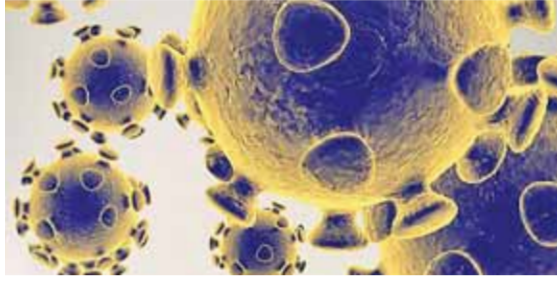




**2** Kuwait reports 1,786 COVID cases over the weekend



**8** Path clears for Okonjo-Iweala as first woman WTO chief



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**14** Egypt's Ahly propelled by 'home' advantage at Club World Cup



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# Govt to 'reconsider' closures as business owners protest

COVID vaccination approved at 15 centers • Health law violators to be punished



By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday said the prime minister has agreed to reconsider measures imposed by the government on businesses to contain the spread of the coronavirus. "I just spoke with Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and he agreed to reconsider" a series of decisions taken by the government at an extraordinary meeting on Wednesday, Ghanem said.

The speaker said the premier agreed that a meeting will take place today between the ministerial emergency committee and representatives of owners of small businesses. Ghanem said he held a meeting with representatives of small businesses who explained the losses they have sustained because of the earlier closures and the potential losses they are expecting to incur because of the new closures, which are scheduled to start today.

The Cabinet decided to close all businesses from 8 pm to 5 am, includ-

ing malls. It also decided to totally shut down salons, barbershops and health clubs. Ghanem called on the Cabinet to immediately cease the implementation of the measures which have hit the business sector very hard and left highly-damaging social, financial and economic impacts.

The speaker's call came after dozens of owners of salons, barbershops and health clubs yesterday held a protest outside the lawyers' association to urge authorities to call off the implementation of the measures. Security men prevented the gathering from taking place outside the National Assembly, but protesters then moved to the Kuwait Lawyers Society, calling on MPs to support their cause and prevent their businesses from going bankrupt.

Meanwhile, some 15 health centers across Kuwait have been given the go-ahead to administer COVID-19 vaccines to nationals and residents, a health ministry spokesman said yesterday. Kuwait's five health regions have

Continued on Page 2

**KUWAIT:** Salon owners protest yesterday against the indefinite closure of salons and barbershops from today as part of the government's measures to fight the spread of COVID-19. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

## News in brief

### Move to end terror designation

**WASHINGTON:** The US has moved to delist Yemen's Houthi rebels as a terrorist organization, removing a block that humanitarian groups said jeopardized crucial aid as the country's warring sides cautiously welcomed a push for peace by President Joe Biden. The move, which will take effect shortly, comes a day after Biden announced an end to US support for the Saudi-led offensive operations in Yemen. — AFP

### Egypt frees Jazeera journalist

**CAIRO:** Egypt has freed a journalist for Qatar's Al Jazeera, a security source said Friday, after four years in jail without trial following the end last month of a rift between the two Arab states. Mahmoud Hussein was released on Thursday night, the Egyptian security source said. The 54-year-old was detained in Cairo when he returned for a family holiday, and was accused of incitement against state institutions and spreading false news. — AFP

### China probe sends image of Mars

**BEIJING:** China's Tianwen-1 probe has sent back its first image of Mars, the national space agency said, as the mission prepares to touch down on the Red Planet later this year. The spacecraft is expected to enter Mars' orbit around Feb 10. The black-and-white photo released late Friday by the China National Space Administration showed geological features including the Schiaparelli crater and the Valles Marineris, a vast stretch of canyons on the Martian surface. — AFP



## ICC paves way for Israeli war crimes probe

**THE HAGUE:** The International Criminal Court ruled Friday that it had jurisdiction over the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, paving the way for the tribunal to open a war crimes investigation. ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda had asked the court for its legal opinion on whether its reach extended to areas occupied by Israel, after announcing in Dec 2019 that she wanted to start a full probe. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu denounced the ICC as a "political body" while the United States said it had "serious concerns" over the decision. The Palestinians called it a "victory for justice". The ICC said in a statement that judges had "decided, by majority, that the Court's territorial jurisdiction in the Situation in Palestine... extends to the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, namely Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem."

Palestine is a state party to the court, having joined in 2015, but Israel is not a member. The court added that its decision was not a ruling on Palestinian "statehood", but that it followed from Palestine's position as a state party, under the ICC's founding

Continued on Page 2

## New transition phase for Libya

**TRIPOLI:** Libya embarked yesterday on a new phase of its post-Gaddafi transition after a unity government was selected to lead the country until December elections following a decade of chaos. In a potential turning point accord widely welcomed by the international community, four new

leaders from Libya's west, east and south now face the task of unifying a nation torn apart by two rival administrations and countless militias.

Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, a 61-year-old engineer, was selected Friday as interim prime minister by 75 Libyan delegates at UN-led talks outside Geneva, the culmination of a process of dialogue launched in November. It marked the start of a new chapter for Libya after the failure of a 2015 UN-brokered deal that established a Government of National Accord headed

by Fayez Al-Sarraj.

Libya has been mired in violent turmoil with divisions between the GNA in Tripoli and a rival administration backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar in the east. Acting UN envoy Stephanie Williams, who facilitated the week-long talks in Switzerland, called it a "historic moment". UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said "I do believe it is a breakthrough".

In the center of the capital Tripoli, citizens guardedly welcomed the news.

Continued on Page 2



Abdul Hamid Dbeibah

## World's tiniest reptile found in Madagascar

**PARIS:** Scientists have identified Earth's smallest known reptile, warning at the same time that sustained destruction of forests in northern Madagascar threatens its survival. Tiny enough to perch comfortably on a fingertip, the ultra-compact chameleon - dubbed *Brookesia nana* - has the same proportions and world-weary expression as its larger cousins around the world. "We discovered it in the mountains of northern of Madagascar," Frank Glaw, curator of herpetology at the Bavarian State Collection of Zoology, told AFP in an

interview. A joint expedition in 2012 of German and Malagasy scientists did not know whether the two specimens collected - one female and one male - were adults until much later, he explained. "We found out that the female had eggs in her body, and that the male had large genitals, so it was clear that they were adults."

Exceptionally large genitals, it turned out, accounting for nearly 20 percent of its body size, Glaw and colleagues reported in the journal *Scientific Reports*. The male's body - about the size of a peanut - was 13.5 mm long (half an inch), with the tail adding another nine millimeters. By contrast, the female measured 29 mm from its nose to the tip of its tail. The pair remains the only specimens of the species ever found.

Islands connected long ago to neighboring continents are known for miniaturized versions of animals that crossed ephemeral land bridges, a phenomenon known as "island dwarfism". — AFP



The chameleon "*Brookesia nana*", identified as Earth's smallest known reptile, is seen in Madagascar. — AFP



**GAZA:** In this file photo taken on July 29, 2014, two Palestinians injured in Israeli air strikes wait outside the Khan Younis hospital in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP



## Local

# Kuwait lists 1,786 new COVID cases in two days

## Over 300 new patients entered hospital in one day

KUWAIT: Kuwait reported 846 positive coronavirus cases yesterday, one day after it reported 940 new cases on Friday, bringing total infections to 170,036. Meanwhile, total deaths stood at 964 yesterday as two new fatalities were reported Friday and zero deaths yesterday. The number of COVID-19 patients in hospital reached 7,979 as of yesterday, including 70 in intensive care units, up from 7,672 patients and 68 ICU patients the day before, which means that 307 new patients have been hospitalized within 24 hours. Total recoveries reached 161,093 as of yesterday, as the ministry announced 539 new recoveries yesterday and 456 on Friday. Meanwhile, the health ministry also announced 10,651 and 11,497 swab tests yesterday and Friday respectively, bringing the total number of tests taken by health workers to 1,590,032.

The Cabinet at an extraordinary meet-

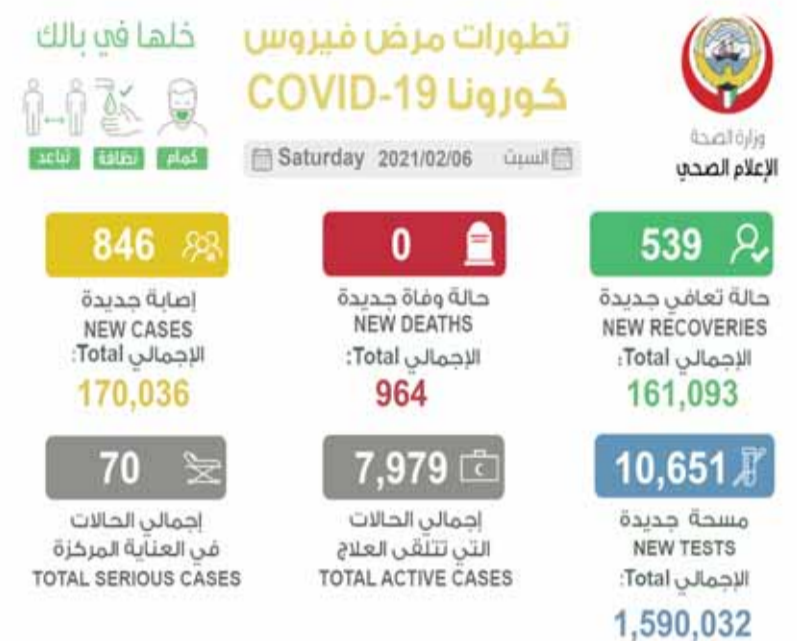
ing on Wednesday decided to shut down all commercial shops - barring food and pharmacies, restaurants and malls from 8:00 pm to 5:00 am the next day, as a new measure to help curb the spread of COVID-19 after a notable increase in the

**Zero deaths yesterday, two on Friday**

number of new cases over the past few days. It however allowed delivery business to continue. It also closed down health clubs, salons, barber shops and

resorts, in addition to celebration halls, tents and catering services. It also banned all gatherings including national holiday celebrations. The ban starts today and will continue for one month which can be renewed if necessary.

The council of ministers also banned the entry of foreigners into the country from February 7 for two weeks that can be renewed. It exempted close relatives of citizens and domestic helpers. The Cabinet also re-introduced institutional quarantines saying that those returning will have to be quarantined at local hotels for seven days and then at home for another seven days. The decision will be implemented from February 21 for one month that can be extended. The health ministry had meanwhile announced yesterday that 15 health centers across Kuwait have been given the go-ahead to administer COVID-19 vaccines to the public.



KUWAIT: Dozens of owners of salons, barber shops and health clubs yesterday held a protest outside the Kuwait Lawyers Society to urge authorities to call off the implementation of the measures. Security men had prevented the gathering from taking place outside the National Assembly but protesters moved to the lawyers society, calling on MPs to support their cause and prevent their businesses from going bankrupt. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh and Yasser Al-Zayyat

## ICC paves way for Israeli war...

Continued from Page 1

Rome Statute. "The chamber is neither adjudicating a border dispute under international law nor prejudging the question of any future borders" it said.

ICC prosecutor Bensouda called for the full investigation in December following a five-year preliminary probe. Her office said it "welcomes this judicial clarity" and "will then decide its next step guided strictly by its independent and impartial mandate". The administration of then-US President Donald Trump slapped sanctions on the

prosecutor and another senior ICC official in September.

The United States, which is not a member of the ICC, inflicted the measures on the court after earlier visa bans on Bensouda and others failed to head off the court's war crimes probe into US military personnel in Afghanistan. But the US has also cited the court's treatment of its ally Israel.

Israel's Netanyahu Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu slammed Friday's decision. "The tribunal has, once again, proved that it is a political body and not a judicial institution," Netanyahu said in a statement, adding the decision undermined the "right of democracies to defend themselves against terrorism". An Israeli official said the decision "will not be helpful" as there is a "wind of change" in the region. "It is a decision that is not good for the court, not good for Israel, not good for the region", the official said. — AFP

## Govt to 'reconsider' closures as...

Continued from Page 1

each been allocated three health centers, with work at Naseem and Masayel centers expected to begin today, Health Ministry Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said in a press statement.

The other centers include Hamad Al-Humaidhi, Sheikh Al-Sdairawi, Musaed Hamad Al-Saleh and Northwest Sulaibikhat in the Capital region; Abdulrahman Al-Zaid, Siddiq and Salwa Specialist in the Hawally region; Mutab Obaid Al-Shallahi, Ardiya Al-Shamali and Khaitan Al-Janoubi in the Farwaniya health region; Masayel, Sabah Al-Ahmad Health Center E and East Ahmadi in the Ahmadi region; and Naseem, Jaber Al-Ahmad Health Center 1 and

Nahda in the Jahra region.

Sanad pointed out that the ministry is already administering vaccines at centers for the care of the disabled and the elderly and plans to launch other campaigns at some public and oil sector establishments in the country.

The interior ministry has called on the public to abide by the health authorities' coronavirus-related instructions, warning that flouters will be penalized. In a press statement, the ministry demanded commitment to the provisions of law no. 8 of 1969 on health requirements for preventing communicable diseases due to the exceptional conditions the country is facing in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

The ministry warned that it will crack down and take all legal measures against law violators. If convicted, they will be jailed for up to six months and fined up to KD 6,000 or either of the two penalties, it added. The ministry urged both nationals and residents to stop holding gatherings, including national day celebrations, wedding parties, receptions and other get-togethers in public or private places.

## New transition phase for Libya...

Continued from Page 1

"At first, Libyans were not optimistic," said 43-year-old Adil Al-Kakli. "But yesterday, the joy was palpable, because we saw these initiatives for the emergence of a state," he added, while cautioning that the plan to hold elections in December remained too ambitious. Fellow citizen Louay Khouzam, 37, said she saw "hope for change", but still believed that polls will not happen before the end of the year.

But on social media, many Libyans warned of a likely repeat of several past failed efforts to restore stability and security to their country. Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the US welcomed the interim government, but cautioned of a "long road ahead" and said it would have to offer Libyans essential public services.

Hailing from the city of Misrata, newly selected premier Dbeibah had led the Libyan Investment and Development Company under dictator Muammar Gaddafi, who was toppled and slain in a 2011 revolution. The wealthy businessman has 21 days to form a cabinet, then another three weeks to win a vote of confidence in parliament, by March 19 at the latest. A three-member presidency council has also been chosen to head a unity administration and steer the North African state towards the ballot box on Dec 24.

The vote is part of a complex UN-led process aiming to build on a fragile ceasefire in force since October that has cleared the way for a resumption of oil exports on which the country is dependent. Mohammad Younes Menfi from eastern Libya, a former ambassador expelled by Greece in Dec 2019 in protest at an agreement between Tripoli and Ankara, is to head the presidential council.

Greece joined the international chorus of approval of the deal, announcing the imminent reopening of its diplomatic missions in Libya. Menfi's deputies are Moussa Al-Koni, a member of Libya's long-marginalized Touareg minority from the south of the country, and Abdallah Hussein Al-Lafi, from the western city of Zuwara.

Haftar's spokesman yesterday congratulated Dbeibah and Menfi as well as "the Libyan people" on the outcome of the selection process, a day after Sarraj wished the new executive "success in their mission".

But analysts have expressed initial skepticism. The new executive authority "will find it very difficult to exert any influence in eastern Libya" and will even face opposition in western Libya, said Wolfram Lacher, a senior associate at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. Dbeibah was considered an outsider candidate - in large part due to his past close ties to Gaddafi - compared to the influential speaker of the eastern-based parliament, Aguila Saleh, and powerful GNA interior minister Fathi Bashagha.

Lacher said "the four people who were elected (Friday) don't really have a common interest... other than getting to power" and staying in power. The selection also came as a surprise to Tarek Megerisi, of the European Council on Foreign Relations. "#Libya's UN process careened over the line producing a new authority which frankly nobody would have expected," Megerisi tweeted, suggesting the favorites were handicapped by longstanding demands for an end to elitism, corruption and poor public services.

"We are delighted with the appointment of a Prime Minister and a Presidential Council following the elections carried out through the inter-Libyan dialogue," the Turkish foreign ministry said in a statement. "Turkey will continue to offer the new executive its support for the holding of elections scheduled for the end of the year... and for the restoration of security in Libya," the Turkish foreign ministry added. — AFP



Local

# Smart licenses not obligatory for holders of valid ones: Interior

## No current plans to issue any kinds of visas: PR chief

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Recently, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced smart driving licenses are being issued. The ministry added this smart license will authorize its holder to use it when driving abroad. Brig Gen Tawheed Al-Kandari, Director of the Public Relations and Security Media Department at the Ministry of Interior, said the new smart driving license is not obligatory for drivers holding a valid license, but they can replace it with the smart one. "Drivers can use the smart driving license internationally. Those holding a valid driving

license can continue using it till it expires," he told Kuwait Times.

MoI also announced it is welcoming citizens and expats every Tuesday starting from this month. "Undersecretaries of each section at the traffic department will be available every Tuesday from 6:00 to 9:00 pm at the main traffic department at Shuwaikh. People can come to submit their complaints and suggestions during this time without a prior appointment," stressed Kandari. On visit visas and entry of foreigners who don't have residency in Kuwait, Kandari said there are no plans to issue any kinds of visas presently. Kuwait Times was



Citizens, expats welcome every Tuesday



Brig Gen Tawheed Al-Kandari

unable to obtain statistics on the number of visitors to Kuwait, and was told these figures are not available.

## Firemen rescue woman in Failaka



KUWAIT: Firemen rescued a woman who sustained an injury while on a trip to Failaka island yesterday. The female citizen was transported in a fireboat and handed over to paramedics at the Salmiya Sea Fire Station, Kuwait Fire Force said in a statement.

## Police disperse classic car parade



KUWAIT: Classic car owners in Kuwait held their annual gathering at the Arabian Gulf Road yesterday, only to have their assembly dispersed by police who arrived to the scene and asked gatherers to leave in accordance with health guidelines set to prevent the spread of COVID-19. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

### News in brief

#### Aviation medical permits approved

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways announced its aviation medicine department was approved by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to issue medical permits related to the aviation field. The permits allow all aviation employees and companies to execute their duties safely around the world, Kuwait Airways CEO Adel Al-Sanea said in a statement yesterday. Kuwait Airways is now the only institution issuing aviation medical permits in Kuwait, he added.

#### Profinal suspended

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health has suspended the Profinal drug, produced by UAE-based pharmaceuticals Julphar, pending further inspection. The move comes in accordance with the UAE Health Ministry's assessment that the medicine may not meet the required standards on active ingredient quantities, the ministry's Assistant Undersecretary for Food and Drug Control Dr Abdullah Al-Bader said. Suspension of the drug's registration will continue in Kuwait until the inspection of standards is complete, he added. The antipyretic, anti-inflammatory, and analgesic drug has not received approval for use in the country since 2018, he mentioned.

