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## REGISTER TODAY

for the COVID-19 vaccine

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# Govt, businesses discuss shutdown, compensation

## Assembly panels OK amnesty, permanent residency for Kuwaiti women's kids



KUWAIT: Municipal inspectors are making sure all commercial establishments close by 8 pm.— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Representatives of small businesses called on the ministerial emergency committee to ease closures of businesses and compensate small and medium businesspeople who have incurred heavy losses because of the government shutdowns of commercial activities to stem the rise in coronavirus cases. Some of the representatives said the committee could propose reopening shops, health clubs and salons by allowing only less than half of the staff to attend.

The representatives called on the government to provide financial compensation to businesses harmed by the closures last year, and which are expecting further losses this year. There has been no word from the committee on the outcome of the meeting which took place late Sunday, but the authorities enforced the closures and teams from the interior ministry and other agencies were sent to impose the new restrictions.

The Cabinet decided on Wednesday to shut down all businesses from 8 pm to 5 am and completely close health clubs, salons and barbershops for a month. The Cabinet also banned the entry of foreigners into the country from Sunday for two weeks, but exempted medics and diplomats.

MPs have strongly rejected the new government measures and called for swift compensation of businesses. The new measures come as the number of



reported coronavirus cases continued to climb, with the health ministry reporting 996 new cases yesterday.

Assembly Speaker Marzuq Al-Ghanem said he has informed the caretaker government about a motion filed by MPs calling to convene a special Assembly session to discuss the pandemic and other

Continued on Page 2

### News in brief

#### Maid commits suicide

KUWAIT: A 27-year-old Filipina committed suicide yesterday at her sponsor's house in Sabah Al-Salem. The Philippine Embassy confirmed the death of the housemaid when contacted by Kuwait Times, but added it is still gathering additional details on the incident.

#### Brent oil hits year-high above \$60

LONDON: The benchmark oil contract Brent North Sea rose above \$60 per barrel yesterday to hit the highest level since the coronavirus pandemic began to spread globally almost a year ago. Oil prices have recovered owing to OPEC and its allies cutting production after the coronavirus pandemic slashed demand, according to analysts. Crude and other assets are winning support also from the prospect of a \$1.9-trillion US stimulus package. — AFP (See Page 8)

#### Full stadiums for World Cup

DOHA: The Qatari 2022 World Cup organizers have insisted that matches will be staged in stadiums operating at 100 percent of capacity even as the global fight against coronavirus drags on. "Qatar started this matter gradually by hosting matches for the AFC Champions League without fans," said Yasir Al-Jamal, chairman of the Operations Office of Qatar's Supreme Committee charged with organizing the 2022 tournament. — AFP (See Page 15)

#### Iran unveils homegrown vaccine

KARAJ, Iran: Iran unveiled its second home-grown coronavirus vaccine project yesterday, the day before the launch of a vaccination campaign to combat the Middle East's deadliest COVID-19 outbreak. The vaccine, dubbed Razi Cov Pars, was developed at the Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute, which is linked to the agriculture ministry. At the start of Phase 1 of the clinical trials, 13 volunteers between the ages of 18 and 55 will receive a jab. — AFP

## British COVID variant rapidly spreading in US

WASHINGTON: A coronavirus variant first identified in Britain is rapidly spreading in the United States, threatening to bring a surge of new cases as it doubles roughly every 10 days, according to a new study. The paper was posted online on Sunday and has not yet been peer reviewed, but it does

offer the most comprehensive look at the rise of B.1.1.7 in the country hit hardest by the pandemic.

A team of scientists led by researchers at The Scripps Research Institute analyzed half a million test samples collected across the country since last summer. Rather than individually sequence all of them, they were able to identify a particular anomaly that was a "reliable proxy" for B.1.1.7. They also analyzed the full genetic sequence, a more time-consuming process, for 212 samples.

They found the variant was introduced at multiple points into the US in Nov 2020, and while currently low in overall frequency, it is set to become the dominant form of the virus by March. The team

## Palestinians launch own postcodes

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Authority announced Sunday it would begin using its own postal codes, a move at easing the delivery of parcels in the occupied territories as well as asserting sovereignty. International mail sent to or from the occupied West Bank currently has to pass through Jordan or Israel. But the PA said Sunday it had asked the Universal Postal Union to notify its member

states that Palestinian postal codes were coming into force.

"From April, postal items that do not bear a Palestinian postal code will not be processed," Palestinian Minister of Communications Ishaq Sidr told reporters in Ramallah, the West Bank headquarters of the Palestinian Authority. "It is a question of asserting Palestinian rights," he said.

Palestinian postal codes would also help put an end to the seizure of shipments from abroad, Sidr said. He said six tons of packages had been held up in Jordan since 2018, and accused Israel of obstructing deliveries.

Using postcodes "will prevent Israel from seizing postal items that

Continued on Page 2

## Panic over med shortages in Lebanon

BEIRUT: With Lebanon's economy in a tailspin and the coronavirus pandemic wreaking chaos, panic-buying has gripped pharmacies, creating shortages and a flourishing black market. All manner of pharmaceutical products have started disappearing from the shelves in recent weeks, including some of the most widely needed. Mostly imported, they include any medicine thought to fight symp-

ptoms of COVID-19, pills for patients with chronic diseases, baby formula and even vitamin supplements.

One customer, Abbas, 37, said he was giving up as he stepped out of a large Beirut pharmacy. "I asked for two things," he said - aspirin and an antibiotic. "I found neither." Abbas said he would have to buy them at much higher prices on the black market, adding dejectedly that the store had also run out of the special shampoo he had been buying for years. "This country is really going to the dumps," he said.

Lebanon was already facing its worst economic crisis in decades and dollar shortages before the pandemic.

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AL-BIREH: Palestinian postal workers examine a mail package at a post office in this city about 15 km north of Jerusalem in the occupied West Bank on Sunday. — AFP



BEIRUT: Customers browse the aisles for medicine at a pharmacy in the Lebanese capital Beirut on Feb 2, 2021. — AFP

## Local

# Amir receives commemorative coins on national anniversaries

## Central Bank Governor presents coins to Crown Prince, Prime Minister



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives the commemorative coins from Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Dr Mohammad Yousef Al-Hashel. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives the commemorative coins from Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Dr Mohammad Yousef Al-Hashel.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives the commemorative coins from Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Dr Mohammad Yousef Al-Hashel.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) Dr Mohammad Yousef Al-Hashel at Seif Palace yesterday. During the meeting, Dr Hashel handed His Highness the Amir three commemorative coins issued on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the independence of the State of Kuwait, the 30th Liberation Day, and 60th

anniversary of the issuance of the Kuwaiti currency. Dr Hashel also presented the coins to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah in separate meetings yesterday. Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince separately received His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-

Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah at Seif Palace.

In other news, His Highness the Amir yesterday addressed a cable of condolences to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz on the demise of mother of Prince Abdulrahman bin Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent cables of similar content to the Saudi monarch. In the meantime, His Highness the

Amir sent a cable of condolences to Indian President Ram Nath Kovind over the victims of an avalanche that took place in northern India. His Highness the Amir prayed to Allah Almighty to bestow solace on families of the victims, and that officials in India would overcome impacts of this natural disaster. Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets Ukraine's Ambassador to Kuwait Balanutsa Oleksandr. — Defense Ministry photos



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets UK's Ambassador to Kuwait Michael Davenport.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets Belgium's Ambassador to Kuwait Leo Peeter.

## Defense minister mulls cooperation with envoys

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah yesterday held talks with ambassadors of Ukraine, the UK and Belgium: Balanutsa Oleksandr, Michael Davenport and Leo Peeter

respectively, on cooperation between Kuwait and the envoys' countries. Kuwait Army said in a press statement that the minister held discussions with the envoys in separate meetings in his office. The talks dealt with means of cementing

cooperation, joint action and latest developments on the regional and international arenas. Later in the day, the minister met with Chairman of Kuwait Airways Captain Ali Al-Dokhan, examining some topics. The meeting was attended by

the Defense Ministry's Acting Undersecretary Sheikh Fahad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Kuwait Airways Deputy Chairman Faisal Al-Gharib and Kuwait Airways Chief Executive Officer Adel Al-Sanea. — KUNA

## Panic over med shortages...

Continued from Page 1

Now, with COVID-19 overwhelming hospitals and little public trust authorities can secure vaccines any time soon, people have been rushing to pharmacies to buy medicine.

But even drugs that are rumored to help treat COVID-19 and oxygen tanks are becoming scarce, as people stock up, anticipating they may have no alternative but to sit out an infection at home. As boxes disappear from shelves, a black market has emerged, offering medicine or medical equipment - sometimes counterfeits - at many times the normal price.

Inside the Mazen Pharmacy, one of Beirut's largest, a pharmacist turned a customer away, saying the medication was "out of stock". Pharmacy owner Mazen Bissat said: "People are scared medicine will run out, so they're stockpiling at home enough for a month, even six months, according to what they can afford. There's a medicine shortage, and suppliers have not delivered on quantities requested by the pharmacies."

He said the makers of a popular, over-the-counter painkiller "just delivered 300 boxes. So we only display 10 a day to be able to make them last until the end of the month," he said. To slow the depletion, the health ministry has ordered pharmacists to sell some medication only on prescription, and suppliers to limit deliveries to pharmacies.

Karim Gebara, the head of the medicine importers syndicate, said aspirin demand had skyrocketed. Two companies "delivered 500,000 boxes in January, whereas normal demand in 2020 was just 200,000," he said. "But even with that, there isn't any left." When people cannot find medicine in shops, they sometimes turn elsewhere.

Gebara said there had been a run on Ivermectin, which is used to treat parasite infections. Some Lebanese media had quoted a study suggesting it might be a miracle cure for COVID-19 - a claim for which there is insufficient evidence, according to health agencies. This had led to "the emergence of a black market," said Gebara, as people started smuggling it in from abroad, with a box selling for the equivalent of \$35. But even after an importer obtained permission to bring it to Lebanon at a subsidized cost of \$1, Ivermectin is still hard to find and the informal market for it is thriving.

Gebara said hoarding by manufacturers was one problem, among others. We are facing "delayed money transfers abroad from the central bank", he said. "If the manufacturer abroad does not receive his dues on time, he delays the shipment." With dwindling foreign currency reserves, the central bank is struggling to continue funding key imports at a preferential exchange rate, and fears have risen that medicine subsidies will be lifted soon.

Moreover, subsidized medicine is being smuggled out of Lebanon, Gebara said. In recent months, travellers have been stopped at Beirut airport trying to fly out to Egypt or Iraq with bags filled with subsidized medicine - some of which turned up as far as the Democratic Republic of Congo. All in all, "it's an alarming situation that keeps on feeding off itself", Gebara added. — AFP



BEIRUT: Customers buy medicine at a pharmacy in the Lebanese capital Beirut, on February 2, 2021. — AFP

## Palestinians launch own...

Continued from Page 1

come to Palestine, and will help make the services more efficient," Imad Al-Tumayzi, head of international relations at the Palestinian Post, told AFP. "In 2020, we recorded more than 7,000 violations of postal equipment on the Israeli side, whether by opening packages, seizing them or summoning their owners for investigation," he said.

Palestinians have complained that they are forced

to use costly private courier services to send or receive parcels. But it was not clear if the application of postal codes would cut mailing costs. Official PA news agency Wafa said some half a million buildings in the West Bank had already been given postcodes. It said the rollout would soon be extended to the Gaza Strip, under Israeli blockade and controlled by Islamists Hamas.

In the West Bank, a Palestinian postal worker who asked not to be named, said the new postcodes were "more symbolic than practical". "Postal coding can only truly be implemented when the Palestinian Authority controls ports or airports," he said. The West Bank, wedged between Israel and Jordan, has no operational civilian airport. — AFP

## Govt, businesses discuss shutdown...

Continued from Page 1

related matters. He said he is awaiting the government's response on the motion. Meanwhile, the Assembly's women and family committee yesterday approved a proposal calling to grant children of Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis permanent residency in the country. Children of Kuwaiti women married to foreigners are not granted citizenship under Kuwaiti law. The proposal also calls to accord this category priority of employment in government jobs after Kuwaiti citizens and treat them on equal footing like citizens in the job.

The legal and legislative committee meanwhile approved a draft law granting a general amnesty to a number of former ex-MPs and opposition activists who have been living in exile for over 30 months. Head of the committee MP Khaled Al-Enezi said the bill also stipulates national reconciliation. The opposition former MPs and activists were handed heavy jail terms over two years ago for storming the Assembly building following an anti-corruption protest in Nov 2011. The general pardon was on top of the political agenda of a majority of MPs during their election campaign in December.

MP Khaled Al-Otaibi also submitted a draft law stipulating to amend the election law. Under the proposal, voters will be allowed to cast two votes in their constituency and one vote outside their district. Each of the five constituencies will elect nine MPs. The remaining five MPs will be the top vote getters from the remaining candidates.

## British COVID variant rapidly...

Continued from Page 1

The United States is the world's hardest-hit country, with more than 27 million confirmed cases

and 460,000 deaths, but its last wave peaked around January 8 and infections have been dropping since.

There are fears that B.1.1.7 could trigger a new spike, and it is spreading particularly rapidly in Florida, according to the study. The study's authors called for the United States to build up its COVID genomic surveillance system. Current vaccines remain effective against the variant, while the use of masks drastically reduces transmission. — AFP

## Local

# Palestinian resolution only through two-state solution: Arab League

## Kuwait's foreign minister attends extraordinary Arab session in Cairo

CAIRO: The Arab League Secretary-General Ahmad Abul Gheit said that the final resolution of the Palestinian issue passes through a single path, which is the two-state solution. In a speech during the extraordinary session of the Arab Ministerial Council to support the Palestinian cause yesterday, Abul Gheit affirmed that the international consensus on the two-state solution must be translated into a practical move that leads to saving this solution from continuous Israeli attempts aimed at undermining and marginalizing it. He also noted that the settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem constitutes a serious obstacle to the two-state solution, which is illegal activity and a "violation" of international legitimacy resolutions, foremost of which is Security Council Resolution No. 2334.

Abul Gheit called on all international parties, led by the international quartet, to make a real effort to launch a political process that has a clear timeline based on the results of previous negotiation rounds, principles of international law and the foundations of the Arab Peace Initiative. He stressed that the Palestinian people have all the support, respect and appreciation from all Arab peoples. The Secretary-General also reaffirmed support for all measures taken by the Palestinian presidency in order to strengthen the unity of the Palestinians and restore unity to it through elections and reconciliation together.

Meanwhile, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shukry called for safeguarding "the status quo in the occupied Palestinian territories" and warned against any "alterations on the ground." Addressing the meeting, Shukry stressed on the necessity of

supporting legitimate rights of the Palestinian people noting that "just causes never cease to exist." Egypt believes in the necessity of respecting the status quo in Jerusalem and averting any measure that may aggravate the conflict, he said.

### Meeting's agenda

Earlier yesterday, Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah met with Abul Gheit in Cairo, ahead of the extraordinary Arab foreign ministerial meeting. Sheikh Dr Ahmad and Abul Gheit examined, during their meeting, the agenda of the scheduled ministerial



### Egypt calls for maintaining status quo

conference and coordination regarding "the march of joint Arab action." The meeting was attended by the Assistant Foreign Minister for the Arab Homeland Affairs Ambassador Fahad Al-Awadhi, and the State of Kuwait Permanent Delegate at the Arab League Ahmad Al-Bakr. Sheikh Dr Ahmad had held talks with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) chief Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf, a day before the Arab League held the emergency meeting.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad also met with Palestinian



CAIRO: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets Arab League Secretary-General Ahmad Abul Gheit in Cairo, Egypt yesterday.— KUNA

Foreign Minister Riadh Al-Malki on fringes of the extraordinary meeting. The two top officials discussed ways of boosting bilateral relations, as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest. In the meantime, Sheikh Dr Ahmad discussed bilateral relations with his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein on Sunday. Talks between the two also focused on regional and international developments in addition to matters of "mutual concern", said a Kuwaiti foreign ministry statement.

In addition, Sheikh Dr Ahmad met with Yemeni Foreign Minister Dr Ahmad Awadh bin

Mubarak, and the two sides discussed ways of boosting bilateral relations, as well as regional and international issues. Sheikh Dr Ahmad also met with his Jordanian counterpart Aymad Safadi and discussed means of further promoting relations between the two countries, in addition to a host of regional and global matters. Moreover, Sheikh Dr Ahmad met with Algerian Foreign Minister Sabri Boukadoum, and they discussed ways of boosting bilateral relations, as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest.— KUNA

## Assembly panel rejects proposal to increase traffic fines

KUWAIT: The parliamentary interior and defense committee rejected a proposal to increase traffic fines, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday. During its meeting on Sunday, the committee discussed a proposed law to amend some rules of law 67/1967 with regards to traffic, in the presence of interior ministry representatives. Committee Chairman MP Mubarak Al-Ajmi said the committee presented its objections to the government proposal to increase traffic fines, adding the committee will not allow increasing burdens on citizens more than what they are now. Ajmi said the committee received seven proposals with regards to amending the election law, which will be discussed tomorrow. He added the committee discussed the

amendment of some residency law items during its meeting and voted on them.

### Future generations fund

Meanwhile, the same paper reported quoting the government sources that withdrawals from the future generations fund to cover the budget deficit through transfers of ownership or exchanging assets is approaching KD 5.4 billion, bearing in mind that the total deficit in the general budget reached KD 7.5 billion during the first nine months of the current fiscal year - a monthly rate of KD 600 million - as per finance ministry data. Based on what was transferred to the general reserve fund, the required liquidity needed to cover salaries and subsidies amounting to around KD 1 billion per month is secured until the end of March.

The government began the process of exchanging assets between the general reserve fund and the future generations fund from June 2020 to provide the necessary liquidity to pay government employees' salaries and finance current spending. Sources said the investment authority has built up enough balance of cash in the future generations fund's reserves as part of its precautionary policy to arrange for

liquidity if the general budget enters a deficit. This is expected to last for years if oil prices do not go up.

### Paper exams

In other news, Al-Qabas also reported that the education ministry is working hard to obtain health ministry approval for a gradual return to school during the second term, or at least allow for in-person final exams at the end of the 2020/2021 school year while observing the strict health measures due to the pandemic. Official sources said statistics of the first academic term revealed 94 percent of the total number of students received an "excellent" grade, which means their grades were 90 percent and above for morning and evening public and private schools, religious schools and adults.

The sources said education officials are very worried about the future of education following the high grades the students received with minimum effort and without exams, especially since it equates hard-working students with lazy ones. The ministry gave the return-to-school and written exams at the end of the current school year proposals to the health ministry for review, then present it to the Cabinet soon.

## Kuwait lists nearly 1,000 new COVID cases, 3 deaths

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MoH) yesterday listed 996 new coronavirus (COVID-19) cases, bringing the caseload of contaminations to 171,994. MoH official spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said that there also were three new fatalities due to infection with the contagious virus registered during the same period, thus mortalities' toll rose to 969. Dr Sanad also revealed that number of people who were receiving treatment at intensive care units reached 90 as of yesterday, while the whole count of confirmed infection cases and remained under medical care stood at 8,905.

