "old folks" shouldn't be in positions of leadership but should instead use their years of experience to offer advice and guidance to others. He said: "I don't think old folks should be leaders. I think old folks should be there to give advice and counsel. I firmly believe in a retirement age of 65 for those in government. I'm 60 now - I'm what you call Triple OG - and I'm here for advice and counsel, not to lead." The Public Enemy frontman called for organizations to group together to "collectively work" against President Donald Trump, 74, to educate him on the Black Lives Matter movement. He said: "I support Black Lives Matter. I think it's a strong organization and speaks to now. "I think it's important in this age of Donald Trump that organizations come together, put aside micro-differences and collectively work to make him sit down." Chuck knows the subject of race can be "controversial" but he doesn't even need to speak about it for people to acknowledge the topic. He said in a recent interview: "I can walk into a room and my skin can be louder than hell. Discussions about race in places that are institutionalized are controversial. Even if you just breathe and smile, it's going to be controversial. "Public Enemy were confrontational - but how could we not be, especially back then?" The 'Don't Believe The Hype' hitmaker would rather be described as Black than African American. He explained: "I prefer the term Black to African American. You can be Charlize Theron, who's from South Africa, and be African American. "Black covers the whole gamut. Black is all over the planet. Black is the antithesis of white supremacy, which tells us that white is pure and the ideal and everything else is diseased."

Lifestyle | Features

# Anime epic 'Demon Slayer' ousts Ghibli classic as Japan's top-grossing film

An anime epic in which a teenager hunts down and beheads demons yesterday became Japan's top-grossing film of all time, its production company said, ending the near two-decade reign of Studio Ghibli's "Spirited Away". "Demon Slayer", based on the hit manga series, has chalked up 32.5 bil-



lion yen (\$314 million) in box-office sales since its October release, a spokeswoman for anime producer Aniplex said. The story of Tanjiro, whose life transforms when his family are killed in a demon attack, has drawn 24 million viewers to cinemas, she added-in a year that has seen movie theatres and film releas-

es around the world hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. After weeks of closing in on the top spot, "Demon Slayer" dethroned the 2001 fantasy classic "Spirited Away", whose total takings had reached 31.7 billion yen including ticket sales from a summer re-release.

Japan has seen a relatively limited outbreak of Covid-19, with some 3,200 deaths, although record numbers of new cases have been reported in recent weeks. "Demon Slayer" has been helped by Japan not implementing the strict lockdown measures seen elsewhere, and movie theatres have largely stayed open, though with restrictions including mask-wearing. Throughout the pandemic, people have been urged to avoid crowds-putting most other forms of mass entertainment off-limits-while a sophisticated marketing campaign, including tie-ups with shops and restaurants, and well-known actors voicing the characters, also helped boost the film. The success of the movie, whose full title is "Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba the Movie: Mugen Train", has been a rare bright spot in the economic malaise that has accompanied the pandemic in Japan. One research institute estimated the entire series has generated an economic impact of 270 billion yen in Japan alone. "Demon Slayer" has already been distributed elsewhere in Asia with releases in Europe and the United States planned for next year.— AFP



Photos show florist Elise Ip making a gift as part of the free "Send Flowers With You" project - which allows relatives and friends to receive gifts ordered by prisoners following last year's massive pro-democracy protests, at her studio in Hong Kong. — AFP photos

## Hong Kong florist helps prisoners send Xmas gifts

Samantha burst into tears when she opened the box from florist Elise Ip on Christmas Day. It was a surprise gift from her boyfriend, in custody for joining last year's Hong Kong protests. "She loves dogs but she loves me more," he had written on a paper slip sent from a detention centre and relayed to Ip via a prisoner support group organized by former social welfare legislator Shiu Ka-chun. After reading it, Ip found Samantha, who wished to use a pseudonym, a cactus in the shape of a puppy's head. "Receiving this is a great support to me," Samantha told AFP. "Those in custody don't really have opportunities to send

flowers or gifts to us." Samantha is one of more than 50 relatives and friends who have received gifts ordered behind bars and prepared by Ip, who initiated the free "Send Flowers With You" project in July. "I hoped it would make people inside and outside the prisons feel closer to each other," Ip told AFP. "With every story told in each delivery, I also wish to remind the world that many have sacrificed their normal and happy life for the city." More than 10,000 people in Hong Kong have been arrested and thousands prosecuted for joining the massive, often violent pro-democracy protests that convulsed the Asian financial

centre for seven months from June 2019. The number of those remanded has been rising, and protecting prisoners' rights has become increasingly difficult after pro-democratic legislators were forced out of the city's legislature. Authorities have also tightened rules around official visits. Shiu, who used to represent the social welfare sector in the legislature, formed a concern group, "Wall-Fare", earlier this year. The group provides services like pen pal matching, flower and snack delivery, and helps contact relatives of people in jail. — AFP

## Chrissy Teigen: I'm going to stop explaining myself

Chrissy Teigen has pledged to stop explaining herself to her Twitter followers. The 35-year-old model has revealed via the micro-blogging platform that she'll adopt a new approach to social media in 2021. Chrissy - who has Luna, four, and Miles, two, with husband John Legend - wrote: "excited about the new year's resolution I started early: not explaining anything to you people "For years I have been CONSUMED by the overwhelming need to explain why I'm doing what I'm doing, why I did why I did. NO MORE. I'm gonna doooooo the things I doooooo and youuuuuu can go bonkers about it. "(Note: I will still explain how to cook things) (sic) Chrissy - who has more than 13 million followers on Twitter - previously revealed she was taking a step back from social media during



the coronavirus pandemic. The model - who has been married to John since 2013 - shared: "I'm barely online anymore, and that was at the request of my therapist." Chrissy also explained how therapy had helped her during the early stages of the pandemic. She admitted that finding a good therapist had "changed [her] world". She said: "I didn't start therapy until quarantine. I used to avoid it and make fun of the idea of it, and then I found the right person and it changed my world." Chrissy feels people often make the mistake of assuming she's tougher than she really is. She explained: "I take on other people's pain and sadness as my own. And when I let people down, I'm hyperaware of it. "Sometimes I feel like people aren't going to be as hard on me as I am on myself. So it's good for me to take a break." — Bang Showbiz



