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## FRONTLINE ... SOON

Student Art Competition 2021

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# For local hotels, institutional quarantine welcome respite

Package rates seen as satisfactory • Lab employee arrested for forging PCR tests



KUWAIT: A vendor arranges stuffed toys outside a shop in Salmiya on the eve of Valentine's Day yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Nawara Fattahwa

**KUWAIT:** After deciding to impose institutional quarantine for all passengers arriving to Kuwait from Feb 21, Kuwait Hotel Owners Association (KHOA) announced the prices for each hotel category. The rates were set as a package for six nights and seven days. For three-star hotels, the room rate will be KD 20 per night for a standard single room and KD 30 for a double room with breakfast and airport transfer. So the package will cost KD 120 for a single room and KD 180 for a double room, while the meal rate (lunch or dinner) will be KD 6.

For four-star hotels, the room rate will be KD 30 per night for a standard single room and KD 40 for a double room with breakfast and airport transfer. So the package will cost KD 180 for a single room and KD 240 for a double room, while the meal rate (lunch or dinner) will be KD 8. For five-star hotels, the room rate will be KD 45 per night for a standard single room and KD 55 for a double room with breakfast and airport transfer. So the package will cost KD 270 for a single room and KD 330 for a double room, while the meal rate (lunch or dinner) will be KD 10.

Kuwait Times spoke with officials of five-star, four-star and three-star hotels to gauge their reactions to this decision. Wassim Mahdi, Director-

Business Development Corporate Accounts of Safir Hotels and Resorts, welcomed this decision for hotels in this difficult time of the coronavirus pandemic. "All businesses were hit by the pandemic, and hotels were one of the most affected. We really needed this initiative to slightly get back to normal after the great losses we are facing since almost a year. I think that the prices of the packages are suitable," he told Kuwait Times.

KHOA will hold a meeting with hotel representatives tomorrow to discuss security and other issues in detail. "We still haven't discussed the organization of guests at the hotel, but this will be clear after the meeting with KHOA. The hotel has three buildings, so maybe we will set one or more buildings for the quarantine. Or maybe we can designate some floors for the quarantine," added Mahdi.

Hakan Gencer, General Manager of Swiss-Belboutique Hotel, also welcomed this decision, noting that under the current circumstances, this is an important step. "Our current occupancy rate is only between 15 to 20 percent. Our sector has been suffering for over a year, and I think this is a great opportunity for hotels. Even if we don't receive the usual room rate, it's still better than nothing," he pointed out.

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## News in brief

### Patient critical after reinfection

**PARIS:** Doctors in France are treating a critically ill patient infected with the South African coronavirus variant, four months after he recovered from COVID-19, in the first case of its kind. The 58-year-old man had a history of asthma and initially tested positive for COVID-19 in September, but tested negative twice in Dec 2020. However, he was admitted to hospital in January and diagnosed with the South African variant. He is currently on a ventilator. — AFP

### Saudi foils new Houthi strike

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia said it foiled a Houthi drone attack on a southern airport yesterday just days before the new US administration is to stop designating the Yemeni rebels as a "terror" group. Saudi air defenses "intercepted and destroyed a drone rigged with explosives which had been launched by the Houthis against Abha airport," the Saudi-led coalition fighting the rebels said in a statement quoted by state television. — AFP

### Biden wants to close Gitmo

**WASHINGTON:** US President Joe Biden wants to close the Guantanamo Bay prison for terror suspects before the end of his term, the White House said Friday. Asked at a press conference about a possible closure of the prison in Cuba during Biden's tenure, spokeswoman Jen Psaki said, "That certainly is our goal and our intention." — AFP

### Rouhani warns of 'fourth wave'

**TEHRAN:** Iran's President Hassan Rouhani warned yesterday of a COVID-19 "fourth wave" as cases rise in certain areas of the country hardest hit by the pandemic. "This is a warning for all of us," Rouhani said in televised remarks. He said some cities in the southwestern province of Khuzestan were now "red" - the highest on Iran's color-coded risk level - after weeks of low alert levels across the country. — AFP

## Virus 'here to stay' despite vaccinations

**STOCKHOLM:** The head of the EU's disease control agency warned Friday that the novel coronavirus could last indefinitely even as global infections slowed by nearly half in the last month and vaccine rollouts gathered pace in parts of the world. In an interview with AFP, ECDC chief Andrea Ammon urged European countries in particular not to drop their guard against a virus that "seems very well adapted to humans" and may require experts to tweak vaccines over time, as is the case with the seasonal flu.

"So we should be prepared that it will remain with us," according to Ammon, head of the Stockholm-based European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. After the latest harsh wave of a pandemic that started in China more than a year ago, glimmers of hope flickered as an AFP database showed the rate of new COVID-19 infections has slowed by 44.5 percent worldwide over the past month. More than 107 million people have been infected worldwide and nearly 2.4 million have died from COVID-19.

But disease experts warned that vaccines won't end the pandemic unless all countries receive doses in a fast and fair manner. Writing in an open letter published in the Lancet medical journal, the authors said with vaccine stockpiling in wealthier

Continued on Page 2

## UK lawyer wins daunting job of ICC prosecutor

**UNITED NATIONS:** British human rights lawyer Karim Khan was elected Friday as the new prosecutor of the International Criminal

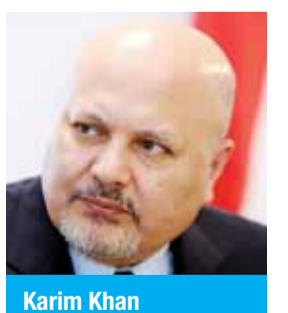
Court, a politically daunting position whose incumbent was slapped with US sanctions. Khan, 50, previously led a special UN probe into crimes by the Islamic State extremist group in which he pressed for a trial on the lines of Nuremberg for Nazi war criminals. More controversially, he also represented late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's son Seif al-Islam.

Khan will be only the third prosecutor of the ICC, taking over in June from Gambian-

born Fatou Bensouda, who has outraged Washington through her investigations into the Afghanistan war and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. ICC nations failed to reach a consensus choice, triggering a vote in New York among four candidates in which Khan won on the second ballot with 72 votes.

In the first round, he did not win a majority but narrowly edged out Ireland's Fergal Gaynor, who has represented victims before

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Karim Khan

## Dubai expats struggle to find love

**DUBAI:** In Dubai, known for its luxury haunts and parties, Lindsey knows she has reasons to be happy. But like many young expatriates, she's sure her quest for a partner will force her to leave. "Even if I had the best job, I wouldn't stay," said the curly-haired 32-year-old French teacher who is

keen on starting a family. "I have friends who have been here for years and all are single," Lindsey said as she ate sushi just ahead of Valentine's Day on a restaurant terrace at the foot of the sprawling Dubai Mall. "Even if I'm having fun, have friends and am not alone, I'm wasting my time."

With little of the oil wealth of its sister emirate Abu Dhabi, Dubai has built its economy with the help of legions of expatriates, who work in sectors including finance, communications, technology and hospitality. More than 90 percent of the emirate's

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PARIS: A medical worker uses a swab to perform a diagnostic PCR test on an arriving passenger at a testing booth at Roissy-Charles de Gaulle Airport yesterday. — AFP



DUBAI: In this photo taken on Jan 14, 2021, a woman looks at a view of Marina Beach. — AFP

## Local

# Information Ministry prepares to launch 2021-2026 strategy

## Ministry hosts discussion panel for local press

By Nawara Fattahwa

**KUWAIT:** As part of the New Kuwait 2035 vision, the Information Ministry is working on its 2021-2026 strategy. Preparations began around two months ago, and will include discussion sessions



### Focus on developing human resources

with various media, individuals and institutions. After these sessions conclude in March, the strategy will be launched.

The ministry has held 22 discussion panels in which over 340 employees participated, in addition to a team of 15 volunteers and dozens of participants from the media and other fields. The ministry concluded the first phase of these sessions on

Thursday with a discussion panel held at the National Library for local press, radio stations and TV channels. During the session, the participants discussed the strengths and weaknesses of different sectors of the information ministry.

Assistant Undersecretary of the Media Planning and Knowledge Development Department of the Ministry of Information Mohammed Bin Naji said this strategy is based on three pillars. "The main pillars of this strategy are infrastructure, developing human resources and media product. The information ministry upgraded its studios from SD to HD and 4K, but human resources are still not developed," he noted during the discussion panel.

The team of volunteers is organizing these sessions. "We met various officials and employees from 11 departments of the information ministry and took their opinion on the points of strength and weakness at the ministry. We also asked them about their vision of the situation in 10 years," Khaled Al-Thkeir, member of the team, told

Kuwait Times.

After they finished dealing with the information ministry staff, the team organized discussion panels with media and other people. "We invited all media including press, radio, TV, electronic media and social media accounts and influencers for these sessions. And soon we will also meet intellectuals and artists to learn their opinions and relations with the information ministry. Furthermore, we will meet with embassies to get the experience of their country in this field," Thkeir added.

The main purpose of these discussion panels is to develop Kuwaiti media and present it in its best form to the world. "The strategy of the information ministry is based on the instructions of the information minister and taking the opinion of the community from all categories, including the media, students, experts, producers, directors, actors, social media influencers and others. We ask what they expect from the official media represented by the information ministry. Based on this we will set the strategy for the next five years," Thkeir explained.



The Information Ministry.



KUWAIT: Gifts are shown in a shop in Kuwait City on the eve of Valentine's Day yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



## Dubai expats struggle to...

Continued from Page 1

3.3 million population are foreigners. Many work menial jobs that keep the city humming, but large numbers of Arab, European and American residents form the middle class.

After being in Dubai - one of seven emirates comprising the United Arab Emirates - for two years, Lindsey has resorted to using the popular Tinder dating app. But she is put off by the frequent ostentatious displays of muscular torsos and luxury cars. "It's possible that I won't find anyone in France either, but I think there's a greater chance there," she said of her home nation.

Clinical psychologist Thoraiya Kanafani said that behind the facade of all-day brunches and throbbing nightclubs, many of her clients in Dubai suffer from "a sense of loneliness". While other large globalized cities such as New York, London and Paris also present difficulties in establishing lasting relationships, she said that

in Dubai - a temporary stop for many - the situation is exacerbated.

"The perception that Dubai tends to be a transitory city plays a big role in people's unwillingness or difficulty in committing," Kanafani told AFP, adding that heartache can lead to long-term consequences like depression, anxiety and substance abuse. Waed, 34, a Palestinian design consultant who has lived in Dubai her whole life, said she has been unsuccessful in finding love after she divorced in 2018. She got married in 2008, she said, before "trashy expats" started flocking to the emirate and people became obsessed with the superficiality of luxury living. "Dating in Dubai? If anyone says it's good, tell them no," she told AFP, adding that she was able to tolerate Tinder for about four days before dumping it. "I'm sure you'll find some people who want to commit, but a lot of them come here for a couple of years to make some money, build a career, have a good time and then leave."

Many of Waed's friends have left Dubai and found love in other countries despite a "very good life in DIFC" - a lavish business district full of Instagrammable bars and restaurants. "One of them has a boyfriend and a dog now, the other one got engaged, and another has met someone," she said, adding they

however ruled last week that the court had jurisdiction over the situation in the Palestinian territories, paving the way for a full investigation after a five-year preliminary probe opened by Bensouda.

The new US administration of President Joe Biden has signaled a less confrontational line but has not said whether it will drop sanctions against Bensouda, who has attacked the "unacceptable" measures. Other candidates for the job included Spanish judge Carlos Castresana, who previously headed a UN panel combating crime and corruption in Guatemala but resigned in 2010 alleging "systemic attacks" by power-hungry officials, and Francesco Lo Voi, an Italian prosecutor of the Mafia.

Bensouda has had a mixed record in her tenure since 2012 even as she expanded - some analysts say overextended - the court's reach. Under her leadership, former Ivory Coast president Laurent Gbagbo was cleared of crimes against humanity, while former DR Congo vice-president Jean-Pierre Bemba was acquitted on appeal. Kenya's Kenyatta also saw charges of crimes against humanity over electoral bloodshed dropped by Bensouda.

But Bensouda has recently secured high-profile convictions against Ugandan child soldier-turned-Lord's Resistance Army commander Dominic Ongwen and Congolese warlord Bosco " Terminator" Ntaganda. She has also been credited with improving the prosecutor's office compared with her predecessor Luis Moreno-Ocampo, whose leadership was described as "autocratic" in a probe ordered by the ICC into the Kenyatta case. — AFP

## For local hotels, institutional...

Continued from Page 1

Mohammed Shawqi, Cluster Director of Sales of Ibis Hotel, concurred that this decision is a very good step. "Although the rates are lower than our prices before the pandemic, it's much better than our present situation. I think this should have been applied a few months ago, as local hotels could've benefited rather than neighboring countries that benefited from the 14-day transit policy (for passengers arriving from 35 countries from which direct flights are banned). The hotel sector was the first that was hit by the pandemic and is suffering

## Virus 'here to stay' despite...

Continued from Page 1

countries, "it could be years before the coronavirus is brought under control at a global level".

The warning came as US vaccine maker Moderna said it was seeking clearance with regulators around the world to put 50 percent more coronavirus vaccine into each of its vials as a way to quickly boost current supply levels. In Britain, a marked drop in infections and accelerating vaccinations have prompted some within the governing Conservative Party to push for stay-at-home rules to be lifted in early March.

Much of the country re-entered lockdown in early January to curb a more transmissible COVID-19 variant first identified in the UK. The British government nonetheless voiced caution, a watchword echoed elsewhere, including Italy, Portugal and Australia. In Australia, more than six million people in Melbourne and its surrounding area were under an emergency five-day coronavirus lockdown. "It's rough. It's going to be a rough few days for everyone," said tennis star Serena Williams, reacting to the lockdown moments after her latest victory at the Australian Open.

While play will continue under the restrictions, fans will no longer be permitted and players must restrict themselves to biosecure "bubbles". The toll on sports, entertainment and economies continued to be massive. The Tokyo Olympic Games are due to open in July after multiple delays. But the games organizers are already battling public misgivings about holding the huge international event this summer.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen urged the 27 EU member countries to accelerate ratification of a key part of the bloc's 750-billion-euro (\$900-billion) plan to recover from the

till now, so we really needed this decision to support us," he told Kuwait Times.

In a related development, the interior ministry's relations and security information department said Ahmadi detectives arrested an Asian laboratory employee accused of forging coronavirus PCR test certificates in exchange of money. Criminal detectives acted on tips received about an expat issuing negative coronavirus PCR tests certificates without carrying out the tests on the applicants.

Further investigations proved the information was correct, and the suspect was arrested. He told interrogators that he took advantage of his job to issue certificates for those who wanted it without going to the laboratory in Farwaniya. He used to take a swab of himself to guarantee a negative result. Those who received such certificates are being sought.

impact of the pandemic. The UK - which has left the EU and has Europe's highest virus death toll after a heavily criticized initial response to the pandemic - reported that the economy shrank a record 9.9 percent last year. Finance minister Rishi Sunak admitted the impact would be a "serious shock" and warned: "We should expect the economy to get worse before it gets better."

Hungary meanwhile said it will become the first EU nation to start using Russia's Sputnik V vaccine. The country broke ranks with the EU last month by becoming the first bloc member to approve Sputnik V, ordering two million doses to be delivered over three months, enough to vaccinate one million people. Russia registered Sputnik V in August, months ahead of Western competitors but before the start of large-scale clinical trials, which left some experts wary. However, recent results published in The Lancet found that the vaccine is 91.6 percent effective against COVID-19. Some EU leaders seem to be warming to the idea of deploying Sputnik V as the bloc struggles with supply shortfalls for the three vaccines it has approved.

The European Medicines Agency has so far approved vaccines for the bloc developed by US-German firm Pfizer-BioNTech, US firm Moderna and British-Swedish firm AstraZeneca with Oxford University. The EMA said Friday it had started a "rolling review" of a vaccine from German manufacturer CureVac, the first step towards possible authorization.

In the United States - the world's hardest-hit country with more than 480,000 deaths - health authorities on Friday urged schools to reopen safely and as soon as possible, offering a detailed plan for limiting the spread of COVID-19. The strategy emphasizes universal masking, hand washing, disinfection and contact tracing. While recommending vaccination for teachers and staff, it stops short of saying it is necessary - a divisive issue among teachers' unions. — AFP

Local

# Kuwait lists 851 new COVID cases, deaths near 1,000

## ICU patients jump to 129; 10,651 total patients hospitalized

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait registered 851 new coronavirus cases yesterday after announcing 1,021 new cases Friday, while total deaths reached 998 after six new fatalities were declared yesterday and seven a day before. The total number of COVID-19 infections stood yesterday at 176,903, the Ministry of Health announced.

Meanwhile, the number of patients in intensive care units (ICU) increased from 122 on Friday to 129 yesterday, as the total number of patients hospitalized jumped from 10,523 to 10,651 in one day. Health workers conducted a total of 20,359 swab tests over the past 48 hours, ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said, noting that the total number of tests rose to 1,660,406.

As for recoveries, the ministry announced 717 and 642 new recoveries yesterday and Friday respectively, raising the total to 165,254. Dr Sanad further urged the public to abide by health precautions, mainly following social distancing rules, which

remains the best way to halt the spread of the virus. The government had insisted during a meeting with a parliamentary panel last week that it will continue with its latest decisions to close shops to con-

tain the spread of the coronavirus, despite calls to end the closures for financial reasons. Rapporteur of the National Assembly's health and labor committee

said following its meeting Wednesday that they discussed with the health ministry representatives the latest developments and called on them to cancel the closures and focus on controlling arrivals from the airport and other terminals. He said the ministry insisted it will continue with the closures and "we stressed that if the closures will continue, the government should compensate businesses" affected by the measures. He added that if the government does not end the closures, MPs will submit a draft law for compensation. Hammad said that MPs told the health ministry to test all people arriving through the airport and no one should be allowed to leave before knowing the result. The government had decided to close all shops from 8:00 pm to 5:00 am the next day and completely shut health clubs, salons and barber shops, starting from last Sunday. Kuwait also banned the entry of all foreigners for two weeks starting on the same day.



