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Kuwait COVID death toll tops 1,000 after 5 more fatalities

Govt to attend session on coronavirus • Calls to scrap institutional quarantine

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The health ministry yesterday registered 798 COVID-19 cases over a 24-hour period, taking the total number of infections to 177,701, while five fatalities were recorded, raising the death toll to 1,003. Active cases amounted to 10,679 with 133 patients in intensive care units, Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad told KUNA during the ministry's 104th regular press conference.

Health authorities conducted 7,514 swab tests to take the total to 1,667,920, which means 10.6 percent of swab tests performed in the past 24 hours were positive, Sanad revealed. He urged everyone in Kuwait to adhere to precautionary measures against the virus and maintain social distancing. Earlier, the ministry confirmed 765 new recovery cases, taking total recoveries to 166,019.

Meanwhile, the caretaker government has agreed to attend a special National Assembly session to debate measures to face the coronavirus pandemic and procedures to rebalance the population structure. Assembly Speaker

Marzouq Al-Ghanem said he was informed by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, who is still forming the new Cabinet, that the outgoing government will attend the special session called by MPs.

MP Osama Al-Munawer and a group of lawmakers submitted a motion last week to hold a special session to debate the new strain of the coronavirus and recent government closures, in addition to the population structure. Ghanem said he has invited MPs and the government to convene the session tomorrow and asked MPs to take a coronavirus test to be allowed to attend the session.

But a number of leading opposition MPs said they will not sit with a caretaker Cabinet and announced they will boycott the session. Other MPs called on the prime minister to speed up the formation of the new Cabinet. MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari strongly criticized the prime minister for accepting to attend a special session while boycotting regular sessions, saying this is a reconfirmation that the Assembly should not cooperate with the pre-

mier. He said that he will not attend the session unless the new Cabinet is formed. A similar position was expressed by MPs Saud Al-Mutairi, Hamdan Al-Azemi, Fares Al-Otaibi and Mohammad Al-Mutair.

Two lawmakers also called on the government to review its decision on forcing arrivals to be placed in institutional quarantine for seven days at their cost. MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri said this decision is not acceptable, and if it is imposed, the health minister will be held responsible. MP Mohammad Al-Rasheedi also called on the government to withdraw the decision, especially for students, because airfares have become too expensive.

A package for a stay of six nights and seven days with breakfast and airport transfers will cost KD 270 for a single room and KD 330 for a double room at five-star hotels, with each meal (lunch or dinner) costing KD 10 KD; KD 180 for a single room and KD 240 for a double room at four-star hotels, with each meal costing KD 8; and KD 120 for a single room and KD 180 for a double room at three-star hotels, with each meal costing KD 6.



Trump acquitted again by Senate

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump was acquitted Saturday on charges of inciting an insurrection at the US Capitol, after a majority of Senate Republicans closed ranks and refused to punish the former president in his historic second impeachment trial. The five-day trial saw Democratic prosecutors argue - bolstered by dramatic video of the Jan 6 riot - that Trump betrayed his oath by whipping up his supporters into storming Congress in a last-ditch attempt to cling to power.

It concluded as expected with a majority of Republicans declaring him not guilty, in a sign of the powerful grip the 74-year-old Trump continues to exert on his party. But while the 57-43 majority that voted to convict fell short of the two-thirds needed in the Senate, seven Republicans joined with Democrats to seek Trump's conviction, making it the most bipartisan impeachment trial in US history.

President Joe Biden said that despite the acquittal the charges against Trump are "not in dispute" and called on Americans to defend democracy. Trump, who has been secluded in his Florida club since leaving office on Jan 20, welcomed the verdict - denouncing the proceedings as "yet another phase of the greatest witch hunt in the history of our country".

Despite the stain of a second impeachment, Trump hinted at a possible political future, saying that "our historic, patriotic and beautiful movement to Make America Great Again has only just begun". "We have so much work ahead of us, and soon we will emerge with a vision for a bright, radiant, and limitless American future," he said in a statement.

Trump was impeached by the House of Representatives on Jan 13, a week after the chaotic assault that stunned the nation and provoked widespread bipartisan outrage. Democrats argued that Trump's behavior was an "open and shut" case of impeachable conduct, retracing how he spent two months repeating the falsehood that the election was stolen, before inciting his supporters to attack

Continued on Page 2

UAE probe sends first Mars image

DUBAI: The UAE's "Hope" probe sent back its first image of Mars, the national space agency said yesterday, days after the spacecraft successfully entered the Red Planet's orbit. The picture "captured the largest volcano in the solar system, Olympus Mons, emerging into the early morning sunlight," it said in a statement.

The image was taken from an altitude of 24,700 km above the Martian surface on Wednesday, a day after the probe entered Mars' orbit, it said in a statement. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-

Maktoum, UAE prime minister and Dubai's ruler, shared the colored image on Twitter. "The first picture of Mars captured by the first-ever Arab probe in history," he wrote.

The mission is designed to reveal the secrets of Martian weather, but the UAE also wants it to serve as an inspiration for the region's youth. Hope became the first of three spacecraft to arrive at the Red Planet this month after China and the US also launched missions in July, taking advantage of a period when the Earth and Mars are nearest.

The UAE's venture is also timed to mark the 50th anniversary of the unification of the nation's seven emirates. "Hope" will orbit the Red Planet for at least one Martian year, or 687 days, using three scientific instruments to monitor the Martian atmosphere. — AFP



A handout picture taken by the UAE 'Hope' probe shows the Olympus Mons, the highest volcano on Mars, and the Tharsis Montes, three volcanoes named (top to bottom) Ascraeus Mons, Pavonis Mons and Arsia Mons. — AFP

Lebanon kicks off COVID-19 vaccinations

BEIRUT: Lebanon yesterday gave its first COVID-19 vaccines dose to a doctor and an elderly actor, as it started an inoculation drive it hopes will keep the pandemic in check amid deepening economic crisis. Mahmoud Hassoun, the head of the intensive care unit at the key Rafiq Hariri Hospital battling coronavirus, was the first person to get the jab, an AFP

correspondent said. "Hopefully this will be the start of the end of this plague in the country," Hassoun told AFP.

He received a Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, a day after the very first 28,500 doses landed at Beirut's airport. Healthcare workers and those aged over 75 were the first to receive Pfizer/BioNTech shots at three major Beirut hospitals under the national roll-out plan. Popular Lebanese comedian Salah Tizani, 93, who is best known by his stage name Abu Salim, was second to roll up his shirt in front of the cameras. "I'm telling everyone to come and get vaccinated and not be scared. Better to get vaccinated than to be knocked down by this deadly virus," he told AFP.

Continued on Page 2



BEIRUT: Head of the ICU at Rafiq Hariri Hospital Mahmoud Hassoun receives the first jab of the COVID-19 Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine at the hospital yesterday. — AFP

Gazans look to ICC for closure

GAZA CITY: During the 2014 war in Gaza, Nevine Barakat lost her husband and saw three of her five children wounded in an Israeli bombardment of a school. Today, she hopes the International Criminal Court (ICC) will finally bring them justice. When the court ruled last week that it had jurisdiction in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories, opening the way for a war crimes investigation, Barakat immediately felt "happy and full of hope".

"It was as if the world was beginning to under-

stand that Israeli injustice had to be ended," she told AFP, fighting back tears. In the summer of 2014, Israel launched what it called Operation Protective Edge with the stated aim of stopping rocket fire into its territory by militants of Islamism movement Hamas. The 50-day war in the Palestinian enclave was the third between the Jewish state and Hamas, after those of 2008 and 2012. Around 2,250 Palestinians were killed in the 2014 fighting, mostly civilians, and 74 Israelis, mostly soldiers.

On July 30, 2014, Barakat and her family, like hundreds of others, were sheltering in a school run by the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) in Jabaliya, in the northern Gaza Strip. Their homes had been destroyed in previous Israeli attacks.

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GAZA: Muhammad Abu Jazar, who lost his legs in an Israeli raid which claimed the lives of his wife and two of his children, is seen with his daughter Maisam at their home in Rafah on Feb 6, 2021. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Amir receives Crown Prince, Speaker, Prime Minister

Sheikh Nawaf congratulates Bahraini King on 20th charter anniversary



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



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



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah.



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

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir later received Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received Ghanem and His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled at Bayan Palace. His Highness Sheikh Mishal also received Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali, Saleh, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

In the meantime, His Highness the Amir addressed a congratulatory cable to the Bahraini King Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa on the 20th Anniversary of the National Action Charter of Bahrain. In his cable, His Highness praised Bahrain's special achievements under his wisdom, wishing the king and his people further progress and prosperity. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables to King Hamad. Separately, His Highness the Amir addressed a cable of condolences to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz on the demise of Princess Dana bint Abdullah bin Turki bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Saud. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent cables of similar content to the Saudi monarch. — KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets a number of Cabinet ministers.

Gazans look to ICC for...

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A UN report said in the hours before dawn the school was hit by an Israeli artillery barrage.

"I counted seven shells before I passed out," said Barakat, who suffered severe back injuries that left her paralyzed in her lower limbs. She said she only recovered consciousness when she heard her son cry out

that his father was dead. Her injured daughter Samar, now 18, remembers how she tried to dodge the shells. "But they were falling in front of and behind us," she said. "Anyone who kills should receive his sentence, and Israel should be held responsible for its crimes."

A summary of a UN inquiry, published in April 2015, says four shells hit the school shortly after an unspecified explosion outside its walls. It said that in the Jabalya girls' school shelling and six other incidents at UNRWA premises between July 8 and Aug 26, 2014, "at least 44 Palestinians were killed as a result of Israeli actions and at least 227 injured".

"United Nations premises are inviolable and should

be places of safety, in particular in a situation of armed conflict," then-UN chief Ban Ki-moon wrote to the Security Council in a letter accompanying the report. The Israeli army said it had done everything possible to minimize casualties, accusing Gaza's Hamas rulers and other armed groups of using civilians as "human shields" by firing from densely populated areas of the enclave of two million inhabitants.

The UN report acknowledged its inspectors found mortar tubes and rounds as well as "rockets" in some schools. At another it "concluded that it was highly likely that an unidentified Palestinian armed group could have used the school premises to launch

attacks". "The fact that they were used by those involved in the fighting to store their weaponry and, in two cases, probably to fire from them is unacceptable," Ban wrote.

Outgoing ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said at the end of 2019 that she wanted to investigate possible "war crimes" in the Palestinian territories, after a preliminary examination opened in 2015 in the wake of the 2014 war. Montasser Bakr, 17, says he is eager to testify to the court in The Hague if called upon. "I will tell them, me, at the ICC, how my nine-year-old cousin Ismail was killed by Israel while he was going to get the ball!" — AFP

Trump acquitted again by...

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Congress and stop the certification of Biden's victory. "He summoned his supporters to Washington... whipped them into a frenzy, and directed them at the Capitol." Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said after the vote. The defense team swatted the evidence away, arguing that Trump's appeal to supporters to "fight like hell, at the rally that preceded the attack", was merely rhetorical. But their central argument was that the Senate had no constitutional jurisdiction to try a former president. Most Republican senators agreed.

But Mitch McConnell, the powerful Senate minority leader who voted to acquit on those grounds, left no doubt he blames Trump for the riot - which sent lawmakers fleeing for safety as a marauding mob rampaged through the Capitol. The former Trump ally unleashed a searing rebuke of the ex-president, calling his actions preceding the assault a "disgraceful dereliction" of duty.

"There's no question - none - that president Trump is practically and morally responsible for provoking the events of the day," McConnell told the chamber after

the vote. He stressed that while Congress has exhausted its avenues for punishing Trump, the US justice system has not. "President Trump is still liable for everything he did while he was in office," McConnell said. "He didn't get away with anything yet."

In a statement Saturday night, Biden said that "while the final vote did not lead to a conviction, the substance of the charge is not in dispute" and acknowledged McConnell's critique of Trump. "This sad chapter in our history has reminded us that democracy is fragile. That it must always be defended. That we must be ever vigilant," Biden said.

Building their case over two days, Democratic impeachment managers described how Trump first encouraged, then refused to call a halt to the Jan 6 insurrection that left then-vice president Mike Pence and lawmakers in mortal danger. Proclaiming Trump's innocence, defense lawyer Michael van der Veen told the Senate that "the act of incitement never happened" and that rioters acted alone.

After the trial, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who was openly targeted by rioters and evacuated from the Capitol on Jan 6, laid into the "cowardly" Republican senators who voted to acquit. "Senate Republicans' refusal to hold Trump accountable for igniting a violent insurrection to cling to power will go down as one of the darkest days and most dishonorable acts in our nation's history," she said in a statement. — AFP

Lebanon kicks off COVID-19...

Continued from Page 1

"Finally there's a glimpse of hope that things will get back to normal," said medical student Dana Chatila, who was waiting in her white lab coat and mask outside the American University Medical Center where she works in the emergency department. "It's going to take time of course, but the darkness is ending."

From today, another 18 hospitals across the country are to join in the vaccination campaign, health ministry adviser Mohamad Haidar has said. The World Bank has allocated \$34 million to inoculate two million of Lebanon's six million inhabitants. Lebanon has been under a lockdown since mid-January, after an unprecedented spike in cases blamed on holiday gatherings that forced overwhelmed hospitals to turn away patients for lack of beds.

The pandemic has compounded the woes of Lebanese, already struggling with a dire economic crisis and reeling from a devastating explosion at Beirut's port last summer that killed more than 200 people, injured thousands and destroyed swathes of

the capital. The Lebanese pound has lost more than 80 percent of its value to the dollar on the black market, prices have soared, and many have seen their savings trapped in the banks.

More than half the population lives in poverty, and rights groups have warned millions would struggle to survive without help if coronavirus restrictions lasted too long. The World Bank and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) are to monitor the vaccine rollout.

Some 450,000 people have signed up to be vaccinated in Lebanon including 45,000 aged over 75 and 17,500 staff from the health sector, caretaker health minister Hamad Hassan has said. He has promised all residents would be vaccinated, including Syrian and Palestinian refugees living in the country. Firass Abiad, the head of the Rafiq Hariri Hospital, said Saturday that a first jab was "the best gift one can ask for on Valentine's Day".

