



**7** Bangladesh moves biggest group of Rohingya to island



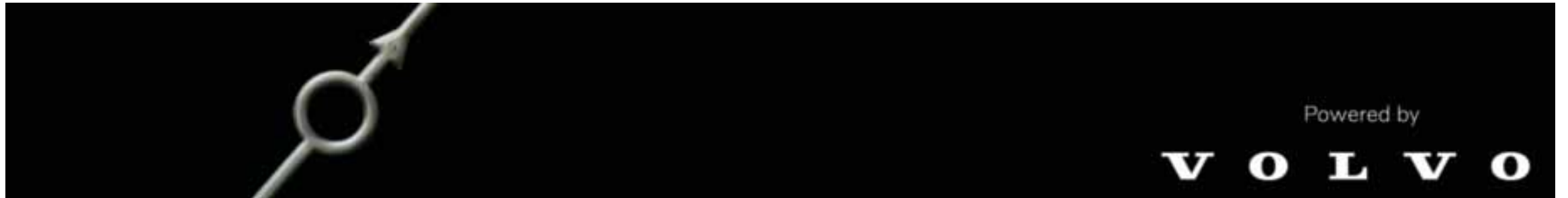
**12** Struggling artists bring smiles in war-torn Yemen



**12** French fashion pioneer Pierre Cardin dies at 98



**16** India thump Australia in 2nd Test to silence critics



# Lawmakers warn govt against imposing taxes, raising fees

## MPs call to debate opening session, Kuwaitize judiciary, increase allowances, pensions

By B Izzak

### Premier visits defense and interior ministries



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah greets officers during his visits to the defense ministry (left) and interior ministry (right) yesterday. — KUNA photos (See Page 2)

KUWAIT: Opposition MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari yesterday threatened to grill HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah if the government insists on including the imposition of taxes in its program. The lawmaker said if the government presents to the National Assembly the same program which has appeared in newspapers and which calls for imposing taxes and cutting spending on health and education, he will debate it by grilling the prime minister.

Kandari also insisted that without eradicating corruption from government agencies, all government plans will remain without any value. MP Osama Al-Shaheen said that if the published program is correct, lawmakers will reject any reference to imposing taxes or increasing charges for public services.

Meanwhile, opposition MPs yesterday stressed that the Assembly must debate events that took place at the inaugural session two weeks ago and reiterated their rejection of the Assembly office's decision to form an investigation committee. The Assembly office on Monday formed a committee headed by

Continued on Page 2

### News in brief

#### DGCA: Flights resume Jan 2

KUWAIT: Flights will resume at Kuwait International Airport on Saturday, Jan 2, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said yesterday. DGCA spokesman Saad Al-Otaibi told KUNA resumption of flights will begin on Saturday at 4 am local time. — KUNA

#### Amnesty extension mulled

KUWAIT: Kuwait plans to extend an amnesty for expat residency violators, according to a report in Al-Rai Arabic daily. The interior ministry intends to give violators a month-long grace period from Jan 1, the paper said, citing security sources. A deadline for illegal expats to adjust their status is due to end on Dec 31. — Al-Rai

#### 50 journalists killed in 2020

PARIS: Fifty journalists and media workers were killed in connection with their work in 2020, the majority in countries that are not at war, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said yesterday. The figure shows an increase in the targeting of reporters investigating organized crime, corruption or environmental issues. — AFP (See Page 2)

#### US police officer fired

WASHINGTON: A white police officer who shot dead a black man in Columbus, Ohio, last week was fired on Monday. The death of Andre Maurice Hill triggered outrage in a country that has been racked by protests against police brutality and systemic racism since the spring. The 47-year-old African-American was in the garage of a house when he was shot several times by Adam Coy, a police officer who had been called to the scene for a minor incident. — AFP

#### Rajinikanth ends political bid

CHENNAI: Indian movie superstar Rajinikanth yesterday cancelled his plans to enter politics, saying a health scare had been "a warning from god". The announcement came a day after the 70-year-old Tamil action hero left hospital where he was treated for high blood pressure. The bus conductor-turned-actor said he could not go ahead in a long letter released on his Twitter account. — AFP

## MoCI: Largest seizure of fake food products

KUWAIT: The ministry of commerce and industry announced yesterday that its commercial control and consumer protection unit seized 52,000 counterfeit packets of products imitating those of an international food brand. The ministry said in a press statement that on the instructions of Commerce Minister Faisal Al-Medlej, inspectors have intensified their inspection rounds, which has enabled them to control goods that are sold to grocery stores without invoices. Yesterday's seizure of fake food products is considered the largest in the history of the commerce ministry, and those responsible for it will be referred to competent authorities, the statement added. — KUNA



Cartons of fake food products that were seized.

## Pakistan sends 196 medics to Kuwait

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan yesterday sent 196 medical professionals to Kuwait under an agreement signed between the two countries in July this year. The new batch of medical professionals, which included 41 doctors, 131 nurses and 24 technicians, came under the agreement between Pakistan and Kuwait to combat COVID-19.

Ambassador of Kuwait to Pakistan Nassar Al-Mutairi thanked the Pakistani government for providing medical assistance to his country, saying

Kuwait-Pakistan ties were rock-solid and unbreakable. In a statement to KUNA, he said Kuwait will continue to work with the Pakistani government and people to enhance cooperation to combat the coronavirus pandemic and promote cooperation and development in all sectors.

"Thank you to all healthcare workers who selflessly provide their services. You are true heroes and should be recognized as such. Blessings to the medical team. This step will help bring two brotherly countries closer," the ambassador said. At a pre-departure briefing of the second team of Pakistani medical professionals to Kuwait, the ambassador said the Pakistani workforce in Kuwait will help foster bilateral ties. The collaboration signifies strengthening bilateral relations between Kuwait and Pakistan, Mutairi added.

Continued on Page 2

## Kuwait COVID cases pass 150K

KUWAIT: Kuwait reported 236 new coronavirus infections in the past 24 hours, taking total cases to 150,093, as the death toll remains at 932, the health ministry said yesterday. The number of people hospitalized with the virus currently stands at 3,105, with 43 patients in intensive care units, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad. The ministry earlier reported that some 248 people had recovered from the virus over the past day, raising the total number of recoveries to 146,056. — KUNA



## Iran trials own vaccine; S Africa tightens curbs

TEHRAN/JOHANNESBURG: Iran launched yesterday the first phase of a clinical trial of a vaccine developed in the Islamic Republic, the region's country hardest hit by the pandemic, state television reported. "The first vaccine against the coronavirus, developed by Iranian researchers, has been unveiled by injecting three people," the public broadcaster said. The novel coronavirus has killed nearly 55,000 out of more than 1.2 million people infected in Iran, according to health ministry data.

Iran has accused archenemy the United States of hampering its access to vaccines through its tough sanctions regime. State television yesterday broadcast images at the trial launch showing two men and one woman receiving injections in the presence of the health minister and the Iranian vice-president in charge of science and technology. It said the vaccine project was funded by a state-run conglomerate whose president is appointed by the Iranian supreme leader, called the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order or EIKO.

The state TV report said the three volunteers were the daughter of the president of EIKO and two high-ranking officials of the conglomerate. The vaccine will be administered to "56 volunteers" in two doses two weeks apart.

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TEHRAN: A woman receives an injection during the first trial phase of a locally-made Iranian COVID-19 vaccine yesterday. — AFP



## Local

# Kuwait Prime Minister visits Defense, Interior Ministries

## Defense Minister affirms readiness to provide 'all forms of support'



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah poses for a group photo during his visit to the Defense Ministry headquarters. —KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah poses for a group photo during his visit to the Interior Ministry headquarters.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah visited yesterday the headquarters of the Ministry of Defense, namely the Ahmad Khaled Al-Sabah Hall, as well as the Ministry of Interior's headquarters, namely the Nawaf Al-Ahmad building. His Highness the Prime Minister was received upon arrival at the Defense Ministry's headquarters by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Chief of the General Staff of the Army Lieutenant-General Sheikh Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense in Charge Sheikh Fahad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and the Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Army Lieutenant-General Fahad Abdulrahman Al-Nasser.

His Highness the Prime Minister delivered a speech, saying that this visit follows the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah last month, to develop programs and mechanisms and to implement his directives. His Highness the Prime Minister affirmed that the state's responsibility is to provide all equipment for all sectors of the Kuwaiti army and to provide education in the most prestigious military colleges and institutes. His Highness expressed his thanks and appreciation to all employees of the Ministry of Defense for their role in

working with the government's team to confront the COVID-19 health crisis. Kuwaiti Air Force was fully prepared to transport citizens, equipment, ship requirements to confront this pandemic, and equip hospitals and field quarantines, he said.

### All forms of support

Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali said in a speech that his ministry is constantly working to



## Interior Minister committed to rule of law

maintain readiness and to provide all forms of support and assistance to government bodies in the country. The minister noted that in doing that they are implementing, decisions, and instructions made by the Cabinet in order to combat the pandemic and limit its spread. He added that his ministry is working to complete efforts of those who preceded it in the restructuring of the leaderships of the Kuwaiti army and the administrative and financial body in order to achieve stability and advance the working

environment.

The minister added that the Defense Ministry continues to consider plans to develop various military and civilian sectors, to work to maintain the required level of readiness and to follow up on modernization and maintenance programs for various weapons and military equipment, including military action to the level that we all aspire to. He also stressed keenness on commitment to achieving and implementing the objectives and directives of the Council of Ministers aimed at improving efficiency level and performance. On his behalf and on behalf of the Ministry's employees, including military and civilian staff, Sheikh Hamad expressed sincere thanks and expressed gratitude to His Highness the Prime Minister for this visit. The minister asked Allah Almighty to protect the State of Kuwait from all harm and help it to overcome these circumstances and give it the blessing of security and safety under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and His Highness the Crown Prince.

### Thanks and appreciation

Upon his arrival at the Interior Ministry's headquarters, His Highness the Prime Minister was received by Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, and Undersecretary of the Ministry of



Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah delivers a speech.

Interior, Lieutenant General Issam Salem Al-Naham.

In a speech, His highness said this visit carries several messages, first is to follow up the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah last month and follow his directives of applying the law to everyone, and that no one is above the law. The second message is to express thanks and appreciation to the Ministry of Interior and its members for the great role they played during the COVID-19 crisis.

His Highness expressed wishes of work to continue in the same manner, as this health crisis still has not ended. While in the third message, His Highness stressed the need to preserve the role of the security man and perform their work



Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah delivers a speech.

as a role model in this society.

### Rule of law

Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer affirmed in a speech his commitment to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to the rule of law in the country. The Interior Minister added that His Highness the Amir urged cooperation and reinforcing the state's rule of law, improving public services, address issues of state and citizens' concerns, and to achieve justice and equality. Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah affirmed that the ministry will continue to make all efforts to maintain stability and security in the country. He expressed his happiness and pleasure on behalf of all working in the ministry on such visit. — KUNA

## 50 journalists killed in 2020

PARIS: Fifty journalists and media workers were killed in connection with their work in 2020, the majority in countries that are not at war. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said yesterday. The figure shows an increase in the targeting of reporters investigating organized crime, corruption or environmental issues, the watchdog said. It highlighted murders in Mexico, India and Pakistan.

Eighty-four percent of those killed this year were "deliberately targeted" for their work, RSF said in its annual report, compared to 63 percent in 2019. "For several years now, Reporters Without Borders has noted that investigative journalists are really in the crosshairs of states, or cartels," said Pauline

Ades-Mével, RSF editor-in-chief.

Mexico was the deadliest country, with eight killed. "Links between drug traffickers and politicians remain, and journalists who dare to cover these or related issues continue to be the targets of barbaric murders," said the report. None of the Mexico killings had yet been punished, added RSF, which has compiled annual data on violence against journalists around the globe since 1995.

Five journalists were killed in war-torn Afghanistan, it said, noting an increase in targeted attacks on media workers in recent months even as peace talks between the government and Taleban are ongoing. RSF also highlighted the case of Iranian opposition figure Ruhollah Zam, who ran a popular social media channel that rallied regime opponents, and who was executed in December. His execution "confirms Iran's record as a country that has officially put the most journalists to death in the past half-century," it said. —AFP

Pakistan, indicated Bukhari, who called on the group to uphold the highest values and standards of professionalism during their stay in Kuwait. The official expressed gratitude to the Kuwaiti leadership for giving Pakistani healthcare professionals the opportunity to serve Kuwait. "This will further cement our ties and provide an opportunity to enhance cooperation in health and other sectors," he added.

Pakistan and Kuwait signed a bilateral cooperation memorandum of understanding on recruitment of healthcare experts from Pakistan on July 4, 2020 at the health ministry of Kuwait. Earlier in October, the first batch of 208 Pakistani healthcare professionals reached Kuwait to join hands in the fight against coronavirus. — KUNA

the speaker's brother Khaled, to the public prosecution for investigation. Opposition lawmakers are also alleging the use of fake ballot papers in the election of the speaker and have demanded a probe.

MP Abdullah Al-Turajji meanwhile proposed that the government should increase the monthly housing allowance of Kuwaitis to KD 250 from the current KD 150. MP Farz also called for increasing the pensions of retired Kuwaitis by KD 30 per month. MP Hesham Al-Saleh yesterday submitted a draft law stipulating that within three years, all public attorneys and members of the judiciary must be Kuwaiti citizens. The draft law also calls to ban the appointment of any non-Kuwaiti personnel in these two posts.

Saleh insisted that Kuwait has sufficient and experienced manpower that can fill the gap, adding that the proposal is not racist, but allows citizens to control the judiciary. In another proposal, Saleh called for amending the law governing the administrative court to allow it to look into all issues including those related to citizenship. The proposal also excludes deporting expatriates from the authority of the court.

## Iran trials own vaccine; S Africa...

Continued from Page 1

according to Iribnews, the state television site, quoting a person in charge of developing the drug. The result would be announced 28 days after the second injection, it said.

Another Iranian vaccine, developed at the country's Razi Institute, "will receive authorization" for the start of human trials "in the very near future," said Health Minister Saeed Namaki. Namaki early this month said Iran had "pre-purchased" about 16.8 million vaccine doses via Covax, the mechanism for the equitable distribution of vaccines established by the UN World Health Organization.

Meanwhile, South Africa banned alcohol sales and made masks mandatory in public from yesterday, tightening restrictions after a surge in coronavirus cases as more countries joined in mass vaccination campaigns to beat the pandemic. Nations around the world are struggling with winter spikes in infections that have pushed the global caseload close to 81 million and killed more than 1.77 million, even as the rollout of vaccines gathers pace in North America and Europe.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a ban on selling alcohol and said face masks will be compulsory after his nation became the first in Africa to record one million cases. "We have let down our guard, and unfortunately we are now paying the price," said Ramaphosa, blaming "super-spreader" social events and an "extreme lack of vigilance over the holiday period" for the spike.

Ramaphosa said data showed "excessive alcohol consumption" leads to an increase in trauma cases reported at hospitals, causing an "unnecessary" strain on public health facilities. Highlighting the renewed virus spread, England's health officials warned the country was "back in the eye" of the coronavirus storm with as many patients in hospital as during the initial peak in April, and the new strain appearing to be causing the recent upsurge.

National Health Service England figures showed there were 20,426 COVID patients in the country's hospitals on Monday, compared to the 18,974 peak recorded during the first wave. "Many of us have lost family, friends, colleagues and - at a time of year when we would normally be celebrating - a lot of people are understandably feeling anxious, frustrated and tired," said NHS England chief executive Simon Stevens.

Across the globe governments are rushing to get vaccines out to try to avoid the kind of economically damaging lockdown restrictions put in place soon after the pandemic first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan a year ago. Argentina and Belarus yester-

day launched their vaccination campaigns, both using the Sputnik V shots developed by Russia. The Gam-CovidVac vaccine, nicknamed Sputnik V after the Soviet-era satellite, has come under fire from critics in Russia and abroad because it was registered before the start of large-scale clinical trials.

Other nations are rolling out campaigns with jabs made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, most inoculating vulnerable older residents, care workers and others most at risk. Vaccinations in EU countries started over the weekend, but authorities fear vaccine hesitancy and rejection could hamper those efforts - especially because of misinformation campaigns on social media.

That was not a concern with 75-year-old Jacques Colineau, resident of an old people's home in Joue-les-Tours, France. "Fear? Fear of what? I've been vaccinated for the flu before, now it's the same thing," Colineau said as he got the shot on Monday. "We don't make vaccines to kill people, we make vaccines to try to save them."

The coronavirus has devastated lives and economies across the globe, but the WHO warned Monday that worse pandemics could be ahead, urging the world to get serious about preparedness. "This is a wakeup call," WHO emergencies chief Michael Ryan told reporters at a briefing marking a year since the UN agency first learned of the new virus spreading in China. "This pandemic... has spread around the world extremely quickly and it has affected every corner of this planet, but this is not necessarily the big one," Ryan added. "We need to get ready for something that may even be more severe in the future."

While huge scientific progress was made to study the virus and develop vaccines at record speed, WHO senior adviser Bruce Aylward cautioned that the world was far from ready for the next pandemic. "We are into the second and third waves of this virus and we are still not prepared to deal with and manage those," he said.

The warnings were backed up by the worrying figures and trends reported worldwide. South Korea, one of the nations hailed for its success during the first months of the pandemic, yesterday logged its highest daily death toll since the beginning of the pandemic as it battled a third wave of infections. India, with the second-biggest caseload in the world, reported the detection of the new coronavirus strain, but officials said the nation's pandemic guidelines have not changed because of it.

Highlighting the frustration and suffering caused by the crisis, submissions from around the world came in for a Good Riddance Day celebration in New York City. The submissions were printed and then shredded, while the host of the event pulverized a 2020 pinata. When Westbury, New York resident Raul was asked what he wanted to say good riddance to, he responded: "Like anybody else, I want to get rid of the coronavirus. That's it!" — AFP

## Pakistan sends 196 medics...

Continued from Page 1

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister of Pakistan for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Sayed Zulfikar Abbas Bukhari, in a statement to KUNA, said this was an occasion of extreme satisfaction that a Pakistani medical group was leaving for Kuwait to help handle the coronavirus pandemic.

These medical professionals are ambassadors of

## Lawmakers warn govt against...

Continued from Page 1

Deputy Speaker Ahmad Al-Shuhoumi to probe events that took place during the opening session, including allowing dozens of supporters of Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem to enter the gallery in violation of rules.

MP Osama Al-Munawer described the Assembly office move as a "farce", saying some members of the Assembly office are party to the problem and should not be involved. MPs Shaheen and Farz Al-Mutairi, who were named as members of the panel, said they will not take part in any investigation without authorization from the Assembly and following a full debate.

MP Mohammad Al-Mutair said lawmakers have submitted a motion to the Assembly calling to refer a number of people involved in the events, including



Local

# Events in Kuwait's social, transport sectors in 2020

**KUWAIT:** The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) added to the burden of tasks for the Kuwaiti social, utility and transport sectors throughout the passing year. The following are record events and tasks in these fields in 2020:

Jan 24: Kuwait Airways received "Wara", its third Airbus A320neo. The aircraft flew from Hamburg, Germany, to Kuwait.

Feb 24: Kuwait Ports Authority (KPA) banned vessels coming from Iraq from entering the country's waters as part of the COVID-19 countermeasures.

Feb 24: The Directorate of Civil Aviation halted flights from South Korea, Thailand, Italy, and Iraq due to the heavy presence of COVID-19 infections in the mentioned countries.