## OLIVIA COLMAN THINKS QUEEN ELIZABETH IS 'SUPERHUMAN'

The award-winning actress plays the monarch in "The Crown", but she doesn't see too many similarities between the Queen and her real-life self. She explained: "The Queen is as strong as steel, which I think is extraordinary. She's a superhuman, which is very far removed from me. Staying in her stoic mindset was always a challenge because I'm very emotional and I cry a lot. "Whenever anyone says anything sad, I burst into tears. If I see a picture of a puppy, I'll burst into tears. I feel like the Queen might naturally want to do that, but she's not allowed to, so I wasn't." Imelda Staunton is set to replace Olivia, 46, for the final two seasons of "The Crown". But the acclaimed actress has insisted she "wouldn't dare offer" any advice to Imelda. She told Radio Times: "I haven't spoken to Imelda and I wouldn't dare offer any advice about playing the Queen. "Imelda is extraordinary and she's going to do it all much better than me. I can't wait to watch what she does." Earlier this year, Olivia admitted to admiring the Queen's "humility" and "stoicism". In fact, the actress revealed she was "slightly in love with her" after playing the monarch in the hit Netflix show. She said: "Having played the Queen, I have become slightly in love with her now. I think as far as royals go, she has such humility and a sort of stoicism that are very impressive." Despite this, Olivia doesn't claim to know too much about her. She confessed: "I understand our version of the Queen, but I wouldn't dare suggest that I understand the real Queen. "We can imagine living in someone else's shoes, but I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to say 'Oh yeah, I totally know what she goes through.' There's no way." — Bang Showbiz

## HILARIA BALDWIN IS TAKING A BREAK FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

The media personality is fed up of being quizzed about her heritage on the platform that she has decided to "sign off for a long time" to spend time with her family - Eduardo, two months, Romeo, two, Leonardo, four, Rafael, five and Carmen, seven. Taking to her Instagram story, she wrote: "I've said my piece. I'm so tired. I'm going to go back to my family, because I've been not a very good mommy spending a lot of time focusing on this. I just want to be left alone. I love you and I'm going to sign off for a long time." Hilaria previously revealed she is teaching her children to be bilingual so they can understand and embrace her Spanish heritage, after people slammed her story. She wrote: "A

bit about me. I've seen chatter online questioning my identity and culture. This is something I take very seriously, and for those who are asking - I'll reiterate my story, as I've done many times before. I was born in Boston and grew up spending time with my family between Massachusetts and Spain. My parents and sibling live in Spain and I chose to live here, in the USA. We celebrate both cultures in our home - Alec and I are raising our children bilingual, just as I was raised. This is very important to me. I understand that my story is a little different, but it is mine, and I'm very proud of it." — BangShowbiz



## Whelan 'grateful' for eating disorder experience

Gemma Whelan is "weirdly grateful" for her eating disorder and subsequent therapy. The former "Game of Thrones" actress recently admitted she came close to death and was hospitalized for eight months as a result of her struggles and she admitted the recovery process has shaped her entire life. She said: "Going through psychotherapy - when you come that close to not being around any more and really having to face up to something very difficult at the age of 17, it was a very long process of recovery that can't do anything but shape you. I was weirdly grateful for it in a way. It was a big part of my family's life. The NHS was incredible and helped me and here I am." The 39-year-old star - who has three-year-old daughter Frances with husband Gerry Howell - hopes being open about her experience can help other people. Asked how she feels about it being public, she said: "I'm neither glad nor sad. "It's part of my life. If it can help one or two people maybe feel it's not hopeless and you can get better, then yeah, I'll share it. "I am not so private I wouldn't talk about that. Because it really shaped me. It formed so much of my life and the way I live my life and my personality and my approach to things." The "Killing Eve" star admitted she used to worry she wouldn't get work if people knew about her past but she no longer thinks it's a "scary" subject to speak about. She explained in an interview: "Sometimes when you're a bit younger you think, 'Ooh, people might have opinions about me,' or, 'They might not want to employ me,' or, 'Mental health is such a scary thing for some people.' "But I suppose as well you hear so much of this in our industry, of so many, particularly female, actors having gone through similar experiences and therefore it's not so scary to talk about it." — Bang Showbiz



day over the weekend. And fans got to see the plunging bridal gown in all its glory. First of all, Behati shared a snap of her embracing the designer and captioned the post: "So many memories together!!!!" The Namibian beauty - whose wedding in Los Cabos, Mexico was officiated by actor Jonah Hill - then showed a full-length shot of the dress and wrote: "This dress you made for my wedding. I'm still not over it haha!" Meanwhile, the Victoria's Secret Angel - who has four-year-old Dusty and two-year-old Gio with husband Adam Levine - previously revealed her own personal wardrobe became "elevated" when she began her career in 2006 because she was learning so much from people in the "industry". She said: "I would say that my

career has affected my style more than becoming a mother. I have just learnt so much from people in the industry. I have always loved fashion and I love watching people express themselves, so becoming a mother hasn't really changed my style - I feel like it just elevated that a bit. I love jeans, that's what I always lived in and I still live in them. "I think I have always felt so lucky in my career and in my life as a model and I have always felt so grateful for the opportunities that I've had. I think after becoming a mother, I definitely have become more selective because I want to spend as much time with my kids, especially as they are so young." — BangShowbiz