#### FM receives call

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received a phone call recently from the Chair of the International Peace Institute (IPI) Board of Directors, Kevin Rudd. The call dealt with regional and international developments.

#### Oil price up

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by 57 cents to \$59.59 per barrel as opposed to \$59.02 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. At the global level, the price of the Brent crude went up by 50 cents to \$59.34 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which went up by 62 cents to \$56.85 pb.

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## Kuwait welcomes election of new Libyan executive authority

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Foreign Ministry welcomed Friday the election of new leaders of the country's executive authority. In a press statement, the ministry commended the remarkable UN efforts to reach this goal, hoping this achievement would pave the way for meeting Libyan people's aspirations for security and stability. It wished success for the UN efforts to tackle other pending issues in the Libyan dossier.

Meanwhile, Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf welcomed election of Libya's new executive authority represented in the presidential council and prime minister. Mohammed Al-Menfi was chosen as interim presidency council head and Abdulhamid Dbeibeh as prime minister. In a statement, Hajraf stressed the importance of this step to reach a permanent and comprehensive solution to the crisis in Libya. He also hoped the new development would help achieve security, stability and development in Libya and meet aspirations of Libyans.

He extolled the efforts by the UN mission in Libya, wishing security and peace will prevail in all Libya soon to strengthen its national unity. The Arab League also welcomed the election of Libya's new executive authority represented in head and members of the presidential council and prime minister designate. In a statement, the League extolled the success of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) held in Geneva. It said it looks forward to the inauguration of the new council and government as soon as possible to begin their duties and prepare for legislative and presidential elections at the end of this year.

The statement renewed the League's support to all national efforts made to reach a final solution to Libya's crisis. It called for unifying regional and international stances to support the UN-led efforts to end the decade-long conflict. UN acting Libya envoy Stephanie Williams announced earlier in the day the winning of the list included Menfi and Dbeibeh, and Musa Al-Koni and Abdullah Al-Lafi as two members of the council. —KUNA

## Photo of the Day



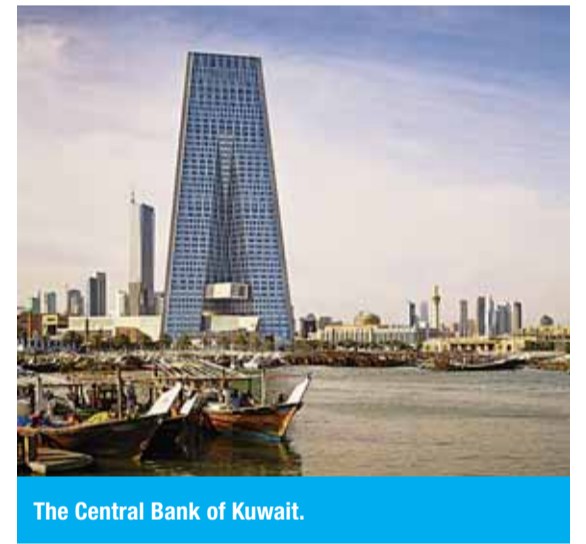
**KUWAIT:** Vehicles pass by Kuwait flags on a roundabout in Salmiya yesterday. National flags are raised at public places and streets around the country as Kuwait celebrates its National and Liberation days this month. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

## Kuwait completes IMF e-GDDS requirements

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has completed all requirements pertaining to the International Monetary Fund Enhanced General Data Dissemination System (e-GDDS), Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) Governor Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel said. The IMF remotely provided Kuwait with technical support, between January 25 and February 4, to develop its National Summary Data Page (NSDP), read a statement by CBK, the coordinator of Kuwait's e-GDDS at the IMF. Commenting on the outcome, Hashel said, the "step is the outcome of joint work between CBK, the Ministry of Finance, and

the Central Statistics Bureau."

"Preparations at the CBK are underway to host the National Summary Data Page (NSDP) on its website, and a link to the page will be available on the IMF's Dissemination Standards Bulletin Board (DSBB)," the governor added. "The NSDP utilizes the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) and aims to serve as a one-stop publication vehicle for key macroeconomic and financial data. In addition, publication of the data through the new NSDP will provide national policy makers, local and international stakeholders - including investors and rating agencies - with easy access to information critical to monitoring economic conditions and policies." He added, "making this information easily accessible will allow all users to have simultaneous access to timely data and will bring greater data transparency. To this end, the State of Kuwait's NSDP is scheduled for launch in April 2021." —KUNA



The Central Bank of Kuwait.

## IWG delegation visits NCCAL



**KUWAIT:** The International Women's Group (IWG) Kuwait's delegation met recently with Kamel Al-Abduljaleel, the Secretary General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) at the NCCAL building in Kuwait City. The IWG delegation included Ambreen Mustafa, President of IWG and wife of the Pakistani Ambassador to Kuwait; Clethe Gubler, Advisor to the President of IWG and wife of the Swiss Federation's Ambassador to Kuwait; and Rima Khalidi, Vice-President of IWG and wife of the Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait.

The delegation briefed the Secretary General on the various activities of IWG and the special arrangements for the upcoming celebrations of

Kuwait's National and Liberation days. The delegation also discussed the other activities which include events celebrating the cultures of its many international members. At their meeting, the Secretary General and the delegation also discussed opportunities for future cooperation between IWG and NCCAL. Abduljaleel expressed his high regard and pleasure to learn the extent of IWG's role in promoting cross-cultural appreciation and understanding in Kuwait, as well as appreciation for IWG's efforts in the activities it organizes. The IWG delegation members were very thankful for the meeting and warm hospitality of Abduljaleel, and look forward to their two organizations collaborating together in the future.

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Myanmar anti-coup protests grow as army widens Net crackdown

## Divisive legacy: Swiss mark 50 years of women voting

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EDINBURGH: Edinburgh residents, Michael Maddocks and James Logan receive a COVID-19 vaccine from military personnel at a temporary vaccination center set up at the Royal Highland Showground yesterday. —AFP

# WHO calls for bigger vaccine rollout

## Biden says US nears 'breaking point'; Macron, Merkel defend EU

**GENEVA:** The World Health Organization called on vaccine makers to dramatically boost production, as US president Joe Biden warned the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic was pushing the United States towards "breaking point".

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters that while the number of COVID-19 vaccines administered (115 million) had now overtaken the number of infections worldwide (104 million), more than three-quarters of the jabs had been handed out in just 10 wealthy countries.

"Almost 130 countries, with 2.5 billion people, are yet to administer a single dose", Tedros complained.

"Unless we suppress the virus everywhere, we could end up back at square one," the WHO chief said, calling on vaccine manufacturers to implement "a massive scale-up in production." At the same time, US President Joe Biden said he had to "act fast" to push a huge new economic relief package through Congress, because many Americans were near "breaking point." The US, the world's biggest economy, is the country that has been hardest hit by the pandemic so far.

Out of the nearly 2.3 million people who have died from COVID-19 worldwide since the outbreak emerged in China in December 2019, the US has recorded more than 450,000 deaths.

"I see enormous pain in this country, a lot of folks out of work, a lot of folks going hungry," Biden said in a White House speech. "We can reduce suffering in this country," Biden said. "I truly believe real help is on the way," as he sought support from the Republican party for his \$1.9-trillion pandemic relief package.

### Macron, Merkel defend EU

Europe is still the worst-affected region, with more than 760,000 deaths. And here, the slow vaccine rollout has

sparked public anger and plunged the bloc's leadership into crisis. EU member states needed to work more closely with drug firms to increase the pace of inoculation, the WHO's regional chief said.

"We need to join up to speed up vaccinations," the WHO's Europe director Hans Kluge told AFP in an interview. "Otherwise, competing pharmaceutical companies (must) join efforts to drastically increase production capacity... that's what we need."

Despite the troubled start to the vaccine rollout in the 27-nation bloc, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron defended Brussels' strategy. "I fully support the European approach," Macron told an online news conference after talks with Merkel. "What would people say if countries like France and Germany were competing with each other on vaccines?"

"It would be a mess, and counter-productive," he said. Merkel, for her part, said that although the sluggish rollout had shown that the bloc needed to ramp up pharmaceutical production capacities, "the basic decision to order together as the European Union was and is right".

Nevertheless, in a sign of Europe's increasing urgency, the EU's top diplomat Josep Borrell said he hoped Russia's Sputnik V jab would be approved for use in Europe soon. So far, only the vaccines made by AstraZeneca and by Pfizer-BioNTech have been authorised for use in the EU.

But Spain said on Friday it would limit use of the AstraZeneca vaccine to people under 55, the latest European country to impose an age restriction on the Anglo-Swedish jab. Last week, the German vaccines authority advised against using AstraZeneca's vaccine for the over 65s, judging that there was "not enough data" on its effectiveness in this age group. The decision came just hours after the EU's medicines regulator gave the vaccine the green light for use in adults of all ages, saying

it believed it would be safe for older people too.

### Still out of control

Drug firm Johnson & Johnson has asked US regulators to authorize its vaccine, which requires only one dose and can be stored at normal refrigeration temperatures—unlike some of the other jabs currently in use. The firm has said it is on track to supply 100 million doses to the US if authorized.

But trials have shown the J&J shot is not as effective against the highly transmissible variant first identified in South Africa that is rapidly spreading around the world. The South Africa variant and another first uncovered in England are causing increasing alarm, with experts in Germany warning that they had given the pandemic "another boost".

"The situation is far from being under control," said Lothar Wieler of the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), a day after the government had hinted it was thinking about relaxing some restrictions.

Many governments are agonizing over when and how to lift shutdowns and other rules. Israel, which has vaccinated more than a third of its population, said it had agreed to relax its lockdown from Sunday—despite registering more deaths in January than in any other month.

### 'It's a nightmare'

The cultural fallout from the pandemic is still being keenly felt in institutions across the world, with museums in Paris shorn of their customary crowds for months and pleading to be allowed to reopen. "It's a nightmare," said Christophe Leribault of the Petit Palais, where a recent Danish art exhibition managed to stay open for just a few weeks. "I managed to negotiate some extensions. But after a year, we had to return the paintings." —AFP

## US in tug-of-war with teachers over reopening schools

**LOS ANGELES:** From lawsuits in San Francisco to threats of a remote learning "lockout" in Chicago, US officials are ramping up the pressure on teachers and their unions to reopen schools that have been closed for almost a year due to COVID. Education professionals are fighting back, insisting that the dangers of sending teachers - many elderly and at-risk - back to classrooms alongside hundreds of students is too great until vaccinations are completed.

The row has escalated amid mounting frustration from parents forced to stay home some 11 months to look after children, and multiplying examples of school dropouts and psychological issues especially in disadvantaged communities. This week, the American Academy of Pediatrics' southern California chapter joined a growing chorus calling for immediate reopenings.

"A large majority of the 1.5 million students in L.A. County has not been physically in a classroom in nearly a year," it said in a statement. "This sad consequence of the pandemic should be addressed immediately with the reopening of schools."

Keeping children out of class does more harm than good, even in COVID times, the branch representing some 1,500 health workers said. On Wednesday, new US federal health chief Rochelle Walensky reiterated the point at a White House press briefing. "Vaccinations of teachers is not a prerequisite for safely reopening schools," said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director, pointing to "increasing data" showing it is safe to do so.

Children under the age of 12 do not appear to transmit the coronavirus as readily as adults, while their symptoms tend to be less severe, many experts now say. "The consensus now is that reopening schools does make sense," Eric Toner, a Johns Hopkins Center for Disease Control specialist, told the Los Angeles Times.

But that "consensus" is disputed by many education workers on the ground, including the 300,000-member California Teachers Association. "No one wants to be back in classrooms with students more than educators, who know there is no equal substitute for regular in-person learning," spokeswoman Claudia Briggs told AFP.

"For that to happen, there must be multilayered safety measures in place," including adequate ventilation, smaller class sizes, testing and tracing programs, she said. "School districts have made very clear that they do not have the resources," Briggs added, pointing to a lack of funding. —AFP

## Hundreds of Arab Israelis protest after student death

**UMM AL-FAHM, Israel:** Hundreds of Arab Israelis demonstrated Friday in northern Israel after a student was killed in a reported police shootout this week, an AFP reporter said.

Protesters defied coronavirus restrictions on gatherings to demonstrate in front of the police station in the Arab-Israeli city of Umm Al-Fahm. They chanted "Police out!" and demanded political action against violence and criminality in Arab-majority areas of Israel.

According to media reports, Ahmad Hijazi, a young Arab Israeli nursing student, was killed by the police overnight Monday to Tuesday during a shootout with suspected criminals in Tamra, around 30 kilometers north of Haifa. Thousands of people attended his funeral Tuesday, Israeli media said.

Arab Israeli lawmaker Yousef Jabareen said on Twitter that protesters had called on police and the government on Friday to "stop talking and start taking action" against violence and criminality. "The days pass and the victims pile up. The authorities have abandoned us to our fate, letting us sink in the blood of our children



UMM-AL FAHEM: Israeli Arab men pray during a protest after a student was killed in a reported police shootout in this northern Arab-Israeli town on Friday. —AFP

and in a sea of illegal weapons," Jabareen wrote.

Arab Israelis-Palestinians who stayed on their land following the Jewish state's creation in 1948 and their descendants-make up about 20 percent of Israel's roughly nine million people. By law, their rights are equal

to those of Jewish citizens. But they say that in practice they suffer discrimination in employment, housing, policing and other essentials. NGOs have long accused the Israeli police of turning a blind eye to gun violence among Arab Israelis. —AFP

## German firm to clear Beirut port

**BEIRUT:** A German firm has treated 52 containers of hazardous material at Beirut port and will ship them out of Lebanon, the German ambassador said yesterday, months after a monster port blast. Andreas Kindl said on Twitter that the heavy lift transport company Combi Lift "has treated 52 containers of hazardous and dangerous chemical material that had been accumulated over decades and were a threat to the people in Beirut". "They stand

ready to be shipped to" Germany, he added.

The August 4 explosion of a stockpile of ammonium nitrate fertiliser that had been left to languish haphazardly at the Beirut port for years killed more than 200 people, wounded at least 6,500 others and ravaged swathes of the capital. Lebanon's worst peace-time disaster sparked concerns over remaining shipments of hazardous chemicals still stored at the blast site.

In November, Lebanon signed a contract with Combi Lift, which was already working at the port, to clear containers carrying hazardous chemicals. The containers, which include corrosive acids, had been stored in an open-air cargo zone for over a decade under the supervision of Lebanon's cus-

tom authority, officials said at the time. If they catch fire "Beirut will be wiped out", interim port chief Bassem al-Kaisi said in November. Kindl on Saturday published pictures on Twitter showing fraying containers at the port and what appears to be chemicals leaking from some of them. Lebanese authorities have said Combi Lift will ship the chemicals in special containers as part of a \$3.6 million deal, with the port authority reportedly to pay \$2 million of that. Lebanon's army and port authority have said they do not have the expertise to handle such a process. Lebanon has launched an investigation into the August blast amid public anger against a political class widely blamed for the tragedy. —AFP



LOS ANGELES: US education professionals are fighting back, insisting that the dangers of sending teachers - many elderly and at-risk - back to classrooms alongside hundreds of students is too great until vaccinations are completed.



## International

# African leaders tackle COVID and conflict at virtual summit

## Continent recorded only 3.5% of virus cases, 4% of deaths worldwide

**DDIS ABABA:** African leaders opened a two-day virtual summit yesterday to discuss the continent's COVID-19 response as well as security issues that have been overlooked during the pandemic. The African Union summit comes almost exactly one year after Egypt recorded the first coronavirus case in Africa, prompting widespread fears that member states' weak health systems would quickly be overwhelmed.

But despite early doomsday predictions, the continent has been hit less hard than other regions so far, recording 3.5 percent of virus cases and four percent of deaths worldwide, according to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Today, though, many African countries are battling damaging second waves while straining to procure sufficient vaccine doses.

"This disease has caused great suffering and hardship across our continent," South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, the outgoing AU chairman, said in opening remarks yesterday. "It is not only a severe health emergency. It is also a grave economic and social crisis."

African leaders have been speaking out against vaccine hoarding by rich countries at the expense of poorer ones. "There is a vaccine nationalism on the rise, with other rich countries jumping the queue, some even pre-ordering more than they require," Moussa Faki Mahamat, chairman of the AU's executive body the African Union Commission, said in a recent interview.

Ramaphosa was due to deliver a pandemic

response update during the closed portion of the summit yesterday, according to a draft program. In his opening speech he called for "a fresh injection of resources" from the International Monetary Fund to "correct the glaring inequality in fiscal stimulus measures between advanced economies and the rest of the world."

### Elections and crises

Separately, member states are due to hold internal elections to lead the restructured commission—the results of which will shape how the AU responds to the pandemic and a host of economic and security challenges. Faki, a former prime minister of Chad, is running unopposed for a second four-year term as commission chief.

He still needs to get two-thirds of the vote, overcoming accusations—which he denies—of "a culture of sexual harassment, bribery, corruption and bullying within the commission," the International Crisis Group wrote in a recent briefing. In another race, Nigerian Bankole Adeoye is favored to head the AU's newly-merged political affairs and peace and security departments, diplomats say, though AU rules dividing top positions among Africa's sub-regions could lead to a surprise result.

Whoever wins could play a critical role, along with Faki, in addressing crises the AU is accused of overlooking. There are multiple internal conflicts the AU has done little to resolve.

Its Peace and Security Council has failed to hold meetings on a conflict between government forces

and anglophone separatists in Cameroon, for example, as well as rising Islamist militancy in Mozambique.

A three-month-old conflict in the AU's host country Ethiopia, pitting Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government against the former ruling party of the northern Tigray region, has proved especially sensitive. Abiy has rejected appeals from high-level AU envoys for talks with Tigrayan leaders, sticking to his line that the conflict is a limited "law and order" operation.

### Congo in charge

This weekend's summit comes as new US President Joe Biden vows to re-engage with multilateral institutions like the African Union. In a video message posted Friday, Biden said his administration would engage in "sustained diplomacy, in connection with the African Union, to address conflicts that are costing lives all across the African continent." The summit also marks the official beginning of the year-long AU chairmanship of Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi, who is replacing Ramaphosa.

