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# Kuwait suspends flights with India over COVID

## India's death toll hits new record as virus 'tsunami' worsens



**KUWAIT:** In this August 1, 2020 file photo, passengers arrive at Kuwait international Airport. Kuwait's Civil Aviation Authority yesterday suspended direct commercial flights with India at the recommendation of health authorities. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak and Agencies

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Civil Aviation Authority yesterday suspended direct commercial flights with India at the recommendation of health authorities after a steep rise of coronavirus cases in the South Asian country. The indefinite suspension took effect from Friday midnight. Passengers arriving directly from India are banned from entering Kuwait unless they have lived at least 14 days in a third country, a statement by the Civil Aviation said.

The ban exempts Kuwaiti citizens and their close relatives - spouses and children - and their domestic helpers. Air cargo flights will continue to operate normally, the statement said. "In view of the health situation, it has been decided to suspend direct commercial air links with India until further notice," the Kuwaiti government tweeted late Friday.

Expatriate workers make up some 70 percent of Kuwait's population and include hundreds of thousands of Indians. The region's busiest international air hub, the United Arab Emirates, had already announced on Thursday that it would suspend flights to and from India from today.

As the clock ticked down to the shutdown of the air corridor between India and the UAE—one of the world's busiest-fares soared as Indians who could afford it scrambled to escape the COVID surge.

India's daily coronavirus death toll set a new record yesterday as the government battled to get oxygen to hospitals overwhelmed by the hundreds of thousands of new daily cases. Twenty patients died in one night at one New Delhi hospital suffering from oxygen shortages, medical officials said. A Delhi court said that the new pandemic wave had become "a tsunami".

Meanwhile, the Iranian authorities said yesterday that they were suspending air arrivals from India and Pakistan. "Flights to and from the two countries of India and Pakistan will be banned" from midnight, aviation authority spokesman Mohammad Hassan Zibakhsh said, quoted by state news agency IRNA. "There are no scheduled flights between Iran and India. Nevertheless, accepting connecting passengers from the noted countries will be banned."

Beyond the Gulf, Canada suspended flights from both India and Pakistan for 30 days, while the US State Department urged Americans to avoid travel to India, even if they are vaccinated. Concern has focused on one new strain of the virus in particular that has spread rapidly in India and has already been detected in Europe.

Meanwhile, Germany will shut out all travellers arriving from India apart from its own citizens, Health Minister Jens Spahn said yesterday, as a new **Continued on Page 2**

Ramadan Kareem

## What is the Noble Quran?

Abdeltawwab Mustafa

The Holy Quran is Allah's speech that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, the final messenger (peace be upon him) via Archangel Gabriel (Jabreel). The Holy Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in stages, according to occasions and events over 23 years, which was the length of Prophet Muhammad's mission. The long span of revelation was for several reasons: 1) to strengthen the prophet's heart, 2) to support him with the message that Allah is with him at all times, 3) to guide the prophet in some situations, 4) to answer questions of the companions as they arose, and 5) to give Muslims time to gradually understand and implement the legislation, as well as to memorize the text so that they could convey it to others.

Some chapters and verses of the Holy Quran were revealed before the migration of the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah; they are called Makki, and others were revealed after his migration and they are called Madani. These two categories of verses and chapters have distinct characteristics.

Because Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was sent to all mankind, the Holy Quran is a lasting miracle that does not expire or become outdated, neither with the death of the prophet nor with the passing of time. Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) promised that He Himself will protect this Book from all kinds of alterations and stated it clearly in the Quran: "Verily, it is We who have sent down the Reminder (i.e. the Quran) and surely We will guard it (from corruption)." (Surat Al-Hijr 15 - 9)

If you look at the Holy Quran objectively, you will discover that it is a great miracle. It is the only book in the world that states clearly to be the speech of Almighty God, word for word. It presents only recently confirmed facts in various fields including biology, geology, immunology, zoology, astronomy, meteorology, embryology and nutrition.

**Continued on Page 2**

## Ex-MP Wasmī to run for Assembly seat

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** Former MP and leading opposition figure Obaid Al-Wasmī yesterday filed his papers to contest the by-election for a seat in the fifth constituency, which fell vacant after the constitutional court

nullified the election of opposition MP Bader Al-Dahoum. Wasmī's move will certainly make the fight for the parliamentary seat very interesting, as the opposition bids to reclaim its lost seat.

Wasmī, a professor of law who was elected to the National Assembly in Feb 2012 before the court scrapped the election four months later, held a series of meetings with opposition figures like former Assembly speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun before taking his decision.

Before he filed his papers, Wasmī visited Dahoum and the two paid a visit to Awazem tribal chief Falah bin Jame to

secure his support for Wasmī. The Awazem are the largest tribe in the constituency. The tribal chief had announced the tribe will boycott the by-election in protest against the nullification of the membership of Dahoum, a member of the tribe.

Opposition lawmakers hailed the move by Wasmī, who is expected to become a leader of the opposition in the National Assembly amid an ongoing political dispute with the government and the Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. Registration of candidates for the by-election closed yesterday and polls will be held on May 22.



Obaid Al-Wasmī

## Gaza rockets follow clashes in Jerusalem

**JERUSALEM:** Israeli warplanes struck the Gaza Strip early yesterday after repeated salvos of rocket fire into Israel followed a second night of clashes between Palestinians and police in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem. Thirty-six rockets were launched, the Israeli army said, the most in a single night this year, after Gaza's Islamist rulers Hamas voiced support for the east Jerusalem protests, which were fuelled by a Thursday march by far-right Jews.

Washington said it was "deeply concerned" by the escalating violence, while the European Union appealed for restraint. The United States, which has taken a more even-handed approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since President Joe Biden took office in January urged "calm and unity".

"The rhetoric of extremist protesters chanting hateful and violent slogans must be firmly rejected," State Department spokesman Ned Price tweeted. Tensions have been running high in east Jerusalem over a ban on gatherings, and a series of videos posted online showing young Arabs attacking ultra-Orthodox Jews, and Jewish extremists taking to the streets to bully Arabs.

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**GAZA CITY:** Smoke rises from explosions during a military drill by members of the Mujahideen Brigades, the armed wing of the Palestinian movement of the same name, along the beach in Gaza City yesterday.—AFP

## Saudis halt fresh food imports from Lebanon

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia announced Friday the suspension of fruit and vegetable imports from Lebanon, saying shipments were being used for drug smuggling and accusing Beirut of inaction. The decision is a blow to Lebanon, which is facing its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war. The local currency has dived by more than 85 percent on the black market, inflation is rampant and more than half the country now lives in poverty. Authorities "have noticed

increased drug smuggling activity targeting the kingdom from Lebanon... especially in vegetables and fruit consignments", the Saudi interior ministry said.

Riyadh will ban the entry or transit of those products through the kingdom from Sunday, it said in a statement carried by the official SPA news agency. The restrictions will remain in place until Lebanon provides "sufficient and reliable guarantees" to put an end to what it called "systematic smuggling operations targeting the kingdom". The move comes after Saudi authorities have made repeated appeals to their Lebanese counterparts on the matter, SPA said.

The agency also reported Friday that customs officials seized 5.3 million pills of captagon hidden in a consignment of "pomegranate" fruit imported from Lebanon at the Red Sea port of Jeddah.

Captagon is an amphetamine manufactured in

Lebanon and probably also in Syria and Iraq, mainly for consumption in Saudi Arabia, according to the French Observatory for Drugs and Drug Addiction (OFDD). Lebanese media quoted the head of the country's fruit and vegetable exporters, Naem Khalil, as denying it was pomegranate season in Lebanon. Khalil said the seized cargo could not have been Lebanese but had transited via Lebanon from Syria. Lebanon's foreign ministry said it had been informed by Saudi Arabia of its decision to halt imports of fruit and vegetables, the official National News Agency reported. Drug smuggling "harms Lebanon's economy, farmers and reputation", the ministry said. Saudi Arabia has taken a step back from its former ally, angered by the influence of Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah, which is backed by Riyadh's rival Tehran.— AFP

## Local

# Tenants facing problems renewing civil ID after changing address

## 'Landlords' indifference' puts tenants in trouble

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Many tenants residing in various areas have faced problems renewing their civil ID due to the address of their building. These problems caused by changes in the building can be resolved by the landlord, but due to their negligence and carelessness, the tenants are the ones suffering. Tenants facing such a problem can find a "fixer" to register their address for KD 10. If they cannot find such an insider, they will face many problems and their ID card will never be issued.

Huda moved to a new flat in Salwa after the building where she lived for over 10 years was demolished. When renewing her ID, she was asked to bring the rent contract of the new flat to be able to change her address. "When I visited the Public Authority for Civil Information, I was also asked to provide the PACI number of the building. But the employee told me there is a problem with this building, as it shows in the system that many people are registered on this building," she told Kuwait Times.

The employee told her to ask the landlord to visit PACI and cancel the names of tenants registered on this address who are not living there. "I contacted

the haris, who said that it's not their fault, and that if I didn't like the building, I can simply leave. He advised me to pay KD 10 to his Arab friend who works at PACI to get it fixed," added Huda.

Tony is another victim of the landlord's indifference. He faced many problems with his civil ID as he couldn't change his address. "The building I moved to in Farwaniya was a new building, and there was no PACI number on it. When I went to renew my ID, they asked for the PACI number. When I got it from the haris, they said we can't register you," he recounted.

"The employee said my flat does not exist. She said according to the PACI number, the building consists of only three floors and there is no fourth floor. When I asked the haris to resolve the problem, he kept saying 'next week', 'soon', etc, but he didn't do anything. I faced many problems without a valid civil ID including access to healthcare," Tony explained.

Tony only resolved his problem after a friend told him about an Asian employee at PACI who could register his new address for KD 10. "Only then was I able to renew my ID, otherwise I would still be suffering," said Tony.



## Ooredoo utilizes 'Kuwait Mobile ID' for digital identity authentication

KUWAIT: In continuation of its ongoing efforts to accelerate the digital transformation in the country, and in line with its business strategy to constantly provide the latest digital services to its customers and the public, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has officially announced the adaptation and utilization of "Kuwait Mobile ID", a mobile application provided by the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) that provides users with a digital civil ID accredited for identification and digital signature for both government and private sector, for secure authentication of identities at any of its branches, sales channels, online at <https://shop.ooredoo.com.kw>, or through the MyOoredoo application. Such collaboration positions Ooredoo Kuwait as the first telecom company in the country to adopt this application.

The signing ceremony between Ooredoo and the Public Authority for Civil Information took place last Monday, with the presence of Musaed Al-Asousi - Director General of Public Authority for Civil Information; Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain - CEO of Ooredoo Kuwait; Fadi Kawar - Chief Operating Officer; Mijbil Alayoub - Senior Director, Corporate Communications; Basil Ramadan -

Senior Director, Regulatory Affairs; Abdulaziz Al Mufarrej - Senior Specialist, Regulatory Affairs; Fatima Dashti - Senior Manager, Public Relations, Internal Communications and Corporate Social Responsibility; and Nazem Al-Ghabra - Manager, Corporate Communications at Ooredoo Kuwait.

Mansour Al-Methen - Deputy Director General of Information Systems and Technology; Nasser Al-Otaibi - Director of Operations and Technical Support; Muhammad bin Naji - Director of Systems Development; Amina AbdulRahim - Quality Control Supervisor; and Ohoud Al-Asalawi - Document and Information Analyst, were the attended representatives of the Public Authority for Civil Information.

### Digital transformation

Babtain said: "Our aim is to reshape the way we deliver services through fostering digital transformation that leads to sustainable growth for the local community and country, economic inclusion, and offering the best digital services to our customers. Through this constructive cooperation, we are fostering innovation and collaboration between the government and private sectors, we are also supporting the government to be digitally maturing and sophisticated leader; that is in line with

Kuwait Vision 2035 'New Kuwait'."

Babtain added: "I am humbly proud of this collaboration between Ooredoo Kuwait and the Public Authority for Civil Information, which lead to the implementation of the "Kuwait Mobile ID". Thank you to all the team members who have worked hand in hand to accomplish this achievement."

"Today, Ooredoo Kuwait and the Public Authority's systems are linked together, in which the customers' certified digital civil ID will be accepted for authorization, e-signatures and other digital services. This digitally sophisticated approach is legally approved and accredited by PACI," Babtain added.

"We, at Ooredoo Kuwait, have had the proactive vision of supporting every domain of the government to deploy and use the latest technologies in a way that can elevate the service-level standards, enhance and simplify interactions with the public and increase efficiency. Providing distinguished digital services, affirms Ooredoo's superiority and leadership in the Telecom sector, and strengthens its competitive advantage in the local market," Babtain concluded.

### Digital ID

Meanwhile, Asousi said: "Our cooperation with Ooredoo Kuwait, and the adaptation of the 'Kuwait Mobile ID' application, come to ratify the effective partnership with the private sector, especially telecommunications; which we are truly proud of. Hence, the Internet and smart phone applications are core in our life, it also facilitates transactions of all kinds and save time



KUWAIT: Director General of Public Authority for Civil Information Musaed Al-Asousi (left) and CEO of Ooredoo Kuwait Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain sign the agreement.

and effort."

"This collaboration will not be our last, but rather we seek more partnerships with the telecommunications sector, and other sectors that contribute to the betterment of our community, country, and economic. It is an integral part of our efforts to achieve the vision of (New Kuwait 2035) and to enhance the country's digital transformation process" Asousi added.

The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) launched the "Kuwait Mobile ID" app to present users with a secure, mobile-based, and certified digital ID that is capable of identity verification, authentication to online e-services, and applying a trusted digital signature to documents and

transactions within government entities and private sector companies. The application is also an ideal way to save effort and time in case they want to obtain official customer data.

It is worth mentioning that the Public Authority for Civil Information has taken into account the ease of installing and operating the "Kuwait Mobile ID" application so that the various segments can use it smoothly and easily, in addition to the availability of all information about it on the authority's official website [www.paci.gov.kw](http://www.paci.gov.kw) where anyone can browse the site to obtain information on the application, as well as watch an introductory video that explains the steps to register in the application.

## What is the Noble...

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Truly miraculous is the fact that it is memorized by millions of people - Arabs, non-Arabs, men, women and children. No book has the same honor. Allah (the Almighty and Majestic) said, "And we have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember, then is there anyone who will remember (or receive admonition)?" (Surat Al-Qamar 54 - 17)

What else does the Holy Quran include? Besides outlining an exemplary way of life that includes prescriptions and prohibitions, which Muslims strive to follow, the Holy Quran includes historic information about previous nations, and mentions 25 prophets by name. Some prophets are described in detail, including their miracles and messages. Muslims believe in all of these prophets and messengers. Allah (swt) said in the Holy Quran, "Say (O Muslims): 'We believe in Allah and that which has been sent down to us and that which has been sent down to Ibrahim (Abraham), Ismail (Ishmael), Ishaq (Isaac), Yaqub (Jacob), and the Tribes (the twelve sons of Jacob), and that which have been given to

Musa (Moses) and Isa (Jesus), and that which has been given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have submitted (in Islam).'" (Surat Al-Baqarah 2 - 136)

The Holy Quran invites people to observe, think about and ponder the creation, starting with themselves. If we look at our organs, we will find billions of cells that work in an organized and continual manner. If we look at the universe around us, we will wonder how Allah created the great heavens without columns and how Allah created birds that fly by opening and closing their wings. When they close their wings, who protects them from falling? - It is Allah. The workings of our world, from the expansion of the universe to the spider's web, is brought to our attention in the Quran. An unbiased person will reach the conclusion that he should worship the only God (the Creator, Allah) and reject the idea of Him having a partner in divinity. He would believe in all prophets and their original scriptures, and believe that prophet Muhammad is the final messenger, as Allah described him.

*Courtesy of TIES: TIES is among the projects funded and managed by Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue. TIES aims at empowering Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, please call 25231015/6 or 94079426 or e-mail: [info@tiescenter.net](mailto:info@tiescenter.net).*

prayers and found themselves confronted by dozens of armed police, some on horseback. Protesters hurled water bottles at police, who fired stun grenades to disperse the crowd. Hundreds of Palestinians also gathered at the Qalandiya checkpoint between Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank, police said.

There have been nightly disturbances in east Jerusalem since the start of Ramadan on April 13, amid Palestinian anger over police blocking off access to the promenade around the walls of the Old City, a popular gathering place after the end of the daytime Ramadan fast. Thursday's march into the heart of Arab east Jerusalem by hundreds of supporters of far-right Jewish nationalist group Lehava added fuel to the fire.

## Kuwait suspends flights with...

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variant has made the South Asian country the latest coronavirus hotspot. "We're very worried about the new mutation of the virus discovered in India. So as not to endanger our vaccination program, India travel has to be significantly limited," Spahn told the Funke newspaper group.

Berlin had already dubbed India a "zone with particularly high risk of infection" with effect from today. Germany is the latest of several countries to restrict travel from India over the new variant, following Canada, Britain and Kuwait.

In India, queues of COVID-19 patients and their fearful relatives were growing outside hospitals in major cities across, the world's new pandemic hotspot, which has now reported nearly one million new cases in three days. Another 2,624 deaths were reported in 24 hours, taking the official toll to nearly 190,000 since the pandemic started.

More than 340,000 new cases were also reported, taking India's total to 16.5 million, second only to the United States. But many experts are predicting the current wave will not peak for at least three weeks and

Jerusalem mayor Moshe Lion told public radio he was in talks with Palestinian community leaders in east Jerusalem "to end this pointless violence".

Lion said he had tried to cancel the Lehava march, but police told him it was legal and noted that "dozens" of Jews who attacked Arabs had been arrested in the past two weeks.

The office of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas condemned "the growing incitement by extremist far-right Israeli settler groups advocating for the killing of Arabs". In a statement on the Palestinians' official Wafa news agency, it urged the international community to intervene to protect Palestinians.

Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi condemned "racist attacks" by Israelis against

that the real death toll and case count are much higher.

Stung by criticism of its lack of preparation ahead of the wave of infections, the central government has organized special trains to get oxygen supplies to the worst-hit cities. The Indian air force was also being used to transport oxygen tankers and other supplies around the country and to bring oxygen equipment from Singapore. The government has also pressed industrialists to increase production of oxygen and life-saving drugs.

Uttar Pradesh, a state of 200 million people, has imposed a weekend lockdown in a bid to curb the spread. In Delhi, the city government said it would begin setting up buffer stocks of oxygen.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said "the government should take over all oxygen plants through the army". Many patients are dying outside hospitals in the capital because of the lack of beds and oxygen. Twenty patients at the Jaipur Golden Hospital in the capital died during the night as it suffered oxygen shortages, the hospital's director told Indian media. He said that at one stage on Saturday morning, the reserve was down to 30 minutes and pressure had been reduced for the 200 coronavirus patients, most of whom were on emergency oxygen.

One charity has set up an overflow crematorium in a car park, with makeshift funeral pyres built to deal with the mounting deaths. A Delhi High Court hearing a special petition on the pandemic measures said Saturday: "We're calling it a wave, it's actually a tsunami."

Palestinians in east Jerusalem and called for "international action to protect them". "Jerusalem is a red line and touching it, is playing with fire," he warned. The UN special coordinator for Middle East peace, Tor Wennesland, called on all sides to "exercise maximum restraint and avoid further escalation". "The provocative acts across Jerusalem must cease," he said.

Hamas's military wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, voiced support for the east Jerusalem protesters. "The spark you light today will be the wick of the explosion to come in the face of the enemy," it said in a statement. An alliance of Palestinian militant groups, including Hamas and its smaller ally Islamic Jihad, issued a statement warning we "cannot remain silent" in the face of the violence. — AFP

## Gaza rockets follow clashes...

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On Thursday, at least 125 people were injured when Palestinian protesters, angered by chants of "death to Arabs" from far-right Jewish demonstrators, clashed repeatedly with police.

Skirmishes broke out again on Friday when tens of thousands of Muslim worshippers left the city's revered Al-Aqsa mosque compound after night

Local

# Kuwait updates UN about missing nationals, recovered properties

## Israel must be held accountable for crimes: Kuwait's envoy

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has updated UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and Security Council members about latest developments about missing Kuwaitis and third nationals, as well as Kuwait's national archive. Kuwait's permanent representative to the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi sent two letters to Guterres and President of UNSC, on April 12, about latest developments regarding the two issues in line with UN resolution 2107 (2013) and UNSC's Statement, issued on November 24, 2020. He said Kuwait identified, on March 3, eight Kuwaiti martyrs and third-country nationals who were arrested by Iraqi forces during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Kuwait's Mission to the UN said in a statement Thursday.

The martyrs were identified through their DNA, said Otaibi. The letters included the names of the martyrs: Asaad Ali Abdulrahman Al-Sultan, Ameen Ali Mohammad Ashkanani, Khalil Saud Khalil Al-Qattan, Abdullah Ibrahim Mohammad Al-Qudaifi, Mohammad Mubarak Mohammad Al-Sameem, Musaed Mohammad Falah Al-Doseri, Nasser Eid Khaled Al-Enezi and Yusuf Yaqoub Mohammad Al-Yaqoub. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed families of the martyrs once confirming their identities. Otaibi said the Criminal Evidence Department at the Ministry of Interior were still examining remains received from Iraq in August 2019. These DNA tests were taking a lot of time because the remains were mixed. Otaibi

praised heroism of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the sake of their country. He also said Kuwait was also keen on handing over all remains of Iraqi soldiers founded in Kuwaiti territories, citing the handing over of a remain on March 30, 2021.

Meanwhile, Otaibi said Kuwait received on March 28 a new batch of properties stolen by the former Iraqi regime during its 1991-91 invasion and occupation of Kuwait. These properties, he said, included 53 boxes containing more than 6,500 books, microfilms, 1,016 cartridge tapes (16 mm), one videoMatic film and one videoMatic player, cinema projector, cinema film reel, two AKAI magnetic recordings and eight magnetic recordings. Otaibi said handing over of the properties took place in State of Kuwait and witnessed by UN resident coordinator in the Gulf nation.