## Prinsloo showcases never-before-seen wedding dress by Alexander Wang

Behati Prinsloo has shared a never-before-seen photograph of her wedding dress. The 32-year-old model - who tied the knot with Maroon 5 frontman Adam Levine, 41, in 2014 - took to her Instagram Story to wish the gown's designer Alexander Wang a happy birth-

## Sports

## Photo of the Day



Rafael Goberna performs during Red Bull Acro Cross in Sopot, Bulgaria. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

MLB Hall of Fame  
knuckleball pitcher  
Niekro dead at 81

WASHINGTON: Phil Niekro, a crafty pitcher who used his trademark knuckleball to baffle batters for 24 seasons, has died at age 81, the Baseball Hall of Fame announced Sunday. Niekro, a five-time Major League Baseball All-Star who was inducted into the Hall in 1997, died in his sleep Saturday night after battling cancer for the past few years. In a career that spanned from 1964 through 1987, Niekro collected a major-league record 121 victories after turning 40 and together with brother Joe combined for 539, the most by any major league siblings.

Niekro pitched for the Atlanta Braves, Cleveland Indians, New York Yankees and Toronto Blue Jays. "Phil Niekro was one of the most distinctive and memorable pitchers of his generation," MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said. "In the last century, no pitcher threw more than Phil's 5,404 innings. His knuckleball led him to five All-Star selections, three 20-win seasons for the Atlanta Braves, the 300-win club, and ultimately, to Cooperstown.

"But even more than his signature pitch and trademark durability, Phil will be remembered as one of our game's most genial people. He always represented his sport extraordinarily well and he will be deeply missed." Niekro learned the unique pitch from his coal miner father and made the ball dance unpredictably to mystify batters starting with Atlanta in 1964 even though it would be 1968 before he became a full-time starter. Niekro pitched a no-hitter against the San Diego Padres in 1973 and finished his career with a record of 318-274 and a 3.35 earned-run average. — AFP

India rip through Australia  
batting, targeting victory

## Indian team zero in on leveling the series

MELBOURNE: A depleted Indian attack ripped through Australia's top order to leave the world's number one team with a slender two-run lead and in deep trouble yesterday after day three of the second Test. At stumps in Melbourne, Australia were 133 for six with Cameron Green on 17 and Pat Cummins on 15 in their second innings as the visitors zeroed in on leveling the series after losing the first Test by eight wickets.

India are doing so with a weakened attack after Umesh Yadav pulled up in his fourth over with a calf problem, limping off the field. It was a setback for India, who were already missing injured regulars Mohammed Shami and Ishant Sharma. But the remaining bowlers, led by Ravindra Jadeja (2-25) and Jasprit Bumrah (1-34), admirably picked up the slack. "I think we played really well. I thought the bowlers came out really strong and bowled in all the right areas. It was good to see," said India captain Ajinkya Rahane.

"But this game is not over yet, we still have to get four more wickets." India were all out for 326 in their first innings on the stroke of lunch, adding just 49 to their overnight 277 for five in reply to Australia's 195. It gave them a 131-run lead, courtesy of Rahane's magnificent 112 and Jadeja's 57. Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon took three wickets each. Australia needed some of their big names to stand tall in the run chase. Opener Matthew Wade did well with a fighting 40 off 137 balls before being trapped lbw by the spin of Jadeja.

But Steve Smith, Marnus Labuschagne and Joe Burns all failed. Burns lasted just 10 balls, caught by Rishabh Pant off Yadav for four to follow his first-innings duck. Even if David Warner fails to recover from a groin strain for the next Test in Sydney, it will be hard for selectors to again justify picking Burns, with Marcus Harris among those waiting in the wings. Labuschagne fell for 28, caught by Rahane off a thick edge from Ravi Ashwin. At the other end, the usually flamboyant Wade dug in but Smith again went cheaply, bowled by Bumrah for eight.

After Wade departed, Travis Head was the last recognized batsman but he became a victim of pacer Mohammed Siraj on debut, slashing a ball to Mayank Agarwal. Captain Tim Paine fell to Jadeja for one, leaving Green and Cummins to knuckle down in a 34-run partnership and take the Test into a fourth day. "Cummo is not an established batsman, but he has done well for us at this ground in the past and we all know what Greenie is capable of if he can get in," said Wade. "So it'd be really good for these two to get a nice partnership together, which we haven't done over this Test match." He added that setting India a target of "anything over a 100 will be good".

## Rahane run-out

India started the day at a chilly Melbourne Cricket Ground in front of 24,995 socially-distanced fans with an 82-run advantage after taking charge Sunday with a gutsy response to their embarrassing



MELBOURNE: Australia's wicketkeeper Tim Paine (right) runs out India's batsman Ajinkya Rahane on the third day of the second cricket Test match between Australia and India at the MCG in Melbourne yesterday. —AFP

36 all out in Adelaide. But Australia quickly made inroads. Rahane, captain in place of Virat Kohli who has returned home for the birth of his first child, rode his luck on day two, when he was dropped on 73 and 104.

But after adding eight to his overnight 104, brilliant awareness from Labuschagne saw him run out.

