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117 of clean fuels project



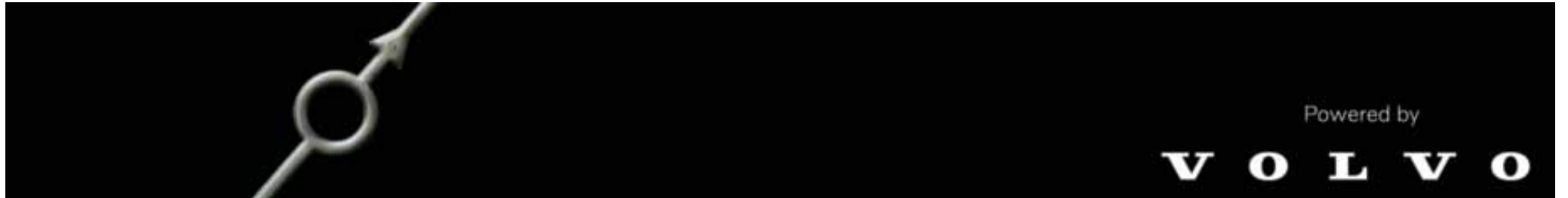
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# Amir, Crown Prince urge MPs to cooperate with government

## Sheikh Nawaf affirms necessity of adhering to constitution, enforcing laws

### MoI extends amnesty for illegal expats

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah yesterday issued a decision extending a grace period for expat residency violators by another month, with the new amnesty ending on Jan 31, 2021. The earlier grace period was scheduled to end today.

Under the amnesty, residency violators were allowed to legalize their stay in the country by paying the necessary fines, or leaving the country - also after paying fines - with the ability to return to the country in the future.

Under the new decision, illegal expats, estimated at more than 150,000, will be given similar facilities. However the decision warned that those who fail to benefit from the new grace period will be penalized in accordance with the law and deported from the country. They will also be barred from returning in the future.



**KUWAIT:** HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and heads of Assembly committees yesterday. — KUNA

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah separately received members of the new National Assembly office at Bayan Palace yesterday, headed by Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. The Amir and Crown Prince urged cooperation between the Assembly and the government and called for strengthening democracy,

respecting the constitution and implementing the law. Present at the meeting along with Ghanem were Deputy Speaker Ahmad Al-Shuhoumi, Assembly Secretary Farz Al-Daihani, Assembly Supervisor Osama Al-Shaheen, head of the legislative and legal affairs committee Khaled Al-Enezi, head of the financial and economic affairs committee Ahmad Al-Hamad, head of the priorities committee Hesham Al-Saleh and Assembly Secretary General Allam Al-Kandari.

Meanwhile, 18 MPs yesterday submitted a new motion calling for setting up a parliamentary committee to investigate events at the opening session of the new Assembly, with the motion insisting that a series of constitutional, legal and moral violations had been committed. The motion calls on the investigation committee to probe the behavior of a section of the invited public, their insults of MPs and causing chaos. It also wants the panel to investigate employees

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### News in brief

#### UK approves low-cost vaccine

**LONDON:** Britain yesterday became the first country in the world to approve AstraZeneca and Oxford University's low-cost COVID vaccine, raising hopes it will help tackle surging cases and ease pressure on creaking health services. The independent Medicines and Healthcare products and Regulatory Agency (MHRA) said the vaccine "met its strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness", and a rollout was set for Jan 4. — AFP

#### US Rep dies of COVID

**WASHINGTON:** A representative-elect from Louisiana died of COVID-19 Tuesday, the first member of the US Congress to succumb to the disease. Republican Luke Letlow, 41, had been elected to Louisiana's 5th district and was due to be sworn in on Sunday. Letlow is survived by his wife, Julia Barnhill Letlow, and two young children. — AFP



Luke Letlow

#### Qatar Amir invited to summit

**RIYADH:** The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) said yesterday that Qatar's ruler is invited to the bloc's summit meeting next week amid efforts to heal rifts between Doha and a Saudi-led alliance. Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani received a "formal invitation" from Saudi King Salman to the Jan 5 meeting of the six-nation GCC in Saudi Arabia's northwest Al-Ula province. — AFP

#### Iran to compensate victims

**TEHRAN:** Tehran will pay \$150,000 to each family of the 176 victims killed when a Ukrainian passenger plane was mistakenly shot down by Iran in January, the presidency said yesterday. Many of those killed were Iranians and Canadians, with 85 Canadian citizens or permanent residents, some dual nationals. — AFP

### Kuwaiti woman gets death sentence for killing Filipina maid

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** A death verdict by hanging was handed by the criminal court yesterday to a Kuwaiti woman who tortured to death her Filipino housemaid, Jeanelyn Padernal Villavende, on Dec 28, 2019. The woman's husband was sentenced to four years in jail for covering up and not reporting the crime.

The Philippine Embassy's lead counsel, Attorney

Sheikha Fawzia Al-Sabah, said the court's ruling was fair and in compliance with the law and sharia. Philippine Ambassador to Kuwait Mohd Noordin Podosina Lomondot thanked the lawyer who represented the Philippine government and the victim. He also thanked the Kuwaiti government for the favorable ruling.

"May the court's decision on the Villavende murder case serve as a reminder to everyone that no Filipino is a slave to anyone, anywhere and everywhere, and that justice will always come to the defense of the weak and the oppressed," a statement by the Philippine Embassy said. Villavende's death certificate from Sabah Hospital said she died due to "acute failure of the heart and respiration as a result of shock and multiple injuries to the vascular nervous system".

On Jan 3, 2020, the Philippines implemented a

ban on sending domestic workers to Kuwait following the death of Villavende. The ban was lifted a month later after consultations with the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the filing of appropriate charges against the perpetrators and after Manila and Kuwait City agreed the full implementation of a harmonized employment contract for Filipino domestic workers.

The agreement signed includes prohibiting employers from confiscating the passports of their housemaids. Domestic helpers also have the right to own a phone, work not more than 12 hours a day, and get enough rest and a weekly day off. They are also prevented from being transferred to other employers without written consent from the worker. There are 230,000 Filipinos in Kuwait, of which 160,000 are engaged in domestic work.

### EU, UK leaders sign Brexit deal

**LONDON:** Britain and the EU signed a post-Brexit trade deal yesterday, setting their seal on a drawn-out divorce just hours before the UK brings its half-century European experiment to an end.

EU chiefs Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel, the heads of the European Commission and European Council, smiled at a brief televised ceremony to put their names to the 1,246-page Trade and Cooperation Agreement in Brussels. "It has been a long road. It's time now to put Brexit behind us. Our future is made in Europe," von der Leyen said.

Continued on Page 2



(Left) Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson gestures after signing the Brexit trade deal between the UK and the EU at 10 Downing Street in London yesterday. (Right) European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel pose in Brussels earlier yesterday with the signed Brexit trade agreement. — AFP

### Yemen airport blasts kill 26 as govt jet arrives

**ADEN:** At least 26 people were killed yesterday as explosions rocked Yemen's Aden airport moments after a new unity government flew in, in what some officials charged was a "cowardly" attack by Iran-backed Houthi rebels. Although all government ministers were reported to be unharmed, more than 50 people were wounded,

medical and government sources told AFP in the southern city, with the casualty toll feared likely to rise.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said it was preparing a "mass casualty medical response plan". As smoke billowed out of the airport terminal from an initial blast, with debris strewn across the area and people rushing to tend to the wounded, a second explosion took place. Video footage shot by AFP appears to show missile-like ordnance striking the airport apron - that moments before had been packed with crowds - and exploding into a ball of intense flames.

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**ADEN:** Smoke billows yesterday after explosions rocked Aden airport shortly after the arrival of a plane carrying members of a new unity government yesterday. — AFP

## Local

# Speaker says honored after talks with Amir, Crown Prince

## Ghanem to convey 'important recommendations' to assembly members



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and members of the parliament's office. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and members of the parliament's office. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and members of the parliament's office met yesterday with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace. In a statement, Ghanem said they listened to many important recommendations and directives from His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince, which would indeed benefit Kuwait and its people. Ghanem added that he will convey all these important recommendations to the members of the National Assembly.

During his meeting with the lawmakers, His Highness the Amir affirmed necessity of constructive cooperation between the legislative and executive authorities, boosting parliamentary action for serving the homeland and the nationals and backing up development. In his instructions to the parliament members, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf also under-

scored necessity of adhering to the National Constitution and enforcing the laws. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince called for constructive cooperation with the government to contribute to national economic development. He also called for further promotion of democratic practices, addressing challenges, respecting of constitution and application of the law.

Speaker Ghanem led a delegation at the meetings featuring members of the assembly bureau for the 16th legislative term. It included Deputy Speaker Ahmad Al-Shuhoumi, the assembly secretary Farz Al-Daihani, parliament's supervisor Usama Al-Shaheen, head of the legislative and legal affairs commission Khaled Al-Enezi, chairperson of the financial and economic affairs committee Ahmad Al-Hamad, chair of the priorities commission Dr Hesham Al-Saleh and the assembly Secretary General Allam Al-Kandari.

Earlier yesterday, His Highness the Amir received



### Amir receives audit bureau's report

## Kuwaiti Amir's envoy delivers letters to Qatari Amir, Bahraini King

DOHA/MANAMA: The envoy of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah, delivered a letter yes-

terday from His Highness the Amir to Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim Al-Thani on regional and international developments, as well as boosting ties in many domains.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad delivered a letter from His Highness the Amir to King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain. The letter highlighted strong bilateral relations, ways of strengthening them in various fields, as well as the latest developments in the regional and international arenas. The envoy delivered the letter to Bahrain's Crown Prince and Prime Minister Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives the audit bureau's annual report.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives the audit bureau's annual report.

His Highness the Crown Prince at Bayan Palace. In the meantime, His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince have separately received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Chairperson of the Audit Bureau Faisal Al-Shaya, who presented to them the bureau's annual report for the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

In other news, His Highness the Amir sent a

cable to Croatian President Zoran Milanovic expressing heartfelt condolences over the victims of an earthquake that struck Petrinja Area. His Highness the Amir wished the injured would recovery rapidly, and that officials would overcome impacts of this natural disaster. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables to President



DOHA: Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim Al-Thani reads a letter from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photos



MANAMA: Bahrain's Crown Prince and Prime Minister Prince Salman Al Khalifa reads a letter to Bahrain's King Hamad Al Khalifa.

## Yemen airport blasts kill 26...

Continued from Page 1

It was not immediately clear what had caused the explosions. Sporadic gunfire was heard soon after.

Yemen's internationally recognized government and southern separatists formed a power-sharing cabinet on December 18, forging a joint front against the Houthi rebels who have seized the capital Sanaa and much of the north. Both Yemeni Information Minister Moammar Al-Eryani and Prime Minister Moen Abdulmalik Saeed said that all the members of the government were safe. "We assure our great people that members of the government are fine, and we assure you that the cowardly terrorist attack by the Iran-supported Houthi militia will not deter us from carrying out our patriotic duty," Eryani said on Twitter.

Saeed tweeted that the "terrorist attack... was part of the war waged against Yemen and its people", but stopped short of accusing the Houthi insurgents. Yemen's government spokesman Rajih Badi called for an international investigation into the "terrorist" attack he said targeted "all members of the cabinet". "It is too soon to accuse any party before an investigation reveals who executed the attack, including (accusing) the Huthis," he told AFP, adding those injured included civilians, security guards and local officials.

Meanwhile, UN envoy Martin Griffiths condemned the attack on Twitter, calling it an "unacceptable act of violence". "I wish the cabinet strength in facing the difficult tasks ahead," he said. "This unacceptable act of violence is a tragic reminder of the importance of bringing Yemen urgently back on the path towards peace." Michael

Aron, the British ambassador to Yemen, also condemned the blasts. "A despicable attempt to cause carnage and chaos and bring suffering when Yemenis had chosen to move forward together," he said. The cabinet members arrived in Aden days after being sworn in by Yemeni President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi in Saudi Arabia, which leads a military coalition against the insurgents. Hadi fled to the Saudi-capital Riyadh after Sanaa fell to the Houthis in 2014.

Tens of thousands, mostly civilians, have been killed and millions displaced in Yemen's grinding five-year war, which has triggered what the United Nations has called the world's worst humanitarian disaster. The new government includes ministers loyal to Hadi and supporters of the secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC), as well as other parties.

While all oppose Houthi rebels, deep divisions have grown between the forces, and the Riyadh-sponsored push to form the unity government was designed to mend rifts. Saudi Arabia has been encouraging the unity government to quell the "war within a civil war" and to bolster the coalition against the Houthis, who are poised to seize the key town of Marib, the last government stronghold in the north.

In recent months, the rebels have stepped up attacks on Saudi Arabia - including its critical oil infrastructure - in retaliation for the Riyadh-led military campaign. Yemen also still hosts a significant jihadist presence, including Al-Qaeda and militants loyal to the Islamic State group, despite two decades of air and drone strikes by the United States. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which the US considers the terror group's most dangerous branch, has thrived in the chaos of Yemen's civil war between pro-government forces and the Houthi rebels. It has carried out operations against both the Houthis and government forces. — AFP



ADEN: A video grab shows the moment an ordnance hit Aden airport yesterday, shortly after the arrival of a plane carrying members of a new unity government. — AFP

## Amir, Crown Prince urge MPs...

Continued from Page 1

at the Assembly secretariat to find how unofficial ballot papers for the speaker's election reached the hands of some MPs.

## EU, UK leaders sign Brexit...

Continued from Page 1

The hefty document, bound in blue leather, was then flown by the Royal Air Force to London for Prime Minister Boris Johnson to add his signature, as the UK parliament began a rushed debate on the deal before the looming deadline. Johnson gave a thumbs up after inking what he called "the beginning of what will be a wonderful relationship between the UK and our friends and partners in the EU". "It's an excellent deal for this country but also for our friends and partners," he said in 10 Downing Street.

Britain will leave the European single market and customs union at 11:00 pm (2300 GMT) today, the end of a difficult year and of a post-Brexit transition period marked by intense and tortuous trade negotiations. The lower House of Commons voted overwhelmingly by 521-73 to back the deal, despite serious opposition misgivings, and the bill was expected to pass the House of Lords later yesterday in an unusually rapid procedure.

Introducing the legislation to ratify it, Johnson told lawmakers it heralded a new chapter for Britain and the EU as "sovereign equals, joined by friendship, commerce, history, interests and values". London and Brussels would work "hand in glove whenever our values and interests coincide, while fulfilling the sovereign wish of the British people to live under their own sovereign laws made by their own sovereign parliament", he added.

Michel echoed the sentiment in Brussels, vowing the two sides would work "shoulder to shoulder" on major issues, including climate change and future health pandemics. Johnson's government only published the accompanying UK legislation on Tuesday afternoon - less than 24 hours before the debate began in parliament and an hour after the EU signing.

The government intended to ram all stages of the 85-page European Union (Future Relationship) Bill

Also, MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari submitted a draft law calling to organize the functions and the status of the chamber of commerce and industry. The bill calls to ban the chamber from interfering in politics and providing any aid to local or foreign political groups. Kandari wrote on Twitter that when politics interferes in commerce, "our funds will be at risk", adding that when a section of merchants benefits by crushing the middle class, "all citizens and the country will be at risk".

through the Commons and Lords in one day, before Queen Elizabeth II formally signs it into law. The last-ditch deal averted the prospect of a cliff-edge separation which would have seen quotas and tariffs slapped on all cross-Channel trade, exacerbating strains in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, which has hit Britain harder than most.

But British fishermen have accused the government of selling them out, while services - accounting for 80 percent of the UK economy - were largely omitted. The City of London faces an anxious wait to learn on what basis it can continue dealing with Europe in the future. Theresa May, whose three-year Brexit-dominated premiership ended in 2019 after she failed to win support for a closer future relationship with the bloc, voiced her unease at the agreement. "We have a deal in trade which benefits the EU, but not a deal in services which would have benefited the UK," she told MPs.

However, an influential faction of arch-Brexiters in Johnson's ruling Conservatives gave their blessing to the EU agreement on Tuesday, and the main opposition Labour party also gave its reluctant backing. Despite objections among some of his own MPs, Labour leader Keir Starmer said neutrality was not an option given the stakes for Britain. "This is a thin deal, it's got many flaws, but a thin deal is better than no deal," Starmer told MPs.

Lawmakers from the pro-European Liberal Democrats and Scottish National Party (SNP) voted against it - with the SNP using the issue to push for a fresh referendum on independence for Scotland. The agreement's impact will play out in the coming months, with UK businesses braced for customs red tape they have avoided for decades in cross-Channel trade.

Meanwhile from Jan 1, there will no longer be free movement of people from Britain to the EU or vice versa. Under the compressed legislative calendar, the European Parliament will debate the Brexit deal after the New Year, but they are expected to eventually nod it through. Pending that, EU member states gave their green light on Monday for the accord to take provisional effect before today's deadline. — AFP

Local

# Parliamentary committees: How they work and why they matter

Where draft laws are discussed before being presented to parliament's floor

By Yasmeena Al-Mulla

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's newly elected National Assembly has concluded the formation of parliamentary committees - always a first step in a new legislative term. Now all eyes are on these newly-elected committees as they are regarded as the 'kitchen of the parliament' amid questions about what legislation they will examine and debate. In this explainer, we examine how the committees operate, their main role and what legislation is likely to dominate at the start of the new legislative term.

## How do events inside the committees affect the public?

The committees are seen as one of the main competencies of the legislative branch as they are the chambers where the MPs discuss each draft law before it is presented to the floor of the parliament for a vote. Therefore, the MPs of each committee have a huge role to play, as they are the ones examining each law under a microscope and determine whether the draft law can move forward or not.

## How are the committees formed?

For the 16th legislative term, there are a total of 22 committees, divided into two different categories: Permanent committees and temporary committees. The permanent committees do not change, whilst temporary committees are suggested at the beginning of every session (the legislative term has a total of four sessions).

Each MP willing to join a committee must nominate themselves - if the number of candidates equals the specific number needed, then the committee is formed unanimously. If there are more candidates than available committee seats, then the 65 parliamentary members vote on the matter by secret ballot.

MPs are allowed to join up to two permanent committees, but can join as many temporary committees as they wish. While an MP can join more than one committee, they are not allowed to be a chairperson or a committee rapporteur (known in Arabic as muqarar) in more than one committee. The head of the committee is charged with chairing and managing the meeting, signing the reports and invites members to the meeting. As for the committee rapporteur, they represent the committee chairperson in their absence, convey the committee's report to the parliament and follow up on reports.

Although each committee deals with the draft laws that affect their responsibilities, each draft law must first go through the legal and legislative committee, as it is tasked with reviewing if the proposal adheres to the Kuwaiti constitution.

## Different forms of committees

Since the legislative branch was inaugurated, several committees were formed. Many are long-

standing, while others are created for special purposes and for a limited amount of time.

Abdulaziz Al-Hudaib, an economic researcher at the National Assembly, explained that when the parliament's procedural law (known in Arabic as laehat al-dakhleya) was first issued in 1963, there were nine committees, each one reflecting more or less a certain ministry.

Then in 1993, a law was enacted to create a permanent committee known as the protection of public funds committee after two major corruption scandals plagued Kuwait that involved the state-owned company in charge of oil tankers and Kuwait's foreign investments, where allegedly KD 1.5 billion in public funds were mismanaged.

The most recent permanent committee was formed in 2013 - the priorities committee (known in Arabic as lajnat al-awlaweyat), which is responsible for deciding which drafts laws make it to the floor for a vote, based on their importance. "This is one of the ways where public opinion affects the committee. The priorities committee often puts forth the laws that are demanded as crucial by the Kuwaiti people," Hudaib told Kuwait Times.

The Amiri speech committee, which basically replies to HH the Amir's opening speech after every



The National Assembly.

committee is created based on specific occasions, usually when a certain crisis or issue arises. In the previous legislative term, an investigative committee was formed to look into the Malaysian funds scandal, known as the IMBD case.

