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Kuwait Times
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for the **COVID-19 vaccine**

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Kuwait suspends entry of foreigners for two weeks

Gyms, salons to shut from Feb 7 • Malls, restaurants to close from 8 pm till 5 am

Institutional quarantine for all arrivals for 7 days

Kuwaitis warned against non-essential travel

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Cabinet yesterday decided to impose a two-week ban on the entry of foreigners into the country from Feb 7 as health authorities battle a substantial rise in the number of coronavirus cases, government spokesman Tareq Al-Mazrem said. The decision exempts close relatives of Kuwaiti citizens and domestic workers.

During an extraordinary meeting, the Cabinet decided commercial shops and restaurants including malls will close from 8 pm to 5 am, but allowed delivery services to continue. Pharmacies and food stores are exempt from the ban, Mazrem said. The Cabinet ordered the total closure of health clubs, salons, barbershops, celebration halls and tents and banned all types of gatherings including national holiday celebrations later this month.

The closure and limiting of commercial activities will commence from Feb 7 for a period of one month, which can be renewed if the situation does not improve, Mazrem said. The Cabinet also decided to re-introduce institutional quarantine for a week for people returning from abroad.

The quarantine will be at local hotels at the expense of returnees, who will undergo another seven days of home quarantine, he said.

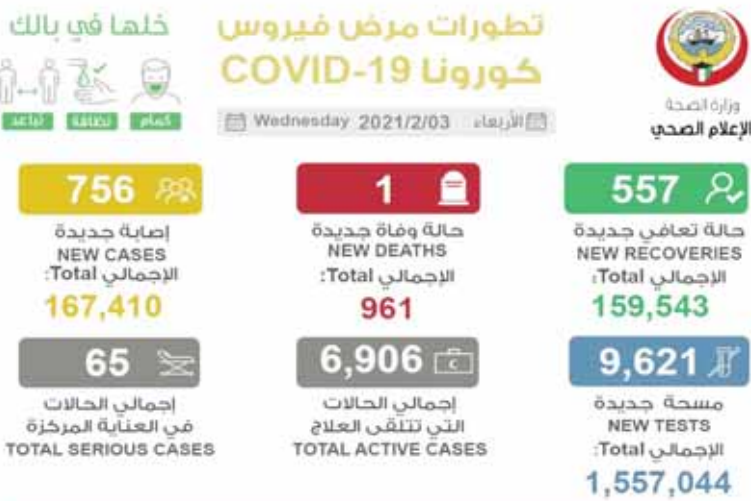
The new tough measures come after a jump in the number of new coronavirus cases and after the discovery that some passengers carried fake negative PCR test certificates. Mazrem warned that if people do not cooperate and comply with health precautions like wearing facemasks and observing social distancing, the government will consider "additional" measures. He said authorities will take legal measures against those who arrive with fake PCR certificates.

The civil aviation department has indefinitely extended precautionary measures that limit the number of passengers per flight to just 35, after the measure was due to end on Feb 6. Health Minister Sheikh Basel Al-Sabah called on the public to comply with precautionary health measures and not to leave home unless it is necessary. The number of new coronavirus cases more than doubled in January over the previous month, according to the health ministry.

Health ministry figures compiled by Kuwait Times show that as many as 14,952 new cases were reported in the past four weeks compared to just 7,234 cases in the previous four weeks, a jump of over 100 percent. In the past week from yesterday, the number of cases increased by 26 percent to 4,548 cases, from 3,598 cases in the previous week.

Meanwhile, the ministry of foreign affairs yesterday advised citizens against overseas travel except when "absolutely necessary" because of the new variants of coronavirus spreading worldwide. The ministry said those who are forced to travel for emergency reasons should have health insurance that covers all diseases including COVID-19 throughout the duration of travel.

MP Yousef Al-Fadhlah called on the health authorities to take all necessary measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, especially by those who arrive from abroad with fake PCR test results. He also called for increasing the number of vaccinations in the country by increasing the number of centers and giving priority to elderly people.



حرصاً على سلامتكم، تنصح وزارة الصحة بتجنب السفر في الوقت الحالي.

WHO team visits Wuhan virus lab

WUHAN, China: World Health Organization inspectors yesterday visited a laboratory in China's Wuhan city at the heart of a controversial theory that it could have been the source of the coronavirus. The inspection of the Wuhan virology institute, which conducts research on the world's most dangerous diseases, will be one of the most-watched stops on the team's probe into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The sensitive mission, which China

had delayed throughout the first year of the international health crisis, has a remit to explore how the virus jumped from animal to human. But questions remain over what the experts can hope to find after so much time has passed. The convoy of cars drove past security to enter a virology institute shrouded in mist yesterday morning.

WHO team member Peter Daszak told reporters that the team was "looking forward to a very productive day and to asking all the questions that we know need to be asked". He later tweeted that it had been an "extremely important meeting today with staff" and a "frank, open discussion".

Most scientists think COVID-19 - which first emerged in Wuhan and has gone on to kill more than two million

Continued on Page 2



WUHAN: Members of the WHO team investigating the origins of the COVID-19 coronavirus arrive at the Wuhan Institute of Virology yesterday. — AFP

Kuwait wealth fund commits to London base

KUWAIT: Kuwait Investment Office, the international arm of one of the world's largest sovereign wealth funds, is sticking with its base in London despite a legal dispute with former managers at its UK office over accusations of inflated bonuses. In comments ahead of a hearing at the employment tribunal yesterday, Kuwait Investment Authority said it continues to view London as a major global financial hub and was confident it will recover public funds at the center of a legal dispute in the High Court.

"We have no plans to relocate our global operation to another city," the KIA said in a statement to Bloomberg. "We place our trust and confidence in the UK courts to return the public funds, and to honor the reputation of our colleagues who call Kuwait Investment Office their home." The fund alleges that three former employees at its London office were part of a conspiracy in 2018 to award themselves unauthorized salary and bonus increases.

Continued on Page 2

Fitch cuts outlook on Kuwait's debt rating to 'negative'

KUWAIT: Rating agency Fitch said yesterday it downgraded the outlook on Kuwait's sovereign debt rating to "negative" from "stable", saying it saw near-term liquidity risks associated with the state treasury fund. Fitch affirmed Kuwait's long-term rating at "AA".

The rating agency said the outlook change reflects near-term liquidity risk associated with the imminent depletion of liquid assets in the General Reserve Fund (GRF) in the absence of parliamentary authorization for the government to borrow. — Reuters (See Page 8)

Disfigured: Yemen women face violence

SANAA: Married at the age of 12, rejected at 16, and then disfigured in an acid attack, Al-Anoud Hussain Sheryan's fate is a shocking illustration of abuse in a society beset by war and poverty. Now aged 19, the Yemeni woman agreed to relate her ordeal at the hands of her abusive husband - rare testimony in a country where domestic violence is largely hidden.

"He grabbed me by the hair and poured the acid on me while laughing," she told AFP as she sat with her veil framing a face badly scarred by last October's assault that also left deep wounds on her body. "I went through hell," she said, describing her years of marriage which she said she spent chained and often beaten.



Al-Anoud Sheryan

When her father died, Al-Anoud's mother remarried and then hurried to find a husband for her daughter. "She wanted to protect me," she said. Having lived for four years as a "slave", Al-Anoud was eventually kicked out by her husband, taken in by her sister and began training as a nurse. But her ex-husband decided he wanted her back, and when she refused, he took his revenge.

After being hospitalized in a clinic where she had once been

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Mummies with gold tongues found in Egypt

CAIRO: An Egyptian-Dominican archaeological mission working near Alexandria has discovered mummies from around 2,000 years ago bearing golden-tongued amulets, the Egyptian authorities told AFP yesterday. "The mission discovered 16 tombs cut into the rock... in the temple of Taposiris Magna, west of Alexandria" in northern Egypt, the antiquities ministry said in a statement, adding that the burial technique was widespread in the Greek and Roman periods.

The tombs contained several mummies that were "poorly preserved" but bore "gold-leafed amulets in the shape of a tongue". The amulets were placed in the mouths of the dead "to ensure they could speak in the after-life", according to the ministry. Two of



A 2,000-year-old mummy with a gold foil amulet inside its mouth. - AFP

the mummies were of particular interest to the researchers, mission chief Kathleen Martinez was quoted as saying in the statement.

One had "bandages and parts of cardboard - layers of glued, stuccoed and painted linen fabric that

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Local

Amir receives Crown Prince, state officials



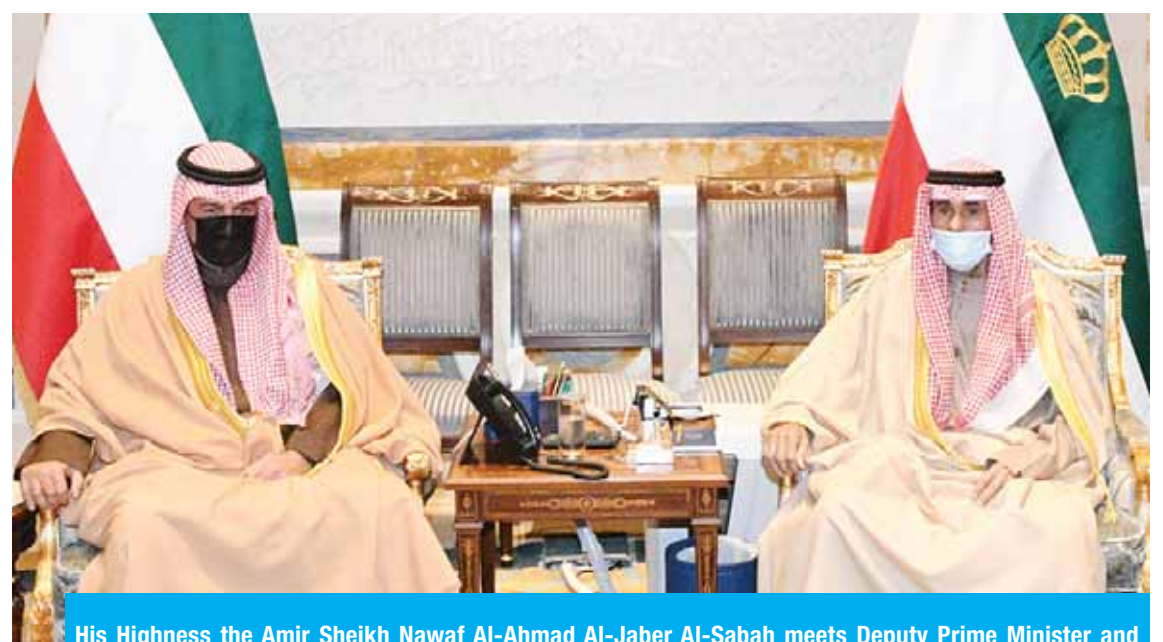
KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh

Mishal Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received Speaker of the National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His

Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs

Anas Al-Saleh. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled and Saleh at Bayan Palace. — KUNA

Kuwait wealth fund commits...

Continued from Page 1

Inquiries by Kuwait's State Audit Bureau into the alleged compensation irregularities started in January 2019 and the KIA filed a claim early last year for more than £1 million (\$1.4 million) in damages. All three employees have denied the allegations. The KIA said it was compelled to file the case

under Kuwait's Public Funds Protection Law, which requires that funds allegedly misappropriated be recovered through "all legal measures, in any jurisdiction."

The former employees have the option to pay the amounts owed and have failed to do so. The three employees filed a separate retaliatory lawsuit at the employment tribunal, whose hearing will focus on disclosure of KIO documents. The dispute won't affect the future hiring of British nationals in a workplace where employees from various backgrounds "help grow the assets of Kuwait's Future Generations Fund together with their Kuwaiti colleagues," it said. — Bloomberg

Osiris, according to the statement.

The team also found a female burial mask, a golden diadem and eight sculpted marble masks, according to Khaled Abu al-Hamd, head of Alexandria Antiquities. The mission has been working to the west of Alexandria for several years, searching for the tomb of the legendary Ptolemaic Queen Cleopatra - though doubts remain among archaeological circles about the likelihood of finding it in the area. The Ptolemaic dynasty was of Greek origin and ruled Egypt between 323 and 30 BC. It was the last pharaonic dynasty before Egypt came under Roman rule, and Cleopatra was its last sovereign. — AFP

Then-US president Donald Trump and his supporters seized on those rumors and amplified them with conspiracy theories that China deliberately leaked the virus. The US-secretary of state Mike Pompeo insisted last year that there was "significant evidence" that the virus came from the lab, while releasing no proof and acknowledging that there was no certainty.

China has faced criticism at home and abroad for playing down the initial outbreak and concealing information when it first emerged in Wuhan in Dec 2019. Beijing is now determined to put the focus on its recovery from the outbreak, and the WHO team toured a propaganda exhibition celebrating China's recovery from the pandemic in Wuhan on Saturday.

On Sunday the team went to the market where one of the first reported clusters of infections emerged over a year ago, which Daszak tweeted was a "critical" stop. Other stops include the hospital which treated some of the first coronavirus cases. Daszak said in his tweet that the team met yesterday with Shi Zhengli, one of China's leading experts on bat coronaviruses and deputy director of the Wuhan lab. — AFP

Jeff Bezos to step down as Amazon CEO

WASHINGTON: Amazon founder Jeff Bezos said yesterday he would stand aside later this year as chief executive of the company he built from a startup into one of the world's most valuable firms. The world's richest person based on his Amazon stake, Bezos said he will transition to the role of executive chair in the third quarter, handing over the CEO role to Andy Jassy, who heads Amazon Web Services.

The news came as Amazon reported a blowout holiday quarter with profits more than doubling to \$7.2 billion and revenue jumping 44 percent to \$125.6 billion - as pandemic lockdowns caused online sales to explode around the globe.

In a letter to Amazon employees, Bezos said he would "stay engaged in important Amazon initiatives" but would

pivot towards philanthropic initiatives, including his Day One Fund and Bezos Earth Fund, and other business ventures in space exploration and journalism. "I've never had more energy, and this isn't about retiring," Bezos wrote. "I'm super passionate about the impact I think these organizations can have."

Bezos, 57, founded Amazon in his garage in 1994 and went on to grow it into a colossus that dominates online retail, with operations in streaming music and television, groceries, cloud computing, robotics, artificial intelligence and more. His other businesses include The Washington Post newspaper and the private space firm Blue Origin.

His successor Jassy joined Amazon as a marketing manager in 1997 and in 2003 founded AWS, the cloud services division of the company which has been one of the most profitable but least-known units of the tech giant. "He will be an outstanding leader, and he has my full confidence," Bezos said of Jassy. "Right now I see Amazon at its most inventive ever, making it an optimal time for this transition," he said. Wedbush analyst Dan Ives saw giving command of Amazon to Jassy as a "major step up in the clouds arms race with crosstown rival Microsoft". — AFP

Mummies with gold tongues...

Continued from Page 1

enveloped the mummy - decorated with gilding with the effigy of Osiris", the Egyptian god of death and the underworld. The second bore a "crown decorated with horns and a cobra... as well as a necklace with a pendent in the form of a falcon's head", representing the god Horus, the son of Isis and

WHO team visits Wuhan...

Continued from Page 1

people worldwide - originated in bats and could have been transmitted to people via another mammal. But there are no definitive answers so far. The WHO experts stayed inside the institute for nearly four hours, before driving away without stopping to talk to media waiting outside.

Police in black uniforms and face masks lined the road to separate the crowds of reporters from the cars. According to the state-run Global Times, the team also visited the P4 lab - Asia's first maximum-security lab equipped to handle Class 4 pathogens (P4) such as Ebola. There was speculation early in the pandemic that the virus could have accidentally leaked from the biosafety lab in Wuhan, although there was no evidence to back up that theory.

Disfigured: Yemen women...

Continued from Page 1

employed, Al-Anoud is now waiting to undergo the three plastic surgery operations needed to repair some of the damage. Her doctor Moutawakal Chahari said the procedures will be complex and expensive, and even the bills for the first aid she received had not yet been paid. Apart from this, he stressed the "irreparable psychological effects" of her ordeal.

Al-Anoud filed a complaint against her ex-husband after the attack, but he vanished and remains at large. She is hoping that someone, anyone - a humanitarian agency, one of the stretched government services, or a grassroots non-government group - can give her the financial assistance she needs. "I want the police and the courts to punish the criminal who did this, but I also want to reclaim my youth, my studies and my work. I want to regain my life," she said.

Child marriage is a feature of Yemeni society but

six years of war, which has left the country on the brink of famine, has made it more common and "greatly increased" violence against women, said Tayseer Walid of the Yemeni Women's Union in Sanaa. Families are forced to "rid themselves of the expense of children, especially girls, because of poor financial situations", she told AFP.

Many organizations advocating for women and girls had to shut down after war broke out, and those which struggle on do so with scant resources to address the daunting legal, medical and psychological needs. When it comes to the status of women in Yemen, the numbers speak for themselves. A UN survey conducted in 2013 found a third of Yemeni women aged 24-32 were married before the age of 18, and nine percent of those were married before 15.

UNICEF has estimated that in 2020 Yemen had some four million married children, 1.4 million of them under 15. In a 2020 report, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which deals with sexual and reproductive issues, estimated that 2.6 million women and girls are at risk of gender-based violence in Yemen. It pointed out that in the era of COVID-19, with lockdowns that cause great strain, "cases of domestic violence are on the rise". — AFP

Local

Prime Minister receives letter from Egyptian counterpart

Foreign Minister meets US Ambassador



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives a letter from Egyptian Prime Minister Dr Mustafa Madbouli, delivered by Egyptian Ambassador Tareq Al-Qouni. — KUNA photos



Foreign Minister Dr Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski.



Foreign Minister Dr Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Ethiopia to Kuwait Abdulfattah Abdullah Hassan.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received yesterday a letter from Egyptian Prime Minister Dr Mustafa Madbouli. The letter was delivered by Egyptian Ambassador Tareq Al-Qouni during a meeting with His Highness the Prime Minister at Seif Palace. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Dr Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Tuesday

received US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski. During the meeting held at the Foreign Ministry's headquarters, the two sides discussed the close and distinctive relations between the two friendly countries. They also discussed means of upgrading these relations in all domains and at all different levels, and the developments on regional and international levels.

Assistant Foreign Minister for Foreign Minister's Office Affairs Ambassador Saleh Al-Loughani, Assistant Foreign Minister for US Affairs Minister Plenipotentiary Hamad Al-Mashaan, Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for the Foreign Minister's Office Ahmad Al-Shuraim and some senior officials at the ministry were present in the meeting. In the meantime, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-

Mohammad received at the Ministry's building yesterday, the Ambassador of Ethiopia Abdulfattah Abdullah Hassan on the occasion of ending his tenure in Kuwait. The minister thanked the efforts and contributions of the ambassador to boost bilateral ties between both nations, a ministry statement said. Ambassador Loughani and a number of senior ministry officials attended the meeting. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Spanish Ambassador to Kuwait Miguel Jose Moro Aguilar (left) and French Ambassador to Kuwait Anne-Claire Legendre visited Kuwait Times recently and met with Editor-in-Chief Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Guard deputy chief, defense minister mull cooperation



KUWAIT: Deputy Chief of Kuwait National Guard Lt Gen Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received in his office yesterday Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah. The two sides discussed ways to improve cooperation and coordination between Kuwait National Guard and the Ministry of Defense, the Guard said in a statement yesterday.

