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for the COVID-19 vaccine [See Page 16](#)

PM meets speaker, MPs after deal with opposition alliance

Two lawmakers call for including pro-Iran cell in general amnesty



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets at his office HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah yesterday held talks with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and a number of lawmakers over the formation of the next Cabinet, a day after striking a deal with opposition MPs. Sheikh Sabah said last week that he will meet various blocs in the Assembly and other MPs for consultation talks over the shape of the new Cabinet.

On Monday, he met members of the so-called group of 16, consisting of opposition members, and struck a deal with them to accept their proposed draft laws, mainly approving a general amnesty law covering former opposition MPs and activists who have been living in exile for over 30 months to avoid jail terms.

The government also pledged to approve draft laws to amend the election law, the cybercrimes law and others. The government also agreed to form a coordination committee with opposition MPs to cooperate and coordinate on various issues. Opposition MPs welcomed the government move and immediately named four lawmakers: Bader Al-Mulla, Abdullah Al-Mudhaf, Hamad Al-Matar and Mubarak Al-Mutairi as members of the agreed

coordination committee.

At the same time, the Assembly's legal and legislative committee reviewed a number of bills calling for a general amnesty for people jailed for political reasons. The panel asked its technical office to prepare a unified bill and report within a week to vote on it and send it to the Assembly for debate.

Rapporteur of the committee MP Muhammad Al-Sayer said the panel also reviewed a draft law calling to change the Assembly's charter to make voting for the Assembly speaker public by calling out the names of MPs. A few weeks ago, the country was headed into political turmoil after the Cabinet resigned a few days after three opposition MPs filed to grill the prime minister. The resignation was accepted by HH the Amir, who later renamed Sheikh Sabah to form the new Cabinet.

MP Abdullah Al-Turaiqi, who met the prime minister yesterday, said on Twitter that Sheikh Sabah showed "serious willingness" to reach an agreement with the Assembly over proposed draft laws. He said he called for the need to complete the national reconciliation to allow those in exile to return, and "the premier showed understanding to settle this issue".

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News in brief

Saudi bans entry from 20 countries

CAIRO: Saudi Arabia yesterday suspended entry to the kingdom from 20 countries, with the exception of diplomats, Saudi citizens, medical practitioners and their families, to help curb the spread of the coronavirus, the state news agency reported. The temporary ban, effective from Feb 3, includes people arriving from the UAE, Germany, the US, Britain, South Africa, France, Egypt, Lebanon, India and Pakistan. — Reuters

Customer service jobs for Saudis

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia will reserve customer service center jobs for Saudi citizens, the Human Resources and Social Development Ministry announced in a statement. "This decision is intended to create job opportunities for Saudis, help them improve their income levels and support the Saudi economy." The edict will apply to all client-facing roles that use telephone contact, email, social media and other "modern means", the ministerial decree said. — AFP

Iran allows crew to leave

TEHRAN: Iran said yesterday it has allowed about 20 crewmembers of a South Korean tanker seized almost a month ago for alleged pollution to leave the country in a "humanitarian move". The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps seized the Hankuk Chemi and arrested its multinational crew near the strategic Strait of Hormuz on Jan 4, saying it had polluted the waters. The case of the tanker and its captain is still being reviewed. — AFP

AOC sexual assault survivor

WASHINGTON: Prominent US lawmaker Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has revealed that she is a survivor of sexual assault, in an emotional video message Monday in which she also described fearing for her life during the deadly storming of the US Capitol on Jan 6. The New York congresswoman drew parallels between the lawmakers seeking to "move on" from the Capitol riot and the denial tactics used by abusers. — AFP

Kuwait reports 811 new COVID cases, one death

KUWAIT: The ministry of health yesterday announced 811 new COVID-19 cases, taking the total caseload of infections to 166,654 since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. The ministry's official spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said in a statement to KUNA a single death was registered in the same period, taking total deaths to 960. He said 59 people are receiving treatment in intensive care units, with 6,708 confirmed cases under medical care.

Sanad added 9,140 swab tests were conducted

in the past 24 hours, with the total number of such examinations reaching 1,547,402. The proportion of infections compared to swab tests in the past 24 hours stood at 8.9 percent. He appealed to the people of Kuwait to remain vigilant against the virus, maintain social distancing and avoid crowds.

The health ministry earlier said 510 patients recovered from COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, taking total recoveries to 158,986. The ministry said in a statement the proportion of recoveries to total cases amounted to 95.1 percent.

According to earlier reports, work is ongoing to have PCR test areas at the airport ready by Feb 6, when the decision to reduce the number of passengers arriving daily by 80 percent is set to end. However, reports yesterday suggested civil aviation authorities are reviewing their plans, with any final decision to come after the Cabinet meets tomorrow. — KUNA

Dubai shuts bars; Emirates eyes daily vaccine deliveries

DUBAI: Dubai on Monday ordered bars and pubs to close until the end of the month to suppress a spike in coronavirus cases, after tourists flocked to the emirate over the holiday period. The closures, effective from yesterday, are among a raft of steps "taken in response to rising violations of preventive measures," authorities said in a statement.

Indoor venues, including cinemas and sports venues, will have their capacity cut by half. Dubai's vast shopping malls, as well as hotels, swimming pools and private beaches,

must operate at 70 percent of capacity. Restaurants and cafes are required to close by 1.00 am. "Penalties will be strictly imposed on anyone found posing a risk to public health by deliberately disregarding preventive measures or not observing them properly," the Crisis and Disaster Management committee said.

Dubai has sought to manage the pandemic without closing its doors, and in July reopened to tourism - an economic mainstay which has been badly battered during the pandemic.

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Sputnik vaccine 91.6% effective

PARIS: Russia's Sputnik V vaccine is 91.6 percent effective against symptomatic COVID-19, according to results published yesterday that independent experts said allayed transparency concerns over the jab, which Moscow is already rolling out. Sputnik V - named after the Soviet-era satellite - was approved in Russia months before results from its final-stage clinical trials were published, leading to skepticism from experts.

But the new analysis of data from 20,000 Phase 3 trial participants, published in The Lancet medical

journal, suggests that the two-dose vaccination offers more than 90 percent efficacy against symptomatic COVID-19. "The development of the Sputnik V vaccine has been criticized for unseemly haste, corner cutting, and an absence of transparency," said a joint independent commentary by Ian Jones of the University of Reading and Polly Roy of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

"But the outcome reported here is clear and the scientific principle of vaccination is demonstrated, which means another vaccine can now join the fight to reduce the incidence of COVID-19." The results suggest Sputnik V is among the top performing vaccines, along with the Pfizer/BioNTech and

DUBAI: This picture taken on Monday shows a view of the Museum of the Future. — AFP



BUENOS AIRES: A health worker displays a vial of the Sputnik V vaccine against COVID-19 yesterday. — AFP

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Local

Chinese center wins Sabah Al-Ahmad elderly care prize

Information minister oversees State award distribution

KUWAIT: China's National Center of Gerontology was unanimously awarded 'His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Prize for Research in Health Care for the Elderly and in Health Promotion'. The announcement was made yesterday by Kuwait's Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah. The prize, under the umbrella of World Health Organization (WHO), was granted to the Beijing-based Center for its efforts in this field since its establishment in 2015. In a press release, Kuwait's Health Minister noted that the prize comes in manifestation of the late Amir's keenness to promote and support medical fields and services on a global scale.



Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah

He further pointed out that this award, under the auspices of the WHO, which is dedicated to the best initiatives and research on health care for the elderly and health promotion, confirms the role of health systems in addressing the challenges of health care for the elderly in recognition of their role in achieving development. He added that the Prize for Research in Health Care for the Elderly and in Health Promotion is proof of deep-seated relations between the State of Kuwait and WHO, which dates back to the period when Kuwait became a member of the Organization in May 1960.

State award

Meanwhile, the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) announced yesterday names of winners of the "State award of admiration and encouragement" at a ceremony held at the National Library, headed by Minister of Information, Minister of State for Youth Affairs and the NCCAL Chairperson, Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi.

The NCCAL said in a statement the award, the admiration category, was earned by Dr Abdulmalek Al-Tamimi (sociology), Abdulredha Abdulbaqer (formative arts) and Yousef Al-Muhanna (music). The encouragement awards were given to Dr Walid Srab (applied formative arts) for his painting "the father," Fares Al-Mujaibel for television acting, Sami Belal for playwright direction and Dr Abdullah Issa for musical composition.

In literature, the winners were the poet Abdullah Al-Failakawi, in novels Abdullah Al-Bsais and Abdulwahab Al-Hamadi, while Alyaa Al-Enezi garnered the award for linguistic and literary works. In sociology, winners were Mudhafar Rashed for historic studies, Dr Mohammad Al-Dghaim for psychology and Jassem Al-Bannai (geography). Kamel Abduljelil, the NCCAL Secretary General, congratulated the winners affirming keenness on sponsoring creative and talented citizens. The encouragement award's first edition was held in 1988. Winners are granted a figurine depicting the award and KD 10,000 for each.

The other category of the award was launched in 2000, granting each winner KD 20,000.

'Entrepreneur Battle'

In other news, the Undersecretary at the office of Youth Minister Dr Meshaal Al-Rabeca announced yesterday the launch of 'Universities Entrepreneur Battle' competition: considered among the political projects. He stressed in a press statement on supporting and developing Kuwaiti youth skills in various fields and work for investing their capabilities and potentials in any challenges.

He explained that it is a local initiative in which all university students can participate, as it enables young people of both genders to present their new ideas for projects capable of developing society and making a positive impact and is an opportunity to exchange and develop ideas. He called on Kuwaiti youth to join this challenge, indicating that the winners will be honored at a ceremony sponsored by the Office of Youth Minister. — KUNA

Zain Great Idea virtual bootcamp kicks off

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced that the virtual bootcamp phase of its sixth Zain Great Idea (ZGI) tech startup accelerator program has kicked off. The bootcamp's first virtual session featured Tesla Motors co-founder Marc Tarpenning, who shared key tips for success in the world of entrepreneurship.

Zain recently concluded ZGI's first stage: the registration and application phase, where the company received many submissions from local and regional talents. Many submissions were accepted, from both those who own startups that have just begun their journey and those in the process of establishing them. Accepted applications particularly centered around startups working in areas related to tech, digital transformation, and innovation.

The Zain Great Idea 6 bootcamp comes this year in an all-virtual format to abide by health guidelines imposed by COVID-19. The bootcamp's first session hosted American engineer, entrepreneur, and Tesla Motors co-founder Marc



Tarpenning, who was joined by Zain Kuwait's Sustainability, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship Department Manager Haya Al-Mana, and Founder and CEO of Brilliant lab Neda Al-Daihani.

Key insights

During the virtual talk (entitled 'Life as an entrepreneur'), Marc Tarpenning shared key insights and crucial tips that are vital to any startup owner, including the most common challenges faced by

newly established startups (especially tech startups) and how to overcome them. Tarpenning also shared the story of founding Tesla Motors along with his partner Martin Eberhard, and how it became one of the world's biggest technology and car companies.

In 2003, Tarpenning and Martin Eberhard collaborated and founded Tesla Motors (now Tesla Inc.). The two co-founders funded the company until early 2004, when Elon Musk led the company's \$6.5 million Series A financing round in February 2004 and became the Chairman of the Board. Tarpenning continued to serve as the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and the Vice President of Electrical Engineering in Tesla until 2008. After leaving Tesla, Tarpenning began to serve as an adviser or member of the advisory board of several companies, including his alma mater (SkyDeck project, UC Berkeley) and Spero Ventures, a VC firm. Marc Tarpenning is a member of the advisory board at Clearpath Robotics, an unmanned vehicles manufacturer.

After the registration period ended, ZGI's judging panel reviewed all applications thoroughly and selected the participants who progressed into the next phase: the virtual bootcamp. The bootcamp, which is completely virtual this year and continues for four weeks, features workshops, training sessions, panel discussions, and more, facilitated by world-class experts, academics, and trainers from top international educational institutions such as IE

Business School, MIT, Stanford, and more. In addition, one-to-one sessions with top experts in various fields will be offered for every finalist.

Refreshed opportunity

ZGI offers a refreshed opportunity for local talents and Kuwait's entrepreneurial community, as it has been one of the most successful initiatives Zain presented to the Kuwaiti market as part of its comprehensive innovation and entrepreneurship strategy. Throughout 10 successful years, ZGI empowered, trained, and invested in hundreds of creative and driven Kuwaiti youth, of which many now own thriving and active Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to this day in local and regional markets.

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

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

How Iran lured a dissident from France to execution

PARIS: In October 2019, Iranian dissident Ruhollah Zam was running a widely followed news site based in France, accompanied by his family and benefitting from refugee status as well as security in his country of exile. But just over a year later, on Dec 12, 2020, Zam was hanged in Iran, an execution that prompted international condemnation. How had Zam gone from the relative comfort of his life in France to meeting his death aged just 42 at the hands of the hangman in his home country, whose leaders he had targeted in his work?

His father Mohammad Ali Zam is a cleric still based in Iran and was, at one time, a senior figure in Iranian cultural institutions. So fervent was his support of the 1979 Islamic Revolution that ousted the Shah that he named his son after its founder, Ruhollah Khomeini. Colleagues and friends of Ruhollah Zam in France told AFP that he had made

the mistake of being lured into a trip to Iraq in October 2019, defying their warnings of danger and falling into a trap set to exploit his own character.

"He played a dangerous game by going to Iraq and he lost," said Mahtab Ghorbani, a Paris-based Iranian writer and a refugee who worked with Zam. "He was dragged into a dirty psychological game designed by this regime." Resident in France for almost half a decade, Ruhollah Zam had attracted up to two million followers to his Telegram channel Amadnews, encouraging people to turn out in protests during the winter of 2017-2018 and also publishing sometimes sensational allegations about the Iranian leadership.

As the privileged child of an influential father, Zam enjoyed good contacts in Tehran which he held onto even after leaving the country following the 2009 protests over disputed elections. He first went to Malaysia and Turkey, and then France. "When there were turf wars between people in power, they turned to Zam," said Maziyar, a friend and fellow Iranian refugee, who worked on Amadnews and asked that his full name not be published. "He delivered information without limits, he had no red line, he respected neither the president, nor the supreme leader, nobody. He even laughed at his own father."

But the success of Amadnews and Zam's own

would be needed to assess how it affects asymptomatic disease.

The Lancet report said that during the trial "no serious adverse events were deemed to be associated with vaccination". Analysis of some 2,000 participants older than 60 also suggested the vaccine was similarly effective and well tolerated in this group. The trial is ongoing and plans to recruit a total of 40,000 people.

Sputnik V uses different disarmed strains of the adenovirus, a virus that causes the common cold, as vectors to deliver the vaccine dose. In this respect it is similar to the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab, which reported efficacy of about 60 percent when two full jabs were given in its trials. But Sputnik V uses two different adenovirus strains - one for each jab. Developers said this minimizes the risk of the immune system developing resistance to the initial vector, which may help create a more powerful response.

Alexander Edwards, an associate professor in Biomedical Technology at the University of Reading, said the trial might help provide evidence to this theory of immune response. In January, Chancellor Angela Merkel said Germany had offered Russia support in developing Sputnik V, after Russian authorities said they had applied for registration in the European Union.

The European Commission spokesman for health, Stefan De Keersmaecker, said yesterday that a key selection criterion for the EU was that the company has production capacity within the bloc. "The aim is to make sure that we can deliver supplies very quickly, ie the day on which the vaccine gets the green light," he told a press conference. — AFP

growing radicalism proved their undoing as Telegram suspended the account for inciting followers to use Molotov cocktails against police. Zam's influence appeared to be waning. Even friends began to question if he was pushing too hard for the overthrow of the Iranian regime.

"Ruhollah became really well known. He advocated the overthrow of the regime and maybe he started to think of himself as a leader," said Hassan Fereshtyan, a Paris-based lawyer who assisted Zam. "Bit by bit, he lost his friends," he said. "He was alone and isolated, and part of the Iranian opposition in exile did not trust him," added Ghorbani.

He was also receiving an increasing number of threats, which prompted French police to give him protection. His friends said this was a dark time for Zam, a hugely ambitious man who feared that the media presence he had built up so fast was now rapidly losing clout. "He was in the position where he could make bad decisions and fall for the trap," said Maziyar.

In mid-October 2019, he appeared at Fereshtyan's Paris office and told the astonished lawyer that he was going to travel to Iraq to conduct an interview with Ayatollah Ali Sistani, one of the most influential figures in Shia Islam. This interview was supposed to launch a new television chan-

nel suggested by an individual claiming to be an Iranian businessman.

His associates immediately sensed the danger, given the security influence Iran has in Iraq, a majority Shiite country, following the 2003 US invasion. "I shouted, I told him: 'If you go, it's the end, you will never come back to France!'" said Fereshtyan. And even though Zam gave no indication of when he planned to go, he took the plane to Amman and then onwards to Baghdad the next day.

"Everyone advised him against leaving, even his bodyguard, but he simply replied that he was tired of waiting," added Maziyar. "And he went. Sadly." Zam telephoned his wife from Amman airport but he appears to have been apprehended as soon as he arrived in Baghdad. He was later blindfolded, put into a car and driven to the Iranian border in footage later seen on Iranian state TV.

His detention inside Iran saw him in July 2020 give an interview to state TV, a method used on prisoners in Iran that activists regard as a forced confession extracted by torture. Sitting in a deep armchair, he was interviewed on the program "Without Compliments" by Ali Rezvani, officially a journalist for state broadcaster IRIB but who campaigners say is actually an interrogator of the Revolutionary Guards. — AFP

Sputnik vaccine 91.6% effective...

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Moderna jabs that also reported more than 90 percent efficacy. Pre-empting the results of the phase 3 trials, Russia has already launched a mass inoculation campaign for citizens 18 and older.

Kirill Dmitriev, head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund, which was part of the Sputnik V development, said the vaccine is already registered in 16 countries. "There are no arguments left for critics of this vaccine, the article in The Lancet is a checkmate," he said, adding that it was affordable and easy to store. Sputnik V has the advantage of being able to be kept at normal refrigerator temperatures instead of the conditions far below freezing required for some other vaccines.

According to the Lancet report, 14,964 participants in the vaccine group and 4,902 in the placebo group were given two jabs 21 days apart in the September-to-November trial. Those taking part were tested for COVID-19 at enrolment, again when they had the second dose, and then after that if they reported symptoms.

From the second dose, 16 cases of symptomatic COVID-19 were confirmed in the vaccine group and 62 cases were reported in the placebo group, giving an efficacy equivalent to 91.6 percent. The authors said however that efficacy was only calculated on symptomatic cases and said more research

PM meets speaker, MPs after deal...

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But two Shiite MPs, Adnan Abdulsamad and Ahmad Al-Hamad, said any general amnesty must include a group of Shiite prisoners who were convicted of forming a spy cell accused of collaborating with Iran. The cell members, locally known as Abdaly Cell, were handed hefty jail terms for possessing of large quanti-

Dubai shuts bars; Emirates eyes...

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The United Arab Emirates is also racing to roll out vaccines - administering some 3.4 million doses of vaccine to its population of about 10 million, for the second-fastest delivery after Israel.

But while masks and social distancing are mandatory, it has not prevented a sharp increase in cases in the new year after Dubai branded itself as an open, sunny and quarantine-free winter escape. Neighboring Abu Dhabi, which has large oil reserves and is less dependent on tourism, has taken a more conservative approach, generally requiring quarantine on arrival.

Images of sports and media celebrities at Dubai's multitude of beach clubs and cocktail bars flooded

ties of arms, smuggling weapons and explosives from Iran and undergoing military training in Hezbollah camps in Lebanon.

The members told the court that the arms they had were collected during the 1990-91 Iraqi invasion and denied other charges. Abdulsamad said after meeting the prime minister yesterday that any pardon must be total and comprehensive and must include members of the Abdaly Cell. He said the media had inflated the case, which was merely a possession of arms from the time of the Iraqi invasion. Hamad said any national reconciliation must not be selective and should include everyone.

social media over Christmas and New Year. However, guidelines for the city-state have been gradually tightened over recent weeks, with an earlier clampdown on the entertainment scene, and non-essential surgery in hospitals has been suspended.