Otaibi thanked Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UN, Britain, France, UN and International Committee of Red Cross for their contributions that led to discovery of the remains despite coronavirus pandemic. He also thanked UNSC members for their keen interest in this humanitarian file until discovery of remains of 338 Kuwaitis and third-country nationals, as well as recovery of all Kuwaiti properties including the national archive.

### Israel's crimes

Separately, Kuwait called for enforcing political

and legal action against Israel, and holding it accountable for relentless violations against the Palestinian people. While the international community is busy fighting COVID-19, "Israel, the occupying power, continues its hostile policies against the Palestinian people to remind us it will not retreat from plans to annex more Palestinian territories in the West Bank and East Jerusalem," Otaibi said in a statement to a UN Security Council session over the Palestinian issue on Thursday.

Otaibi said Israeli policies were forcing occupation through illegal activities and policies including expansion and construction of thousands of Jewish housing units, and annexation of lands in clear violations of UN Security Council resolutions, namely resolution 2334. All recent UN reports, he said, confirmed deterioration of conditions in Palestinian territories due to the rising construction of thousands of illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank including in East Jerusalem.

"What concerns us as well is that while Israeli authorities give green light for construction of illegal settlements there are violent acts committed by Israeli settlers and Israeli security forces against unarmed Palestinian people, as well as destruction of buildings and properties whether they were Palestinian or built through donations from the international community like schools and health facilities," he said. Otaibi described the Israeli actions as "new



Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi

war crimes" added to Israel's hostilities against the Palestinian people. The Israeli occupation seeks to abort any chance and hope towards establishment of the independent and viable Palestinian state, he said.

The international community must act to put an end to the Israeli arrests, destruction or confiscation of Palestinian buildings and forced displacement, said Otaibi, in addition to the 13-year-old siege on Gaza Strip. He said Kuwait believed peace was the strategic choice in the Middle East which would lead to the two-state solution in line with relevant UNSC resolutions, land-for-peace principle and Arab peace initiative, paving way for an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Sibi George addresses a virtual open house at the Indian Embassy.

## Indian embassy to collect data on stranded Indians

**KUWAIT:** Embassy of India announced recently the launch of a new "registration drive" for stranded Indian nationals who have not been able to return to Kuwait on account of the COVID-19 pandemic. This registration drive is for all those stranded Indian nationals who are facing various issues due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions, the embassy said in a press release.

"The embassy is preparing an updated database of Indians who are stranded in India and are facing difficulties due to loss of jobs, expiry of residencies, inability to pay rent, close family members stranded in India, non-payment of indemnities and other benefits etc", said Indian Ambassador Sibi George,

addressing a virtual open house Wednesday.

"We are starting this new registration drive with a view to sharing the database with the Kuwaiti authorities and request their intervention. This is a follow-up of my meetings with the Kuwaiti authorities," he added.

The ambassador said, the COVID-19 situation continues to be worrisome in everywhere including in India and in Kuwait. "We need to remain cautious. We need to continue to monitor the situation and continue to take all precautions. Our effort is to ensure that we should not close down or slow down the work of the embassy, its community welfare activities, its consular services both at the embassy and at the three centers in Sharq, Fahaheel and Abassiya," he added. All those who registered in the earlier drive conducted in 2020 may also register for this drive by filling in the Google form online (<https://forms.gle/sExZK1GKW36BLpVz7>). Any official update on this matter will be shared by the embassy on its website and social media handles, the release further said.

## Marijuana farm busted in Kabd

**KUWAIT:** Drugs Control General Department men learned about an Arab expat farming marijuana for use and sale at a Kabd farm. Detectives, after making sure the information was correct, arrested the suspect at the rented farm, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported. Fifteen seedlings of marijuana, a small piece of hashish and three unlicensed firearms were found at the farm. The suspect and the seized materials were sent to concerned authorities.

Separately, a violent fight broke out between a colonel and several officers on one side and a non-commissioned officer on the other at the criminal detectives department in Salmiya. The non-commissioned officer was taken to Salmiya police station, where he requested to go to hospital to obtain a medical report. A security source said a verbal argument took place between the colonel and the non-commissioned officer after he was asked why he was at that department at dawn, Al-Anbaa reported. When he said his duty was to check on those on the Shlonik app, an argument ensued and escalated to blows. The colonel told police the non-commissioned officer beat him, while the officer said the colonel's men beat him badly. Investigations are ongoing.

### News in brief

#### KRCS delivers food in Comoros

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced delivering Iftar meals and Eid clothing for those in need in Comoros. Head of public relations and media at KRCS Khaled Al-Zaid said the society's Ramadan program includes delivering aid to different islands in Comoros, adding that over 73 families benefited from food baskets. KRCS will continue aiding people in need in Comoros and other places during Ramadan and other months, he added. —KUNA

#### Oil price up

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by 63 cents to \$63.96 per barrel Friday as oppose to \$63.33 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. The prices of the Brent crude and West Texas Intermediate, globally, went up with the first going up by 77 cents to \$66.11 per barrel, while the latter went up by 71 cents to \$62.14 pb. —KUNA

## Kuwait curfew: What you need to know

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait imposed a curfew from 7:00 pm to 5:00 am until the end of Ramadan to help curb the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases registered in recent weeks. During the curfew hours, pharmacies, medical stores, co-operative societies and supermarkets are allowed to continue operation only through delivery services, while restaurants and cafes are allowed to deliver food from 7:00 pm to 3:00 am every day. Also during the curfew, people are allowed to go to prayers at mosques only by walking, and the government allowed people to practice walking and jogging from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm. The government meanwhile allowed salons and health clubs to reopen during the day but kept restaurants and cafes closed except for drive-through and delivery services. Meanwhile, taxis are allowed to carry only two passengers.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry launched a booking service, allowing people to shop from 7:00 pm to 12:00 am during the curfew hours. The service is valid for all co-ops and supermarkets around Kuwait. To book an appointment, a shopper should visit [www.moci.shop](http://www.moci.shop), enter the required information (civil ID number and serial number, contact number and email address), the reason for appointment (food supply center) and the time and date of the appointment. The shopper would then

receive a barcode to show once they reach the shopping center.

### Where to obtain a curfew pass?

Citizens and residents that need a pass during the curfew hours to leave their homes can apply for a pass at <https://www.paci.gov.kw/>. The pass is available for those in need of emergency medical treatment, doctor's visits, blood donation, COVID-19 swabs and COVID-19 vaccinations.

### Co-op delivery during curfew hours

During curfew hours, co-ops, grocery stores and other markets will be allowed to offer delivery services. Most co-ops will accept orders via delivery. Here is an incomplete list of co-op WhatsApp numbers. Each co-op will be responsible for deciding if and when they provide delivery services and not all may be providing.

Omariya Co-op  
WhatsApp 6041-0067

Farwaniya Co-op  
WhatsApp 6767-8211

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## Kuwait ready for schools' resumption

KUWAIT: Minister of Education Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf affirmed the resumption of study at schools next September through a well-studied plan for the safety of students in all grades. Regular study at schools was suspended for more than one year across the country due to the coronavirus pandemic. The minister wished, at the same time, conditions would be available for a safe return to schools, concurrently with the vaccination campaigns carried out by the Ministry of Health (MoH) for all the Ministry of Education (MoE) staff and students. Speaking to Kuwait State Television, Dr Mudhaf priorities highly health of students, adding that all matters are going better and the ministry is doing its best for safe conditions for the exams of both 12th grade and all grades. He revealed that the ministry has formed some committees of specialists to evaluate education in Kuwait. He said the ministry is planning to develop the national council for education development and the higher council for education as well as educational system or setting a specified and clear strategy to upgrade education position in international indicators.

The ministry has faced some challenges due to the coronavirus, and teachers and students have been trained on online education, he said, noting that this kind of learning is not alternative to the regular one. He noted that the exam of the 12th grade will be carried out through paper not electronically, reassuring people about relevant health matters. He affirmed that the MoE has worked with the MoH through some committees to set health measures to guarantee the safety of students. Up to 49,000 male and female students will be examined in the 12th grade, referring that every classroom has only six students with the implementation of a two-meter social distancing between a student and another. The minister pointed to some measures taken at schools like wearing facemask, using hand sanitizer and measuring temperature, in addition to the presence of a number of medical emergency teams. The MoE provided the MoH with names of all staff and students to receive vaccines, Dr Mudhaf said. — KUNA

# Kuwait a global role model in philanthropy: UN official

KUWAIT: United Nations Acting Resident Coordinator in Kuwait Hideko Hadzialic said Friday that the State of Kuwait "constitutes an international model to be followed in terms of providing aid and assistance in support of international peace and security under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah." Hadzialic added Kuwait also helps in building international and regional partnerships and pursuing peace and preventive diplomacy. These effective political efforts and positions are nothing but an extension of a history deeply rooted in the establishment of the State of Kuwait.

Marking the UN's third anniversary of the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace, Hadzialic expressed her "sincere thanks and appreciation for the Kuwaiti pioneering efforts at all levels to enhance security and peace and strengthen plural partnerships, mainly the tireless efforts of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

"The United Nations Charter constitutes a tool to enhance the role of diplomacy for peace, and charts the approach that should be taken in light of multilateralism and strengthening our commitment to achieving the goals of sustainable development and building a safer and just world for future generations," Hadzialic noted. "And that commitment is essential to the United Nations, states and to all spectrums of society around the world, more than ever."

The UN official also stressed on the importance of highlighting current challenging circumstances stemming from the outbreak of COVID-19, unresolved disputes, climate change, exacerbated inequalities, deterioration of the humanitarian situation. Hadzialic mentioned these challenging factors undoubtedly affirm the need to work together and promote diplomacy for peace on the local and global levels. Also, she noted "while stressing on the importance of strengthening cooperation between states, companies, individuals and all spectrums of society, and partnering with international organizations to find solutions to local, regional and global challenges."

"The State of Kuwait plays a pioneering role in the field of multilateral partnerships and peace diplomacy, which was evident through its relentless efforts and tireless work in promoting peace and security in the region and beyond," Hadzialic said. "Kuwait spared no effort in taking decisions, especially in issues of concern to the Arab region and maintaining international peace and security. It also reaped the fruits of its labors in solving the Gulf crisis after three years of its role as a mediator calling for an end to the Gulf crisis."

A historic achievement was made in the 41st Gulf Summit (Al-Ula Summit) to heal the Gulf rift by the State of Kuwait, resulting in naming the summit after the late Amir of Kuwait His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as a recognition of the endeavors of His Highness and the efforts of the leaders



JERUSALEM: This archive photo shows people distributing food during a Kuwait-funded campaign to give away iftar meals in Ramadan this year. — KUNA

of the State of Kuwait in resolving this crisis. "This is besides the leading efforts of the State of Kuwait in hosting international donor conferences to end the Syrian crisis and the generous contribution in support of the Syrian humanitarian situation, hosting the Yemeni peace talks and the International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, and its generous contributions in support of the countries affected by the spread of COVID-19," she added.

The UN official also noted "through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, whose activities extended to include 107 countries in the world, Kuwait contributed towards various humanitarian and development issues, the last of which was the commitment of the State of Kuwait on September 17, 2020 during the Ministerial Meeting on the Republic of Yemen, which was held on the sidelines of the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly with an amount of \$20 million, which will be allocated through the Fund."

In addition, the Kuwait Fund has wide-ranging contributions covering a wide scope and geography in terms of supporting host communities for Syrian refugees, as the State of Kuwait has committed financial contributions and hosted conferences to support Syrian refugees. These commitments, which amounted to \$1.8 billion, out of which about \$377.5 million spent from the resources of the Kuwaiti Fund in support of Syrian refugees in Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, the Jordan, and Lebanon. In addition to various contributions with international and local organizations mandated to protect refugees and providing them with a decent life.

On the other hand, Hadzialic said, "the State of Kuwait has activities in Iraq that commenced after the end of the Iraq Reconstruction Conference held on February 14, 2018, which resulted in mobilizing several international resources amounting to about \$30 billion, from which the Kuwait's share amounted to \$2 billion in the form of loans and investments."

"Kuwait Fund has initiated the implementation of this fund through an educational project worth KD 23.5 million, and other health projects are being discussed with the Iraqi counterparts," she noted. "The Kuwaiti Fund has also contributed to addressing the epidemics and diseases sweeping the world. The latest of these contributions is the support provided to countries in facing the emerging COVID-19 virus pandemic, as the Kuwaiti Fund contributed to the Debt Service Postponement Initiative launched by the G20 and the World Bank Group in April 2020, which aims to empower poor countries to mobilize and focus their own resources to face the negative repercussions of the pandemic. Besides providing a set of emergency humanitarian grants that have been allocated to various entities, including UN agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) And the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and in Palestine implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (PAPP), through the Islamic Development Bank, Kuwait Fund contributed \$42,000,000 for the construction of a comprehensive, functional and operational wastewater treatment plant serving over 217,000 residents of Khan Younis - Gaza," Hadzialic added.

All these grants were mainly aimed at facing the repercussions of the existing health crisis and supporting the humanitarian situation in the beneficiary communities. UN International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace is also a day that represents the reaffirmation of the UN Charter and its principles of resolving disputes among countries through peaceful means. It acknowledges the use of multilateral decision-making and diplomacy in achieving peaceful resolutions to conflicts among nations. — KUNA

## NBK social program leverages innovative approaches in Ramadan

KUWAIT: NBK's Public Relations Assistant General Manager, Manal Al-Mattar, said that NBK's "Do Good Deeds in Ramadan" philanthropic drive initiated by NBK 30 years ago, is leveraging innovative approaches this year in response to COVID-19 pandemic.

"At NBK, we are driven to better understand how social responsibility can be used as an opportunity to support the front liners efforts, marginalized communities and lifesaving needs such as food and other kinds of social support," she added. For almost three decades, the Ramadan program comprised a series of activities and initiatives aimed at encouraging community engagement and solidarity in Kuwait. "During these unprecedented times, NBK hopes to encourage a greater sense of responsibility during the holy month," Mattar noted.



Manal Al-Mattar

### Food rescue

NBK Ramadan Social Program includes more than 3000 "Ramadan Baskets" to low-income families. This initiative is a food solidarity initiative that is launched in partnership with Refood to make a difference in the community.

The basket contains a variety of items that meet the needs of the beneficiary families during the holy month. Through this initiative, rescuing food and saving the environment goes hand in hand. Refood's initiative works to bridge-the gap between excess food in the industry that would've gone to waste and instead give it to those in need across Kuwait.

In addition, NBK presented a donation to the



KRCS to support its efforts and help smoothing the vaccination process in Kuwait Vaccination Center in Kuwait International Fairground in Mishref. The donation included providing golf carts to give elderly patients and people with disability free rides from and to the parking area. Throughout NBK social media channels, awareness videos from doctors are posted to highlight the effectiveness and safety of vaccines and correcting misinformation being shared.

### Promoting health

NBK Mobile ATM will be visiting different parks in Kuwait during the outdoor exercise period allowed during the curfew. NBK will be challenging people who achieved or exceeded 10 thousand steps walking to win prizes. This initiative aims at promoting positive health effects and wellbeing.

NBK Ramadan Social Program will include daily awareness videos, competitions and health tips through the official social media channels of NBK.

Despite social distancing, NBK is organizing a group of health events for staff that includes clinical visits to doctors for consultation. These events focus mainly on mental health and online education. In addition, NBK has a schedule full of fun and rewarding activities for staff including the traditional Graish celebration, which was, organized Live this year through the employees Instagram channel I Am NBK. It witnessed an array of entertaining activities and contests. These staff activities aim to bring NBK family closer and find a way to demonstrate the ties between NBK family members are stronger in these difficult times.

## Info Ministry to launch five-year media strategy

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Information will launch a five-year strategy to establish sustainable and pioneering media, Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi said yesterday. The minister affirmed that the strategy comes under the directives of the country's political leadership on the necessity of developing the official media and empowering Kuwaiti youth in various fields. The minister pointed out that the strategy keen to create distinguished youth

media leaders who have a clear vision to adopt a media discourse that keeps pace with the state's renaissance. The media strategy focuses on the necessity of digital transformation of Kuwait TV and Radio channels and all its platforms on social media, as it aims to enhance Kuwait's position as a country with distinguished media history and long cultural heritage, he added. He also noted that a timeline for the strategy has been drawn up, a committee to produce programs has been formed, a spokesperson has been appointed, training courses will be held, and laying down the basic building blocks to achieve the scheduled digital transformation. Furthermore, the minister stated that there will be an annual evaluation for the strategy achievements, stressing that the official media, as one of the nation's development soft powers, has a role in reflecting the cultural image of Kuwait. — KUNA

ISSUE NO: 18418 RAMADAN 12, 1442 AH

### Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

12- A chapter (Surah) of the Book of Allah the Almighty in which the Name of Allah is mentioned in every verse:

- A. Ar-Room  
 B. Al-Mujaadilah  
 C. Al-Hashr

### Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

Date :  
Name :  
Civil ID :  
Tel :  
Email :

ISSUE NO: 18418 RAMADAN 13, 1442 AH

### Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

13- A verse (ayah) in the Book of Allah the Almighty about which it is said whoever makes it a practice to recite it after every prayer, there will be nothing between him and his entering Paradise except death:

- A. Verse of Honor (last verse of Chapter Al-Israai)  
 B. Verse of Thihhaar (second verse of Chapter Al-Mujaadilah)  
 C. Verse of Al-Kursi (Verse 255 of Chapter Al-Baqarah)

### Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

Date :  
Name :  
Civil ID :  
Tel :  
Email :



Myanmar must end violence, restore democracy: Indonesia

## Three held after police worker stabbed to death near Paris

# US names envoy amid tensions over Tigray

## Sudan warns of legal action against Ethiopia over dam

WASHINGTON: The United States on Friday tasked a senior diplomat with reducing tensions surrounding Ethiopia's Tigray region as fears rise that the conflict will spread. Jeffrey Feltman, a veteran US diplomat who until 2018 served in a top UN position, was named to a new role of special envoy to the Horn of Africa.

Feltman will address the Tigray conflict as well as related tensions between Ethiopia and Sudan, which has taken in refugees and sent troops into a disputed border area. He will also take up disputes over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, a massive project that Egypt and Sudan fear will deprive them of vital water resources.

"At a moment of profound change for this strategic region, high-level US engagement is vital to mitigate the risks posed by escalating conflict while providing support to once-in-a-generation opportunities for reform," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. The announcement comes a day after the UN Security Council voiced alarm over Tigray, where the UN aid chief says that people have started to die of hunger and sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war.

Blinken has previously spoken of "ethnic cleansing" in the region by troops of neighboring Eritrea, which has since announced a pullout. Ethiopia, a US ally, launched an offensive in Tigray in November after the local ruling party was blamed for attacks on military installations. The former administration of Donald Trump unsuccessfully sought to mediate a solution on the mega-dam at the behest of Egypt.

Meanwhile, Sudan warned Friday it could take legal action against Ethiopia if it goes ahead with

plans to fill a mega-dam on the Blue Nile without a deal with Khartoum and Cairo. Water Minister Yasser Abbas also said in a tweet that Ethiopia has raised "objections" to an invitation by Sudan to attend three-way talks to discuss the controversial dam. Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia have been locked in inconclusive talks for nearly a decade over the filling and operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) which broke ground in 2011.

Cairo has regarded the dam as an existential threat to its water supplies, while Khartoum fears its own dams would be harmed if Ethiopia fills the reservoir without a deal. Last week, Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok invited his Egyptian and Ethiopian counterparts to a closed meeting after recent African Union-sponsored negotiations failed to produce a deal. "Ethiopia has objected to the invitation of Sudanese prime minister Abdalla Hamdok for a three-way summit and we see that there is no justification for that," Abbas tweeted.

Addis Ababa announced last July that it had filled part of the barrage with a second stage due to take place this coming July, even if no agreement has been with Cairo and Khartoum. If Ethiopia goes ahead with the filling, Sudan "would file lawsuits against the Italian company constructing the dam and the Ethiopian government", Abbas warned.

He said the lawsuits would highlight that the "environmental and social impact as well as the dangers of the dam" have not been taken into adequate consideration. The tensions over the dam come as Sudan's relations with Egypt warm while its relations with Ethiopia have been hit by a dis-



In this file photo, a man drinks water from a plate as Ethiopian refugees who fled fighting in Tigray province camp at the Um Raquba camp in Sudan's eastern Gedaref state. —AFP

pute over the use of the Fashaga farmland near their common border. In March, Sudan said it has accepted an offer by the United Arab Emirates to mediate with Ethiopia over GERD and the contest-

ed border region. Abbas said the UAE's initiative included investment opportunities in the Fashaga region as well as "unofficial bid to bridge the gap in views with regard to GERD". —AFP

## 'Best thing I've done': First person to get COVID jab is beaming

LONDON: It was the shot in the arm that made history: in December last year British grandmother Margaret Keenan became the first person in the Western world to get an approved coronavirus vaccine, kicking off a global campaign to end the pandemic. Now, close to one billion people around the world have received Covid jabs — both first and second doses — and Keenan said she is proud to have been the first.

"It really is the best thing I've ever done," the former jewelry shop owner said. She got her shot on December 8 — just a week before her 91st birthday — and says she is now looking forward to going on holiday, after only retiring four years ago. She also hopes her inaugural vaccine will inspire others to follow in her steps. "I just feel really honored to have had it done, to have been the first and to have got the ball rolling," Keenan said this week during a call with the state-run National Health Service (NHS).

"I'm telling everyone to go and get it... I hope everyone comes forward." She got her first dose

less than a week after UK regulators became the first in the world to approve the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for general use, and has since had her second. Britain has now approved several other jabs, and an army of health officials and volunteers have now administered nearly 45 million doses — one of the most successful efforts globally.

### 'Dawn is coming'

Keenan praised the NHS for its pivotal role in the UK's vaccine rollout, calling its efforts "incredible" and the cherished institution "wonderful". Medics cheered and formed a guard of honor back in December after Keenan — wearing a festive Christmas T-shirt — got the first jab, administered by nurse May Parsons.