**717 new recoveries yesterday**

tain the spread of the coronavirus, despite calls to end the closures for financial reasons. Rapporteur of the National Assembly's health and labor committee



## Suspected arson in Salmi tire blaze



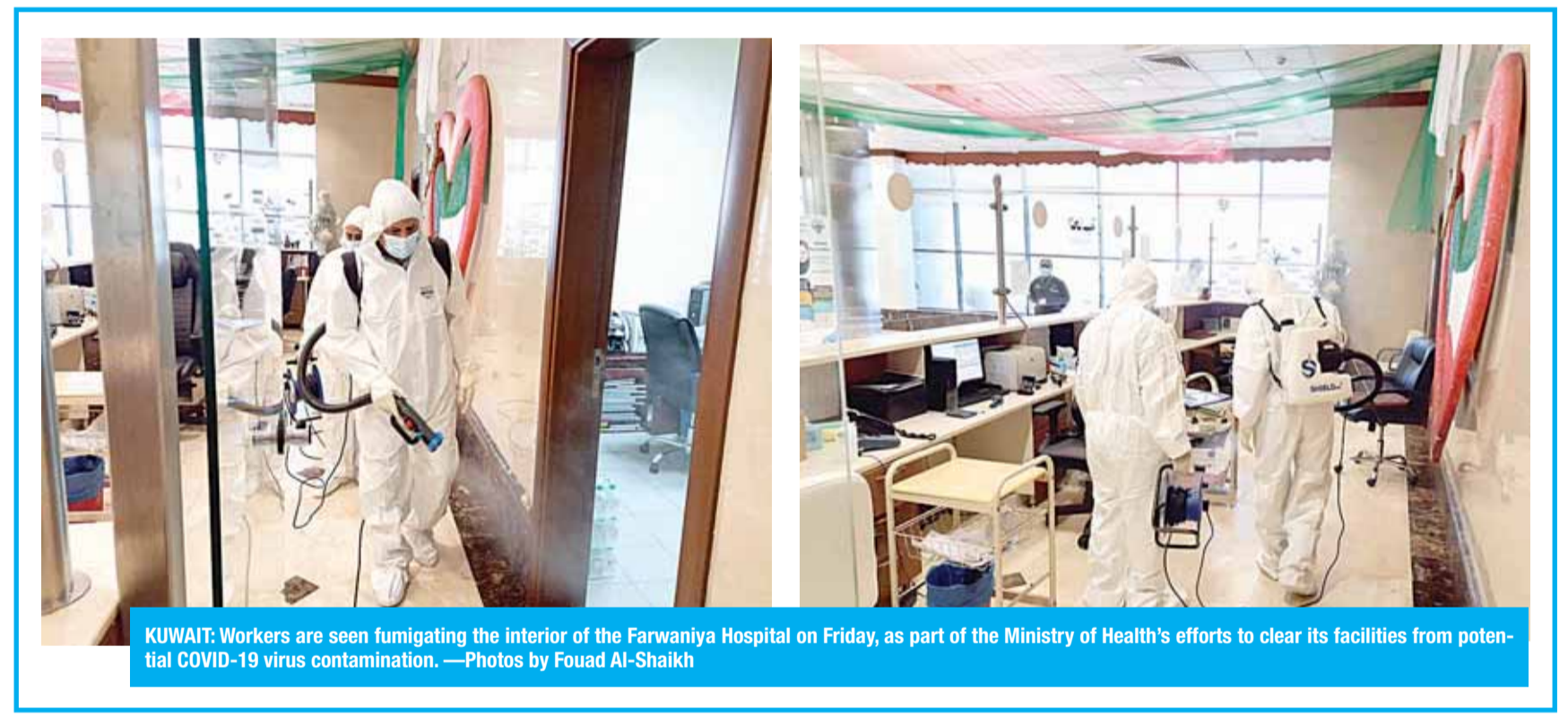
**KUWAIT:** Firemen battled a blaze in a pile of tires reported yesterday in Salmi. Preliminary investigations indicate that the fire was an arson, Kuwait Fire Force said in a statement. The fire had started in four different places, suggesting that it was deliberate, it explained, noting that detectives had collected samples from the scene. No injuries were reported in the incident, KFF said, adding that investigations are ongoing in the case.



## 24 arrested for leaking case files

**KUWAIT:** The interior ministry's relations and security information department said in a follow up of an earlier case where four court bailiffs were arrested for photocopying documents and leaking case files and selling them, 24 others were arrested for committing the same offense. Interrogation of the four bailiffs led to 24 others - 10 bailiffs, two secretaries, two employees and two lawyers, while the rest are lawyers' representatives. All the suspects confessed to having contacts with the four suspects to obtain documents

of cases that are still being considered by courts. The Interior Ministry had announced nearly three weeks ago that police arrested four Arab bailiffs who leaked information, documents and files of cases that are still in deliberation in courts in exchange of money. The arrest came weeks following a similar case in which police detained two bailiffs, a court secretary and a lawyer's representative on similar charges. "While conducting investigations, criminal detectives detected four persons taking snapshots of documents related to court cases under deliberation," the ministry had said in a statement, noting that police obtained warrants to search the suspects' homes where they found more documents stolen from courts.



**KUWAIT:** Workers are seen fumigating the interior of the Farwaniya Hospital on Friday, as part of the Ministry of Health's efforts to clear its facilities from potential COVID-19 virus contamination. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

## Kuwait strongly deplores Houthis' continued attacks

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Foreign Ministry on Friday condemned in the strongest terms Houthis' continued targeting of Saudi civilians and civilian neighborhoods with booby-trapped drones and ballistic missiles. The continuation of these terrorist acts poses a dangerous escalation that threatens Saudi Arabia's security and the region's stability, the ministry said in a statement. These acts blatantly challenge international and humanitarian law, and undermine international efforts aiming to reach a political solution to end the ongoing conflict, it added. The ministry also renewed Kuwait's call to the international community, mainly the UN Security Council, to assume its responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security. The State of Kuwait stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Saudi Arabia and supports the Kingdom in all measures it takes to maintain its security, stability and sovereignty, it stressed.

Meanwhile, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) condemned the Houthi militia's continued "deliberate" targeted drone attacks on civilian-populated areas in Saudi Arabia, most recently Abha airport. These attacks represent a "flagrant violation" of international norms and laws, GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf said in a statement, holding the group and its financial and arms backers "fully accountable." Hajraf went on to praise the vigilance and the efficiency of the Saudi-led Arab coalition in Yemen after it successfully intercepted and shot down the explosive drone earlier in the day. He also underlined the Gulf Arab bloc's support of Saudi Arabia, in its measures to maintain its security and stability and the safety of its citizens. The GCC chief went on to call on the international community to take a firm stance against the Houthi militia and those who support it, amid their ongoing attempts to destabilize regional peace and security.

Furthermore, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation condemned in the strongest terms the Houthi militia's continued targeting of civilians and residential areas after a recently thwarted drone attack on an airport in southern Saudi Arabia. This comes after the Arab coalition in support of Yemen's legitimacy earlier on Saturday intercepted and shot down a bomb-laden drone targeting Abha International Airport. The OIC "supports all measures taken by the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen, to deal with the hostile actions of the terrorist Houthi militia," Secretary General Ahmed Al-Othaimen said in a statement. —KUNA

**Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed**

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## Local

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## Turkish FM lauds Kuwait's efforts in Gulf reconciliation

DOHA: Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Thursday expressed appreciation to Kuwait's efforts in resolving the Gulf crisis. Speaking at a joint news conference with his Qatari counterpart Mohammad bin Abdulrahman, Cavusoglu hailed the resumption of normal ties between Gulf countries, describing it as a good development. Good relations between the neighboring countries bring benefits, development and security to the whole region, he said. He argued that there are other problems in the Middle East region that require joint action to resolve them, mainly those related to Washington-Tehran relations, the sanctions imposed on Iran and the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran.

He expressed hope that the Yemeni crisis would end and peace and security would return to the Yemeni state soon, extolling the UN efforts aimed at restoring peace and security there. The Turkish minister described the current developments in Libya as "positive", hoping that power would be transferred smoothly to the new government. He affirmed that Turkey backs the peaceful political process in Libya, and noted the discussions held today in Qatar dealt with this issue.

Talks with the Qatari minister also covered the Syrian file, he said, wishing a near end to the Syrian conflict. In addition, the Palestinian cause was also discussed in the talks, and Qatar and Turkey support the peaceful solution in Palestine, the Turkish top diplomat made clear. He affirmed that Turkey-Qatar ties have been developing and strengthening, and the two sides desire to increase their bilateral trade exchange. Cavusoglu spoke highly about Qatar's efforts and preparations for hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's flags and portraits 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 can be seen around the country as Kuwait celebrates its national holidays later this month. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

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## Supporting Kuwaiti youth our top priority: NBK Capital

KUWAIT: As part of the career readiness program "Tamakan" sponsored by it, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) held a seminar in which Faisal Al-Hamad, CEO of NBK Capital, gave a lecture and answered a number of questions raised by the participants.

In the seminar, Hamad stressed that investing in enhancing skills and developing capabilities through learning and training is the best investment with ever growing return and gains accumulating day after day, and never fails. In that context, Hamad advised the program's trainees and all Kuwaiti youth, saying: "Be keen to learn and develop yourself, and do not rush in search for salary and position, as both will be attained at the right time."

### Most valuable resource

Hamad pointed out that academic qualifications are necessary to start a career, but that there are basic personal skills that must be met by those willing to join leading institutions. Hamad said: "At NBK Capital, we have our own school, as we require basic qualities in those willing to join our team, most notably ethics, professionalism, the ability to learn and one-team spirit."

"We have a clear path for training our employees and enhancing their skills, in line with an unshakable strategy that aims to invest in our human capital, being the company's key asset and most valuable resource," he added. Hamad noted that NBK Capital is committed to performing its national duties and social responsibility by launching innovative initiatives all year round, which focus on training the Kuwaiti youth, developing their skills, and spreading the culture of savings and investment to help them properly manage their savings and invest them using up-to-date mechanisms and strategies.

### Invest Early

Answering a question about the appropriate timing to start investing, Hamad replied: "Start from now, and do not postpone the decision. The best financial investments are those you start early, and diversify between stocks, sectors and asset classes, while continuing to pump money into them regularly, no matter how little, as this guarantees building good investment positions."

On the importance of starting early, Hamad gave an example that the total return of an investment started at an early age of 20, with annual savings of KD 5,000 for 10 years is the same as that of an investment that starts at the age of 30, with annual savings in the same amount for 30 years.

Hamad highlighted the importance of diversifying investments and not concentrating them in



KUWAIT: Faisal Al-Hamad, CEO of NBK Capital, speaks during the lecture.

any of the stocks, regardless how leading the company or strong its performance is, as changes in the operating environment come all of a sudden, and strike major institutions, noting: "We have a lesson to learn from the coronavirus pandemic."

### SmartWealth

Hamad mentioned that "Digital transformation in the financial sector will not stop or retreat; that is why we are keen to provide investment platforms that cope with cutting-edge international levels in areas of artificial intelligence and digital investment solutions."

Hamad emphasized that SmartWealth adopts a prudent investment strategy offering access to international markets and ensuring the diversification of asset classes to be suitable for all levels of financial solvency and income, no matter how small. This makes it suitable for the youth and an ideal solution for a hard equation, in case of starting investment with a small amount. "SmartWealth draws up a carefully designed investment plan according to your investment goals and your risk tolerance, regardless of the size of the investment or the level of income," he added.

### GameStop

In response to a question about a possible contagion of the GameStop craze and the momentum of individual trading on the US stock exchanges to the Kuwait and regional markets, and how NBK Capital's is ready for this phenomenon, Hamad said that the booms in stock prices are not a new phenomenon in the financial markets, but always occur, for varying reasons from one time to another.

"We are investors, not speculators. As long as your investments are diversified, based on sound financial grounds and you are keen to accumulate and increase these investments regularly, you will be safe from such sharp changes," he added. Hamad warned against speculation in the hope of good luck and making a fortune quickly, saying: "There are more losers than winners from markets crazes like GameStop's."



Jade and rubies:  
How Myanmar's military  
amassed its fortune

## 200 years after Napoleon defeat, Russia and France bury their dead

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ROME: Italian outgoing Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte (left) hands over the cabinet minister bell to new Prime Minister Mario Draghi during a handover ceremony at Palazzo Chigi yesterday. —AFP

# Draghi sworn in as Italy's new PM

## Country hopes to turn page with appointment of 'Super Mario'

ROME: Former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi was formally sworn in as Italy's new prime minister yesterday, against the backdrop of the deadly coronavirus pandemic and a crippling recession. The appointment of the 73-year-old known as "Super Mario" capped weeks of political instability for the country still in the grips of the health crisis that has killed more than 93,000 people.

"I swear to be loyal to the Republic," recited Draghi, as he stood before President Sergio Mattarella in the ornate presidential palace in a televised ceremony. Members of his new cabinet, who include technocrats, veteran politicians and ministers held over from the previous government, each took the oath of office. Draghi was parachuted in by Mattarella after the previous centre-left coalition under premier Giuseppe Conte collapsed, leading Italy rudderless amid the worst recession since World War II.

After assembling a broad-based coalition, on Friday night Draghi formally accepted the post of premier, publicly revealing the new cabinet for the first time. On Wednesday, Draghi will be presented to the Senate, the upper house of parliament, followed by the lower Chamber of Deputies on Thursday for a confidence vote that will give the final official blessing to his government.

"Break a leg," read the headline on La Stampa daily Saturday, as an Ipsos poll in the Corriere della Sera daily showed 62 percent of Italians supporting

Draghi. Conte's final months in office were marked by political turmoil but the former law professor - who rose to power in 2018 with no prior political experience - represented for many Italians a comforting, steady hand during the darkest moments of the pandemic last year.

### Coalition, for now?

Draghi has the support of a rainbow coalition ranging from leftists to Matteo Salvini's far-right League. It includes the populist Five Star Movement (M5S), the center-left Democratic Party (PD) and Italia Viva - who made-up the previous government before falling out over the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. M5S, parliament's biggest party that began life as an anti-establishment movement, was split over whether to support a government led by an unelected technocrat.

But in an online vote, members backed Draghi by 59 percent, after securing the promise of a new super-ministry for "ecological transition". That post has gone to renowned physicist Roberto Cingolani, who works at Italian aeronautics giant Leonardo. The senior deputy governor of Bank of Italy, Daniele Franco, was named economy minister, while Roberto Speranza and Luigi Di Maio stay on at health and foreign affairs, respectively.

### Challenges await

High hopes await the new leader, who famously

pledged to do "whatever it takes" to save the eurozone in the midst of the 2010s debt crisis. Yesterday, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyden tweeted that Draghi's "experience will be an exceptional asset for Italy & Europe" while British Prime Minister Boris Johnson congratulated him. Although Draghi himself has no political power base, he relies on years of experience in the Italian civil service, as well as his banking career.

His arrival was cheered by the financial markets with Italy's borrowing costs dropping to a historic low this week. Nevertheless, "it is difficult to overstate the scale of the challenges that Draghi and Italy face", said Luigi Scazzieri of the Centre for European Reform. The COVID-19 shutdown and waves of subsequent restrictions caused the economy to shrink by a staggering 8.9 percent last year, while more than 420,000 people have lost their jobs.

The virus remains rife and Conte's cabinet, in one of its last acts, on Friday tightened curbs in four regions and extended a ban on inter-regional travel. Like other European Union countries, Italy has also fallen behind in its vaccination program, blaming delivery delays. The country is pinning hopes on receiving more than euro 220 billion (\$267 billion) in EU recovery funds to help get back on its feet, but analysts expect uphill challenges for Draghi in pushing through structural reforms. —AFP

## Palestinians hoping vote boosts strength

GAZA CITY: A deal reached between Palestinian rivals Fatah and Hamas to hold elections is aimed at renewing confidence in Palestinian governance ahead of a diplomatic push and talks with Israel, experts said. Joe Biden's election as US president motivated Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas of Fatah, to hold "serious" talks with Hamas, according to a Palestinian analyst.

Abbas' Palestinian Authority had cut ties with Donald Trump's administration, accusing it of bias towards Israel, and Abbas wants to renew the legitimacy of Palestinian institutions as he re-engages with Washington, said the analyst Ashraf Abu al-Houl. In January, Abbas, whose Fatah party controls the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank, announced the dates for the first Palestinian elections in 15 years.

Hamas Islamists won a surprising landslide when Palestinians last went to the polls in 2006, in a result not recognized by Fatah and which sparked deadly clashes and left Palestinian politics divided. Hamas has held power in Gaza since 2007, the year Israel imposed a blockade on the coastal enclave, while Fatah has retained control in the West Bank. —AFP

## Biden dismantling Trump's 'Remain in Mexico' policy

WASHINGTON: Asylum seekers forced to remain in Mexico while their cases are being resolved in the United States will begin to be admitted into the US as of next week, President Joe Biden's administration announced Friday. Biden instructed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) earlier this month to take action to end the controversial "Remain in Mexico" program put in place by his

predecessor Donald Trump.

It saw tens of thousands of non-Mexican asylum seekers - mostly from Central America - sent back over the border pending the outcome of their asylum applications, creating a humanitarian crisis in the area, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. "Beginning on February 19, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will begin phase one of a program to restore safe and orderly processing at the southwest border," the agency announced in a statement.

It said there are approximately 25,000 active cases still. Candidates will be tested first for the coronavirus, a senior DHS official who asked not to be identified told reporters. At least 70,000 people were

returned to Mexico under the agreement from Jan 2019, when the program began to be implemented, through Dec 2020, according to the NGO American Immigration Council.

US authorities emphasized that they are working closely with the Mexican government and with international organizations and NGOs at the border. DHS chief Alejandro Mayorkas, who is the first Latino and the first immigrant to head the department, stressed that Washington is committed to "rebuilding a safe, orderly and humane immigration system". "This latest action is another step in our commitment to reform immigration policies that do not align with our nation's values," Mayorkas said in a statement. —AFP

## Yemen rocked by heavy clashes amid starvation warning

DUBAI: Fighting in Yemen's north has left dozens dead and wounded, a government source said Friday, as UN agencies issued stark warnings that 400,000 children risk death this year from lack of food. Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis rebels have resumed an offensive to seize strategic oil-rich Marib, the government's last northern stronghold, the loss of which would be disastrous for the beleaguered leadership.

"Dozens of people have been killed and wounded on both sides," a government source told AFP, reporting a Houthi

missile fired into Marib's suburbs and air strikes from the Saudi-backed military coalition pounding rebel positions. "Most of the deaths were Houthis hit by air strikes," he added.

Yemen is engulfed in a bloody power struggle that erupted in 2014 between its government, supported by Saudi Arabia, and Iran-backed Houthi rebels, who control the capital Sanaa and most of the north. The grinding conflict has claimed tens of thousands of lives and displaced millions, according to international organizations, with close to 80 percent of the 29-million population in need of some form of aid for survival.

The upsurge in violence comes as Washington said it would remove the Houthi rebels from its list of terrorist groups next Tuesday, overturning sanctions put in place by the administration of ex-president Donald



In this photo taken on Jan 20, 2021, a Yemeni mother sits with her malnourished child during treatment at a medical center in Yemen's northern Hajjah province. —AFP

Trump. The sanctions had sparked an outcry from aid groups, who said the designation would put them at legal risk and severely hamper efforts. —AFP

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## International

# 200 years after Napoleon defeat, Russia and France bury their dead

## Caskets contain remains of 120 soldiers, 3 women and 3 teenagers

**VYAZMA, Russia:** The remains of French and Russian soldiers who died during Napoleon's catastrophic retreat from Moscow in 1812 were laid to rest yesterday in a rare moment of unity between the two countries.

Officials and descendants of 19th-century Russian and French military leaders gathered for a windswept ceremony in the western town of Vyazma to re-bury the remains of 126 people killed in one of the bloodiest battles of Napoleon's Russian campaign. The snow fell and a military band played in temperatures of minus 15 degrees Celsius as uniformed pall-bearers carried eight flag-draped caskets at a cemetery in Vyazma, a town more than 200 km west of Moscow.

The caskets containing the remains of 120 soldiers, three women and three teenagers were later put into the snow-covered ground to the sounds of a gun salute. The earth had frozen, and the coffins were left in the ground covered by a white canvas. "As generations pass, death and time reconcile everyone," Yulia Khitrova, a descendant of Russian field marshal Mikhail Kutuzov considered a national hero for repelling Napoleon, said at the ceremony. Prince Joachim Murat, a descendant of one of Napoleon's most celebrated marshals, was also in attendance along with dozens of re-enactors in period uniforms.

The interment took place as France marks the bicentenary of the military leader's death this year. The remains were discovered in a mass grave by French and Russian archaeologists in 2019. The dig was led by Pierre Malinowski, the Kremlin-connected head of the Foundation for the Development of Russian-French Historic Initiatives. The three women are believed to be so-called "vivandieres", who provided first aid and kept canteens in the French army, while the three adolescents are believed to have been drummers. All are thought to have fallen during the Battle of Vyazma on November 3, 1812 at the beginning of the French army's retreat from Moscow and before the horrific crossing



VIAZMA, Russia: Re-enactors in period uniforms stand next to coffins containing remains of Russian and French soldiers during a burial ceremony in the western town of Vyazma yesterday.— AFP

of the Berezina River. The ceremony marked a rare moment of unity between Russia and Europe at a time of heightened tensions over a litany of issues including the Kremlin's increasingly harsh crackdown on the opposition.

### 'Sign of reconciliation'

"Direct descendants of the main players in the conflict are meeting here together in a sign of reconciliation to commemorate the Russian and French soldiers that their ancestors commanded more than 200 years ago," Malinowski told AFP ahead of the re-burial. The site

was first discovered during construction work and was initially believed to be one of the many World War II mass graves that dot western Russia.