Britain last week announced a travel ban on non-citizens arriving from the UAE, and severe quarantine measures for citizens arriving from the country, hitting Dubai holidaymakers and expatriates. Direct flights from the UAE to Britain were also cancelled until further notice, although Dubai-based carrier Emirates said Monday it would resume some one-way services between Britain and Dubai.

Meanwhile, Emirates airline said Monday it would make daily deliveries of coronavirus vaccines to countries with low storage capacities as part of an initiative to accelerate global jab distribution. The Dubai-based company, the Middle East's largest carrier, will use both its cargo and passenger fleets to deliver vaccines to countries without the means to stockpile vaccines, said deputy head of Emirates' cargo division Nabil Al-Morr. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Amir receives credentials of newly appointed diplomats

Amir, Crown Prince meet Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets the newly appointed Ambassador of the Central African Republic to Kuwait. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets the newly appointed Ambassador of Cuba to Kuwait.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday the credentials of newly appointed Ambassadors to the State of Kuwait. The Ambassadors were of the Central African Republic, Cuba, Vietnam and Brazil. Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, and other officials from the Amiri Diwan and the office of His Highness the Amir attended the receptions.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad at Bayan Palace. In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah expressed heartfelt condolences to Zimbabwe President Emmerson Mnangagwa on his sister's demise, in a cable addressed to the leader of the African nation. His Highness the Amir also expressed his condolences to president Mnangagwa and the Zimbabwean people on the demise of Foreign Minister Sibusiso Moyo and Transport Minister Joel Matiza, due to the coronavirus. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to president Mnangagwa. —KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets the newly appointed Ambassador of Vietnam to Kuwait.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets the newly appointed Ambassador of Brazil to Kuwait.

News in brief

Kuwait, Tunisia defense ministers discuss cooperation

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah received on Tuesday a telephone call from his Tunisian counterpart Dr Ibrahim Al-Bertaji, discussing cooperation between the two states. Kuwait Army said in a statement the two ministers exchanged views on a large number of issues of joint interest. They also discussed means of boosting mutual cooperation, joint action and expertise swap between the two countries. — KUNA

Successful book fair

KUWAIT: Kuwait has succeeded in organizing the annual book fair, though virtually, and demand on books was "encouraging," according to an official. Dr Issa Al-Ansari, the acting assistant secretary general for the sector of culture and arts at the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, affirmed the exhibition's success in a press statement yesterday. So far, more than 14,000 books have been sold and number of visitors to the fair's website (ebookfair.nccal.gov.kw) has exceeded 86,000, while sale value has stood above KD 260,000 (nearly \$858,000). The fair which kicked off on November 29 was extended until the current month, coinciding with the national days. —KUNA

Kuwaiti counsel for AP President

CAIRO: The Arab Parliament Office approved the appointment of Kuwaiti consultant Khaled Al-Husaini as a legal advisor to the AP President, in recognition of his distinguished academic and professional experience. The AP Office added in a press release today that its approval came upon the various experiences Husaini possesses, as he worked as a lawyer before the Constitutional, and Cassation Courts in Kuwait, served as a certified arbitrator in the (National Authority for Sports Arbitration), and as assistant secretary-general for financial affairs at the Gulf Lawyers Union, in addition to his chairmanship and membership in a number of civil society organizations. — KUNA

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.



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Kuwaiti oil price up 79 cents to \$55.68 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil moved up by 79 cents to \$55.68 per barrel on Monday, after it was at \$54.89 pb last Friday, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. Globally, the price of Brent crude went up by \$1.11 to \$56.35 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which increased by \$1.35 to \$53.55 pb. The OPEC daily basket price gained 72 cents during Monday's trading to stand at \$55.13 per barrel (pb) compared with \$54.41 pb a day before, the organization said in a statement yesterday. OPEC said average annual price in 2020 was \$41.47 pb. Oil prices have been on the rise with benchmark Brent going beyond \$57 pb today despite disturbances in distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, new infections and spread of the variant of the virus. However, observers said commitment of OPEC+ in production cuts contributed to withdrawal of surplus from the market. OPEC+ agreed, during a virtual meeting on January 5, to release two million barrels per day by summer. The OPEC Reference Basket of Crudes (ORB) is made up of the following: Saharan Blend (Algeria), Girassol (Angola), Djeno (Congo), Zafiro (Equatorial Guinea), Rabi Light (Gabon), Iran Heavy (Islamic Republic of Iran), Basra Light (Iraq), Kuwait Export (Kuwait), Es Sider (Libya), Bonny Light (Nigeria), Arab Light (Saudi Arabia), Murban (UAE) and Merey (Venezuela). — KUNA



Airlines free to set lower PCR test prices for arrivals to Kuwait

Manpower authority sets procedures for reporting absconding helpers

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) instructed airlines not to charge more than KD 60 for the two PCR tests for passengers arriving to Kuwait, which is the maximum charge approved by the health ministry of KD 30 per test, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday, quoting informed sources. Airlines will not have to charge the maximum allowed price of KD 30, allowing companies to work according to their competitive strategies by offering tests at a reduced price, provided it does not exceed KD 60, the sources said. They added that this will allow airlines to have better competitiveness in price reductions of PCR tests so that they satisfy passengers, bearing in mind that prices have reached unimaginable levels due to a lack of supply, which is in the interest of both airlines and passengers.

According to the sources, work is ongoing to have the test areas ready on Feb 6, when the decision to reduce the number of passengers by 80 percent will end. This will allow the higher committee for combating the coronavirus to take less restrictive decisions with regards to air traffic. The sources said it is not possible to base all decisions concerning air traffic in Kuwait

on the daily case average without referring to the source of the infection. They added decisions should be based on accurate official statistics with regards to airport traffic and declaring the number of cases discovered among arrivals from abroad and not the total number of infections in the country without deciding the source of infection. This is so that the airport is not falsely accused, because arriving passengers follow precautionary health measures through tests they undergo before traveling all the way to random tests upon arrival and home or institutional quarantine for 14 days.

Absconding cases

In other news, the Public Authority for Manpower revealed a mechanism for sponsors on how to deal with cases of absconding domestic helpers, according to a report published in Al-Anbaa Arabic daily yesterday. The authority said steps of this mechanism start with an absconding report filed at an interior ministry service center, then going to the manpower authority to file a complaint for not shouldering the price of airline tickets in case the helper is arrested and demanding compensation for not serving out the contract. The authori-



KUWAIT: This November 18, 2020 file photo shows vehicles lined up for a PCR test at the COVID-19 Drive Thru Vaccination Center near Kuwait International Airport. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

ty said in case the helper does not complete six months from the date of arriving, the office will be compelled to reimburse the sponsor in full and pay for the airline ticket. In case the sponsorship period is completed, the complaint will be sent to courts to issue a ruling to not bear the price of the airline ticket and decide the means of compensation.

In the meantime, the same newspaper reported that the education ministry sent the names of stranded teachers as well as those whose resi-

dency permits have expired to the emergency committee at the Cabinet for review. Educational sources said the lists include nearly 350 names that were approved by the ministry to return to work, adding that the public education sector decided the required specialties include mathematics, English, chemistry, physical education, biology and music. Sources said in case the committee approves the names, they will be sent to the interior ministry for approval. Entry visas will then be issued for them.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force launched a three-day blood donation drive yesterday in cooperation with the Kuwait Central Blood Bank.

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KUWAIT: A combination of photos showing a heavily damaged section of the Seventh Ring Road yesterday. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



After life under IS, Ukraine woman hopes for new start

Ousted Myanmar party demands release of toppled leader Suu Kyi

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WASHINGTON, DC: Republican senators talk to reporters after meeting with US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris at the White House on Monday in Washington, DC. — AFP

Biden to roll back 'failed' Trump policies

President moves to streamline naturalization of 9 million migrants

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden is calling for his administration to streamline the naturalization of nine million migrants, senior officials said, as part of a raft of steps aimed at rolling back the "failed" policies of his hardline Republican predecessor. The Democratic president will sign a series of executive orders overhauling the US immigration process Tuesday, officials said, signaling a return to a more inclusive policy.

Biden is also set to order a review of all legal obstacles to immigration and integration that were put in place under Donald Trump. "The review will likely lead to dramatic changes in policies," according to a senior government official, saying the goal is "to restore faith in our legal immigration system, and promote integration of Americans." "President Trump was so focused on the wall that he did nothing to address the root cause of why people are coming to our southern border," the official said.

"It was a limited, wasteful and naive strategy, and it failed." In line with campaign promises, one of the orders will put in place a working group tasked with reuniting migrant families separated by Trump's "zero tolerance" policy put in place in 2018.

That policy allowed officials to prosecute and deport adults who had entered the US illegally. Their

children were then placed into federal custody. Faced with international outcry, and even criticism from within his own party, the Trump administration was forced to scale down the policy, but hundreds of migrant children have still not been returned to their parents. The working group will examine ways to reunite the families, officials said, without specifying whether that could allow parents or children who had been deported to return to US soil.

A second executive order echoes a similar policy under the Barack Obama administration, putting in place legal mechanisms for prospective immigrants in their home countries to apply for residency, allowing them to avoid dangerous smuggling routes.

End to 'wealth test'

The third decree will promote the integration of migrants legally settled in the United States and make naturalization "more accessible to the more than nine million immigrants who are currently eligible to apply" for citizenship. There will be a review of the so-called "public charge rule" introduced in August 2019 that allowed officials to refuse citizenship or green card applications to migrants receiving social assistance, such as subsidized care or housing allowances. The public charge rule "basically created

or established a wealth test for immigrants," one senior Biden official said.

Most of the reforms will be led by the Secretary of Homeland Security. Biden has nominated Alejandro Mayorkas to the position, and the Senate was to vote on his appointment later. If confirmed, Mayorkas—who arrived in the United States as an infant as the son of Cuban refugees—will be the first Hispanic person to lead the Department of Homeland Security, a sprawling agency that oversees immigration issues, border police and emergency responses.

Political obstacles

The Biden administration's efforts to overturn Trump-era immigration policies will likely be welcomed by the left wing of his Democratic Party. Since coming into office he has canceled two of his predecessor's landmark measures, suspending construction of a wall along the border with Mexico and lifting a ban on US entry for residents of a number of countries with majority Muslim populations. Biden has also sent a bill to Congress that could lead to the naturalization of millions of undocumented immigrants in the United States. The legislation's adoption, however, will require convincing several Republican lawmakers to back it—no easy feat. — AFP

Myanmar aerobics instructor dances through coup

YANGON: Pumping her arms to an electronic ditty, aerobics instructor Khing Hnin Wai appeared oblivious as a convoy of armored vehicles drove by—accidentally capturing Myanmar's military coup-in-progress in a surreal video that has now gone viral. The PE teacher in Naypyidaw, Myanmar's capital, posted footage of her workout to Facebook on Monday morning, gyrating and waving her arms to the tune of a dance track. Unbeknownst to her, history was in the making right behind her as armored vehicles and black SUVs swept by on the Royal Lotus Roundabout near the country's parliament.

The military seized control of the country in the early hours of Monday, detaining de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other top officials in her party. Army chief Min Aung Hlaing now has "legislative, judicial and executive powers"—a move that effectively returns Myanmar to military rule, halting the country's 10-year dalliance with democracy. The post soon went viral with more than 630,000 views on Facebook thanks to the bizarre juxtaposition of a power grab taking place against a pulsating earworm. "How harmonic with the background music and background scenery!" Khing Hnin Wai said in her post Monday. "Before I heard the news (of the coup) in the morning, the video I made for the aerobic dance competition has become an unforgettable memory." — AFP

Erdogan hints at new Turkish constitution

ANKARA, Turkey: President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday that it may be time for Turkey to adopt a new constitution, feeding speculation that he could seek a way to extend his rule. Erdogan, 66, has governed Turkey as prime minister or president since 2002, cementing his control over the nation of 83 million people and surviving a failed coup. He pushed through changes to the constitution in 2017 that created an executive presidency and abolished the premiership.

He then won the 2018 presidential election, the first of two potential five-year terms under the revised rules. Turkey is scheduled to hold parliamentary and presidential elections in June 2023, meaning that Erdogan's rule would have to end by 2028 if he were re-elected. But after chairing a four-hour cabinet meeting, the president raised the idea of writing a brand new constitution to replace one that Turkey has been using since 1982. It was drafted following a military coup.

"It is clear that the source of Turkey's problems is that constitutions have always been written by putschists," Erdogan said in nationally televised remarks. "It may be time for Turkey to reopen the debate about a new constitution," he said. "If we reach a common understanding with our (ruling coalition) partners, we may take action for a new constitution in the future." Erdogan's AK Party is allied in parliament with ultranationalist MHP. Erdogan added that the drafting of the new constitution "would have to be done in a transparent manner and the agreed upon text would have to be submitted to the will of the people".



Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Eroding support

Erdogan has never lost an election, but his popularity has been waning since he unleashed a sweeping crackdown after the failed coup in 2016. His jailing of political opponents and assault on civil liberties have been accompanied by economic problems that analysts blame on financial mismanagement.

The Turkish lira has fallen sharply since 2018, wiping out people's savings and undermining his support among working class voters who form a part of Erdogan's political base. Turkey's political opposition has been pushing Erdogan to call a snap election, arguing that he has lost the public's trust. Soner Cagaptay, Turkey program director at the Washington Institute, said Erdogan's comments were his "first admission that he may not win Turkey's next elections held under the new executive-style presidential system". "His likely next step: divide his opposition through culture wars along left-right lines," Cagaptay said in a tweet. "Turkey is a right-wing dominated country (where Erdogan will) try to build a new majority." —AFP

Rights group urges fair COVID vaccine rollout in Syria

BEIRUT: Human Rights Watch yesterday urged support for aid groups to ensure "equitable" distribution of coronavirus vaccines across all of war-torn Syria, warning against any discriminatory approach by Damascus. "Those supplying vaccines for Syria should do everything in their power to ensure that... (they) reach those most vulnerable no matter where they are in the country," HRW researcher Sara Kayyali said.

"The Syrian government has never been shy about withholding healthcare as a weapon of war, but playing this game with the vaccine undermines the global effort to control the pandemic."

"International aid groups should have support to secure the widest and most equitable distribution... including (in) all areas controlled by different groups," the rights organization said. The New York-based group made the call following restrictions to aid deliveries to the country's rebel-held northwest and Kurdish-held northeast Syria in recent years, under pressure from Damascus' ally Moscow at the UN Security Council.

Aid can only enter northwest Syria from a single border crossing from Turkey, which backs rebels in that area, while aid to northeast Syria now needs to transit through Damascus, where HRW says authorities often withhold or delay permission. Since the start of the coronavirus outbreak last year, Syria's government has recorded 14,096 cases of Covid-19 in areas it controls, including 926 deaths.

In rebel-held northwest Syria, opposition officials have said 21,006 people caught the virus, of whom 400 died. In the Kurdish-held northeast, the Kurdish administration has said 8,490 people fell ill with coronavirus, including 296 who died. But doctors and rights organizations believe the numbers are probably much higher, especially in northeast Syria where HRW said the government has refused to allow the UN to set up COVID-19 testing labs. —AFP

Announcement



We would like to announce the resignation of **Mr T O Thomas**, Kuwait Times (Circulation & Promotion). He is no longer working with us effective 31 / 01 / 2021. Mr Jino Areecal will be taking over Mr Thomas' duties.

I would like to thank Mr Thomas for his efforts for the last 24 years, and wish him all the best.

Fathy Al Hakeem
Circulation Manager

International

Kremlin critic Navalny in court facing prison term

Russia hopes Navalny 'nonsense' will not affect EU ties

MOSCOW: The Kremlin's most prominent critic Alexei Navalny was in a Moscow courtroom yesterday facing several years in prison, after his arrest last month triggered protests across Russia and Western condemnation. The 44-year-old anti-corruption campaigner was detained on January 17 when he returned to Moscow from Germany, where he had spent months recovering from a nerve agent poisoning in August that he blames on President Vladimir Putin.

Tens of thousands have taken to the streets of Moscow and other cities over the last two weekends to call for Navalny's release, prompting a massive police clampdown that saw several thousand people arrested. The case is presenting one of the most serious challenges to the Kremlin in years and has led to calls for new Western sanctions against Russian authorities. Navalny is charged with violating the terms of a three-and-a-half-year suspended sentence he was given in 2014, because he did not check in with the prison service while in Germany. A prison service representative in court accused Navalny of "systematically violating" his parole conditions, leading to sharp exchanges with his lawyers, who asked why his legal team or family members were not contacted before he was put on a wanted list.

Addressing the court, a visibly irritated Navalny insisted he had sent documentation to the prison service on his new location in Germany. "What else could I do? Did you need me to send video of my physiotherapy?" asked Navalny, dressed in a dark hoodie in a glass cell in the courtroom. There was a massive security presence outside the building, after Navalny's team had urged supporters to gather for the hearing. Police in full riot gear cordoned off the

building and AFP journalists saw people being detained. OVD Info, a group that monitors arrests and opposition protests, said more than 230 people including journalists had been seized by police. Navalny's wife Yulia, who was briefly detained at both of the recent anti-Kremlin protests, arrived at the courtroom surrounded by reporters, but declined to comment on the hearing.

Anti-graft investigations

The 2014 case saw Navalny spend one year under house arrest as part of his three-and-a-half-year suspended sentence and his brother Oleg serve the entire time in jail. The European Court of Human Rights in 2017 ruled the Navalny brothers had been deprived of their right to a fair trial in the case, denouncing the ruling as "arbitrary and manifestly unreasonable". Navalny, who in the last decade has emerged as Putin's best-known domestic critic, and his allies see the 2014 case as retribution by the authorities for his political activities.

They say the Kremlin is now repurposing it to muzzle Navalny, who later this week is due in court on separate charges of defaming a World War II veteran. While he has never held elected office, Navalny has made a name for himself with anti-graft investigations exposing the wealthy lifestyles of Russia's elite. Two days after he was placed in pre-trial custody last month, his team released an investigation into an opulent seaside property Navalny claims was given to Putin through a billion-dollar scheme financed by close associates who head state companies.

The probe was published alongside a YouTube video report that has garnered more than 100 million



MOSCOW: Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, charged with violating the terms of a 2014 suspended sentence for embezzlement, listens to his lawyers during a court hearing in Moscow yesterday. — AFP

views. Putin denied owning the property and last week a billionaire businessman close to the Russian leader, Arkady Rotenberg, said he was the owner and was turning it into a hotel. Navalny's arrest and the corruption claims spurred nationwide protests over the past two weekends, including on Sunday when police shut down the centre of Moscow and detained more than 5,400 people in a single-day record.

His arrest and the mass detentions during street protests have also triggered a wave of condemnation

from the West. European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell is expected to raise the issue of Navalny during a visit this week to Moscow. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said yesterday that Navalny's detention should not affect Russia's ties with European countries. "We hope that such nonsense as linking the prospects of Russia-EU relations with the resident of a detention center will not happen," he told reporters, in keeping with a Kremlin tradition of never using Navalny's name. — AFP



KOZYN, Ukraine: Alime Abbasova, 37, wife of IS ex-sympathizer, speaks to AFP minutes before departing from a sanatorium in the village of Kozyn outside Kiev. — AFP

After life under IS, Ukraine woman hopes for new start

KOZYN, Ukraine: Six years after she left Ukraine to follow her husband and promises of a dignified life under the Islamic State group in Syria, Alime Abbasova arrived home on New Year's Day, hopeful for a fresh start. The journey that took her from the Crimean peninsula, annexed by Russia, to the so-called Caliphate, and then to camps for IS sympathizers run by overstretched Kurdish authorities, was a miscalculation, she told AFP.

"You know what they say: we all make mistakes. What happened is now behind us, thank God," the 37-year-old mother-of-five said. At a Soviet-era spa in central Ukraine where she was in quarantine and making plans for the future, Abbasova said: "Now I only hope for the best."

Western countries have been reluctant to repatriate their IS-linked nationals held in northeast Syria, though some have brought home women and children on a case-by-case basis. But President Volodymyr Zelensky was unambiguous in his country's position when he publicly welcomed Abbasova and another returnee home last month. "Ukraine will always bring home all of its citizens, no matter who they are and wherever they get into trouble".