An NHS veteran of two decades originally from the Philippines, Parsons also spoke this week of her pride in helping Britain appear to turn a corner in the fight against COVID-19. Following surging virus infections, hospitalizations and deaths earlier this year, months of stringent restrictions and the successful jabs drive have helped push the numbers back to levels not seen since last September. "Vaccinating Maggie was a little spark of light in the midst of the darkness, and now I feel like the dawn is coming," she said.

"It's almost unbelievable that we've managed to roll out the vaccine so successfully. "I'm really



A nurse administers the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to Margaret Keenan, 90, at University Hospital in Coventry, central England on December 8, 2020. — AFP

grateful to all my colleagues for the bravery and courage that they've shown throughout this pandemic, which has helped us care for our people and care for our patients like Maggie." Britain is aiming to have offered a first vaccine dose to all adults by August. Queen Elizabeth II, who turned 95 this week, and Prime Minister Boris Johnson are among those to have already received jabs. —AFP

## Iran's Zarif to visit Qatar, Iraq today

TEHRAN: Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif is to visit Iraq and Qatar today, his ministry announced, following reported talks brokered by Baghdad between Tehran and regional rival Riyadh. The talks in the Iraqi capital earlier this month, which have not been confirmed by either capital, were held at the level of officials not ministers and aimed at restoring relations severed five years ago, an Iraqi official and a Western diplomat told AFP in Baghdad.

Tehran has neither confirmed nor denied the reports saying only that it has "always welcomed" dialogue with Saudi Arabia. Riyadh has flatly denied them. Foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said Zarif's visits to Qatar and Iraq are "in the framework of developing bilateral ties (and) regional and trans-regional talks."

The Baghdad talks, brokered by Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi, remained secret until the Financial Times reported last weekend that a first meeting had been held on April 9, with another planned for shortly after. An Iraqi government official confirmed the meeting to AFP, while a Western diplomat said he was "briefed in advance that talks would happen" with the "purpose to help broker a better relationship between Iran and Saudi and decrease tensions".

The meetings came amid talks in Vienna between Iran and major powers on the mechanics of a US return to a landmark 2015 nuclear deal abandoned by president Donald Trump. The talks must also address Iran's own return to full compliance with the deal, after it suspended its implementation of several key provisions in protest at Trump's reimposition of sweeping economic sanctions. Tehran has rejected calls by Riyadh to be involved in the nuclear negotiations, but has repeatedly stated its readiness to conduct a regional dialogue.

Tehran and Riyadh are on opposing sides in conflicts from Syria to Yemen and have had strained relations since the kingdom cut diplomatic ties in 2016. Some Gulf states have followed Saudi Arabia in taking a tough line on Iran. But Qatar has maintained warm relations despite the appeals of Saudi Arabia and its allies, which cited it as one of the reasons for imposing a blockade on the gas-rich emirate in 2017. That rift now appears to have healed after Qatar was invited to a meeting in Saudi Arabia in January at which it was brought back into the regional fold.

Meanwhile, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said yesterday that they had dismantled a "terrorist" cell linked to the Islamic republic's enemies and killed three of its members in the country's southeast. The Guards mounted a "successful operation" yesterday morning in Sistan-Baluchistan province and ambushed the "terrorist cell linked to the global arrogance", according to a statement published on the force's official website, Sepah News. Iran generally uses the term "global arrogance" to refer to the US or its allies. "Three of the terrorists were killed and their weapons, ammunition and communications equipment were seized," the statement added. —AFP

## 'Landmark' advance as malaria vaccine first to hit WHO goal

LONDON: A new malaria vaccine has proven 77 percent effective in trials on infants, British researchers said Friday, in what could prove to be a potential game-changer against the deadly mosquito-borne disease. In a clinical trial in Burkina Faso, the Matrix-M vaccine—developed by the University of Oxford's Jenner Institute—was found to be 77 percent effective after 450 infants inoculated in 2019 were followed up for a year, the Oxford researchers said in a statement.

No serious adverse events were reported. It is the first candidate vaccine for malaria to surpass a target set by the UN's World Health Organization, for researchers to create a jab of 75 percent efficacy by 2030. A broader "Phase 3" trial involving 4,800 children will now be carried out in four African countries, in collaboration with the Serum Institute of India and the US pharmaceutical company Novavax. Professor Adrian Hill, head of the Jenner Institute—which developed the coronavirus vaccine now being distributed worldwide by Anglo-Swedish pharma giant AstraZeneca—said the test results marked "a great day" in the global fight against malaria.

"We need to build on this, we need to keep all our ducks in a row, we need to avoid any safety signal, but I think the odds are now on our side, we can get this through," he told the PA news agency. He pointed out that vaccines against COVID-19 were approved rapidly while the first trials for one against malaria date all the way back to the 1940s.

Ahead of World Malaria Day today, the UN health agency has insisted that elimination of the disease that kills some 400,000 people each year around the globe is a "viable goal for all countries". But a vaccine breakthrough remains key, and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the Oxford trial result was a "landmark achievement". "Malaria kills hundreds of thousands of children a year. An effective vaccine holds out the possibility of ending this global tragedy," he said on Twitter.



A medical volunteer of the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) organization takes a blood sample from a patient to be tested for malaria at his home in Barcelona, Anzoategui State, Venezuela. —AFP

### Children at greater risk

"Malaria killed at least four times as many more people in Africa last year as Covid did," Hill said. "And nobody for a moment questioned whether COVID should have an emergency use review and authorization in Africa—of course it did, very quickly. "So why shouldn't a disease that firstly kills children rather than older people, certainly killed an awful lot more, be prioritized for emergency use authorization in Africa?" The Serum Institute has committed to make at least 200 million doses annually, and Hill said Matrix-M "has the potential to have major public health impact if licensure is achieved".

The vaccine was given in a randomized trial involving 450 babies and toddlers aged five months to 17 months. A control group received a rabies vaccine instead. The infants received a booster vaccine after a year. Professor Charlemagne Ouedraogo, minister of health in Burkina Faso, said: "Malaria is one of the leading causes of childhood mortality in Africa. "We have been supporting trials of a range of new vaccine candidates in Burkina Faso and these new data show that licensure of a very useful new malaria vaccine could well happen in the coming years. "That would be an extremely important new tool for controlling malaria and saving many lives." The results of the clinical trial were reported in a pre-print article on the website of the British medical journal The Lancet. —AFP

## Kremlin critic Navalny ending hunger strike

MOSCOW: Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said Friday he was ending a 24-day hunger strike he launched to demand medical treatment behind bars, after allies said his life was in danger. The announcement came after Navalny's personal doctors said Thursday that he had received treatment at a civilian hospital and urged him to put a stop to his protest. "Taking into account the progress and all the circumstances, I am beginning to end my hunger strike," President Vladimir Putin's best-known critic said in an Instagram post.

He said that the process would take him 24 days, writing: "They say it's even harder" than the hunger strike. Navalny's protest in prison had raised the stakes in a standoff between Putin and Western leaders, who said Moscow would face repercussions if Russia's most prominent opposition leader died in detention. The 44-year-old announced the hunger strike in his penal colony on March 31, demanding to see an independent doctor for pain in his back and numbness in his arms and legs.

Navalny was thrown behind bars in February for more than two years on old embezzlement charges—which he says are politically motivated—just weeks after returning to Moscow from Germany where he had been recuperating from a near-fatal poisoning attack.

Navalny blames Russian authorities for the attack with nerve agent Novichok—a claim the Kremlin has repeatedly denied. His allies had demanded he be allowed access to proper treatment and warned in mid-April he could suffer cardiac arrest "at any moment", calling on the authorities to move him to intensive care. Medical professionals including Navalny's personal doctor Anastasia Vasilyeva made several attempts earlier this month to visit him, but were either detained or turned away. Navalny said he was guided in his decision by the recommendation of his doctors, whom he "completely trusts", and the fact that some of his supporters also went on hunger strike in solidarity. —AFP

## International

# Three held after police worker stabbed to death near Paris

## Murder revives trauma of a spate of deadly attacks last year

PARIS: French investigators were yesterday questioning three people linked to a Tunisian man who stabbed a police employee to death near Paris in a suspected Islamist attack. The murder at a police station in Rambouillet, a commuter town about 60 kilometers (40 miles) from Paris, revived the trauma of a spate of deadly attacks last year.

The victim was a 49-year-old woman named as Stephanie M, a police administrative assistant and mother-of-two, who was stabbed twice in the throat at the entrance of the station. Her 36-year-old attacker named as Jamel G., who had not been known to police or intelligence services, was shot and fatally wounded by an officer at the scene.

President Emmanuel Macron, who was out of the country on a visit to Chad, tweeted that France would never give in to "Islamist terrorism". The latest violence targeting police is likely to focus attention further on the danger of Islamic extremism in France and wider concerns about security a year ahead of a presidential election. Prime Minister Jean Castex said he would hold a meeting in Paris with ministers and security officials after the killing. National anti-terrorism prosecutors have opened a terror investigation.

Chief anti-terror prosecutor Jean-Francois Ricard confirmed "comments made by the assailant" indicated a terror motive.

### Security stepped up

Jamel G's father and two other people were taken into custody on Friday, and questioning was continuing yesterday as police delve into his background, contacts and possible motives. The assailant had arrived in



The sister of a 36-year-old Tunisian man identified as Jamel Gorchene, who stabbed to death a French police employee at her workplace southwest of the French capital Paris is pictured at the entrance of the family residence in the northeastern town of M'saken yesterday. — AFP

France illegally in 2009 but had since obtained residency papers, a police source said. He had just moved to Rambouillet. Far-right leader Marine Le Pen immediately questioned why the attacker had been able to settle in the country, and hit back at recent criticism about police brutality in France.

"We need to get back to reason: supporting our police, expelling illegal immigrants and eradicating terrorism" she wrote on Twitter. Polls show her running close to Macron in next year's election, though experts warn that surveys conducted so far ahead and during a pandemic should be interpreted with caution. About 30

police officers wearing balaclavas raided the suspect's home in Rambouillet on Friday, AFP reporters said.

At the same time police in the Paris region searched the home of the person who had sheltered Jamel G. when he first arrived in France, sources close to the inquiry said. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, who also visited officers in Rambouillet, said security would be stepped up at stations nationwide.

### Spate of attacks

France has been repeatedly targeted by Islamist attackers since 2015, with a series of incidents in the

last year keeping terrorism and security as a leading concern. Macron's government has introduced legislation to tackle religious extremism, which would make it easier for the government to close places of worship and track foreign funding of mosques.

The bill has been condemned by critics who see it as stigmatizing Muslims. Last September, a Pakistani man wounded two people with a meat cleaver outside the former offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo. In October, a young Chechen refugee beheaded teacher Samuel Paty who had showed some of the caricatures to his pupils in a crime that profoundly shocked the country.

Later that month, three people were killed when a recently-arrived Tunisian went on a stabbing spree in a church in the Mediterranean city of Nice. In the most serious recent attack against French police, three officers and one police employee in Paris were stabbed to death in October 2019 by an IT specialist colleague who was himself then shot dead. These attacks came after the massacres carried out by extremists from 2015 that began with the killing of staff in the offices of Charlie Hebdo in January that year. In France's deadliest peacetime atrocity, 130 people were killed and 350 were wounded when Islamist suicide bombers and gunmen attacked the Stade de France stadium, bars and restaurants in central Paris and the Bataclan concert hall in November 2015. The following year a man rammed a truck into a Bastille Day crowd in Nice, killing 86 people. Just a few weeks earlier, in June 2016, two police officers were stabbed to death at their home outside Paris by a man claiming allegiance to the Islamic State group. — AFP

## Recycled SpaceX Crew Dragon brings crew to ISS

WASHINGTON: A recycled SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule with four astronauts docked with the International Space Station early yesterday, the third time Elon Musk's company has safely delivered humans to the orbital outpost. The spacecraft named Endeavour, piloting itself autonomously, began docking at 5:08 am Eastern time (0908 GMT) above the south Indian Ocean. The process was completed around 10 minutes later. "Hard capture complete, welcome Crew-2," said US astronaut Shannon Walker, current commander of the ISS. "Thanks Shannon, we're glad to be here," replied Endeavour's commander, US astronaut Shane Kimbrough. The crew will begin boarding after 7:15 am (1115 GMT) once the hatches are opened.



This screen grab taken from the NASA live feed shows the International Space Station taken from the SpaceX's Crew Dragon spacecraft before docking, yesterday. — AFP

The Crew-2 mission, which includes the first European, Thomas Pesquet of France, blasted off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida before dawn on Friday, around 23 hours earlier.

Endeavour first flew to the ISS on the Demo-2 mission in May 2020, ending almost a decade of US reliance on Russia for rides to the ISS following the end of the

## Ex-aide attacks UK's Johnson in blogpost tirade

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's former top aide launched an extraordinary tirade Friday after a series of incriminating leaks, claiming the Conservative leader lacks "competence and integrity". Dominic Cummings, who stepped down as his top adviser in December, used a personal blog to allege that Johnson told his staff to lie to the media, tried to block an inquiry, and solicited potentially illegal donations. In response, a Downing Street spokesperson said "all reportable donations are transparently declared and published", and added: "The PM has never interfered in a government leak inquiry."

Cummings, the controversial brains behind the 2016 campaign for Britain to leave the European Union, was appointed chief adviser by Johnson when he took power in July 2019. He helped to secure a thumping election victory that December, but his frequent clashes with colleagues are said to have led to persistent tensions and he left government a year later. Cummings was particularly blamed for undermining the government's coronavirus lockdown message when he went on a lengthy cross-country journey with his family, claiming he and his wife needed help from relatives after they both developed COVID-19 symptoms. Even some Conservatives expressed concern over Cummings' explosive charges, which were seized on by opposition parties ahead of UK-wide local elections on May 6.

Labor deputy leader Angela Rayner said "the Conservatives are fighting each other like rats in a sack and slipping deeper and deeper into the mire of sleaze".

Space Shuttle era. It was the first time a capsule has been reused for crewed spaceflight and the mission also featured a reused rocket, accomplishing key cost-saving goals of NASA's partnerships with private industry. Two Crew Dragons are now parked side by side at the ISS, underscoring hard-charging SpaceX's position as the US space agency's primary transport provider.

Musk has made no secret of his push to drive humanity onward to the Moon and Mars, and told a post-launch press conference: "I think we're at the dawn of a new era of space exploration."

The arrival of the latest space quartet—which also includes American Megan McArthur and Japan's Akihiko Hoshide—will bring the number of people on the station to 11. That's two shy of the record of 13 set in 2009.

### Major step for Europe

The mission is also a major milestone for Europe, which named the mission "Alpha" after the star system Alpha Centauri. "This is really the golden era for us in terms of exploitation of the International Space Station," Frank De Winne, head of the European Space Agency (ESA)'s ISS program told AFP. Germany's Matthias Maurer and Italy's Samantha Cristoforetti are set to follow Pesquet on SpaceX missions, this fall and next spring respectively.

The next module of the ISS, built by Russia, should reach the station in July and will include a robotic arm built by ESA that Pesquet will help make operational, added De Winne. ESA will also be a key partner to the United States in the Artemis program to return to the Moon, providing the power and propulsion component for the Orion spacecraft, and critical elements of a planned lunar orbital station called Gateway.

The Crew-2 team has around 100 experiments in the diary during their six-month mission. These include research into what are known as "tissue chips"—small models of human organs that are made up of different types of cells and used to study things like aging in the immune system, kidney function and muscle loss. In terms of the environment, by the time Crew-2 returns in fall, it will have taken 1.5 million images of the Earth, documenting phenomena like artificial lighting at night, algal blooms, and the breakup of Antarctic ice shelves. Another important element of the mission is upgrading the station's solar power system by installing new compact panels that roll open like a huge yoga mat. — AFP

"It shows breathtaking contempt for the country," she said. In his blog, Cummings claimed the prime minister had proposed torpedoing the leak inquiry because its findings might prove problematic with Johnson's fiancée. He also said he had warned Johnson against plans to use Conservative Party donations in an "unethical, foolish, possibly illegal" way to renovate his Downing Street apartment.

Cummings was responding to newspaper headlines Friday reporting that Johnson's staff blamed the ex-aide for leaking embarrassing text messages, including some that have embroiled billionaire inventor James Dyson in a Westminster lobbying scandal.

### 'Stop the leak inquiry?'

"The Prime Minister's new Director of Communications Jack Doyle, at the PM's request, has made a number of false accusations to the media," Cummings stated in his lengthy post. "It is sad to see the PM and his office fall so far below the standards of competence and integrity the country deserves."

Friday's reports, sourced to anonymous Downing Street officials, blamed the ex-advisor for leaking text messages Johnson exchanged with Dyson early last year about tax arrangements during the pandemic. It prompted the government to launch an internal inquiry, the latest probe into a series of leaks from within Whitehall. Cummings denied being the leaker himself, pushing back in particular over a damaging disclosure of government plans that forced Johnson into bringing forward one period of lockdown last November. He claimed that an earlier internal investigation over that leak was blocked by Johnson after it identified the likely culprit.

"I will have to fire him, and this will cause me very serious problems with Carrie as they're best friends," Cummings said Johnson told him, referring to his fiancée Carrie Symonds. "Perhaps we could get the Cabinet Secretary to stop the leak inquiry?" he claimed the leader added. — AFP

## Dating app boast nets US Capitol riot charges

SAN FRANCISCO: A Bumble dating app boast about invading the US Capitol left a man facing criminal charges on Friday after his prospective match turned him in to police. The case against Robert Chapman, who lives in the city of Yonkers in New York State, came together with the help of Bumble text messages, Facebook posts, and video captured by

police body cameras, according to an FBI criminal complaint. Chapman, who also uses the last name Erick, is charged with violent entry and disorderly conduct at the Capitol, FBI agent Kenneth Kroll said in the complaint. The prospective date alerted the police after receiving a text message on Bumble from a prospective match who said "I did storm the Capitol and made it all the way to Statuary Hall." Kroll identified Chapman as being among those shown in video taken by Capitol police body cameras when rioters stormed the building in a deadly attack on January 6.

Evidence in the case included Facebook photos of the accused man in Statuary Hall, in keeping with the Bumble boast. Former US president Donald Trump has been accused of inciting the deadly January 6 insurrection. — AFP



N'DJAMENA: French President Emmanuel Macron pays his respects in front of the coffin of late Chadian president Idriss Deby during his state funeral in N'Djamena, Chad, Friday. — AFP

## Chad bids farewell to Deby as France, allies back his son

N'DJAMENA, Chad: Chad on Friday staged a state funeral for veteran ruler Idriss Deby Itono, a linchpin in the fight against the Sahel's jihadist insurgency, as France and regional allies voiced backing for his son and successor, Mahamat Idriss Deby. The elder Deby, who had ruled the vast semi-desert state with an iron fist for 30 years, died from wounds sustained fighting rebels at the weekend, the army said Tuesday. His death has stunned the Sahel and its ally and former colonial ruler France, battling a jihadist revolt that in nine years has swept across three countries.

The unrest has claimed thousands of lives and forced hundreds of thousands from their homes. Deby's coffin, draped in the national flag and surrounded by elite troops, was driven to the Place de la Nation square in the capital N'Djamena for ceremonies attended by foreign leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron. A 21-gun salute sounded out for Deby, who only last August had been declared a field marshal—the first in Chad's history—after leading an offensive against jihadists in the west of the country. Macron, in his tribute to the fallen president, said "you lived as a soldier, you died as a soldier, weapons in your hands".

"France will never let anyone, either today or tomorrow, challenge Chad's stability and integrity," Macron pledged. But Macron also called on the newly-appointed military government to foster "stability, inclusion, dialogue, democratic transition".

A similar message was conveyed personally to Deby's son when he met earlier with Macron and the presidents of Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, a French presidential aide said. The African Union meanwhile called on Chad's security forces "to respect the constitutional mandate and order, and to expeditiously embark on a process of restoration of constitutional order and handing over of political power to the civilian authorities." The body's Peace and Security Council also called for "an all-inclusive national dialogue" and expressed "grave concern" over said the establishment of a military council.

The younger Deby, a 37-year-old four-star general commanding the elite Republican Guard, was named president and head of a military council

immediately after his father's death was announced. Parliament and the government were dissolved.

He will wield full powers but has promised "free and democratic" elections after an 18-month transition period that can be extended once. The move has been branded an "institutional coup" by the opposition. The International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), underscoring the "terrible repression" under Deby, on Friday urged the swiftest possible return to civilian rule.

Deby's death was announced the day after he was declared the winner of an April 11 election—giving him a sixth mandate after three decades at the helm. The army said the 68-year-old had died on Monday from wounds suffered while leading troops in battle against rebels who had crossed from Libya. The Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT) has vowed to pursue its offensive after a pause for the funeral, with spokesman Kingabe Ogozoumei de Tapol telling AFP that the rebels were "en route to N'Djamena".

### Unstable country

Deby seized power in a chronically unstable country in 1990 and had twice thwarted attempted coups with support from France. He was repeatedly returned to office in elections condemned by opponents as fraudulent. But he gained a reputation in the West as an unflinching ally in the fight to roll back jihadists, whose campaign has shaken the vast, impoverished Sahel. Chad has well-respected armed forces and hosts the headquarters of France's 5,100-strong Barkhane anti-jihadist mission.

It also partners Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger in a regional anti-jihad coalition called the G5 Sahel. The group may name Burkina's president, Roch Marc Christian Kabore, as interim leader to succeed Deby, who had been its chairman under a rotational arrangement, a source at the G5 Sahel secretariat in Noukatchott said.

### French armored escort

Macron, who left for France mid-afternoon, was the only Western head of state to attend the ceremony. French armored vehicles escorted Macron to the embassy after his arrival at the military base used for Barkhane's headquarters, an AFP journalist saw. The funeral was followed by prayers at the capital's Grand Mosque. Deby's remains were then flown a thousand kilometers (600 miles) east to the village of Amdjarass near the Sudanese border, where he was to be buried alongside his father, close to his birthplace of Berdoba. — AFP

International

# Myanmar must end violence, restore democracy: Indonesia

## ASEAN holds crisis talks with junta chief leader Hlaing

**JAKARTA:** Myanmar's military must restore democracy and stop committing violence against citizens, Indonesian president Joko Widodo said after crisis talks with junta chief leader Min Aung Hlaing and Southeast Asian leaders yesterday.