Jadeja, back in the team after missing the first Test injured, dabbled Nathan Lyon to point and set

off for a single as he looked to bring up his 50. Rahane responded but wasn't quick enough with Paine whipping off the bails after Labuschagne's throw. It ended a 121-run partnership and one of the 32-year-old's most important innings, having come to the crease with India in trouble at 64 for three. Jadeja brought up his 15th Test half-century before misjudging a Starc bouncer, then Lyon and Josh Hazlewood mopped up the tail. — AFP

Battle of broken toe:  
NZ dominate  
Pakistan despite  
Wagner injury

MOUNT MAUNGANUI: Not even a broken toe could stop New Zealand's pace attack dominating day three of the first Test against Pakistan, but their efforts to quickly wrap up the innings were slowed by Mohammad Rizwan and Faheem Ashraf's late century stand yesterday. As intermittent showers and an unseasonal hail storm disrupted proceedings at Mount Maunganui, the Black Caps' pace four-some took five for 50 in the first two sessions before Pakistan rallied to be all out for 239 at stumps, still 192 in arrears.

Rizwan and Ashraf provided a face-saving partnership for Pakistan with 107 for the seventh wicket before Rizwan was run out for 71 by Mitchell Santner's smart underarm throw from square leg. Ashraf soldiered on to a career-best 91 before he was the last wicket to fall. Kyle Jamieson returned the best figures for New Zealand with three for 35, while Neil Wagner ignored the pain from a broken toe to charge in for 21 overs to take two for 50. He hobbled off at stumps describing it as one of the toughest days of his career and revealed he needed pain killers to keep going.

"After the first rain break I just went 'dammit I can't bear the pain' and I got a jab and that took the pain away a little bit... but it started wearing off pretty quickly," said Wagner, who broke a toe on his right foot when batting on day two. "Injuries happen and it's unlucky but I can still do things and run and it's not going to stop me. It's sore and it's bloody uncomfortable but it's just one of those things you've got to deal with and I still felt that I didn't want to let my teammates down."

## Early declaration

New Zealand need to win both Tests against



MOUNT MAUNGANUI: New Zealand's Neil Wagner goes down injured after being hit on the toe during the second day of the first cricket Test match between New Zealand and Pakistan at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui on December 27, 2020. —AFP

Pakistan to be in with a chance to make the World Test Championship final in June, and Pakistan batting coach Younis Khan said that would put added pressure on the Black Caps going into their second innings today. "If New Zealand want to win this Test match they should do some brave decisions so we are expecting there will be an early declaration and we are ready for that," Khan said.

When Pakistan resumed the day at 30 for one, Abid Ali and nightwatchman Mohammad Abbas put on just nine runs in 74 balls while Wagner was kept out of the early attack. The partnership was broken by Jamieson who hurt Abid Ali with the last ball of his first over which smacked into the batsman's fingers. Two balls into Jamieson's next over Abid kept his hands out of the way from a ball wide of off stump, only to see it jag back and he was bowled for 25. In the following over Trent Boult, who had troubled Abbas with a succession of short balls, found an edge with a full delivery and Ross Taylor held the catch at first slip. — AFP

Kohli and Perry  
named cricketers  
of the decade

DUBAI: India captain Virat Kohli was named the ICC's male cricketer of the decade yesterday as Australia all-rounder Ellyse Perry swept the top women's awards. Kohli and Perry were the big winners in the International Cricket Council's Awards of the Decade, while Australian batsman Steve Smith was crowned the best Test player. Kohli, who was also named ODI player of the decade, lifted the 2011 World Cup and the 2013 Champions Trophy with India, before inspiring their first Test series victory on Australian soil two years ago. "It's just been an honor for me to be able to go out there and perform for my team, and it's a great honor for me to win this award," Kohli said in a video message.

"My only intention was to make winning contri-

Steyn stars as  
Cheetahs keep  
Currie Cup double  
hopes alive

JOHANNESBURG: Two-time Rugby World Cup winner Francois Steyn kicked 17 points as the Cheetahs overpowered the Sharks 37-10 Sunday to bolster hopes of back-to-back South African Currie Cup titles. The 33-year-old centre converted tries by captain and lock Carl Wegner, hooker Marnus van der Merwe, winger Rhyno Smith and prop Boan Venter and slotted three penalties in Bloemfontein. Steyn is renowned for long-range goal-kicking and one of his penalties in a flawless performance from the tee was struck from inside the Cheetahs' half.

butions for the team and I just strive to do that in every game," he added. India's all-formats captain was the decade's highest run-scorer with 20,396, hitting the most fifties (66) and having the highest average (56.97) of players with more than 70 innings. He was also the only player with more than 10,000 one-day international runs, including 39 centuries and 48 fifties at an average of 61.83. Perry was named female cricketer of the decade as well as the top ODI and T20 player as she cleaned up in the women's awards.

Perry, who also played football for Australia at the 2011 World Cup, won four T20 world titles and the 2013 one-day World Cup, scoring 4,349 runs and taking 213 wickets in the decade. "It has been tremendous to develop the women's T20 game and take it forward," Perry said. "Amazing to see where it's come from when I was introduced to it." Smith, who averaged 65.79 with 26 centuries and 28 fifties, won the Test award despite his role in the ball-tampering scandal at the 2018 Cape Town Test which saw him banned for a year. — AFP

The utility back won World Cup medals with South Africa in 2007 and 2019, one of only two Springboks to achieve the feat. Cheetahs triumphed despite being shown three yellow cards, which reduced the side to 13 players at one stage in the second half when winger Rosko Specman and Venter were sin-binned. The try by Venter in additional time was the most important as it earned the Cheetahs a bonus point for scoring three more than the Sharks.