But many in Lebanon are still hesitant to get the jab. Of 500 people surveyed by private think-tank Information International, 31 percent said they would get vaccinated, 38 percent said they would rather not and another 31 percent were undecided. Lebanon has ordered around six million vaccine doses in total, including two million from Pfizer/BioNTech and another 2.7 million via the international Covax distribution program. — AFP

Local

Surge in Kuwait COVID-19 cases big challenge: Municipality chief

Health Ministry announces 798 new COVID cases, five deaths

KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait Municipality Ahmad Al-Manfouhi said yesterday that the surge in coronavirus cases "has placed us before a big challenge" to heed health conditions. He made his remarks to reporters after a tour at Murooj Complex in Sabhan to see first-hand compliance of restaurants and coffee shops with health regulations. Government institutions stepped up their readiness after health authorities raised the alarm about rising numbers of COVID-19 cases, he said. Manfouhi said he was pleased to witness business owners' commitment to health conditions which exceeded 95 percent. This compliance, he added, would help owners avoid any penalties. He warned anew against any slackness in compliance with the health conditions "because it would endanger lives of people."



Municipality inspects stores' compliance

The Ministry of Health yesterday announced 798 new COVID-19 cases registered over a 24-hour span, increasing the total number of infections to 177,701, while five fatalities were recorded during the same period, raising the death toll to 1,003. Plus, active cases amounted to 10,679 with 133 of them in intensive care units as of yesterday, MoH's Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. Health

authorities conducted 7,514 swab tests to a total of 1,667,920, which meant that 10.6 percent of the swab tests performed in 24 hours were infections, he revealed. Earlier, the ministry confirmed 765 fresh recovery cases, added to a total of 166,019 cured people so far. Dr Sanad urged the public to adhere to precautionary measures against the virus and maintain social distancing.

The Cabinet had decided earlier this month to shut down all commercial shops, restaurants and malls from 8:00 pm to 5:00 am the next day as of February 7, as a new measure to help curb the spread of COVID-19 after a notable increase in the number of new cases. Grocery shops and pharmacies were exempted, while delivery business were allowed to continue. It also closed down health clubs, salons, barber shops and resorts, in addition to celebration halls, tents and catering services. It also banned all gatherings including national holiday celebrations. The ban will continue for one month which can be renewed if necessary.

The Cabinet also banned the entry of foreigners into the country from February 7 for two weeks that can be renewed. It exempted close relatives of citizens and domestic helpers. Furthermore, the



KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait Municipality Ahmad Al-Manfouhi speaks to reporters after a tour at Murooj Complex in Sabhan yesterday. —KUNA

Cabinet re-introduced institutional quarantines saying that those returning will have to be quarantined at local hotels for seven days and then at

home for another seven days. The decision will be implemented from February 21 for one month that can be extended.



KUWAIT: Prevention sector officials at Kuwait Fire Force carried out several campaigns in the presence of deputy chief of the sector Maj Gen Khalid Abdullah Fahad. They issued several citations and warnings to violating stores in Amghara for not meeting safety and fire prevention conditions and not having a license from the fire force.

KD 183.8m loans, grants in 2020: KCB

KUWAIT: Kuwait Credit Bank (KCB) said yesterday that the total of loans and grants disbursed from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020 equaled KD 183.8 million (about \$606.5 million). The entirety of real estate loans amounted to KD 116.8 million (roughly \$385.4 million) and total loans of divorced

women added up to KD 12.5 million (\$41 million), KCB said in a statement.

Total loans of widows were KD 6.4 million (\$21 million), while the whole number of loans for the loan portfolio reached KD 787,000 (\$2.5 million), it added. Summation of social loans amounted to KD 24.9 million (\$82 million), it said, mentioning that the total donations and grants added up to KD 22 million (\$72.6 million) distributed over KD 12.5 million (\$41 million) as social donations and KD 9.6 million (\$31.6 million) granted to people with disabilities. — KUNA

PACI service allows owners to verify tenants' info online

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) has introduced a service for property owners to check on residents and complain online in case of any inaccurate data. PACI Director General Musaed Al-Asousi said after the launch of Kuwait Mobile ID as a secure electronic ID of an individual according to the e-transactions law, it is possible to display the information of residents of real estate owners' properties. This move compliments a service launched in 2018 enabling landlords to check any addition or omission of residents at the properties they own.

Asousi said the goal behind this service is to adhere to transparency and enable the owner to be one of the monitoring tools, in addition to strict procedures by PACI for change of address, which requires documents and the fingerprints of the renter to guarantee their appearance in person, as well as the landlord's fingerprints to guarantee their knowledge and approval of the renter to reside at their property. Asousi said the service is in agreement with transparency requirements of Nazaha. He said the service enables the owner to complain online after completing a survey, because the authority noticed that at times the lease contract is signed by a family member without the knowledge of other members, especially in cases of inherited property.

Three dead in family tragedy on Kabd Road

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti woman, her daughter and granddaughter were killed as their vehicle flipped over after a collision on Kabd Road near the second roundabout, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday. The three victims were trapped in their vehicle, but died by the time they were pulled out. The driver of the other vehicle was taken to hospital. The deceased were recovered by forensics. Meanwhile, the same daily reported that three Kuwaitis are being questioned for flying gliders in Khairan in violation of the law and not having licenses.

A citizen told police about the gliders equipped with cameras flying over the chalets of Sabah Al-Ahmad Sea Area. A source said it is necessary to obtain licenses to fly gliders and drones from the civil aviation to avoid legal action. In a separate case, a Kuwaiti under the influence of drugs caused three traffic accidents in Hawally. Police found drugs on him, which he claimed were for his personal use, reported Al-Rai. Those involved in the accidents filed charges against him.

in my view

Positive features of distance learning

By Azzh Al-Ghamdi

local@kuwaittimes.net

In this article, I aim to focus on the positive features of distance learning. As we all know, COVID-19 has changed many aspects of our life, including education. Although distance learning has been around for many years, it was not widely accepted in many countries because most educational institutions required personal attendance. Also, there was no distance learning for primary education, but because of the global pandemic, all countries have implemented distance learning. We should thank the inventor of the Internet because he rescued students around the world!

And after this pandemic is over, we should accept distance learning at all levels of education, as many people migrate to work in other countries which have a different language and culture. This results in difficulties faced by their children who leave their schools and friends. Distance learning gives a chance for expats to choose this method of education for their children from the beginning, so they do not feel homesick after leaving their countries and their families and friends. This will eliminate a lot of the negativity of leaving their countries to work abroad. Some expatriates are saddened because their children don't know anything about the culture and the language of their home country.

During online learning, children can communicate easily with their friends via the camera and mic. They can retain their culture and not feel left out when they eventually go back to their countries. Conversely, a person planning to migrate who wants his children to prepare for the new country can choose schools of that nation, so his children can learn its culture and language easily and not feel different. As we can see, distance learning gives us a chance to discover new things and solve many problems which we have faced for many years without finding a suitable solution. But this needs support from UNESCO, while distance learning certificates should be accepted by all countries in the future.

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

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Ministry sets prices at fish market after auctions halted

Souq Mubarakiya's fish market almost half empty yesterday



KUWAIT: Fish displayed at Souq Mubarakiya's fish market yesterday. — Photos by Ben Garcia

News in brief

MP proposes jail term for harassment

KUWAIT: MP Mohammad Al-Huwailah submitted a proposal to combat harassment at public places. The proposal says any person who harasses a woman at a public place will be punished by six months in jail and a maximum fine of KD 1,000, or either of the two penalties. The court can rule for more than the maximum punishment limit - but not more than double - in the following cases: If the offender is a security officer; if the victim is a minor; if the offender repeats his offense within one year of the sentence. Huwailah added that if the convicted harasser is a foreigner, the judge must rule for his deportation after serving his sentence, and he will be barred from returning. — Al-Rai

Summer plan discussed

KUWAIT: Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Mohammad Al-Faris met yesterday with senior ministry officials to discuss its 2021 summer plan. During the meeting, Faris affirmed the need to tackle any issues regarding maintenance contracts. He also stressed on the need to enable Kuwaiti workers, who represent over 90 percent of the labor force serving in the electricity and water field, to execute engineering and technical duties, the ministry said in a statement. They also discussed preparations to face the current challenges posed by the coronavirus crisis in the country, said the statement, adding that the minister noted that 2020's summer was the most challenging time due to the pandemic. Moreover, they discussed measures to face any emergency, workers' safety and receiving clients' complaints. — KUNA

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: After halting daily auctions of local fish at Souq Sharq in Kuwait City and Souq Al-Kout in Fahaheel, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry is setting the prices of all fish available in the market. The price of Hamour was set at KD 4 per kilo, baloul KD 6, nuwaibi KD 2, sha-em KD 3, sheem KD 5, nagroul KD 5, qubqub KD 2.500, biyya KD 2, subaiti KD 4.500, kanad KD 2.500, sheeri KD 2.500, l'lah KD 3.500, m'zeizei KD 5 and faskar KD 3 per kilo. Kuwaitis' favorite fish zubaidi is classified depending on size - large (700 gm-1 kg) KD 11 per kilo, medium (400 gm to 600 gm) KD 8 and small (350 gm and less) KD 5.

"I've been here for many years now at Souq Mubarakiya, and if you compare the last few years, there seems to be a lot of disparity. There are only a few sellers now, and we barely have enough fish," said Hashem, a fishmonger and owner of a stall in Mubarakiya. "Our prices here follow the prices set by the market. Whatever the prices at the big market in Sharq, we follow," he added.

The fish market at Souq Mubarakiya was almost half empty and few fish were available when Kuwait Times visited the market at 10 am yesterday. "Perhaps because of the weather, stocks are few and prices have gone up. For many months during the pandemic, it has been like this. We cannot do anything about the prices," said Hashem, who hails from Iran.

Doris, a restaurant owner and regular visitor of the fish market at Mubarakiya, said there have been changes in the prices of fish compared to the pre-COVID era. "Yeah, fish is expensive now! I normally buy fish at the auction because we can get discounts and offer it at the restaurant's 'all you can eat' promo. But not anymore. I am now considering removing fish from my 'all you can eat' promo. Maybe instead of serving it whole, I will cut the fish in two or more pieces so that we can still serve fish. Fish is the bestselling item on the buffet at my restaurant," she noted.

The government last Tuesday abruptly halted auctions at fish markets to curb the spread of the coronavirus due to overcrowding. The Kuwait Fisherman Union said the commerce ministry informed the union about the cancellation of auctions and that the ministry will set the prices for vendors and supermarkets. The decision led to a quota system for vendors and supermarkets.

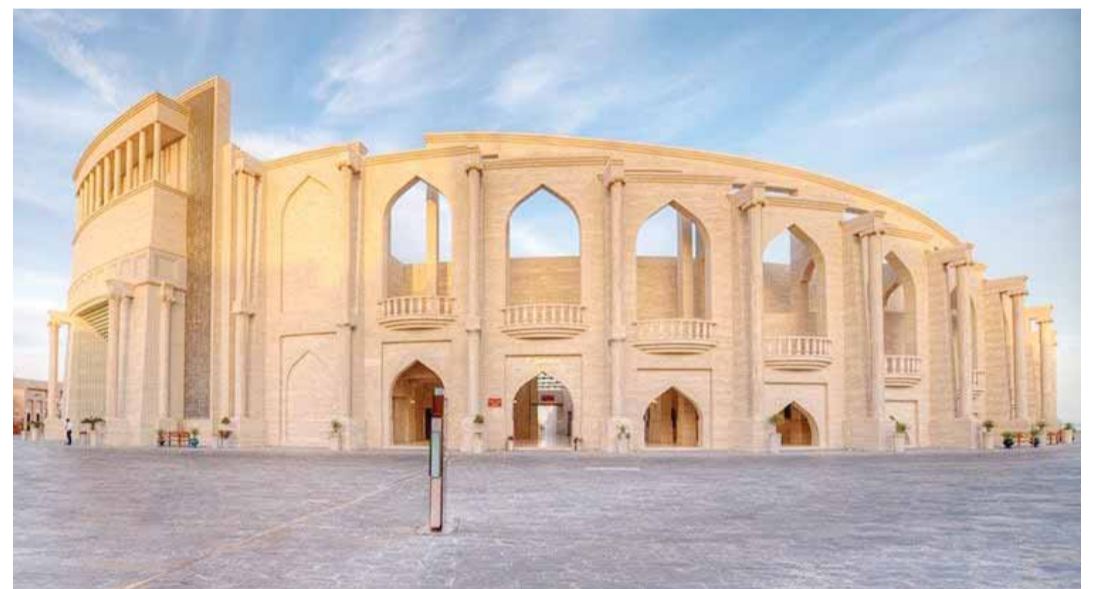
"We have our contacts inside the fish market and they are distributing fish to all vendors accordingly. Fish are allocated for every stall; we only have to collect the stocks when ready," said Noordin, a fishmonger from Bangladesh.

Fish caught in Kuwaiti waters account for a 20 percent share of the Kuwaiti market, with the rest imported from various countries including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Zubaidi, hamour, nuwaibi and maid are some of the variety of fish popular in Kuwait.

Stocks are few and prices are up



Katara theater unique monument where ancient arts meet



DOHA: Katara theater, an architectural aesthetic monument visitors to Qatar could see when visiting the capital, Doha, is an open-air unique theater called 'Jewel of Katara' for its creative design where Roman architecture meets Arab-Islamic art. The theater considered the first open-air located on the sea shore, the only one in the world and opened in

2011, aims to promote the cultural dialogue and exchange of civilizations around the world. The theater, located on an area of 3,275 square meters, was designed to accommodate an audience between 3,200 and 3,900 persons, as its maximum capacity reaches nearly 5,000. It was named Katara after the ancient name for the Qatar Peninsula. — KUNA

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HERAT: A security forces personnel walks amidst wreckage of gas tankers after a fire accident at Islam Qala on the outskirts of Herat, in the border between Afghanistan and Iran yesterday. —AFP

100 fuel tankers gutted on Afghan-Iran border

Fire 'catastrophe' causes millions of dollars of losses

ISLAM QALA, Afghanistan: At least 100 oil and gas tankers have been destroyed by fire in a "catastrophe" at Afghanistan's biggest trade crossing with Iran, causing millions of dollars of losses, officials said yesterday.

The huge blaze, which broke out Saturday afternoon at Islam Qala port 120 kilometers (75 miles) from the western city of Herat, has been contained and an investigation launched into its cause. "We were told that 100 or 200 tankers have been destroyed, but this number could be higher," Jilani Farhad, spokesman for the governor of Herat province, said after visiting the scene.