In my view

Flexible legislations to attract investors

By Azzah Al-Ghamdi

In this article, we will focus on the most important points on how to develop Kuwait's private sector and the most important challenges facing the government, which is still unable to develop this sector. It has been observed that political crises between the parliament and government have always caused a halt in development projects.

The parliament focuses on personal issues away from development, with repeated grillings of ministers, which has affected legislation and the economy negatively, maybe for decades. The economic sector is facing many problems, as there are no flexible legislations to improve the private sector in Kuwait.

No country can close the door to foreign investment, but foreign investors need many legislations to protect their rights and facilitate their work in Kuwait. Some in the society think young graduates have no jobs because of expatriates in the private sector, but this is not right. The main reason is that the private sector does not pay strong salaries, and there are not many opportunities.

The most important thing that lawmakers should focus on is to study the Kuwaiti economy and what legislations are needed, especially business laws. But continuous crises with the government will not result in any positivity and only make our country a poor environment for foreign investors.

MPs should coordinate with the government, especially since we have a very good prime minister, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, a strong and well-educated leader who has a very good idea to develop the nation. But some MPs do not give him the chance to work to improve the state and remove obstacles in many fields for the private sector.

To improve the economy, you should have a suitable environment for foreigners to invest. Some projects should have backing from the state to safeguard foreign investors' money. MPs on the legislative committee of parliament should draft a law to insure any risks faced by foreign investors.

- Al-Ghamdi is a law graduate from Kuwait International Law School

OPEC+ strategy greatly supported oil market: Minister

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Oil Minister and Minister of Electricity and Water Mohammad Al-Fares said that the strategy of OPEC+ and the unprecedented commitment to reducing oil production in addition to the voluntary reduction made by Saudi Arabia during the current and next months by one million barrels per day have greatly supported the oil market. Global oil markets are going through a corrective phase as a result of the OPEC+ historic decision that has positively affected the rebalancing of the oil markets. Speaking before taking part in the OPEC+ Joint Ministerial Committee for Production Control meeting yesterday, the minister stressed that Kuwait supports all OPEC+ decisions aimed at restoring balance to the oil market and adjusting the balance of supply and demand.



Mohammad Al-Fares

The Joint Technical Committee (JTC) had held its 48th meeting to assess oil market conditions and examine its developments and trends on Tuesday. OPEC Secretary General Mohammad Sanusi Barkindo opened the meeting by highlighting the improving prospects for the global oil market and the world economy at large. The global economy is forecast to grow by 4.4 per cent in 2021, a substantial shift from -4.1 per cent last year. "With the crude oil market currently switching into backwardation, we are hopeful that 2021 will be a good year for overall demand," Barkindo said. The Secretary General also underlined the effective role of the Declaration of Cooperation (DoC) in helping to restore confidence and balance in the global oil market throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that the DoC has become a model platform for multilateralism and international dialogue.

Barkindo said that the DoC's actions have benefited producing and consuming countries alike by supporting market rebalancing and stabilization. "Our careful market monitoring, regular consultations, and step-by-step approach have been instrumental in providing much-needed support and assurance throughout the very, very difficult months of 2020, and continue to bear fruit for the market in 2021," the Secretary General stated. The JTC and JMNC were established under the framework of the landmark DoC, which was signed at the First OPEC and non-OPEC Ministerial Meeting on 10 December 2016 in Vienna, Austria. The JTC is the JMNC's technical think-tank. — KUNA

CONDOLENCES

Kuwait Times Editor-in-Chief, management and staff convey their

deepest condolences to

Al-Ghanem and Boodai families

on the sad demise of

Sheikha Mohammad Thunayyan Al-Ghanem

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on her

Local

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News in brief

'Manpower' system upgrade

KUWAIT: As the Public Authority for Manpower plans to upgrade its systems, the marketplace will see several changes, such as not allowing women to work in certain businesses including lawyers' offices, entertainment places and others after midnight. Moreover, the file of a private company will be suspended if a government employee works there without prior approval. The new system stipulates that if a Kuwaiti wishes to work in the private sector while working for the government, they must apply to the manpower authority and must include essential data such as salary, job, work hours and the necessary permit from the body he works at for a maximum period of one renewable year. If this is not done, the private company's file will be suspended.

Ahli Bank's offer

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced its latest offer in support of World Cancer Day titled 'I am and I will', in partnership with Global Med Group. ABK cardholders will receive a discount of 40 percent on cancer screening tests, to raise awareness of the illness and encourage its prevention. Valid throughout the month of February, all ABK customers can get their 40 percent discount on tumor marker screening with two separate male and female packages available at Global Med Clinic in Jabriya (Mazaya Tower) and Global Medical Center in Bneid Al-Qar. ABK aims to make a difference in the communities it operates in, and throughout the year arranges various discounts for its cardholders to encourage health and preventive care such as the above.

Oil price up

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil moved up by \$1.77 to \$57.45 per barrel (pb) on Tuesday, after it was at \$55.68 pb the day before, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. Globally, the price of Brent crude went up by \$1.11 to \$57.46 pb, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which increased by \$1.21 to \$54.76 pb.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Vehicles drive on a main highway towards Kuwait City. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Vaccination pace to increase after Oxford vaccines' arrival: Spokesman

Kuwait lists 756 new COVID-19 cases, one death

KUWAIT: Spokesman for the Ministry of Health (MoH) Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said the rise in coronavirus cases and the number of patients at hospitals requires care and mutual cooperation from all segments in the society to keep achievements made in controlling the spread of the virus. Speaking at a news conference on Tuesday, Dr Sanad said increased coronavirus cases were caused by travel, social gatherings and wedding parties. Kuwait is not away from the world's countries especially in light of the mutation of the novel coronavirus and the repercussions of the second wave, he added. He pointed to the importance of maintaining gains and achievements for keeping stability and avoiding shutdown.

Dr Sanad renewed call for both nationals and residents to avert travel now, saying "we are witnessing and following up repercussions and results of mutated cases in all different strains for the safety of all." He lauded steps taken by the MoH, in collaboration with all different bodies, to prevent COVID-19 cases from entering the country. Dr Sanad pointed to the

suspension of direct flights from more than 30 countries, and reduction of flights and passengers heading to the country. He pointed out that passengers must have a negative PCR analysis valid up to 72 hours, before travel, starting from the date of conducting the swab. Passengers also will undergo a PCR swab when arriving at Kuwait airport and another one five days later, he stated.

Oxford vaccine

There is a specialized team to monitor any new coronavirus strain, he said, noting that after the arrival of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines, the pace of vaccination process will be rapid and accommodate larger numbers. Vaccination is depends on the batches of vaccines the country obtain, he explained, stressing readiness and efficiency of the MoH. He said that people would receive two doses of Oxford vaccines within four weeks at some specialized centers in Kuwait International Fair, and southern and northern country.

In addition to medical staff, workers at the MoH

and the front lines, the elderly, people with special needs and patients with chronic diseases that are included in the previous stage of the vaccination campaign, the nationals aged 40-64 will be added to receive vaccines, he made clear. He declared that the ministry has launched an e-link to facilitate vaccination to patients who are not able to go to receive vaccines in the three centers. They can send an SMS on the telephone number placed on the application to have an appointment, he explained.

756 new cases

Kuwait had listed 756 new COVID-19 cases yesterday, in addition to one death, taking the total cases up to 167,410 and deaths to 961. Meanwhile, the ministry announced that the number of coronavirus recoveries in Kuwait rose by 557 to 159,543. The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood yesterday at 6,906, with 65 of them in intensive care units, according to Dr Sanad. He added that some 9,621 swab tests were conducted over the same period, bringing the total to 1,557,023. —KUNA

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Successful rare operation at Chest Hospital

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Head of the catheterization unit at the Chest Hospital Dr Khalid Al-Merri and Head of the Heart Disease Department Dr Abdullah Al-Enezi

announced they've conducted a successful rare catheterization operation for a patient in his 80s. The procedure was highly complicated, and considered the first-of-its-kind in Kuwait and the Middle East, they said. Merri said the patient suffered from various ailments and had underwent an open heart surgery previously, including the replacement of the aortic valve, which narrowed by time and had to be replaced to save the patient. Enezi said the procedure is highly risky and the coronary artery could have closed, so to solve the problem, a new procedure called BASILICA was used to prevent blockage while changing the valve.

126,192 square meters paved with asphalt in week

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Public Works announced yesterday paving roads with asphalt at a total space of 126,192 square meters in nine locations nationwide, between January 27 and February 2, 2021. The Ministry added in a statement that those areas were the Ministries Area, Rumaihiya, Sabahiya, Adan, Old Jahra, Rawdha, Hitteen, and the Gulf Road, using 478 vehicle and asphalt pavers. These works were carried out by the maintenance and engineering sector at the ministry, and are in responding to citizens' complaints of fixing some holes on roads, along with development and maintenance operations in some locations, it added. The ministry called



on citizens and expatriates to cooperate with emergency and maintenance teams in conducting their round-the-clock tasks, urging them to reach out to the teams by the hotline 150, WhatsApp number 93333150, or through the ministry's smartphone application. —KUNA



Myanmar's Suu Kyi charged as calls to oppose coup grow

Draghi urges unity in face of Italy's 'difficult moment'

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MOSCOW: Law enforcement officers block Moscow's Manezhnaya Square. —AFP

Kremlin defends crackdown on protesters

Russian police detain more than 10,000 Navalny supporters

MOSCOW: The Kremlin yesterday defended its crackdown on protesters demanding the release of opposition figure Alexei Navalny as his allies vowed to continue putting pressure on the authorities. Protest monitors said that more than 10,000 people have been detained at recent nationwide rallies in support of President Vladimir Putin's loudest critic, who was handed a prison term of almost three years on Tuesday.

The verdict spurred Navalny's supporters to take to the streets of the capital Moscow where riot police used batons to disperse the protesters who were detained en masse. The Kremlin said "The holding of unauthorized rallies raises concerns and justifies the tough actions of the police." Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters yesterday.

Mass protests in more than one hundred cities across Russia were sparked by Navalny's arrest in a Moscow airport last month on arrival from Germany where he was recovering after being poisoned in August. The 44-year-old anti-corruption campaigner was given a jail term of two years and eight months for violating the terms of a 2014 suspended sentence on embezzlement charges he claims were a pretext to silence him.

The case is presenting one of the most serious challenges to the Kremlin in years, with some in the West calling for new sanctions against Russia. But his jailing has also weakened Russia's opposition movement now without its most prominent figure whose aides have also been seized by police. Leonid Volkov, a key ally and head

of Navalny's regional network, said that even after the verdict, "everything is just beginning".

'Harsh detentions'

"We will increase pressure on Putin... new investigations will come out. New peaceful rallies and marches will be held," Volkov wrote on Telegram.

In its most recent investigation, Navalny's team accused Putin of being gifted an opulent palace on the Black Sea coast in a video that garnered more than 100 million views on YouTube. The report was seen as a rallying cry that spurred tens of thousands of demonstrators onto the street on consecutive weekends last month, with protester chants and signs referencing the investigation.

The OVD-Info group that monitors opposition protests said Wednesday that more than 10,000 people had been seized by police at those rallies and the protests that followed Tuesday's ruling. An analyst working for the group Grigory Durnovo told AFP that many of the detainees had been subjected to "difficult conditions" in police custody. He said the authorities were purposefully carrying out "harsh detentions" and beating protesters.

He also noted that OVD-Info lawyers who provide free legal aid to protesters had been denied access to detention centers. The authorities "are openly demonstrating that a lawyer is perceived as an accomplice of the offender," he said.

AOC video cements status as progressive star and scourge of right

NEW YORK: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's livestream video in which she described how she feared for her life during the Capitol assault and revealed she is a survivor of sexual assault has reinforced why the US lawmaker is a leftist hero. It also pointed to her status as a lightning rod for outrage among conservatives, whose insistence that Washington move on from the riots she likened to the denial tactics used by abusers.

"They're trying to tell us to move on without any accountability, without any truth-telling, or without confronting the extreme damage, loss of life, trauma," Ocasio-Cortez said in front of 150,000 people on Instagram Live. "I'm a survivor of sexual assault and I haven't told many people that in my life," the 31-year-old told her followers.

"As a survivor, I struggle with the idea of being believed," she added, without giving further details about the assault or when it took place. Ocasio-Cortez, one of America's most prominent progressive politicians and known widely as "AOC" - has harnessed the power of social media to galvanize young voters in the United States. For just over an hour on Monday she detailed her experience of the January 6 storming of the US Capitol by pro-Trump supporters seeking to stop Congress from certifying Joe Biden as president.

She described how she was forced to hide in a bathroom in her congressional office, fearful that the mob was going to kill her. Her account has now been watched more than three million times.

Ocasio-Cortez's remarks drew widespread praise for bravery and honesty. "She is an incredibly effective communicator on complex topics," said Kelly Diltmar of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. "She is very direct about her personal work in Congress and about her feelings."



For Virginia Sapiro, a professor of political science at Boston University, the visceral and honest account will further endear Ocasio-Cortez to her loyal fans. "I think people are sort of clutching their heart saying, 'Oh my God, that must have been horrific,'" Sapiro told AFP.

'The Squad'

Ocasio-Cortez's account also highlights how she has become a target of the right since establishing herself as a leading light of the left of the Democratic Party in the two years she has been a congresswoman. "AOC", along with other left-wing female lawmakers dubbed "The Squad" - Ayanna Pressley, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib - have been on the receiving end of numerous insults from former president Donald Trump and other Republicans. Supporters say they are also victims of racism and sexism.

In July last year, Ocasio-Cortez, who was re-elected to her New York constituency in the Queens and the Bronx with 71 percent of votes, denounced a Republican representative who had called her "disgusting" and "a bitch." "As a democratic socialist, her support of policies like Medicare-for-all and a Green New Deal are anathema to conservative principles," said Julia Payson, an assistant professor of politics at New York University. —AFP

"talabat" and "Give" join forces to create "Give Friday" to support Kuwaiti communities in need



Abdullah Almansour



Skh. Shayma Alsabah

- "talabat", the region's leading food and grocery delivery platform is giving customers based in Kuwait the chance to donate to many good causes this February.
- After placing an order on "talabat", customers will have the option to support a variety of charities and projects via "Give's" donation platform.

"talabat", the region's leading food and delivery platform is launching "Give Friday", in collaboration with "Give", a non-profit organization that improves the process of donating to Kuwaiti charities through its online platform.

"Give Friday", which starts this week, and will run every Friday in February, offers customers the opportunity to donate to a number of local initiatives post-order, including financial support to cancer patients, feeding those in need, and providing health care to low-income families.

Customers' donations go towards registered Kuwaiti NGOs such as the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, Al-Sidra Association and Ruqayah Abdulwahab Alqatami Breast Cancer Foundation.

Abdullah Almansour, Sr. Manager Comms, PA & CSR of talabat Kuwait says, "We are proud to facilitate opportunities for our customers where they can make a real difference to communities in need. As a purpose-driven organisation and

as a Kuwaiti-based aggregator, it is really satisfying to be able to collaborate with fellow Kuwaiti-based non-profit organisations, such as "Give", for the social betterment of the people living and working in Kuwait.

Skh. Shayma Alsabah, the Founder of "Give", added - "We are thrilled to collaborate with talabat on this initiative as we aim to collectively help a large number of people across the country. With their support and through the talabat platform, we are able to reach a growing number of donors looking for ways to help, especially during the ongoing pandemic. We look forward to achieving great things following our partnership with "talabat".

How can customers donate?

Once a customer completes their transaction on the talabat platform, a pop-up message will appear on the screen informing the customer of the "Give Friday" campaign. Customers will then be given the option to click on the provided link, which will redirect them to the Give platform to donate to the charity and project of their choice.

Consumers can now download the "talabat" app through the iOS Appstore or Google Play to donate to "Give Friday" through the talabat platform every Friday this February starting from the 5th to the 26th.

For more information about "Give's" platform, please visit www.give.org.kw.

International

Draghi urges unity in face of Italy's 'difficult moment'

President asks former ECB chief to form new government

ROME: Former ECB head Mario Draghi called for unity yesterday after being charged by Italy's president to form a new government, saying the country faced a "difficult moment". He was called in after weeks of political instability in the eurozone's third-largest economy and the resignation of the former prime minister, Giuseppe Conte, against the backdrop of the coronavirus crisis. "The awareness of the emergency requires responses worthy of the situation and it is with this hope and this commitment that I respond positively to the appeal of the President of the Republic," said Draghi, after meeting with President Sergio Mattarella.

"It's a difficult moment," he said. Draghi will now meet with the political parties, as his appointment is contingent on whether he can find enough support for a new government within Italy's warring parliamentarians. "I am confident that... unity will emerge and with it the ability to give a responsible and positive answer to the appeal of the President of the Republic," said Draghi.

Italy's latest political crisis was sparked when former premier Matteo Renzi pulled his small party out of the coalition government, depriving it of its parliamentary majority. Conte resigned last week but had hoped to return at the head of a new coalition.

'Super Mario'

Conte's center-left coalition had been in power since September 2019 but was fatally weakened last month when former premier Matteo Renzi withdrew his Italia Viva party in a row over the handling of the pandemic. Conte finally resigned last week, but hoped to return with a new government comprising the populist Five Star Movement (M5S) and the center-left Democratic Party (DP). Mattarella gave them until Tuesday to patch things up with Renzi, but the deadline came and went—leaving the president with what he said were only two viable options. He ruled out snap elections because of the pandemic, and instead said he would help form a "high-profile government that should not identify itself with any political formula".

Draghi, dubbed "Super Mario" for his action calming



ROME: Former head of the ECB Mario Draghi (center) gives a speech after a meeting with the Italian president, at the Quirinal palace in Rome, yesterday.— AFP

the markets during his stint at the ECB during 2011 to 2019, had long been discussed as a potential savior.

But still it came as a surprise, after Mattarella's office rejected reports at the weekend that he had been in touch with the economist. "Draghi's moment," headlined La Repubblica daily, while the Milan stock market opened 2.3 percent higher yesterday.

Mattarella has stressed the urgency of creating a stable government to manage the pandemic, which hit Italy first among European nations. Alongside the ever-mounting death toll, the economy shrank 8.9 percent in 2020 — the biggest contraction since the end of World War II.

Conte had drawn up a 220-billion-euro recovery plan using the EU funds, but Renzi accused him of using it for vote-winning handouts, rather than addressing long-term structural issues. The political instability in recent weeks had sparked concerns about whether Rome could meet the April deadline to submit its spending plans to Brussels. "Thank you, President!" tweeted the EU's econ-

omy commissioner and former Italian prime minister, Paolo Gentiloni, after Mattarella announced his plans.