The strongly worded statement followed a meeting in Jakarta of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which marked the senior Myanmar general's first foreign trip since security forces staged a coup that ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in early February. Min Aung Hlaing has become the focus of international outrage over the coup and a subsequent crackdown on dissent that has left more than 700 dead. "The first requested commitment is for the Myanmar military to stop the use of violence and that all parties there at the same time must refrain so that tensions can be reduced," Widodo said yesterday. "The violence must be stopped and democracy, stability and peace in Myanmar must be restored."

He also called for the release of political prisoners and for a special envoy to be allowed into the country to "push for dialogue". Singapore's prime minister Lee Hsien Loong, meanwhile, called on the military to release Myanmar's ousted president, as well as democracy icon Suu Kyi who is under house arrest.

Yesterday's meeting follows mass protests which have been met by a brutal crackdown that has left blood on the streets. An estimated 250,000 people have been displaced, according to a UN envoy, with Myanmar's democratically elected top leaders in hiding or under house arrest.

Also at the weekend meeting was the Sultan of Brunei, the current chair of ASEAN, as well as leaders and foreign ministers from most of the 10-country group, including Malaysia, Cambodia,

Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines and Laos. Small protests outside the bloc's Jakarta headquarters were dispersed by security personnel.

### 'Murderer-in-chief'

In Myanmar, protesters continued to take to the streets yesterday, including in northern Kachin state, where demonstrators wore blue shirts to symbolize detainees. In commercial hub Yangon, some residents staged a mock funeral for the senior general by smashing saffron-colored clay pots on the ground, symbolic of cutting ties with the dead.

The general's involvement in the Jakarta talks has angered activists, human rights groups and a shadow government of ousted Myanmar lawmakers, which was not invited to the gathering.

"Meetings that contribute to a solution to the deepening crisis in Myanmar are welcome," the latter said in a statement. "(But) meetings that exclude the people of Myanmar but include murderer-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing... are unlikely to be helpful." The lawmakers called on the junta to "stop murdering civilians", release more than 3,000 political prisoners and return power to the country's democratically elected government.

"The crisis initiated by a murderous and unrepentant Myanmar military has engulfed the country, and will cause severe aftershocks-humanitarian and more-for the entire region," rights group Amnesty International said ahead of the meeting.

### 'Be realistic'

There have also been calls for the regional bloc to expel Myanmar. But ASEAN generally takes a hands-off approach to members' internal affairs. Few analysts had expected major breakthroughs from the meeting, saying instead it was a chance



**JAKARTA:** This handout photo taken yesterday and released by the Indonesian Presidential Palace shows leaders attending the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit on the Myanmar crisis in Jakarta. —AFP

to bring Myanmar's military to the bargaining table and pave the way for a possible resolution. "We have to be realistic here. I don't think the summit is going to bear out a full-blown plan on how to get Myanmar out of the conflict," Mustafa Izzuddin, senior international affairs analyst at Solaris Strategies Singapore, said before the talks. "But rather I think it will start the conversation

and perhaps lay the parameters as to how a resolution could be found."

The crisis engulfing Myanmar has delivered a major challenge to the future of the ASEAN bloc and its consensus-driven approach. "International eyes are on (it) to see whether the regional approach that ASEAN has taken to find a resolution in Myanmar is effective," Izzuddin said. —AFP

## Indonesia military: Submarine sank with 53 aboard

**BALI, Indonesia:** An Indonesian submarine that went missing off the coast of Bali has sunk, the navy said yesterday, dashing hopes of rescuing any of its 53 crew. The navy's chief said a search party had recovered fragments from the KRI Nanggala 402 including items from inside the vessel, whose oxygen reserves were already believed to have run out.

Warships, planes and hundreds of military personnel have been searching for the stricken vessel. Authorities had said the German-built craft was equipped with enough oxygen for only three days after losing power. That deadline passed early yesterday.

"We have raised the status from submit to sub-sunk," navy chief Yudo Margono told reporters, adding that the retrieved items could not have come from another vessel.

"(The items) would not have come outside the submarine if there was no external pressure or without damage to its torpedo launcher." Navy officials displayed several items including a piece of

its torpedo system and a bottle of grease used to lubricate a submarine's periscope.

They also found a prayer mat commonly used by Muslims. Indonesia is the world's most populous Islamic nation. Margono said the hunt for the submarine-and sailors-would continue, but warned that deep waters made the recovery effort "very risky and difficult". "We don't know about the victims' condition because we haven't found any of them. So we can't speculate," he said in response to questions about the possibility of survivors. "But with the (discovery) of these items, you can make your own conclusion."

### Sudden disappearance

The submarine-one of five in Indonesia's fleet-disappeared early Wednesday during live torpedo training exercises off the Indonesian holiday island. An oil spill spotted where the submarine was thought to have submerged pointed to possible fuel-tank damage, fanning fears of a deadly disaster.

There were concerns that the submarine could have been crushed by water pressure if it sank to depths topping 700 meters (2,300 feet) — well below what it was built to withstand. The vessel was scheduled to conduct the training exercises when it asked for permission to dive. It lost contact shortly after.

small, what will I tell his wife?" GTB has run out of beds and, like all hospitals in Delhi, is fighting to get oxygen.

It has said it is doing the best it can in a crisis, and medical staff are working without days off. India's surge has seen it add around 350,000 cases and 2,600 deaths a day, and the healthcare system has been pushed to breaking point. Narayan's death at the hospital doors is common and it is unlikely to be counted in official figures-his body was taken away without any formal admission.

The security guard at the GTB door turned away patients, telling panicked relatives the wards were full. Some stayed in line, others hailed auto-rickshaws to continue the desperate hunt for a bed.

Exhausted seventeen-year-old Mohan Sharma stood with his 65-year-old grandfather, giving the old man water, supporting him as he coughed and tenderly putting his oxygen mask on. His father had died of coronavirus in the same queue less than 24 hours earlier. "He was gasping for air, we removed his face mask and he was crying and saying 'save me, please save me'."

"But I could do nothing. I just watched him die", said Sharma. With no time to grieve, he had to quickly move on to helping his grandfather.

The family managed to find a bed for him but the grandfather was overwhelmed by the grim conditions. "There were three dead bodies next to him and he panicked and said he would not survive. So I took him

September. "And he has approved the addition of some long range bombers to be deployed to the region. Two of those B-52s have arrived in the region," Kirby said.

The Stratofortress bombers are usually based in Qatar, where the US military has an important base. Kirby did not dismiss the idea that further reinforcements could be sent to ensure the smooth and safe removal of some 2,500 US troops and another 16,000 civilians supporting the US operation in Afghanistan. There are also another 7,000 NATO troops in the country, who also depend on the United States for material and security support.

"I think it's reasonable to assume, as I've said before, that there could be temporary additional force protection measures and enablers that we would require to make sure that this drawdown goes smoothly and safely for our men and women," Kirby told reporters. —AFP



**DENPASAR:** Indonesian military chief Hadi Tjahjanto (center) speaks during a press conference in Denpasar yesterday as search operations continued off the coast of Bali for the Navy's KRI Nanggala (402) submarine that went missing on April 21 during a training exercise. —AFP

Authorities have not offered possible explanations for the submarine's sudden disappearance or commented on questions about whether the decades-old vessel was overloaded. The military has said the submarine, delivered to Indonesia in 1981, was seaworthy. —AFP



**NEW DELHI:** Relatives transport a COVID-19 patient on a stretcher to a hospital in New Delhi yesterday. —AFP

outside and he's resting now," said Sharma.

People who have been inside described crowded hallways, with beds and stretchers occupied by two or three people. Sharma's grandfather's oxygen cylinder was almost empty, with no guarantee that it would be replaced.

He also needed to check on his mother, who was nursing a coronavirus-positive grandmother at home. "I have seen three dead bodies in six minutes," said Ravi Kumar, who managed to get his 80-year-old grandfather admitted after waiting outside the hospital all night. —AFP



**This handout photograph shows US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (center right) walks with Afghanistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Hanif Atmar (center left), in Kabul on April 15. —AFP**

### News in brief

#### Avalanche kills 8 Indians on border

**NEW DELHI:** At least eight workers were killed and hundreds were rescued after an avalanche struck a remote Himalayan region near the China border in northern India, officials said yesterday. Six people were in critical condition in hospital after authorities used helicopters to retrieve trapped workers in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand state. The avalanche is believed to have been triggered by glacier collapse in the Himalayas late Friday, two months after a devastating glacial burst in the same region left more than 200 dead. The Chamoli district chief said rescue and relief operations were continuing in the remote Niti Valley, close to the China border. —AFP

#### Sri Lanka Easter attacks: One arrested

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka's police arrested a top Muslim legislator yesterday in connection with the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks that killed 279 people, as pressure mounted to speed up the investigation. Detectives took Rishad Bathiudeen, leader of the All Ceylon Makkal Party (ACMP) and a former minister, into custody under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), police spokesman Ajith Rohana said. Bathiudeen and his brother Riyaj were arrested in pre-dawn raids on their homes in Colombo. "They were arrested under the PTA based on circumstantial and scientific evidence that they had connections with the suicide bombers who carried out the attacks," Rohana said in a statement. —AFP

#### French volunteers leave cave

**TARASCON-SUR-ARIEGE, France:** A group of 15 French volunteers yesterday left a cave where they had stayed for 40 days, in an experiment probing the limits of human adaptability to isolation. Dazzled by the light and with pale faces but otherwise healthy, the group led by French-Swiss explorer Christian Clot emerged at around 10.30 am (0830 GMT) from the Lombrives cave in Ariege, southwest France. The underground isolation experiment saw the subjects, aged between 27 and 50, give up watches, phones and natural light, exchanging modern comforts for a cave system with a constant 12 Celsius (54 Fahrenheit) temperature and 95 percent humidity. Members had to generate their own electricity with a pedal bike and draw water from a well 45 meters below the earth. —AFP

#### Singapore names new FM

**SINGAPORE:** A top Singapore official who has been tipped as a future premier was named the new finance minister Friday, as the city-state overhauls its leadership succession plans following a setback. Lawrence Wong, currently education minister, was picked as the replacement for Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat in a major cabinet reshuffle. Heng was widely seen as the prime minister in waiting until he gave up his claim to the job this month in a shock move that upended the tightly-controlled country's carefully planned power transfer. The key finance portfolio is sometimes seen as a stepping stone to the premiership, although analysts said it was too early to tell who will take over from Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. —AFP

## Death, despair at doors of stricken Delhi hospital

**NEW DELHI:** Barely breathing, Shyam Narayan arrived at the New Delhi hospital in a red rickshaw, his feet hanging over the side, but it soon became clear to his desperate family that the overwhelmed staff could not help him. He was just the latest victim of the coronavirus wave battering India, where thousands of afflicted are turning up at hospitals only to find no beds and a battle for oxygen and life-saving drugs. At Guru Teg Bahadur (GTB) hospital in northeast Delhi, Narayan and his family were part of a steady stream of ambulances, rickshaws and other vehicles bringing COVID-19 patients for treatment, waiting for beds inside already occupied by up to three people. He didn't make it that far: a stretcher carrying his lifeless body was wheeled out just a few minutes after he was taken through the doors.

### Gasping for air

The Narayan family had tried all night to find an oxygen bed for him. But they were repeatedly turned away by hospitals, said brother Ram. "My brother has five children and the youngest one is so

## US positions carrier, bombers to back Afghanistan pullout

**WASHINGTON:** The Pentagon has deployed B-52 bombers to the Middle East and has prolonged the presence of an aircraft carrier in the region to support the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, spokesman John Kirby said Friday. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin decided to keep the USS Eisenhower in the US Central Command region for an extended period, in the wake of President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw all US forces from Afghanistan by

# Business

SUNDAY, APRIL 25, 2021

## Leaders seek \$19bn for COVID weapons

### Billionth vaccine dose on the verge of being administered

GENEVA: World leaders united Friday to demand \$19 billion of investment in weapons to beat the COVID-19 pandemic, saying the "miracle" of vaccines did not mean the end was in sight. One year on from the launch of the Access to COVID Tools (ACT) Accelerator, a multi-billion-dollar internationally-coordinated attempt to find vaccines, tests and treatments, the

But leaders warned that despite the progress so far, another push was needed to see off the pandemic, as variants of the virus stalk the planet and the disease takes off in India. "We cannot allow the virus to run out of control across entire regions," said French President Emmanuel Macron. "The appearance of new variants demonstrated that our health also depends on the poorest countries. Much remains to be done."

The ACT-Accelerator is seeking \$22 billion this year to further the assault on the pandemic, but is \$19 billion short. "World leaders face a choice: invest in saving lives by treating the cause of the pandemic everywhere, now, or continue to spend trillions on the consequences with no end in sight," said World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "We can only end the pandemic by funding, sharing, and scaling-up access to the tools we need to fight the disease."

At its launch 12 months ago, the pandemic was still in its infancy. The death toll - now more than three million - stood at around 190,000, while only 2.7 million people had been infected, compared to more than 144 million confirmed cases today.

### Biden summit brings new hope on climate but hard path ahead

WASHINGTON: Could the planet finally be on track to limiting climate change? After US President Joe Biden ramped up ambitions with a climate summit, experts are cautiously saying yes - although a difficult path lies ahead. At a 40-leader summit he convened just months into his presidency, Biden doubled US targets to slash greenhouse gas emissions responsible for climate change by 2030, with Japan and Canada also raising commitments and the European Union and Britain locking in forceful targets earlier in the week.

"Together we've made great progress," Biden told the closing day of the summit, which he called the "start of a road" to a rigorous new climate accord at a UN conference in Glasgow in November. John Kerry, Biden's climate envoy, said that more than half the world's economy has now pledged action that would check warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels - the aspiration set by the 2015 Paris Agreement to avoid the worst effects of climate change such as droughts, submergence of low-lying islands and worsening storms, hunger and migration.

But that still leaves half the world - and the effects of climate change are already being felt, with the planet clocking year after year of record heat

### Turkey seeks arrest of crypto boss over fraud, detains dozens

ISTANBUL: Turkey issued an international arrest warrant on Friday for the founder of a cryptocurrency exchange who fled with a reported \$2 billion in investors' assets, state media reported. Police also detained 62 people in raids over their alleged links to Thodex, the company headed by the fugitive businessman Faruk Fatih Ozer.

He is being sought on charges of "fraud by using information systems, banks or credit institutions as a tool and founding a criminal organization", the Anadolu news agency reported. Turkish security officials on Thursday released a photo of Ozer going through passport control at Istanbul airport on his way to an undisclosed location.

Security sources later confirmed that Ozer - said to be 27 years old - has been in Albania since Tuesday. The justice ministry has started legal proceedings to seek his arrest and extradition from the Albanian capital Tirana, Anadolu reported. Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu spoke by phone with his Albanian counterpart about the case, the agency added.

The Thodex exchange suspended trading after posting a mysterious message on Wednesday saying it needed five days to deal with an unspecified outside investment. Media reports said the exchange shut down while holding at least \$2 billion from 391,000 investors.

#### Freeze on bank accounts

The 62 suspects were apprehended in simultaneous raids carried out in eight cities including Turkey's main hub Istanbul, Anadolu reported. Police raided the company's headquarters on the Asian side of Istanbul and seized computers and

'Miracle'  
The ACT launch gave birth to the Covax facility to ensure poorer countries could access eventual vaccines, fearing - with justification, as it turned out - a scramble for jobs. Just 0.2 percent of COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered in the 29 lowest-income countries, home to nine percent of the world's population. Covax has so far shipped more than 40.5 million vaccine doses to 118 participating territories.

It is aiming to supply at least two billion vaccine doses this year, of which 1.3 billion will be for the 92 lowest-income participants, with the cost covered by donors. "We achieved a miracle. Every cent that we put into the ACT-Accelerator has been a good investment," said European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, calling for countries to join forces as "Team Human".

"The pandemic is far from over. We need ACT-Accelerator perhaps even more than one year ago, to track the virus as it evolves, to scale up manufacturing, to deliver vaccines to all corners of the world," she said. One of the key problems now is manufacturing doses on the unprecedented scale required - and the supply chain constraints associated with it. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa called for more countries to be able to produce their own vaccines, diagnostics and treatments through a temporary suspension of intellectual property rights. "Africa lags behind in the manufacture of vital products," added Rwandan President Paul Kagame.

and extreme weather on the rise. Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency, told the summit that climate-warming emissions are on track for the second largest increase in history in 2021 amid the recovery from the COVID pandemic.

And more than half of the reductions needed to achieve goals of carbon neutrality mid-century will depend on technological innovations that do not yet exist, he said. "Right now the data does not match the rhetoric and the gap is getting wider and wider," he said. Bill Hare of Climate Analytics assessed that the new pledges reduced the gap in meeting the 1.5 goal by 12 to 14 percent - a major reduction, but still not enough.

"On the other hand, politically, momentum is building for more ambition to come through this year," he said. "Governments made commitments and the next big question is whether or not they actually implement them," he said. A steeper gap remains on climate aid for the poorest nations, despite Biden's pledge to boost US funding that had been severed by his climate-skeptic predecessor Donald Trump.

#### Eyes on China

The key players will be both the United States and China, which together account for nearly 50 percent of emissions. Chinese President Xi Jinping, pledging cooperation with the United States on climate despite a raft of other disputes, recommitted to carbon neutrality by 2060 and offered a hint of reducing reliance on coal - the dirtiest form of energy, on which the manufacturing powerhouse remains heavily reliant.

digital materials, press reports said. Authorities also confiscated Ozer's 31 million lira (\$3.7 million) in banks, Soylu said.

He said the financial scale of the fraud remained unknown for now. "We will see the ramifications in the coming days ... God willing, he will be captured and returned to Turkey." Police have issued arrest warrants for 16 other people, Anadolu said, without elaborating. There was no immediate information about those being held.

A lawyer for the investors, Oguz Evren Kilic, said Friday that the investigation into Thodex "is deepening". "Hundreds of thousands of users cannot get access to their digital wallets. The situation will get more serious unless a concrete step is taken" by Thodex, he told AFP by phone. Kilic said his clients have already lodged complaints at the prosecutor's office in Istanbul and other cities.

In a message posted on the company's official Twitter account on Thursday, Ozer slammed the "baseless allegations" against him. He said he was abroad for meetings with foreign investors and would return home "in a few days and cooperate with judicial authorities so that the truth can come out".

#### 'I'm begging you, help'

The number of complaints against Thodex has increased by more than 1,160 percent over the week to April 20 compared to the previous week, according to Turkish customer complaint website Sikayetvar. One investor who reached Sikayetvar said: "I have been unemployed for a year. I trusted Thodex and invested everything I have... I can't sleep or eat. I am begging you, please help." Another said: "Why is Thodex's CEO silent? Why are they victimizing people? Are you making fun of us?"

Growing numbers of Turks are turning to cryptocurrencies in a bid to shield their savings in the face of a sharp decline in the value of the Turkish lira and high inflation. The Turkish crypto market remains unregulated despite growing skepticism from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government about its safety. —AFP



SURESNES, France: French President Emmanuel Macron (left) talks to a patient in rehabilitation service during a visit to the long-term COVID-19 unit of Foch Hospital near Paris on April 22, 2021 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. —AFP

#### COVID cure?

On the ACT tests pillar, Francoise Vanni, communications director for the Global Fund financing organization for combating epidemics, said the testing rate in rich countries was currently about 80 times higher than elsewhere. "This inequity is basically a global health risk for all of us," she told reporters. "We need to continue monitoring the

virus among the vaccinated population," she added, to keep track of what SARS-CoV-2 is up to. Meanwhile on treatments, ACT supported 15 clinical trials, investigating 21 therapies in 47 countries, with 85,000 patients enrolled. It supported research that identified dexamethasone as the first life-saving therapy for COVID-19 - the only treatment for the disease approved by the WHO. — AFP



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden delivers remarks and participates in the virtual Leaders Summit on Climate Session 5: The Economic Opportunities of Climate Action from the White House yesterday. — AFP

He said China would "strictly control" coal and lower use in the next five-year development plan starting in 2025. David Waskow, director of the International Climate Initiative at the World Resources Institute, said Biden's summit gave "really important traction" but that particular attention will be on whether China makes more concrete steps. "There's no question that signaling politically that China is prepared to start phasing down coal by 2025 is extremely important," he said.

A number of leaders offered no new ambitions, notably Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi - pointing to his nation's much-lower energy use per capita - announced cooperation with the United States but kept to previous pledges to reduce the intensity of emissions, not the absolute number. — AFP

### Airfares soar, private jets in demand as rich Indians flee COVID

MUMBAI: Airfares soared and demand for private jets boomed Friday as Indians who could afford it scrambled to escape a COVID surge before flights to the United Arab Emirates shut down. All flights from the UAE to India - one of the world's busiest air corridors - will be suspended from today as coronavirus cases in the South Asian nation reach record levels and overwhelm hospitals.

Price comparison websites showed one-way commercial flights from Mumbai to Dubai on Friday and yesterday costing as much as 80,000 rupees (\$1,000), around 10 times the usual rate. Tickets for the New Delhi to Dubai route were going for more than 50,000 rupees, five times the normal level. No tickets were on offer from today when the 10-day flight suspension comes into force.

For private jets, the amount of interest was "absolutely crazy", a spokesman for charter company Air Charter Service India told AFP. "We have 12 flights going to Dubai tomorrow and each flight is completely full," the spokesman said. "I've fielded almost 80 enquiries for flying to Dubai today alone," said a spokesman for Enthral Aviation, another provider.