## Response to committee formation

In terms of the current committees, while they have yet to meet, many were quick to criticize their formation on several grounds. The makeup of the committees are a combination of Islamists, independents and 'opposition' members, a broad term used within Kuwaiti politics to refer to MPs that are usually opposed to the government's agenda.

One of the committees that came under harsh scrutiny was the women and family committee, with many pointing to the fact that one of its members, Osama Al-Munawer, has in the past publicly called for imposing harsh measures like enforcing the hijab on all women. Munawer has also previously expressed that he is against appointing women as judges.

In addition, many committees will likely face a deadlock as there are competing agendas by many of MPs. Based on past performance, the interior and defense committee, seen as one of the more important committees, was the slowest committee in terms of discussing proposed laws during the past term.

"There were political reasons why this committee took its time and it was mainly because the members did not want to change the electoral law, so they purposefully delayed it," Hudaib explained. The MP who has joined the most number of committees is Saleh Al-Mutairi, as he is a member of

one permanent committee and nine temporary committees.

## Critical issues

While any MP and the government are free to present proposals, the draft laws that are usually presented are based on public demands or matters of national importance. Currently, several proposals have been put forth to amend laws such as the electoral law, the amnesty law and the press and publications law.

"These laws are a reflection of what's being demanded on the Kuwaiti streets and therefore will likely be some of the first issues discussed during the term," Hudaib said. In terms of the previous legislative term, one of the main committees that were active reflected important issues being addressed in the country. One of these was the demographic imbalance (where non-Kuwaitis make up 70 percent of the population), which led the human resources committee (a temporary committee) to meet 21 times in the last two sessions, according to the website Raqib 50.

Civil society and non-governmental agencies (NGOs) have a role to play, as they are invited to join committee meetings to share their opinion or expertise on a matter as they are "the pulse of the streets", Hudaib mentioned. Several laws that were passed in the previous legislative term were done with the help of NGOs and civil societies, from the domestic violence law to the press and publication law, which resulted in the end of book censorship. Although many critical issues were brought up, many others went unresolved due to political clashes between the parliament and the government.

“  
Kitchen of the  
parliament  
”

opening session, is a temporary committee, but it is treated as a permanent committee and is the first committee formed at the beginning of every session.

Many temporary committees like the women and family committee, human rights committee, housing committee and the bedoon committee are usually always reinstated every term since the 1990s, as they focus on key issues that have yet to be resolved.

The negative phenomena committee (known as lajnat al-thawher al-salbeya in Kuwait) has been formed almost every term since 2006 to address issues that affect Kuwait's social cohesion. In the past, the committee has proposed banning Christmas trees, combating the appearance of Satan worshipers and punishing public acts of indecency like wearing a bathing suit in public.

Although the current legislative term has so far only formed temporary and permanent committees, if needed, at any time in the upcoming session they can form an investigative committee. This type of

## Kuwait commissions unit 117 of clean fuels project

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has commissioned a naphtha treatment unit (No 117) at Mina Abdullah refinery as part of the mega Clean Fuels Project. The operated unit, with an output capacity of 23,500 barrels per day, cleans the fuel of minerals, sulfur and nitrogen, said Wadha Al-Khatib, KNPC's Deputy Chief Executive Officer at Mina Abdullah, in a statement to the press yesterday. The low-sulfur naphtha is produced according to top international standards, she said, indicat-

ing that the unit had been designed by a pioneering international company, praising the national cadres who overcame obstacles caused by the coronavirus crisis and succeeded in operating a number of units in the project. The KNPC declared in April operating all units of the Clean Fuels Project at Al-Ahmadi refinery while pursuing work to make the same accomplishment at Mina Abdullah refinery. The two refineries are projected to put out 800,000 barrels of high quality fuel a day in the foreseeable future. — KUNA



KNPC's Deputy CEO  
Wadha Al-Khatib

## Kuwait confirms 205 new COVID cases, one death

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's health ministry announced yesterday that it reported 205 new coronavirus infections in the past 24 hours, raising the total to 150,298, while one death recorded over the same period raised the death toll to 933. Meanwhile, total recoveries increased to 146,284 after 228 new recoveries were announced yesterday. The number of patients hospitalized stood yesterday at 3,081, with 46 patients of them in intensive care units, according to the ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad. He added that health workers conducted 2,429 tests during the same period, raising the total number of tests to 1,251,543. —KUNA



## Homeowner arrested for hosting wedding

**KUWAIT:** The interior ministry's relations and security information department said public security officers carried out investigations with regards to a video on social media that showed a wedding in a house and a motorcyclist riding recklessly. The house owner was identified and was detained for violating Cabinet decision 64/2020 banning parties including weddings regardless of where they are held. The motorcyclist was arrested and his bike impounded, as he faces legal action.

## Helper dead

Detectives are working on the case of a Filipina woman who died at her sponsor's house, reported Al-Rai. A security source said a Kuwaiti told operations that he found his domestic helper on the floor of her room. Police and paramedics responded and found she was dead. Forensic officers recovered the body as they suspect the death is not due to natural causes.

## Weapon lost

A lieutenant lost his weapon after he left it in the car and went to pray, Al-Rai reported yesterday. He said when he returned, he discovered that the weapon had disappeared although there were no signs of forced entry on the vehicle. The lieutenant did not accuse anyone and does not know how the thief got into the car. Detectives are working on the case.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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## Local

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launches 'Kuwait  
Digital Memory'

**KUWAIT:** As part of its effort to maintain the intellectual and cultural heritage of Kuwait, the National Library of Kuwait launched yesterday the 'Kuwait Digital Memory' project. The program, launched on the Library's official website, aims to transfer and save a collection of various information and documents of the history of Kuwait into a digital format. In a statement, the National Library said that the program would afford data and pictures of all the special names, dates, and events, as well as saving the material and cultural heritage of the country throughout the years. It also aims at saving and preserving the media heritage and production of Kuwait in readable, audio and visual formats, the statement added.

The library called upon the generous Kuwaiti institutions, people and families to enrich this national project with a copy of their holdings of rare documents and books for digitization. The addition of these documents will make it easier for researchers and people with heritage interest to search for any document, and save copies of them for future generations through the optical character recognition (OCR) technology. OCR technology enables the browser to search the content with the desired word and then access the books and publications that were received in a way that facilitates the search and reading process. —KUNA

Over 7,000 titles in  
Kuwait Virtual Book Fair

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Due to the pandemic, all exhibitions and fairs were canceled in Kuwait, and the International Fairground was and still is being used for medical purposes. The Kuwait Book Fair is the most popular book fair in the region, visited by thousands of people - even from outside Kuwait - in previous years.

This year it was canceled and replaced by a virtual book fair - the Kuwait Virtual Book Fair, organized by the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) and operated by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). The virtual fair was launched last month, and yesterday it was extended till the end of February 2021.

Over 70 publishing houses are participating in the e-book fair with over

7,000 titles. Apart from Arabic books, there are also many English publications from different fields. "The door is open for more publishers to join the fair. During the regular book fair, local publishing houses only used to sell their publications at the fair, but at this virtual fair, these publishing houses have authorization from other publishing houses to sell their publications," Mohammed Al-Hasan, Director of the E-book Fair, told Kuwait Times.

Participating publishers offer delivery services. "Delivery inside Kuwait is free of charge within five days, but usually it's sooner than that. Publishers also provide delivery outside Kuwait for a special price. Also KFAS' publications are available at special discounted prices that reach over 50 percent. KFAS reduced the prices of its publications during the pandemic to

encourage people to read during this extraordinary period. And now there are further reductions in this fair," Hasan added.

The fair is great opportunity to view and buy the latest publications. "People wait for the book fair to check out the latest books that were published this year. There are many new publications in 2020, and the fair's website is systematically updated. Also, we have many individual publishers such as some authors who are personally participating in this fair with their books," stressed Hasan.

There are cultural and scientific activities too at the E-book Fair. "In cooperation with NCCAL, we have online seminars and symposiums on social media on literature, sciences and other fields. We also review participating books to allow the visitors to get an

معرض الكويت الافتراضي للكتاب  
Kuwait Virtual Book Fair

idea about them," concluded Hasan. You can visit the E-book Fair on the website <https://ebookfair.nccal.gov.kw/>

Kuwaitis make  
achievements  
in 2020

**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti photographers won awards for distinguished pictures and shooting, while Kuwait Red Crescent Society added to its long record of humanitarian achievements in 2020. The following are highlights of such accomplishments, also chronicling awards won by the Kuwaiti inventor Jenan Al-Shehab in the passing year:

**Feb 16:** The Central Blood Bank of Kuwait was recognized by the American Association of Blood Banks (AABB), the first Arab body to win this recognition.

**June 7:** Kuwaiti photographer Talal Al-Rabah won the top award of Hamdan bin Mohammad Al-Maktoum for optical photographing for his shot, "the North Pole King."

**July 7:** KFAED Director-General Abdulatif Al-Hamad and the Kuwaiti astronomer Saleh Al-Ojairi won KFAS Award for their contributions locally, regionally, and internationally.

**July 26:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society distributed Eid clothes to 5,000 limited-income families.

**Aug 4:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society launched a donation campaign to aid Lebanon in aftermath of the Beirut port blast.

**Aug 6:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society dis-

patched a planeload of relief supplies to Lebanon in aftermath of the Beirut port bombing.

**Aug 15:** The Kuwaiti photographer Majed Al-Zuabi won the Grand Award in the international birds photography competition.

**Aug 19:** Kuwait Alms House donated medical equipment to Azerbaijan.

**Aug 29:** The Kuwaiti engineer Jenan Al-Shehab won two awards and the gold medal at Toronto inventions exhibition for inventing electromagnetic cells for wireless power transmission to charge electronic devices.

**Sept 7:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society opened a field hospital in Hadramot, Yemen.

**Sept 10:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society sent a convoy of relief supplies to Lebanon following the explosion that ripped through Beirut port.

**Nov 24:** Minister of Public Works Rana Al-Fares declared the start of receiving citizens' request online for houses' construction in Al-Mutlaa.

**Nov 25:** Kuwait won the Arab League's government distinctiveness award and Kuwait Municipality Director-General was awarded as the top municipal chief in the Arab world.

**Dec 4:** Member of the teaching staff at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) Dr Salah Al-Ali won the gold medal for the patent office candidates of the GCC at the Seoul International Invention Fair (SIIF) 2020 for a device that avoids the sudden death of children during sleep.

**Dec 11:** Islamic Educational, Scientific and



Kuwaiti photographer Talal Al-Rabah.

Cultural Organization (IESCO) registered four sites in Kuwait including Kuwait Towers, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber castle, Boubyan Island, and Mubarak Al-Khabeer marine reserve in the initial list of 44 Islamic cultural sites in six countries.

**Dec 16:** UNESCO included Kuwait Al-Sadu weaving in its list of Intangible Heritage.

**Dec 16:** UN Environment Programme (UNEP) announced that Kuwaiti engineer Fatmah Al-Zalzalha won the champions of the earth award for 2020. The list of winners included seven other individuals.

**Dec 17:** Kuwaiti engineer Jenan Al-Shehab won several accolades at Taiwan's Kaohsiung International Invention and Design EXPO (KIDE) 2020. —KUNA

**July 26:** KRCS distributed clothes for 5,000 families during Eid holidays.

**Aug 4:** KRCS launched a donation campaign for the Lebanese people following Beirut Port's devastating explosion.

**Aug 6:** KRCS sent plane-load of humanitarian supplies and medical equipment for the Lebanese people.

**Aug 19:** Kuwait Zakat House donated medical equipment for kidney patients in Azerbaijan.

**Sept 7:** KRCS opened a field hospital in Hadhramawt, Yemen.

**Sept 10:** KRCS sent a convoy of six trucks loaded with food and medical supplies to Lebanon.

**Dec 14:** KRCS sent 40-tons worth of humanitarian assistance to Sudan to help the country cope with floods and heavy rain.

**Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development**

**Feb 14:** Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) signed a \$5 million loan to fund a road project in Cameroon.

**March 24:** Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) provided a \$30 million grant to support the Kuwaiti government efforts against the coronavirus.

**Nov 15:** KFAED signed with UNICEF a grant accord worth KD 1.2 million (\$4 million) for efforts against the novel coronavirus at refugees' sites in Syria. —KUNA

Kuwait spends  
millions of dollars  
in aid in 2020

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait earmarked millions of dollars' worth of aid for the needy at the local and external levels in 2020. The following are some of the recorded relief assistances provided by Kuwait to those in need locally and abroad in the passing year.

## Humanitarian Assistance

**Jan 22:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) delivered aid to the floods and heavy rain-devastated Djibouti.

**Feb 20:** Kuwait relief aid society signed a \$1.33 million agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to aid refugees in Yemen and Iraq.

**May 5:** The Kuwaiti Relief Society delivered \$600,000 to the UN Human Settlement Program-the Gulf chapter.

**May 22:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society equipped 115 apartments for medical personnel at Jaber Al-Ahmad district.

Ooredoo Kuwait  
recognized by Kuwait  
Red Crescent Society

**KUWAIT:** Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, was honored yesterday, Wednesday, 30 December 2020, by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society for its distinguished voluntary role in which a group of Ooredoo Kuwait employees volunteered to support the society throughout the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. The honoring ceremony was held at the association's headquarters in the Shuwaikh area, with the presence of the Dr Hilal MUSAED Al-Sayer, Chairman of Board of Directors, Anwar Abdullah Al-Hasawi, Deputy Chairman, Maha Al-Barjas, General Secretary - Kuwait Red Crescent Society, Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, and Fatima Dashti, Senior Manager, Public Relations, Ooredoo Kuwait in addition to the presence of other entities.

During the honoring ceremony, Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "We always strive to enhance our pioneering role in humanitarian work that supports the community and its individuals, and our partnership with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society has resulted in many achievements in the field of humanitarian work. Today, I grant this recognition to our valued employees who have put efforts and given all support throughout the global crisis, which came with the guidance of Ooredoo's Executive Management."

It is worth highlighting that 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



KUWAIT: KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer (left) and Deputy Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi (right) honor Ooredoo's Mijbil Alayoub (second left) and Fatima Dashti.

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.

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 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) situation in the country.

The Kuwait Red Crescent Society is one of the leading Kuwaiti beacons in the field of humanitarian work, and it is noteworthy that this cooperation was not the first between Ooredoo Kuwait and the Kuwait Red Crescent Society. The collaboration was established based on their belief in the importance of collective work, solidarity, and cooperation in the face of crises and challenges through humanitarian work that support the society.

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Chinese court jails 10 Hong Kong activists for up to three years

## Ethiopia's Tigray conflict revives disputes over land



BUENOS AIRES: Pro-choice activists celebrate outside the Congress after the Senate approved a bill to legalize abortion yesterday. —AFP

# Argentine Senate passes abortion bill

## Thousands of pro-choice activists celebrate on the streets

**BUENOS AIRES:** Argentina yesterday became one of only a handful of South American nations to legalize abortion, a landmark decision in a country where the Catholic Church has long held sway. Senate president Cristina Kirchner confirmed the vote, after more than twelve hours of debate, with thousands of pro-choice activists celebrating on the streets of capital Buenos Aires.

Hundreds of thousands of illegal terminations are carried out every year with at least 3,000 women dying after backstreet abortions since the 1980s, said President Alberto Fernandez, who proposed the bill earlier this year. "After so many attempts and years of struggle that cost us blood and lives, today we finally made history," protester Sandra Lujan, a 41-year-old psychologist, said after the vote. "Today we leave a better place for our sons and daughters."

The landmark bill in the country of 44 million succeeded despite strong opposition from Evangelical Christians and traditional Roman Catholics - with Pope Francis tweeting his tacit disapproval of change

ahead of the vote. Human Rights Watch Americas Director Jose Miguel Vivanco hailed the decision as a historic step, and hoped it would energize other governments to legalize abortion in Latin America. "The criminalization of abortion has failed. It's time to end it," he tweeted.

The new legislation will allow voluntary terminations up to 14 weeks of pregnancy, and was approved 38 to 29 with one abstention. The vote overturns a similar one in 2018 which - although also passed the lower house - ultimately foundered in the Senate by 38 votes to 31.

Only Uruguay, Cuba and Guyana and Mexico City allow voluntary terminations in South America, which has some of the most restrictive abortion laws in the world. In El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, it is banned, and women can be sentenced to jail even for having a miscarriage. In Argentina, terminations were previously allowed in only two instances: Rape, and danger to the mother's life.

### 'Legislate for everyone'

The bill was proposed by President

Fernandez and passed the Chamber of Deputies on Dec 11. "I'm Catholic but I have to legislate for everyone. Every year around 38,000 women are taken to hospital due to (clandestine) abortions and since the restoration of democracy (in 1983) more than 3,000 have died," Fernandez said earlier. After the law was passed, Fernandez tweeted: "Today we are a better society that expands rights to women and guarantees public health."

Earlier yesterday, Pope Francis, who is Argentine, tweeted: "The son of God was born discarded to tell us that every person discarded is a child of God." While not explicitly mentioning the vote, his comment was interpreted by many as encouraging the senators to vote against the bill. More than 60 percent of Argentines call themselves Catholic, according to a 2019 survey by the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (Conicet).

Another Conicet survey this year found more than half of Argentina's Catholics supported abortion only in some limited circumstances - with around 22 percent sup-

porting it, and roughly 17 percent rejecting it in all cases. "The interruption of a pregnancy is a tragedy. It abruptly ends another developing life," said Ines Blas, a senator from the ruling coalition. However, Senator Silvina Garcia Larraburu, from the same coalition, said she would vote for the bill this time despite being against it in 2018.

### Love for all children

Despite measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, thousands of pro-choice and anti-abortion demonstrators had gathered outside parliament ahead of the vote, following the debate on giant screens. Pro-choice activists have campaigned for years to change the abortion laws that date from 1921, adopting a green scarf as their symbol.

Anti-abortion activists, who recently started wearing light blue scarves, expressed sadness after the vote passed. Social law changes have always been slow in Argentina: Divorce was legalized only in 1987, sex education introduced in 2006, gay marriage approved in 2010 and a gender identity law passed in 2012. —AFP

## Germany daily virus deaths top 1,000

**BERLIN:** Germany's daily coronavirus death toll crossed 1,000 for the first time yesterday, with politicians predicting an extension of the country's partial lockdown beyond the current January 10 deadline. A total of 1,129 deaths were reported by the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) disease control center, breaking the previous daily record of 962 logged last yesterday. There were 22,459 new daily infections, the RKI said.

"The infection and death figures show that we are still very far from normality," Health Minister Jens Spahn told reporters in Berlin. "I don't see how, in this situation, we can return to how things were before the lockdown," he added. An apparent drop in new infections and deaths in recent days was a result of local authorities not sending in their data over the Christmas period, the RKI said.

Germany is under a partial lockdown until January 10, with most shops closed along with schools, restaurants, cultural and leisure facilities. New Year's Eve festivities will be muted, with a ban on the sale of fireworks and tight restrictions on the number of people who can gather in public. "It will probably be the quietest New Year's Eve that Germany can remember," Spahn said.

### 'Nowhere near'

The health minister had on Tuesday told German broadcaster ARD that the country was "nowhere near where we need to be" and "there will undoubtedly be measures" after Jan 10. Chancellor Angela Merkel and leaders of Germany's 16 federal states will meet on Jan 5 to decide on future measures. Armin Laschet, the leader of Germany's most populous state of North Rhine-Westphalia, told the DPA news agency that "no one can seriously raise this hope" of restrictions ending soon.

Berlin mayor Michael Mueller also told the ZDF broadcaster he believes "we will have to continue to live with restrictions" for some time. The eastern regions of Saxony and Thuringia remain hotspots in the country, with 330 and 255 infections per 100,000 inhabitants respectively.

### Vaccination delays

More than 32,000 people have now died from the virus in Germany, which appeared to fare relatively well in the spring but has been hit hard by a second wave. The country began its vaccination drive on Saturday, with a 101-year-old woman in a care home becoming the first person to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech jab. Around 78,000 people have so far received a first dose of the vaccine, data released Wednesday said.