Addressing fellow heads of state and government yesterday, Tshisekedi vowed to make the AU more relevant by taking it "away from meeting rooms". Tshisekedi has outlined an ambitious agenda that includes responding to climate change, fighting sexual violence, promoting the African Continental Free Trade Area and accelerating his own country's Grand Inga Hydropower Project, which the AU sees



South African President Cyril Ramaphosa will deliver a pandemic response update during the closed portion of the summit Saturday, according to a draft program.

as an important source of electricity for the continent. But Tshisekedi is also embroiled in a tussle for power at home with supporters of DR Congo's former president Joseph Kabila. Mohamed Diatta, a researcher for the Institute for Security Studies, said Tshisekedi is "trying really hard to consolidate power at home, but it's not an easy task." "He's probably going to still be busy with that because what he's created at home is essentially a very fragile and loose governing coalition," Diatta said. —AFP

### News in brief

#### One missing in French garage blast

**BORDEAUX, France:** An 89-year-old man was seriously hurt and one person was still missing yesterday after an explosion in a garage in the French city of Bordeaux, firefighters said. Initial investigations suggest gas was the cause of the blast, which destroyed the small building and seriously damaged two neighboring buildings. The 89-year-old was fighting for his life, city officials said. So far nine other people have been identified with minor injuries following the blast. About 70 firefighters were on the scene. — AFP

#### Police shooting fuels Chile protests

**PANGUIPULLI, Chile:** Hundreds protested and a public building was burned down in a southern Chilean town Friday in reaction to the fatal police shooting of a street artist. The incident took place in Panguipulli after the juggler refused to cooperate with a police search by two uniformed men. The check resulted in a dispute that ended with one of the agents firing at the street artist, according to a video widely circulated by local channels and on social media. "We regret the loss of this young juggler. I hope that justice is done," Ricardo Valdivia, Panguipulli's mayor, told Radio Cooperativa. — AFP

#### Ecuador left candidate won't vote

**QUITO:** The main left-wing candidate in today's presidential election in Ecuador, the economist Andres Arauz, will not be able to vote in his own country because his residence is registered as being in Mexico, where he normally lives, the electoral authorities said Friday. "He cannot (vote), he could only do it in Mexico" at the Ecuadorian consulate, Enrique Pita, vice president of the National Electoral Council (CNE) told AFP. Another CNE adviser, Jose Cabrera, confirmed that since Arauz "is registered in Mexico, he cannot vote in Ecuador." — AFP

#### Microsoft funding curbs on politicians

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Microsoft on Friday said it is temporarily cutting off donations to politicians who voted against certifying the US election results or supported efforts to overturn President Joe Biden's victory. Contributions from employees, shareholders and family members channeled through a Microsoft Corporation Stakeholders Voluntary PAC will be withheld from those lawmakers through the 2022 election cycle, according to corporate vice president Fred Humphries. — AFP

#### Intruder spotlights US Air Force security

**WASHINGTON:** The US Air Force opened an investigation Friday after an intruder managed to board an official plane at an air force base near Washington, despite heightened security measures after the January 6 Capitol Hill attack. An "adult man" managed to enter Andrews Air Force base—which hosts visiting dignitaries in Washington and is where official US planes, including the Air Force One presidential jet, are based—on Thursday, officials said. "Everyone takes this very seriously. (Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin) takes this very seriously," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said, stressing that the investigation would focus on security measures of the US Air Force around the world. — AFP

## Somalia leaders fail to reach deal on elections

**MOGADISHU:** Emergency talks between Somalia's divided political leaders have ended without agreement on how to proceed with elections, a government minister has announced just days before the president's mandate expires. Somalia is likely to miss a February 8 deadline to choose a new president after days of negotiations between the central government and federal states collapsed Friday without resolution over the disputed electoral process. The impasse threatens a constitutional crisis in the fragile Horn of Africa nation that is already confronting a violent Islamist insurgency, a locust invasion and serious food shortages.

"The government offered to negotiate and settle all the disputed issues, but some brothers have failed to understand, and refused to resolve the issues," Information Minister Osman Abukar Dubbe told reporters in the capital Mogadishu late Friday. "The government has shown flexibility to compromise, gentleness and readiness to negotiate, but some leaders tried to exploit that openness to seek more. That will not work."

President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed and



In this February 1, 2021 file photo, debris remain at the blast site from a suicide car bombing attack from the day before at the side of Afrik Hotel in Mogadishu. — AFP

Somalia's five regional leaders reached an agreement on September 17 that paved the way for indirect parliamentary and presidential elections in late 2020 and early 2021. But that deal fell apart as disagreements over the multi-stage process escalated

between the president, better known by his nickname Farmajo, and some regional rivals. Farmajo, who is seeking a second term as president, is expected to announce another round of talks at a joint sitting of parliament yesterday. — AFP

## Key players rally behind Draghi in Italy talks

**ROME:** Former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi will today wrap up a first round of talks aimed at forming a new Italian government, hoping to drag the country out of its economic and COVID-19 crises. Summoned by President Sergio Mattarella this week after prime minister Giuseppe Conte's coalition collapsed, Draghi—dubbed "Super Mario" for extricating the eurozone from its debt crisis early last decade—has already rallied some political players behind him.

So far the center-left Democratic Party (PD) and the small Italia Viva outfit of centrist former premier Matteo Renzi—the man behind the collapse of the last government—have promised support, as well as Silvio Berlusconi's center-right Forza Italia (FI). But the economist will need backing from bigger parties, possibly including the far-right League led by Matteo Salvini, to build a governing majority.

### 'Confidence of Europe'

Time is ticking as Italy must present plans for how it will spend around 200 billion euros (\$241 billion) from the EU's pandemic recovery fund—the largest share for any single country—by the end of April. Draghi "already has the confidence of Europe and the markets. Soon he will receive parliament's confidence," daily Il Corriere della Sera predicted.

Wolfgang Piccoli of consulting firm Teneo agreed. "The question has somewhat shifted from 'if' Draghi could form a government to 'how' this government will be constituted, meaning which parties will be part of the coalition." Boasting the largest numbers of MPs, the decisive answers will come from the League and the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S).

With its roughly one-third of MPs and senators, M5S had backed Conte to the hilt.

But saying he had always worked "for the good of the country," Conte on Thursday promised not to be an "obstacle" to Draghi and wished him "good luck!" The League will have to overcome its reluctance to work with the PD and possible reservations about Draghi personally.

The former central banker personifies a European elite that the nationalist, anti-immigration



ROME: Mario Draghi gives a press conference after a meeting with the Italian president, at the Quirinal palace in Rome. — AFP

party and its counterparts across the bloc love to hate. But League leader Matteo Salvini, who served under Conte as interior minister from 2018-19, said he would be ready to return to the cabinet table.

He appears likely to push through backing a Draghi-led government even at the risk of grumbling in his party ranks. — AFP

## Divisive legacy: Swiss mark 50 years of women voting

**GENEVA:** Switzerland will mark 50 years since women won the vote today—dismally late for a country that prides itself on having one of the oldest democracies in the world. The move came in 1971, more than a century after the first demands for universal suffrage in the country. Swiss politicians including Justice Minister Karin Keller-Sutter hailed the progress made since then.

"February 7, 1971 marked the decisive step towards gender equality," she said in a tweet. "It was also the birth of the democracy we are so rightly proud of today: a complete democracy."

Ruth Dreifuss, who became the first woman to serve as president in 1999, stressed that the past half century had seen "the elimination of legal

discrimination between men and women" in large part thanks to the votes cast by women. Others, however, scoffed at the celebratory tone.

"We are doing this kind of memorialising of something that should in many ways be a national shame, because it came so late," Eleonore Lepinard, a sociology professor at Lausanne University, told AFP.

### Women 'remained excluded'

Indeed, Swiss women won the right nearly 80 years after women in New Zealand, 65 years after Finland and nearly three decades after France. And even when Switzerland finally allowed women to vote at a national level, its federal system enabled the conservative canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden to continue barring



Newly elected Swiss Federal Councilors Viola Amherd (center left) and Karin Keller-Sutter. — AFP

women from participating in regional votes until 1991.

The delay is ironic in a country famous for having one of the world's oldest and most inclusive democratic systems. Switzerland was among the

first countries to introduce universal suffrage for citizens back in 1848, and soon developed its direct democratic system allowing citizens to regularly vote on a vast array of issues. But only men were considered citizens. — AFP



## International

# Myanmar anti-coup protests grow as army broadens Internet crackdown

## UN envoy makes 'first contact' with Myanmar commander

**YANGON:** Myanmar saw its largest anti-coup protests yet yesterday with young demonstrators spilling on to the streets to denounce the country's new military regime, despite a nationwide internet blackout aimed at stifling a growing chorus of popular dissent. Soon before nearly all lines of communication in and out of the country went dark. An Australian economic advisor to Myanmar's deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi told the BBC yesterday he had been detained in the country following the coup. Macquarie University professor Sean Turnell is the first foreign national confirmed arrested by the new military junta since it took power on Monday after detaining Suu Kyi and other senior politicians from her National League for Democracy (NLD) party. "I'm just being detained at the moment, and perhaps charged with something. I don't know what that would be," he told the broadcaster. "Everyone's being very polite... but obviously I'm not free to move or anything like that," he added.

The internet shutdown did not stop several thousand demonstrators from gathering on a road near Yangon University, many holding up the three-finger salute that has come to symbolize resistance to the army takeover. "Down with the military dictatorship!" the crowd yelled, many donning red headbands—the color associated with Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party.

A large riot police contingent blocked nearby roads, with two water cannon trucks parked at the scene. Some protesters left the area without confrontation while others remain at the scene, with no reports of clashes with police so far. At least two other groups of demonstrators are marching through other parts of Myanmar's biggest city, while as many

as 2,000 people were marching further north in Mandalay, AFP reporters on the ground said.

All were out to condemn the dawn raids that brought a sudden halt to the country's brief 10-year experiment with democracy on Monday, just as lawmakers elected in national polls last November were due to sit in parliament for the first time. "They don't respect our people's votes and I think they are betraying the country," one protester told AFP. "Our revolution starts today." Australian professor Sean Turnell became the latest figure associated with Suu Kyi—and the first confirmed foreign national—to be detained by the junta. "I'm just being detained at the moment, and perhaps charged with something. I don't know what that would be," Turnell, a longtime economics advisor to the Nobel laureate, told the BBC.

### 'First contact'

Online calls to protest the army takeover had prompted increasingly bold displays of defiance against the new regime, including the nightly deafening clamor of people around the country banging pots and pans—a practice traditionally associated with driving out evil. Some have shown their opposition by gathering for group photographs with banners decrying the coup and flashing a three-finger salute earlier adopted by democracy protesters in neighboring Thailand. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said a special envoy to the country had made "first contact" with Myanmar's deputy military commander to urge the junta to relinquish power to the civilian government it toppled. State media in Myanmar reported Saturday that junta figures had spoken with diplomats the previous day to respond to an international outcry and asked them

imposed a strict lockdown on millions of people in Wuhan and surrounding Hubei province.

Commenters marked the anniversary of his death with thousands of messages, ranging from candle emoticons to updates on their own lives addressed to the late doctor. "Dr. Li, the weather is great today where I live... everyone around me is trying their best in life, all is good, happy lunar new year" one Weibo user wrote yesterday in a comment on Li's last post, which has attracted more than a million comments, mostly after his death. "I thought everyone would have forgotten you after a year," wrote another commenter. "I was wrong, you live forever in the hearts of the Chinese people." Wuhan city itself, however, showed few outward indications of mourning.

There was little sign of tributes outside Wuhan Central Hospital where the 24-year-old ophthalmologist first warned colleagues of the mysterious new virus, in stark contrast with the photos and bouquets left by mourners a year ago. The city where the virus was first detected is now playing host to a delegation of World Health Organization inspectors searching for clues to the source of the pandemic.

The sensitive mission, which China had delayed throughout the first year of the international health crisis, has already visited the Huanan Seafood Market where many of the first known patients worked.

The experts have also toured a controversial Wuhan virology institute at the heart of conspiracy

and monkey near the tiger cage. Police and conservation officials were immediately dispatched to search for the tigers. Nearby tourism attractions were ordered to close and locals were told to stay at home while police searched for the animals.

"We tried with a tranquilliser gun first but it didn't work, so we were forced to shoot the tiger because it was already behaving very aggressively," Sadtata Noor Adirahmanta, the head of a local conservation agency, told AFP. "We were afraid it would escape to the nearest neighborhood. Although we tried our best to catch it alive, our priority is humans' safety," he added. Authorities are still looking for the other tiger in the jungle surrounding the zoo.

A cage with animal prey inside has been prepared in hope the escaped tiger will return to the zoo at her feeding time. Sumatran tigers are considered critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, with fewer than 400 believed to remain in the wild.

to be further confirmed", Sinovac said in a statement.

Fellow Chinese pharmaceutical company Sinopharm received a similar conditional green light in December to put its vaccine on the market. Sinovac said trials in Brazil had shown around 50 percent efficacy in preventing infection and 80 percent efficacy in preventing cases requiring medical intervention.

"The results show that the vaccine has good safety and immunogenic effect on people of all age groups," Sinovac said yesterday.

Meanwhile Sinopharm said in December that its vaccine had a 79.34 percent efficacy rate, lower than rival jabs developed in the West by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna—with 95 and 94 percent rates respectively. China has been racing to develop homegrown jabs and aims to vaccinate 50 million people before the start of the Lunar New Year in mid-February.

The holiday normally spurs a travel rush with hundreds of millions traversing the country—though authorities are encouraging people to stay home this year through a mixture of restrictions and incentives. As

world's second-highest mountain, K2, their expedition manager and the Alpine Club of Pakistan said yesterday. Climbers John Snorri from Iceland, Juan Pablo Mohr from Chile and Muhammad Ali Sadpara from Pakistan reportedly lost contact with base camp on Friday. "It's already been more than 30 hours, we (at basecamp) have received no

news of John Snorri, Ali Sadpara, and Juan Pablo Mohr, since none of the GPS trackers seem to be working", Chhang Dawa Sherpa, their expedition manager, said in a statement.

An army helicopter has conducted a search flight for the missing climbers, Sherpa said in a separate statement. "Unfortunately, they cannot trace any-

thing and the condition up in the mountain and even at the basecamp is getting poor", he said. Karrar Haidri, Secretary of the Alpine Club of Pakistan, also told AFP that the climbers had gone missing on the mountain. News of the missing men comes a day after a Bulgarian mountaineer was confirmed to have died on K2. He is the third mountaineer to die on

K2's slopes this year, after a Spanish climber fell to his death last month. Russian-American Alex Goldfarb also died on a nearby mountain during an acclimatizing mission in January.

A team of Nepali climbers made history on K2 last month when they became the first to scale it in winter. —AFP



YANGON: Protesters take part in a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon yesterday. —AFP

to work with the new leaders.

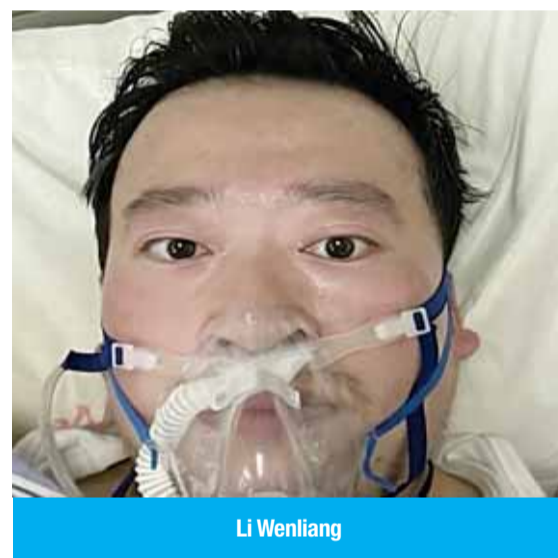
As protests gathered steam this week, the junta ordered telecom networks to freeze users out of access to Facebook, an extremely popular service in the country and arguably its main mode of communi-

cation. "We strongly urge the authorities to order the unblocking of all social media services," a Facebook representative said. "The people of Myanmar need access to important information and to be able to communicate with their loved ones." —AFP

## China media tributes mark anniversary of whistleblower doctor's death

**WUHAN:** Thousands of Chinese social media users paid tribute to Li Wenliang yesterday, marking the one year anniversary of the death of the doctor who first blew the whistle on the coronavirus outbreak. Li, one of a group of doctors in Wuhan who shared posts on social media warning of a SARS-like virus spreading in the central city in December 2019, was reimprisoned by police for spreading "rumors".

His death in February last year after catching the virus from a patient prompted a national outpouring of grief, as well as anger at the government's handling of the crisis and bold demands for political reforms. The Chinese government has since promoted an official narrative centered on its efficient handling of the outbreak as local transmissions have largely been brought under control and censors swiftly scrub the more critical comments from the internet. But Li's personal page on the Twitter-like Weibo platform remains a rare space for users to commemorate the trauma of the early outbreak after the country



Li Wenliang

theories about the disease's origins. Life in Wuhan, a city of 11 million, has largely returned to normal, with bustling shopping malls and lively night markets months after the world's first COVID lockdown was lifted in April. "Last year, there were no people or cars on the street, and the only vehicle on the road was an ambulance, so I felt very empty inside" Wuhan resident Hou Mingli said. A year later, Hou said, "I feel much warmth and comfort." —AFP

### News in brief

#### Police, farmers face off in Delhi

**NEW DELHI:** Tens of thousands of police deployed across India yesterday in a bid to smother threatened new protests by farmers fighting government agriculture reforms. Ten metro stations were closed in central New Delhi—where a tractor rally last month turned into a violent rampage—and thousands of police manned barricades and roadblocks at key intersections. Farmers unions called for protest roadblocks across the country in the latest day of action. Media reported isolated farmers and their supporters occupying roads and toll booths in several states but no trouble. —AFP

#### Firefighters contain Australian blaze

**SYDNEY:** Australian firefighters have managed to contain a bushfire burning near Perth, authorities said yesterday, allowing them to downgrade the blaze which has destroyed 86 homes. Despite another night battling the fire amid strong winds on the fringes of Australia's fourth-biggest city, crews managed to hold the blaze back and reduced the emergency warning to a watch-and-act alert ahead of forecast rains. "I am really happy to report that the Wooroloo fire is now 100 percent contained," Western Australia state fire commissioner Darren Klemm told media. —AFP

#### Twitter condemns Myanmar's move

**BANGKOK:** Twitter yesterday condemned Myanmar's move to block access to its platform as part of a broadening crackdown on social media, days after a coup that imprisoned Aung San Suu Kyi and other civilian leaders. "It undermines the public conversation and the rights of people to make their voices heard," a spokesperson for the platform said. "We will continue to advocate to end destructive government-led shutdowns."