A 'trap'

The ex-Soviet country is home to hundreds of thousands of Crimean Tatars, a Muslim minority, mostly living in Crimea, who opposed Russia's 2014 takeover of the peninsula and fled, fearing political persecution. Abbasova said that she and her husband were lured to IS-controlled territory by one of his friends, who promised him he could continue his work repairing shoes in the so-called Caliphate. "I didn't want to be left without a husband. I had two children at that time," she said, of her decision to follow. Echoing many returnees and IS-linked detainees, she said that she quickly became disillusioned with life in Syria and was "disappointed" by the terror group's brutal interpretation of Islam.

But there was no way out, she said, describing the so-called Caliphate as a "trap" where "all roads closed". "If you tried to escape, they could shoot you in the back." In the four years that she and her husband spent in Syria, Abbasova said that they were never called to take up arms by the terror group's leadership. But that claim did not resonate with the Kurdish forces that accepted their surrender in 2019 and separated the husband and wife in captivity. "It was the last time I saw my husband," Abbasova, who took charge of their children, said. She said she spent nearly two years in the Kurdish-run camps, al-Hol and Roj, where tens of thousands of relatives of IS fighters and sympathizers have been held since the 2019 defeat of IS.

She described life in the sprawling tent cities that have been battered by inhospitable weather and lawlessness as "very difficult". Aid groups, too, have deplored conditions at the al-Hol camp, where the UN recently reported a spate of murders. Still, the camps, run by Kurdish authorities, are home to at least 10 more Ukrainian women and some 30 children that Tatar community leaders are working to return to Ukraine. — AFP

In Peru, people line up day and night for life-saving oxygen

LIMA, Peru: While loved ones are fighting for breath at home, hundreds of Peruvians have taken to sleeping on the street, sometimes for days on end, in queues of people desperate for oxygen amid a deadly second wave of the coronavirus pandemic. In the night chill, they take cover in small tents, under blankets or sheets of cardboard outside Criogas, a small oxygen factory in the port city of El Callao near the capital Lima. Hundreds of man-sized oxygen cylinders line the street outside the factory, each bearing the name of the person who brought it.

"Yesterday I stood in a long queue. I've been here since 5:00 am yesterday. I arrived late because when I came, there were people who had already spent two or three days here," said Yamil Antonio Suca. The 25-year-old student told AFP he hoped not to have to spend a second night sleeping rough, but did not expect to reach the front of the line by day's end. Going home empty handed is not an option. "My father has COVID-19, he is 50 years old, he needs the oxygen," Suca said.

'We do what we can'

Every morning, factory staff aided by police officers do the rounds, revise the waiting list, and announce how many cylinders can be filled that day. The factory has not increased its price, despite others having hiked theirs by as much as 300 percent-a

practice Health Minister Pilar Mazzetti has denounced as "truly criminal." The second wave of COVID-19 has seen oxygen supplies run low in several South American countries, and many Peruvian families say their loved ones died because they could not access any. At El Callao, people are willing to sleep rough for days on end, without bathroom access and some without food, to get their hands on the precious substance.

Many of their loved ones are being cared for at home, with hospitals running short on beds. As dawn breaks, hawkers come around offering a humble breakfast of bread with avocado, or simply a coffee. Miguel Angel, 22, says he is number 124 in line. "We have a member of the family, 89 years old, in a bad way, we do what we can for her," he said. He came with his cousin to take turns waiting in line.

'She will die'

Police were brought in to keep an eye on the hopeful buyers, prevent queue jumpers and thwart any merchants seeking to take advantage of the special price reserved for individual customers. The mood among those waiting is somber with many worried about their ill family members, yet there is little evidence of jostling as many a supportive hug is shared. Smiles brighten faces when a name is finally called and a bottle filled, bringing hope — one patient at a time. The factory can fill 10 bottles about every 45 minutes, until closing time at 5:00 pm.

"My mom is fragile, she's 69," said Yulitza Torres, 46. "If we don't bring oxygen she will die." Residents of Lima and seven departments of Peru are under a new lockdown from Monday until at least February 14 as authorities try and brake the spread of the killer virus. The country of 33 million inhabitants has registered more than 1.1 million cases and over 40,000 deaths since March last year. — AFP



LIMA, Peru: Medical personnel tend patients at a makeshift ward constructed for COVID-19 patients at a school in the central city of Huanuco, 370 kilometers northeast of Lima. — AFP

Huge snowstorm hits US east coast, disrupting virus vaccinations

NEW YORK: A huge snowstorm has brought chaos to the United States' east coast, shuttering airports, closing schools and forcing the postponement of coronavirus vaccinations into yesterday morning as New York City steered itself for possibly one of its heaviest ever snowfalls. The National Weather Service (NWS) issued storm warnings from Virginia to Maine-home to tens of millions of people-as heavy snow mixed with wind gusts up to 50 miles (80 kilometers) per hour spurred blizzards along the eastern seaboard.

New York declared a state of emergency restricting non-essential travel, moved all children back to remote learning and rescheduled long-awaited vaccine shots as some parts of the city were hit by more than 18 inches (1.5 feet) of snow. CNN meteorologists said that figure could reach two feet before the storm comes to an end. "The storm is still developing. It's still intensifying. It's a massive storm," one said, with the broadcaster reporting the extreme weather could con-

tinue today. Salt trucks and snowplows moved out across New York's streets, already quieter than usual due to COVID-19, as Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that the few children who had returned to classrooms would also stay at home yesterday. "There will be locusts, next, at the rate we're going," he quipped on MSNBC. More than 1,600 US flights were canceled mostly at airports in New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Washington-disrupting travel that has already been heavily curtailed by the pandemic. Airlines canceled all flights in and out of LaGuardia and JFK airports, while 71 percent of flights were scrapped at Newark Liberty Airport.

'Dangerous'

COVID-19 vaccinations for New York City were also to be halted yesterday. "This is a dangerous, life-threatening situation," New York Governor Andrew Cuomo told reporters. By 7:00 pm Monday, 16.3 inches of snow

Republican COVID relief plan excludes Biden priorities

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden met Monday with a group of Republican senators who are pushing an alternative to his massive COVID-19 relief plan, but no agreement was reached.

Biden, who campaigned on restoring bipartisanship in Washington, wants to spend \$1.9 trillion to revitalize the world's largest economy after the pandemic caused waves of layoffs, but Republicans in Congress have said they won't support such a large package. On Sunday, a group of 10 Republicans detailed a measure costing \$600 billion, and Biden responded with an invitation to the White House to discuss the idea. But no agreement was at hand following the meeting, which Republican Senator Susan Collins described as "frank and very useful," if not conclusive. "I wouldn't say that we came together on a package tonight. No one expected that in a two-hour meeting," she told reporters. The senators released a statement Monday night saying the meeting was a "very productive exchange of views" and that they would continue to talk with the Biden administration and other senators "in the coming days" to reach an agreement on a bipartisan relief package. For its part, the White House said its package "was carefully designed to meet the stakes of this moment, and any changes in it cannot leave the nation short of its pressing needs."

An outline of the Republican proposal shows it excludes aid to state and local governments that Democrats say any package must have. It also gives out stimulus checks of \$1,000, less than the \$1,400 Biden has proposed, and tightens eligibility. Democratic leaders responded to the proposal by announcing they were moving ahead with a maneuver in Congress to pass the president's plan without Republican votes, while Biden took to Twitter to restate his case.

"We're facing an economic crisis brought on by a public health crisis, and we need urgent action to combat both," he said. "My American Rescue Plan will dig us out of the depths of these crises and put our nation on a path to build back better." In a sign of the economy's ill health, the government last week said that the number of new applications for unemployment aid received each week was at 1.3 million, an enormous figure 10 months after business shutdowns began in response to the pandemic. It also released data showing the country last year suffered its worst contraction since 1946, with the economy shrinking 3.5 percent. Yet it may be bouncing back faster than expected. On Monday, the Congressional Budget Office said it expected GDP to reach its pre-pandemic level by the middle of this year, "in large part because the downturn was not as severe as expected and because the first stage of the recovery took place sooner and was stronger than expected." — AFP

had been recorded in Central Park, according to the NWS. Snowfall was expected to continue into yesterday morning, with forecasters predicting 20 inches in total before the storm moves northeast through New England. "This is expected to be one of the bigger snowfall events for New York City," Matthew Wunsch, an NWS forecaster, told AFP. The most snowfall to have blanketed America's commercial capital was 27.5 inches, over three days, in January 2016. In Washington, where snow and ice had formed since Sunday, President Joe Biden postponed a scheduled visit to the State Department due to the conditions.

The capital has postponed a planned yesterday return to school for tens of thousands of children who have been learning at home for almost a year because of the pandemic, local television networks reported. Heavy snowfall also lashed New Jersey, Philadelphia and Connecticut. New Jersey issued a state of emergency, allowing authorities to close roads, evacuate homes and commander equipment needed for public safety. "This storm is going to get worse before it gets better," tweeted Governor Phil Murphy, adding that six vaccination mega-sites in the state would remain closed yesterday. — AFP

International

Ousted Myanmar party demands release of toppled leader Suu Kyi

Coup draws international condemnation and sanctions threats from Biden

YANGON: The party of Myanmar's toppled leader Aung San Suu Kyi demanded her immediate release yesterday, after a military coup that triggered international condemnation and sanctions threats from the new US president. Armed troops patrolled the capital, Naypyidaw, where Suu Kyi and other National League for Democracy party leaders were detained in pre-dawn raids on Monday just ahead of the scheduled resumption of parliament. Soldiers were also stationed yesterday outside the dormitories for parliamentarians in Naypyidaw, with one NLD MP describing it as "an open-air detention center".

"We are not allowed to go outside," she told AFP by telephone, requesting anonymity for fear of the military. "We are very worried." Despite the intimidation, a statement was posted on the NLD's verified Facebook page yesterday calling for Suu Kyi's release, as well as President Win Myint and all detained party members. "We see this as a stain on the history of the State and the Tatmadaw," it added, referring to the military by its Burmese name. It also demanded the military "recognize the confirmed result of the 2020 general election".

By afternoon, a party officer said they still have not had direct contact with Suu Kyi, though a neighbor sighted the de-facto leader in her Naypyidaw residence. "According to her neighbor we contacted, she walks sometimes in her compound to let others know she's in good health," NLD press officer Kyi Toe told AFP. Most of the state ministers across Myanmar have been released from detention but are under house arrest, he said. The military justified its seizure of power by alleging widespread fraud in elections held three months ago that the NLD won in a landslide. It said it would hold power under a state of emergency for 12 months, claiming it would then hold fresh elections.

Condemnation

US President Joe Biden led the chorus of global outrage, calling for a quick restoration of democracy and warning that Washington could reimpose sanctions. "The international community should come together in one voice to press the Burmese military to immediately relinquish the power they have seized," Biden said.

"The United States is taking note of those who stand with the people of Burma in this difficult hour," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the European Union and Australia were among others to condemn the coup. Britain summoned Myanmar's envoy in formal protest. But China's response was less emphatic, with the official Xinhua news agency describing the coup as a "cabinet reshuffle". The United Nations Security Council was due to meet for an emergency meeting.

Japan extends virus emergency, months before Olympics

TOKYO: Japan's government approved a month-long extension of its coronavirus state of emergency yesterday, less than six months before the pandemic-postponed Olympic Games open in Tokyo. "We have decided to extend the state of emergency until March 7th," Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said at a meeting of the taskforce guiding the government's pandemic policy.

The extension will apply to 10 of the 11 areas currently under the measure, including greater Tokyo, which had been due to end on February 7. It will not be extended in Tochigi, north of the capital, where cases are judged to have dropped sufficiently. "In prefectures where the virus situation improves, we will gradually lift the state of emergency, without having to wait for March 7th," Suga added.

The extension had been widely expected, with government spokesman Katsunobu Kato telling reporters yesterday morning that "it is our understanding that continued vigilance is warranted for a while". Japan's virus emergency is significantly looser than the lockdowns seen elsewhere in the world, and primarily calls for increased teleworking and the closure of bars and restaurants from 8pm.

Legislation currently working its way through parliament would add enforcement measures including fines for businesses that do not close early. But even the comparatively relaxed approach appears to have yielded results, with new infections dropping across the country. Still, after facing criticism for its initial reluctance to impose the measure, the government has been cautious about lifting it too quickly.—AFP

Missing Rohingya women trafficked from Indonesia

LHOKSEUMAWE, Indonesia: Scores of Rohingya women missing from a refugee camp in Indonesia have been trafficked into Malaysia to reunite with their husbands, several sources have told AFP. Just over 100 refugees remain at the camp in Lhokseumawe on Indonesia's northern coast, well down from the almost 400 who arrived in separate boat landings between June and September last year. Neither local authorities nor the UN could account for the whereabouts of the women, who are feared to have enlisted traffickers to help them cross the Malacca strait into Malaysia.

"They talked with their husbands on the phone and made arrangements," said Namashah, whose own reunification with his wife and daughter was profiled in an AFP series on trafficking networks. Relatively affluent Muslim-majority Malaysia is the main destination for Rohingya fleeing sprawling refugee camps in Bangladesh set up to house them after a bloody crack-



YANGON: This file photo taken on November 1, 2015 shows Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi gesturing towards supporters as she travels in a motorcade ahead of a campaign rally for the National League for Democracy in Yangon. — AFP

Military rule

Myanmar's November polls were only the second democratic elections the country had seen since it emerged from the 49-year grip of military rule in 2011. The NLD won more than 80 percent of the vote in November-increasing its support from the 2015 elections. But the military claimed to have uncovered more than 10 million instances of voter fraud.

Although the military had flagged last week it was considering a coup, Monday's events seemed to stun the country and power was seized extremely quickly. The military strangled the internet as the coup was unfolding, but eased restrictions later in the day. Yesterday, there were few signs of extra security in Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city and commercial capital, indicating the generals' belief that, for now, they faced no mass protests. On Yangon's streets, people voiced anger, fear and helplessness.

"We want to go out to show our dissatisfaction," a taxi driver told AFP. "But Mother Suu is in their hands. We cannot do much but stay quiet at this moment." Myanmar's youth networks have announced a "civil disobedience" campaign, though it has yet to materialize on the streets. The power takeover has its supporters—on Tuesday, hundreds of pro-military supporters gathered around Yangon's Shwedagon Pagoda in a celebration, waving the country's flag in approval of the coup.

Pariah

Military chief and coup leader Min Aung Hlaing is now in charge of the country, although former general Myint Swe is acting president. Min Aung Hlaing is an international pariah who is under US sanctions for a military campaign against Myanmar's Muslim Rohingya community that forced 750,000 of them to flee into Bangladesh, a campaign UN investigators said amounted to genocide.

Suu Kyi, 75, is an immensely popular figure in Myanmar for her opposition to the military—which earned her the Nobel Peace Prize—having spent the best part of two decades under house arrest during the previous dictatorship. But her international image was shredded during her time in power as she defended the military-backed crackdown on the Rohingya.

Derek Mitchell, the first US ambassador to Myanmar after military rule, said the international community still needed to respect Suu Kyi's overwhelming victory in November. The West "may have considered her this global icon of democracy and that luster is off. But if you care about democracy in the world, then you must respect the democratic choice and she is clearly that". "It's not about the person; it's about the process," he said. — AFP

North Nigeria city in dark for week after jihadist sabotage

MAIDUGURI, Nigeria: Residents of the northeastern Nigerian city Maiduguri have been struggling with a power blackout for a week after jihadists blew up supply lines, causing water shortages and disrupting businesses and daily life. The attack was the third time in a month that the IS-linked Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) group have plunged the city of three million into darkness for days by blowing up transmission lines. Maiduguri's latest troubles came as President Muhammadu Buhari replaced his top four military commanders, in a sudden overhaul after months of criticism over the handling of the country's decade-long insurgency. Maiduguri, capital of Borno state, has been without power since January 26 after the jihadists blew up a power grid just outside the city, according to residents and sources at the power company.

Bukar Musa, a welder, has seen his business crippled by the power outage, forcing him to look for menial jobs to feed his wife and three children. "It has been a whole week without a light in the city which has grounded my welding job," the 27-year-old told AFP. "I have now turned to a labourer, assisting a bricklayer for a fraction of what I make as a welder, which is inadequate to feed my family," Musa said. He would usually earn the equivalent of around \$6.60 (about 5.5 euros) per day at his workshop.

Now, though, he makes around \$4 working on building sites, spending a good part of the daily wage on medication for body pains from the labor, he said. Grema Umar's ice-block vending business has also crumbled, forcing him to contemplate begging to feed himself. "I have nothing left, even if power is restored I

down by Myanmar's military drove them into the poor South Asian country.

"We heard that some traffickers went to camp, took money and then helped the women escape," he added. Some of the women had since called friends in the Lhokseumawe camp to say they had reunited with their husbands, Namashah said, but others may have fallen into more dire circumstances. "Some are missing



LHOKSEUMAWE, Indonesia : This picture shows Namashah and his family resting in their room at the makeshift camp in Lhokseumawe, Aceh province. — AFP



MAIDUGURI, Nigeria: Young boys work on generators at a workshop in the Bulabulin area of Maiduguri. — AFP

will have to raise another capital and I don't know how," Umar said.

Water lines

Even water has become scarce in the city, which relies heavily on motorized boreholes that require electric power to operate. Many households have shut down their boreholes which supply them and their neighbors due to the high cost of diesel to power them, several residents said. Long queues have appeared at the few boreholes supplying water, as residents line up with pails and jerry cans. "The major problem is water scarcity which has hit the city, making it expensive," said Hajara Abdulkarim.

The price of a 25-litre (6.6-gallon) jerry can of water has more than tripled, to 25 naira up from seven naira previously, said Abdulkarim, a mother of five. Maiduguri is also home to several internally displaced persons (IDP) camps for people forced to flee their homes by military operations against the jihadists. For now, the outage has not affected the camps, which are lit by solar power installed by charities. —AFP

and we don't know what happened, whether they got there or were sold by traffickers," he added. "We've heard some are with their husbands and others got caught," said Fatimah Binti Azizulhaq, 20.

At least 18 Rohingya from the Lhokseumawe camp and over a dozen suspected smugglers were recently caught by police several hundred kilometers south, in Medan city, a frequent staging point for illegal crossings into Malaysia. A Myanmar military crackdown in 2017, which UN investigators said amounted to genocide, forced 750,000 Rohingya to flee across the border into the Bangladesh district of Cox's Bazar, where many ended up in sprawling refugee camps.