But some German regions have reported delays in receiving and administering doses. Berlin's health minister Dilek Kalayci said Wednesday that the city-state would be suspending its campaign until January 11 after a planned delivery of almost 30,000 doses was cancelled. Britain yesterday approved a second coronavirus vaccine developed by Oxford University and AstraZeneca, which is cheaper and easier to transport than the Pfizer-BioNTech jab. —AFP

## Israel gives hero's welcome to US spy Pollard

**JERUSALEM:** Jonathan Pollard, an American jailed in the United States in 1985 for spying for Israel, landed in the Jewish state yesterday to a hero's welcome led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Pollard, 66, served 30 years in prison for passing on classified documents when he served as a US Navy intelligence analyst, and had been confined to the United States under his parole terms since his 2015 release. After years of Israeli lobbying to allow Pollard, a Jewish American, to leave, the US Justice Department removed the terms and conditions last month. Pollard and his wife Esther arrived in Israel before dawn Wednesday and were seen walking off a plane towards a waiting Netanyahu, who raised his hand in welcome, in a

video distributed by the prime minister's office.

Pollard, with a kippa skullcap and a long white beard, then removed his face mask, got down on his hands and knees and kissed the ground, with Esther following suit. Netanyahu and Pollard said traditional Jewish blessings before the premier handed an Israeli identity card to the old spy, who was granted citizenship in 1995. "You're home," the Israeli premier told the two.

### 'Ecstatic to be home'

Pollard's arrival was widely celebrated, with President Reuven Rivlin and other politicians sending welcome tweets. The authority in charge of Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv released a recording of the pilot requesting permission to land. The Pollards flew in on a private jet owned by Jewish-American casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, which touched down just before 3 am, said transport sector journalist Itay Blumental.

Pollard said he and Esther were "ecstatic to be home at last after 35 years, and we thank the people and the prime minister of Israel for bringing us home". "We hope to become productive citizens as soon and as quickly as

possible and to get on with our lives here." The former spy and his wife then went into quarantine, after which they plan to move to a home in Jerusalem, Israeli lawyer Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, who represented Pollard, told army radio. —AFP



Jonathan Pollard, an American jailed in the US in 1985 for spying for Israel, and his wife Esther pose for a picture on board a private jet heading to Israel from the US yesterday. —AFP

## Mask up: S African cops enforce 'zero tolerance' drive

**JOHANNESBURG:** "Go home - I could arrest you for that." The blunt message came from the policeman armed with a gun and a night stick. It can have left no doubt in the mind of its recipient - a citizen deemed to be breaching South Africa's tough new anti-COVID rules. The country's security forces stepped up checks in Johannesburg streets on Tuesday evening, under orders to implement what the authorities called a "zero-tolerance approach" to violators.

The restrictions wind back the clock to the early months of the coronavirus pandemic in South Africa. Announced on Monday by President Cyril Ramaphosa, they include a new ban on alcohol sales, the cause of

accidents and violence that strain hospital resources. The wearing of masks in public space has become mandatory, and potentially punishable by jail. Bars and restaurants are being ordered to close from 8 pm, which is followed an hour later by a 9 pm-6 am curfew.

Ramaphosa - like other leaders grappling with the pandemic's second wave - pointed the finger at social events and the holiday period for sapping vigilance. "We have let down our guard, and unfortunately we are now paying the price," he said. Coronavirus has claimed more than 27,500 lives in South Africa, the highest on the continent. The country also became the first to notch up more than a million recorded cases, in a population of 59 million.

As the curfew began on Tuesday, several dozen police cars fanned out across rundown districts in Johannesburg, a city of five million people, to get the message across. As the patrols passed by, shadows flitted away into the darkness. A young girl and a boy were captured in the car headlights, but by the time the police got out of their vehicle, they had already disappeared.

Further up the street, a dozen police cars formed a



JOHANNESBURG: A South African Police Service (SAPS) officer gestures towards his watch while asking a pedestrian why he is not home before the new curfew time on Tuesday. —AFP

roadblock, stopping any traffic and checking the driver. "From 9 o'clock, there is no movement," a policeman told the driver of a minibus taxi. "Wear your mask, chief," he ordered the driver before getting onboard to carry out a search for booze. —AFP

## International

## Biden says Trump vaccine plan falling 'far behind'

## Trump lashes out at Republican leaders over looming veto override

WILMINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden on Tuesday vowed a relentless effort to fight COVID-19 the moment he takes office, as he warned that Donald Trump's vaccination drive was falling dangerously short. Speaking after a briefing by experts, Biden promised that as president he will undertake the "greatest operational challenge we've ever faced as a nation" to inoculate against the illness that has claimed more than 1.7 million lives globally. "The Trump administration's plan to distribute vaccines is falling far behind," Biden said, promising: "I'm going to move Heaven and Earth to get us going in the right direction."

The Trump administration had predicted that 20 million Americans would be vaccinated by the end of December. With less than three days left, some 2.1 million have received the first shot of the vaccine, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Biden, who takes office on January 20, confirmed that he would invoke the Korean War-era Defense Production Act to force private industry to step up vaccine production for the government. He also implored Americans to wear masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and said he would impose a mandate on face covers in areas where the federal government has jurisdiction, such as airplanes. "We're planning a whole-of-government effort and we're going to work to set up vaccination sites and send mobile units to hard-to-reach communities," Biden said. "We're going to make sure vaccines are distributed equitably so every person can get one, no matter the color of their skin and where they live."

He voiced confidence of a return to normality in 2021 — but not immediately. "We might not see improvement until we're well into March as it will take time for our COVID response plan to begin to produce visible progress," Biden said. "The next few weeks and months are going to be very tough—a very tough period for our nation, maybe the toughest during this entire pandemic."

The US recorded 245,500 new cases of COVID-19



WILMINGTON, DE: US President-elect Joe Biden acknowledges the press while departing the Queen Theater after addressing the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on Tuesday in Wilmington, Delaware. — AFP

on Tuesday, and 3,223 more deaths, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins university. The country has notched up more than 19.5 million cases and more than 337,000 deaths since the pandemic began, both the worst tolls in absolute terms globally.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump, facing a humiliating first veto override of his presidency, lashed out at Republican leaders in Congress on Tuesday as relations soured ahead of a crucial pair of runoff elections in Georgia that could determine control of the Senate. The 74-year-old Trump, in a series of tweets from his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, where he is on vacation, took aim at erstwhile close ally Senator Mitch McConnell, the powerful Republican Majority Leader.

"Weak and tired Republican leadership will allow the

bad Defense Bill to pass," Trump said of the looming veto override by the Senate of his veto of the National Defense Authorization Act.

"A disgraceful act of cowardice and total submission by weak people to Big Tech," said Trump, who vetoed the defense bill in part because it does not repeal Section 230, a federal law that provides liability protection to internet companies. "Negotiate a better Bill, or get better leaders, NOW!" he said. "Senate should not approve NDAA until fixed!!!" Trump also criticized McConnell's refusal to allow a vote in the Senate to increase coronavirus relief payments to Americans to \$2,000 from \$600, a move approved by the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives already with wide bipartisan support. — AFP

year but it continued activities illegally, he added. The move sparked an angry reaction from the Islamist group, which vowed to carry on despite the ban.

"They can ban FPI but they cannot stop our struggle to defend the country and religion," said group spokesman Novel Bamukmin. "If we want, we can declare a new Islamic organization this afternoon. If it's banned again, we will do it again... We're here to stay," he added. Police arrested the FPI's firebrand leader Rizieq Shihab two weeks ago over allegations he breached coronavirus restrictions after holding a series of sermons with tens of thousands of followers.

## 'Moral revolution'

The arrest came just days after Jakarta police shot dead six FPI followers in a highway shootout. If found guilty, Shihab could face up to six years behind bars. Shihab was welcomed by tens of thousands of followers on his return last month from Saudi Arabia where he fled shortly after police named him a suspect in a pornography case in 2017. He remained in exile for three years. Since his return, he's called for a "moral revolution", stirring concerns about the group's bid to boost its political power. Basuki, who is Christian, was sentenced to two years in prison for blasphemy. — AFP

## Indonesia bans hardline Islamic Defender's Front

JAKARTA: Indonesia has banned an influential hardline Islamic group as police held its leader in custody over allegations he violated virus protocols by holding mass gatherings, the country's chief security minister said yesterday. The order bans the Islamic Defender's Front (FPI) from holding activities or using its name in public, effectively yanking its ability to legally operate.

The politically powerful group was long-notorious in the world's most populous Muslim majority nation for targeting night clubs and other establishments it deemed "immoral". It has also attacked minority Muslim sects it considers "deviant". "The government prohibits and will stop any FPI activities because they do not have legal standing as a mass organization," chief security minister Mahfud MD told reporters in Jakarta yesterday. The group's license to operate had expired last



BOGOR, Indonesia: In this file photo taken on November 13, 2020, Muslim cleric Rizieq Shihab (center), leader of the Indonesian hardline organization FPI (Front Pembela Islam or Islamic Defenders Front), gestures to supporters as he arrives to inaugurate a mosque in Bogor. — AFP

## UK pet owners have bone to pick with post-Brexit travel rules

LONDON: Vets, pet owners and others in Britain are bracing for new and potentially costly bureaucracy from Friday, when the UK ends participation in the EU passport scheme for cats and dogs. Britain will be in a new category-known as Part 2 listed status-under European Union pet travel rules, and no longer able to utilize passports which had permitted seamless continental feline and canine journeys.

Among the changes, pet owners in mainland Britain will now have to get an animal health certificate (AHC) no more than 10 days before travel to the EU and Northern Ireland. Although the new regime is less onerous than if the UK had not been granted so-called listed status, it has left owners and others involved in pet travel unimpressed.

"This health certificate is a new thing and obviously added bureaucracy," said Stuart Pearson, who with his wife Carole has eight dogs-five Dalmatians and three Bracco Italianos-that regularly compete in shows in Europe. "That is going to add to the expense of going abroad... pet travel's not the cheapest anyway," added

the 42-year-old, from Gateshead, northeast England.

He predicted making fewer trips to Europe compared to the 15-20 they have typically made annually in recent years, and with fewer of his dogs in tow to save money. Pearson, who voted against Brexit in 2016, is irked the rules will change for British-based pet owners, but that the UK government opted to maintain the status quo for Europeans bringing in their pets. He sees the imbalance as nonsensical given Britain is free from rabies while some European countries are not. "It seems more like a punishment from the EU, because it doesn't make sense to put restrictions on a country that is rabies-free," he told AFP. "I guess something had to change with Brexit but I'm disappointed."

## 'More onerous'

Vets have also greeted the new criteria warily, according to representative bodies. They noted an AHC will be required every time owners travel with their pets from Britain, and expect an overall increase in hassle and costs for all concerned.

"These new certificates and requirements are more onerous than the current pet passports and so there will need to be more forward planning... more trips to the vet," said Daniella Dos Santos, senior vice-president at the British Veterinary Association (BVA). "These animal health certificates are also very complex, so vets have got a very short time to get their heads around how to fill them in," she added, noting the new system was only announced this month.



HONG KONG: This general view shows the outside of 37 Shouson Hill Road in southern Hong Kong yesterday part of a multimillion-dollar property of six mansions owned by the US Consulate General in the city. — AFP

## US consulate HK property sale stuck in row

HONG KONG: A multi-million-dollar property sale by the US Consulate in Hong Kong has been put on ice because it has not received permission from Beijing, the prospective buyer said yesterday. The deal for six luxury pads in a swanky part of the island would have seen the US State Department pocket US\$330 million.

But it appears to have fallen victim to growing tensions between Washington and Beijing, who insisted it was no ordinary property transaction and needed a specific go-ahead. The two countries have been at loggerheads for months over trade, human rights and a clamp-down on Hong Kong, with Beijing increasingly willing to wield its economic power to push back against what it says is American interference in internal affairs.

Hong Kong's Hang Lung Properties had agreed to pay HK\$2.6 billion for the six plots earlier this year. But yesterday, it said the sale could not be completed as scheduled, because Hong Kong's Land Registry had not received written consent from Beijing. The company said it had received a letter from the Land Registry advising that the "sale of the property involves foreign affairs between the People's Republic of China and the US, and should not be regarded as an ordinary commercial activity". — AFP

Meanwhile, others have voiced concerns that Northern Ireland will be treated as an EU member for pet travel and require the new paperwork for arrivals from mainland Britain. The UK province, home to the only land border with the EU, will remain subject to special rules post-Brexit to ensure a free-flowing border with Ireland—a crucial part of the 1998 peace accords that ended decades of sectarian violence. "We're disappointed that... owners will need specific paperwork to travel to Northern Ireland from mainland Britain, for the first ever time," said Ed Hayes, of The Kennel Club, Britain's biggest organization devoted to dog health, welfare and training. — AFP



Britain will be in a new category known as Part 2 listed status under the EU pet travel rules, and no longer able to utilize passports which had permitted seamless continental feline and canine journeys. — AFP

## News in brief

## Boko Haram kill 11 security men

KANO: Landmines planted by Boko Haram jihadists have killed 11 security personnel, including four soldiers in northeast Nigeria, security sources said Tuesday. Seven hunters recruited to help the military fight the Islamist insurgents were killed on Tuesday when their vehicle hit a landmine in the village of Kayamla, outside Borno State's capital Maiduguri. "Seven hunters died in the explosion and nine others are badly injured," Babakura Kolo, the head of a local anti-jihadist militia, said. "Their vehicle hit a landmine as they were pursuing Boko Haram insurgents," he added. Another local militiaman confirmed the incident. — AFP

## Hundreds evacuated in Norway

OSLO: At least nine people were injured and up to 200 evacuated yesterday after a nighttime landslide in a small town north of Oslo, police and local media said. Several houses were swept away in Gjerdrum, home to 5,000 people 25 kilometers northeast of the capital, in the early hours of yesterday. "Several homes have been taken by the landslide. Emergency services, with assistance from the Norwegian civil defense and the military, are in the process of evacuating," Norwegian police said on Twitter. Norwegian media said up to 200 people had been evacuated from their homes and nine injured, though none were in critical condition. — AFP

## Chile reports new virus strain

SANTIAGO: Chile's health authorities said on Tuesday they had detected a case of the new coronavirus strain initially found in Britain, the first such confirmed infection in Latin America. Experts believe this COVID-19 variant to be considerably more contagious than the original strain first detected in China. The case was found in a Chilean woman who returned to the country on December 21 from Madrid, having also traveled to Britain and Dubai. She started displaying coronavirus symptoms upon her arrival in Chile's capital Santiago, health ministry undersecretary Paula Daza said. — AFP

## 15 dead in PNG landslide

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea: Up to 15 people were feared dead after a landslide struck a mining camp in central Papua New Guinea following heavy rain, officials said yesterday. Local MP William Samb said the camp in Goilala was buried as miners slept early Monday. "Unfortunately there are no survivors from what we hear," Samb told ABC, Australia's national broadcaster. "Sadly they were all buried alive." Officials said the exact death toll was unclear, but two bodies had so far been recovered and up to 15 were feared dead. The group was panning a riverbed for gold. Heavy rain and a lack of equipment had hampered local rescuers attempting to dig through the mud. — AFP

## Ethiopia's Tigray conflict revives disputes over land

ALAMATA, Ethiopia: As rifle-toting militiamen fired celebratory rounds into the air, young men marched through the streets denouncing the former ruling party of Ethiopia's Tigray region as "thieves." The party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), is the target of military operations ordered by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, last year's Nobel Peace laureate, that have reportedly left thousands dead since early November.

But the impromptu parade this month in Alamata, a farming town in southern Tigray flanked by low, rolling mountains, was unrelated to any kind of battlefield victory. Rather it was to hail the release of Berhanu Belay Teferra, a self-described political prisoner under the TPLF whose pet issue, analysts warn, risks becoming Ethiopia's next flashpoint.

In 2018, Berhanu, 48, was detained by the TPLF for advocating that his homeland-located in an area known as Raya, of which Alamata is the biggest city-had no business falling under Tigrayan control. Berhanu argued that the TPLF had illegally incorporated the famously fertile land into Tigray after it came to power in the early 1990s. He was detained for more than two years—enduring beatings and long stretches of solitary confinement in a cave-before pro-TPLF forces, fleeing the government's assault in November, let him go, setting the stage for his triumphant homecoming. Now reunited with his wife and four children, Berhanu is back to agitating for the transfer of Alamata and its surroundings to Ethiopia's Amhara region, which borders Tigray to the south.

"We don't want to live with Tigray people, who don't know our culture and traditions," Berhanu told AFP a few days after the parade marking his return—a moment of joy he said was unrivalled by every other event in his life besides his wedding. Raya is not the only place in Tigray where, since the onset of fighting on November 4, some residents have been clamoring for change. A similar dynamic is playing out in western Tigray, where activists and politicians also accuse the TPLF of annexing land historically administered by ethnic Amharas. — AFP

## International

# China jails 10 HK democracy activists for up to three years

## Crackdown on dissent in the territory intensifies

**HONG KONG:** A Chinese court yesterday jailed 10 Hong Kong democracy activists for up to three years over a bid to flee the city by speedboat to Taiwan, as a crackdown on dissent in the territory intensifies. The group were arrested by the Chinese coastguard on August 23 en route to the self-ruled island, which has quietly opened its doors to Hongkongers seeking sanctuary.

The court in the southern city of Shenzhen sentenced Tang Kai-yin to three years in jail and Quinn Moon to two years for organizing an illegal border crossing.

The eight others were sentenced to seven months behind bars for illegally crossing the border. The 10 were also fined up to 20,000 yuan (US\$3,060) in addition to their jail terms. The sentencing follows the imposition of a sweeping new security law in Hong Kong this year that has given the government broad powers to prosecute political dissidents. A number of activists have fled the city for overseas and political organizations have shuttered their doors as Beijing seeks to keep a lid on unrest that rocked the financial hub for months last year.

A total of 12 people were caught on the boat and have been held in custody for more than four months on the mainland. The group were facing prosecution in Hong Kong related to last year's protests before attempting their escape.

They will likely face further charges in the city after serving their mainland sentences.

Two minors from the so-called "Hong Kong

12", aged 17 and 18, were returned to the city yesterday after they admitted wrongdoing, Chinese officials said. The court said it would not pursue its case against them. In Hong Kong, the 18-year-old faces charges of conspiracy to commit arson, while the 17-year-old faces charges of attempted arson and possession of offensive weapons.

### 'Utterly unjust'

Barrister Chow Hang-tung, from the "Save 12" concern group, condemned the mainland legal process as "utterly unjust" as their families and lawyers had been kept in the dark.

"According to the state media's report, the defendants even praised the mainland's justice system, which is very absurd," Chow said. "We can't imagine what kind of treatment they have got in the detention center." The 10 adults first appeared before the Shenzhen court on Monday, but the trial-like many in China's opaque legal system was not open to foreign reporters or diplomats.

Families of the accused were only notified three days before the hearing and were unable to attend due to the short notice and COVID-19 restrictions. Their lawyers were barred from meeting the detainees, with authorities instead appointing state-approved legal representation.

The lawyers said the sentences were too heavy and the allegation of organizing a border crossing was not substantiated. "I think no matter he was sentenced to one day or seven months, every single



**HONG KONG:** Hong Kong's acting chief superintendent of the Commercial Crime Bureau, Cheng Lai Ki speaks to the media in Hong Kong yesterday after the release of the two youngest members of the so-called "Hong Kong 12" held over the border in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen since last August when the 12 were caught trying to flee the territory for Taiwan. — AFP

day is unjust," said the father of jailed activist Cheng Tsz-ho.

### 'Fleeing tyranny'

According to mainland Chinese media, Tang bought the boat in August and learnt basic driving skills for the escape, while Quinn Moon was responsible for communicating with the rest of the

group, urging them to tell the coastguard they were going fishing if caught. They all pleaded guilty to the crime and signed confession papers in the presence of lawyers, said the Southern Daily, a mouthpiece of the Guangdong provincial Communist Party committee. The United States on Monday called for the immediate release of the group, saying they were "fleeing tyranny". — AFP

## Afghan troops abandon 200 checkpoints to Taleban

**KANDAHAR:** Afghan security personnel have abandoned nearly 200 checkpoints in restive Kandahar province in recent weeks, officials said yesterday, in some cases leaving behind their weapons to be seized by the Taleban.