#### US, EU hail Belarus democrats

**WASHINGTON:** The United States and the European Union on Friday hailed demonstrators in Belarus six months after disputed elections, in a message sure to irritate President Vladimir Putin of neighboring Russia. US President Joe Biden's administration and the Europeans said they backed a "day of solidarity" called for today by Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, who believes she defeated President Alexander Lukashenko, an authoritarian ally of Putin, in August. "We continue to be amazed by the exceptional strength, resilience and courage of the Belarusian people in the face of unyielding repression," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.

#### Troops retake second CAR town

**BANGUI:** Forces loyal to the Central African Republic government have retaken a second town on an arterial highway from rebels, the prime minister said Friday. "The town of Yaloke is liberated..." Prime Minister Firmin Ngrebada said on Facebook. "Congratulations to our defense forces and allies." By "allies", the CAR government usually refers to Rwandan troops and Russian paramilitaries. Yaloke is located nearly 200 kilometers (125 miles) northwest of the Bangui and lies on a major highway that links the landlocked nation's capital to neighboring Cameroon. —AFP

## Two Sumatran tigers escape Indonesian zoo

**PONTIANAK, Indonesia:** A critically endangered Sumatran tiger was shot dead yesterday while another is still on the loose after they escaped from a zoo on Borneo island, leaving a zookeeper dead, an official said. The tigers, both female and about 18 months old, escaped from Sinka Zoo in the town of Singkawang, West Kalimantan late Friday after days of torrential rain caused a landslide and opened a tunnel allowing their exit.

A 47-year-old zookeeper was found dead with scratches and bite wounds on his body. Authorities also found dead a cassowary, ostrich

## China approves second domestic COVID vaccine

**BEIJING:** China's drug authorities have given "conditional" approval for a second Covid-19 vaccine, Sinovac's CoronaVac jab, the pharmaceutical company said yesterday.

The vaccine has already been rolled out to key groups at higher risk of exposure to coronavirus but Saturday's approval allows for its use on the general public. A conditional approval helps hustle emergency drugs to market in cases when clinical trials are yet to meet normal standards but indicate therapies will work. The approval comes after multiple domestic and overseas trials of the vaccine in countries including Brazil and Turkey, although "efficacy and safety results need

## Three climbers missing on K2 mountain

**ISLAMABAD:** Three climbers have gone missing attempting to summit the



## Business

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2021

## Biden pledges to 'act fast' on US stimulus amid weak January hiring

## \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package clears key Senate hurdle

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden on Friday seized on feeble US employment data to argue the world's largest economy needs his \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package, which cleared a key Senate hurdle without support from the Republican opposition. The closely-watched jobs data showed the unemployment rate dropped to 6.3 percent in January, but the economy added only 49,000 jobs, the Labor Department said.

The anemic report made plain the ongoing struggles in the United States as Americans cope with the largest COVID-19 outbreak in the world. "I believe the American people are looking right now to their government for help," Biden said after a meeting with top Democratic lawmakers. "So I'm going to act, I'm going to act fast."

Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said she would push for rapid approval of the package.

"Hopefully in a two-week period of time, we'll send something over to the Senate," she told reporters after the White House meeting. The House of Representatives approved a budget proposal by a narrow margin on Friday, following Senate Democrats who in the wee hours of the morning won a procedural vote setting the stage for passage of the president's relief bill.

The package includes a host of measures aimed at boosting the recovery, including aid to small businesses and the unemployed, and funds to speed

up vaccine distribution to contain the pandemic.

But in a sign of just how narrow the path to approval, Vice President Kamala Harris cast the tie-breaking vote to overcome the objections of Republicans, who have balked at the high price tag.

Biden has shrugged off the criticism. "The way I see it, the biggest risk is not going too big," he said.

But he did have to concede somewhat on issues such as his proposal for a hike in the federal minimum wage to \$15, telling CBS in an interview Friday that the measure likely would not pass.

"I don't think it's going to survive," he admitted. Nevertheless Biden's efforts received a big endorsement, when IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva offered her support for the plan, and rejected the notion it was excessive.

"The US does have fiscal space to take additional relief and support measures," she told reporters Friday. And it is "appropriate" to use that firepower "given the exceptional uncertainties, and most importantly, given the fact that there is still a lot of pain for households and businesses."

## Distress signals

Analysts warn the monthly employment report indicates the economic recovery remains tied to the intensity of the coronavirus pandemic. "Hiring will pick up as restrictions are relaxed but gains will be stronger once the economy

can fully reopen," Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics said.

"Until then, generous fiscal support will provide a safety net for households and businesses."

The United States last year endured its worst economic contraction since 1946, and the recovery has been uneven, with some sectors like housing bouncing back more quickly while other areas, such as travel and entertainment, are still suffering. Unemployment in the world's largest economy was at historically low rates before the pandemic struck, when massive business closures drove the jobless rate up to 14.7 percent. It has declined in the months since, as some activity resumed, but at a progressively slower pace, and hiring in December fell.

There were warning signs for the economy throughout the latest data, which showed the workforce is 6.5 percent — 9.9 million positions — smaller than it was in February before the pandemic struck.

At 61.4 percent, the labor force participation rate in January was at a level not seen since the 1970s, and Gregory Daco of Oxford Economics said adjustments meant to account for holiday-related employment trends made the data appear better than it is.

"While favorable seasonal factors helped lift the monthly jobs count, the January gain nonetheless represented little progress toward recovery," he said.



US President Joe Biden makes his way to board Air Force One before departing from Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. Biden on Friday seized on feeble US employment data to argue the world's largest economy needs his \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package, which cleared a key Senate hurdle without support from the Republican opposition. —AFP

## Uneven recovery

The number of long-term unemployed people rose to just over four million, or 39.5 percent of all jobless workers, which William Spriggs, chief economist of the AFL-CIO trade union federation, warned was a sign of a persistent employment crisis. "These show it will be very hard to get the unemployment number down. We need help now to slow that growth," he tweeted.

Job growth was strongest in the business services and private and public education sectors, but continued layoffs in industries like retail trade, health care and especially the hard-hit leisure and hospitality sector undercut the gains. The pain was not spread evenly across the country, with whites and Hispanics seeing their unemployment rates decline, while for Black Americans, the rate fell but to a still-high 9.2 percent. —AFP

## Path clears for Okonjo-Iweala as first woman WTO chief

GENEVA: US President Joe Biden's administration on Friday offered its "strong support" to Nigeria's Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala to lead the World Trade Organization (WTO), clearing a path for her to become the body's first female and first African leader. The move marks another sharp split with former president Donald Trump, who paralyzed the organization and opposed the candidacy of the former Nigerian finance minister who was backed by many other countries.

The US Trade Representative in a statement cited her "wealth of knowledge in economics and international diplomacy" and said she had "proven experience managing a large international organization". USTR also noted that South Korea's trade minister-whom the Trump administration supported-had abandoned her bid to head the WTO earlier Friday.

Yoo Myung-hee consulted with the United States-her primary backer-and other major countries and "decided to

renounce her candidacy". South Korea's trade ministry said in a statement.

The process to name a successor for Roberto Azevedo, who stepped down last August, had been deadlocked for months. Key WTO ambassadors tapped Okonjo-Iweala back in October as the best pick to lead the organization, but without US support the process was left at a standstill since the director general is normally chosen by consensus among all 164 member states.

"The United States stands ready to engage in the next phase of the WTO process for reaching a consensus decision on the WTO Director General," USTR said. "The Biden Administration looks forward to working with a new WTO Director General to find paths forward to achieve necessary substantive and procedural reform of the WTO."

Okonjo-Iweala later said on Twitter: "Grateful for the expression of support from the US today."

The next regular meeting of the Geneva-based organization's General Council, where the leadership issue could be discussed, was not until March 1. WTO spokesman Keith Rockwell said.

But, he stressed, "another could be called on short notice", since the last meeting in October had been suspended amid the deadlock.



GENEVA: A picture taken on July 15, 2020, in Geneva shows Nigerian former Foreign and Finance Minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala facing a TV camera during an interview following her hearing before World Trade Organization 164 member states' representatives. —AFP

## 'Good news'

A European diplomat hailed Yoo's decision to drop out of the race. "We salute the spirit of responsibility in this decision. This is good news for multilateralism," he said. "Now nothing stands in the way of members rapidly approving the Nigerian candidate, Doctor Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who won the selection process." If she does get the nod, Okonjo-Iweala would become the first woman and also the first African to lead the WTO.

The crisis-wracked organization is widely seen as needing reform. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, it

had grappled with stalled trade talks and struggled to curb tensions between the United States and China. The global trade body also faced relentless attacks from Washington under Trump, which crippled its dispute settlement appeal system.

The previous US leader had threatened to leave the organization altogether. Twice Nigeria's finance minister and its first woman foreign minister, Okonjo-Iweala, 66, trained as a development economist-she has degrees from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard. — AFP

## Denmark moves forward on North Sea 'energy island'

COPENHAGEN: Denmark said Friday it has approved plans to build an artificial island in the North Sea that could generate wind power for at least three million households.

Parliament in June adopted a political environmental framework aimed at reducing the country's CO2 emissions by 70 percent by 2030, which included plans for the world's first "energy hubs" on the island of Bornholm in the Baltic Sea and in the North Sea. On Thursday, parliament went further by approving a plan to place the North Sea hub on an artificial island, with a wind power farm that will initially supply three gigawatts (GW) of electricity.

That could later be scaled up to 10 GW-enough for 10 million households-according to the ministry of climate, energy and utilities, much more than needed for Denmark's population of 5.8 million.

"Clearly this is too much for

Denmark alone and this also why we see this as a part of a bigger European project," Climate Minister Dan Jorgensen told AFP, adding that Denmark wanted to also export excess energy to the rest of Europe. Plans also include the use of "electrolysis" to extract hydrogen for use in the production of renewable fuels for things like maritime transport.

The island, "the largest construction project in the history of Denmark," is to be majority owned by the Danish government in partnership with private companies and is expected to cost around 210 billion Danish kroner (\$34 billion, 28 billion euros). Rather than a traditional offshore wind power farm, the island will function as an "energy hub" allowing connections from other countries' wind power farms and cables to efficiently distribute the incoming energy. Its final size is yet to be decided but it is



COPENHAGEN: Denmark has approved plans to build an artificial island in the North Sea that could generate wind power for at least three million households, the government said Friday. —AFP

expected to cover between 120,000 to 460,000 square meters (about 1.3 million to five million square feet), according to the ministry.

The total number of wind turbines has not been finalized either, but estimates range between 200 and 600 units at "a previously unseen scale," with the tip of the blades reaching as high as 260 meters (850 feet) above the sea. While the project is a step in

the plan to provide enough energy to electrify Denmark, Jorgensen also said they hoped the project could offer guidance for bigger countries looking to transition their societies in the face of climate change. "We know that as a small country, only responsible for about 0.1 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, it doesn't matter that much to the climate what we actually do in Denmark," he said. —AFP

## Brazil's watershed 'Car Wash' probe ends with a whimper

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil: One of the biggest corruption investigations in history, Brazil's "Operation Car Wash," which felled presidents and powerful players across Latin America, wrapped up this week after falling into scandal itself. The task force, which began as a probe into money laundering at a Brasilia gas station in March 2014, soon blew the lid off a sprawling tangle of corruption reaching the highest levels of government and industry in Brazil, with tentacles stretching across Latin America and into Africa. Using aggressive plea-bargain tactics to get suspects to rat out their superiors, prosecutors uncovered how politicians systematically conspired with executives at companies such as Brazilian oil giant Petrobras and construction giant Odebrecht to inflate government contracts and pocket the proceeds for themselves and their parties.

A fearsome force whose exploits inspired a movie and Netflix series, the hard-hitting prosecutors shared their dirt with colleagues around the world. The long list of people sent to jail by the investigation and its international spinoffs includes former presidents Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of Brazil, Alejandro Toledo of Peru and Ricardo Martinelli of Panama, plus top executives at Petrobras, Odebrecht and several other firms.

But despite the operation's spectacular list of accomplishments — 174 people convicted in Brazil, 12 current or former presidents implicated across Latin America, \$790 million returned to Brazil's public coffers, with nearly \$2.8 billion more on the way-the attorney general's office announced Wednesday without fanfare that its main investigative team had been disbanded.

Ironically, the news came under a leader who arguably owes his job to Car Wash: far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, the self-styled outsider who rode a wave of anti-establishment outrage to victory in Brazil's 2018 elections. "The politician who most benefited from Brazil's anti-corruption probe has put the final nail in its coffin," Brazilian sociologist Celso Rocha de Barros wrote in Americas Quarterly.

Bolsonaro had long been saying the task force's days were numbered. "I've ended Car Wash, because there's no more corruption in government," he said last October. The claim was easy to fact-check: the following week, the deputy leader of Bolsonaro's coalition in the Senate was caught with around 30,000 reais (more than \$5,000) in his underwear during a police raid for suspected embezzlement of Covid-19 funds. — AFP



## Business

Interview with Global Finance

## Al-Marzouq: NBK stands on solid grounds

## Bank is well-positioned to seize opportunities as it proceeds to recovery

KUWAIT: Sulaiman Al-Marzouq, Deputy CEO of National Bank of Kuwait - Kuwait said: "The year 2020 was a very challenging year, however, NBK clearly demonstrated that it stands on solid grounds in the face of the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic."

In an interview with Global Finance magazine, Al-Marzouq added: "The challenge was even doubled due to the sharp fall in oil prices combined with the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent measures taken by governments to contain the spread of the virus, including partial and full lockdown, severely weakening operating environment, diminishing financing opportunities, and impairing main income streams."

At NBK, since the early beginning of the crisis, we activated emergency plans to ensure business continuity and took all necessary measures to protect both our employees and our customers, he pointed out. Al-Marzouq noted that during the year 2020, the bank significantly reinforced its capital and liquidity ratios through two issuances of subordinated tier 2 bonds: one worth KD 150 million, and the other US\$ 300 million, which both saw record subscription, reflecting the bank's strong credit position locally and internationally, despite these challenging times.

## Digital transformation strategy

The Deputy CEO of NBK - Kuwait mentioned that over the past years, NBK increased its investments in IT infrastructure and digital transformation strategy, which provided it with more dynamic data, and it showed proactive examples in anticipating the trends and levels of customer satisfaction. Al-Marzouq added that the bank's digital channels provided effective and practical alternatives for branches, giving the bank a resilient operating model that is capable of changing the way it operates and adapting to the exceptional circumstances imposed by the pandemic, noting that NBK Mobile Banking App emerged as the bank's largest branch and key digital channel, with the number of app users increasing by 38 percent during 2020, and the number of mobile-based transactions boosting by

51 percent, compared to last year.

For 2021, Al-Marzouq stated that NBK is looking forward to continue building and investing in technology and digital platforms that simplify operations and support growth in key areas such as wealth management and banking transactions, with a view to keep pace with our growing aspirations, the fact that makes us well-positioned to continue to be a source of strength for all our stakeholders.

NBK has made tremendous investments in the selective development and implementation of the most advanced automation solutions, upgrading IT infrastructure, and ensuring the resilience and capabilities of cybersecurity, he noted. He also highlighted that NBK focuses on directing its investments to technologies that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of back office operations in the long term, as well as investing heavily in robotic process automation and focusing on improving efficiency in terms of saving time and costs.

- NBK to continue to invest in digital platforms that support growth in key areas
- NBK made tremendous investments in developing and upgrading IT infrastructure
- NBK's strategy in 2021 will continue to focus on consolidating our footprint in the international markets
- The Kuwaiti banking sector played an instrumental role in the recovery from the coronavirus crisis

## International markets

Al-Marzouq stressed that in 2021, NBK will carry on its strategy aimed to strengthen its footprint in the markets in which it operates, by striving to expand in the Egyptian and Saudi markets as well as to consolidate its position as a leading regional player in the area of wealth management.

Al-Marzouq said: "We hope that the Kuwaiti

panies. This would be done by raising SME shares in tenders, operations, and purchase and supply requests (either directly or indirectly), as the law currently obliges public authorities to allocate at least 10 percent of all procurements to small and medium-sized companies, and grant them a price preference not exceeding 20 percent of acceptable prices.

Gulf Bank was keen to roll out vital financing tools and provide suitable financing options for small and medium-sized enterprises, especially in light of recent legal developments and the economic report published by the Bank a few days ago, which highlighted the lack of funding granted to small and medium-sized companies. For more information regarding the various services Gulf Bank provides to SMEs, the Bank has launched a dedicated website: <https://www.e-gulfbank.com/en/sme>

Companies can apply for financing through Gulf Bank's dedicated website by filling out the form and providing the required company information, including: the company's date of incorporation, commercial record, banking information, a snapshot of the com-

pany's most prominent financial indicators, cash flows, and the size of the cash and non-cash facilities required. After filling out the form, customers can then direct the form and any relevant information to the designated email provided. Upon receiving the request, Gulf Bank will review the client's request and evaluate the funding options accordingly. If economic viability is proven, the Bank will contact the SME for next steps.

Gulf Bank continues to provide SMEs with an integrated set of financial services, including digital salary transfers, issuance of debit cards, point-of-sale service registration, payment gateways, and more. For more information and to apply for a service, company owners can visit Gulf Bank's dedicated website for SMEs. To learn more about Gulf Bank's various initiatives, customers can visit one of the Bank's branches, or visit the Gulf Bank website at [www.e-gulfbank.com](http://www.e-gulfbank.com). Customers can also use the WhatsApp service on 1805805 for round-the-clock assistance from Gulf Bank representatives, or call the Customer Contact Center on the same number.

end, and normal activities are resumed across different economic sectors, with the rollout of the vaccine worldwide, which should be made on fair basis, including poor countries, in order to avoid a setback to square one, he affirmed.

## Well-positioned for recovery

Al-Marzouq said that NBK will be the biggest beneficiary from the recovery, thanks to its compet-

itive edges that ensure faster growth than other banks under natural circumstances. These edges mainly include our excellence as a provider of digital banking, locally and regionally, in addition to well-diversified income sources, geographically and sectorally, thanks to our broad geographical footprint, dominant local market share, provision of both conventional and Islamic banking (through Boubyan Bank), the Group's Islamic banking arm, as well as investment services through NBK Capital.

NBK will also be at the forefront of beneficiaries from the expected momentum of government investment spending with economic recovery, and accelerated pace of project implementation to make up for the disruptions during the lockdown, as we are the largest financier of government projects with a share exceeding 30 percent of the trade finance market, and NBK is the bank of choice for foreign companies engaged in these projects, being the "house bank" for about 75 percent of them, he noted.