Feb 25: Kuwait's Touristic Enterprises Company allocated Khairan resort as a quarantine facility for COVID-19.

Feb 25: Directorate of Civil Aviation halted flights coming from Singapore and Japan due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

March 13: The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs closed mosques nationwide to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

March 13: Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri ordered the closure of public parks until further notice to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

March 15: Jazeera airline provided 14 of its aircraft to aid the government program to repatriate Kuwaitis abroad and to deliver goods and medical supplies.

March 17: Kuwait enforced quarantine for Kuwaitis returning from the US, UK, Germany, Spain, and France.

March 21: Kuwait Ports Authority allocated four warehouses for medical supplies used by the Ministry of Health.

March 29: Over KD 9 million was collected from the public to aid the government efforts against the spread of the coronavirus. The campaign's money was used to assist low-income families and workers throughout the country.

May 8: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation declared that the total number of returning citizens as part of the overall evacuation scheme hit 29,168. The process that kicked off on April 19 and ended on May 6 involved 75 air flights.

June 10: The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs reopened a number of mosques nationwide after nearly three months of closure as a countermeasure against COVID-19.

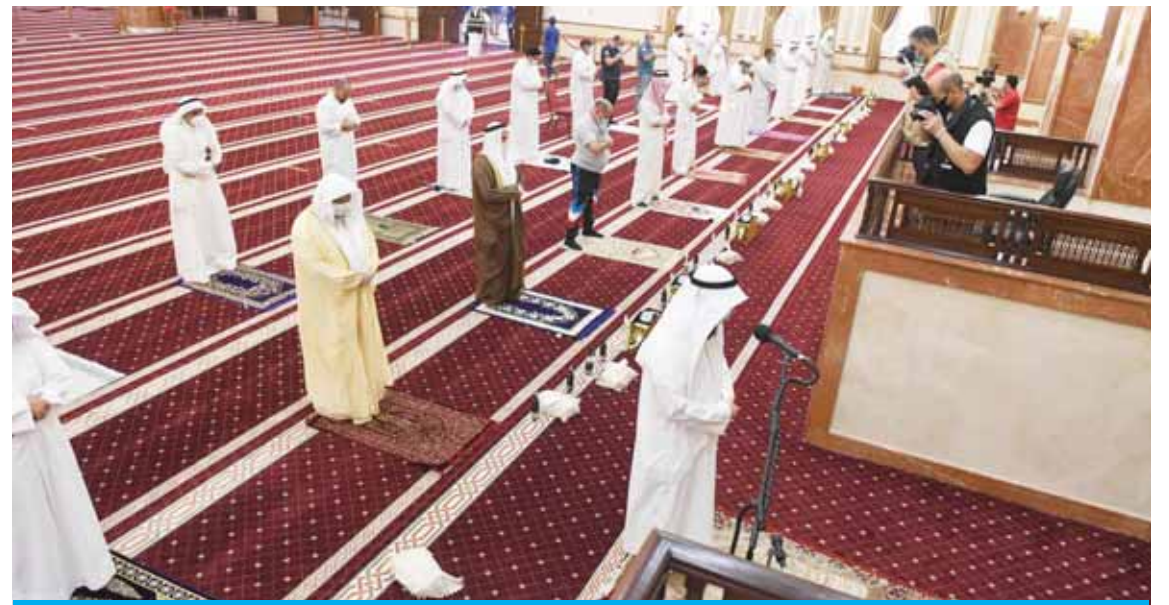
July 28: Government departments resumed work with the physical presence of the workforce at 50 percent.

Aug 1: Kuwait International Airport resumed operations gradually starting with a six-month first phase at the operating rate of 30 percent of the passenger capacity after a total stoppage starting on March 13 due to the novel coronavirus.

Aug 31: The new board of Kuwait Airways held the first meeting under the chairmanship of Ali Al-Dokhan after Finance Minister Barrak Al-Sheetan issued an order on August 27 for reforming the board.

Dec 1: The 10,000 square meters Hawalli municipal building opened including several municipal departments serving citizens and residents alike.

Dec 2: Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of



**KUWAIT:** This June 10, 2020 file photo shows people praying while socially distanced inside a mosque in Kuwait for the first time after nearly three months of closure as a countermeasure against COVID-19. — KUNA

State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel said that the cabinet was keen on cultivating human resources, revealing that the Civil Service Commission (CSC) assigned 12,924 out of 15,680 candidates to jobs. She added that in cooperation with the public authority for planning and development, 500 training courses were held in the country, noting that 30 scholarship programs were offered in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education.

Dec 2: Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Rana Al-Fares said that the Public Authority for Housing Affairs had signed the south Khaitan housing project, offering dwelling for some 1,448 Kuwaiti families. She indicated that 531 kilometers of inner streets were paved in 48 areas.

Dec 8: The Ministry of Communication signed a KD 1.1 million (\$3.6 million) deal to import fiber optic cables linking 907 schools with the ministry. — KUNA

## Gulf Bank amplifies digital outreach on social media throughout 2020

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank is wrapping up 2020 as a year of swift action in the face of unprecedented challenges and historic transformation. Throughout the year, the bank proudly maintained its unwavering line of communication with the public it serves through a series of sustainability activities and awareness initiatives. With the safety of both its customers and employees at the forefront, Gulf Bank continued to uphold its commitment to its community sustainability principles, as part of a program of activities that spread hope and generated positivity in the hearts of both the bank's followers and the general public.

Throughout the year, Gulf Bank strategically utilized its social media accounts to circulate its social and educational messages to followers, spanning several topics including health, the economy, sports, psychology, and technology. The educational messages were broadcasted in the form of short and simple videos that were easy to share with others.

As a result of these initiatives, Gulf Bank is wrapping up the year with a notable 23 percent increase in social media followers, and more than 500,000 interactions with followers, including comments, return posts and responses. The bank's channels also received nearly 7 million views, while the bank's Customer Contact Center quickly responded to more than 25,000 messages received during the year, as part of Gulf Bank's commitment to maintaining the highest level of customer service.

In 2020, Gulf Bank's social media campaigns revealed more interactions with the public than ever through a collection of sustainability initiatives and activities. The year also marked an increase in health initiatives and safety awareness, as the bank amplified announcements by the Ministry of Health and the Cabinet of Ministers, in addition to the bank's annual news cycle and response to the nation's health and legal developments. The bank's social media campaigns reflected shifting public interests, and presented an exciting combination of

news and activities to followers throughout the year. Topics of interest included the latest updates about national lockdowns and curfews, sports programs and physical activity initiatives, housekeeping activities, and interviews with entrepreneurs. In keeping with the bank's efforts to increase transparency, Gulf Bank was also keen to highlight its various efforts across its branches in applying the best preventive health measures and ensuring the highest levels of customer satisfaction.

Commenting on this year's achievements, Gulf Bank's Assistant General Manager of Corporate Communications, Ahmad Al-Amir, said: "There is no doubt that 2020 was a unique year that was truly unlike any other. As we reflect on a year that presented the world with completely new challenges, we are very proud of what Gulf Bank has been able to achieve, especially in light of the difficult circumstances the country was facing. At Gulf Bank, our primary goal has always been to maintain an innovative communication approach with our followers, and we pride ourselves on being at the forefront of national efforts to provide positive public content and a line of continuous communication throughout the various stages of the pandemic. We are happy to wrap up 2020 in good health and with memories that will last a lifetime, and look forward to engaging with our local community with more innovative, exciting and entertaining content to come!"

### Community Sustainability Across Social Media Post-COVID Response

As national efforts to curb the spread of the pandemic launched into action, Gulf Bank was quick to contribute to the Central Bank of Kuwait's KD 10 million fund designed to allow local banks to support national efforts in combating the spread of the novel coronavirus.

In appreciation and recognition of the Ministry of Health's continuous efforts throughout the year, Gulf Bank's sustainability team also assisted at the Coronavirus Rapid Screening Center in Sabhan. Employees distributed preventive materials to all the visitors as part of the bank's unwavering com-



Ahmad Al-Amir

### SOCIAL MEDIA ENTERTAINMENT CAMPAIGNS DURING COVID19



AHMED AL BADER

EBTISAM ALOUMI

DANA GHAREEB

CIRCUIT+ FITNESS

mitment to social responsibility, and as part of its community sustainability efforts in raising awareness about the virus and its prevention.

### Entertainment at Home

This activity came as part of a wider set of initiatives pioneered by Gulf Bank, as the bank launched several community sustainability campaigns commensurate with the conditions the country was undergoing, including the lockdown and curfew periods. The bank collaborated with several local leaders to provide useful and entertaining content for its social media followers. Local gym Circuit+ provided Gulf Bank's followers with short home workout tips aimed at assisting athletes in completing their favorite physical activities at home, and to encourage working out as a means of lowering anxiety and boosting the immune system. The bank also collaborated with diet and nutrition specialist Dana Ghareeb who provided nutrition, health and lifestyle advice to followers, helping them cope with periods of high stress and encouraging healthier diet choices as a way of strengthening the immune system. With many followers staying home throughout the year, the bank also spearheaded several lifestyle initiatives across its social media channels, collaborating with Ebtisam Al-Oumi, who shared home organization tips, and Chef Ahmed Al-Bader, who shared easy recipes for quick home meals at a time when restaurants in the country were closing down.

### Weekly Campaigns

This year, Gulf Bank also launched several weekly social media campaigns, including: "Save the Environment" Sundays, in which Gulf Bank focused on recycling initiatives and encouraged followers to reduce their plastic use; Motivational Mondays, in which the bank spread inspirational messages and influential content; Tech Tuesdays, in which Gulf Bank highlighted a weekly technological tip; and Wellness Wednesdays, in which the bank presented health advice for increased mental and physical wellness. The weekly campaigns, which have quickly become a few of the bank's most anticipated digital segments, aim to deliver quick and beneficial tips for users in an effort to promote environmental awareness, lifestyle wellness, and financial literacy.

Gulf Bank also launched "Let's Talk Business," a series of interviews with local entrepreneurs designed to stimulate an entrepreneurial culture in Kuwait, and discuss how to overcome business challenges during an economic crisis such as the pandemic. The entrepreneurs are interviewed by Tareq Al-Saleh, Deputy General Manager of the Economic Research Unit at Gulf Bank, who discusses various business-related topics with guests including Chef Ahmad Al-Bader, Abdulaziz B Al-Loughani, Talal Al-Nafisi, Abdullah Al-Essa. The business leaders discuss the keys to success for small businesses, how to conduct business during times of crisis, how to successfully diversify and expand your business, and more.

## 4 earthquakes hit Kuwait in 2020

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait witnessed at least four earthquakes during the passing year. It also loomed high in Arab and international indexes for protecting the environment. The following are highlights of some events at the environmental level:

March 27: Kuwait registered a 3.2-magnitude quake in Al-Abdali area north of the country.

June 10: Kuwait ranked second at the Arab level and 47th internationally in the global environmental index, advancing by 14 points.

Oct 6: The National Seismic Network, a Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) affiliate, recorded a 2.4-degree earthquake east and west of Boubyan island.

Nov 11: The National Seismic Network recorded a 4.6-degree quake southwest of Kuwait.

Dec 21: Kuwait National Seismic Network (KNSN) registered a 4.4-magnitude tremor southwest of Kuwait. — KUNA

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.





## Local

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## News in brief

## Indian Embassy daily online quiz

**KUWAIT:** As part of Republic Day celebrations, Thematic Library of the Embassy of India Kuwait is organizing a Daily Online Quiz on weekdays from January 3 - 25, 2021. The quiz will be on a wide range of topics covering Constitution of India, Rivers of India, Festivals of India, Islands of India and States of India, a press release said. The questions in Google form format will be released before noon each day on social media handles of the Embassy and responses received on next day before noon will be included in the competition. All Indian nationals and friends of India in Kuwait are invited to participate. Winners will be felicitated and prizes given at an event to be held at the Embassy at a later date in 2021. "Let's get ready to celebrate the Republic Day of India virtually," the release added.

## Oil price down

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by 98 cents to \$49.89 per barrel (pb) on Monday, after it was at \$50.87 pb last Thursday, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. Globally, the price of Brent crude went down by 43 cents to \$50.86 pb, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which decreased by 61 cents to \$47.62 pb.—KUNA

## Accounts frozen

**KUWAIT:** A special criminal court in Dhaka has ordered that 617 bank accounts in Bangladesh belonging to Bangladeshi MP Mohammed Shahid Islam and his associates be frozen, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday. The bank accounts were allegedly used to transfer money that Islam and his partners received from human trafficking activities in the Gulf region, according to a judicial source.



**KUWAIT:** Health workers arrive to be vaccinated for COVID-19 at the make-shift vaccination center in the Kuwait International Fairground in Mishref yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Cabinet content with declining COVID-19 figures

**KUWAIT:** The Cabinet held its weekly meeting on Monday, chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. After the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh said that Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah briefed the meeting on the latest developments concerning COVID-19 in Kuwait. The minister voiced content over the general status of the pandemic in the country, deeming it "stable" based on declining figures in new contamination and fatality rates. Sheikh Dr Basel also underlined that the decision to suspend commercial flights and land travelling is still valid until January 1, 2021; with traffic in all ports and border crossings resuming the day after the aforementioned date. He fortunately noted that no mutant COVID-19 strains were detected thus far, as well as



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's meeting. —KUNA

not detecting any side effects since the trial launch of vaccination campaign last Thursday.

The Cabinet was then briefed by the invitation received by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah from King Salman Bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia to attend the 41st GCC ordinary leaders' summit in Riyadh, as well as the letter sent by Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani. In his letter, the Qatari Amir voiced appreciation to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for their sincere efforts to resolve

the Gulf crisis. The Cabinet, in this regard, expressed content over the potential breakthrough in mending the Gulf rift, hoping for the anticipated summit to complement previous efforts led by the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. During the session, a visual display on the State Audit Bureau's 2019-2020 financial reports was presented by chair of the Government Performance Follow-Up Agency Sheikh Ahmad Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for projects under the Agency's mandate. The Cabinet then discussed latest political issues and developments on regional and international levels.—KUNA

## Fashionista jailed for insulting prosecutors

**KUWAIT:** The misdemeanor court sentenced fashionista Jamal Al-Najadah to one year in jail and a KD 1,000 fine for insulting members of the public prosecution, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday. The public prosecution had earlier released Najadah on KD 2,000 bail after charging her with insulting the judiciary. Najadah denied the charge, saying she did not mean to insult the judiciary, adding that a follower contacted her on Snapchat and spoke to her about the money laundering case she is charged with. She said she didn't know the call was being recorded, and was surprised after it was posted on social media. She apologized to the prosecution.

### Money laundering

The public prosecution has completed the charge report of a money laundering case estimated

at more than KD 4 million, Al-Rai reported yesterday. Sources said the case includes 19 suspects, with a man named "Salehi" the most notable among them. The charges include money laundering, liquor trade and possession of firearms. It said four suspects are in jail and one is outside Kuwait. Investigations revealed that the suspects laundered more than KD 4 million, knowing that the money was embezzled from the government. The sources said the suspects carried out many transfers through various accounts and issued checks, cashed them and circulated the money to cover the illegal sources. They said "Salehi" used money in his account to buy real estate and luxury cars.

### Suicide

A 31-year-old Indian man committed suicide in Kuwait after his employment was terminated, Al-Anba Arabic daily reported yesterday. Police received a report that a person had committed suicide inside his apartment in Abu Halifa, so security men and forensic officers rushed to the scene and found the body hanging by a rope. According to his friends, the man took his life after the company where he worked terminated his services.

## KRCS sends relief to burned camp victims in Lebanon



**BEIRUT:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society yesterday delivered relief supplies to scores of Syrian refugees whose camp in northern Lebanon was totally burned. Head of the KRCS mission in Lebanon Dr MUSAED AL-EZEI said that the society team acted quickly to relieve the refugees after their camp was scorched in the town of Bahnin. The team, in coordination with the Lebanese Red Cross, distributed food, hygienic materials and blankets to the families who were deprived of dwellings after the blazes gutted the shanty town, which had

accommodated 100 families. Dr Ezezi indicated that rapid response was necessary to aid the refugees, amid the biting winter cold. Meanwhile, the deputy municipality head in Bahnin, Amer Bekaa, expressed appreciation for the Kuwaiti aid for the impoverished Syrians. The camp was set afire against background of a personal quarrel that involved some locals with Syrian workers. Ezezi also indicated that among the team's latest tasks was delivery of aid supplies to 300 Lebanese and Syrian families.—KUNA

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COVID hollows out German city centers

## Switzerland gets 24/7 airspace protection

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WASHINGTON: Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi heads to the house floor on Monday. —AFP

# Weakened Trump faces first veto override

## US House of Representatives deals a blow to US President

WASHINGTON: The US House of Representatives dealt a blow to President Donald Trump on Monday by rejecting his veto of a defense bill, setting the stage for the Senate to deliver a humiliating first veto override in the final days of his presidency. The Democratic-controlled House voted 322 to 87 to override Trump's veto of the \$740.5 billion defense bill, with 109 members of the president's own Republican Party siding with Democrats. A similar motion will be introduced in the Republican-majority Senate, where it will also have to gain two-thirds support to override the president's veto.

In a statement released after the vote, Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi slammed Trump's veto as "reckless" and called on the president to "end his eleventh-hour campaign of chaos." The House vote came a day after Trump caved to pressure from both Republicans and Democrats and reluctantly signed a \$900 billion coronavirus relief and stimulus package that he had threatened to veto. Trump's capitulation on the Covid-19 relief bill and the looming congressional veto override are the latest signs of his waning powers as he prepares to leave the White House on January 20.

The fiscal 2021 National Defense Authorization Act was passed this month by 335 votes to 78 in the House and by 84 to 13 in the Senate. But the NDAA was vetoed by the president because it did not repeal Section 230, a federal law that provides liability protection to internet companies.

Trump also opposed a provision that would strip several US military bases of the names of generals who fought for the secessionist, pro-slavery South in the 1861-65 Civil War. Including the defense bill, Trump has vetoed nine bills during his four years in the White House. Congress has not previously mustered the votes needed to override any of his vetoes.

### 'Stop the Insanity'

For a real estate tycoon who prides himself as a master negotiator, the past few days have been an exercise in humiliation.

Trump threatened for days not to sign the Covid-19 relief and spending bill that had been hammered out by his own treasury secretary and had received broad bipartisan support in Congress. His surprise move risked shutting down the government from Tuesday and depriving millions of Americans of economic relief badly needed

during the pandemic.

He finally backed down under bipartisan pressure and signed the bill on Sunday night at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, out of sight of television cameras. But in an attempt to save face, Trump released a statement airing his grievances about the November 3 election and claiming that he had obtained a number of concessions on the relief bill. Among Trump's demands was increasing direct relief payments to Americans from \$600 to \$2,000. The House, in a 275 to 134 vote, approved a motion on Monday to increase the payments to \$2,000, but it is likely to meet with resistance from Republicans in the Senate.

Independent Senator Bernie Sanders threatened late Monday to filibuster the veto override bill in the Senate if the upper house did not allow a vote on the extra \$2,000 direct payments to Americans. That would potentially delay the measure and throw extra pressure on the Republicans ahead of two key Senate run-offs in Georgia next month that could determine control of the chamber. President-elect Joe Biden, asked by a reporter Monday if he favored raising the payouts to \$2,000, replied, "Yes."

Biden, speaking after a briefing by his transition team on national security, also said that political appointees at the Pentagon, which Trump has packed with loyalists since the election, have refused to provide a "clear picture" on troop posture or budgeting. "It is nothing short, in my view, of irresponsibility," Biden said in Wilmington, Delaware, warning that US adversaries could take advantage of the transition. The strange episode over the relief package highlighted the degree to which Trump has become isolated, spending much of his time playing golf or railing on Twitter about his election loss.