Kandahar provincial governor Hayatullah Hayat and a local lawmaker separately confirmed the situation, saying commanders would be disciplined for their actions. The defense ministry in Kabul denied the reports, insisting government forces had been making progress in the region. Government forces and the Taleban have clashed regularly in Kandahar

province since October despite peace talks between the warring sides.

"Afghan security forces have retreated from 193 checkpoints and outposts in Zharai, Maiwand, Arghandab and Panjwai districts," Kandahar provincial governor Hayatullah Hayat said. "Most of the security chiefs and officers who neglected their duties have been dismissed and referred to the judiciary," Kandahar lawmaker Hashim Alkhozai and a local police officer confirmed the details to AFP.

"The security forces exited the bases leaving behind their weapons and ammunition," Alkhozai said. Most of those who left were soldiers, said Jan Mohammad, a policeman from Zharai district.

"They left without firing a bullet," he said. "The Taleban now have all the weapons seized from the army and are using them against us." Governor Hayat blamed "poor coordination" for the situation amid a shortage of police and troops. Kandahar is the birth-



**Shoppers crowd at a market in Herat.** — AFP

place of the Taleban, who went on to rule Afghanistan with a harsh version of Islamic sharia law until being overthrown by a US-led invasion in 2001. Since a US-Taleban deal in February, the insurgents have mostly refrained from carrying out major attacks on

cities, but have launched near-daily assaults against Afghan forces in rural areas. Peace talks between the two sides—which started in September in the Qatari capital of Doha—are currently on a break and are due to resume on January 5. — AFP

## US 'stands ready' to try mastermind behind Pearl murder

**WASHINGTON:** The US Attorney General said Tuesday the United States "stands ready" to try a militant convicted of murdering American journalist Daniel Pearl whose release was ordered by a Pakistani court. The decision by Sindh High Court to release the accused comes months after it sparked outrage for overturning the murder conviction and death sentence of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, and acquitted three other men connected to the case.

The four are being held under the emergency orders of the local government while an ongoing appeal against their acquittals is heard in the Supreme Court, but defense lawyers argued against their continued detention in the south of the country. "We remain grateful for the Pakistani government's actions to appeal such rulings to ensure that (Sheikh) and his co-defendants are held accountable," acting attorney general Jeffrey Rosen said in

a statement, calling the acquittals "an affront to terrorism victims everywhere."

"If, however, those efforts do not succeed, the United States stands ready to take custody of Omar Sheikh to stand trial here," the statement said. "We cannot allow him to evade justice for his role in Daniel Pearl's abduction and murder." Sheikh, a British-born jihadist who once studied at the London School of Economics and had been involved in previous kidnappings of foreigners, was arrested days after Pearl's abduction and later sentenced to death by hanging.

In January 2011, a report released by the Pearl Project at Georgetown University following an investigation into his death made chilling revelations, and said that the wrong men had been convicted for Pearl's murder. The investigation, led by Pearl's friend and former Wall Street Journal colleague Asra Nomani and a Georgetown University professor, claimed the reporter was murdered by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the September 11, 2001 attacks, not Sheikh.

Pearl was South Asia bureau chief for The Wall Street Journal when he was abducted in Karachi in January 2002 while researching a story about



**KARACHI:** Sheikh Aslam (right), a relative of one of the accused of murdering US journalist Daniel Pearl and his lawyer Nadeem Azhar speak with media representatives outside a prison in Karachi. A court in Pakistan ordered the release of a British-born militant convicted of murdering American journalist Daniel Pearl, who was kidnapped and beheaded in the southern city of Karachi in 2002. — AFP

Islamist militants. A graphic video showing his decapitation was delivered to the US consulate nearly a month later. — AFP

## Sinopharm: Vaccine 79% effective against COVID-19

**BEIJING:** Phase 3 trials of a Sinopharm coronavirus vaccine found it was 79 percent effective, the Chinese pharma giant said yesterday, lower than rival jabs developed by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna but a potential breakthrough in the battle to stem the pandemic in Asia.

China, where the pandemic first emerged, has been racing against the West to develop its own COVID-19 vaccines, with five already in large-scale Phase 3 clinical trials but none officially approved yet. Yesterday's announcement was the first data released regarding the efficacy of a Chinese vaccine candidate. "The protective effect of the (Sinopharm CNBG Beijing) vaccine against COVID-19 is 79.34 percent," said the Beijing Institute of Biological Products, a Sinopharm subsidiary that has been developing a vaccine with CNBG.

Sinopharm has applied to China's drug regulator for approval of the inactivated coronavirus vaccine, the statement said, a type of inoculation using particles of the pathogen. But China has struggled to gain international trust for its vaccine candidates, hindered by a lack of transparency on test results.

It has also been slow to complete Phase 3 trials, which had to be conducted abroad due to China's success at curbing the spread of COVID-19 within its own borders. Meanwhile, Western countries have surged ahead with vaccine rollouts and approvals. Hundreds of millions of doses have been booked from frontrunner candidates by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, which have a 95 percent and 94 percent efficacy rate respectively.

### Vaccine diplomacy

Despite little data and unproven vaccines, more than one million people have already taken unapproved jabs in China under its emergency use program. They include frontline health workers, state-owned enterprise employees and workers planning to travel abroad. China plans to vaccinate millions more this winter in the run-up to Lunar New Year, and officials have vowed to ramp up vaccine production capacity to more than 1 billion doses next year.

The United Arab Emirates approved a Sinopharm vaccine earlier this month, becoming the first foreign country to adopt a China-developed COVID-19 inoculation. Beijing has pledged to share its vaccines at a relatively low cost—a potential boost for poorer Asian countries who are otherwise reliant on limited distribution offered by a global scheme. That also hands China a diplomatic carrot at a time when it has faced widespread criticism led by the US and Australia over



**LIMA:** A health worker prepares a syringe to inoculate a volunteer with a COVID-19 vaccine produced by China's Sinopharm during its trial at the Clinical Studies Center of the Cayetano Heredia University in Lima. — AFP

its handling of the initial outbreak.

"We will also give priority to developing countries for vaccines. This will be made through a variety of ways, including through donations and aid," foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said Friday.

Its inactivated vaccines are more easily transported than Pfizer's candidate, which must be stored at minus 70 degrees Celsius—impossible in most developing countries. As a winter wave of virus sweeps across much of the world spurring fresh lockdowns and grim spikes in death tolls, attention has returned to China's management of the pandemic. — AFP

## Singapore kicks off COVID-19 vaccination drive

**SINGAPORE:** Singapore began a coronavirus vaccination campaign yesterday with a nurse receiving the first jab, making it among the first Asian nations to roll out inoculations.

The city-state, which has suffered a mild outbreak, became the first country in Asia to approve the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine earlier this month, and its program kicked off with healthcare workers.

Nurse Sarah Lim, 46, whose work includes screening suspected COVID-19 patients, was the first to be immunized, the health ministry said. "I feel grateful and thankful for being the first to be vaccinated," the nurse from the national center for infectious diseases was cited as saying by the Straits Times newspaper. More than 30 staff from the center are receiving the first dose of the two-shot vaccine Wednesday, and will get the second next month. After healthcare workers, the city-state will vaccinate the elderly, and then the rest of the population. The government expects to have enough vaccines for all 5.7 million people in the city by the third quarter of 2021, with the voluntary vaccine free for all Singaporeans and long-term residents.

Other countries that have started immunizations include Britain, EU nations, and the United States, although most Asian nations are yet to begin. In China, where the virus emerged, at least one million people have already received jabs after vaccine candidates were approved for emergency use, although they have so far been limited to priority groups such as state employees. The inoculations are yet to receive official approval. Vaccinations have been given in limited numbers in other parts of the region, including to members of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's security team, and to US troops stationed in South Korea.

Singapore has recorded about 58,000 infections, mostly among low-paid migrant workers living in crowded dormitories, and just 29 deaths. — AFP

## India races to find UK arrivals to halt new virus strain

**NEW DELHI:** Indian authorities were trying yesterday to track down tens of thousands of people who entered the country from Britain in recent weeks as cases of a new and fast-spreading coronavirus strain more than doubled in 24 hours. They have launched efforts to locate around 33,000 people who flew to India in the last month from the UK after 20 people tested positive for the new, more virulent strain-up by 14 cases since Tuesday.

India also extended yesterday the ban on flights to and from Britain by a week to January 7 in a bid to combat the new strain that British authorities say is no more deadly, but which spreads more easily.

"Comprehensive contact tracing has been initiated for co-travellers, family contacts and others," the Indian health ministry said Tuesday, referring to those who flew between November 25 and December 23, when Delhi suspended air links with Britain. It remains unclear how many arrivals from Britain it has traced so far. Britain is home to a huge Indian community and several flights per day take hundreds of people from London to New Delhi and Mumbai. — AFP

# Business

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2020

## How Cuxhaven port is navigating Brexit

### Brexit will remain an unprecedented challenge for North Sea port

**CUXHAVEN, Germany:** The German port of Cuxhaven has felt every twist and turn of the Brexit saga, from the shock of the referendum result to the interminable negotiations. Now, with the end of the transition period that has effectively kept Britain in the EU fast approaching, port manager Hans-Peter Zint has only one wish: "It has to finally happen."

But Brexit will remain an unprecedented challenge for the North Sea port long after Britain's newly agreed deal with the EU kicks in on January 1. Around 85 percent of maritime freight to and from Cuxhaven involves the UK, making it one of the harbors worst affected by Brexit.

The scale of the task can be seen from Zint's office. Hundreds of Mercedes and BMW cars from German factories are waiting to be loaded onto a ship that has just arrived from the port of Immingham, on the east coast of England. As it docks, the ship opens its hatches and unloads Land Rovers, made in Britain, destined for the continental market, as well as metal parts for the construction industry.

The operation will take a few hours before the ship returns to Immingham, some 20 hours away. "Today we have no customs formalities to carry out, but in the future they will apply to 85 percent of our goods. It's uncharted territory for Cuxhaven," Zint said. This is not the case for other large ports nearby, such as the mighty Hamburg, which are less dependent on British clients and more accustomed to trading outside the EU.

#### Climate of uncertainty

"It's been a lot of preparation over the last three

years," Zint said, exhausted by the climate of uncertainty that has prevailed since 2016. "There comes a time when you say to yourself, 'It has to finally happen.'" The German car industry will be one of the first to feel the consequences of Brexit. The UK was the largest export market for German car manufacturers in 2019, with nearly 600,000 vehicles, or around 17 percent of automotive exports, according to car industry association VDA. Cuxhaven's preparations have focused on three main strands: training for staff in new customs procedures; a new IT system to facilitate the transmission of customs documents; and the expansion of the terminal and storage areas.

A lot is at stake: Britain was Germany's seventh largest trading partner in 2019, albeit two places lower than before the referendum. "According to our simulations, if every link in the chain does its job well, from seller to customer, the transport times shouldn't get any longer," the manager said. "But these are still only tests, and now we must see if everything works in reality," he added.

#### 'A strange year'

Heavy goods vehicles are constantly flowing in and out of the port at the mouth of the Elbe River.

After a fall in activity in spring due to the pandemic, Germany and Britain worked hard to get as much freight through as possible before the end of the transition period. "It's been a strange year," sighs Marcus Braue, local manager for Danish maritime company DFDS, which operates two daily routes between Cuxhaven and Immingham.

"Most companies are well prepared, but some-



Fishing boats at Cuxhaven port. —AFP

for whom the British market is not central—are just beginning to worry about future formalities," he said. The trade deal agreed on December 24 has finally put to bed the worst-case scenario of a no-deal Brexit, which could have dramatically raised the price of goods transported via Cuxhaven and put a stranglehold on commercial activity.

But the threat of administrative chaos and traffic jams remains. However, Cuxhaven believes it has an advantage over maritime giants such as Hamburg,

Calais or Rotterdam.

"Here, only the trailers are shipped—the drivers don't accompany their goods," Zint said.

"If in the future we're faced with incorrect or missing documents, the trailers can be put on hold without blocking the drivers." The German port therefore hopes to win new customers looking for less congested routes. Zint is even willing to bet that, "In three or five years, Brexit will have blown over. It will be ancient history." —AFP

## Japan, S Korea run with Vietnam coal plant despite vows

**TOKYO:** Japan and South Korea are pushing ahead with a controversial coal plant in Vietnam and will provide \$1.8 billion in loans for the project, despite having announced ambitious pledges to become carbon-neutral on their home turf. The state-aligned Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) said it will lend around \$636 million to the Vung Ang 2 project in central Vietnam, which has come under international criticism and even divided opinion within Japan's government.

Private financial institutions and the Export-Import Bank of Korea will also provide loans, with the total amounting to \$1.77 billion, JBIC said on Tuesday. The 1,200-megawatt Vung Ang 2 plant was first proposed over a decade ago and has received investment from heavyweight firms like Mitsubishi Corporation.

Japan said in July it would tighten rules for investment in foreign coal-fired power stations on environmental grounds, but stopped short of promising to end government funding for projects or axe existing ones. The country also recently unveiled plans to boost renewable energy and phase out petrol cars in a bid to reach its new goal for carbon neutrality by 2050. South Korea has also made a similar pledge this year.

Vung Ang 2 came under fire in May when 127



This file photo taken on September 27, 2011 shows a view of the Belchatow power plant in Belchatow, near Lodz central Poland. —AFP

environmental groups from around 40 countries signed a petition calling on all the Japanese parties involved—reported to include big private banks—to pull out of the project. "It's a real disappointment," Eri Watanabe from 350.org, which signed the May petition, told AFP on Wednesday about JBIC's announcement.

"It shows the Japanese government is not very serious about complying with the Paris agreement and mitigating CO2 emissions," she said. The Global Energy Monitor watchdog said in 2019 that Japan accounted for over \$4.8 billion in financing for coal power plants abroad—particularly in Indonesia, Vietnam and Bangladesh. Japan's Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi has also raised concern over the country's financial support for the project. —AFP

## CEO of T4 operator happy to reopen Kuwait Airport

**KUWAIT:** The CEO of Incheon Korea Airport Services (T4 operator), Kwang Soo Lee, stated to "Kuwait Times" that he is happy to re-open the airport and operate commercial flights again on Saturday January 2nd, 2021 at 4 am after ceasing flights for 12 days, optimistic about the joy of departure and arrival passengers.

He said that everyone is going through a difficult phase in which we must focus in the first place on making trips safe and healthy in order to avoid the epidemic, and this requires cooperation from travelers to be safe by adhering to all the instructions related to this matter.

He stressed the importance of maintaining the application of social distancing and sterilization, pointing out that the health security of passengers is on top priority and concern during the current stage. He pointed out that since the first phase of re-opening the airport, efforts are being made by all workers so that all passengers through Terminal 4 enjoy safe trips until the end of this epidemic.



Kwang Soo Lee

## US jobless to get weekly aid despite Trump's approval

**WASHINGTON:** Jobless Americans who risked not receiving unemployment aid this week due to President Donald Trump's delay in signing off on it will indeed receive the money, the Labor Department said on Tuesday. Congress in March expanded the US unemployment safety net as the coronavirus pandemic struck, creating the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) for freelancers and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) for the long-term unemployed but only funding them until the end of the year.

After months of stuttering negotiations, Congress agreed to reauthorize those programs in a \$900 billion spending package passed only days before their December 26 expiration, but Trump objected to its contents before eventually signing it on Sunday—one day after those programs lapsed.

Because many states determine benefit payments for the week ahead on Sunday morning, experts feared Trump's evening signing of the bill could mean benefits due to the timing of the law's enactment," the spokesperson said. An interruption in weekly jobless payments would have increased the pressure on Americans put out of work by the world's largest COVID-19 outbreak.

The United States saw unemployment spike to 14.7 percent in April after business shutdowns were ordered to stop the virus from spreading. Though it decreased to 6.7 percent in November, Labor Department data released last week said more than 800,000 people on average are losing their jobs each week, a level above the worst single week of the 2008-2010 global financial crisis.

As of the week ended December 5, the Labor Department said more than 9.2 million people were receiving PUA benefits and more than 4.8 million were receiving PEUC.

Meanwhile, American workers could start seeing stimulus payments of as much as \$600 in their accounts as soon as Tuesday night, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said. "Treasury and the IRS are working with unprecedented speed to issue a second round of Economic Impact Payments to eligible Americans and their families," Mnuchin said.

"These payments are an integral part of our commitment to providing vital additional economic relief to the American people during this unprecedented time." On Twitter, he added that for those not receiving electronic payment, "paper checks will begin to be mailed tomorrow." —AFP

## Weak Sauce? US relief bill may be too skimpy for restaurants

**NEW YORK:** Washington's long-awaited pandemic relief package offers a lifeline to the devastated US restaurant industry, but eateries still face months of turmoil before they are clear of the coronavirus crisis. The \$900 billion bill that provides more funding for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), comes too late for the estimated 110,000 restaurants that have closed their doors permanently.

Those that survived the shutdowns and restrictions on indoor dining, can borrow up to \$2 million in loans that would convert to grants if at least 60 percent is spent on payroll.

Despite some improvements from the original PPP that Congress approved in March, restaurants gave mixed reviews of the program and some worry the funding will fall short. Vivian Forte, who with her husband owns Pisticci in New York City, said Monday she was "exuberant" the relief bill was finally enacted. Without it she would have had to lay off the entire staff.

"Our back is completely against the wall," Forte told AFP. "None of us are making any money. We're all in this for the staff right now." But Andrew Volk, owner of the Hunt and Alpine Club in Portland, Maine, has not decided whether to seek another PPP loan.

It "seems like a band aid," he said. "We don't know what our business is going to look like when the snow melts."

#### 'We're just hustling'

Nine months into the pandemic, a recent survey from the National Restaurant Association shows more than one-sixth of the nation's restaurants have closed, and a majority expect continued furloughs and layoffs for at least the next three months. Dimitri Fetokakis, owner of Niko Niko's, a small Greek restaurant chain in Houston, said the crisis has forced eateries to adapt.

"We're just hustling," he said. When in-person dining was banned in the early days of the pandemic, Niko Niko's cut managers' salaries by 40 percent and they joined other staff assisting with curbside pickup. He also organized pop-up events in the suburbs, taking orders online and setting up mass-distribution sites without delivery charges. Fetokakis said he expects to apply for a PPP for his catering business and for the downtown location that has suffered most with many people still working from home.

RayNathan's, a North Carolina barbecue restaurant, has found it difficult



NEW YORK: Pisticci restaurant owners Michael and Vivian Forte set up a table outdoors in front of their establishment in New York.

to adapt as business has fluctuated, especially given the time-intensive nature of good barbecue: smoked beef brisket, for example, requires 15 hours of prep time. "The dining public is just a lot more emotional," said co-owner Stephen Carroll of the unpredictable flows that make it difficult to know how much food to cook.

At times the restaurant has given away surplus food to food banks. "You've either got waste, or you lose sales when you don't have enough," he said. Carroll said he is not sure if the restaurant will apply for another PPP.

The earlier round allowed him to avert layoffs, but the original rules mandated the money be spent within eight weeks.

#### Political reality

Congress in June extended the deadline to use the funds to 24 weeks, but by then RayNathan's had already spent most of the money, Carroll said. The PPP also has been a source of controversy, after huge amounts went to publicly-traded companies including Shake Shack and Ruth's Chris before the chains returned the funds, and after revelations about funds going to tenants of buildings owned by the Trump Organization and the family of Jared Kushner, President Donald Trump's son-in-law and advisor. Still, the program has been credited with saving millions of jobs and again became the prime vehicle for providing government support to small businesses. —AFP



## Business

## EU, China reach major investment deal

## China pushes past US in Q3 to become EU's top trade partner

BRUSSELS: The European Union and China yesterday approved "in principle" a major investment pact that Brussels hopes will open up lucrative opportunities, despite concerns about Beijing's rights record.