## Quick response

Al-Marzouq stated that Kuwait was one of the first countries to take various measures to contain the spread of the virus through quick decisions, including partial and full lockdown. He also mentioned that the Central Bank of Kuwait showed an early and quick response, which aimed to maintain monetary and financial stability and stimulate the economy, including cutting the discount rate to a historic low of 1.5 percent, with the aim of reducing the cost of funds for all economic sectors to create an environment promoting economic growth.

Al-Marzouq stressed that the Kuwaiti banking sector played an instrumental role in supporting the private and public sectors, acting as a pivotal part in the recovery from this crisis. This was the fruit of the conservative strategy and measures adopted by the Central Bank of Kuwait over the past years, which gave the sector more strength, making it one of the main drivers of recovery from this crisis, given that Kuwaiti banks are well capitalized, with an exceptionally strong balance sheet in terms of liquidity and asset quality.

## Gulf Bank welcomes funding requests from SMEs with tenders in oil sector

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced its readiness to receive funding requests from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that have contracts in oil-related ventures and tenders. The announcement coincides with the virtual conference organized by the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), in cooperation with the National Fund for SME Development, which delved into the registration process for SMEs bidding for oil tenders.

During the conference, KPC announced that a certain percentage of oil tenders and related contracts would be allocated to small and medium-sized com-

## US stocks scale new heights as jobs data boosts stimulus odds

NEW YORK: Wall Street stocks scaled new heights Friday as a lackluster US jobs report was seen as bolstering the case for US President Joe Biden's \$1.9-trillion stimulus plan. The S&P 500 and the Nasdaq ended at records for a second straight day following the jobs data. Analysts also cited progress on coronavirus vaccines as a factor in extending the rally.

The closely-watched jobs data showed the unemployment rate dropped to 6.3 percent in January but the economy added only 49,000 jobs, the Labor Department said. Stephen Innes, chief global markets strategist at Axi, called the report a "double clunker" as the December figure was

revised to show a loss of 227,000 jobs from an initial estimate of 140,000.

Biden argued the data show the need for speedy relief. "I see enormous pain in this country, a lot of folks out of work, a lot of folks going hungry," the US president said in a White House speech.

"I believe the American people are looking right now to their government for help... so I'm going to act. I'm going to act fast." Economist Joel Naroff expects Washington to produce another relief package "within the next few weeks," he said in a note.

"The economy is being supported by the federal government and the markets are reaping the rewards," Naroff wrote.

In Europe, Paris ended the day with gains, but Frankfurt and London slipped into the red.

Meanwhile, oil prices continued to climb on rising demand expectations as people return to more normal lives. "WTI and Brent crude oil hit their highest levels since February last year on continued worries about supply coupled with a belief the

## Amazon warehouse workers unionization vote to move ahead

SAN FRANCISCO: Amazon workers at a large US distribution center will begin voting tomorrow on whether to unionize after labor regulators rejected a request by the e-commerce giant to delay the process. Ballots will be mailed to workers at the fulfillment center in Bessemer, Alabama, and voting will continue through March 29, according to the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union conducting the drive.

Amazon had asked the National Labor Relations Board last month to reconsider allowing mail-in balloting, and instead require in-person voting. "Amazon's blatant disregard for the health and safety of its own workforce was demonstrated yet again by its insistence for an in-person election in the middle of the pandemic," union president Stuart Appelbaum said in a released statement.

"Today's decision proves that it's long past time that Amazon start respecting its own employees; and allow them to cast their votes without intimidation and interference."

Amazon contended in NLRB filings that the bargaining unit of approximately 5,800 employees was "unusually large," arguing in-person voting would be more manageable. "Our goal is for as many of our employees as possible to vote and we're disappointed by the decision by the NLRB not to provide the most fair and effective format to achieve maximum employee participation," Amazon said in response to an AFP inquiry.

Amazon had proposed an on-site election process, validated by specialists at guarding against Covid-19, so workers could vote before, after or during their shifts at the distribution center, the spokesperson added.



HAWTHORNE: An Amazon.com Inc. delivery driver walks past a row of vans outside of a distribution facility in Hawthorne, California. Amazon workers at a large US distribution center will begin voting tomorrow on whether to unionize after labor regulators rejected a request by the e-commerce giant to delay the process. — AFP

NLRB officials said in their order denying Amazon's request that there were no substantial issues in need of review and reasoned that the safety of all involved with the voting "is best served, at this time, by avoiding the type of in-person gatherings that a manual election entails."

Formation of a bargaining unit at

Amazon facility in Alabama would be the first successful effort in the US to unionize workers at the major employer. Amazon said it opened the distribution center in early 2020, offering health benefits and starting pay of \$15.30 in a state where the legal minimum wage is less than half that amount. — AFP



HANGZHOU: The logo of Chinese video sharing company Kuaishou is seen at its company in Hangzhou, in eastern China's Zhejiang province on Friday. — AFP

world economy is going to improve this year, and therefore demand for oil will rise," said David Madden at CMC Markets UK. — AFP

## ABK cardholders can earn double miles when shopping online

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK), in partnership with Emirates Skywards, the award-winning loyalty program of Emirates Airline, is allowing holders of ABK Emirates Visa Infinite and Signature credit cards to earn double miles when they shop online during February weekends.

The promotion will run every Friday and Saturday during February 2021 and applies to local and International e-commerce transactions only. All ABK Emirates Visa Infinite and Signature credit cards are eligible for the promotion. ABK Infinite cardholders will earn up to 12 Skywards Miles per KD 1 spent and ABK Signature cardholders will earn up to 8 Skywards Miles per KD 1 spent. Extra-earned Skywards Miles will be credited to customers' Skywards membership accounts after the campaign has concluded. These can then be redeemed for flights, upgrades on-board Emirates flights, and a wide range of other experiences and activities globally.

This strategic partnership demonstrates ABK's commitment to enhancing its customers' banking experience, with innovative offers that bring additional value to customers' lives.

## IMF working on loan deal with Argentina

WASHINGTON: The IMF is working towards reaching agreement on a new loan deal with Argentina and the next round of meetings will focus on the details, fund chief Kristalina Georgieva said Friday. "It takes two to tango" so both sides need to do our part and find the pathway to an agreement, and we are not yet at that point," Georgieva told reporters. "But what I can tell you is that we are working in a very constructive way to reach an agreement."

A spokesman for the International Monetary Fund told reporters on Thursday that a team from the crisis lender will hold a new round of virtual talks with officials from Buenos Aires in coming weeks and would strive to meet the government's goal of reaching a deal by May. Georgieva said that mission will get into the specific questions on "the likely shape of the program." She stressed the need to balance stability with getting aid to the most vulnerable people and help boost economic growth driven by the private sector. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the South American nation was facing a severe economic crisis despite massive IMF aid in recent years.

The coronavirus crisis exacerbated already high unemployment and poverty rates, and the government of President Alberto Fernandez is aiming to renegotiate repayments on a \$44 billion loan received from the IMF in 2018. — AFP



## Business

# Al Mulla opens a new home for Acura cars

## Acura clients will enjoy highest standards of quality and experience unique luxury



KUWAIT: Chief Executive Officer of Al Mulla Group Talal Anwar Al Mulla accompanied by Managing Director of the Automotive Group at Al Mulla Group Imad Flayhan, senior executives and managers of the company during the ribbon cutting ceremony.



KUWAIT: As part of the company's growth strategy, Al Mulla International Auto Trading Company, a member of Al Mulla Group and the sole authorized distributor of Acura luxury vehicles in Kuwait, announced the opening of a new home for Acura showroom at a newly designed location in Al-Rai area on the 4th Ring Road.

Chief Executive Officer of Al-Mulla Group Talal Anwar Al Mulla accompanied by Managing Director of the Automotive Group at Al Mulla Group Imad Flayhan, senior executives and managers of the company attended the opening ceremony, which included an official cutting of the ribbon followed by a tour in the facility. The new showroom offers Acura clients the highest international standards of design and customer experience showcasing Acura's comprehensive offers of luxury and quality of service.

The company applied the highest levels of quality and service in its new showroom to guarantee

clients a royal experience at every visit. The new Acura showroom combines all maintenance services in one place, as well as showcasing the latest car models and spare parts. With a luxurious waiting room, the service center boasts the latest technology and equipment to ensure the comfort of customers, while grand private offices are designed to ensure a one-on-one interaction with customers in their pursuit of the car of their dreams. The new showroom is complemented by an adjacent service center offering comprehensive body shop repairs and car painting services, as well as a warehouse for light and heavy spare parts. The Service Center provides all types of maintenance and repair works including express service, express maintenance, car wash services, delivery area and other facilities.

Acura is renowned for setting luxury standards to serve customers in the history of the Japanese automotive industry. Al Mulla International Auto



Trading Company ensured that these standards continue to be met in its new Acura showroom in Kuwait with its commitment to meet and exceed the expectations of customers. Acura clients are assured peace of mind and the highest standards of service and quality from the moment they choose to buy their new Acura and throughout



their life journey with their vehicle.

Al Mulla International Auto Trading Company invites luxury cars enthusiasts to visit the new Acura showroom where they will experience first-hand Acura's commitment to their satisfaction and the wide range of advanced technologies of Acura car models.

## Burgan Bank launches new exclusive 'Haiba' card for elite customers



Naser Al-Qaisi

Saket Jajoo

KUWAIT: Ensuring its elite customers are met with world-class offerings, Burgan Bank unveiled 'Haiba' card that has been built with its customers as the center of every experience. A first of its kind card in the region, "Haiba" comes with a unique laser engraved personalized design, best in class rewards, and a host of exclusive privileges, ranging from luxurious travel experience, insurance, healthcare, entertainment, dining, shopping and exclusive access to premium members-only facilities.

Chief Retail Banking Officer at Burgan Bank, Naser Al-Qaisi said: "Burgan Bank continues to consolidate its leading position in the local and regional markets through a portfolio of customized and diversified product offerings. We always strive to be one of the first Kuwaiti banks that meet both the banking and modern lifestyle needs of our customers by providing new and innovative features alongside a safe and distinctive experience."

Head of Cards at Burgan Bank, Saket Jajoo added, "Driven by a pioneering strategy, we are proud, as Burgan Bank, to add the one-of-a-kind card that is accompanied by special and exclusive benefits to our growing list of credit card options as it will empower our elite customers' lifestyles with improved banking solutions/sophisticated experiences. In line with our customer-centric approach and culture, Burgan Bank aims to continue delivering extraordinary products and services that combines best-in-class solutions with optimal convenience and safety at its customers' fingertips."

Provided on an invitation-only basis, customers can enjoy a distinctly designed and personalized card with laser engraved names. The card comes with best in class rewards with a welcome bonus of 40,000 points, while enabling customers to earn 7 points locally and 14 points internationally for every KD 1 spent.

Cardholders can enjoy exclusive personalized services with a 24/7 global premium concierge service including ordering elusive hard-to-find "Hermes Birkin" bag, limited-edition timepieces, hosting celebrities to private events, private jet arrangements or book a 3-star Michelin restaurant amongst other customizable experiences.

In addition, cardholders can enjoy a host of handpicked entertainment, dining and shopping offers designed to suit their lifestyle as well as to access to some of the most premium and luxury hotels around the world. Furthermore, cardholders can also enjoy complimentary access to an unlimited number of lounges around the world, concierge services at the airport, Global Blue VIP services and visa services. Other services include auto insurance with up to \$500,000 for travel accident, medical insurance, travel inconvenience and cancellation, collision damage waiver and rental losses.

## KFH supports 'Be Aware' campaign

KUWAIT: Acting Group CEO of Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Abdulwahab Al-Roshood said that KFH is keen on supporting the "Be aware" campaign launched by Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and Kuwait Banking Association (KBA). The campaign aims to raise public awareness of the role of the banking sector and to enhance the financial literacy of society.

He added that KFH is keen on protecting, enhancing, and raising public awareness of customer rights by using best practices and highlighting the importance of the various banking services provided by the bank through supporting such campaigns, publishing videos and awareness campaign messages through KFH's accounts on social networks platforms, as well as clarifying the mechanisms for submitting complaints and pro-

tecting customer rights.

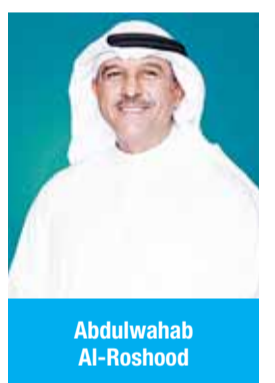
Given the development of e-banking transactions and digital activity and higher online penetration, Al-Roshood stressed the importance of cybersecurity and continuous customer awareness of potential risk of e-crimes through different means and learning about the main steps that should be taken to avoid fraud and increase society's financial awareness. He explained that the major objective of fraud and e-crimes is money, stressing the importance of avoiding sharing personal or banking information as banks never ask for customers' banking information via phone calls, emails, messages, or other means.

He indicated that KFH keeps raising public awareness of cybersecurity and protection of bank accounts, so that customers are sufficiently aware of financial and banking transactions, and thus remain safe from e-crimes. Al-Roshood praised the Central Bank of Kuwait's procedures and the strengthening of controls and regulatory frameworks for banking services that contribute to reducing fraud in society and raise awareness of the high-risk investments, sharing card payment data, and other e-crimes, pointing out that KFH strongly supports these

measures to protect customers.

He concluded that "Be aware" campaign is part of sustainable development and social responsibility for Kuwaiti banks along with promoting financial inclusion and economic stability. Al-Roshood confirmed KFH's support to the efforts of CBK and KBA in this campaign, expressing his hope that it will optimally achieve the required objectives and create safe environment away from e-crimes.

The one-year "Be aware" campaign covers diverse topics, including the role of banks as financial intermediaries, the importance of investment and saving, how best to benefit from banks' services, educate customers about their rights, provide services for special needs customers, the mechanism of submitting complaints about banking services, different banking cards as well as major steps to avoid frauds and other topics.



Abdulwahab Al-Roshood

## KIB signs first-of-its-kind agreement with CARIRS

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing efforts to provide innovative banking services and solutions to all segments of society, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently signed a new agreement with the Central Agency for Remediating Illegal Residents' Status (CARIRS). The first-of-its-kind agreement is set to facilitate completion of transactions and procedures for this category of customers while also providing them with best banking experience.

In a statement, Othman Tafweqe, General Manager of KIB's Retail Banking Department, said: "At KIB, we go above and beyond to meet the needs of all customers and provide them with services and facilities that fit into the lifestyles they lead, hence the idea of inking this agreement with CARIRS to provide innovative banking solutions that facilitate transactions through automated links - a first-of-its-kind initiative in Kuwait."

Tafweqe further noted that the agreement is aimed for facilitating banking transactions for Bidoon customers, adding: "A select number of Bank staff will be authorized by CARIRS to access customer data by linking to the central agency's auto-

mated system, thereby reducing paperwork and minimizing the steps required to complete banking procedures, eventually saving time and effort for customers and employees alike."

For his part, Fahad Al-Bader, Assistant General Manager - Operations at KIB, said: "At KIB, we constantly seek to establish a strategy in line with the Bank's operational environment and operational objectives. Our drive to deliver innovative banking services to customers of different segments, particularly this category, led us to sign this agreement with CARIRS, under which some Bank employees will be granted authority to inquire about customer data by looking at ID and health insurance cards by linking to the central computer system."

Concluding his statement, Al-Bader highlighted that the confidentiality of customers' personal data and bank account information is at the forefront of KIB's priorities and represents the core of the Bank's operational continuity, adding: "The Bank will nominate a number of its employees who will be meticulously authorized to inquire about customer data after obtaining CARIRS's approval, thus demonstrating the Bank's obligation towards preserving banking secrecy and not disclosing information to third parties."

CARIRS is responsible for addressing the situation of the illegal residents of the country (i.e. the Bidoon



Othman Tafweqe

Fahad Al-Bader

## AUB congratulates winners of Al-Hassad draw

KUWAIT: In accordance with full preventive guidelines and measures set by health authorities, Ahli United Bank (AUB) held the weekly draw on 03 February 2021 of Al-Hassad Islamic account which is the very first draw account in Islamic banking in Kuwait and has won the "Best Savings Product in Kuwait 2019" by the prestigious Banker Middle East Magazine for the numerous unique features it provides. Al-Hassad Islamic account offers over 750 prizes, over a 12-month period and has reshaped the lives of thousands of lucky winners.

The bank announced 20 winners of KD 1,000 as follows: Thamer Reden Al-Mutairi, Shaikhah Abdulaziz Al-Muzaini, Abdullah

Aman Abdulkareem, Hasan Mahmoud Hasan, Hamad Abdulrahman Al-Besher, Mohammad Ali Ashknani, Baqer Ali Baqer, Yousef Abdulaziz Al-Muraikhi, Adam Saud Al-Jabri, Fatemah Saad Al-Habbad, Maha Obaid Al Dheferi, Najeebah Rashdan Al-Roomi, Abdulwahab Saeed Al-Asbahi, Mohammad Falah Al-Hamlan, Samiha Nasser Al-Misalam, Nadiyah Naji Al-Bahrani, Adnan Hameed Al-Saffar, Asif Hamid Abdulhamid, Mona Abdulwahab Al-Terkait And Amal Abdulmohsen Al-Julibi.

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

that are aspiring to build their short and long-term savings through a unique savings account with many advantages.

Furthermore, for the first time in Kuwait, the AUB Al-Hassad presents the "Privilege Draw", which is a quarterly draw of KD 25,000 exclusively for Al-Hassad customers who maintain their balances for more than one year and have not won a prize in the past five years.

For all draws, the clients are eligible for one draw chance for each KD 50 deposited in their Al-Hassad account. It is worth mentioning that Al-Hassad Islamic account has won the "Best Savings Product in Kuwait 2019" by the prestigious Banker Middle East Magazine for the numerous unique features it provides. Such features include the simplest and easiest program, highest number of winners, largest prize value, unique draws during Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, loyalty multipliers, unique online account opening feature, transparent draws held during radio shows with live broadcast on the Bank's social media platforms.



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## Lifestyle | Features



This picture taken on Jan 31, 2021 shows car owners posing for a photo during a gathering of auto enthusiasts in Urayasu, an eastern suburb of Tokyo.

— AFP photos



Hiroyuki Wada, who runs a vintage car service company, poses for a photo with a 1959 Cadillac Coupe DeVille.



Real estate and construction business owner Atsushi Hasegawa poses for a photo with a 1969 Chevrolet Corvette during a gathering of auto enthusiasts.



Logistics company employee Masamune Isogai poses for a photo in front of a 1991 Trans Am Knight Rider.