"We have requested more aircraft from abroad to meet the demand... It costs \$38,000 to hire a 13-seater jet from Mumbai to Dubai, and \$31,000 to hire a six-seater aircraft," he told AFP. "People are making groups and arranging to share our jets just to get a seat... We've had some queries for Thailand but mostly the demand is for Dubai." About 300 commercial flights a week usually operate between the UAE and India, according to local media. The UAE is home to roughly 3.3 million Indians who make up a third of the population - most of them in Dubai, one of the seven emirates that make up the federation. — AFP

### Manufacturing hurdles, not IP, slowing COVID jabs rollout: Industry

GENEVA: Removing intellectual property protections from COVID-19 vaccines or pressuring companies into technology sharing will not speed up production of the jabs, and could even slow it down, the industry has warned. Proponents of doing away with IP rights say more companies in more countries could produce the vaccines, providing broader access in poorer nations that so far have seen few doses.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, whose country is co-leading a push at the World Trade Organization to exempt COVID-19 vaccines from IP rights, insisted Friday the jabs were "a public good and must be recognized as such". "We call on the pharmaceutical industry to directly transfer this technology free of intellectual property barriers to low and middle-income countries," he told an event hosted by the World Health Organization. "Let us together challenge vaccine nationalism and show that protecting intellectual property rights does not come at the expense of human lives."

Vaccine makers have voiced broad commitment to cooperating to boost production, but at a separate event on Friday, industry representatives insisted that IP waivers and forced technology sharing was the wrong way to go.

#### 10 billion doses

An IP waiver "wouldn't give us the tools to produce more doses of vaccines", Thomas Cueni, head of the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA), told reporters. He pointed out that around 275 manufacturing deals, including on technology transfer among staunch competitors, had helped the industry go from zero to one billion Covid-19 vaccine doses already produced, with the goal of 10 billion doses by the end of the year.

Industry players said though that that target hinged not on IP restrictions or broader technology transfers, but on resolving serious challenges, linked to trade barriers and export restrictions, hindering the movement of vaccine components and the vaccines themselves. "Vaccine manufacturing is not just about patents," said Sai Prasad, head of quality operations at Indian vaccine maker Bharat Biotech and president of the Developing Countries Vaccine Manufacturers' Network (DCVMN).

Prasad pointed to the complexity of ensuring that manufacturers have the equipment and know-how to meet the stringent quality and safety standards required in vaccine production. "This is a very complex space, very complicated science, manufacturing is very complicated... We need to be careful who we are transferring technology to." With vaccine skepticism already rampant, manufacturing difficulties could have dire consequences, warned Michelle McMurtry-Heath, who heads the Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO). "We don't want to do anything to undermine vaccine confidence," she said. — AFP



## Business

# EU to have enough vaccines for 70% of adults 'in July'

## Von der Leyen thanks Pfizer for building up supply

**PUURS, Belgium:** The EU coronavirus vaccine program will secure enough doses to immunize 70 percent of adults by the end of July, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said Friday. The EU chief had previously set a goal of late September, but announced the new target during a visit to a Belgian vaccine plant that is ramping up production. "I'm confident we will have enough doses to vaccinate 70 percent of all EU adults already in July," von der Leyen said, at a factory producing the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

Von der Leyen said the European Union would "in the next days" conclude a new contract with the firm - already a mainstay of the European effort - for an additional 1.8 billion doses of second-generation jabs in 2022 and 2023. The Pfizer vaccine, developed by German partner BioNTech, is expensive compared to some competitors and uses the mRNA technique that can be adapted to future coronavirus variants.

The European Commission's vaccine effort to jointly purchase vaccines for the 27 member states got off to a rocky start, with delivery shortfalls, particularly from UK-based AstraZeneca. But von der Leyen thanked Pfizer and its subcontractor in Puurs for its "enormous effort" in building up supply. "So we negotiated together a second contract already early in January, and to accelerate the delivery of vaccine," she said, at a joint news conference with Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla.

"I have outlined the challenges going from vaccinating potentially children and teenagers to hav-

ing a boost to increase immunity after a certain amount of time, and mainly to prepare for... variants that might occur. And here the technology of mRNA is incredibly agile. So there is a limited amount of time that is needed to, if I may say so, engineer the mRNA in a way that it can adapt to potential escape vaccines."

The European Commission is drawing up plans to take legal action against another pharma giant AstraZeneca over its failure to meet vaccine delivery targets. Von der Leyen did not address this, but said the question of whether drug companies had proven "reliable partners" had been taken into account in the ongoing contract negotiations.

### 'On track to exceed'

Pfizer boss Bourla said his company was "really on track to exceed" commitments it had made to the EU and will deliver 250 million doses by the end of the second quarter, a four-fold increase on the first quarter this year. The visit with von der Leyen to the plant in Belgium underlined Europe's role as a one of the globe's vaccine-producing powerhouses.

The EU's medicines regulator on Friday gave permission for the facility in Puurs to expand its production capacity by 20 percent, with Pfizer aiming to start churning out 100 million doses a month there from May. Von der Leyen said that so far 150 million doses of vaccine had been delivered across the EU and over 123 million jabs given to people in the bloc. She said the EU has exported



**PUURS:** (From left) German scientist, CMO and co-founder of BioNTech Ozlem Tureci, Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander De Croo address a press conference after a visit to oversee the production of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at the factory of US pharmaceutical company Pfizer on Friday. —AFP

155 million doses to 87 countries around the world since December - a bid to allay fears that Brussels

was closing up shop after introducing export controls in the face of delivery shortfalls. —AFP

## Pfizer CEO: COVID vaccine to become easier to ship, store

**PUURS:** US pharmaceuticals giant Pfizer is planning a new version of its coronavirus vaccine that can be stored in a standard freezer and comes diluted and ready for use, its CEO told AFP on Friday. The vaccine developed by Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech is already a mainstay in Europe's efforts to control the pandemic - but it is a challenge to ship and protect.



Albert Bourla

The current version must be stored at minus 70 degrees Celsius, limiting its distribution to specially equipped vaccination centers. But Pfizer's chief executive Albert Bourla told AFP in an interview that a new version is in the pipeline and that he was optimistic the vaccine will also prove effective against new virus variants.

### Indian variant

Bourla said Pfizer has large amounts of real world data from some of the variant outbreaks. "We have already data for the UK one - I hate using the countries, but people know them like that - which is very prominent in Israel... efficiency was 97 percent," he said. "We have data from South Africa, with the South African variant, and overall the efficacy was 100 percent. And also have data from Brazil. And it looks also this is very well controlled." Pfizer has not yet compiled sufficient data on the efficiency of its vaccine against the so-called Indian variant, the latest to raise concerns that a new wave of infections could overcome the immunization drive. But he said he was "optimistic" the vaccine would prove effective, and that the firm's mRNA technology can be adapted to counter new strains.

"The thing that makes me feel more comfortable is that we have developed a process that once a variant becomes a variant of concern, we should be able to have a new vaccine within 100 days," he said. "It's a tough target, but I am very comfortable that we should be able to do it. "And because of the effectiveness of this mRNA technology, I believe that variants will not become an issue, we'll be able to control them."

### Keeping cool

The European Union is betting big on Pfizer's relatively expensive vaccine, but there are concerns that the difficulty of keeping it at very cold temperatures will make it hard to distribute in poorer countries. But here again Bourla was confident. "We are doing actually two things on this front," he said. The US Food and Drug Administration allows the vaccine to be kept at minus 20 Celsius in a standard freezer for two weeks and Bourla thinks that could be extended.

"And we are about to generate the data for another two weeks. So that this formulation can be stored, let's say, a month in minus 20 if we get approval for that," he said. "On the other hand, we are also working with a new formulation which is much improved, that will be ready to use: that means you don't need to dilute the vaccine, it will come diluted."

Pfizer hopes the vaccine will be able to be stored for two to three months in normal refrigeration and an additional three months in a freezer, Bourla said. "So a total of four-to-six months outside the minus 50 or 70... we believe we'll be able to have it if we are successful in summer." —AFP

## Hatchery reviving UK's near-extinct local oysters

**PORTSMOUTH:** Decimated by over-fishing and pollution, British oysters could make a comeback as a hatchery in the Channel port city of Portsmouth is helping to revive a native species. At Portsmouth University's Institute of Marine Sciences, huge piles of empty oyster shells are stacked in the courtyard, ready for the young oyster larvae to move in.

"In the wild environment, the oysters will be reproducing roughly May through to September, and we're hoping that that will be mimicked here in the hatchery," said Luke Helmer, a scientist at the Blue Marine Foundation, which co-launched the project in 2015 with the university of Portsmouth.

The hatchery is the first in Britain to focus solely on saving oysters, without any commercial motivation. It aims to reintroduce millions of the European flat oysters (*ostrea edulis*), a species that is almost extinct in this region. At the center of the research center is a small room full of saltwater tanks that hold the adult oysters that will lead their revival.

The team of scientists are "feeding them, keeping the conditions right," said Helmer. The team of eight researchers will soon start slowly raising the water temperature to match that of nearby seawater, triggering the oysters to release their larvae. Oysters reproduce by male oysters releasing sperm into the water, which fertilizes eggs released by female oysters. Larvae initially drift in the water but then seek out an oyster shell to attach to and live in. At the hatchery, the larvae will live in incubators before being released in June into the Solent, a shallow strait next to the laboratory.

### Overfishing and pollution

Human intervention is required because oysters have almost disappeared from the Solent in recent decades. "If you take it back to the 1970s, there were about 15 million oysters taken out from the fishery each year," said Helmer. "That has now declined to almost nothing." In Europe as a whole, the population of this oyster species has fallen by 90 percent since the end of the 19th century, according to the University of Portsmouth, and is almost extinct in some regions.

The reasons for this is "mainly overfishing and harvesting," said Monica Fabra, a PhD student in marine biology. Other factors include pollution and the introduction of non-native species which compete for space and food, she added, most importantly the Pacific oyster.

Also known as the "Japanese oyster", this was introduced in the last century to compensate for falling numbers of native molluscs and it is now the

## Honda aiming for 100% electric vehicles by 2040

**TOKYO:** Japanese car giant Honda said Friday it would aim to have electric and fuel cell vehicles account for 100 percent of all sales by 2040 to promote climate goals. The automaker's newly appointed CEO Toshihiro Mibe described the target as "challenging" but said the firm wanted to "set high goals".

Honda has said it wants the ratio of electric vehi-



**SOUTHSEA, United Kingdom:** PHD student in marine biology Monica Fabra displays a British native oyster at an oyster hatchery at Portsmouth University's Institute of Marine Sciences on April 6, 2021. —AFP

main species in Europe. It proved a highly invasive species that has a profound effect on the ecosystem and squeezed out the European oyster.

"Making them reproduce in the hatchery is a safer environment," said Fabra as she gently handled Grand Ma, who is over 15 years old and as large as a hand. Here, "we can ensure that they survive until the very end of the production," when they enter the sea, she added.

### Environmental clean-up

Even though it will take a while to reverse the drop in the oyster population, Helmer hopes to reintroduce "somewhere between half a million and a million larvae" into the Solent in the next year or so. If successful, these will help clean up the water. Each oyster can filter up to 200 litres of water a day (4.4 gallons), "which is a phenomenal amount," said Helmer.

They used to play a considerable role in improving water quality in the area when you take into account the millions of oysters that used to live on the seabed. "The oysters are known as an ecosystem engineer so they enhance the environment", due to their constant filtering, he added. Oysters will also improve the biodiversity of the reef where they settle, as their shells can shelter many other species, said Fabra.

During a preliminary trial, researchers put oyster cages down into the sea and were astounded when they pulled them up and discovered 97 species. This result is particularly spectacular for European oysters since it has evolved to live alongside local species, he said. What's more, some studies have shown that the European oyster could be better adapted to deal with the warming climate than the Pacific one.

The hatchery's findings could be rapidly duplicated around Europe as the researchers are collaborating with similar projects in Germany and the Netherlands. But Helmer cautions that a commercially viable population is still a long way away, and it could take a decade to sample delicious local oysters in Portsmouth. —AFP

cles and fuel cell electric vehicles sold in major markets to hit 40 percent by 2030 and 80 percent by 2035, before hitting 100 percent globally by 2040. It has unveiled 5 trillion yen (\$46 billion) in investments in its R&D to reach the goals.

The announcement comes a day after Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said Japan would aim to cut emissions 46 percent by 2030, significantly more than previously pledged. The new target revised a previous goal of cutting emissions 26 percent from 2013 levels by 2030. The pledge came with international focus on climate change as US President Joe Biden hosts a summit to encourage stronger action on warming and faster moves towards carbon neutrality. —AFP

## Europe's COVID recovery fund starts to fall into place

**BRUSSELS:** Negotiations were difficult and the plan got off to a slow start, but Europe's huge post-coronavirus recovery fund may make its first payments in July. To Brussels' relief, two important obstacles in the path of the 672-billion-euro (\$812 billion) package of grants and loans were passed this week. Germany's constitutional court rejected a bid to block the deal's ratification and Portugal became the first EU member to submit its spending plan.

"It was a very good week," a senior EU official told AFP. A dozen more members - including big player France - are due to follow suit next week, handing over what officials warn are on average 50,000-page documents. This will allow the European Commission to spend two months studying what will eventually be 27 national plans for investment and reform.

If they pass muster the member states will take up to four weeks to give the go ahead and then, one official said, "we'll see money start to flow in July". This will be a year on from the European Union's historic decision to pool debt to fund the recovery package. And what once seemed like a hugely ambitious exercise has been dwarfed by the United States' adoption of a \$1.9 trillion infrastructure plan.

The US has also surged ahead with coronavirus vaccinations, meaning its economy will emerge from lockdowns quicker than those in Europe. EU chiefs remain upbeat and optimistic. "Our objective is to approve all the plans by the summer," European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said.

### Here comes the cavalry

But some national capitals have been champing at the bit. "I see that the American cavalry is arriving on time," French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said earlier this month. "I wish the European cavalry would also arrive on time." As late as Thursday, European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde stressed the "urgency" of getting on with Europe's stimulus.

Spain and Italy will see the biggest injections of funds if their roughly 70-billion-euro plans are approved, followed by France at 40 billion. In recent weeks, behind the scenes, European Commission officials have been in difficult discussions with national governments on the criteria that spending plans must meet.

But, with the arrival of Portugal's dossier, they see political road blocks beginning to collapse. In terms of investment spending, each plan must assign at least 37 percent to measures that better the environment or fight climate change. Another 20 percent is supposed to finance the transition to a more digital economy.

The hope is that as European output picks up after a year of COVID and lockdown woes, it will herald a rash of spending in insulating buildings, railway transport, electric vehicle charging points and high-speed Internet. But, in a stick to accompany the carrot, the European Commission is once again looking to impose structural economic reforms on member states. —AFP



**BRUSSELS:** Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban is welcomed by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in the Berlaymont building at the EU headquarters on Friday. —AFP

## Business

# Boursa Kuwait rings the bell for World Earth Day

**KUWAIT:** Boursa Kuwait rang the bell for World Earth Day, one of the most important environmental initiatives around the world, in collaboration with the UN Environment Programme's Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP) and the Environmental Voluntary Foundation (EVF).

Earth Day is an annual event on April 22 to demonstrate support for environmental protection. First held in 1970, it is now celebrated by more than 193 countries around the world. This year's theme is "Restore our Earth", a reminder that the preservation of our planet is not an option but has now become a necessity. Climate change and other environmental degradations have broken our natural systems, which may affect the global economy negatively.

Boursa Kuwait participated in this year's festivities to raise awareness to this cause as part of its Corporate Sustainability strategy, which aims creating long-term value for the company's stakeholders in the economic, social and environmental dimensions, while also contributing to the development of Kuwait and its economy as well as creating a meaningful impact on the community in which the bourse operates.

Over the past year, the company launched many initiatives across the three pillars of its strategy in partnership with local and international organizations. These programs and initiatives were focused on financial literacy and capital market awareness, the empowerment of women, support for nongovernmental organizations and volunteer work, safety and preventive measures against Covid-19 including the maintenance of business continuity in the best interests of issuers and investors, as well as environmental protection.

Boursa Kuwait is committed to minimizing its carbon footprint and continually improving environmental management practices to reduce the consumption of energy and other resources. The company undertook

several measures to reduce its use of electricity and water, including the implementation of energy-saving electrical products, advanced heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, and water-efficient plumbing devices, successfully reducing energy consumption by over one million kilowatts and water consumption by around 85 thousand gallons during 2020. Boursa Kuwait also actively promotes recycling across its operations and encourages employees to adopt environmentally responsible behaviors.

Naser M Al-Sanousi, Director of Marketing and Communication at Boursa Kuwait, commented on this occasion, saying, "On World Earth Day, Boursa Kuwait rings the bell for environmental awareness in collaboration with the United Nations Environmental Program and the Environmental Voluntary Foundation, reminding our society of the need to transform into a more sustainable economy that works for the people and this Earth."

As the country's sole exchange operator, Boursa Kuwait is keen to adopt and promote sustainable standards and practices, endorsing the efforts of market participants to enhance performance on environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) issues.

"ESG is now a key factor for investors when making decisions about their portfolios, as listed companies have a higher chance of reaching more investors by adopting sustainability practices in their operations. At Boursa Kuwait, we support listed companies by offering them an ESG guide and hosting representatives from the world's biggest index providers as well as helping them reach institutional investors from around the world," Al-Sanousi added.

Sami Dimassi, the Director and Regional Representative of the United Nations Environment Program in West Asia hailed Boursa Kuwait's involvement in the Earth Day festivities, saying, "Climate change and environmental degradations have broken our natural

systems, causing us to losing biodiversity at an alarming rate. The pandemic has given us a wakeup call to the state of our planet. Today, on Earth Day, we are reminded of what lays ahead and how we can protect and restore our Earth."

He added: "It is an opportunity for us to recognize that what we do, individually and collectively makes a difference on this planet. Let us focus on the opportunities that lay ahead, understand our natural environments and ecosystems, find solutions through innovation and forge a stronger partnership with our Earth."

Since September, Boursa Kuwait has collaborated with the Kuwait Dive Team - under the umbrella of the EVF and in cooperation with the UNEP - to protect and conserve the marine environment of Kuwait Bay. The Kuwait Dive Team conducted 16 operations using the Boursa Boat, removing around 63 tons of waste through the end of 2020. These trips included a two-ton clearing of hazardous waste from beaches and islands in collaboration with government institutions, eight trips to clear 4.8 tons of fishing nets, and six operations to remove wrecked ships and boats with the combined weight of 56 tons.

Showing its commitment to the preservation of the Kuwait Bay and its surroundings, Boursa Kuwait reinforced its partnership with the EVF and the Kuwait Dive Team in association with the UNEP, sponsoring the National Campaign to Remove Hazardous Waste from the Kuwait Bay and its Beaches and supporting the Dive Team's efforts for the preservation of Kuwait's



Nasser Al-Sanousi



Sami Dimassi



Waleed Al-Fadhel

marine environment.

Commenting on the ongoing partnership between the bourse and the EVF, Al-Sanousi said, "I am pleased to announce Boursa Kuwait's sponsorship of the National Campaign to Remove Hazardous Waste from the Kuwait Bay and its Beaches, helping raise awareness of the preservation of these beaches in the community as well as encouraging its members to participate in volunteer work."

President of the Kuwait Dive Team Waleed Fadhel Al-Fadhel also spoke about the partnership with Boursa Kuwait, saying, "The Kuwait Bay is the second most important bay in the world after the Gulf of Mexico. With the support of our strategic partners Boursa Kuwait and the UNEP, the Dive Team will continue to preserve the marine environment of the Kuwait Bay, with its importance economically, environmentally and scientifically as a center for the reproduction of fish and other marine creatures. On World Earth Day, we ask that everyone be environmentally vigilant, protecting the marine environment in general and the Kuwait Bay in particular."

## Markaz wins Kuwait's 'Best Investment Bank' for 2021

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" was recently named the 'Best Investment Bank in Kuwait' for 2021 by Global Finance Magazine, the New York-based financial publication for the tenth time in 11 years. The award follows the results of the annual survey, which are scheduled to be published in the magazine's April issue.

Markaz topped the list of the most distinguished investment banks in Kuwait, based on international standards. The criteria for selection included quality of service, volume of transactions, market share, pricing, and innovative transactions.

Ali H Khalil, Chief Executive Officer, expressed Markaz's pride in winning the award, which is a tribute

### NBK Economic Update

## Kuwait project awards gather pace in 1Q 21

**KUWAIT:** Project awards came in higher in 1Q21 compared to a year earlier but still lower than originally anticipated. The value of projects awarded in 1Q21 reached KD 257 million, up 99 percent from the previous quarter, according to MEED projects. This is still far short of the KD 1.4 billion that was expected in 1Q21.

The ongoing mobility restrictions in place to limit the spread of the coronavirus and the uncertain economic climate have likely hindered progress in project tendering and execution. The majority of projects awarded (by value) in the first quarter were in the construction and transport sectors (see below). While there are many projects slated for the rest of 2021 (about KD 4 billion), based on past trends and given the still pandemic-related movement restrictions, awards could fall way short of expectations.

### Projects awards by sector transport

Awards in the transport sector increased in 1Q 21 compared to the previous quarter. The transport sector witnessed about KD 84 million in project awards, though this stemmed mainly from the MPW's Damascus Street, 5th Ring Road & King Faisal Bin Abdul Aziz Road works projects, valued at about KD 78 million. Transport sector projects are a pressing concern, as maintenance and upkeep of the country's transport infrastructure becomes increasingly overdue. Looking ahead, awards activity in the sector is expected to gather pace with about KD 1 billion worth of

## 6 KFH customers win 12 kg of gold in Al-Rabeh draw

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has announced Huda Al-Sabah, Shadi Jaber and Salem Al-Mutawa as winners of 3 kg of gold each in the Al-Rabeh account quarterly draw. The bank also announced the winners of 1 kg of gold in the monthly draw of Al-Rabeh account. The winners of 1 kg of gold each are Muhammad Nazish, Qais AbdulRedha and Muhammad Al-Janahi and that is for the month of March.

KFH is offering a total of 77 kg of gold prizes for 45 winners during the one-year campaign, through the new Al-Rabeh account campaign entitled "Your winning chance is bigger with Al-rabeh account". KFH conducts monthly, quarterly and annual draws under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The prizes are targeted for all KFH and non KFH customers with their salaries not being less than 500 KD.

to its leading position in the market and the excellence of its products and services. Since inception, Markaz has won more than 50 investment banking and asset management awards from several esteemed international institutions.