The ministry had earlier reported that up to 582 patients had recovered during the same period, putting

the whole count of recoveries at 162,120. The ministry said in a statement that confirmation of these recovery cases was determined after conducting necessary medical examinations. Meanwhile, the percentage of the recuperated cases as compared to the tally of infections stood at 94.2 percent.

In the meantime, Dr Sanad pointed out that 8,864 swab tests were conducted in the same period, bringing the total number of such examinations to 1,608,305. The percentage of infections compared to the number of swab tests during that period stood at 11.2 percent. He re-appealed to the people of Kuwait to remain on guard against the dreaded virus, maintain social distancing and avert crowds.— KUNA

### In my view

## There is a health crisis!

By Azzah Al-Ghamdi

In this article, I aim to focus on the most recent crisis in the state, as the government decided to close malls and restaurants by 8:00 pm after the number of daily COVID-19 cases reached 900. Many people tweeted against the government decision, claiming it will negatively affect owners of small businesses. By law, the government has the right to take measures to protect the society from any crisis. From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has acted on this right.

But the government did not get support from some MPs to convince people, who can't understand what an epidemic is and what measures the state should take to control the number of cases. An increase in the number of cases will be a disaster for hospitals, because no state has the capacity for beds for patients if they reach in the tens of thousands. The government has worked alone in this crisis without support from the parliament. In other societies, the parliament supports the government, especially in health crises like COVID-19, but here in Kuwait our parliament is busy with personal issues.

And if we search the main reasons for the increase in the number of cases, it is because some segments of the society do not follow health ministry procedures. This has led to big trouble, but we still find some people blaming the government for its new decisions, because they think it will not reduce the number of cases and will have no positive effect. We know very few people observe health precautions - this was clearly seen at malls, restaurants, beaches and gardens, and also at family gatherings and diwanis. All these reasons made the government take this decision. The government and the parliament should cooperate to face this pandemic, because the health of the nation is the most important issue we should work on today.

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

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# Interior Minister inspects correctional facilities

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah stressed the necessity of continuing inmates' rehabilitation and training inside correctional facilities and the implementation of judgments on how to deal with inmates according to the requirements stipulated in international human rights charters. This came in a press release by the Relations and Security Media Department in the ministry, following a tour Sheikh Thamer conducted at a number of correctional institutions, where he was received by the Assistant Undersecretary for Correctional Institutions and Judgment Execution Sector Major General Talal Marafie, in the presence of a number of ministry officials. The statement said that the minister was given during the tour a virtual presentation on the prisons' facilities, including the "qualitative shift that it witnessed," and the health services provided, which include medical specialties, laboratories, radiology and preventive health in light of the exceptional circumstances that the country is going through in the face of the novel coronavirus. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah (center) is seen during the tour. —KUNA

## Crimes

### Duo insults police

KUWAIT: Two women - a Kuwaiti and a bedoon - insulted policemen after they were pulled over because the car they were in had violations. Police discovered the two women were under the influence, and when asked to get out of the car, they insulted the policemen and refused to get out. The women were then brought under control and the car was impounded. Police noticed drugs and rolling paper in the car, and when the women were searched, drugs were found on them. Both confessed to using drugs. They were sent to the Drugs Control General Department.

### Under the influence

A Jordanian woman was arrested and will be deported, while a Syrian man is being sought by police on drug-related charges. The woman said the man encouraged her to use drugs. Police and paramedics went to Salmiya after responding to a call about a vehicle that had flipped over. There they found the woman and noticed she was under the influence of drugs. She was given first aid. She later said she was with a Syrian man and used drugs with him, adding he walked away after the accident and left her on her own. Drugs were found in the car.

### Illegal hiring

Criminal detectives busted a gang led by an Egyptian woman and two mandoubs (representatives) - a Lebanese and an Egyptian - for running a network to appoint Egyptians at the court for KD 7 per day. The three were arrested and sent to concerned authorities after questioning. Tips were received about the woman offering jobs in violation of the law, as she works for a company that has contracts with the justice ministry. An undercover detective spoke with the suspects, saying he is looking for a job. The source said the three agreed to appoint him at a court for KD 7 per workday.

—Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Qabas and Al-Rai

## Al-Najat Charity felicitated by Indian Ambassador

KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George held a felicitation luncheon last week for board members of Al-Najat Charitable Society, for their support to Indian Community Support Group (ICSG) which helped thousands of distressed Indian nationals during the lockdown in Kuwait in 2020. ICSG, which was formed by the Indian embassy last year, was primarily meant to distribute food kits to Indian nationals impacted by the lockdown. The support group, through hundreds of volunteers and with the support of Al-Najat Charitable Society, managed to distribute almost 18,000 food kits or more than half a million meals.

Welcoming the exclusive gathering of guests, Dr Amir Ahmed, executive member of ICSG extended a deep appreciation and gratefulness to Al-Najat Charitable Society for their collaboration with ICSG. He noted that this first of its kind collaboration by a reputed and recognized Kuwaiti charity with an Indian community organization was a blessing to thousands of distressed people.

Addressing members of Al-Najat and ICSG, the Chairman of the ICSG committee, Rajpal Tyagi, praised and thanked the timely help of Al-Najat to ICSG. He pointed at the various instances and wholehearted support extended to ICSG which in turn helped thousands of members of the Indian community. He wished for this collaboration to continue and be part of the continued help to people in need. Tyagi also praised the Embassy of India for their continued patronage and unwavering support to ICSG.

In his address to the gathering, Ambassador Sibi George extended a warm welcome and appreciation to Al-Najat board members and praised the historical



ties between the two countries. He reiterated on the age-old friendship and magnanimity of the host nation. Ambassador Sibi George has been at the forefront to help Indians who have been impacted by the pandemic during the past year. He extended support and gratitude to ICSG for their role in serving the community. He also praised the positive collaboration between Al-Najat and ICSG that was instrumental in reaching out to far off locations when the country was in lockdown.

Speaking on behalf of Al-Najat, Faisal Al-Zamel, again recollected the age-old relations between India and Kuwait and applauded the vast Indian community's contribution to Kuwait. He reminisced on the people to people connections with India and the influence of India in several areas of Kuwaiti life. Zamel also

pointed at the tradition of philanthropy of Kuwaitis. He emphasized the Al-Najat's sustainable initiative as a collective and shared responsibility.

ICSG members then presented shawls to Al-Najat members as a token of appreciation and gratitude from the Indian Community. Indian Ambassador and ICSG chairman presented a memento to Al-Najat vice-chairman Rashed Hamad Al-Hamad on behalf of Indian Embassy and ICSG committee. Meanwhile, Hamad also felicitated Indian ambassador with a memento and appreciation for his kind gesture in recognizing their role in support and cooperation to the Indian community. Concluding the felicitation luncheon, Dhiraj Oberoi, executive member of ICSG presented the vote of thanks with an overwhelming expression of gratitude to the entire Al-Najat team.

## Dr Tharoor inaugurates ICSK's virtual higher education fair 2021

KUWAIT: The 3rd Virtual Higher Education Fair by the Indian Community School, Kuwait was recently inaugurated by Dr Shashi Tharoor, Member of Parliament-Lok Sabha, former Under-Secretary General of the United Nations, Indian politician, writer and former international diplomat. Dr Shashi Tharoor in his inaugural address applauded the initiatives taken by ICSK in helping students studying in various schools across Kuwait, the Middle East, India and around the world, enrich their information on the numerous courses, eligibilities and facilities offered by universities and colleges globally. He further affirmed that this higher education fair would help them, select a good college or university where they could recognize, develop and sharpen their academic and professional skills. The function was also graced by the presence of guest of honor and career guide Dr T P Sethu Madhavan (Consultant to World Bank and Member of AEC Commission Switzerland). He too has highly praised the commendable efforts put in by ICSK in helping the students secure a bright future by choosing the right career path. The students and parents will get the opportunity to interact with him in this exclusive program.



Eminent dignitaries in the field of education Professor R D Garg, IIT Roorkee and William Burns from Loughborough University offered felicitations and seconded Dr. Shashi Tharoor's opinion that students need an informative platform in order to be enriched with information about the right career, courses, universities and colleges and congratulated the efforts taken by the management of ICSK in fulfilling this. The elite gathering was bid a hearty welcome by the Principal of ICSK Khaitan, Gangadhar Shirsath and Susan Rajesh, Vice Principal -ICSK Senior and Saritha P Nair, Academic Supervisor, Secondary-ICSK Senior, introduced the distinguished guests. Sheikh Abdul Rahman, the Honorary Chairman of ICSK Board of Trustees honored the guests with digital tokens of appreciation. Shery Dennis, Principal of ICSK Junior rendered the vote of thanks.

## DWC honors Sheikha Halah

KUWAIT: Celebrating the National holidays of the State of Kuwait, The Diplomatic Women's Committee (DWC) participated in honoring Sheikha Halah Badr Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for her sincere efforts and outstanding support for the activities and programs of the committee. The honoring took place during a ceremony entitled 'Kuwait of Humanity and Peace.' Among the attendees were the chairperson of the DWC, the Ambassador of the Republic of Sierra Leone Ishata Thomas, as well as the Ambassador of the Republic of Tanzania Aisha Amour, and the Ambassador of the Republic of Kenya Halima Mohamad, in addition to the advisor of the committee Nargis Al-Shatti, and Media and Public Relations Officer Fauzia Abdul Basit.

The Chairperson of the Committee highlighted the role DWC played during the previous years, introducing cultures, history, heritage and tourism of the various participating countries, and bringing social and diplomatic cohesion between these countries. Meanwhile, the Ambassador of the Republic of Tanzania also expressed her gratitude for the role in



which DWC carried out its online activities under the theme of 'Cultural Exchange' for the month of January by presenting a documentary on Tanzania's culture, heritage and tourism. The program has achieved a great success among the diplomatic circle accredited to the State of Kuwait. The participants wished DWC a successful and prosperous future and best wishes for the State of Kuwait under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

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18 dead and 200 still missing after Indian glacier disaster

## S African women turn to guns to fight rape, murder scourge



JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu walks as he talks to his lawyer ahead of a hearing in his corruption trial at the Jerusalem district court yesterday. —AFP

# Netanyahu denies corruption charges

## Israeli PM appears in court as his graft trial resumes before election

**JERUSALEM:** Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied corruption charges against him in a brief court appearance yesterday as his graft trial resumed weeks before a fourth national election in two years.

Netanyahu, the first Israeli premier to be indicted in office, was formally charged last year over allegations that he accepted improper gifts and sought to trade regulatory favor with media moguls in exchange for positive coverage.

He had been compelled to appear to deliver an in-person response to the charges, after last month formally submitting his innocent plea in writing. "I confirm the written answer submitted in my name," Israel's longest-serving premier said, after Jerusalem court judge Rivka Feldman Friedman read out the charges against him.

Netanyahu was referring to a January 18 court filing from his defense team which said "the prime minister denies all charges" in each of the three separate cases against him. The combative 71-year-old premier, who has previously blasted the charges as "fabricated and ludicrous", spent just 20 minutes inside the courtroom yesterday, entering and exiting amid a heavy security deployment and dozens of protesters. The hearing continued in his absence for several hours, with Netanyahu's lawyers Boaz Ben Zur and Amit Hadad accusing Israel's Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit—a Netanyahu appointee—of mishandling the case.

They argued that elements of the investigation into the premier were opened without required authorizations.

### 'Election meddling'?

Netanyahu has repeatedly charged that he is the victim of a witch-hunt, with the allegations against him trumped-up. The trial schedule has not yet been set but it may force the prime minister to appear in court multiple times a week, as he campaigns ahead of Israel's March 23 elections.

His lawyers asked for a delay of several months saying they needed more time to prepare due to the complexity of the case, but judges did not rule on that request before the hearing ended. When Netanyahu last appeared in court nine months ago, he had just won a political victory by forming a coalition government with election rival Benny Gantz, following three inconclusive national polls.

But that fraught coalition proved short-lived and collapsed in December, with Gantz branding Netanyahu as serially dishonest. It is unclear whether the cloud of the trial will hurt the premier's re-election chances in March. Israel's parliament speaker Yariv Levin, loyalist of Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party, insisted the court must "postpone" the trial's upcoming phase.

Proceeding now "will be lending a hand to blatant meddling in the elections", he told the right-wing Israel Hayom newspaper on Sunday.

Several recent polls show that Netanyahu's right-wing Likud remains the strongest party by a comfortable margin, but it is far from certain that it will be able to form a 61-seat majority with its conservative and religious allies.

### 4,000, 2,000, 1,000

The charges against Netanyahu are divided into three separate cases. The most serious-known as Case 4,000, in which the premier is accused of bribery, fraud and breach of trust—centers on the allegation that he negotiated with Shaul Elovitch of telecommunications giant Bezeq to secure positive coverage on his Walla! news site in exchange for policies benefiting Bezeq.

Elovitch and his wife were also indicted. Case 2,000 concerns allegations Netanyahu sought a deal with the owner of the Yediot Aharonot newspaper that would have seen it give him more favorable coverage. Case 1,000 involves allegations Netanyahu and his family received gifts, including luxury cigars, champagne and jewellery estimated to be worth more than 700,000 shekels (\$213,000), from wealthy individuals, in exchange for financial or personal favors.

He would be forced to resign if convicted with all appeals exhausted, but that process would likely take several years. Weekly protests against him have rumbled on for months, with some demonstrators focusing on the graft allegations.

Some of the protesters who met Netanyahu's motorcade outside the court carried placards branded with the words "Crime Minister", while other demonstrators taunted him as he entered and exited the court. "We are here to swipe (away) all the dirt and all the corruption that he has created," protester Claudia Manoquian said. —AFP

## IS ambush kills 26 pro-regime fighters in Syria

**BEIRUT:** The Islamic State group yesterday ambushed a regime convoy in eastern Syria, killing at least 26 fighters, including seven Syrian troops, a war monitor said. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the early morning ambush in the province of Deir Ezzor came as the convoy combed the area for jihadists, after a string of recent attacks.

"Violent clashes between the two sides led to large human losses," it said, calling the toll from fighting the "largest since the start of the year". Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said at least seven of the 26 killed were Syrian troops, while the remaining casualties were

mostly Syrian militia fighters.

At least 11 IS jihadists were also killed, the Observatory added. The jihadist group overran large parts of Syria and Iraq and proclaimed a cross-border "caliphate" in 2014, before multiple offensives in the two countries led to its territorial defeat. The group lost its last scrap of territory in Syria in March 2019, but in recent months it has ramped up attacks against regime forces, especially in the east of the country bordering Iraq. Last week, IS jihadists killed 19 Syrian regime fighters and allied militia forces in central Syria. And in December, nearly 40 Syrian troops were killed when IS ambushed a bus carrying soldiers travelling home for the holidays.

The desert area in Deir Ezzor province provides a "safe haven" for jihadists planning attacks on regime forces and other rivals, the United Nations said in a report published this month. IS retains some 10,000 active fighters in Iraq and Syria, although the majority are reported to be in Iraq, the UN has said. The war in Syria has killed more than 387,000 people since it started in 2011, the Observatory says. —AFP

## Russia defends expulsion of European diplomats

**MOSCOW:** The Kremlin defended yesterday Russia's shock expulsion of EU diplomats during the high-profile visit of the European Union's top diplomat but insisted it remained interested in reviving relations with Brussels.

Russia on Friday announced the expulsion of diplomats from Germany, Poland and Sweden during the rare meeting in Moscow between EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. The declaration of the three foreign diplomats as personae non gratae was a "consequence of the actions of some diplomatic missions in Moscow against the backdrop of illegal riots," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists yesterday.

He added that Russia "has clearly demonstrated it does not intend to tolerate this".

In January, tens of thousands of Russians rallied for two consecutive weekends against President Vladimir Putin's 20-year rule and demanded the release of opposition politician Alexei Navalny, his

most prominent critic who was sentenced to nearly three years in prison last week.

Borrell said he learned of the decision to expel the diplomats during his meeting with Lavrov and "strongly condemned" the decision. Initially Borrell said there were no immediate plans for new European sanctions against Russia. After his return, however, the former Spanish foreign minister said that Russia was rejecting constructive dialogue with the EU and that Europe must "draw the consequences", including possible new sanctions.

"Russia has been and remains interested in reviving relations between Moscow and Brussels," Peskov said on Monday, adding that Moscow did not initiate "the collapse" of the relationship.

Earlier Monday a spokesperson for the foreign ministry told Russian news agencies that Russia was "surprised" to learn of Borrell's comments as they "strongly contrast" with his statements during a press conference in Moscow. Western leaders have slammed the expulsions, further straining ties that have worsened after Navalny was sentenced to two years and eight months in a penal colony for violating parole conditions while recovering from a poisoning attack in Germany.

Borrell is expected to meet with foreign ministers from the 27 EU states on February 22 to discuss fresh sanctions against Moscow that would require an unanimous vote among the EU members. —AFP



A Russian helicopter flies over a joint Russian and Turkish convoy (not pictured) as it patrols in oil fields near the town of Al-Qahtaniyah, in Syria's northeastern Hasakeh province close to the Turkish border. —AFP

## DR Congo announces 'resurgence' of Ebola

**BENI, DR Congo:** DR Congo on Sunday announced a "resurgence" of Ebola in its troubled east after a woman died of the disease, just three months after authorities declared the end of the country's latest outbreak. The World Health Organization (WHO) said it had dispatched a team of epidemiologists to the scene of the latest death to investigate.

"We have another episode of the Ebola virus" in the Biena health zone of North Kivu province, Health Minister Eteni Longondo told state television RTNC. "It was a farmer, the wife of a survivor of Ebola, who showed typical signs of the disease on February 1," he added. She died on February 3, after which a sample of her blood tested positive for Ebola, the health ministry said.

The WHO's Africa office said the woman had died in an area that had previously been one of the epicenters of the latest outbreak, near the town of Butembo. "It is not rare that sporadic cases continue after a major epidemic," the WHO said in a statement. It added that WHO epidemiologists were in Butembo investigating, and that more than 70 people who had been in contact with the woman had already been identified. —AFP

## Pandemic takes mental health toll on US youngsters

**NEW YORK:** Anxiety, depression, self-harm and even suicide: a growing number of children in the United States are struggling with their mental health during the coronavirus pandemic, doctors, teachers, parents and the government are all warning.

Millions of students have been attending school virtually since March last year, spending hours in front of computers, without playing games or chatting with friends in person and missing out on sports and face-to-face art or music classes. "There's a lot of loneliness for me and other teens," said Sarah Frank, an 18-year-old from Florida, who has not left home since March because she lives with relatives considered high-risk if they contract COVID-19.

"I have days I feel really sad, and a bit hopeless. It feels like a never-ending nightmare," she told AFP. Frank co-founded the State of Mind Project in July, a website with mental and physical health tips for teenagers. "I missed a lot of a high school experiences that I'll never get back. I never went to a football game, I never got to go to prom," she said.