Thousands have since paid smugglers to get them out of Bangladesh, enduring harrowing, months-long sea journeys punctuated by illness, beatings by traffickers and near-starvation rations to reach Indonesia and Malaysia. More than 100,000 Rohingya live on the margins of society in Malaysia, registered as refugees but not allowed to work, forcing the men into illegal construction and other low-paid jobs. Some Rohingya men in Malaysia pay smugglers to bring over their families, or new brides from arranged marriages. Another camp dweller, Asmot Ullah, said there were "parents crying in Bangladesh because they borrowed money to send their kids to Malaysia, but they reached Indonesia" instead. — AFP

News in brief

2 killed in Afghan attack

KABUL: Two people were killed as the Afghan capital was rocked yesterday by a series of rush-hour car bombs, officials said, while a police vehicle was targeted in an attack north of Kabul. Attacks during the morning commute have become a favored tactic of insurgents, who remotely detonate bombs attached to target vehicles. Police spokesman Ferdaws Faramarz told reporters two people were killed and two injured in a first blast, while a second targeting an interior ministry vehicle wounded two security personnel. — AFP

New Caledonia govt collapses

NOUMEA, France: New Caledonia's coalition government collapsed yesterday after pro-independence politicians resigned over disagreements over the budget and the sale of a nickel factory on the French South Pacific territory. The resignation of the FLNKS group—who count five of 11 members of the executive-means Congress will have to elect a new executive within 15 days. The group has been tussling with the government over the sale of the Brazilian Vale nickel factory, with indigenous leaders claiming an offer by a local firm has been unfairly overlooked by the French government and the current owners.— AFP

Chad bans protests

N'DJAMENA, Chad: Chad's government has barred the opposition from staging protests ahead of an expected announcement by President Idriss Deby Itno's party that the veteran leader will be its champion in upcoming elections. In a decree published late Monday, Public Security Minister Mahamat Tahir Orozi said the authorities "cannot allow the holding of such protests, which have the potential to provoke public disorder across the country." The organizers told AFP the demonstrations were "peaceful marches" for political change and equality and vowed to carry on with them as scheduled. They are due to take place every day from tomorrow to Sunday. — AFP

Nigeria detects 6 new cases

LAGOS, Nigeria: The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) has said six new cases of the British variant of coronavirus were found in the West African nation at the weekend. NCDC Director-General Chikwe Ihekazu said the variant was detected in samples collected by scientists at the Africa Centre of Excellence for Genomics of Infectious Diseases (ACEGID) at a university in southwestern Osun state. The variant, known as B.1.1.7, has swept Britain and been found in more than 60 nations. The British government last month said early data suggested the strain could be deadlier as well as more transmissible. Ihekazu said five cases had been detected in Osun state and one in Kwara state. — AFP

Indonesia detains British woman on terror suspect list

JAKARTA: Indonesia has detained a British woman named in a list of global terror suspects and plans to deport her for visa violations, authorities told AFP. Tazneen Miriam Sailer—a Manchester-born convert to Islam once married to a now-deceased Indonesian jihadist—is not charged with terror offences. But she and her late husband are on a police list of suspected domestic and foreign extremists, including a Frenchman who appeared in Islamic State (IS) beheading videos and another close to the brothers who massacred staff at satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo.

Sailer, 47, and her 10-year-old Indonesia born son, were being held in Jakarta after they were picked up last year on allegations she didn't have documents to remain in the Southeast Asian nation, according to her lawyer Farid Ghazali. "She was put (in detention) while awaiting her return which will be facilitated by the British Embassy," Indonesian immigration directorate spokesman Ahmad Nursaleh told AFP, without elaborating. The British Embassy in Jakarta declined to comment and it was unclear when the deportation would happen. The police document does not say why Sailer was listed along with some 400 other terror suspects, including her late husband who was killed in Syria in 2015, sources said.

The couple's 2010 marriage was officiated by radical Indonesian cleric Abu Bakar Bashir, the spiritual head of extremist group Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), according to sources familiar with the case. JI members were behind the Bali bombings which saw more than 200 people, including nearly 90 Australian holidaymakers, killed when massive blasts ripped through a pair of packed bars on the Indonesian holiday island in October 2002. Sailer operated a charity named after her late husband, which sent aid to women and children in conflict-racked Syria, sources said.—AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2021

Elon Musk, a new Wall Street oracle?

Tech billionaire says he's off Twitter 'for a while'

NEW YORK: With social media prognostications about Bitcoin or GameStop, Elon Musk has ventured further away from his own businesses and become more like a Wall Street heavyweight who can move markets with just a few words.

In his latest foray, the Tesla and SpaceX founder appeared on Clubhouse—a social network accessible only by invitation—to interview the head of online broker Robinhood, in the hot seat for his management of the GameStop affair, a chain of video game stores whose share price recently rocketed and is shaking hedge funds. After discussing his ambitions for the colonization of Mars, as well as cryptocurrencies and artificial intelligence, Musk spoke with Vlad Tenev for 14 minutes, offering him the opportunity to respond to his detractors. Robinhood has been limiting transactions on GameStop shares for several days.

But the gaming company, in fragile financial health,

is being propped up by an army of small traders in a crusade against giant Wall Street hedge funds betting on its demise. "Spill the beans, man," Musk said. "What happened last week? Why can't people buy the GameStop shares? People demand an answer and want to know the details and the truth."

Contempt

Musk, who last month became the richest man in the world on paper thanks to a Tesla stock market boom, has nearly 45 million followers on Twitter. Swept on by the success of his companies Tesla and SpaceX, as well as by interest in the electric cars and rockets they manufacture, he is considered by many fans to be a visionary, his slightest word enough to sway some investors.

When he changed his Twitter profile to read simply "#bitcoin" on Friday, the cryptocurrency's price temporarily skyrocketed by around 20 percent. And the

mere mention of the Polish publisher of video game CD Projekt, or the e-commerce platform Shopify or the craft market Etsy—which apparently delighted Musk with a hand-knitted hat for his dog—caused their stocks to soar. The business giant, who has expressed his contempt for investors betting on a decline in a company's shares, waded in on the GameStop affair by tweeting a link to the Reddit group WallStreetBets, which helped stock of the video game specialist take off.

Influential figures jostling the fate of companies is nothing new, said Aswath Damodaran, a professor of finance at New York University. Comments by banker John Pierpont Morgan more than 100 years ago, or Chrysler boss Lee Iacocca in the 1980s, could move markets. And the pronouncements of investment guru Warren Buffett are still scrutinized by many traders, earning Buffett the nickname "the Oracle of Omaha," the city where he lives.

'Outsider persona'

"The fact that Twitter and Clubhouse have replaced traditional media is more a reflection of media than it is of markets," said Damodaran. But Musk has been "very intentional about creating kind of an outlaw, outsider persona," said Christopher Smith, professor of communications at the University of Southern California.

"And that resonates with the tech bro culture," he said. In a highly fragmented media landscape, Musk has mastered the art of using new technologies "to really stoke excitement," he said. Other giants like Amazon founder Jeff Bezos rely on their business portfolio to do the talking, "but Elon Musk is probably more of an attention-seeking narcissist, he's much more of a showman," added Smith. Musk often uses his personal Twitter account to impart news about his various companies. But his presence on the website has caused him some headaches, too. Musk had a serious run-in with the US Securities and Exchange Commission, which accused him in 2018 of misleading investors by tweeting about a possible withdrawal of Tesla from the stock exchange. The tweet forced him to step down as chairman of the automaker's board. Perhaps aware of his Twitter account's continued power to move markets and the legal issues that might follow—the billionaire yesterday announced he was taking a break from the platform. "Off Twitter for a while," Musk said on Twitter, naturally. — AFP

But BP shares nonetheless tanked by 3.4 percent yesterday after the energy major revealed that it slumped into an annual net loss of \$20.3 billion (16.8 billion euros) on coronavirus fallout.

US stimulus hopes

On the US stimulus front, President Joe Biden on Monday held a meeting with Republican lawmakers to discuss their stimulus counter-proposal as he looks to push through a bipartisan deal. The \$600 billion plan backed by Republicans is less than a third of one put forward by the White House, and includes smaller handouts and no provision for state and local governments—two issues that Democrats are likely to reject. While investors' mood was a lot lighter than last week, the ever-present shadow of the coronavirus, along with stuttering vaccine rollouts and spiking infections, continues to persist and keep gains in check. Elsewhere, fears about the social media-led retail investor battle with Wall Street hedge funds appeared to be abating. — AFP



In this file photo Tesla CEO Elon Musk gestures as he arrives to visit the construction site of the future US electric car giant Tesla in Grnheide near Berlin. — AFP

Global stocks rally on optimism; oil hits one-year peak

LONDON: World stocks yesterday extended the previous day's rally on brightening US stimulus hopes, while oil soared close to pre-pandemic levels on an outlook for stronger demand. Silver prices sank by 5.0 percent to \$27.50 per ounce, having soared the previous day to an eight-year peak on chatroom-driven demand. The precious metal is still up by 3.8 percent over the last three days. Asian and European stocks fired higher once again, after overnight Wall Street gains, as investors got back in the saddle following last week's global rout to snap up bargain shares.

"The new month continues to be good to equities, which have thrown off their late January despair and staged an impressive bounce from the lows of last week," said IG analyst Chris Beauchamp.

Oil powers higher

New York oil prices surged on the back of upbeat market sentiment and a snowstorm in the northeastern United States. US benchmark West Texas Intermediate oil soared to \$54.91 per barrel, a price last seen on January 24, 2020. Europe's London Brent North Sea crude hit \$57.73, a level last reached nearly a year ago. "Oil prices powered higher... lifted in part by the positive sentiment returning to equity markets, but mostly because of frigid weather sweeping the United States, pushing up the demand for heating," said OANDA analyst Jeffrey Halley. The rebound marks a stunning turnaround for the oil market, which briefly turned negative early last year, as the deadly Covid-19 outbreak shuttered economies and companies worldwide.

NBK Economic Report

Banks, the mastermind and center of financial and economic equilibrium

KUWAIT: The three main functions of banks: saving and investing, managing funds, and financing operations. Banks promote trade and contribute in development, which is reflected on the lives of individuals and societies. In the context of its participation in the banking awareness campaign "Diraya", National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) sheds light in this article on the instrumental role of banks as one of the mainstays of the economy by facilitating economic and financial transactions.

Let's imagine a world without banks, how it would be like? Where would we borrow money and what would we do with our savings? Would we be able to borrow or save as much as we need, when we need, and in a form that suits our needs?

Banks play a key role in the financial and economic system, as they help to ensure smooth operation of the economies. They receive the savings of individuals and business institutions, then use them to finance individuals and other business institutions, and these financial services help boost the efficiency of the economy, promote trade and contribute to economic development, which is ultimately reflected on the lives of individuals and societies.

Banks' business includes three main functions: saving and investment, managing funds, and financing operations. Banks also contribute to facilitating individuals' access to many benefits such as: educational opportunities, healthcare, housing, transportation, job opportunities, and other aspects of the quality of life in addition to core banking services.

Banks also provide advisory services to individuals and commercial institutions and play the role of mediator in commercial and industrial businesses,

and obtaining bank accounts is the main pillar of financial inclusion, as they allow their holders to keep money, send and receive cash, thus acting as a gateway to other financial services. In addition, banks provide advisory services to individuals and business institutions and act as intermediaries in commercial and industrial businesses, and having bank accounts is the key foundation of financial inclusion, as they allow account holders to keep their money, send and receive cash, thus acting as a gateway to other financial services.

Banks' business is governed by the regulatory authority, namely the central bank, which monitors and regulates the business of banking and financial institutions by setting prudent monetary and supervisory policies, as well as taking all measures to ensure the protection of banks' customers.

Payments

A bank's most important role may be matching up creditors and borrowers, but banks are also essential to the domestic and international payments system. Not only do individuals, businesses, and governments need somewhere to deposit and borrow money, they need to move funds around—for example, banks play a central role in processing payments, from the tiniest of personal cheques to large-value electronic payments between banks.

Banks also play a central role in the transmission of monetary policy, one of the government's most important tools for achieving economic growth. The central bank controls the money supply at the national level, while banks facilitate the flow of money in the markets within which they operate.

Economic development

Banks are vital institutions in any society as they significantly contribute to developing the economy by facilitating business. By providing credit that fuels economic activity, companies can invest beyond the cash available with them. Also, families can buy houses without paying the full cost in advance. Banks also enable governments to facilitate their spending and support investment in infrastructure and planned projects. Banks also contribute to providing liquidity for companies and households by providing unexpected cash needs, as banks are the main direct provider of liquidity by granting credit lines.

Banks are considered the basis for rapid economic development, by providing loans of different tenures for vital sectors such as agriculture, industry and trade, in addition to providing industrial, agricultural and commercial advice, thus facilitating the process of economic development.

Given the crucial role of the private sector in accelerating the pace of economic growth, banks increase the private sector's participation in economic development by making loans easily available at a reasonable interest rate, as the expansion of the financial sector encourages entrepreneurs to invest, which contributes to promoting entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, banks facilitate domestic and international trade, since a large part of the trade is made on credit. Banks provide references and guarantees, on behalf of their customers, based on which sellers can supply goods on credit, and this is particularly important in international trade where the two parties are in different countries and often unknown to each other.

A pivotal role

During the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, the crucial role of the Kuwaiti banking sector was manifested in mitigating the fallout of the crisis on the Kuwaiti economy, as the Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwaiti banks played a pivotal role to mitigate its impact by ensuring the financing of basic commodi-



An Exxon sign at a petrol station in Manassas, Virginia. — AFP

Exxon Mobil reports big 2020 loss, unveils low carbon earnings

NEW YORK: Exxon Mobil closed the books on a terrible 2020 yesterday, reporting losses in the fourth-quarter and for the full year in the wake of lower oil prices amid the Covid-19 crisis.

The big US oil company, which has been criticized over the last year for both its financial performance and its response to climate change, suffered a 2020 loss of \$22.4 billion, after posting a profit of \$14.3 billion in 2019. The energy giant unveiled new cost-cutting efforts, a new low-carbon business unit and a new board member that it said would position it for the future.

"The past year presented the most challenging market conditions Exxon Mobil has ever experienced," said Chief Executive Darren Woods, adding that the company responded "decisively" in ways that will position it for the long term.

In the fourth quarter, Exxon Mobil suffered a loss of \$20.1 billion following huge write-offs. Revenues fell 30.7 percent to \$46.5 billion. The company unveiled plans for additional spending cuts of \$3 billion in annual expenses expected by 2023, its latest belt-tightening move amid the industry-wide downturn. Amid criticism it has not invested in renewable energy, Exxon Mobil said its low carbon solutions business would focus on carbon capture and storage technology as a means to counter the emissions that cause global warming.

The oil giant also nominated to its board former chief executive of Malaysian national oil company Petronas, Tan Sri Wan Zulkiflee Wan Ariffin. Shares rose 2.0 percent to \$45.80 in pre-market trading. — AFP

ties in vital sectors such as the foodstuff and medical sectors. In addition, they provided support to SMEs owners by stopping fees on POS terminals, ATMs and digital channels for 3 months, as well as raised the limit of contactless payments.

Banks have also supported individuals by deferring the payments of consumer and installment loan and credit card installments for 6 months for all banks' customers, without any resulting interest, profits, or other fees, as well as granting soft loans as part of the commitment to their national duties.

The number of banks operating in Kuwait is 23, including 11 Kuwaiti banks (5 conventional banks, 5 Islamic banks, and 1 specialized bank). This is in addition to 12 branches of foreign banks (11 conventional banks and 1 Islamic bank). The sector as a whole is subject to the supervision of the Central Bank of Kuwait to ensure its soundness through the application of stringent regulatory rules and requirement of precautionary ratios, such as lending limits, concentration ratios, investment limits, liquidity and capital adequacy ratios. Over the past decade, the sector has shown strong resilience and high levels of financial soundness.

"Diraya"

It is worth mentioning that the banking awareness campaign "Diraya" has recently been launched in an initiative from the Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association, with a view to promote credit, financial and banking culture among banking sector customers and the society at large.

The campaign comprises many topics such as the process of borrowing, bank cards, awareness of the rights of special needs customers, as well as advice related to cybersecurity and the protection of bank accounts. It also provides guidance regarding complaint submission mechanisms, and protection of customers' rights, and introduction of the functions of the banking sector and its role in promoting and developing the economy, so that all segments of society become more familiar with banking and financial transactions.

Business

Gulf Bank Insight Report

Banking the SME sector: Beyond financing

Private sector plays key role in generating growth, fostering innovation and creating jobs

KUWAIT: Nurturing SMEs and supporting their development is central to the Kuwaiti government's strategy of increasing the role of the private sector in generating economic growth, fostering innovation and creating large-scale employment opportunities.

SME access to credit remains low in the GCC region and suffers from one of the highest rejection rates for SME loan applications (70 percent in 2018, according to the IMF), with SMEs in Kuwait receiving only 4.7 percent of total gross loans in 2019. Other hindrances impeding SME growth and development include inadequate access to finance and structural and operational obstacles.

Kuwait banks face challenges in profitably serving the SME segment as potential loan rates are capped, and inadequate financial records make it difficult to price risk. Furthermore, unclear business objectives, unrealistic valuations by entrepreneurs, and a lack of sufficient assets (for use as collateral) create daunting challenges for banks.

To overcome these hurdles - and aside from providing credit - banks could offer non-financial support, including advisory and support services in collaboration with other agencies, to foster the development of SMEs. They can incentivise SMEs to improve their operational efficiency by offering cheaper credit when key performance indicators are met. Banks can also assist SMEs in obtaining credit ratings that can enhance an SME's ability to apply for future loans.

In addition, banks can organize workshops and conferences to facilitate interactions between SME entrepreneurs and decision-makers, like regulators and industry leaders, which will help foster entrepreneurship. Through such services and initiatives, banks can ensure a win-win proposition of developing the SME ecosystem while profitably supporting them.

Kuwait National Fund Criteria for SMEs

Firm Size	Number of Employees	Capital
Small	Less than 50	< KD 250,000
Medium	Not more than 150	< KD 500,000

Source: Kuwait National Fund (KNF)

SME Ecosystem in Kuwait

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are vital to the economic development of a country as they foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and create large-scale employment opportunities. As Kuwait transitions to a non-oil based economy, the private sector is expected to play a key role in future economic growth and in generating employment. Globally, SMEs are a key part of the private sector and the wider economy with SMEs responsible for more than 45 percent of global GDP. In Kuwait, the SME contribution to GDP is lower (around 12 percent as of 2017), likely due to the outsized role of the Kuwait public sector in a heavily hydrocarbon-based economy. As Kuwait embarks on an ambitious plan to reduce the dependency on hydrocarbons over the next few decades, the government has also been making efforts to build the non-hydrocarbon economy. Nurturing and supporting SMEs to enhance the role of the private sector in the economy and creating jobs for its burgeoning workforce are a key part of the strategy.

SME funding in Kuwait and challenges faced by banks

Access to credit has remained a key challenge for SMEs looking to grow and expand. The SME loan application rejection rate by banks is as high as 70 percent in the region, compared to less than 20 percent for OECD countries. Cognizant of this, in 2013

SME contribution to GDP



Source: Government authorities, World Bank, Statista, National Transformation Program (Saudi), Marmore.

Kuwait established the Kuwait National Fund (KNF), a specialized institution to fund, promote and develop SMEs, with a capital of KD 2 billion. From 2016 to the end of 2019, the KNF funded around 1,035 SMEs at a cumulative cost of KD 177 million, according to the Public Authority for Industry (PAI).

As of 2019, bank loans to SMEs stood at 4.7 percent of total gross loans. In 2018, the share of SME loans was even lower at 2.8 percent. The sudden spurt could be attributed to CBK's move to reduce risk weights for SMEs from 100 percent to 75 percent.

The Kuwait SME loan book by sector and the economy

Sectors	Percentage of SME loan book	Percentage of SME businesses
Whole sale and retail trade	41.4%	38.6%
Real estate & renting	38.7%	27.3%
Manufacturing	9.3%	20.7%
Construction	5.8%	9.9%
Others	4.9%	3.5%

Source: Central Bank of Kuwait; Central Statistics Bureau.

Challenges facing the banking sector in relation to serving SMEs include:

1. Interest rate ceiling: Interest rates of short-term loans (less than 12 months duration) are capped at 2.5 percent above the discount rate, and long-term loans are capped at 4 percent above the discount rate. As a result, banks tend to not extend credit at a rate that is not commensurate with the risk undertaken by the bank.
2. Difficulty in pricing risk for SME loans: Many SMEs are run as 'sole proprietorships' and lack the detailed financial reports provided by larger firms. Many SMEs might not follow traditional accounting standards and are not rated by credit rating agencies, nor do they have credit scores, making it very difficult for banks to determine risk rate accurately.
3. Lack of assets available as collateral: The lack of collateral and inadequate financial records often mean that SMEs cannot access long-term financing instruments like term loans. Banks are forced to extend short-term unsecured loans to SMEs on an ad hoc basis at higher rates.
4. Lack of business objectives and unrealistic valuations by entrepreneurs: A great majority of SMEs can present business goals and objectives that are unclear, with the entrepreneurs' valuations of their businesses also being generally unrealistic. Hence,

the size of the loan demanded is often excessive compared to the actual capital required to run the business.

Issues within the SME ecosystem in Kuwait can explain the challenges listed above. According to data from the Central Statistics Bureau, a significant percentage of SME businesses are in low margin industries like wholesale and retail trading (39 percent), real estate and hospitality (27 percent), and construction (9.9 percent). SMEs in these sectors are vulnerable to economic shocks like recessions.