Bulls top the table with 35 points and seem set to finish first, leaving Western Province (31), Lions (29), Sharks (28) and Cheetahs (26) fighting for three semi-finals places with two matches each to play. The teams who come first and second enjoy home advantage in the penultimate stage of a competition first staged in 1892, making it the oldest provincial rugby competition in the world. It was 33 degrees celsius (91.5 Fahrenheit) when the match kicked off in Bloemfontein at a stadium empty because of the coronavirus pandemic, with a second wave sweeping South Africa. — AFP

Sports

# Mavericks thrash Clippers; Hornets hand Nets first loss of NBA season

## Another injury blow for Warriors as Chriss breaks leg

**LOS ANGELES:** The Dallas Mavericks powered to an NBA-record 50-point halftime lead on the way to a 124-73 demolition of the short-handed Los Angeles Clippers on Sunday. The Mavs, taking full advantage of the absence of injured Clippers star Kawhi Leonard, set the tone early. Point guard Luka Doncic scored 18 of his 24 points in the first half and the halftime score of 77-27 gave Dallas the largest margin at the break ever in the NBA, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Josh Richardson added 21 points and Tim Hardaway Jr. chipped in 18 for the Mavs, who had opened the season with two defeats. "Everything was clicking on all cylinders," Hardaway said, adding that the Mavericks did not realize how big their halftime lead was until they were in the locker room. Coach Rick Carlisle said the key for the Mavericks going forward would be to maintain the intensity they showed in the first half. "Our guys established a standard for collective toughness and will that we need to find a way to maintain," he said.

In Charlotte, Gordon Hayward scored 28 points as the Hornets cooled off red-hot Brooklyn, handing the Nets their first defeat of the season 106-104. Terry Rozier-Hayward's former teammate in Boston added 19 points and PJ Washington chipped in 14 points and 12 rebounds for the Hornets, who held the Nets to 42.7 percent shooting. "Unbelievable win for us," said Hayward, who joined the Hornets from the Celtics in November. "Just proud of our effort, man, proud of our defense. We finally got it together it seemed like on that end."

Kevin Durant led the Nets with 29 points and Kyrie Irving had 25 for Brooklyn, which had become the first club since the 2008-09 Lakers to win their

first two games by 20 or more points. It looked like the Nets might pull out a close one when they erased a 16-point fourth-quarter deficit, twice trimming the gap to two points with less than three minutes to play. Durant missed a fadeaway jumper with 7.4 seconds left and Rozier made two free throws that sealed the win. The Hornets were playing without center Cody Zeller, who broke his left hand in their season opener.

Brooklyn guard Spencer Dinwiddie departed in the third quarter with a right knee strain and did not return. The reigning champion Los Angeles Lakers seemed not to feel the absence of Anthony Davis, nursing a calf contusion, in a 127-91 romp past the Minnesota Timberwolves—who were without star Karl-Anthony Towns a day after he dislocated his left wrist in a win over Utah. Kyle Kuzma led the Lakers with 20 points. LeBron James added 18 with nine rebounds and five assists and sat out the fourth quarter with the game in hand.

### 'Why chance it?'

The Cleveland Cavaliers, with 24 points, 14 rebounds, three assists and three steals from Andre Drummond, cruised to a 118-94 victory over a Philadelphia 76ers team missing big man Joel Embiid, who was a late scratch with a tight back. "We just thought, why chance it this early in the season," Sixers coach Doc Rivers said. "Nothing to be concerned about." The Golden State Warriors, who were again without Draymond Green—and may have lost center Marquese Chriss for the season with a broken right leg and ankle injury suffered in practice—shook off the bad news to edge the Bulls in Chicago 129-128.

Stephen Curry delivered 36 points with five three-



**LOS ANGELES:** Luke Kennard #5 looks up as Terance Mann #14 of the Los Angeles Clippers gets a loose ball against Josh Green #8 and Boban Marjanovic #51 of the Dallas Mavericks in the second half at Staples Center on December 27, 2020. —AFP

pointers. His first long-range shot of the night made him just the third player, along with Ray Allen and Reggie Miller, to make 2,500 three-pointers in their career. But it was Damian Lee who drilled the game-winner from beyond the arc with 2.3 seconds remain-

ing, taking over as the Bulls prevented Curry from getting his hands on an inbounds pass. It was a blowout in New York, where the Knicks stunned Giannis Antetokounmpo and the Milwaukee Bucks 130-110. —AFP

## La Rochelle cling on to Top 14 lead with Montpellier win

**LA ROCHELLE:** La Rochelle beat Montpellier 22-9 on Sunday to maintain their Top 14 lead despite playing an hour with 14 men but the two teams immediately below both picked up bonus points to gain ground. Racing 92 scored six tries as they beat bottom side Agen 45-10. In the evening, Toulouse collected their bonus when they scored their fifth try in added time to beat Bordeaux Begles, 45-23. Toulouse closed to a point of La Rochelle with Racing, who have played one fewer game, a point further back.

In the late game, winger Gabin Villiere scored a hat-trick of tries as Toulon beat Clermont 27-9 to remain in fourth. In La Rochelle, Ihaia West kicked the home team into a fifth minute lead but Will Skelton conceded a penalty two minutes later to allow Montpellier's Anthony Bouthier to level. The 2.03 metre (six foot, eight inch) Australian's afternoon got worse in the 19th minute when he tackled Montpellier's own hulking lock, the 2.02 meter Paul Willemse. Skelton's shoulder made contact with the South African's head, resulting in a red card.

Bouthier added further punishment by kicking the penalty to give Montpellier the lead. West replied with a penalty three minutes later and kicked another on half time to give La Rochelle the lead at the break. In a match played in rain and

gusty wind, dominated by the packs and marred by handling errors and lost lineouts, the only try came when Montpellier made a mess of fielding the second-half kick off under their own posts. The bounce helped La Rochelle number 8 Kevin Gourdon who pounced to score.

West converted and added two more penalties while Montpellier, even with a man advantage, could only manage a penalty by Alex Lozowski in reply. "We had to work hard to fill the gap left by Will Skelton's red card," said La Rochelle flanker Mathieu Tanguy. "We had more desire than they did." The victory, in the opening match of the round, ensured La Rochelle would remain the top of the table after what the Top 14 calls its 'Boxing Day' round of games. Montpellier remain mired in 12th.