In a sign of his fading influence, the Rupert Murdoch-owned New York Post, one of Trump's most ardent supporters, published an editorial late Sunday telling him to "Stop the Insanity" and acknowledge he lost the election. "Mr President, it's time to end this dark charade," the newspaper said. "We understand, Mr President, that you're angry that you lost. But to continue down this road is ruinous," the Post said. "If you insist on spending your final days in office threatening to burn it all down, that will be how you are remembered. Not as a revolutionary, but as the anarchist holding the match." —AFP

## Algeria seizes nearly \$100,000 militants' ransom cash

ALGIERS: Algeria's army has retrieved a "slice of the ransom" cash paid out to free hostages held by "terrorist groups" in the troubled Sahel region, the defence ministry has said. Soldiers "recovered the sum of 80,000 euros" (\$97,900) during an operation in Algeria's northeastern Jijel province, a statement issued late Monday said.

Algerian authorities use the term "terrorist" to describe armed Islamists who have been active in the country since the early 1990s,

including members of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The defense ministry said the cash was an "instalment of the ransom" paid out in a controversial October agreement, where neighboring Mali released some 200 prisoners including militant leaders to secure the release of four hostages, including French aid worker Sophie Petronin.

Algeria condemned the deal, and Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad said the payment of ransoms "undermines our counter-terrorism efforts". Algiers said it had subsequently arrested several extremist fighters who had fled across the porous desert border from Mali. Earlier this month, in the same Jijel province, three Islamists fighters and an Algerian soldier were killed in clashes, while on December 16, troops arrested a

man they described as "dangerous terrorist", named Rezkane Ahcene. One of the men later arrested in Algeria alleged that a ransom was paid totaling "millions" of euros.

Rumors of ransoms paid for the release of western hostages in the Sahel region are common but rarely confirmed, and France has denied any involvement in negotiations for the release of the hostages. France has deployed over 5,000 troops across the arid Sahel region of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger as part of its Operation Barkane mission fighting jihadist groups. Three French soldiers were killed on Monday in Mali when their armoured vehicle struck an explosive device, taking the total deaths to 47 since Paris first intervened militarily in 2013. —AFP

## Russia, Turkey to develop military ties despite US sanctions

MOSCOW: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said yesterday that Moscow and Ankara's military cooperation would not be deterred by US sanctions on Turkey for acquiring a Russian missile defence system. Washington earlier this month punished Turkey for buying Russia's S-400 air defense system, imposing rare sanctions against a NATO ally.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at the time assured Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu that the American sanctions were intended to prevent Russia from receiving substantial revenues from the sale. Yesterday, Cavusoglu visited Moscow

for talks with his counterpart Lavrov, who told reporters that, "we have confirmed our mutual intention to develop military ties with Turkey".

He added that President Vladimir Putin appreciated Turkey's determination to "continue cooperation in this area despite continuing illegitimate pressure from Washington". Russia last year delivered the S-400 system to Ankara ignoring warnings that it is not compatible with Turkey's membership in the NATO alliance.

Although Russia and Turkey are rivals in several conflicts including Libya and Syria, Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan maintain good relations. The two countries are jointly monitoring a Russian-mediated truce over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region after a six-week war between Armenia and Azerbaijan that claimed more than 6,000 lives.

But tensions between the two had risen over Nagorno-Karabakh while the fighting was ongoing, with Russia accusing Turkey of deploying Syrian



SOCHI, Russia: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov welcomes his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu ahead of their meeting yesterday. —AFP

fighters to combat Armenian forces in the contested region. Earlier this month Turkish police briefly arrested two Russian journalists in Istanbul for allegedly filming a drone production unit without permission. —AFP



MOSCOW: A pedestrian wearing a mask looks at a smartphone as she walks beside Christmas decorations in front of a shopping mall yesterday. —AFP

## Russia admits to world third-worst COVID death toll

MOSCOW: Russia on Monday said its coronavirus death toll was more than three times higher than it had previously reported, making it the country with the third-largest number of fatalities. For months President Vladimir Putin has boasted about Russia's low fatality rate from the virus, saying earlier this month that it had done a "better" job at managing the pandemic than western countries.

But since early in the pandemic, some Russian experts have said the government was playing down the country's outbreak. On Monday Russian officials admitted that was true. The Rosstat statistics agency said that the number of deaths from all causes recorded between January and November had risen by 229,700 compared to the previous year. "More than 81 percent of this increase in mortality over this period is due to Covid," said Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova, meaning that over 186,000 Russians have died from Covid-19.

Russian health officials have registered more than three million infections since the start of the pandemic, putting the country's caseload at fourth-highest in the world. But they have only reported 55,265 deaths - a much lower fatality rate than in other badly hit countries. Russia has been criticized for only listing COVID deaths where an autopsy confirms the virus was the main cause. Alexei Raksha, a demographer who left Rosstat in July, told AFP last week that the Russian health ministry and the consumer health ministry falsify coronavirus numbers.

Rosstat's new figures mean that Russia now has the world's third-highest Covid-19 death toll behind the United States with 333,140 and Brazil with 191,139, according to an AFP count. The figures came as authorities hold out against reimposing a nationwide lockdown in the hopes of buttressing a struggling economy even as the country is battered by a second wave of infections. Russia's government predicts the economy will shrink by 3.9 percent this year, while the Central Bank expects an even deeper decline.

During his annual end-of-year press conference earlier this month, Putin rejected the idea of imposing the kind of lockdown many European countries introduced going into the Christmas holidays. "If we follow the rules and demands of health regulators, then we do not need any lockdowns," he said. —AFP



## International

# Trump urges supporters to amass on January 6 for a last-ditch rally

## Biden: Pentagon stalling transition as US faces risks

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump is urging supporters to amass in Washington on January 6 for a last-ditch rally to pressure Congress to not certify Joe Biden's election victory. Thousands of supporters from around the country, from the Women for America First group, to StopTheSteal, to the violent Proud Boys, are expected to descend on the US capital pressing Trump's unsupported claim that massive voter fraud was behind his defeat in the November 3 election.

Trump tweeted twice this weekend urging supporters to attend, labeling the election "the biggest SCAM in our nation's history." "See you in Washington, DC, on January 6th. Don't miss it," he wrote Sunday. The rally raised fears of fresh violence after the previous pro-Trump protest that included the Proud Boys on December 12 saw several people stabbed and dozens arrested. Trump appears to hope that the protestors could pressure Congress to reject the final count of state-based electors and reverse his election loss.

"We the People must take to the US Capitol lawn and steps and tell Congress #DoNotCertify," StopTheSteal declared online. "Congress cannot certify this fraudulent Electoral College," they said. On January 6 Vice President Mike Pence is to lead Congress in certifying the Electoral College votes submitted by each state, which represent the results of the popular vote. In the joint session of the House of Representatives and the Senate, Pence is to open and read the certificates reporting elector tallies from each state, and then declare the victor.

That process should be, as it almost always is, a formality. Democrat Biden captured 306 electors while Republican Trump only won 232. Trump's campaign has lost dozens of court challenges in several contested states, with judge after judge saying they showed no evidence of any significant fraud. But the session can be stalled if lawmakers from both houses submit formal objections to any state's report. Alabama Representative Mo Brooks told Fox News on Monday that he has the



WEST PALM BEACH, Florida: Supporters hold up signs as the motorcade with US President Donald Trump drives past on Monday. — AFP

support of "dozens" of lawmakers to formally challenge the counts. Meanwhile Trump and supporters have pressured Pence to unilaterally reject some pro-Biden states' elector certificates, a power legal experts say Pence does not have. Republican Congressman Adam Kinzinger on Sunday said it was all an effort by "certain members of Congress and the president" to raise money. "It is a scam and it is going to disappoint the people that believe this election was stolen," he told CNN.

### Pentagon stalling transition

Meanwhile, president-elect Joe Biden said Monday that Donald Trump's appointees at the Pentagon were stalling on the transition and warned that the United States faces security risks as a result. After he and Vice

President-elect Kamala Harris were briefed by their transition teams on national security, Biden said that political appointees at the Pentagon as well as the Office of Management and Budget had put up "roadblocks." "Right now, we just aren't getting all the information that we need from the outgoing administration in key national security area(s)," Biden said after the briefing. "It is nothing short, in my view, of irresponsibility."

Biden said he was seeking a "clear picture" from the outgoing administration on the force posture of US troops around the world. "We need full visibility into the budget planning underway at the Defense Department and other agencies in order to avoid any window of confusion or catch-up that our adversaries may try to exploit," Biden said. — Agencies

## Russia jails former energy exec for 15 years for spying

MOSCOW: A Russian court yesterday handed a 15-year prison sentence to a former manager of an energy company for spying for Moldova, the latest in a string of high-profile espionage trials. Karina Tsurkan, a former board member of the Inter RAO energy group, was detained in 2018 on suspicion of handing classified information to Moldovan intelligence. The Federal Security Service (FSB) accused Tsurkan, a 46-year-old Moldovan-born Russian citizen, of passing documents detailing Russian energy supplies to Ukraine-including areas held by Russian-backed separatists—in 2015. The Moscow city court said in a statement yesterday that Tsurkan was sentenced to 15 years in prison following a trial that was held behind closed doors.

The court added that 656 million rubles (\$8.9 million) seized from Tsurkan was added to state coffers. Tsurkan's lawyer Ivan Pavlov said that his client intended to appeal the decision. Russia's most prominent rights group Memorial in October described Tsurkan as a political prisoner who had been denied a fair trial. "The Tsurkan case is directly related to the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine," where Russia has backed armed separatists since a popular uprising in 2014, Memorial said.

The rights group described the trial as part of an effort by the authorities "to maintain the image of Russia as a besieged fortress surrounded by enemies." The former executive's sentencing was the latest in a string of high-profile espionage cases in Russia that has spurred criticism from rights groups. The FSB in July arrested on treason charges a respected former defense journalist who had recently become an advisor to the head of Russia's space agency. A court in Moscow the month before handed former US marine Paul Whelan a 16-year jail term on espionage charges. — AFP

## Switzerland gets 24/7 airspace protection

GENEVA: Switzerland will get round-the-clock airspace protection starting this week, the military said yesterday, nearly seven years after the country was unable to scramble fighter jets to respond to an hijacking outside of business hours. Starting on December 31, two F-18 fighter jets will be operational 24/7 to protect the airspace over the small, landlocked country, the armed forces said in a statement.

"From now on, the air police service will be on call 24 hours a day to guarantee the security and the sovereignty over Swiss airspace," the statement said. The plan to increase Swiss airspace surveillance was proposed to parliament in 2009, but it was boosted by an incident five years later that cast a spotlight on the lack of round-the-clock protection. In February 2014, an Ethiopian Airlines co-pilot, Hailemedhin Abera Tsegay, hijacked his own plane, carrying 202 passengers and crew from Addis Ababa to Rome, and forced it to land in Geneva.

When Tsegay locked himself in the cockpit while the pilot went to the bathroom, Italian and French fighter jets were scrambled to escort the plane through their respective airspaces. But although the co-pilot-turned-hijacker quickly announced he wanted to land the plane in Switzerland, where he later said he aimed to seek asylum, Switzerland's fleet of F-18s and F-5 Tigers remained on the ground. The Swiss airforce explained at the time that this was because its planes were only available during office hours. — AFP

## COVID-19 hollows out German city centers

LUEBECK: The charming German city of Luebeck was lovingly done up for the holidays with fairy lights and garlands but the usual festive bustle was eerily absent this pandemic-scarred winter. Across the country, all non-essential businesses have been forced to shut until at least mid-January to help stem a second coronavirus wave engulfing Europe's top economy.

But many of the "closed" signs in shop windows in the town centre, with its signature brick facades and sumptuous art nouveau villas that made it a UNESCO World Heritage Site, have given way to "out of business" notices. The Hanseatic city, population 220,000, has not escaped the urban blight which has plagued many German city centers for years but whose spread has been spurred on by the pandemic. In Luebeck, known around the globe for its traditional marzipan and visited by 18 million tourists in 2019, 20 percent of retail space remains empty — a figure that has been rising for several years.

In the middle of the main high street, Olivia Kempke points to a clothing store that went bust: "Some shops were already not doing well before the corona crisis and the current drop in sales is the final blow." Head of Luebeck Management, an association that encourages local urban development, Kempke blames a boom in suburban shopping centres for siphoning off shoppers and ever higher commercial rents which "have grabbed merchants by the throat".

### Cash for town planning

Another big driver out of urban commercial districts is online shopping, a sector given a huge lift from the pandemic. Sales in Germany are expected to soar by a third for November-December compared to one year ago. That growth will come at the expense of shops that do not offer internet purchases, the German Retail Federation (HDE) said, fearing the closure of 50,000 stores due to COVID-19. The lockdown of high-street shops in the all-important Christmas season is expected to cost them 16.9 billion euros (\$20.6 billion) for November-December alone, the IW economic institute said.

The tighter rules from mid-December until mid-

January and probably beyond are certain to push merchants further into the red. Economy Minister Peter Altmaier said in November that shopping at small businesses was akin to "a national task, even a patriotic act", a message that quickly rang hollow as shops were forced to bring down their shutters. The federal government has dramatically ramped up spending to try to ease the pain and is thrashing out a new e-commerce tax whose revenues would flow to high-street traders.

It has earmarked an additional 25 million euros for 2021 to shore up city centers. The HDE is calling for an annual "urban emergency fund" of around 1.5 billion euros that would rejuvenate cities in the longer term. "If we're not careful, we won't recognize our cities after the pandemic," HDE president Gerd Landsberg said. "We must take action." The emergency government assistance comes in addition to the construction ministry's program, created in 2002, to inject some 790 million euros annually to boost urban redevelopment. Since then, 1,081 German cities and towns have benefited.

### 'Spaces for life'

Hanau in the western state of Hesse was one of the first to profit from the scheme. The city, whose landscape bore the dreary mark of hasty post-war architecture, has had a major facelift with a re-greening drive and improved access for those with reduced mobility. Hanau built a mall popular with shoppers but filled it with independent stores and restaurants instead of the usual chain franchises, and installed a new public square.

It's a success story, said Frank Schwartze, an urban planning professor at Luebeck's Technical University, calling for the state funds to allow "city centres to adapt for new uses" to create "spaces for life" and not just consumption. "The old retail commerce is not coming back," he said, calling for "places to walk and socialise" while making other "forms of mobility possible".

In other words, fewer parking spots and more space for pedestrians, cyclists and scooters. Luebeck has just in the past year started on a similar path with a few novelties including a community garden in the heart of town, widened sidewalks with places to sit, open-air cultural exhibitions and streets closed to vehicles. "We noticed a return of people on foot and a 60 percent reduction in car traffic," said mayor Jan Lindenau. "And citizens have gained in quality of life." — AFP



LUEBECK, Germany: A general view shows the Breite Strasse downtown in this northern German city on Dec 10, 2020. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Smuggling network dismantled

MOSCOW: Russia said yesterday it had dismantled an international drug smuggling network as part of a collaborative operation with the United States, in a rare show of cooperation between Washington and Moscow. The Federal Security Service (FSB) said it had carried out a multi-stage mission with the US Department of Justice that ended with the seizure of 330 kilograms of cocaine with an estimated street value of \$1 billion. Video released by the FSB to Russian media showed plainclothes agents dragging suspects from cars as well as boxes of confiscated cash and drugs. The security agency said in a statement that the joint-US operation had disrupted "a transnational criminal community that specialized in smuggling cocaine from South America to Russia and other European states." — AFP

#### China urged to free Zhang

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Tuesday demanded that China release citizen journalist Zhang Zhan and several other jailed reporters, lawyers and human rights champions. The EU statement was issued just ahead of Brussels signing a major investment pact with Beijing, despite concerns about China's labor and civil rights record. Zhang was jailed on Monday for four years over allegations of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" during her coverage of the early stages of the Covid-19 outbreak in epicenter Wuhan, her lawyer said. "Prior to her detention, Ms Zhang Zhan had been reporting about the coronavirus pandemic in Wuhan," EU foreign policy spokesman Peter Stano said in a statement. — AFP

#### Explosive device kills 3 soldiers

PARIS: Three French soldiers were killed Monday in Mali when their armored vehicle struck an explosive device in the Hombori region in the centre of the poor Sahel state, the French presidency said. The deaths brought to 47 the number of French soldiers killed in Mali since France first intervened militarily in January 2013 to help drive back Islamist jihadists who had overrun parts of the west African country. President Emmanuel Macron "salutes the memory of these soldiers with the greatest respect," the president's office said in a statement. He underscored "France's determination to continue the fight against terrorism," it said. France's Barkhane force numbers 5,100 troops spread across the arid Sahel region and has been fighting jihadist groups alongside soldiers from Mauritania, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, who together make up the G5 Sahel group. — AFP

#### Vaccinations for US troops

SEOUL: The United States began a coronavirus vaccination campaign for its troops stationed in South Korea yesterday as a third virus wave saw the host country record its highest daily death toll since the pandemic began. US Forces Korea (USFK) administered initial doses of the Moderna vaccine for military and civilian healthcare workers, first responders and command staff across its medical treatment facilities in the country, it said in a statement. Washington has around 28,500 troops stationed in South Korea to help it defend against the nuclear-armed North and protect US interests in north-east Asia. Among the inoculated included USFK Commander Robert Abrams, who was pictured receiving the shot in a mask and a T-shirt emblazoned with "#KilltheVirus". — AFP

#### Moscow bars German officials

MOSCOW: Moscow yesterday expanded a list of German officials who are banned from entering Russia in response to EU sanctions that the bloc imposed over Russian cyber attacks on the German parliament. The Russian foreign ministry said that in response to "destructive" EU sanctions in October, "Moscow made a decision to expand the reciprocal list of German citizens who are prohibited from entering Russia." The European Union and Britain in October hit senior Russian intelligence officers with the penalties for their alleged role in hacking the German parliament's computer network in 2015. A cyber attack in April and May 2015 completely paralyzed the IT infrastructure of the Bundestag and the entire parliament had to be taken offline for days while it was fixed. — AFP

#### Barnier to return to politics

PARIS: Michel Barnier, the EU's chief negotiator in years of tortuous talks on the British exit from the European Union, said yesterday that he now planned a return to French politics. Barnier, who helped find deals on Brexit in 2019 and then last week an accord on Britain's future trading relationship with the bloc, told French radio he did not intend to join President Emmanuel Macron's centrist movement and rather return to the fold of the right. "I want to use the energy that I still have to work for my country," he told France Info radio. "I will see where I can be useful," he added. "I want to find the French again." Barnier indicated he planned to back, as before his departure to Brussels, the right-wing The Republicans (LR) rather than Macron's The Republic on the Move (LREM). — Agencies



## International

# Bangladesh moves biggest group of Rohingya to an isolated island

## Activists express new doubts about the transfers

**BHASHAN CHAR:** Four Bangladesh navy ships yesterday took the second and biggest group of Rohingya Muslims yet from crowded refugee camps to an uncertain future on a bleak island three hours from the mainland. The government insisted that the 1,800 refugees, who have been in camps since fleeing a Myanmar military clampdown, want to start new lives on Bhashan Char, where 1,600 others arrived earlier this month. But rights activists expressed new doubts about the transfers. They said some Rohingya had their shanty homes in the camps on the Myanmar border padlocked so they had no choice.