## OLD BUT GOLD: TOKYO'S RETRO CAR OWNERS REVEL IN MODERN CLASSICS

Fast and furious they aren't, but for a group of Japanese retro car enthusiasts the sleek lines and high shine of their old-school models hold a much more special charm. A loose club of fans rolls up most weekends in central Tokyo to show off their Cadillacs, Chevrolets and other modern classic vehicles from the mid to late 20th century.

"Each time I drive it, I still get a thrill. There aren't many vehicles that give you that feeling," Masamune Isogai told AFP of his Knight Rider replica - a Pontiac Trans Am, the car made famous by the hit 80s TV drama. Sliding into the driver's seat - which he calls

the cockpit - he is surrounded by futuristic displays, illuminated buttons and a wheel that looks like an oversized gaming controller.

These sci-fi touches were installed to give the ride the look and feel of the show's AI-powered talking car called Knight Industries Two Thousand, or KITT. "I speak to the car when I drive," laughed the 46-year-old, who has owned the streamlined black vehicle - complete with sound effects and a "KITT scanner" light on the front - for around a decade.

These days Japan is known for its practical cars that economize on fuel and space, and rarely break

down - a world away from the group's painstakingly maintained wheels. The casual society has around 10 members and the oldest cars they own are a 1941 Cadillac and a restored 1929 Ford Model-A. People cheer and take snaps as the cars go by, from the 1956 Ford F100 Pumpkin to the 1961 Volkswagen Karmann Ghia.

"The shape of old cars is very charming, impossible with today's mass production," said Hiroyuki Wada, 49, next to his red 1959 Cadillac Coupe de Ville. "When you get older, you are more likely to appreciate a car that requires lots of care," Wada

said. "Old engines often need 10 minutes or so to warm up before you can drive them. That's what's really charming about them."

Wada, who runs a car valet business near Tokyo, will spend three to four days on each old-fashioned ride to give it a shiny new look. He says his heart belongs to American vehicles including old police cars, which he rents out for film and photography shoots. "Someday I want to valet old fire engines in the United States. That is my dream," he said. — AFP



Kazutaka Fukuda, who works in the construction industry, poses for a photo in front of a 1929 Ford Model A.



Real estate manager Masashi Aiba poses for a photo in front of a 1956 Ford F100 Pumpkin.



Vintage car dealer Osamu Yokota poses for a photo in front of a 1968 Toyopet Corona.



Trucking company executive Yuji Nakayama poses for a photo in front of a 1941 Cadillac.

## Oscar-winning actor Plummer dies at 91

Veteran Canadian actor Christopher Plummer, whose decades-long career featured an indelible star turn in "The Sound of Music" and an Oscar win late in life, died on Friday, his manager announced. He was 91. Plummer died at his home in Connecticut with his wife Elaine Taylor at his side, his longtime friend and manager Lou Pitt said.

"Chris was an extraordinary man who deeply loved and respected his profession with great old fashion manners, self-deprecating humor and the music of words," Pitt said in a statement. "He was a national treasure who deeply relished his Canadian roots. Through his art and humanity, he touched all of our hearts and his legendary life will endure for all generations to come."

Plummer starred as the aristocratic widower Captain Georg von Trapp opposite Julie Andrews in "The Sound of Music," the beloved 1965 cinematic tale of a musical family and their mischievous governess in Austria on the eve of World War II. Despite its enormous worldwide success, Plummer publicly despised the film, calling his role "goosey" in The Hollywood Reporter in 2011.

But he later softened, telling the same publication in 2015 that the production was "the last bastion of peace and innocence in a very cynical time". Andrews called Plummer a "consummate actor", adding in a statement to The Hollywood Reporter: "I treasure the memories of our work together and all the humor and fun we shared through the years."

### Versatile and prolific

Plummer was one of the most recognizable and admired character actors in Hollywood, with some 100 films under his belt and dozens of television roles. His first Academy Award nomination came in 2010 for "The Last Station", for his portrayal of Russian author Leo Tolstoy. He finally took home the golden statuette two years later, becoming - at the age of 82 - the oldest



In this file photo taken on Feb 26, 2012, Christopher Plummer holds his Oscar for best actor in a supporting role for "Beginners" in the press room at the 84th Annual Academy Awards in Hollywood. — AFP

actor to win an Oscar, for his supporting role in "Beginners" as a man who openly embraces his homosexuality only after his wife dies.

"Where have you been all my life?" he joked to the trophy at the awards ceremony, quipping that he had been rehearsing his Oscar acceptance speech since he was born. In 2018, he earned another Oscar nomination after standing in at the last minute in "All the Money in the World" for Kevin Spacey, who was dropped from the film following accusations of sexual misconduct.

Plummer played the hard-hearted billionaire J Paul Getty, who refused to pay a ransom for his kidnapped grandson. Recently, he starred in the 2019 whodunit "Knives Out" alongside Daniel Craig, Chris Evans and Jamie Lee Curtis. The director of that film, Rian Johnson, called Plummer a "legend who loved his craft, and was an absolute gentleman". "So lucky to have shared a set with him," Johnson tweeted.

### Career began in 1950s

Born on Dec 13, 1929 in Toronto, Plummer made his professional theater debut in Ottawa in "The Rivals" in 1950. He took to Broadway in 1954 with "Starcross Story" and broke into film in

1958 with "Stage Struck", before crossing the Atlantic in the early 1960s to work in London theater. Plummer was dynamic on stage, earning praise as one of the premier Shakespearean actors to come out of North America in the 20th century.

Some critics said he initially failed to project that charisma on the silver screen, but that changed with "The Sound of Music," his best-known role. After that film's wild success, Plummer earned a host of other leading roles over the decades, including as the first Duke of Wellington in "Waterloo" (1970), Rudyard Kipling in "The Man Who Would Be King" (1975), veteran CBS journalist Mike Wallace in "The Insider" (1999) and in Spike Lee's 2006 heist movie "Inside Man."

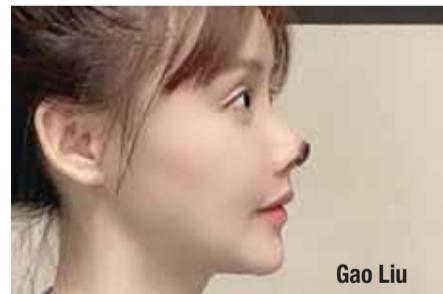
He also took on bit parts, from a Klingon general in "Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country" to the voice of a dastardly explorer in Disney-Pixar's Oscar-winning animated film "Up". Plummer also took on many television roles, including a starring role in the popular 1980s miniseries "The Thorn Birds."

He won two Emmys - one in 1977 for playing a scheming banker in "Arthur Hailey's The Moneychangers" opposite Kirk Douglas, and another in 1994 for narrating an animated series featuring the children's book character Madeline. He also won two Tony Awards for his work on Broadway, both as best actor in a musical and in a play.

"I've managed to finish the cycle of the great, classic roles," he told British newspaper The Guardian in 2018. "I've played them all, some more than once. But the parts I'm receiving in films now are wonderful - the last 10 parts have all been fascinating," he said. Plummer was married three times, the last time to Taylor. He is also survived by his daughter, actress Amanda Plummer. — AFP

## Chinese actress shares photos of botched nose job

A Chinese actress has shared shocking photos of her "nightmare" botched nose operation, warning fans of the dangers of cosmetic surgery. Gao Liu posted candid pictures of her post-surgery face on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform, which showed a part of her nose blackened with dead flesh. She wrote to her five million followers that the experience had left her feeling suicidal and cost her several acting jobs.



Gao Liu

"I had thought that these four hours (of surgery) would make me more beautiful, but I didn't realize that they would be the beginning of a nightmare," she wrote Tuesday. Plastic surgery is booming in China, with over 15.2 million patients estimated to have gone under the knife last year, according to a report by Chinese market research firm iiMedia.

Gao said she hoped the surgery would improve her acting career. But what she thought was a "micro-adjustment" to graft cartilage onto the tip of her nose in late October left it infected, requiring repeated follow-up surgeries, she wrote. Gao said she was then hospitalized for 61 days and lost some 400,000 yuan (\$61,800) in work.

Photos she posted of her face show a clear patch of blackened flesh on the tip of her nose, as well as bandages and bruising. Her post this week has sparked sympathy online and the hashtag "why is cosmetic surgery becoming more and more common" had gained 330 million views on Weibo by Friday. — AFP



Lou Dobbs

## FOX NEWS CANCELS SHOW OF PRO-TRUMP HOST LOU DOBBS

Fox News has canceled the show of Lou Dobbs, a rightwing presenter with a history of airing baseless conspiracy theories and one of the most ardent supporters of former president Donald Trump among US broadcasters. The decision on Friday came a day after Fox News and Dobbs were sued for defamation by voting technology firm Smartmatic, which is claiming \$2.7 billion in losses from the network for promoting false claims that the company was involved in fraud in November's presidential election.

"As we said in October, Fox News Media regularly considers programming changes and plans have been in place to launch new formats as appropriate post-election, including on Fox Business," a Fox News spokesperson told AFP. The cancellation of Lou Dobbs Tonight "is part of those planned changes", the spokesperson said. "A new 5 pm program will be announced in the near future."

Dobbs' show had the highest viewership on Fox News' affiliate channel, averaging more than 300,000 viewers every night. After the presidential election won by Joe Biden, the presenter tirelessly relayed the accusations of massive election fraud made by the Trump camp, including claims of "corruption" and "irregularities" without any supporting evidence. He notably invited lawyer Sidney Powell to guest on his show, a member of Donald Trump's legal team who has falsely claimed that voting machines had flipped votes for Trump to Democrat Biden. — AFP



Lifestyle | Features

# Skateboarding seeks to flip image of whiteness

Wheels whir and clatter as Jerahn Thomas and his skateboarding friends land tricks on the streets of downtown Houston, each success bringing broad smiles to their faces. Passers-by at nearby taco stands seem oblivious to their skill - but it doesn't matter to Thomas. "What we've been through those last months, that's history in the making," the 25-year-old, dressed in a beanie, hoodie and glasses, told AFP on a recent Friday in January.

back covers of its September 2020 issue. The cover has no headline. The portraits speak for themselves, and the message is clear: the skating community must highlight its members of color.

And this acknowledgement from an established skating source was a long time coming. "I heard a thousand times - from people who had never been in a skate park - that (the sport) was something for white people," Thomas, who is Black, said. His friend and fellow skate-

boarding's origins can be traced back to surfers in California and Hawaii in the 1940s and 1950s who, on days when the ocean was gentle, turned to "sidewalk surfing" instead. Its popularity has peaked and dipped as it spread across the country and - thanks to American soldiers stationed in Germany - overseas, but it has long been associated with an image of affluent, suburban and rebellious white teenagers and punk culture.

And yet skaters of color "were always there," says Neftalie Williams, a skateboarding expert at the University of Southern California (USC). He attributes the misperception of the sport as "white" to a historic lack of representation and diversity in media. In a marginal sport without the resources of, say, American football, that image can be more difficult to push back against, he argued. It wasn't just the media, citing his own field - academia.

"We were missing the stories of those people who are actually responsible for helping bring skateboarding culture into the Olympics and making it be the global phenomenon that it is," he said. "It was really disheartening."

### 'We had to do something'

For him, that finally began to change with the eruption of the Black Lives Matter movement in recent years. The reckoning with racism in America it has provoked - during mass protests in 2020 in particular - included the world of skateboarding. Thrasher was not the only magazine to take action. In December, the British skat-



Jordan Miles



Jerahn Thomas

ing magazine Skateism dedicated its issue to nine skaters of color, with athletes from South Africa to Brazil.

"After witnessing what happened earlier this year with the BLM protests and uprisings, we felt like we had to do something," the publication explained in an editorial. And former skating great Alphonzo Rawls, who himself appeared on the cover of Thrasher in 1992, turned to his later career as a designer to help broaden skating's image. He created a skateboard cover in the names of Black skaters who had inspired him, with the words "Thank you" written in red in the middle.

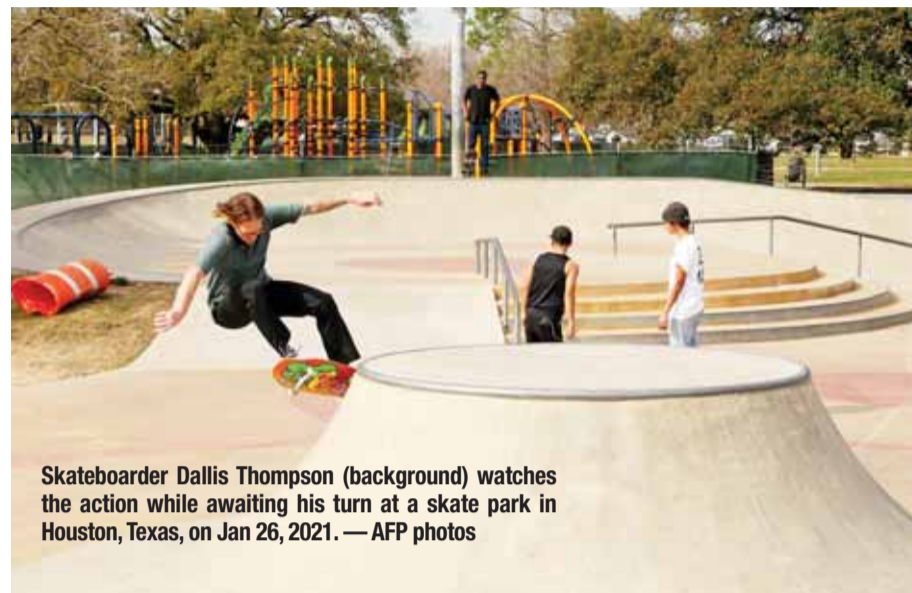
### The different stories of skating

At a Houston skate park, the talented Dallis Thompson, 33, recalled his first experiences sliding down ramps in Long Beach, California, near Los Angeles, surrounded by "people from everywhere: Hispanic people, Asian, Indian." Thompson, who is Black, said he does not personally see a revolutionary quality in Thrasher's recent front page. "So many people are underestimated in our sport,"

he lamented. "Why choose 32 of them because of the color of their skin?"

But Williams, who has also co-authored a study on the influence of ethnicity, gender and cultural background on skaters, insists that those facets of their identities must be taken into consideration. It's important to acknowledge "some (skaters) have different stories, they're still dealing with the systemic racism in the world," Williams said.

For some skaters of color - as for white skaters - the sport is a way to reclaim public space. Others are still attracted to its lingering image of urban anarchy. For Jerahn Thomas - filming his friend Miles as he skates in hope of being spotted by a brand offering sponsorships - it could be a way to a brighter future. "Coming from where I came from, it's so easy to get in trouble," Thomas said. "Skateboarding kept me out of that ... It kept me out of dark places for sure." — AFP



Skateboarder Dallis Thompson (background) watches the action while awaiting his turn at a skate park in Houston, Texas, on Jan 26, 2021. — AFP photos

The reason for his excitement? Thrasher, the iconic skateboarding magazine, recently confronted a historic image of whiteness in his sport by placing 32 Black skaters on the front and

boarder Jordan Miles agrees. "People from my community often told me I should rather play basketball," a sport more stereotypically associated with Black athletes, Miles said.



Thompson executes a slide.



An illustration shows the cover of the Sept 2020 issue of the skate magazine Thrasher laying open on a board at the skate park in Houston on Feb 2, 2021.



Dallis Thompson

## FRENCH MUSEUMS BEG TO REOPEN AS BLOCKBUSTERS GO UNSEEN

It was to be a highlight of the art calendar: 230 works by impressionist master Henri Matisse gathered at France's leading modern art museum to mark 150 years since his birth. But thanks to the pandemic, the show at the Pompidou Centre in Paris stayed open for only 10 days after it began in October, and it looks highly unlikely to resume before the paintings are packed away again at the end of February.

Only 17,000 people secured a ticket in time - an abysmally low figure for a museum that attracts more than three million visitors each year in normal times. "For an artist that was absolutely not melancholy, this is something very melancholy," said Pompidou curator Aurelie Verdier.

This week, desperate museums demanded a chance to reopen - even if only partially - with two petitions to the government signed by hundreds within the industry and wider art community. "For an hour, a day, a week or a month - let us reopen our doors, even if we have to shut them again in the case of another lockdown," it says.

### 'It's a nightmare'

Museums had hoped to reopen in December when the last lockdown ended, but as with restaurants, theatres and cinemas, they have remained shut as infection rates remain stubbornly high. Some exhibitions - such as a photo exhibition at the Grand Palais featuring Man Ray, Diane Arbus and Robert Frank - have been and gone without anyone getting to see them.

Many shows are unable to prolong or postpone their dates, because the paintings are booked in elsewhere around the world or must make room for

the next exhibition - always planned years in advance. "It's a nightmare. The dates (for opening and closing) change endlessly," said Christophe Leribault of the Petit Palais, where an ambitious exhibition of Danish art was delayed and ultimately managed just four weeks of public viewings.



This photo taken on Jan 8, 2021 at the Louvre Museum in Paris shows the Venus of Milo sculpture in an empty hall, as the museum remains closed. — AFP photos

"I managed to negotiate some extensions. But after a year, we had to return the paintings to make room for the next show on the great Italian painter Giovanni Boldoni, while also having this concern that his works might get blocked in other exhibitions in Italy."

The petitioners say they are ready to accept tougher health protocols and even more limited numbers than during the brief summer respite - following the example of other countries such as Italy which has partially reopened many cul-

tural sites. They say art is a powerful way of keeping up people's spirits, particularly the young who have been denied much of their social life for almost a year.

"Museums are without doubt the places where human interactions and the risk of contamination are the least proven," said another petition published in Le Monde newspaper this week and signed by many public figures, including singer and former first lady Carla Bruni. There is the added grievance that small, private galleries have been allowed to reopen, and are often packed with people in desperate search of diversion.

### 'Have courage'

Frederic Jousset, on the board of the Louvre and head of the ArtNova investment fund, said museums lacked the economic clout to pressure the government. But he held out hope for "the hundreds of petitioners coming out of the woods to reveal the thoughts of the silent majority". "Museums are effectively open already: the heating is on, the lights are burning, the guards are there," he told AFP.

Unlike theatres, no dress rehearsals are needed, the petitioners add. They just need to call in a few furloughed staff and the doors could reopen tomorrow - perhaps only on certain days, in low-infection areas, or for certain groups such as pupils and students. They accept that such a move risks inciting jealousy on the part of other shuttered sectors, such as cinemas and theatres. But for the sake of the nation's mental and economic health, the government "must have the courage to make the choice - and quickly," said Jousset. — AFP

## HIVE THINKING: BEEKEEPING MAKES A BUZZ IN IVORY COAST

Night has just fallen in central Ivory Coast and the hour has come for two men, venturing forth in protective suits, veils and gloves, to steal honey from their bees. The art of beekeeping has spread swiftly in Assounvoue, in the heart of the world's top cocoa producer. Farmers started taking up honey-making to supplement their income - and then also realized their primary crops did better when pollinated by the bees. Word of the twin benefits spread fast.