Khalil stated: "Markaz won the "Best Investment Bank in Kuwait" award for the tenth time in 11 years, which reflects the exceptional quality of our investment banking team; especially in the areas of advisory and capital markets. It is the result of our strong commitment to provide our clients with the best quality service and to deliver on what we promise under all circumstances. This has earned us the trust of our clients and the notable appreciation we get from our local and international partners."

Despite the challenges faced by regional markets during previous years, Markaz has earned the reputation of being one of the most reliable investment institutions due to its consistent performance throughout the years. This reflects the strength of the company's research-driven culture in decision-making. Markaz

projects in the pipeline for 2Q and 3Q 21. Notable upcoming projects include infrastructure works on PAHW's Sabah Al Ahmed Township (KD 300 million) and MPW's crossroads for the new passenger terminal, due to be awarded in 2Q 21 and 3Q 21 respectively.

### Construction

The construction sector came in first in terms of project awards in the first quarter of 2021. The sector witnessed about KD 92 million in project awards - and this was mainly from PAHW's Sabah Al Ahmed township (residential complex). Government-sponsored projects have been rationalized amid the coronavirus pandemic and intensifying fiscal pressures. That said, however, nearly 40 percent of planned projects for 2021 are in the construction sector, including Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP) and Kuwait Municipality - South Al-Jahra Labour City (KD 149 million) and MPW's Mubarak Al-Kabeer Seaport Project (KD 271 million), along with various smaller scale projects.

### Power and water

Momentum eased in the power and water sectors this quarter, after awards exceeded KD 100 million in the previous quarter. This sector saw moderate activity in 1Q 21 with KD 41 million in project awards, stemming from several Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) projects, including the substation at Al-Sabah hospital. Additionally, with the development of various energy-intensive projects as part of Kuwait's development plan, the demand for utilities is projected to grow significantly. Looking ahead, MEED figures show about KD 660 million in the project pipeline for the rest of the year, most of which is due to be awarded in the second quarter. However, given recent trends, we expect to see some projects rolled over into subsequent quarters. Notable upcoming projects include the MEW - Wastewater Treatment Plant in South Al-Mutlaa Area (KD 173 million), which is now scheduled for 3Q 21 (previously 1Q 21).

When their salaries are transferred to Al-Rabeh account, they will be able to win unprecedented prizes by participating in the draws, that are: a monthly draw in winning 1 KG of gold for three winners, and a quarterly draw with 3 winners per draw with 3 KG of gold per winner.

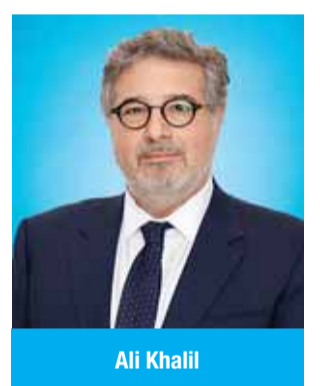
At the end of the campaign, an annual draw is made to announce the grand prize winner of 12 kg of gold for the first place winner, 3 kg of gold for the second place winner and 2 kg of gold for the third place winner. The total number of winners is 45 customers, and the total prizes at the end of the campaign is 77 kg of gold.

Al-Rabeh account is opened in KD for individuals, providing that salary transfer is required as a prerequisite for customers to enter the draw. With regards to the terms and conditions of the prizes and draws, a customer should deposit 3 salaries during the 3 months prior to the draw, and the minimum balance of the account should not be less than KD 50 at the end of each month during the 3 months prior to the draw.

Every additional KD 50 in the account increases the customer's chances to win, thus, Al-Rabeh account, with these benefits and rewards is suitable for customers wishing to transfer their salaries and manage their personal accounts, with the possibility of saving and investing. Al-

offers full-fledged services in asset management, investment banking and real estate.

Markaz Asset Management includes regional equity and fixed income mutual funds, and portfolio management. Its real estate activities include managing real-estate funds, direct real estate investments, and real estate development covering the GCC, Europe and the USA. Also, its Wealth Management team offers global asset allocation investments for family offices and institutional clients. Markaz Investment Banking solutions encompass issuance of debt and equity, advising corporate clients on dispositions and acquisitions, and debt and capital restructuring.



Ali Khalil

### Oil, gas and chemicals

The oil and gas sector finally saw some awards in 1Q21, after a year in which there was negligible activity. The sector saw about KD 41 million from a single project award: Kuwait Oil Company's (KOC's) Jurassic Production Facilities 4 & 5 (Off-plot works) project. Project awards effectively stalled in 2020 on concerns about the oil sector's future prospects following the precipitous, pandemic-linked decline in oil prices. Kuwait's oil and gas sector has about KD 635 million in awards planned for 2Q and 3Q21 including KOC's JPF 4 & 5 Production Facilities, valued at around KD 270 million and several smaller scale oil pipeline projects (KD 280 million). That said, based on a recent report by MEED, the Jurassic Production Facilities (4 & 5) project is facing further delays as the tender has yet to be finalized.

Kuwait's chemical sector has seen negligible activity in recent years. However, with the upcoming Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIIC) - Al Zour Petrochemical Complex project (KD 2.85 billion), the sector is poised to see some highly anticipated movement in early 2022. Further delays cannot be ruled out, though.

### The Projects outlook for 2021

MEED Projects estimates that some KD 3.9 billion worth of projects are planned for the remainder of 2021, including many that have been rolled over to 2Q21 from 1Q 21. However, given the ongoing pattern of delays and setbacks and the high probability that the current partial curfew will be extended through to mid-May, it is very likely that a much smaller figure will materialize.

A large portion (40 percent) of planned 2021 project awards stems from the construction sector, with phase 1 of MPW's Mubarak Al-Kabeer Seaport Project (KD 271 million) and several other parts of the Public Authority for Housing and Welfare (PAHW's) Sabah Al Ahmed Township project due to be awarded this year.



Rabeh account confirms KFH's continued keenness to deliver premium products that meet customers' aspirations and enhance the bank's leadership in the market.

## AUB congratulates winners of Al-Hassad weekly draw

**KUWAIT:** In accordance with full preventive guidelines and measures set by health authorities, Ahli United Bank (AUB) held the weekly draw on April 21, 2021 of Al-Hassad Islamic account which is the very first account draw in Islamic banking in Kuwait and has won the "Best Savings Product in Kuwait 2019" by the prestigious Banker Middle East Magazine for the numerous unique features it provides. Al-Hassad Islamic account offers over 750 prizes, Over 12 Month Period and has reshaped the lives of thousands lucky winners.

The bank and announced 20 winners of KD 1,000 as follows: Ghanim Saqer Al-Shaheen, Kareemah Khudhair Karm, Rashid Ali Al-Elaiwa, Hasan Mahmoud Hasan, Souad Kassem Kassem, Abdulrahman Faisal Al-Kandari, Salah Ahmad Al-Kandari, Marek Wlodzimierz Narkiewicz, Sanad Hemaidi Al-Sanad, Najat Mohammad Haji, Nadia Anas Abdulaheem, Eman Darweesh Hasan, Laila Abdullah Al-Haddad, Ahmed Mohamad Abdmohaymen, Sarah Saeed Ghadhbani, Ibrahim Adeb Khalifeh, Taisir Obaid Al-Shikh, Awatef Hamad Al-Subeeh, Aiydah Jamaan Al-Azmi, And Bader Saleh Al-Enezi.

The draws of Al-Hassad include several cash prizes, such as KD 100,000 each Eid and the grand quarterly draw of KD 250,000 prize which continues to be a key aspiration for customers who are wishing to fulfill their dreams. Al Hassad offers 20 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 for each winner. In addition to this attractive package of rewards, Al-Hassad Islamic account incorporates a Wakala contract for projected annual profits, making this account beneficial to all customer segments that are aspiring to build their short and long-term savings through a unique savings account with many advantages.

Furthermore, for the first time in Kuwait, the AUB Al-Hassad presents the "Privilege Draw", which is a quarterly draw of KD 25,000 exclusively for Al-Hassad customers who maintained their balances for more than one year and have not won a prize in the past five years. For all draws, the clients are eligible for one draw chance for each KD 50 deposited in their Al-Hassad account.

It is worth mentioning that Al-Hassad Islamic account has won the "Best Savings Product in Kuwait 2019" by the prestigious Banker Middle East Magazine for the numerous unique features it provides. Such features include the simplest and easiest program, highest number of winners, largest prize value, unique draws during Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, loyalty multipliers, unique online account opening feature, transparent draws held during radio shows with live broadcast on the Bank's social media platforms.

Business



# stc spreads joy through continuous humanitarian initiatives during Ramadan

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its collaboration for the second year in a row with the Tarahom Volunteer Team, a subsidiary of the International Islamic Charity Organization, in a humanitarian initiative as part of its #today\_we\_can campaign.

The humanitarian initiative, led by Ahmed Al Nowaibet, a member of stc's public relations team, included two different segments. The first segment focused on highlighting four cases pertaining to members in the community regarding their hardships and aspirations. Upon evaluating their cases and listening to their stories, stc aims to support them in fulfilling their needs and bring joy to their hearts during the holy month of blessings.

### Humanitarian Initiatives

Within this context, Zainab Al-Khaldi, a young skilled writer born with one leg, showcased her inspiring story as she overcame obstacles and faced her challenges head on in pursuit of her dream. Al-Khaldi managed to use her talents as a writer to tell the story of how she struggled with her challenges at the young age of only 12 years old. In support of the inspirational writer, stc stated that it would take on the costs of publishing and printing Al-Khaldi's latest book, "Mohakaty", in collaboration with Tarahom Volunteer Team and



Danah AlJasem

renowned writer Yousef Alhajri. All proceeds from the sale of Al-Khaldi's book will be placed towards obtaining the best treatment for her condition.

The second case reviewed by stc involved Om Mahmoud, a mother who is struggling during times of hardship and uncertainty. In support of Om Mahmoud, stc provided groceries and supplied food for the month of Ramadan, as well as, donated new electrical appliances and toys for her children. The Company hopes to have provided Om Mahmoud with a helping hand as she overcomes the challenges she is facing in her life.

stc reached out to Abu Ayoub in the third case reviewed by the Company, an individual that has recently converted to Islam. In celebration of this act during the holy month, stc gifted Abu Ayoub a monthly supply of food for the month of Ramadan along with a new smartphone. The Company wishes the new convert a prosperous and blessed life as it presented him with this generous gesture in collaboration with the Islam Presentation Committee, especially with the support of the Committee's Public Relations Manager, Ammar

Alkandari, who shed light on the Committee's past initiatives and history since establishment.

The fourth case reviewed by stc involved an individual named Mohsen who is employed as a security personnel for a building in Kuwait. stc reached out to Mohsen, presenting him with a month supply of food for the holy month and a new smartphone as a gesture of gratitude and appreciation for the challenges he managed to overcome during these unprecedented times. His positive attitude and work ethic resemble the values that are reciprocated with blessing and acts of generosity during the holy month.

### Iftar Meals

Aside from the cases reviewed throughout stc's humanitarian initiative, stc continues to spread joy and give back to the community by distributing iftar meals to sanitary workers and those who are in need throughout Kuwait. The Company also distributes iftar meals daily to the Al-Adan Hospital ambulance center throughout the holy month.

### Appreciating Front-liners

To show its continuous support towards front-liners risking their lives during the ongoing pandemic, stc distributed Ramadan gift baskets to the heroes in the Ministry of Interior and all those working in the Kuwait International Fair vaccination center located in Mishref. On this occasion, Danah AlJasem, General Manager

of Corporate Communications at stc, expressed the Company's gratitude and appreciation to all those that participated in the humanitarian initiative that was solely dedicated to give back to members of the community. She extended a special thanks to the Tarahom Volunteer Team, the Islam Presentation Committee, and the Public Relations Team at stc for their dedication and will to achieve the objectives behind stc's #today\_we\_can Ramadan campaign, which proved to be a success.

AlJasem indicated that the #today\_we\_can campaign follows the core values stc believes that also focus on attaining sustainable results, especially during the month of Ramadan. The objective of the campaign was to spread awareness on the importance of acting today for a better tomorrow, whether it is supporting the community or taking advantage of a given opportunity.

Through its region wide campaign, AlJasem expressed, stc focused on highlighting the importance of acting at a given moment, whether it is an act to stop hunger, end the pandemic, educate those who are in need, or capitalize on an opportunity that can ultimately change the lives of others. AlJasem concluded, "stc consistently participates in initiatives that support and empower the community. This comes as an ongoing commitment that stc upholds towards its customers and the people of Kuwait. Despite the circumstances we face today, we will continue to build on our CSR framework by focusing on causes that affect societies both worldwide and in our community."



## Mezzan holding holds 20th annual general meeting

**KUWAIT:** Mezzan Holding KSCP, one of the largest manufacturers and distributors of food, beverage, FMCG, and healthcare products in the region, held its 20th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Shareholders in Kuwait. The shareholders approved the Board of Directors' recommendation to distribute cash dividends of 18 percent of the nominal value of the share (18 fils per share) representing 50 percent of the profit, and distribution of treasury shares at a rate of 2 percent (two shares for every 100 shares held by investors).

Shareholders also approved the board's 2020 remuneration, a total amount of KD100,000, and agreed to not transfer the compulsory reserve and the voluntary reserve, given that they exceed half of the company's issued capital. The meeting also authorized the buying, selling, or disposing of the company's shares that do not exceed 10 percent of the number of shares by the Board of Directors. This is in accordance with the controls and conditions stipulated by the law, regulations, decisions, and instructions of the supervisory authorities, provided that this authorization con-

tinues for a period of eighteen months from the date of its issuance.

Mezzan Holding Executive Vice Chairman Mohammad Jassim Al Wazzan said: "Last year was a challenging year for regional and international markets, where uncertainty and difficulties continued to prevail. Despite this, Mezzan has succeeded in facing these fluctuations due to our diversifying strategy and business model. Our 2020 results demonstrated the flexibility and endurance of our business model and the

group's ability to adapt quickly to the fluctuations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic without losing sight of our strategic priorities and our commitment to the company's shareholders and customers."

He added "Since the diversification of our business's income and strengthening its leadership position at the local and regional levels, Mezzan has continued to invest in its production, storage, and distribution capabilities to reinforce its regional position. This further reinforced our diversified revenue streams, raised

productivity and operational efficiency, as well as investing in developing the brands owned by the company. Looking forward, our primary objective is investing in key production lines in different markets to further diversify our revenue streams and deliver more to our customers and shareholders."

### FY 2019 Financial Performance Review

Mezzan Holding crossed several milestones in 2020, specifically the enhancement of operating performance motivated by its diverse product portfolio and the inorganic growth through previous acquisitions and opportunities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The company witnessed high growth in consumer-driven business units. The company recorded KD 10.9 million in Net Profit to Parent Company Shareholders which grew by 93.9 percent compared to 2019 which amounted to an amount of KWD 5.6, million as a result of higher margins, increased scale of operations, as well as lower borrowing costs.

### FY 2020 Financial Highlights

- Revenue: KD 246.4 million, up 10.8 percent
- Operating Profit: KD 17.1 million, up 35.3 percent
- EBITDA: KD 25.4 million, up 36.9 percent
- Net Profit to Parent Company Shareholders: KD 10.9 million, up 93.9 percent
- Total Assets: KD 252.9 million
- Shareholders' Equity to Owners of Parent Company KD 109.4 million



## Lifestyle | Features

## Hollywood set for pandemic-era Oscars, with 'Nomadland' out front

The Oscars tonight will mirror the movie industry they honor: transformed by the pandemic, forced to experiment with new venues and formats, and likely to be dominated by "Nomadland." The crowning event of Hollywood's awards season was delayed by two months, and will mainly be held at Los Angeles' Union Station, chosen for the social distancing its enormity allows in the age of COVID-19.

In a nod to the past year's unique circumstances, the 93rd Academy Awards will have a large footprint—the presentation of honorary prizes and musical performances will take place at a Hollywood theater and the Academy's new film museum, while Europeans unable to travel will gather at "hubs" in London and Paris. But the main business of handing out golden statuettes will take place at the station—with one particular film expected to depart with a handful including best picture, the night's final award. "I can't imagine that 'Nomadland' does not win the big prize. I can't imagine that Chloe Zhao doesn't win for director," Variety journalist Marc Malkin told AFP. "But I always say about this year—this year has been so weird. You just never know."

**'Total lock'**

Zhao's elegiac road movie about older Americans roaming the West in vans after the global financial crisis won top film festival prizes last fall and has dominated this



In this file photo US-China director Chloe Zhao poses during a photocall to present the movie "Songs My Brothers Taught Me" in the French northwestern sea resort of Deauville, during the 41th Deauville US Film Festival. — AFP

year's elongated and largely virtual awards season. The 39-year-old Beijing-born director is "a total lock—they're going to vote for her even if they haven't seen the movie," said Deadline awards columnist Pete Hammond. "Right now, she's very respected and much beloved in the directing community," one Academy voter, who asked not to be named, told AFP. If any film can rival "Nomadland," it may be "The Trial of the Chicago 7," which won the top prize from Hollywood's actors guild.

That would hand Netflix the industry's biggest accolade for the first time, in a year of shuttered movie theaters that was

ruled by streaming. "It's not inconceivable, but I don't get the vibe out there for it right now where it's going to pull this off," said Hammond, pointing to #MeToo revenge thriller "Promising Young Woman" and immigrant drama "Minari" as dark horses.

**Hopkins 'lurking'**

"Nomadland" star Frances McDormand, a two-time Oscar winner who anchors a film in which several real-life "nomads" play versions of themselves, is nominated once again this year. But that category is "up in the air" and "could go any which way," said Hammond, noting that all five contenders including Viola Davis ("Ma Rainey's Black Bottom") and Carey Mulligan ("Promising Young Woman") have won major awards in the run-up to the Oscars. Davis's co-star Chadwick Boseman, who died last year from cancer before the release of his tragic final performance as a trumpet player haunted by racist atrocities, is tipped to win the third-ever posthumous acting Oscar.

"I would probably put my money on Chadwick, but there could be a surprise," said the Academy voter. "Anthony Hopkins is lurking in the background," the voter added, referring to the Oscar-winner's shattering performance as a dementia sufferer in "The Father." Daniel Kaluuya is expected to win best supporting actor for "Judas and the Black Messiah," while South Korean actress



In this file photo Oscar statuettes are displayed at the "Meet The Oscars" exhibit before the 80th annual Academy Awards in Hollywood, California.

Youn Yuh-jung's popularity has grown with her "endearing" recent acceptance speeches for other supporting actress awards for her work in "Minari," said Malkin. It is realistically possible that all four acting prizes—and director—could go to people of color, while Netflix is expected to scoop the most prizes of the night, including for best documentary for "My Octopus Teacher."

**'Opportunity'**

The ceremony will be pared back—producers have spoken of a guest list so strict that even Hollywood's most powerful studio executives won't be allowed in, and

a "teeny-tiny" red carpet that could pose some challenges. "The few interviews that (the) talent are doing at the Oscars, they're doing from seven feet away," said Malkin. "That's just awkward... how do you do that? How do you make it fun?" But the show's co-producer, Oscar-winning director Steven Soderbergh, has described the Covid-mandated changes as an "opportunity" for a show unlike "anything that's been done before."

The ceremony will have "the aesthetic of a film as opposed to a TV show," including movie-like "over-the-shoulder shots from within the audience" and high-resolution, widescreen formats, he said. Stars have been asked to dress to the nines—and reportedly can remove their masks when cameras are rolling. A-list presenters include Harrison Ford and Brad Pitt.

"Kudos to the Academy for at least trying to have some semblance of a live show, without Zoom," said Hammond. But the lower profile of this year's nominees and pandemic-era screen fatigue mean the Oscars are all but certain to suffer the same precipitous ratings drop of other awards shows. "It would be a wonderful day for the Academy if it only drops 50 percent," he told AFP. "It's just the way it's going." — AFP

## Five things to watch for at the Oscars

Travelers passing through Union Station in downtown Los Angeles tonight might notice a slight commotion—for one night only, it is doubling as the venue for the Oscars. While passengers jumping on a train most likely won't get a glimpse past the tight security, here are five things that movie fans watching the 93rd Academy Awards from home should look out for:

**'Nomadland' sweep?**

Going into tonight, "Nomadland" is the clearest best picture Oscar frontrunner in years. So barring a dramatic shock, the question may be just how many Oscars Chloe Zhao's road movie can win. If the heavily improvised film lands the prize for best adapted screenplay early in the night, a serious sweep could be on the cards. And Zhao—who would be the second woman, and the first of color to win best director—could equal another remarkable record. Nobody has won more Oscars in a night than Walt Disney's four in 1953. Zhao is up for golden statuettes for editing, screenplay, directing and as a producer for best picture.

**Eighth time unlucky?**

Of course, there is a big difference between landing multiple nominations and actually winning—just ask Glenn Close. From 1983's "The World According to Garp" to 2019's "The Wife," Close has been nominated but failed to win on seven previous occasions. If she comes up short again tonight, she will be tied with the late Peter O'Toole as the Academy's most reliable runner-up. Unfortunately the odds



In this file combination of pictures shows (from left) British actor Daniel Kaluuya, actor Chadwick Boseman, South Korean actress Youn Yuh-jung and US actress Viola Davis.

don't look great for Close—while her transformational performance as a tough-as-nails grandmother in "Hillbilly Elegy" was praised, the film drew widespread scorn.

**#OscarsSoDiverse?**

When last year's nominations were announced, it looked like years of activism and pledges for reform driven by the #OscarsSoWhite campaign had come to nothing — 19 of the 20 actors were white. But this year's crop of stars have set new records for diversity, including nine actors of color on the shortlists, and the first Asian American ever nominated for best actor (Steven Yeun of "Minari"). Two women were nominated for best director, for the first time ever.

And it is not just the Oscars—earlier this month, the Screen Actors Guild selected non-white winners in all four film categories. That quartet—Chadwick Boseman, Viola Davis, Daniel Kaluuya and Youn Yuh-jung—could well repeat tonight.