The Bangladesh government eventually wants to rehouse 100,000 of the camps' approximately one million Rohingya on the island, which takes the full force of cyclones that roar across the Bay of Bengal each year. The Rohingya carried bags of belongings, toys and chickens and took selfies with each other as they sat on wooden benches during the three hour trip from Chittagong to Bhashan Char. Housing blocks have been set up for the new arrivals on the island that foreign minister AK Abdul Momen has called a "beautiful resort".

More than 700,000 Rohingya joined 300,000 already in camps in Bangladesh in 2017 after a deadly purge on their villages in Myanmar that the United Nations has said could be genocide. With Bangladesh now struggling to find a long-term solution to the Rohingya exodus, government refugee

officials said there were better living facilities and better security for the Rohingya in Bhashan Char. "They are very eager to go to 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.

### 'Peace of mind'

Some Rohingya in the latest group said they were going willingly. "The camp is a difficult and overcrowded place to live and move around," Shafi Alam told AFP on the navy ship. Grandmother Morium Khatun, 55, said she was making the change to escape drug-related crime in the camps that has seen dozens killed in recent years. "I am looking for peace of mind. The refugee camp is not a place for that," she said. But an international rights worker who interviewed some Rohingya said they had no choice about the move.

"The homes of some of the refugees were padlocked by volunteers working for the Bangladesh camp authorities to force them to agree to the relocation," the worker told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. "They are told that if they don't go, their homes will remain padlocked." "Allegations from within the community about cash incentives being offered to Rohingya families to relocate to Bhashan Char as well as use of intimidation tactics are making the relocation process questionable,"



**CHITTAGONG:** Rohingya refugees sit on a Bangladesh navy ship as they are relocated to the controversial flood-prone island Bhashan Char in the Bay of Bengal yesterday. — AFP

said Amnesty International's South Asia campaigner Saad Hammadi.

A Rohingya journalist who took photos of refugees boarding buses for the relocation was detained on Monday, a local rights activist said.

Police told AFP they were not aware of an arrest. After the first transfer on December 4, several Rohingya told AFP that they were beaten and intimidated to agree to move. The UN said it has not been involved in the process. — AFP

## Telecom towers targeted amid Indian protests

**AMRITSAR:** More than 1,600 telephone towers have been vandalized in an Indian state where farmers have taken the lead in an increasingly angry campaign against government agriculture reforms, officials said. The action came as tens of thousands of farmers marked more than a month of protests on major roads leading into the capital, New Delhi, against new market reform laws. Farmers leaders say the reforms will lead to a takeover of the agriculture business by Indian conglomerates and have called for a boycott of groups such as Reliance, which owns the telecom towers, and Adani.

Farm union leaders have however denied any role in the guerrilla action against the telecom towers in Punjab state, India's agricultural heartland. The towers had power supplies and fibre cables cut while some had their generators stolen, officials said. A source close to Jio, Reliance's mobile phone enterprise, said more than 1,400 towers had been vandalized up to Sunday. A telecoms industry official said at least 150 more were damaged Monday. Videos showing Jio employees being chased from towers have been widely shared on social media.

### Boycott calls heeded

Reliance, which is owned by Asia's richest person, Mukesh Ambani, has not commented on the vandalism. But mobile phone services have been affected



**AMRITSAR:** This photo taken on Monday shows farmers standing near telecom towers of Reliance Jio during a demonstration against the telecommunications corporation and the central government's recent agricultural reforms. — AFP

in Punjab which has 9,000 towers in all. Protesters have also blockaded one of Punjab's biggest cooking oil depots owned by Adani subsidiary Fortune in the Punjab city of Amritsar. Davinder Singh, a farmer who took part in a protest in Amritsar on Monday, told AFP the boycott calls were being increasingly followed. "We are with our farmer brothers who are protesting at the Delhi borders. We appealed to the people to boycott Jio and Adani. "People have heard us. Many people have cut their Jio connections," he said.

Farmers have taken over several kilometers of key

roads leading into Delhi, demanding that the government repeal the new laws. The government says the changes, that allow farmers to sell their produce on free markets, are need to modernize the rural sector, the foundation of the Indian economy, and boost farm incomes. Farmers, who received huge public subsidies, have demanded that the laws be repealed and minimum prices for key produce be guaranteed. A new round of talks between union leaders and the government is to be held today. But protesters have vowed to step up their action if there is no breakthrough. — AFP

## Officer accused of planting weapons on slain civilians

**SRINAGAR:** Indian police have accused an army officer and two associates of planting weapons on the bodies of three laborers killed in Kashmir to make it look as though they were militants in a staged gun battle. Their July deaths sparked a furor in the Indian administered side of the Himalayan region that is also claimed by Pakistan.

The army had claimed that the three men were killed in a gun battle in the village of Amshipora in south Kashmir and that three weapons were found on them. The bodies were hurriedly buried in a remote border area. The men's families in the remote mountainous area of Rajouri identified them one month later from photographs that circulated on social media. The families said the three had only been looking for work in Kashmir's apple orchards.

The controversy sparked rare separate investigations by the Indian army, which has more than 500,000 troops in Kashmir, and the police, who said they were only informed of the supposed firefight after the killings which violated the normal rules of engagement. A police statement issued late Sunday said the officer and two others "planted illegally acquired weapons and material on their dead bodies after stripping them of their identities and tagged them as hardcore terrorists in possession of war-like stores."

The army said last week only that the recording of evidence in the case had been completed and action would follow. Following the investigation, the bodies of the three slain men were exhumed in September and returned to their families after DNA tests. Captain Bhoopendra Singh has been charged with murder, conspiracy and other offences, the police statement said. He is now in military detention. The two civilian "sources", who were with him at the time, are in police custody.

A local court has asked the army whether the accused officer should be tried in a civilian court or subjected to a military court martial, according to the statement. Under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, an emergency law applied in Kashmir since 1990 when an insurgency against Indian rule erupted, government forces deployed in the region cannot be tried in a civilian court unless the New Delhi government agrees. No such permission has ever been granted during the last three decades, despite dozens of requests by the police after investigations into actions by the security forces. Tens of thousands of people, mainly civilians, have died in the insurgency. — AFP

## Hong Kong teen jailed for China flag insult

**HONG KONG:** A Hong Kong teenager was ordered to spend four months in prison yesterday for insulting China's national flag and unlawful assembly as Beijing increasingly targets prominent activists from the financial hub. Tony Chung, a 19-year-old who led a now-disbanded pro-democracy group, was convicted earlier this month for throwing the Chinese flag to the ground during scuffles outside Hong Kong's legislature in May 2019.

While serving his sentence, Chung will be waiting for trial over a charge of "secession", which could land him life imprisonment according to the draconian national security law Beijing imposed on Hong Kong on 30 June. Chung is the first public political figure prosecuted under the new security law, which Beijing described as a "sword" to return "order and stability" to the financial hub after seven months of massive, often violent pro-democracy protests last year.

He was sentenced to three months each for insulting the national flag and unlawful assembly, and told to serve four months behind bars. The teen is also facing separate charges of money laundering and conspiring to publish seditious content. Chung was arrested by plainclothes police opposite the US consulate in late October and had been remanded in custody since. Speculation has swirled that the authorities moved on Chung because he was hoping to ask for asylum at the US consulate in Hong Kong.

### Crackdown

An increasing number of pro-democracy activists across the political spectrum have fled Hong Kong since Beijing stepped up its crackdown on the city's protests against China's authoritarian rule. Under the security law, dissenting speech instead of acts can be alleged of vague yet severe offences like "subversion" and "collusion with foreign forces".

The law has also toppled the legal firewall between Hong Kong's internationally recognized common law judiciary and the opaque, Party-controlled justice system in mainland China by allowing extradition of suspects across the border for trial. Last Sunday, China's state TV CGTN reported that Hong Kong police had put 30 people who are not currently in Hong Kong on its wanted list for suspicion of breaching the national security law, including self-exiled activists Ted Hui and Baggio Leung.

Prominent activists remain in Hong Kong have either been - jailed like Joshua Wong and Agnes Chow - or face frequent arrests and multiple charges. Jimmy Lai, a pro-democracy media mogul who is also charged with the national security law, has been placed under house arrest and stripped of public speech - his Twitter account included - as Hong Kong's High Court granted him bail last week. The decision, however, provoked serious criticism from China, which threatened to extradite Lai to the mainland for trial. — AFP



**GAZA:** People watch as rockets are fired during a military drill by Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas and other Palestinian armed factions in Gaza City yesterday. — AFP

## Gaza forces fire rockets to mark war anniversary

**GAZA:** Palestinian armed groups staged military exercises in Gaza yesterday, including firing rockets into the sea, to mark the anniversary of the start of the 2008 conflict with Israel. The demonstrations were scheduled to last several hours and involve about 10 groups in the Israeli-blockaded Palestinian enclave, said a spokesman for the Al-Quds Brigade forces, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad.

The goal of the exercise, the first of its kind, is to "strengthen the skills of combatants" and demonstrate the "unity" of armed groups in Gaza, added the spokesman, whose face was almost entirely covered by a traditional headscarf. Hamas, the Islamist group that has controlled Gaza since 2007, was also taking part. Hamas's Al-Aqsa TV showed rockets being fired from the strip yesterday into the

Mediterranean Sea.

Israel's army said a projectile device was launched from Gaza overnight, but that it did not cross into Israeli territory. Israel did not immediately retaliate to that launch with airstrikes, as it typically does when rockets fired from Gaza enter Israel. The drills also come days after Hamas accused Israel of launching strikes that damaged a children's hospital. Israel, which said it carried out the weekend airstrikes in response to rocket fire from Gaza, denied that its missiles hit the hospital.

In December 2008, Israel launched "Operation Cast Lead" to stop Palestinian rocket fire into Israel. It ended with a ceasefire in January 2009, after 1,440 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed. Hamas and Israel fought two further conflicts, in 2012 and 2014. A fragile truce has broadly held in recent months, despite rocket fire from Gaza which is generally followed by retaliatory Israeli air strikes. Poverty rates in Gaza, which hovered around 50 percent before the coronavirus pandemic, are thought to have increased since Hamas imposed lockdown measures to limit transmission. — AFP



## Business

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2020

## UK fishermen enter uncharted waters

## Post-Brexit deal to force European boats to relinquish 25% of their current quotas

**RAMSGATE, United Kingdom:** The fishermen of Ramsgate, a once thriving seaside town in southern England, had high hopes that Brexit would bring back the pre-EU glory days of teeming catches and lively fish auctions. Britain had insisted it wanted to take back control of its waters while EU coastal states sought guarantees that their fleets could keep fishing in UK waters.

"We've been sold out by Boris!" fumed John Nichols in his Ramsgate cottage overlooking the English Channel, referring to Prime Minister Johnson.

Nichols, president of the Thanet Fishermen's Association representing around 40 boats, said they were looking forward to a return to the days before frozen rectangles of cod could be imported from far away. They fought for stricter quotas and stepped-up checks, especially against Dutch "electric pulse fleets", a method that Nichols said sterilizes fish stocks.

Instead, last week London and Brussels reached a compromise that will see European boats gradually relinquish 25 percent of their current quotas during a five-and-a-half-year transition period.

Nichols, 69, has been fighting for a "hard" Brexit since 2016, the year Britain voted to leave the EU in a referendum, with his group staging "Leave" flotillas on the Thames, sailing under the Houses of Parliament in London. Now, "foreign vessels will continue to come in and out and take more fish than they did before," Nichols said.

'Careful what you wish for'

"The old saying says 'be careful what you wish

for.'" said the doyen of the group, 85-year-old Tom Brown, his cap pulled down to his eyebrows. Brown said that "when it all started to go wrong" after Britain joined the European Union—then the European Economic Community—in 1973, he and his brother joined every protest, from strikes to blockades, to fight for their rights against European competition.

Brown even created his own modest fuel company, with profits going to fellow fishermen to help offset the losses. And then, with global warming, the cod population began migrating northwards, and the British began importing their cod for fish and chips—a national staple—from Iceland.

Brown said that people in England no longer eat fresh fish, "only fish and chips".

"It's finished. People go to the supermarket. The young generation doesn't like the smell of fish," he said. Without a local market, the fishermen of Kent depend entirely on exports. The fishmongers and fish auctions that were once a fixture of the seaside resort have long since disappeared.

All that is left is a wholesaler who loads trucks each morning with about 70 percent of the meagre overnight haul, mainly sole and crustaceans, to cross the Channel to the French port of Boulogne-sur-Mer. On January 1, when Britain leaves the single market, the headache begins along with the heartache.

"We will assist them with all the papers," Nichols said. "But the most difficult is the veterinary procedure for freshness. Bringing the customs guy for seven kilos (15 pounds) doesn't make sense." As they turn their back on decades of partnership, through thick and thin, with French buyers, the



Fishermen are at work in the port of IJmuiden, on Monday. Due to the Brexit deal, Dutch fishermen will be allowed to catch a quarter less fish in British waters in the coming years. — AFP

Ramsgate fishermen are now hoping for a miracle from across the Atlantic.

"We've been approached by the Americans to send by plane to New York some high-value fish"

such as sole, bass, brill and turbot, Nichols said.

But Brown was despondent. "We were the greatest fishing nation, we had the best fishing grounds," he sighed. "All gone." —AFP

## EU clears way for China investment pact

**BRUSSELS:** EU member states gave political backing to Brussels' planned investment pact with China on Monday, clearing the way for a deal between the world's biggest economic blocs. At a meeting of ambassadors, the German EU presidency noted that no member had "raised a stop sign and the way for a political endorsement was thus cleared", a diplomat said.

The diplomats noted "recent positive developments" in negotiations, with China reportedly addressing concerns over the alleged use of forced labor on its farms. This came after the Chinese foreign ministry said last week that "negotiations have entered the final stretch"—and a second EU diplomat said an agreement could now be formally announced this week. "We have to be careful, but as long as China is in agreement, there could be an official announcement from Brussels and Beijing by the end of the week," the senior envoy said. No member state intervened at the meeting to block the accord, but afterwards Poland's ambassador Andrzej Sados said he had "expressed our doubts" after Germany added it to the agenda. The deal would be a major boost for both sides and strengthen economic ties between the giants before the arrival of US president-elect Joe Biden in the White House in January.



Outgoing US leader Donald Trump has engaged in a trade war with China but his successor has also expressed concern about the EU outreach, with his team urging Brussels to consult with Washington. "The new administration in the US is starting work in three weeks... and an agreement with China should take into account the EU's relations with the US," Sados told the Polish PAP news agency.

"We also said that we shouldn't act too hastily after seven years of tough negotiations. Meanwhile, such an item is suddenly added to the EU ambassadors' meeting agenda in Brussels. This is unheard of." "In the last days of the German presidency we are dealing with a sudden and unjustified acceleration regarding a very important issue, which concerns international relations."

The bloc's leading economic power Germany, which holds the rotating EU

presidency until the end of the year, has made securing the deal a priority of its time at the helm. The European Commission, the EU executive, had said before Christmas that the draft of the "political agreement" was "95 percent ready" and just needed the capitals' green light. China's commitment to labor rights had remained a hurdle, but Europe has long sought greater access to the huge Chinese market for its companies.

The head of the EU chamber of commerce in Beijing Joerg Wuttke told AFP this month that negotiators had "apparently made great strides on market access". As part of the accord the EU has also been pushing Beijing to reinforce respect for intellectual property, end obligations to transfer technology, reduce subsidies for public enterprises and improve on climate commitments. —AFP

## In US, jobless may have to wait for needed help

**WASHINGTON:** The United States government has agreed to another massive stimulus package to keep its listing economy afloat as the coronavirus pandemic rages on, but help for the unemployed people most in need may not come right away.

Congress's decision to wait until the last minute to pass the \$900 billion measure, followed by President Donald Trump's days-long hesitation to sign the bill into law, means two programs supporting millions of unemployed Americans briefly expired, and experts warn states may take weeks to restart payments. "Everything about unemployment insurance and having 53 different systems is difficult, and it does mean some states may drop the ball," said Michele Evermore, senior policy analyst at the National Employment Law Project.

The new stimulus measure follows up on the CARES Act passed in March, a massive bill that expanded benefits to freelance workers and allowed unemployed people to receive aid for an extended period of time. But those programs expired on December 26, a victim of both the months Congress took to reach its agreement last week and the president's refusal to sign it before finally capitulating on Sunday.

The hold-up may have cost unemployed people a week of benefits, and could lead to a gap stretching as long as three weeks in which the jobless won't get paid, experts say—the last thing Americans who have been out of work for months need. "I've been running with zero income for the past couple of weeks. Anytime that you don't have income hurts," said Carson Noel, an Arizona resident who hasn't been able to work in the live events industry since the

pandemic struck and used up all of his benefits in October.

## Economic damage

The world's largest economy ground to a sudden halt in March when states ordered businesses shut to stop the transmission of Covid-19 — efforts that did grievous economic damage and didn't prevent the country's outbreak from becoming the largest on the planet. Costing \$2.2 trillion, the CARES Act has been credited with keeping the US from an even worse downturn, in part by supporting consumption through the expanded unemployment programs.

The new package "providing coronavirus emergency response and relief" is part of a larger spending bill and gives jobless people an extra \$300 in weekly payments. Americans will also get stimulus checks totaling as much as \$600 per person, though Trump has called for them to be raised to \$2,000.

It also extends until March 14 programs created under the CARES Act for the long-term unemployed and gig workers like 51-year-old Noel, who was evicted from his apartment after using up all of his benefits in October. Now living with a family member, he relies on his dwindling savings to get by, and though the restoration of the unemployment payments is a relief, he'd rather be working. "I don't want to sit at home," he said.

Unemployment aid in the US is administered by individual states and territories, and many systems are overwhelmed and reliant on badly outdated technology that few believe can easily reactivate a benefit program that had just been deactivated. "The fact that they have to roll everybody off and they have to roll everybody back on, it's not going to go smoothly in any circumstances," said Andrew Stettner of progressive think tank The Century Foundation, which estimated 12 million people were depending on these programs that would have lapsed had the new stimulus bill not been passed. —AFP

## London stocks soar on post-Brexit trade agreement

**LONDON:** London stocks surged yesterday with investors relieved over Britain's long-awaited Brexit deal with the EU, while eurozone equities also rose on US stimulus news with Frankfurt extending its record-breaking run.

The British capital's benchmark FTSE 100 index jumped 2.2 percent in late morning deals, having last traded on Christmas Eve before the announcement of a long-awaited post-Brexit trade deal.

Britain and the European Union finally struck a trade deal Thursday to cushion the economic blow of Brexit, in a major boost to Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The pound climbed against the dollar but steadied versus the euro, as dealers continued to digest the 1,246-page agreement document.

"The Brexit deal is really a blessing... for the UK and for the FTSE 100 index. There is no doubt that the FTSE 100 has been a laggard index and now is its time to shine," AvaTrade analyst Naeem Aslam told AFP. He added: "European stocks are still very much in Santa rally mode and



traders only want to push stocks higher because they know that there is enough tailwind for the stock market in 2021."

The EU gave the green light to the deal on Monday, paving the way for it to come into effect in the New Year. Britain's parliament will seek to ratify it this week. "Markets seem to be welcoming the Brexit deal," noted AJ Bell investment director Russ Mould. "However, the agreement struck between London and Brussels is yet to win universal acclaim—even if that is the inevitable result of the compromises that the Prime Minister had to make to get the deal over the line."