Deanna Caputo is a psychologist and mother of two children who says she sees signs of depression in her 10-year-old son since his class in Arlington, Virginia became virtual in March. "He'd wake up in the morning and go back to sleep until noon. He was moody. He started saying things like 'I am not smart, I'm not good at anything,'" said Caputo.

She says knows of other children even worse off. "All I hear is about medication starting. They (parents) can't find therapists," because of high demand, said Caputo.

Caputo, who is a member of the Arlington Parents for Education association that is actively lobbying for schools to reopen in Arlington County, says schools are being held hostage by teachers' unions. A recent CDC report said that schools are safe if proper precautions are taken, such as wearing a mask and social distancing. But many teachers' unions resist going back to classrooms. In Chicago, the mayor ordered elementary schools to reopen but unions refused, demanding vaccinations for all teachers and threatening a strike. Teenage suicides have been on the rise in the United States.

There is no data for 2020 yet but numbers from Clark County in Nevada, which includes Las Vegas, are causing alarm. Nineteen students have taken their own lives there since March, more than double the number for the same period the previous year. —AFP



Daniel Mooney, a third-grader who attends classes virtually from his basement because his public school is closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, plays with his mother Courtney Mooney at their home in Falls Church, Virginia. —AFP

## International

# South African women turn to guns to fight rape, murder scourge

## A woman is murdered every three hours in South Africa

**MIDRAND, South Africa:** For the dozens of women training at a shooting range near Johannesburg, learning how to use a gun has become a means of protection in a country where a woman is murdered every three hours. For the first time in her life, Ntando Mthembu holds a revolver in her hands. Without hesitating she fires 10 bullets towards a cardboard target.

Last November Mthembu's cousin, left alone in a house for several hours, was gang-raped and murdered. "Before it happens to me, I want to be prepared," said 33-year-old Mthembu.

South Africa is among the most violent countries on Earth, and its homicide rates are constantly increasing. In 2019-2020, the country suffered 21,325 murders, according to the latest annual police report-up 1.4 percent on the previous year.

And the rate of femicide is five times higher than the global average. "Women are targets in this country," says Matsie Noge, another participant in the training organized by the Gun Owners of South Africa (GOSA) association. She brought along her 24-year-old daughter to the session, reserved exclusively for women. "I should have done it way before, when she was 15," Noge added.

### Every minute counts

"These trainings have a focus on young black women, statistically most impacted by crimes," says Themba Kubheka, who organized the female-only training for GOSA. "Every lady here knows a lady that has been raped, robbed, mugged. Each of them has a story about crime in this country."

For Kubheka, the point of the training is to equip the women with immediate self-defense skills in a dangerous situation. "Instead of waiting for help, they need to be able to first respond," he says, noting that South African police take an average of 15 minutes to arrive when alerted to a case of assault.

## Somali opposition leaders 'no longer recognize president'

**MOGADISHU:** Somalia's president faced a leadership crisis yesterday as his term ended with no clear path toward elections, and an alliance of opposition parties declared they no longer recognized his authority.

The Horn of Africa nation was supposed to choose the next president on February 8 but the deadline was missed as the central government and federal states failed to break a deadlock over how to proceed with a vote. The country now confronts a constitutional crisis alongside a violent Islamist insurgency, a locust invasion and serious food shortages.



**MOGADISHU:** The opposition alliance urged President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed to "respect the constitution" by standing aside and allowing for a peaceful transfer of power.

The opposition alliance urged President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, better known by his nickname Farmajo, to "respect the constitution" by standing aside and allowing for a peaceful transfer of power.

"Starting from 8th February 2021, the council of opposition candidates does not recognize Farmajo as president," they said late Sunday. "The council will not accept any form of mandate extension through pressure," said the alliance, which includes two former presidents and other political heavyweights running for the next presidency. They called for the creation of a transitional national council composed of the speakers of parliament, opposition figures, regional leaders, and civil society groups, to steer the country until elections can be held. There has not been any official response from

## Haitian opposition names judge as transitional president

**PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti:** Haitian opposition parties named a top judge as interim leader yesterday, the latest attempt to oust President Jovenel Moise, whose term they say has expired. In a video statement sent to AFP, Judge Joseph Mecene Jean-Louis, 72, said he "accepted the choice of the opposition and civil society, to serve (his) country as interim president for the transition."

Moise has been governing without any checks on his power for the past year and says he remains president until February 7, 2022 — an interpretation of the constitution rejected by the opposition, which has led to protests asserting his term has ended. The political crisis intensified on Sunday, when authorities said they had foiled an attempt to murder Moise and overthrow the government.

The plot was an "attempted coup d'etat," according to Justice Minister Rockefeller Vincent, with authorities saying at least 23 people have been arrested, including a top judge and an official from the national police. "I thank my head of security at the palace. The



**MIDRAND:** Participants, fire range officers and instructors pose for a group photograph during a training organized by the women empowerment group Girls on Fire, in Midrand, on Sunday. — AFP

Some 4.5 million guns are used legally in South Africa, with almost the same number again circulating on the black market, according to Gun Free SA, a group which campaigns for arms control. After shooting three bullets, 32-year-old Nthabiseng Phele rests her revolver on the stand. Her hands are trembling and she is sweating; she is visibly shaken. "Holding the gun reminded me of the position I was in, the time I wished I had one," she says quietly. Nine years ago, she was raped in her bedroom by a neighbor who climbed through the window into the house she shared with her parents in the Johannesburg suburbs.

She did not file a criminal complaint against her attacker or receive any support. Her parents admonished her for her own rape, accusing her of bringing shame on the family. When Phele confided in a friend, he in turn raped her.

the president's office. Some major roads in Mogadishu, including the road to parliament, were closed Monday after a tense evening in the capital. "We could not sleep last night, because so many gunshots were being fired by opposition supporters celebrating the end of the president's mandate," said one resident, Abdullahi Ali.

### Blame game

Farmajo and the leaders of Somalia's five semi-autonomous federal states reached an agreement in September that paved the way for indirect parliamentary and presidential elections in late 2020 and early 2021. But it fell apart as squabbles erupted over how to conduct the vote, and last-minute talks to salvage the agreement collapsed Friday.

Jubaland, one of the regions at odds with Mogadishu, accused Farmajo of refusing their attempts at compromise. The president blamed his rivals for renegeing on the terms. Somalia's foreign backers urged Somalia's divided political leadership "to resume their dialogue urgently" so that elections can take place as soon as possible.

"We believe that it remains possible to reach consensus, and that all sides are open to further discussions," the United Nations, African Union and other international partners said in a statement yesterday. Any attempt at partial or parallel elections would not be supported by the international community, the statement continued.

### Security fears

Somalia's weak central government only controls part of the national territory, and requires considerable security and financial assistance to stay afloat. Somalia plunged into chaos after the 1991 overthrow of president Siad Barre's military regime, leading to years of clan warfare followed by the rise of Al-Shabaab, the jihadist group fighting to unseat the foreign-backed government in Mogadishu. The Islamists were driven out of the capital in 2011 but still control swathes of territory from where they launch frequent and deadly attacks against government and civilian targets.

On Sunday, at least eight soldiers were killed in a roadside bombing in central Somalia claimed by the Al-Qaeda-linked insurgents. The United States said yesterday: "The political gridlock of the past year has resulted in a disappointing lack of progress in fighting Al-Shabaab and improving security."

This election was to follow a complex indirect system after hopes of hosting Somalia's first one-person, one-vote ballot since 1969 was abandoned over security and political problems. Under this system, which mirrors past elections, special delegates chosen by Somalia's myriad clan elders pick lawmakers, who in turn choose the president. — AFP



**The Capitol of Haiti, Port-au-Prince is seen almost empty on Sunday as people demand the resignation of president Jovenel Moise, who seeks to extend his term of office until February 2022, which according to the constitution ended yesterday. — AFP**

goal of these people was to make an attempt on my life," Moise said.

"That plan was aborted," he added, speaking on the tarmac at Port-au-Prince airport, accompanied by his wife and Prime Minister Joseph Jouthe. Jouthe said plotters had contacted police officials at the presidential palace who were planning to arrest Moise and then help install a "transition" president.

Leon Charles, the director of Haiti's national police

### National priority

South African police receive 110 rape accusations every day. As with the murder rate, those numbers have been rising: 2019 saw a 1.7 percent increase in sexual assault cases, or 53,293 recorded attacks in total. Comparing the levels of sexual violence seen in South Africa to those suffered in a country at war, President Cyril Ramphosa announced in late 2019 that tackling the scourge of abuse would be a national priority. "There is a dark and heavy shadow across our land. Women and children are under siege," he said at the time, describing South Africa as one of "the most unsafe places in world to be a woman". Today, Phele is living with a boyfriend, and he knows about her past. Together, they have decided to install a safe at home-so that she can keep a gun. — AFP



**BARCELONA:** Laura Borrás, "Junts per Catalunya" party (Together For Catalonia) candidate for the up-coming Catalonia regional elections, gives a speech in front of an image of European Member of Parliament and former Catalan president Carles Puigdemont during a campaign meeting in Vic on Sunday. — AFP

## Catalan separatism loses its spark as election looms

**BARCELONA:** As has happened every night for over a year, dozens of protesters demanding independence from Spain sit down in the middle of a wide Barcelona avenue, bringing traffic to a standstill. Though just a handful, they are supporters of Catalonia's powerful separatist movement which is gearing up for an important regional election on Sunday that could ease a years-long crisis over the thorny question of independence. The movement, whose two main parties dominate the regional government, has faced a growing crisis since 2017 following a failed bid to break away from Spain.

"Before the pandemic there were more of us but people are tired. There is political disenchantment," says 70-year-old Amadeu Pallister, who swears he has been at every one of the more than 300 nightly protests held so far on Meridiana Avenue. "Some politicians are talking about dialogue, about negotiating with Madrid, but we already know you can't expect anything from Spain, only repression," he told AFP. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Algeria prods France over nuke sites

**ALGIERS:** France must "shoulder its historic responsibilities" for 1960s nuclear test sites in Algeria, a senior Algerian military official said in the influential army monthly El Djeich, published Sunday. France carried out 17 nuclear explosions in the Algerian part of the Sahara Desert between 1960 and 1966. Eleven of the tests came after the 1962 Evian Accords ended the six-year war of independence and 132 years of French colonial rule. — AFP

#### Greek PM faces flak over island lunch

**ATHENS:** The Greek government on Sunday played down criticism after Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis was pictured enjoying lunch with around 30 people on a remote island despite a ban on gatherings. On Friday, Greece announced stricter anti-Covid measures including a 6pm curfew in big cities while gatherings in private residences remained forbidden. Mitsotakis, however, met around 30 people on Saturday at the home of Christodoulos Stefanadis, a ruling party MP, on the island of Ikaria, according to a photo that soon went viral on social media. — AFP

#### Israel begins exit from lockdown

**JERUSALEM:** Israeli barbershops and some other businesses reopened Sunday as the country began easing its third coronavirus lockdown amid an aggressive vaccination campaign. The government had announced Friday it was lifting some restrictions imposed since December, when the country saw a rise in COVID-19 infections. Jerusalem barber Eli Aroas was among those re-opening on Sunday morning, the start of the working week. "I slowly notified all my customers that we are back at work," he said. "We have a working schedule and orders, and we hope this will be the end of this saga." — AFP

#### France exceeds CO2 reduction target

**PARIS:** France outperformed its target for reducing carbon emissions in 2019, President Emmanuel Macron said Sunday, four days after a court rapped the state for not respecting its own climate targets. "France reduced its greenhouse gas emissions in 2019 by -1.7%. It is beyond our objective!" Macron wrote on Twitter. Earlier, Environment Minister Barbara Pompili was quoted in an interview with Le Journal du Dimanche newspaper on the figures, saying the reduction allowed France to exceed the target of 1.5 percent. In June 2020, the national emissions inventory agency CITEPA estimated that France produced 437 million tons of CO2 equivalent in 2019, which represented a drop of only one percent from the previous year. — AFP

## Another trial for the ages: Senate to judge Trump over riot

**WASHINGTON:** One year after his first impeachment, former president Donald Trump finds himself the subject of an unprecedented second trial beginning today in the Senate, whose members must determine whether he incited a deadly assault on the US Capitol.

The 100 senators will also step into uncharted territory when they sit in judgment of a president who is no longer in office, a deeply damaged political figure who remains a potent force in his party even without the power of the White House. At the heart of the coming week's high-stakes proceedings is the January 6 melee, when several hundred pro-Trump rioters stormed Congress, fought police and sought to stop the ceremonial certification of Joe Biden's election victory. The uprising, which some Democratic lawmakers say was an attempted coup by domestic terrorists, has been described as the most dangerous attack on American democracy since the 1860s Civil War.

It left members of Congress—who were ruthlessly targeted by the insurrectionists—so shaken, and the nation so enraged, that Democrats began the process of impeaching Trump just two weeks from the end of his term. On January 13, the House of Representatives indicted him for "incitement of insurrection," forever branding Trump a twice-impeached president. No other commander-in-chief has been so disgraced.

Yet no US president has ever been convicted in a court of impeachment—and the odds are that such a record will stand. A principal goal of Democrats driving the trial would be to ban Trump from holding federal office in the future, should they win an unlikely conviction. The mob riot itself is beyond dispute. US networks covered the mayhem live, and thousands of self-incriminating photographs and video clips—including of some rioters insisting Trump "wants us here" storming the Capitol—made their way into the world's news media. Critics aver that Trump's role was such that he violated his oath of office by inciting his supporters to launch the attack. The Republican billionaire and his allies, however, argue that the trial itself is unconstitutional, saying the Senate can convict and remove from office a current president but not a private citizen. "If it happened in the Soviet Union, you would have called it a show trial," Republican Senator Bill Cassidy said on NBC's "Meet the Press." — AFP

## International

# 18 dead and 200 still missing after Indian glacier disaster

## Wall of water and debris destroy bridges, roads and hit two power plants

**RISHIKESH, India:** Eighteen people were confirmed dead yesterday and at least 200 others were missing after a devastating flash flood in India thought to have been caused by a chunk of glacier breaking off. The resulting wall of water and debris barreled down a tight valley in India's Himalayan north on Sunday morning, destroying bridges, roads and hitting two hydroelectric power plants.

"There was a cloud of dust as the water went by. The ground shook like an earthquake," local inhabitant Om Agarwal told Indian TV. The Uttarakhand state government said on Monday 18 bodies have been recovered, and chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat said at least 200 people were still unaccounted for.

Most of those missing were working at the two power plants. Some were trapped in two tunnels cut off by the floods and by mud and rocks. "If this incident happened in the evening, after work hours, the situation wouldn't have been this bad as laborers and workers in and around the work sites would have been at home," Rawat told reporters.

Twelve people were rescued from one of the tunnels on Sunday but 25-35 more were still trapped in the second one, state disaster relief official Piyosh Rautela told AFP.

With the main road washed away, paramilitary rescuers had to scale down a hillside on ropes to reach the entrance. Emergency workers were using heavy machinery to remove tons of rocks. "Approximately 80 meters (260 feet) inside the

tunnel is cleared and accessible. It appears that approximately 100 meters of debris inside the tunnel is yet to be cleared," said Vivek Kumar Pandey, another disaster official. Several hundred rescue workers resumed their search operation at first light on Monday including national and state disaster response teams, the army and navy diving teams.

### Disaster movie

Scores of social media users captured the disaster, with footage showing water tearing through the narrow valley with terrifying force. "We were 300 meters inside the tunnel working. Suddenly there was whistling and shouting telling us to get out," said survivor Rajesh Kumar, 28.

"We started running out but the water gushed in. It was like scenes from a Hollywood movie. We thought we wouldn't make it," he said. Authorities said initially that the cause was a chunk of glacier breaking off into a river, but the trigger may instead have been a phenomenon called a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF). This is when the boundaries of a glacial lake formed when a glacier retreats are breached, releasing large amounts of water downstream.

It is possible that this in turn was caused by an avalanche. The incident may also have been triggered by water pockets inside a glacier bursting.

Glaciers in the region have been shrinking rapidly in recent years because of global warming, but



This handout photo taken yesterday and released by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) shows members of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) during a rescue operation after a broken glacier caused a major river surge that swept away bridges and roads, at a tunnel near Tapovan dam in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand. —AFP

experts say that the construction of hydroelectric plants could also be a factor.

Floods in 2013 killed 6,000 people and led to calls for a review of projects in Uttarakhand, a state of 10 million people bordering Tibet and Nepal.

Vimlendu Jha, founder of Swachha, an environmental NGO, said the disaster was a "grim reminder" of the effects of climate change and the "haphazard development of roads, railways and power plants in ecologically sensitive areas". —AFP

## Glacier disaster survivor recounts escape from tunnel

**TAPOVAN, India:** A whistle turned into a roar of water that trapped a dozen men in a Himalayan tunnel after a glacier burst in northern India, but Rajesh Kumar lived to tell the tale. Eighteen people were confirmed dead yesterday and at least 200 others missing after the glacier broke off a mountainside, triggering a flash flood through a valley in the northern state of Uttarakhand.

Floodwaters swamped a nearby hydro complex where Kumar and his colleagues were working 300 meters (984 feet) inside a tunnel. "We didn't think we were going to make it," the 28-year-old told AFP from his hospital bed. "Suddenly there was a

sound of whistling... there was shouting, people were telling us to come out. We thought it was a fire. We started running but the water gushed in. It was like a Hollywood movie."

The men clung to scaffolding rods in the tunnel for four hours, keeping their heads above water and debris, trying to reassure each other. "We just kept telling each other—come what may, we must not let go of the rods. Thank god our hands did not lose their grip," said Kumar.

As the flood coursed down the valley, the water started to recede in the tunnel, leaving it filled with more than five feet (1.5 meters) of debris and mud. "We climbed across the rock debris and forced our way to the mouth of the tunnel," said Kumar. There they found a small opening but they were not sure where it led.

"All we knew was that we could feel some air." Eventually, they saw some light coming through and one of the men got a phone signal and called for rescue. There were emotional scenes as Kumar

and his colleagues were pulled out of a tiny hole at the surface. Some punched the air in joy as they saw daylight, some were put straight onto stretchers and carried away. One man put his arms in the air and then fell face-first into the mud.

They were trapped inside a flooded tunnel for four hours but miraculously managed to escape with just minor injuries. The glacier broke away as the power complex was in full operation, and scores of workers at two power plants are still missing. Some 35 workers were feared trapped in another tunnel. The chief minister of Uttarakhand, Trivendra Singh Rawat, said efforts to clear the tunnel had continued through the night.

About 80 meters of mud and rock had been taken out, but there was still another 100 meters to go to reach the workers. "It is possible that about 35 people are stuck inside," Rawat said.

Hundreds of paramilitary and emergency service workers were scouring the valley yesterday for signs of more survivors. —AFP

## New killings revive old fears in Darfur village

**HAMADA VILLAGE, Sudan:** Farmer Abbas Abdullah was among hundreds who had trickled back to his remote village in South Darfur nearly a decade after fleeing war there. Now, he thinks he rushed the decision. Abdullah, from the Bergid ethnic minority, was attacked last week by Arab nomads on horses and camels at his farm in the village of Hamada, hundreds of kilometres west of the Sudanese capital Khartoum.