EU chiefs Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel agreed with China's President Xi Jinping to wrap up seven years of painstaking negotiations during a video conference that also included German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French leader Emmanuel Macron. The bloc said the deal, which is still expected to take months to be finalized and fully ratified as a legal text, was of "major economic significance" and had seen China commit to "an unprecedented level of market access for EU investors".

China's state-run Xinhua news agency cited Xi saying the agreement "demonstrates China's determination and confidence to promote high-level opening up". And Xi dubbed Europe and China "the world's dual major forces, markets and civilizations." Von der Leyen, meanwhile, tweeted: "This agreement will uphold our interests and promotes our core values. It provides us a lever to eradicate forced labor." But the end of year rush to conclude the political part of the agreement could upset US President-elect Joe Biden as he prepares to enter the White House, hoping to coordinate with his western allies. Europe has long sought to increase access for its companies to China's vast markets, but Beijing's lack of respect for international labor standards had remained a final hurdle to an agreement. Brussels insists the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) is the "most ambitious" anyone has convinced China to sign—lowering barriers for EU businesses, bolstering competition and strengthening environmental protection. The bloc says it has also managed to get Beijing to agree to "continued and sustained efforts" to ratify International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions on forced labor.

"We have to remain realistic: this deal will not solve all the China-related challenges we face, of which there are many," EU executive vice president Valdis Dombrovskis said. "However, it ties China into significant commitments in the right direction—more than it has ever agreed before".

But European lawmakers warned that there is no way to compel China to make good on worker rights.

And some in Brussels accuse Beijing of running a "government-led system of forced labour" targeting the Uighur and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang province. "EU leaders do know that the CAI language on ILO and forced labor is not worth the ink. They are not stupid," Reinhard Butikofer, the head of the European parliament's delegation on China, wrote on Twitter. MEPs complain that the outline deal—which came the same day the bloc signs its post-Brexit farewell trade pact with Britain—is being rushed through



French president Emmanuel Macron takes part in a video conference meeting with European Council President, European Commission president, German Chancellor and Chinese presidents to approve an investment pact between China and the European Union yesterday at the Fort de Bregancon, in Bormes-les-Mimosas, south-east of France. — AFP

under the stewardship of leading export power Germany just before its rotating EU presidency ends.

## Ahead of Biden

China pushed past the United States in the third quarter of this year to become the EU's top trade partner as the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the US economy while Chinese activity rebounded.

The political accord comes just weeks before Biden will be sworn in as US president and with his team expressing concern over the EU's outreach to Beijing and urging Brussels to consult with Washington. As the EU has taken a softer approach on China, outgoing President Donald Trump has carried out a trade war to batter Beijing into concessions. Despite vast differences with his predecessor on many issues, Biden looks set to continue a tough line, although he is looking to forge a more multinational front to tackle Beijing.

The EU insists the investment agreement with China—which it views as a "systemic rival"—will not hamper its relations with the new US administration and says it in part matches the "phase one" trade deal Trump inked with Beijing in January. The bloc says the deal, which it began negotiating in 2014, helps rectify what it sees as the long-standing imbalance in the way Brussels and Beijing treat investors and the access they allow them. It also insists the deal secures guarantees from China on key European concerns by ending obligations to transfer technology, reinforcing respect for intellectual property, strengthening Beijing's environmental commitments and addressing state subsidies.

While the deal should pave the way for EU firms to make inroads in areas including China's electric car,

health, telecoms and financial services sectors, it also looks set to open up Europe's renewable energy market to Beijing. But an EU official said that the agreement would still allow individual member states to block access for Chinese firms on national security grounds. The preliminary agreement is likely to take months to be worked into shape by legal teams and translated, and will then have to be ratified by the EU's 27 member states and approved by the European Parliament. — AFP

## Debt and COVID are a double whammy for Zambia

LUSAKA: For days on end, Mildred Mwenya hasn't seen so much as the shadow of a customer in her pharmacy in the Zambian capital Lusaka. Today, her stomach was as empty as her premises. She had been unable to afford breakfast before coming to open the store. She is one of a growing number of victims in Zambia of a double hit—a macro-economic crisis combined with the coronavirus pandemic. "When we come for work, we have no customers and not even food to eat for the morning," says Mwenya, from behind her counter.

"When you go to order goods and the following day the prices increase, business is bad," she explains. "Those who use transport are affected and we also need to pay rent for the shop." A landlocked country in

## ABK extends best wishes for New Year 2021

KUWAIT: On behalf of the Board of Directors, Executive Management and staff, ABK would like to extend its warmest wishes to the Amir, HH Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince of Kuwait Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and to the Kuwaiti government and its people, as well as all residents of Kuwait, on the occasion of the New Year.

The bank will be closed on Sunday 3rd January 2021 and will resume its regular working hours on Monday 4th January 2021. ABK's online services and Call Center will be available 24 hours a day during the holiday.



southern Africa, and the world's second-largest copper producer, Zambia has been lashed by a plunge in commodity prices. Starved of income, the government announced in mid-November that the country would no longer pay creditors—and the prices of basic goods began to rise.

## Debt spiral

The nation of 17 million people has a foreign debt estimated at nearly \$12 billion, half of which comes from private creditors. Much is owed to China. In mid-October, Zambia missed the deadline to honor a payment of \$42.5 million due on a bond worth \$750 million which matures in 2022. The global rating agency Standard & Poor's relegated the country to the "selective default" category. Once classified as a defaulter, a country undergoes penalties that further increase the cost of servicing its debts, said economist Mambo Hamaundu. "You won't have money to buy medicines in hospitals, chalks for our schools, because more money would have moved away from the treasury," Hamaundu says. "If there is no money in the treasury the ordinary citizens will suffer." — AFP

## HAPPY NEW YEAR

ABK wishes His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the people and residents of Kuwait, a Happy New Year.

The Bank will be closed on Sunday 3 January 2021, and will resume business as usual on Monday 4 January 2021.

Simpler Banking

eahfi.com Ahlan Ahli 1 899 899

## Benchmarking the global 5G user experience – December update

by Ian Fogg

Link: <https://www.opensignal.com/202021/12/benchmarking-the-global-5g-user-experience-december-update>

Opensignal has previously analyzed the real-world 5G experience of our users across mobile operators in a number of countries globally, including Australia, the U.S., Taiwan and South Korea.

Now, we are publishing a new look at the 5G experience across 15 leading 5G markets. In every country, 5G users see average download speeds many times faster than 4G. The improvement in 5G speeds ranges from 14.7 times faster than 4G in Thailand to 1.9 times faster in the U.S. Across most of these countries, users see 5G download speeds that are 5 to 6 times faster than 4G.

Our users in South Korea see the fastest average download speeds using 5G technologies with an average speed of 351.2 Mbps, which is slightly faster than the 272.8 Mbps seen in Saudi Arabia. In all but one country, our users see average 5G download speeds over 100 Mbps. Speed is by no means the only 5G measure that matters — how long users spend connected to the much faster 5G technology is also extremely important. Often, our users spend more time connected to 5G networks in those countries where we record slower 5G speeds.

The modest 5G Download Speeds in the U.S. are due to the combination of a limited amount of new mid-band 5G spectrum available now and the widespread use of low-band spectrum by operators. For example, T-Mobile's 600MHz and AT&T's 850MHz offer excellent availability and reach but lower average speeds than the 3.5GHz mid-band spectrum used as the main 5G band in every country outside of the U.S. However, in our last U.S. report we found that Verizon's mmWave-based 5G service offers a very considerably faster average 5G Download Speeds of 494.7 Mbps, which is faster than the average 5G download speeds Opensignal has seen on any operator, or in any country to date, including Saudi Arabia.

The amount of time users spend connected to 5G — or 5G Availability — is an important factor in the overall experience 5G users enjoy.

We are still in the early stages of a 5G era that will last for at least a decade because the first 5G services launched only in 2019, and in a number of countries we continue to see 5G mobile services launching for the first time. Despite this immature 5G market, Opensignal's data now shows that our users in five countries enjoy an active 5G connection for more than one fifth of the time. We see U.S. 5G users connect 19.5% of the time to 5G, placing the U.S. in the seventh place for 5G Availability, only just behind Taiwan and ahead of all seven European countries we analyzed.

The U.S. is much higher ranked on 5G Availability than on average download speed because low-band spectrum is ideally suited to enable greater 5G reach and allow users to spend more time connected than in countries where higher frequency 5G spectrum is commonly used. In the U.S., the low-band 5G services of T-Mobile and AT&T have helped drive a high 5G Availability result. T-Mobile U.S.'s very recent launch of standalone access 5G — where a phone no longer needs to connect to 4G in order for 5G to work — should help boost 5G Availability and network responsiveness in future.

Clearly, smaller geographies like Kuwait or Hong Kong have an advantage over large countries like Australia, Canada or the U.S. in offering users high levels of 5G Availability which makes the achievements of operators in Australia, Canada and the U.S. — powering their 5G users' experience ahead of Germany, Italy, Spain and the U.K. — all the more impressive.

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# Annual report features effects and challenges of pandemic in Kuwait

## PROCAPITA launches special report on latest HR practices for 2020

**KUWAIT:** PROCAPITA Management Consulting launched its special annual report on the latest HR practices for 2020, which was distinctively developed. The report includes the main features and trends of business and human resources practices in the State of Kuwait, the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic, how various companies operating in the private sector are dealing with emerging challenges, and the future outlook on the human resources strategies for 2021.

Mohammad Abu Al-Rob, CEO of PROCAPITA, said that the survey's participation rate was very stimulating, reaching more than 80 percent of companies invited to participate and addressing the opinions of more than 210 business leaders (CEOs, board members, and executive business leaders), in addition to HR leaders from various sectors in Kuwait. The participants represented more than 144 major companies, 45 of which are listed on the Kuwait Stock Exchange, and 99 are not listed.

This report covered 12 sectors in the Kuwaiti market, the most important of which are: telecommunications, oil and gas, financial services (banks, insurance, asset management, and capital markets), general trading and contracting, manufacturing, business and professional services sector, etc. This survey's significant interaction indicates the urgent need for business leaders to know recent trends in human resource practices to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and the high confidence that PROCAPITA has gained as the largest HR consulting services provider in the State of Kuwait and the GCC. Abu Al-Rob expressed his sincere thanks and gratitude for PROCAPITA's clients' continuous support and steadfast confidence. This fundamental pillar has enabled PROCAPITA to continue achieving more excellent value for its services.

Abu Al-Rob added that the main highlights of the survey conducted by PROCAPITA Management Consulting are:

### • The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

• The results have shown that 31 percent of companies from various sectors in Kuwait have been positively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, including telecommunications companies, internet service providers, IT companies, e-commerce, and some professional services such as legal advisory services, insurance companies, consumer-trade companies, and food and medical manufacturers.

• 67 percent of companies from various sectors in Kuwait have expressed negative impact on the COVID-19 pandemic, including the sports sector, entertainment, travel & tourism sector, the banking sector, some investment and money markets companies, automotive sector, transportation and logistics companies, food and beverage companies (restaurants), in addition to general trading and contracting companies.

• 47 percent of business leaders indicated that the decline in oil prices is the primary concern facing businesses in the coming period.

### • The incentive plans and economic support packages provided by the government

• Concerning the government's incentive plans and economic support packages, 37 percent of business leaders expressed their satisfaction with the incentive plans and government measures presented to face the repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis and revive the affected sectors. In comparison, 44 percent of business leaders expressed their dissatisfaction to some extent.

### • Business and technology practices

• Regarding the penalties and challenges that represent an obstacle to business growth, 44 percent of business leaders stated that the legislative and legal environment and the availability of talent and competencies required in the local labor market are among the most critical challenges facing compa-

nies and impeding their business growth process. In comparison, 19 percent of business leaders indicated that the adequacy of governance and the application of transparency standards in different business transactions constitute the most prominent challenges that negatively affect the growth of their business, followed by operational risks, risks of delays in technology and digital transformation, crisis management, environmental risks, cultural and social factors, and logistical factors. Only 3 percent of companies reported no challenges and penalties that negatively impacted their business growth.

• 79 percent of business leaders emphasized the importance of investing in digital transformation as part of the plans set to confront the pandemic and its repercussions.

• 32 percent of business leaders stated that direct government support for private sector companies to attract and develop national workers is one of the most critical aspects that must be improved to contribute to raising the percentage of localization of jobs (Kuwaitization) in the coming period, followed by improving education outcomes in line with future labor market requirements by 27 percent.

• The scarcity of talents and specialized competencies in the local market ranked first concerning the use of skills and competencies attracted from abroad by 43 percent. Simultaneously, the vast majority of the participants indicated that the talents and competencies currently available do not serve their companies' future strategic goals.

• 76 percent of business leaders indicated the importance of attracting and retaining talent, such as implementing long-term incentive plans, granting shares to employees, awarding competitive wages, and other related strategies. Half of them expressed their continuous implementation and updating of these plans and strategies. On the other hand, the other half expressed their tendency to study and develop these strategies and monitor their budgets to realize their importance.

• More than 50 percent of the participants expressed their satisfaction with remote work effectiveness and praised their employees' efficiency and productivity during the previous period. PROCAPITA expects that many companies will continue to adopt and implement this strategy in the next year, 2021.

### • Manpower and Recruitment Department

• Only 8 percent of the participating companies have reduced employees' wages in line with the companies' powers by the relevant government agencies. In comparison, 19 percent of them granted employees paid leave and adopted a remote work mechanism to maintain business sustainability, reduce the pandemic's effects, and exit from it with less possible losses.

• Concerning recruitment, 62 percent of the responding companies indicated that they did not disperse any of their employees' services as one of the alternatives available to confront the pandemic. Also, 52 percent of the participating companies expected an increase in hiring employees in 2021 compared to 2020.

### • Compensation practices

• Concerning compensation practices and adjusting the salary scale and benefits, 8 percent of the responding companies expect a total change in the salary scale, including all job titles. In comparison, 65 percent of them expect a partial change in the salary scale, including some job titles, and at

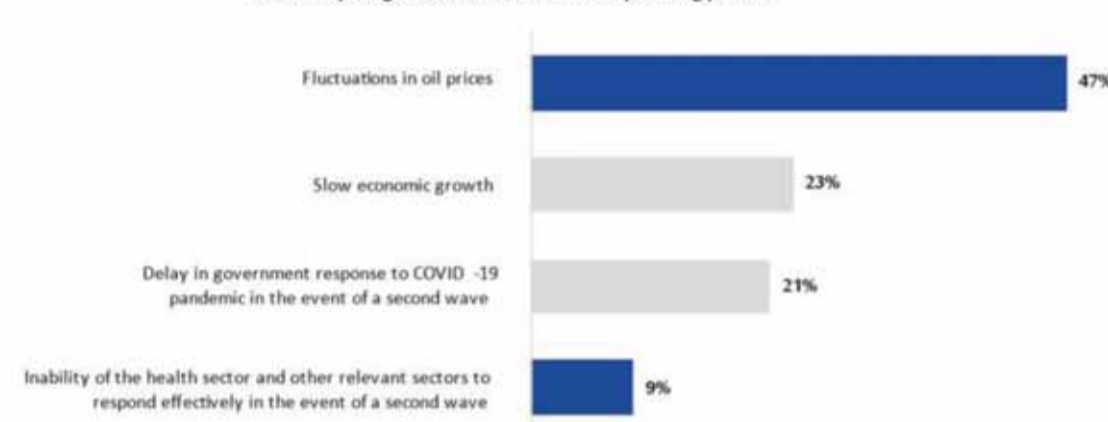


Mohammad Abu Al-Rob



### Report covers 12 sectors in Kuwaiti market

What are your greatest concerns in the upcoming period?



varying levels according to sectors and their extent affected by the pandemic.

• 27 percent of companies were limited to granting short-term incentives (annual bonus) depending on their financial performance in 2019. While some companies indicated a lack of clarity of vision about the possibility of disbursing annual increases or incentives in 2021 due to poor economic conditions and declining returns as a result of the pandemic, and that it may have to stop or postpone it in response to the changes taking place.

### • Future expectations of human resource practices (structural imbalance):

• On the other hand, Abu Al-Rob stated that a structural defect in the local employment market is expected as a result of the repercussions of the pandemic on the structure of supply and demand in terms of high supply of many skills and competencies working in the affected sectors such as tourism, aviation, and others, which led to an imbalance in the rates of salaries and wages as a result of the accumulation of some competencies in the Kuwaiti market and the dispensation of some companies of human cadres and thus the high unemployment rate.

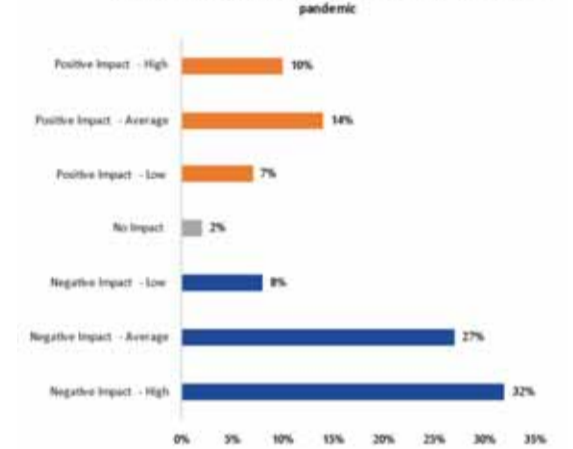
• However, it is necessary to note that the local market suffers from a shortage of supply and a scarcity of some specialized skills and competencies such as IT-related jobs (such as software developers, professional IT trainers, smartphone application developers, and data analysts) and technical and professional jobs (such as professions Medical, engineering, technicians, and chefs), in addition to the decision to stop recruiting from abroad, which will increase the gap between supply and demand, and this constitutes an additional challenge for companies to develop their business and an imbalance in the salary and benefits scale.

• Based on the foregoing, Abu Al-Rob commended that the companies must review the current salary and benefits scale and amend it depending on the extent of the pandemic sector and business. He also pointed out that the amendment and modernization of the salary scale do not necessarily mean reducing the salaries and benefits granted, but rather it means restructuring them in proportion to the skills available in the local market and being able to attract them easily and give them a competitive advantage to companies.

• It is worth mentioning that it is not expected that there will be an amendment to leaders' salaries and benefits during the current period and not expected to be affected in the coming period, as factors such as scarcity and specialized expertise play a "decisive role" in continuing the demand for leadership positions and thus salaries and benefits may be negatively affected. However, the annual incentives granted to leaders may be affected in part, depending on the decrease in the profits made versus the planned profits or the desired returns.

• In addition to what was mentioned above, Abu Al-Rob expressed the importance of adopting several different strategies in the coming period to improve the economic conditions of companies and enable them to face any exceptional

Describe to what extent has your business been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic



circumstances that may arise in the external environment, including:

• Remote work strategy, as many companies could continue their work and run it smoothly despite the exceptional circumstances witnessed by the whole world.

• Developing talent management programs, including performance appraisal systems, and linking their outputs with annual incentives, development and training plans, succession planning, and others, because of their significant impact on the process of attracting and maintaining competencies and skills, and thus companies advance and gain a competitive advantage in the local market.

• Defining business trips and using video and audio communications as a viable alternative to holding and attending meetings.

• Investing in digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and partly relying on electronic transactions and e-commerce.

• Using "Outsourcing" contracts to meet the companies' needs to support jobs because of their benefit in reducing costs and pressure on the recruitment team and many other benefits.

PROCAPITA Management Consulting and Human Resources Services is a regional company headquartered in the State of Kuwait in addition to its regional offices in both Jordan and Dubai. Since its establishment in 2013 to this day, it has succeeded in providing the best consulting and administrative services to more than 400 clients through the efforts of its distinguished consultant staff. Throughout the Middle East and the Arab Gulf states, PROCAPITA has distinguished itself for its unique approach by providing human resource consulting, recruitment counseling, and human resource outsourcing services in addition to human capital development services, which has been a significant factor in making PROCAPITA one of the leading consulting firms in the region, and in line with leading practices in consulting services, PROCAPITA has given technology a lot of attention through its investment in ZENTHR Intelligence Solutions business.