During the blaze looters descended on the site, stealing goods that were being imported and exported across the border, Younus Qazi Zada, the head of the Herat Chamber of Commerce said. "The catastrophe was much bigger than imagined," he said, adding: "Unfortunately, irresponsible people have looted a large number of goods."

Qazi Zada said initial estimates were of "millions of dollars of losses". Farhad added that investigators needed more time to examine the extent of damage.

Videos posted on social media on Saturday

night showed the towering fire and huge clouds of thick black smoke billowing into the sky. On Sunday security forces opened fire on a vehicle, killing one man, after the driver failed to stop at a checkpoint that had been hastily set up to prevent suspected looters from entering what was left of the customs office compound.

An AFP photographer said hundreds of people had gathered at the site, trying to get access to the trucks. Around 20 people were injured in the fire, according to Herat health officials.

The finance ministry said early findings suggested the blaze started in a tanker before quickly spreading and causing "heavy financial losses" including fuel, tankers and customs facilities. Damage to power lines from the incident left large parts of Herat province without power yesterday.

Trucks fled over the border

Islam Qala is one of the major ports in Afghanistan, through which most official trade with Iran is conducted. Kabul has waivers from Washington allowing it to import oil and gas from Iran despite US sanctions. Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said the border

"was held open for trucks, cars and people running from the fire".

Afghanistan's vice president Amrullah Saleh said hundreds of trucks were allowed to enter Iran to escape the fire. Traders have been asked to use alternative border crossings. The Taliban has regularly attacked fuel tankers they suspect of supplying foreign troops in the country.

In 2014, the hardline group destroyed more than 200 fuel trucks on Kabul's outskirts in an attack. There was no indication that militants were behind Saturday's blaze.

However, insurgents assaulted a nearby security post shortly after the blaze broke out, taking advantage of the situation, Farhad said Saturday. Security forces have been deployed around the port area. Afghanistan has been hit by a surge in violence despite ongoing peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government, which have so far failed to achieve a breakthrough.

The rise in violence has led US President Joe Biden's administration to launch a review of a deal signed between Washington and the terror group last year that paved the way for the withdrawal of all American troops in the coming months. —AFP

Dozens killed in overnight clashes in northern Yemen

DUBAI: Dozens were killed in overnight clashes in Yemen as Iran-backed Houthi rebels intensified attacks to seize the government's last northern stronghold, officials said yesterday. Earlier this month, the Houthis resumed an offensive to seize oil-rich Marib, some 120 kilometers east of the capital Sanaa. The city's loss would be disastrous for Yemen's beleaguered leadership.

Two government military officials said at least 16 pro-government forces were killed and 21 wounded in the past 24 hours, adding that "dozens were killed" among Houthi ranks. The Houthis have cut off supply lines to a district about 50 kilometers south of the city, with "the goal to lay siege to Marib", one of the sources said. Yemen has been embroiled in a bloody power struggle since 2014 between its government, supported by Saudi Arabia, and Houthi rebels, who control the capital Sanaa and most of the north. The rebels have also escalated attacks against Saudi Arabia, drawing

condemnation from the international community.

The kingdom said it had foiled a Houthi drone attack on the southern airport of Abha on Saturday, just days after a rebel drone strike on the airport left a civilian aircraft ablaze. The upsurge in violence comes shortly after the United States decided to remove the rebels from its list of terrorist groups, in order to ensure humanitarian work in Yemen is unimpeded, and to pave the way to restart peace talks.

'Foreign enemy'

Observers say the Houthis are seeking to take control of Marib as leverage before entering into any negotiations with the internationally recognized government. If the city falls into rebel hands, the Houthis will have full control of north Yemen, weakening the government's negotiating position, according to observers. Saudi Arabia has invested heavily in Marib in recent years, and the Saudi-led coalition has intensified air strikes to stop the rebels from seizing the city. Yemen's grinding conflict has claimed tens of thousands of lives and displaced millions, according to international organizations, sparking what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Houthi spokesman Mohamed Abdelsalam tweeted on Saturday that the rebels were fighting "only



MADGHIL, Yemen: Forces loyal to Yemen's Saudi-backed government get into position during clashes with Houthi rebel fighters in Al-Jadaan area about 50 kilometers northwest of Marib in central Yemen. —AFP

those militarily involved with the foreign enemy" amid government calls for residents to defend the city. "May the honorable people of Marib be reassured... and acknowledge that the aggressor coalition is fighting them, not for them," he said. On Friday, the UN agencies warned that about 400,000 Yemeni children aged under five are in danger of dying of acute malnutrition this year. The UN agencies also warned that about 1.2 million pregnant or breastfeeding women are expected to suffer from extreme malnutrition in 2021. —AFP

Overshadowed by war, aid groups in the Sahel soldier on

PARIS: Aid groups in the Sahel have spent years in the shadows fighting the region's poverty and humanitarian crises, squeezed by a war that has monopolized the world's attention and made their lives even more difficult. Since 2012 the global spotlight has been placed on a bloody conflict between government forces and the French-led Barkhane force on the one hand, and ruthless jihadist groups on the other. But behind the graphic headlines, many problems go unnoticed.

One is the abject poverty of a region where nearly half the population lives with less than \$1.25 (1.03 euros) per day, placing it at the very bottom of global development indices. The hundreds of NGOs in the Sahel region, which comprises Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, have developed an unparalleled expertise on the ground. But, say some, their work is still seen as little more than a sideshow by governments, which will confer today and tomorrow, along with France, at a summit in Chad.

'Nobody asks us'

"NGOs have something to say," said Frederic de Saint-Semin, who runs humanitarian relief organization Acted, but "nobody asks us for our point of view". This, de Saint-Semin said, is a mistake—NGOs are experts in the Sahel's complexities thanks to their skills in implementing demanding programs with a high proportion

of local staff. Politicians "ask the opinion of the military, diplomats and the police, but not of humanitarian organizations," he said. The brutal conflict has made aid work even more difficult, said Pierre Mendiharar, deputy head of operations at Doctors Without Borders (MSF), especially outside government-controlled big cities. "The situation in the countryside is extremely complex," he said. "It's a no-man's land."

Shifting power balances mean "we constantly have to negotiate our presence" with armed groups "who don't give a damn about neutrality and impartiality," said Mendiharar. Last year the group suffered half a dozen attacks on its health centers in Mali, when "armed men came to take away wounded patients who were never seen again", said Mendiharar. There have been countless other incidents targeting NGOs, ranging from simple theft to abduction and murder. —AFP

Decision time soon for Biden on Iran nuclear deal

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden ran supporting a return to diplomacy with Iran but made clear he will not be rushed into re-entering a 2015 nuclear deal trashed by Donald Trump. Nonetheless, a series of dates are coming up that will force the new US administration to show its hand.

What dates are coming up?

The Biden administration has repeatedly said it will return to full compliance with the deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Agreement Plan of Action (JCPOA), once Iran does. In other words, Biden will lift draconian sanctions imposed by Trump only after the clerical regime reverses nuclear steps it took to protest those sanctions. Iran, likely mindful of the widespread hostility it faces in Washington, wants to ensure an end to sanctions before it backs down on steps away from the nuclear commitments, which included enriching uranium beyond agreed limits. A key date comes on February 21 when Iran, under a law passed in December by the conservative-led parliament, is set to stop allowing intrusive inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency unless there is an easing of US sanctions.

Kelsey Davenport, director for nonproliferation policy at the Arms Control Association in Washington, said that Iran can quickly undo most steps such as uranium enrichment. "But the steps that are coming, I think, do pose a more significant risk and are more difficult to reverse," she said. While Iran has stopped short of threatening to expel IAEA inspectors, Davenport worried that any loss of access would fuel speculation that Tehran is engaged in illicit activities. The risk "underscores the importance of restoring full compliance with the JCPOA before Iran takes these steps and develops this new knowledge," she said.

Another key date is in June when Iran holds elections that could bring to power a hardliner to succeed President Hassan Rouhani, who bet on engagement with the West when Barack Obama was president only to see tensions soar under Trump.

Is there time?

With February 21 fast approaching, "it is imperative that diplomacy happens," a former European Union diplomat said. "The next 10 days will be important to give us an idea of what is occurring and how successful it will be" in persuading Iran to step back, the diplomat said. "The entire issue is to make sure that the threshold is not crossed on that date," said another European diplomat. The diplomat said that position was shared by Russia and China, which are also signatories to the JCPOA but enjoy much closer relations with Iran than Western powers. Jon Wolfsthal, who advised Biden when he was Obama's vice president, said that the United States and Iran, along with other JCPOA nations, could issue a statement before February 21 "that would show their mutual intent to return to full compliance."

But while action would be best as soon as possible, he doubted that decision-making would fundamentally change after the elections in Iran, where Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has final say. "I don't think the United States is going to say, Oh, we have to give away everything we have to do everything, because after June it's impossible," said Wolfsthal, now at the anti-nuclear weapon movement Global Zero. —AFP

International

Homeschooling taking off in US as pandemic shutter schools

Number of children taught at home in US rose to 10m in 2020

WASHINGTON: Faced with long school closures because of the coronavirus pandemic, many US parents have taken to homeschooling to ensure their children's education continues despite the massive disruptions of the past year. "It's all me: I make the lesson plan, execute the lesson plan, then do it again the next week," said Catherine Strokes, whose daughter's school shut last year because of the pandemic.

Homeschooling "exploded" when the virus caused school closures across the country in March 2020, according to the National Home School Association, based in Colorado. The number of children being taught at home in the United States rose from between four and five million in 2019 to almost 10 million last year, the NHTA estimates. Nearly 51 million students, from kindergartners to 12th graders, were supposed to have gone to public schools after the summer of 2020, but most schools opted for online instruction instead.

Strokes, 37, who works part-time, made her decision in July, when school officials in Fredericksburg, Virginia were still undecided on how to start classes the following month. More than fear of COVID-19, it was this uncertainty that pushed her into homeschooling.

"Like most people with a part-time job, I had to know what day my kids would go to school, but they kept canceling school at the last minute, lengthening break or going all virtual, it was this instability for me and my daughter," she told AFP. Isabelle, aged seven and in second grade, therefore joined her big brother Aidan, 10 and in the fifth grade, who had already been studying at home for more than a year with his mother, a member of the Organization of Virginia Homeschoolers. Many parents do not want their children to spend the day staring at a screen, believing it is bad for their



LOS ANGELES: High school student Jocelyn Hernandez has been distance learning at home since August 2020 in Los Angeles.

health, or find it too difficult to supervise online courses. Andrea Cubelo-McKay, president of Virginia Homeschoolers, told AFP. Some religious communities also educate their children at home. This type of instruction affords a certain "flexibility," said Strokes. "I decide when school starts, when our day is done, I decide when we take a break," she said. She takes on all subjects on the curriculum—reading, writing, science and math—so that Isabelle doesn't fall behind her in-school classmates, but she does concentrate on what she considers most important.

A 'challenge'

But NHTA President J. Allen Weston said the transition can be "a challenge" for children used to traditional

school. There is a "huge difference" between home instruction and virtual lessons, he told AFP. It is also difficult for parents who must juggle their job and their role as teacher, while lacking benchmarks for performance, said Cubelo-McKay. "Every day is different and challenging," said Strokes. "One will have a good day while the other... may or may not be cooperative, some subjects are harder to teach than others." A massive campaign to vaccinate teachers is underway in the United States, which should make it possible to safely reopen schools.

The cities of New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, with the three largest school districts in the country, have plans to gradually reopen, but some parents are reluctant to put their children back in school next year. "For next year I really don't know, it will depend on how the school handles the fall, the sanitary measures, and how they make up for lost learning for virtual students," said Amber Lancaster, the mother of a third-grader who has been homeschooling in Richmond, Virginia, since September. She said her son gives her a "nine out of 10" for this year, even though he misses class discussions with his friends.

Currently unemployed, Lancaster is ready to carry on homeschooling for another year. "I'm not opposed to one more year of homeschooling, it will be third grade, not too complicated," she said. According to the Urban Institute think tank, local authorities fear a drop in the number of students, believing that homeschooling is not a substitute for classroom education. This youthful brain drain from schools could also affect the funding allocated to school districts, which is calculated each year in part based on enrollment numbers. — AFP

Edinburgh University appoints first black rector

EDINBURGH, United Kingdom: It's been more than 16 years since Debora Kayembe fled her home in the Democratic Republic of Congo after learning that a gun-running militia group that she had helped to expose wanted to kill her.

Since then, Kayembe sought asylum in Britain, started a family and settled in Edinburgh, where she worked as a human rights lawyer and political activist. Despite a life filled with hardship and achievement, she said nothing could have prepared her for the message she received on the afternoon of February 1.

The previous November, she was asked if she would consider accepting a nomination to be the new rector of the University of Edinburgh, which was founded in the 16th century. If she was appointed, she would be the university's first-ever black rector. She accepted the offer, believing she stood little chance. When the message came that she had been confirmed for the role — 162 years after William Gladstone was made the first rector—Kayembe, 45, was speechless. "It is something in my life I never imagined would happen to me," she told AFP. "I never went looking for it. It came onto my plate and I welcomed it. "So... (on) February 1 at 12:30 pm when I was officially notified that I am the only valid candidate... I thought 'oh my God. This is it. It has happened.'"



BONNYRIGG, United Kingdom: Debora Kayembe, 45, a human rights lawyer born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo who lives in Scotland, poses for portraits at her home in Bonnyrigg, southeast of Edinburgh. — AFP

Racism to activism

Months before the nomination came, Kayembe had found herself embroiled in a conflict that she had initially wanted to avoid. She had been a target of racism before in Scotland. But the abuse came to a head in June last year as anti-racism protests erupted around the world after the death of an unarmed black man, George Floyd, in US police custody. Kayembe was driving to a meeting when her car lost control and veered violently off the road. She inspected the vehicle and found that nails had been driven through all of her tires. "The previous times I had kept quiet," she said.

"Sometimes you have to have a big heart to let things pass in the common interest, but what happened to me that day was unacceptable." Kayembe announced what had happened to her on social media. But instead of confrontation, she chose to adopt a message of tolerance and dialogue with the perpetrators of the abuse. "I said 'listen, these things are from the past,'" she said. "We have passed that. If you still don't understand that, I need a dialogue with you. That was my message. Nothing else." Not long after the incident, Kayembe's daughter returned home from school and cried because she had been asked by a teacher to perform a slave dance in front of her classmates.