**McDormand three-peat?**

Frances McDormand has long been an Academy favorite, and she anchors this year's frontrunner "Nomadland" with a characteristically unglamorous portrayal of a grieving widow living in an old van. If she takes best actress honors tonight, she will become only the second woman in Oscars history to bag a trio of wins in that

category—after the peerless Katharine Hepburn, who has four. The Oscar would put her at the pinnacle of a triple-winners actress club also including Meryl Streep and Ingrid Bergman, who each have two lead actress Oscars and one supporting actress prize.

**Masks, movie shots and more?**

Oscars co-producer Steven Soderbergh and his colleagues held a press conference last weekend where they set out their vision for a ceremony intended to look more like a feature film than a TV show—without saying anything specific at all. For instance, will the stars wear masks?

"Masks are going to play a very important role in the story of this evening... If that's cryptic, it's meant to be," Soderbergh said. With so much under wraps, one thing is sure—the night is the first major Hollywood gathering in more than a year, and without pesky journalists and studio executives around to disturb them, many stars will be ready to party. "After the show, we'll go to the post-show, probably more alcohol on the post-show, but it'll be free, so it'll be great," joked co-producer Jesse Collins. — AFP

## The Oscars: Five memorable moments

The Oscars is Hollywood's most glamorous night, and the gala has generated some remarkable moments in its more than 90-year history—some funny, some moving and some confounding. The following is a look at some of the most unforgettable moments in Oscars history:

**And the best picture goes to... oops**

The most memorable moment in recent Oscars history happened in 2017, when the Academy's top prize was briefly handed to dreamy musical "La La Land," when coming-of-age drama "Moonlight" was the actual winner. It turns out accountants for PricewaterhouseCoopers, the firm responsible for tabulating and safeguarding Oscar votes and results, had handed presenters Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway the wrong envelope.

They ended up with a duplicate of the best actress envelope—a prize that went to Emma Stone for "La La Land"—instead of the one that had "Moonlight" winning for best picture. The embarrassing mix-up, the worst snafu in the history of the Academy Awards, came to be known as "Envelopegate." "It was a heartbreaking fiasco," Entertainment Weekly critic Jeff Jensen wrote at the time. "You felt embarrassed for Dunaway and Beatty, who clearly knew something was amiss when he opened the envelope but didn't know how to proceed."

**Political protest**

In March 1973, the legendary Marlon Brando won the best actor prize for his work in mob epic "The Godfather," besting a remarkable field of contenders—Michael Caine, Peter O'Toole, Laurence Olivier and Paul Winfield. But Brando did not attend, and Apache actress and activist Sacheen Littlefeather took the stage in his place. When actor Roger Moore offered her the golden statuette, she held up her hand in refusal, and he and co-presenter Liv Ullmann stepped back as she began to speak. Before a stunned audience, Littlefeather said Brando "very regretfully cannot accept this very generous award" as he wanted to protest the movie industry's treatment of Native Americans. Her statement was met with applause, cheers and a few boos.

**It's a tie!**

There have been a handful of ties in Oscars history, but one that earned a lot of attention came in 1969, when Barbra Streisand and Katharine Hepburn both won the award for best actress. "The winner—it's a tie!" exclaimed presenter Ingrid Bergman. Streisand earned the honor, her first Oscar, for her performance as

Fanny Brice in "Funny Girl," while Hepburn—the all-time leader among actors and actresses with Oscar wins at four—triumphed for "The Lion in Winter." Only Streisand attended the ceremony. "Hello, gorgeous!" she said, looking at the golden statuette.

**Lip lock**

Of course, actors are thrilled when they join the hallowed pantheon of Oscar winners, but in 2003, Adrien Brody definitely took it a bit too far when he picked up the best actor statuette for "The Pianist." When he took the stage to accept his award from the previous year's best actress winner Halle Berry, he stunned the audience—and Berry—when he swept her into a brief but passionate kiss on the lips. "That was not planned. I knew nothing about it," Berry said in a 2017 interview, explaining she was caught totally off guard. But she confirmed she just "went with it."



In this file photo "La La Land" producer Jordan Horowitz (left) shows the card reading Best Film "Moonlight" next to US actor Warren Beatty after the latter mistakenly read "La La Land" initially at the 89th Oscars in Hollywood, California. — AFP

For his part, Brody said in 2015 that "time slowed down" for him in the moment, but that the stunt almost cost him his chance to make a speech. "By the time I got finished kissing her... they were already flashing the sign to say 'Get off the stage, your time is up,'" he said in an interview at the Toronto film festival.

**Show of strength**

The late Jack Palance won his first and only Academy Award in 1992 for best supporting actor, for his portrayal of a crusty old cowboy opposite Billy Crystal in the Western comedy "City Slickers." After Whoopi Goldberg handed the then 73-year-old Palance the award, he gave a short acceptance speech about how producers worry about casting actors "at a certain age plateau." "They forget to ask" if you can do certain things, he said—and then left the audience gobsmacked when he dropped to the stage and did one-handed push-ups in his suit, earning a jovial round of applause. "I didn't know what the hell else to do," Palance later quipped. — AFP



In this file photo Union Station is pictured during preparations for the 93rd Academy Awards in Los Angeles.



In this file photo US actress Frances McDormand delivers a speech after she won the Oscar for Best Actress in "Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri". — AFP photos

## Bollywood composer Shrivani Rathod dies after COVID diagnosis

Tributes poured in Friday for popular Bollywood music composer Shrivani Rathod, who died in a Mumbai hospital aged 66 after being diagnosed with COVID-19. Rathod worked with fellow

composer Nadeem Saifi to create some of Bollywood's most enduring hits of the 1990s, with the duo winning multiple awards for their soundtracks during the decade.

He was hospitalized after contracting COVID-19 and died late Thursday, his musician son Sanjeev Rathod told the Press Trust of India. His death comes as India battles a vicious second wave of the pandemic, and on the heels of a particularly tragic period for Indian cinema, with the film industry losing many luminaries over the past year. Much-loved singer S.P. Balasubrahmanyam died in September aged 74 following a prolonged battle with COVID, while 42-year-old composer Wajid

Khan passed away in June after contracting the virus.

The industry also lost leading actors Irrfan Khan and Rishi Kapoor to other illnesses last April, while the June suicide of young star Sushant Singh Rajput shocked the country. Oscar-winner A.R. Rahman led the tributes to Rathod, with the "Slumdog Millionaire" composer tweeting: "Our Music community and your fans will miss you immensely". The duo known as Nadeem-Shrivani were responsible for many of Bollywood's biggest romantic chartbusters in films such as 1991's "Phool Aur Kaante" ("Flowers and Thorns") and "Saajan" ("Beloved") that helped top stars such as Salman Khan and Ajay

Devgn cement their places in the industry.

"Shrivani (and Nadeem) walked 30 years alongside me in my career with the evergreen album for Phool Aur Kaante. Very sad, very unfortunate to hear of his demise last night," Devgn tweeted. A heartbroken Saifi, who had earlier asked fans to pray for Rathod's recovery, said on Facebook: "I have lost my younger brother today." Leading producer Boney Kapoor, who collaborated with the duo on two films, tweeted that he was "deeply pained to hear of the demise of music Director Shrivani. Have wonderful memories of working with him". — AFP



In this file photo Bollywood music director/composer Shrivani Rathod (left) and writer/lyricist Yogesh Gaur pose for a photograph during the Ravindra Jain Academy Awards ceremony in Mumbai. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



# Farmers and football: The Vietnamese women scoring big on the field

Legs stiff from long days in the rice terraces of northern Vietnam, scores of female farmers dressed in colorful cloth headbands and skirts gather on a gravel pitch for a game of football. The all-female squads of Huc Dong commune, a mountainous village only 40 kilometers from the Chinese border, have little time to practice and may spend months away from the sport when it's time to tend their crops. But the com-

story in women's football in Vietnam, with the national side multiple South East Asian championship winners. Trying to catch a pass from her teammate, striker May Thi Kim bumps against her competition as she aims for the goal on the community's gravel hill-top stadium overlooking the paddy and bamboo-covered valley. Her team from Mo Tuc village is facing off against friends from neighboring

ago. "I told the youth union they must let us women play."

### Skirts shortened, shirts loosened

Kim and her fellow players in Huc Dong commune — 14 in all across two teams-play in black skirts, long-sleeved blue shirts and headbands that have been part of their traditional dress for generations. "There is no difference playing football in either the traditional clothes or sportswear," Kim told AFP before the match. That said, their skirts have been shortened, shirts loosened and some of the women play with colourful long football socks. Midfielder La Thi Thao, 15, says she might be more comfortable in regular shorts and T-shirt, but is happy to show off the clothing of her tiny community, which numbers just over 2,000. It helps "people, including tourists, understand us better", she said.

### 'It hurt every muscle'

All the players in Huc Dong, including Kim, make a living from hard grind on the terraced paddy fields and in the forests, where they grow cinnamon, star anise and pine trees. Their step count climbs into the tens of thousands each day as they traverse hills and navigate rocky streams. But although strong, the women did not have the physical agility at the outset that football demands. "When we first started, it hurt every muscle," Kim said, admitting they had very little time to train due to the combined pressures of farming and housework. Coach May A Cang has trained them hard to improve their flexibility, asking the women to run regularly to limber up their muscles.

It was tough work at first, with the women soaking their legs in warm salt-

ed water and medicinal leaves for pain relief-but gradually their bodies adapted to the training. While Cang has taken on a coaching role, he admits that even he was initially hesitant when his wife, a squad member, wanted to join the team. "I thought her playing could hurt her



legs and then she could not go to the field to work," he said. "But she told me she would train and would know how to play properly." The women believe they have proved their doubters wrong-some have even transferred their passion on to their daughters. "Even if it hurts, we are ok to take it for our love of football," Kim said. — AFP



Ethnic Dao women wearing traditional clothing watch a friendly football match as part of the Soong Co festival celebrations.

mitment of the women, who hail from the San Chi ethnic minority group, has earned them respect-plus a little money and fame-in football-mad Vietnam.

Since they began playing in 2016, the women have featured regularly in national press and across social media. But they are far from the only success

Luc Ngu in a sports event that is part of the traditional Soong Co festival. As the team dribbles the ball closer to the goalposts, spectators-many of whom are their husbands, children and tourists-cheer the women on. "I used to watch football on TV," Kim, 29, told AFP, recalling the beginnings of the team five years



Ethnic San Chi women dressed in traditional costumes wait before the start of a friendly football match.—AFP photos



Ethnic San Chi women dressed in traditional costumes play a friendly football match as part of the Soong Co festival celebrations in northern Vietnam's Quang Ninh province.

## Black ballet dancer wins payout in Berlin racism row

A black ballet dancer has been awarded 16,000 euros (\$19,000) in compensation and the renewal of her contract at the Berlin State Ballet in an out-of-court settlement over allegations of racism. Chloe Lopes Gomes, the first black dancer to be hired by the company in 2018, began legal action after her fixed-term contract was not renewed last summer, accusing her bosses of

forcing her to wear white make-up, among other things. "Lopes Gomes' contract will be renewed for one more season and will be terminated at the end of the 2021/22 season," the company said on Thursday after a settlement was reached in a Berlin court.

The 29-year-old French dancer said

in a video posted on Instagram that she would receive 16,000 euros in compensation. "It's a small victory but already a big step for the ballet world and I think this will make a huge change," she said. Lopes Gomes, who has also performed with the Opera de Nice in France and Switzerland's Ballet Bejart, told AFP in

January she had been subjected to continual "harassment" by the company's ballet mistress. In one production, when the ballet mistress was handing around white veils for the dancers to wear, Lopes Gomes said she was told, "I can't give you one. The veil is white and you're black."

On another occasion she was asked to wear white make-up, which felt like "denying my identity," she said. Christiane Theobald, acting director of the Berlin State Ballet, said the dispute with Lopes Gomes had been "a wake-up call" and the company had a "zero-tolerance policy with regard to racism and any form of discrimination". The company has embarked on a "structural transformation", she said, setting up an office where employees can anonymously report experiences of racism or discrimination. —AFP



Chloe Lopes Gomes

## Yemeni model detained as Houthis impose morals crackdown

Entisar Al-Hammadi was just starting a career in modeling when she was arrested two months ago in Yemen's rebel-held capital Sanaa, where the Houthis are enforcing a morals campaign. Born to an Ethiopian mother and Yemeni father, the 19-year-old had been pictured online in traditional dress as well as leather and denim jackets, and sometimes she went without a Muslim headscarf. With her high cheekbones and piercing green eyes, Hammadi had several thousand followers on Instagram and Facebook where she posted sessions with local stylists and designers.

The Iran-backed Houthis, who seized the Yemeni capital from the government in 2014 and control much of the north, have not commented on her fate. But Hammadi's lawyer Khaled al-Kamal said she was targeted for working in the fashion industry which the Shiite rebels consider a violation of Islamic culture. Hammadi was snatched on February 20 along with two other models and their friend who was driving them to a photo shoot, the lawyer told AFP. "I still don't know what she is accused of," he said.

According to Kamal there have been attempts to defame the young woman, with unverified local reports alleging that she was involved in prostitution and drugs. "The prosecution is trying to make it look like an act of gross indecency, claiming that my client has let out two strands of her hair out or was not wearing a hijab in a public space," he said. Yemeni society, although conservative, has traditionally allowed space for individual freedoms and cultivated an appreciation of music and leisure. But all that changed with the rise of the Houthis.

### Morals crackdown

Hammadi's detention follows a series of incidents in rebel-held areas that illustrate the Houthis' determination to impose their own moral code on Yemenis who have been enduring years of grinding conflict. Restaurants where men and women mingle have been shut down and reports say women have been harassed for wearing belts around their abaya robes, with rebels tearing them off, saying the silhouette they create is too "exciting". An investigation into Hammadi's case was finally opened on April 21, her lawyer said, but the charges against her have not been clarified.



This undated handout picture obtained from the Facebook page of Entisar Al-Hammadi shows her posing for a 'selfie' at an unknown location.—AFP

The friend who was driving her is being prosecuted for possession of hashish, he said, but the two cases have been separated. Essentially, he said, the group was targeted because the Houthis "hate art and artists". "They are trying to accuse her of any crime because of her work, which the Houthis oppose," as if to say "How dare you be a model in a Muslim country?"

### 'Catastrophic' for women

Kamal has reached out for support from civil society groups which have launched an online campaign under the hashtag #FreeEntisar. "According to the Huthi vision, this issue is a moral one because they are an extremist religious group," said Tawfik Al-Hamidi, head of the SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties. "Entisar's activity and the field of fashion modeling is new in Yemen, and it is something the group cannot accept," said the Vienna-based Yemeni human rights activist.

Violence and discrimination against Yemeni women and girls has worsened as a result of the war that has ravaged the country, leaving tens of thousands of people dead and millions pushed to the brink of famine. Hamidi said the situation of women in Yemen-where Houthis are battling a government backed by a Saudi-led military coalition-is "catastrophic", with all warring sides contributing to it in one way or another. But it is worse under the Houthis, who have adopted an Iranian model of the Muslim moral code. "Arrest, torture, enforced disappearances and sexual violence are particularly prevalent in Sanaa," he said.

The rebels have targeted women in terms of economic rights, freedom of movement, and exclusion from public sector jobs.—AFP

## Sports

# Nets hold on to edge Celtics and regain first place in East

LOS ANGELES: Joe Harris scored a team high 20 points as the short-handed Brooklyn Nets withstood Jayson Tatum's 38-point performance with a 109-104 victory on Friday in New York. Kyrie Irving flirted with a triple double, finishing with 15 points, 11 assists and nine rebounds but it wasn't his best shooting game as the Nets had to hold off a late rally by the Celtics in front of a pandemic-limited crowd of 1,700 at Barclays Center arena.

"We know that we're not going to have it right away some games, so we've just got to battle through," Irving said. Even though they were missing Kevin Durant and James Harden, the Nets still managed to lead for most of the contest and regain first place in the Eastern Conference standings with the victory. They improved to 40-20 on the season for a half-game lead over the Philadelphia 76ers, who have been struggling of late.

Nets forward Durant missed his third straight game with a high injury which he got in Sunday's loss to Miami. Durant has played in just 24 of Brooklyn's 59 games this season. He recently returned from a 23-game absence due to a hamstring injury. Brooklyn also continues to be without star guard James Harden (hamstring), who sat out for the ninth straight game.

Jeff Green scored 19 points, Bruce Brown chipped in 15 and DeAndre Jordan grabbed 11 rebounds for Brooklyn, who controlled the tempo by outscoring the Celtics 32-3 in fast break points. Tatum led all scorers, rookie Payton Pritchard drained six six-pointers en route to 22 points, while Marcus Smart finished with 19 as the Celtics

outscored the Nets 27-15 in the last 10 minutes of the game. Tatum bounced back offensively after going three of 17 from the field in each of his previous two games.

"Any time you turn the ball over a lot and you give a team like Brooklyn opportunities to get out in transition, get easy shots and stuff like that, it's going to be tough to win games," Pritchard said. Boston dropped to 32-28, losing for only the third time in its past 12 games and falling one game behind the Atlanta Hawks.

## Curry rebounds

Elsewhere, Stephen Curry led a balanced offense with a game-high 32 points as the Golden State Warriors beat Nikola Jokic's Denver Nuggets 118-97. The 30-point game was the 12th in Curry's past 13 outings. He was held to just 18 points in a four-point loss at Washington on Wednesday.

Kelly Oubre had 23 points, Andrew Wiggins 19, Jordan Poole 15 as the under-manned Warriors surprised the Nuggets. Nuggets star Jokic was held to 19 points, six rebounds and six assists as Denver also lost Will Barton early in the game to an apparent hamstring injury.

Also, Bogdan Bogdanovic had 21 points and a game-high eight assists, leading the host Atlanta Hawks, who played without two of their biggest stars, to a 118-103 win over the Miami Heat. The Hawks were without a half dozen players, including Trae Young (ankle) and Clint Capela (bruised tailbone). Young and Capela are averaging 41 points per game and Capela leads the league in rebounds. — AFP



NEW YORK: DeAndre Jordan #6 of the Brooklyn Nets reacts after a call during the second half against the Boston Celtics at Barclays Center on Friday in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. — AFP

## Commercial logic remains for new European league

LONDON: "Soccernomics" economist Stefan Szymanski says the "pent-up demand" underpinning the concept of a European Super League will not disappear, despite the launch in Britain of a wholesale review into the running of English football.

The 12 elite European clubs pushing the much-vilified concept fell foul of an arrogant failure to consult and their "mad idea" of making it a US-style closed league without demotion, the British academic told AFP in an interview. But UEFA, the governing body of football in Europe, must still reckon with pressure to see the continent's greatest clubs play each other more regularly and help deal with the financial mess caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Szymanski, who teaches sports management at the University of Michigan, has been publishing research into the economics of football for decades, including in the best-selling book "Soccernomics" (2009), co-authored with journalist Simon Kuper.

Szymanski believes that some ideas informing the British review — such as the German model of fan ownership at clubs — are a legal and business minefield, and that mandating fan representation on club boards is a more likely route in future.

"(Prime Minister) Boris Johnson is an unmitigated populist, so he's going to go with whatever he thinks is going to buy him popularity. And it just might be that instituting something like that (the German model) might be a good idea," he said.

### Backlash from fans

But any talk of driving out the mostly foreign tycoons who run England's top six clubs risks capital flight, and longer-term consequences for which politicians are ill-prepared, according to Szymanski. "If I was advising Johnson, one thing I'd say is 'You know what? You buy yourself a lot of short-term popularity by using the law to mandate the German system, but also remember, the next time something goes wrong, it's all on you.' Because you have taken over football, you've said that you're in charge, so if there's any problem in the future, people are going to look for you to sort it out."

The Super League proposals involving Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City, Manchester United and Tottenham were the catalyst for the government finally launching its much-delayed review. The breakaway European Super League plan, which also involved six top clubs from Italy and Spain, collapsed this week after a furious backlash from fans. The UK government will examine wider questions about the way the sport is run, looking at examples such as the collapse of lower-league Bury, which went into administration last year.

The review will consider creating a new independent regulator for football, and changing the "fit and proper person test" for owners, which came back into contention last year when a Saudi-backed consortium tried to buy Newcastle United. More widely, UEFA has confirmed the Champions League will be expanded from 2024, but the controversy unleashed by this week's abortive breakaway leaves the 12 clubs grappling with an unprecedented united front from fans and demands for reprisals. Szymanski said the business case for a revamped European competition is strong, given the continent's biggest clubs are already global brands but are struggling to recover from the pandemic and recoup a greater share of broadcast revenues. — AFP

## Djokovic hopes COVID-19 vaccination will not be compulsory

BELGRADE: World number one Novak Djokovic said Friday he hoped it would not become compulsory for players to be vaccinated against coronavirus and insisted any decision he makes on whether or not to take the vaccine will remain private. "I am still a supporter of freedom of choice," Djokovic said after reaching the semi-finals of the ATP tournament in Belgrade.

It was in the Serbian capital last summer where Djokovic, as well as a number of other players, tested positive for COVID-19 after organizing a controversial exhibition event. On whether or not he will be vaccinated to guarantee entry to tournaments, 33-year-old Djokovic refused to commit himself.

"I will keep my decision to myself, I think it's a private, intimate thing. I do not want to be labelled as someone

who is for or against vaccination," added Djokovic who has expressed his reservations in the past. "I hope it does not become compulsory."

On court, Djokovic stayed on course for a third Belgrade title with a comfortable 6-1, 6-3 quarter-final win over compatriot Miomir Kecmanovic. Djokovic, the 2009 and 2011 champion at the event which is played at a venue which carries his name, will face Russia's Aslan Karatsev for a place in the final.

In their first meeting, Djokovic broke his 21-year-old opponent's first service game and repeated the feat for a 5-1 lead in the opener. His only bloop was when he was broken as he served for the match at 5-2 in the second set.