"In West Africa, you have to harvest the honey at night," says French beekeeper Sebastien Gavini, co-director of a firm called Le Bon Miel de Cote d'Ivoire (The fine honey of Ivory Coast). "These bees are savage and aggressive - they don't let you go. By working at night, you don't get pursued by the bees, which means we don't put people at risk."

West African bees are "wilder and barely used to contact with human beings," Gavini explains. He contrasts these characteristics with milder-natured European bees which have been kept for centuries - and sadly are now threatened in many areas by insecticides.

### Double win

Modern beekeeping is only getting started in Africa, says Francois Silue, a member of the Ivorian Cooperative Company (SCI) at Katiola in the north, the source of the country's most highly-regarded honey. "Our duty is to stop farmers from killing the bees, to change their culture," explains Silue, who was trained by Japanese and German specialist aid workers. The SCI brings together about 50 beekeeping farmers.

Obtaining statistics on the beekeeping business is complicated at national level. "There are only partial figures," says Marcel Iritie, president of the Agricultural Platform of Ivory Coast. The platform estimates that 30 tons of honey are produced each year by about 100 members and several cooperatives. "But that doesn't take into account hundreds of small producers," Iritie notes.

All or nearly all these people have kept their traditional roles as farmers,

treating the production of honey as a secondary activity. "The farmer who goes into beekeeping wins twice over," argues Mathieu Offi, who works alongside Gavini. "Money is earned from the honey and harvests are better because of better pollination."

### Minimum investment

While he gives training classes as one of the most experienced beekeepers in the country, Offi also carries on with his work as a farmer near Kossou in the middle of the country. "Thanks to the bees, (cocoa) production can be multiplied by 1.6," he adds. "It's the bees who do all the work!"

Offi and Gavini have installed their beehives across a strictly organic market garden in Assounvoue in a successful marriage of cultures. "Bees are like humans, they thrive when the environment is right," Offi says. "With pesticides, they suffer." "I need five more hives," says Ahmed Yao, a farmhand who benefits both from the sale of market produce and income from honey.

Gavini and Offi have signed partnerships with agro-business ventures producing bananas and other fruits. "It's a win-win situation," Gavini says, stressing the advantages of pollination and providing training for small farmers. Gavini says a relatively tiny investment is needed for bee keeping. "All in all, a hive costs 35,000 CFA francs (53 euros/\$64). Add the clothing and some basic equipment, and it's 65,000 CFA (99 euros) at the most. You get the money back in the first year."

### 'Incredible varieties'

The price of a kilogram of honey ranges from 3,000 to 10,000 francs (A15), while spinoff products (bees' wax, propolis varnish, essential oils and even bee venom) also sell well. "The taste of the honey depends on what the bee has been foraging. Honey from here is renowned because there are acacias and cashew nuts. It's sweet," says Edvige Brou Adoua, a saleswoman at the Katiola cooperative.

But, she insists, you should always buy directly from the outlet, not from a product hawked on the roadside. In the economic capital Abidjan, it is not uncommon for street vendors to sell honey mixed with water and sugar. "Quality is the most important thing," agrees Sebastien Gavini. "We have the good luck to have incredible varieties of honey," he says, reeling off some of the botanical treasures of the Ivory Coast, from coffee flowers, kapok and orange trees, to acacias and cashews. "Each honey has a specific taste. Ivory Coast could become the world's leading honey producer. We have all it takes!" — AFP



This file photo taken on Sept 18, 2020 shows paintings displayed for the exhibition "The golden age of Danish paintings (1801-1864)" at the Petit Palais in Paris.



## Sports

# Dias makes case for Man City defense as Liverpool struggle

## City looks to win at Anfield for first time since 2003



**LIVERPOOL:** Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp (left) congratulates Brighton's English manager Graham Potter after the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Brighton and Hove Albion at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England on February 3, 2021. Brighton won the match 1-0. — AFP

**LONDON:** Manchester City's dominant position at the top of the Premier League ahead of tonight's trip to champions Liverpool has been built on the solid foundations of an impenetrable defense. Pep Guardiola's men have conceded just two goals in their past 13 league games, winning nine in a row to open up a seven-point lead over fourth-placed Liverpool, with a game in hand.

Liverpool took City's crown as champions last season, romping to a first league title in 30 years. But the contrasting fortunes at center-back for both clubs this season have helped City reassert their position as the team to beat in English football. After a humbling 5-2 home defeat by Leicester in their second game of the season, City splashed out £62 million (\$85 million) on Ruben Dias from Benfica.

In 27 games, the Portuguese international has been on the losing side just once and has kept 18 clean sheets, forming a formidable partnership with a revitalized John Stones. So strong has that pairing been that Aymeric Laporte — the bedrock of the City defense that denied Liverpool the title by a point in the 2018/19 season — has largely been left in reserve along with another £40 million summer center-back signing, Nathan Ake.

"We knew the quality he had on the pitch, we knew

a little bit his personality, but we have been impressed at the consistency to be ready mentally and physically to play every three days," said Guardiola on Dias's impact. Despite injuries to Kevin De Bruyne and Sergio Aguero, City's attacking play has begun to click into gear in recent weeks.

### Clean sheets

But their revival from mid-table obscurity after they last lost in the Premier League to Tottenham in November began with a series of clean sheets in low-scoring games against Fulham, Southampton, Newcastle and Brighton. "This season we don't make the mistakes that we did (in the past) to give opponents easy goals," added Guardiola. "Many things help to be champions. When one or two things drop a little it is difficult to get it."

In contrast to the wealth of center-back options available to Guardiola, Liverpool have been hit hard by long-term injuries to Virgil van Dijk, Joe Gomez and Joel Matip. Even when new recruits were badly needed, the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic left Liverpool hunting for bargains in the final hours of the January transfer window, bringing in Ozan Kabak on loan from Schalke and signing Ben Davies from Preston.

The impact made by Dias has been compared with Van Dijk's signing in January 2018, which transformed Liverpool's fortunes under Klopp. The kamikaze scorelines of the German's early days in charge disappeared with the towering Dutchman marshaling the Reds' defense, leading Liverpool to Champions League glory in 2018/19 before the long-awaited league title. Since Van Dijk suffered cruciate ligament damage in October, Klopp's men have only conceded 12 goals in 17 league games.

But the impact has been felt throughout the team as midfielders Fabinho and Jordan Henderson have been forced to deputize at center-back. Unbalanced by their injury crisis, it is Liverpool's attack that has suffered in a run of two wins in eight games, which has allowed City to leave them behind. Despite the huge sums invested since City's Abu Dhabi-backed takeover 13 years ago, their last win at Anfield came back in 2003. However, in front of empty stands, Liverpool's fortress has crumbled in recent weeks. After a 68-game unbeaten home run in the Premier League dating back nearly four years, they have lost consecutive matches at Anfield. The champions have failed to score in nearly 350 minutes at home. That task will not get any easier on Sunday when they face the daunting task of finding a way past Dias at the heart of City's backline. — AFP

## Egypt's Ahly propelled by 'home' advantage at Qatar Club World Cup

**DOHA:** Despite playing Qatar's Duhail a stone's throw from their own ground, Egyptian giants Al-Ahly clearly felt they had the home advantage at the first day of the Club World Cup. Doha is home to tens of thousands of Egyptian expats, working in every corner of the Qatari economy, and turned out in numbers to support the visitors despite strict virus controls.

The earlier fixture between Mexico's Tigres and South Korea's Ulsan, which Tigres won 2-1, played out in front of a mostly empty stadium as fans from overseas are banned from travelling. Neither country has a significant diaspora in Doha, with Mexican expats estimating that just three of their number cheer for Tigres.

The African champions by contrast have a bedrock of support among the estimated 300,000 Egyptians in the Gulf gas emirate, easily eclipsing Duhail's home support to watch their side triumph 0-1. They became the first African side since 2013 to win their opening Club World Cup match meaning the Cairo Red Devils face a semi-final tomorrow against tournament favorites and former title-holders Bayern Munich.

Doha's Education City was disproportionately speckled with Ahly's home strip, a signature red jersey emblazoned with an eagle. Their vocal but masked support brandished Egyptian flags and Ahly scarves as they were spurred on by drummers dotted among them. "Travel restrictions affect the fortunes of other teams because their fans are absent... Al-Ahly has a large fan base inside and outside Egypt," said red-shirted accountant Naji Odeh, 31, during the match at Doha's 40,000-capacity Education City stadium. As many as 300,000 Egyptians call Qatar home, according to official statistics. Qataris number just 333,000. Thursday's fixture was easily the liveliest game in

Doha since Qatar imposed stringent coronavirus measures on all public football matches.

### 'Greater opportunities'

"The first effect of coronavirus is to limit the attendance to only 30 percent — this is felt especially by Al-Ahly, the most popular among the participating teams," said Hossam Abu al-Ela, head of the Al-Ahly Fans Association in Qatar. Ela has led efforts to turn out a formidable fan base, ensuring they were equipped with up to date regalia for the clash. "Social distancing measures will affect the fans' interaction with the tournament in general," he added.

Qatar is in the grip of a COVID-19 resurgence. New cases in Qatar averaged 95 per 100,000 people in the past week, up almost 30 percent on the previous week as hospitalizations jumped 85 percent in the past month compared to the 30 days before. As of Thursday, 249 people had died from the virus while the overall case load has topped 152,000 in a country with a population of under three million. The tournament is being staged under strict virus containment rules. All fans are required to test negative or prove antibodies, players and staff are confined to bio-bubbles and stadiums are at just 30 percent capacity.

On the eve of the tournament authorities announced new nationwide measures including reducing capacity at cafes and restaurants not yet assessed by health officials to 15 percent, and limiting gatherings in the home to five. Mohamed El Shenawy, Ahly goalkeeper and captain, said "it makes me really happy to see the fans of Ahly" ahead of his team's first match of the campaign. "When we reached Doha we saw all the fans. Everyone loves having the fans at the stadium," he said.

Ahly, like all Egyptian top-flight sides, have been playing without fans because of Egypt's strict virus containment effort. European champions Bayern Munich are the overwhelming favorites as they head to Qatar for the delayed tournament which concludes on February 11. "Football without fans is meaningless, and the absence of the other teams' fans due to Corona means greater opportunities for Al-Ahly," Ahmed Hassanein, a 31-year-old accountant, told AFP. — AFP



**AL-RAYYAN:** Ahly supporters cheer during the FIFA Club World Cup second round football match between Qatar's Duhail and Egypt's Al-Ahly at the Education City Stadium in the Qatari city of Ar-Rayyan on Thursday. — AFP

## Bayern fume over seven-hour flight delay to Qatar

**BERLIN:** Bayern Munich's Club World Cup mission got off to a rocky start with their take-off from Berlin on a direct flight to Qatar delayed seven hours overnight Friday. After beating Hertha Berlin 1-0, the team made their way to the airport and had boarded their plane expecting to arrive in Doha six-and-a-half hours later.

But after heavy snow in the German capital the plane's de-icing took longer than expected and air traffic control refused permission for take-off due to a 00:00-07:00 (23:00-06:00 GMT) ban on flights.

Bayern had to disembark the Qatar Airlines plane which had been due to leave at 23:15 but in the end was only given the all-clear for departure one minute before the flight curfew began.

The German champions, who have a semi-final against Egypt's Al-Ahly tomorrow, were forced to remain at the airport overnight, eventually leaving a few minutes before 07:00, but this time with a stopover in Munich to change airline crew.

"We had the impression that the competent authorities didn't care about us," an irate Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, Bayern's chairman, told Bild. "Those in charge (at the airport) don't have an inkling of what they've done to our team." After the semi-final against Egypt's Al-Ahly and either the final or third-place play-off on Thursday Bayern are back home on Bundesliga duty against Arminia Bielefeld on Monday week. One consolation for Bayern: they finally took off buoyed by five successive wins which left them 10 points clear of second-placed RB Leipzig. — AFP



**RAWALPINDI:** Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan (right) plays a shot as South Africa's wicketkeeper captain Quinton de Kock (left) watches during the third day of the second Test cricket match between Pakistan and South Africa at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi yesterday. — AFP

## South African spinners push Pakistan in second Test tussle

**RAWALPINDI:** George Linde took three wickets and Keshav Maharaj two as South Africa and Pakistan wrestled for advantage on the third day of their second Test in Rawalpindi yesterday. Pakistan closed the day on 129-6 with an overall lead of 200 and four wickets intact on a tacky Rawalpindi stadium pitch which has cracks to help slow bowlers.

Linde (3-12) and Maharaj (2-74) rattled Pakistan's top order before Faheem Ashraf (29) and Mohammad Rizwan (28 not out) saved Pakistan's blushes during their 52-run sixth wicket stand. Linde removed Ashraf caught in covers, leaving Hasan Ali not out on nought when bad light ended the game.

The day could have ended in South Africa's domination had Ashraf and Rizwan not been dropped off the two spinners. Ashraf was yet to get off the mark when Dean Elgar grassed an edge off Linde in slips while Rizwan was four when Rassie van der Dussen let off a sharp chance off Maharaj.

Pakistan would hope another 50 runs on day four could win them the match and the series, having won the first Test in Karachi by seven wickets. Hasan said batting wouldn't be simple given the conditions. "Even chasing 200 won't be easy on this pitch," he said. "We will try to get to 240 to 250 and with our spinners it won't be easy." The highest target chased in the previous ten Tests at this venue is 220 which Sri Lanka chased to beat Pakistan by two wickets in 2000. Linde said South Africa were "hungry to win".

"Obviously we have to win this Test to level the series," he explained. "I think anything under 300, we will take that for a chase." Earlier, Hasan's 5-54 — his second five wicket haul in Tests — restricted South Africa's first innings to 201, giving the home team a lead of 71. Pakistan had made 272 in their first innings, but South Africa reduced them to 42-2 by tea. Pakistan lost newcomer Imran Butt — managing just 36 in four innings of his first series — in the fifth over, leg-before to pacer Kagiso Rabada for duck.

Butt's partner, Abid Ali fell caught behind off Maharaj for 13, ending up with 33 in the series to highlight Pakistan's top order woes. Azhar, on 11, survived a confident leg-before appeal off Maharaj only to see the referral showed it was the umpire's call.

It was Hasan who wrapped up South African innings after they added 95 runs in the morning. Temba Bavuma fought a lone battle with 44 not out. Resuming at 106-4 South Africa had hoped their skipper Quinton de Kock would build on his breezy overnight score of 24, but the left-hander played on to Shaheen in the third over of the day. De Kock scored 29.

Bavuma and Wiaan Mulder frustrated Pakistan's pace-cum-spin attack during a 50-run sixth wicket stand before disaster struck. Mulder nudged a push to deep fine-leg but while returning for a second run failed to beat a Shaheen throw and was run out. George Linde hit three boundaries and a six in his quickfire 21 but missed the line of a Hasan delivery and was bowled. Hasan also had Maharaj (one) and Anrich Nortje (nought) to finish the innings. — AFP

## England tribute to phenomenal Root after double ton

**CHENNAI:** Joe Root's landmark double century for England against India in the opening Test made his teammates look "rubbish", Ben Stokes said in a tribute to his captain yesterday. The captain, who resumed on his overnight 128, hit a big six to become the first player to go past 200 in his 100th Test. He made 218 before departing in the final session in Chennai. England rode on Root's masterclass to reach 555 for eight at close on day two. Dom Bess, on 28, and Jack Leach on six, were at the crease. Root's remarkable feat — his fifth Test double ton — came after a quickfire 82 from the returning Stokes. The pair put on 124 for the fourth wicket.

"He makes us all feel pretty rubbish. How easy he makes batting look. I was quite surprised he ran down the wicket and hacked a six to bring up a double," Stokes told reporters. "He is in phenomenal form. He dominates spin, incredible to watch. I don't think we have had an England batsman ever to play spin in the way that he does. He has got an answer and option for everything that's thrown at him. It's a delight to watch him at the moment." Root, who expertly kept India's spinners at bay in his 377 ball marathon, extended his golden run that followed match-winning scores of 228 and 186 against Sri Lanka in Tests last month.

### 'Tough to take 20 wickets'

Left-hander Stokes, who along with Jofra Archer and Rory Burns returned to the squad for the four-Test series after missing the Sri Lanka tour, hit his 23rd Test half-century — with 10 fours and three sixes — before falling to Shabbaz Nadeem's left-arm spin. "Nice to come back in with a bit of time off and spending some time in the middle," Stokes said of his attacking cameo. "Batting first after putting ourselves in and being 500 or whatever, we are with two wickets remaining on to day three is a very strong position."

Stokes, a right-arm paceman, said the team has no thoughts of declaring their innings and would like to bat for another hour this morning. But he cautioned that a big first innings total does not guarantee a win on Indian pitches. "It's tough to take 20 wickets anywhere but out here 20 can be hard to come by. We know we have a big challenge ahead."

After Stokes' wicket, Root and Ollie Pope got going to frustrate the Indian bowlers before Ravichandran Ashwin broke through. Ashwin trapped Pope lbw for 34 and Nadeem got Root's prized scalp with a delivery that straightened up to hit the batsman's pad. Root reviewed the call but replays showed the ball would have hit leg stump. India skipper Virat Kohli shook hands with his opposite number as he walked back to the pavilion. "It feels nice to get big names out and break partnerships," Nadeem said on getting key wickets of Stokes and Root. — AFP



## Sports

# Raptors edge Nets with Durant out twice due to COVID protocol

## Celtics beat Clippers, Giannis speaks against all-star game



NEW YORK: Kevin Durant #7 of the Brooklyn Nets reacts as he sits during a time out against the Toronto Raptors at Barclays Center on Friday in New York City. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Pascal Siakam scored a season-high 33 points as the Toronto Raptors recorded a 123-117 win on Friday over the Brooklyn Nets, who lost forward Kevin Durant twice in the same game due to COVID-19 contact tracing protocols.

Siakam added 11 rebounds and six assists while shooting 12 of 23 from the floor and Kyle Lowry scored a season-high 30 points for the Raptors, who won for the eighth time in 12 games. Lowry tied a season-best with a half dozen threes and helped clinch the victory by scoring on a layup with 35 seconds left to give Toronto a 121-113 lead.

"We missed some open looks and Lowry made some big shots," Nets coach Steve Nash said. "You add it all up and they found separation in the last couple of minutes." The Raptors also took advantage of the loss of Durant who was held out of the starting lineup.