But research by the Russian Academy of Sciences later showed that the remains were of victims of Napoleon's campaign, most of them in their 30s at the time of their death, said anthropologist Tatyana Shvedchikova. Alexander Khokhlov, head of the archaeological expedition, said that the discovery of metal uniform buttons helped establish that some of the victims served in the French army's 30th and 55th line infantry regiments and 24th light infantry regiment.— AFP

## In shadow of Tigray war, ethnic massacres roil western Ethiopia

**CHAGNI, Ethiopia:** On the night before Orthodox Christmas last month, Ethiopian priest Girmay Getahun donned a white robe and Bible in hand, walked down the dirt road to his church to prepare for services. Around midnight, heavily-armed fighters arrived in his village, in Ethiopia's western Benishangul-Gumuz region, sending Girmay fleeing into the forest to hide for two days. He returned to a horrifying sight: the corpses of his eight housemates, all day-laborers on teff and peanut farms, who had become the latest victims in a gruesome, perplexing string of attacks. Hundreds have died and tens of thousands have fled their homes.

Inter-ethnic violence in this lowland area, known as Metekel, predates a brutal three-month-old conflict farther north that has pitted Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed against the former ruling party of the Tigray region. Yet the bloodshed has intensified just as the military is trying to assert control over Tigray-high-lighting how Abiy, the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize winner, does not have the luxury of addressing just one security crisis at a time. In mid-November, 34 civilians were killed in Metekel when gunmen attacked a bus.

In late December, one day after Abiy visited the

area, more than 200 people perished in a pre-dawn massacre, some burned alive as they slept. And last month more than 80 died in a raid involving knives and arrows. Even as analysts puzzle over who and what is driving the violence, there are fears it could soon escalate. Abiy's government has unveiled plans to form a militia of civilians displaced by past attacks to return to Metekel to "protect" those remaining. At a displacement camp in the town of Chagni, east of Metekel, Girmay is one of many residents who back this move. "I don't fully support the idea of forming a militia, because in my opinion it's like saying, 'Kill one another,'" Girmay told AFP as he clutched a wooden cross. "But if there are no other options and if (the gunmen) are not disarmed, we shall train some recruits from here to protect our lives."

Abiy has so far failed to provide an explanation for the carnage in Metekel. He told lawmakers in October that assailants were receiving training in neighboring Sudan, and in December he said the killings were aimed at siphoning off military forces sent to Tigray. But his government has not put forward evidence to back either claim.

At the Chagni camp, an ever-growing collection of crammed tents surrounded by waterpear trees in Ethiopia's Amhara region, theories center on long-running disputes over land. Most of the camp's 20,000 inhabitants are ethnic Amharas, Ethiopia's second-largest group. Many buy into the idea of an "Amhara genocide" perpetrated by militiamen from the local Gumuz population. These fighters, they say, are attacking Amhara farmers like Girmay's housemates to drive them off land they have long cultivated.—AFP



CHAGNI, Ethiopia: Internally Displaced People (IDP), fleeing from violence in the Metekel zone in Western Ethiopia, gather outside a tent where clothes are being distributed at a camp in Chagni, Ethiopia.— AFP

## Trump critics call for permanent Facebook ban of ex-president

**NEW YORK:** Calling Donald Trump a "clear and present danger," scholars and civil rights advocates on Friday urged Facebook to permanently ban the former US president from the platform. Critics of the social media company along with strong advocates of unfettered political discourse called on Facebook's oversight board to endorse the decision to boot Trump from the platform in the aftermath of the January 6 attack on the US Capitol. A public comment period ended Friday with more than 9,000 submissions regarding the case, according to the board. The social network itself has asked the independent body to review Trump's eviction from the online community.

The oversight board has the final say on what is removed or allowed to remain on the world's biggest social network. A ruling is expected by April. "Overturning the Trump ban is an invitation to violence, hate and disinformation that will cost lives and undermine democracy," a group of critics maintained in a letter. "Don't strike the match." They described

Trump as a serial abuser of social media rules who poses a danger "to democracy and human life." Signers of the letter include Rashad Robinson, president of Color of Change; Anti-Defamation League head Jonathan Greenblatt; and Harvard professor Lawrence Tribe.

### Dangerous precedent?

Conservatives on Capitol Hill and beyond say the moves by Facebook and Twitter to "deplatform" Trump demonstrate political bias and inhibit free speech. Twitter chief Jack Dorsey last month backed the messaging platform's ban of Trump, but said it sets a "dangerous" precedent and represents a failure to promote healthy conversation on social networks. "Having to ban an account has real and significant ramifications," Dorsey said in a string of tweets about his take on the company's decision to permanently bar the president. "While there are clear and obvious exceptions, I feel a ban is a failure of ours ultimately to promote healthy conversation."

Trump's access to social media platforms that he used as a megaphone during his presidency has been largely cut off since a violent mob of his supporters stormed the Capitol in Washington. Twitter recently announced that Trump will not be permitted back on the network he used constantly, even if he runs for office again. "Our policies are designed to ensure that people are not inciting violence," Twitter Chief Financial Officer Ned Segal said on CNBC.

### News in brief

#### Biden aide suspended

**WASHINGTON:** An official on President Joe Biden's staff was suspended Friday after allegedly threatening to "destroy" a reporter who was asking about his personal life. White House Deputy Spokesman TJ Ducklo was suspended for one week without pay, Biden's Press Secretary Jen Psaki said. According to Vanity Fair magazine, Ducklo called up Politico reporter Tara Palmeri after she began asking questions about his months-old personal relationship with a reporter from Politico rival Axios, Alexi McCammond. "I will destroy you," Ducklo said to Palmeri in a phone call shortly after the January 20 inauguration of Biden as president.—AFP

#### Turkey detains Iran consulate employee

**ISTANBUL:** An Iranian consulate employee in Istanbul was remanded in custody on Friday in connection with a probe into the assassination of an Iranian dissident in Turkey in 2019. The employee, identified by Turkey's Anadolu state news agency by his initials M.R.N., is suspected of providing forged travel documents for the assassination's alleged mastermind, allowing him to return to Iran. The investigation concerns the gangland-style killing in Istanbul on November 14, 2019 of Masoud Molavi, who had helped run a channel on Telegram called "Black Box" since March 2018.—AFP

#### TV producer rejects rape allegation

**PARIS:** A prominent French television producer who is being investigated for child sexual assault said yesterday he was the victim of a plot by his nephew who had demanded money from him. "I am not a predator!" Gerard Louvin told the newspaper Nice-Matin, in his first public comments on the affair—the latest sexual assault case to rock the intellectual elite in France. French prosecutors said Tuesday they had opened an investigation into accusations of rape and complicity in raping minors by Louvin, who has produced some of the most popular shows on French television over the last decades, and his husband Daniel Moyné.—AFP

#### Global calls to probe 'violent death'

**TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras:** The United Nations, European Union and United States have urged Honduras to investigate the recent deaths of six young women in just four days, including a nurse who died in police custody. Honduras police said Keyla Martinez, 26, was arrested last night for violating the coronavirus curfew in La Esperanza in the country's west, and claimed officers found her in her cell hours later "trying to kill herself." The hospital she was brought to said she was dead on arrival, and prosecutors said an autopsy showed Martinez had died from hanging. But her mother, Norma Rodriguez, told AFP that she is "one hundred percent sure that my daughter was killed."—AFP

#### Nigeria police arrest protesters

**LAGOS:** Nigerian police arrested a small group of protesters in Lagos yesterday after they tried to hold a rally demanding justice for victims of a deadly shooting during demonstrations last year. Activists had called for new protests yesterday after a judicial panel authorized the reopening of the city's giant Lekki tollgate, where security forces shot at protesters in October. Last year's mostly youth-led #EndSARS protests against police brutality and governance brought Africa's largest city to a standstill in October in a campaign that won backing from many high-profile celebrities.—AFP

### 'Last resort'

Even German Chancellor Angela Merkel has weighed in, stating through her spokesman that she believed freedom of opinion should not be determined by "the management of social media platforms." A group of US university law professors, joined by former Facebook security chief Alex Stamos, sent the board a letter reasoning that while a disfavored "last resort," the removal of Trump from the social network was justified by his actions. "The eventual deplatforming of Trump's accounts helped defuse a dangerous and anti-democratic situation," read the letter, sent by University of California law professor Richard Hasen to speak for the group.

"Had the platforms granted Trump continued, broad unmediated access, he could have provoked additional violence and potentially further undermined the peaceful transition of power which is essential to a working democracy." In its letter to Facebook's board, the activist group also lambasted the social media company for employing the board as a "fig leaf" to evade responsibility for tough decisions and called for laws regulating social media giants. The board has stressed its independence, citing funding by an irrevocable trust set up by Facebook, and makes policy recommendations along with binding rulings on specific appeals. Members of Facebook's oversight board come from various countries and include jurists, human rights activists, journalists, a Nobel peace laureate and a former Danish prime minister.—AFP



NEW YORK: People celebrate the Lunar New Year holiday in Chinatown on February 12, 2021 in New York City.—AFP

## In NYC Chinatown, pandemic and stigma dulls New Year cheer

**NEW YORK:** A smattering of firecrackers, the odd lion dance and a lone drummer: New York's Chinatown turned the page on a year it was ravaged by the pandemic and virus stigmatization with subdued celebrations Friday. No annual parade or large family gatherings greeted the Lunar New Year. Just relief at the passing of the Year of Rat and hope that the Year of the Ox will bring a turnaround in fortunes.

"Of course I'm happy the year has finished," says Jenny Li, as a slow trickle of shoppers stop at her gift store to buy lanterns, tubes of confetti and red envelopes synonymous with Chinese New Year. Li has seen takings at her shop plummet to a quarter of what they were before coronavirus struck the Big Apple almost exactly a year ago. "It was tough times. I hope for the new year that everything goes back to normal and everybody gets healthy," the 48-year-old told AFP.

The pandemic has closed thousands of businesses and restaurants across New York City, where COVID-19 has killed more than 28,000 people. Nowhere has the pain been felt more acutely than in Chinatown, where the economic toll was compounded by misunderstandings of the virus and racism. As COVID-19, which former president Donald Trump routinely called the "Chinese virus," spread from Wuhan around the world in early 2020, New York's bustling Chinatown turned ghost town almost overnight. "Even before the economic impact and the crisis really hit New York City, there was a lot of xenophobia and just fear about," recalls Olympia Moy, co-founder of the non-profit Think! Chinatown. "It just like snowballed into a really bad situation." This week, New York Mayor Bill de Blasio tweeted an article about a massive spike in hate crimes against Asian Americans across the United States.

### Indoor dining

"We CANNOT allow bigotry and hate to divide us," he tweeted. Sixteen-year-old Irina Wong echoed that sentiment as she welcomed in the New Year with her parents and younger brother after traveling from New Jersey to Chinatown. "I hope that this coming year, whether COVID becomes better or not, we can all learn to rely on each other and I wish there would be less division throughout the country," she told AFP. The pandemic closed several stores and left many more fighting for survival in this historic district in Lower Manhattan. "Usually at this time of year all the restaurants are full," says restaurant manager Alex Chan, pointing to empty tables up and down the street. George Ma, the 55-year-old owner of a gift shop says he is seeing "a little bit of improvement" with the rollout of vaccines. There was further cause for optimism, Friday, with the new year coinciding with the partial reopening of indoor dining in New York. Restaurants are now allowed to sit customers inside at 25 percent capacity. "It will make a big difference," said Chan, who nevertheless doesn't expect Chinatown to really pick up until April at the earliest.—AFP

## International

# Jade and rubies: How Myanmar's military amassed its fortune

## Opaque groups have tentacles in a diverse range of industries

**BANGKOK:** Mines, banks, petroleum, agriculture, tourism: Myanmar's ruling junta has vested interests in large swathes of the country's economy, providing it a colossal—and closely guarded—fortune that the United States has targeted with sanctions. After last week's coup to oust civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi—and the subsequent protest crackdown—calls have grown for international penalties. On Thursday, the United States slapped sanctions on the country's top brass.

President Joe Biden said his administration was cutting off military leaders' access to \$1 billion in funds in the US, while the Treasury Department blocked any US assets and transactions with 10 current or former military officials held responsible for the February 1 coup. But experts believe the army chiefs still have access to enormous wealth from the sprawling conglomerates behind them. Through two highly secretive military-controlled behemoths—Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) and the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC)—at least 133 companies in the country are wholly or partially overseen by generals, according to a report by Justice For Myanmar (JFM).

The opaque groups have their tentacles in industries as diverse as beer, tobacco, transportation, textiles, tourism and banking. Much of the lucrative—and largely unregulated—jade and ruby trade is controlled by military-owned businesses. Although Myanmar is the world's largest producer of jade, and the trade is estimated to be worth billions of dollars a year, only a very small part of the financial windfall ends up in state coffers—with most high-quality stones believed to be smuggled over the border into China.

### Amassing fortunes

Since 2011, the disaster-prone jade industry has remained "controlled by a network of military elites, drug lords and their cronies", according to NGO Global Witness. An MEHL subsidiary reportedly holds the largest number of jade mining licenses. The company, Myanmar Imperial Jade Co. Ltd., was among the three gems entities slapped with US sanctions Thursday.

MEHL has partnerships with companies in China, Japan, South Korea and Singapore, among others. It has enriched its shareholders in Myanmar, who—according to the conglomerate's government filings—are all current or retired military officials. Between 1990 and 2011, some \$18 billion was paid out to them, according to an Amnesty International report in September 2020.

Junta chief General Min Aung Hlaing, reportedly one of the main shareholders, would have received some \$250,000 in dividends from MEHL in 2011 alone, the report said. Ruling for nearly half a century, "the military top brass had time to enrich themselves", said Francoise Nicolas, Asia director of the French Institute of International Relations. The brief stint of quasi-civilian rule from 2011-21 did little to change that. But the military may have feared for its future prospects after Suu Kyi's party won by a landslide in November, Nicolas told AFP. "This risked endangering part of their wealth and was very probably part of their decision to launch a putsch," she added. In the wake of the coup, the military has regained control of state companies.

It now oversees the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise—which has partnerships with France's Total and the US's Chevron—and is a hugely important asset reportedly netting nearly a billion dollars a year from natural gas sales. So far, Japanese brewer Kirin and Singapore-based oil company Puma are the only foreign corporations to have announced they are reconsidering their operations in the country. Kirin said it would be looking for a new partner, instead of MEHL. Total, which operates largely in the gigantic offshore Yadana gas field and paid \$257 million to the Myanmar government in 2019, said it would evaluate the impact of the coup. Australia's Woodside, which holds a stake with Total in another offshore project, said it was "monitoring the situation".

### Further sanctions?

Prior to the coup, US sanctions were imposed over the army's abuses against the Rohingya Muslim minority in 2017. Those retaliatory measures targeted military units and individuals, including Min Aung



**MOGOK, Myanmar:** In this file photo sellers trade rubies and other gemstones at the gems market in Mogok town, north of Mandalay. —AFP

Hlaing. Debbie Stothard from the International Federation for Human Rights pushed for more penalties to throttle the generals' access to funds. Stothard also urged international companies to break all partnerships with the ruling leaders, and said Singapore—the largest foreign investor in Myanmar—was key.

"Some top Burmese military officials have had a lot of personal investments and bank accounts in Singapore since the mid-2000s. The trend has accelerated in recent years," she said, adding that the city-state "has leverage to act against" the army chiefs. Justice For Myanmar's Yadanar Maung urged swift retaliatory measures. "Without definitive action now,

the military will inflict more violence against the people, and democracy will not have a chance," she said. But others cautioned against plunging one of Southeast Asia's poorest countries back into an economic chokehold, especially as the junta is well-versed in sanctions.

Having run the country for decades under crippling embargoes, the military "will be prepared to do so again", said Myanmar-based political analyst Richard Horsey. "Policymakers must resist the urge to impose progressively harsher measures without clear-headed cost-benefit analysis," he added. "Don't inflict harm on Myanmar people for the sins of their rulers." —AFP

## Arrests thwarted as UN demands Suu Kyi's release

**YANGON:** Opposition to Myanmar's new military regime intensified yesterday as spontaneous neighborhood watch groups mobilized to thwart arrests of anti-coup activists and the UN demanded the release of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The army takeover that brought a decade-old democracy to an end last week has unleashed a storm of anger and defiance, with huge daily protests bringing urban centers around the country to a standstill. Since taking Suu Kyi and her top allies into custody, troops have stepped up

arrests of civil servants, doctors and others joining strikes to call on the generals to relinquish power.

Crowds defied overnight curfews to mass on the streets as night fell, hours after finishing a seventh straight day of rallies, following rumors that police were launching a fresh wave of arrests. One group swarmed a hospital in the city of Patheingyi on rumors that a popular local doctor would be taken, chanting a Buddhist prayer urging protection from harm. "If I have problems, I will ask for your help," Than Min Htut told the group who had come to aid him, flashing the three-finger salute that has come to symbolize resistance to the coup.

Than Min Htut told AFP yesterday he was still free and would continue participating in a civil disobedience campaign opposing military rule. People in Yangon skirted a junta ban on Facebook to organize neighborhood watch groups that warned of rumored

arrests. We didn't know who will be taken, but when we heard the sound, we went out to join our neighbors," said Tin Zar, a storekeeper in Yangon's north. "Even if they shoot, we are not afraid," she told AFP.

More than 320 people have been arrested since last week's coup, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners monitoring group. An emergency session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva called for the new regime to release all "arbitrarily detained" persons and hand power back to Suu Kyi's administration. The UN deputy rights chief Nada al-Nashif warned Myanmar in the Friday meeting that "the world is watching" events unfold in the country.

News of more arrests did not stop tens of thousands from returning to the streets of Yangon yesterday, where columns of traffic ground to a halt and blared their horns for five minutes to mark the birthday of Aung San. —AFP

## Rohingya on edge with return of generals

**YANGON:** Myanmar's stateless, conflict-scarred Rohingya community are on edge with the return of military rule, fearing further violence in a restive part of the country where others have shown support for the new regime. Much of the long-persecuted Muslim minority have spent years in cramped displacement camps, with no freedom of movement or access to healthcare, living in what rights groups call "apartheid" conditions. They are still reeling from a 2017 military crackdown that razed entire villages and sent around 750,000 Rohingya fleeing across the border into Bangladesh carrying accounts of rape and extrajudicial killings.

"Under a democratic government, we had a little hope we could go back to our old home," said a 27-year-old, who asked not to be named, from a camp near the city of Sittwe. "But now it is certain we will not be able to return." Myanmar and its generals are on trial in a UN court for charges of genocide from

the 2017 violence in northern Rakhine state, where the majority of the country's Rohingya population lived before their exodus.

Army chief Min Aung Hlaing, who now heads the country's new junta, repeatedly claimed the crackdown was necessary to root out insurgents in northern Rakhine state. "There is a real risk that (this regime) can lead to new violence in Rakhine," said Tun Khin, president of the Burma Rohingya Organization UK lobby group. Shortly after seizing power, the junta promised to abide by plans to repatriate the refugees from Bangladesh—a scheme that has been in limbo for years.

But "no one believes a word they say," Tun Khin said. Aung San Suu Kyi, the civilian leader ousted and detained by the generals last week, had travelled to The Hague to defend them from genocide charges while in office. But across the border in Bangladesh, Rohingya refugees have sent messages of support to anti-coup protesters calling for her return. Some have posted photos of themselves on social media while flashing the three-finger salute that has come to signify opposition to army rule.

### 'This time will be different'

Rakhine state, home to both the Rohingya and a largely Buddhist ethnic Rakhine majority, has been a tinderbox of conflict for decades. In recent years

around their eyes to symbolically protest the government turning a blind eye to the spate of cases. "We are here to challenge and pressure the government... The murderer has to be brought out to the streets, has to be punished," protester Rekha Thapa told AFP. "Next to none have received justice," another protester, Anoushka Pandey, told AFP.

"If tomorrow something happens to me or somebody I love and care about, who is going to be accountable? Who is going to give us justice? For all of these answers I am here." In 2018, thousands poured onto the streets after the brutal rape and murder of 13-year-old schoolgirl Nirmala Pant, with one person dying and dozens injured during the protests.