After confronting the school, Kayembe petitioned the Scottish Parliament to urgently address racism in education in Scotland. Parliament has agreed to the request and will debate the matter in the coming months. It was Kayembe's message of dialogue and tolerance that caught the attention of the University of Edinburgh, which counts prime ministers, Nobel laureates and Olympians among its alumni. "They said as the rector of the university, your message will go far and the whole world will listen," she said. "This is why we want you to take this position." — AFP



MOSCOW: A social worker at Miloserdie (Mercy), one of Russia's best known charities, prepares free food parcels at the Martha and Mary Convent in central Moscow. — AFP

Russia's rising poverty fuels political discontent

MOSCOW, Russia: Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, crowds have grown at the Martha and Mary Convent in central Moscow. The white-walled women's monastery houses one of Russia's best known charities that gives out free food parcels, among other projects. "Before the pandemic we had around 30 to 40 people a day," Yelena Timoshchuk, a social worker at Miloserdie (Mercy) told AFP, leaning against a table loaded with bottles of sunflower oil. "Now we get about 50 to 60 people daily. It's a heavy workload." Many of the visitors who queue for packages containing buckwheat, sugar, and tea are retired but there are also those who have lost their jobs or had their salaries cut.

The coronavirus pandemic has delivered a new blow to Russia's stagnating economy, which was already chafing under Western sanctions, low oil prices and weak corporate investment. Observers say that rising poverty, falling incomes and lack of tangible government support during the pandemic are fuelling discontent with President Vladimir Putin's two-decade rule and strengthening the opposition. Answering the jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's call, tens of thousands of people have protested across Russia over the past few weeks, and his team plans more protests ahead of parliamentary elections in September.

Russians' real disposable incomes have been falling for the past half-decade, and contracted by 3.5 percent in 2020, while the cost of basic foodstuffs surged. Aware of growing anger over falling living standards, Putin in December ordered ministers to introduce emergency measures to cap prices. Despite government efforts to rein in inflation, the cost of sugar was 64-percent higher in January than it was a year earlier.

Wearing a red cap over long braids, 66-year-old Sandra said she had stopped going shopping and instead turned to Miloserdie's free food parcels. "You can't buy anything anymore," said the pensioner, who did not give her last name. "Before I could afford to feed the birds but now even grain is expensive."

'Risks have increased'

"From the point of view of political consequences, the current situation does not look good," said Igor Nikolayev, head of strategic analysis at FBK Grant Thornton. "The risks for the authorities have increased." Older Russians were particularly "very sensitive" about rising prices because they brought to mind runaway inflation that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Nikolayev said. He suggested the Russian government might unveil a new economic package to dampen social discontent ahead of the parliamentary polls. "They have to do something," added Nikolayev.

According to a recent poll by the independent Levada Centre, 43 percent of Russians do not rule out protests motivated by economic demands, a level last seen in 1998. The study also found that 17 percent of respondents were ready to take part in those protests

themselves. Denis Volkov, deputy director at Levada, said recent protests showed that anger at the authorities was no longer limited to the marginalized opposition and that many demonstrators were motivated by economic hardship.

The protesters wanted to "express their disappointment with the authorities, concern over a lack of prospects and the dead end in which our country has found itself according to them," Volkov wrote in the Russian edition of Forbes last month. "Authorities have nothing to offer to those who are unhappy over their policies," he added, pointing to "ostentatious wealth" of the Russian elites and growing divisions in society.

Eighteen-year-old Yekaterina Nikiforova, who joined pro-Navalny rallies in the Pacific port of Vladivostok, said the country was stagnating. The political science student told AFP she could not see "any prospects of economic and political development" in Russia. Arseny Dmitriyev, 22, who rallied on the other side of the country in the second city Saint Petersburg, struck a similar note. The sociology graduate said he understood "how things are going for the county." "Just looking at the statistics I understand that real disposable incomes are falling and the quality of life is not improving." — AFP

UN to debate challenge of vaccine access

UNITED NATIONS: At the initiative of Britain, which boasts of having an effective vaccination program, the UN Security Council on Wednesday will debate the problem of global access to COVID-19 vaccines, raising issues likely to underscore sharp differences between council members. How, for example, can vaccines be distributed fairly—without, as has been the case, going first to the richest countries in the North while those in the South suffer? Should blue-helmeted UN peacekeeping troops in some 15 countries, along with other UN employees deployed around the world, be declared essential workers and receive vaccine priority—including in countries yet to receive vaccine doses?

If so, who should provide the jabs—the United Nations, the troops' countries of origin or those where they are deployed? "Vaccine, vaccination is not really the job of the Security Council," said one ambassador, speaking on grounds of anonymity. The Security Council, with a mission of maintaining peace and security around the world, has no special health expertise, the ambassador noted, adding, "the Security Council can just have a contribution."

He added that no resolution on the matter is likely to come this week. The Security Council's only direct involvement in the pandemic came in July 2020 when, after long and difficult negotiations to resolve sharp US-Chinese tensions, it passed a resolution encouraging cease-fires in countries in conflict in order to limit the spread of COVID-19. Britain recently shared with a few other countries a draft resolution on vaccine management, diplomats said. — AFP

What's next for Trump, Republican Party and Biden?

WASHINGTON: The US Senate acquitted Donald Trump on Saturday of the charge of inciting the January 6 assault on the US Capitol in an unprecedented second impeachment trial. Trump's acquittal raises questions about what's next for the 74-year-old former president, the Republican Party and President Joe Biden.

Donald Trump

Although Trump's acquittal by the Senate was a near certainty, the verdict must have come as a relief to the former president. In a statement, Trump denounced what he called a "witch hunt" and talked about the future. "Our historic, patriotic and beautiful movement to Make America Great Again has only just begun," he said. "We have so much work ahead of us, and soon we will emerge with a vision for a bright, radiant, and limitless American future." Trump has flirted with the idea of running for the White House again in 2024 and a conviction would have likely barred him from holding federal office again.

Since leaving the White House on January 20, Trump has been holed up in his Mar-a-Lago resort, deprived of the Twitter account he used to communicate with his many millions of followers. Capri Cafaro, executive in residence at American University in Washington and a former Democratic member of the Ohio state senate, said the acquittal could be a "rallying cry" for Trump and his backers.

But, Cafaro added, "the legacy of Donald Trump for many at this point may be the events of January 6, regardless of acquittal." "There will be Americans who think that Donald Trump had some kind of role," she said, and that could carry over to the real estate tycoon's activities in the private sector. "It's almost like he has no choice but to continue to try to be in politics," she said.

Wendy Schiller, a professor of political science at Brown University, agreed that Trump's future may be limited. "If a corporation were to offer him a speaking appearance, the social media backlash would be swift and severe, with possible boycotts of their products," Schiller said. "Even holding conferences or events at Trump properties will be a problem for large publicly traded companies, or companies that provide a direct to consumer product," she said.

The Republican Party

The fact that the vast majority of Senate Republicans voted to acquit Trump is a clear signal that he retains a grip on the GOP, the Grand Old Party. "The party is his," Georgia Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, one of his most fervent supporters, said last week. "It doesn't belong to anyone else." But seven Republican senators voted to convict the former president and 10 Republican members of the House of Representatives voted last month to impeach him, including the party's third-ranking member, Liz Cheney, daughter of former vice president Dick Cheney.

Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell voted for acquittal but said Trump was "practically and morally" responsible for the January 6 violence. A number of Republicans have distanced themselves from the former president and are lining up to take their own shot at the White House in 2024. Among them is former South Carolina governor Nikki Haley, who said Republicans were wrong for supporting Trump's campaign to reverse the election results, a course that led to the January 6 attack on Congress. "He went down a path he shouldn't have, and we shouldn't have followed him," Haley said in an interview with Politico magazine.

Haley also dismissed speculation Trump will seek the presidency in 2024. "I don't think he can," she said. "He's fallen so far." But the Republicans advocating a complete break with Trump are in the minority and most remain fearful of the power he holds over his base. "GOP senators who vote to acquit may be protecting themselves against primary challenges from the more extreme wing of their party in 2022, or even 2024," Schiller said. "But they may simultaneously make themselves more vulnerable to defeat in the general election." Cafaro said Republican lawmakers remaining faithful to Trump were making an "incredibly risky" gamble. "They're making a decision based upon a snapshot in time that may not exist for them in two years," she said. A group of anti-Trump former Republican officials has raised the idea of creating a center-right third party but it is unlikely to gain much traction.

Joe Biden

Trump's impeachment trial has been hanging over the start of Biden's presidency and the Democrats must be glad it took just five days. The Senate will now be in a position to swiftly confirm Biden's cabinet appointees and work on his legislative agenda as the country struggles with the Covid-19 pandemic and severe economic woes.

"President Biden has done a very good job of separating himself from the impeachment trial proceedings and keep his messaging on the Covid-19 crisis and the accompanying economic crisis," Schiller said. But Trump remains a force to be reckoned with. "There's no saying that we're immune from more protests, demonstrations, activism from the far right," Cafaro said. "If and when that happens how Joe Biden deals with them will be something to watch." — AFP

International

Myanmar junta warns public not to hide fugitive protesters

Regime issues arrest warrants for veteran democracy campaigners

YANGON, Myanmar: Myanmar's new military regime warned the public not to harbor fugitive political activists yesterday after issuing arrest warrants for veteran democracy campaigners supporting massive nationwide anti-coup protests. Much of the country has been in uproar since last week when soldiers detained Aung San Suu Kyi and ousted her government, ending a decade-old fledgling democracy after generations of junta rule. Security forces have stepped up arrests of doctors and others joining a civil disobedience movement that has seen huge crowds throng streets in big urban centers and isolated frontier villages alike.

Police are now hunting seven people who have lent vocal support to the protests, including some of the country's most famous democracy activists. "If you find any fugitives mentioned above or if you have information about them, report to the nearest police station," said a notice in state media yesterday. "Those who receive them will (face) action in accordance with the law." Among the list of fugitives was Min Ko Naing, who spent more than a decade in prison for helping lead protests against an earlier dictatorship in 1988 while a university student.

"They are arresting the people at night and we have to be careful," he said in a video published to Facebook on Saturday, skirting a junta ban on the platform, hours before his arrest warrant was issued. "They could crack down forcefully and we

will have to be prepared." The 1988 protests vaulted Suu Kyi to the top of Myanmar's democracy movement, and the Nobel laureate spent years under house arrest as a prisoner of the generals. She has not been seen in public since she was detained on February 1 alongside top aides.

Nearly 400 others have been arrested in the days since, including many of Suu Kyi's top political allies, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners monitoring group. Military leader Min Aung Hlaing suspended laws requiring warrants for home searches as part of several legal maneuvers announced on Saturday.

Neighborhood watch

In Yangon, many areas have begun forming neighborhood watch brigades to monitor their communities overnight-in defiance of a junta curfew-and to prevent the arrests of residents joining the civil disobedience movement. Some have also expressed fears that a mass prisoner amnesty this week was orchestrated to release inmates into the public to stir up trouble, while freeing up space in overcrowded jails for political detainees. "We don't trust anyone at this time, especially those with uniforms," said Myo Ko Ko, a member of a street patrol in the commercial hub Yangon.

Near the city's central train station, residents rolled tree trunks onto a road to block police vehicles and escorted away officers who were attempting to return striking railway employees to



YANGON, Myanmar: Protesters hold up signs supporting the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) at a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon yesterday. — AFP

work. Thousands elsewhere in Yangon took to key intersections around the city in a ninth straight day of street protests. A day earlier, Buddhist monks gathered outside the city's US embassy and chant-

ed the Metta Sutta, a prayer that urges protection from harm. "We wanted them to know most citizens in Myanmar are against the military," said Vicitlankara, one of the participants. —AFP

On the occasion of his birthday

The reunification achievements of Leader Kim Jong Il

February 16th marks the 79th anniversary of the birth of Kim Jong Il (1942-2011), who left a great mark in the history of modern Korea. Leader Kim Jong Il, who led the DPRK for decades following the founder of modern Korea and made huge achievements in the cause of national reunification, so his existence is deeply cherished in the hearts of the entire Korean people. Leader Kim Jong Il revealed the clear direction for the reunification of Korea.

He established the three main principles of national reunification proposed by President Kim Il Sung, the 10 general principles of nationwide unity for national reunification, and the plan for the establishment of the Democratic Federal Republic of Koryo as the three main charters of national reunification.

The three principles of national reunification are the principles of independence, peace, and great national unity announced in a joint statement between the North and the South in 1972. In other words, the reunification of the North and South is a peaceful method without any foreign intervention, not using force. It is a principle that

it should be realized through a method of great national unity that transcends differences between ideas, ideologies and institutions.

The 10 Principles of Great Unity of the Whole Nation were announced in 1993, and it is a political code for realizing wide unity of the whole people by subscribing for reunification, even those who have committed crimes in front of the nation in the past period.

The plan for the establishment of the Democratic Federal Republic of Koryo was announced in 1980, and it is a plan to create a unitary state by uniting the North and the South while keeping the ideas and institutions of the North and South as they are. Leader Kim Jong Il opened the era of the reunification movement based on the spirit of our nation.

With his passionate love for nationality and accurate and realistic reunification policy, the first North-South summit meeting was held in June 2000 for the first time in the history of North-South division, and the North-South Joint Declaration based on the spirit of our nation was announced. It became a historical event marked the start of the era of independent national reunification.

From this time on, a long period of distrust and confrontation between North and South Korea was resolved, and joint efforts were made for reconciliation and cooperation, and a new heyday could unfold in the movement for national reunification. Mr Kim Jong Il's patriotic reunification policy was continued by Leader Kim Jong Un.

Due to his direct interest and activities, several summit meetings of North and South have



Leader Kim Jong Il giving instructions in national reunification

been conducted in recent years, and several important documents have been adopted. Efforts are being made to reject foreign intervention in the issue of reunification and to develop the reunification movement based on the principle of national independence.

Leader Kim Jong Un emphasized the heavy treatment of the North-South Declarations adopted during the last period in relation to North-South relations and the issue of national reunification at the 8th Congress of the ruling party held in January.