Existing Challenges Exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic

Government-mandated lockdowns and curfews have led to many SMEs closing for much of March, April, and May 2020 in Kuwait. This resulted in a significant revenue drop for many businesses, making it more difficult to pay stakeholders like employees, suppliers and banks. The government has tried to mitigate this impact by instituting measures like suspending collection of KNF loans, postponing social security contributions and expediting outstanding payments due to SMEs from the government. The CBK has also reduced the risk weights for SMEs loans from 75 percent to 25 percent to incentivise SME lending.

Bank support vital to supporting SME development

Postponing SME loan payments will help SMEs in the short term, but will only kick the can further down the road. Longer-lasting assistance needs to be provided for SMEs and banks can play a role in this process. For one, banks can help SMEs on some of their long-standing issues that have slowed their development. Challenges such as lack of financial records and talent management can be alleviated by the extension of non-financial support, including advisory services. Banks could assist in developing business plans and increase the operational efficiency of SMEs by setting key performance indicators (KPIs), and can incentivize SMEs by offering cheaper credit for those that achieve the KPIs. Banks can bring about awareness of credit ratings by helping SMEs initiate a rating action by credit rating agencies, lowering the cost of credit. These advisory services can improve SMEs' chances of achieving growth and profitability in the long run. In addition, profitable SMEs that have demonstrated growth can be advised on the process and benefits of listing in stock exchanges.

Banks can also use innovative debt financing vehicles to fund SMEs. SME loan portfolios of different tenures and sizes can be bundled together to diversify default risk, and the portfolio can then be sold to

investors. Structured finance products like these can be explored for financing SMEs in Kuwait.

In addition, banks can also organize public forums with SME proprietors to bring about awareness of the rights of SME owners and the opportunities available to them. Public forums can be used to facilitate dialogue between SME owners and government agencies, lawmakers, and other decision-makers who can take into consideration the needs and requirements of SME owners and formulate policies accordingly.

Criteria for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises World Bank criteria for MSMEs

Firm Size	Number of Employees	Assets	Turnover
Micro	< 10	< USD 100,000	< USD 100,000
Small	< 50	< USD 3 million	< USD 3 million
Medium	< 300	< USD 15 million	< USD 15 million

Source: World Bank; Note: Enterprise must meet at least two of three characteristics to be classified.

Finally, banks can foster a spirit of entrepreneurship in the country by organizing competitions in colleges and universities, even funding winning ideas if they are feasible. Conferences in which current and aspiring entrepreneurs are exposed to industry leaders can also be organized or sponsored. Not only are initiatives like these a great public relations exercise for banks, but they can also bring about much-needed change in the interim.

Conclusion

It is imperative that SMEs are given adequate support to enable them to contribute to the local and global economy and create jobs. While the government has provided support through programs like the KNF, banks can also play an important role in SME development. Banks can extend assistance in a number of ways (apart from financial support) to alleviate the operational and structural challenges facing SMEs. Banks can offer advisory and support services that can improve the operational efficiency of SMEs, and can also organize workshops and conferences with industry leaders to provide corporate exposure to SME entrepreneurs. Banks can also come up with innovative debt vehicles to finance SMEs. With the increasing number of fintech companies funded by venture capitalists and private equity funds in the region, banks need to combine bold measures and a fresh approach to serve the SME segment profitably.

North Ireland halts post-Brexit checks over staff safety

DUBLIN: Border inspections at two Northern Irish ports were suspended yesterday, after staff were threatened over contentious new Brexit controls in the long-divided British province. The development comes just over a month into new trading arrangements after Britain's departure from the European single market, and warnings they could stoke lingering sectarian sentiment in Northern Ireland. The European Commission said staff working at the two border posts in Northern Ireland were also told "not to attend to their duties" yesterday after the "threat of violence" prompted regional authorities to pull staff from ports.

Northern Ireland's Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, said late Monday that regulatory animal-based food checks were dropped at Belfast and Larne ports "in the interests of the wellbeing of staff". At Larne Port, the local Mid and East Antrim Borough Council withdrew 12 staff after "an upsurge in sinister and menacing behavior in recent weeks", with hardcore unionists blamed. The council cited "the appearance of graffiti within the local area referencing increasing tensions around the Northern Ireland Protocol and describing Port staff as 'targets'".

Regional media reported that attempts seemed to have been made to collect information on staff, including vehicle registration plates, in acts of intimidation recalling the darkest days of "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Executive-formed under a power-sharing agreement between pro-British unionist and republican parties who want a united Ireland-jointly condemned the situation. Police patrols have since been stepped up, while Northern Ireland's leaders are due to talk to UK and EU ministers today.

The protocol

The Northern Ireland Protocol came into effect on January 1, when the Brexit transition period ended and the full effects of the UK's 2016 decision to split from the EU were finally felt. The protocol is designed to prevent a hard border emerging between Northern Ireland



In this file photo taken on January 01, 2021 an official checks freight from Scotland as truckers disembark a ferry at the Port of Larne in County Antrim, Northern Ireland. — AFP

and EU member the Republic of Ireland—a frequent flashpoint in three decades of violence over British rule.

Up to 1998, some 3,500 people were killed as unionists who favored ties to Britain engaged in a deadly tug-of-war with republicans seeking to merge the province with Ireland. Security checkpoints and patrols along the 500-kilometre (310-mile) border were targeted by republican paramilitaries in some of the bloodiest chapters of the sectarian violence.

Post-Brexit, London and Brussels feared splinter republican groups still active after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement peace deal could target checks and use them as a recruiting tool to grow their base.

'Sea border'

The protocol avoids the need for a hard border by transplanting EU single market and customs union checks to Northern Irish ports and airports. However, some unionists believe they create a de facto "sea border" between Northern Ireland and mainland Great Britain-England, Scotland and Wales.

They feel the border disrupts the key principle of free movement between the united territories and binds

the province in an economic union with Ireland. Unionists—and more hardcore loyalists sometimes linked to paramilitaries-branded 2019 legislation to enact the Northern Ireland protocol "The Betrayal Act".

Last week, PSNI Assistant Chief Constable Mark McEwan told UK lawmakers that officers were noticing "growing discontent" among the unionist community—chiefly graffiti and on social media.

Northern Ireland's first minister Arlene Foster-head of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) — called threats against port staff "utterly reprehensible". She told broadcaster UTV that "there is community tension in Northern Ireland".

The protocol became the renewed focus of unionist ire last weekend after a coronavirus vaccine row pushed the European Commission to warn it would invoke "Article 16" of the treaty to restrict job exports to the province. The fallback provision allows London or Brussels to unilaterally suspend aspects of the deal in special circumstances. Brussels quickly backtracked on the threat—now widely considered a diplomatic bungle—after criticism from the UK, Ireland and all of Northern Ireland's mainstream political parties. —AFP

Economic growth has 'devastating cost to nature'

PARIS: Humanity's unbridled growth in recent decades has come at a "devastating cost to nature" according to a wide-ranging international review on the vital economic role played by our living planet. The 600-page rundown of scientific material commissioned by the British government highlighted the precarious state of biodiversity and warned that only a sea change in how countries power economic growth could prevent catastrophic impacts for nature, and humanity. The Dasgupta Review—a two-year global collaboration of hundreds of academics overseen by Partha Dasgupta, professor emeritus of economics at the University of Cambridge—said that all livelihoods depended on the health of the planet.

It showed that while global capital produced per person had doubled in the three decades since 1992, the stock of natural capital—that is, the quantifiable benefit an individual derives from services bestowed by nature—had plunged 40 percent. "While humanity has prospered immensely in recent decades, the ways in which we have achieved such prosperity means that it has come at a devastating cost to nature," the review said.

It called for a fundamental redressing of humanity's demands and nature's supply, warning that biodiversity is intricately linked with human wellbeing and health. Some species are going extinct up to 1,000 times faster than the historical average, "undermining nature's productivity, resilience and adaptability", the review said.

It warned that catastrophes related to nature loss—including the COVID-19 pandemic which was driven by land-use changes and species exploitation—could prove to be "the tip of the iceberg" if development continued at its current rate. "We are totally dependent upon the natural world," renowned naturalist David Attenborough wrote in a foreword to the review. "It supplies us with every oxygen-laden breath we take and every mouthful of food we eat. "But we are currently damaging it so profoundly that many of its natural systems are now on the verge of breakdown." The economic benefits of biodiversity had historically been missed from growth models, distorting the value of capital accumulation and leaving crucial conservation programs chronically underfunded, said the review. —AFP

Business

Kaico Al-Shaya and Al-Sagar reveals latest Mazda models

New Japanese Mazda with European luxury



KUWAIT: Youssef Al-Shaya, Kaico CEO, Ashish Tandon, General manager and Nader Salmeh, Senior Executive Manager- Vehicles group, during the unveiling of two Mazda models in the Avenues.



KUWAIT: As part of its celebration of the launch of its latest and distinct models, the Kuwait Automotive Imports Company, KAICO Al-Shaya and Al-Sagar, the exclusive distributors of Mazda cars in Kuwait, presented two new models of Mazda cars 2021 in the Avenues at the weekend in the presence of Youssef Al-Shaya, Kaico CEO, Ashish Tandon, General manager and Nader Salmeh, Senior Executive Manager-Vehicles group. The modern display provided an opportunity for car fans and enthusiasts in automotive in general and Mazda in particular to get acquainted with Mazda's concept of luxury.

This celebration invited all Mazda followers and fans to be among the first customers to have the opportunity to get to know the Mazda 3 and Mazda CX-30 up closely. With the launch of these two models at the beginning of the

year, Mazda is adding to its assortment of cars of various sizes and designs. Its new models enhance the diversity and introduce the latest modern models. These new cars offered by Mazda are considered the latest and best, as they reflect creativity in design, employment of the latest technology applications, use of the best safety features, and great attention to performance.

During the event, KAICO pre-registered test drive requests under the supervision of the Mazda expert. Ashish Tandon, General Manager at KAICO, expressed his pride in launching the latest cars from Mazda in 2021 to make them accessible to customers in Mazda showrooms in Kuwait. These models reflect an energetic and attractive picture for young men, young women and families.

On this occasion, Nader Salmeh,

Senior Executive manager- Vehicles group said, "KAICO always strives to present the latest models of the 100 percent Japanese Mazda cars, and to satisfy our customers, we have launched two different Mazda models at once" and added, "The best way to choose a car for you and your family and the conviction that it is the perfect car is to try it yourself, and drive it your way, that's why we provided the opportunity to pre-book your test drive for the two new models.

Mazda 3 hatchback...2020 world car design of the year

The Mazda 3 hatchback is the leading model in the design of Mazda models, being the most elegant thanks to its dynamic and streamlined design in the rear, and it is a sports saloon equipped with everything needed in the cockpit,

which is customized to help you enjoy your trip.

The Mazda 3 is equipped with a highly efficient SKYACTIV-G direct injection petrol engine, which achieves fuel efficiency of up to 15 percent. The car is also equipped with an advanced set of safety systems that include Driver Monitoring, Lane Keeping Assist, Lane Departure assistant and Blind Spot Monitoring System to ensure the safety of your loved ones while driving. While the interior is equipped with the MZD CONNECT system that gives you superior internet connectivity, advanced navigation and 360-degree monitoring. While Mazda maintains its established traditions of being among the few cars that are still entirely manufactured in Japan, while the company has developed the "Mazda 3" to become one of the best sedans that combines the

advantage of luxurious appearance and sculpted sporty design, in addition to a full range of SKYACTIV Technology.

Mazda CX-30...the new definition of luxury

Mazda CX-30: The pure beauty of "less is more". Clean curves and undulating surfaces, embracing and reflecting the surroundings. Sleek, bold proportions lifting and energizing the spirit.

Inside, the cabin is a study in premium materials and superior craftsmanship. The new Mazda CX-30 boasts many specifications, including standard cylinder deactivation technology that can close the outer cylinders when there is no need to increase fuel efficiency. The new Mazda CX-30 is fitted with the SKYACTIV-G engine, a 4-cylinder 2.0-liter engine with 153 horsepower linked to a 6-speed automatic transmission.

The stunning KODO design of the all-new Mazda CX-30 also infuses pure vitality and solidity that raises it to the status that it deserves and defines an SUV. The new CX-30 offers a well-thought-out cabin that makes life in the driver's seat - and passenger seats - enjoyable and easy. From the perfect placement of the dashboard and reclining on the back seats, to the many features such as HMI Control Switch, Noise Reduction and High Vibration (NVH), a human-centered cabin that's ideal for long distances and every day.



Take your love places this year with Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait at Burj Alshaya

KUWAIT: Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait at Burj Alshaya provides couples with the perfect Valentine's Day setting this year, where beautifully crafted, bespoke packages celebrate love and romance. Multi-sensorial dining experiences from the Hotel's celebrated restaurants will take patrons to Rome, Paris and Tokyo on the most authentic of culinary journeys. And for those wanting to stay longer in the moment, a carefully curated romantic stay package in a suite awaits. With the option to enhance the romantic occasion with the gift of an indulgent spa treatment, guests can be sure that Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait is the venue for love this year.

Executive Chef Sebastiano Spriveri has drawn inspiration from a celebrated culinary career to design dining events across the Hotel that promise to excite and create special memories for couples this year. "I can't wait to deliver the whole experience to our guests," smiles Chef. "It's going to be like travelling, without travelling," he explains, alluding to his team's plan to take diners on a very special journey of their own in the process. "We've made sure that the menus are elevated, authentic and different across every restaurant of the hotel," explains Chef Sebastiano, pointing to the plethora of packages on offer at Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait at Burj Alshaya this Valentine's Day.

Dai Forni

Stunning views from the 21st floor, fine Italian dining and the unique sophisticated style of Dai Forni combine to create the perfect environment for to say "Ti amo" (I love you). An elegant set menu combines with quintessentially International virtual entertainment to provide an evening that will excite, surprise and transport you to the heart of Rome in the process.

Sintoho

Experience the magic of love in Tokyo at the Hotel's modern Asian restaurant. Recently celebrated for its reimagined menu that has captivated diners there is no doubt that this specially prepared Valentine's Day menu will delight and astonish couples. Executive Pastry Chef

Lucio Colombo adds the sweetest of finishes to the evening, with a showstopping dessert to round off the evening, before guests are presented with a gift as a memento of their trip to Tokyo.

Elements

The Hotel's popular 4th floor restaurant will be transformed this Valentine's Day into a Parisian eatery. Executive Sous Chef Fabio Quarta, himself a fluent French speaker, has meticulously planned a very French experience at Elements this year. A charming set menu in a relaxed setting awaits, fuelled by romantic background music and virtual entertainment.

Al-Bandar

A limited number of private dining Cabana experiences are available this Valentine's Day at Al Bandar's poolside venue. Offering personalized butler service, a lavish gastronomic spread and world-class virtual entertainment, this package option will create special memories for couples under the city lights. Al-Bandar's popular lounge will host an altogether more convivial atmosphere, with an informal tone along with a live DJ.

Romance Staycation

During the month of February, create new memories and relax with your loved

one in true Four Seasons style with the Romance Package at Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait. Specially selected romantic amenities will be set up in the room with a special cake and a bottle of Zahara. The package also extends 15 percent savings at Sintoho restaurant and for treatments at The Spa.

Suite dreams

Treat a loved one this Valentine's Day and indulge in the comfort of a spacious suite and enjoy 25 percent off when you stay for two nights or more to mark the occasion in style.

Spa treatments

The much-adorned destination day spa for the local Kuwaiti community, with its range of innovative, result-driven treatments, offers endless options for those gifting for loved ones this Valentine's Day. Treat yourself and visit the French Provence without leaving the city, with the "Time for Lavender Love" romantic aromatherapy experience inspired by the beautiful Valensole Plateau lavender fields. The 120-minute journey begins with an organic lavender-infused salt body scrub followed by a relaxing massage with lavender oil, leaving you completely rejuvenated. The "Oriental Essence" treatment, inspired by traditional therapies from the Far East provides a deeply relaxing 75-minute journey combining dry massage and Thai stretching techniques followed by a nourishing aromatherapy oil massage to rejuvenate the senses. Make Valentine's Day an extra special occasion with Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait.



Kamco Invest led 6 bond and sukuk offerings in 2020

KUWAIT: Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, successfully led six debt capital markets (DCM) transactions amounting to over \$2.6 billion during 2020, reporting another record year. The transactions included four local and two regional offerings in Kuwaiti dinars and US dollars with fixed and variable rates.

Through its comprehensive debt advisory services, Kamco Invest has successfully managed issuances worth over \$9.7 billion in conventional and Islamic debt for its clients since starting its debt capital markets practice, making it one of the most active debt advisors in issuing bonds and sukuk throughout the region.

Leveraging on its strong regional presence and wide network of institutional investors, Kamco Invest's Investment Banking platform optimizes capital structures for its clients and diversifies their sources of debt funding on a syndicated or stand-alone basis. Building on its strong track record of consistently delivering a successful outcome for key issuers, the team managed more than 80 percent of the KWD denominated bonds in the last 10 years. During the year 2020, Kamco Invest acted as a joint lead manager on the \$300 million Sukuk for the Bahrain-based GFH group, \$500 million Sukuk for the largest bank in the UAE First Abu Dhabi Bank, \$300 million Tier 2 Sukuk for Kuwait International Bank, \$500 million Tier 2 Bond for Burgan Bank, KD 150 million Tier Bond for the National Bank of Kuwait and \$150 million Sukuk for Warba Bank.

The GCC fixed income market remained vibrant in 2020 with total issuances exceeding those of last year, even though business closures and government restrictions triggered an economic slowdown due to the pandemic. The increase in issuances were fueled mainly on the back of refinancing needs by the corporates as well as

budgetary requirements by the governments. Bonds and sukuk issued by corporates in the region saw an uptick during the year. The demand for these instruments were higher from yield seeking investors globally.

Abdullah M Al-Sharekh, Managing Director of Markets and Investment Banking, said, "This has been an interesting year for capital markets. Despite the unexpected circumstances, the regional debt market performed exceptionally, affirming the interest of institutions in exploring financing solutions, as well as the interest of local and regional investors in such offerings. We were able to structure and close transactions for several prominent issuers in the Kuwaiti and regional markets while implementing our highly responsive and client-oriented approach. Overall, we are proud of the track record we have built over years and for maintaining our position as one of the most active debt facilitators in the local and regional markets."

Al-Sharekh added that the budget requirements set by governments and the expansion capital required by corporates should continue to drive issuances in the near term within the MENA region. Currently low interest rates may entice and motivate issuers to raise funds sooner to lock in the low costs of borrowing.

Executive Director of Debt Capital Markets, Omar Zaineddine, said, "The year 2020 has proved to be a challenging year for all market participants, yet it was a testament for the resilience of local and regional issuers and their ability to secure attractive funding options even in the toughest of times. The high credit quality of Kuwaiti issuers has allowed them to access the market and benefit from international and regional liquidity to secure USD4.4bn of funding at very attractive pricing, out of which \$1.8 billion was arranged by Kamco Invest."

It is worth mentioning that Kamco Invest was awarded the "Best Debt Bank in the Middle East" by Global Finance in recognition of the DCM group's track record and annual performance during the year 2019. Additionally, Kamco Invest has advised on deals exceeding \$23.8 billion from its inception to 31 December 2020 in equity, debt capital markets, as well as mergers and acquisitions.



Abdullah M Al-Sharekh



Omar Zaineddine

Classifieds

Wednesday, February 3, 2021

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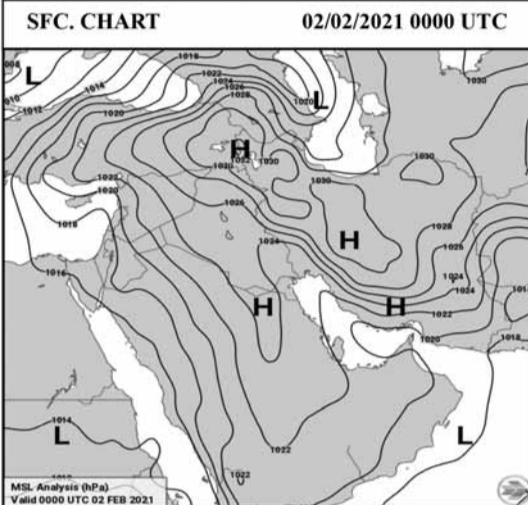
Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Warm with light to moderate variable wind to north westerly wind with speed of 08 - 30 km/h.