The state was accused of not taking adequate action in rape cases, and a video emerged of police officers destroying evidence. Some 2,100 rape cases were reported in Nepal last year, according to the police, up from less than 1,000 in 2015. Activists say the higher number of cases reflect more reports of violence by women. But they say that many more assaults also go unreported in the deeply patriarchal country. —AFP



**MAUNGDAW, Myanmar:** This file photo shows Rohingya refugees gathered behind a barbed-wire fence at a temporary settlement setup in a "no man's land" border zone between Myanmar and Bangladesh. —AFP

the military has battled the Arakan Army, which is fighting for more autonomy for the state's ethnic Rakhine population. But days after its coup, the junta ended a 19-month internet shutdown and reaffirmed a commitment to a ceasefire with the militant group. The regime also announced a member of a local Rakhine nationalist party would be joining its cabinet. —AFP



**KATHMANDU, Madhyamanchal:** Demonstrators stage a mock funeral symbolizing victims of sexual assault during a protest rally against rape and the increasing cases of violence on women, in Kathmandu. —AFP

## Teen's rape and murder sparks protest in Nepal

**KATHMANDU:** Hundreds of Nepalis staged a mock funeral procession in the capital Kathmandu Friday after the rape and murder of a teenage girl drew attention to a rise in sexual assault cases. Bhagirathi Bhatta, 17, went missing on Thursday last week while she was going home from school. Her body was found a day later in a gorge near her village in Baitadi district in western Nepal. An initial investigation by police found that she had been raped and then strangled.

At the protest in Kathmandu, demonstrators dressed in white mourning clothes carried a young woman on a bamboo stretcher to symbolize the victims who lose their lives to such violent crimes. Others followed, calling for an end to violence against women and justice for victims as they marched. Several people wrapped black cloth

### News in brief

#### 19 killed in firecracker blast

**NEW DELHI:** At least 19 people were killed and dozens hurt in a blast at a firecracker factory in India, authorities said yesterday. The blast on Friday afternoon in Virudhunagar district was one of the worst such incidents in years in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Local official R Kannan told AFP that the death toll was likely to go up in the next few hours. "So far 34 people have been injured and are undergoing treatment. Some of them are severely burnt," he said. —AFP

#### India fears another flash flood

**INDIA:** A newly formed Himalayan lake raised fears Friday of another flash flood above a disaster-hit valley in northern India, prompting authorities to conduct helicopter surveys and send a team on a 16-hour climb to investigate. Thirty-eight people died and 166 are still missing, state disaster officials said, after a barrage of water and debris hurtled down the valley in the northern state of Uttarakhand with terrifying speed and force on Sunday, obliterating roads and bridges and smashing through dams. —AFP

#### 3 killed in Mogadishu car bomb

**MOGADISHU:** Three people were killed and eight wounded after a car bomb detonated near a security checkpoint in the Somali capital Mogadishu yesterday, a security official and witnesses said. "The police were chasing the hostile vehicle after spotting it a few kilometers away from where it exploded," the official, Abdurahman Mohamed, told AFP. "The police opened fire on the vehicle and chased it and this allowed many people to flee. This has really limited the number of casualties the blast could have caused." —AFP

#### Peru health minister resigns

**LIMA:** Peru's health minister resigned Friday, state TV reported, amid a growing scandal over claims that former President Martin Vizcarra was vaccinated against COVID-19 before the jab was available to the public. Pilar Mazzetti—who had served as the country's minister of health since July last year—has presented her letter of resignation to President Francisco Sagasti, state television network TV Peru reported. The government is yet to formally confirm she is stepping down. —AFP

#### Bolivia congress gives amnesty

**LA PAZ, Bolivia:** Bolivia's socialist-dominated congress on Friday voted to give amnesty to those prosecuted for acts of violence during the chaos that followed the November 2019 resignation of then-president Evo Morales. Bolivia's congress is dominated by Morales's Movement for Socialism (MAS) party after it romped to victory in an October 2020 general election that also saw Luis Arce from the party win the presidency. The law means that those prosecuted for violence during the year-long reign of conservative president Jeanine Anez will face no punishment. —AFP

# Business

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2021

## Ooredoo Kuwait Group reports revenue of KD 593m in 2020

### Recommended dividend of 15 fils per share announced

**KUWAIT:** National Mobile Telecommunications Company K.S.C.P "Ooredoo" announced its financial results for year 2020:

- Consolidated customer base decreased by 5 percent to 24.8 million in 2020, compared to 26.1 million in 2019.
- Revenues in KWD were impacted by lower sales in Kuwait (substantial support for local customers with free of charge services and plans), a decrease in Algerian revenue mainly due to the weak economic environment, currency devaluation, price competition and the impact of the Coronavirus and related business limitations across all operations. Consequently, consolidated revenue decreased by 6 percent to KD 592.8 million for 2020, compared to KD 633.5 million in 2019.
- EBITDA decreased by 15 percent in 2020 to KD 196.9 million, compared to KD 232.6 million in 2019.
- Net profit attributable to NMTC was KD 3.4 million for 2020 compared with KD 30.1 million in 2019, due to the decline in EBITDA.
- The consolidated earnings per share was 7 fils for 2020, compared to 60 fils per share earned in 2019. The Board of Directors recommends a dividend payment of 15 fils per share, subject to shareholder approval at the General Assembly scheduled for 1 March 2021.



Sheikh Mohammad Bin Abdullah Al Thani

Sheikh Mohammad Bin Abdullah Al Thani, Chairman of the Board of Directors commented: "2020 has been an unprecedented year in many ways, as the COVID-19 pandemic impacted nearly every aspect of our lives. During this period, we focused on the health and wellbeing of our employees and customers as well as supporting the communities in which we operate. Our efforts and service to the community was recognised by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society which honoured the voluntary role Ooredoo Kuwait employees performed to support society throughout the ongoing pandemic.

During the year we accelerated our digital transformation, focusing on expanding our digital customer acquisition channels and increasing the digital services available to our customers. This contributed to a significant growth in our digital user base and supported an increase in sales through the Ooredoo App in Kuwait. Our investments in technology and the customer experience, enabled us to maintain a healthy consolidated customer base of 24.8 million in 2020 compared to 26.1 million in 2019.

Our financial performance in 2020 was impacted by the economic slowdown resulting from the global pandemic, which deteriorated market conditions in some of our geographies. NMTC reported consolidated revenues of KD 593 million in 2020 down from KD 633 million in the previous year. Revenues improved sequentially from KD 148 million in Q3 2020 to KD 151 million in Q4 2020 indicating the start of a potential recovery. However, due to the uncertainty of the ongoing pandemic we remain cautiously optimistic and prudent in our approach.

#### Financial Highlights:

	Quarterly Analysis			Full Year Analysis		
	Q4 2020	Q4 2019	% change	2020	2019	% change
Consolidated Revenue (KWD m)	151.1	163.5	-8%	592.8	633.5	-6%
EBITDA (KWD m)	45.3	58.1	-22%	196.9	232.6	-15%
EBITDA margin (%)	30%	36%	-	33%	37%	-
Net Profit attributable to NMTC (KWD m)	(2.5)	6.7	-137%	3.4	30.1	-89%
Consolidated Customers (m)	24.8	26.1	-5%	24.8	26.1	-5%

The pressure from the top line impacted EBITDA and Net Profit attributable to NMTC, which was KD 197 million and KD 3 million, respectively. In Kuwait, we continued to accelerate our digital strategy to create a seamless user experience and drive the growth of our digital customer base. In Tunisia, revenues increased by 4 percent to KWD 128 million despite challenging market conditions.

Our results in Algeria were impacted weak macro-economic conditions, intense price competition and a 5 percent year on year depreciation of the Algerian dinar. In Palestine EBITDA increased 15 percent to KD 11 million in 2020 compared to the previous year, driven by our ongoing efficiency and cost optimisation initiatives. In Maldives' our performance was impacted by the dampened tourism industry, which contributes to more than 40 percent of GDP, due to the COVID-19 pandemic."

#### Review of Operations

The Group's operational performance can be summarised as follows:

#### Ooredoo – Kuwait operations

Ooredoo Kuwait Revenues were KD 209.8 million in 2020, compared to KD 231.3 million in 2019 and EBITDA was KD 52.0 million in 2020 compared to KD 72.4 million in 2019. Ooredoo Kuwait offered special benefits for workers in the ministries and governmental organisations to support their efforts in fighting the pandemic as

well as free 5GB data a day and unlimited local calls for all its customers, during the COVID-19 crisis. Ooredoo Kuwait also witnessed a multi-fold increase in its digital user base and digital sales supported by an easy to use Ooredoo App.

- Significant growth in Ooredoo Kuwait digital user base and supported an increase in sales through the My Ooredoo App
- Investments in technology and the customer experience, enabled Ooredoo Kuwait to maintain a healthy consolidated customer base
- Ooredoo Kuwait continued to accelerate its digital strategy to create a seamless user experience and drive growth of its digital customer base
- Ooredoo Kuwait launched its all-new "Shamel Pro" which was a big step that added to the company's portfolio
- Ooredoo Kuwait has been persistent in developing and providing ProPing service over its 5G network
- Ooredoo Kuwait honored by several entities and won many prestigious awards including; the "Best Loyalty and Rewards Program" award for its "Nojoom Rewards Program"
- Ooredoo Kuwait witnessed tremendous increase in digital user numbers and digital sales revenues

- Significant growth in Ooredoo Kuwait digital user base and supported an increase in sales through the My Ooredoo App
- My Ooredoo app provides users a quick and easy way to check their balance, recharge their prepaid numbers, pay their post-paid bills, and more. In short, customers can manage all their lines at once through the App.

Customers can also customize their mobile plan minutes, internet and other features with "ANA" to suit their needs. Customers can also subscribe to any roaming packages within minutes through "ANA".

COVID-19 made My Ooredoo App, digital services and virtual gatherings parts of people's everyday lives, which encouraged them to never leave their homes. Today, millions of people depend on this tech to study and work from home, attend virtual meetings, and shop online. Thus, Ooredoo Kuwait constantly improves its products, services, and offerings to better serve the community.

- Investments in technology and the customer experience, enabled Ooredoo Kuwait to maintain a healthy consolidated customer base
- Ooredoo Kuwait continued to accelerate its digital strategy to create a seamless user experience and drive growth of its digital customer base

Advanced technologies create constant opportunities for innovation, growth, and value. These technologies allow companies to better engage with their customers, meet their ever-changing demands and desires, and offer customized customer experience. Ooredoo Kuwait never stopped investing in connected technologies with the aim of improving efficiency and leverage customer experiences.

- Ooredoo Kuwait launched its all-new "Shamel Pro" which was a big step that added to the company's portfolio

Ooredoo Kuwait launched its all-new "Shamel Pro" which was first of its kind tariff plan offering benefits such unlimited 5G Internet home and roam. The company gained more than 1,000 new "Shamel Pro" customers in the first two days of its launching.

- Ooredoo Kuwait has been persistent in developing and providing ProPing service over its 5G network

Ooredoo also launched ProPing, the first and leading gaming platform service in the country, which was previously provided by FASTtelco through fiber optics. Ooredoo Kuwait has been persistent in developing and providing ProPing service over its 5G network, as the service has become available with guarantees, allowing customers to directly communicate with the largest global gaming systems and websites.

- Ooredoo Kuwait honored by several entities and won many prestigious awards including; the "Best Loyalty and Rewards Program" award for its "Nojoom Rewards Program"

Ooredoo Kuwait has been honored by several entities and won many prestigious awards including; the "Best Loyalty and Rewards Program" award for its "Nojoom

Rewards Program" at the 14th edition of Telecom Review Leaders' Summit, the ICT industry's biggest and first hybrid event in the Middle East, happened in November 2020. The company has also won the prestigious recognition as the 'Best Application' (Mobile/Tablet) at the MENA Digital Awards 2019 for its innovative MyOoredoo Application. More and above, Ooredoo Kuwait was also named the winner of Bronze Stevie Awards in the categories 'Most Valuable Corporate Response' and 'Business & Government'.

- Ooredoo Kuwait witnessed tremendous increase in digital user numbers and digital sales revenues
- Lastly, the company witnessed tremendous increase in digital user numbers and digital revenues by 90 percent.

#### Ooredoo - Tunisia

Ooredoo's customer base in Tunisia decreased to 8.1 million customers in 2020. Revenues increased by 4 percent to reach KD 127.7 million in 2020 compared to KD 123.1 million in 2019. EBITDA decreased to KD 54.7 million in 2020 compared to KD 56.9 million in 2019 due to increased billing and collection cost reflecting a slowing economy.

#### Ooredoo - Algeria

Customer base in Algeria decreased by 1 percent to 12.5 million in 2020 compared to 12.6 million in 2019. Business in Algeria was negatively impacted by the devaluation of the Algerian Dinar, a weak economic environment and intense price competition. Consequently, revenues decreased to KD 190.0 million in 2020, compared to KD 208.7 million in 2019. EBITDA was KD 62.6 million in 2020, down from KD 72.4 million in 2019. Algerian Dinar depreciated by 5 percent year on year.



#### Ooredoo - Palestine

Customer base in Palestine stood at 1.3 million customers in 2020. Revenue increased by 3 percent to KD 31.2 million in 2020, compared to KD 30.2 million in 2019. EBITDA was strong, increasing 15 percent to KD 10.5 million in 2020, compared to KD 9.0 million in 2019, driven by operational efficiencies across the business.

#### Ooredoo - Maldives

Ooredoo Maldives reported a 15 percent decrease in revenues to KD 34.3 million in 2020, compared to KD 40.2 million in 2019. EBITDA was KD 17.0 million in 2020 compared to KD 22.1 million in 2019. Ooredoo Maldives now serves a total of 349k customers.

## Financial Results for 2020

**ooredoo**  
Enjoy the Internet

The Board of Directors of National Mobile Telecommunication Company K.S.C.P (Ooredoo) is pleased to announce to its shareholders that the Company has achieved a consolidated Net Profit attributable to shareholders of **KD 3.4 million**, translating to an earnings per share of **7 fils**, and total revenues of **KD 592.8 million** for the financial year ended **December 31, 2020**.

Customer Base

**24.8**  
Million  
Customers

Revenue

**592.8**  
KD Million

Net Profit to NMTC

**3.4**  
KD Million

The Board of Directors takes this opportunity to express their gratitude and appreciation to NMTC (Ooredoo) esteemed shareholders, valued customers, and employees for their continuous efforts during the past year.

[ooredoo.com.kw](http://ooredoo.com.kw)



Business

# From flowers to vaccines, Kenya Airways sees new opportunity

## Carrier faces stiff competition from Ethiopian Airlines

**NAIROBI:** With passenger traffic in a slump, airlines are turning to freight to fill the gap - and Kenya Airways spies an advantage in the market to deliver temperature-sensitive COVID vaccines: its expertise in flying fresh roses to Europe. Some 3,000 tons of flowers are currently exported every week from Nairobi's international airport under demanding cool-storage conditions akin to those required to safely ship COVID vaccines.

Jabs earmarked for Africa risk spoilage if not transported within precise temperature ranges from ground handling to shipment and delivery - a logistical feat beyond many infrastructure-poor countries on the continent. "That is the range we manage our fresh flowers, so it's very common and well known in our temperature control mechanisms," Peter Musola, Kenya Airways' general manager of cargo, told AFP in an interview this week. "Around fresh, cool-chain management, I will tell you Nairobi is way ahead of so many countries."

The airline serves the major air hubs in Africa, has long-established routes to Europe and on Friday introduced a flight to Delhi, with an eye on business to ship Covishield, an Indian-made vaccine. It has converted passenger planes to cargo freighters and opened a pharmaceutical storage facility capable of storing tons of vaccines, as it courts the big business of bringing vaccines to more than a billion Africans.

### Flower power

The airline faces stiff competition from Ethiopian Airlines, the state-owned rival next door. Africa's largest carrier, Ethiopian welcomed its first coronavirus vaccines this month. The shipment from China,

destined for Chad, showcased the airline's ambition for continent-wide distribution, and its own capability at cold-storage technology. Kenya is expected to receive its first vaccines this month, though a date has not been set, and Musola stressed KQ is ready to serve: "Charity begins at home."

But the national carrier is keen to demonstrate it has an edge in transporting delicate cargo no matter where it is needed. Every day, Kenya's coveted roses and carnations are cut and packed by hand, rushed by refrigerated truck 100 km to Nairobi, placed aboard cargo planes and flown to Europe. To keep the petals fresh and vibrant, the flowers must be kept between two and eight degrees Celsius the entire way.

Buyers use trackers inside shipments to ensure the "cold chain" remains unbroken from farms on the Equator to the market floor in Amsterdam. Some coronavirus vaccines on the market, such as those produced by Pfizer and Moderna, must be kept in extreme freezers seldom available on the continent.

As a result, many African governments have gravitated to the Sinopharm, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson vaccines that, like flowers, also keep at two to eight degrees C. "This is really one big advantage that Kenya will have: the experience in handling fresh products will really be a great value-add in managing the temperature control for the vaccines," Musola said.

### 'Something else will come'

The vaccine-transport business would bring much-needed revenue to the struggling airline. Kenya Airways cargo operations grew slightly



**NAIROBI:** Kenya Airways' Commercial Cargo Manager Peter Musola gives an interview at the airline's import handling facility at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport on Feb 11, 2021. —AFP

in 2020 but passenger services, its main source of revenue, collapsed as the pandemic gutted demand for international travel. The government has quietly given the airline \$91 million to cover losses, after a year in which the firm had to axe hundreds of jobs, Business Daily reported this week.

To reflect the economic realities, Kenya

Airways this week unveiled its first repurposed Dreamliner 787 to cater to expanding cargo demand, with a second in the works. Musola said the 50-tonne freighter had interested the market. In the coming busy months, with frequent charters to European capitals with flowers for Valentine's Day and Mother's Day, Kenya Airways hopes the fleet can return with vaccines aboard. —AFP

## Feminist dating app Bumble takes Wall Street by storm

**WASHINGTON:** US dating app Bumble, where women make the first move, won Wall Street's heart as it went public Friday, with markets valuing the company at \$13 billion. Bumble offered 50 million shares at a price of \$43 each, allowing it to raise more than \$2 billion. The New York Stock Exchange welcomed its new arrival, listed as "BMBL," with open arms: its shares shot up by 63.51 percent to \$70.31 dollars in its first trading session, given the company a market capitalization of \$13 billion.

Dating apps have been hugely successful since the pandemic began and singles found themselves without venues to meet up. One of the best-known players in the sector, Match, owner of Bumble's rivals Tinder and Meetic, has seen its shares increase fivefold on Wall Street since March and the outbreak of the pandemic in the United States.

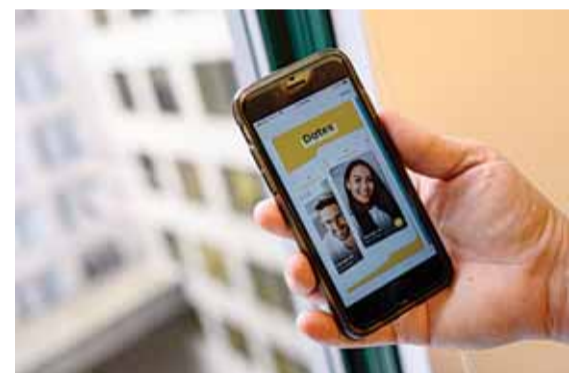
Bumble Inc, which includes the Badoo and Bumble apps, was launched in 2014 by Whitney Wolfe Herd, 31, a former president of marketing for Tinder. She wants Bumble to become a global social platform, first and foremost feminist and at the service of love, but also catering to professional and friendship issues and offering what she says is the power for women to create the relationships they want.

A year after its launch, the application claimed

## Will money laundering laws end art world's culture of secrecy?

**PARIS:** When a Botticelli painting went under the hammer last month at Sotheby's in New York for \$92 million, it was assumed the buyer was a Russian oligarch since the bidding was done by an adviser to wealthy Russians. But as art journalist Scott Reyburn told "The Week in Art" podcast, it's not always that simple: "Sometimes very wealthy collectors use telephone bidders that imply a certain nationality just to guarantee their own anonymity... to throw us off the scent," he said.