"They whipped me and forced me to stand under the scorching sun from the morning until sunset," said the 80-year-old, outside his hut in the village. "They then allowed their livestock to graze on my crops. It was all destroyed." The assault, he said, was grimly reminiscent of the 2003 Darfur conflict in which now-ousted president Omar Al-Bashir unleashed Arab militias against marginalized ethnic African minorities following an uprising against his rule.

In 2005, Hamada was raided by the notorious government-backed Janjaweed, who slaughtered cattle, burned farms and forced the village's 3,000 residents to seek refuge in grim displacement camps. Abdullah only returned to the village in 2016 after the conflict had largely subsided and a joint United Nations-



A picture taken in the South Darfur village of Hamada, north of the region's capital town Nyala shows children at a school as residents return to the village. —AFP

African Union peacekeeping mission UNAMID had launched regular patrols in the vast, arid region.

He has since resumed growing oranges, mangoes and vegetables, despite periodic clashes with Arab tribes over livestock and access to water. Things took a turn for the worse with last month's tribal clashes in West and South Darfur, which left some 250 people dead.

The clashes coincided with the end of UNAMID's

mandate in Darfur on December 31.

Like Abdullah, many of the 700 villagers who returned to Hamada in recent years have complained of an uptick in attacks. Farmer Mohamed Adam says armed Arab nomads have increasingly destroyed crops in his farm. Another resident Khadija Bekhit, who regularly leaves the village to collect firewood for cooking, said she gets stopped by Arab militias more than before. —AFP

## Martial law declared in parts of Myanmar

**YANGON:** Martial law was declared in parts of Myanmar's second largest city Mandalay yesterday, after hundreds of thousands rallied across the country against the coup and the military issued a stern warning against further protests. The orders cover seven townships in Mandalay, banning people from protesting or gathering in groups of more than five, and a curfew will run from 8 pm until 4 am, the general administration department said in a statement.

A similar declaration has been made in a township in Ayeyarwaddy further south and announcements concerning other localities are expected to trickle out tonight.

"This order is applied until further notice," one Mandalay township statement said. "Some people... are behaving in a worrying way that can harm the safety of public and law enforcement. Such behaviors can affect stability, safety of people, law enforcement, and peaceful existence of villages and could create riots, that's why this

order bans gathering, speaking in public, protest by using vehicles, rallies," the statement said.

The military last week detained Suu Kyi and dozens of other members of her National League for Democracy party, ending a decade of civilian rule and triggering widespread international condemnation. In the face of an increasingly bold wave of defiance rippling across the country, state broadcaster MRTV warned that opposition to the military takeover was unlawful and signalled a potential crackdown.

"Action must be taken according to the law with effective steps against offences which disturb, prevent and destroy the state's stability, public safety and the rule of law," said a statement read by an announcer on the channel.

Tens of thousands of people rallied over the weekend in the first major outpourings of opposition, and the movement built on Monday with bigger protests in key locations across the



YANGON: Protesters gather to demonstrate against the February 1 military coup, in downtown in Yangon yesterday. —AFP

country, as well as the start of a nationwide strike. In Yangon, the nation's commercial capital, massive throngs spilt onto the city's main roads, immobilizing traffic across the city and dwarfing the previous day's crowds. "Down with military dictatorship" and "release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and arrested people", the protesters

chanted, flashing the three-finger salute that has come to symbolise their movement as car horns were honked in support.

Calls for a nationwide strike had gathered momentum over the weekend, with textile workers, civil servants and railway employees walking off the job in the commercial hub. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Two Christians flogged in Indonesia

**BANDA ACEH:** Two Christian men were publicly flogged yesterday in Indonesia's ultra-conservative Aceh province for drinking alcohol and gambling, in a rare instance of non-Muslims facing a punishment frequently condemned by rights groups. The caning comes less than two weeks after a male couple were flogged nearly 80 times each for having gay sex, which is outlawed under local Islamic law. Yesterday, the two accused received 40 lashes each from a masked sharia officer who beat their backs with a stick. One of them, identified only as JF, said he chose flogging to avoid a criminal prosecution that could have seen him jailed up to six months. —AFP

#### Canada reports Brazilian virus strain

**MONTREAL:** Health authorities in Toronto announced Sunday that a resident had been diagnosed with the Brazilian variant of COVID-19, marking Canada's first known case of the mutated virus. The patient has been hospitalized. Toronto Public Health (TPH) said in a statement. He had recently traveled from Brazil. TPH also said it had found the first case of the South African coronavirus variant in Canada's largest city, though the strain had previously been detected elsewhere in the country. —AFP

#### Bolivia probes deaths of 35 condors

**LA PAZ, Bolivia:** Bolivian environmental authorities on Sunday announced an investigation into the apparent poisoning of 35 Andean condors in a rural community, one of the most devastating such cases for the endangered species. "It is an irreparable injury to our nature and the species," the environment and water ministry said. Deputy environment minister Magin Herrera confirmed 35 dead condors had been discovered in the rural community of Laderas Norte, in the southern department of Tarija. —AFP

#### Algeria to probe student torture

**ALGIERS:** The public prosecutor at a court in Algiers ordered an inquiry Sunday after a student alleged security forces had tortured him in custody, a statement said. Walid Nekliche was arrested on November 26, 2019, in Algiers during a march of students from the Hirak anti-government protest movement, which first launched vast street demonstrations early that year to oppose then-president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's bid for a fifth term in office. On February 1, during his trial, the 25-year-old, who spent more than a year in administrative detention, said members of the security forces "sexually, physically and verbally assaulted" him while in custody. —AFP

#### EU call to donate vaccines to Ukraine

**KIEVE:** The European Commission chief said yesterday she had called on EU member states to donate some of their coronavirus jabs to Ukraine, which is trying to launch a vaccination campaign. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has faced criticism at home for failing to source Western-made jabs and has called on the EU to help Ukraine source vaccines. Zelensky said yesterday that Ukraine, one of the poorest countries in Europe, would begin the first phase of the vaccination campaign later this month. —AFP

# Business

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2021

## Bitcoin hits record near \$45,000 after Tesla's \$1.5bn investment

### Cryptocurrency up by around 50% since the start of 2021

LONDON: Bitcoin hit a record-high near \$45,000 yesterday after Elon Musk's electric carmaker Tesla invested \$1.5 billion in the digital currency.

Bitcoin hit \$44,795.20 around 1325 GMT, before cooling slightly to \$44,207.95. The cryptocurrency is up by around 50 percent since the start of the year. "This is probably one of the biggest developments for the cryptocurrency industry," noted Fawad Razaqada, analyst at ThinkMarkets.

"Tesla is going to be a major player in the auto industry and if it starts accepting bitcoin as a form of payment, it will give the digital currency further legitimacy."

Tesla's announcement, in a US Securities and Exchange Commission document, is a sign of confidence in the cryptocurrency that regulators are concerned could be used for illegal transactions. "As more and more companies start accepting bitcoin, this will only lead to further increases in demand in a market which is limited in supply," Razaqada added. "Therefore, the long-term outlook on bitcoin remains bullish even if it is starting to look quite expensive in fiat currency terms."

Tesla's move comes after CEO Musk last week changed his Twitter bio to read simply "#bitcoin".

Just 12 years old, bitcoin has seen a meteoric rise since March, when it stood at \$5,000, spurred by online payments giant PayPal saying it would enable account holders to use cryptocurrency.

A number of central banks have responded to the rise of cryptocurrencies and the dwindling global use of cash by announcing plans for bank-backed digital units. Unregulated by any central bank, bitcoin emerged as an attractive option for investors with an appetite for the exotic-although criminals have also picked up on its under-the-radar appeal.

Debate has raged over the status of the digital asset, launched in late 2008, as to whether it should be seen as a form of money, an asset or a commodity. After the unit-worth a handful of cents in late 2008 — surpassed \$1,000 for the first time in 2013, it increasingly began to attract the attention of financial institutions and has experienced wild price swings.

Tesla's move is "the kind of backing that can take bitcoin through \$50,000", remarked Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at Markets.com. It nonetheless raises "questions for fund managers who may not want to invest in a company with this kind of risk on its balance sheet—we know bitcoin is very volatile", he added. —AFP



This file shows bitcoin medals. Tesla has invested \$1.5 billion in bitcoin, a decision that came just days after the electric carmaker's CEO Elon Musk changed his Twitter bio to simply read "#bitcoin". — AFP

## CBK marks National Days, national currency anniversary with coin issue

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) is marking the 60th anniversary of the Independence and the 30th anniversary of the Liberation of the State of Kuwait, as well as the 60th anniversary of the issue and circulation of the Kuwait national currency, the Kuwaiti dinar, by issuing three commemorative coins on these occasions, stated CBK Governor Dr Mohammad Y Al-Hashel.

In a press statement on this occasion, the governor noted it is customary for the CBK to mark important occasions and landmarks in Kuwait's development with such commemorative issues. These issues, he added, are the Bank's contribution to these national celebrations.

The first two coins marking the independence and liberation anniversaries stress the State of Kuwait's sovereignty and underline the spirit of solidarity the Kuwaiti people always exhibit; a spirit of which we are reminded by such

occasions and one that shall take our nation forward still, he said. On the third occasion, the 60th anniversary of the issuance of the Kuwaiti Dinar, Dr. Al-Hashel remarked the Bank is keeping to the same path it had adopted for the last three decades which aims at bolstering and safeguarding the strength and stability of the national currency. This feat is achieved through an exchange policy that pegs the Dinar to a weighted basket of the currencies of the State of Kuwait's key trade and economic partners. This fixed element of CBK's prudent monetary policy, he stressed, bolsters monetary stability, which in turn supports economic stability.

The CBK Governor pointed out the three commemorative coins were designed to clearly evoke these patriotic occasions and are gold-plated pure silver minted according to international standards. Those wishing to purchase any of the coins may do so from CBK



Dr Mohammad Y Al-Hashel



Banking Hall and may book an appointment to visit the Bank through the "meta" application.

In conclusion, Dr Al-Hashel

expressed CBK's pride in such issues that mark occasions that are close to the hearts of all Kuwaitis and important landmarks in our nation's progress.

## SoftBank CEO touts 'goose with golden eggs' as profit soars

TOKYO: SoftBank Group said net profit rocketed to \$11.1 billion in the third quarter, as CEO Masayoshi Son taunted critics and dubbed his Vision Fund a "goose that produces golden eggs."

The telecoms firm turned tech investment behemoth said net profit for October-December hit 1,171.9 billion yen (\$11 billion), more than 21 times higher than the 55 billion yen (\$500 million) reported a year earlier. Despite the results, it said it would not provide a forecast "due to numerous uncertainties affecting earnings."

But the economic crisis that has accompanied the coronavirus pandemic has worked largely in SoftBank's favor, with rallies in tech stocks it owns and rising valuations for firms in its portfolio suited to the era, including food delivery.

SoftBank reported a nearly \$9 billion net loss in the previous full fiscal year, but has quickly returned to the black. Founder Son, who has battled critics of his commitment to sometimes-troubled start-ups, came out swinging at a presentation of the firm's results.

"Just a year ago, a lot of mass media criticized the Vision Fund as a fund which is wrong and not functioning, only laying rotten eggs, but I believed in it," he said at an earnings presentation. "I want to say once again SoftBank is a producer. It's a producer of golden eggs." "Since the Vision Fund began, the number of eggs has increased at an

accelerated pace... And it is finally entering a harvest period."

### Asset sale program

SoftBank has stakes in some of Silicon Valley's hottest start-ups through its \$100 billion Vision Fund. In a statement, the firm said the fund soared thanks to "a rebound in the public equity markets" and rising values of portfolio companies.

"Businesses in sectors such as e-commerce, entertainment, healthcare, education, food delivery, and the future of work have benefited from the accelerated adoption of digital services" during the pandemic, the firm said. "Conversely, companies in sectors such as travel and hospitality are recovering at a slower pace."

Son has consistently backed the firm's worth, insisting its stock has been undervalued and its fundamentals remain strong. Masahiko Ishino, an analyst at Tokai Tokyo Research Institute, said SoftBank had benefited from soaring stock markets buoyed by government stimulus to tackle the economic crisis.

The firm and its SoftBank Vision Fund "took full advantage of monetary easing", he told AFP before the results were released. The value of the Fund's stake in US food delivery app DoorDash also rose massively following its initial public offering in December.

SoftBank has invested heavily in tech-based start-ups including ride-hailing



TOKYO: A pedestrian walks past a shop of SoftBank Group along a street in Tokyo yesterday ahead of the company's earnings reports expected after the markets close later in the day. — AFP

platforms in recent years, from California-based Uber to Didi Chuxing in China, Singapore's Grab and India's Ola.

Last month, SoftBank Group announced the sale of \$2 billion-worth of stocks in Uber following a surge in the US ride-hailing giant's value, though it still remains the firm's main shareholder.

### Market rout risks

SoftBank has launched an aggressive plan to sell up assets to finance a stock buy-back and reduce its debt, raised around 5.6 trillion yen so far. In December it sold an 80 percent stake in robotics firm Boston Dynamics to Hyundai in a deal that values the US company at \$1.1 billion.

And in September, it announced an agreement to sell British chip designer Arm to US firm NVIDIA for up to \$40 billion, potentially creating a new giant in the industry.

If approved, the deal will be one of the largest acquisitions in the world this year and propel NVIDIA to the forefront of the semiconductor sector. But the sale faces challenges-including securing approval from regulators in Britain, Europe, the United States and China.

Paired with the recent recovery in tech stocks, SoftBank's asset-sale strategy appears to be paying off, but analysts warned the firm may need more risk-management and to keep reviewing its portfolio. — AFP

## Brent oil hits year-high above \$60

LONDON: The benchmark oil contract Brent North Sea rose above \$60 per barrel yesterday to hit the highest level since the coronavirus pandemic began to spread globally almost a year ago. Oil prices have recovered owing to OPEC and its allies cutting production after the coronavirus pandemic slashed demand, according to analysts.

"It is worth reminding oneself that OPEC+ is the single most important reason for why the oil price reached \$60" on Monday, noted Bjarne Schieldrop, chief commodities analyst at SEB Research.

"It is because of large cuts by OPEC+... since May," he added. Crude and other assets are winning support also from the prospect of a \$1.9-trillion US stimulus package. European and Asian stock markets also climbed Monday, while the dollar rose against its main rivals.

Adding to the upbeat mood is data showing new COVID infection rates, with last week seeing the lowest level since October, while governments begin to get to grips with inoculation programs. Brent crude hit \$60.27 per barrel yesterday, the first time it has exceeded \$60 since February 2020.

After lockdowns began to spread in March, oil prices dropped off a cliff, with US oil contract WTI even briefly turning negative. And despite production cuts, oil supplies remain high.

"Global oil demand is still hurt badly by the global pandemic," added Schieldrop.

Recovery in part relies on US lawmakers approving President Joe Biden's huge stimulus package that should help the jobs market. Figures last week showed the US economy created less than half the number of jobs expected last month, which analysts said reinforced the need for a new, big spending bill. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Sunday warned that the US job market was "stalling" and might not recover for years without support.

But she told CNN that if the spending package was passed, "we would get back to full employment next year". Despite the weak jobs reading, all three main indices on Wall Street ended on a positive note Friday, with the Nasdaq and S&P 500 clocking up new records.

"Markets are continuing last week's bullish momentum, with Friday's jobs report providing a fresh reminder of the need to push a major stimulus package across the line," said Joshua Mahony, senior market analyst at IG trading group. — AFP



## Business

# KFH focusing on core banking business for achieving sustainable profitability

## Al-Roshood: Profit results reflect the solid financial position of KFH

KUWAIT: Abdulwahab Al-Roshood, Acting Group Chief Executive Officer at Kuwait Finance House (KFH) said that the financial results for the year ended 2020 were positive despite the unfavorable economic conditions, adding that net finance income grew 15.8 percent to KD 614.2 million compared to the same period of 2019, while cost to income ratio improved to reach 37.2 percent for the year ended 2020, compared to 51.3 percent for 2014.

- Ongoing efforts to enhance cost to income ratio
- KFH's subsidiaries contribution forms 43.6% of 2020 net profits
- KFH proves efficiency during the pandemic
- Experience in risk management and thoughtful plans for business continuity
- KFH developed IT infrastructure paving the way to launch outstanding digital services
- A successful digital plan under the theme "easy banking experience"
- KFH customers conducted 140 mn online banking transactions in 2020
- KFH keeps focusing on developing national talents

He indicated during TV interviews that total assets increased 10.9 percent to KD 21.5 billion, while depositors' accounts reached KD 15.3 billion, an increase of 13.0 percent compared to the end of last year. In addition, financing portfolio reached KD 10.8 billion, i.e., an increase of 13.4 percent, of which 19.7 percent and 6.6 percent growth from corporate and retail segments, respectively. Al-Roshood confirmed that the positive financial results reflect the solid financial position of KFH, high creditworthiness, and its efficient capability to handle the exceptional conditions.

He explained that the contribution of KFH subsidiaries in the 2020 net profit for KFH shareholder represented 43.6 percent, of which 40.6 percent contribution from KFH-Turkey.

Al-Roshood added that due to coronavirus pandemic and its negative economic impacts locally and globally, the exit of investments in 2020 declined to approximately KD 28.2 million, achieving a net profit of KD 4.7 million compared to KD 40.7 million last year.

He stressed that exiting non-core assets is part of the bank's strategy in focusing on core banking business for achieving sustainable profits.

Al-Roshood said that due to the negative impacts of pandemic, KFH increased the provisions while the value charged on the group's income statement declined to 284.1 million, representing an increase of percent 44.3. This includes provisions of financing, investment and other precautionary provisions against finance and real estate portfolios.

He added that the non-performing financings ratio NPFs at KFH Group reached 2.20 percent as of end 2020 as per the CBK's accounting principles. The coverage ratio of provisions for non-performing debts stood at 288.5 percent and 223 percent for KFH solo and the Group respectively.

### High efficiency

Al-Roshood explained that the pandemic demonstrated KFH's highly efficient ability to deal with exceptional circumstances, noting that the bank has great expertise in risk management and thoughtful plans to ensure business continuity in various circumstances.

He added that during the pandemic KFH keeps successfully providing services despite full lockdown in Kuwait, indicating the developed IT infrastructure that paved the way to providing outstanding digital services that meet all banking needs of customers.

He added that KFH was a pioneer in adopting remote work solutions for employees in a safe and effective manner to ensure their health and safety, and thus to achieve the best customer service.

Al-Roshood said that KFH's customers conducted nearly 140 million transactions through KFHOnline for



Abdulwahab Al-Roshood

the year 2020. This emphasizes the successful digital transformation strategy of KFH and the secure and easy digital services it offers to customers. He indicated that KFH keeps implementing its ambitious digital plan launched by the bank under the theme "easy banking experience", including digital services through mobiles and alternative channels such as digital self-banking station KFH Go. This e-branch is equipped with the latest financial technologies and digital platforms and XTM machines which enable communicating directly with the telephone service personnel in audio and video calls, with other comprehensive packages of banking services.