Elsewhere, Asian markets mostly rose

yesterday following a record-breaking lead from Wall Street, as investors cheered the passage of a huge US stimulus bill which has helped temper fears about surging coronavirus infections. Investor sentiment was given another shot in the arm after US President Donald Trump signed a \$900-billion (735-billion-euro) Covid-19 economic stimulus bill late on Sunday.

"The hunt for records continues," said Comdirect analyst Andreas Lipkow. Frankfurt's DAX index also powered its way Tuesday to new heights, extending its record-breaking run as the market ends a turbulent year on a strong note. —AFP



In this file photo, a banner against renters eviction reading 'no job, no rent' is displayed on a controlled rent building in Washington, DC. — AFP



## Business

# Cambodia PM hails extraction of country's 'first drop of oil'

## A long-awaited milestone for one of Southeast Asia's poorest nations

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia: Cambodian premier Hun Sen announced yesterday that the kingdom had extracted its first drop of crude oil from its waters, a long-awaited milestone for one of Southeast Asia's poorest nations.

The Gulf of Thailand boasts significant oil deposits, with Chevron's first finding proven reserves off Cambodia in 2005. But production stalled as the government and the US giant failed to reach a revenue-sharing agreement, leading the firm to sell its stake to Singapore's KrisEnergy in 2014.

Hun Sen hailed the first extraction of crude as "a new achievement for Cambodia's economy". "The first drop of oil has been produced." "The year 2021 is coming... and we have received a huge gift for our nation—the first oil production in our territory," he said in a Facebook post. The crude was taken from an area off the southwestern coast of Sihanoukville.

Chevron's discovery of the reserves led the kingdom to be feted as the region's next potential petro-state, with the government estimating hundreds of millions of barrels of crude were beneath its waters. KrisEnergy currently holds a 95 percent stake of the

block where the oil was taken from, while the government holds the rest.

Kelvin Tang, the CEO of KrisEnergy's Cambodia operations, said there has been a "steep learning curve" to launch the field production during a global pandemic. "The cross-border logistics of mobilizing personnel and equipment to execute this development safely during this time of Covid-19 would not have been possible without [government support]," he said.

The company expects a peak production rate of 7,500 barrels a day once the drilling program is completed in February 2021 — a modest amount compared with Cambodia's oil-producing neighbors Vietnam and Thailand. But the revenues could be significant for the government, which estimated in 2017 that it would make at least \$500 million in royalties and taxes from the first phase of the project.

The discovery also raised concerns about how Cambodia—a country long ranked poorly in terms of transparency—would use its new-found wealth, but Hun Sen, Asia's longest-serving leader, dismissed them, calling the extraction "a blessing" for Cambodians. "It is not a curse like it has been cited by some ill-will people," he said. —AFP



This undated handout photo released by Cambodia's Ministry of Mines and Energy shows an offshore oil platform under construction off the Cambodian coast.—AFP

## Crossing Channel post-Brexit: Big changes in store

LILLE: Despite London and Brussels reaching a trade deal to limit the fallout of Brexit the flow of people and goods across the Channel will change significantly on January 1, when Britain's departure from the EU becomes complete. Britain leaves the EU single market and customs union at 11 pm (2300 GMT) on December 31, which is midnight in Brussels. As the free movement of goods and people across Britain's borders with its neighbors comes to an end, AFP looks at how travel and trade with France will be affected.

### Passports, please

Around 60,000 passengers and 12,000 trucks cross the Channel between Britain and France each day. From January 1, British citizens arriving in France via the Channel Tunnel or ferry will have to produce a passport, which will be stamped. They can stay in the EU for 90 days in a 180-day period, after which they will need a visa. The potential for travel chaos in the event of delays at the border was brought home to travellers on either side in the run-up to Christmas, when thousands of trucks remained blocked on roads leading to Dover after France temporarily closed the border over coronavirus fears. From around 20 seconds per person currently in the British port of Dover—the main staging post for crossings to the Continent—travellers could be delayed for up to a minute on average after January 1, officials estimate.

Britons could also be subjected to immigration checks on arrival in France but French officials say they consider Britain a safe third-party country and will aim to keep traffic flowing as smoothly as possible.

French ports are also anxious to keep things moving, mindful that British travellers and hauliers could shift their custom to Belgium or the Netherlands if they face long delays in France.

### 'Smart' customs controls

With Britain also leaving the EU customs union, exporters and importers on either side of the border will need to declare their goods to French customs online, before their shipments leave the factory.

France has devised a new high-tech "smart border", designed to keep goods moving smoothly along the world's busiest shipping route. Lorries departing

Britain must present customs officials with customs documents containing a barcode, which the agents will scan and forward, along with the truck's registration number, to officials on the other side of the Channel.

The barcode will allow French authorities to identify the truck's contents and quickly determine, before the driver arrives in France, whether or not the vehicle needs to be inspected upon arrival. Those transporting animal products or plants that require EU health checks will be directed on arrival to veterinary services. The rest will be waved through, provided the forms filled out by the exporter online are in order.



Trucks leave the ferry terminal in Calais after crossing the Channel as France and Britain reopened cross-border travel after a snap 48-hour ban to curb the spread of a new coronavirus variant threatened UK supply chains.—AFP

### Quality control

Some 230 veterinary staff will vet animal products, animal feedstuffs and plants in the ports of Calais, Dunkirk and Boulogne-sur-Mer. Besides checking the haulier's documents against the cargo the inspectors may also carry out health checks on a sample of the merchandise. French authorities estimate that 10-12 percent of trucks arriving in northern French ports will be subject to checks to prevent the spread of plant diseases. Trucks carrying animal products such as lamb from EU member Ireland over the so-called UK land bridge will be exempted from the inspections.

### Multi-million infrastructure

France has spent some 40 million euros (\$54 million) and hired 700 extra customs, immigration and veterinary staff to prepare for the return of a border with Britain. Truck drivers whose shipments have incomplete paperwork or are subject to lengthier inspections will be ordered to park in one of the 6,000 new spots built to avoid logjams in and around France's Channel ports.—AFP

## US appeals court ruling blocking US TikTok ban

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration on Monday appealed a federal court ruling which allows TikTok to keep operating in the United States despite a move to block the popular social media application on national security grounds.

The Justice Department filed the appeal seeking to enforce a ban on TikTok by President Donald Trump, who has argued that the app's Chinese parent company may use TikTok for espionage and to spread disinformation. The filing did not include arguments for enforcing the ban, which had been rejected earlier this

month by US District Judge Carl Nichols and in a parallel case filed in Pennsylvania.

Nichols said TikTok's lawyers had demonstrated that the Commerce Department likely overstepped its authority by seeking to ban the popular social media app and "acted in an arbitrary and capricious manner by failing to consider obvious alternatives." The White House claims TikTok is a national security risk because of potential links to the Beijing government through its Chinese owner ByteDance.

Trump's order said the action was necessary to "protect our national security" and claimed the personal data of TikTok users could be used by Beijing. TikTok has repeatedly defended itself against allegations of data transfers to the Chinese government, saying it stores user information on servers in the United States and Singapore. TikTok has a further fight on its hands over an August 14 executive order from Trump to force ByteDance to sell its US operations to an American buyer.—AFP

## New York state passes tough new anti-eviction bill

WASHINGTON: New York's state assembly on Monday passed tough laws to protect renters from eviction during the coronavirus pandemic, as rising unemployment and a weakened US economy make it difficult for many tenants to make rent. The new laws, passed in a special session of the state legislature, came just days before existing bans on evictions were due to expire at the end of the year. The latest measures bar most landlords from evicting tenants who are unable to pay their rent for at least another 60 days, the New York Times reported. They will also protect many small landlords from the risk of foreclosure due to lost rental income.

"We want to make sure that homeowners are protected, that it doesn't affect their credit rating, there's no mortgage foreclosure," the state governor Chris Cuomo said before the vote. The bill also renews tax exemptions for elderly or disabled homeowners. The New York Times described the measures as "one of the most comprehensive anti-eviction laws in the nation." It halts proceedings on existing evictions already in the courts for the next 60 days and stops any new proceedings until at least May 1. "We want to get to May 1 and we'll see what happens by May but we want to protect tenants," said Cuomo, the Democratic governor.—AFP

## How new \$900bn stimulus package breaks down

WASHINGTON: The \$900 billion stimulus package aimed at bolstering the US economy during the coronavirus pandemic was signed into law by President Donald Trump on Sunday, freeing up the funds after a week of doubts. Here are the main points:

### Households

The poorest households will receive a check of \$600 per adult and per child, subject to income (up to \$75,000 annually per person, or \$150,000 for a married couple), up to a total amount of \$166 billion. Unemployment benefits will be extended until March 14 (with four additional weeks for those who have not exhausted their allowance), and they will again be extended to workers who would not usually be eligible to claim them, including drivers and delivery workers in the "gig economy." These measures were first adopted at the end of March. Normally unemployment benefits are paid out by states, for up to six months among the most generous states—meaning that those measures ended on December 26, and more than 12 million Americans were left without income overnight. Another measure which had expired at the end of July has also been restored: the payment of an additional \$300 per week for all unemployed people. This is, however, half of what was granted from April to July. Finally, rental evictions have been suspended until the end of January 2021, and a package of \$25 billion has been earmarked for bank loans to local communities so that they can help tenants to make rent.

### Children and education

While learning is still virtual for at least part of the week for most US students, \$82 billion has been allocated to helping public and private schools equip themselves to eventually welcome back students while ensuring the safety of both students and teachers. A budget of just over \$10 billion dollars is also planned for nurseries and other establishments that cater to the youngest kids. It will also finance an aid program, including food, for children from families on the lowest incomes.

### Combating COVID-19

The text provides just over \$55 billion for testing and tracing of the virus, accelerating the vaccination program and continuing research through several programs.

### Businesses

A total of \$325 billion will be dedicated to small and medium-sized businesses. The flagship measure of the first recovery plan in the spring, the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) has been renewed for companies with no more than 300 employees and whose turnover fell by at least 25 percent over a quarter in 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.—AFP



FRANKFURT: Clouds over Frankfurt's banking district including the Commerzbank building (center) reflect in the river Main in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany.—AFP

## Commerzbank to sink 610m euros into job cuts

FRANKFURT: Germany's second-largest lender Commerzbank said Monday it will set aside 610 million euros the final quarter of 2020 to cover sweeping job cuts as it restructures its operations.

Like its crosstown rival Deutsche Bank, Frankfurt-

based Commerzbank is slashing thousands of roles as customers switch to online banking and cashless payment options, reducing the need for bricks-and-mortar branches. The troubled lender has reached an agreement with its works council to reduce 2,300 positions between 2021 and 2024, the managing board said in a statement.

As a result, Commerzbank will book 610 million euros (\$744 million) in additional provisions in the fourth quarter, the statement said. The restructuring will have a "correspondingly negative impact on the net result" in the fourth quarter, it added.

Commerzbank had already set aside 200 million euros for restructuring in the third quarter, with the new plans bringing the total job cuts announced in 2020 to 2,900.

The lender posted a 69 million euro net loss in the third quarter, during which it closed 200 branches. At the end of September, the bank had 39,600 employees. Commerzbank said it would likely end the year with a net loss for the first time since 2009. Shares in Commerzbank fell on Germany's MDAX index, down 0.9 percent at 1200 GMT, compared with a rise of 1.0 percent in the index as a whole.

The task of getting the bank back on track will fall to its new boss from the start of 2021, Manfred Knof, a defector from Deutsche Bank. He will replace Martin Zielke, who resigned in July after being criticized by its second-biggest shareholder, investment house Cerberus.—AFP



## Business

# Ooredoo's success journey crowned by remarkable milestones in 2020

## Free 5GB internet and calls for one month for Ooredoo customers during coronavirus outbreak



Ooredoo and Tamdeen Group



(From left to right) Mohammed Al-Hbaida, Thamer Al-Tahous, Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, Meshal Al-Sayyar, Mijbil Alayoub and Hmoud Snan

**KUWAIT:** COVID-19 has become a part of the equation of our lives, but not the entire equation. In fact, it is merely a signpost that unexpected events happen, but also such crises prove the human's ability to adapt and the corporates' capability to sustain. Sustainability requires struggle, and fulfillment is earned only by taking the right real-time decisions and managing the struggles.

Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has been again an extraordinary performer during the tough times the world went through, and achieved greatness.

Ooredoo Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer, Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain said: "Being 'an average' is the standard of failure, while being 'an extraordinary' is our culture's standard of success. Today, we mark this year by celebrating everything we have accomplished - from bringing new innovative digital solutions to our customers, to supporting the government and community during the crisis, partnering with well-established companies, and more." Ooredoo Kuwait has reaffirmed its full support of the government and its entities in light of the Coronavirus outbreak in the country beginning of March 2020 and to ensure that customers are staying home as per Government directives. The company reaffirmed its support during a meeting held with Salem Al-Uthainah - Director General of Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) and the top management of Ooredoo Kuwait.

In March 2020 which was the beginning of the outbreak, the company reaffirmed its support by collaborating with the Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) by providing customers with free 5GB internet and free calls for one month. Ooredoo Kuwait also launched its 'Be Safe. Be Home. Be Online' campaign which featured an array of digital offers and services designed to support customers and to ensure they are well connected and informed during the Coronavirus outbreak in the country. Ooredoo Kuwait also took a serious role in helping businesses thrive through launching exciting offers targeting companies in the country with the aim of helping them run their business smoothly and to stay connected; especially as the country is preparing for Phase 3 of the 'gradual return to normal life'.

### Milestones

Ooredoo Kuwait celebrated 1000 days of launching its state of the art data center with zero downtime since its launch in 2017. This comes to further reiterate the company's commitment to being one of the leading companies in information technology solutions, and the company of choice for prospective clients searching for ICT solutions, catering especially for the needs of corporates and businesses. The data center provides a suite of managed hosting services tailor-made to fit corporate and business needs. These services are ideal for corporates and businesses looking to better manage their data, platforms and applications.

More and above, Ooredoo Kuwait launched its all-new "Shamel Pro" on Monday, 19 October 2020, which was a big step that added to the company's portfolio. The hard work of Ooredoo's team has paid off as they have proudly stated that they gained more than 1,000 new "Shamel Pro" customers in the first two days of its launching. Ooredoo Kuwait never ceases to amaze its customers with its constant captivating products and services, and "Shamel Pro" takes Ooredoo's digital customer experience to the next level through its three different plans that were designed and built around the needs and passions of the local consumer market be it travelling, gaming or entertainment. The company's headquarters opened its doors on Friday, 20 November, 2020 at mid-night

amid with adherence to social distancing and safety measures to welcome customers who were keen on the two-day exclusive offer by Ooredoo, iPhone 12 launch offer on Shamel starting from KWD 25 per month. The hard work of the team has paid off, and the successful event was the talk of the town.

Ooredoo Kuwait also launched its Education Learning Platform, the provider of a new-age, learning environment. Ooredoo is the first telecommunications company in Kuwait to launch such a platform. Education is a provider of a new-age, learning environment. It strives to help students capitalize on teachable moments by giving them instant access to knowledge at all times. The platform resembles the full classroom experience, with online conferencing and the ability to conduct exams and complete assignments virtually. The Platform also allows educators, students, and parents to communicate easily online.

An undeniable fact, the Coronavirus crisis has imposed unforeseen global challenges and left a lot of human damage. One of the priorities of Ooredoo Kuwait was to provide and preserve jobs for all. Hence, Ooredoo was one of the companies that did not dismiss its employees during the COVID-19, rather, they made distinct efforts to employ young talents, and in December 2020 specifically, the company opened its doors for Kuwaiti youth to join the Ooredoo family.

### Partnerships

Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, is reshaping the age of information and

- Text messages were sent to the public to keep them aware of the safety procedures
- SIM cards with free internet and calls were gifted to citizens who returned to Kuwait
- The launching of "Education", a provider of a new-age, learning environment
- The company celebrated 1000 days of launching its data center with zero downtime
- The company opens its doors for young talents to join Ooredoo family
- Strategic partnerships were conducted to create new innovative products and services
- **Al-Babtain:** Without a doubt, 2020 was the year of milestones, achievements, and greatness for Ooredoo Kuwait

insight through innovative partnerships. The company is launching state-of-the-art IPv6 and 5G/IoT ready for faster mobile data customer experience and evolution of smarter network. The partnership between Ooredoo and Wipro Limited enables the services on Ooredoo's mobile network in Kuwait. Wipro leveraged a dual-stack solution through network devices that translate Internet Protocol (IPv4) and (IPv6) to provide futuristic, reliable, secure, and faster mobile data experience. Ooredoo represented by Fast Telco has also been recognized as a Gold Partner in the Aruba Partner Ready for Networking Program with Hewlett Packard Enterprise. It has also signed up to be Aruba's first Managed Service Provider (MSP) in Kuwait.

Gold Certified Partners are recognized for having some of the industry's best-trained network engineers and demonstrating the highest level of expertise in planning, designing, implementing, and supporting complex networking, security, and wireless solutions.

Ooredoo have fulfilled Gold level competencies and completed noteworthy projects in the country which has

enabled them to reach this level. Ooredoo has also signed a partnership with Nutanix, Inc. (NASDAQ: NTNX), a leader in enterprise cloud computing, to offer Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI)-as-a-Service to businesses in Kuwait. The telecom service provider has implemented Nutanix Enterprise Cloud Platform combined with Citrix Virtual Desktops software in its data center with a view to provide a fully supported solution for desktop virtualization to small and medium businesses (SMBs) and enterprise customers. Moreover, Ooredoo and Batelco, the leading digital solutions provider in Bahrain, partnered to launch "Global Zone" in Kuwait which will offer an ecosystem platform to further support the enablement of digital transformation in the region.

The company has also partnered with Warba Bank, Kuwait's leading Islamic Bank with the aim of providing innovative digital services, solutions, and products to their customers. This partnership is also the first of its kind in Kuwait which will provide mutual cooperation in providing innovative and smart digital solutions that will satisfy customer needs and provide them with the best and most inno-



Abdulaziz Al-Babtain



Mijbil Alayoub

Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, said: "It is our responsibility to contribute to the stability of the society, therefore, we adopt an inspirational vision that supports individuals of all groups and harness our efforts and capabilities to have a prominent role in elevating our country to the ranks of the advanced countries at all levels."

He added: "Thus, Ooredoo Kuwait collaborated with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a related organization of the United Nations (UN), that plays a leading role in the field of migration governance globally. The collaboration allows Nojoom members who are also Ooredoo customers to donate their points to IOM on MyOoredoo Application." The company also announced its strategic partnership of the Global Biking Initiative at a press conference held 10th of February 2020 at its headquarters in Kuwait City as a testament to its support of Kuwaiti youth and athletes.

### In response to COVID-19

The crisis the world went and still going through, planted in us a growing appreciation for life's simple experiences. As a fact, Life after the COVID-19 outbreak will never be the same, we are only waiting for a new beginning. Supporting the society at all times has always been Ooredoo Kuwait's corporate social responsibility strategy.

Ooredoo Kuwait affirmed its full support of the Government in cooperation with Al Rahma International Charity by gifting SIM cards which included free internet and calls to citizens who returned to Kuwait on repatriation flights to use during the medical quarantine period.

The free SIM cards were distributed at Kuwait International Airport by members of Ooredoo Kuwait's team and Head of the Volunteer Unit at Al-Rahma International Charity. The company also gifted its customers in Ministries and Governmental Organizations which include the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior, Civil Defense, Kuwait Police, Kuwait Airways and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation free internet valid throughout the month of March in appreciation for their great efforts during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) situation in the country.