Irresponsible

Lorenzo Castellani, a political expert at Rome's Luiss University, said he believed a Draghi-led government would be highly technocratic. "The government program will be 99 percent occupied by the pandemic and the recovery fund," he told AFP. But the economist would still have to secure a majority of support among lawmakers, before submitting to a vote of confidence in parliament. So far the PD appears on board, as does Renzi, but the M5S, the biggest party in parliament once defined by its euroscepticism, is split. One of the M5S leaders, Vito Crimi, warned: "This type of executive has already been adopted in the past, with extremely negative consequences for Italian citizens." The breakdown in talks between the ruling parties prompted a round of finger-pointing, particularly against "irresponsible" Renzi. — AFP

12 police arrested in deaths of burned migrants in Mexico

CIUDAD VICTORIA, Mexico: Twelve police officers have been arrested for their alleged involvement in the deaths of 19 people whose charred bodies were found near Mexico's border with the US last month, prosecutors said Tuesday. Evidence at the site indicated that "at least 12 members" of the state police participated in the massacre, Tamaulipas state attorney general Irving Barrios said during a press conference.

Prosecutors said that on January 23 two burnt-out vehicles containing human remains were found on a country road near the town of Camargo, in the northern Mexican state which borders Texas. Preliminary investigations suggested the victims had been shot before their bodies were set alight.

Most of them were believed to be migrants making their way to the United States. Preliminary investigations and crime scene analysis led authorities to suspect the 12 police officers of being involved, Barrios said. The officers have been arrested and will be charged with "probable participation in the crimes of

homicide, abuse of authority and performance of administrative functions and falsification of reports given to an authority," the prosecutor said.

Relatives of migrants in Guatemala said family members who were crossing Mexico with the help of smugglers to reach the US could be among the victims. Prosecutors worked with Guatemalan consular authorities on DNA analysis to identify two Guatemalans and two Mexicans among the victims.

Camargo, a town of about 15,000 people, borders the US state of Texas and is near the Mexican state of Nuevo Leon. The region sees frequent clashes between the Noreste cartel, which controls a part of Nuevo Leon, and the Gulf syndicate, which has been active in Tamaulipas for decades.

In January 2019, in the neighboring town of Miguel Aleman, 24 corpses were found, of which 15 were burned. In August 2010, a group of 72 undocumented migrants were killed in San Fernando, in Tamaulipas.

Authorities said the massacre was perpetrated by the Zetas cartel, one of the most powerful at the time. Tamaulipas, on Mexico's Gulf coast, is the shortest route to the United States but also the most dangerous because of the presence of criminal gangs, which kidnap, extort and murder migrants. Cartel-related violence has beset Mexico since 2006, with more than 300,000 killings since then. The country recorded 34,523 assassinations in 2020, a slight decrease on the previous year's figure, which was a record high since official tallies began. — AFP



CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico: A Guatemalan migrant and his son cross the Rio Grande natural border between El Paso, state of Texas, US, and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua state, Mexico in search of political asylum.— AFP

Rights group slams Turkey's transfer of Syria detainees

BEIRUT: Human Rights Watch yesterday condemned the "illegal transfers" to Turkey of more than 60 Syrians arrested by Ankara and its local proxies in Syria's northeast in 2019. Turkey and its Syrian rebel proxies arrested the 63 Syrians between October and December 2019 in the border area of Ras Al-Ain in Syria's northeast, after seizing the region from Kurdish fighters, the rights group said. The men, Arabs and Kurds, are being held over their alleged links to Kurdish groups viewed by Ankara as "terrorists", according to HRW.

They have been charged with "undermining the unity and territorial integrity of the state, membership in a terrorist organisation, and murder", the rights group added. "Not only have these Syrians been illegally transferred to Turkey for abusive prosecutions, but in an extraordinarily cruel move, the courts have imposed the highest sentence possible in Turkey—life without parole"—on at

least five of them, said Michael Page, HRW's deputy regional director. Turkey and its Syrian proxies seized control of Ras al-Ain during an October 2019 offensive that saw it wrest a 120-kilometre (70-mile) long strip of land from Kurdish forces on the Syrian side of its southern border.

Turkish authorities have not produced evidence that the detainees committed crimes or were active fighters with Kurdish groups, HRW said. "Turkish authorities, as an occupying power, are required to respect people's rights under the law of occupation in northeastern Syria, including the prohibition on arbitrary detention and on the transfer of people to their territory," Page said.

"Instead, they are violating their obligations by arresting these Syrian men and carting them off to Turkey to face the most dubious and vaguest of charges connected to alleged activity in Syria." While HRW said it could only confirm 63 transfers, it said available evidence suggests the number of Syrians taken to Turkey could be almost 200. The alleged arrests and transfers are only the latest violations Turkey and its Syrian rebel proxies are accused of carrying out in areas under their control. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet warned last year of growing violence and criminality in areas captured by Turkey and its Syrian proxies, including in Ras al-Ain.—AFP



TAMPERE, Finland: Sierra Leonean national Gibril Massaquoi, wears a face mask as he attends the first day of his trial at the Pirkanmaa District Court in Tampere, Finland, yesterday.— AFP

Massaquoi goes on trial in Finland over war crimes

TAMPERE, Finland: The trial of a suspected warlord accused of atrocities in Liberia's civil war began in Finland yesterday, the first such case to be partly heard on Liberian soil. Gibril Massaquoi, a Sierra Leonean living in Finland since 2008, is accused of murder, aggravated war crimes and aggravated crimes against humanity during the West African country's internal conflict a generation ago.

The 51-year-old—who denies the charges—was allegedly known by the moniker "Angel Gabriel" and appeared before the Pirkanmaa District Court in Tampere, the Finnish town where he was arrested in March last year. In a historic first, the court will also move to Liberia and neighboring Sierra Leone in mid-February to hear testimony from up to 80 witnesses and visit sites where the atrocities allegedly unfolded under Massaquoi's orders.

Wearing a grey suit and facemask, Massaquoi listened through a translator as prosecutor Tom Laitinen read the charges: a grisly litany of killings, rapes and torture the prosecution says were carried out by Massaquoi and soldiers under his command between 1999 and 2003. The prosecution is calling for a life sentence, which in Finland means on average 14 years imprisonment.

Court documents seen by AFP contend Massaquoi held an "extremely senior and influential position" in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), one of the main militias fighting alongside president Charles Taylor's NPFL forces. Finnish law can permit prosecution of serious crimes committed abroad. In the northern village of Kamatahun Hassala, witnesses say Massaquoi ordered civilians, including children, to be locked into two buildings which were then torched. At least seven women were raped and murdered in the village and other locals were killed, their bodies cut up and "made into food which Massaquoi also ate," Laitinen told the court.—AFP

In life and death, Mexico's victims face growing wait

MEXICO CITY: When Miguel caught the coronavirus his family hoped help would come quickly for the Mexican grandfather, but instead they had to wait for oxygen, a hospital bed and, finally, a cremation.

Their story is increasingly familiar as Mexico reels from its worst month of the pandemic yet, with more

News in brief

Japan toughens virus measures

TOKYO: Japan passed a new law strengthening enforcement of its virus restrictions yesterday, allowing authorities to fine bars and restaurants that defy closure requests. People can also be fined up to 500,000 yen (\$4,800) if they test positive for Covid-19 but refuse hospitalization, although lawmakers scrapped plans to introduce prison sentences as punishment. With just six months until the pandemic-postponed Summer Olympics, Tokyo and other regions are currently under a state of emergency following a record surge in coronavirus infections.— AFP

Istanbul rector rules out quitting

ISTANBUL: A Turkish university rector at the heart of protests posing a growing challenge to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan ruled out quitting yesterday and predicted that the rallies will soon end. More than 300 students and their supporters were detained in Istanbul and the capital Ankara in increasingly violent altercations with the police this week. The demonstrations erupted after Erdogan appointed party loyalist Melih Bulu as the head of Istanbul's elite Bogazici University at the start of the year.— AFP

China to offer 10m doses to Covax

BEIJING: China plans to provide 10 million doses of COVID-19 jabs to the WHO-backed international vaccine distribution program Covax, Beijing said yesterday as it seeks to reframe perceptions of its role in the pandemic. The Covax program, which aims to provide two billion doses of vaccine, pools funding from richer countries with the intention of ensuring poorer nations can inoculate their health workers and most vulnerable citizens, on the basis that the pandemic would remain a global threat if it was not tackled worldwide. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said yesterday that China "decided to provide 10 million vaccine doses to Covax, primarily to meet the urgent needs of developing countries." — AFP

Ukraine bans 3 pro-Russia TV channels

KIEV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has banned three pro-Russian television channels in a move the presidency said was aimed to stave off Kremlin propaganda. The ban came into effect in the early hours of Wednesday after Zelensky issued a decree imposing sanctions against pro-Russian lawmaker Taras Kozak and eight of his companies, including the three TV stations. The channels — 112 Ukraina, Zik TV and NewsOne TV—are formally owned by Kozak, but are also linked to powerful MP Viktor Medvedchuk, a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin.— AFP

French writer to crowdfund new book

PARIS: Despite being investigated over claims he raped children, award-winning French writer Gabriel Matzneff hopes to crowdfund a new book that responds to one of his accusers, his former editor confirmed to AFP. The new book, titled "Vanessavirus", is a response to Vanessa Springora, whose book "Le Consentement" (Consent) detailed how she was groomed by Matzneff in the 1980s when she was 14 and he was in his 50s. Her revelations, published in January 2020, triggered a major scandal in the French literary scene—not least since Matzneff had never hidden his preference for underage boys and girls, publishing a notorious defense of paedophilia in 1974, "The Under-16s", that was reprinted as recently as 2005.— AFP

French firm to make Moderna vaccine

PARIS: A French lab will start producing Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine in March, while another will begin making the vaccine from Pfizer and BioNTech in April, Industry Minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher said yesterday. President Emmanuel Macron pledged Tuesday that four sites on French soil would begin making coronavirus vaccines soon, as the government draws sharp criticism over an inoculation drive that has started off slowly. French pride has also taken a hit after its pharma giant Sanofi said its COVID vaccine would not be ready until later this year.— AFP

than 32,000 deaths in January, overwhelming hospitals, mortuaries, cemeteries and crematoriums.

After Miguel fell ill in late December, "the doctor asked us to go get oxygen, and that's where the long journey began," said his 32-year-old granddaughter, who asked not to identify her grandfather's family name for reasons of privacy. When the 78-year-old's condition worsened his relatives struggled to find a hospital with room for him. After he succumbed to the virus on January 4, Miguel's family was put on a waiting list to cremate his remains.

"They told us that he was in the queue, because many people had already died," his granddaughter said. Finally Miguel was cremated on January 8.—AFP

International

Myanmar's Suu Kyi charged as calls to oppose coup grow

Suu Kyi supporters announce massive campaigns on Facebook group

YANGON: Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi was formally charged yesterday two days after she was detained in a military coup, as calls for civil disobedience to oppose the putsch gathered pace. The Southeast Asian nation was plunged back into direct military rule when soldiers arrested key civilian leaders in a series of dawn raids on Monday, ending the army's brief flirtation with democracy.

Suu Kyi, who has not been seen in public since, won a huge landslide with her National League for Democracy (NLD) last November but the military-whose favored parties received a drubbing-declared the polls fraudulent. Yesterday, the NLD's press officer said 75-year-old Suu Kyi was formally charged with an offence under Myanmar's import and export law, with a court signing off on two-weeks remand.

The unusual charge stemmed from a search of her house following her arrest in which walkie-talkies were discovered, according to a leaked police charging document seen by reporters. A similarly unorthodox charge under the country's disaster management law against President Win Myint revolved around him allegedly breaching anti-coronavirus measures last year by meeting voters on the campaign trail.

With soldiers and armored cars back on the streets of major cities, the takeover has not been met by any large street protests. But signs of public anger and plans to resist have begun to flicker.

Doctors and medical staff at multiple hospitals across the country announced yesterday they were donning red ribbons and walking away from all non-emergency work to protest against the coup.

"Our main goal is to accept only the government we elected," Aung San Min, head of a 100-bed hospital in Gangaw district, said. Some medical teams posted pictures on social media wearing red ribbons-NLD's colors-and raising a three-finger salute, a protest gesture used by democracy activists in neighboring Thailand, while some have chosen to bypass work altogether. "My protest starts today by not going to the hospital... I have no desire to work under the military dictatorship," said Nor Nor Wint Wah, a doctor in Mandalay. Activists were announcing their campaigns on a Facebook group called "Civil Disobedience Movement" which by yesterday afternoon had more than 150,000 followers within 24 hours of its launch.

The clatter of pots and pans-and the honking of car horns-also rang out across Yangon on Tuesday evening after calls for protest went out on social media.

Military's deadly legacy

Army chief Min Aung Hlaing appointed himself head of a new cabinet stacked with former and current generals, justifying his coup on Tuesday as the "inevitable" result of civilian leaders' failure to heed the army's fraud warnings. The military



YANGON: In this file photo people participate in a rally in support of Myanmar's State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, as she prepares to defend Myanmar at the International Court of Justice. —AFP

declared a one-year state of emergency and said it would hold new elections once their allegations of voter irregularities were addressed and investigated. The move stunned Myanmar, a country left impoverished by decades of junta misrule before it

began taking steps towards a more democratic and civilian-led government 10 years ago. But protesting is fraught with risk. During junta rule, dissent was quashed with thousands of activists-including Suu Kyi-detained for years on end. —AFP

Pakistan health workers to begin receiving Chinese-made vaccine

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan will begin administering a Chinese-made COVID-19 vaccine to frontline health workers yesterday, but the country is still months away from a mass roll-out. Beijing has donated about 500,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine-which has yet to be fully approved by China's health authorities-with a further million expected by the end of the month.

The country of 220 million has recorded more than half a million coronavirus cases, with around 11,000 deaths, but limited testing suggests true figures are likely much higher. Lawmaker Nausheen Hamid, who leads parliament's health committee, said a first phase of vaccinations would prioritize health workers. "I can't say with certainty, but we would still need around two months to start a mass vaccination campaign," she added.

The Sindh province health authority said around 100 health workers nationwide had died since the virus reached the world's fifth most populous country last spring.

Pulmonologist and COVID-19 expert Shazli Manzoor told AFP that the Chinese vaccine suited



ISLAMABAD: Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan witnesses the first Chinese-made COVID-19 vaccine being administered to a frontline health worker on Tuesday. — AFP

impoverished Pakistan because it could be stored at between two and eight degrees Celsius (36 and 46 Fahrenheit), compared to -70 degrees Celsius for other vaccines. He said the government would set up special clinics to monitor how the population was responding to the vaccinations.

Some doctors have questioned how effective the vaccine will be. "It lacks transparency and data compared to other vaccines," one Pakistani health expert told AFP. Up to 17 million doses of the British-

Swedish produced AstraZeneca vaccine have been promised to Pakistan in the first half of 2021 under the Covax global pool, the government has said. Pakistan was not included on a list of countries in the region to receive vaccines from neighboring India, which is home to the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, the Serum Institute. A doctor in Islamabad was the first health worker to receive the jab in a symbolic ceremony in front of Prime Minister Imran Khan on Tuesday night. —AFP

Portuguese funeral workers nearing 'breaking point'

AMADORA, Portugal: Yet another phone call comes in for Artur Palma, who is straining to cope with all the bodies piling up at his suburban Lisbon funeral parlor. The call is from a nearby retirement home, prompting Palma to send his employee Jose Santos to collect the latest COVID-19 victim and drive her body back to the Velinho funeral parlor he runs in Amadora.

Santos suits up in line with Portugal's latest health guidelines: head-to-toe white suit, gloves and surgical mask. Then, he sets off in his hearse. Faced with an explosion in COVID deaths during a virulent third wave in the last few weeks, Palma says that the demands on the business and staff are taking their toll. "It's real chaos. There are so many dead people we don't have enough room for them all," Palma says. "It's an enormous weight at all levels, physically and psychologically. We sleep little and

we are reaching our limit. We are reaching the breaking point," he adds. Velinho employees now make three or four trips a week to retirement homes to collect the dead, Santos, 62, tells AFP, at the wheel of his hearse.

That is about three times the number of deaths the funeral parlor handled in January 2020. According to data compiled by AFP, over the last two weeks Portugal has recorded the largest number of infections and deaths relative to its population of any country in the world.

Over the year since the pandemic began, Portugal ranks seventh in the world for infections per capita but is lower down the list for deaths per capita. The disease has claimed just over 13,000 lives in the country of 10 million people, including more than 5,500 in January alone. A second general lockdown was introduced on January 15 in a bid to slow infections.

At the retirement home, Santos and a



AMADORA, Portugal: Funeral workers wearing protection suits seal the casket of a COVID-19 victim at a funeral parlor in Amadora, in the outskirts of Lisbon. — AFP

colleague place the body in a mortuary bag and wheel it on a stretcher to the hearse. "It really has to happen like this from now on," Santos says, stressing the importance of respecting health measures at each stage of preparing the body for burial. Back at the funeral parlor, amid stacks of new ornate wooden

coffins, Santos and Palma complete their protective gear by pulling on medical shoe covers, goggles, overalls and gas masks. "We absolutely must stick to using this protective equipment. I myself put on three pairs of gloves. They are made for high-risk situations," Palma says. —AFP

71 homes gutted as Australia bushfire rages near Perth

PERTH, Australia: At least 71 homes have been destroyed in a bushfire raging out of control near Australia's fourth-biggest city Perth, authorities said yesterday, as they told residents to ignore a coronavirus lockdown and leave threatened areas. The blaze has torn through swathes of land in the Perth Hills and was moving towards more densely populated areas. Six firefighters received minor injuries-including one who officials said suffered burns and continued working to extinguish the blaze-but no deaths or serious injuries have been reported so far.

"To the people who have lost their homes, it's just devastating for them. Our thoughts go out to them," Western Australian fire commissioner Darren Klemm said. Several emergency warnings were issued, with

conditions set to worsen later yesterday and strong gusting winds expected to fan the flames. The blaze hit a population that had just been forced into a snap lockdown after a coronavirus case was detected. About two million people in and around Perth fell under the stay-at-home orders imposed on Sunday. "This is a situation the likes of which we have never seen before," said Western Australian Premier Mark McGowan. "A full lockdown and raging bushfires. It is frightening and it will test us all."

No new virus cases have been detected since the lockdown began, but the number of homes lost is still expected to rise slightly. As the fire front edged nearer to more populated areas, Klemm called on locals to act swiftly to escape the potentially deadly blaze despite the coronavirus restrictions. "What we don't want is indecision from people about whether they should evacuate or not when we require them to evacuate," he said. "So that evacuation overrides any quarantining requirements that people may have."