The ultra-wealthy prize that sort of confidentiality, and it also helps build the mystique and theatre in which auction houses like to drape themselves. Lately, however, regulators in Europe and the United States are out to spoil the fun, arguing that this culture of



**WASHINGTON:** In this file photo taken on Feb 26, 2020 an AFP journalist holds his phone showing the dating application Bumble. —AFP

15 million subscribers and 80 million meetings. By 2020, Bumble had 54 million monthly users, according to Bloomberg, and 2.4 million paid subscribers through Bumble and Badoo. Both apps, which were acquired by the Blackstone investment fund in 2019, employ 600 people in Austin, Texas and have offices in several European cities.

"Bumble's IPO coming just in time for Valentine's," said Wall Street 24/7, an investment newsletter. "The market for online dating has become increasingly popular over the past decade and is now the most common way for new couples to meet in the United States," it said. The "Great Lockdown" has pushed singles around the world to dating apps. When the pandemic hit, Tinder posted record usage on March 29, with more than three billion swipes. The number of messages exchanged on competitor Bumble shot up 26 percent the same month in the United States. —AFP

secrecy is ripe for exploitation by criminals. New anti-money-laundering rules mean art and antiquities dealers in Britain and the EU must now record the actual beneficiaries of their sales for the first time. US Congress approved similar legislation last month that should be in place by 2022.

Some high-profile cases over the past decade seem to justify the clampdown, such as disgraced Brazilian financier Edemar Cid Ferreira buying an \$8-million Jean-Michel Basquiat painting and shipping it to a New York storage facility with a \$100 label. Or fugitive Malaysian Jho Low, accused of spending some \$137 million on art with money he "borrowed" from his country's IMDB sovereign wealth fund. But some in the art market fear the new approach means they are being essentially hung out as bait for criminals. "They say we don't report enough people, but that's because we don't do sales if we get a sense that the buyer is doubtful or shady," said Marion Papillon, who runs a Paris gallery and heads a group representing the trade. —AFP

## ABK congratulates winners of weekly Samsung Visa draw

**KUWAIT:** Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced the winners of the final "Samsung Visa" weekly draw campaign, which started in Nov 2020. The lucky winners who will each receive a Samsung Watch3 are:

6 <sup>th</sup> Draw	7 <sup>th</sup> Draw	8 <sup>th</sup> Draw	9 <sup>th</sup> Draw	10 <sup>th</sup> Draw
Abdullah Hussain Al Qattan	Danny Koshy	Faisal Khalifah Alsaif	Shazia Tabbassum	Hasanain Asgar Ali
Jamil Charbel Girgis	Mousa Haji Ali Boushahri	Abdulaziz Asaad Alusaimi	Utpal Shah	Naser Alshatti
Hesham Jassim Altuwari	Rakan Mohamad Albader	Safaa Ahmad Alsayed	Ahmad Albaghli	Mohammad Aleidi

ABK's Samsung Pay offers users a better way to pay, offering a simple, safe, and contactless payment solution. The bank will continue to introduce innovative digital solutions, supporting a shift towards a cashless future.

## Maryland becomes first US state to tax digital ad revenue

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Maryland on Friday became the first US state to tax digital ad money taken in by Internet giants. Legislators in the state senate mustered enough votes to override a veto by Republican Governor Larry Hogan, who had sought to derail the tax on revenue taken in from online ads shown in Maryland. "It's all about taxes and no results," Hogan said in a video posted at Twitter. "This is not the end

of this fight, this is the only the beginning. It cannot and it will not stand." The tax is expected to be challenged in court. Supporters of the tax, money from which is to be funneled into education, touted its passage as a victory for schools that have gone underfunded while internet firms have raked in fortunes from targeted ads. Hogan vetoed the bill last year, contending it would raise taxes on people already struggling due to the pandemic. A tax bite of up to 10 percent would be taken from the portion of digital advertising revenue resulting from internet use in the state. "Maryland will become the first state in the country to make sure big tech pays their fair share while making billions of dollars a year using our personal data to sell digital ads," state senator Bill Ferguson said in a Facebook post supporting the bill. —AFP



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## Business

# Pandemic showcases Belgium as Europe's Vaccine Valley

## Biopharma a strategic industrial choice for small country

**WAVRE, Belgium:** A small country with an outside reputation in research and pharmaceuticals, Belgium has emerged with a strategic role in the world's battle against the coronavirus. The drugs giants racing to develop and produce new vaccines at scale in record time are international, but many of their global supply chains intersect here. In 2019, before the pandemic, Belgium accounted for 13 percent of EU biopharmaceutical exports and 10 percent of research investment, with just 2.5 percent of the European Union's population.

Biopharma - the extraction of a drug product from a biological culture - is used in the production of many of the vaccines that governments are rushing to secure. In Wavre, just outside Brussels, British multinational GSK already produces an adjuvant to be used in future vaccine candidates from France's Sanofi and Canada's Medicago. Now, it is also leaping into the production of a promising jab from German start-up Curevac, which is in clinical trials and could be approved in the EU by May.

"We're putting part of our production capacity at the service of other companies in order to move more quickly," GSK Vaccines managing director Patrick Florent told AFP at the plant. The plan is to produce 100 million doses of Curevac vaccine at the Belgian site this year, a quarter of the total ordered from the firm by the European Commission.

The commission, which is coordinating vaccine purchases for the 27 member states and has promised to support its poorer neighbors, has contracts with five more companies. And several of these are also hard at work in Belgium, which has sites operated by or on behalf of the world's 10 biggest private pharmaceutical firms. US giant Pfizer is supplying the globe with a vaccine designed by German lab BioNTech from its plant in Puurs, a Flemish town previously better known in Belgium

for a brand of beer, Duvel. And when British-Swedish outfit AstraZeneca need to produce a vaccine designed at Oxford University, it turned to a subcontractor in Seneffe, in Belgium's French-speaking south.

### EU inspection

The Seneffe plant, formerly operated by Novasep, was bought by America's Thermo Fisher in January in a transaction worth euro 725 million (\$880 million) - but which also brought with it a public relations headache. AstraZeneca warned the European Commission last month that it would not be able to meet its delivery promises - and was accused of short-changing Europe while serving its UK contract.

The Belgian plant was identified in reports as a source of production bottlenecks, and has been inspected by Belgian authorities at the request of the European Commission. Biopharma was a strategic industrial choice for Belgium even before COVID-19 spread around the world, supporting 30,000 jobs, 8,000 of them created in the last decade.

The sector's trade body, Essenscia, argues that the magic formula has been the use of public money to encourage cooperation between universities and private enterprise. Essenscia secretary general Frederic Druck said the shared effort drives applied research producing market ready drugs. Belgian firms like Galapagos, Biocartis and Sequana Medical account for two-thirds of the equity in the European biotech sector.

A typical operation would see research conducted at a campus in Louvain or Ghent spun-off into a lab that could attract private investment to exploit a new patent. Belgian firm Henogen began in this way, with researchers from the Free University in Brussels going into business with



WAVRE, Belgium: Employee are at work at the factory of British pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) on Feb 8, 2021 where the COVID-19 CureVac vaccine will be produced. —AFP

GSK and setting up the plant in Seneffe. This in turn became a hub in Belgium's BioPharma Valley, before being bought by Novasep and then Thermo Fisher. "It's a good example of the weaving of this kind of industrial fabric in Belgium. Most of the spin-offs work out, because the landscape is favorable," Florent said.

Belgium is also reputed for giving generous tax breaks to firms that re-invest profits in research

and to scientists that register patents in the country. Medical industry lobby Pharma.be spokesman David Gering also points to the excellent transport links and Belgium's central position at the crossroads of Europe. Both of Belgium's international airports are licensed to export pharmaceuticals, and the one serving the capital, Brussels-Zaventem, boasts it has shipped 15 million doses of vaccine since the crisis began. —AFP

## KFH announces winners of 'Win with Hesabi' draw

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Finance House (KFH) announced the winners of the 1st and 2nd draws of "Win with Hesabi" campaign that offers 3 Jeep Wrangler Sport cars and 120 cash prizes worth KD 250 each. The draw was held at KFH Headquarters under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The winners are: Reem Al-Mutairi, Mohammed Al-Jassar, Saud Al-Ajmi, Afrah Al-Azmi, Fatima Al-Azmi, Nourah Al-Ajmi, Abdullah Al-Qinai, Mohammed Al-Dossari, Awdah Al-Khusaiby, Rawan Al-Anzi, Abdulaziz Al-Hajaj, Bodour Al-Rishidi, Hajar Al-Azmi, Saeed Al-Rishidi, Rawan Al-Otaibi, Bashayer Al-Enzi, Abrar Al-Foudari, Talal Al-Mutairi, Bashayer Al-Zuaby, Ahmed Al-Kandari.

This campaign comes as part of KFH continuing efforts to add value to Hesabi customers including advantages, discounts, prizes, and exclusive rewards. Once the social allowance is transferred to Hesabi program, customers enter the monthly draw on 10 prizes of KD 250 each, in addition to three special draws on Jeep Wrangler Sport cars.

KFH offers "Hesabi for Youth" with a variety of privileges as part of its continued endeavor to provide adequate customer care, innovate new products and services and fulfill the needs of all customers of various age categories and interests. Services and products are tailored to suit customers' needs and provide distinguished service as per global standards regarding quality, accuracy and speed.

Hesabi program has been designed to meet the needs of youth and aspire for their active lifestyle. This program presents for youth many exclusive offers and a wide range of privileges including Hesabi ATM card with a unique design, eligibility to issue Hesabi prepaid card (as per credit regulations of KFH), distinguished offers and discounts etc.

KFH continues to launch marketing campaigns to reward youth customers. Hesabi for Youth represents the ambitions and expectations of youth category and copes with KFH aspirations to attract the largest portion of youth who represents the major part of Kuwaiti society. Also, the account represents KFH initiative to diversify banking services and products.

## Saud Alotaibi winner of Gulf Bank salary account grand draw

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank held its annual draw to announce the grand prize winner of the salary package. The lucky winner, Saud Eid Amer Alotaibi, took home a cash prize worth up to 100 times his monthly salary. In addition to the grand prize draw, the bank also held a draw to reveal the name of the monthly salary package draw winner for January 2021. The winner of the monthly draw, Jumanah Falah Ghuloum Mohammad, received a prize equivalent to 12 times her monthly salary.

The draws took place on Thursday evening at Kuwait Pulse FM 88.8, and were held in the pres-

## Markaz reduces net loss to KD 1.72m after net profit of KD 4.3m for Q4

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" reported its financial performance with a net profit of KD 4.3 million for the quarter ending Dec 31, 2020, reducing the net loss attributable to shareholders for the year 2020 to KD 1.72 million, as compared to a net profit of KD 6.96 million for 2019. The Earnings per Share (EPS) was accordingly negative 4 fils for the year 2020 as compared to 15 fils for 2019.

Diraar Yusuf Alghanim, Chairman stated: "2020 was clearly the most challenging period in recent history with the onset of the global health crisis. The primary focus of Markaz in the first half of 2020 was to maintain the business stability and continuity, ensuring its clients' objectives are being achieved, while protecting the health and safety of all its employees. The second half recov-

ery started with the removal of the initial lockdown restrictions, even as the GCC continued to feel the impact of lower oil prices and demand. With this economic and market backdrop, Markaz was still able to deliver gradual improvement during the year on both operational and financial performance indicators."

Ali H Khalil, Chief Executive Officer stated: "In December 2020, Markaz successfully closed its KD 35 million 5-year bond issue through private placement. The bonds were oversubscribed, which supports the financial plan for the company on the mid and long terms."

He added: "Markaz reported Asset Management fees of KD 7.52 million in 2020, a decline of 7.3 percent y-o-y, which were most impacted in Q2 2020 as a direct result of equity market volatility. However, Asset Management fees recovered sequentially in Q3 and Q4 2020 to pre-pandemic levels. Investment Banking fees for 2020 were KD 0.61 million, a growth of 5.9 percent y-o-y and a reflection of Markaz's commitment to providing incomparable investment banking services."

He pointed out: "Revenues for 2020 were sup-

Burgan Bank will be providing 'security tips' on a regular basis through several of its channels such as the website and other social and digital platforms in order to safeguard against security breaches and online fraud and ensure optimal protection of consumer data. Some of the most important security tips for customers are as follows:

- In order to preserve banking transactions and their privacy, the bank does not request the customer's personal information, whether via e-mail, text messages or even phone calls. Therefore, customers should remain cautious and avoid responding to these messages, as it is considered fraudulent attempts targeted at obtaining banking information to steal money or identity thefts.

- Another important advice is to not to store any confidential information such as: debit card numbers, credit card numbers, or personal identification numbers on the mobile phone, nor write the password on the card and share it with any party

- Avoid sharing the one-time password (OTP) to avoid any fraud or scams.

- Handle electronic links with caution, because simply clicking on the link may expose your confidential banking data to theft.

- Customers must ensure to log out of the application or the bank's website upon completion of the banking transaction and do not write passwords on the card or share it with anyone.

On the occasion of the launch of the campaign, Masaud M J Hayat, Vice Chairman and Group CEO of Burgan Bank Group said: "We are delighted to be a



Diraar Yusuf Alghanim

Ali H Khalil

ported by the positive results of Markaz real estate activities. On the other side, the annual performance was offset by the loss from financial assets at a fair value of KD 2.08 million out of which KD 0.26 was actually realized. Markaz also recognized an impairment of properties of KD 2.07 million due to subdued real estate market conditions. Markaz AUM at the end of the year closed at KD 979 million as compared to KD 1.143 billion at the end of 2019."

part of this unique program initiated by the Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association and support the cause through the aid of our social media channels and the bank's branches. Promoting the banking culture is part of our social responsibility toward our valued customers and all members of the society. Through the campaign, we seek to enhance people's knowledge on fundamental banking concepts, crucial services and keep the community well-informed of their rights and duties, which are critical to the long-term financial and economic stability of Kuwait."

Hayat continued, saying: "I would also like to highlight the most recurring and recent banking risks faced by all globally, in particular, since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, such as the various miscellaneous scams and threats. Hence, we request the consumers of Kuwait to abide by and follow all of the security tips and rules provided by the Kuwaiti banks in order to ensure seamless and secure banking experiences."

Burgan Bank will serve as an integral part of the "Let's be Aware" campaign throughout the year, to enhance the role of Kuwaiti banks, promote financial literacy and raise awareness on the citizen's financial rights and responsibilities through this journey.

## Burgan Bank sheds light on security tips

**KUWAIT:** As part of its corporate social responsibility practices and in context to its role in the banking awareness campaign "Let's be aware", Burgan Bank took the lead on educating its customers and the wider community on how to protect their bank accounts better through efficient security tips. The nationwide campaign was recently launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Banking Association alongside participation of local banks.

The campaign aims to enlighten the public on their financial rights and core banking and financial services and transactions. The campaign addresses several important issues, including in the areas of investments, cards, financial planning, loans, senior citizens' rights, special needs services.

The platform also details cyber security and the protection of customers' bank accounts, with guidance on the related procedures such as how to submit complaints and protection acts. Additionally, different segments of the community can hear on the various functions of the banks and their vital role in the progress of the economy, which is key to reaching the desired outcome of the campaign.

ence of a representative each from the Ministry of Commerce and Ernst & Young. Mohammad Al-Qattan, General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, announced this year's updated salary account offers, saying:

"First of all, we would like to congratulate Mr. Saud Eid Amer Alotaibi on winning Gulf Bank's annual Salary Account grand draw prize award of 100 times his salary! We would also like to extend our congratulations to our first winner of the monthly draws of 2021, Mrs Jumanah Falah Ghuloum Mohammad, who will be taking home a cash prize of up to 12 times her monthly salary."

"Gulf Bank's salary account is one of the most rewarding salary accounts in Kuwait, with a wide range of exclusive offers that are tailored to our clients' needs, in addition to monthly and annual draws that offer cash prizes of up to 100 times the winner's monthly salary," said Qattan.

"This year, we are granting our salary account



clients even more exclusive offers than ever, including the ability to choose between an interest-free loan, a cash prize of up to 300 Kuwaiti dinars, or a free credit card, with these offers being valid for workers in both the public and private sectors. We are also proud to have special

offers for frontline workers in appreciation of their continuous efforts in combating the pandemic. For these reasons and more, I would like to encourage all Kuwaiti employees to take advantage of these exclusive offers and transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank."

# Classifieds

Sunday, February 14, 2021

**Kuwait Times**  
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 e-mail: info@kuwaittimes.net



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 Fax: (+965) 24348714  
[www.met.gov.kw](http://www.met.gov.kw)

## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY DAY:** Warm with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind with speed of 08 - 26 km/h.

**BY NIGHT:** Rather cold to cold with light variable wind to light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 06 - 26 km/h with a chance for mist forming over some areas.

**WEATHER WARNING** No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	26 °C	15 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	27 °C	08 °C
ABDALY	27 °C	10 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	27 °C	12 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	24 °C	17 °C
AHMADI	23 °C	17 °C
NUWAISIB	25 °C	11 °C
WAFRA	26 °C	09 °C
SALMY	25 °C	10 °C

SFC. CHART		13/02/2021 0000 UTC

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	02/14	Warm	28 °C	10 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 28 km/h
Monday	02/15	Rather hot and some scattered clouds will appear for rising dust and a chance for scattered rain	30 °C	10 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 28 km/h
Tuesday	02/16	Relatively hot and Partly cloudy with a chance for rising dust and a chance for scattered rain	33 °C	12 °C	S-SE	15 - 45 km/h
Wednesday	02/17	Relatively hot and Partly cloudy with a chance for rising dust and a chance for rain that might	32 °C	13 °C	SE-NW	15 - 50 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:08
Sunrise	06:29
Zuhr	12:02
Asr	15:12
Sunset	17:36
Isha	18:53

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	27 °C
MIN. Temp.	08 °C
MAX. RH	78 %
MIN. RH	17 %
MAX. Wind	NW 36 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

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

## Hospitals

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

## Clinics

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

## WANTED

• Seaman • Drivers • Cooks  
 • Small Boats Captain & Engine Driver  
 • Marine Engine Mechanic's (Cummins/Volvo)  
*Must have transferable residence*  
 Send CV to: [KWMARINEJOBS@GMAIL.COM](mailto:KWMARINEJOBS@GMAIL.COM)

I, Robi Thankachan, S/o, Late David Thankachan, residing at Bldg-123, Street -23, Mangaf B-4, Kuwait, informing public that my B.Tech Mech. Engg. semester examination mark lists (12 nos) from University of Calicut have been irrevocably lost in Kuwait during travel and I intend to apply for the duplicate as per below details:

1st & 2nd Semester (combined) - 28570 June1992, 30014 Jan1993  
 3rd Semester - 4970 Oct1993, 8193 Feb1994, 5502 May1995  
 4th Semester - 6508 Sep1993, 1909 Oct1994  
 5th Semester - 1350 Apr1994, 4348 June1995, 1720 Jan1996  
 6th Semester - 7366 June1995  
 7th Semester - 1034 May1995

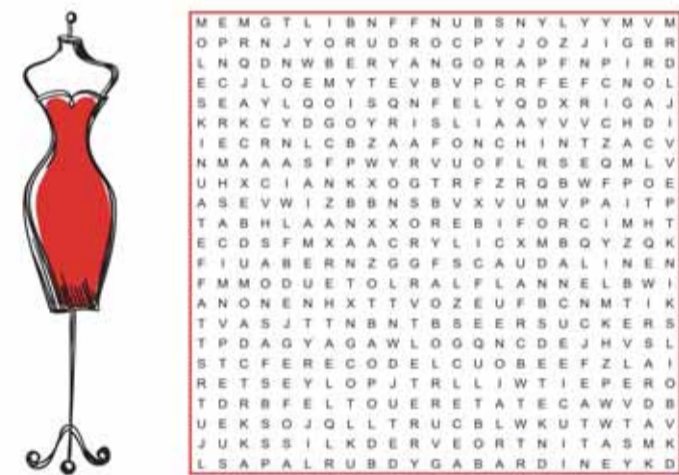
If anybody finds the originals, may kindly contact me on Mob-66346622.