Durant was pulled from the starting lineup shortly before the opening tipoff and then allowed to come into the game in the first quarter. He scored eight points in 19 minutes before he was told by Nets officials to leave the bench and return to the dressing room midway through the third. It was the first time in his 867-game career that Durant entered a game as a reserve.

### Clippers lose at home

In Los Angeles, Jayson Tatum scored a team-high 34 points and Kemba Walker delivered a late surge as the Boston Celtics rallied from a first-half deficit to hold on and edge the Los Angeles Clippers 119-115. Walker tallied 24 points and Carsen Edwards came off the bench to score 16 as the Celtics took over in the third quarter, setting the stage for a thrilling back and forth final quarter.

Kawhi Leonard scored 28 points and Lou Williams added 18 for Los Angeles, who saw its six-game win streak at Staples Center arena halted. Both teams were without key starters. Boston was missing Jaylen Brown who sat out with a sore knee and the Clippers, were minus Paul George because of a toe injury and Patrick Beverley (knee). The Clippers led by as many as 16 points late in the second quarter and went into half-time with a 62-51 lead.

In Florida, Nikola Vucevic scored a career-high 43 points and added 19 rebounds as the Orlando Magic held off the Chicago Bulls for a 123-119 victory. Vucevic's hot start included scoring 13 points in the game's first three minutes.

Vucevic set his career high with two free throws with two seconds left in the game. He surpassed his previous high of 41 points, which he scored in 2017

against Brooklyn. "It felt great to have a career high in a win because the last one was a loss," Vucevic said. "It's much better when you win because you can enjoy these things more when you win. I'm most happy about the win because I thought we had great effort from the beginning." Chicago's Zach LaVine took over late, scoring 24 of his team-high 26 points in the fourth quarter, but it wasn't enough to get Chicago the win.

### All-star game

Also, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 33 points as the Milwaukee Bucks opened a six-game road trip with a 123-105 win over the Cleveland Cavaliers. Antetokounmpo echoed the comments from LeBron James a day earlier that the 2021 all-star game should not go ahead because of the short off season due to the global pandemic. "The big dog says he has zero excitement and zero energy for the all-star game, and I'm the same way. I really right now don't care about the all-star game. We cannot see our families," he said.

Elsewhere, Brandon Ingram scored 30 points and Lonzo Ball added 20 as the New Orleans Pelicans held off the Indiana Pacers for a 114-113 victory in Indianapolis. Zion Williamson scored 18, Steven Adams had 12 points and 12 rebounds, JJ Redick scored 12 and Josh Hart scored 11 for New Orleans. — AFP

## 'No risk it, no biscuit': Fortune favors bold Bucs coach

LOS ANGELES: A willingness to take risks carried the Tampa Bay Buccaneers into tonight's Super Bowl and head coach Bruce Arians has no intention of changing. Arians, who at 68 could become the oldest head coach to win the Vince Lombardi Trophy if the Buccaneers upset the Kansas City Chiefs, lives his life by a five-word philosophy: "No risk it, no biscuit."

The inspiration for Arians' approach comes from Rudyard Kipling's poem "If", which was pasted into a playbook by a colleague early in his career. "It just talks about not being afraid to throw your hat in the ring, not being afraid to fail or to win, how to bounce back and keep on going," Arians said.

"I'll hit a lot of the balls in the water going for the green in two knowing I can't get there. But I ain't going to get there unless I try. And the one out of 10 that makes it — it's a great feeling. That's how I live life." That bold approach was in evidence last month when the Buccaneers upset the Green Bay Packers at Lambeau Field to reach the Super Bowl. Arguably the key passage of the game came shortly before half-time. With 13 seconds left in the half, Arians and quarterback Tom Brady opted for, and made, a risky fourth-down conversion. On the next play, Brady uncorked a 39-yard completion to Scotty Miller for a touchdown that put the Buccaneers ahead 21-10, and with one foot in the Super Bowl.

### Attack, attack, attack

"Each and every game you have a feel for how it's going," Arians explains. "How your defense is playing, how your offense is playing, and are the risks worth the rewards? I can't say that we ever go in there saying 'Hey, let's throw caution to the wind today.' A lot of it is gut feeling depending on the circumstances of the game."

Yet Arians says the Buccaneers do set out to impose themselves on their opponents in every department. "It all starts with attack," Arians says. "We want to attack in all three phases — offense, defense, special teams."

Over the course of a coaching career that has

spanned six decades, Arians has forged a reputation as one of the NFL's most prominent "quarterback whisperers," a coaching guru with an instinctive feel for understanding the psychology of the most important player on the field. His career has included stints working with some of the greatest quarterbacks the game has seen, including Peyton Manning, Ben Roethlisberger and now the six-time Super Bowl champion Brady.

"One of Bruce's great gifts is that he knows exactly what's going on inside the head of his quarterback," said Tom Moore, Tampa Bay's 82-year-old offensive consultant who will be part of Arians' staff this weekend. Arians, meanwhile, has relished the opportunity of working with Brady.

Having been tempted out of retirement by the Buccaneers in 2019, Arians admits he could scarcely contain his excitement when the franchise landed Brady in free agency last year, realizing the quarterback could have a transformative effect on the Bucs' locker room.

### 'The missing piece'

"I thought Tom was the missing piece," Arians said. "I knew how good a football team we had, and I knew what we were missing. And what we were missing was the belief we were good enough. The great quarterbacks all have it. They have the ability to will themselves onto other people, to make sure that everyone in the locker room has bought into the cause. And the cause is putting a championship in your trophy case. Tom brings that attitude to work every single day, and it permeates throughout the entire locker room."

The relationship has not been without hiccups. Early in the season, Arians raised eyebrows after openly criticizing Brady's performance in a 38-3 thrashing by the New Orleans Saints. "I just answer questions honestly. If someone asks me why Tom threw an interception I'll tell them the truth. That is not 'calling him out.' That's answering a question," Arians said. "And I really don't know any other way. Tom and I have had a great relationship from day one. He wants to be coached hard." Arians, meanwhile, says Brady's influence on the team is like "having another coach on the field."

"He does such a great job working with younger and older players," Arians said. "For him to come to another ball club and do what he has done is remarkable, especially when you consider he had no off-season. The continual growth from September to October to November until now. Just a fantastic player." — AFP

### 'Completely sore'

Spanish world number two Rafael Nadal has also been struggling with a lower-back problem that has kept him out of the ATP Cup. Two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka was another casualty, opting not to play her quarter-final clash with Anett Kontaveit at the Grampians Trophy due to a lower-back injury.

World number four Kenin said not being able to practice properly during quarantine had left her "completely sore" after returning to action. "After two matches, my leg is completely sore," said Kenin. "You can see that being in a room for two weeks, not playing, practicing, it's not the same as playing a match clearly. People who haven't played matches for two weeks, it's obviously not the same."

Due to Australia's strict rules for incoming travellers, players underwent a compulsory 14-day quarantine on arrival but were granted daily five-hour blocks for training and treatment. Some players, including Azarenka, had to endure a hard lockdown and were not able to train at all after coronavirus cases were detected on their charter flights. "Today it's better. I'm not going to complain about that," she said. "I want it to be better for the Australian Open," said Kenin.

World number two Halep was also hampered by a lower-back injury as she was thrashed by Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-2, 6-1 in the Gippsland Trophy quarter-finals. "I struggled a little bit from the air-conditioning with my low back," she said. "The muscle got a little bit blocked. But I did some treatment last night, this morning, so I'm getting better now. It's nothing dangerous." — AFP

## Chumps to champs: 'Big Red' Reid building Chiefs dynasty

LOS ANGELES: Andy Reid is the avuncular Kansas City Chiefs coach who has helped transform a broken franchise into a potential NFL dynasty. Victory over the Tampa Bay Buccaneers tonight would seal back-to-back Super Bowls for the Chiefs, who had fallen on hard times before Reid arrived in 2013.

In the six seasons prior to Reid's appointment, the Chiefs had won just 29 games and lost 67. In 2012, the team had finished with a dismal 2-14 record, propping up the bottom of the AFC West. The organization Reid inherited was also raw from the trauma of linebacker Jovan Belcher's horrific murder-suicide. In late 2012, Belcher shot dead his girlfriend before driving to the Chiefs training facility and killing himself in front of general manager Scott Pioli and coach Romeo Crennel. Reid, who was hired by the Chiefs in January 2013, just four days after being fired from the Philadelphia Eagles, had also endured a season touched by tragedy.

In August, his eldest son Garrett died from an accidental heroin overdose in his room at an Eagles training camp. Reid's arrival in Kansas City had a transformative effect. In his first campaign in charge, the team finished 11-5 and reached the playoffs. The Chiefs have reached the post-season for six years running since 2015 and won a first Super Bowl in 50 years with victory over the San Francisco 49ers in Miami last season.

At the heart of the renaissance has been Reid, the jovial 62-year-old with a penchant for Hawaiian shirts known affectionately as "Big Red." Under Reid, the Chiefs have built a team boasting the NFL's most potent offense, striking gold by snapping up quarterback Patrick Mahomes in 2017 with the 10th pick of the NFL Draft.

### Second chances

In the three seasons since Mahomes became starting quarterback, the Chiefs have been two Super

Bowls and came within a whisker of reaching a third. Reid has been dubbed the "Patron Saint of Second Chances" for his willingness to give players a chance after off-field misdemeanors.

At the Eagles, he offered Michael Vick a chance at redemption in 2009 after the quarterback had served a prison sentence for involvement in a dog-fighting ring. Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce was drafted in 2013 despite a suspension for marijuana use at college. Marcus Peters was chosen in the 2015 draft despite a volatile reputation.

"If you go about the right steps to right the wrong, then I think you deserve another shot," Reid said later. Heading into the Super Bowl, Reid says his man-management style is comparable to a teacher. "I think we all want to be treated a certain way, and if not, I know how I like to be treated, and that's 'Tell me what I need to do to get better at what I'm trying to accomplish,'" Reid said.

"You don't necessarily have to yell and scream at me to get me to do something better," Reid said. "So I just kind of go about it that way. I just say, 'Listen, try to treat people the way I'd want to be treated.' I think we're here as teachers and that's what I do. So that's how I look at myself, as a teacher of, in my case, men. And whether it's on the field or off the field, if I can give them any experience that I might have had to help them become better players or husbands or whatever it might be, fathers, I try to do that."

With Mahomes, Reid says he is simply trying to make a great player even better. "The thing I've found with great players is they want you to give them one more thing so they can even be greater, and that's the way I approach it," Reid said. "I think if you just keep it open and real, I think that's the best way to roll with it. That's how I feel, and that's how I've been with Patrick. I know he wants to be great." — AFP

## Osaka slams 'ignorant' sexist comments by Tokyo Olympics chief

MELBOURNE: Japanese tennis superstar Naomi Osaka yesterday slammed "ignorant" remarks from the Tokyo Olympics' chief organizer after a sexism row that has triggered an angry backlash and calls for his resignation.

Osaka, a leading face of the Games in her home nation, joined growing criticism of former Japanese prime minister Yoshiro Mori, 83, after he complained that women speak for too long in meetings. The gaffe-prone Mori has apologized but refused to step down, and attempted to justify his comments by explaining he doesn't "speak to women much".

"I feel like that was a really ignorant statement to make," said Osaka, 23, referring to the original remarks. "I think that someone that makes comments like that, they need to have more knowledge on the thing that they're talking about."

Osaka, the world's top-earning female athlete, emerged as a potent voice on social issues last year when she wore facemasks highlighting victims of racism and police brutality at the US Open. "I also want to hear the reasoning behind those comments," said the three-time Grand Slam winner, ahead of the Australian Open in Melbourne, a tournament she won in 2019. I also want to hear the perspective of everyone else that surrounds him."

Olympic medalists, Japanese sports officials and Games volunteers have lined up to lambast Mori, while Tokyo's governor said she was left "speechless" by the remarks. Japan's Asahi Shimbun daily in an editorial called for Mori's resignation, and an online campaign urging his sacking has attracted more than 112,000 signatures, including from Grammy-winning musician Ryuichi Sakamoto. Several European embassies in Japan have also tweeted hashtags "dontbesilent" and "genderequality" following the controversial remarks. Diplomats from German, Finnish, Swedish and the EU missions have uploaded pictures of staff raising their hands — a pose intended to back gender equality which has gone viral on Japanese social media.

The Mainichi Shimbun yesterday reported that Mori had considered quitting in the wake of the criticism, but was talked out of it. "From the beginning, I don't have no regrets about the chairmanship," Mori told the daily. "I had



MELBOURNE: This hand out photo released by the Tennis Australia yesterday shows Japan's Naomi Osaka speaking at a press conference at Melbourne Park in Melbourne. — AFP

once decided to resign, but I held back after being strongly convinced" by Tokyo 2020 officials, he added.

### 'What he said wasn't right'

Despite the uproar, the International Olympic Committee said Thursday it considered the issue "closed" after Mori's apology. Osaka yesterday stopped short of calling for his resignation, but said he should be made to understand why he has caused so much offence.

"I'm not sure if it's a situation where someone should demand that he resigns or if it's just something that people need to make him understand that what he said wasn't right," she said. Mori is also a former president of the Japan Rugby Football Union, and JRFU board member Yuko Inazawa told Japanese media on Friday she believed his comments were aimed at her.

Japan ranks high on a range of international indicators but persistently trails on gender equality, coming 121 out of 153 nations surveyed in the World Economic Forum's 2020 global gender gap report. The sexism row is the latest headache for organizers already battling public disquiet about the postponed Games, with polls showing more than 80 percent of Japanese oppose holding the event this summer with the coronavirus pandemic still raging.

Mori, who has a history of controversial remarks, had already attracted criticism earlier in the week by insisting the Games would happen "however the coronavirus (pandemic) evolves". Osaka said she remained keen to compete at the Games, which start in July, but added that public approval was crucial for them to go ahead. — AFP

## Injuries mount as Osaka, Serena struggle ahead of Aussie Open

MELBOURNE: World number three Naomi Osaka joined Serena Williams and Simona Halep with injury niggles ahead of the Australian Open yesterday as defending champion Sofia Kenin blamed her groin strain on spending two weeks in coronavirus quarantine. The season's first Grand Slam has had an unusual build-up after the pandemic torpedoed much of last year's schedule and gave players only a week to play warm-up tournaments after their mandatory quarantine in Australia.

Japan's Osaka, the US Open champion and 2019 Australian Open winner, withdrew from her Gippsland Trophy semi-final against Elise Mertens, blaming a long-standing shoulder problem. "Anyone that's followed me for a bit knows that I've had a slight shoulder thing since 2018 in Beijing," she said. "It kind of flared up again because I played a lot of matches back-to-back. But, yeah, my main focus is hoping I can rest enough before the Open."

Osaka had looked in fine form powering past Irina-Camelia Begu 7-5, 6-1 in 76 minutes on Friday. She joined Williams as a late withdrawal after the American 23-time Grand Slam winner pulled out of her semi-final against world number one Ashleigh Barty with a shoulder problem Friday.

Williams, 39, who withdrew after beating fellow American Danielle Collins 6-2, 4-6, 10-6 in the Yarra Valley Classic, said Saturday that the injury wasn't serious. "I feel pretty good. I've gotten a lot of treatment already on my shoulder. But I'm super-confident it's going to be great," she said. However, Williams added: "It's definitely something that I'm going to have to deal with for the fortnight."



## Villa strike early to sink Arsenal

Nine-man Newcastle win Saints thriller • Burnley, Brighton draw

LONDON: Arsenal crashed to a second successive Premier League defeat as Ollie Watkins' early goal fired Aston Villa to a 1-0 win, while nine-man Newcastle beat Southampton 3-2 yesterday. Mikel Arteta's side fell behind after just 74 seconds at Villa Park and were unable to muster a convincing response.

Arsenal lost at Wolves on Tuesday and have now gone three league games without a victory. The Gunners are languishing in 10th place, nine points adrift of the top four as their faint hopes of Champions League qualification look less realistic by the day. When Arsenal faced Villa in November, they suffered a lackluster 3-0 defeat that sent them sliding towards the relegation zone.

Although Arsenal had managed to claw their way back up the table, eighth-placed Villa once again showed the flaws that still plague Arteta's men. Arsenal, badly lacking a cutting edge, have scored just once in their last three matches and retain a fatal inability to stay focused at the back. Villa took the lead with their earliest Premier League goal since 2014, aided by some woeful defending from the Gunners.

Arsenal's Cedric Soares gave the ball away and Bertrand Traore crossed to the unmarked Watkins, whose shot went in via a deflection off Rob Holding. Bemoaning Arsenal's lack of killer instinct, Arteta said: "In the Premier League when you give a goal to the opponent - and we gave them another three opportunities to be fair, just giving them to them - and then you are not ruthless in the opponent's box, you don't win games."

"The rest, the way the team played, the energy and quality they showed, the amount of chances and situations we created, how quickly we regained the ball, how we controlled long balls, second balls, how aggressive we were in our duels - incredible. But it wasn't enough to win the game."

### Bruce boosted

At St James' Park, Newcastle midfielder Joe Willock marked his debut with a goal to help the Magpies ease



BIRMINGHAM: Arsenal's Norwegian midfielder Martin Odegaard (left) vies with Aston Villa's Argentinian goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Arsenal at Villa Park yesterday. — AFP

the pressure on beleaguered boss Steve Bruce. Willock, who joined on loan from Arsenal on transfer deadline day, opened the scoring in a thrilling clash. Miguel Almiron netted twice for Newcastle either side of Takumi Minamino's strike in his first appearance for the Saints since the Japan midfielder joined on loan from Liverpool.

A fine James Ward-Prowse free-kick dragged the visitors back into it in their first match since losing 9-0 at Manchester United. Southampton dominated

following Jeff Hendrick's dismissal for a second bookable offence and Fabian Schar's premature departure through injury - which left Newcastle down to nine as they had used all their substitutes. But Newcastle held on to claim just their second win in 14 attempts in all competitions as they moved 11 points clear of the relegation zone.

Johann Berg Gudmundsson made amends for an earlier mistake by bagging the equalizer in Burnley's 1-1 draw against relegation rivals

Brighton. Lewis Dunk's towering header from a corner sailed into the net, despite the presence of Gudmundsson at the back post, with the Iceland winger seeming to lose his footing in the pouring rain at the crucial moment.

However, Gudmundsson's strike eight minutes after half-time rescued Sean Dyche's team. Burnley remain 17th but are nine points clear of the bottom three. Brighton are 11 ahead of third-bottom Fulham after extending their unbeaten run to six matches. — AFP



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