He added that KFH Go provides several services including conducting "Murabaha" financing transactions, updating data and phone numbers, activating bank cards, opening deposits and accounts, receiving gold bullion (10 grams), buy and sell gold, cash withdrawals without a card and a host of banking and financing services.

Meanwhile, Al-Roshood said that KFH leads the Kuwaiti banks and the private sector as a top recruiter of Kuwaitis where citizens made up 99 percent of new hires in 2020, reflecting KFH's ongoing focus on building and developing local talent. He confirmed that the bank implemented a comprehensive training and development strategy for talents, providing all the success elements and opportunities that enable them to build a successful career and assume leadership positions in the future given that they are among the most important elements in achieving sustainable development.

Looking forward, Al-Roshood expressed his optimism, wishing for the pandemic to recede and the world economies to recover as soon as possible given the acceleration of vaccination rollouts in Kuwait and around the world.



## FASTtelco ensures a high speed online experience for customers

KUWAIT: FASTtelco, the company owned by Ooredoo Kuwait, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has launched its new campaign "Inconsistent Internet Connection, unstable mood", which highlights the power of high internet speeds of optical fibers, which offer customers stable and fast internet connection.

FASTtelco understands the needs of its customers and through this campaign, the company is offering them amazing offers along with the chance of trying a free 100 Mbps Fiber internet test for an indication of both their download speed and upload speed. This campaign stems from the importance of high internet speeds in our current world, where speed is required in all aspects of life. In the world of internet, the speed of response (Ping) occupies an important place especially in the world of electronic games. For gamers, it's also important to pay attention to ping time, because they are doing a significant amount of both uploading and downloading. Hence, lower response (ping) speed means a better online Internet experience and consistently efficient gaming.

Commenting on the launching of the campaign, FASTtelco highlighted that these days, we live our lives on the internet, however, it is no longer about just having an Internet connection, in fact, it is way beyond that, in which customers are aiming for an online internet experience without any interruption or delay in download and upload speed.

The company further explained that it is about understanding the world around us and the changing needs of people. Fiber internet is powerful enough to handle huge amounts of data at a time. And that is what customers are going to experience with the free test that shows the connection's real-time download and upload speed.

## Hyundai, Kia deny Apple car talks, send shares crashing

SEOUL: South Korean automaker Hyundai and its affiliate Kia yesterday denied news reports they were in talks with Apple for a joint project to make autonomous vehicles, sending their shares tumbling.

The announcement came about a month after the country's cable broadcaster Korea Economic TV said the iPhone maker had approached Hyundai to discuss a potential partnership to develop electric vehicles and batteries for them, sending the car maker's shares soaring. Reports last week suggested they could produce cars in the US state of Georgia. But yesterday Hyundai and Kia said in regulatory filings they were "not discussing autonomous electric car development with Apple".

Both automakers added that they had talked with multiple firms about such projects, but no decision had been made. Hyundai said those talks were in their "early stages". Kia shares slumped 14.98 percent at the close in Seoul yesterday, while Hyundai fell 6.21 percent.

Consumer interest in eco-friendly vehicles has mounted in recent years with Tesla largely taking the lead in the sector. Apple's Project Titan is devoted to self-driving technology but the firm is known for being ultra-secretive about its business.—AFP



### News in brief

#### Japan's Renesas acquires Dialog

BERLIN: Japanese electronics company Renesas will acquire its German-British competitor Dialog, a semiconductor specialist and Apple supplier, in a 4.9-billion-euro (\$5.9-billion) deal announced by the two companies yesterday. According to a Dialog statement, Renesas will pay 67.50 euros for each Dialog share between now and the end of the year, approximately 20 percent more than the closing price on Friday. The two groups, which have collaborated for a number of years, both produce chips for the automobile industry, which has been hit by a semiconductor shortage.—AFP

#### German industrial output stagnates

FRANKFURT: German industrial production was flat in December compared to the previous month as pandemic restrictions weighed on Europe's top economy, official figures showed yesterday. Federal statistics agency Destatis said industrial output expanded 1.5 percent in November according to revised figures. The closely watched indicator fell 1.0 percent year-on-year and was down 2.5 percent in November. Germany in mid-December imposed another partial lockdown, shutting schools and all non-essential businesses.—AFP

#### Spanish factories post slump

MADRID: Spanish industrial output fell by more than nine percent last year, its biggest plunge since 2009, owing to the coronavirus pandemic and a strict lockdown, official figures showed yesterday. Data published by the National Institute of Statistics (INE) showed that output collapsed by 9.4 percent in 2020. In 2009, Spanish factory output plunged by 15.6 percent. The latest figures nonetheless also showed a slight upturn at the year's end, with December posting a 1.1-percent increase from the previous month owing to a pickup in energy production.—AFP

### Energy Analysis

## Measuring carbon intensity of oil could be differentiator for Mideast producers

By Pete Compton

The world will continue to rely on fossil fuels until 2050, despite great efforts to decarbonize and grow renewable energy. S&P Global Platts Analytics forecasts that oil demand will not peak before the next decade and it is therefore incumbent on the industry and policymakers to ensure that the fossil fuels consumed are incentivized to come from the lowest carbon-intensive sources. This could become an important point of differentiation for Middle East oil producers.

Auditable measurement of upstream carbon intensity, supply chains and manufacturing along with effective market prices will be required to help market participants successfully navigate the Energy Transition and address emerging demand for fossil fuel consumption with lower emissions.

### Valuing 'low carbon oil'

Oil and gas companies and investors alike are responding to calls for less carbon-intensive energy sources and investment opportunities, which has begun to translate into capital flows toward supply sources with lower carbon intensities.

In July 2020, the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative (OGCI) - a consortium of 12 member companies that includes major national oil companies (NOCs) around the world such as Saudi Aramco, CNPC, and Petrobras, with combined crude oil output of approximately 25 million b/d - announced its target to reduce the collective carbon intensity of its upstream operations by 9 percent by 2025.

Banks, sovereign wealth funds, and other sources of external capital have declared intentions to reduce the carbon footprint of their portfolios while maintaining competitive returns. Upstream producers will be required to consider carbon intensity when making development decisions driven by regulatory and economic factors.

### Carbon intensity

The foundational metric necessary for market participants is carbon intensity - the ratio of carbon-equivalent emissions to unit of output. Applied to the upstream oil industry, carbon intensity refers to the quantity of emissions per barrel of oil produced (kg CO<sub>2</sub>eq/barrel).

Oil production is a highly complex process involving dozens of phases and emissions sources, which vary widely from field to field. However, according to the US EPA, around 80 percent of overall upstream emissions come from the flaring and venting of natural gas and the energy required for onsite drilling and pumping.

For example, the Bakken shale field in the US and the Kirkuk field from Iraq have outsized carbon intensity, which is largely driven by above-average volumes of gas flared per barrel of oil produced.

Calculating flaring and venting emissions can be straightforward provided good metering is installed. Conversely, combustion emissions associated with drilling and pumping are more complex and depend on factors such as the age, depth and pressure of the reservoir, as well as the gravity of the crude. Lower



oil prices producers, such as those in the Middle East, may look to minimize the cost of extraction by reducing the energy required. However, this may not be strongly correlated to the carbon intensity and may not incentivize producers to switch to renewable sources of energy without further incentives or regulation.

Additionally, the energy or supply chains and manufacture should also be considered when comparing the relative carbon intensity of crudes. Heavier crudes may require more energy to move and process them into finished products.

S&P Global Platts Analytics ran a pilot study covering 50 oil fields of various natures and locations and the relationship between modeled carbon intensity and crude gravity was immediately evident.

### Establishing upstream carbon emissions price

Pricing has proved an effective mechanism for driving market outcomes. For many years we have differentiated sulfur content in gasoline and gasoil and priced it accordingly. The IMO 2020 legislation reduced sulfur in marine bunker fuels and, in advance of implementation, Platts launched VLSFO assessments to introduce transparency into price and product availability. Similarly, the market could introduce carbon intensity as an attribute of fossil fuels supported with similar regulation that has seen lead and sulfur removed from gasoline.

Establishing upstream carbon intensity of individual sources of crude (and gas) will be the first step in enabling markets to quantify a differential between the price of a "standard barrel" and the price of a carbon adjustment.

Many Middle East crudes have a lower carbon intensity than crudes from other geographies. As such, a crude like Abu Dhabi's Upper Zakum would have a carbon intensity approximately 9.5 kg CO<sub>2</sub>eq/b lower than the estimated global average. Using the current EUA carbon price of around \$30/mt, Upper Zakum would attract a premium of \$0.28/b. Conversely, Iraq's flaring-intensive Kirkuk field would fetch a discount of \$0.75/b due to its higher-than-average carbon intensity.

As the market for low-carbon oil matures, prices will likely reflect the associated upstream carbon intensity, with crudes of lower carbon intensity trading at a premium to those of higher carbon intensity. Setting carbon intensity specification and default intensity for crudes without auditable data will drive up the value of lower carbon-intensive crudes and incentivize market participation.

Providing greater transparency into the carbon intensity of upstream oil production will help producers access markets, better understand the risk of stranded and underutilized assets, and evaluate price risk as they seek to navigate the energy transition. Note: Compton is Senior Project Consultant, Custom Analytics, S&P Global Platts

## Business

# NBK presents an 'inspiring banking experience' in digital transformation

## Al-Othman gives a lecture during career readiness program 'Tamakan'

KUWAIT: As part of the activities of the career readiness program "Tamakan" sponsored by the bank, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) held a seminar in which Mohammed Al-Othman, GM-Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait gave a lecture and answered a number of questions raised by participants.

### A turning point

Al-Othman said that continuous training and learning after joining work is a key pillar of career excellence and a pressing need to enhance the skills and bridge the gaps between what distinguishes a person and the changing work needs, in light of the rapid developments seen across all business sectors. Al-Othman said: "No matter how prestigious the position and leading the institution, joining a job is not the end of the story, but rather the beginning of a process that is based on two main factors to achieve success: doubling the efforts and continuing education and training so that you can represent an added value for the work team and the institution."

Al-Othman gave an example to the attendees about the impact of continuous learning and training on career development through his joining Harvard and Columbia Business Schools saying: "It was a major turning point in my career that contributed to significantly enhance my skills, which was reflected on my performance and had a great impact on the development my career path."

Al-Othman affirmed the importance of institutions and private sector companies' role in focusing on training their employees and setting a path for continuous learning, in order to enrich their skills with a view to help the institution achieve its goals. He stressed that the training and learning opportunities provided by NBK to its employees are a key pillar of the bank's strategy to achieve sustainable growth and consolidate its leading position, which makes it an example to follow, in this regard.

### Youth and digitization

Discussing the challenges facing institutions and ways to overcome them, Al-Othman discussed the key challenges facing the banking industry includ-

ing the rapid technological developments and the boundless expectations of customers from the youth segment. Al-Othman indicated that NBK remarkably succeeded in giving a successful banking model and an inspiring experience in digital transformation and attracting customers from the youth segment.

The key challenges faced by Consumer Banking Group team were the necessity to provide digital services that meet the needs of all customers, especially the youth, while abiding by a prudent strategy that maintains NBK's principles in providing secure services and following a conservative risk management strategy. These services also had to reflect the bank's leading position and conservative approach, while offering advanced and up-to-date solutions, he noted.

Al-Othman explained that NBK's strategy showed remarkable success, as reflected in the continuously growing number of customers from the youth segment, and clearly manifested in the massive demand for the bank's digital offerings and advanced payment solutions during the exceptional circumstances imposed by the coronavirus pandemic.

### A lifetime journey

Al-Othman explained how banks, through the banking product, services and payment solutions they provide, have become an essential part of the daily life of people who rely on these services in most of their investment, spending and saving decisions, at all times. In this regard, Al-Othman highlighted NBK's comprehensive strategy that aims to cater to the needs of all segments of society from all ages, goals and financial positions. This has made NBK a lifetime partner, starting from opening Zeina children's account, to the products and services provided to students and youth, financing entrepreneurship projects and meeting the ambitions and expectations of all family members, as well as the various investment solutions and savings channels it offers. In addition, the bank provides advanced payment solutions and exceptional rewards program that makes the bank part of every detail of their daily life.



Mohammed Al-Othman gives the lecture

### NBK's unique environment

Al-Othman highlighted the emerging changes in work culture and environment, as the success of institutions is no longer attainable without working as one team, and focusing on innovation. The work environment has become largely dependent on technology and advanced communication technologies, which must be part of the qualifications of fresh graduates as they navigate into the labor market, as well as acquiring the necessary experience and skills to quickly engage in this culture and work efficiently within this environment.

Al-Othman emphasized that NBK is characterized by well-established organizational work nature that sets a general framework of principles defining work culture and all aspects related to work environment and communication between team members. This represents a melting pot in which all ideas and various management trends, at all levels, are fused, with open-door policy and one-team spirit

representing essential characteristics of NBK's work environment.

### Only be what you wish

It is a golden advice when it is given by a leadership from the same generation of the youth, who succeeded in making a rich career taking the long way from working as a teller to heading the largest staffed department at the leading bank in Kuwait:

- Know well what you wish, and listen to everyone, but only do what realizes yourself.
- When it comes to your ability to achieve goals that seem distant, do not listen to anyone and make your ambitions sky high.
- However the circumstances around you may be unfavorable, try to light a candle; that is better than cursing the darkness.
- Study is one stage of learning, followed by a long journey of knowledge acquisition and training that requires doubling your efforts.

## ABK appoints Omar Wahby as CEO, UAE

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK), this week announced the appointment of Omar Wahby as CEO - UAE. Omar has over 25 years' experience across many disciplines. He started his career as an investment banker in Egypt, and has worked in a number of senior roles in top institutions including BNP Paribas and Citibank. His last position was with National Bank of Kuwait as Deputy CEO for the International Banking Group. Omar has extensive experience across key markets of the MENA region.

Commenting on his appointment, George Richani, Group CEO of ABK said: "We are very pleased to welcome Omar to ABK. He has an excellent track record of strong leadership, both in Kuwait and the MENA region, and I am certain that he will grow the UAE business, and add great all round value to the Group. We wish him every success."



Omar Wahby

## KIB participates in 'Let's Become Aware' campaign

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to provide the safest banking experience to its customers, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced its participation in "Let's Become Aware" - a banking awareness campaign organized by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) throughout the year 2021 under Kuwait Banking Association. The campaign will witness the participation of all local banks, with the aim of promoting financial literacy among different segments of society, which will contribute towards increasing customer awareness of how to benefit from the banking services while protecting their personal information and bank assets.

The campaign will highlight a variety of topics that will be communicated across the social media platforms of the CBK, the local participating banks, or by visiting [dirayakw.com](http://dirayakw.com). The topics will include: introducing the role of banks as a financial intermediary, the importance of saving and investing and how to benefit from products offered by banks in this area, raising awareness of customer's rights when obtaining personal finance, whether consumer loan or housing finance, services for the disabled, the mechanism for filing complaints about banking services, in addition to various banking cards, the most important steps to be followed to avoid fraud, awareness of the risks of what is known as "loan encashment", high-risk investments and more.

Commenting on the campaign, Raed Jawad

Bukhamseen, Vice Chairman and CEO of KIB, said: "We are delighted to be part of this unique initiative, more likely a comprehensive national campaign that seeks to promote financial literacy and banking awareness among as many members of the community as possible, reflecting on financial inclusion and the protecting customers against any risks, as well as improving KIB's customer base and boosting their trust in banking institutions, thereby supporting the country's overall economic stability. This campaign also comes in line with the Bank's social responsibility program to spread financial and banking awareness - a first-of-its-kind program the Bank had launched a few years ago with the aim of spreading financial and banking awareness amongst diverse segments of Kuwait's community, particularly youth and children by educating them on the concepts of budgeting and saving, banking transactions, managing money and its many usages at an early age, thereby building a generation that is well-positioned to build a better future."

Bukhamseen further noted that through participating in the campaign, KIB will focus on providing guidelines to protect customers from cybercrime through the Bank's various media and social media platforms, consistent with its newly adopted digital transformation strategy, which calls for spreading financial and banking awareness by not only introducing customers to e-banking services, but also by alerting them to the risks of fraudulent activities and educating them on how to maintain the confidentiality of their banking data, thus ensuring a safe and efficient banking experience at all times. To that end, the Bank succeeded in nabbing the "Safest Bank in Kuwait" award for 2020 by World Finance magazine, in recognition of its quality financial products and services, in addition to its commitment

to the highest safety and security standards, which has always been our top priority."

Bukhamseen praised KIB's outstanding efforts to provide the highest levels of global security and safety standards to protect customers against cybercrimes, highlighting the Bank's compliance with cybersecurity regulations set forth by the Central Bank of Kuwait, which included the recently released cybersecurity framework, ISO 27001 Information Security Management System standard, payment card industry data security standard, and SWIFT Customer Security Programme. The Bank also provides increased banking security through the SMS service, the secure log-in and automatic log-out system, as well as state-of-the-art security encryption techniques and other security measures that protect customers against online banking fraud.

Concluding his statement, Bukhamseen provided a set of safety tips and security guidelines for customers to follow when carrying on their online banking transactions, including: refraining completely from responding to suspicious emails or phone calls related to their bank statements and reporting the Bank immediately, using a strong password, maintaining the confidentiality of the PIN and changing it regularly, installing an anti-virus scanner, not using internet networks or computers available in public places, in addition to ensuring that the website is secure prior to making any online payment.



Raed Bukhamseen

## Why most AI projects fail

By Anas A Abdul-Haiy

KUWAIT: Verticals determining the success of any project vary even within the same field, or even within the very same project down the timeline. This is the case especially in AI, a relatively new field fueling business worldwide and shifting the attention of investors to more technologically powered, sustainable and cost-effective solutions. AI is a business superpower on the rise: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hosted the Global AI Summit in October 2020, where an elaborate, market-wide AI strategy was revealed. The strategy aims to train up to 20,000 data and AI experts and set up 300 AI-focused startups. This is predicted to generate up to \$20 billion in investment by the year 2030.

If AI can be used to develop whole nations, it's then a tool to shift the way the world works, and a lot of decision makers are noticing this as more than a trend, but also as a gateway into a healthier, more sustainable future. The enthusiasm to jump on the AI train is understandable and encouraged, but the success of AI depends on the complete universe of data being captured and analyzed through a large-scale database with continuous analysis of the convergence between predictive and real time data. Premature failure of AI projects is a common concern, and



Anas A Abdul-Haiy

one that is legitimate: recent numbers show 85% of all AI projects fail, sometimes before they have even been initiated. Why? Well, oftentimes, these big projects are misaligned with business priorities. Especially today, a lot of businesses are invested in keeping their traditional processes going, so embarking on such an altering project is not likely to make the top priorities list.