## Lack of cooperation hinders China's debt relief to Africa

**BEIJING:** China last month joined other members of the G20 in agreeing to suspend interest payments on all loans owed by dozens of low-income countries, in a bid to ease pressure on developing economies ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic.

Most of those nations are in Africa and getting China onboard was considered something of a coup for the G20. But there are some reservations about how far China will really deliver on its side of the deal.

What is the G20 agreement?

The world's top economies agreed last month to suspend interest payments on all official loans owed by 73 low-income countries — 40 in Africa—until the end of June and extended the repayment period.

"The debt service suspension initiative has provided much needed 'breathing space' to countries," said IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva. While the United Nations led calls for the suspension to be prolonged until the end of 2021, the G20 said it would examine the recommendation when the IMF and World Bank meet next spring "if the economic and financial situation requires" such an extension.

The final communique did not offer any guarantees.

What is the situation at the moment?

China is the biggest investor in Africa, pumping about \$148 billion in railroads, ports and airports in exchange for securing oil and commodity supplies such as copper and cobalt, according to data from the China Africa Research Initiative (CARI) at Johns Hopkins University. —AFP

## LuLu Hypermarket offers year-end super deals promotion

**KUWAIT:** LuLu Hypermarket, the leading retailer in the region is bringing 2020 to a close and welcoming the new year with a Big Bang Super Deals promotion from 29 December to 3 January 2021.

The eight-day amazing discount promotion across all LuLu Hypermarket outlets in Kuwait, will provide customers with fantastic promotional-prices, huge discounts and enticing one-time offers on a wide range of products. Adding extra layers of excitement to the Big Bang bonanza period are a host of activities, including Happy Hours, where shoppers can avail hour-long amazing discount

## COVID-19 takes its toll on African economy

**PARIS:** Africa has so far been spared the worst of the coronavirus pandemic in terms of cases and deaths but its economy has not been so lucky, especially the poorer, smaller countries dependent on a single resource or sector. The spread of the disease has also picked up speed in recent weeks, stoking concerns that worse is to come. Here are some key features of the pandemic's economic impact on Africa:

### Historic recession

For 2020, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that the economy of sub-Saharan Africa will shrink 3.0 percent, "the worst outcome on record".

However, it should then grow 3.1 percent next year—although this is a much slower pace than elsewhere in the world. In terms of per capita income, it has fallen 5.3 percent and back to 2013 levels in the space of just a few months.

Abebe Aemro Selassie, the head of the IMF's African division, highlighted the fact that unlike in the 2008-09 global financial crisis, sub-Saharan countries were in a much worse budgetary position, with fewer resources available to face the crisis than their wealthier peers.

• Different countries, different impact - African countries can be classified as three economic types: Diversified, such as in West Africa, with Ivory Coast, Senegal and Ghana. In the east, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. In these economies, activity has slowed significantly but they are still managing to grow, the IMF says.

• Oil producers such as Algeria, Angola and Nigeria. They have suffered very badly from the plunge in crude prices, especially in the early months of the crisis.

Since then, prices have firmed slowly to arrive back at around \$50 per barrel.

• Tourism-dependent countries such as Morocco, Tunisia and the Seychelles. The pandemic has brought travel to a virtual standstill, grounding airlines, which are struggling to survive.

"The crisis has confirmed the differences between diversified countries and the exporters of industrial raw materials but has also impacted North African countries which were in a growth rebound thanks to tourism since 2016," noted Clement Gillet, economist with Societe Generale.

Standing on its own, South Africa, the continent's second-biggest economy, has been hit the worst given that it was already in recession before the crisis hit.

Its economy is expected to shrink 8.0 percent this year.

### Raising funds

Again, the picture is mixed when it comes to how different countries manage



extra influencer element to the shopping activity.

The Big Bang year-end super deals promotion is part of LuLu Hypermarket's commitment to interact with customers and enhance the shopping experience throughout the year, with various exciting and alluring campaigns and promotions that offer some of the finest products from around the world at highly competitive prices.

debt and raise fresh funds. On the one hand, there is Zambia, which is heavily dependent on mining and became the first country to default on its debt last month, while Ivory Coast only two weeks later easily raised funds on the market.

Since then, "the financial markets have found their appetite for risk again, and especially for African debt, but investors are going to be much more careful about the details" and quality of the issuers, said Gillet.

Another important source of funds for African countries is remittances from their foreign workers and inevitably this has also suffered in the pandemic.

According to the World Bank, such remittances are expected to fall 14 percent to about \$470 billion going into 2021. "The impact of Covid-19 is pervasive when viewed through a migration lens as it affects migrants and their families who rely on remittances," said Mamta Murthi, Vice President for Human Development and Chair of the Migration Steering Group at the World Bank. —AFP

# Classifieds

Thursday, December 31, 2020

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



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 Fax: (+965) 24331579  
[www.met.gov.kw](http://www.met.gov.kw)

## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

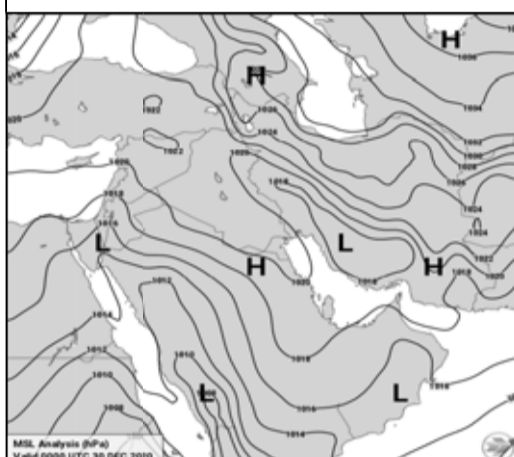
**BY DAY:** Fair and Partly cloudy with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind with speed of 08 - 26 km/h .

**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.
KUWAIT CITY	19 °C	13 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	20 °C	10 °C
ABDALY	21 °C	06 °C
BUBYAN	19 °C	09 °C
JAHRA	21 °C	11 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	19 °C	14 °C
AHMADI	- °C	- °C
NUWAISIB	21 °C	13 °C
WAFRA	21 °C	13 °C
SALMY	20 °C	10 °C

SFC. CHART 30/12/2020 0000 UTC



DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Thursday	12/31	Fair and with a chance for scattered light rain later on	21 °C	11 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 26 km/h
Friday	01/01	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	22 °C	12 °C	VRB	06 - 22 km/h
Saturday	01/02	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	23 °C	12 °C	VRB	06 - 20 km/h
Sunday	01/03	Fair and Partly cloudy	23 °C	11 °C	VRB	06 - 20 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:17
Sunrise	06:42
Zuhr	11:50
Asr	14:40
Sunset	16:58
Isha	18:21

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	19 °C
MIN. Temp.	06 °C
MAX. RH	87 %
MIN. RH	30 %
MAX. Wind	NW 25 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

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or may contact on telephone No.:

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

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**EMERGENCY 112**

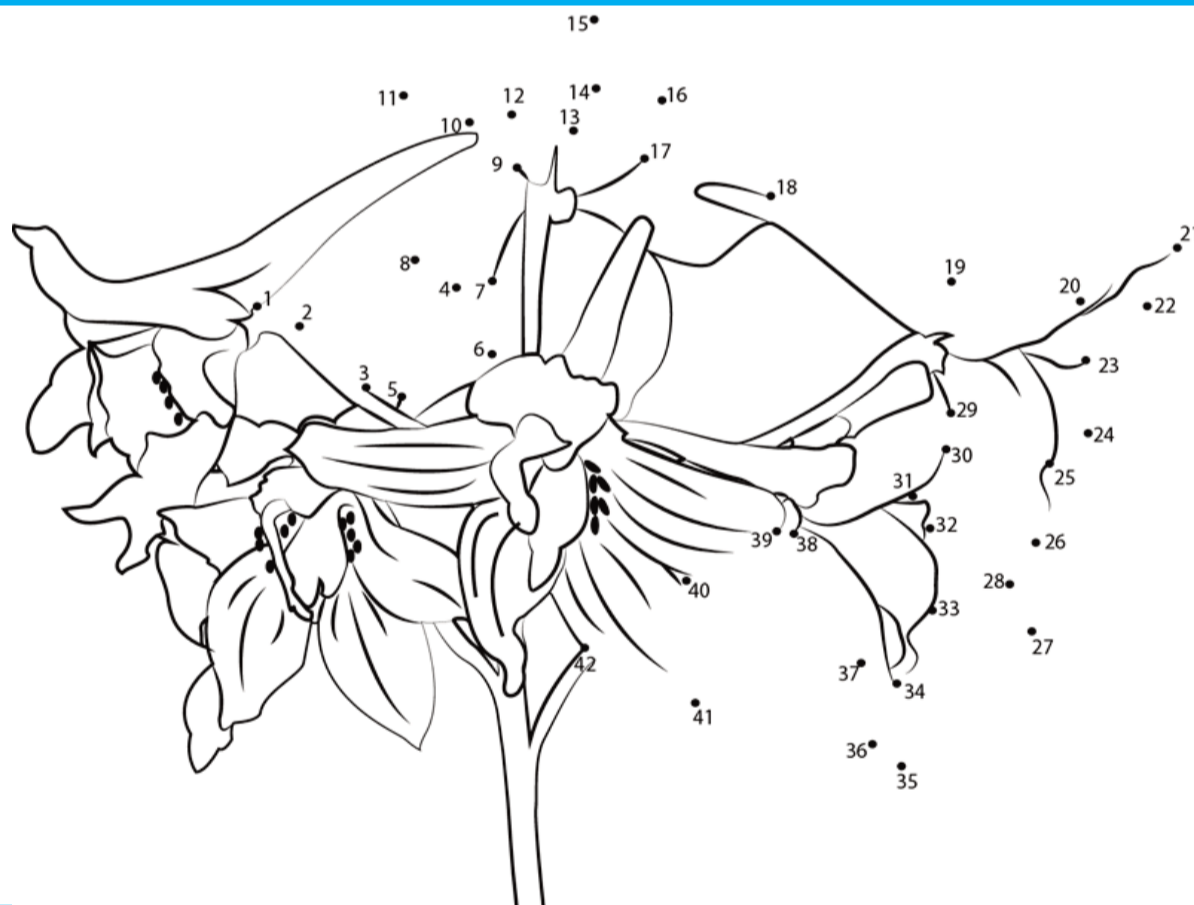
## Word Search

### Play a Tune

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

- |           |           |           |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| ACCORDION | HARMONICA | TRIANGLE  |
| BANJO     | HARP      | TRUMPET   |
| CELO      | MARIMBA   | TUBA      |
| CLARINET  | ORGAN     | XYLOPHONE |
| DRUM      | PIANO     |           |
| FLUTE     | RECORDER  |           |
| GIUITAR   | SAXOPHONE |           |

## Join the Dots



## STAR TRACK

**Aries (March 21-April 19)**  
 Issues regarding love and romance should be going well for you now, Aries. You will find that your natural tendency to ground and plan is working perfectly with your desire to find what you want in a mate. Things may be about to come to a dramatic climax in your emotional realm. A foggy, dreamy feeling may make it difficult for you to keep your feet on the ground.

**Cancer (June 21-July 22)**  
 You may have many irons in the fire today, Cancer. People and projects could demand your attention, yet you may feel so dreamy and unmotivated that it could be hard to make progress on any of them. Creative solutions are the best route for you. Be flexible and open to other people's ideas, and make sure you consider the unlikely ways to tackle the issues.

**Libra (September 23-October 22)**  
 This is an excellent day for you, Libra. You will find that things automatically flow your way. You will receive more attention than usual and be the center of any flattering discussions. The one difficult point might be intimate relations with others. Romantic issues may take on a more serious, grounded tone at this time.

**Capricorn (December 22-January 19)**  
 You may feel a great deal of nervous energy today, Capricorn. Tension could come to you from all angles. Indecisiveness might be your biggest problem. You may be in a frenzy trying to figure out where to move next. The key is to slow down and relax. Don't make a move without evaluating things. Be careful about acting too hastily, especially when it comes to matters of the heart.

**Taurus (April 20-May 20)**  
 You may want to escape into your dreams today, Taurus. Trying to do something practical may be met with opposition, as the general mood of the day calls for things to be more ethereal and elusive. Connect with your sensitive side and feel free to spend time on artistic projects. You may have to take a more grounded approach when it comes to matters of love.

**Leo (July 23-August 22)**  
 This is going to be a great day for you, Leo. Strangely enough, you will find that tension may help you get things done. There's an easiness today that will create openings for exploring creative outlets. Regarding love and romance, try to stay grounded. You and the object of your desire may have two different points of view on the relationship. Communicate clearly.

**Scorpio (October 23-November 21)**  
 You may feel a bit lazy and unmotivated today, Scorpio. It could be hard to drag yourself out of bed. In terms of love and romance, there's apt to be some tension, as one part of you wants to make plans while another part is feeling up in the air and in the clouds. These two different viewpoints might make it difficult to make a move in any one direction.

**Aquarius (January 20- February 18)**  
 Issues having to do with love and romance are in your favor today, Aquarius. You're more in touch with your emotions. You will find that your attitude toward love is more grounded than usual. Feel free to let go of some control. Let fate take you where it will in this department. Also make sure that you don't worry so much about things. Worrying will cause doubt, something you don't need.

**Gemini (May 21-June 20)**  
 You will be able to find a greater connection to your inner soul today, Gemini. You will also find that you're more psychic than usual. Trust your intuition. The more you look inward, the more you're apt to find the solutions to your outward questions. Combine a sense of dreamy emotion with a grounded feeling of love and beauty. You may need to balance your cloudy head with stable roots.

**Virgo (August 23-September 22)**  
 You may need to let go and release your control, Virgo. You know what you want, so just trust your intuition. If you continue to let your brain do all the work, you will probably miss valuable information that can only come when you slow down and look within. Connect with others on sensitive issues and feel free to let your guard down. Let your mind work freely.

**Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)**  
 Love and romance are apt to be going quite well for you now, Sagittarius. You should find that it's easier to be yourself in a partnership. Let your romantic side shine through. Indulge in delicious candlelit dinners and share your deepest fantasies with those you love. If your partner resists this energy now, you may want to consider looking elsewhere for romantic company.

**Pisces (February 19-March 20)**  
 You may not feel in sync with the day's energy, Pisces. Something about it may not sit right with you. Your natural instinct to want to take the lead may be overshadowed by an unwillingness to even get up. You may feel like your internal fire is squelched, especially when it comes to love and beauty. If your mind is cloudy, don't worry about it. The fog will clear soon.



A file photo taken on May 13, 2011 shows French fashion icon Pierre Cardin (centre right) waving after his fashion show on board the former-Soviet aircraft carrier Kiev at the Tianjin Binhai Aircraft Carrier Theme Park outside Tianjin in northeastern China.— AFP photos



This file photo taken on January 28, 1967 shows French designer Pierre Cardin flanked by fashion models after his Spring-Summer collection show, in Paris.



This file photo taken on November 9, 2006 shows French designer Pierre Cardin posing with his new fashion space, in Saint-Ouen.

## Pierre Cardin, fashion's savvy futurist

**P**ierre Cardin, who died Tuesday aged 98, was a man of many paradoxes—a designer who sought flamboyant yet simple styles, an aesthete with a head for business, and a futurist now associated with retro. He rose to the pantheon of France's post-war fashion giants only to shake it all up by leading what was in the 1950s a revolutionary concept—designing “ready-to-wear” collections for the high street.

A savvy businessman, he expanded his empire globally, moving into once closed markets and selling hundreds of licences to make himself the undisputed king of designer merchandising—and being slammed by the fashion elite for selling out. Cardin's 1960s “Space Age” collection is among his most legendary, and his designs such as the men's collarless “cylinder” suit inspired the early look of the Beatles.

### Batwings and knitted catsuits

Cardin entered the Parisian fashion world in the aftermath of World War II, training with the likes of Christian Dior and Elsa Schiaparelli. In the 1950s, as he began to branch out on his own, he soon established a name as an innovator with the now legendary bubble dress in 1954. His 1964 “Space Age” collection remains a landmark in the fashion history with its cut-out dresses, knitted catsuits, tight leather pants, close-fitting helmets and



This file photo taken on January 10, 2003 shows French fashion designer Pierre Cardin walking on the stage after a show for a contribute to his 50 years of career in Florence.

batwing jumpers. Throughout the 1960s, as one of the most influential creative forces, he turned out collection after collection featuring an array of original

ideas, and with his penchant for geometric shapes and motifs he frequently ignored the female form altogether.

It was this disregard for femininity which led him to be credited with creating the “unisex” look. Although he was gay, he had a four-year affair with the French film star Jeanne Moreau. She wanted to have a child with him but could not after suffering from uterine cancer.

### 'Beauty and the Beast'

Cardin was born into poverty on July 2, 1922, near Venice in northern Italy. His family emigrated to France when he was a child, and he grew up in the dour French industrial town of Saint Etienne. At the age of 17 he was apprenticed to a tailor in Vichy where he soon specialized in women's suits. In 1944, after the liberation of France, he cycled all the way to Paris where he studied architecture before starting to work in fashion houses. He began designing costumes and met the poet, artist and director Jean Cocteau, for whom he designed the mesmerizing sets and outfits for the classic film “Beauty and the Beast” in 1947.

### Global empire

In his heyday, Cardin boasted of having some 1,000 licences and franchises, from fashion and food to cigarettes and furniture, which generated hundreds of millions in annual sales and made him a household name around the world. He headed a global empire with a strong presence in Japan. He also signed production deals with the Cold War-era Soviet Union in 1978, then 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.

“I cover the entire world, except perhaps North Korea, and I could go there too if I chose,” he told AFP in a 2010 interview. Cardin's empire also included hotels, factories and boutiques. Among



This file photo taken on July 29, 1982 shows French designer Pierre Cardin posing after being awarded the “Golden Thimble” a fashion award in Paris.

his many acquisitions was the upscale Paris restaurant Maxim's, which he turned into an international chain.

### Futurist's controversial castle

But the much used and franchised Cardin brand later showed signs of wear. In 2011, he put his fashion label up for sale saying he hoped it would fetch up to a billion euros. It failed to sell. And Cardin's purchase of a castle in Provence that once belonged to the Marquis de Sade, and dozens of houses around it, angered locals who complained the buildings were left empty and wrecking the life and economy of the village. Still, Cardin remained intensely proud of his achievements. In 2014, inaugurating a small Paris museum for his work, he said he had built up quite a “legacy for a couturier who came from nothing.”— AFP



This file photo taken on July 4, 2006 shows French designer Pierre Cardin posing with some dummies featuring his Men's 2007 Spring-Summer collection, in Paris.

### LUXURY FRENCH LINGERIE: LACE, HIDDEN CLASPS AND OPTICAL ILLUSIONS

**U**nder soft light and in concentrated silence, seamstresses at a workshop in the heart of Paris carefully assembled fine Calais lace, embroidering it with onyx beads and sequins in delicate motifs. A couture bra takes two days to create, a bustier three. Corsets, meanwhile, require “real expertise, it's very French,” according to Amandine and Vanille at the headquarters of luxury lingerie brand Livy. A piece is made in 20 steps, sometimes with 15 materials. The process takes patience and precision. The limited collection, made entirely by hand, is created exclusively for weddings or red carpet events, according to 39-year-old designer Lisa Chavy.

The rest of the line is ready-to-wear and designed to appeal both to clients who want something racy but discreet,

and for those looking beyond function for lingerie that is a bit more showy and a fashion accessory in its own right: a subtle sexy strap, or bit of lace to peek out from underneath clothing. Chavy, who has been a designer for mainstream labels, created the brand three years ago hoping to offer something more modern and fresh, in a country where lingerie has been world-famous for 200 years. “I couldn't find any lingerie that I really wanted to wear,” she said.