— North Korean Embassy - Kuwait

News in brief

Biden aide resigns over

WASHINGTON: The White House said Saturday it has accepted the resignation of a staffer who allegedly threatened to "destroy" a reporter who was asking about his personal life. White House Deputy Spokesman T.J. Ducklo was originally suspended for one week without pay, but now the administration of President Joe Biden has accepted his resignation. White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement. According to Vanity Fair magazine, Ducklo called Politico reporter Tara Palmeri after she began asking questions about his months-old personal relationship with a reporter from Politico rival Axios, Alexi McCammond. —AFP

Two Poles killed in avalanche

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia: Two Polish skiers have died in an avalanche in Slovakia's High Tatras Mountains, rescuers said yesterday. Slovakia's Mountain Rescue Service (HZS) said three skiers were caught by an avalanche near the Kondratova Kopa mountain in the western High Tatras on Saturday evening. "One of them managed to dig himself out and contacted rescuers who began a mission on snowmobiles and skis. They discovered two bodies of Polish skiers," the HZS said in a statement. A Polish rescue team found the man who survived and placed the emergency call, the HZS said. —AFP

Haiti judge calls to end 'dictatorship'

HAITI: A judge proposed by the opposition to serve as acting president in Haiti's latest political crisis ended days of silence Saturday by calling on people to fight against what he called a dictatorship. The comments by the judge, Joseph Mécène Jean-Louis, were seen as a direct challenge to unpopular President Jovenel Moïse, who is embroiled in a dispute over whether his term ended last weekend or he has another year in power, as he claims. Moïse has been ruling by decree for a year because there is no parliament right now. Legislative elections due in 2018 were delayed. —AFP

Guinea sees first Ebola deaths

CONAKRY, Guinea: Four people have died of Ebola in Guinea in the first resurgence of the disease in five years, the country's health minister said Saturday. Remy Laham told AFP officials were "really concerned" about the deaths, the first since a 2013-2016 epidemic which began in Guinea-left 11,300 dead across the region. One of the latest victims in Guinea was a nurse who fell ill in late January and was buried on February 1, National Health Security Agency head Sakoba Keita told local media. —AFP

Nigeria protesters released on bail

LAGOS: A court has released on bail a group of protesters arrested in Lagos for trying to hold a rally demanding justice for victims of police violence, one of their lawyers said yesterday. "All 40 protesters have been granted bail and released yesterday evening," the lawyer, Akeem Fadun, told AFP. The protesters were ordered to pay 100,000 naira (215 euros, \$260) as bail, but remain under investigation for "breach of the peace" and "violating COVID-19 guidelines", he said. —AFP



SOMA, Japan: This aerial picture taken from a Jiji Press chartered aircraft shows the landslide site on the Joban Expressway in Soma, Fukushima prefecture yesterday after a 7.3-magnitude earthquake struck off Japan's east coast. — AFP

Over 100 injured in strong quake off Japan's Fukushima

TOKYO: A 7.3-magnitude earthquake off Fukushima in eastern Japan injured more than 100 people, authorities said yesterday, nearly a decade after the region suffered a devastating quake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown. No casualties have been reported after the late-night quake in the Pacific, which did not trigger a tsunami, and no abnormalities were observed at the stricken Fukushima nuclear plant.

But residents preparing to mark the 10th anniversary of the triple disaster said they were frightened by Saturday's jolt-which the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said was considered an aftershock of the massive tremor on March 11, 2011. "I was at home... the shaking was so strong I

became truly afraid for my physical safety," Masami Nakai, a municipal official in Soma city in northern Fukushima, told AFP. Images posted online showed a car crushed by a rock lantern in the car park of a Shinto shrine, while another showed broken glass and items thrown from the shelves at a shop.

The disaster agency said 114 injuries-six classed as "serious"-were reported in the region and also around Tokyo, where the quake was felt strongly just after 11 pm on Saturday. Authorities were assessing the impact of a landslide on a highway, government spokesman Katsunobu Kato said, and aerial TV footage showed another landslide at a remote race circuit. The government reported partial damage to eight structures, mostly houses, while local media said dozens of buildings had suffered broken ceilings and broken water pipes. Kato warned residents about the possibility of strong aftershocks in the next week and further landslides due to heavy rain forecast. "Particularly for the next two to three days, there might be very strong earthquakes," Kato said. —AFP

Bodies recovered from Indian flood disaster tunnel

INDIA: Rescuers yesterday pulled the first bodies from a blocked tunnel at a power complex in a northern Indian valley devastated by a flash flood a week ago, where 161 people remain missing. Scores were killed in Uttarakhand state when the deluge-thought to have been triggered by a chunk of glacier sliding down a mountainside or a glacial lake breaching its banks-swept down the Rishiganga valley in minutes, destroying roads, bridges and buildings. Amid warnings that river levels could rise again, the corpses of three victims were retrieved from the tunnel, where at least 30 people are thought to have been trapped by mud and rocks.

Initially there were hopes that those inside might still be alive in air pockets. Two more bodies were found in a devastated village nearby, police said, bringing the total recovered over the past week to 43. One of those identified was that of Alam Singh, a father of two. His family received a call from rescue officials early yesterday telling them that his body had finally been found. His brother said they would now have to find a way to tell the man's young daughters. "We were still hoping for the best. But now we have to tell them. He went to work that day like any other day but never did we think this would happen," Surat Singh told AFP.

Rescuers have been working around the clock to clear out mud and debris from the tunnel at the Tapovan hydroelectric plant. Some relatives have held protests at the entrance accusing authorities of not working fast enough to find the men. Authorities warned residents of a new rise in the water level but locals still gathered around the tunnel again yesterday waiting for news. Many were colleagues of those stuck inside, who escaped when the disaster struck. —AFP

Business

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2021

City of London pays early price of Brexit

UK officials insist the city is suffering a temporary blip

LONDON: Europe's financial capital is feeling the cold of Brexit but UK officials insist the City of London is suffering a temporary blip and is well-positioned to profit from new trading horizons.

For the first time last month, as Britain's withdrawal from the EU took full effect, London's financial district lost its European share trading crown to Amsterdam.

Researchers at IHS Markit attributed the decline to a "relatively hard Brexit", and the UK government's failure so far to persuade Brussels to grant full trading rights to City-based firms under a regime known as "equivalence". London's daily trading volumes in other areas such as derivatives and foreign exchange still vastly outweigh its European neighbors, and Catherine McGuinness, policy chair at the City of London Corporation, played down the development.

"We've always known that some EU-facing business would have to leave the City of London following Brexit, whatever the shape of the deal," she said.

"However, significantly fewer jobs have shifted from the City because of Brexit than was expected, and we remain very confident about the fundamental strengths of the City for the future," McGuinness said. London "continues to go from strength to strength" in emerging financial technology (fintech) and tech investment, as well as green finance, she added.

In January, according to the Financial Times, an average of 9.2 billion euros (\$11.2 billion/£8.1 billion) of shares were traded each day on Euronext Amsterdam together with two other Dutch share markets.

That was more than four times their December figure, and overtook London's daily average of 8.6 billion euros, the newspaper said. A spokesman for the Dutch Financial Markets Authority told AFP it was not a surprise. "We think it's a logical consequence because we already had a strong trading standing with the Euronext Amsterdam," he added.

Sri Lanka import ban takes the spice out of life

COLOMBO: An import ban in cash-strapped Sri Lanka is leaving a bad taste in the mouths of its curry lovers, depriving them of vital turmeric supplies and encouraging budding smugglers to take their chances with the spice. With no foreign cash coming in as COVID-19 cripples the tourism industry, the government in March imposed a ban on many imports to stop money leaving the country, so that it can pay \$4.5 billion this year to service its international debt.

Cars, floor tiles and machinery parts are among the items prohibited but it is a ban on turmeric that has the Indian Ocean island simmering with anger.

The aromatic root is a vital ingredient in curries and other local cuisine and also increasingly sought after as a health supplement. But only a fifth of the 7,500 tons Sri Lanka consumes every year is produced locally. Since the pandemic, demand has increased so much that prices have shot up 20-fold to an eye-watering 9,000 rupees (\$48) a kilogram—a week's wages for many Sri Lankan workers.

"Our home-cooked curries are not the same since the pandemic," said

health worker Prarthana Weerasinghe, who claimed that many market varieties were now "adulterated". "We never thought turmeric would be such a big issue. We had taken it for granted. Now, we can't afford to use it in our daily cooking."

Customs agents recently found 25 tons of the spice smuggled into the country from India in containers marked "onions", while navy patrols have seized several tons from Indian fishermen.

Those seeking turmeric have watched on helplessly as officials burn seized turmeric at crematoriums, claiming they do not want to flood the market and depress prices. The government says it wants to promote local production over cheap imports as hundreds of thousands have lost their jobs and the economy recorded its worst-ever contraction of 3.9 percent last year.

On the skids

Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's ban on "non-essential" items has also seen a surge in prices for other goods, including car tires, floor tiles and even toilets. "There are

Lost passport

Financial services—a key driver of the British economy—were largely omitted from the last-minute Brexit trade deal agreed between London and Brussels in late December. So from January 1, Britain's financial sector lost access to the EU's single market and its European "passport", a means for UK financial products and services to be sold in the EU.

Both sides are instead working to carve out an "equivalence" regime under which each would recognize the other's financial regulation, and so far Brussels has approved only two areas of trading out of dozens that the City needs. Anish Puaar, an analyst at Rosenblatt Securities, said London's relative decline was "symbolic in the post-Brexit era".

"But beyond that the impact is pretty minimal," he said on Twitter. Puaar said fund managers will "probably not" care in apportioning assets but the greater danger is for a fragmentation of markets in Europe, which would make trading more inefficient and drive up costs.

Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey also addressed fragmentation in a speech last week, urging the EU to hurry up on the equivalence negotiations for the sake of pandemic recovery on both sides of the Channel. Rebutting some of the demands made by Brussels in return for the City to regain access to EU states, Bailey said Britain had no intention of creating "a low-regulation, high-risk, anything-goes financial center and system".

But the EU wants cast-iron legal assurances that Britain will not diverge in its financial regulation at the expense of European firms, and stresses that the hardline model for Brexit now in operation was a choice made by London.

Divergence, not equivalence

"It cannot be business as usual," the EU's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier said on Thursday, a day after Bailey's speech. "When you look at the consequences in the financial services, you can clearly



LONDON: In this file photo, a man walks along the southern bank of the River Thames with the office towers of the City of London in the background in London. — AFP

see that there is no added value to Brexit and many, many consequences, unfortunately," he said.

However, the UK central banker played down fears of an exodus of jobs from London. Last month, Bailey said up to 7,000 jobs had so far been relocated to rival centers on the continent including Amsterdam, Paris and Frankfurt—well down on doomsday predictions of as many as 50,000 losses. Mark Simpson, an expert on financial services at the law firm Baker & McKenzie, agreed that by the metric of job losses, London did not need to panic yet.

"But the ongoing equivalence debate illustrates a

point that many have been saying for some time—that the EU is determined to reduce its reliance on London, even if that means driving business further afield" to New York for instance, he said. "It seems increasingly apparent that the UK will need to accept that its market position for many areas of European business is going to be weaker in future," Simpson said. The City should focus instead on boosting its appeal to non-European businesses, along with fintech and green finance. "So what is happening with equivalence is probably going to give the UK more incentive to diverge from EU rules in future." — AFP



In this picture, customs officials examine turmeric imported illegally into Sri Lanka at a warehouse in Colombo. — AFP

no foreign brand tires available for small cars," a dealer in Colombo said. "Those who have stocks have jacked up prices."

Kasun Chaminda said he had lost regular customers for his taxi operation because he could not buy new tires. "When they realized that I was unable to replace the worn tyres, they cancelled the (regular) hire. It is dangerous to run with worn tires, but I have no

choice." With no foreign competition, the share prices of local tile and sanitaryware makers have soared five-fold in less than six months—making the tiny Colombo stock exchange a star performer during an economic crisis. And with banks prevented from releasing dollars to finance car imports since March, the second-hand car market has also shot up, with the price of used vehicles almost doubling. — AFP

In Venezuelan Amazon, gold gives life, and takes it

YAPACANA NATIONAL PARK, Venezuela: Delicately, Jose Valenzuela places a small quantity of gold powder on a digital scale. He sets it aside to pay for fuel in the Venezuelan Amazon, where the precious metal is the currency of choice. Valenzuela works as an assistant on the merchant boat of Oliver Ramirez, with whom he navigates the Orinoco river through the Yapacana National Park in Amazonas state, some 750 kilometers (466 miles) south of the capital Caracas.

The region is so remote that the people who live here refer to Venezuela as a distant country. They are closer to Colombia and Brazil. The two men dock their narrow wooden boat at Cariche, one of many indigenous settlements along the riverbank.

They sell some goods to clients on the riverbank, and settle in for a short rest. On the motorized boat, a piece of cardboard announces the products for sale, with prices in "lines" of gold dust in a region where illegal mining feeds many mouths. One "line" is a tenth of a gram of gold—its

value fluctuates with the exchange rate of the Colombian peso.

On the day Valenzuela and Ramirez arrive in Cariche, the price for a line is set at some 20,000 Colombian pesos. This is the equivalent of about \$6, but the greenback is little used in this region unlike in the rest of Venezuela where it is the de facto currency.

The cardboard sign advertises a can of tuna for one line of gold dust, a liter of oil for two, a kilo of milk powder for three or four lines.

A liter of gasoline costs one line—about 10 times the price charged at the pump in Colombia, where it comes from. Caracas is the only city in Venezuela where it's possible to fill a tank without queuing for days.

'Worthless' bolivars for wrapping

Added to the price of fuel, explain the boatmen, are the bribes that must be paid along the route to security agents and indigenous leaders who charge for transit through their territories.

Completely absent is the Venezuelan currency, bolivars. "They are worthless," says Valenzuela.

A barefooted Ramirez says the notes are sometimes used to wrap the gold, but never as legal tender.

"You weigh and then you throw the bills away," he explains, swaying in a hammock on the boat as he swats at mosquitoes. On this trade day, the

Orinoco is tranquil, and the men have a stunning view of the Yapacana mountain that gave the park its name.

But beyond the beauty lies a sad tale of natural destruction and violence.

Activists say the area is being ravaged by illegal gold mining, aided by military personnel who turn a blind eye in exchange for bribes. Despite its location in a protected park that hosts a treasure trove of biodiversity, gold mining is growing by 242 hectares—almost 300 football fields—per year, according to the NGO SOS Orinoco. In its last report in 2019, the group said mining activity in the park already covered 2,227 hectares.