### Financial strategy

AI is expensive. Spending on AI projects and solutions will hit the \$58 billion mark within the next few years. Many companies tend to take a leap into a sea of information on the matter and end up with one takeaway: AI helps cut cost. While this is true, the results take time, effort and skills. From partnering with the right solution providers, to hiring the perfect candidates to administer AI projects. A lot of companies will initiate and then withdraw when the costs are fully evaluated in comparison to the results. This is why strategizing AI projects is essential to success, but still does not guarantee it.

While strategy is a vertical in business generally, in AI-focused projects, it's simply not enough. Financial strategy without expertise is like throwing money on a problem: it simply won't work. AI is new. This means there is a lack of the proper skills in the market. For reasons like this, governments are turning to training programs, pumping capital into developing a solid generation of skilled AI engineers, scientists, and businesspersons. This relatively new field makes investment tricky also because there isn't enough history behind it. In a way, it's an age of trial and error, and error often means massive losses and premature failure. This happens a lot: a lot of AI projects start big, with ambition and hope backing up high-complexity work.

This relates to the way AI is described as risky business. It's considered an expensive tool that is hard to measure and maintain. However, developing strategy and approach can set companies on the right path. It must always start with a problem the business is facing, and a

question: 'Can AI solve it?' A strategy can then be designed and set, with proper and regular measuring of ROI. There is more to this, however. Part of why AI is often met with dissatisfaction, contributing to many businesses choosing safer options, is the ambiguity and myth surrounding it. For the longest time, it seemed like this technological leap was a thing for film and literature. When investors go into AI, they have a hard time managing and adjusting their expectations. Businesses investing massive efforts and capital in AI often focus on the technology instead of the business. AI adoption must be a step-by-step process, starting with why the business needs it, and how it can help. AI can, for example accurately predict valuable information based on data, but it cannot function as intricately as the human brain.

The way an AI solution will work for a business is through data, and the quality of data it is fed with. This poses another threat to AI projects, and is considered a major contributing factor in their failure. The term 'Big Data' came about as tech giants started taking over the global business sphere. The concept is quite enigmatic, because 'how big is big,' one might ask. Well, really big. AI requires a lot of data in order to deliver, and the more the better. If a company is small, with not much data to go from, then expectations must be scaled to that level of data availability. The data must also be relevant to the problem the AI solution is designed to solve, and oftentimes such intricacies aren't even considered.

AI is risky, but the rewards can bring cost-cutting and long-term success to business. It is most crucial to consider data quality and availability when AI adoption is on the table. Strategy, success and failure measurement criteria are also determining steps in the adoption process. Meanwhile, globally, the direction business is going towards is one that should solve the issue of low skill levels and expertise in the field.

Note: Anas A Abdul-Haiy is Director and Deputy CEO of Proven Consult

## Burgan Bank reveals winner of Al-Thuraya account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank, announced yesterday Waleed Abdullah Rashed as the lucky winner of the draw prize of Al-Thuraya Salary Account monthly draw.

The draw rewards new and existing customers who transfer their salary to Burgan Bank by offering them a chance to win KD 10,000 every month. Each account holder has one chance to enter the draw.

The Al-Thuraya account holders have the option to hold money in Kuwaiti Dinar and other major currencies and can access account-related services such as standing orders, loans and credit cards, and benefit from the discounts and offers throughout the year. Customers wishing to open the Al-Thuraya account can do so by simply visiting the nearest Burgan Bank branch and obtain all the necessary details.

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## Lifestyle | Features

## Poet Amanda Gorman opens Super Bowl

Amanda Gorman, the young poet who delivered a captivating performance at President Joe Biden's inauguration, opened the Super Bowl on Sunday with a new work celebrating essential workers, while The Weeknd performed a pandemic-era halftime show to headline one of pop's most visible



In this file photo National youth poet laureate Amanda Gorman recites during the inauguration of Joe Biden as the 46th US President at the US Capitol in Washington, DC.

gigs. The Canadian star opened with his hits "Starboy" and "The Hills," wearing a sparkling red jacket and deploying selfie-camera work fit for the age of Covid-19.

When the artist born Abel Tesfaye broke into "I Can't Feel My Face," he felt his way through a narrow mirrored hallway, clamoring among a group of backup performers with bandaged faces, one

of his signature looks. On a stage set against a Vegas-esque skyline, The Weeknd included strings for "Earned It" after performing "I Feel It Coming" and "Save Your Tears." He and his dancers stormed the field for "House of Balloons" - which samples the British rockers Siouxsie and the Banshees, offering a rare post-punk Super Bowl appearance-taking up the space normally occupied by hundreds of dancing fans who were unable to attend due to coronavirus restrictions.

He closed with "Blinding Lights"-his 2019 Day-Glo smash that now harkens back to the pre-pandemic era of club nights. It was the NFL's second halftime show production partnership with hip hop mogul Jay-Z's Roc Nation, which was tapped in 2019 to steer the coveted musical performances in a move the league marketed as a step for social justice. The Weeknd has vocally supported the Black Lives Matter movement, and also donated \$200,000 to Kaepernick's legal defense initiative after George Floyd, a Black man, was killed in police custody this past summer.

## 'Feat for art'

Gorman, meanwhile, became the first-ever poet to perform at the National Football League championship, America's most-watched broadcast of the year. In a pre-taped performance, the 22-year-old delivered her poem "Chorus of the Captains," paying homage to three people declared honorary captains in the night's coin toss: an educator, an intensive care nurse and a US



Pictures show The Weeknd performs during the Pepsi Super Bowl LV Halftime Show at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Florida. — AFP photos

Marine Corps veteran. "They've taken the lead / Exceeding all expectations and limitations / Uplifting their communities and neighbors / As leaders, healers and educators," she said.

Gorman became an international sensation after reciting her original work "The Hill We Climb" at the inaugural ceremony, a poem inspired by the attack on the US Capitol that declared democracy "can never be permanently defeated." The performance saw her work soar to the top of bestseller lists even before their publication, and IMG Models signed her for fashion and beauty campaigns.

The Super Bowl is among the world's

largest stages, with at least 80 million viewers, meaning Gorman's work will reach an even wider audience than Biden's inauguration that saw some 40 million tune in. "Poetry at the Super Bowl is a feat for art & our country, because it means we're thinking imaginatively about human connection even when we feel siloed," Gorman tweeted ahead of her performance. "I also can't reiterate how exciting it is for me that others are excited to see poetry at a football game. What a time to be alive."

Originally from Los Angeles and raised by a single mother, Gorman had a speech impediment as a child-like the 46th president-and turned to writing. In

her latest public poetry performance, Gorman called the work of nurses an example that "even in tragedy, hope is possible." "For while we honor them today / It is they who every day honor us." Sunday night's championship game saw the Buccaneers of Tampa Bay, where the event of the season was hosted, defeat the Kansas City Chiefs. Prior to Gorman's performance, the enigmatic R&B artist H.E.R. sang an electrified version of "America The Beautiful," and Jazmine Sullivan joined country singer Eric Church for a duet of the US national anthem. — AFP

FELLINI'S  
CINEMATOGRAPHER  
GIUSEPPE ROTUNNO  
DIES AGED 97

Giuseppe Rotunno, cinematographer to Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti and Sydney Pollack and Oscar nominee for Bob Fosse's "All That Jazz", has died, Italian media reported Sunday. He was 97. Nicknamed "Peppino", the Rome native began his cinema career aged 20, tapped by Roberto Rossellini for the 1943 war film "L'Uomo dalla Croce" (The Man with a Cross).

Rotunno went on to work with Italy's greatest directors including Fellini, for whom he was director of photography for eight films including "Casanova" (1976) and "Satyricon" (1969). Abroad, he worked with Pollack in "Sabrina" as well as John Huston ("The Bible") and Terry Gilliam ("The Adventures of Baron Munchausen"). He was nominated for an Oscar and won a Bafta Award in 1980 for "All That Jazz". — AFP



Cinematographer Giuseppe Rotunno

The Queen's Gambit star  
has ideas for a second season

Anya Taylor-Joy has an idea for a second series of 'The Queen's Gambit'. The 24-year-old actress insisted there was "never" any discussion about the Netflix series - in which she portrayed chess prodigy Beth Harmon - running for more than one season but following a huge demand from fans for more episodes, she has hinted it's now a possibility. She told Deadline: "It's so surreal and very wonderful that people want a second season, because we never thought about it, there was no discussion about it." "That said, never say 'never' in Hollywood." "It would be very interesting to see how Beth would be as a mother, now that she's sober and more cognizant of the demons that pull her down." Anya has previously admitted she "adored" playing Beth and would return if she was asked to, though she felt that was unlikely because the end of the limited

series had been so satisfying. She said last year: "I adore the character, and I would certainly come back if I was asked to. I do think we leave Beth in a good place. I think the rest of her life will surely be an adventure as well, but in the quest that she goes on in this to find some form of peace, just some form of being able to be happy with who she is." And executive producer William Horberg previously insisted there are no plans for a sequel because everyone was so pleased with how the show - which was based on Walter Tevis' 1983 novel of the same name - ended. He said: "The last scene feels like a beautiful note to end the show on, so I'm not sure if we want to go on. Maybe we can just let the audience imagine what comes next."

Cyrus breaks  
down in tears at  
Super Bowl TikTok  
tailgate gig

Miley Cyrus broke down in tears during her performance of "Wrecking Ball" at the Super Bowl LV TikTok Tailgate concert. The 'Midnight Sky' hitmaker - who split from ex-husband Liam Hemsworth in August 2019, after just eight months of marriage - had to pause before continuing the 2013 hit during the gig on Sunday afternoon ahead of the Pepsi Super Bowl LV Halftime Show. Miley's voice cracked as she sang the line: "Don't you ever think, I just walked away, I will always want you." She attempted to pick up the chorus with, "I came in...", before telling the audience why she was struggling to perform the track. The song was penned about the end of a relationship and Miley

admitted to the crowd at the pre-game show in Tampa, Florida, that she wears her "heart on [her] sleeve" and it "gets broken a lot". Wiping away her tears, she said: "Singing that song, 'Wrecking Ball', about feeling completely broken and shattered ... everyone's suffering is different, even everyone's threshold of pain. I wear a lot of glitter and I wear a lot of armor, and I also wear my heart on my sleeve, and it gets broken a lot." Elsewhere, the 28-year-old megastar honored her godmother Dolly Parton with a cover of 'Jolene' and was joined on stage by Billy Idol and Joan Jett during her performance for frontline healthcare workers at the Raymond James Stadium. Billy joined Miley on a rendition of their punk rock duet 'Night Crawling' from Miley's recent LP 'Plastic Hearts' and his own hit 'White Wedding'. Joan and Miley performed their track 'Bad Karma' from the 2020 album, while the former sang her songs 'Bad Reputation' and 'I Hate Myself For Loving You'. Miley - who rocked a cheerleading outfit with 'FTW' emblazoned across her top - wrapped her slot with a rendition of 'The Climb'.

B. Jordan, Springsteen and Chalamet  
Super Bowl ads most watched on YouTube

Michael B. Jordan, Timothee Chalamet, and Bruce Springsteen were among the stars of the most-watched Pepsi Super Bowl LV advertisements on YouTube. The annual American football extravaganza took place on Sunday, where companies often splash out on hiring A-list stars for the commercials that are shown during the match. And this year was no different, with the likes of Michael, Timothee, and Bruce being joined in big-budget ads by the likes of Cardi B, Matthew McConaughey, and Winona Ryder. Following the Super Bowl, the commercials were posted to YouTube, and on Sunday night, Google released data about the Top 10 most viewed ads globally on its video platform, which show the A-list stars dominating the list. According to Google, the most-watched ad on Gameday was for Amazon's virtual assistant Alexa, which starred 'Black Panther' actor Michael B. Jordan as the "ideal body" for the talking tech. In second place was a commercial for car manufacturer Jeep, who employed Bruce Springsteen in an ode to unity, healing the divide, and common American ideals. And completing the top three was fellow car dealer Cadillac, who created a 'Edward Scissorhands'-themed advert starring Timothee

Chalamet and Winona Ryder, in which Timothee plays 'Edgar' Scissorhands, a clumsy man who discovers the joys of hands-free cruise control. Other adverts in the list include Uber Eats - who employed 'Wayne's World' duo Mike Myers and Dana Carvey, as well as Cardi B - and Anheuser-Busch, whose commercial was directed by David Fincher. Meanwhile, the trailer for upcoming Marvel movie 'The Falcon and

The Winter Soldier' also made the list, as did a trailer for 'Coming 2 America', which will be shown on Amazon Prime Video. According to Google, viewership of Super Bowl ads on YouTube during the game rose over 70 percent on TV screens from last year, whilst the YouTube channel for half-time show headliner The Weeknd peaked at over 1.6 million views per hour.

Stefani and Shelton poke fun at  
relationship in Super Bowl commercial

Gwen Stefani and Blake Shelton poked fun at their relationship in a new commercial for T-Mobile. The engaged couple were joined by their friend and former 'Voice' coach Adam Levine in the ad, which aired during a Super Bowl commercial break on Sunday. The promo was set "a few years ago" with Gwen 51, FaceTiming Adam to discuss how she is ready to "start dating again". She told the Maroon 5 singer: "I'm sick of L.A. guys. I want someone completely different. Maybe someone from another country and someone cultured and sensitive and who is not threatened by a strong, confident woman." Unfortunately, Adam's patchy mobile signal meant he just heard: "I want someone completely country, uncultured and threatened by a strong confident woman." Blake, 44, then appeared at Adam's table to scream about "winks and nachos", prompting the 'Moves Like Jagger' hitmaker to tell Gwen on the call: "I have your guy." The ad then jumped to the couple's fictitious first date, where they were surprised to see one another. Gwen said: "Blake? Um. Hilarious, right? I mean, no? Are you wearing spurs? Did you ride a horse here?" A T-Mobile voiceover then cut in to quip: "Don't trust your love life to just any network."

The ad ended when Blake - who has been dating Gwen for more than five years - asked Gwen if he could give her a ride home. The Super Bowl broadcast is famously packed with star-studded adverts, and Gwen and Blake weren't the only couple to make a commercial together. Ashton Kutcher and Mila Kunis teamed up with Shaggy for a Cheetos promo which saw the 'Black Swan' actress hiding around the house to eat her husband's Cheetos Crunch Pop Mix - but her orange-dusted fingers and mouth rendered her musical denials of 'It Wasn't Me' unconvincing. —Bang Showbiz



Lifestyle | Features



Serbian sculptor Nikola Macura browses through a military scrapyard, searching for weapons he could use as instruments in Temerin near Novi Sad. — AFP photos



Serbian sculptor Nikola Macura grinds a Yugoslav army helmet at his studio.



Srdjan Sarovic, visual artist and a war veteran, plays on a guitar made out of M70 rifle and a helmet, made by Serbian sculptor Nikola Macura at his studio.



Serbian sculptor Nikola Macura (right) and cellist Milica Svirac adjust a cello, converted from a bazooka and army gas bucket, in his studio.



Serbian sculptor Nikola Macura browses through a military scrapyard, searching for weapons he could use as instruments in Temerin.

# CHANGING THE TUNE: SERBIAN ARTIST TURNS WEAPONS INTO INSTRUMENTS

Every week, Serbian sculptor Nikola Macura wanders through a messy military junkyard in search of sounds. Picking through discarded rifles, helmets and missiles, he taps, blows and raps his knuckles on the decommissioned weapons to find pieces he can bring back to his studio and turn into musical instruments. The 42-year-old is trying to transform these former tools of destruction into vessels of creation, in a region that still bears scars from the 1990s wars that unraveled Yugoslavia.

He has already successfully converted a bazooka and an army gas bucket into a cello, created a guitar out of a Zastava M70 rifle and a Yugoslav army helmet, and assembled a violin from an assault rifle magazine and a first aid kit, among others. "Guns are all around us. We are so surrounded with destruction that we no longer notice it", said Macura, an assistant professor at Novi Sad Academy of Arts in Serbia's north. There is a vast supply of material to work with: since the wars, depots selling decommissioned army equipment for pennies have become a common sight around the country.

These graveyards overflow with deactivated guns, bombs and gas masks, as well as combat vehicles, radars and even huge chunks of warplanes. The sculptor's goal is to create a full orchestra that would travel and



Serbian sculptor Nikola Macura grinds a Yugoslav army helmet at his studio.



Cellist Milica Svirac plays a cello converted from a bazooka and army gas bucket, made by Serbian sculptor Nikola Macura at his studio.

play throughout the region, with war veterans serving as some of the musicians. "I aim to offer those people who participated in the war a chance to utilize the weapons they used to wage war to create music instead", he said. He has already recruited veteran and visual artist Srdjan Sarovic, who likes to jam on the guitar made from a rifle and helmet.

"It disappears as a rifle and becomes exclusively a musical instrument. When I hold it in my hands and play it, all I worry about is how to align with the instru-

ment," he told AFP. Macura's next project is turning an army tank into a percussion instrument for five musicians, which he plans to paint pink. "To make an instrument out of a tank? It's the same as making an instrument out of a rifle. Impossible," he laughed. — AFP

# Venice still magical as tourist-free carnival kicks off

Sumptuously-dressed couples promenaded around St Mark's Square in the swirling fog as Venice kicked off its celebrated carnival this weekend-without the usual crowds of tourists, absent due to the pandemic. "It's totally surreal," said 47-year-old carnival-goer Chiara Ragazzon, an office worker. "What hits me most is the silence. You've always been able to hear music during the carnival, people having fun. But Venice in the fog-it's still a magical place."

Ragazzon and her husband had ventured into Venice from their home around 50 kilometers (30 miles) away. Italy relaxed its coronavirus restrictions yesterday, allowing greater freedoms in most regions. Venice is among the areas now under a lower-risk "yellow" category-but residents are still not allowed to travel outside the region. A short walk from St Mark's Square, Hamid Seddighi, dressed in paint-splattered overalls, was making a carnival mask in his workshop, molding and smoothing it with delicate precision.