## Airlines

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

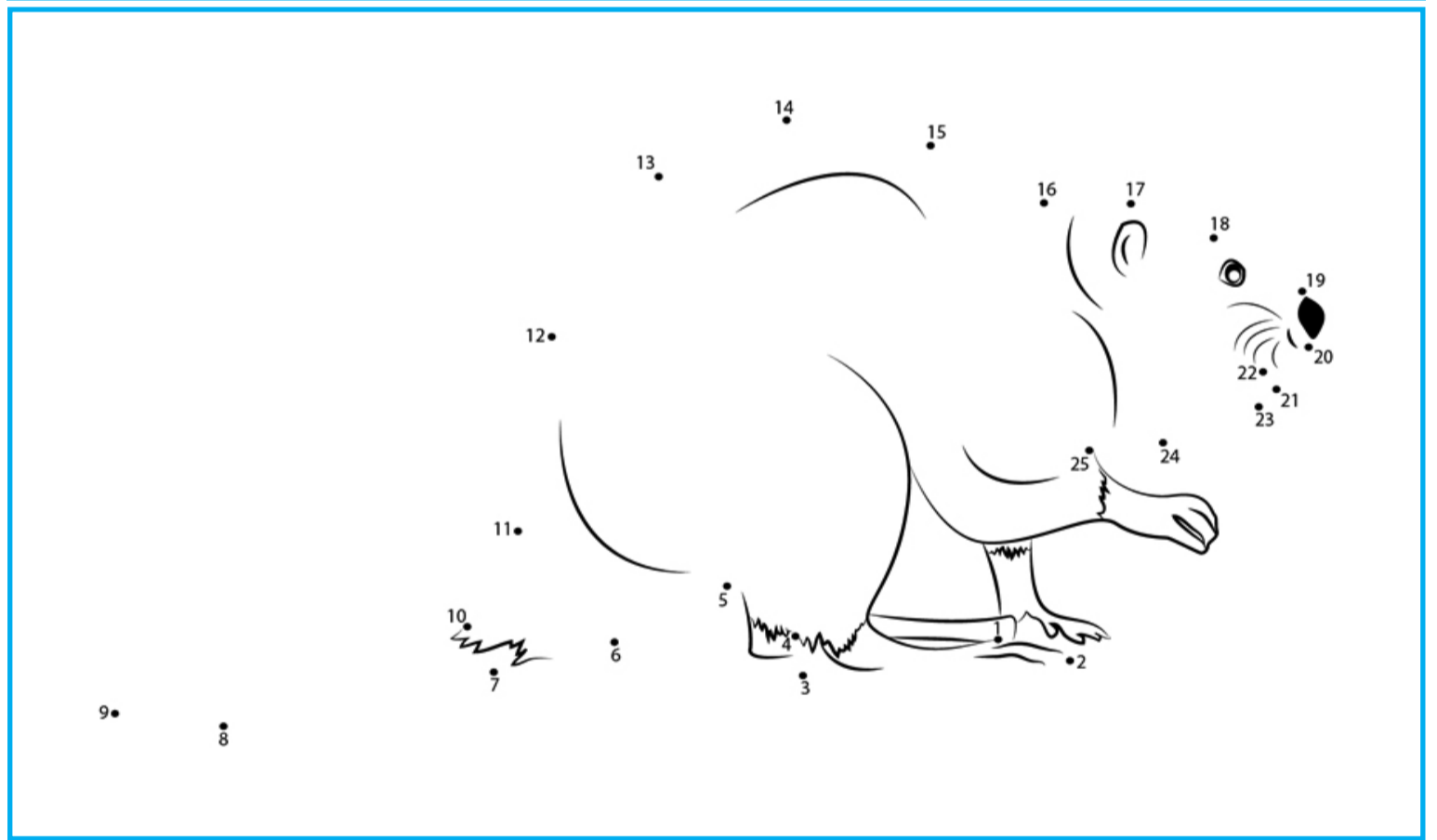
## Word Search

### Cut From the Same Cloth



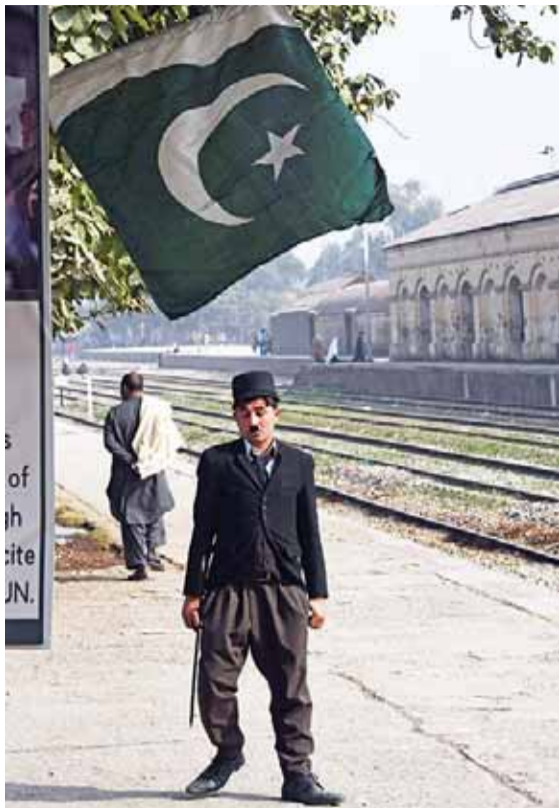
- |            |           |            |            |
|------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Acetate    | Cotton    | Linen      | Satin      |
| Acrylic    | Denim     | Lycra      | Seersucker |
| Angora     | Faux Fur  | Madras     | Silk       |
| Bamboo     | Felt      | Microfiber | Spandex    |
| Bauclé     | Flannel   | Moleskin   | Suede      |
| Broadcloth | Fleece    | Muslin     | Taffeta    |
| Brocade    | Gabardine | Nylon      | Terry      |
| Burlap     | Gingham   | Olefin     | Tweed      |
| Canvas     | Grograin  | Organza    | Twill      |
| Cashmere   | Jersey    | Percale    | Velour     |
| Chiffon    | Jute      | Polyester  | Velvet     |
| Chintz     | Loose     | Poplin     | Viscose    |
| Corduroy   | Leather   | Rayon      | Wool       |

## Join the Dots



## STAR TRACK

<p><b>Aries (March 21-April 19)</b>                  You may feel a bit protective today, Aries, and with good reason. Others are likely to be aggressive when it comes to moving in on your territory. Be strong. Assure yourself as well as those in your charge that everything will be fine. Take reasonable precautions, but don't completely close yourself off to the outside world. That knock at the gate could just as easily provide much-needed help.</p>	<p><b>Cancer (June 21-July 22)</b>                  Break through the potential moodiness of the day, Cancer. Burst into song while walking down the street. Encourage others to sing back to you, as if your life were an opera. Your creativity is extra strong at this point, so let it shine in unexpected areas of your world. You have the wonderful ability to turn even the most mundane situations into something exciting.</p>	<p><b>Libra (September 23-October 22)</b>                  Overall, this should be a pretty good day for you, Libra, as long as you don't get overly sensitive about certain things. Your awareness is bound to be extra sharp today, so use this ability to stay alert and open to what's going on around you. Perhaps you're feeling a bit restless when it comes to matters of the heart. This is telling you to stop fidgeting and take action.</p>	<p><b>Capricorn (December 22-January 19)</b>                  It would be a good idea to socialize with others today in a comfortable, open setting. Say what you feel instead of just concentrating on what you think, Capricorn. Be just as good a listener as you expect others to be for you. Join a writing circle or take a painting class. Your creativity is looking for an outlet today, so you might as well share this gift among friends.</p>
<p><b>Taurus (April 20-May 20)</b>                  You may be a bit confused today, Taurus. More than likely, it will be hard for you to get an accurate read on your emotions. One of your automatic responses in situations like this is to turn to a close partner for advice. Unfortunately, this advice may throw you into even more of a tailspin. What you need more than anything is to spend quality time alone.</p>	<p><b>Leo (July 23-August 22)</b>                  You may be plagued with restlessness, Leo, to the point that you may not be able to get anything done. If you sense that this is happening to you even in the slightest degree, stop whatever you're doing and take a break. Your work isn't worth the sacrifice of your sanity. Consider going to a spa or call up a friend with a hot tub so you can soak in some warm, relaxing water for a while.</p>	<p><b>Scorpio (October 23-November 21)</b>                  This is one day in which your heart pounds with excitement. For some reason, Scorpio, there's a quiet voice inside warning that you may be getting yourself into a great deal of trouble. An enthusiastic approach toward love may be necessary, but this may not be the best day to act. People are too sensitive and not necessarily that impressed with your potentially abrasive demeanor.</p>	<p><b>Aquarius (January 20- February 18)</b>                  Stick with what comes naturally, Aquarius. If something feels difficult or abrasive, this is a sign that your energy is better used elsewhere. But don't turn away until you're sure that what you're facing is actually a combative force instead of your own skewed sense of reality. You could be overly sensitive about a given situation and thereby making up scenarios that don't even exist.</p>
<p><b>Gemini (May 21-June 20)</b>                  Secure your emotions and make sure you're set in your mind before you take action today, Gemini. This is a terrific time to get things started. Following through to completion shouldn't be a problem. The difficult part is taking that first step. This can be easily done on a day like today, so don't miss this opportunity when your intuitive sense is extra keen.</p>	<p><b>Virgo (August 23-September 22)</b>                  Be careful of exerting your will too strongly toward someone who really isn't receptive to it, Virgo. Be conscious of other people's feelings. Be gentle when it comes to love and romance. You have a yellow light, which means that it's OK to proceed. Be careful that the other person is receptive to your advances. Don't come across as too aggressive and end up making a fool of yourself.</p>	<p><b>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)</b>                  Be more aggressive when it comes to your intentions in a romantic situation, Sagittarius. It would be a great idea to impress your lover with a delicious home-cooked meal on a night like this. Put a bit more passion into the equation and relight the spark that might have recently gone out. Don't hesitate to be the instigator in love.</p>	<p><b>Pisces (February 19-March 20)</b>                  Your heart may feel extra loving today, Pisces, which is good, since you will probably need it. There is most likely someone close to you who needs a lift of some sort. You may be like the tow truck that arrives to pull a car out of the ditch. Be careful when you hook up the chains. Don't scratch the bumper or pull too hard all at once!</p>



Street actor Usman Khan (second right), dressed up as silent film star Charlie Chaplin, performs at a train station in the Pakistan's northwestern city of Peshawar. — AFP photos

## Pakistan's 'Charlie Chaplin' bringing laughs to frontier city

Wearing a bowler hat and familiar toothbrush moustache, Pakistan's Usman Khan darts through traffic swinging a cane, teasing motorists and shopkeepers for laughs and a few rupees with a Charlie Chaplin impersonation that has become a viral sensation. The 32-year-old actor in bustling Peshawar hopes the silent film antics of old will bring a bit of joy to the residents of the notoriously chaotic frontier city. Khan said the idea to impersonate Chaplin's iconic character from "The Tramp" came to him as he watched a video of the legendary silent film actor while recovering from an illness.

"I thought that I should start acting like Charlie and spread happiness among the people, to take their minds off the coronavirus pandemic," Khan told AFP. Dressed as Chaplin, Khan leaps into passing rickshaws, annoys local shopkeepers, and

occasionally swats onlookers with his cane as he shuffles bow-legged across the city, where he is frequently mobbed by fans asking for selfies. "It is my purpose to make people laugh, to make them happy, to help them get rid of their grief," said Khan. The act has proven to be a hit.

In just two months, Khan has attracted more than 850,000 followers and garnered millions of likes on TikTok—the hugely popular platform in Pakistan where he uploads videos of his slapstick routine. But it hasn't always been all laughs for Khan, who like many in Pakistan is struggling to hold down a full-time job amid the economic fallout of the coronavirus epidemic. The Chaplin shtick, he said, has given him a new purpose. "That's why I like to get up like Charlie Chaplin, to hide all my worries and grief."—AFP



## Larry the Cat marks 10 years' ruling Downing Street roost

A stalwart of the British political scene, Larry the Cat has ruled the roost in Downing Street for a decade, serving three prime ministers and becoming a legend in his own napping. The tabby-and-white cat arrived at 10 Downing Street on February 15, 2011, at the age of four. He was adopted from London's Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, an animal shelter, and was chosen for his mousing skills, according to his biography on the Downing Street website. He received the title of Chief Mouser—the first inhabitant of the prime minister's famous residence and office to do so.

But while he did catch three mice in his early months, according to David Cameron, his first prime minister, he has since disappointed, leaving the role in the "tactical planning stage". Nevertheless this nonchalant operator has clung onto power. While lacking the killer instinct, Larry has made fur fly in very undiplomatic spats with feline rivals including Palmerston, the black-and-white resident of the nearby foreign ministry. Palmerston has since turned tail, quit politics and retired to the countryside in 2020. Larry's soft-power diplomacy has "captured the hearts of the Great British public," according to Downing Street.

That includes building up a rapport with the journalists, photographers and camera crews stationed outside, who reward him with strokes and snacks. When Cameron left Downing Street in 2016 after the British public backed the vote "Leave" campaign, Larry steadfastly stayed on. Cameron even had to fight off rumors of a rift with his four-legged housemate at his last Prime Minister's Questions session with lawmakers. He held aloft a photo of them together, denying sugges-

tions that "somehow I don't love Larry". Since seen as belonging to Downing Street staff, Larry has cohabited with Theresa May and now Boris Johnson.

### 'I run the place'

In a nation of animal-lovers, a cat in Downing Street plays a crucial role in public relations, the historian Anthony Seldon told AFP. "It helps to humanize the prime minister," said the author of biographies of the last four premiers. At times of crisis, a cat can "act as a distraction", he added. Tim Bale, professor of politics at Queen Mary University of London, attributes Larry's longevity in the role to prime ministers' desire to bridge "a huge disconnect between politicians and voters". A prime minister, particularly one who has polarized the public, is "going to seize any and every opportunity they have to give people the impression that they've got something in common".

"Not all of us like cats—which is presumably why Boris Johnson also got a dog," he added. "But millions of Brits have pets. So this is one such opportunity." Larry has rubbed up against numerous world leaders on state visits—with varying degrees of friendliness. While he let Barack Obama stroke him, he immobilized Donald Trump's armor-plated presidential limousine, "The Beast". Larry sat underneath and stubbornly refused to move.

On Christmas Eve, as journalists waited outside for a Brexit trade deal announcement, Larry suddenly rushed forward and pounced on a pigeon, prompting gasps of excitement. It flew away unharmed. While maintaining a dignified silence in public, Larry has told his story in a book called "The Larry Diaries" by journalist James Robinson. He also has an unofficial Twitter account, @Number10cat, with more than 433,000 followers. Contacted via social media, the account's author insisted there is no human intervention and gave a brief insight into Larry's long rule at Downing Street. "The key thing to remember is that I live here permanently, the politicians just lodge with me for a bit until they're fired," he said. "They all work out sooner or later that it's me that runs the place."—AFP



In this file photo Larry, the Downing Street cat, sits outside the front door of 10 Downing Street, the official residence of Britain's Prime Minister, in London. — AFP

## SNOW JOKE: SCOTLAND'S NAMED GRITTER TRUCKS WARM HEARTS

Temperatures fell to a record minus 23 degrees Celsius (minus 9.4 Fahrenheit) in the Scottish Highlands this week, as Britain shivered in the snow and ice of a harsh Arctic cold snap. But one thing distracting people from the big freeze—and the coronavirus lockdown—has been Scotland's 230-strong army of gritter lorries and snowploughs battling to keep main roads clear. Traffic Scotland has seen a surge in clicks to its "Trunk Road Gritter Tracker" website, which allows users to follow their progress. On Friday, "Gritney Spears" and "Spready Mercury" were making their way down the road towards the English border.

"Sir Andy Flurry" was plying a route from the city of Perth to Dunblane—home of the British tennis star nicknamed Murray—while over the hills and far away, "Sled Zeppelin" was making the roads safe around Loch Lomond. "Sir Salter Scott" was trundling around the Edinburgh suburbs, while "Robert Brrrns" and "Salt Disney" were out near Glasgow Airport. The Guardian reported that in one 24-hour period last week, more than 110,000 people logged on to the site. Normally the site gets some 700,000 in a full year. This year, the public has been asked to name dozens of new gritters and snowploughs. Suggestions include "Coldfinger" and "You Only Grit Twice" in tribute to late James Bond actor Sean Connery. "Snowcially distanced" was parked up in Glasgow.

In 2016, a similar public appeal for suggestions for a new British polar research ship back-fired after 120,000 voted to call it "Boaty McBoatface". The vessel was eventually named "Sir David Attenborough" after the naturalist, although in a nod to the public vote, officials agreed to give the comedy name to its on-board yellow submarine.—AFP

## 'I failed': Skewered by Britney fans, Justin Timberlake apologizes

Justin Timberlake on Friday apologized for moments he "fell short" and condoned misogyny, one week after the release of a blockbuster documentary on Britney Spears saw the behavior of the former boy band star come under sharp criticism. The film, produced by FX and The New York Times, explores the vitriol both the media and entertainment industry aimed at Spears, who soared to global fame before publicly suffering a mental health crisis and becoming a paparazzi punching bag in the mid-to-late 2000s. Spears and Timberlake famously dated several years around the turn of the millennium, having met as children while cast members of Disney's "Mickey Mouse Club" variety show.

The popular narrative of their breakup cast Spears as a cheating heartbreaker, offering sympathy to Timberlake especially after he released a revenge fantasy music video for the break-up hit "Cry Me A River." The documentary "Framing Britney Spears" includes audio from a 2002 radio interview in which Timberlake jokes about the couple's sex life; Spears for years was needed over the state of her virginity prior to the break-up. "So when are you apologizing to Britney?" asked Spears fans on social media, flooding Timberlake's accounts with tags. "I've seen the messages, tags, comments, and concerns and I want to respond," Timberlake said Friday on Instagram. "I am deeply sorry for the times in my life where my actions contributed to the problem, where I spoke out of turn, or did not speak up for what was right," he wrote. "I understand that I fell short in these moments and in many others and benefited from a system that condones misogyny and racism."

### 'Privileged'

Timberlake, 40, said he "specifically wanted to apologize to Britney Spears

and Janet Jackson both individually, because I care for and respect these women and I know I failed." In Jackson's case the former NSYNC star was referring to the infamous "wardrobe malfunction" Jackson suffered during a much-watched Super Bowl halftime show, when Timberlake appeared to pull off part of her outfit and expose her breast. The 2004 scandal triggered widespread outcry, with much of the criticism aimed at Jackson.

In both cases Jackson's and Spears' careers took serious hits, while Timberlake's popularity remained largely unscathed. "As a man in a privileged position I have to be vocal about this," Timberlake wrote, nearly two decades after the incidents in question. "Because of my ignorance, I didn't recognize it for all that it was while it was happening in my own life but I do not want to ever benefit from others being pulled down again." The documentary's release this month has triggered renewed scrutiny of the conservatorship Spears, 39, has lived under since 2008, a legal guardianship dictating the course of her life and finances that's largely been steered by her father Jamie.