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

WEATHER WARNING: No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	24 °C	14 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	24 °C	07 °C
ABDALY	24 °C	08 °C
BUBYAN	22 °C	09 °C
JAHRA	24 °C	10 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	22 °C	16 °C
AHMADI	22 °C	15 °C
NUWASIB	24 °C	09 °C
WAFRA	24 °C	07 °C
SALMY	24 °C	10 °C



DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Wednesday	02/03	Warm and some scattered clouds will appear by day and Rather cold to cold by night	24 °C	08 °C	VRB	08 - 22 km/h
Thursday	02/04	Warm and some scattered clouds will appear by day and Rather cold to cold by night	25 °C	08 °C	VRB-SE	06 - 28 km/h
Friday	02/05	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy by day and Rather cold to cold by night	26 °C	11 °C	SE	10 - 32 km/h
Saturday	02/06	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery and a chance for	26 °C	14 °C	SE	15 - 50 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:16
Sunrise	06:38
Zuhr	12:02
Asr	15:05
Sunset	17:26
Isha	18:45

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	23 °C
MIN. Temp.	05 °C
MAX. RH	81 %
MIN. RH	24 %
MAX. Wind	N 32 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated. UP:0

Hospitals

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

Clinics

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

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Ahammed Syed s/o Syed Ussain Basha holder of Indian passport no. K9653790 issued at Kuwait on 07/03/2013 & Civil ID no. 278081011639 has changed my name from Ahammed Syed to Shaik Syed Basha. In all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Syed Basha (given name) and Shaik (surname). (C 5831) 3-2-2021

Old name: Haussain Sabun, New name: Hussain Sabun, Passport: J5546259. (C 5764) 1-2-2021

Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073

EMERGENCY 112

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

Word Search

Bob Marley Word Search

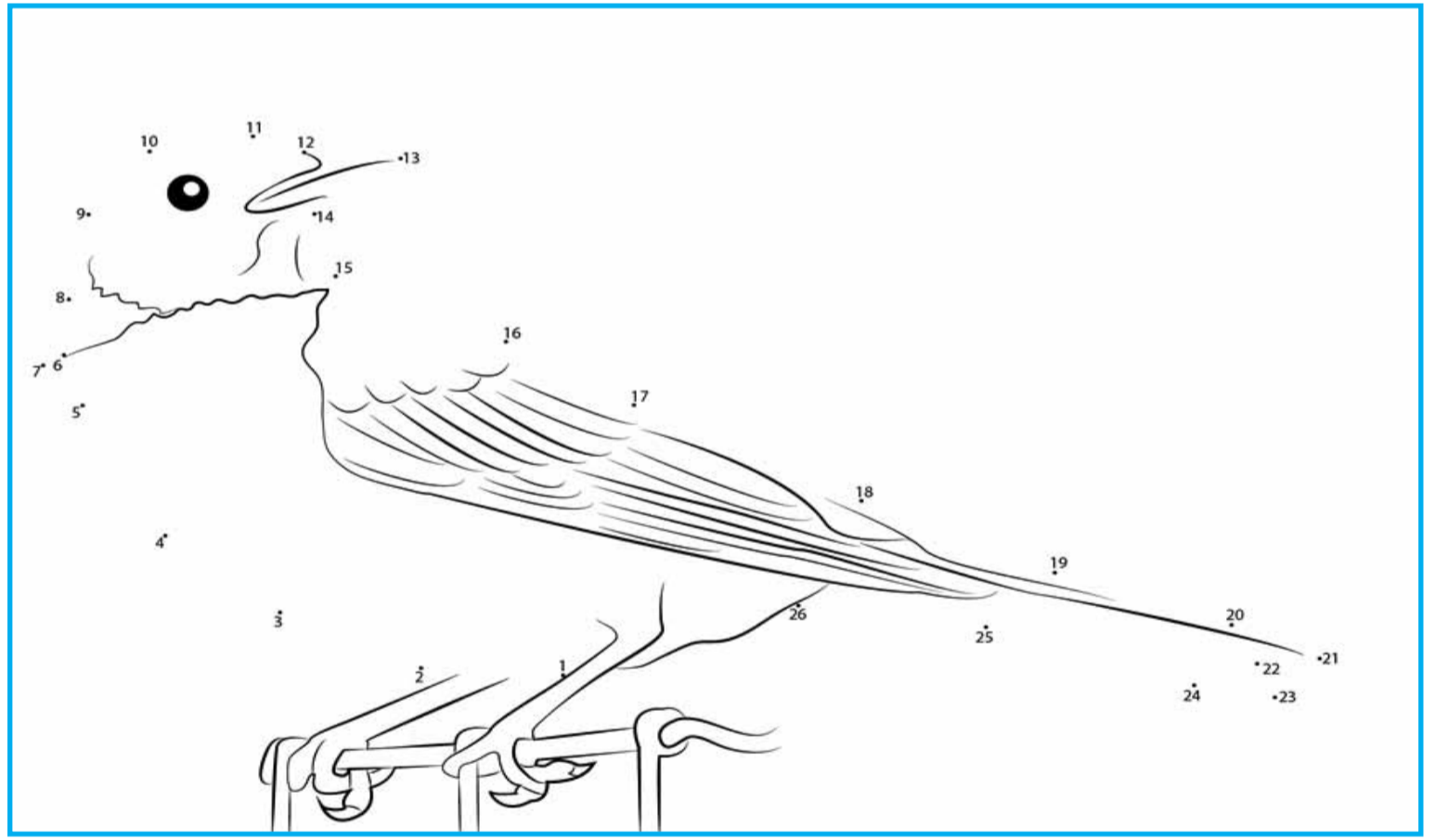
DIRECTIONS: Find and circle the vocabulary words in the grid. Look for them in all directions including backwards and diagonally.

Bunny
 Catch a Fire
 Dreadlocks
 Exodus
 Jamaica
 Kingston
 Legend
 London
 Marijuana

Marley
 Melanoma
 Natty Dread
 Nesta
 Nine Mile
 One Love
 Peter Tosh
 Politics
 Rastafari

Reggae
 Rita
 Robert
 Rocksteady
 Ska
 Soccer
 Trench Town
 Walkers
 Ziggy

Join the Dots



STAR TRACK

<p>Aries (March 21-April 19)</p> <p>A quick survey of the financial news might reveal that your investments, particularly those involving property, might be worth far more than you thought, Aries. This might make you wonder if you should sit back and let it all mount up or actively put it to work for you. Consult a professional before taking any immediate action. You will want to be sure you're doing the right thing.</p>	<p>Cancer (June 21-July 22)</p> <p>Your physical and mental energy are exceptionally strong right now, Cancer. If you're creative, you will want to put that energy into a project that means a lot to you. If you're athletic, you will probably want to get outside and play a game or go for a jog or cardio class. Bear in mind that much of this energy is nervous energy that burns out quickly. Pace yourself.</p>	<p>Libra (September 23-October 22)</p> <p>Paperwork regarding money might take up a lot of your time today, Libra. This can be tedious, but it's something that can make a very positive difference to you, and therefore needs to be handled as soon as possible. Try to stay focused, and don't forget to ask for clarification when you need it. In the evening, celebrate by going out on the town with a group of friends.</p>	<p>Capricorn (December 22-January 19)</p> <p>Social events or group activities could prove more stimulating than usual, Capricorn. Discussions of every subject imaginable could take place around you, and you might have trouble deciding which ones you want to join. Your mind may be going the speed of light by the time the gathering ends. Walk home if time and weather permit.</p>
<p>Taurus (April 20-May 20)</p> <p>A message could come today from a business or romantic partner that brings some welcome news, Taurus. Action on an enterprise of some kind, perhaps involving writing or speaking, could put one or both of you in the limelight. Make the most of the opportunity. It could lead to future advancement and exposure, perhaps even more promising than this. You've worked hard and now you're reaping the rewards.</p>	<p>Leo (July 23-August 22)</p> <p>A delivery could come to your house that you find very emotionally moving, Leo. Perhaps you've received a gift that represents a big sacrifice to the giver, and was all the more sincere for that. This could be on your mind for most of the day even though you have a lot to do. When thanking the giver, be warm and sincere but not too effusive. You don't want to embarrass your friend.</p>	<p>Scorpio (October 23-November 21)</p> <p>A subject that fascinates you could occupy much of your time today, Scorpio. Questions may arise about this subject that you want answered now. Therefore, you could get into some in-depth research. This might have you trapped in the library or glued to the Internet until you either find what you want or pick up a few leads to places where you might find it.</p>	<p>Aquarius (January 20-February 18)</p> <p>Your writing, speaking, and communicating skills are enhanced today, Aquarius. Therefore, you can expect to impress a lot of people around you who will change their opinion about you. People will express their sympathy openly, and you will feel integrated and accepted throughout the day. Tonight, find a bookstore that's sponsoring a lecture and go.</p>
<p>Gemini (May 21-June 20)</p> <p>Today you can expect to have a highly interesting conversation with someone, Gemini. The person you will be talking to is going to provide you with a ton of information that will open a whole new world of knowledge. Excitement and happiness will be with you all day. This conversation will have an impact on your future.</p>	<p>Virgo (August 23-September 22)</p> <p>A friend might drop by and want you to keep them company while they runs errands, Virgo. This might be a good idea, not only for the diversion from routine but also because something might happen in the course of these short journeys that points you in a new and very positive direction. Your mind could suddenly be flooded with ideas. Make the most of it.</p>	<p>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)</p> <p>Emotions, impressions, and memories could come up from your subconscious today, Sagittarius. This may preoccupy you and keep you from other matters. This is a positive development. Pleasant memories bring joy. Disturbing ones offer a release from past trauma. Write down your thoughts and then distract yourself by doing something you love.</p>	<p>Pisces (February 19-March 20)</p> <p>Correspondence with someone who lives far away could appear to lead to something more than friendship, Pisces. This person seems to be in total accord with you about nearly everything, and warm feelings could flow between you. However, if you haven't met in person, you should, at least before you get your hopes up for a relationship.</p>

Lifestyle | Features

EVAN RACHEL WOOD ACCUSES MARILYN MANSON OF 'HORRIFICALLY' ABUSING HER

“Westworld” star Evan Rachel Wood on Monday accused goth industrial rocker Marilyn Manson of being a “dangerous man” who subjected her to years of abuse starting when she was a teenager. The American actor, who began working in entertainment as a child, has in the past alleged abuse by an ex-partner whom she kept anonymous, but on Monday identified her abuser as “Brian

fear of “retaliation, slander, or blackmail.” “I am here to expose this dangerous man and call out the many industries that have enabled him, before he ruins any more lives. I stand with the many victims who will no longer be silent,” she added.

Wood reposted allegations by four other women of rape and sexual and psychological abuse by 52-year-old Manson, as well as druggings, intimidations,

also was cutting ties with Manson going forward.

Shortly thereafter, the artist categorically denied all accusations against him. “Obviously, my art and my life have long been magnets for controversy, but these recent claims about me are horrible distortions of reality,” he wrote in an Instagram post. “My intimate relationships have always been entirely consensual with like-minded partners. Regardless of how-and why-others are now choosing to misrepresent the past, that is the truth.”

‘Gaslighting and brainwashing’

Manson gained a cult following in the 1990s with his eponymous band, named after the Hollywood icon Marilyn Monroe and the serial killer Charles Manson. Almost always appearing in ghostly pale pancake make-up, heavy eyeliner, painted lips and slicked black hair, Manson cultivated a controversial image after co-founding the group in 1989.

His albums, laden with occult references, include “Portrait of an American Family,” “Antichrist Superstar” and “Mechanical Animals.” In 2018, shortly after the Harvey Weinstein scandal unleashed a slew of abuse accusations against powerful men, a police report was filed against Manson, citing unspecified sex crimes dating back to 2011.

The Los Angeles district attorney dismissed the case, saying the statute of limitations had expired and noting an “absence of corroboration.” The goth rocker was engaged to Wood before the pair broke it off in 2010. Their relationship had first been reported in 2007, when Wood was 19. He spoke in a 2009 interview of fantasizing about smashing Wood’s skull with a sledgehammer, although his representatives maintained he was just being deliberately provocative.



In this file photo Marilyn Manson performs during the Astroworld Festival at NRG Stadium in Houston, Texas.



In this file photo US actress Evan Rachel Wood arrives for the Los Angeles season three premiere of the HBO series “Westworld”. — AFP photos

Wood broke into the mainstream with her leading role in the 2003 film “Thirteen,” a depiction based on a true story of two teenagers whose lifestyles grow increasingly destructive as they experiment with sex and hard drugs, developing petty crime habits.

The part earned her a Golden Globe nomination, and she cemented her star status with a number of film roles in the years that followed, including 2009’s “The Wrestler,” directed by Darren Aronofsky. Wood was rumored to have

been a factor in Manson’s divorce from burlesque superstar Dita von Teese. The musician also dated and was engaged to actor Rose McGowan, who is among the most high-profile women to have accused Weinstein. McGowan cited a “lifestyle difference” in explaining the end of their relationship. In 2018, Wood gave a harrowing account of her experiences of abuse in the US Congress, without naming anyone.

“My experience with domestic violence was this: Toxic mental, physical and sexual abuse which started slow but escalated over time, including threats against my life, severe gaslighting and brainwashing, waking up to the man that claimed to love me raping what he believed to be my unconscious body,” she said. — AFP



(From left to right) Actor Jim Sturgess, musician Marilyn Manson, actress Evan Rachel Wood and actress T.V. Carpio attend the after party for a special screening of “Across The Universe”.

Warner, also known to the world as Marilyn Manson.” In an Instagram post, Manson denied the allegations, calling them “horrible distortions of reality.”

Wood, 33, had earlier said the vocalist “started grooming me when I was a teenager and horrifically abused me for years.” She described herself as “brainwashed and manipulated” by Manson but said she’d had enough of living in

tion, violence and death threats. Within hours, Manson’s record label, Loma Vista Recordings, announced it was parting ways with the artist. “In light of today’s disturbing allegations by Evan Rachel Wood and other women naming Marilyn Manson as their abuser, Loma Vista will cease to further promote his current album, effective immediately,” the label said in a statement, saying it

Space tourism: New test flight planned for Virgin Galactic

Space tourism company Virgin Galactic said Monday it planned a new test flight for its SpaceShipTwo craft this month after an aborted test in early December. “The flight window will open on February 13 with opportunities to fly throughout February, pending good weather conditions and technical readiness,” Richard Branson’s company said. “Pre-flight preparations are already underway at Spaceport America, New Mexico.” It added the flight would test remedial work completed since the December test when the onboard computer halted ignition of the rocket motor. SpaceShipTwo had been expected to take its first passengers into space later this year.

So far, 600 people who have paid up to \$250,000 — Virgin Galactic calls them “future astronauts” — have been waiting for years to take their seat. SpaceShipTwo’s development was delayed by a devastating crash of the first one in 2014 due to a pilot error. When fully functional, the spacecraft will be taken up by a special plane and released at high altitude. Seconds later, the spaceship-part plane, part rocket-will ignite its engine and blast upward. — AFP



Out-of-this-world wine back in Bordeaux after space station trip

Twelve bottles of Bordeaux wine and dozens of vine shoots are back at home in southwest France after spending months on the International Space Station (ISS) for an unusual astrochemistry experiment. The red wine and 320 mature shoots known as canes arrived Monday after their return to Earth via a Dragon capsule operated by SpaceX, the private launching company created by Elon Musk. They will be analyzed at the Institute of Vine and Wine Science in Bordeaux to see how the stresses produced by zero gravity affect both grape growth and the finished product, which could spur new agricultural research.

“The WISE Mission is the first private applied research program aimed at using spatial conditions to tackle agricultural challenges of tomorrow, on a warmer planet and with less water,” said Nicolas Gaume. Gaume and his partner Emmanuel Etcheparre founded their Space Cargo Unlimited group for carrying out a range of research projects in zero gravity. The bottles were on the station for 438 days, and will be compared with 12 similar Bordeaux bottles stored in similar conditions on Earth, while the vine

plants-half Cabernet Sauvignon and half Merlot-were stored 312 days. A private expert tasting of the wine is planned for later this month.

“The only thing that changes compared with Earth is the near-total absence of gravity, which produces immense stress for life on the ISS,” Gaume told AFP. Plants that can be made resilient to such stress might also be able to better cope with environmental changes produced by climate change. “The things we learn about wine we also plan to develop for other agricultural uses,” he said. The cost of the project, carried out with the University of Erlangen in Germany and France’s CNES space agency, was not disclosed. It was not the first time wine has been sent into orbit: In 1985, Jean-Michel Caze, owner of the storied Chateau Lynch-Bages, gave French astronaut Patrick Baudry a small bottle of its 1975 vintage for a Space Shuttle launch in Houston. But no one got to sample the wine in weightlessness-it still sits unopened on a dining-room shelf in Caze’s home. — AFP

What a dummy: Apology for K-pop star who hugged Nazi-era mannequin

The managers of K-pop girl band GFriend issued an apology after leader Sowon was pictured hugging a mannequin dressed in a Nazi-era German army uniform. Images taken during a video shoot at a European-themed cafe in Paju, north of Seoul, showed the 25-year-old embracing the dummy, her eyes closed and with a dreamy smile. The photos triggered outrage online after she posted them over the weekend. “It’s not difficult to avoid situations like this,” said one Twitter poster. “Some issues are too big to be ignorant (of).”

Sowon deleted the photos “right after she learnt of the implications” of her action and felt “heavy responsibility”, her agency Source Music said. The managers added they had “failed to recognize the issue with the mannequin’s uniform”. “We apologize that we didn’t pay enough attention to historical facts and social issues,” they said in a statement on Monday. “We bow our heads in apology for anyone offended by our contents.” Six-member GFriend made their debut in 2015 and have enjoyed several years’ success in the cut-throat K-pop industry, releasing three studio albums.

The owner of the cafe where the photos were taken, a military history buff who declined to be identified by name, told AFP the uniform was that of “a second lieutenant in a German army tank unit during World War II”. The display was not “intended to glorify National Socialism”, he added, but was part of his research for a book on the history of military uniforms. “I also have mannequins dressed in uniforms for the Allied Forces



A mannequin dressed in a Nazi-era German army uniform is displayed at a European-themed cafe in Paju, north of Seoul.

in World War II on show, including the US and UK,” he said.

Awareness of Europe’s World War II atrocities can be limited in Asia, where Nazi iconography is sometimes displayed in ignorance of what it symbolizes. This is not the first time a K-pop group has garnered criticism over the use of Nazi-era items. Source Music is a subsidiary of Big Hit Entertainment, the management agency of global megastars BTS, who were embroiled in controversy in 2018 as images circulated of a concert where the septet wore uniforms and waved flags that critics said recalled Nazi symbols. Band leader RM was also pictured in a cap bearing an SS Death’s Head logo in a 2014 photoshoot. — AFP



Figures of soldiers from World War II are displayed at a European-themed cafe in Paju, north of Seoul. — AFP photos

UK FASHION LEADERS WARN OF ‘DECIMATION’ FROM BREXIT

Britain’s fashion industry is “at real risk of decimation” by the post-Brexit trade deal with the European Union and current government policy, a leading forum warned on Monday. More than 400 industry figures signed an open letter from the Fashion Roundtable to

Prime Minister Boris Johnson arguing there was a “gaping hole” in his deal where free movement of goods and services for creatives should have been. They said the agreement, finalized on Christmas Eve just a week before the UK left the bloc’s single market and customs union, had failed to deliver on promises of frictionless future trade.

Their concerns echo those of other sectors, from music to fisheries, who argue the new bureaucratic regime is endangering the future of their industries. “We have been disregarded in this deal and our concerns overlooked in current policy decisions,” their letter said. “We call on the government to stand by their commitment to frictionless work travel for British creatives, including the fashion and textile industry and their equipment.” The open letter, signed by models such as Twiggy and designers including

Katharine Hamnett as well as bosses of fashion retailers, urged Johnson to take specific steps to address their concerns.