However, it was a brief respite for world number 47 Kecmanovic who handed back the break in the next



BELGRADE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after victory over Serbia's Mimir Kecmanovic during their ATP 250 Serbia Open quarter-final singles tennis match at The Novak Tennis Centre in Belgrade on Friday. — AFP

game allowing the top seed to complete a 75-minute win. "I think personally I'm feeling very well on court,

moving well, hitting the ball well and, of course, enjoying the home court advantage," Djokovic said. — AFP

## NBA star LeBron James's police tweet sparks uproar

NEW YORK: NBA star LeBron James was facing a firestorm of criticism from the US rightwing Friday over an incendiary tweet targeting an Ohio police officer who fatally shot a Black teenager, with conservative pundits accusing the athlete of racism and irresponsible behavior.

The policeman shot dead 16-year-old Ma'Khia Bryant as she lunged with a knife at another girl in James's home state of Ohio — prompting the Lakers star to post a picture of the officer on Twitter with the words "YOU'RE NEXT #ACCOUNTABILITY."

The killing coincided with the guilty verdict against the white police officer charged with the murder of George Floyd, a Black man whose death in Minneapolis last year sparked nationwide protests. The 36-year-old NBA star, popularly known as "King James," took down the tweet hours later, explaining his post was "being used to create more hate - This isn't about one officer, it's about the entire system and they always use our words to create more racism. I am so desperate for more ACCOUNTABILITY."

That explanation did little to stem the tide of anger on social media, stoked by prominent rightwing pundits led by former president Donald Trump who said "His RACIST rants are divisive, nasty, insulting, and demeaning. He may be a great basketball player, but he is doing nothing to bring our Country together!"

Tom Cotton, a hardline Republican senator from Arkansas, took to Twitter to say that "LeBron James is inciting violence against an Ohio police officer. This is disgraceful and dangerous. Is the NBA okay with this? Is Twitter?"

James had avoided wading into social issues in the early days of his sporting career, but that changed with the shooting of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager shot dead in 2012 by a man who subsequently avoided jail under Florida's "Stand your ground" law.

"I think it starts with the Trayvon Martin situation and the reason it starts with that, I believe is because having kids of my own - having boys of my own - it hit home for me to see and to learn the story and to think that if my boy left home and he never returned," he said in an interview with CNN in 2018.

Since then he has often spoken out about racial discrimination in the country. "I think it's just the natural evolution and growth of a man," his longtime friend Maverick Carter told the sports new website Bleacher Report in 2018.



DALLAS: LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers in the second quarter at the American Airlines Center on Thursday in Dallas, Texas. — AFP

### "Shut up and dribble"

Thanks to his status as an athlete, his commentary on social issues and his activism, James is now seen as one of the most influential sports personalities in the political sphere. He had several very public spats with Trump in the past, most frequently played out on Twitter before the social media platform barred the former president over his own incitement of a mob that attacked the US Capitol on January 6.

James even produced his own 2018 documentary series on the political engagement of Black athletes called "Shut Up and Dribble," whose title was drawn from a Fox News commentator's reaction to the basketball player's clashes with Trump. He also has a television talk show on HBO with Carter, who is a businessman, called "The Shop" in which he discusses social issues of the day with prominent personalities. In 2020, the four-time NBA player of the year went even further by launching "More Than a Vote", recruiting tens of thousands of volunteers to encourage Black people to register to vote ahead of last year's elections, in which Trump was defeated by Democrat Joe Biden.

"LeBron James should focus on basketball rather than presiding over the destruction of the NBA, which has just recorded the lowest television RATINGS, by far, in the long and distinguished history of the League," Trump said in his statement.

In 2016, Trump linked bad ratings at the NFL to the movement started by quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who had taken a knee during the national anthem at ball games in protest of police violence against Black people. The WNBA women's basketball league racked up the highest ratings gains among major US leagues in 2020 when its players were by far the most active in supporting the movement that emerged after George Floyd's death. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Chiefs land Orlando Brown

WASHINGTON: Kansas City Chiefs star quarterback Patrick Mahomes has a new blind-side blocker to protect him after the NFL team made a trade Friday with the Baltimore Ravens for Orlando Brown. Mahomes, who spent much of February's Super Bowl loss to Tampa Bay scrambling because his blockers struggled to stop the Buccaneers, tweeted his delight with five smiley faces and a story about the deal. Mahomes was the 2018 NFL Most Valuable Player, led the Chiefs to the 2019 season crown with a Super Bowl MVP award and led Kansas City to the title game again last season. Brown, a Pro Bowl offensive tackle, will fill a void on the left side of the Chiefs' line and complete a major revamp of the protection for Mahomes. — AFP

#### Zimbabwe beat Pakistan

HARARE: Zimbabwe beat Pakistan for the first time in a Twenty20 international Friday, with four-wicket Luke Jongwe the star of a shock 19-run triumph at Harare Sports Club. A maiden victory in 16 attempts seemed unlikely when the tourists restricted the hosts to a meagre 118-9 with Tinashe Kamunhukwe (34) the only batsman to impress. But right-arm medium pacer Jongwe (4-18) wreaked havoc and Zimbabwe bowled out Pakistan for 99 in 19.5 overs. It was the lowest total defended in a T20 international in Harare and victory for Zimbabwe leveled the three-match series at 1-1 ahead of the decider at the same venue Sunday. — AFP

#### Red Bull to develop engines

PARIS: Red Bull Racing will develop their own engines from 2025, the team announced Friday, as they plan long-term following the decision by current supplier Honda to leave the sport this season. The team of Max Verstappen and Sergio Perez said they have also recruited Ben Hodgkinson as technical director from Mercedes to oversee the switch. Red Bull have acquired the technology of Honda and will produce it in-house between 2022 and 2024 before going solo with their own powertrains to comply with new regulations from 2025. "The formation of the powertrain division represents Red Bull's single largest investment in F1 since the establishment of Red Bull Racing in 2005," said a team statement. — AFP

## Sports

# Man City, Spurs clash in League Cup final after Super League debacle

**LONDON:** Treble-chasing Manchester City face a Tottenham side desperate to end their trophy drought in the League Cup final as two members of the failed European Super League clash at Wembley tonight. Just seven days after the bombshell revelation that City and Tottenham were among 12 clubs plotting the breakaway Super League, they will contest the first major silverware of the English season.

Alarmed by the furious public backlash against the Super League, City's Abu Dhabi-based owners were the first to lose their nerve when they pulled out on Tuesday. City's exit sparked a chain reaction that saw Tottenham withdraw along with fellow Premier League teams Liverpool, Chelsea, Manchester United and Arsenal.

The tournament was dead in the water only 48 hours after its launch. But amid groveling apologies from owners, supporters remain furious at the cynical betrayal and there have been calls for sanctions against the six Premier League teams.

Against that explosive backdrop, it is ironic the League Cup will be the focus of attention for two of the Super League founders this weekend. If the competition — effectively a closed-shop replacement for the Champions League — had gone ahead, it was said the increased midweek fixture list could have killed off the League Cup.

Given both clubs would gladly have turned their backs on the League Cup forever, it would be no surprise if there are protesters and dissenting voices among the 8,000 fans allowed into Wembley this weekend.

But for City manager Pep Guardiola and Tottenham caretaker boss Ryan Mason the goal in the build-up to the final has been keeping their players focused on the pitch rather than letting the

Super League furore distract them.

After beating Aston Villa 2-1 on Wednesday, City need eight points from their last five league games to win the English title for a third time in four seasons. On Wednesday, they take on Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League semi-final first leg.

"We deserve to be there. The final every team wants to win and we will travel to London to do a good game and win the title," Guardiola said. "The Aston Villa game showed we were ready and we'll be ready on Sunday."

## Wounded Spurs

There was good news for Guardiola on Friday when Belgium midfielder Kevin De Bruyne, injured in last weekend's quadruple-ending FA Cup semi-final defeat against Chelsea, and Argentina striker Sergio Aguero, sidelined by a muscle problem, were both declared fit after returning to training.

Tottenham arrive at Wembley wounded by a week that saw Jose Mourinho sacked on Monday, just days after Harry Kane suffered the latest in a long line of ankle injuries. Kane missed Tottenham's 2-1 win over Southampton in the first match of the post-Mourinho era on Wednesday and is not certain to return after failing to train on Friday.

Mourinho's dismissal was triggered by his failure to mount a top-four challenge, while his strained relations with several senior players including Gareth Bale proved debilitating. "Maybe just to be on the front foot a bit more," Bale said pointedly when asked what might change after Mourinho's exit. "We want to attack. We're a big team with big players."

At just 29, Mason's unexpected promotion from

hovering overhead. The fans came from all walks of life but they appeared to universally have one similar wish — farewell to the 73-year-old owner, who first bought a stake in the club in 2007.

Success has been thin on the ground for Arsenal in that time with just four FA Cups and they last played in the Champions League in the 2016/17 season. Even their bigger signings have failed to spark great enthusiasm amongst the fans.

The slump in form of striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang this season after signing a lucrative new contract had echoes for them of the Mesut Ozil saga. The now departed German World Cup winner sat idly on the sidelines despite being the biggest earner at the club.

Banker Iseh Kaonje, 20, was scathing about the American owner. "Kroenke hasn't even invested one pound in this club and look how it's gone: challenging for the Champions League to 10th in the Premier League," he told AFP. "He doesn't talk. He doesn't communicate with the fans. Fans are the heart of the club. How is that possible? We want our voices to be heard. We want fans first, football first. Kroenke needs to sell the club."

## 'No to greed'

Both Kaonje and Jo Telfer, 44, chief executive of a charity, are keen for fans to gain representation on the boards of clubs. They will hope the fan-led review set up this week following the Super League fiasco, under the direction of former sports minister Tracey Crouch, will reach the same conclusion.

"It's important to make a stand against the greed in football, particularly my club," Telfer told AFP. "I want the government to bring in new

just think June is too soon," Irish Deputy Prime Minister Leo Varadkar had said on Wednesday.

Dublin's three group matches go to St Petersburg, with Wembley the new venue for its round of 16 game. Seville gets Bilbao's three matches and round of 16 tie after its regional authority pledged the Estadio La Cartuja could be filled to 30 percent capacity. UEFA said it had forced the switch "simply to allow fans to attend the games after a year of not being able to watch live football in stadiums".

Budapest, St Petersburg, Baku, Amsterdam, Bucharest, Glasgow, Copenhagen, Rome and London had all promised crowds at between 25 percent and 100 percent of capacity in the run up to UEFA's deadline this month.

Munich, venue for world champions France against Germany on June 15, got the go-ahead for their four matches after confirmation from local authorities they would be able "to welcome a minimum of 14,500 spectators". UEFA's statement confirmed. However, Munich mayor Dieter Reiter said: "There have been no promises of any kind to guarantee spectators."

While there will be disappointment in Dublin and Bilbao for missing out, UEFA expressed its "appreciation and gratitude" to the two cities, say-

assaulting two women.

Giggs will appear in a Manchester court in April while caretaker manager Robert Page will remain in charge of the national team. Giggs, who maintains his innocence, will rue his absence from the touchline but for all the success he has enjoyed in his short career in the Wales hotseat, he is best known for his staggering exploits on the pitch.

Former United manager Alex Ferguson recalled his first glimpse of the boy who would play a pivotal role throughout his Old Trafford reign. "I remember the first time I saw him," he said. "He was 13 and he floated across the ground like a cocker spaniel chasing a piece of silver paper in the wind"

Giggs, who was on Manchester City's books as a youngster, made his league debut for United against Everton in March 1991 at the age of 17. In his early days the Cardiff-born winger, blessed with explosive pace and a dazzling skill-set, inevitably drew comparisons with 1960s United star George Best,



**LONDON:** Tottenham Hotspur's head coach Ryan Mason reacts with Tottenham Hotspur's Welsh midfielder Gareth Bale on his substitution during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Southampton at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in north London on April 21, 2021. —AFP

his role in Tottenham's youth academy makes him the youngest manager in Premier League history. The former Tottenham midfielder only went into coaching after his playing career was prematurely ended when he suffered a fractured skull playing for Hull in 2017.

Now Mason has a chance to lead the club he

supported as a boy to their first trophy since the 2008 League Cup. At a time when a cabal of greedy owners risked alienating their core audience with the cold-hearted Super League plan, the sight of Mason with his hands on the League Cup trophy would reinforce football's redemptive powers. —AFP

## Arsenal fans turn to devil and vampire in protests at owner

**LONDON:** Arsenal owner Stan Kroenke's humiliating climbdown over joining the European Super League appears to have only further estranged him from the club's furious fans. Around 2,000 protested prior to Arsenal's Premier League match with Everton on Friday, registering once again their distaste for the American owner. Chants of "We want our Arsenal back" and "We want Kroenke out" were mixed with expletive-ridden outbursts. Signs depicted Kroenke as a vampire and devil whilst flares added an acrid smell to the tense atmosphere.

Jason McIntire, a builder, said it was time to restore the old emotions associated with the 'Beautiful Game'. "Football isn't about money, it's about love, fans, pleasure," the 28-year-old told AFP. "Money can't buy passion. That's why we're all here today: to kick out the money-hungry and bring back the passion, the love, the energy. It's like going to see your girlfriend — you're not going to pay £100 (\$138 price of a ticket) to see your girlfriend, are you?"

As time passed on Friday, beer cans and bottles littered the ground and there was more chaos. One fan with his face covered in blood was stretched into an ambulance. Police reinforcements arrived in two waves to jeers from the fans.

In all there were 27 police vans with a helicopter

## UEFA drops Euro hosts Dublin, Bilbao

**LAUSANNE:** UEFA on Friday dropped Dublin and Bilbao as Euro 2020 hosts over a failure to guarantee fans' attendance and held fire over any reprisals it might mete out to the 12 clubs involved in the failed Super League project.

The four matches destined for Dublin will now be held in St Petersburg and London while Seville steps in to replace Bilbao, UEFA announced. Munich was confirmed as a venue at the eleventh hour, the German city joining Budapest, Baku, Amsterdam, Bucharest, Glasgow, Copenhagen and Rome.

Held over from 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, the European Championship will now be held in 11 different countries from June 11-July 11. UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin welcomed being able to "guarantee a safe and festive environment" with fans "at every match".

Dublin and Bilbao lost out after the Irish government and Basque region officials were unable to assure UEFA of fans despite the pandemic. "We

## Giggs: Man United and Wales icon facing court battle

**LONDON:** Ryan Giggs has a special place in the pantheon of Manchester United's greats — a dazzling teenage talent who ended his career at Old Trafford as the most-decorated player in English football history. The former winger, 47, served as assistant at United under Louis van Gaal after his playing days were finally over and was appointed as Wales manager in January 2018. Under Giggs, Wales qualified for Euro 2020. However, he will be unable to lead his country at the delayed tournament, which starts in June, after being charged with



**LONDON:** Supporters protest against Arsenal's US owner Stan Kroenke, outside English Premier League club Arsenal's Emirates stadium in London on Friday, ahead of their game against Everton. —AFP

legislation so we can have fan ownership. We want to say loud and clear: we do not want Stan Kroenke near our football club. We were here before Stan Kroenke and we will be here after Stan Kroenke."

Nicholas White, a 24-year-old waiter, said the Emirates was a joyless place even when fans were allowed in before the coronavirus pandemic. "It's time for greed to leave football," he told AFP. "There's no place for a man like Stan Kroenke at this football club. He's a disgrace. If you're going to take out, put in. We've had nothing. Look at the stadium — there's no color or life here. We need to get him (Kroenke) out, back the boys and have honest football without money." To add to the fans' dismay, Arsenal were beaten 1-0 by Everton. —AFP

ing "both are considered as good venues to host future UEFA events". "While today is a disappointing day for football fans in the city and country, public safety must always come first," said Owen Keegan, chief executive of Dublin City Council.

One man who will definitely miss the Euros is Wales manager Ryan Giggs who faces a court appearance after being charged with assaulting two women. The Football Association of Wales said caretaker boss Robert Page, who has overseen matches since November, would remain in charge for Euro 2020.

## Super League 'options'

Also on UEFA's agenda at Friday's virtual meeting was the matter of punishment, if any, for the so-called 'dirty dozen' architects of the doomed Super League designed to supplant the Champions League.

European football's governing body said it had examined its "options" without announcing any sanctions. "The UEFA executive committee has been informed of the latest developments in relation to the 'Super League', in particular regarding the options available to UEFA and the measures it plans to take," said UEFA. —AFP

with his ability to torment opposition defenders.

Off the pitch he became a pin-up and was one of the most marketable players as the glitzy Premier League era began. He was part of the famous "Class of '92" alongside David Beckham, Paul Scholes, the Neville brothers and Nicky Butt but in terms of honors he outdid them all.

The most iconic moment of his career was his winning goal in the 1999 FA Cup semi-final against Arsenal, when he raced from his own half and slalomed through the Arsenal defense before smashing a shot past David Seaman.

That year United went on to complete an historic treble, their greatest achievement during two decades of almost non-stop success under Ferguson. But there were countless other moments of magic in a career in which he racked up a club-record 963 appearances over 23 years, scoring 168 goals. On top of that he made 64 outings for Wales. —AFP

## News in brief

### Spotify founder eyes Arsenal

**STOCKHOLM:** The founder of Swedish streaming music site Spotify, Daniel Ek, has expressed interest in buying English football club Arsenal, as angry fans urged owner Stan Kroenke to sell over his role in the failed Super League plan. "As a kid growing up, I've cheered for Arsenal as long as I can remember. If KSE (Kroenke Sports Enterprises) would like to sell Arsenal I'd be happy to throw my hat in the ring," Spotify's billionaire founder and chief executive Ek wrote on Twitter late Friday. Arsenal was one of six Premier League clubs that had signed up for the planned European Super League, which was met with a fierce backlash and withdrawn in a humiliating climbdown this week. —AFP

### CONMEBOL wants help

**ASUNCION:** South American football's governing body said on Friday it has asked FIFA for extra time at the end of the year to play World Cup qualifiers postponed in March due to coronavirus restrictions. CONMEBOL called off two rounds of matches after several major European clubs, including Manchester City and Liverpool, threatened not to release players fearing they would be subject to COVID-19 quarantine rules on their return. The governing body was already forced to reprogram its first four rounds of qualifiers last year due to the pandemic and is now running out of time to fit in its crammed schedule ahead of the finals in Qatar next year. CONMEBOL wants to play the postponed matches in the international windows in September, October and November, in each of which they already have two matchdays scheduled. —AFP

### Title bid shattered

**LONDON:** Defending champion Ronnie O'Sullivan had his hopes of a record-equating seventh snooker world title shattered in the second round by Anthony McGill on Friday. McGill triumphed 13-12 in the final frame at the Crucible in Sheffield after O'Sullivan had fought back from 10-5 down to lead 11-10 and then 12-11. The Scottish player, ranked 16 and who was a semi-finalist in the last world championship, held his nerve with an 85-point clearance in the decider. McGill, who lost a heartbreaking semi-final in 2020's delayed world championship when he was just one frame from winning, said: "I played so well this morning and Ronnie just played like Ronnie tonight and I didn't step up. But I managed to stop the rot at 11 each." —AFP



**MANCHESTER:** In this file photo taken on March 20, 2004 Manchester United's Ryan Giggs celebrates after scoring to make it 1-0 against Spurs during the Premiership clash at Old Trafford Stadium, Manchester. —AFP

## Liverpool blow place in top four to round off rollercoaster week

**LIVERPOOL:** Liverpool suffered another setback in a tumultuous week as Joe Willock's 94th minute equalizer earned Newcastle a 1-1 draw at Anfield that prevented Jurgen Klopp's men from moving into the Premier League top four.

Mohamed Salah had opened the scoring after just three minutes, but Liverpool wasted a host of chances to extend their lead and paid in stoppage time.

The Reds even had already had a reprieve when Callum Wilson's equaliser was ruled out after a VAR review for handball, but still could not hold on as Willock's deflected strike secured a vital point in the Magpies' bid for survival.

Two more dropped points is a blow to Liverpool's chances of a place in next season's Champions League after their owners' plans for ensuring they have top level European football every season without having to earn it on the field collapsed this week.

Liverpool were one of 12 clubs to initially sign up to proposals for a European Super League (ESL) last weekend, only to quickly withdraw within 48 hours after a backlash from their own players and fans.

A protest outside Anfield yesterday was more muted than the ones seen ahead of Chelsea and Arsenal's home matches in recent days, but a number of flags and banners were attached to the gates around the ground calling out the "greed" of the club's American owners Fenway Sports Group. In his program notes, Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson, who spoke out against the ESL on behalf of the squad on Tuesday, called for calm.

"Being critical of my own employers isn't something I do easily," said Henderson. "It is good that Liverpool withdrew and the concept has collapsed. That's good for football. It's also good that our owners, via John Henry, have apologized unreservedly. "People can disagree with me saying this,

but my opinion is that our owners have been good for Liverpool. If you have a problem with me saying that, fair enough and I respect that. But my opinion is built on my own first-hand experiences."

Henry's FSG helped deliver Liverpool's first Premier League title for 30 years last season. But many of the problems Klopp's men have encountered in defending their title were in evidence again as they as failed to see off Newcastle long before a nervy finale.

The hosts could not have made a better start as a brilliant touch and finish from Salah opened the scoring after just three minutes. The Egyptian's 29th goal of the season set up a wide-open game with plenty of chances at both ends.

Salah should have had a second but fired too close to Martin Dubravka when clean through on goal. Sadio Mane also failed to round the Slovakian goalkeeper with a glorious chance. Dubravka made a string of fine saves after the break to deny Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane at his near post and a long-range effort from James Milner.

The tension in the Liverpool players was clear late in the game and Newcastle capitalised after manager Steve Bruce sent on Wilson and Willock. Wilson bundled the ball home after Alisson had saved his initial effort, but the ball had rebounded off the Brazilian goalkeeper onto the former Bournemouth striker's hand before he stabbed it into an unguarded net.

Seconds later, Liverpool failed to deal with another long ball into their box and the ball fell for on-loan Arsenal midfielder Willock, whose strike deflected in off Fabinho to leave Alisson helpless. Liverpool move up to sixth but are a point behind fourth-placed Chelsea and West Ham, who face off later on Saturday at the London Stadium. Newcastle edge ever closer to survival. They are nine points clear of the bottom three. — AFP



**LIVERPOOL:** Liverpool's Scottish defender Andrew Robertson shoots but fails to score during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Newcastle United at Anfield yesterday. — AFP



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