Spears filed last year to remove her father from the conservatorship and give sole power over her estate to a financial institution. Her court-appointed lawyer says she's "afraid" of her father. On Thursday a judge ruled that both Spears' father and Bessemer Trust would oversee the pop star's finances, denying Jamie Spears' bid to keep sole power to delegate investments. Spears' lawyer did not seek Thursday to remove Jamie Spears' from the legal arrangement normally intended for the elderly or infirm, but has not ruled out doing so in the future. The next hearing is set for March 17.—AFP



In this file photo Pop superstars Britney Spears (right) and boyfriend Justin Timberlake (left) talk as they sit courtside at the NBA All-Star Game in Philadelphia. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

# Valentine's Day: Flowers, chocolates or a good whipping?

Saint Valentine's Day may now be celebrated worldwide but traditions are often very different—and sometimes have nothing at all to do with romance. While in Europe it's all about couples cozying up, in the US it's more about schoolchildren celebrating friendship while in Japan women give chocolates to their bosses. Yet in Muslim countries it has a subversive edge. From pagan festival to marketing ploy, we look at the rich Valentine's mix:

**All whipped up**

Valentine's Day was once a rather violent affair. Its origins are thought to go back to the Roman purification festival of Lupercalia when naked young men would whip young ladies to make them more fertile. Down the centuries that evolved into only slightly less raucous lotteries that paired young men off with young women at medieval carnivals.

**Martyr to his heart**

The day is also, of course, associated with the cult of third century Roman Christian martyr Saint Valentine. He literally lost his head over love—decapi-



A worker carries a bouquet in the flower district two days before Valentine's Day amid the COVID-19 pandemic in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

tated on the orders of the Emperor Claudius, they say, for secretly performing weddings. According to the legend, Valentine cured his jailer's blind daughter and the day before his death slipped her a note signed "Your

Valentine". Unfortunately there was no happy ending.

**Love letters**

In England the exchange of messages known as "valentines" on

February 14 developed with the rise of the postal service in the 19th century, with the sender often signing off "Your Valentine".

**Love spoons**

They did things differently across the border in Wales. Their festival of love is held on January 25 and celebrates a fourth century Welsh princess called Saint Dwynwen. Unlucky in love, broken-hearted Dwynwen sought solace in religion and became a nun, praying for others to find true love. Among the gifts traditionally exchanged between lovers, and would-be ones, are carved Welsh wooden love spoons.

**My darling Galentine**

The celebration took a commercial turn in the mid-19th century in the United States, with the invention of mass produced greeting cards. Promoters quickly got the idea to extend the "tradition" beyond lovers, with schoolchildren now expected to bring a Valentine card for every one of their classmates. Today it has become a 20-billion-dollar business and has even spawned Galentines Day, when "gals" go out together and eat waffles.

**Hot choc**

The Japanese Valentine tradition began after World War II when confectionery makers thought up the wheeze of having women offer chocolates to their bosses and boyfriends on February 14. A half-century later, the practice has begun an annual ritual, with millions of Japanese women giving pralines or ganaches to show affection, friendship or professional respect. But not any chocolate will do. The "giri choco", for example, are standard chocolates reserved for work colleagues while the superior "honmei choco" are the sign of true love.

**Not in public**

Valentine's is less loved in some parts of the world however, with some Muslim countries including Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia taking a dim view. Although the day is very popular in Iran, people have to show their affection modestly. The sale of heart-shaped balloons, for example, is rather frowned upon by traditionalists.—AFP

## LATEST TRENDY PROFILE POINT ON DATING APPS? VACCINE STATUS

Dating apps offer a snapshot about a person's life, but in the space of a few weeks, a surprising health issue has emerged as a dealmaker or heartbreaker: have you had the coronavirus vaccine? Some are bragging they have gotten the shot in order to better their chances, while others are using it to justify what one singleton described as "the most 2021 rejection ever." But can you trust every lonely heart who claims they've been inoculated against Covid-19? Samantha Yammine, a scientist who often talks on Twitter about health issues, says she's received messages about "dudes on dating apps claiming they're 'totally safe for close contact' because they have received the vaccine.



This illustration shows a person looking at the OkCupid dating app on a smartphone in Los Angeles. — AFP

Of course, most young people using dating apps are not in vaccination priority groups at the front of the line, so some see having gotten the shot as a sort of golden ticket for hooking up. "Basically, getting the vaccine is the hottest thing you could be doing on a dating app right now," said Michael Kaye, global communications manager for OkCupid. When asked on Monday, 43 percent of some 1,500 members of another site, Coffee Meets Bagel, said they were right now more attracted to someone who had been vaccinated. Journalist Sarah Kelly, who has not been able to get the shot, said she really got "the most 2021 rejection ever." A man on a dating site wrote her: "Ur real cool however I found someone who is also Vaccinated!! So I think we both wanna minimize our bubble n stay safer in these trying times!!!"

**Idea for new dating app?**

Dozens of people on social media have even suggested—some jokingly, others in the spirit of pandemic entrepreneurship—that a new dating app be created for the vaccinated. Those who haven't been jabbed with the Pfizer-

BioNTech or Moderna elixirs need not log in. Kimberly Te, who hasn't been inoculated yet, was contacted by one guy who emphasized he had received his first dose. But for Te, that status is not really all that important. "I didn't care because it seemed like he had only gotten the first dose so I did not consider him safe from Covid-19," she told AFP.

"I wouldn't really care if someone on an online app said they were vaccinated because for the most part, I don't know these people, so I have no reason to trust them during this pandemic." Cristina Vanko—who participated in Moderna's clinical trials—says she has seen more and more people on dating sites posting about being vaccinated, but she too is not exactly swayed by it. "There's still little research regarding transmission amongst vaccinated individuals," she said. "For me, there's no difference between vaccinated or not because I'm vaccinated," she noted. "It's more of an 'are we both aware of the risks and do we hold the same values about safety?' question."

**'Wake-up call'**

For university student Brittany Biggerstaff, people who say they are vaccinated are not more attractive because of the shot—but it does mean they have put their faith in science. "It gives insight on a potential partner's political views and knowledge about science and medicine," she said. Dawoon Kang, the co-founder of Coffee Meets Bagel, agrees. "It kind of signals that this is somebody who actually is being careful with Covid-19, which probably gives people a little bit more peace of mind," Kang told AFP.

In a deeply divided United States, where there is a vocal contingent of antivaxers, even love is a battlefield. On the online discussion platform Reddit, one user, echoed by many others, mocked "all these women being guinea pigs for big pharma." Another vaccine skeptic chimed in: "I'm using people's stances on vaccines and masks to determine if I even wanna associate with these mindless fools following everything they're told." Vaccination or not, after nearly a year of living in some degree of social isolation because of coronavirus restrictions, some people in the dating pool are eager to get out there. As Valentine's Day approaches on Sunday, that urge is even more palpable.

"People are more active this Valentine's Day than ever before," said OkCupid's Kaye. "After a really challenging year, people are tired of being alone and want someone by their side, even virtually, during these challenging times." Kaye noted that women "especially are more active than ever! They're sending 'Likes' at a significantly higher rate than men." Since the pandemic took hold in the United States, dating sites have been forced to innovate, offering more video chat options, which had not been a major feature, and more virtual happy hour mixers.—AFP

the crisis will pass, that we just have to have a bit patience. But when temporary becomes permanent, you have to try new things," he said.

With school mostly online and limited options for going out with friends, "I had the feeling I was spending my entire life with my parents." Rodrigo now visits dating apps every day. More than just chasing the thrill of a hook-up, they have become a place to simply hang out. He has made friends with four people his age through the apps and chats with them daily—a way of "relieving the stress and frustration" of the pandemic, he says. "It's all we have left," he sighs, especially since Portugal was plunged back into lockdown last month.

Match, the group that includes several leading apps such as Tinder, Hinge and Meetic, says it added more than a

## 'Singles' shopping baskets a Valentine's Day hit in Hungary

A supermarket in Hungary has brought smiles to faces and romantic opportunities to shoppers by providing shopping baskets for "Singles" in time for Valentine's Day. Shoppers entering the Auchan store in Csomor, east of Budapest, can choose a blue or pink basket with a "Single Seeking Mate" sign. A sign above the stack of baskets reads: "Are you single? Use the singles baskets, so you can meet 'the one' in your favorite store". "It's a great idea in this time of coronavirus. It's an opportunity for those seeking partners, and entertaining and funny as well," one shopper Csilla Beres, 25, told AFP while grabbing a basket.

"Let's see what comes up, and give it a try, we don't skip opportunities," said 25-year-old Tamas as he wheeled his basket into the store. Staff who came up with the idea decided it could prove



Two single young men pick up their signed plastic shopping baskets at a French Auchan supermarket in Csomor town, Hungary a few days ahead of Valentine's Day. — AFP

popular with unattached shoppers whose dating channels have been restricted by anti-coronavirus rules such as social distancing and mask-wearing. "Of course, we also draw attention to the fact that you can only get acquainted with the maximum compliance with epidemiological rules." Ildiko Varga-Futo, a manager at Auchan, told AFP. After their success in Csomor, similar

baskets will be used in other Auchan stores in Hungary on Valentine's Day on Sunday, she said. "I guess not everyone heard about the news that there are such baskets here," a shopper Annamaria, 40, told AFP on her way out. "It didn't work, but next time I'd try it again," she said.—AFP

## For Valentine's Day: The original 'Name-a-Roach' returns for 10th year

Since 2011 the Bronx Zoo has been offering the only Valentine's Day gift that will last forever – the original Name-a-Roach. For the past decade, the Bronx Zoo offers the opportunity to symbolically name its 10,000-plus giant



This undated image released by the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Bronx Zoo in New York shows a Valentine's Day gift honoring a loved one by naming a Madagascar Hissing Roach after them. — AFP photos

Madagascar hissing cockroaches. The tongue-in-cheek Valentine's Day gift comes with a colorful certificate emailed to your loved one announcing that a cockroach has been named in his or her honor. The Name-a-Roach offering is a fun, light-hearted way to make sure your loved one knows your feelings will last a lifetime while helping the Bronx Zoo and WCS further its mission to save wildlife

and wild places in New York and around the world.

For a \$15 donation, your Valentine will receive a printable certificate featuring the name chosen for the roach named in their honor. To make an extra special impression, orders can be upgraded to include a lovable plush roach, a scented roach candle, or a special Valentine virtual Bronx Zoo Animal Encounter with a live Madagascar hissing cockroach and another animal guest. All upgrades are while supplies last. Name-a-Roach gift orders can be placed at BronxZoo.com/Roach. The original Name-a-Roach was launched by the Bronx Zoo in 2011, and thousands of hopeless romantics from around the world have named the zoo's Madagascar hissing cockroaches after friends, family, and loved ones. Previous names chosen have been inspired by politics, music, movies, and more. The possibilities are limitless.

The zoo has plenty of roaches to name with thousands of the super-sized bugs on exhibit in Madagascar! – an award-winning habitat for lemurs, crocodiles, and many other species from the African island nation. Madagascar hissing cockroaches, reaching nearly four-inches long, are the world's largest roach species. The namesake hissing noise is emitted as a defense mechanism. Unlike nearly every other roach species,



This undated image shows a Valentine's Day Certificate honoring a loved one by naming a Madagascar Hissing Roach after them.

Madagascar hissing cockroaches are not considered pests and rarely enter homes.—newsroom.wcs.org

## 'All we have left': Dating apps on frontline of loneliness pandemic

Dating apps are booming in lockdown—no longer just a way of hooking up but also of simple interaction at a time when the coronavirus inflicts loneliness on millions. Rodrigo, 18, had never considered joining a dating app until the months of lockdown boredom finally forced his hand. "At the start, we told ourselves

million users in the last quarter of 2020, up some 12 percent to around 11 million worldwide. "It sounds like a cliché, but the apps have really kept me from sinking," said Sebastian, a 19-year-old student in France. "When we can't go to college, and the bars, restaurants, and cinemas are all closed, we spend entire days on our own, stewing. It's horrific," he said.

**Watching yourself date**

Exchanges start by text before moving on to video chats—a function that dating apps have increasingly focused on since the pandemic ruled out the usual next step of a physical date. Martha, a 41-year-old Londoner, has found Zoom dating a bit of a slog, even if it saves her having to bother with perfume. "The biggest challenge I found

with Zoom dating... was how strange it is to watch yourself talking and laughing," she said.

She suspects a lot of people felt like her—that the pandemic might actually be an opportunity to focus on meeting Mr or Mrs Right, "but somehow it's harder to motivate myself when I don't know when I'll meet them in person, when I'll be able to have a flirt and a snog." Martha did eventually meet someone. She's not sure if it will last, but it has at least provided a little companionship through the dark winter months of Britain's extended lockdown.

Others have had overnight success. Ana, 31, a Spaniard from Valladolid, took less than 24 hours to find someone on Tinder and they have remained a couple since. "Towards the end of 2020, I convinced myself to give it a try

for a few days, while vowing that if the conversations made me feel uncomfortable, or if I didn't find a shoe that fits, that I would drop it," she said. On the other side of the world in Tokyo, 32-year-old Ambrose, a translator, has not been so lucky so far.

Unwilling to risk meeting in person, she says most of her connections have fizzled out after a while, even if Tinder has provided an outlet when her morale dips. "I don't really have hope (of finding love) online... but no hope at all in real life," she said, adding that when she leaves the house "I'm wearing a mask, and often comfy clothes with no make up... you know, pandemic fashion!"—AFP

## Sports

## Photo of the Day



Alexander Titarenko performing in Alexandria, Egypt. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

# Nadal maintains record bid as Djokovic races to be fit

## Barty advances in Melbourne's first day of lockdown



MELBOURNE: Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates after winning against Britain's Cameron Norrie during their men's singles match on day six of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

MELBOURNE: Rafael Nadal stayed on course for a record 21st Grand Slam title at a fan-free Australian Open yesterday as Ashleigh Barty gave locked-down Melbourne something to cheer. As Victoria state went into a snap, five-day lockdown to curb a coronavirus outbreak, Daniil Medvedev, Stefanos Tsitsipas and Andrey Rublev all reached the last 16 at an eerily empty Melbourne Park.

But world number one Novak Djokovic, the defending champion and holder of a record eight Australian Open titles, faced a race to be fit for his third-round clash today. The Serb, who said he tore an abdominal muscle during Friday's five-set win over Taylor Fritz, skipped training and sought medical advice and treatment on Saturday. He is scheduled to play Canada's Raonic late on Sunday.

The loss of Djokovic, 33, would be another blow for the tournament, reducing the men's 'Big Three' to just one — Nadal — with Roger Federer already sidelined by injury. Nadal, who has his own injury concerns with a stiff lower back, faced down his toughest test so far with a 7-5, 6-2, 7-5 win over British fellow leftie Cameron Norrie. "The feeling is completely different — nobody wants this," said Nadal, referring to the 15,000 empty seats that faced him at Rod Laver Arena. Nadal, 34, will next play colorful Italian Fabio Fognini, who dismissed Australia's Alex De Minaur in straight sets.

Barty, the women's top seed, also said it was "very strange" to play behind closed doors, a day after more than 22,000 fans visited Melbourne Park. Barty's straightforward 6-2, 6-4 win over Russia's Ekaterina Alexandrova put her into the fourth round without dropping a set as she bids to become the first Australian winner since Chris O'Neil in 1978. "It's very strange, it changes the sound in the court a little bit," Barty said of the empty, 7,500-seat Margaret

Court Arena. "It kind of felt a little bit like practice," she added.

### 'Different vibe'

Players were ordered into a biosecure "bubble" during the lockdown, just the latest coronavirus disruption for a tournament that was pushed back three weeks to allow for quarantines. The Australian Open, the biggest international sports event so far this year, is seen as a test case for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, which are scheduled to start in July after a year's delay.

As play unfolded in the empty arenas, former world number one Karolina Pliskova had a racket-smashing tantrum en route to a 7-5, 7-5 defeat by fellow Czech Karolina Muchova. Ukrainian fifth seed Elina Svitolina beat Yulia Putintseva 6-4, 6-0, and Russia's men's fourth seed Medvedev overcame but-tack pain and a mid-match lapse in his 6-3, 6-3, 4-6, 3-6, 6-0 win over Filip Krajinovic of Serbia.

"It's a different atmosphere, different vibe," said Greek world number six Tsitsipas, after his 6-4, 6-1, 6-1 win over Mikael Ymer. "But if I can win my next matches, the crowd will be back. It's just five days, and I'll be happy to see them back."

Tsitsipas beat Ymer in a silent John Cain Arena — which had been packed with thousands of noisy fans late on Friday for Australian player Nick Kyrgios's defeat by Dominic Thiem. In the same venue, Matteo Berrettini beat Russian seed Karen Khachanov 7-6 (7/1), 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/5) to set up a meeting with Tsitsipas. "I really miss the crowd, I have to be honest," said the Italian. "Looking at a stadium like this and seeing it empty is not the best feeling. But we're living in really tough times." Elsewhere Russia's Rublev ended Spanish veteran Feliciano Lopez's record 75th consecutive Grand Slam to set up a meeting with Norway's Casper Ruud. — AFP

day, and went on to win three of the four stages — including the rally-ending Power Stage — to kick off his title defense in the perfect way.

The team also succeeded in locking out the top three positions during the Power Stage, which from this season gives bonus points towards the manufacturers' championship. This, combined with the one-two finish in the rally, meant the team took maximum points from the opening round — a dream start for new Team Principal Jari-Matti Latvala as he looks to build upon the work of his predecessor Tommi Makinen.

Akio Toyoda, President, Toyota Motor Corporation, commented: "Ogier and Ingrassia, who I am sure achieved this result with pride and responsibility, congratulations on the victory in your home rally and your 50th win! Evans and Martin, thank you for bringing the points for second place! I'm sure Latvala will keep making this team better and better, and the drivers, co-drivers, and team members will make the Yaris WRC an ever-better car. Finally, I would like to say thank you to our fans. I appreciate your continued support for the GAZOO Racing World Rally Team throughout the 2021 season."



## GAZOO Racing triumphs in Monte-Carlo

MONTE-CARLO: The GAZOO Racing (GR) World Rally Team achieved a dream start to this year's 2021 FIA World Rally Championship recently at Rallye Monte-Carlo. Sebastien Ogier and his co-driver Julien Ingrassia won the legendary race in the No. 1 Toyota Yaris WRC, leading teammates Elfyn Evans and Scott Martin in the No. 33 Toyota Yaris WRC to secure a fantastic one-two finish. Kalle Rovanpera and Jonne Halttunen claimed fourth in the No. 69 Toyota Yaris WRC, completing an amazing Day 4 for the GR team.

The fourth Rallye Monte-Carlo win in Toyota's history came on the 30th anniversary of its maiden victory in 1991. This is the first time GR has won the WRC's most prestigious event with its Toyota Yaris WRC, having made the podium every year since its debut in 2017. Ogier and Ingrassia also celebrated their historic 50th victory in the World Rally Championship, becoming only the second competitors to attain this landmark.

Rallye Monte-Carlo lived up to its reputation as the most demanding event on the WRC calendar with special challenges for this year's edition. A modified schedule to follow COVID-19 restrictions in France meant that some stages took place before dawn, complete with ice and snow. The teams also had to get to grips with tires from the new sole supplier Pirelli during an event where tire choice is always critical.

The GR team led the rally from its third stage early on the second morning, with Rovanpera, Ogier, and Evans all taking turns in the lead over the course of the rally's longest day. On his home event, Ogier claimed back the lead in the No. 1 Toyota Yaris WRC with a storming stage win during the third day's first test. He carried a 13-second advantage over Evans into the fourth and final

## Kuwaiti athletes qualify for Tokyo Paralympics

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait disabled athletics national team qualified for the Tokyo Paralympics to be held in the summer. Faisal Suroor won the gold medal at the shot put event during the 12th Fazza International Athletics Championship for the Disabled, which concluded yesterday in Dubai. Meanwhile, Dhari Botti took the silver medal in the same event. Yasser Al-Musallam set a world record that qualified him for the Tokyo Paralympics, while Faisal Al-Rajhi and Abdullah Al-Enezi won the bronze in the 1,500m and 100m wheelchair races.

Chairman of the Paralympic committee Mahdi Al-Azmi dedicated the wins to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. "These wins by Kuwait athletes came during the first international participation since the spread of the coronavirus about a year and a half ago," he said.



Azmi said the athletes displayed their ability in a tournament that saw 63 countries participating, adding that the Paralympic committee will continue its support of Kuwait athletes to raise the number of participants in the next Paralympics. They will participate in two international championships in Al-Ein and Tunisia in March to qualify for the Paralympics.