'Like a bomb had gone off'

Hundreds of people have fled the area since the

bushfire was sparked on Monday, with many sleeping in evacuation centers overnight. Among them was Peter Lavis, 68, who left two nights ago after watching distant smoke quickly transform the landscape until it "looked like a bomb had gone off". "We could see the fire clearly, the red glow and occasional rush of flames going up," he told AFP. "We had a little family conference and decided the best thing to do was to leave."

Lavis said he believed his home was safe while a neighbor had reported his eldest daughter's nearby house was also standing despite everything around it being burned. "It's some of the best news but also the saddest-a lot of people haven't been so lucky," he said. Bushfire smoke has blanketed Perth, about 30 kilometers west of the blaze which had a 75-kilometre (47-mile) perimeter Tuesday and has so far burned almost 10,000 hectares (24,700 acres). "It was just scorched earth. Even where I was behind the fire, there was a lot of active burning because the crews just had to react so fast," local mayor Kevin Bailey told public broadcaster ABC. —AFP

News in brief

GSK, CureVac to develop vaccine

LONDON: British pharmaceutical group GlaxoSmithKline and German biotech firm CureVac yesterday announced plans to jointly develop a coronavirus vaccine with the potential to counter multi-variants of COVID-19. "The development program will begin immediately, with the target of introducing the vaccine in 2022, subject to regulatory approval," a joint statement said. GSK will also support the manufacture this year of up to 100 million doses of CureVac's first generation COVID-19 vaccine, it added. —AFP

32 killed in Uganda

KAMPALA, Uganda: Thirty-two people died and five were injured on Tuesday when a truck carrying mourners collided with a car and three other vehicles in Uganda, the Ugandan Red Cross said. The overloaded truck, carrying mourners and a coffin, collided with a car near Kasese in western Uganda shortly before midnight, according to Red Cross spokeswoman Irene Nakasiita. "The road is small, it's under construction and it was dark," said Nakasiita. Shortly afterwards, two trucks coming from Kasese ploughed into the crash site and a third coming in the opposite direction, from Bundibugyo, also struck the vehicles and overturned. —AFP

Brin family office in Singapore

SINGAPORE: Google co-founder Sergey Brin has opened a family office in Singapore to help manage his fortune, making him the latest tycoon to establish a private investment company in the financial hub. The company overseeing the assets of Brin, the world's ninth-richest person with wealth of \$86.5 billion, set up its Singapore branch late last year, according to documents filed with the corporate regulator. The ultra-wealthy have increasingly chosen the city-state in recent years to open so-called "family offices" focused on handling their fortunes and lives, among them British billionaire inventor James Dyson. They are attracted by the city-state's low Nearly 11,000. —AFP

Afghan judge shot dead in Jalalabad ambush

JALALABAD, Afghanistan: An Afghan judge was shot dead in an ambush in the eastern city of Jalalabad yesterday, police said, the third court official killed in less than a month. Judge Hafizullah was attacked as he headed to work in a motor trishaw, said Farid Khan, spokesman for Nangarhar province's police. Gulzada Sangar, a doctor at Jalalabad public hospital, said Hafizullah had multiple bullet wounds.

The murder of Hafizullah, who like many Afghans goes by just one name, comes after militants shot dead two women judges working for the Supreme Court in Kabul on January 17. Several prominent Afghans-including judges, clerics, journalists, activists and doctors-have been assassinated in often brazen daytime attacks. Targeted killings with remotely detonated bombs attached to vehicles, or drive-by shootings, have become favored tactics of insurgents, especially during the morning commute in big cities. Earlier yesterday a policeman was killed and three others wounded in Kabul by a bomb attached to their vehicle. Four similar bomb blasts rocked the Afghan capital on Tuesday, including one that killed a prominent cleric. —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2021

RATING ACTION COMMENTARY

Fitch revises Kuwait's outlook to negative; affirms at 'AA'

Economy to stage a mild economic recovery this year

HONG KONG: Fitch Ratings has revised the outlook on Kuwait's Long-term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) to negative from stable and affirmed the IDR at 'AA'.

Key rating drivers

The revision of the outlook reflects near-term liquidity risk associated with the imminent depletion of liquid assets in the General Reserve Fund (GRF) in the absence of parliamentary authorization for the government to borrow. This risk is rooted in political and institutional gridlock that also explains the lack of meaningful reforms to tackle double-digit fiscal deficits and the expected weakening of Kuwait's fiscal and external balance sheets, although these will remain among the strongest of Fitch-rated sovereigns.

Without passage of a law permitting new debt issuance, the GRF could run out of liquidity in the coming months without further measures to replenish it. Depletion of GRF liquidity would sharply limit the government's ability to make good on its spending obligations and could result in significant economic disruption. Our base case is that government will replenish the GRF to avoid depletion even without any new legislation by parliament, and that debt service (about KD 400 million or 1 percent of GDP in 2021) would in any case continue in a timely manner. Nevertheless, a degree of uncertainty remains.

The authorities have shown commitment to avoiding a liquidity crisis and have flexibility to take extraordinary measures, but the timing of a sustainable funding solution remains unclear. In August, parliament passed legislation removing the automatic requirement to transfer 10 percent of revenue from the GRF into the much larger Future Generations Fund (FGF). This allowed for the reversal of the transfer for the fiscal year ending March 2019 (FY18), and followed the purchase of liquid assets from the GRF by the FGF. The GRF still has a broad range of illiquid assets that could also be

transferred to the FGF, including the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC).

We expect the general government deficit to widen to about KD 6.7 billion (20 percent of GDP) in FY20, including in revenue the estimated investment income of the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA), which is not officially disclosed and mostly relates to the FGF. We expect revenues to fall 33 percent to a little over KD 14 billion (42 percent of GDP), driven by lower oil prices and production. Spending will be in line with the previous fiscal year at KD 21 billion (62 percent of GDP), slightly below the final budget. The government allocated a total of KD 740 million (less than two percent of GDP) in additional spending to fight the coronavirus and support the private sector, which was offset by savings elsewhere, including lower subsidies, which vary with oil prices.

Fiscal deficits will likely remain in the double digits in the medium to long term and lead to a gradual but steady deterioration of Kuwait's balance-sheet strengths, barring significant fiscal reforms or a rebound in global oil demand. We expect a fiscal deficit of about KD 7.5 billion (21 percent of GDP) in FY21, assuming an average oil price of \$45/bbl and average production of 2.4 million bbl/day. Under the same assumptions, the recent draft government budget plans for a broad-based increase in spending to KD 23 billion (about 65 percent of GDP), but we expect that the actual spending increase will be lower. We estimate that at current oil production levels, oil prices would need to average \$80/bbl for the budget to be in balance.

Rating drivers

Kuwait's 'AA' IDRs also reflect the following key rating drivers.

Kuwait's public sector balance sheet will likely remain among the strongest of any Fitch-rated sovereign, even assuming little fiscal reform and no

ucts and services such as Sukuk, Euro settlement, FX sale and purchase, gold account, KFH global platform, FX Waad forward, profit rate swap and other treasury services and products.

Al-Sumait pointed out that KFH has a team of national professional youth skills with sufficient experience to manage all treasury activities and serve customers by using advanced technological solutions to enhance performance efficiency. "Seeking to meet business requirements and maintain leadership at all levels, KFH is keen to keep abreast of latest treasury products while completely adhering to sharia principles and achieving performance excellence," he said.

Al-Sumait explained that as for the treasury, there are harmony and coordination between KFH Group subsidiaries in Kuwait, Turkey, Germany, Bahrain, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, noting the importance of KFH geographical spread within regional and global banking network.

"Smart management of cash and treasury systems



Ahmed Al-Sumait



recovery in oil prices or production. We estimate the foreign assets of the KIA, mostly in the FGF, at around \$581 billion at end-2020, accounting for the bulk of Kuwait's sovereign net foreign asset position of 652 percent of GDP. We estimate that the KIA total likely increased on the back of strong financial returns in 2020, despite drawdowns from the GRF. Government debt/GDP is among the lowest among Fitch-rated sovereigns, at around 17 percent in 2020, and passage of the debt law allowing KD 20 billion of borrowing by the central government could take this to 50-60 percent, just above the median for 'AA' sovereigns.

Kuwait's bank and non-bank private sectors are net external creditors and major investors in the rest of the region, reflecting relatively muted domestic growth prospects. This provides support to the current account balance and Kuwait's net international investment position, which we estimate at 675 percent of GDP in 2020. Kuwait's current account has been in surplus in all but two of the past 20 years.

Kuwait's fiscal and external metrics are particularly sensitive to changes in oil prices and production. We estimate that a \$10/bbl change in the average oil price from our baseline assumption would shift Kuwait's fiscal balance by around 6 percent of GDP. An additional 100,000 bbl/day of oil production would impact the fiscal balance by around 1.5 percent of GDP.

We expect Kuwait's economy to stage a mild economic recovery this year as the dual shocks of oil production cuts and the coronavirus begin to fade. We estimate that real GDP contracted by about 7 percent in 2020, with the oil sector contracting by 9 percent and the non-oil sector by 4 percent. As global oil demand recovers and OPEC production quotas are phased out, there is potential for Kuwait to gradually raise output towards current production capacity of 3.1 million bbl/day (with KPC planning to expand capacity to 3.5 million bbl/day by 2025). The commissioning of refinery upgrades, KPC's clean fuels project and higher gas production could also support growth in 2021-2022.

KFH wins 'Best Treasury and Cash Management Bank in Kuwait' Award 2021

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) won 'Best Treasury and Cash Management Bank in Kuwait' Award 2021 from Global Finance Magazine in its twenty-first annual Best Treasury and Cash Management Banks and Providers awards.

General Manager-Treasury Kuwait at KFH, Ahmed Essa Al-Sumait, said that: "The award reflects the prestigious position KFH enjoys in the treasury and cash management. This deserved win crowns KFH efforts in offering innovative financial and banking solutions as well as advanced digital platforms in treasury for customers according to the highest quality standards."

He added that KFH offers diversified portfolio of foreign exchange and capital market products to facilitate customer activities and provide them daily with the latest global market news as well as tailored innovative financial solutions. Moreover, KFH offers prod-

were essential over the past year of pandemic-induced chaos," said Joseph D Giarraputo, publisher and editorial director of Global Finance. "Our awards pinpoint the financial entities that shepherded their clients through the crisis with real-time insights and strategies that worked even at a time of rapid and dramatic changes."

Award criteria

Global Finance used a multi-tiered assessment process-which included entries from banks and providers and input from industry analysts, corporate executives, technology experts and independent research-to select the best providers of treasury and cash management services. A variety of subjective and objective criteria were considered, including profitability, market share and reach, customer service, competitive pricing, product innovation and the extent to which treasury and cash management providers have successfully differentiated themselves from their competitors around core service provision. It is worth noting that Global Finance, founded in 1987, has readers in 191 countries and 34 years of experience in international financial markets. The magazine is an international reference in the financial sector, covering topics of corporate finance, joint ventures, capital markets, currencies, banks and risk management.

Diraya campaign addresses e-crimes

KUWAIT: Keen to enhance financial awareness among all segments of our society, and in its efforts to bolster the banking sector's social responsibility, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) continues to oversee activities of "Be Aware" Campaign (Diraya in Arabic). The campaign, recently launched under CBK supervision in cooperation with Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) and with the participation of all Kuwaiti banks, aims to raise public awareness on the role of the banking sector and on how best to benefit from banks' services.

In a statement, the CBK stressed the importance of increasing public awareness on e-fraud and e-crimes. Customers could be approached through email, text messages, smart phone applications, or even through direct phone calls where their confidential banking information such as account number, PIN number, and OTP number could be obtained and used for theft of money or personal data, the campaign warned.

Among the series of public service adverts disseminated as part of the "Diraya" campaign, an advert launched today indicates means to avoid e-fraud and to protect customers' banking and personal data through avoiding any call or message from an unknown party. The advert also stresses that banks never ask for customers' banking information via phone calls, emails, messages, or other means.

The awareness campaign messages are published through several channels, most importantly CBK and Kuwaiti banks' accounts on social networks platforms. More information on the financial awareness campaign and its details are available through the official campaign website www.dirayakw.com.

After restructuring, Siemens makes change at the top

BERLIN: German industrial giant Siemens prepared to turn a page yesterday with a new CEO following a restructuring drive, after a year marked by falling sales due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Chief executive Joe Kaeser was to hand the baton to his deputy, Roland Busch, after a seven-year tenure marked by slimming down and spinning off assets to refocus as a technology company. Due to shutdown measures, the annual shareholder's meeting was taking place online, with the handover to Busch to come at the end of the event around 1600 GMT.

"Our company has a decade of opportunities before it," Busch said as the gathering kicked off, paying tribute to Kaeser's run. After reporting full-year to September earnings down by a quarter as the coronavirus battered the global economy, Siemens said it had turned a corner in the first quarter of its financial year. The Munich-based company, which makes products ranging from trains to factory equipment, saw a 38-percent surge in net profit to 1.5

billion euros (\$1.8 billion) in the three months to December. "We made Siemens robust these last years," Kaeser told the meeting.

'Better position'

Kaeser announced in March that he would not be pursuing a contract extension and would pass the reins to Busch, 56, who has been a Siemens director since 2011 and served as Kaeser's number two since October 2019. "Siemens is in a better position today than a few years ago," Busch told the daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung in December, defending Kaeser's stewardship.

At the end of September, Siemens spun off its Energy division, which includes oil-and-gas operations, and in October sold components subsidiary Flender to US-based Carlyle for 2.0 billion euros. Siemens Energy, in which the group still holds a 35.1-percent stake, this week announced it would slash 7,800 jobs over the next four years to cut costs in a rapidly changing market. Despite the ongoing impact of the virus,



MUNICH: Outgoing CEO of German industrial conglomerate Siemens Joe Kaeser (left) and his successor Roland Busch react after his speech during the virtual annual shareholders' meeting in Munich, southern Germany, yesterday. — AFP

the group yesterday lifted its growth forecast for the year to "average or higher", with strong prospects for its software and industrial automation activities.

'Consolidating' progress

Kaeser's tenure was marked by turmoil rarely seen since the group's founding in 1847. Like many sprawling industrial conglomerates with diverse activities, Siemens has been forced to adapt to an economy in which specialization is king. Kaeser's increasing attention to

software, automation and "industry 4.0" meant that the group's footprint shrank on his watch. Annual turnover, still hovering at around 76 billion euros in 2013, came in at 57.1 billion euros last year. The listing in recent years of the Energy and Healthineers divisions came alongside major downsizing operations, shedding tens of thousands of jobs. The moves came in for sharp criticism from trade unions which accused the company of putting the interests of shareholders ahead of staff. —AFP

Business

stc revenues reach KD 283.2 million in 2020; net profit KD 32.1 million

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc), a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers and enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its financial results for the financial year ended 31 December 2020. stc highlights the financial and operational performance in addition to the social initiatives that the company took during the year 2020 amid COVID-19's difficulties, challenges and negative economic consequences affecting most companies within various sectors.



Dr. Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulrahman

Eng. Maziad bin Nasser Al-Harbi

Commenting on the announcements of these results, Dr. Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulrahman, stc's Chairman, stated: "2020 was an unusual year that is radically different from previous years in terms of the external events associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the ongoing internal development processes which have resulted in a significant transformation of stc's operational activities in line with company's digital transformation strategy". As for the overall performance of the telecommunications sector, Dr. Abdulrahman added: "On a local, regional and global level, the telecommunications sector is witnessing drastic changes in terms of enhancing the digital services and business solutions in addition to providing advanced as well as diversified Information and communication technology (ICT) packages aimed at enhancing company's operational and financial performance".

- stc launched advanced distinct products and services backed by 5G technology.
- stc demonstrated its ability to overcome the economic challenges to keep up with the business operations and strengthen the digital transformation strategy.
- stc has developed its corporate strategy to support its operational performance and create an added value to its shareholders and customers.
- stc enhanced its position as the second largest telecom operator in Kuwait with a market share of approx. 35% in terms of sector's market share of revenues
- stc records an EBITDA of KD 73.4 million
- Recommendation to distribute cash dividends to shareholders by 60 fils per share in 2020.
- stc implemented advanced plans to ensure business continuity in order to enhance its profitability through the adoption of a balanced as well as effective financial policy for the operational and capital expenditures.
- stc achieved these results by the continuous efforts and professionalism of its staff, despite the global economic challenges resulted by COVID-19.

COVID impact

He pointed out: "Despite the continuing negative repercussions of the current economic crisis associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected most sectors on a global level, we are optimistic about the future of business, and we are; therefore, constantly seeking to renew and innovate everything we offer our customers with in addition to our keen to expand easy and accessible communication channels to provide better and faster services".

Dr. Abdulrahman commented on stc's social initiatives since COVID-19's outbreak: "During 2020, stc was keen to support all segments of Kuwaiti society by launching a series of social initiatives that include supporting the country's preventive activities in the field of health, safety and social awareness". He also stated: "Throughout the year, stc has collaborated with some governmental agencies and medical companies on ways to prevent the infectious diseases in addition to undertaking a number of precautionary measures and procedures for prevention in accordance with the health guidelines and instructions provided by the Ministry of Health. stc has also adopted the best safety standards and instilled them in the culture of performance of its employees to provide high quality services consistent with the required measures that were predefined to protect its customers and employees. stc has also continued providing social activities targeting several sectors, including sports, education and health, with the aim of leaving a social impact in Kuwait.

In addition to its leading role in providing integrated, advanced and innovative digital as well as technology solutions for individuals and enterprises throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, stc has been able to achieve these results by adopting a flexible operating model in addition to being flexible in implementing the company's digital transformation strategy and providing integrated advanced technical solutions that serve the Kuwaiti government's outlook

with regards to the social distancing for the individual and enterprise segments.

5G network

Capitalizing on the 5G network, stc was able to provide a range of digital services, which have become a major part of the Kuwaiti society's daily activities. Furthermore, stc was also able to meet the growing demand for high-speed wide broadband networks following the latest governmental decisions with regards to pursuing the current academic year through online platforms. Not to mention company's digital and cloud computing services designed to better serve the latest corporate directions".

Commenting on the stc's financial position as of December 31, 2020, Dr. Abdulrahman said: "Company's total assets reached KD 374.2 million at the end of 2020, while the total shareholders' equity increased by 3.2 percent reaching KD 222.2 million. As a result, the book value per share reached 445 fils. Moreover, the company has a strong solvency position among its peers in the Middle East. stc's Board of Directors has recommended distributing cash dividends to respective shareholders of 60 fils representing 60 percent of the share's nominal value for the year ended 2020, subject to the approval of the Ordinary General Assembly of the company. This decision was driven by stc's confidence in the evolution of its business, its strong financial position and the ongoing cash flow generation during economic downturns."

Commenting on the announcement of company's financial results for the year ended December 31, 2020, Eng. Maziad bin Nasser Al-Harbi, stc's CEO, stated: "Despite the worldwide economic challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the strong competition in the Kuwaiti telecommunications market, stc has managed to achieve good levels of revenues and enhance its operational efficiency to add value to its customers and achieve better returns to its shareholders. stc has also demonstrated its ability to overcome potential challenges and potential risks while keeping up its business operations and serve customers during such circumstances. stc was able to achieve the above mentioned results due to the great efforts provided and the dedication of its employees, who demonstrated their determination to address the health risks we experienced from COVID-19's outbreak. This was the main reason, which helped the company to continue providing services to its customers with the same quality standards despite the growing demand and the convergence of the communications with customers and customer delivery services to the digital platforms".