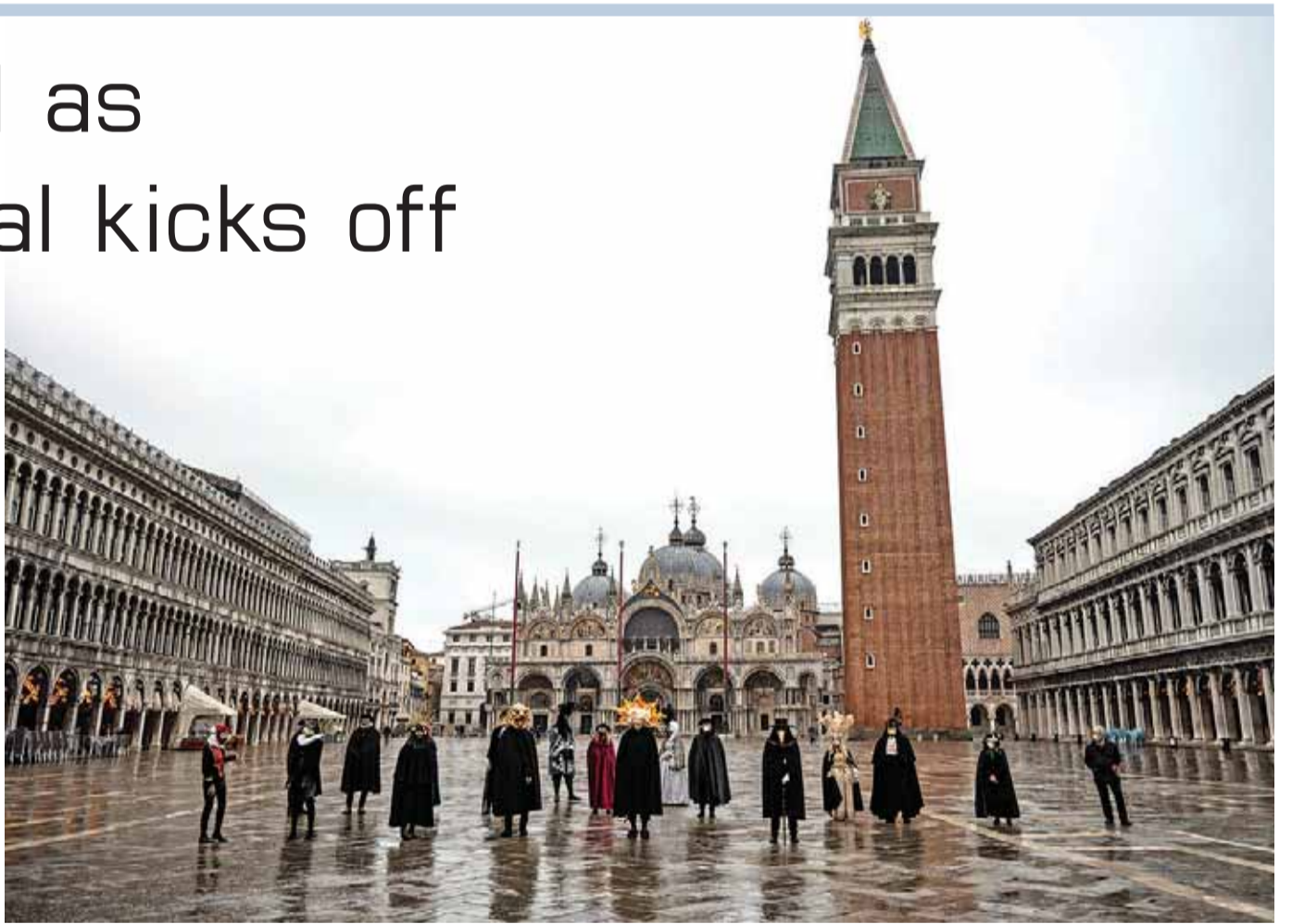
His store, Ca' de Sol, sells masks made from papier mache, lace and iron, bedecked with Swarovski crystals. But his creations have been piling up without takers. The pandemic has pushed his revenues down 70 percent-

mainly due to the lack of foreign tourists, his main clientele. "It was love at first sight for me and these masks," said the 63-year-old, who moved to Italy from Iran. "I've been making them for 35 years. But it's tragic-I have only sold two for the carnival."

### Venice for the Venetians?

Pre-pandemic, the carnival brought some 70 million euros (\$84 million) to Venice's coffers, according to City Hall, with more than half a million tourists flooding in. The local artisans' association has launched a discount campaign to encourage residents to take part in this year's festivities in the absence of foreign visitors. "Venice carnival-masked... and with masks", runs their slogan, a nod to the ubiquity of face-coverings both festive and protective.

Despite the gloom, the association's director Gianni De Checchi sees an opportunity for residents to reclaim a city where over tourism has brought with it a slew of negative effects, from pollution to rocketing rents. "It's an opportunity for Venetians to reappropriate and rediscover their town," he said. "For the past 25 years, mass tourism has unraveled the socio-economic fabric of central Venice. And in a way, it has led the carnival astray."



Venetian artisans wearing carnival masks and costumes take part in a demonstration of The Confederation of Venice Artisans.

**'Fun in the middle of COVID'**  
Venice authorities were forced to cut short last year's carnival when the pandemic took hold. This year it is moving some of the celebrations online, with videos showing Venetians in full carnival regalia. "It's a way of reinvigorating the ties which bind us to the millions of people who love Venice," said Simone Venturini, deputy mayor for tourism.

A stately dance on the Rialto bridge, performed by a group of carnival-lovers in baroque costumes, is among the scenes that have been filmed. "We wanted to show that Venice is not a dead city-that we can have fun even in the middle of COVID," said one of the dancers, Armando Bala, decked out in a red velvet frock coat and a curled white wig. With his wife Arnisa, Bala

has managed the store La Bauta for more than 20 years, selling sumptuous period costumes and artisan masks. The carnival usually contributes about 40 percent of their revenues. "We're not trying to make money-we just want to survive," said Bala. — AFP



The Grand Canal is pictured from the Accademia bridge in Venice.



A Venetian artisan wearing a carnival mask and costume takes part in a demonstration of The Confederation of Venice Artisans (Confartigianato Venezia) at St Mark's square in Venice.



Venetian artisans wearing a carnival mask and costume are pictured prior to take part in a demonstration of The Confederation of Venice Artisans (Confartigianato Venezia). — AFP photos

## Sports

# Hasan leads Pakistan to first series win over South Africa since 2003

## Win lifts Pakistan to fifth in international Test rankings

**RAWALPINDI:** Medium pacer Hasan Ali took a maiden ten-wicket haul to help Pakistan win its first series against South Africa since 2003 with a 95-run victory in the second Test on the fifth and final day in Rawalpindi yesterday.

Hasan finished with 5-60 to record his best match figures of 11-114 and help dismiss South Africa — who were set a daunting 370 to chase — for 274 before the tea break. Hasan's new-ball partner Shaheen Shah Afridi finished with 4-51, while spinner Yasir Shah took the last wicket to spark jubilation among the Pakistan players. Opener Aiden Markram scored a fighting 108 and Temba Bavuma 61. They put on a 106-run stand for the fourth wicket to give Pakistan a scare. Markram took a single off the last ball before lunch as South Africa reached the break on 219-3, needing 151 for a win.

But Hasan ripped through the tourists' batting order, which lost seven wickets for just 33 runs with the second new ball. Hasan struck with the second over of the new ball to end Markram's resistance by getting the opener caught in the slip and end his 335-minute fight. Markram's fifth Test century — the first outside South Africa — included 13 boundaries and three sixes.

Next ball, Hasan had Quinton de Kock caught in the slip for nought, ending the South African skipper's miserable series with just 46 runs. Pakistan skipper Babar Azam was delighted with the win. "Thanks to South Africa for coming and playing competitive cricket," said Azam. "Hasan's comeback after one year was great and he showed great character."

Hasan was sidelined for more than a year with multiple injuries but came back strongly with 12 wickets in the series. Azam admitted South Africa's resistance provided a tough challenge for his side. "At one time, we thought the game could've gone either way when Markram and Bavuma were playing well. But we knew, one wicket and we can come back into the game again," he said.

Losing captain Quinton de Kock said his team lacked a killer touch. "The first-innings deficit did play a big part," said de Kock. "We lost the big moments in the game and that cost us. It's painful at the moment. When we get back home, we'll have to look at our performances and improve on the way forward."

### Historic win

Hasan dismissed George Linde for four to record his third five-wicket haul as he improved upon his previous best match figures of 7-83 against New Zealand in Abu Dhabi in 2018. In the morning, both teams were involved in a keen battle for victory as South Africa resumed on 127-1, knowing the best chase at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in ten previous Tests was the 200 scored by Sri Lanka in 2000.

South Africa saw Dussen bowled off a beautiful inswinger by Hasan — only the third ball of the day — while Du Plessis was leg-before to the same bowler in the fifth over of the morning. It capped a sub-par series for the experienced Du Plessis who managed just 55 in four innings.

This is Pakistan's only second Test series win over South Africa in 12 attempts, having lost eight



**RAWALPINDI:** Pakistan's players celebrate after the dismissal of South Africa's Keshav Maharaj during the fifth and final day of the second Test cricket match between Pakistan and South Africa at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi yesterday. — AFP

and drawn three. Pakistan last beat South Africa 1-0 in a two-match series at home in 2003. Pakistan won the first Test by seven wickets in Karachi.

The series against South Africa — who were touring Pakistan for the first time in 14 years — is the biggest hosted by the home side since a deadly 2009 militant attack on Sri Lanka's squad in Lahore

halted international tours.

The series win also lifts Pakistan to fifth in international Test rankings — the first time they have placed in the top five since January 2017. South Africa are pushed to sixth from fifth. The two teams will now play three Twenty20 internationals on February 11, 13 and 14, all in Lahore. — AFP

## Super-sub Messi leads Barcelona comeback

**MADRID:** Lionel Messi scored his fastest league goal as a substitute as his strike 136 seconds after coming on inspired Barcelona to a 3-2 victory over Real Betis on Sunday. Messi was among several key players rested, with Ronald Koeman seemingly prioritising Wednesday's Copa del Rey semi-final against Sevilla ahead of Barca's fading title challenge in La Liga.

Defeat would have called that decision into question but Messi drove in an equaliser less than three minutes after coming on in the second half and then helped set up Francisco Trincao to score a late winner, the 21-year-old's first goal for Barcelona. "He changed the game," said Koeman, when asked about Messi. "It's a bit about the cup game but we also have to decide when the best moment is to rest players. The cup is the shortest route to a title this season."

Koeman's side sit seven points behind La Liga's leaders Atletico Madrid, who have played two games fewer and were set to face Celta Vigo at home last night. Success also came at a cost as Barca's best available central defender Ronald Araujo was forced off with an ankle injury early on. With Gerard Pique already a long-term absentee, Araujo's fitness will be a huge concern, especially with a Champions League last 16 first leg at home to Paris Saint-Germain to come, a week after the test against Sevilla.

### Messi magic

Betis will wonder how they managed not to



**SEVILLE:** Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (right) celebrates after scoring a goal during the Spanish league football match between Real Betis and FC Barcelona at the Benito Villamarin stadium in Seville on Sunday. — AFP

take at least a point from a wild contest at the Benito Villamarin but Barcelona sustain their momentum, this their sixth league victory in a row. They were hit early by the injury to Araujo, whose ankle caved under the weight of an awkward fall. Frankie de Jong came in at centre-back and his partner Clement Lenglet should have given Barca the lead but headed wide from five yards out with nobody near him.

Betis made them pay with a brilliant opening goal on the break. Ousmane Dembele lost the ball upfield and Betis poured forward, the ball shifted right to Emerson who motored round Jordi Alba and squared for Borja Iglesias to slam home. Juanmi might have made it two but was denied by Marc-Andre ter

Stegen before Messi came on for Miralem Pjanic in the 57th minute and equalised in the 59th. Dembele returned a pass to the Argentinian on the edge of the area and he drove a sizzling shot inside the post.

Nine minutes later, Barca were in front, Alba's cross mishit by Antoine Griezmann, only for the ball to cannon in anyway off the legs of Victor Ruiz. Betis were not finished yet and neither was Ruiz, the defender making amends by heading in Nabil Fekir's crossed free-kick with 15 minutes left. Yet Barcelona had one more trick up their sleeve as Messi weaved in from the left and his chipped pass was headed into the path of the 21-year-old Trincao, whose thundering shot flew in off the crossbar. — AFP

## 'Exceptional' Ibra breaks 500 goal mark to keep AC Milan top

**MILAN:** Zlatan Ibrahimovic broke the 500-mark for career club goals with a brace on Sunday as AC Milan held top spot in Serie A with a 4-0 win over lowly Crotone. "It's difficult to be surprised by Ibrahimovic," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli of the 39-year-old who is powering his team's bid for a first 'Scudetto' since 2011.

Milan moved back two points in front of city rivals Inter Milan who had pulled ahead after a 2-0 win over Fiorentina on Friday. Champions Juventus are a further five back in third after beating Roma 2-0 on Saturday. The capital side dropped to fourth equal on points with city rivals Lazio who beat Cagliari 1-0.

Ibrahimovic opened the scoring on the half hour at the San Siro after combining with Rafael Leao for his 500th strike with nine different clubs. And the Swede brought his tally to 501 in the 64th minute, finishing off a Theo Hernandez cross for his 83rd Milan goal. "To hold up at this level means you're an exceptional professional and he's helped by a physique that few have," continued Pioli. "He's a champion, an athlete who has great motivation, he takes care of his body scrupulously. Sometimes he's tired, but he never fails."

Ante Rebic turned the game into a comprehensive win with a quick-fire brace of his own past Crotone goalkeeper Alex Cordaz. The Croatian headed in a Hakan Calhanoglu corner

in the 69th minute and then seconds later turned in a rebound after Cordaz kept out an Ibrahimovic strike. "The Scudetto? The decisive matches will come later, now we have to withstand all the pressures which is a privilege to have," continued Pioli. "The top seven are all capable of fighting for the title and the first four places. It's not yet time to look too much at the table, a challenging period will come with many matches and the Europa League is about to start again."

### 'My job is to score'

Ibrahimovic showed his incredible form 22 years after making his professional debut for Swedish club Malmö, scoring his first goal in October 1999. "It means that I have scored a few goals in my career," said the Swede, who was substituted off with 15 minutes to go. "The important thing is to continue to help the team in the best possible way. My job is to score and create situations to score."

Ibrahimovic reached the landmark in 825 games, having played for three Serie A sides — Juventus, Inter and Milan — as well as Paris Saint-Germain, Manchester United, Barcelona, Ajax and Los Angeles Galaxy. He has now scored 396 league goals, 57 in European competitions and 48 in cup games.

The former Sweden striker returned to Milan in January 2020 and has scored 27 goals in 37 appear-



**MILAN:** AC Milan's Swedish forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic celebrates after opening the scoring during the Italian Serie A football match AC Milan vs Crotone on Sunday at the San Siro stadium in Milan. — AFP

ances since. He has scored 14 league goals in 11 games this season having been sidelined with coronavirus and injury, two short of top scorer Cristiano Ronaldo, who turned 36 on Friday. With 116 games for Sweden and 62 goals, Ibrahimovic is the all-time leading scorer for the Swedish national team.

### Immobile lifts Lazio

In Rome, Ciro Immobile scored the only goal as Lazio pushed their winning run to six league games to move ahead of Napoli and level with Roma. Cagliari goalkeeper Alessio Cragno kept the relegation-threatened Sardinians in the

game for an hour, denying an Immobile header, and getting down to clear a Luis Alberto volley. But he could do nothing to stop Immobile latching on to Sergej Milinkovic-Savic's nodded cross with the Italian finishing off with his left foot. Last season's European golden shoe winner has now 14 goals this campaign, equal with Ibrahimovic and Inter's Romelu Lukaku. In the Emilia-Romagna derby, Musa Barrow scored twice within the first half hour with Riccardo Orsolini adding a third in injury time as Bologna got back winning 3-0 against Parma. Bologna move up to 12th with Parma stuck 19th. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Hamilton signs new deal

**LONDON:** Lewis Hamilton has ended his long-running contract saga with Mercedes by signing a new one-year deal, the Formula One team announced yesterday. The British driver, 36, will be bidding to win an unprecedented eighth world title when the season gets under way in Bahrain next month. "The Mercedes-AMG Petronas F1 Team is pleased to announce that the reigning Formula One world constructors' champion and the reigning F1 world drivers' champion will continue together in 2021," the team said in a statement. Hamilton had been out of contract since his last deal expired on the final day of December. But after several weeks of negotiations with Mercedes, his future has finally been settled, albeit with both parties agreeing to only one extra year. — AFP

#### US to Olympics 'remains to be seen'

**TAMPA:** US President Joe Biden said late Sunday it remains to be seen if the US will send a team to the pandemic-postponed Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Japan's government, organizers and Olympic officials all insist the Games will go ahead this summer, and that extensive virus countermeasures will ensure the event is safe. Asked in a Super Bowl half-time radio interview with network Westwood One if he thought the Games would go ahead, Biden said any decision "has to be based on science". "I hope we can play, I hope it's possible, but it remains to be seen," he said, stressing that Japanese prime minister Yoshihide Suga was "working very hard to be in a position to be able to safely open the games." — AFP

#### Tigres reach final

**AL-RAYYAN:** Tigres set up a potential Club World Cup final date with Bayern Munich after seeing off Palmeiras 1-0 in Sunday's last four clash at the tournament in Qatar. Andre-Pierre Gignac's penalty eight minutes after the break was enough for the Mexican side to beat Brazilian giants Palmeiras, who claimed their second Copa Libertadores title last month but were subdued at the Education City Stadium. Palmeiras goalkeeper Weverton was the star of the first half with two superb saves, but he could do nothing to stop Gignac's powerful spot-kick after Luan yanked back Carlos Gonzalez in the box. Gignac's winning strike made it three goals in two games for the former Marseille forward, and made his side the first CONCACAF team to reach the Club World Cup final. — AFP

#### Morocco CHAN champions

**YAOUNDE:** Morocco became the first back-to-back winners of the African Nations Championship (CHAN) when they scored twice after corners to defeat Mali 2-0 in the final in Yaounde Sunday. Soufiane Bouffini broke the deadlock on 69 minutes and captain Ayoub el Kaabi doubled the lead 10 minutes later to create history after Morocco hosted and won the previous edition three years ago. It was the second CHAN final loss for Mali, after 2016, and they are still seeking a first Confederation of African Football (CAF) senior national team success. Morocco won five of six matches at a tournament reserved for home-based players, scored 15 goals and conceded three. The north Africans went into the title decider as favorites having scored 12 goals against Uganda, Zambia and hosts Cameroon in their previous three matches. — AFP

## Sports

# Brady's magnificent seven as Bucs upset Chiefs in Super Bowl

## 'We're coming back,' 43-year-old Brady says on future

**TAMPA:** Tom Brady sealed his place in the pantheon of America's greatest sporting icons on Sunday, winning a record seventh Super Bowl as the Tampa Bay Buccaneers routed the Kansas City Chiefs 31-9. The 43-year-old Brady — who became the oldest man to play in the Super Bowl — etched another remarkable chapter in his 21-year career as the Buccaneers shattered the Chiefs' dreams of back-to-back NFL championships.

Brady — who only joined the Buccaneers last year after two decades with the New England Patriots, delivered a vintage display with three touchdowns — 21 from 29 completions and no interceptions at Tampa's Raymond James Stadium.

"I'm so proud of all these guys," said Brady, named Super Bowl Most Valuable Player for the fifth time. "Everything we dealt with all year ... but the team had a lot of confidence, we came together at the right time," added Brady, who confirmed he plans to extend his career next season. "We're coming back. You know that," Brady said.

It was a miserable night for the Chiefs and quarterback Patrick Mahomes, seen by many as the likeliest pretender to Brady's throne. Mahomes, 25, was roughed up repeatedly by a relentless Buccaneers defense, sacked three times and intercepted twice, and failed to register a touchdown as the Chiefs' vaunted offense failed to fire. "Obviously I didn't play the way I wanted to play," said Mahomes. "We battled to the very end. That's one thing you can say."