They include adding more reciprocal elements to the agreement in areas such as VAT, making it easier for garment workers to come to Britain and for the government to offer more industry-specific support. “Ours is a thriving industry, based on global leadership, complex supply chains and above all a deeply interconnected relationship with our overseas colleagues,” it stated. The letter added the sector contributes £35 billion (\$48 billion, 40 billion euros) to UK GDP and employs almost one million people, but was “at real risk of decimation by the Brexit trade deal and current government policy”.

Britain formally left the EU a year ago but remained bound by its rules and regulations until 2021 under the terms of its

divorce. The free trade agreement struck by Johnson and Brussels after months of strained negotiations saw no tariffs or quotas imposed. However, after the UK chose to leave the single market and cus-

toms union, it was unable to prevent reams of new red tape for British businesses trading with Europe. — AFP



Lifestyle | Features

'Saved by the Bell' star **Dustin Diamond** dies of cancer at 44

US actor Dustin Diamond, best known for playing the nerdy Screech on the hit TV series "Saved by the Bell," died Monday, his agent said, just weeks after being diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. He was 44. "He was diagnosed with this brutal, relentless form of malignant cancer only three weeks ago. In that time, it managed to spread rapidly throughout his system, the agent, Roger Paul, told AFP. "Dustin did not suffer. He did not have to lie submerged in pain. For that, we are grateful."

School in California for "Bell," which aired for four seasons starting in 1989. The light-hearted show tackling the highs and lows of adolescence was popular both in the United States and abroad. Diamond's offbeat Samuel "Screech" Powers was the perfect foil for Mark-Paul Gosselaar's Zack Morris. Even though he was a major reason for the show's success, Diamond's career did not take off afterwards.

'You will be missed'

Other than some "Saved by the Bell" spinoffs and made-for-television movies, he worked infrequently in small roles. In 2009, his tell-all book "Behind the Bell" contained some juicy behind-the-scenes tales of the set-but Diamond later admitted it was full of fabricated anecdotes. In 2015, he was sentenced to four months in prison for carrying a concealed



In this file photo actor Dustin Diamond poses for a portrait during the 2007 Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. — AFP

weapon and disorderly conduct in connection with a stabbing at a bar. He was released from jail a month early in 2016 for good behavior. In recent years, Diamond has worked as a stand-up comedian and appeared on several

reality TV shows.

"We are aware that Dustin is not considered reputable by most. He's had a history of mishaps, of unfortunate events," his agent said Monday. "We want the public to understand that he

was not intentionally malevolent. (...) His actions, though rebukable, stemmed from loss and the lack of knowledge on how to process that pain properly." Last year, when the rest of the "Saved by the Bell" cast reunited for yet another reboot, Diamond did not appear. His former co-stars paid tribute to him on Monday. "Deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Dustin Diamond, a true comedic genius," Gosselaar wrote on Twitter.

"Looking back at our time working together, I will miss those raw, brilliant sparks that only he was able to produce. A pie in your face, my comrade." Mario Lopez, who played AC Slater on "Bell," added: "Dustin, you will be missed my man. The fragility of this life is something never to be taken for granted." — AFP



This file photo shows actress Tina Fey (left) and Amy Poehler (right) arriving for the 71st Golden Globe Awards held at the Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills. — AFP photos



In this file photo English actor Gary Oldman arrives for the premiere of "The Laundromat" during the 2019 Toronto International Film Festival Day 5, in Toronto, Ontario.



In this file photo Frances McDormand attends the Drive-In Premiere of "Nomadland" hosted by Fox Searchlight and The Telluride Film Festival at Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California.

Black Panther' TV series in development for Disney+

Disney is developing a "Black Panther" television series set in the fictional African kingdom of Wakanda as part of a massive new five-year content deal with director Ryan Coogler, the company said Monday. Global smash hit film "Black Panther" starring the late Chadwick Boseman was adored by critics and audiences, becoming the first comic book movie to be nominated for best picture at the Oscars, and grossing over \$1 billion worldwide.

It was also credited as a major step forward in African American representation for Hollywood, with a predominantly Black cast and writer-director in Coogler, who is also overseeing a film sequel set for next year. "Ryan Coogler is a singular storyteller whose vision and range have made him one of the stand-out filmmakers of his generation," said Disney executive chairman Bob Iger in a statement. "With 'Black Panther,' Ryan brought a groundbreaking story and iconic characters to life in a real, meaningful and memorable way, creating a watershed cultural moment."

Golden Globe noms set tone for Hollywood's pandemic awards season

The unveiling of the Golden Globes nominations today will jumpstart a Hollywood awards season like no other, with pandemic-related theater closures and blockbuster delays expected to boost smaller, stay-at-home movies like Netflix's "The Trial of the Chicago 7" and "Mank." The influential Globes are often a bellwether for any given film's success at the Oscars, but all bets are off in a year that has seen glitzy award campaign events scrapped and ceremonies postponed by COVID-19 restrictions.



In this file photo Golden Globe trophies are set by the stage ahead of the 77th Annual Golden Globe Awards nominations announcement at the Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills.

Tinseltown's traditional studios held back the release of several big hitters last year in the hope of theaters reopening, so streamers including Netflix, Amazon Prime and Apple should fare better than ever at upcoming prize ceremonies. Among the lead contenders are Aaron Sorkin's "Chicago 7"—a timely look at the protests, police violence and madcap trial surrounding the 1968 Chicago anti-war riots—and David Fincher's "Mank," which dives into Golden Age Hollywood with the making of "Citizen Kane."

Amazon Prime has "One Night in Miami," a play adaptation about Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X, Sam Cooke and Jim Brown's friendship at the height of the US civil rights movement, and sleeper hit "Sound of Metal" about a rock drummer who loses his hearing. Holding the line for Hollywood's old-school studios almost singlehandedly is "Nomadland," which swept the prizes at the Venice and Toronto festivals and is the pick of many

experts for overall best picture.

The movie from Disney-owned Searchlight stars Frances McDormand adrift among a community of elderly, nomadic idealists who roam across America in worn-out vans. "Most of the contenders seem to be more intimate movies, or ones that do play well at home," said Chris Beachum of awards tracker Gold Derby. "A lot of the 'big-screen' type movies—thinking about a James Bond movie or the Marvel movies—have been held back anyway. They're not

even competing for this year's races."

Acting heavyweights

Voted on by the 90-odd members of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, the Globes split movies into "drama" and "comedy or musical" categories. In the latter, Amazon sequel "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm" looks set to contend with Meryl Streep's Netflix musical "The Prom" and the Disney+ filmed version of Broadway hit "Hamilton." "Hamilton," created from multiple performances featuring the original cast including creator Lin-Manuel Miranda, is not allowed to compete at the Oscars, meaning the Globes represent the best chance for the Tony-winning musical about the US founding fathers to scoop up film accolades.

Foreign-language films are likewise separated out into their own Globes pool, where Korean-American family drama "Minari" is tipped to emulate last year's all-conquering "Parasite." In the acting categories, late "Black Panther" star Chadwick Boseman could receive dual nominations for his work in 1920s blues drama "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" and Spike Lee's "Da 5 Bloods," both on Netflix. Other heavyweight lead actor favorites include Anthony Hopkins for "The Father," adapted from a French play about dementia, and Gary Oldman for "Mank."

"And you've got a favorite of the Globes people, Tom Hanks (for "News of the World") — I mean, it's a really strong

category," said Beachum. Boseman's "Ma Rainey" co-star Viola Davis is expected to feature on the best actress side, along with Carey Mulligan for #MeToo revenge thriller "Promising Young Woman," and McDormand. Sacha Baron Cohen ("Borat" and "Chicago 7") and Leslie Odom Jr ("One Night in Miami" and "Hamilton") are also eyeing multiple nods.

Oscars await

Last year, the HFPA was slammed for its failure to nominate any female directors, but Chloe Zhao ("Nomadland") and Regina King ("One Night in Miami") appear well-placed this year. The 78th Golden Globes ceremony will take place on February 28 — almost two months later than usual, yet still a week before nominations voting for the Oscars even begins. Tina Fey and Amy Poehler will host the ceremony, broadcast from its usual Beverly Hills hotel venue, but presumably without the event's trademark raucous A-list crowd and party atmosphere.

The Globes also include a plethora of television awards, tending to mimic the small screen's showpiece Emmys, which took place in September. Jane Fonda will receive a career achievement award, as will Norman Lear for his work on the television side. The Oscars follow some two months later, on April 25. — AFP



In this file photo actor Chadwick Boseman at the Los Angeles World Premiere of Marvel Studios' BLACK PANTHER at Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

"We're thrilled to strengthen our relationship and look forward to telling more great stories with Ryan and his team." Coogler's company Proximity will develop a "wide variety" of projects for streaming service Disney+ and other branches of the sprawling Mouse House studio. "We're already in the mix on some projects that we can't wait to share," said Coogler.

The untitled Wakanda series is the latest in a huge raft of Disney+ television shows set in the world of the record-grossing Marvel superhero films. At an investor presentation in December, Disney announced "roughly 10 Marvel series" would hit the streaming service in the "next few years." Others included the Samuel L Jackson-led "Secret Invasion," "If Beale Street Could Talk" actress Dominique Thorne in "Ironheart," and Don Cheadle for "Armor Wars."

"WandaVision," the first new release in the Marvel franchise "universe" for almost two years due to delays caused by the pandemic, is currently airing on Disney+. The pioneering Boseman's lead role in "Black Panther" will not be recast in the sequel film following his death in August from colon cancer, the company has said. "His portrayal of T'Challa the Black Panther is iconic and transcends any iteration of the character in any other medium from Marvel's past—and it's for that reason that we will not recast the character," Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige told Disney's investor day. — AFP

BERLIN FILM FEST RETOOLS COMPETITION FOR PANDEMIC

Berlin's international film festival, the first major European cinema showcase of the year, on Monday unveiled plans for a hybrid online and live competition in March in response to the pandemic. The Berlinale, as the event is known, said its jury will be made up of six previous winners of its prestigious Golden Bear who will watch this year's contenders in a large cinema together in the German capital. Critics and reporters will have access to the movies online during the March 1-5 competition. The films' stars, however, will be absent, dimming the event's usual glamour quotient.

A second stage of the festival will roll out in June, with the filmmakers invited to

attend screenings of its selected films for the general public at venues across the city. A gala awards ceremony will also take place then. Cinemas throughout Germany have been closed since November as part of a nationwide shutdown to curb the coronavirus. Festival organizers said the 71st edition of the Berlinale would be "entering into new territory" because of the challenges posed by the pandemic.

"In this moment in time, it is meaningful and a great sign of hope that the Golden Bear winners will be in Berlin watching films in a theatre and finding a way to support their colleagues," said artistic director Carlo Chatrion about the six-member jury. They include last year's laureate, dissident Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof, who claimed the top prize with his drama "There Is No Evil", a searingly critical work about the death penalty in his country.

He was unable to accept the prize in person as he was barred from leaving Iran. Israel's Nadav Lapid, Romanian filmmaker Adina Pintilie, Ildiko Enyedi of Hungary, Italian documentary maker Gianfranco Rosi and Bosnian director Jasmila Zbanic will round out the panel.

Red carpet glitz

The festival, which normally attracts tens of thousands of visitors, will scale back considerably this year. The



European Film Market, where movie rights are bought and sold and which usually runs in parallel, will move entirely online. The Berlinale announced late last year a postponement from its usual February slot as the virus takes a harsh toll on the global entertainment industry. The world's premier festival, Cannes, last week pushed back its 2021 edition to July from May due to the pandemic, with questions still open when the glitz of the red carpet will return to its full pomp.

Sports

Olympics will happen 'however COVID evolves': Tokyo 2020 chief

Organizers to outline details of extensive virus countermeasures

TOKYO: The pandemic-postponed Olympics will go ahead this summer "however the coronavirus evolves," Tokyo 2020 president Yoshiro Mori said yesterday, brushing aside doubts about the event. Organizers, Japan's government and Olympic officials are trying to shore up support for the Games despite a surge in infections around the world, less than six months before the opening ceremony.

Doubts about the Games have grown as countries have been forced to re-enter lockdowns, with large parts of Japan currently under a virus state of emergency, but Mori sounded a confident note. "We'll certainly go ahead however the coronavirus (pandemic) evolves," he told a meeting of Olympic organizers and members of Japan's ruling party in Tokyo.

"We must go beyond discussion about whether we will hold it or not. It's about how we will do it. Let's think about a new kind of Olympics on this occasion," he added. The comments came hours before Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga announced a month-long extension of the state of emergency — meaning the measure will run until March 7 in Tokyo and several other parts of the country.

Tighter border restrictions imposed after infections surged have already forced the postponement of some sporting fixtures including this year's first Olympic test event, an artistic swimming qualifier that was scheduled for March. The nationwide Olympic torch relay is still due to begin on March 25. Organizers are expected today to outline further

details of the extensive coronavirus countermeasures they have devised for the 2020 Games, which were pushed back to 2021 last March as COVID-19 spread around the globe. But Japanese public opinion appears opposed to holding the Games this year, with 80 percent of people backing either further postponement or a cancellation in surveys.

'Hopes and dreams'

Organizers have said neither of those options are on the table, and have received strong support from both the International Olympic Committee and athletes around the world. Olympic Minister Seiko Hashimoto told the meeting she too was confident the Games could go ahead.

"Making the Tokyo Games a success will demonstrate the world is united," said Hashimoto, herself a former Olympian. She said it would deliver "hopes and dreams" to the world, and "send a message that Japan can contribute to solving issues that the world faces".

While organizers have clung to the line that the Games will open as scheduled on July 23, key decisions about the shape of the event remain — including whether foreign fans will be able to come and how many spectators will be in the venues. Local medical associations have urged organizers to limit fans, warning the country's healthcare system has been overburdened in the current wave of infections.

IOC chief Thomas Bach acknowledged for the first time last month that the Games could take place behind closed doors. "This I cannot tell you," he



TOKYO: A couple checks pictures after posing in front of the Olympic rings on display at the Odaiba waterfront in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

said, when asked if fans would be able to attend. "Our priority is to ensure safe Olympic Games and we will do whatever is needed to organize safe Olympic Games."

The thorny question of vaccination also hangs over the event, with Olympic and Paralympic offi-

cialists keen to encourage athletes to be vaccinated where possible but to avoid being seen as promoting queue-jumping. Japan has yet to approve any coronavirus vaccines, and is not expected to start inoculating its population before late February at the earliest. — AFP

Qadisiya upset Fatat Club in Women's football

KUWAIT: With only 20 seconds remaining in the match, Qadisiya's player Abrar Al-Hamadi scored a goal against Fatat Club securing the first win for her team in Kuwait's Women Indoor Football Championship with a final score of 3-2. Meanwhile, Kuwait defeated Arabi 5-1 in the second match of the day in the tournament's best-of-three playoffs' stage. Qadisiya's win was described as an upset as it came against a Fatat team that ended the regular season matches on top of the standings, while Qadisiya was fourth. Mai Al-Ahmad scored Qadisiya's first goal in the 4th minute, but Fatat did not wait long to equalize with a goal in the 6th minute scored by Naseema Ghulami. The best player in Asia Farashta Kareemi scored for Qadisiya 8 minutes before the end of first half. Dina Al-Khawari was able to score the equalizer for Fatat in the 25th minute before Hammadi secured the win for Qadisiya.



KUWAIT: Qadisiya players celebrate after their win in Kuwait's Women Indoor Football Championship.

Toyota celebrates another outstanding performance at Dakar 2021

RIYADH: Toyota has proved once again the capabilities of its vehicles on all terrains, and harsh climatic conditions, with a spectacular performance at the world's most extreme motorsports event, the Dakar Rally. Toyota's iconic Land Cruiser continued to dominate the Production Car category, with the Toyota Auto Body team claiming a spectacular one-two victory. Akira Miura and Laurent Lichtleucher took first place in the No. 340 Toyota Land Cruiser, while teammates Ronald Basso and Jean-Michel Polato finished as runners-up in the No. 345 Toyota Land Cruiser. This incredible milestone means that the Land Cruiser has now achieved eight consecutive championship wins at the Dakar Rally.

Meanwhile, GAZOO Racing (GR)'s Nasser Al-Attiyah and navigator Mathieu Baumel achieved second place in the Four-Wheel Drive category after securing five stage victories in the No. 301 GR Toyota Hilux. The Hilux proved a runaway success at this year's rally, with various drivers winning eight out of the 12 stages behind the wheel of the model at the legendary race.

Akio Toyoda, President, Toyota Motor Corporation, commented: "Congratulations to all Team Land Cruiser Toyota Auto Body team members for their eighth straight victory, and to Miura san and Lichtleucher for winning the championship! I would also like to congratulate Al-Attiyah and Baumel for taking on the challenge in the Hilux, finishing second overall. I think it's a wonderful result because they never gave up and continued to trust their partners, the team, and people who supported them."

Toyoda continued: "I think this year's Dakar was very unique. It was a very significant day for the automobile industry to be able to compete at a rally held under such chal-

lenging circumstances. Taking advantage of this experience, we at Toyota will continue our efforts to make ever-better cars. We're grateful to all the fans and appreciate your continued support. Thank you very much to all our fans everywhere."

The 2021 edition of the Dakar Rally was held in Saudi Arabia and kicked off with a Prologue on January 2 to determine starting positions on the outskirts of Jeddah. Al-Attiyah and Baumel, who have previously won the 2019 Dakar Rally and took second place last year, got off to the best possible start in the No. 301 GR Toyota Hilux after finishing fastest on the 11-kilometre route.

The GR duo went on to secure wins in Stage 2 (Bisha - Wadi Ad-Dawasir), Stage 3 (Wadi Ad-Dawasir - Wadi Ad-Dawasir), Stage 4 (Wadi Ad-Dawasir - Riyadh), Stage 8 (Sakaka - Neom), and Stage 11 (Al Ula - Yanbu). Al-Attiyah and Baumel headed into the final stage in second place, just over fifteen minutes behind the leading car. Despite closing the gap during the 200-kilometre-long stage from Yanbu to Jeddah, the No. 301 GR Toyota Hilux finished Dakar 2021 in second place overall.

Nasser Al-Attiyah, Driver of the

No. 301 GR Toyota Hilux, commented: "This is a fantastic result for us. I'm really proud of the team and would like to thank the entire GR team for the hard work they've put in to make this a reality."

Akira Miura, Driver of the No. 340 Toyota Land Cruiser, said: "In this year's Dakar Rally, I maintained a positive outlook every day, and I really enjoyed the driving in a very good way. I believe this is why we were able to win. I could strongly feel how much everyone contributed to creating an environment that enabled a focus on the driver. I am overwhelmed with gratitude."

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established GR, to consolidate all its motorsport activities under one in-house brand. Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people, and the people build the cars,' GR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars. Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, GR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure, and joy of driving to everyone.



Fired-up Djokovic makes perfect start

MELBOURNE: Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic got his season off to a perfect start with a battling win over Denis Shapovalov in the ATP Cup yesterday, but Rafael Nadal pulled out injured and world number three Dominic Thiem crashed to defeat.

The Serbian world number one, who will be chasing a ninth Australian Open crown when the year's first Grand Slam begins on Monday, was pushed hard before coming through 7-5, 7-5 against the hot shot Canadian on Rod Laver Arena. Djokovic showed no signs of being hindered by a nasty blister on his racket hand that troubled him at an Adelaide exhibition last week and returned 30 minutes later alongside Filip Fraynovic to play the decisive doubles rubber.

The pair beat Shapovalov and Milos Raonic 7-5, 7-6 (7/4) as defending champions Serbia took the Group A tie against Canada 2-1. "It was a great opening of the season. Playing Shapo is always a great challenge on hardcourts, he is such a dynamic, explosive player," said Djokovic, who was fired up by playing in front of a smattering of noisy Serbian fans.

"I thought we both played on a pretty high level, so I'm really pleased with the way I started the season. This is a great competition," added Djokovic, who won all eight matches he contested en route to the trophy last year. "We need more competitions where we represent a team, represent our country."