### 'Second wind'

Racing responded by crossing six times in the sheltered environment of their indoor La Defense Arena. Victor Moreaux gave visiting Agen an early lead with an 11th minute try. Louis Dupichot, Teddy Baubigny and Kurtley Beale replied before half time. Teddy Thomas, Jordan Joseph and Ibrahim Diallo touched down in the last 19 minutes to ensure an emphatic victory.

Racing coach Laurent Travers made 12 changes to his team and said that the Christmas break explained the slow start. "These players need playing time," he said. "They wanted to play, but nothing can replace competition. It took about 20 minutes for them to get their second wind." The meeting between hosts Toulouse, the Top 14 champions in 2019, and Bordeaux-Begles, the



**LA ROCHELLE:** La Rochelle's New Zealand centre Tawera Kerr-Barlow passes the ball during the French Top 14 rugby union match between La Rochelle and Montpellier at The Marcel Deflandre Stadium in La Rochelle, western France, on December 27, 2020. —AFP

team that led the standings when last season was halted by the coronavirus pandemic, was close until the 50th minute.

Yann Huguët, Selevasio Tolofua scored first half tries for Toulouse while Yoram Falatea and Thierry Paiva replied for the visitors. With Toulouse just three points ahead, France scrum half Antoine Dupont sidestepped through the visiting defense to score. Matthijs Lebel added another try and veteran back Maxime Medard touched down after time had expired to secure bonus point. "We got a scare," Dupont said. "Five points is very good from an accounting point of view, but there is a lot of room for improvement." Bordeaux Begles are eighth. —AFP

## Mourinho bemoans Spurs' lack of ambition in Wolves 1-1 draw

**WOLVERHAMPTON:** Jose Mourinho said Tottenham's lack of attacking intent was not inspired by him after dropping more points from a winning position in a 1-1 draw at Wolves on Sunday. Spurs have now failed to win in four consecutive league games to heavily dent their hopes of a first league title in 60 years. Mourinho's men edge up to fifth, but remain six points adrift of leaders Liverpool. Tottenham have dropped eight points by conceding equalizers in the final 10 minutes this season after also blowing leads against Newcastle, West Ham and Crystal Palace. They also conceded a 90th-minute goal to lose at Liverpool. The visitors made a dream start at Molineux as Tanguy Ndombele opened the scoring in the first minute.

But it was a familiar story for Mourinho as, just as against Palace a fortnight ago, they sat on a precarious 1-0 lead for most of the match and were punished. "We didn't have that ambition, that desire to go for more," said Mourinho. "One point against Wolves normally wouldn't be a bad result because they are a strong

opponent, but scoring a goal in the first minute and having 89 minutes to score more goals, you feel frustrated. "Defending deep, that's not the intention. They know what I asked them at half-time, if they couldn't do better it's because they couldn't do better."

Romain Saïss's late leveler was no less than Wolves deserved as they dominated after a nightmare start. "We conceded in the first minute and that requires a lot of character," said Wolves boss Nuno Espirito Santo. "We played a good game after that." The normally reliable Rui Patrício was at fault for the opener as Ndombele's shot from the edge of the box deceived the Portuguese international goalkeeper. Wolves have struggled for goals since losing Raul Jimenez to a fractured skull last month.

The Mexican was at Molineux for the first time since his injury, but his presence was missed on the field as the hosts dominated possession without a cutting edge. Fabio Silva flashed a shot into the side-netting and Daniel Podence fired too close to Hugo Lloris from the edge of box before the



**WOLVERHAMPTON:** Wolverhampton Wanderers' Moroccan midfielder Romain Saïss (left) beats Tottenham Hotspur's English striker Harry Kane to score the equalizing goal during the English Premier League football match between Wolverhampton Wanderers and Tottenham Hotspur on December 27, 2020. —AFP

break. Espirito Santo's men have made a habit of scoring the bulk of their goals in the second-half and looked like the only side capable of scoring after the break. Silva's claims for a soft penalty were waved away as Tottenham largely restricted the hosts to potshots from range.

Ruben Neves curled narrowly over before Wolves' danger man Pedro Neto saw another effort from the edge of the

area deflected just wide. Neto was the provider when Wolves did score the goal their second-half performance deserved. Saïss beat his marker to a corner at the near post and flicked the ball into the far corner. Wolves should even have gone on to win the game when 18-year-old Silva wasted a golden chance for his first Premier League goal from open play with a header straight at Lloris deep into stoppage time. —AFP

## Masked and muted Olympics dominate new sporting year

**PARIS:** The rescheduled Tokyo Olympics will be the centrepiece of a crammed sporting year in 2021 as sports administrators who had their calendars wiped away by the coronavirus pandemic try to fill the gaps

even as a second wave hits. While the Games will still be called the 2020 Olympics, they have been changed by COVID-19. Tokyo organizers and the Japanese government are struggling with increased costs and, despite the growing possibility of vaccination, whether to allow foreign visitors and what safeguards and restrictions will apply to spectators and participants.

In early December, organizers said the delayed Games will cost at least an extra \$2.4 billion as the unprecedented peacetime postponement and a raft of pandemic health measures inflate a budget that was already over \$13 billion. Enthusiasm appears to have waned in Japan. A poll in July showed that just

one in four people wanted to see the Games held in 2021 - and a majority backed either further delay or cancellation.

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

## Messi says Barca 'my life' but tight-lipped on his future

**MADRID:** Lionel Messi remained coy on his future at Barcelona in a long interview broadcast on Sunday in which he called the Catalan giants "my life". Speaking to Spanish TV channel La Sexta, Messi insisted that he was "excited" to play under coach Ronald Koeman this season despite trying to leave the club where he has played his entire senior career last summer.