These initiatives stem from the company's Corporate Social Responsibility and a continuation of its efforts during the COVID-19 situation and its commitment to supporting the Government and its entities. 2020 was tough enough on those who were not prepared, and challenging enough for those who think strategically, anticipate the future, have the ability to efficiently manage crises, and take real-time actions. Without a doubt, 2020 was the year of milestones, achievements, and greatness for Ooredoo Kuwait.



Abdulaziz Al-Babtain talking to customers



(From left to right) Abulmohsen Al-Fahad, Fatima Dashti and Nazem Al-Ghabra



Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, Abdullah Al-Methen and Mijbil Alayoub at Kuwait International Airport



Ooredoo's Data Center



(From left to right) Elias Haidari, Peter Babak, Tipan Tripathy, Yousuf Al-Shallal and Naser Abdullah



# Classifieds

Wednesday, December 30, 2020

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



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

## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

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

**BY NIGHT:** Cold with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind with speed of 06 - 26 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 29/12/2020 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	19 °C	12 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	19 °C	07 °C		
ABDALY	19 °C	07 °C		
BUBYAN	17 °C	09 °C		
JAHRA	20 °C	09 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C		
SALMIYAH	18 °C	13 °C		
AHMADI	- °C	- °C		
NUWAISIB	18 °C	08 °C		
WAFRA	19 °C	07 °C		
SALMY	16 °C	07 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Wednesday	12/30	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	21 °C	08 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 26 km/h
Thursday	12/31	Fair and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain later on	21 °C	09 °C	VRB	06 - 20 km/h
Friday	01/01	Fair and Partly cloudy	22 °C	10 °C	VRB	06 - 20 km/h
Saturday	01/02	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	23 °C	10 °C	VRB	06 - 20 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:17
Sunrise	06:41
Zuhr	11:50
Asr	14:40
Sunset	16:58
Isha	18:21

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	17 °C
MIN. Temp.	09 °C
MAX. RH	76 %
MIN. RH	36 %
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

## Hospitals

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

## EMERGENCY 112

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

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

## Word Search



### Geometric Shapes

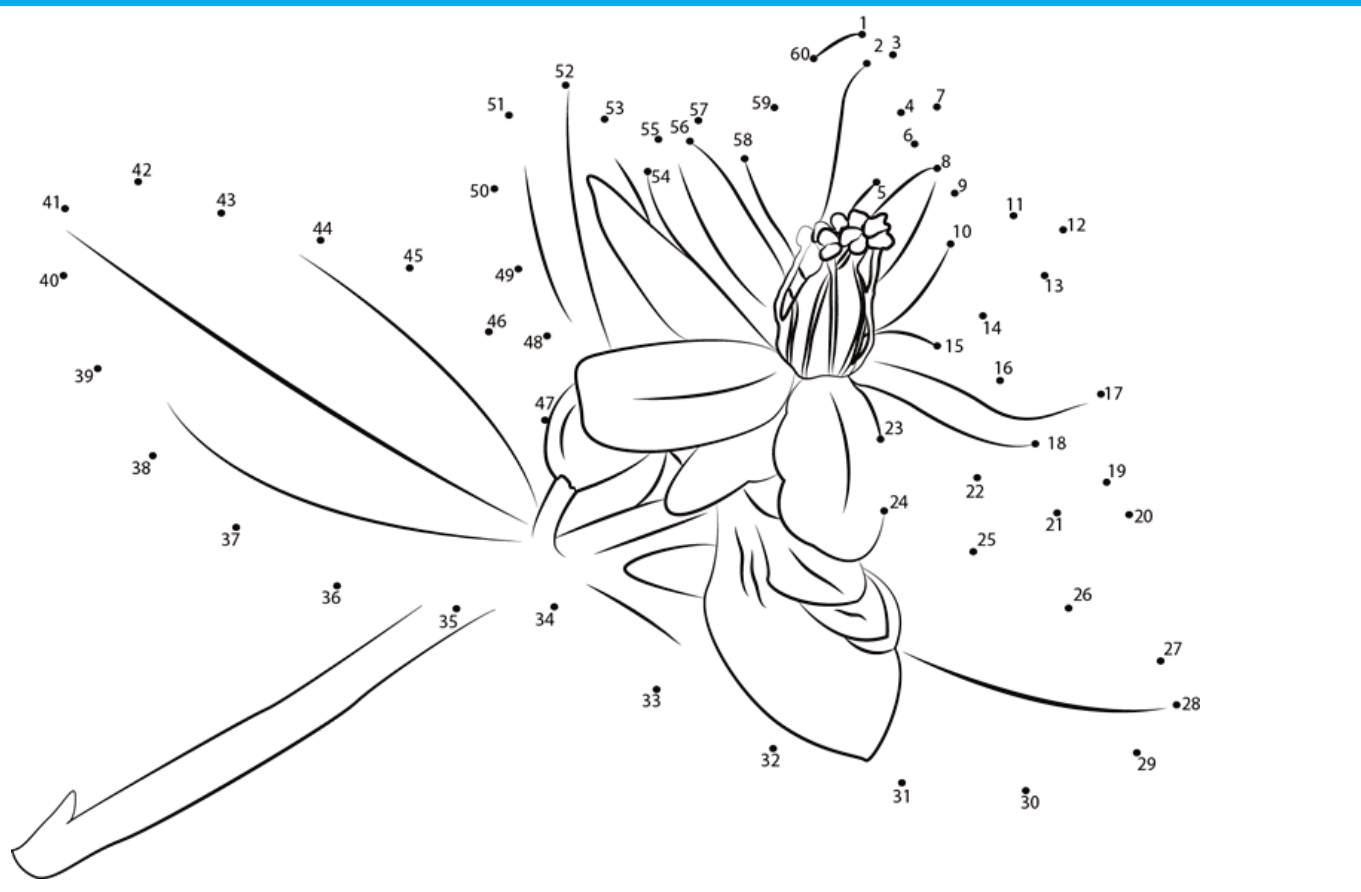
O H Q R E C T A N G L E P  
 D V Q I M H E S Q W R A K  
 I C A V U L Q N T H R K O  
 O P X L Q U O R O A I N N  
 Z N P P A G I M L C H Y O  
 E R U R A A B L H R E D G  
 P Y E T N U E Z E F X S A  
 A I C G S L C D E H A P T  
 R O L P O I N Y B E G H N  
 T E L G R I P H U I O E E  
 S U R C L A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

CIRCLE  
 CONE  
 CUBE  
 CYLINDER  
 HEXAGON  
 OCTAGON  
 OVAL  
 PARALLELOGRAM

PENTAGON  
 PYRAMID  
 RECTANGLE  
 RHOMBUS  
 SPHERE  
 SQUARE  
 TRAPEZOID  
 TRIANGLE



## Join the Dots



## STAR TRACK



### Aries (March 21-April 19)

Intense emotions are apt to dominate the scene today, Aries. Don't do anything halfway. It's time to give it your all or nothing. You have the power to cut to the heart of the issue. Don't hesitate. If you meet opposition, stay strong. There's a valuable lesson to be learned. If you're being true to yourself, you should have no trouble overcoming any obstacle that stands in your path.



### Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You might find that others' strong opinions dictate today's actions, Cancer. The atmosphere is quite intense, so you might want to lay low and let others have their way. Don't try to put up a fight. Unexpected opposition may come out of nowhere and take control. There's a powerful force at work asking you to do things with more passion than usual.



### Libra (September 23-October 22)

Other people may tend to snap under the emotional pressure of the day, Libra, but you're well suited to soar through with flying colors. You're ruled by your emotions and you have no problem navigating rough waters. Other people may look to you for strength and support. Trust yourself and try not to get lured off course by conflicting opinions that don't seem to sit right with you.



### Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

What ails you now can be eliminated if you're willing to stand up and say exactly what needs to be said, Capricorn. Going with the flow may be an easy route to follow, but it might not always take you down a path that leads to the fulfillment of your dreams. Be a bit more aggressive about your position today and outwardly project yourself as the true master of your destiny.



### Taurus (April 20-May 20)

There's an overwhelming intensity about the day that might make it difficult for you to maintain the peace, Taurus. Strong opinions and courageous emotions are clashing in a climactic fashion. You might find yourself in the middle of conflicting forces if you aren't careful. Make sure you take care of yourself and your needs before you try to patch up things for everybody else.



### Leo (July 23-August 22)

Create your own reality, Leo. It could be that you have the puppet strings in your hands, but you're too afraid to use them. Don't shy away from responsibility. Take your time and don't lose sight of your goals. The stakes are extra high today, and you will find that the slightest movement is magnified several times over. Be careful how you use your words. They won't be taken lightly.



### Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

There's a need for decisive action today, Scorpio, and you're the one fit for the job. Strong wills and forceful opinions will win out. Others aren't likely to be easily manipulated. Everyone has a voice, and they won't be afraid to use it. Make sure that you speak up on your behalf or your best interests may be lost. Stand up for yourself. It's now or never.



### Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

It takes two to tango, Aquarius. Remember that life isn't a one-way street. There needs to be a bit of give and take if you expect others to treat you the way you want to be treated. Don't let people take control when it comes to taking charge of your own life. Others may be emotional and stubborn. Don't waste your breath with useless drivel. Say something meaningful.



### Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You may feel extra self-confident today, Gemini, making you more able to say and do the things you might normally keep inside. Be warned, however, that you're apt to run into some powerful, unexpected opposition. The genius in you wants to come out and show others what you're made of, but other people may have reason to find fault. Don't let others' disapproval hinder your progress.



### Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Things that you thought were obvious may not seem quite as clear as you'd like them to be, Virgo. Be aware that there may be some intense opposition to your plans. Take care of other people and their emotions. You will find that a wall might suddenly go up, putting a harsh barrier between you and your goals. Consider your heart as well as your head.



### Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

There may be tension and opposition today, Sagittarius, so be prepared. It could seem like everyone wants to rattle your cage. Stand strong. There are forceful opinions crying out to be heard. The more stubborn you are, the harder it will be for important information to flow freely. Protect your interests by standing your ground, but make sure you don't step on other people's toes in the process.



### Pisces (February 19-March 20)

It may be hard to resolve anything today, Pisces. It could be that there's an overwhelming resistance making it difficult to act according to plan. Today isn't a good day to fight. If things don't seem to be going your way, don't push it. Trying to strong-arm the situation will only aggravate things and make them worse. You may need to make some compromises in order to maintain the peace.



## Lifestyle | Features

# FRENCH FASHION DESIGNER PIERRE CARDIN DIES AGED 98

French fashion designer Pierre Cardin, hailed for his visionary creations but also for bringing stylish clothes to the masses, died yesterday aged 98, his family told AFP. Cardin, who was born to a low-income family in northern Italy but became a France-based fashion superstar, died in a hospital in Neuilly in the west of Paris, his family said. "It is a day of great sadness for all our family. Pierre Cardin is no more," the statement said. It said after a lifetime spanning a century he had left France and the world a "great unique artistic heritage" and not only in fashion.

Born into poverty in 1922 near Venice in northern Italy, his family emigrated to France when he was a small child. "Italian by birth, Pierre Cardin never forgot his origins while bringing unconditional love to France," said his family.

### From apprentice to global empire

He grew up in the French industrial town of Saint Etienne and was apprenticed to a tailor in Vichy at the age of 17, already specializing in women's suits. Moving to Paris, he designed the mesmerizing sets and costumes for the film



This file photo taken on October 14, 2006 shows French designer Pierre Cardin with an award from China Fashion Association as he is surrounded by his Chinese models, as he presents his 2007 Spring/Summer collection, at a fashion show in Beijing.

"Beauty and the Beast" with poet, artist and director Jean Cocteau in 1947. After a stint with Christian Dior, he had already set up his own fashion label in 1950. He quickly established a name as an innovator, creating the now legendary bubble dress in 1954. He also broke new ground commercially, ruffling feathers in the fashion establishment for producing a

ready-to-wear collection for the Paris department store Printemps.

His 1964 "Space Age" collection remains a landmark in fashion history with its cut-out dresses, knitted catsuits, tight leather pants, close-fitting helmets and batwing jumpers. His global empire had a strong presence in Japan and also signed production deals with Cold War-



This file photo shows French fashion designer Pierre Cardin applauded by the audience at the end of a retrospective show at the Institute de France, in Paris. — AFP photos

era Soviet Union in 1978. He also became the first French designer in 1979 to cement links with China. He was also the first designer to hold a fashion show in Red Square in Moscow in 1991, drawing a crowd of 200,000. His family praised how he had plunged "early on into the flow of globalization".

But the much used and franchised

Cardin brand later showed signs of wear and, in 2011, he put his fashion label up for sale although it failed to sell. "We are all proud of his tenacious ambition and the daring he has shown throughout his life," his family said. — AFP



Yemeni actors rehearse on the eve of the premiere of a play entitled 'Yemeni Film', a comedic production that touches on the current struggles of local artists, in the capital Sanaa. — AFP photos

## Struggling artists bring smiles in war-weary Yemen

Yemeni men, women and children filled a hall earlier this month in rebel-held Sanaa, laughing and clapping as actors took to the stage with comic relief for their war-ravaged country. Yemen's conflict has sparked the world's worst humanitarian crisis, the UN says, and the Arab world's poorest country has also been hit hard by the novel coronavirus. Hoping to provide entertainment to the embattled population, a

masks, despite coronavirus dangers. "We, as struggling artists, cannot provide food aid or stop the ongoing conflict," Mohammed Khaled, the director of the play, told AFP. "All we can do is offer the people entertainment to take them out of their current situation and an artistic message that they can enjoy." Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have been killed and millions displaced in the Yemen war, which erupted after the Iran-backed Huthis took control of Sanaa in 2014.

The conflict has deepened since 2015, when a Saudi-led coalition intervened to support the government against the rebels. After five years of war, malnutrition has reached record levels and pushed the country further to the brink of famine, the United Nations World Food Program warned in early December. Despite a UN-brokered agreement reached two years ago between the warring parties, a peaceful settlement has yet to materialize.

### No infrastructure

The conflict affected everyone and everything in Yemen, said Khaled, and the art scene is no exception. "This play talks about me, and all the artists and filmmakers in Yemen who are struggling," he said. Before the war, Yemen had a small but budding film and theatre industry but there were only a handful of makeshift cinemas that showed old films, while often cultural centers or schools provided the backdrop for plays that spoke of politics or significant moments in Yemeni history. Over the years, some films produced by Yemenis grabbed headlines.

"Karama Has No Walls", a documentary short by Sara Ishaq, was an Oscar-nominated movie in 2014 that told the story of 2011 protests in Sanaa. The doc-

umentary "I am Nojoom, Age 10 and Divorced"—the real story of a child bride—was submitted for consideration at the 2017 Academy Awards but not selected. The 2018 drama "10 Days Before the Wedding" that told the story of a couple trying to tie the knot during the war was selected as Yemen's entry for Best Foreign Language Film the following year, but it was not nominated. "The biggest problem that we face is that there are no movie theatres," said Khaled. Today filmmakers produce their work but "upload it online only," he said. "There is no financial return and this undermines (our) ability to sustain the industry."

### A 'Yemen that we miss'

But these are not the only challenges. Huthi authorities that control Sanaa—whose Old City is one of Yemen's four UNESCO World Heritage sites—have imposed strict rules on dress, gender segregation and entertainment in the capital. Although Yemeni society has always been conservative, it has traditionally allowed space for personal freedom and for cultural events, including concerts. Actor Ahmad Hilmy hopes that such activities will return to Sanaa. "We actors and filmmakers suffer a lot because there is no infrastructure for the film and theatre industry," he said.

Sanaa resident Ayash Subai said cultural activities should be used to deflect from usual headlines that only depict Yemen as a war zone. "This is what we young people in the country miss. These activities convey the beautiful and positive image of Yemen that we miss," he said. To make up for it, Subai said, young people follow the work of Yemeni artists online. "But this is not enough," he added. — AFP



Yemeni actors rehearse on the eve of the premiere of a play entitled 'Yemeni Film'.

troupe of struggling artists performed in the capital Sanaa a play called "Yemeni Film", which showcased the country's hardships. It revolved around young people who want to produce a film but face a mountain of challenges, including violence, air strikes, a lack of funding and a shortage of trained actors.

In an effort to avoid the minefields of political sensitivities and any backlash, the actors turned to comedy to paint a picture of their ordeal. For the dozens of men, women and children who packed a Sanaa cultural centre, it was a welcome respite from their daily struggles. They cheered, whistled and laughed openly, as they sat side by side with no face



Yemeni actors rehearse on the eve of the premiere of a play entitled 'Yemeni Film'.



## Second Taiwan-born panda cub makes media debut

A second Taiwan-born giant panda made her media debut on Monday, clambering over a wooden climbing frame and playing with sawdust to the sound of clicking cameras. The cub was born on June 28 to Tuan Tuan and Yuan Yuan, who were gifted by China in 2008 to mark then warming relations between the two rivals. China usually only loans its pandas to foreign zoos, but gave the breeding pair—whose names combine to mean "reunion" or "unity". China views Taiwan as part of its territory and has vowed to one day bring the self-ruled democratic island back into the fold, by force if necessary.

Yuan Bao, which means "round baby" in Chinese, was unveiled to some 150 reporters and invited guests alongside her mother at Taipei Zoo. Taipei mayor Ko Wen-je said the cub had "grown well". She now weighs over 13 kilograms (30 pounds), up from 186 grams (6.5 ounces) at birth. Taiwan's zoo has seen a flurry of births this year, including a gorilla, koala, Malayan tapir and pangolin. Yuan Yuan gave birth to a daughter



The picture shows six-month-old giant panda cub Yuan Bao during a media preview.

Yuan Zai in 2013 — the first giant panda born in Taiwan. The family has been the top attraction at the zoo. According to the World Wildlife Fund, just over 1,800 are believed remaining in the wild. — AFP



The picture shows six-month-old giant panda cub Yuan Bao and her mother Yuan Yuan during a media preview at Taipei Zoo in Taipei. — AFP photos

## US actress Loughlin released from prison

American actress Lori Loughlin was released from prison on Monday after serving a two-month sentence for her part in a scam to secure spots for privileged children at prestigious universities, authorities said. The 56-year-old known from her role as Aunt Becky in the 1980s-90s hit sitcom "Full House" had entered a low-security federal prison in Dublin, some 30 miles east of San Francisco, on October 30. Actress Felicity Huffman of "Desperate Housewives" fame was released in October 2019 from the same prison after serving 11 days of a two-week sentence for her role in the scam.

Loughlin and her husband, designer Massimo Giannulli, were among some 50 people indicted over the elaborate scam. She and her husband were sentenced by a federal judge in August after having pleaded guilty. The pair admitted to paying \$500,000 to gain admission for their two daughters to the University of Southern California as recruits to the rowing crew team—a sport neither had

ever trained in. Loughlin was also sentenced to two years of supervised release, a \$150,000 fine and 100 hours of community service. Giannulli, 57, described by prosecutors as the more active participant of the duo, was sentenced to five months, a \$250,000 fine and 250 hours of community service.

He began serving his sentence on November 19 at the Lompoc prison near Santa Barbara, California. The ringleader behind the college admissions scam, William "Rick" Singer, who authorities say was paid about \$25 million to bribe coaches and university administrators, has pleaded guilty and is awaiting sentencing, expected sometime next year. — AFP



Lori Loughlin



Lifestyle | Features



Eggs of freshly extracted 600 grams of caviar, worth 8 thousand euros, with a surprising cream color from a 16-years old albino sturgeon is seen at Gruell fish delicacy store at the village of Anif near Salzburg, Austria.



Walter Gruell, packs 30 gram box of freshly extracted 600 grams of caviar, worth 8 thousands euros with a surprising cream color.