On a cool day, big-serving Raonic got Canada off to a blistering start, crushing Dusan Lajovic 6-3, 6-4 in 79 minutes to give his team a 1-0 lead, with the former world number three, now ranked 15, dropping just eight points on serve while sending down 11 aces. It was left to Djokovic to level the tie before clinching the doubles rubber. Serbia beat Nadal's Spain in the final of the inaugural and hugely popular tournament last year in Sydney — launched as a rival to the Davis Cup. It has been slimmed down from 24 teams to 12 this year due to the coronavirus with all matches at Melbourne Park over five days with \$7.5 million at stake, rather than the multi-city format employed in 2020. Nadal was due to face Australia's Alex de Minaur in an evening Group B clash, but withdrew shortly beforehand with a back niggle. — AFP

Impressive Osaka, Barty make winning start in Melbourne

MELBOURNE: Ashleigh Barty and Naomi Osaka made successful returns after long layoffs yesterday, fine-tuning their preparations ahead of the Australian Open. In the night match, world number one Barty showed little rust to comfortably beat Ana Bogdan 6-3, 6-3 in the Yarra Valley Classic.

"I've missed coming out here competing but I felt great tonight," she said. The Australian played her first tournament in 11 months after opting to remain home in relatively COVID-19 free Queensland during the pandemic and even decided against defending her French Open crown. Barty, hoping to break her country's 43-year singles title drought at the Australian Open, was made to work early before pouncing on Bogdan's tentative serve and she proved far too consistent for the Romanian. The 24-year-old plays world number 52 Marie Bouzkova next.

Osaka made similarly light work of France's Alize Cornet in the Japanese star's first competitive match since winning the US Open for a second time. The three-time Grand Slam champion hit 22 winners to move into the third round of the Gippstand Trophy with a 6-2, 6-2 victory in Melbourne. "I haven't played a match since the final in New York, I was definitely really nervous going into it," said Osaka, who won the Australian Open in 2019. "But I'm really happy with how positive I was throughout the match."

It was an impressive performance from Osaka, who had few problems against Cornet in her first encounter with the French veteran. Osaka plays Katie Boulter in the next round after the British woman knocked out teenage sensation Coco Gauff 3-6, 7-5, 6-2 in one hour and 43 minutes. After a tough opening victory over Jil Teichmann, the 16-year-old American started strongly before fading in her second match in consecutive days.

Earlier, defending Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin's long-awaited return to Melbourne Park was brief after her Italian opponent Camila Giorgi retired injured after one set at the Yarra Valley Classic. The 22-year-old was back at the scene of her stunning breakthrough Grand Slam title last year, where she beat Garbine Muguruza in three sets. But it was a short stay on Margaret Court Arena with the 76th-ranked Giorgi retiring because of a thigh injury after Kenin clinched a tight first set 7-5. "I'm happy with the win, the way I played," she said. "I started off pretty good... just made a little bit too many unforced errors." — AFP



MELBOURNE: Japan's Naomi Osaka serves against France's Alize Cornet during their Gippstand Trophy women's singles tennis match in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

Sports

Slimmed-down Super Bowl week kicks off as virus threat remains

Capacity cut to 22,000 seats, corporates skip advertising bonanza

LOS ANGELES: The final countdown to the Super Bowl got off to a low-key start on Monday with a virtual opening night media event, as the specter of COVID-19 hovered over the US sporting showpiece. With just six days until the Tampa Bay Buccaneers attempt to dethrone the Kansas City Chiefs in the NFL's championship game, players from both sides were adjusting to a new normal as a week of media activities got under way.

The Super Bowl's "opening night" is usually played out in a crowded arena made up of fans and thousands of media against a backdrop of rock music and pyrotechnics as the teams are introduced. Safety issues surrounding COVID-19 however made the traditional circus-like kick-off a non-starter this year, leaving the likes of Tom Brady and Patrick Mahomes to instead conduct press interviews via Zoom.

Buccaneers quarterback Brady, who is preparing for his 10th Super Bowl, would normally expect to find himself in the center of a scrum of dozens of cameras and journalists. Instead he addressed media in front of a lone camera at the Tampa Bay Buccaneers team facility.

"Crazy media day. I'm sitting here in an empty room," Brady remarked. "It's very different from the other nine experiences." Chiefs counterpart Mahomes was similarly bemused by the contrast in surroundings, a year after being the center of attention in Kansas City's Super Bowl victory over the San Francisco 49ers.

'Very different'

"From last year to this year, very different," said Mahomes. In another departure from tradition, when

participating teams arrive in the host Super Bowl city several days ahead of the game, the Chiefs are remaining in Kansas City until the weekend, when they will decamp for Florida.

The Buccaneers and the 43-year-old Brady — who will become the oldest player to play in a Super Bowl on Sunday when he chases his record seventh championship — have the advantage of playing at home. The Bucs won the right to become the first ever team to play a home Super Bowl after upsetting the Green Bay Packers in the NFC Championship game at Lambeau Field last month.

"It's all very unique," Brady said Monday. "I'm happy in my own bed, happy I'm eating good stuff at home, don't have to travel, pack my clothes and all the other crap. There's some real positives to take from it," he said. The slimmed-down feel to this year's Super Bowl will be in evidence across the week, with fewer parties and smaller, ticketed fan events which will be staged outdoors and tightly controlled.

Some US corporate titans meanwhile have opted to skip the television advertising bonanza that accompanies the Super Bowl, with the likes of Budweiser and Coca-Cola deciding to remain on the sidelines. "This commitment is an investment in a future where we can all get back together safely over a beer," Budweiser said in a statement.

Capacity slashed

Capacity for Sunday's game meanwhile has been slashed by around two thirds, with only 22,000 seats being filled. Some 7,500 of those tickets have been given to vaccinated US healthcare workers, while only 14,500 tickets went on sale to the public via a



KANSAS CITY: Michael Wheeler, also known as KC Superman, poses in front of a Kansas City Chiefs display at Union Station in downtown Kansas City ahead of Super Bowl LV against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Monday in Kansas City, Missouri. —AFP

lottery. A further 2,000 seats will be filled in VIP suites. The United States continues to battle against COVID-19, which has infected 26.3 million Americans and left 443,000 dead.

While the NFL managed to complete its season with relatively few hitches, the threat of coronavirus lurked over Monday's media activities as the Chiefs confirmed that two players — receiver Demarcus Robinson and center Daniel Kilgore — have been

placed on the COVID-19 reserve list. Robinson and backup Kilgore were placed in isolation after coming into contact with someone who had tested positive and must now record five consecutive days of negative tests to avoid missing the Super Bowl. "The problem is you're fighting the invisible man," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said. "It's germs, and they're hard to see. It just gets you when least expected, and we're seeing that in everything. It's an unfortunate thing." —AFP

Diversity driving Bucs, Brady into Super Bowl

LOS ANGELES: If the Tampa Bay Buccaneers upset the odds and defeat the Kansas City Chiefs in the Super Bowl, it will be a victory for diversity as well as Tom Brady. Brady may understandably hog the limelight heading into Sunday's NFL showpiece, but the quarterback's journey to a 10th Super Bowl has been powered by a backroom staff that is the most diverse in the league.

At a time when NFL teams have faced accusations of systemic racism for their failure to promote minority coaches to senior coaching roles, the Buccaneers have been a rare beacon of diversity. The Buccaneers are the only team in the NFL to have black coaches in all four coordinator roles — offensive coordinator Byron Leftwich, defensive coordinator Todd Bowles, special teams coordinator Keith Armstrong and assistant head coach Harold Goodwin.

Tampa Bay are also the only team in the NFL to employ two women in full-time coaching positions in the shape of assistant defensive line coach Lori Locust and assistant strength and conditioning coordinator Maral Javadifar.

The Bucs coaching staff is also no bastion of ageism. Among the employees who will be providing input on the sidelines this weekend is the 82-year-

old offensive consultant Tom Moore. Bruce Arians, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers head coach and architect of the diverse back room staff, insists that his hiring policy is simple: picking the best candidate for the job.

'Best coaches I know'

"They're the best coaches I know," Arians told reporters on a Zoom call on Monday. "It starts with that." Arians, who at 68 years and 127 days would become the oldest head coach to win a Super Bowl if the Buccaneers triumph on Sunday, compares coaching to school teaching.

"A player is going to ask a coach, 'How are you going to make me better?' He doesn't really care if the answer comes from a male or a female, black, white, brown or yellow or whoever," Arians said. "We're glorified school teachers. The best school teachers I ever had were all different races and ethnic groups, male and female. So if you can teach, you can coach," he added. The hiring of women coaches Locust and Javadifar was long overdue, Arians maintains. "It was time for that door to be knocked down," Arians said Monday. "A lot of (women coaches) have put in the time and are very qualified, and ones we have are overly qualified."



TAMPA: In this file photo taken on December 20, 2019 OJ Howard #80 of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers works with assistant defensive line coach Lori Locust before the game against the Houston Texans at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Florida. — AFP

Arians believes that the range of backgrounds, ages and genders in his coaching staff leads to better outcomes. "To hear voices in a staff meeting that aren't the same, that don't look alike, you get better output and for the players it's the same thing," he said. "Not hearing the same thing over and over. To hear it from different ages whether it's 27 or 82, and every kind of ethnic group, male or female. I think our players learn from that. I know I do."

Not 'checking boxes'

Locust, who arrived in Tampa Bay after working her way up from coach-

ing jobs in high school and semi-professional grid-iron, praises Arians' commitment to hire staff from all backgrounds. "This is not something that's done because of checking boxes," Locust said. "It's not done because of an initiative. It's who BA is and who he has always been." Arians meanwhile is frustrated that more members of his coaching unit did not come into contention for the handful of head-coaching jobs that fell open following the regular season. Arians said Monday he was peeved that offensive coordinator Byron Leftwich didn't get an interview. — AFP

Davis, James lead Lakers over Hawks, fans ejected

LOS ANGELES: Anthony Davis scored 25 points and LeBron James added 21 as the Los Angeles Lakers overpowered the Atlanta Hawks on Monday to end their road trip with a hard-fought 107-99 victory. James pulled down seven rebounds and weighed in with nine assists as well as a clutch three-pointer that gave the Lakers a 101-97 lead with just over a minute remaining at State Farm Arena.

It was the decisive blow in a game that had been halted midway through the fourth quarter after two female spectators heckled James from courtside. The women were ejected from the arena. Davis, meanwhile, was satisfied after a victory that left the Lakers firmly on the tail of the Los Angeles Clippers and Utah Jazz, who occupy the top two spots in the Western Conference.

"The last game of a road trip's always tough and we didn't want to buy into that 'being tired, ready-to-go home' mentality," Davis said. "And (Atlanta) is a good team. They were 10-9 and they came out and played like it. We dropped two already on this road trip which we hate doing, so we wanted to come



ATLANTA: LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers reacts to a fan courtside during the second half against the Atlanta Hawks at State Farm Arena on Monday in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

out and end this trip the right way, with a victory."

James, meanwhile, laughed off the incident that led to play being halted in the fourth quarter, revealing that the altercation began when he had exchanged words with a male spectator seated next to the women.

'Happy fans are back'

"At the end of the day I'm happy fans are back in the building," James said. "I miss that interaction. I need that interaction. I don't feel like they deserved to be kicked out. "There was a back and forth between two grown men, he said his piece, I said my piece. And then someone else jumped in and said their piece. But I don't think they

should have been kicked out. They might have had a couple of drinks maybe. It's fine. It kind of got blown out of proportion... fans in the stands, just feels better," James said. Trae Young led the Atlanta scorers with 25 points and 16 assists, while John Collins chipped in with 22 points. Clint Capela added 16 points and pulled down 13 rebounds.

Elsewhere on Monday, the Milwaukee Bucks romped to a 134-106 win over the Portland Trail Blazers. Portland's Nassir Little led the game scoring with 30 points, but six Bucks players made double-digit tallies as Milwaukee cruised to the win. Giannis Antetokounmpo had 18 points, while Jrue Holiday had 22. Bobby Portis added 21 points off the bench. —AFP

Pakistan eye first Test series win over South Africa in 17 years

RAWALPINDI: New-look Pakistan will look to end a 17-year wait for a series win against South Africa and leapfrog the Proteas in the rankings in the second Test starting tomorrow. Victory would be poignant for Pakistan, who are hosting their biggest Test series since the deadly 2009 militant attack on Sri Lanka's team halted international tours.

Pakistan, whose lone series win over South Africa was at home in 2003, start as favorites in Rawalpindi after last week's thumping seven-wicket win in Karachi. They stand to rise two places to fifth in the rankings with a series victory, while defeat would push South Africa down from fifth to sixth.

Debutant Nauman Ali and fellow spinner Yasir Shah were the heroes in Karachi with seven wickets each, along with Fawad Alam whose first-innings century set up the win. Babar Azam, who captained Pakistan for the first time, said the win was much needed after they went down heavily in both Tests away to New Zealand in December and January.

"This win was very necessary for our group," said Azam. "The last series in New Zealand didn't go very well. Yes, these are home conditions but South Africa is a top Test side and beating them was morale-boosting."

He added: "We have been telling the players to be confident. I don't want them to take pressure, learn from mistakes and do your best." However, Rawalpindi will provide a different challenge for both teams as fast bowlers tend to dominate. When Pakistan beat Bangladesh there by an innings and 44 runs, 12 months ago, 20 of the 30 wickets went to fast bowlers. With that in mind, Pakistan are expected to drop Nauman, despite his wickets in Karachi, and give a Test debut to paceman Haris Rauf. —AFP

News in brief

USA Basketball face France, Iran

PARIS: Olympic basketball champions the United States will face France and Iran in the men's group stages of the Tokyo Olympics following yesterday's draw. They will be joined in Group A by the winner of Greece, China, Canada, Uruguay, Czech Republic and Turkey from a qualifying event in Victoria, Canada in late June. The draw also pitted Spain, Japan and Argentina with Group C completed by the winner of a qualifying event in Kaunas consisting of Lithuania, South Korea, Venezuela, Poland, Slovenia and Angola. Australia are in Group B with Nigeria and two other teams decided by qualifying events in Split (Germany, Russia, Mexico, Tunisia, Croatia and Brazil) and in Belgrade (Dominican Republic, New Zealand, Serbia, Puerto Rico, Italy, Senegal). — AFP

Perez tests positive

MADRID: Real Madrid president Florentino Perez, 73, has tested positive for Covid-19, the club announced yesterday. The reigning Spanish champions said in a statement Perez "is not presenting any symptoms." Perez's positive test comes after Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane also tested positive last month. Zidane was asymptomatic and returned to Madrid's training ground yesterday morning following his period of isolation. Perez is in his second term as Real Madrid president, which began in 2009. He was also in charge of the club between 2000 and 2006. — AFP

'Messi is worth it'

BARCELONA: Two of the candidates in Barcelona's presidential election, Joan Laporta and Victor Font, insisted on Monday that Lionel Messi "generates more" than he earns, after his "colossal" club contract was published in a Spanish newspaper. "Leo generates much more income than the money he costs," Joan Laporta, who is seeking to regain the presidency, told Ra1 radio. One of his rivals, Font, spoke on Onda Cero radio. "To imply that Barca is ruined because of Messi is an absolutely erroneous conclusion," he said. On Sunday, under the headline "the colossal contract that ruins Barcelona", El Mundo published details of the current deal, signed in 2017. It said Messi could have earned 555 million euros (\$674 million) by the time the deal expires. — AFP

Al-Arabi, Al-Shabab win

KUWAIT: Al-Arabi beat Kazma 2-1 in a match held on Monday as part of the second round of Kuwait premier league. Udai Al-Dabbagh of Al-Arabi, in the match held at Sabah Al-Salem stadium, scored the two goals raising his team's score to four. Kazma's Hamad Al-Harbi scored the single goal, with the score remaining vacant. Meanwhile, Al-Shabab defeated Al-Salmiya 2-1 at Thamer Stadium. Al-Shabab started scoring in the first half through Asieno Caesar in the 8th minute, while Asieno Nadiya scored in the 67th minute and added the second goal for Al-Shabab. Patrick Fabiano scored the only goal for Al-Salmiya. Al-Shabab registered their first three points in the league, and Al-Salmiya remained with the only three points. — KUNA

Liverpool bolster defense as window shuts

Minamino off to Saints in quiet last day of Premier League transfer

LONDON: Liverpool finally bolstered their defensive options by signing Schalke's Ozan Kabak and Preston's Ben Davies before the Premier League transfer window slammed shut on Monday. Meanwhile Premier League champions' Japanese attacking midfielder Takumi Minamino left for Southampton on loan until the end of the season in one of the few moves between Premier League clubs on a quiet deadline day.

The January window is regarded as a sellers' market and often a time for stop-gap measures but Liverpool were forced to act. The champions are missing all of their senior central defenders, with Virgil van Dijk, Joe Gomez and Joel Matip out of action.

Fabinho, who had impressed at center-back after moving from his usual midfield position, recently joined the injured list while captain Jordan Henderson, who usually plays in midfield, has been forced to deputize at the back.

Japanese international Minamino departed Anfield for Southampton in a surprise move allowed to be completed after the window shut because the Saints had submitted the necessary paperwork in time. "I am very pleased to welcome Takumi to our squad for the rest of this season," Southampton manager Ralph Hasenhuttl said in club statement issued two hours after the 2300 GMT deadline. "He will help provide another good attacking option, and is importantly the right profile of player for us. This will give us some additional depth in our squad at an important time."

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp had been suggesting for several weeks that a replacement center-back would be a major lift for his team. Klopp got his wish at last as the Reds brought in two defenders in the final hours of the transfer window.

Kabak joined on loan until the end of the season, subject to international clearance. The Premier League champions have paid an initial £1 million (\$1.37 million) loan fee with the option to buy for £18 million at the end of the season.

The 20-year-old arrives after two years in the Bundesliga, where he played for Stuttgart before joining Schalke in July 2019. He previously gained Champions League experience at Galatasaray and has won seven caps for Turkey.

Davies, 25, signed for an initial fee believed to be £500,000, plus future add-ons. Klopp conceded signing a relatively unknown player from the second tier was a move forced by financial restraints of the pandemic and Liverpool's injury woes.

"It's probably clear that in a normal transfer window, without any issues, we would not look at Preston if there's a player for us," he said. "But since we saw him and since our situation got clearer and clearer — the problems we had — when we saw him we got really excited about it and thought, 'Wow.' We see the quality and we see the potential." Davies made 145 appearances for Preston, scoring two goals, since his debut in 2013.

Low-spending window

"Obviously it came as a bit of a surprise when it first came out but once you start to get your head around it, the opportunity that is in front of me is incredible," Davies said. "I've never actually been to Anfield and I haven't had a look around yet."

Major moves involving "Big Six" Premier League clubs were few and far between in the January window. Top-flight clubs, who splashed the cash in the summer transfer window, are reeling from the financial fallout as a result of the COVID-19 crisis and are coming to terms with new Brexit rules that make it tougher to recruit young players from Europe.

The last time less than £100 million was spent in the January transfer window was 2012. Arsenal allowed Shkodran Mustafi to leave, with the German defender signing a short-term contract at Schalke. Gedson Fernandes ended his disappointing spell at Tottenham, with the midfielder's loan from Benfica cancelled so he could join Galatasaray.



Relegation-threatened West Bromwich Albion



GELSENKIRCHEN: Schalke's Turkish defender Ozan Kabak (left) and Bayern Munich's German midfielder Leroy Sane vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match Schalke 04 v FC Bayern Munich in Gelsenkirchen, western Germany, on January 24, 2021. — AFP

signed Turkey midfielder Okay Yokuslu on loan from Celta Vigo until the end of the season. West Brom also agreed a deal with Arsenal to take the versatile Ainsley Maitland-Niles on loan until the end of this term. Ecuador international Moises Caicedo joined Brighton from Independiente del Valle for a fee of around £4 million.

Newcastle signed Arsenal midfielder Joe Willock on loan for the rest of the season, while Magpies' right-back DeAndre Yedlin joined Galatasaray in a permanent deal. Fulham landed former Sunderland forward Josh Maja on loan from French side Bordeaux. Everton were hoping to sign Bournemouth striker Josh King in a late deal. — AFP

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