He said that at the time he felt like he "needed a change", but his attempted exit was blocked amid a spat with former Barca president Josep Maria Bartomeu. Messi's contract expires at the end of the season and from next month he will be free to negotiate a move away from Catalonia. "Barca is my life, I'm in love with the club. And the city, my children were born here," Messi said in an interview conducted earlier this month.

"It's true I had a bad time in the summer. It came from everything that happened before the summer, how the season ended, the burofax (how Messi communicated his desire to leave), all of that. "I carried that into the start of the season a little bit." Bartomeu stepped down in October and a new Barcelona president will be elected on January 24, after which 33-year-old Messi is expected to begin talks over whether to extend his career-long stay. "I feel good right now, ready to fight for everything. I feel excited," he said.

### Barca situation 'really bad'

Messi said he is under no illusions over the position Barca find themselves in, with the financial problems exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic likely to hamper player recruitment. "I know the club is going through a difficult period and that makes everything surrounding Barcelona difficult, but I am motivated," he said. He described Barca's situation as "really bad" and poured scorn on the idea that Neymar could make a shock return to Catalonia. "To do that you need money, and there is no money. Neymar would cost a lot," Messi said.

Much of the talk surrounding Messi's departure centred around the possibility he might reunite with Pep Guardiola at Manchester City, although there are also reports of him potentially lining up alongside Neymar at Paris Saint-Germain. Messi won three La Liga titles and two Champions Leagues in his four seasons under Guardiola, and was full of praise for his former boss. "Pep has something special. He makes you see things in one way: how he prepares for matches, defensively, how to attack," he said. "He told you exactly how the match was going to be, how you had to attack to win." —AFP



### Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Brighton & Hove Albion v Arsenal	beIN Sports HD 1	21:00
Burnley v Sheffield United	beIN Sports HD 5	21:00
Southampton v West Ham	beIN Sports HD 4	21:00
West Bromwich v Leeds United	beIN Sports HD 6	21:00
Manchester United v Wolves	beIN Sports HD 1	23:00
SPANISH LEAGUE		
Sevilla v Villarreal	beIN Sports HD 3	19:00
Barcelona v SD Eibar	beIN Sports HD 3	21:15
Cadiz v Real Valladolid	beIN Sports HD 3	23:30
Levante v Real Betis	beIN Sports HD 4	23:30

**14** Battle of broken toe: New Zealand dominate Pakistan despite injury



**15** Mavericks thrash Clippers; Hornets hand Nets first loss of NBA season



**15** Mourinho bemoans Spurs' lack of ambition in Wolves 1-1 draw



## Leicester edge up to second

Crystal Palace hold Leicester to 1-1 draw



LONDON: Crystal Palace's English midfielder Andros Townsend (left) collides with Leicester City's English midfielder Harvey Barnes (top) during the English Premier League football match between Crystal Palace and Leicester City at Selhurst Park yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: A much-changed Leicester moved up to second in the Premier League thanks to Harvey Barnes' late equalizer in a 1-1 draw at Crystal Palace yesterday. Wilfried Zaha's stunning near post volley put the Eagles in front against the run of play after Kelechi Iheanacho had a first-half penalty saved for Leicester.

With little over 48 hours rest between the Foxes' 2-2 draw with Manchester United on Saturday and the trip to Selhurst Park, Leicester boss Brendan Rodgers made seven changes with Jamie Vardy and Youri Tielemans among those left on the bench. Both were introduced midway

through the second-half and Leicester's pressure was rewarded with an equaliser when Barnes fired in a low shot from the edge of the box for his eighth goal of the season.

Despite the upheaval of missing many of their star names, Leicester were still the better side and will rue not taking their chances before the break as they missed out on closing the gap to Liverpool at the top of the table to just one point. Iheanacho was given a rare start with 33-year-old Vardy rested, but the Nigerian did little to further his case for more game time. James Tomkins brought down Foxes defender Luke Thomas inside the area on 19

minutes and with Vardy and Tielemans not on the pitch, Iheanacho took responsibility from the spot.

However, the former Manchester City striker remains without a Premier League goal this season as he was unable to beat Vicente Guaita who produced a fine save to his left. Dennis Praet also blazed a glorious chance over after Ayoze Perez's deflected cross came back off the crossbar. Palace had conceded 10 goals without reply in their last two games to Liverpool and Aston Villa. But Roy Hodgson's men started the second half with much better intent and got their reward in the 58th minute when Zaha fired them ahead.

Andros Townsend's cross to the back post picked out the Ivorian, who connected sweetly on the volley to beat Kasper Schmeichel at his near post. Vardy was summoned from the bench to find the Foxes a route back into the game, but instead it was the in-form Barnes who scored an excellent equalizer as he wriggled clear of a number of Palace challenges before firing into the bottom corner. Leicester could have gone onto win the game in the final stages as Perez blazed over a good chance from the edge of the box. But a point at least ensures they will end the year in the top four. —AFP

## Chiefs grab playoff bye as Steelers and Seattle win divisions

WASHINGTON: Patrick Mahomes rallied the Kansas City Chiefs over Atlanta 17-14 on Sunday to give the reigning Super Bowl champions a first-round bye and home-field edge in the NFL playoffs. Mahomes completed 24-of-44 passes for 278 yards and two touchdowns, his second scoring toss a 25-yarder to Demarcus Robinson with 1:55 remaining to lift the Chiefs ahead to stay. "It's that championship swagger of knowing how to win the game even when you're not playing well," Mahomes said.