Rare 16 years old albino female sturgeons are seen at Walter Gruell's fish farm in Groedig village near Salzburg, Austria.— AFP photos

# In the Alps, white caviar offers an exclusive alternative

In his waders, Stefan Astner checks on the albino sturgeon: Almost two decades after they hatched, they're ready to be gutted for their caviar to be shipped out for New Year's celebrations. "The fish have already been through the ultrasound so we saw that they are full (of roe) and they will go into production soon," Astner says, dipping his net into a small pond teeming with the rare, white sturgeon. Deemed the most expensive food in the world, demand for caviar—essentially, salted roe—has driven most sturgeon species to the brink of extinction in the wild. But fish farms like the one where Astner works in the village of Groedig, near the Austrian city of Salzburg, offer a more sustainable alternative.



A freshly caught 16 years old albino sturgeon is pictured at Gruell's fish delicacy store before it will be cut.

Owner Walter Gruell is one of about 2,500 sturgeon farmers worldwide that produce a combined 415 tons of caviar a year, according to the World Sturgeon Conservation Society's most recent figures dating from 2018. But patience is imperative for producers. The required investment is high and doesn't pay off for years until the sturgeon begin carrying roe—that's if they aren't stolen by gangs hoping to skip the arduous breeding process. The albino female that Gruell slices with surgical precision is 16 years

old. Slowly, he removes, rinses, and weighs the cream-coloured roe, which, like the fish, lacks pigmentation.

There are no more than 40 sturgeon breeders specializing in albinos worldwide, according to Thomas Friedrich, an expert on sturgeon at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences in Vienna. Though there's no research suggesting that lack of pigmentation affects caviar's taste, Gruell is convinced of its superiority, asserting that "it's even sweeter, even smoother than the tradi-

tionally black one." Consumers are willing to pay for the difference. The female that Gruell just cut yields 600 grams (21 ounces), worth 8,000 euros (\$9,750) — more than three times the price that black caviar fetches.

### Sturgeon rustlers

The coronavirus pandemic has curbed demand as upscale restaurants, like all eateries in Austria, have been closed, but retail is booming, partly because people still want to treat themselves, Gruell believes. "People want to savour the present moment," he says, between the many phone calls ahead of the end-of-year celebrations, when he makes close to 40 percent of his annual turnover. While AFP visited his farm, Gruell spoke to a luxury automaker, and shortly before had been in contact with an airline hoping to serve first-class travellers caviar "Made in Austria". Demand for caviar remains high, and not just from paying customers, but sturgeon rustlers, too.

A year ago, 400 kilos of sturgeon were stolen from a farm less than two hours away from Groedig. The eviscerated fish were later found in a reservoir. A year before that, 400 individual sturgeon worth 50,000 euros were stolen from



Walter Gruell, fish farmer and fish delicacy store owner, presents his products including a white caviar (blue box) at his store in the village of Anif near Salzburg.

another farm. At Gruell's farm, the fish, which include sturgeon native to the Danube, are protected by surveillance cameras and high fences with heavy padlocks.

### Outliving dinosaurs

Though sturgeon breeding in countries like China, Italy and France started as a purely financial venture, it is now also seen as a sustainable alternative to wild sturgeon. Having survived the

demise of the dinosaurs, some sturgeon species have recently gone extinct, while others are on the brink. In Russia and Iran, production of wild caviar collapsed in the 1980s due to overfishing as well as pollution in the Caspian Sea. Most countries along the Danube now protect the local sturgeon species, though experts worry that conservation might have come too late.

Official government data in Romania, where the Danube empties into the Black Sea, show that catches of Russian sturgeon plummeted from 3,725 kilos (8,214 pounds) in 2002 to just 37 kilos (82 pounds) in 2005, indicating that overfishing had gravely diminished their numbers. Though the country issued a moratorium in 2006, impoverished fishermen continue to try and catch the fish, as the dozens of kilos of roe that one sturgeon can carry are worth as much as a fisherman's annual income. Some fans of the delicacy still believe that the taste of wild caviar eclipses that extracted from farmed sturgeon—though Gruell says his albinos are in a taste category of their own. — AFP



Rare 16 years old albino female sturgeons, are seen at Walter Gruell's fish farm in Groedig village near Salzburg, Austria.



Fish farmer Stefan Astner inspects extremely rare 16 years old albino female sturgeon.



Walter Gruell, cuts open a freshly caught 16 years old albino sturgeon before extracting 600 grams of caviar.

## Swan Late: Mourning bird holds up German trains

A swan mourning the death of its companion on a German railway track held up 23 trains for almost an hour and had to be removed by firefighters using special equipment, police said. The two birds had strayed onto the track area of the high-speed line between Kassel and Gottingen in central Germany "during an excursion", according to Kassel police. One of the birds died, likely after getting caught in the

overhead power cables, said the statement on the December 23 incident, which was made public Monday. Its companion then sat beside the body in mourning, resisting attempts by officials to lure it away and temporarily closing the line to traffic.

Firefighters with special equipment were later called in and managed to lift the dead swan and its surviving companion away from the area. Twenty-three trains were delayed for about 50 minutes while the rescue operation took place, the police statement said. The surviving swan was unharmed and later released onto the river Fulda, it added. According to Britain's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, swans try to find a mate for life. — AFP



A swan sat on the tracks, mourning its companion.—DPA

## MEXICO MOURNS MAESTRO ARMANDO MANZANERO, LOST TO COVID AGED 86

Mexican singer-songwriter Armando Manzanero died Monday at the age of 86 after being hospitalized with the coronavirus, sparking an outpouring of tributes for one of the country's best-loved musicians. The composer and crooner of romantic Latin ballads, who became the first Mexican to receive a Grammy lifetime achievement award in 2014, suffered a cardiac arrest, his publicist told AFP. Manzanero's songs, which include "Adoro" (I Adore) and "Voy a apagar la luz" (I'm Going to Turn Off the Lights), are known across Latin America. His lyrics, some of them translated into English, have also been sung by international stars including Frank Sinatra, Christina Aguilera, Andrea Bocelli and Elvis Presley.

The artist was admitted to hospital on December 17 and later intubated, although news from his entourage over the weekend that his health was improving had sparked hope that he would beat the virus. A visibly moved

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador cut short his daily news conference on Monday after showing a video of Manzanero performing "Adoro." He hailed the musician as "a great composer, one of the best in the country." The Latin Recording Academy, which also presented Manzanero with a lifetime achievement award in 2010, described his death as an "irreparable loss for the world of Latin music." Spanish singer Alejandro Sanz said the Mexican maestro had "taught us to adore in the most beautiful way."

Due to the coronavirus pandemic that has hit Mexico particularly hard, no tributes were due to be held, so the Society of Authors and Composers, which Manzanero had presided over since 2010, asked that people sing from their balconies and windows at nightfall the song "This afternoon I saw it rain." In different parts of Mexico City, that song and other melodies made famous by the late composer rang out at dusk. "His songs reached to the bottom of our hearts, all of them, there is not one that does not reach the depths," Leticia Mart?nez, a 63-year-old housewife, told AFP.

### 'Noble soul'

Argentine singer-songwriter Fito Paez said Manzanero "was above all an example for future artists to follow. A noble soul and a beautiful person." Manzanero was born in Merida in the

southeastern state of Yucatan on December 7, 1934, although his birth was only registered a year later. He recorded around 30 albums and some 400 songs over a career spanning six decades. Music was in his blood—his father was also a singer, although Manzanero credited his grandmother for his romanticism. The songwriter was honored in person by the Yucatan authorities this month with the opening of a museum dedicated to his life and work.

"Gratitude is the memory of the heart, and music is the best memory you can carry in your pocket," said Manzanero, who developed a cough after his return to the capital. The songwriter, who was proud of his indigenous Mayan roots and known for his elegant suits, married five times and had seven children.

Mexico has registered more than 122,000 coronavirus deaths—the world's fourth-highest toll after the United States, Brazil and India. News that one of the country's iconic musicians had joined the victims triggered shock and sorrow on the streets of the capital. "Of course, as Mexicans we will always remember him, and when we are somewhere and we have the opportunity to listen to his music, we will do so remembering the great Manzanero," said Mexico City resident Jose Luis Ramirez. — AFP

## Rio de Janeiro to block beach access on New Year's Eve

Rio de Janeiro authorities announced Monday they will block beach access the night of December 31 to prevent crowds in one of Brazil's worst-hit cities by the coronavirus pandemic. The measures will include a ban on vehicles along some 30 kilometers (19 miles) of Rio's coastline, where millions of people typically

gather every December 31 to ring in the new year with elaborate firework displays. Only inhabitants of the surrounding neighborhoods will be able to walk in the area. Violations may be punished with fines of up to 15,000 reais (\$2,800).

"We have to send a hard and direct message to the population," said Alexandre Cardeman, chief of the Rio

Operations Center, which is in charge of security and traffic video surveillance. "What we want to make clear, beyond those restrictions, is that a lot depends on us," he said. "Spend a conscious New Year and stay at home." Last week, the mayor's office announced that entry would be forbidden to the Copacabana neighborhood, the center of traditional

New Year's festivities, from 8:00pm on December 31. Police barriers will be erected to block both public transport and private vehicles, and the subway will stop circulating in those areas.

The mayor's office had initially planned a virtual celebration with online music shows but canceled any official events two weeks ago. Brazil, with more

than 191,000 deaths, has the second-highest death toll from the coronavirus pandemic, after the United States. In Rio alone, the death toll is more than 15,000, with a mortality rate of 216 per 100,000 inhabitants—more than double the national average.— AFP



## Sports

## Photo of the Day



Nasser Al-Attiyah and Matthieu Baumel of Toyota Gazoo Racing SA perform during testing in Dubai. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

China drops 76ers  
NBA broadcasts as  
HK row rumbles on

BEIJING: Chinese streaming giant Tencent has stopped live broadcasts of games by the NBA's Philadelphia 76ers in apparent protest at their new president Daryl Morey, who sparked a row by voicing support for Hong Kong (HK) protesters last year. Tencent has been offering text updates only for Sixers games as well as those involving the Houston Rockets, Morey's former employer. It also refused to screen Rockets games last season.

State broadcaster CCTV, which holds China's exclusive TV rights for the NBA, has not aired any games since the season opened on December 22. Tencent's refusal to stream Sixers and Rockets games, and CCTV's continued black-out, extends a year-long stand-off in the NBA's biggest international market that has cost it hundreds of millions of dollars. Morey, then the Rockets' general manager, tweeted "Fight for Freedom, stand with Hong Kong" in October 2019, referring to the pro-democracy protests that Beijing calls separatist and seditious.

When the NBA backed Morey's right to free speech, CCTV responded by pulling broadcasts, although it made a "goodwill" gesture by airing Game 5 from the NBA Finals series in October. Tencent has continued streaming games, but only text updates were available for the Sixers' season-opening win over the Washington Wizards on December 23. Two other Sixers games over the weekend - against the New York Knicks and Cleveland Cavaliers - also had text updates. — AFP

# Morant limps out as Grizzlies record first win of the season

## Portland Trail Blazers down Lakers

LOS ANGELES: The Memphis Grizzlies' first win of the NBA season was a costly one, as Rookie of the Year Ja Morant limped out with a sprained ankle in the first half of a 116-111 overtime triumph over the shorthanded Brooklyn Nets on Monday. Morant rose to block a shot by Brooklyn's French forward Timothe Luwawu-Cabarrot with less than three minutes remaining in the first half, rolling his ankle as he came down and hopping to the baseline where he fell to the court.

He was taken to the locker room in a wheelchair, with the Grizzlies tweeting that the initial diagnosis was a sprained left ankle. Morant watched from the sidelines as the Grizzlies rallied for the victory, standing through the final minutes - a protective boot on his injured ankle. Kyle Anderson led the Grizzlies with 28 points - with a career-best four three-pointers - and Dillon Brooks added 24. It was Anderson who drained three of four free-throws in the waning seconds of overtime, after he'd grabbed the rebound of when Brooklyn's Joe Harris couldn't get a potential game-winning three-pointer to drop with 5.6 seconds remaining.

"You always want to get that first one in the books to start rolling, so this was a big one," Anderson said. "We had to get this one." But the loss of Morant was a potentially huge blow for the Grizzlies. The 21-year-old star had averaged 36

points in the first two games of the season. Caris LeVert led the Nets with 28 points and 11 assists. Brooklyn rested stars Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving - both coming off long injury layoffs after the abbreviated off-season.

The Nets were also without Spencer Dinwiddie, who will have surgery to repair a partially torn right knee ligament suffered on Sunday. The Los Angeles Lakers, heavy favorites to win a second straight title, suffered their second defeat in four games in the new season, falling 115-107 to the Portland Trail Blazers. LeBron James led the Lakers with 29 points, nine rebounds and six assists and Anthony Davis returned from a night off with 13 points and 10 rebounds. Damian Lillard led the Blazers with 31 points and Gary Trent Jr added 28 off the bench as Portland's reserves out-scored the Lakers bench 45-23.

"I thought we came out with great energy," said Los Angeles coach Frank Vogel, whose Lakers seized a 13-point lead in the first quarter. "When they made their runs we weren't able to sustain the energy we began the game with." In Salt Lake City, Utah's Donovan Mitchell scored the Jazz's final 12 points - including the game-winner with seven seconds remaining - and Rudy Gobert shut down Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander at the rim as time expired to give the Jazz a 110-109 victory over the Thunder.

The game marked the Jazz's return to Oklahoma City for the first time since March 11 - when Gobert became the first NBA player to test positive for Covid-19 and league play shuttered to halt, resuming four months later in a quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida. "Obviously you have all the memories coming back," said French big man Gobert, who finished with 12 points, 10 rebounds and four blocked shots. "It's a little bit of a weird atmosphere. "But I'm happy we were able to come back and get the win."

### Jokic triple-double

Although the NBA managed to resume and crown a champion, the pandemic continues to affect the new season with games being played in largely empty arenas. The Houston Rockets, without John Wall, DeMarcus Cousins, Eric Gordon and Mason Jones because of COVID-19 health and safety protocols, fell 124-111 to the Nuggets in Denver, where Serbian center Nikola Jokic had a triple-double of 19 points, 12 rebounds and 18 assists to lead the hosts. Jamal Murray added 21 points before departing after a hard fall in the third quarter and Paul Millsap added 19 points as seven Nuggets players scored in double figures. Rockets star James Harden scored 34 points for Houston, who were still without John Wall, DeMarcus Cousins, Eric Gordon and Mason Jones because of Covid-19 health and safety protocols. — AFP



BROOKLYN: Gorgui Dieng #14 of the Memphis Grizzlies shoots the ball during the game against the Brooklyn Nets on December 28, 2020. — AFP



## Kuwait National Hockey League competitions

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The National Hockey League competitions for men and women for 2020/2021 season were concluded Monday. The 'Stars' team won the men's league with 39 points, although it lost the final match to 'Falcon' by the score of 8/5. Falcon ended in second place with 33 points and 'camels' grabbed third with 28 points.

In the women's competition - 'Blue Waves' won first place with 30 points; 'Wild Cats' second with 24 points and 'Kuwait Gladiators' took third position with 15 points. Director General of Public Authority for Sports Dr Humoud Fulaiteh



congratulated the winners and lauded the success of the Winter Games Club in organizing such local events.

Chairman of the Kuwait Winter Games Fuhaid Al-Ajmi said the game was held in the club's new hall. He said the club will concentrate on preparing Kuwait's national teams (both men and women) in preparation for the Gulf Games to be held in March. Fulaiteh appreciated the sports authority.

## Kuwait first table tennis for ladies

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Treasurer of Kuwait Table Tennis Association (KTTA) Anwar Al-Kandary said the start of the first Table Tennis for ladies will be during the second half of February. It will be in two parts for players born in 2003 and before - with the participation of four teams: Arabi, Fatat, Salwa Al-Sabah and Fatayat Al-Oyoum. Each club can participate with two teams. Al-Kandary spoke during a meeting that was also attended by technical director Sabri Jamaan, administrative director Ahmad Al-Qallaf and clubs' representatives.

Al-Kandary said the board of directors is keen on promoting table tennis among women clubs in



order to broaden the base of female players - adding the "the launch of the first women's league will be an important step forward". He added that the program was organized in coordination with clubs for field visits by the ladies national team coach Belarusian M Anderea to help train the ladies and develop their skills.

## Swedish NHL star goalie Lundqvist to have heart surgery

WASHINGTON: Swedish goaltender Henrik Lundqvist, an Olympic champion and 15-year National Hockey League star for the New York Rangers, said Monday he will undergo open-heart surgery. The 38-year-old netminder signed a one-year free agent deal with Washington in October but said earlier this month he would miss the upcoming NHL season due to a heart condition. "Last three weeks my focus has shifted from training camp and the upcoming season to my health and what I can and can't do," Lundqvist tweeted. "Scheduled for an open-heart surgery now - aortic

valve replacement, aortic root and ascending aortic replacement to be more exact.

"We all have our mountains to climb. Staying positive here and set on the road to recovery."

Lundqvist said he was hoping to help the Capitals win the Stanley Cup as they did in 2018 after failing to capture the title with the Rangers. "A routine physical that was an early physical turned into, 'Well, we need to explore further what's going on with you,'" Capitals general manager Brian MacLellan said last week. "Our doctors, the cardiologists, the specialists, it kept getting deeper and deeper. As we went that far, Henrik got a lot more knowledge of what his situation is and where it's going and what his risk levels are... and his risk level is not acceptable for him to continue to play."

The Rangers, who selected Lundqvist in the 2000 NHL Draft, bought out his contract in September after the emergence of goalies Igor Shesterkin and Alexandar Georgiev made "King Henrik" expendable. — AFP



## Sports

# Chelsea fail to lift mounting pressure on Frank Lampard

## COVID's spike causes Man City postponement

LONDON: Chelsea failed to ease the mounting pressure on manager Frank Lampard as Aston Villa came from behind to earn a 1-1 draw at Stamford Bridge on Monday, as a coronavirus outbreak at Manchester City caused their clash at Everton to be postponed. Lampard's men have now won just one of their last five league games to fall six points behind leaders Liverpool in sixth and having played a game more than the champions. Chelsea also trail Villa on goal difference, despite Dean Smith's men having two games in hand, and the visitors were well worthy of a point.

"Now it's a tough moment and you have to fight through it," said Lampard. "Nobody let me down tonight, everyone worked, we just didn't quite get the rub of the green." Lampard was able to make six changes from the side beaten at Arsenal 48 hours ago. Olivier Giroud was one of those drafted into the side and the French international proved his worth with a precise near post header from Ben Chilwell's cross to open the scoring with his ninth of the season.

By contrast, Smith made just one enforced change from the team that played for 45 minutes with 10 men in Saturday's 3-0 win over Crystal Palace. But Villa showed no signs of fatigue in the second-half and leveled when Anwar El Ghazi turned home his fifth goal in as many games from Matty Cash's cross five minutes into the second-half. "I'm still yet to see a player carried off the pitch with exhaustion," said Smith. "I'm a big

believer in you want to play every game and if they are doing well keep playing them."

### COVID outbreak at Man City

For just the second time since the 2019/20 Premier League match season resumed in June, a match was postponed due to coronavirus infections after a spike at City. The Manchester giants announced on Christmas Day there had been positive tests at the club for players Kyle Walker and Gabriel Jesus and two staff members.