Financial results

Al-Harbi added: "Consequently, stc has been able to achieve good financial results that meet the aspirations of company's shareholders during the unprecedented and unstable situations where the total revenue reached KD 283.2 million in 2020, compared to KD 293.7 million last year. This decline is attributed to the total and partial lockdown imposed in Kuwait due to COVID-19, resulting in a decline in the sales revenues of the consumer sector, as well as a significant and almost a total decline in the roaming services revenues as a result of the closure and suspension of flights at most airports worldwide. stc's social contributions that we are proud of have also contributed to the decline in company's revenue, where customers have been provided with unlimited free local calls for all mobile networks, in addition to a 5GB internet package per day from March 22, 2020 to April 20, 2020, in collaboration with the Communications & Information Technology Regulatory (CITRA) in support of the Kuwaiti community during the COVID-19 crisis. In contrast, sales of the business and enterprise sector has witnessed a growth in volume due to the need and increasing demand for digital and IT services.

On the other hand, while COVID-19's negative con-



sequences during 2020 had a significant impact on the financial results of most of the companies, this has put a considerable pressure on the business movement, which in turn led to a decline on stc's consolidated revenue resulting in a decline on company's profitability levels during 2020. The increase in the expected credit losses for on trade, other receivables and contract assets was also by 17.9 percent reaching KD 15.0 million in 2020 compared to 2019 had a significant impact on EBITDA which reached KD 73.4 million in 2020 compared to KD 83.8 million during 2019. While EBIT-

ness into new areas of sustainable growth, through a series of innovative initiatives aimed at improving operational efficiency and customer experience in addition to delivering the best services and products that meet the needs of its customers throughout COVID-19 and its associated requirements. Not to mention stc's support to the business sector through providing a well-developed 5G network infrastructure with the best and widest coverage. At stc, we are working on a balanced cost optimization program to achieve the best results and enhance company's profitability by adopting effective

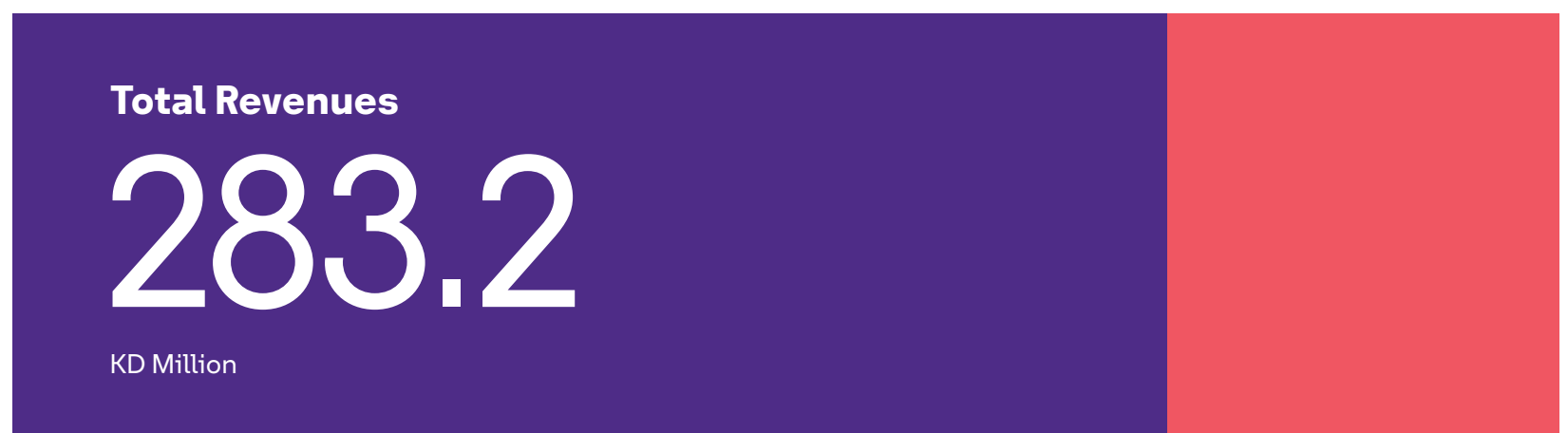
The financial results for the financial year ended 31 December 2020	
Revenues	KD 283.2 mn
EBITDA	KD 73.4 mn
Net Profit	KD 32.1 mn

DA margin reached 26 percent in 2020 compared to 29 percent in the previous year. On the other hand, the increase in the depreciation and amortization item by 4.2 percent to reach KD 39.3 million in 2020 as a result of capital expenditures invested on expanding the 5G network formed a burden on company's net profit which reached KD 32.1 million (earnings per share 64 fils) with a profit margin of 11 percent compared to KD 43.6 million (earnings per share 87 fils) and a profit margin of 15 percent recorded by the company in 2019. While the customer base has reached KD 1.9 million customers by the end of December 2020".

Al-Harbi pointed out: "stc achieved these results by implementing the digital transformation strategy and providing integrated technical solutions for individuals, private companies and government sectors. Furthermore, stc has been always keen to push its busi-

ness into new areas of sustainable growth, through a series of innovative initiatives aimed at improving operational efficiency and customer experience in addition to delivering the best services and products that meet the needs of its customers throughout COVID-19 and its associated requirements. Not to mention stc's support to the business sector through providing a well-developed 5G network infrastructure with the best and widest coverage. At stc, we are working on a balanced cost optimization program to achieve the best results and enhance company's profitability by adopting effective

Al-Harbi added: "stc's financial results for the end of 2020 reflected its competitiveness and strengthened its position as the second largest telecommunications company in terms of its market share of revenues in the Kuwaiti telecommunications sector of approx. 35 percent".



The Board of Directors of Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc) is pleased to announce to its shareholders that the company has achieved a net profit of KD 32.1 million for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.

EBITDA	Net Profit	EPS	Subscribers
FY 2020 73.4 KD Million	FY 2020 32.1 KD Million	FY 2020 64 Kuwaiti Fils	31 December 2020 1.9 Million Subscribers



Business

NBK profits in 2020 demonstrate its strong banking franchise: Al-Sagar

NBK Group CEO in analysts' conference call for year-end results of 2020

KUWAIT: Isam Al-Sager, Group Chief Executive Officer of National Bank of Kuwait, said: "NBK demonstrated the strength and resilience of its business model as we moved to navigate the headwinds of the pandemic. Our strong digital capabilities were critical for ensuring the agility of operations, enabling us to maintain progress towards most of our strategic goals."

In the Analysts' Conference call for the year-end results of 2020, Al-Sager added: "NBK reported a net profit of KD 246.3 million, a drop of 38.6 percent compared to last year, which is attributed to because of low interest rate environment and higher precautionary provisions."

A strong financial position

Al-Sager mentioned that NBK's Board of Directors has proposed a cash dividend of 20 fils per share, in addition to 5 percent bonus shares, subject to the approval of the general assembly, noting that the bank enjoys a strong financial position, which enabled to continue distributing profits to shareholders despite the prevailing exceptional circumstances.

Promising opportunities

Al-Sager pointed out that in 2021, the bank will continue to capitalize on its broad geographical footprint to increase profitability, by seeking to grow organically in key markets, in particular Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In Egypt, there are compelling retail and wholesale opportunities that we are very well positioned to seize, while in Saudi Arabia, our wealth management proposition has generated strong momentum. In Kuwait, growth in Islamic banking through Boubyan Bank remains an important driver for earnings diversification, he added.

NBK Group CEO pointed out that: "The Digital Transformation program will continue at pace, in our effort to achieve regional leadership in digital banking. This will improve the efficiency of operations, and help us cut down growth in costs."

Al-Sager added that for customers, the bank's commitment to enhancing online and mobile banking channels will lead to a more holistic and seamless journey, enabling us to cater to a wider clientele, noting that it was clear in 2020 that digital channels were critical for the bank's resilience to the pandemic.

A conservative approach

Al-Sager stressed that NBK will maintain its conservative approach to risk, and continue to provide for uncertainty across sectors, which will help it position itself for an eventual return to more normal levels of economic activity and demand for credit.

"We will also continue to monitor costs, as this discipline has already enabled us to maintain operating expenses at an appropriate level," he added. Al-Sager noted that NBK still benefits from a dynamic business model and strategy, supported by a strong balance sheet, healthy asset quality and comfortable liquidity levels. These characteristics have not changed, and will support us in withstanding the current crisis as we seek to return to profitable growth.

Provisioning levels

On provisioning levels during year 2021, Al-Sager mentioned that in the 2nd and 3rd quarter of 2020, there was a high level of uncertainty around the operating environment and the management took a very conservative view on the liquidity of some customers, which eventually led into building high provisioning buffers. Those are mostly specific provisioning towards these groups of clients: which in turn reflected towards easing provisioning for the 4th quarter mainly.

Public debt law

Commenting on the possibility of adopting the Public Debt Law in the near future, Al-Sager said: "We just have a new parliament that has been elected 2 months ago. I believe that sooner or later, the Debt Law has to be approved. It is more of a political decision that has to be taken by the parliament. In order to finance these mega projects, it is necessary that the government pushes for the approval of the Debt Law."

On his part, Suij Ronghe, Acting Group CFO said that the results for the year 2020 have been satisfying in light of the benign operating conditions and demonstrate the bank's ability to stand headwinds and uncertainties. The bank's business model showed resilience that was reflected on operating income, good growth in core franchise deposits and well-contained costs. Also, comfortable liquidity levels and a solid capital base have been a feature of NBK's 2020 results, noting that the Group's Balance Sheet remains strong with stable credit quality, he added.



Isam J Al-Sager



Ronghe pointed out that there was an improvement in the NIMs in the 4th quarter of the year. This is what we had expected: because of the way that the bank's liability book is structured. The time deposits when and as they mature, especially the expensive ones, these get replaced by lower cost deposits, and hence, we saw that the funding costs improved remarkably in the 4th quarter of 2020.

Ronghe highlighted that the bank has achieved the level of benefit in overall funding cost to a large scale, noting that NIMs on an overall basis, should remain around the levels that we saw around the last quarter of 2020 at 2.22 percent for the year.

Ronghe explained that in 2020, the Group benefited from higher growth in consumer and retail deposits; mainly CASA deposits, noting that CASA deposits have remained stable in the last quarter, despite the start of repayments and the gradual opening up of the economy.

Markaz: Issuances by GCC sovereign entities soar 25%

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz", in its recent research report titled "GCC Bonds and Sukuk Market Survey 2020," highlighted the trends pertaining to Bonds and Sukuk primary issuances in the GCC region during the past year. The report showed that despite the double blow of the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent decline in oil prices, primary debt issuances set a new record for the total value of issuances raised in one year.

GCC bonds and sukuk market

The bonds and sukuk market within the GCC consists of Bonds and Sukuk issued by governments or corporations for financing purposes and are denominated in either local or foreign currencies. Primary issuances of Bonds and Sukuk amounted to \$132.7 billion during 2020, marking a growth of 16 percent year-on-year from \$114.2 billion raised in 2019. The implications of COVID-19 have resulted in added strain on regional economies in terms of growing budget deficits and tightening liquidity. Moreover, the total number of primary issuances during last year totaled 360, compared to 409 issuances during the same period in the previous year.

Geographical Allocation: UAE-based issuers led the GCC Bonds and Sukuk market during 2020, raising a total of \$48.5 billion, or representing 37 percent of the total value raised in the GCC, through 195 primary issuances. Saudi Arabia followed with 32 percent and Qatar with 18 percent of the total value raised. Moreover, Kuwaiti entities raised a total of \$4.6 billion, representing 3 percent of the total value raised during the year.

NBK Economic Report

Oil prices range-bound as demand worries resurface

KUWAIT: Oil prices have fallen slightly from recent 11-month highs amid renewed oil demand concerns following the spread of more virulent coronavirus strains. The demand for oil could accelerate in the second half of 2021 as suggested by the IEA, and in line with the IMF's 2021 growth forecasts. For now, Saudi Arabia's production cut has helped tighten supplies and put a floor on prices. Supply restraint may have to continue for longer.

Brent futures also ended January further in backwardation (i.e. where the price premium of near over longer-dated futures has widened), a signal that the market expects near term supply to be tighter. Saudi Arabia's decision to unilaterally cut production in February and March by 1 mb/d is probably the major factor in this development.

Last week saw Brent trading in a very narrow \$55-\$56 range, with bullish impulses largely held in check by near-term concerns over a faltering oil demand recovery amid the emergence of more virulent coronavirus strains. Positive for oil was EIA data showing the steepest fall in US commercial crude inventories since last July and reports that Russian oil companies could redirect more oil for domestic use (rather than export it). News that the latest COVID vaccine candidate, the one-shot jab from Johnson and Johnson, appeared to offer protection from some of the new coronavirus variants, was enthusiastically welcomed, but failed to push Brent out of its range and top its recent eleven month high of \$56.58.

The vaccine-inspired optimism that was a feature of markets at the start of January has been tempered by the increase in cases and hospitalizations linked to the new variants. Many economies have had to re-impose or tighten mobility restrictions. Even China has had to rein-

state measures following a flare up of infections in Hebei Province. The authorities have also had to urge citizens not to travel over the Lunar New Year, the largest annual human migration in the world and a key driver of transportation fuel consumption. Air and road data show a marked reduction in activity already, which will negatively affect oil demand this quarter.

The potential for weaker Chinese oil consumption at the start of IQ21 stands in stark contrast to oil activity at the end of 2020. Refiners, with one eye on the Lunar New Year travel season, processed record amounts of crude in November and December, 14.2 mb/d and 14.13 mb/d, respectively, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. China's imports of crude, however, fell to a 27-month low of 9.06 mb/d (-18 percent m/m) in December. This was at least partly due to independent refiners exhausting their import quotas for the year, though.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) cited the return of COVID-lockdowns over the winter in cutting its oil demand growth estimate for IQ21 and the year as a whole. IQ21 oil demand growth was revised down by a massive 580 kb/d, with the year-avg. then coming in at 5.45 mb/d. This is still a significant improvement on 2020's unprecedented contraction of 8.85 mb/d, and oil demand is expected to accelerate in 2H21 and end 4Q21 at a high of 99.05 mb/d. The acceleration of oil demand in the second half of 2021 is attributed to higher global growth, which is projected by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reach 5.5 percent, an upward revision (+0.3 percent) from October's forecast. The IMF reasons that the recovery will accelerate in 2H21 due a combination of vaccine gains and additional policy support.

The IEA estimates that global stocks could fall by 1.1 mb/d (or 100 mb) during this quarter, following an observed decline of 2.58 mb/d in 4Q20, largely on the back of Saudi Arabia's production cut. The Saudi decision to cut supply appears appropriate in light of the IEA's oil demand estimate of essentially flat-to slightly negative oil demand growth in IQ21. Steeper stock declines are projected once vaccination efforts advance and activity returns in 2H21.

Supply boost

OPEC+ supply increased in December to 34.4 mb/d,

Another concern is online data theft. This is tackled by EMUI 11 on multiple aspects, depending on how you use your smartphone. Thanks to EMUI 11, you can remove sensitive information sharing such as your location and time, when you share a photo, keeping your privacy intact. The Ad Filtering feature also allows you to block on online advertisements as the pop up, allowing for a more comfortable online browsing environment. You can also disable personalized ads to remove unwanted targeted advertising. Once enabled, advertisers will not be able to obtain ad identifiers from your device, while also giving you the option to completely reset it.

Children today are also avid smartphone users and with the Internet openly available to them, online protection has become of utmost importance. Giving children full access to phones can also open the door to many problems, such as addictive behavior, online purchases and even risks to eye-sight. Keeping all this in mind, EMUI 11 comes with a Child Mode that can be set up for the phone. Simply set up the Child account and content that is not suitable for children will be filtered out. This mechanism is applied in Huawei native apps such as Huawei AppGallery, Huawei Video, Huawei Music, Huawei Reader, and Huawei Browser.

With this feature, Huawei AppGallery, apps are restricted

according to OPEC and Platts data, with compliance exceeding 100 percent. OPEC-10 members pumped 21.7 mb/d in December, with Congo (95 percent), Equatorial Guinea (0 percent), Gabon (21 percent) and Iraq (95 percent) failing to abide by their December allocations. Non-OPEC produced around 12.7 mb/d. From January, all OPEC+ members were permitted to increase supply by about 1.4 percent (500 kb/d in aggregate) to bring total OPEC+ output up to 34.86 mb/d. Mexico returned to the OPEC+ fold in January (its quota is 1.75 mb/d), bringing OPEC+ aggregate output upto 36.65 mb/d. This will decline to 35.8 mb/d by end-IQ21, adjusting for Saudi cuts/Russia and Kazakhstan increases, which means that there is still around 8 mb/d of OPEC+ oil being withheld from the market.

The above supply figures do not include production from Libya, Iran and Venezuela nor the contribution of cumulative compensatory cuts that non-compliant producers are expected to make. Iran's production has been inching up of late, and could potentially increase if sanctions under the Biden administration are lifted. Libya's output, at 1.2 mb/d in December, is also at its highest since 2013. As for compensatory cuts, Iraq said recently that it intends to bring its output down in January and February by about 257 kb/d from December's level to 3.60 mb/d-so long as the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) agrees to reduce flows from its fields. January tanker tracking data shows exports already starting to pare back.

In the US, recent crude stock draws of 9.9 mb leave stock levels at 476.7 mb in the w/e 22 January, which provides 32.6 days of forward cover-the least since last April. Crude production fell to 10.9 mb/d even as oil rig counts continue to rise, to 295 by January's close.

Looking ahead, while the oil futures curve is signaling near-term supply tightness, the oil demand outlook for this quarter is murky, and perhaps only helped by winter heating fuels demand. Prices largely reflect future vaccine gains and Saudi Arabia's promise to restrain its supplies. The risk is that the pandemic will persist for longer than expected and beyond even the kingdom's willingness to singlehandedly shoulder output cuts. It appears that output restraint may need to stay for longer, but this many not be easy to maintain within OPEC+.



based on age information and children will not be able to download games at will. If a child searches for restricted content, AppGallery will automatically block certain content. In addition, once a game has been downloaded, children need to ask their parents for permission to make in game purchases, and the same is true when children want to buy an e-book or a new wallpaper for their phone. This is further supported by Digital Balance, which supports screen time management, content restrictions, and location sharing. This allows parents to set usage limits for their children.

Not many users are aware of privacy protection and its importance, assuming it is just something trivial. However, with the growing digitization, it is a threat that needs to be tackled. With HUAWEI EMUI 11 on board, users need not worry, because their privacy and data is safe and secure from prying eyes and hostile forces around them.