Forgoing cushioned bras and shape-altering pieces for a more natural look, Livy's designs focus on delicate, intricate patterns in lace for an elegant feel. During a recent fitting before a photo shoot, Chavy carefully fastened an ornate gold clasp on a bra worn by one of the models. Hidden clasps and other visual illusions, such as lacework resting on transparent tulle, are part of the playful seduction that is Livy's signature. Lingerie should be refined, commanding and vulnerable all at once, Chavy said. — AFP

### Fashion pioneer Pierre Cardin in quotes

**K**ey quotes from French designer and businessman Pierre Cardin who died on Tuesday aged 98:

#### Fashion

“The clothes I prefer are those I have created for a life that does not yet exist, the world of tomorrow.” “My aim was the street, that my name and my creations be on the street. Celebrities, princesses were not my cup of tea. I respected them, I dined with them, but I could not see them in my dresses. In any case, they would have looked ridiculous.” “My great stroke of genius was ready-to-wear at a time when there was only haute couture. They told me it would not last two years. I charged on, believing in my idea. I was criticized, made fun of.”

#### Creation

“Form comes first. Then the material that expresses the volumes, the flow, the flexibility. Colour comes last.” “A table leg, a root, a tree, a leaf, all can give me ideas. I am capable of seeing an artichoke and making an artichoke dress!” “I don't stop, I need it, just like a painter or a writer. I need to express myself. My reason for being is fashion.”

#### Business

“I own 100 percent of everything, I am self-sufficient. I can drink my own wine, go to my theatre, eat in my restaurants, sleep in my hotels, dress, wear my own perfume...” “If I have made money with my licences, it is to be free, do something other than fashion. By changing profession I distract myself. There would not be a bigger punishment than forcing me to play the game.”— AFP



This file photo taken on November 9, 2006 shows French designer Pierre Cardin posing with his new fashion space, in Saint-Ouen.



This file photo taken on November 25, 1977 shows French designer Pierre Cardin surrounded by “Catherinettes” in front of his new shop Maxim's in Paris.



This file photo taken on September 17, 1981 shows French designer Pierre Cardin standing with models during the presentation of a retrospective Haute Couture collection from 1950 to 1980, in Paris.

Lifestyle | Features

# NEW YEAR'S SAVING GRACE FOR VIENNA'S SILENCED MUSIC SCENE

While a virus-laden silence has descended over what is normally a busy period of concerts and balls in the Austrian capital Vienna, the city's world famous New Year Concert is at least providing one saving grace-albeit to an empty hall. The city's concert halls were among the first in Europe to re-open in June, in the wake of the first wave lockdown, as Vienna tried to preserve its reputation as one of the world's preeminent centres of classical music. But as the virus took hold again in the autumn, fresh restrictions soon followed. Music venues again had to close in November, in a city that normally boasts some 15,000 concerts and musical events annually. But one show will go on, no doubt charged with more symbolism this year.

"If we cancel the New Year's Concert, that would be such a horrible sign to the entire world," Vienna Philharmonic chairman Daniel Barenboim told AFP at the end of October when rising infection numbers were forcing Vienna's cultural world to prepare for a new phase of restrictions. In December, even once venues had been forced to close, Barenboim said at a press conference that it would be "impossible" not to go ahead-and his view has prevailed.

### Applause played in

The first one of the prestigious concerts took place at a much darker moment in Austrian history, on New Year's Eve 1939. Since then it has built up a following which sees it broadcast in more than 90 countries to more than 50 million people. Normally the lucky few who get to go in person at Vienna's Musikverein are chosen in a draw. This year though the musicians, conducted by Italian Maestro Riccardo Muti, will perform to an empty hall. But to break the silence, the



In this file photo overall view taken as debutant dancers dance the first dance during the annual Opera Ball in Vienna, Austria. — AFP photos

ORF public broadcaster will play in applause from 7,000 music lovers watching from home.

If, as Barenboim says, the Philharmonic is to Austria as "soccer is to England", then it's only fitting that the New Year's Concert should be a rare survivor of lockdown closures. But the wider shutdown of cultural life has been catastrophic for many artists. Since spring, Barenboim has been trying to raise their plight, even taking their case to Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. Barenboim insists performances are safe, arguing that in the several months in which restrictions were relaxed, "we never once had a large cluster" of infection from performances. "We do PCR tests in order to play and play masks" until playing,

he says. "Our audience is very disciplined."

### 'Musical message'

While the New Year's Day concert may be some comfort for music lovers, those hoping to dance during Vienna's legendary ball season will be disappointed. This season there will be none-in a city that normally hosts around 450 of them between November and February, dedicated to groups as diverse as chimney sweeps, cafe owners, bodybuilders and florists. The tradition goes back to the 18th century, when the tradition of Habsburg court balls being reserved to the aristocracy ended. For Thomas Schaefer-Elmayer, the 74-year-old head of a dancing school founded by his



In this file photo Italian Maestro Riccardo Muti (center) conducts the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra during the traditional New Year's concert in Vienna, Austria.

grandfather 100 years ago, the current situation is "extremely sad".

While normally there would be around 100 students twirling on the gleaming parquet floor of his school, this year it is empty. "It is the first time that we are totally helpless... online is not the same," says Schaefer-Elmayer, who has acted as master of ceremonies at some of Vienna's most stylish balls. The current situation is a "disaster" for the 20 or so dancing schools in Vienna. In addition, the ball season normally creates work for thousands of hairdressers, florists, hoteliers, tailors and taxi drivers, among others. In 2019/2020, the season attracted 500,000 visitors, 55,000 of whom came especially from abroad, spending an average of 290 euros (\$350) per person. In all, the

city has lost 150 million euros in revenue this year, says Norbert Kettner, director of Vienna's tourist office. But it is also a blow to the Viennese carnival season, says Kettner.

For while the balls are an expression of the city's centuries-old traditions, they have also been embraced and adapted by younger generations and Kettner assures that they can be "very wild, lively". Kettner says the New Year's Concert will be an opportunity for the city to send out a "musical message"-in the hope of attracting more visitors when the pandemic is finally defeated.—AFP

## Part of the world a stage with Miami poignant pandemic performance

When the coronavirus pandemic began, theater director Michel Hausmann sought to devise a safe and effective way of performing. Nine months later, he and his theater company have done it by making the world a stage-at least part of it-providing catharsis to performers and the public alike. The play "7 Deadly Sins" has opened in Miami Beach, outdoors and with empty storefronts as a stage. It consists of seven 10-minute acts, each about a cardinal sin: pride, greed, lust, wrath, gluttony, envy and sloth. The year 2020 is reflected in both the play's theme and execution. It is staged in shops closed by the economic crisis resulting from the pandemic.



A singer performs after the play "Seven Deadly Sins" at Lincoln Road in Miami Beach, Florida.— AFP photos

The audience is seated in the street, as the Miami climate is still pleasant in December, in groups of 12. People watch the acts through the store windows and listen with headphones. "The world of theater is experiencing a very important disruption this year," Hausmann told AFP. "Doing theater the conventional way is a death sentence." He was seated at an outdoor cafe, sipping an espresso in front of the Colony Theatre, a 1930s building emblematic of Miami's Art Deco architecture. Hausmann, 39, is the artistic director and co-founder of Miami New Drama, a non-profit theater company housed in the Colony, on the pedestrian boulevard Lincoln Road. "The question for us was: what do we do, what is our business? Is it the business of filling buildings with people? Or the business of telling live stories?" he asked. Storytelling is the obvious answer. "So," he said, "that paradigm shift is what helps us imagine solutions."

### Home is exile

The play's acts tell diverse stories: the statue of a slave-owning politician come to life, an African-American teacher accused of cultural appropriation, a couple trapped by the virus, an ex-president who "gluttonously" seeks to return to power, a person who delivers a monologue about the pandemic in a fit of rage. "Is no longer home. It no longer feels like home. Is a place of exile," reads a line in the last act, written

by playwright Dael Orlandersmith. "Place of confinement. Prison. No matter whether it is big/small/medium-sized. It is a prison." The act is performed by Carmen Pelaez, who also wrote the act on pride. She told AFP that the public reacts emotionally to the return of live art, because it is what "keeps us connected to our humanity, in communion with each other."

And the pandemic "has reminded us all how fragile we are and how much we need each other," said the 49-year-old actress and playwright. As if to prove her point, a young man in the audience approached the window where she had just recited her furious monologue. He pressed a piece of paper to the glass for Pelaez to read, with the message, "Thank you."

### How to resurrect Lincoln Road

Since the start of the pandemic in March, Lincoln Road has become increasingly grim as store after store closed down. Nearly a quarter of its 250 storefronts are shut. "It broke my heart," Hausmann said. "Lincoln Road is our tropical version of the Champs-Elysees." He devised the concept of "7 Deadly Sins" and commissioned seven playwrights to write the acts, for one or two actors each. One is Moises Kaufman, Miami New Drama co-founder, Tony-nominated and also Venezuelan, like Hausmann. The others are Cubans Pelaez, Rogelio Martinez and Pulitzer Prize winner Nilo Cruz, as well as Orlandersmith, Hilary Bettis and Aurin Squire. "But I told them that they were going to compete with the ambulance blaring, the person passing by on a skateboard, the dog barking," Hausmann joked.

The play, which premiered November 27, faced unprecedented challenges in terms of lighting and sound-not to mention COVID-19 safety protocols. The actors rehearse over Zoom, take weekly COVID-19 tests and enter onstage without coming into contact with anyone. Those who act together in a piece live together, Hausmann explained. Slowly, thanks to this and other artistic endeavors, Lincoln Road once more began to fill with people-though at a distance-in December. Hausmann's work "bolsters the crucial economic recovery of our city after months of devastation and loss," Miami Beach mayor Dan Gelber told AFP. "Never have the seven deadly sins been more welcome." — AFP



Michel Hausmann, 39 years old, artistic director of the Miami New Drama, the resident company and operator of the historic Colony Theater, poses in front of a store window used as a stage for the play "Seven Deadly Sins" during an interview with the AFP.



Colombian actress Laura Londono is pictured backstage as a makeup artists works on her during the production of a new version of the Colombian soap opera Cafe.



Colombian actress Laura Londono (right) and Cuban actor William Levy perform a scene during the production of a new version of the Colombian soap opera Cafe.



TV director Mauricio Cruz (left) rehearses a scene during the production of a new version of the Colombian soap opera Cafe.

## Love in the time of COVID: TV kisses return, despite pandemic

Dozens of peasants wearing face masks remain immobile under the baking midday sun in a coffee plantation in central Colombia. Suddenly a voice shouts out: "Face masks off, we're going to roll!" Colombia's popular daytime soap operas-known as telenovelas in Latin America-were forced off the screens by the coronavirus pandemic. But after six months of silence, they are back in all their steamy and corny glory-kisses included. Filmed in the central-western Caldas region "Coffee with the Scent of a Woman" is operating under strict restrictions in terms of staffing capacity, the use of masks, personal protective equipment and regular COVID-19 testing.

It's constrained by a reduced budget and the perennial risk of being shut down again-a far cry from the romanticism of its characters and storylines. Social distancing is a near-impossibility in an industry that relies on close contacts, whether between actors or in their interactions with make-up or wardrobe artists. There are also dozens of people working in close proximity behind the camera. Actors Laura Londono and William Levy, the stars of "Coffee," talk to each other without masks, centimeters apart as the romance between their characters Paloma and Sebastian bubbles to the surface.

"If we were astronauts we'd have a different distance but we're actors, we work with the voice and the body," said Katherine Velez, who plays Paloma's mother, Carmenza. To ensure safety, the entire production staff take Covid tests every Monday and most of them live at the farm that doubles as the soap's set. Colombia has recorded more than 1.5 million coronavirus cases and over 42,000 deaths.

### 'Things became bleak'

"Coffee" is a modern adaptation of a famous soap written in the 1990s by Colombian screenwriter Fernando Gaitan, who wrote the original telenovela that inspired the hugely popular "Ugly Betty" series in the US. Filming was due to begin in April but the pandemic put it on hold. "Just 10 days before starting ... we were locked down for almost six months," said Yalile Giordanelli, the show's executive producer. Many of the 270-strong production staff had already

arrived on set. "We were told to pack up everything and go home, but at that time it was temporary," said make-up artist Adriana Ortiz. "As the time passed things became bleak."

The RCN television channel that was due to screen "Coffee" kept paying a reduced salary during the months of lockdown. "We had to tighten the purse strings," said Ortiz, 54. The pandemic hasn't been so kind to much of the arts and entertainment industry, though. The national statistics department says more than 200,000 jobs were lost in the indus-

### 'Safe kiss scene'

Director Mauricio Cruz says the testing is crucial to give confidence to actors working closely with each other. "Yesterday we did a kiss scene for some promotional material ... the test was the day before so ... we were very safe," said Cruz. It's impossible to entirely shield the cast from the virus, says Velez. But once the cameras roll "everyone is without face masks, confident that the production has the situation under control as much as possible." The world of telenovelas is rife with contradictions.



Colombian actress Laura Londono reads a script on her mobile phone during the production of a new version of the Colombian soap opera Cafe in the municipality of Chinchina. — AFP photos

try between October 2019 and the same month this year. The national media and communications association says that television channels RCN and Caracol had to cancel 38 productions between them after Colombia imposed a lockdown in March.

Colombia started lifting lockdown restrictions in September and production companies began to gradually return to work under strict protocols. However, the production staff are not in a bubble and everyone is allowed to go home at weekends to visit their families. Testing everyone when they return is costly but Giordanelli said it's a price worth paying as any positive cases could mean actors needing to stay in isolation, which would delay filming.

"Since people are enclosed at home they're watching more television ... but on the other hand, industry in general, companies, ... have stopped investing in advertisements" due to the economic crisis inflicting the country, said Giordanelli. It means television productions have smaller budgets while the pandemic has pushed up logistical costs. The virus, though, has not only disrupted revenues and schedules, it's also affected storylines. Script writers were forced to rewrite scenes involving parties or major social events in favor of small family gatherings. It's created "a much more cosy, intimate story" that is faithful to the difficult circumstances it's filmed under, said Giordanelli.— AFP

## Sports

Photo of the day



Nasser Al-Attiyah performs in Dubai, UAE. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Thailand pledges 'world's safest' badminton event as China pulls out

**BANGKOK:** Thailand's badminton chief pledged that next month's restart tournaments will be the "safest in the world" yesterday after heavyweights China withdrew because of coronavirus restrictions. China's pull-out blows a big hole in the draw for the three world tour events from January 12 in Bangkok, the first in Asia since Covid-19 shut down the sport in March.

Badminton Association of Thailand president Patama Leeswadtrakul said China's anti-coronavirus rules prevented the team, which includes men's Olympic champion Chen Long and women's world number two Chen Yufei, from travelling. "The reason is that the Chinese government doesn't allow them to go out of the country—not just for the sport of badminton but for all kinds of athletes," Patama told AFP.

The three back-to-back tournaments, in bio-secure "bubble" conditions and behind closed doors, culminate in the delayed 2020 World Tour Finals from January 27. Patama said the Thai government has been working to ensure top standards of health, including isolating players the minute they get off their flights. "This bubble competition will be the safest in the world," Patama said. "After January 4, no one is allowed to enter this bubble and all the measures and protocol are very strict for the health and safety of everyone."

She admitted that the prospect of playing without fans was a concern for some competitors, who are worried about how it may affect their performances. "Our badminton players also mention these same feelings... But we have to seal everyone in the bubble for the best health this time," she said. "We are the only tournament that can host in this world at this time—I mean internationally, globally, at this time of resurgence." Thailand has seen a low toll from the virus since it registered the first case outside of China in January. But new outbreaks in recent weeks have prompted the government to put certain areas under partial restrictions after months of relative normalcy. —AFP

## Zain offers bundle of latest tech solutions to 'Shooting'

## Upgrading company's infrastructure with world-class standards

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, signed a partnership agreement with National Shooting Company (Shooting), owner of the Shooting Ranges Complex, to offer a variety of the latest tech and wireless telecom solutions, Internet services, CCTV systems, and more with the aim of elevating the company's customer experience and reinforcing its infrastructure with world-class solutions.

As part of this agreement, Zain will offer a wide range of the latest digital services and wireless telecommunications solutions built on the most advanced technologies to serve Shooting's technical needs as per the highest standards. National Shooting Company, the owner and operator of the Shooting Ranges Complex – the only shooting range in Kuwait, is a leading national company that contributes to offering shooting sports activities in an appropriate and safe environment that follows global quality and safety standards.

Zain is set to offer Shooting a number of world-class solutions to upgrade and reinforce the infrastructure of the company's entire facilities. This includes supplying,

installing, and operating outdoor and indoor CCTV systems, supplying, installing, and operating Cisco Wi-Fi systems via the most advanced standards, as well as offering the latest Internet and voice call services in the market.

In addition, the agreement includes upgrading all of the company's shooting systems and wireless control units used inside the Shooting Ranges Complex, and offering drone services for photography and videography purposes related to the company's facilities. Recently, Zain received three international certifications from Cisco, the global leader in telecommunications and networks technologies. The certifications from Cisco reflect Zain's commitment in offering the latest and most advanced technology solutions as per the highest international standards for customers in Kuwait's business sector.

The first certification from Cisco, Advanced Collaboration Architecture Specialized Partner, acknowledges Zain's capabilities with respect to Cisco's HCS solutions over the cloud in the Kuwaiti market. The second certification, Advanced Cloud and Managed

Services Certified Partner, affirms Zain's capabilities in offering the latest advanced cloud and managed services to corporate customers.

The third certification recognizes Zain as a Premier Certified Partner of Cisco. The bundle of services and solutions Zain offers in collaboration with Cisco aims at raising operational efficiency and increasing productivity for businesses while providing high levels of security. Zain continues to achieve its strategy towards fully transforming into an integrated digital service provider, reflecting its commitment in further pushing the digital transformation wheel in Kuwait by contributing to advance the local business sector. The company considers itself an active partner in creating the future of smart life in Kuwait on all levels, especially within business areas.

The offering of these services and solutions to Shooting comes as part of Zain's commitment to offer the latest and most advanced solutions to Kuwait's business community, whether large companies or SMEs, and as per the highest international standards.



This commitment comes in line with Zain's digital transformation strategy through which it aims at empowering a more efficient business sector in the Kuwaiti market.

## NZ end Pakistan defiance for a thrilling Test win

**MOUNT MAUNGANUI:** New Zealand (NZ) beat Pakistan by 101 runs in a thrilling finish to the first Test in Mount Maunganui yesterday, where the visitors were just 27 balls from escaping with a draw. The win tentatively put New Zealand top of the World rankings and kept alive their chances of making the World Test Championship final. After a 165-run fifth-wicket stand by Fawad Alam and Mohammad Rizwan the Test went into the final session with both sides in with a chance to win.

Pakistan needed 158 runs, New Zealand required six wickets and 36 overs remained. New Zealand captain Kane Williamson put his faith in Neil Wagner, bowling on two broken toes, and the youngest of his pace quartet, Kyle Jamieson, to swing the match towards the Black Caps. Wagner bowled a marathon 11 overs unchanged after tea and Jamieson – on his 26th birthday – bowled nine.

They obliged with the wickets of Alam and Rizwan. "We saw an incredible spell from Kyle and Wags together that did turn the match when it was looking likely to run out into a draw," Williamson said, adding that with so much at stake he could not contemplate going defensive.

"For us it was trying to win at all costs. Going into

that last session we still clearly had that opportunity, as did Pakistan, but in the context of the Test championship losing while trying to win was still a better bet than anything else. "It was great coming away with the result and the excitement of finishing so late in the piece obviously adds to that." When Jamieson had Rizwan lbw for 60 and Wagner removed Alam for 102, New Zealand were into the tail as Pakistan folded from 240 for four to be all out for 271.

Tail-enders Shaheen Afridi and Naseem Shah kept the draw option alive as long as they could, blocking for seven overs in fading light before Naseem was caught and bowled by spinner Mitchell Santner for one, ending Pakistan's resistance. Pakistan captain Rizwan said that despite the result, he was proud of the way his side played. "We put in hard work, but you must give credit to the New Zealand team," he said. Jamieson struck first, 11 overs after the tea break, with the wicket of Rizwan, lbw for 60, before Wagner removed Alam for 102. Jamieson produced a particularly miserly spell after the tea break when he sent down nine overs and took two for four.