The 'captain' decides

From local towns, boats set out for the park on a regular basis with heavy mining equipment that arrives by plane on small runways before making its way downstream on the Orinoco.

NGOs say the damage being done to the freshwater ecosystem is irreversible. But matters are complicated by locals insisting the National Guard has no authority over the river system. The law that prevails is indigenous, and in the mine it is "the captain" who calls the shots—often someone from a criminal organization, or a paramilitary or guerrilla group who rules with an iron fist. "He (the captain) is the one who maintains order," says Misael Herrera, a 19-year-old miner. — AFP

US minority entrepreneurs fear for survival

WASHINGTON: For the past 11 months, Reign Free has done everything she can think of to keep her catering company open after the pandemic hit—a fight shared by many Black-owned businesses across the United States. As her business dried up, Free has taken out loans from the US government and other lenders and searched for new opportunities, but she wonders how much longer Red Door Catering in Oakland, California can survive the slump.

"We're getting crumbs and it's not enough. We're still having hope, and still trying to stay afloat, but really we're getting deeper and deeper into the hole," she said.

Racial minorities have borne the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, with higher rates of death, unemployment and business failure, and less success obtaining federal government assistance intended to provide relief.

President Joe Biden has argued his proposed \$1.9 trillion spending package will both pay for an aggressive vaccine campaign to end the virus that has strangled business, while also addressing the longstanding racial inequities that have worsened during the pandemic.

"It is a great effort," Cathy Adams, president and CEO of the Oakland African American Chamber of Commerce, said of Biden's plan. The chamber's members have managed to avoid closure, but only with considerable struggle, and Adams fears for their future. "This right here has hit us so hard," she said.

Pre-existing conditions

The world's largest Covid-19 outbreak has exacted an awful toll on the United States, killing more than 480,000 people and leading to mass layoffs, with 20.4 million people unemployed as of January, according to Labor Department data. But it has been a starkly unequal experience. The unemployment rate was at 5.7 percent for white Americans last month but 9.2 percent for African Americans and 8.6 percent for Hispanics, the Labor Department said.

Government data also shows both groups have higher death rates from the disease than whites, and their businesses are similarly imperiled. An August study from the New York Federal Reserve said Black-owned small businesses failed at a rate two times above the national average. — AFP

Business

Venture capital becomes key factor in investment strategies: Kamco Invest

GCC investors seek alternative asset classes to further diversify their portfolios

KUWAIT: Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, issued a report on the importance of venture capital as a key asset class for investors seeking diversification and wealth creation. As modern-day technology continues to evolve and drive innovation, the shift towards digitization was well underway prior to the pandemic.

While the outcome of the pandemic was unpredictable, it not only fast-tracked the shift towards digitization, but has become a defining moment for digital transformation. What began as a questionable year for venture capitalists, with investments in the startup and innovation ecosystem expected to significantly drop, soon became a transitional point in the venture capital realm with new opportunities available across various industries.

The unexpected circumstances global economies are facing due to the pandemic led to the rise of industries that were overlooked by analysts. The cloud computing industry, for example, boomed since the onset of the pandemic witnessing a drastic increase in the demand for cloud-based technology. Performing at a level far exceeding analyst predictions, the industry is now considered a key and necessary component in streamlining the path to the new normal. Lockdowns and social distancing accelerated the adoption of a decade's worth of digital technology into one year, driving traditional businesses to shift online and digitize their operations. This shift in return has increased the demand for such solutions, increasing revenue levels of suppliers exponentially to reach record highs.

The impact triggered by the pandemic led most venture capital firms to halt spending and fund-raising activities. This however rapidly changed in a matter of three months, when they witnessed retailers achieve significant revenue growth due to strong online sales. On one hand, countless employees were losing their jobs due to cost-cutting, and on the other, small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs), including mom-and-pop stores were suffering due to lockdowns and social distancing. Retailers with strong online platforms, however, witnessed a surge in sales and higher demand for such services. Quarantine and isolation proved to have a positive effect on the technology sector, and hence venture capital activities witnessed a strong return in Q3-2020 with companies lined up to go public.

The transition was documented in the latest study released by Abe Othman, Chief Data Science at AngelList, revealing that Q4-2020 was the best quarter on record for early-stage startups. More than 80 percent of the startups that changed valuations in Q4 were marked up, according to AngelList investments into 3,449 active startups. Large-cap technology stocks, led by Apple, Amazon and Netflix, drove major US stock indexes to record highs in 2020, capitalizing on the larger shift towards digitization. The rise in e-commerce spending sent Amazon surging 76 percent, while Apple became the first-ever \$2 trillion company. Lockdowns and social distancing spiked the number of subscribers to online streaming services, increasing Netflix shares by almost 62 percent. The 'big four', Apple, Amazon, Alphabet and Facebook, now worth approximately \$5.9 trillion in total - roughly one-fifth of the S&P 500 SPX, reported record revenue reaching \$718.55 billion over three quarters.

Returns

Based on the findings of Cambridge Associates, venture capital has generated compelling returns relative to the public markets, both in recent years and over the long-term. The index is a horizon calculation based on data compiled from 1,955 US venture capital funds, including fully liquidated partnerships, formed between 1981 and 2020. Venture capital is currently outperforming other assets classes in the US. According to the 2019 NACUBO-TIAA Study of Endowments, venture capital was the highest-performing asset class for university endowments with 13.4 percent in 10-year average annual returns, bringing in more than US equities (8.2 percent).

With the potential to generate attractive returns while making a significant and positive impact, venture capital has become a critical component of long-term investment strategies. Cambridge Associates considers venture capital as a key component in wealth creation and HNWIs to sustain future generations. As such, top performing institutional investors understand the importance of venture capital and its positive impact on their portfolios. This has been a key driver in increasing venture capital allocations, reaching a mean of 15 percent of their portfolio.

Al-Tijari announces winners of Al-Najma account draws

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait conducted the weekly draws on Al-Najma Account and Salary Transfer Campaign yesterday. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Ahmad Al-Basman.

The results of the draws were as follows:

1. Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5,000 Kuwaiti dinars went to the winner Ahmed Ossama Mohamed Ali
2. Salary account campaign - the prize of up to KD 1,000 went to the winner Naser Falah Al-Baddah

The bank stated that the salary campaign is aimed at customers who transfer their salaries of KD 500 or more to the Bank, especially Kuwaiti employees and residents working in the government, oil sectors and companies listed with the Bank as well as retirees, and take advantage of the benefits of this campaign and get



Source: Pitchbook NVCA Venture Monitor as at 31 December 2020

Risk profile

Venture Capital has always been considered high risk, some had claimed in the past that almost 90 percent of companies end up going bankrupt. Studies however showed a loss ratio of 50 percent in the 1990s which decreased to 20 percent within the last two decades, as per the Cambridge Associates Venture Capital Positively Disrupts Intergenerational Investing report.

It is important for investors to understand how the risk profile of venture capital investing has changed considering that today's market is not the same as it was 20 years ago. The industry has evolved, and fund managers have learned from their mistakes. Before the 2000 tech bubble, venture capitalists relied on capital and luck, since then, they started implementing a more rigorous risk management approach. They focus on how to add value and scale their portfolio companies. This involves surrounding themselves with advisors and incubators, while setting aside capital for follow-on investments to increase exposure in winning portfolio companies or mitigate any potential risks. This has had the effect of reducing the impairment and capital loss ratios of the underlying companies. To further reduce the risks associated with single startups, investors are considering venture capital portfolios or funds that include several investments, allowing more opportunity for growth and diversification.

Highest fund-raising in 2020

Despite uncertainty from the pandemic, US venture fundraising activities in 2020 were strong and witnessed the highest fund-raised amount during the last decade. The total raised amount in 2020 was \$73.6 billion, higher than the previous record in 2018 which was \$68.1 billion. Some of the main factors that led to the record raised amount were the shifts in industry dynamics, accelerated technology adoption rates, and role of technology in enhancing life during the pandemic, in addition to a strong IPO market. In 2020, Venture capital firms raised 44 mega-funds, consisting of USD500 million or more, nearly double the 24 funds closed in 2019.

Increasing liquidity for exits

The US VC liquidity market exceeded expectations in 2020 witnessing some of the largest tech IPOs ever. A major concern with the ongoing pandemic was the impact it would have on exits from VC-backed companies. Not only did high-profile exits continue in 2020, but they also increased liquidity to new levels. The total exit value in 2020 amounted to \$290.1 billion, exceeding the total value in 2019 over a similar number of exits (around 1,101 exits). IPOs, M&As and buyouts were active, however, the enormous IPOs drove the record exit value. Public listings in 2020 included Snowflake, Unity, Root Insurance, Palantir, and Asana. The IPOs of Airbnb and DoorDash in December were the largest VC-backed IPOs of the year, each raising over \$3 billion with a market capitalization between \$55 billion and \$100 billion. The largest VC-backed acquisition was Intuit purchasing Credit Karma for \$7.1 billion.

The push for new investing avenues comes as GCC investors seek alternative asset classes, such as venture capital, to further diversify their portfolios beyond real estate, fixed income, and listed equities. Ultra-high-net-worth individuals and family offices are setting on the same path as Sovereign Wealth Funds by investing in tech-based companies abroad.

an instant cash gift from KD 250 to KD 500 or an interest-free loan of 5 times the salary and a maximum of KD 10,000, Kuwaiti pensioner, along with expatriate customers who transfer their debt amounting to KD 10,000 or above to the Bank will receive an instant cash gift of 1 percent from their transferred debt.

The bank stated that Al-Najma Account prizes are distinguished by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that the account offers weekly prize of KD 5,000 monthly prize of KD 20,000 and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked bank account payout of KD 1,500,000.

Al-Najma Account can be opened by depositing KD 100 and customer should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 to be eligible to enter all draws on Al-Najma Account prizes. As for the chances of winning, the more balance a customer maintains in Al-Najma Account, the more chances the account holder will get to win, the account also offers additional benefits like the ATM card, a credit card against customer's account and all CBK banking services that customer can enjoy.

The bank revealed that Al-Najma account is available to everyone, and anyone can open Al-Najma account through CBK mobile application in simple steps from anywhere and at any time.

'Mini-jobbers' hit hard by pandemic fallout in Germany

BERLIN: Since losing her job as a school bus driver in November, German mum-of-two Viola Auer has had to rely on the generosity of neighbors and a small disability allowance to get by during the pandemic. "Who cares about us, Germany's working poor?" she asked.

Auer, 47, is one of many Germans in so-called mini-jobs-part-time, easily terminated contracts that allow workers to earn a maximum of 450 euros (\$545) a month. Though flexible and tax-free, these jobs are also extremely precarious and not covered by Germany's vaunted furlough scheme. As Europe's top economy feels the strain from months of coronavirus restrictions, these workers have been declared the "biggest losers of the crisis" by the German Institute for Economic Research. When she lost her job, Auer received no severance pay.

"I'm keeping my head high and trying to keep



going," she said. Auer is now applying for welfare benefits and looking for another part-time job in her home town of Singen, southwestern Germany.

It is a familiar story for many "mini-jobbers", the majority of whom are women. The latest official figures show that more than 870,000 mini-jobs have disappeared in the last year, bringing the total to its lowest level since 2004.

Ticking time bomb

Vacancies have dwindled particularly in the hotel and restaurant sectors, which have been among the hardest hit by shutdowns imposed to slow the infection rate. One of those affected is 67-year-old Matthias Eichner, who took on a part-time catering job in the eastern city of Goerlitz four years into his retirement. "At my age, I'd have liked to be peacefully seeing to my garden, but with a pension of only 1,000 euros, I don't have a choice," he sighed.

But the Covid-19 curbs have forced his employer to drastically reduce his hours. Around a quarter of Germany's mini-jobbers are at least 60 years old and 91 percent of them have no higher education. Having increased in number by 43 percent between 2003 and 2019, mini-jobbers now make up 7.6 million of Germany's 42 million workers.—AFP

Opinion Editorial

Energy firms' digital focus pays off

By Badar Chaudhry

KUWAIT: \$2.6 trillion. This is the staggering sum that can be unlocked via digitalization in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) by 2025 - a very short four years away. As market pressures intensify, no energy firm can afford to ignore this potential. The Middle East's interest in digital tools that fall under the umbrella of the 4th Industrial Revolution has been gradually increasing. But now appetite is soaring: energy stakeholders not investing in digitalization are fast becoming outliers.

This is especially true in times of strain - and have no doubt, this is certainly one of them. Oil prices continue to hover in the \$50s/bl range and the International Energy Agency says at least \$1 billion must be spent per year in the near-term to create an environmentally friendly energy economy. Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund warns of a 'long and difficult ascent' out of the global economic plunge that is being spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic. The squeeze on economics, operational norms and talent development is very real, particularly for nations that have had restricted travel and lockdowns over the last year.

Pandemic bounce-back?

These difficulties only emphasize the value of investing in digitalization. For example, digital tools and technologies thread into each of the three traits that the Boston Consulting Group said the companies best able to rebound from the pandemic have: end-to-end supply chain transparency, agile operations and quickly digitized customer interactions.

The unpredictability wrought by COVID-19 has put many energy companies on a level playing field in the Middle East and beyond. But it has made it clearer than ever that the size of an energy company is not everything - its smarts are. With that, firms' growing appetite to ramp up digital growth together as they rebuild their economic robustness could organically nurture a digital ecosystem in the region. It makes sense to leverage each other's expertise to accelerate progress as the global clock for energy security and decarbonisation ticks on relentlessly. Therein lies the rapid rise of digitally orientated partnerships across the region.

A+ for progress

Many are now vigorously walking what has long been just digital talk in the GCC. In January, Saudi Aramco - the world's biggest oil producer - launched Damman 7, a new supercomputer which is among the top ten most powerful in the world. This boost for exploration and development marks the next step in Aramco's digital transformation. Plus, Saudi Aramco Development Company, a subsidiary of Aramco, signed a deal with Cognite to establish a

new company that will focus on digitalization in Saudi Arabia and the broader MENA.

In the UAE, energy leader ADNOC has saved \$2 billion over the past five years by leveraging advanced technologies and digitalization to enhance drilling efficiencies and optimize operations. It has also recently awarded a \$519 million contract to further expand the world's largest 3D seismic survey. And most recently, ADNOC teamed up with ExxonMobil to jointly identify areas where advanced technologies can further increase operational efficiencies and unlock value.