A further round of tests revealed more positives on Monday, reportedly for three players, leading to the Premier League to agree to City's request for the match to be called off. "With the security of the bubble compromised, there posed a risk that the virus could spread further amongst the squad, the staff and potentially beyond," City said in a statement. "Based on strong medical advice the Premier League, in consultation with both clubs, have decided to postpone the fixture."

The club's training ground will now close for an "indeterminate period" with further testing on players and staff to take place before it can reopen. City are due to face Chelsea away in the Premier League on Sunday and Manchester United in the English Cup semi-finals on January 6. "The Premier League Board received medical advice that the match should be postponed," the Premier League said in a statement. "The Premier League continues to have full confidence in its protocols and rules, and the way in which all clubs are implementing them."



LONDON: Aston Villa's Dutch striker Anwar El Ghazi (2nd left) shoots to score the equalizing goal past Chelsea's French-born Senegalese goalkeeper Edouard Mendy (right) during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Aston Villa on December 28, 2020. —AFP

### Leicester pay penalty without Vardy

Earlier, a much-changed Leicester moved up to second thanks to Harvey Barnes' late equalizer in a 1-1 draw at Crystal Palace. 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, James Maddison and Yuri Tielemans among those left on the bench.

Vardy in particular was missed as Kelechi Iheanacho had a first-half penalty saved by Vicente Guaita. Wilfried Zaha's stunning near post volley then put the Eagles in front against the run of play. Vardy was summoned from the bench to find a route back into the game, but instead it was the in-form Barnes who scored an excellent equaliser as he wriggled clear of a number of Palace challenges before firing into the bottom corner. —AFP

## Pochettino favorite to take over as PSG sack coach Tuchel

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain yesterday confirmed the sacking of coach Thomas Tuchel, who had been at the club since July 2018, but did not name his successor. "After an in-depth analysis of its sporting situation, Paris Saint-Germain decided to terminate Thomas Tuchel's contract," the French giants announced in a statement. Argentinian Mauricio Pochettino, the ex-Tottenham coach and a former PSG player, is widely reported to be the favorite to take over.

Tuchel, whose axing was widely reported but unconfirmed last week, managed PSG 127 times in all competitions, with 95 wins, 12 draws and 20 defeats. His trophy haul featured two Ligue 1 titles (2019, 2020) as well as the French Cup and French League Cup in 2020. The 47-year-old German also led the Parisian club to their first ever Champions League final last August, which they lost 1-0 to Bayern Munich. Despite appearing to be adept at man-managing PSG's squad of superstar players such as Neymar and Kylian Mbappe, Tuchel reportedly upset the Qatari-backed club after complaining about an apparent lack of recognition at leading PSG to the Champions League final.

"I would like to thank Thomas Tuchel and his staff for all they have

contributed to the club," said PSG chairman Nasser Al-Khelaifi. "Thomas has put a lot of energy and passion into the job, and we will of course remember the good moments we shared together. I wish him all the best for the future." Less than three months on from the final defeat to Bayern Munich in Lisbon, Tuchel has become the first PSG coach to leave mid-season since Antoine Kombouare was replaced by Carlo Ancelotti in December 2011.

### Barca date looms

Tuchel departs the Parc des Princes having secured a last 16 Champions League clash with Barcelona and PSG sitting third in Ligue 1 - a point shy of leaders Lyon-despite being plagued by injuries, suspensions and coronavirus infections.

Should Pochettino take over, his opening match in charge will be January 6's trip to Saint-Etienne on Ligue 1's resumption after the winter break. Then, on February 16, the Argentinian could face his first massive test against his compatriot Lionel Messi's Barcelona, with the return leg on March 6.

Pochettino was let go after five and a half years at Tottenham in the aftermath of leading the north London side



DORTMUND: This file photo shows Paris Saint-Germain's German coach Thomas Tuchel during a press conference. —AFP

to their first ever appearance in a Champions League final against Liverpool in 2019. Although he has yet to win any silverware the former PSG defender's stock is high in managerial circles. The Parisians will be keen to complete his signing and avoid missing their man who has been linked to the likes of Real Madrid, Manchester United and Barca in recent months. Importantly, Pochettino, like Tuchel, is at ease in man-managing a dressing room crammed with a galaxy of stars.

Neymar has been at the centre of new controversy this week after Brazilian media reported that he is organising a huge New Year's Eve party despite the coronavirus pandemic-claims his lawyers have denied. Pochettino is the son of a farmer from Murphy, in the north of Argentina. He is

known as a stickler for detail, which coupled with his tactical acumen, devotion to an attractive style of play and his popularity amongst Parisian fans, makes him a potentially ideal fit as the new occupant of the PSG dugout.

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

## NFL playoff-bound Bills complete season sweep of Patriots

NEW YORK: The Buffalo Bills, their first AFC East title in 25 years already in hand, completed a season sweep of division rivals New England Monday with a 38-9 triumph at the Patriots' Gillette Stadium. Bills quarterback Josh Allen threw four touchdowns, three of them to Stefon Diggs as Buffalo completed a season sweep of the Pats for the first time since 1999. Allen completed 27-of-36 passes for 320 yards and four touchdowns - setting Bills franchise records for TDs in a season with 34 and completions with 375. He surpassed the marks held by Jim Kelly and Drew Bledsoe.

Diggs caught nine of Allen's passes for 145 yards and three TDs. The Patriots, whose 11-year reign atop the division had already ended, seized a 3-0 lead on a 45-yard field goal by Nick Folk on the opening drive of the contest. But the Bills seized control from there, with a Tyler Bass field goal followed by touchdowns on their next four possessions. Zack Moss scored on a five-yard touchdown run to give the Bills a 10-3 lead, capping a drive that

saw Buffalo convert two fourth downs. Patriots quarterback Cam Newton scored on a nine-yard TD run to trim the deficit to 10-9 after a missed extra point from Folk.

That's as close as the Patriots would get. Lee Smith caught a four-yard scoring pass from Allen as the Bills stretched their lead to 17-9. Allen hit Diggs for a 50-yard touchdown to give the Bills a 24-9 halftime lead, and Allen would connect with Diggs on scoring passes of 18 and eight yards before they both hit the bench for the end of the fourth quarter. The Bills improved their record to 12-3 and moved into the second seed in the AFC, with the Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs assured of the top seed and a first-round bye going into the final week of the regular season. It's the first time the Bills have won 12 games in a season since 1993.

### Washington dumps Haskins

In another development, Washington quarterback Dwayne Haskins was released Monday by the NFL team, days after Covid-19 violations that cost him his captaincy and hours after poor play in a key defeat. Washington Football Team coach Ron Rivera announced Haskins' dismissal a day after the side lost 20-13 at home to Carolina, missing a chance to clinch a division title and playoff berth.

"This afternoon I met with Dwayne and informed

beachside mansion near Rio de Janeiro that started on Saturday and will last until New Year's Day.

Neymar, who is no stranger to controversies over his parties, allegedly even installed soundproofing equipment to try to avoid bothering his neighbors. Leo Dias, a columnist for the Metropoles website who is renowned for his scoops on celebrities, even named the artists due to perform at Neymar's party, such as Ludmilla and Wesley Safadão.

Guests' mobile phones are allegedly due to be confiscated on the door to prevent any evidence finding its way onto social media. Brazil has suffered the second-largest number of COVID-19 related deaths in the world with more than 191,000, while 7.4 million people have contracted the virus. A specialist events agency, Agencia



FOXBOROUGH: Stefon Diggs #14 of the Buffalo Bills avoids a tackle by Terrence Brooks #25 of the New England Patriots to run the ball for a touchdown during the second half at Gillette Stadium on December 28, 2020. —AFP

him that we would be releasing him," Rivera said in a statement. "I told him that I believe it benefits both parties that we go our separate ways. We want to thank Dwayne for his contributions these last two seasons and wish him well moving forward." Haskins took responsibility for his ouster in a tweet, vowing the experience would improve him should another NFL club give him a chance. —Agencies

Fabrica, released a statement confirming it had been contracted for a New Year's event in the Costa Verde region where Neymar's villa is located "that will host around 150 people... while respecting all the health rules determined by the public bodies."

But Neymar's lawyers denied a party had been planned or that the Agencia Fabrica event was related to the football star. "No! This is a Fabrica event. It is not related to Neymar," they told AFP. Neymar's villa is in Mangaratiba, a small town in an area of luxury seaside resorts in Rio de Janeiro state. The local town hall has pleaded with its 41,000 inhabitants not to hold end of year parties and has erected barriers to prevent people congregating. "We don't have any information about this party," the town hall said in a statement sent to AFP. —AFP

## Real resume Atletico chase; Messi absent for Barcelona clash

MADRID: Real Madrid will attempt to sign off the year with a sixth win on the bounce as Zinedine Zidane's in-form side continue their pursuit of La Liga leaders and city rivals Atletico Madrid today. Defending champions Real are level on 32 points with Atletico but have played two games more than Diego Simeone's men ahead of their trip to Elche.

Karim Benzema has been the driving force behind Real's excellent December run, claiming key goals in wins over Athletic Bilbao, Eibar and Granada after securing the club a spot in the Champions League knockout phase. Eden Hazard is also in line to feature after recovering from his latest injury setback. The Belgian was an unused substitute in last week's victory over Granada and has made just three league starts this campaign. Real coach Zinedine Zidane hopes the short festive break afforded to his players over Christmas will not interrupt the momentum built over a domestic five-game winning streak.

"We're going to keep working hard. We have an awful lot of games, we should be pleased with what we're doing," said Zidane. "We're going to lose games again, but we're going to try to win as many as possible. From time to time it's inevitable." Atletico have responded well to the 2-0 defeat by Real earlier this month that snapped their 26-match unbeaten league run. However, the loss of Kieran Trippier is a substantial blow to a defence that has conceded just five goals in 13 matches, easily the fewest in the division.

The England defender, an ever-present for Atletico in La Liga and Europe this term, was recently hit with a 10-week ban for breaching betting rules and will be unavailable until March. The club is said to be considering an appeal. Diego Costa has reportedly asked to terminate his contract for family reasons, having just returned from a blood clot that sidelined the Brazil-born Spain international for a month. Joao Felix is expected to return after missing the 2-0 win at Real Sociedad, although the Portuguese star hasn't scored in the league since November 7.

Barcelona will bid to end a turbulent 2020 on a winning note at home to Eibar, but Ronald Koeman's side will be without Lionel Messi after the Argentine was granted an extended break as he recovers from an ankle knock. The six-time Ballon d'Or winner admitted his aborted departure in the summer had affected him at the start of the season, but stressed he felt "excited" to play under Koeman. "Barca is my life, I'm in love with the club. And the city, my children were born here," Messi said in an interview with Spanish TV channel La Sexta broadcast on Sunday. —AFP



### Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Tottenham Hotspur v Fulham	21:00
beIN Sports HD 1	
Newcastle v Liverpool	23:00
beIN Sports HD 1	
SPANISH LEAGUE	
Granada v Valencia	19:00
beIN Sports HD 3	
Atletico de Madrid v Getafe	21:15
beIN Sports HD 3	
Celta de Vigo v Huesca	21:15
beIN Sports HD 4	
Elche CF v Real Madrid	23:30
beIN Sports HD 3	

## Neymar in new controversy over 'New Year party'

SAO PAULO: Brazil's star footballer Neymar is at the center of a new controversy after several Brazilian media reported that he's organizing a huge New Year's Eve party despite the coronavirus pandemic, a claim his lawyers denied. Acelmo Goes, a columnist for the O Globo newspaper, wrote that the Paris Saint-Germain forward is hosting 500 people for a week-long party at his luxury



**14** Morant limps out as Grizzlies record first win of the season



**15** Pochettino favorite to take over; PSG fire coach Tuchel



**15** Chelsea fail to lift mounting pressure on Frank Lampard



## Resilient India thump Australia

India silence critics, leveling series 1-1



MELBOURNE: Australia's Mitchell Starc drops a catch from Indian batsman Ajinkya Rahane on the fourth day of the second cricket Test match between Australia and India played at the MCG in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

MELBOURNE: Stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane led India to a dominant eight-wicket win over Australia in the second Test yesterday, leveling the series 1-1 and capping an extraordinary turnaround after their record collapse in the opening game. Rahane, deputising during Virat Kohli's paternity leave, hit an unbeaten 27 in Melbourne - after a century in the first innings - as India reached the meagre target of 70 for the loss of two wickets.

It capped a remarkable comeback for an Indian side desperate to make amends after losing in Adelaide by eight wickets, when they posted their lowest ever score of 36 and were widely criticized at home. And they bounced back without superstar and batting mainstay Kohli, who has returned home for the birth of his first child. "Really proud of all the players," said Rahane. "I want to give credit to the debutants (Mohammed) Siraj and (Shubman) Gill, the character they showed after the Adelaide loss was great to see. Character was important for us." Kohli, watching at home in India, tweeted his congratulations. "What a win this is, absolutely amazing effort by the whole team," he

said. "Couldn't be happier for the boys and specially Jinks (Rahane) who led the team to victory amazingly."

### 'Sloppy cricket'

Under the mild-mannered Rahane, India battled hard to dismiss Australia for 195 in the first innings and then posted 326 in reply. Australia resumed their second innings on day four on 133 for six with a two-run lead, and their hopes resting on 21-year-old rookie all-rounder Cameron Green. He made 45 as they battled to 200 before tail-ender Josh Hazlewood was the last man to fall before lunch. Siraj took 3-37 with Jasprit Bumrah, Ravindra Jadeja and Ravi Ashwin grabbing two each.

Rahane and Gill (35) then saw India home, but not before some nervous moments. Mitchell Starc got a nick from the out-of-form Mayank Agarwal (5), which Tim Paine caught, then Pat Cummins snared Cheteshwar Pujara for three, edged to Green at gully.

It left India on 19 for two before they regained their composure to seal the win. "Very disappointed, played poor cricket, sloppy cricket," said

Australia captain Paine. "Let's not take anything away from India, they forced us to make mistakes. They bowled beautifully, we haven't adapted as well as we would've liked. "Disappointed as a batting group, but two Tests to go." To make matters worse for Australia, they were fined 40 percent of their match fee and docked four World Test Championship points for a slow over-rate.

### Match-winner Rahane

Australia had collapsed to 99 for six in the run chase on Monday before Green and Cummins knuckled down to weather 18 overs and steer them to stumps. Green showed glimpses of his magic, cutting Ashwin and driving Bumrah beautifully for fours, while also exhibiting patience. But in only his second Test, he was undone by Siraj, caught by Jadeja as he looked to find the boundary with a pull shot, ending a 146-ball stay. Cummins survived chances on 15 and 19, but when Bumrah took the new ball he finally fell, gloving a rising delivery to Agarwal. Starc was unbeaten on 14 with Nathan Lyon caught behind off Siraj for three, and Hazlewood making 10.

Australia's hopes rested with the tail-enders after their top order failed to fire, exposing the fragile nature of their batting in the absence of the injured David Warner. Opener Joe Burns again flopped, out for four, to put his place in the team for the third Test next week at risk, while Travis Head (17) also disappointed and Steve Smith's poor run continued, gone for eight. Their troubles came despite India being a bowler down following Umesh Yadav's calf strain on Monday, a further setback for a team already missing Mohammed Shami and Ishant Sharma.

But India's weakened attack rose to the occasion, with Bumrah at the top of his game and Siraj impressing, while experienced spinners Jadeja and Ashwin consistently posed problems. But it was Rahane's gritty 112 that ultimately proved match-winning.

He came to the crease with his team in trouble at 64 for three and, against one of the world's most potent bowling attacks, reached a 12th Test century, one that pundits rated as perhaps his most important ever. The third Test is due to start on January 7 in Sydney. — AFP

## Southee celebrates his milestone 300th wicket

MOUNT MAUNGANUI: Swing king Tim Southee celebrated his milestone 300th wicket as New Zealand sensed victory over Pakistan at stumps on day four of the first Test in Mount Maunganui yesterday. New Zealand declared their second innings at 180 for five and Pakistan, set an unlikely target of 373, will go into the final day at 71 for three. Azhar Ali will resume on 34 with Fawad Alam on 21. The Black Caps need to sweep the two-Test series if they are to be in contention to make the World Test Championship final at Lords in June.

In New Zealand's second innings, the Pakistan quicks struggled to get any assistance from the fourth-day wicket, but Southee and Trent Boult immediately had the ball dancing to their tune. Abid Ali fended a rising Boult delivery and was caught behind, while Shan Masood was caught at first slip off Southee and Pakistan were two down for no runs after 14 deliveries.

Azhar Ali and Haris Sohail provided some resistance for 15 overs and 37 runs before Sohail chipped Southee to Mitchell Santner at short cover - making Southee only the third New Zealander, after Richard Hadlee and Daniel Vettori, to take 300 Test wickets. But Southee said the landmark delivery was not the one he was looking for. "I would have loved one to pitch off and nip away and get



MOUNT MAUNGANUI: New Zealand's Tim Southee dives for the ball during the fourth day of the first cricket Test match between New Zealand and Pakistan at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui yesterday. — AFP

caught behind," he said. "But the surface obviously dictates what you're trying to achieve and the wicket is obviously a bit slower so those catches in front of the wicket become important." Southee said the target now was to extend New Zealand's 15-match unbeaten streak on home pitches. "The boys will recover well tonight and turn up with that chance of achieving something special tomorrow." For Pakistan, much hinges on Azhar Ali staying at the crease on a deteriorating wicket if they are to avoid defeat.

"Obviously losing three wickets doesn't help," said the batsman. "You've seen some balls keep low and it (the pitch) is getting slower so it's hard to time the ball. —AFP

## South Africa hammer injury-hit Sri Lanka

CENTURION: South Africa wrapped up victory by an innings and 45 runs shortly after lunch on the fourth day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at SuperSport Park in Centurion yesterday. Sri Lanka, needing 225 runs to avoid an innings defeat, were bowled out for 180. Kusal Perera hit a spirited 64 off 87 balls for the tourists and debutant Wanindu Hasaranga slammed 59 off 53 balls, taking advantage as South Africa seemingly tried to lift their over-rate by rushing through six overs of slow bowling after lunch.

Sri Lanka resumed at 65 for two yesterday but never recovered after all-rounder Wiaan Mulder dismissed overnight batsman Dinesh Chandimal and Niroshan Dickwella in quick succession. Batsman Dhananjaya de Silva, who retired hurt after making 79 in the first innings, did not bat for Sri Lanka. He was ruled out of the rest of the tour with a torn thigh muscle.

Sri Lanka suffered a spate of injuries during the match but bowlers Kasun Rajitha and Lahiru Kumara hobbled to the crease to delay the inevitable. Both suffered groin injuries while bowling. Sri Lanka started the match well, making 396 after winning the toss but an injury-depleted bowling attack conceded 621 runs when South Africa batted, with former captain Faf du Plessis hitting 199. Du Plessis was named man of the match.



CENTURION: Sri Lanka's Kasun Rajitha (right) plays a shot as South Africa's captain Quinton de Kock looks on during the fourth day of the first Test cricket match between South Africa and Sri Lanka at SuperSport Park yesterday. — AFP

It was South Africa's second win in eight matches in the world Test championship. They have suffered six defeats. Sri Lanka have won one, lost three and drawn one of their five matches. Chandimal, who appeared to suffer a groin injury towards the end of Monday's play, resumed his innings yesterday and survived for 40 minutes before being bowled for 25 by a ball from the medium-paced Mulder which cut back off the pitch.

Mulder, 22, followed up by having Niroshan Dickwella caught behind. He provided the control that was missing from much of South Africa's bowling in the first innings during a spell of two for 29 in nine overs. —AFP