Here is how Huawei tackles privacy and security features with its new EMUI 11

KUWAIT: Our smartphones are the nexus point for everything we do today. Be it for work, studying, entertainment, or even carrying out everyday tasks of paying bills, shopping, etc. The smartphone has become an integral part of it all. However, with everything running on digital platforms it's no surprise that security and privacy concerns arise amongst users, especially in regards to data theft or leak. Huawei recognizes the importance of privacy and security and with the new EMUI 11 brings to users a wide range of features that ensure maximum protection.

Let's look at data privacy first. There are many instances during the day where your personal notifications and messages can be read or seen by someone else. To avoid this you might tend to keep your phone always locked, disable notifications on your home screen or even turn off all notifications while you have your phone display being streamed on a larger display. Huawei takes care of all of this with its new features. For example, with the new Eyes-On-Display, Huawei replaced the traditional Always-On-Display to only

show you notifications when you look at the phone. Not only does this hide notifications from prying eyes, but also saves battery. On the other hand with AI Information Protection, the phone will display message details only when it detects that only you are looking at it and no one else. Otherwise, message details are automatically hidden to protect your privacy.

But what about when you stream your smartphone on an external display? Once connected, you can choose the desktop mode, where the projected screen will be displayed as a computer screen, and your phone will work as a touchpad. While working on your new "computer", the new features in the Do Not Disturb Mode ingeniously protect your personal information. Incoming messages will only be displayed on your phone and not pop up on your big-screen display. Even if you get an incoming call, the content you are displaying up on the big screen won't be interrupted, even if you wander off to take the call and chat for a few minutes.

Classifieds

Thursday, February 4, 2021

Kuwait Times
Now you can browse
www.kuwaittimes.net
e-mail: info@kuwaittimes.net



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 66819 - 66817
Fax: (+965) 24348714
www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Warm with light variable wind with speed of 06 - 22 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

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

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings		
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 03/02/2021 0000 UTC		
KUWAIT CITY	25 °C	15 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	25 °C	09 °C			
ABDALY	26 °C	09 °C			
BUBYAN	21 °C	09 °C			
JAHRA	26 °C	12 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C			
SALMIYAH	23 °C	16 °C			
AHMADI	22 °C	16 °C			
NUWAISIB	25 °C	12 °C			
WAFRA	26 °C	09 °C			
SALMY	23 °C	11 °C			

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Thursday	02/04	Warm and some scattered clouds will appear	27 °C	08 °C	VRB-SE	06 - 32 km/h
Friday	02/05	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy and rising dust with a chance for rain that might be	25 °C	13 °C	SE	15 - 55 km/h
Saturday	02/06	Rather cold and Partly cloudy to cloudy and rising dust with a chance for rain that might be	19 °C	15 °C	SE-NW	20 - 55 km/h
Sunday	02/07	Fair and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered rain and a chance for fog forming at	22 °C	07 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 28 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:15
Sunrise	06:36
Zuhr	12:02
Asr	15:07
Sunset	17:28
Isha	18:47

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	24 °C
MIN. Temp.	07 °C
MAX. RH	74 %
MIN. RH	23 %
MAX. Wind	NW 36 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, Imtiyaz Ali Khan Madanapalli s/o Madanapalli Nazeer Ali Khan holder of Indian Passport No. L1459984 issued at Kuwait on 30/09/2013 & Civil Id no. 278070110615 has changed my name from Imtiyaz Ali Khan Pathan in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Imthiyas Ali Khan (given name) and Pathan (Surname). (C 5832)

I, Husen Zulfikar s/o Zulfikar holder of Indian passport No. K7922341 issued in Kuwait on 25/10/2012, r/o SN 18/19, B-13, F-403, R= Euphoria Phase 2, Kondhwa Budruk, Pune-411048, Maharashtra, India have changed my name to Hussain Zulfikar, add surname Ratlamwala. Vide Maharashtra Gazette No. (P-2025488) for all purposes. (C 5833) 4-2-2021

I, Ahmed 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

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
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044

Word Search

Car Makers

Find the names of the car manufacturers in the grid. The names may be vertically, horizontally or diagonally placed and may also be backwards. Which is your favorite car?

ACURA	V	O	L	K	S	W	A	G	E	N	P	O	N	T	I	A	C	P
AUDI	C	H	V	I	M	E	R	C	E	D	E	S	B	E	N	Z	E	O
BMW	H	Y	Q	N	N	R	E	N	A	U	L	T	Z	H	A	E	R	R
BUICK	R	R	F	P	C	I	T	R	O	E	N	Z	X	J	W	U	S	
CADILLAC	Y	N	K	I	A	E	O	N	L	V	L	V	B	B	D	M	Q	C
CHEVROLET	S	D	U	N	N	Y	U	L	Q	N	P	P	F	F	B	A	H	
CHRYSLER	L	A	A	I	O	R	E	G	N	B	A	Q	I	O	M	L	K	E
CITROEN	E	I	V	T	T	D	U	A	E	N	D	S	R	U	L	J	C	F
DAEWOO	R	S	K	I	B	B	K	T	S	O	U	D	S	I	L	K	G	E
DODGE	O	S	Y	D	X	C	E	A	Z	T	L	D	I	A	O	E	R	
EAGLE	G	Z	I	G	I	K	U	Z	U	S	A	A	D	K	N	N	G	R
FERRARI	M	O	W	L	L	G	I	D	U	A	C	R	A	D	I	D	A	
FORD	M	E	R	C	U	R	Y	X	S	U	B	A	R	U	R	T	O	R
GMC	J	A	J	V	C	H	E	V	R	O	L	E	T	G	O	A	D	I
HONDA	S	K	Z	N	O	L	D	S	M	O	B	I	L	E	V	R	A	H
HUMMER	U	H	V	D	Y	L	E	F	Q	Q	E	L	G	A	E	E	E	B
HYUNDAI	T	Y	S	A	A	B	V	B	H	O	N	D	A	M	R	S	W	U
INFINITI	O	R	A	U	G	A	J	O	I	G	E	T	M	Q	H	A	O	I
ISUZU	L	A	M	B	O	R	G	H	I	N	I	U	G	M	C	M	O	C
JAGUAR	B	X	M	I	T	S	U	B	I	S	H	I	H	B	J	X	Z	K
JEEP																		
KIA																		
LAMBORGHINI																		
LAND ROVER																		
LEXUS																		
LINCOLN																		
LOTUS																		
MASERATI																		
MAZDA																		
MERCEDES BENZ																		
MERCUY																		

Join the Dots

Join the dots to reveal a bird.

STAR TRACK

<p>Aries (March 21-April 19) A trip of some kind might have to be postponed, as computers and other technology involved in your arrangements might be temporarily out of operation. This can prove frustrating, Aries, but it's beyond your control. The best thing to do is make new arrangements and move on. For the most part, everything is going very well for you, so don't give in to panic. Hang in there.</p>	<p>Cancer (June 21-July 22) Obstacles may arise in the course of your chores when machines break down and interfere with your efficiency. Your frustrations may cause you to want to yell and throw things. If you must blow your top, Cancer, do it in such a way as to avoid causing upset to others. Go for a workout or jog. The machines will be fixed and the situation will pass. Hang in there.</p>	<p>Libra (September 23-October 22) Problems in your community may result from malfunctioning machines. Be prepared, Libra. Have flashlights handy in case of a power outage, and walk instead of drive in case signals cause major traffic jams. Neighbors may be going crazy, but try to stay calm. This is a temporary situation, and not worth getting all stressed over. A good piece of advice is to spend the day reading.</p>	<p>Capricorn (December 22-January 19) 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) Some upsetting dreams might haunt you today, Taurus. They might evoke some uncomfortable emotional issues. You might be a bit edgy emotionally and more likely to overreact when other people quarrel or machines break down. It might be a good idea to analyze your dreams first thing in the morning so you can learn from and release them. That way you will be more balanced throughout your day.</p>	<p>Leo (July 23-August 22) Payment for work you've performed may not come when expected, Leo, particularly if direct deposit is involved. The planetary energies today don't favor the smooth functioning of computers or other machines. This is a temporary setback and not worth stressing over. Don't give in to the temptation to lose your temper. All will be straightened out and your funds will be in their proper place.</p>	<p>Scorpio (October 23-November 21) Temporary upsets regarding money might result from a computer failure of some sort. Take care not to lose your temper over it, Scorpio. Instead, remain calm, focused, and polite until everything is worked out. Your financial condition itself still looks very promising. It's just that the planetary energies don't favor machines today, so they may all go out of whack. Hang in there.</p>	<p>Aquarius (January 20-February 18) No matter what friends tell you, Aquarius, this isn't the day to make an investment of any kind, from buying a house to starting a savings account. And this isn't a good day to invest online. The planetary energies don't favor computers or other forms of modern technology used in such transactions, so wait a day or two. Discussions about possibilities are OK. Just don't do it yet.</p>
<p>Gemini (May 21-June 20) Machines are likely to pose a few problems today, Gemini, particularly where work and money are concerned. An unforeseen problem might interfere with your social life, perhaps forcing you to cancel a get-together you've been anticipating. If the person you were supposed to meet protests, avoid taking out your frustrations on him or her. Make new arrangements. It's only a temporary situation.</p>	<p>Virgo (August 23-September 22) Family members might not be in the best of moods today, Virgo. Frustration with machines or friends could have tempers on edge, so try to avoid the temptation to get into arguments. The problems will be resolved and the bad moods will pass. You don't want any residual bad feelings between you and them. This is a good day to get out and spend the day in the bookstore by yourself.</p>	<p>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21) Computers and other equipment could go haywire today, limiting your abilities to work at maximum efficiency. Even though you're usually calm and laid back, Sagittarius, today the ogre in you may be tempted to emerge. Don't let it. It will only cause tension between you and those around you. Stay calm and focused, call in a technician, and enjoy the break from your routine.</p>	<p>Pisces (February 19-March 20) More than one problem with modern equipment could rear its head today, Pisces. Computers could malfunction, crash, or be maddeningly slow. You might also have a hard time reaching people you need to talk to. Don't be tempted to blow your top. That won't accomplish anything. Just call the technicians and get it handled. Tomorrow everything should be back to normal.</p>

Lifestyle | Features



Head of board of Education of the City of Vienna Heinrich Himmer (left) and owner of the Cafe Museum Irmgard Querfeld pose in the Cafe Museum in Vienna.



Students sit at the study table in the Cafe Museum in Vienna.



Vienna students find lockdown haven in shuttered cafes

The interior of central Vienna's Cafe Museum is much quieter than usual given its closure as part of the coronavirus lockdown-but the calm is all the more welcome for the students now nestling in its comfy red booths. With only the gentle strains of some jazz music intruding on the studious atmosphere, the cafe is one of several venues participating in a scheme run by the city administration to give school and university students somewhere quiet to work and escape the monotony of lockdown life.

The students are given time slots to use designated spaces dubbed "Lerntische" ("Learning Tables") in the cafes, whose doors have otherwise been shut since November 3. Cafe Museum, part of Vienna's iconic cafe culture since 1899, is not allowed to serve its new visitors any food or drink. But a bottle of water, small snacks and an internet connection are provided. Savanka Schwarz,

a 23-year-old political science student, is one of those taking up the opportunity to work in the cafe's stylish interior after months of distance learning at home.

"There atmosphere makes a nice change, there's lots of space and it's very pleasant," she says, masked up and hands freshly disinfected. "It's good to have one place where you live and one place where you can work," she says, adding that the calm atmosphere of the cafe is a welcome change from her flatshare. "Here I can close my laptop, go home and I'm done," she adds.

'No barriers'

Even though Austria plans to ease some of its coronavirus restrictions starting from February 8, cafes and restaurants will remain closed for the time being. One of Cafe Museum's owners, Irmgard Querfeld, says she is "very happy" to welcome the students and that it was also



Students sit at the study table in the Cafe Museum in Vienna. — AFP photos

"an investment in the future" if students keep coming back after the pandemic. "It's important that the space is still given a purpose despite the lockdown, that it can be of use," she says.

The "learning tables" are reserved online, with numbers limited to make sure distancing can be respected. Visitors younger than 15 have to be accompanied. "Principally, it's meant for those who

don't have room or peace at home, or don't have wifi," says Vienna's education director, Heinrich Himmer. "But there are no barriers to access," he adds. He says the scheme has been enthusiastically taken up, with more than a thousand bookings for the "learning cafes". As part of the scheme, hotel rooms are also available as working spaces.

And Himmer, like Querfeld, hopes the scheme might have effects even once the pandemic is over. "Many Viennese writers used cafes to write their books or as their living rooms," he says. "Perhaps young people will get to know parts of the city which they wouldn't have otherwise and which they can return to even after the lockdown." — AFP



A picture at Polenezkoy district in Istanbul shows a tiny house. — AFP photos



Pelin Dustegor (right), owner of the brand Casa Lokomotif, talks during an interview at Siliври in Istanbul.

Tiny houses: Turkish tourism thinks small in COVID era

Gizem Baburhan stepped into a tiny house on wheels she rented in the Aegean vineyards and saw the future of Turkey's coronavirus-ravaged tourism industry. "This minimalist life offered us priceless peace," said Baburhan. "I hope in the future, we will own a tiny house and tour the world with a home on our backs." The tiny house movement—a fad that gained momentum in the United States in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis—appears to have caught on in Turkey during the pandemic.

The unimposing wood and composite metal structures resemble spruced-up sheds on wheels or sawn-off trailer homes. Yet the Turkish firms that make them say they have barely been able to keep up with demand in the past year. YAKO Groups chief executive Galip Olmez said he received only "sporadic orders" after introducing the concept to Turkey in 2017. "If we compare 2020 with the previous year, the orders have increased 20 fold," Olmez said without disclosing precise numbers.

Architect Pelin Dustegor said most of her Casa Lokomotif tiny house company's clients were "from the tourism industry looking for camping concepts". "We had just under 250 orders in all of 2019 and this shot up to 4,500 a month in 2020," Dustegor told AFP. "There has been tremendous interest."

Fear of hotels

Turkey is perhaps best known to global tourists as the place of golden beaches



A picture shows an inside view of a tiny house.

and all-inclusive luxury hotels. But the economic shock of the pandemic and suspicions that people will shy away from crowds for years to come have some Turkish tourism firms revising their plans. Dustegor said the tiny houses' popularity with tourism companies was rooted in their low investment cost and the potential to turn a profit within three and a half years.

It is easier and far less risky to invest in a scattering of little mobile homes than it is to maintain or build a hotel. The houses can also be parked on lands without a building permit because they have the status of a vehicle in Turkey. Dustegor said people between their late 30s and early 40s also tended to buy them as an investment then rent them out. "I can easily see more camping stations and tiny house resorts opening in the future," said

Dustegor. Caglar Gokgun rents out the tiny house he bought and parked in the middle of a vineyard on the Aegean Sea.

"People will want to stay in nature in small groups rather than at a 500-person hotel," Gokgun predicted. "No one will want to wait in the queue for an open buffet." Baburhan said the New Year holiday she spent with her husband at Gokgun's vineyard home was like being in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". "We didn't know what to expect at first," she admitted. "But we found ourselves in a tiny, fully-fledged house in the heart of a wonderful vineyard. We quickly got used to the house and felt like we have been living there for years." —AFP

FOR BILLIONAIRE JARED ISAACMAN, THE SPACE TOURISM ERA BEGINS

Jared Isaacman is not a professional astronaut, but by the end of the year the young billionaire will have shot around the Earth multiple times at the helm of a space mission made up entirely of tourists. The tech entrepreneur will blast off on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, in what will be the first all-civilian mission into Earth's orbit, which he will command and pay for himself. The mission, named Inspiration4, "is the first step in a world where everybody can go and journey among the stars," Isaacman said with an enormous grin as he explained the project to AFP in front of SpaceX's headquarters in the Los Angeles suburb of Hawthorne.

The CEO of payments processing firm Shift4 Payments, which he founded at age 16 in his basement, is an experienced pilot, qualified to fly military aircraft, and already holds a world record for circumnavigating the globe in a light jet in less than 62 hours. In 2012, he even founded his own company that trains pilots for the US military force, Draken International.

"I've been a space and aviation enthusiast since as long as I can remember," the 37-year-old said. "When I was in kindergarten, I remember looking at picture books of the space shuttle. I told my kindergarten teacher that 'Someday I'm going to go to space.'" If all goes as planned, his childhood dream will come true in the last quarter of this year, according to SpaceX. And the magical voyage is something he plans to share. Isaacman is to be joined by three other novice astronauts for the multi-day journey—including one lucky winner of a drawing—aboard the same model of Dragon spacecraft that carried four astronauts to the International Space Station in November 2020.

'Everyday people'

"Probably the most exciting part of this mission is that we are opening up this crew selection process to everyday people," Isaacman said. "You have folks walking

around today that don't realize in 30 days from now they're going to get fitted for a spacesuit," he added. The idea, Isaacman said, is to have a crew that reflects "the key pillars of the mission": hope, generosity and prosperity.

The "hope" seat will be going to a female healthcare worker who survived cancer as a child following treatment at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, which specializes in childhood cancers and pediatric diseases. The second seat, "generosity," will be part of a fundraiser for the hospital, he said, with a name drawn at random from online donors. Isaacman himself is additionally giving \$100 million to the St. Jude organization.



Jared Isaacman, founder and chief executive officer of Shift4 Payments, stands for a portrait in front of the recovered first stage of a Falcon 9 rocket at Space Exploration Technologies Corp (SpaceX) in Hawthorne, California. — AFP

The third seat, which symbolizes "prosperity," will go to an entrepreneur who can best explain "how their business is going to make a difference in the world." The competition is open to US residents over age 18, but does not require any unusual physical or technical skills, he said. Isaacman recounted that SpaceX CEO and founder Elon Musk had told him that "if you can handle a really, really tough roller coaster, you should be able to handle riding on Dragon." The NASA astronaut selection process is so choosy that "you have a better chance of getting hit by lightning," but that is not the case here, Isaacman said. —AFP



Rope access technicians repaint the Eiffel Tower in Paris. — AFP

Going for gold: Eiffel Tower gets Olympic facelift

The Eiffel Tower has embarked on the most extensive revamp of its 130-year history to look its best for the 2024 Paris Olympics, including with a paint job giving it a distinctly golden hue. Not only will layers from the 19 previous coats of paint be removed, but the Paris icon will also lose the signature "Eiffel Tower brown" it has sported since 1968. It will be replaced with a yellow-brown composition that Gustave Eiffel himself wanted for his monument.

"It's going to give the Eiffel Tower a bit more of a gold hue than the color that we're used to seeing, in time for the Olympic Games," said Patrick Branco Ruivo, the CEO of the company operating the tower. The renovation job for the 324-metre (1,063-foot) tower, with its 18,000 metal pieces held together by 2.5 million rivets, is monumental, coming to an estimated 50 million euros (\$60 million). The stripping of the old layers is made hazardous by the presence of lead, requiring a strict health protocol for workers.