Apart from when Pakistan whipped out the New Zealand openers cheaply on day one, the match had been in New Zealand's control until Rizwan, the stand-in skipper, joined Alam in the middle with Pakistan 75 for four on the final morning. They occupied the crease for more than 63 overs until Jamieson struck 11 overs into the final session. Jamieson had gone close to taking a wicket several times previously, and even his lbw shout against Rizwan was turned down before the umpire's decision was overturned on review. Alam lasted three more overs until he gloved a Wagner short ball to wicketkeeper BJ Watling



**MOUNT MAUNGANUI:** Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan (right) watches a shot towards New Zealand's Tom Latham (left) during the fifth day of the first cricket Test match between New Zealand and Pakistan yesterday. —AFP

down the leg side.

Alam had been discarded by Pakistan in 2009 after three Tests and a best innings of 168, and since his recall this year his highest score was 21 against England in August. There were a few loose shots early in his innings and a nerve-wracking moment when a ball ricocheted off his arm and bounced dangerously close to the stumps. Otherwise he staunchly held his own through 269 deliveries before bringing up his century with a four off Wagner – scoring only two more runs off his next 33 balls before his dismissal. New Zealand's frontline pace bowlers Tim Southee, Trent Boult, Wagner, Jamieson and Santner each took two wickets. —AFP



same model used by Toby Price and Sam Sunderland, both of whom are previous champions of the Dakar Rally. They also represent the Red Bull KTM Team. "I hope to continue to adjust my training from this race for the coming years. Every race leads into the next one," said Jaffar.

When asked if he had anything to add or comment on about the upcoming race, he said, "I'm optimistic." You can find Mohammed Jaffar competing in the Dakar Rally this January. To find out more about Mohammed Jaffar's participation in the Dakar Rally, visit @RedBullKuwait on Instagram and Twitter, and @RedBull on Facebook, or visit <https://www.redbull.com/int-en/events/dakar-rally>

## Jaffar pushes through the final stretch of his pre-rally training

**KUWAIT:** The 43rd Edition of the world-renowned rally raid is set to begin proper on January 3, just over a month from now. This year it returns to Saudi Arabia, where it will start and finish in the major city of Jeddah. He's feeling elevated for the rally and is very much looking forward to the 12-day event. "This has been a lifelong dream for me," said Mohammed Jaffar. "I just want to compete and learn from all the people I am going to meet." Jaffar and his team must prepare themselves on multiple fronts and continue to work closely together until the race ends on January 15.

The number of preparations are too numerous to count. For Jaffar, it begins with him being physically and mentally ready for the arduous journey ahead of him. "This is my first Dakar Rally, which means my first pre-Dakar training regimen. What I'm doing now is combining my previous schedules into one that fits this particular rally," said Mohammed Jaffar. He trains on a set schedule. This includes various forms of endurance, stamina, and cross-training workouts that are meant to strengthen his body and build his mental fortitude.

There is an upside to this particular race. "What is helpful is that the race will be in KSA. The good thing is I have some experience there," he said. As the race nears he moved his training from Kuwait to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where he will make preparations with the mechanical team, all of whom already have experience in the Dakar Rally. Together, they will practice and learn what they can from the road book, assessing the different areas, and strategize on what to expect.

The current route shows them going from sea level flatlands, to sand dunes, and mountainous landscapes as well. Each section must be approached with its own set of rules in order to tackle them successfully. Jaffar also discussed the motorbike, which is the off-road category he competes in. "I've already received the new bike for the rally," Jaffar said. "It's fully-set to handle anything we might encounter out there. I have no plans to use it until race day arrives."

Jaffar will be equipped with the model 2020 KTM 450 Factory Rally Replica. This all-terrain bike is the

## Burns dumped as Warner, Pucovski get nod for Australia

**SYDNEY:** Australia yesterday included David Warner and debutant Will Pucovski in their squad for the third Test against India, with selectors ditching Joe Burns after a poor start to the series. Warner will return as he continues recovering from a groin injury, while Pucovski is also expected to be fit after a concussion, Cricket Australia said in a statement. Fast bowler Sean Abbott has also recovered from a calf strain and was included in the 18-man squad for the remainder of the four-Test series.

But out-of-form Burns was released after struggling in the first two Tests. "Unfortunately, Joe's returns haven't been what he or the selectors would like or what we consider he is capable of," national selector Trevor Hohns said. Although Warner was still recovering from his injury, selectors were hoping the opener would be fit for the match at the Sydney Cricket Ground. "David has made strong progress in his recovery from injury and will be given every chance to play," Hohns said.

The selection of Pucovski clears the way for the 22-year-old to make his Test debut, after a blow to the helmet in a warm-up match earlier this month. Australia won the opening Test in Adelaide by eight wickets, with India leveling the series on Tuesday with an eight-wicket win in Melbourne. Despite an outbreak of Covid-19 in Sydney, Cricket Australia has confirmed the third Test will be held at the SCG on January 7, with players expected to arrive on January 4.

The virus cluster, which emerged earlier this month, has forced authorities to put parts of the city in lockdown and place restrictions on travel to other states. But officials were still confident the Test would be able to go ahead before the teams travelled to Brisbane for the final Test on January 15. Australia squad: Tim Paine (capt), Pat Cummins, Sean Abbott, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Marcus Harris, Travis Head, Moises Henriques, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Michael Neser, James Pattinson, Will Pucovski, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Mitchell Swepson, Matthew Wade, David Warner. —AFP

## Sports

# Bucks' long-range barrage buries Miami Heat; Clippers bounce back

## Milwaukee Bucks set an NBA record

LOS ANGELES: The Milwaukee Bucks set an NBA record for three-pointers in a game, draining 29 from beyond the arc in a 144-97 blowout win over the Miami Heat on Tuesday. The Heat, who stunned the top-seeded Bucks in the second round of the 2020 Eastern Conference playoffs en route to the NBA Finals, never got a look in, trailing by as many as 51 in a game Milwaukee led all the way.

Sam Merrill drilled the record-breaking 28th three-pointer of the game, surpassing the 27 set by the Houston Rockets against the Phoenix Suns on April 7, 2019. Jrue Holiday had six three-pointers on the way to 24 points. Khris Middleton, who led the Bucks with 25 points, made four of five from three-point range. Starting guard Donte DiVincenzo's 17 points included five three-pointers, and Brook Lopez had three treys on the way to 14 points.

Two-time reigning Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo was the only Bucks starter not to make a three-pointer, coming up empty on two

attempts in a nine-point performance. His brother Thanasis Antetokounmpo drained one three-pointer for the family on the way to five points off the bench for the Bucks, who simply steamrolled a Heat team that was without injured forward Jimmy Butler. "Honestly, (we) just played hard," Holiday said. "We know the Heat way and how they're going to come out and play no matter who's playing."

"So we just wanted to take that approach." It was a bounce-back win for the Bucks, who were blown out 130-110 by the Knicks in New York on Sunday. "Last game in New York, we didn't show what we wanted to show," Holiday said. They left no doubt in this one, leading by as many as 24 points on the way to a 46-26 first-quarter lead and never let up. "Some nights, the basketball gods are with you a little bit, and it was probably one of those nights for us," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said.

"But I liked our defense, too. I think the energy on both ends of the court feeds and builds on each oth-

er and good things will happen." The Bucks' previous record for three-pointers in a game was 22, against the Sacramento Kings on November 4, 2018. The most the Heat had given up before was 24. "It looked like they had been thinking about this game for 80 days," said Heat coach Erik Spoelstra, whose team will get a chance to avenge the embarrassing defeat when they host the Bucks again. The Los Angeles Clippers also rebounded from a big defeat.

Two days after a 124-73 loss to the Dallas Mavericks the Clippers beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 124-101. Lou Williams scored 20 points off the bench to lead seven Clippers players who scored in double figures. "We knew coming tonight we had to do better," said Clippers center Serge Ibaka, who scored 16 points. "We had to be aggressive, just play team basketball." The Philadelphia 76ers, coming off a lopsided loss to Cleveland, beat the Toronto Raptors 100-93. Center Joel Embiid, who sat out Sunday's 24-point loss to

the Cavaliers with a tight back, led the Sixers with 29 points and 16 rebounds.

### Randle leads Knicks

Elsewhere, Julius Randle posted a triple-double of 28 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists to lead the New York Knicks to a 95-86 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers. But Russell Westbrook's triple-double of 21 points, 15 rebounds and 11 assists - his third in as many appearances in the young season - again went for nothing as his Washington Wizards fell 115-107 to the Chicago Bulls. Zach LaVine led the Bulls with 23 points, and Wendell Carter Jr added a double-double of 10 points and 12 rebounds as Chicago notched their first win of the season. Denver center Nikola Jokic also had a triple-double in a losing effort, his 26 points, 11 rebounds and 12 assists not enough in the Nuggets' 125-115 loss to the Sacramento Kings - who were led by the 24 points of De'Aaron Fox. — AFP



## Wheel Chair Basketball game

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The first phase of the return of local sports activities for the handicapped was concluded with the final Wheel Chair Basketball game in the presence of the Paralympics Committee Chairman Mahdi Al-Azmi, Honorary Chairwoman of Kuwait Handicapped Sport Club Al-Sheikha Sheikhha Al-Sabah and Chairman of the (KHSC) Shafi Al-Hajiri. Chairman of the Paralympic Committee Mahdi Al-Azmi said he will support all clubs and remove all obstacles the clubs face.



## Three-day shooting Championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Late Sheikh Abdallah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah Championship will be launched today, and will continue for three days with the participation of club and National Guard shooters who will compete in the 10m Air Pistol and Rifle as well as the Olympic archery for both men and women. The organizing committee prepared all that the shooters need at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex. Kuwait Shooting



Sport Club Assistant Secretary Engr Mohammad Misfer Al-Ghurba lauded the role of the Late Sheikh Abdallah Al-Mubarak's family towards the shooting sport in Kuwait over the years. He said there will be the Archery official training starting at 3:20 pm, then the Rifle and Pistol will start at 5:00 pm. Actual scoring competition will be on Friday and Saturday while the closing ceremony will be held by 3:30 pm.

## Federer and Nadal re-elected to ATP players' council

PARIS: Tennis legends Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer, ranked second and fifth in the world respectively, have been re-elected to the ATP players' council, whose term runs until June 2022. The council, as voted by ATP player members, also saw the re-election of Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime, Australian John Millman, South African Kevin Anderson, Briton Andy Murray and Brazilian Bruno Soares. In addition, France's Gilles Simon returns to the council having

served previous terms, while newcomers Pablo Andujar of Spain and New Zealander Marcus Daniell will serve their first term.

Britain Colin Dowdeswell and Venezuela's Daniel Vallverdu were elected as representatives of retired players and coaches respectively. The council's president and vice-president will be elected at its first meeting in 2021. It was presided over until last year by world number one Novak Djokovic. But the Serb broke away in August to establish a new players' association which he said would include women and was intended to bring players together to give them a louder voice in decision-making. Federer and Nadal both spoke out against the proposal when it was announced, calling for "unity, not separation". — AFP

### Murray wildcard

Federer's absence will be felt at the Australian Open, despite a top-quality field led by world number ones Djokovic and Ashleigh Barty. US superstar Serena Williams, Federer's contemporary at 39, is also on the entry list as she again attempts to equal Margaret Court's record of 24-time Grand Slam singles titles. Federer's withdrawal comes as former world number one Andy Murray, a five-time Australian Open finalist, was given a wildcard entry. Tiley welcomed the 33-year-old back to the tournament, two years after his first-round exit prompted fears his career was at an end.

"Seeing him come back, having undergone major surgery and built himself back up to get onto the tour again, will be a highlight," Tiley said. The opening Slam of the year, which will be played in front of at least 50 percent of normal crowds, has been pushed back three weeks to February 8 over difficulties caused by the coronavirus. All players must undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine on arrival, during which they will constantly be tested for Covid-19 but allowed to train for five hours a day in a bio-secure bubble.

The men's and women's qualifiers will be held in Doha and Dubai respectively from January 10-13, with players arriving in Melbourne from January 15 on special charter flights. Melbourne only emerged from a months-long lockdown in October following a second wave of Covid-19, complicating planning for the Grand Slam and how to allow so many players and support staff to enter the country safely. — AFP

## Kuwait Weight Lifting Federation organizes refresher championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Weight Lifting Federation (KWLF) organized its second refresher championship for the ladies - in preparation for West Asia Championship to be organized by Kuwait next February with the participation of nine countries. Abrar Al-Fahad won the first place in the 76 kg category; Saham Al-Saif took second; Sundus Al-Faili won the 71 kg category. In the 64 kg category, Anfal Al-Muzayen won first place, Noura Al-Awadhi (second) and Athoob Al-Faraj (third). Hawraa Al-Mousawi won the 81 kg category. In the 55 kg, Bashayer Al-Mayas took first place while Shathar Al-Saleh grabbed the second position.

Meanwhile, the Chairman of KWLF Talal Al-Jassar expressed satisfaction over the level

of players' performance during the tournament, adding that such level will contribute to winning medals during the international championships. He said that COVID-19 pandemic and suspension of sports activities halted preparations by the national teams for tournaments. "We were keen to utilize time and prepare the ladies team for West Asia, Gulf and Arab Championship," he said, adding that he is proud of the elite group of players who are able to put Kuwait's name in the international championship registers.

On his part, KWLF's secretary Musaleem Al-Adwani said the refresher championship witnessed fierce competition. He said that the federation seeks good preparation for upcoming championships and have a team able to compete and get results.

On another note, Al-Adwani said that KWLF cancelled all financial fines that were levied on clubs on the occasion of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's assumption of power and naming HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad as the Crown Prince. KWLF announced in September 2019 the formation of ladies team for the first time ever - with 20 players as members. In October 2019, the federation organized the first local championship, and then participated in the Arab Championship that was held in Jordan.



Weight lifters are pictured during the refresher championship for the ladies. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Live		Matches on TV (Local Timings)	
SPANISH LEAGUE			
Athletic de Bilbao v Real Sociedad	beIN Sports HD 3	16:00	
Osasuna v Deportivo Alaves	beIN Sports HD 3	18:15	

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## Barca end gloomy year on drab note

Sevilla pound visiting Villarreal 2-0



BARCELONA: Eibar's Serbian goalkeeper Marko Dmitrovic (left) saves a shot on goal by Barcelona's Danish forward Martin Braithwaite during the Spanish League football match between Barcelona and Eibar on December 29, 2020. — AFP

MADRID: Barcelona ended a difficult year with another disappointing result as they were held 1-1 at home by struggling Eibar on Tuesday. The result left Barcelona in sixth place in La Liga, seven points behind Atletico Madrid who have played two fewer matches. "We have to be realistic," said Barcelona manager Ronald Koeman.

"The league is very complicated. In life nothing is impossible, but you have to recognize the points gap to a team like Atletico, which seems to give

very little away." The six-time Ballon d'Or winner Lionel Messi is nursing an ankle injury and watched from the stands. In his absence Martin Braithwaite took an eighth minute penalty kick, and missed. The Dane did put the ball in the net in the 25th minute but the strike was disallowed.

Although Barcelona dominated possession and took far more shots, Eibar took the lead after 57 minutes. Their captain Kike Garcia pounced after a defensive mistake from Ronald Araujo. "I take

responsibility," said Araujo. "I didn't notice that the forward was so close."

"It's a pity, we wanted to win and we played well" Ousmane Dembele levelled 10 minutes later with a right foot shot but Barcelona could not find the winning goal. "We were missing Leo, of course," said Koeman, before asking: "How is it possible that we didn't win this match?"

"We created chances, we missed a penalty, and we gave away a goal, the only shot on target they

had?" Barcelona have struggled with injuries this season and lost Philippe Coutinho who limped off in added time. "He said he was feeling pain in his left knee," said Koeman. "We need to do more tests to find out exactly what's wrong with him". In the other early game, Lucas Ocampo converted an early penalty and Youssef En-Neyri added a second after the break as Sevilla beat visiting Villarreal 2-0. Sevilla moved onto a tie for third with Real Sociedad and Villarreal. — AFP

## United move up to second

LONDON: Marcus Rashford's 93rd minute strike beat Wolves 1-0 to move Manchester United into second in the Premier League as fears over the continuation of the season due to rising coronavirus infection rates grew on Tuesday. A record 18 positive tests for Covid-19 among players and staff were detected in the weekly round of testing.

After Manchester City's trip to Everton on Monday was postponed due to a COVID outbreak in Pep Guardiola's squad, all five matches scheduled for Tuesday went ahead despite disruption for Sheffield United and Southampton. Bottom-of-the-table United revealed they had suffered a number of positive cases but were still able to field a squad of 18 for their 1-0 defeat at Burnley. Southampton manager Ralph Hasenhuttl coached his side from his home for a 0-0 draw against West Ham after a member of his household tested positive.

The Telegraph reported the Premier League will discuss plans for a two-week circuit breaker with infection rates soaring across England. However, Manchester United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer called for the competition to continue. "I'm not sure if stopping playing football will make a difference," said Solskjaer, whose side are mounting an unexpected title challenge after a slow start to the season. "In our bubble we've proven to be quite (safe), we haven't had too many cases transmitting within the group."



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Uruguayan striker Edinson Cavani controls the ball during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Wolverhampton Wanderers on December 29, 2020. — AFP

On the field, United were fortunate to escape with all three points against a youthful Wolves side, who were in action just 48 hours ago against Tottenham. In keeping with several meetings between the sides in recent years, chances were few and far between. But United answered Solskjaer's call to win more games late on in the style he did as a player during Alex Ferguson's time at Old Trafford as Rashford's shot took a wicked deflection off Romain Saiss deep into stoppage time. "This is a big step forward that you don't perform, but you still win," added Solskjaer.

Winning the best medicine for Arsenal Arsenal eased fears they could be dragged into a relegation battle with a 3-1 win over Chelsea on Saturday and can now look up the table with hope thanks to Alexandre Lacazette's winner in a 1-0 victory at Brighton. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang returned from injury in the place of Lacazette in the only change made by Arteta. But the French striker came off the bench to make an instant impact with a fine near-post finish from Bukayo Saka's pass just 21 seconds after coming on. Victory moves the Gunners up to 13th, within six points of the top six. — AFP

## Coronavirus: Premier League hits new high

LONDON: The Premier League confirmed on Tuesday that 18 players and staff have tested positive for coronavirus, the highest number since weekly testing began. Manchester City's clash at Everton was postponed on Monday after an outbreak of multiple positive cases at City. "The Premier League can today confirm that between Monday 21 December and Sunday 27 December, 1,479 players and club staff were tested for Covid-19," the league said in a statement.

"Of these, there were 18 new positive tests. Players or club staff who have tested positive will self-isolate for a period of 10 days." That figure surpassed the previous highest figure recorded of 16 for November 9-15. All remaining seven Premier League games on Tuesday and Wednesday are still set to go ahead. City had already announced on Christmas Day there had been four positive tests at the club for players Kyle Walker and Gabriel Jesus and two staff members prior to the latest positive cases on Monday.

The club's training ground has been closed 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

League Cup semi-finals on January 6. Southampton revealed that manager Ralph Hasenhuttl will not be in attendance for his side's match against West Ham on Tuesday as a member of his household has tested positive.

The Everton-City postponement was just the second time that a Premier League game has been called off due to Covid-19 since the 2019/20 season resumed in June. Aston Villa's clash with Newcastle earlier this month was postponed due to an outbreak at Newcastle's training ground. However, the Premier League insisted the protocols put in place are still stringent enough to prevent another shutdown like the three-month stoppage between March and June earlier this year. "The Premier League continues to have full confidence in its protocols and rules, and the way in which all clubs are implementing them," the league said in a statement on Monday.

Further down the English football pyramid, postponements are mounting with seven of the 12 games scheduled for Tuesday in League One called off due to COVID-19 infections. The number of positive tests recorded over a 24-hour period in England and Wales hit new high of 41,385 Monday, according to UK government figures. — AFP