To the east, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the sultanate's largest oil and gas exploration and production company, has wrapped up phase three of its Information Management digital transformation journey with Hexagon. This includes a single platform where all the lifecycle information is centralized for more than 4,100 employees and contractors - bolstering transparency and efficiency in one go.

Keeping pace

The Middle East's push is well-timed, for its progress is key to sustaining global competitiveness on both the energy and digital stage. For example, 50 percent of oil and gas respondents of a survey by Deloitte said their company is already investing in energy efficiency, cleaner fuels to power field operations, and acquiring businesses outside their core focus. And another 50 percent of industry respondents said they would invest in digital technologies to boost energy efficiency and in operational technologies, such as carbon capture to reduce future emissions.

Another area that the region needs to keep abreast of is cyber threats. Globally, across all industries, a staggering 36 billion records were exposed in data breaches in the first half of 2020, according to a report detailed by Risk Based. And last year was already the "worst year on record" by the end of Q2 in terms of the total number of records exposed. Plus, Saudi Aramco was just one of many energy firms that has reported a recent rise in attempted cyber-attacks.

Far more digital sheriffs are needed to safeguard operations, especially as cyber security is fast being woven into energy companies' competitiveness. Greater transparency and accountability are increasingly coveted by digitally aware investors. What were daily, or even weekly, checks must now be done on a minute-by-minute or second-by-second basis. Especially in these times of both uncertainty and great growth, there is no such thing as excessive diligence.

The same applies to exploring and applying digital solutions. Considering one billion people worldwide still lack access to electricity and that we are lagging on the Paris Agreement goals, our exploration of digitalization to streamline efficiency and bolster scalability should know no bounds.

Note: Badar Chaudhry is Senior Vice President, Sector Head - Energy, Mashreq Bank

Business

NBK supports 'Diraya' campaign on its social media platforms, digital channels

Al-Rushaid: Campaign enhances financial culture among segments of society

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues its effective participation in the banking awareness campaign "Diraya" recently launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, by publishing educational material and awareness content on all the bank's social media platforms and digital channels, with the aim of shedding light on customers' rights of and raising their awareness in relation to their dealings with banks. On this occasion, Abdul-Mohsen Al-Rushaid, Assistant General Manager of Communications Department at National Bank of Kuwait said: "NBK strongly supports "Diraya" campaign, which comes as an initiative from the Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association, out of its belief in the importance of enhancing financial culture among the different segments of society and raising awareness about how to make the utmost benefit from the various services provided by banks."

Al-Rushaid pointed out that the campaign, which is the largest across the region, aims in the first place, to raise the banking and financial awareness of banks' customers, noting that this campaign is the fruit of relentless efforts exerted over more than two years, as the launching was postponed last year due to the exceptional circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic. "Diraya" campaign adopts a highly important awareness agenda that includes acquainting customers with the role of banks as financial intermediaries, the importance of saving

and investment, and ways to benefit from the products provided by banks," he noted.

Al-Rushaid mentioned that the campaign aims to raise the awareness about customers' rights in relation to personal finance operations, whether consumer or housing loans, the mechanism for submitting complaints about banking services, in addition to various bank cards, and key precautions for protection from fraud, and awareness about the risk associated with "loan shark" schemes, and high-risk investments, as well as other important topics.

He also stressed that the campaign focuses on an important aspect, which is introducing the services provided to special needs customers, noting that NBK has taken the lead in extending all types of support for special needs customers by developing services and providing the necessary equipment to facilitate their access to the branches dedicated to servicing them.

Al-Rushaid said that NBK provides ATMs equipped with Braille keyboards and earphones, which allow visually impaired customers to make withdrawals. It also trains its employees to provide services in sign language to hearing-impaired customers, and offers iPads with speech-to-text functionality for visually impaired customers, as well as wheelchair access to branches, and reserved, clearly marked parking spaces for special needs customers.

Al-Rushaid emphasized that NBK is a key supporter and partner in all the initiatives and cam-

aigns of the Central Bank of Kuwait which aim to raise financial awareness and spread banking culture among all segments of society. He also noted that, as the leading financial institution in Kuwait and the region, NBK frequently organizes various activities that contribute to raising awareness about all topics related to the banking sector. It also organizes a wide range of training courses for its employees to enhance their expertise in the areas of combating fraud and financial crimes.

NBK, with a branch network spanning 4 continents and 15 countries worldwide, launches campaigns to raise their awareness of its customers about the risks of cybercrime and fraud, through its branches, all digital channels and social media platforms, he added. It is worth mentioning that the banking awareness campaign "Diraya" has recently been launched in an initiative from the Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association, with a view to raise credit, financial and banking culture among banking sector customers and the society at large.

The campaign comprises many topics such as



Abdul-Mohsen Al-Rushaid



the process of borrowing, bank cards, awareness of the rights of special needs customers, as well as advice related to cybersecurity and the protection of bank accounts. It also provides guidance regarding complaint submission mechanisms, and protection of customers' rights, and introduction of the functions of the banking sector and its role in promoting and developing the economy, in order to create awareness among all segments of society about banking and financial dealings.

stc strengthens its cyber security solutions with 'Shield'

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that it is offering its corporate customers through its specialized business arm solutions by stc with the ultimate solution in cyber security and protection, "Shield". The pioneering service is deployed through solutions by stc under the Security Operations Center (SOC) to ensure the safety of businesses by identifying risks in possible data breaches, 360 degrees protection, and assessing critical assets to enable a worry-free environment for businesses to thrive digitally.

Solutions by stc issued a statement highlighting the benefits of its leading IT solutions in the cyber security field that can elevate the customer experience and provide protection for businesses who rely on digital and online data. The cyber security solutions are offered through solutions by stc's SOC, which consists of highly qualified and intellectual cyber security technicians that utilize the latest cutting-edge technology, world-class standardized tools, and advanced methods to manage online and data protection.

The SOC aims to detect and analyze vulnerabilities in the digital infrastructures without inflicting data loss or any unexpected interruption in service. The team monitors and identifies possible breach attempts or incidents that might compromise the security of any business, while analyzing data logs and reporting any suspicious behavior to the customer in real-time to take proper action.

To strengthen its SOC, solutions by stc partnered with leading international cyber security providers to keep pace with the rapidly evolving tools and techniques hackers may use to penetrate the fire walls of any business. As a pioneering IT solutions provider in the region, solutions by stc maintains the highest level of cyber security for its customers, ensuring that their data is always protected. "Shield", the solution offered by solutions by stc, aims to reduce the costs businesses would generally expect when hiring experts to carry out the same functions and standard of protection. The solution also includes 24/7 rapid detection while minimizing risks and possible downtime.

The cyber solutions offered by solutions by stc follow a series of innovative offerings introduced by the Company to support businesses in managing their operations more effectively while enhancing efficiency. "Shield", an innovative cyber security solution, stems from stc's strategic plan to provide safe and secure world-class connectivity through IT solutions under one roof, paving the way for digital transformation in businesses. As a business solutions provider, solutions by stc offers a range of connectivity solutions, fixed or wireless services, 5G technology, ICT, IoT and the IT products and services.

Mohammad N Al-Nusif, Chief Executive Officer of solutions by stc, said, "As the number of daily cyber-attacks increases both locally and globally, so does the demand for effective data protection. Through our SOC, solutions by stc can provide competitive solutions that suit the diverse needs of our growing corporate customer base while providing 24/7 data protection monitoring and prevention. We possess an in-depth understanding of our customers' needs which positions us as the preferred telecommunication and IT solutions provider in the region."

Al-Nusif added, "We will spare no effort in developing effective solutions that maintain the highest levels of online and data security for our customers with the support of international players who specialize in data breach and prevention management. Additionally, we provide a breadth of solutions that can greatly enhance the operational efficiency of the day-to-day activities run by businesses of all sizes across multiple industries. In our mission to aid businesses succeed within their industries and sectors, we will continue to introduce new offerings, and enhance existing ones, to achieve optimal outcomes for our customers."



Mohammad N Al-Nusif

KIB announces winners of salary campaign draw

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently announced the names of the two lucky winners of the Salary Campaign final grand prize draw live during the "Diwaniyat Al-Yaqout & Al-Ansari" show on 'Q8 Pulse' 88.8 FM, in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as KIB staff members and managers. Isaa Mubarak Alaszmi was the lucky winner of the 2019 Luxury Lexus IS350, while Ahlam Mustafa Alqazweni won the grand prize of KD 10,000.

The campaign was launched in October 2019 and continued until October 2020. A first-of-its-kind in Kuwait, Salary Campaign offered new customers the opportunity to choose between more than 400 bundles packed with exclusive benefits and rewards, which included: eligibility to enter the final draw on grand prizes, as well as receiving an Qard Hasanof up to KD 10,000, instant cash prize of up to KD 200, KIB Takaful car insurance, mobile bill cash back, petrol allowance, online food order allowance and more.

On this occasion, Othman Tawfeq, General

Manager of KIB's Retail Banking Department congratulated the winners and spoke about the campaign, saying: "We are pleased to conclude the 2020 Salary Campaign with great success and a remarkable turnout from KIB customers who committed to transferring their monthly salary to their KIB salary accounts throughout the campaign, and were therefore rewarded with instant prizes and enjoyed exceptional salary account privileges. Beyond the campaign, KIB is constantly looking to offer a topnotch customer experience, in addition to exclusive rewards tailored to fit customers' unique requirements with maximum security."

Tawfeq also pointed out that KIB is always in search of state-of-the-art banking solutions and innovative ideas for launching its various marketing campaigns, including its distinguished salary account campaigns that provide customers with the best financial solutions, in addition to endless rewards and privileges. Furthermore, the Bank continues to craft exclusive offers in collaboration with various entities and retail shops that complement customers' unique high-end lifestyle and status. It serves to note that salary account benefits



Othman Tawfeq



Isaa Mubarak Alaszmi, the lucky winner of the 2019 Luxury Lexus IS350

include access to a free credit card for the first year, a free international debit card, access to Murabaha facilities as well as access to e-banking services.

Burgan Bank announces winners of Yawmi account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

NBK Money Markets Report

Fed seeks to ease inflation worries

KUWAIT: Last week, it was revealed that the key measure of US inflation was unchanged in January for a second straight month. The core figure (which excludes volatile food and energy costs) increased 1.4 percent from the prior year though was unchanged m/m. The broader CPI advanced 0.3 percent m/m, boosted by higher gasoline prices. The data comes during a time of intense debate among economists regarding the course of inflation moving forward. While the relatively tame figures were weaker than expected, inflation is for the most part expected to move higher in the months ahead. Expectations that Congress will pass another large stimulus package alongside a pickup in demand as more get vaccinated against COVID-19 supports this theory.

Hence, the concern is in regards to the pace of the rise in inflation. If higher rates come into play soon, it would damage stock valuations which are currently trading near record highs due to a lack of competition from bond yields. More importantly, the cost of debt would rise exponentially at a time of record debt in the US and on a global scale. The US budget deficit (how much more the government spends than it receives in revenue annually) is expected to rise to \$3.7 trillion for 2020. To put this into perspective, prior to the pandemic the 2020 deficit was projected at \$1.1 trillion. Meanwhile, lawmakers are continuing to debate the size of the next COVID-19 relief bill, with President Joe Biden's proposal of a \$1.9 trillion plan worrying economists who warn it could spur an outbreak in inflation. On the other hand, others argue there is plenty of room for fiscal stimulus and fears of increases

in price pressures are not a concern.

Moving forward, inflation figures may be distorted due to the recession which led CPI to plummet in March, April, and May of 2020. When annual figures are calculated this year, inflation will appear to accelerate quickly y/y compared with those three months.

Inflation subdued

US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has said the central bank will continue to support the economy "until the recovery is complete." Speaking to the Economic Club of New York last week, Powell said "You could see strong spending growth, and there could be some overt pressure on prices." He added, "My expectation would be that will be neither large nor sustained. Inflation dynamics will evolve but it's hard to make the case why they would evolve very suddenly in this current situation." Furthermore, the Fed has voiced its willingness to let inflation run above its 2 percent objective for a period of time - an indication policy makers will probably leave interest rates near zero for a while. The struggling labor market also plays a big role here, as persistently high unemployment will limit the degree of the rise in CPI.

Labor market

Unemployment claims are continuing to decline as COVID-19 restrictions recede and activity picks up. Last week's figure decreased by 19,000 to 793,000 - declining for four weeks in a row now. The improving situation has prompted states like California and New York to relax prior restrictions specifically on indoor dining and other activities. However, industries such as leisure and hospitality remain under pressure. Challenges remain for the nearly 10 million Americans who remain unemployed, and the Labor Department's recent reporting of just 49,000 jobs added in January is a grim reminder of what can be expected regarding the pace of recovery.

The lucky winners are:

1. Abdulaziz Mohammad Jassim Alabdulsalam
2. Fatemah Ali Hasan Qabazard
3. Mohammad Irfan Ektiar Siddiqui
4. Ghassan Shukri Abuasba
5. Majid Hilal Abdulhussein Altameemi

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the

President Joe Biden's relief package includes an extension of emergency jobless benefits introduced at the start of the pandemic, which are due to expire in March. Fed Chair Jerome Powell stressed the importance of "patiently accommodative" monetary policy to support the struggling labor market. He added that it would "not be easy" for the economy to achieve full employment and that we are still "very far from a strong labor market".

Markets react

US stocks are ending another broadly positive week with the S&P 500 index and Dow Jones Industrial Average ending 1.23 percent & 1.00 percent higher respectively. Equities have continuously touched record highs with investors powered by record amounts of stimulus and hopes that COVID-19 vaccines will result in a rapid recovery. The greenback declined last week, sending the GBP/USD above the 1.38 mark to its highest level since April 2018.

Looking at safe-havens, the price of Gold continued to move lower as Treasury yields moved higher. The price for the safe-haven metal has dropped 2.4 percent so far in February following a 2.7 percent decline in January. This has correlated with a significant rise in longer-term Treasury yields. The yield difference between the 30-year and 5-year bond is at the widest since 2015, while the gap between the 2 & 10 year reached its widest since 2017.

UK economy

The UK economy suffered its largest economic slump in more than three centuries as GDP plummeted nearly 10 percent in 2020. Essentially, this has wiped out all growth in the UK over the last 7 years with the economy now back to its 2013 size. Though the 9.9 percent drop in GDP was less severe than expected, it surpassed the collapse of the 1921 Great Depression, marking the worst annual

quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws.