Azmi thanked the Public Authority for Sport and its Director General Humoud Fulaith and his deputy Sayer Al-Mulla for their support. He also thanked Kuwait Disabled Sports Club and its Chairman Shafi Al-Hajeri. Head of the delegation to the championship Hamad Al-Adwani said he is happy with the results achieved, especially since they came during very difficult health conditions and a lengthy period of inactivity.

## Sharma says 'fun' to have crowds back after dazzling ton

CHENNAI: Rohit Sharma yesterday paid tribute to the returning crowd after his masterful century guided India to 300 for six on day one of the second Test against England. Sharma, welcomed with chants of "Rohit! Rohit!", hit 161 and put on a key fourth-wicket partnership of 162 with Ajinkya Rahane after India — down 1-0 in the four-match series — elected to bat first in Chennai.

Rishabh Pant, on 33, and Axar Patel, on five, were batting at the close of play after England's bowlers took three wickets in the final session. Spinners Jack Leach and Moeen Ali claimed two wickets each on a pitch that offered turn even on day one. Ali bowled skipper Virat Kohli for nought to put India in trouble at 86-3, stunning the raucous 15,000-strong home crowd — present for the first time since the pandemic — into silence.

But Sharma's knock restored the exuberant mood of cheering fans, all of whom backed the home team except for a brave half dozen Barmy Army soldiers. "It was great fun to have them at the ground. I mean it is something that lives up the whole atmosphere of the stadium," Sharma told reporters. "When there was no one at the ground in the first Test, the intensity was slightly low from both the teams... I am happy that they witnessed some good cricket today."

His seventh Test century was his first against England. When he crossed 150 in his 36th five-day match he got a standing ovation from the ecstatic crowd. But Leach broke through with his left-arm spin to send Sharma trudging back to the pavilion in the final session after the batsman holed out a catch to deep square leg.

Sharma, who survived a tight stumping chance — given not out by the TV umpire — off Leach on 159, hit 18 fours and two sixes in his 231-ball stay. Rahane, who hit form after scores of one and nought in the first Test, soon fell to Ali, bowled on another good delivery by the off-spinner for 67.

Skipper Joe Root chipped in with his off spin to get Ravichandran Ashwin caught at short leg by Ollie Pope. "Ajinkya's knock was crucial to the team and so was our partnership. We had put the team in a comfortable position till tea," Sharma said. "I believe 350 would be good score on this pitch and we still have four wickets left. We hope Pant and Axar can score big and get more runs as we know the wicket will turn more on day two, three and four."

Earlier Olly Stone had Shubman Gill leg before for a duck in not only the second over of the day, but Sharma and Cheteshwar Pujara steadied the ship with an 85-run second-wicket stand. But then Leach took Pujara for 21 and Ali's prized scalp of Kohli left India 106 for three at lunch. Ali bowled Kohli through the gate as the Indian captain stood shocked for a few moments while the TV umpire checked to see if the bail had been dislodged by the wicketkeeper's gloves. Leach said England are in the game despite a tough day on the field. — AFP

## Sports

# Jazz dominate Bucks again, Lakers rally past Grizzlies

## Doncic's career-high propels Mavs over Pelicans



SALT LAKE CITY: Rudy Gobert #27 of the Utah Jazz drives to the basket against the Milwaukee Bucks on Friday at Vivint SmartHome Arena in Salt Lake City, Utah. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Rudy Gobert and Joe Ingles scored 27 points each as the league-leading Utah Jazz used an explosive and balanced attack to beat the Milwaukee Bucks 129-115 and continue their dominant run through the NBA on Friday.

The Jazz had four players score 25 points in a game for the first time in franchise history as Donovan Mitchell (26) and Jordan Clarkson (25) also got into an offensive flow in front of a pandemic-limited crowd of almost 4,000 at the Vivint Smart Home Arena.

It was the sixth straight win and the 17th victory in 18 games for the Jazz, who became the first NBA team to reach the 20 win mark when they beat Boston on Tuesday. "It just looks fun. Like when I watch them play, it looks fun, it looks easy," Bucks star Giannis Antetokounmpo said. "It looks simple. For sure, they look like us last year, and man, when you're at that point and you're playing with that confidence you're hard to beat for sure."

Gobert had 12 assists and four blocks while Clarkson came off the bench to score 25 for Utah, who have beaten Milwaukee twice this season and both times by double digits. Antetokounmpo finished with 29 points, 15 rebounds and six assists but the Bucks lost their second game in a row. The Jazz seized control in the second quarter when they outscored the Bucks 34-21. They put up 35 points in the first quarter and nailed 12 of 24 threes in the first half.

Elsewhere, LeBron James and Anthony Davis com-

binated for 63 points as the Los Angeles Lakers used a second half blitz to beat the Memphis Grizzlies 115-105 for their seventh straight win. For the first time in four games the defending league champion Lakers didn't have to go into overtime, but they did need to rally from a 20-point first half deficit for the second game in a row.

"We got to figure that out," said James. "We shouldn't be down in the first quarter. We can't do that against good teams and we got some good teams coming up. Being down 22-2 is not a good ingredient for championship team, but we found a way to get it done."

Davis scored 35 points and James finished with 28 points, nine rebounds and eight assists for the Lakers, who looked tired early after playing three straight overtime games and were down 22-2 halfway through the first quarter against the Grizzlies. The Lakers outscored Memphis 41-23 in the third quarter. In the fourth, they boosted the lead to double digits and cruised the rest of the way.

"We finally got some stops. Our defense wasn't where it needed to be in the first quarter. We grinded it out made a little bit of a run at the end of the third," said Lakers coach Frank Vogel. James played 34 minutes, capping his scoring performance with an emphatic one-handed dunk on a pass from Marc Gasol with three minutes to go.

In Dallas, Luka Doncic scored a career-high 46

points to propel the Dallas Mavericks to a fourth straight victory on Friday, 143-130 over the New Orleans Pelicans. Doncic added 12 assists and eight rebounds — his seventh career game with at least 40 points and 10 assists. Kristaps Porzingis added 36 points for the Mavericks, who withstood a career-best 36 points from Pelicans star Zion Williamson. The scoring extravaganza included a franchise record 25 three-pointers from the Mavericks, who took a 69-65 lead into the second half — in which they never trailed.

Doncic connected on five of eight from three-point range, while Porzingis hit eight of 13 from beyond the arc. Williamson was a perfect 10-for-10 from the field in the first half and 14-of-15 overall — his lone miss a three-point attempt in the third quarter. "Luka was phenomenal," Mavs coach Rick Carlisle said. "KP was phenomenal. Williamson was ridiculous."

Dallas pushed the lead to double digits midway through the third, connecting on 13 of their first 15 shots after the break. Carlisle thought the contest was a "pillow fight" defensively, but he couldn't help but be impressed by the explosive offense on display. "The shotmaking was phenomenal, by both teams," he said. "We were able to get a little bit of traction defensively in the fourth. Also, Kawhi Leonard scored 33 points on 14-for-21 shooting, Marcus Morris came off the bench to score 20 points as the Los Angeles Clippers cruised to a 125-106 win over the host Chicago Bulls. — AFP

## Club World Cup highlights challenges ahead of 2022

DOHA: Organizers would have wanted to use the Club World Cup as a demonstration of readiness for next year's World Cup in Qatar, highlighting gleaming infrastructure and a soft touch with fans from abroad. Instead foreign supporters were banned and all eyes were on strict coronavirus containment measures that followed high-profile outbreaks at the AFC Champions League and recent Australian Open qualifiers played in the Gulf state. While the measures were lauded by FIFA as a success, Bayern Munich star Thomas Mueller tested positive for the virus and at least two members of the Al-Ahly delegation went down with COVID-19.

Bayern went on to beat Mexico's Tigres 1-0 in the final without Mueller. Two Ahly players breached their bubble when they ran into the stands to greet Egypt legend Mohamed Aboutrika, with both banned from their team's third-place play-off and fined. New coronavirus cases grew 18 percent nationwide in the eight days of the tournament compared to the same period the week before as health officials warned of a second wave. A new lockdown could now be on the horizon, medical sources said. However, confident authorities said ahead of the tournament that stringent testing requirements at a recent domestic cup final, similar to those in place for the Club World Cup, showed that the risk of the virus spreading at such an event could be contained.

The day before the competition was due to get underway, Qatar announced a tightening of restrictions including a reduction of spectator capacity at stadiums to 20 percent. However because the Club World Cup had secured approval to stage matches with stadiums at 30 percent capacity prior to the new rules, it was permitted to proceed with larger crowds, an official source said.

"One hundred percent security never exists, but we can do whatever we can to go very close to this," FIFA president Gianni Infantino said in Doha during the tournament. For the first time he also raised the prospect of coronavirus measures being enforced

during the 2022 World Cup but insisted stadiums would be full.

The Club World Cup played out as Doha underwent a relative cold snap with temperatures in the evening, when matches were played, dipping below 20 degrees Celsius (68 Fahrenheit). Next year the World Cup itself will be staged in November and December when conditions are likely to be similarly mild. The two gleaming brand-new stadiums used for the Club World Cup — Education City and Ahmad bin Ali Stadium — also won plaudits from visiting players and managers. So far Qatar has inaugurated three new venues and one refurbished ground with four still to open, most likely later this year. All of them boast state-of-the-art air conditioning.

It was also revealed just ahead of the tournament that alcohol would be available at venues — albeit only in VIP hospitality suites pending a decision on general ticket holders' access to drinks. There was however no repeat of the boozy fan zones which proved popular with fans during the 2019 Club World Cup as all events away from matches were cancelled to stop the spread of COVID-19.

While the large contingent of Al-Ahly fans who call Qatar homemade stadiums feel more than 30 percent full, there was little else in Doha to suggest a major tournament was underway. The limited number of fans attending matches also meant key aspects of Qatar's 2022 infrastructure did not face an acid test.

The involvement of Bayern, both in the tournament and at previous training camps in Qatar, drew scrutiny from supporter groups and rights activists. Bayern have a shirt sponsorship deal with Qatar Airways. In February 2020, labor activists Fair Square wrote to Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge urging the club to take a stand on workers' rights issues.

The club had previously stated in an annual report that "since Bayern Munich became a partner of Qatar" there had been "positive developments in human and labor rights". Fair Square claimed that despite some progress, including reform pledges backed by the International Labor Organization, "progress has been limited in scope and as yet not effective in implementation".

Qatari authorities stress that Amnesty International credits Qatar with meaningful labor reforms. They include a new minimum wage due to begin this month, and scrapping requirements for managerial approval for staff changing companies. Some migrant workers still complain of unpaid wages and being charged illegal recruitment fees. — AFP



HOUSTON: In this file photo taken on January 2, 2021 JJ Watt of the Houston Texans participates in warmups prior to a game against the Tennessee Titans at NRG Stadium in Houston, Texas. — AFP

## Texans release star defensive end Watt

WASHINGTON: Three-time NFL Defensive Player of the Year JJ Watt was released Friday by the Houston Texans, who are struggling to keep top players after revamping their executive lineup. Watt announced his departure in a video posted on social media to his fans in Houston and Texans owner Cal McNair confirmed the release of the player who had become the face of the franchise. "I want you guys to hear it from me," Watt said in the message. "I have sat down with the McNair family and I have asked them for my release and we have mutually agreed to part ways at this time."

The Texans are the only club for which Watt has played since being taken with the 11th overall pick of the 2011 NFL Draft. Watt was named the 2017 NFL Man of the Year for helping Houston recovery from Hurricane Harvey, raising more than \$40 million for relief efforts. "You treated me like family and I truly feel like you're my family," Watt said. "I've tried to do everything I can to work and earn your respect and try and make you proud on and off the field. The connection is special and I will never ever take that for granted because I know how rare it is."

Watt had one year at \$17.7 million remaining on his contract but is now a free agent to sign with any club he wants. A possible interested team would be the Pittsburgh Steelers, who already have Watt's brothers TJ and Derek on their roster. The Texans reached the playoffs for the first time in 2011 and have made the postseason six times in Watt's tenure, but have never gone past the second round. Watt now should have the chance to play for a Super Bowl contender. "I'm excited and looking forward to a new opportunity," Watt said. "But at the same time it's always tough to move on."

Watt, 31, has been a first-team All-Pro selection five times in his 10 NFL seasons and twice led the league in sacks, with 101 career sacks for the Texans. He won Defensive Player of the Year honors in 2012, 2014 and 2015. "Change is never easy, especially when it involves the ones you love," McNair said in a statement. "JJ's impact on not only our organization, but the entire Houston community, is unlike any player in our franchise's history... we will forever consider him a Texan. For now, we will build upon the foundation that JJ created here and forge ahead with our unwavering mission to bring a championship to our city."

### Watson salutes Watt

That might require a major rebuilding after a 4-12 campaign in 2020 and the request by Texans star quarterback Deshaun Watson to be traded. "We expect him to remain a Texan," McNair said. Watson said any team would be lucky to have Watt. "Salute to one of the Greatest of All Time @JJWatt," Watson tweeted. "I appreciate you for all the work you put in and more importantly the person you are. Any team in the league will be better the day you out on their jersey! LOVE my brother! MORE Glory."

David Culley, a former Baltimore Ravens assistant coach, was named the Texans' new head coach last month. The club this week also lost team president Jamey Rootes, who resigned Wednesday in the latest departure of a major executive shakeup. Nick Caserio was hired as the Texans' new general manager and the club also parted ways with its director of football administration, equipment manager and vice president of communications in recent weeks. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Raptors to finish season in Tampa

NEW YORK: The NBA's Toronto Raptors, forced into a United States home base due to COVID-19 issues, said they will play the remainder of the 2020-21 season out of Florida. The Canadian franchise will complete the campaign where they have played so far, at Tampa's Amalie Arena. "Florida has been really welcoming to us and we're so grateful for the hospitality we've found in Tampa," Raptors president Masai Ujiri said. The Raptors also could be hoping some of the city's championship fortune rubs off on them. — AFP

#### O'Ree tribute postponed

NEW YORK: Willie O'Ree, the first black player in the National Hockey League, will have his Boston Bruins jersey retirement ceremony postponed to next year with hopes he and fans can attend. The Bruins announced the postponement on Thursday, moving the ceremony from next Thursday to January 18, 2022, after consulting with the league. The new date will mark the 64th anniversary of O'Ree making history as the NHL's first black player when he took the ice for the Bruins against the Montreal Canadiens. — AFP

#### Arsenal vs Benfica 'switched'

PARIS: The venues for Europa League ties involving both Arsenal and Tottenham have been switched because of COVID-19 restrictions. UEFA announced on Friday. Arsenal's second leg against Lisbon giants Benfica on February 25 will be played in Greece. The game will be played at the Georgios Karaiskakis stadium of Olympiakos at 17:55 GMT. The first leg of the last 32 tie on February 18 had already been switched from Lisbon to the Stadio Olimpico in Rome. Tottenham's Europa League first leg away to Wolfsburg will be played at the Puskas Arena in Budapest because of restrictions on entry into Austria. — AFP

#### Bayern add Upamecano

BERLIN: France defender Dayot Upamecano will join Bayern Munich from Bundesliga rivals RB Leipzig next season, according to reports Friday. Both magazine Kicker and daily Bild say Bayern will pay 43 million euros (\$52 million) to activate the buy-out clause in Upamecano's Leipzig contract, which runs until 2023. European champions Bayern appear to have fought off competition from Liverpool and Chelsea, who also wanted to sign the center-back. Upamecano will replace David Alaba, 28, who is set to leave Bayern when his contract expires in June after repeatedly turning down extension offers. — AFP

#### Sao Paulo hire Crespo

SAO PAULO: Argentine Hernan Crespo will be the new coach of Sao Paulo, the Brazilian club announced on Friday. The 45-year-old's appointment comes just three weeks after he led modest Argentine side Defensa y Justicia to the Copa Sudamericana title. The former striker, a Premier League winner with Chelsea and three-time Serie A champion with Inter Milan, has signed a two-year contract. Crespo replaces Brazilian Fernando Diniz, who was fired after a string of poor results that dropped Sao Paulo off the top of the Brazilian championship. — AFP



AL-RAYYAN: Bayern Munich's German goalkeeper Manuel Neuer lifts the trophy as he celebrates their win in the FIFA Club World Cup final football match between Germany's Bayern Munich vs Mexico's UANL Tigres at the Education City Stadium in the Qatari city of Al-Rayyan on Thursday. — AFP

## Alisson blunders as Leicester rocks Liverpool

### Third straight loss puts Champions League hopes in jeopardy

**LEICESTER:** Liverpool crashed to a dismal 3-1 defeat at Leicester to leave their top four hopes in jeopardy after Alisson Becker's latest blunder sparked a stunning collapse from the troubled Premier League champions yesterday. Jurgen Klopp's side endured a third successive defeat to effectively end any chance of retaining the title.

The calamitous nature of Liverpool's late meltdown raises serious questions about their bid to qualify for next season's Champions League. Mohamed Salah had given the Reds the lead in the second half at the King Power Stadium. But James Maddison triggered a remarkable burst of three goals in seven minutes from the hosts.

Maddison's VAR-assisted equalizer was followed by a howler from away keeper Alisson, whose miscued clearance was converted by Jamie Vardy. It was another miserable afternoon for Alisson following his two costly mistakes in last weekend's 4-1 defeat against Manchester City. Harvey Barnes put the seal on Leicester's superb comeback, leaving fourth placed Liverpool languishing 10 points behind leaders City.

While Klopp would privately concede that Liverpool won't win the title, it is their top four place that he will be more worried about after the Reds were left with just two wins from their last 10 league games. They could be as low as sixth place by Monday if Chelsea and West Ham win their games in hand.

The temperature was well below zero in the east midlands and Klopp's 300th game in all competitions as Liverpool

manager could not have been any more bitter. The City humiliation last Sunday left Klopp insisting he does not listen to the "noise" around Liverpool's shocking slide. He won't be able to ignore the alarm bells any longer.

Leicester climbed above Manchester United into second place after feasting on Liverpool's problems. With Fabinho sidelined by a muscle injury, on-loan Schalke defender Ozan Kabak endured a Liverpool debut to forget.

Kabak had relatively little experience in the Bundesliga and Vardy welcomed him to the Premier League with a superb run that left the 20-year-old trailing in his wake as the Leicester striker lifted his shot just over the bar. Vardy had a golden opportunity to open the scoring when he got between Kabak and Jordan Henderson to meet Barnes' cross, yet his header was too close to Alisson.

Picked out by Maddison's sublime backheel, Vardy got in behind Henderson before smashing his shot against the bar. Trent Alexander-Arnold was inches away from giving Liverpool the lead after half-time when his free-kick deflected off Vardy and clipped the bar.

Roberto Firmino headed just wide from Alexander-Arnold's corner before Liverpool's pressure was rewarded in the 67th minute. Alexander-Arnold whipped over a cross and Firmino brilliantly dragged it back to Salah with a remarkable piece of nimble footwork.

Salah guided Firmino's pass into the far corner with a clinical finish from 15 yards for his 23rd goal of the season in all competitions. Just as Klopp's men



**LEICESTER:** Leicester City's English midfielder Harvey Barnes scores his team's third goal during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Liverpool at King Power Stadium in Leicester, central England yesterday. — AFP

looked back on track, they were unhinged a VAR controversy.

Initially, Leicester were frustrated when VAR ruled that Alexander-Arnold's challenge on Harvey Barnes was just outside the penalty area rather than inside it. But Maddison ensured they wouldn't rue that decision when he bent his free-kick into the far corner.

An offside flag went up against Daniel Amartey, but a VAR review showed Firmino's foot had played the Leicester midfielder inside so the goal was given. Klopp reacted with a frustrated laugh at the way fate had conspired against Liverpool, but the German was simply furious three minutes later.

Needlessly rushing out to deal with

Youri Tielemans' long pass, which could have been cleared by Kabak, Alisson collided with the defender and miscued his kick straight to Vardy, who couldn't believe his luck as he slotted in the empty net. Liverpool were in disarray and their misery was complete in the 85th minute as Barnes sprinted onto Wilfred Ndidi's pass to fire past Alisson. — AFP



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