The Eiffel Tower receives a new coat of paint every seven years, as much for the protection of its metallic structure from the wind, rain, sun and pollution, as for the maintenance of its looks. The current work started in 2019 and is to be completed by 2022 when the new shade of gold—which for now can be detected only vaguely at the top of the tower—will

be visible to all. "Why did Gustave Eiffel pick yellow-brown? Probably so the Eiffel Tower would echo the whole city of Paris, with its cut-stone houses made of limestone," said Pierre-Antoine Gatiery, the chief architect for France's historical monuments who decided on the color change.

For some of the workers it's the job of a lifetime. "Most of the time we move around like at a treetop adventure course," said Antoine Olhagaray, a 22-year-old steeplejack. "Not to mention the view," added his colleague, Charles-Henri Piret. "It's not every day you get to hang off a rope at 300 meters." The Eiffel Tower will play a prominent part in the Paris 2024 Summer Olympics, serving as a backdrop for the triathlon and open water swimming events. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Rihanna, Greta Thunberg anger India by backing protesting farmers

Pop superstar Rihanna and climate activist Greta Thunberg drew the ire of the Indian government yesterday after they tweeted in support of the massive farmers' protest against new agriculture laws. Tens of thousands of farmers have been camped on the outskirts of India's capital New Delhi since November, calling for a repeal of laws they fear will allow large corporations to crush them.

Rihanna, who has more than 100 million followers on Twitter, wrote "why aren't we talking about this?! #FarmersProtest", with a link to a news story about a government crackdown that included an internet blackout. Her comment was retweeted more than 230,000 times and liked by over half a million users. She was not alone—Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, one of the world's most

prominent environmental campaigners, also tweeted a story about the internet blackout, saying: "We stand in solidarity with the #FarmersProtest in India."

There was also support from the niece of US Vice President Kamala Harris, whose mother was born in India. "We ALL should be outraged by India's internet shutdowns and paramilitary violence against farmer protesters," tweeted Meena Harris. The international celebrity tweets triggered an online storm in India, where the farmers' protests have become one of the biggest challenges to Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi since he took power in 2014.

India's government has bristled at international remarks on the protests, calling them an "internal matter". The foreign ministry said yesterday that the celebrities needed "a proper understanding of



Members of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and its supporters regularly brand their critics traitors, propagandists and "anti-nationals". Some Indians tweeted in support of Rihanna, but others were not pleased, with her remarks getting abusive replies. Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut, a vocal Modi supporter, responded by calling the protesting farmers "terrorists" and Rihanna a "fool". Modi has said the laws are necessary to modernize India's agriculture sector, but farmers fear they would be placed at the mercy of big corporations.



In this file photograph Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg is pictured during a "Fridays for Future" protest in front of the Swedish Parliament Riksdagen in Stockholm. — AFP

Twitter temporarily blocked scores of accounts tweeting about the protests on Monday at the demand of the Indian government, while police have detained dozens of farmers and a journalist. India—the world's biggest democracy—regularly uses internet shutdowns to limit information sharing during disturbances. — AFP



In this file photo Festivalgoers attend the 51st Montreux Jazz Festival. — AFP

MONTREUX JAZZ FESTIVAL TO LIVESTREAM FUTURE EVENTS

The Montreux Jazz Festival, which was forced to cancel last year's edition due to the pandemic, said Tuesday it was moving towards a hybrid model, including livestreaming concerts. Organizers said they had reached a deal

with Qello Concerts by Stingray for livestreaming, allowing live events and digital projects to be combined. "Streaming is a crucial medium for securing the continued success of the festival: if people can't come to the Festival, we will bring it to them," said Nicolas Bonard, head of Montreux Media Ventures.

They are also creating a new brand, MJF Spotlight, dedicated to promoting emerging talent through digital content. Taking place in the idyllic Swiss town of Montreux on the shores of Lake Geneva, the summer event has over the past half century become a magnet for big names and rising stars. The jazz label has been retained despite an expanding repertoire over the years, bringing in the likes of Nina Simone, Johnny Cash, Deep Purple, Prince and Nick Cave.

The festival had already in 2019 begun moving towards more of a hybrid model with increased focus on digital content. But that strategy was accelerated significantly by the COVID crisis, which forced the first cancellation in the festival's history. Lionel Richie, Brittany Howard, Lenny Kravitz and Black Pumas were among the artists who had been booked for last year.

However the festival "continued to keep its lights on", organizers said, pointing to several initiatives including the free online publication of 50 legendary concerts. The program for this year's festival, expected to take place July 2-17, will be published in coming weeks. — AFP

Deaf drama 'CODA' and Questlove documentary win at Sundance

"CODA," the heartwarming indie drama about a teenage girl struggling to support her deaf family, scooped the Sundance film festival's top prize Tuesday, while musician Questlove won documentary honors with his debut. Taking its title from an acronym for child of deaf adult, "CODA" follows a high-school student (Emilia Jones) who is torn between pursuing her passion for music, and staying home to help her deaf parents and brother. Apple purchased the film early in the US festival after a rapturous online response and an intense bidding war between distributors—reportedly shelling out a Sundance record of \$25 million.

star-studded concert which was attended by 300,000 people and featured Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone and Mahalia Jackson, but has largely been lost to history until now.

"Hive," about a woman fending for herself in patriarchal war-torn Kosovo, took world cinema drama prizes, while foreign documentary went to "Flee"—an animation about a child refugee from Afghanistan, bought mid-festival by "Parasite" distributor NEON. Top indie film festival Sundance was co-founded by Robert Redford and is typically held at Park City in the mountains of western state Utah. But it took place largely online this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with all 72 feature films making their premieres via online streaming.



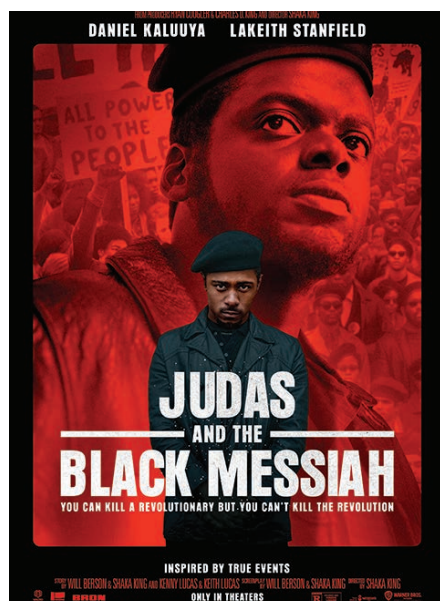
In this file photo Emilia Jones attends Netflix's "Locke & Key" series premiere photo call at the Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

"I'm so excited, I'm so moved—I want to try to sign and talk at the same time but it's hard," said director Sian Heder, accepting the award remotely. "CODA" is based on French 2014 comedy "La Famille Belier," transplanted to the US fishing town of Gloucester by Massachusetts native Heder ("Orange is the New Black.") Both Heder and Jones learned to use sign language for the film, which features several prominent deaf actors in lead roles including Oscar-winner Marlee Matlin ("Children of a Lesser God.")

The film also won the top Sundance audience award, and prizes for directing and ensemble cast. Musician Questlove's first movie "Summer of Soul (...Or, When The Revolution Could Not Be Televised)," about the huge "Black Woodstock" festival that took place in 1969 Harlem, won jury and audience prizes for best documentary. The film uses never-before-seen footage of the

Hollywood explores Panther betrayal in 'Judas and the Black Messiah'

"Judas and the Black Messiah," Hollywood's latest Oscar contender based on the 1960s US civil rights movement, turns a tragic historical story of treachery into a modern and urgent call-to-action, its cast and director said Tuesday. The Warner Bros biopic starring Daniel Kaluuya, out in theaters and on HBO Max streaming February 12, re-examines the life of young Black Panther leader Fred Hampton alongside the FBI informant who betrayed him.



Produced by Ryan Coogler—director of Marvel superhero film "Black Panther"—the film follows Hampton's attempts to galvanize Chicago activists against police violence, and an establishment that viewed the real-life Panthers as "the single greatest threat to our national security." "Our goal was to really make a movie that captured 1968. But so little has changed between 1968 and 2021, that we don't really have to draw parallels to the present," director Shaka King told a virtual press event.

The film—which premiered at the Sundance film festival this week—does not shy away from Hampton's incendiary speeches, including his infamous rallying cry: "Kill a few pigs, get a little satisfaction... kill them all, get complete satisfaction." Kaluuya devoured Black Panther literature and Hampton's speeches to prepare for the role, hiring a singing coach to achieve the leader's fiery cadence. But the film also spotlights the sometimes deadly harassment the Panthers faced, and shows the leader's more private, bashful side, employing his son and fiancée as consultants.

"I collected and just read and took everything in, and trained, got myself bigger—I did all that I can do to get into the spirit space of him," said the British actor known for "Get Out" and Marvel's "Black Panther." "They would die to protect their own, and to liberate their own," said Kaluuya, of Hampton's followers. "That

deely inspired me."

With its double agents and biblical betrayal, King's film is billed by its director as "The Departed" inside the world of Cointelpro—a reference to Martin Scorsese's 2006 crime thriller, and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover's controversial network to spy on "radical" political groups. Hoover's agents monitored domestic protesters against the US war in Vietnam, the white supremacist Ku Klux Klan, and the black militant Panthers, until the program was officially scrapped in 1971.

Early in the film, petty Chicago criminal William O'Neal (Lakeith Stanfield) is caught trying to boost a car, and is convinced to infiltrate the self-styled revolutionaries to avoid prison. The film is bookended with a real interview O'Neal gave decades later in which he clumsily sought to justify his actions, through a series of convoluted lies about his role in sabotaging the fledgling movement.—AFP

'LES RAPPEUSES': A NEW GENERATION OF FRENCH WOMEN TAKE THE MIC

Tackling racism, prostitution and sexual assault, an emerging wave of female MCs is setting new boundaries for French rap after years in which women were barely visible on the scene. Some do it with a light touch: the party-ready beats of Lous and The Yakuza—the stage-name of Congo-born, Belgium-based Marie-Pierré Kakoma—can disguise some heavy subject matter, from struggles with cancer on "Amigo" to the experience of a rape victim on "Quatre heures du matin" (Four in the morning). "I want to shine a light on evil—otherwise we don't heal," she told AFP, though she added there is no bitterness in her music. "It comes from a place of love, kindness, truth."

It has been a rapid rise, with her single "Dilemme" racking up more than 7.6 million views on YouTube and an appearance on US chat show "Jimmy Kimmel Live" last year—a rarity for a non-English-speaking performer, particularly when it comes to rap. Kakoma's family fled war in the Democratic Republic of Congo when she was just four. She spent time in Rwanda and Belgium, including a dark period on the streets—the result of being a "head-strong" teenager, she says.

Her back story can be a nightmare for journalists, she laughs: "It can take up 40 lines of the article." But it has also given her rich material: "I interviewed a lot of prostitutes when I was on the streets, like a journalist. I've always been very intrigued, especially about their relationship with their children." The result is the moving "Courant d'Air" on her debut album "Gore".



French rap singer Lala & Ce poses for a photo session in Paris. — AFP

rap. It has been especially true in French-speaking countries, despite the huge popularity and success of the genre. While Nicki Minaj and Cardi B are household names, there has been a void on the French scene since the departure of Diam's, who dominated the charts in the 2000s but hung up her mic in 2012. The talent has always been there, says Eloise Bouton of Madame Rap, an online magazine, but has been held back by misogyny. "It comes from the suburbs and it penalizes women," she said.

She is excited by the generation that is finally emerging: "They are very complete. They were shunned, so they had to learn everything on their own." Among them is Lala & Ce (pronounced "Lala Ace"), a French-Ivorian from Lyon with a distinctive take on hazy, ethereal cloud rap. The initials of her new album "Everything Tasteful" are not a coincidence, she tells AFP: "It's a little wink to the fact that I'm a bit different in the French musical landscape, and that I like to feel like an extra-terrestrial."

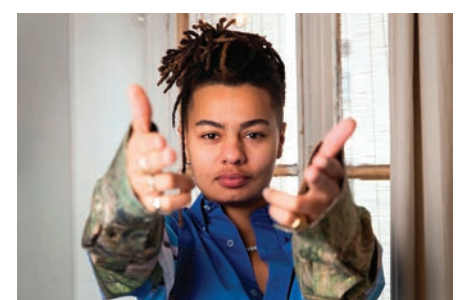
Though the music is not overtly political, the ease with which she carries her queer identity—from the casual references in her lyrics to her androgynous delivery—

nonetheless point to something new and perhaps more liberated for rap music in the 2020s. "I didn't decide one day: 'OK, I'm going to write about girls,'" she says, laughing. "It's a natural part of my life and my writing."

Acceptance

And if young French girls have been lacking a voice to channel their anxieties, they may have found it in another up-and-coming rapper, Tessae. Still in her teens, she has drawn high-profile attention with her raw accounts of young girlhood, such as single "Salope" (Whore) about street harassment. "It's particularly my sister who has experienced it. She's often telling me about guys following her in the metro, or someone spitting on her or insulting her," she tells AFP.

Her own experience has been more with online hatred—the sadly inevitable chauvinism that comes when you hit four million views on YouTube (for single "Bling"). "I've had things like: 'A girl doing rap is disgusting,'" she says. "For me, you can criticize if your own music is any good." But most of the reaction has been positive, not least when a TikTok clip of her rapping in the style of Congolese star Gims was spotted by the man himself, who then agreed to appear on Tessae's debut album "Saisons".



But for this school drop-out, openly struggling with her self-confidence, it's the connection with fans that has meant the most. "There are young girls who are in the process of constructing themselves that listen to me, and tell me: 'This helps me accept myself'. And that helps me, too." — AFP

'A little wink'

Female MCs have always been in the minority in the often-chauvinistic world of

Sports

Photo of the Day



Sebastien Loeb and Daniel Elena race during the Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Ocampos fires Sevilla into Copa del Rey semis

MADRID: Lucas Ocampos' second-half goal was enough to see Sevilla edge past second-tier Almeria 1-0 on Tuesday to reach the Copa del Rey semi-finals. Papu Gomez, who joined from Atalanta last week, made his debut for Sevilla but made little impact and was substituted on the hour mark.

It was his first appearance since December 16 after falling out of favor with Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini. "I think he played a good game," said Sevilla boss Julen Lopetegui. "It wasn't easy for him after a month and a half without playing and I think he's at a good level."

Gomez's fellow Argentinian Ocampos broke Almeria's stubborn resistance in the 67th minute, heading home Suso's cross. It is the first time Sevilla, five-time winners, have reached the last four since being thrashed 5-0 by Barcelona in the 2018 final.

Sevilla are bidding for a second major trophy under former Spain and Real Madrid coach Lopetegui, having won the Europa League last season. Lopetegui's side have now won six straight matches in all competitions and have lost just one of their last 16 games. Sevilla, who sit fourth in La Liga, are also into the Champions League last 16, where they will face Borussia Dortmund. — AFP

Olympics organizers unveil virus rule book for Tokyo Games

Rule breakers could be kicked out

TOKYO: Olympics organizers unveiled the first of a series of "playbooks" aimed at holding the coronavirus-postponed Tokyo Games safely yesterday, warning that rule breakers could be kicked out. Sports officials will be allowed to skip quarantine as long as they monitor their health for 14 days after arriving in Japan, according to the 32-page document.

During those 14 days, however, the officials will not be allowed to travel outside the Games bubble or watch events as a spectator. The playbooks are aimed at building confidence that the Games can go ahead even if the pandemic is not under control by the opening ceremony on July 23. The rules are set to be updated in April and again in June.

The first of the guides is aimed at sports officials, with versions for athletes, fans, media and others to follow in the coming weeks. "We have learned a lot from the best practices of other events," said Olympic Games Executive Director Christophe Dubi of the International Olympic Committee. "It is the mantra of all of us — the Games have to be safe, for each stakeholder group, for each participant. It's a question of responsibility."

Officials will be subject to a series of rules during their stay in Japan, including mask-wearing, complying with contact tracing and staying within designated areas. They will have to present a detailed itinerary of their planned movements for their first 14 days in Japan and stick closely to it on arrival.

And they will have to monitor and record their health for two weeks before going to Tokyo. Details on rules for athletes were still being finalized, but officials said they would be tested for COVID-19 at least every four days, and would be tested before leaving their country and again on arrival in Japan.

The guide released yesterday warns rule breakers will face "consequences that may have an impact on participation" at the Games, with "repeated or serious failures" potentially leading to offenders being kicked out. "These Games in many respects will be different," said Olympic Games Operations Director Pierre Ducrey at the IOC. "There will be a number of constraints and conditions that the participants will have to respect and follow, which will have an impact on their experience, particularly when it comes to social aspects," he told reporters at a press conference presenting the rule book.

Doubts about the Games have grown as countries have been forced to re-enter lockdowns, with large parts of Japan currently under a state of emergency. Japan's government approved a month-long extension of its state of emergency on Tuesday, with measures now running through March 7 in parts of the country.

Tighter border restrictions imposed after infections surged have already forced the postponement of some sporting fixtures in Japan, including this year's first Olympic test event, an artistic swimming



TOKYO: A woman wearing a face mask walks past logos of Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo on Tuesday. —AFP

qualifier that was scheduled for March. The nationwide Olympic torch relay is still due to begin on March 25. Tokyo 2020 president Yoshiro Mori said

Tuesday that the Games would go ahead this summer "however the coronavirus evolves", brushing aside doubts about the event. — AFP

Uncertainty, doubts for Japan's Olympic volunteers, fans

TOKYO: Mai Tarumi has been looking forward to volunteering at the Tokyo Olympics for years, but now she's wondering if the Games will end up being a disappointment. With less than six months to go, Japanese who hope to be involved as spectators, torch bearers and volunteers are confronting the prospect of the Olympics being drastically scaled back or cancelled altogether. For now, organizers say the Games will go ahead, but have warned spectators might be limited or barred altogether — something Tarumi said would strip the Olympics of what makes it special.

"If you hold it without fans, it would be the same as any other sports event," the 33-year-old told AFP outside the taekwondo venue where she plans to volunteer. That's completely different from the Olympics ethos. The Olympics are about gathering people from all over the world, holding the competitions, sharing in a cultural exchange and enjoying the festival. That's what makes it the Olympics.

Tokyo 2020 chiefs recruited 80,000 volunteers for last year's original dates, but the 12-month postponement over the coronavirus has left many unable or unwilling to take part this summer. Tarumi, who was inspired to apply after spending time in Canada during the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics, intends to volunteer as planned, even if fans are shut out. But she would prefer Tokyo 2020 to be postponed another year, something organizers have called "absolutely impossible".

Once in a lifetime

A decision on how many spectators will be allowed — and if foreign fans will be permitted to attend — is set to be taken in the coming months. The nationwide Olympic torch relay is scheduled to begin on March 25, despite this week's extension of a virus state of emergency now set to last until March 7.