There was also plenty of heartache in the season's penultimate weekend as losses jeopardized the playoff hopes of Indianapolis, Washington, the Los Angeles Rams and a Cleveland squad missing key players due to COVID-19. Host Pittsburgh rallied late to edge Indianapolis 28-24 and secure the AFC North division crown while the host New York Jets (2-13) beat Cleveland 23-16, ensuring league-worst Jacksonville (1-14) has the 2021 NFL Draft top pick.

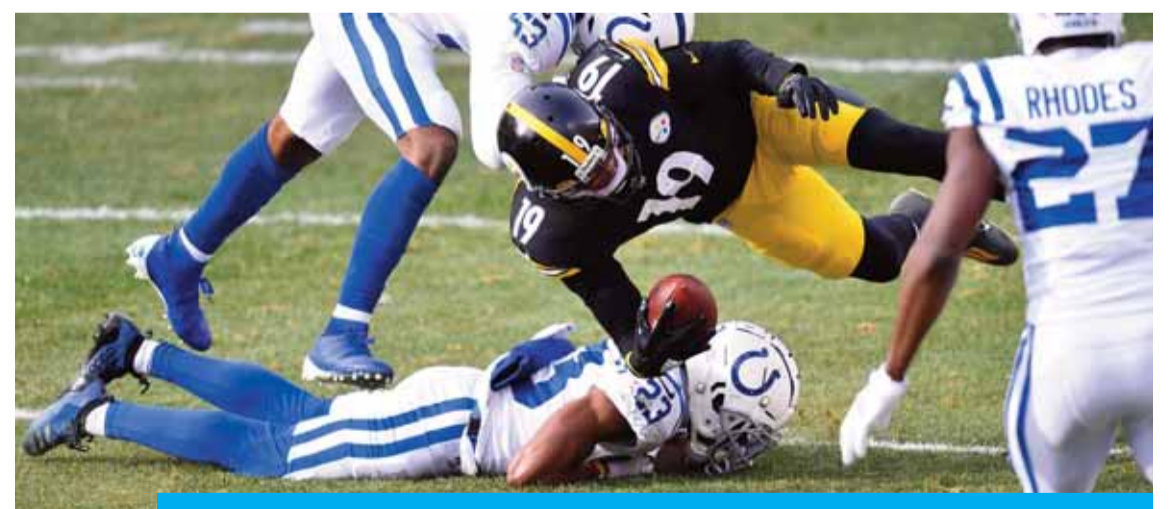
Seattle defeated the Rams 20-9 to secure the NFC West title while host Washington lost 20-13 to Carolina, failing to claim the NFC East crown. Half the NFL's 14 playoff spots will be settled next Sunday. Chiefs coach Andy Reid says his team must improve to repeat as champions. "We just weren't as sharp as we need to be," Reid said.

Mahomes said he needs to play better. "The defense played their tail off to keep us in the game and give us a chance," he said. "The offense found a way to score a touchdown when we needed to."

A 39-yard field goal attempt by South Korean kicker Koo Young-hoe was wide right for Atlanta in the dying seconds to seal Chiefs' bye as AFC top seed. "When you look at the history of the bye week, usually it's a good thing for a team trying to make a championship run," Mahomes said. Super Bowl 54 Most Valuable Player Mahomes also threw a 4-yard touchdown pass to Travis Kelce, whose seven catches for 98 yards gave him an NFL one-season tight end record of 1,416 reception yards this year.

Pittsburgh's Ben Roethlisberger completed 34-of-49 passes for 342 yards and three touchdowns as the Steelers snapped a three-game losing skid. Indianapolis led 24-7 before "Big Ben" hit scoring throws of 39 yards to Diontae Johnson, 5 yards to Eric Ebron and 25 yards to JuJu Smith-Schuster. The Colts fell level with Cleveland, Baltimore, Tennessee and Miami at 10-5 in a fight for the last three AFC playoff spots, but would need help in the final week to advance.

At cold and snowy Green Bay, Aaron Rodgers threw four touchdown passes and the Packers (12-3) beat Tennessee 40-14 to stay atop the fight for the NFC top seed while keeping the Titans from clinching the AFC South title and a playoff berth. Cleveland, out of the playoffs since 2002, had four receivers and two linebackers out due to COVID-19 tests and contact tracing and fell behind 20-3. A fightback died when the Browns lost the ball on downs in the final seconds.



PITTSBURGH: Cornerback Kenny Moore II #23 and linebacker Darius Leonard #53 of the Indianapolis Colts hit wide receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster #19 of the Pittsburgh Steelers in the second quarter of their game at Heinz Field on December 27, 2020. — AFP

### Ravens, Cowboys win

Lamar Jackson threw for 183 yards and two touchdowns and ran 13 times for 80 yards to spark the Baltimore Ravens over the visiting New York Giants 27-13. The Giants (5-10) stayed in playoff contention when Washington (6-9) lost to Carolina, missing a chance to clinch the NFC East title. Dallas (6-9) ripped Philadelphia 37-17 to end the Eagles' playoff hopes. If Washington loses at Philadelphia next week, the Cowboys-Giants winner captures the NFC East, the NFL's weakest division, and will host a playoff game. Seattle (11-4) kept the Rams (9-6) from securing an NFC

playoff berth and stayed level with New Orleans chasing Green Bay for the NFC bye.

Russell Wilson ran four yards for a touchdown and flipped a 13-yard touchdown pass to Jacob Hollister to give the host Seahawks a division title. The Rams (9-6) could miss the playoffs with a loss next week to Arizona (8-7) and a Chicago victory over Green Bay. The Bears (8-7) overpowered Jacksonville 41-17. Los Angeles Chargers quarterback Justin Herbert broke Baker Mayfield's NFL one-season rookie touchdown pass record with his 28th of the campaign in a 19-16 victory over Denver. —AFP