Instead the night belonged to the Buccaneers and Brady, who added another incredible feat to his extensive catalogue of achievements by leading his new franchise to the Vince Lombardi trophy after a tumultuous season played under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. "I'm not putting any comparisons," Brady said when asked to rank his achievement. "This team is world champions forever and you can't take it away from us."

## Brady joins the immortals after Super Bowl triumph

**LOS ANGELES:** If Tom Brady didn't already occupy a seat at the top table of North American sport's greatest icons, he will now be pulling up a chair. The 43-year-old quarterback authored another implausible chapter to his age-defying career on Sunday, winning a record seventh Super Bowl as the Tampa Bay Buccaneers stunned the Kansas City Chiefs 31-9.

It was a victory that elevated Brady alongside names like Michael Jordan, Wayne Gretzky, Babe Ruth or Serena Williams — the rare, once-in-a-generation athletes whose achievements are expected to stretch long into the future. Sunday's victory in Tampa saw Brady improve a slew of records he already owned, putting them even further out of reach.

At 43 years and 188 days old, Brady is the oldest man ever to play in a Super Bowl, let alone win it. His seventh Super Bowl victory means he has now won more Vince Lombardi Trophies than every team in the league. Brady's fifth Super Bowl Most Valuable Player award is two more than his nearest rival, boyhood idol Joe Montana.

And the victory with the Buccaneers means he is only the second quarterback to take two different teams to a Super Bowl title. True to form, Brady brushed off questions about where he ranks Sunday's victory in his catalogue of success. "I haven't had time to think about that," Brady said. "We've been blessed. It's been a great year."

Other athletes and commentators were in

## Mitchell leads NBA-best Jazz over Pacers

**WASHINGTON:** Donovan Mitchell scored 27 points, passed off 11 assists and grabbed nine rebounds to spark the NBA-best Utah Jazz to their fourth straight victory on Sunday, beating Indiana 103-95. Mitchell matched a career high in assists but just missed a triple double as Utah won for the 15th time in 16 games while the Pacers lost for the fifth time in six starts.

"My mind wasn't really on that at the end of the day," Mitchell said of a triple double. "I'm just trying to go out there and find ways to impact the game." The Jazz, who improved to 19-5 with the road triumph, also had 18 points from Croatian forward Bojan Bogdanovic, 16 points and 16 rebounds from French center Rudy Gobert and 17 points off the bench by guard Jordan Clarkson.

"There were times we were tired, there were times we had to dig deep but we did it collectively and I think that's the biggest thing," Mitchell said. Indiana fell to 12-12 with a third consecutive loss despite 20 points by Lithuanian forward Domantas Sabonis, who fouled out in the fourth quarter after hitting only 7-of-19 from

**Chiefs pay penalty**  
The expected Super Bowl classic never materialized in front of a reduced capacity crowd of 25,000 fans that included 7,500 vaccinated healthcare workers invited as guests by the NFL. The Buccaneers raced into a 21-6 first half lead with two touchdowns from Brady's old Patriots team-mate Rob Gronkowski and a third from Antonio Brown.

Running back Leonard Fournette rushed for a fourth early in the third quarter as the Bucs comfortably closed out a win that saw head coach Bruce Arians become the oldest head coach to win a Super Bowl. "This really belongs to our coaching staff and our players," Arians said afterwards.

The Chiefs were left to rue a disastrously undisciplined first half display that saw them give up repeated penalties that cost 95 yards. "You just can't do the things we did and beat a good football team like that," Chiefs head coach Andy Reid said. "It's uncharacteristic and it's too bad it happened today. It was a bad day to have a bad day."

The Chiefs were never in the game after taking the lead with a 49-yard Harrison Butker field goal, with the Bucs defense pressuring Mahomes from the outset. The Buccaneers sparked into life on their third drive, which ended with Brady picking out Gronkowski to put the Bucs 7-3 up with Ryan Succop's extra point.

The Bucs were back in good field position soon afterwards when a penalty left the Chiefs punting from close to their own goal-line. The Chiefs looked to have snaffled an interception off a deflected Brady pass but again another holding penalty let the Bucs off the hook.

**Defense dominant**  
It got worse for the Chiefs soon afterwards when another penalty, this time for an infraction at the line of scrimmage, turned a Succop field goal attempt

doubt about Sunday's masterpiece, with some describing it as the greatest achievement of his career. "It's unbelievable... it's unreal," was the verdict of Williams, speaking after her first round victory at the Australian Open in Melbourne. "I just was watching as much as I could," Williams added.

**'The Greatest?'**  
Former NFL wide receiver and television pundit Donte Stallworth compared Brady's seven championships to Michael Jordan's six NBA titles. "So Jordan has 6 rings, and Brady has 7 rings. Is it now safe to say that Brady is the GOAT (Greatest of all Time) of all GOATS?," Stallworth quipped. NBA icon LeBron James added on Twitter: "If you know, you know!! GOAT talk."

Brady's win with the Buccaneers came after he stunned the NFL last March by quitting the New England Patriots after two decades. While the Patriots had been the most dominant force in the league during that time, the Buccaneers had been one of the weakest teams in the NFL over the previous decade.

Brady's preparations for the season had also been blown off course by COVID-19, which decimated off-season training last year. "At the age of 43, Tom Brady walked into a season like no other due to pandemic with new teammates, coaches & in a new conference... and won his 7th Super Bowl," wrote Women's NBA player Chiney Ogwumike on Twitter. "He made one of the hardest things for an athlete to ever do, look easy. GOAT is an understatement at this point."

Buccaneers head coach Bruce Arians meanwhile said Brady had had a transformative effect on the franchise. "He's a winner, man. That's all you can say," Arians told ESPN. "His preparation is unbelievable. His confidence rubs off on the rest of the

the floor thanks to Gobert's good defense. "My goal is to make sure they don't score," Gobert said. "It's on me to make sure they take the toughest shot possible and if they make it, they make it."

De'Aaron Fox scored 36 points on 15-of-25 shooting to spark the Sacramento Kings to their fourth consecutive triumph, a 113-110 road victory over the Los Angeles Clippers. Lou Williams and Nicolas Batum missed tying 3-point attempts in the dying seconds and Kings guard Buddy Hield added the last of his 22 points on two free throws with 8.3 seconds remaining to seal the win by Sacramento (12-11). Williams had 23 points off the bench to lead the Clippers (17-8) while Kawhi Leonard had 20 and 10 rebounds.

Miami center Bam Adebayo scored 24 points and pulled down 11 rebounds to lead six double-digit scorers for the Heat in a 109-103 triumph at New York. Jimmy Butler added 17 points for Miami (9-14) despite 3-of-11 shooting, going 11-of-12 at the free throw line. Julius Randle had game highs of 26 points and 13 rebounds in a losing cause for the Knicks (11-14).

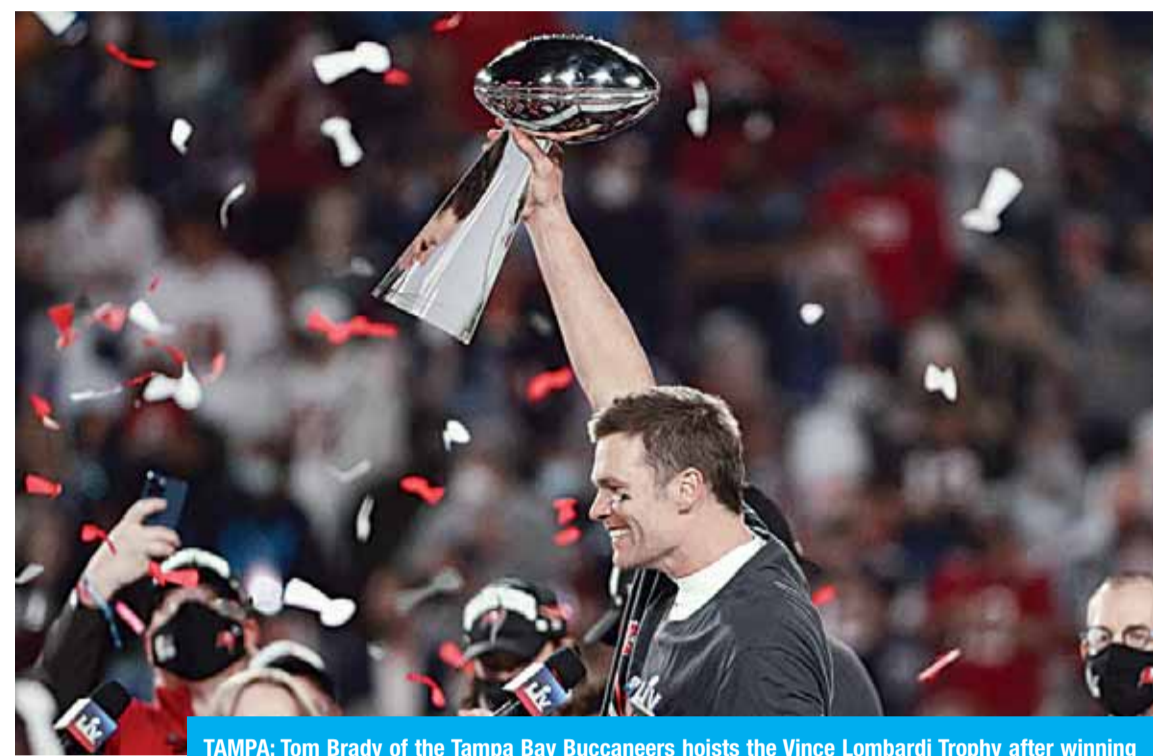
Multiple media reports Sunday said the Detroit Pistons traded veteran guard Derrick Rose — second in scoring among NBA reserves — to the Knicks, where he will reunite with coach Tom Thibodeau after the two



**INDIANAPOLIS:** Donovan Mitchell #45 of the Utah Jazz shoots the ball against the Indiana Pacers on Sunday at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis, Indiana. —AFP

were paired previously in Chicago and Minnesota. The Pistons would land guard Dennis Smith Jr and a second-round pick in this year's NBA Draft in return for Rose, who is averaging 14.2 points, 4.2 assists and 1.9 rebounds a game.

**Suns win as fans cheer**  
Phoenix swingman Mikal Bridges led a balanced attack with 19 points and nine rebounds to power the host Suns over Boston 100-91 for a fifth win in six games. Devin Booker added 18 points and 11 assists while Bahamas



**TAMPA:** Tom Brady of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers hoists the Vince Lombardi Trophy after winning Super Bowl LV at Raymond James Stadium on Sunday in Tampa, Florida. —AFP

into a Bucs first down. On the next drive, Brady found Gronkowski in the end zone once more to make it 14-3. With the Chiefs again settling for a field goal on their next possession, the Bucs regained the ball leading 14-6 with a minute remaining in the half.

Yet again penalties proved to be the Chiefs' nemesis. A 34-yard pass attempt from Brady to Evans earned a flag after Bashaud Breeland tripped Mike Evans. Another holding penalty, this time

against Tyrann Mathieu, left the Buccaneers on the one-yard line with 13 seconds left.

This time Brady arched a bullet pass through a crowd of defenders to find Brown for a touchdown and a 21-6 lead. After a Butker field goal made it 21-9, Fournette plunged the dagger with a 27-yard gallop for a touchdown in the third quarter. Another Buccaneers field goal from Succop made it 31-9 heading into the fourth quarter, and the game ended as the Bucs grabbed another interception. —AFP



**TAMPA:** Tom Brady #12 of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers celebrates winning Super Bowl LV at Raymond James Stadium on Sunday in Tampa, Florida. —AFP

team. His leadership is off the charts. He brought a winning mentality to a really talented team that didn't know how to win."

Brady's former New England Patriots team-mate Julian Edelman speculated the quarterback had been motivated by talk that the Chiefs' Patrick Mahomes was ready to take over Brady's mantle. "That's the ridiculous thing about this whole thing. He's gone for 22 years, whatever year he's on, and can still be so motivated," Edelman told NFL Network.

"He can be that same guy, every day, coming to work, motivated. That's the kind of stuff this guy eats for breakfast. He loves proving people wrong. It's an extraordinary thing. I mean, this guy is 43 years old." Brady, who earlier in the week said he could "definitely" see himself playing two more seasons, which would take him up to his 45th birthday, confirmed he is not going anywhere. "Oh yeah, we're coming back," Brady said. —AFP

## Qatar says 2022 World Cup to be played in full stadiums

**DOHA:** The Qatari 2022 World Cup organizers have insisted that matches will be staged in stadiums operating at 100 percent of capacity even as the global fight against coronavirus drags on. In Tokyo, organizers of this year's rescheduled Olympics have insisted their tournament will go ahead, but infectious diseases experts question the safety of hosting it before the virus is comprehensively defeated and speculation is rife that they could be called off.

If the Olympics fall, the 2022 World Cup being staged in the Middle East for the first time would be the next major global sporting event to face scrutiny of its virus strategy and safety plans. "Qatar started this matter gradually by hosting matches for the AFC Champions League without fans," said Yasir Al-Jamal, chairman of the Operations Office of Qatar's Supreme Committee charged with organizing the 2022 tournament.

"Then in December, capacity was raised to 30 percent which was followed by the Club World Cup at the same percentage... then reaching the 2022 World Cup with crowds of 100 percent," he told AFP on Sunday. Qatar is currently hosting the Club World Cup of regional champions as the country sees a spike in coronavirus cases and hospital admissions.

Local authorities have taken a swathe of measures including banning travelling fans from outside the country. New cases over the past week jumped by a fifth compared to the week before, according to official data, while hospital admissions due to COVID-19 are up 85 percent in the past month, the health ministry said.

"There is confidence in the measures that are taken in the stadiums and the metro network and in the means of entry and exit to preserve the safety of everyone," Jamal said. Qatar officially cut the maximum capacity permitted capacity at open air football grounds to 20 percent ahead of the Club World Cup but the competition was permitted to continue with maximum 30-percent attendance.

"We have put in place several precautionary measures to ensure that 30 percent is appropriate," Jamal said. Matches are being played at two stadiums which will also host World Cup games next year. Qatar has so far inaugurated three new grounds and opened one refurbished venue with four yet to be opened.

Two of the as-yet unopened stadiums, Al Thumama and Ras Abu Abboud, could be used for the 22-nation Arab Cup competition in December, Jamal said. "It is up to FIFA, but we hope that the Arab Cup will represent a golden opportunity to test the two stadiums," he said. Jamal denied any stadium projects had been delayed due to the pandemic. —AFP

## Djokovic, Serena dominate at Aussie Open

### First Grand Slam of 2021 finally underway after COVID delay

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic served a reminder of why he's the greatest Australian Open champion in history as he demolished France's Jeremy Chardy in straight sets in round one yesterday. The eight-time winner's 6-3, 6-1, 6-2 win showed that normal service had resumed at Rod Laver Arena after the year's first Grand Slam was delayed three weeks over the coronavirus.

Serena Williams, Naomi Osaka and Simona Halep also enjoyed convincing wins as the tournament finally got underway in front of limited crowds after a troubled build-up. "It feels great, so great to see people back in the stadium," Djokovic said. "This is the most I've seen on a tennis court in 12 months."

Form and fitness are highly unpredictable at the Australian Open after the coronavirus wiped out five months of last season and badly disrupted preparations for the first Grand Slam of 2021. But Djokovic left little doubt about his readiness to pursue a record-extending ninth title in Melbourne, breaking in the first game and completing the victory in 91 minutes.

The Australian Open was postponed to allow players to quarantine and play warm-up events, which were suspended for a day last week after a coronavirus case at a tournament hotel. After the tortuous build-up, third seed Osaka struck the first serve on the center court against Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova and strode just 68 minutes later as a 6-1, 6-2 winner. "I was really nervous coming into this match. I just wanted to play well," Osaka told a smattering of spectators on the socially-distanced court.

equaling 24th Grand Slam title in style with a 6-1, 6-1 romp past Germany's Laura Siegemund in 56 minutes. "This was a good start, it was vintage Serena," said the 39-year-old, turning heads in a brightly colored, one-legged catsuit.

Later, the 2019 US Open champion Bianca Andreescu won an emotional first match after 15 months out against Romania's Mihaela Buzarnescu 6-2, 4-6, 6-3. The 20-year-old Canadian last played at the WTA Finals in October 2019 at Shenzhen, China, where she suffered the knee injury that scuppered her entire 2020 season.

French Open champion Iga Swiatek, 19, beat Arantxa Rus 6-1, 6-3 to reach the second round and continue her Grand Slam winning streak. But Angelique Kerber, the 2016 Australian Open winner, was the first significant casualty of the women's championship when the 23rd-seeded German lost 6-0, 6-4 to 63rd-ranked American Bernarda Pera.

The tournament known as the "Happy Slam" for its relaxed atmosphere has taken on a different appearance this year with fewer spectators, mandatory mask-wearing and fans unable to circulate freely around the grounds.

Yesterday's total attendance was 17,922 — a far cry from a year ago, when 64,387 came through the turnstiles on day one. It's the fourth Grand Slam tournament affected by the coronavirus after last year's Wimbledon was cancelled, the French Open was postponed and the US Open was held behind closed doors.

Dominic Thiem was made to work hard in the first set by Kazakh veteran Mikhail Kukushkin before coming through 7-6 (7/2), 6-2, 6-3. "He's very experienced and the first set was super-challenging," said Thiem, beaten by Djokovic in five epic sets in the Australian Open final last year.

Sixth seed Alexander Zverev dropped a set and smashed a racquet before grinding to a 6-7 (8/10), 7-6 (7/5), 6-3, 6-2 win against American Marcos Giron. "He played incredible," said the German, who lost to Thiem in the final in New York and the Melbourne semi-finals last year. "He had me on the ropes, particularly in the second set tie-break."

Australia's Nick Kyrgios scored a point with a tweener as he beat Portuguese qualifier Frederico Ferreira Silva in straight sets. Stan Wawrinka, the 2014 champion, reached the second round for a 16th straight time with a 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 win against Portugal's Paulo Sousa.

Milos Raonic, the 14th seed from Canada, also enjoyed serene progress through to the second round with a 6-3, 6-3, 6-2 win over Federico Coria of Argentina. Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov got through in three sets against Croatia's Marin Cilic, the 2014 US Open champion.

But Gael Monfils, the French 10th seed, was stunned 3-6, 6-4, 7-5, 3-6, 6-3 by Emil Ruusuvuori of Finland, the world number 86, in three hours and 46 minutes. Japan's Kei Nishikori also fell at the first hurdle with a straight-sets defeat to Pablo Carreno Busta of Spain. Top women's seed Ashleigh Barty, defending champion Sofia Kenin and 20-time men's singles Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal all begin their challenge today. — AFP



MELBOURNE: Serena Williams of the US hits a return against Germany's Laura Siegemund during their women's singles match on day one of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

**'Vintage Serena'**  
Williams started her quest for a record-

**Racquet smash**  
In the men's draw, US Open champion



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