Despite anti-virus measures, including smaller celebrations and social distancing, 10,000 run-



TOKYO: This picture taken on January 23, 2021 shows Tokyo 2020 Olympic volunteer Mai Tarumi posing in front of a countdown of the Olympic games outside Makuhari Messe, which is one of the venues of Tokyo 2020 games, in Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture, suburban Tokyo. —AFP

ners are expected to take part, including 62-year-old karate teacher Kazuo Okano. Okano says karate's inclusion as an Olympic sport in Tokyo made him want to get involved in the last year's relay, which was called off two days before its start date.

He's still keen to participate this year, even if fewer supporters line the roads. "I'd be happy even if there were no spectators. It's something you only get the chance to do once in your life," he told AFP. "If it wasn't being held in Japan, I wouldn't get the chance to do it. If it's possible, I want to do it."

Live atmosphere

For 56-year-old Yoshiko Tanaka, everything hinges on whether spectators will be allowed in. Tanaka and her family won four tickets for the judo competition, after applying for around 30 different events in Japan's ticket lottery.

Tanaka watched speed skating live at the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, but admits she

doesn't expect the Tokyo Games to live up to those memories. "As soon as we got into the venue in Nagano, I was struck by how many people there were," she said. "I was surprised by how quiet everyone was when the races started, then the noise when the races were won was something I still remember to this day. It was amazing."

"I was struck by how different it is when you watch it live," she added. "That won't be possible if the Tokyo Olympics are held with no fans." Tanaka also wants the Games postponed by a year or even until 2024, but says she will understand if the event has to be cancelled.

Tarumi, the volunteer, fears that if the Games go ahead while infections remain high, the Olympic message of hope and equality could be lost. "If things have returned to normal by then and people are coming from all around the world, it will be a big celebration at having beaten the virus," she said. "If they push on and hold it in the kind of situation we're in now, though, I think the world will look at it with disdain." — AFP

Kohli's India face England with Lord's Test final at stake

CHENNAI: New dad Virat Kohli returns to captain a buoyant India against England as they aim to build on their crushing win over Australia by sealing a place in the World Test Championship final. Kohli, who welcomed a baby daughter last month, missed most of the Australia series on paternity leave as Ajinkya Rahane led an injury-ravaged side from 0-1 down to a sensational 2-1 away win.

Next up is the much-anticipated four-game series against Joe Root's England, who are also on a winning streak after beating Sri Lanka 2-0 on their first Test tour since the pandemic. However, India start as strong favorites on their spin-friendly home pitches, where England haven't won a Test since 2012.

The hosts will also expect to clinch their place in the inaugural World Test Championship final in June at Lord's, where New Zealand await. India top the table followed by New Zealand, Australia and England. The Black Caps reached the final when Australia called off their tour of South Africa over coronavirus concerns. Fast bowler Mohammed Siraj and wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant were among the new stars unearthed by India as they clinched the series by handing Australia their first defeat at Brisbane's Gabba ground since 1988.

Paceman Mohammed Shami and left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja will miss the first two Tests due to injuries, but England are keenly aware of the strength and variety of India's attack. "The one thing about the Indian bowling attack is that it's not just about spin," England's assistant coach Graham Thorpe said. "Their seam attack is also strong. We can't be sidetracked completely and focus just on the spin side of things."

Jasprit Bumrah will lead the pace attack that also includes Siraj, Ishant Sharma and Shardul Thakur. Spinners Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Yadav, Washington Sundar and Axar Patel will also be key on the Indian pitches. — AFP

Sports

COVID tests for fans as Club World Cup kicks off in Qatar

Limited crowds, Bayern Munich favorites

DOHA: Bayern Munich are the overwhelming favorites to cap a remarkable last year as they head to Qatar for the delayed FIFA Club World Cup, taking place later than scheduled because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which overshadows the tournament.

Bayern qualified after their triumph in last season's UEFA Champions League, the crowning moment of a 2020 which also saw Hansi Flick's team win the Bundesliga, German Cup, UEFA Super Cup and German Super Cup.

Now they are hoping to become the eighth consecutive European winner of the Club World Cup, a run that started when Bayern themselves lifted the trophy in Morocco in 2013. If they do so they can — albeit with the caveat that this competition is being played in a different calendar year — match the achievement of Pep Guardiola's Barcelona, who won six trophies in 2009.

"That would probably be the icing on the cake, but it's obviously going to be a challenge," said Flick. "It's always the case at Bayern Munich that you want to have the most successful season possible and after the treble, you're obviously looking at the FIFA Club World Cup."

Bayern have named all the big guns, from Manuel Neuer to Thomas Mueller and Robert Lewandowski, in their squad ahead of their entrance in the semi-final next Monday against either African champions Al-Ahly or host nation representative Al-Duhail.

Final against Palmeiras?

The expectation is that they will go through to the February 11 final and likely

face Palmeiras, with the Brazilians fresh from winning the Copa Libertadores last weekend. Palmeiras play their semi-final on Sunday against either Tigres of Mexico, the CONCACAF Champions League winner, or Ulsan Hyundai of South Korea, who are back in Qatar after winning the Asian Champions League there in December. Tigres and Ulsan Hyundai kick the tournament off today when they meet at the Ahmad Bin Ali stadium in Al-Rayyan, on the outskirts of Doha.

Muted atmosphere

The mood in Doha is muted compared to the last Club World Cup in December 2019, which saw thousands of supporters of Liverpool and Brazilian giants Flamengo descend on the normally staid city.

This time, the tournament kicks off with Qatar seeing a spike in coronavirus cases and hospital admissions, and local authorities have taken a swathe of measures including banning travelling fans from outside the country.

New cases over the last week jumped by a third compared to the week before, according to official data, while hospital admissions due to COVID-19 are up 85 percent in the past month, according to the country's Ministry of Public Health. As of Monday, 249 people had died from the virus while the overall case load has topped 151,000 in a country with a population of under three million.

Obligatory testing

However Abdulwahab al-Musleh, sports affairs adviser to Qatar's health ministry, claimed ahead of the tournament



DOHA: This handout picture provided by Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy on January 30, 2021, shows Tigres UANL players arriving in the Qatari capital Doha, ahead of the 2020 FIFA Club World Cup. —AFP

that fans faced a negligible risk of contracting the virus because of the requirement for them to present a negative test ahead of each match.

That comes after the experience of the domestic Amir of Qatar Cup final in December, where all 20,000 fans who attended the half-capacity match were required to present a negative test. And so while sporting events across much of the world are currently going ahead behind closed doors, a limited number of spectators will be allowed inside Club World Cup games.

Spectator numbers are capped at 30 percent of capacity at each of the 20,000-seat venues. Social distancing,

mask wearing and use of Qatar's contact tracing app will be mandatory. Meanwhile, following a cluster of cases in the Saudi Al-Hilal team during the AFC Champions League late last year, Musleh said "several measures to prevent that recurring" had been taken.

The pandemic has already directly impacted the tournament though as Oceania champions Auckland City withdrew due to quarantine measures required by the New Zealand authorities. Despite the specter of coronavirus, the tournament remains a useful test event for FIFA and organizers ahead of the fast-approaching 2022 World Cup in the country. —AFP

Ronaldo double gives Juventus Cup edge over Inter

MILAN: Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice as Juventus came from behind to beat Inter Milan 2-1 at the San Siro in their Italian Cup semi-final first leg on Tuesday. Record 13-time winners Juve will be favorites to reach a sixth final in seven years when they bid to complete the job in the return game in Turin next Tuesday.

"This is just the first leg, we haven't achieved anything yet," Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo told RAI Sport. "What this does prove is that if we are fully concentrated, it becomes difficult for anyone against us." Inter, who beat Juventus 2-0 last month in Serie A, have it all to do to keep their hopes of lifting a first Italian Cup since 2011 alive.

"It was an important match, the Serie A game showed Inter are far from an easy side to face," Juventus midfielder Adrien Rabiot said. "The tie isn't over yet, there's another leg to go and that will be even tougher than this one."

Inter made a flying start in the ninth minute, as Lautaro Martinez got in front of Matthijs de Ligt to meet Nicolo Barella's low cross, sweeping a right-footed finish into the net despite Gianluigi Buffon getting a hand to the shot. But Juventus were given a way back into the tie midway through the first half.

Juan Cuadrado, who was making a run into the box off the ball, was held by Ashley Young, with VAR deeming that the visitors should be awarded a penalty. Ronaldo did the rest, hammering the spot-kick into the roof of the net to score his 21st goal of the season.

Juventus completed the first-half turnaround in the 35th minute, as a terrible mix-up between Alessandro Bastoni and Inter goalkeeper Samir Handanovic allowed



MILAN: Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo (C) challenges Inter Milan's Italian defender Alessandro Bastoni (left) and Inter Milan's Chilean midfielder Arturo Vidal during the Italian Cup semifinal first leg football match between Inter Milan and Juventus on Tuesday at the San Siro stadium in Milan. —AFP

Ronaldo to slide in his second goal from a tight angle. Inter, missing top-scorer Romelu Lukaku through suspension, should have equalized 11 minutes after half-time, but Alexis Sanchez's shot was brilliantly cleared off the line by Merih Demiral.

The hosts kept pushing for an equalizer, with Martinez curling narrowly over after Buffon's smart save kept out Matteo Darmian from point-blank range. Ronaldo was visibly frustrated to be replaced by Alvaro Morata with 14 minutes remaining, but Pirlo said he wanted to keep his key player fresh for Sunday's league

match against Roma.

"I understand that Ronaldo wasn't happy at being substituted, but it was only right to rest him for the upcoming Serie A game, even if just a few minutes," he added. Inter coach Antonio Conte threw on Christian Eriksen, who scored a late winner in the last eight against AC Milan, but the home side failed to create another clear-cut chance. "We had Juve on the ropes, it's really disappointing, because we deserved much, much, much more than the final result," bemoaned Conte. —AFP

eventually made the game safe with two closing free throws from Irving with 1.9 seconds on the clock.

"We've got to get our defense in order, last few games we've been giving up a lot of points," Irving said after his season-high points tally. "So we've got to knuckle down on the defensive end and continue to will ourselves to win." Harden finished with 23 points, 14 assists and 11 rebounds to bring up his half-century of triple-doubles. Durant had 28 points with nine rebounds during his 38 minutes on court.

Treat for VanVleet

Elsewhere on Tuesday, Fred VanVleet exploded for a franchise record 54 points as the Toronto Raptors demolished the Orlando Magic 123-108. VanVleet — whose previous best score was 36 points — looked poised to topple Klay Thompson's single-game three-pointer record of 14 after nailing 11 threes in the opening three quarters.

But VanVleet was unable to add to his collection in the closing stages and had to content himself with beating the Raptors previous best scoring record of 52 points set by DeMar DeRozan in 2018. "It was just my time," VanVleet said afterwards. "I've been missing a lot of open ones this season, more than I usually do. But it was my time tonight. Sometimes you just get in that groove and find that zone and my teammates did an unbelievable job of finding me. A lot of them were just catch-and-shoots."

VanVleet joked that he had taken particular satisfaction from beating his friend DeRozan's record. "Every time I get a 30-point game, I usually get a text from DeMar telling me that I'm weak for not passing his record. I definitely had him in mind as I got close down the stretch."

In Washington, Damian Lillard finished with 32 points to lead the Portland Trail Blazers to a 132-



ORLANDO: Fred VanVleet #23 of the Toronto Raptors shoots the ball during the game against the Orlando Magic on Tuesday at Amway Center in Orlando, Florida. —AFP

121 win over the Wizards. Lillard was backed by Gary Trent Jr. with 26 points while veteran Carmelo Anthony had 21. Bradley Beal topped the Wizards scoring with 37 points with Rui Hachimura adding 24. —AFP

Club World Cup participants - can anyone stop Bayern?

PARIS: Bayern Munich jet off to Qatar this week targeting another title at the FIFA Club World Cup, taking their place in the six-team tournament as winners of last year's UEFA Champions League. These are the teams who will be challenging the Germans, overwhelming favorites to make it an eighth straight European winner of the competition:

Palmeiras

As winners of the Copa Libertadores, South America's premier club competition, Palmeiras represent Bayern's primary threat in Qatar. Of the four Club World Cups not won by a European club, all have gone to teams from Brazil, with Corinthians taking the honours in 2000 and 2012, Sao Paulo in 2005 and Internacional in 2006.

Palmeiras, Brazil's most successful club with 10 national titles, secured the Libertadores trophy for the second time over the weekend, defeating Sao Paulo state rivals Santos 1-0 courtesy of Breno Lopes' goal in the ninth minute of stoppage time.

Former Shakhtar Donetsk star Luiz Adriano, who returned to Brazil in 2019 after more than a decade in Europe, initially earned a move to Ukraine after starring for Internacional in the 2006 tournament, as the Porto Alegre outfit defeated Barcelona 2-1 in the final.

Gabriel Menino, a versatile midfielder but also touted as the heir apparent at right-back to Dani Alves for Brazil, is one to watch while a host of Europe's top clubs are reportedly courting 18-year-old attacker Gabriel Veron, who missed the Copa Libertadores final due to injury.

Al-Ahly

The Egyptian giants celebrated a record-extending ninth African Champions League title last year, defeating Cairo rivals Zamalek in the first final featuring clubs from the same country.

South African Pitso Mosimane became only the third coach to win the competition with two clubs, having led Mamelodi Sundowns to the 2016 title. Al-Ahly conceded just eight goals in 34 games in cruising to a fifth successive league triumph, and won the Egyptian Cup on penalties in December.

They will be appearing at the Club World Cup for the sixth time, their best showing a third-place finish 15 years ago when they were beaten in the semi-finals by eventual champions Internacional of Brazil. Mohamed 'Afsha' Magdy, whose late winner saw off Zamalek to punch Al Ahly's ticket to Qatar, is one of several Egypt internationals in the squad.

Ulsan Hyundai

The South Korean club return to Qatar barely six weeks after their Asian Champions League success. Ulsan reeled off nine successive wins once the delayed tournament restarted after its relocation to the Gulf state. Former national team star Hong Myung-bo, a cornerstone of the side that reached the 2002 World Cup semi-finals, has replaced Kim Do-hoon as coach.

Veteran striker Junior Negrao spent much of his career bouncing around the Brazilian lower leagues but has found a place to call home in Ulsan. His double in the December final secured victory over Iran's Persepolis, and a haul of 26 goals in 27 K-League games last term mark him out as the man to watch for the Koreans.

Tigres UANL

The Mexican side ended their long wait for an elusive CONCACAF Champions League crown with a dramatic victory over Los Angeles FC in the 2020 final. After finishing runners-up in three of the past four editions, Tigres finally got their hands on the trophy as former Marseille and France striker Andre-Pierre Gignac hit a late winner in Orlando.

Gignac, 35, has been a huge success at the Liga-MX outfit, scoring 144 goals in 244 games since joining on a free transfer in 2015, although his effectiveness could be hampered by a hip injury sustained last month. Mexican champions on seven occasions, most recently in 2019, Tigres are making their Club World Cup debut. No team from the region has ever reached the final.

Al-Duhail

The reigning champions of the host nation, Al-Duhail received a bye through the first round after would-be Oceania representatives Auckland City withdrew because of the pandemic and related quarantine measures required by the New Zealand authorities.

Managed by former France international and ex-Rennes and Nottingham Forest coach Sabri Lamouchi, Al-Duhail can count on the experience of Morocco international Medhi Benatia, formerly of Bayern and Juventus, in defense.

Much of Al-Duhail's firepower is derived from Brazilian duo Edmilson Junior and Dudu, the latter incidentally appearing twice for Palmeiras in the Copa Libertadores group stage before moving on loan to Qatar in July.

Almoez Ali, who scored a tournament-record nine goals in Qatar's 2019 Asian Cup triumph, is another player to monitor while Kenya striker Michael Olunga recently joined from Japanese club Kashiwa Reysol. —AFP

Man Utd thrash Southampton 9-0

Red Devils equal record, move level on points at top

MANCHESTER: Manchester United matched the Premier League record win with a 9-0 demolition of nine-man Southampton on Tuesday to move level on points with Manchester City at the top of the table before City played Burnley last night.

It is the second consecutive campaign Saints have suffered a 9-0 thrashing after Leicester last season at St Mary's equaled the record set by United against Ipswich in 1995. The visitors were punished for Alexandre Jankewitz's second-minute red card on his Premier League debut.

Aaron Wan-Bissaka, Marcus Rashford, Edinson Cavani and Jan Bednarek's own goal made it 4-0 before half-time. Anthony Martial came off the bench to score twice in the second half, while Scott McTominay, Bruno Fernandes and Daniel James also netted either side of Bednarek's late dismissal.

But United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer evoked memories of the 2011/12 title race that City snatched on goal difference from their local rivals as the reason why his side had to show no mercy. "We know better than anyone what goal difference can do to you because we have lost the league on goal difference," said the Norwegian. Solskjaer had called on his forward players to be more clinical after a number of missed chances cost United in a shock 2-1 defeat to Sheffield United and 0-0 draw at Arsenal over the past week.

Rashford, Martial and Fernandes had all seen goals dry up in 2021, but Solskjaer is hoping they will now have the perfect confidence boost heading

into the second half of the season. "We've been waiting for them to show the magic and it was a night for them to go and enjoy it," he added. "We've not had many times where we could just enjoy the second half."

Southampton 'helpless'

Ralph Hasenhuttl survived the 9-0 thrashing by Leicester to turn his time in charge of Southampton around. But after a bright start to the season, the Saints have lost four consecutive leagues games to slip to 12th. Southampton were already decimated by an injury crisis that led to Jankewitz getting his chance before the 19-year-old lunged into McTominay after just 79 seconds.

"He punished the guys who were on the pitch. They were helpless after he is sent off," said Hasenhuttl. "You know the 90 minutes can be very long against a team of this quality. The result is there and we have to live with the result again. It doesn't reflect what we did this season so far. It's hard to explain. We have to live with this again."

Wan-Bissaka opened the floodgates on 18 minutes when he scored just his second goal for the club by meeting Luke Shaw's cross at the back post. Rashford then converted Mason Greenwood's cross and it was from his driven low ball across the box that Bednarek turned into his own net.

Cavani powered home a header from another Shaw cross before the Uruguayan thought he had won a penalty. A VAR review gave



MANCHESTER: The scoreboard displays the final score after the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Southampton at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on Tuesday. Manchester United won the game 9-0. — AFP

Southampton a rare let-off as instead a free-kick on the edge of the box was awarded. However, Hasenhuttl's men were denied themselves after the break when Che Adams had a consolation strike ruled out for a marginal offside.

The goals at the other end kept on coming as Martial ended his eight-

game goal drought with a thumping finish from Fernandes's through ball. McTominay then drilled home a low effort from long range. A nightmare night for the visitors continued when Bednarek was harshly sent off after another lengthy VAR review for clipping Martial as he bore down on goal.

Fernandes coolly converted the resulting penalty to end his own five-game goalless run in the league. Martial then controlled and finished Wan-Bissaka's cross before James inflicted the final blow in stoppage time by flicking home Fernandes's header. — AFP



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