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.

drop since the 1709 "Great Frost". The recession is one of the worst among major economies. For example, Germany held up a lot better with provisional estimates suggesting a 5 percent contraction for 2020. The EU is expected to have shrunk 6.4 percent, while the US fared even better with GDP decreasing by 3.5 percent. On a positive note, preliminary GDP figures saw an increase of 1 percent in Q4 of 2020, providing some signs of improvement following record growth in Q3. However, the national lockdown imposed on January 5 is once again expected to hit the economy hard in Q1 of 2021, reversing the return to growth in Q4 of 2020. Adding to the weight on activity is disruption to EU-UK trade following the end of the Brexit transition period on December 31.

A challenging winter

The EU & euro-area is expected to reach pre-COVID19 levels of output earlier than previously anticipated, according to the European Commission. Projections are for the EU economy as a whole to see growth of 3.7 percent in 2021 and 3.9 percent in 2022 following the 6.4 percent drop last year. Growth is expected to resume in the spring and summer as vaccination programs progress and containment measures ease.

According to the report, some EU member states will be able to fully recover this year such as Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Poland. Meanwhile, growth in countries such as Germany, France, and Belgium will not be enough to recoup prior losses, and an improvement will probably have to wait until 2022. Estimated numbers for southern countries such as Spain, Greece, and Italy lead to expectations that they will have to wait even longer after plunging 11 percent, 10 percent, and 8.8 percent in 2020 respectively.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar

USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30230.

Classifieds

Monday, February 15, 2021

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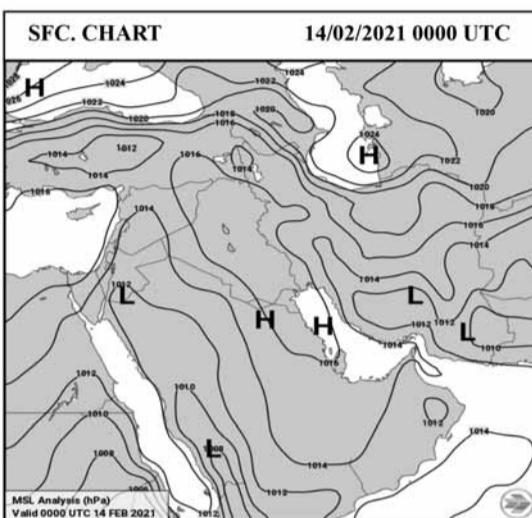
Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

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 to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind with speed of 06 - 26 km/h .

WEATHER WARNING	No Current Warnings
-----------------	---------------------

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	27 °C	17 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	28 °C	11 °C
ABDALY	27 °C	11 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	27 °C	14 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	21 °C	17 °C
AHMADI	20 °C	18 °C
NUWASIB	24 °C	12 °C
WAFRA	27 °C	11 °C
SALMY	26 °C	11 °C



DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Monday	02/15	Warm	28 °C	10 °C	VRB-NW	08 - 28 km/h
Tuesday	02/16	Rather hot and Partly cloudy with a chance for rising dust	30 °C	13 °C	SE-SW	15 - 45 km/h
Wednesday	02/17	Relatively hot and Partly cloudy with a chance for rising dust with a chance for rain that might be	32 °C	15 °C	SE-NW	15 - 50 km/h
Thursday	02/18	Unstable and Cloudy with a chance for rising dust with a chance for rain that might be	20 °C	14 °C	SE-NW	25 - 55 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:08
Sunrise	06:28
Zuhr	12:02
Asr	15:12
Sunset	17:36
Isha	18:54

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	26 °C
MIN. Temp.	08 °C
MAX. RH	70 %
MIN. RH	22 %
MAX. Wind	SW 21 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

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Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Oman Air	22958787
Turkish Airlines	22453820/1

Word Search

Dog Breed Word Search

A word search puzzle with a grid of letters. The words to find are listed on the left and right sides of the grid.

Left side words: AIREDALE, AKITA, BASSET HOUND, BEAGLE, BOXER, BULLDOG, CHIHUAHUA, CHOW CHOW, COLLIE, DACHSHUND, DALMATIAN, GERMAN SHEPHERD, GREAT DANE, LHASA APSO, MALAMUTE, MALTESE, MASTIFF, PEKINGESE, POMERANIAN, POODLE, PUG.

Right side words: ROTTWEILER, SAINT BERNARD, SAMOYED, SCHIPPERKE, SHAR-PEI, SHIH-TZU, WEIMARANER.

Join the Dots

STAR TRACK

<p>Aries (March 21-April 19) The bizarre nature of the day may leave you feeling a bit bewildered, Aries. Don't sweat it. Focus on your romantic nature and incredibly nurturing heart. Use your instinctive healing abilities to care for a close friend in need. Today is an especially good day to connect with others and openly share your feelings. Confide in people you trust. Consider calling your mom.</p>	<p>Cancer (June 21-July 22) Be open and honest about your feelings toward others today, Cancer. Your receptive nature should be ready. Take a break and let others come to you. Unexpected events may pop out of nowhere. Opportunities for new growth in love and romance are definitely at your fingertips as long as you're ready to receive them. Don't try to force the issue if the time and place aren't right. Let it flow.</p>	<p>Libra (September 23-October 22) Your warm, sensitive nature is perfectly suited to today's aspects, Libra. Your emotional energy is strongly tied to your heart, and you will find that there's a longing to be close to others. Indulge in conversation with close friends and let your imagination run wild. Your creativity is especially piqued today, so start an art project or write a song that inspires or perhaps changes the world.</p>	<p>Capricorn (December 22-January 19) All aspects of love and romance will go especially well today, Capricorn. You might take this opportunity to make a bold move toward the object of your affection. Go with an unconventional approach and move fearlessly. Your relationships will go well. Nurture your romantic side and communicate your feelings. Love will act suddenly and unexpectedly. Go with the flow.</p>
<p>Taurus (April 20-May 20) You will be in an especially affectionate and loving mood today, Taurus. Your romantic nature is heightened and your nurturing qualities are strong. You're extra sensitive and receptive. You might find that you have no problem communicating your truest feelings to others. Connect with those you feel especially close to, and enjoy an intimate evening.</p>	<p>Leo (July 23-August 22) Your heart beats extra strong today, Leo, but it may not seem like anyone knows it but you. You may feel like you aren't really fitting in with the energy of the day. Don't get down on yourself for it. Realize that not everything is going to go according to your plans. Let things come to you. The unexpected is bound to happen, so don't try to resist the impending change.</p>	<p>Scorpio (October 23-November 21) You will enjoy a great deal of affection from others today, Scorpio. You radiate an air of love and beauty. Love will come in strong, erratic bursts and you should be on the alert to expect the unexpected. New people will pop out of the woodwork to share their feelings. All group activities are favored, and you're sure to be the life of any party.</p>	<p>Aquarius (January 20- February 18) Your connection with others is especially strong today, Aquarius. You will enjoy an important nurturing role. Reconnect with your mother and let her know how you're feeling. Curl up with loved ones tonight and surprise someone with a romantic gesture. Try something unconventional. Your feelings may be strong and erratic. You may feel like pulling back into your protective shell. If so, do it.</p>
<p>Gemini (May 21-June 20) Annoyances of daily life may rub you the wrong way today, Gemini. Other people's strong opinions and odd quirks may be difficult to swallow and your fuse may be a bit shorter than usual. Emotions could also run high, and you may do battle with the feelings in your own heart. Perhaps someone you care about deeply is creating unnecessary friction in your relationship.</p>	<p>Virgo (August 23-September 22) This is a fantastic day for you, Virgo. Join close friends and share a night on the town and fine meal. This is a chance to begin a new cycle of romance. Reflect on past relationship problems, examine their causes, and toss them away so you can invite in a new, uplifting energy for the next cycle of romance. Start a new relationship or strengthen the one you're in.</p>	<p>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21) Your heart may be especially sensitive today, Sagittarius. You may feel a bit vulnerable. Your romantic nature is particularly strong, so treat yourself to a pampered evening, including a good meal with someone you love. All relationships with women will go smoothly now. You might want to give your mother a call if you haven't spoken with her in a while. She would love to hear from you.</p>	<p>Pisces (February 19-March 20) You might feel especially playful today, Pisces. You can expect to feel a great deal of love and affection from others. Be aware that you will have a strong tendency to indulge in food and drink, so try to keep things in moderation. You may have an aversion to work and lack self-discipline. Overcome this by looking forward to intimate plans with someone tonight.</p>

Lifestyle | Features



A handout picture released by the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, shows the remains of what may be the world's "oldest" high-production beer brewery, uncovered in the Abydos archaeological site near Egypt's southern city of Sohag. — AFP photos



Egypt unearths 'world's oldest' mass-production brewery

A high-production brewery believed to be more than 5,000 years old has been uncovered by a team of archaeologists at a funerary site in southern Egypt, the tourism ministry said Saturday. The site containing several "units" consisting of about 40 earthenware pots arranged in two rows was uncovered at North Abydos, Sohag, by a joint Egyptian-American team, the ministry said in a statement on its Facebook page. The brewery likely dates back to the era of King Narmer, it quoted the secretary general of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, Mostafa Waziry, as saying, adding it believed the find to "be the oldest high-production brewery in the world."

Narmer, who ruled more than 5,000 years ago, founded the First Dynasty and unified Upper and Lower Egypt. British archaeologists first discovered the existence of the brewery at the beginning of the 20th century but its location was never precisely determined, the statement said. The joint Egyptian-American team



"was able to re-locate and uncover its contents", it said. According to Waziry, the brewery consisted of eight large areas which were used as "units for beer production". Each sector contained about 40 earthenware pots arranged in two rows. A mixture of grains and water used for beer production was heated in the vats, with each basin "held in place by levers made of clay placed vertically in the form of rings".

along several dresses and a matching blouse and skirt, which a staff member assessed before crediting points to her account. She spent her points on 17 items, including a yellow and green dress to wear for the first day of the new year as it looked like "an auspicious pineapple". The fruit, seen as a symbol of prosperity, is typically given as a gift or displayed during Lunar New Year in Singapore.

'Insane consumption'

"I've always been brought up by my parents to have a new set of clothes every Chinese New Year, and I fell into that behavior of consumerism," the 35-year-old told AFP. "In the past I probably made sure I have 15 days of outfits even if I'm not visiting (relatives), which is too much." But now, "as long as the item is new to me, I think it's good enough," added Chng, who works for a tech company and is married. Chng first learnt about clothes swapping at a work event five years ago, and decided to change her ways after realizing her wardrobe was filled with unworn items. "Prior to switching over to swapping, my con-

Brew for 'royal rituals'
Archaeologist Matthew Adams of New York University, who heads the joint mission with Deborah Vischak of Princeton University, said studies have shown that beer was produced at a large scale, with about 22,400 liters made at a time. The brewery "may have been built in this place specifically to supply the royal rituals that were taking place inside the funeral facilities of the kings of Egypt", the statement quoted him as saying. "Evidence for the use of beer in sacrificial rites was found during excavations in these facilities," the statement said. Evidence of beer-making in ancient Egypt is not new, and past discoveries have shed light on such production.

Fragments of pottery used by Egyptians to make beer and dating back 5,000 years were discovered on a building site in Tel Aviv, the Israeli Antiquities Authority announced in 2015. Abydos, where the latest discovery was unearthed, has yielded many treasures over the years and is famed for its tem-

ples, such as that of Seti I. In 2000, a team of US archaeologists brought to light in Abydos the earliest known example of an ancient Egyptian solar barge, dating back to the first Pharaonic dynasty around 5,000 years ago. Egypt has announced several major new discoveries which it hopes will spur tourism, a sector which has suffered multiple blows from a 2011 uprising to the coronavirus pandemic.

'Not dirty, not dusty'

Filipino clothes designer Raye Padit founded The Fashion Pulpit nearly three years ago after learning about his industry's impact on the environment and poor treatment of garment workers. "In Singapore, the problem is overconsumption and waste," he told AFP. "We want to provide a platform where you can still dress up, express yourself... through clothes. But at the same time, it's not damaging to the planet and to your wallet."

His company now has more than 1,500 members and has started turning a profit. It also holds workshops where customers can learn how to mend or upcycle used clothes. People have swapped everything from casual clothes made by high-street brands to top-end items such as Prada bags and Louboutin shoes, Padit said. One-time swap events are also popping up in the city-state while a group of volunteers host monthly swap gatherings. "When I join a clothing swap it reminds me to consume consciously because when I give away clothes, I think about whether I'm still wearing them," said Nadia Kishlan, a 30-year-old participant at one clothing swap.

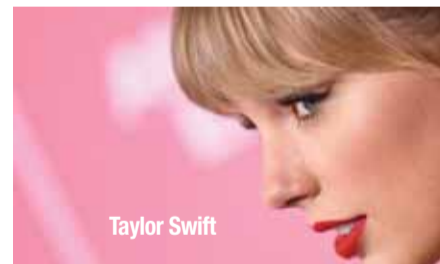
Challenges remain in persuading Singaporeans to swap rather than shop, however, and the city's industry is still in its infancy. Second-hand shops are not as popular in Asia as in the West, in part because many believe used clothes from strangers could bring bad luck, or be unhygienic. But Padit said attitudes in Singapore were changing, driven by rising environmental awareness and a wave of trendy new thrift shops marketing their goods on social media. "It's slowly changing the perception of what second hand is all about," he said. "It's no longer dirty, it's no longer dusty-it's a cool thing." — AFP

A mission working near Alexandria recently discovered several mummies from around 2,000 years ago bearing golden-tongued amulets-thought to have been placed in the mouths of the dead to ensure they could speak in the afterlife. Authorities had expected 15 million tourists to visit Egypt in 2020, compared to 13 million the previous year, but the virus has kept holidaymakers away. — AFP

planned to visit Egypt in 2020, compared to 13 million the previous year, but the virus has kept holidaymakers away. — AFP

Taylor Swift to release re-recorded hit album 'Fearless'

Taylor Swift, making good on her vow to re-record her first six albums so she can control their rights, on Thursday announced plans to release the new version of her second record "Fearless" in April. The 31-year-old also said that extremely successful album's lead single "Love Story (Taylor's Version)" would come out at midnight. "The way I've chosen to do this will hopefully help illuminate where I'm coming from," Swift said in a statement posted on social media. "This process has been more fulfilling and emotional than I could've imagined and has made me even more determined to re-record all of my music."



In addition to the 20 tracks originally on the 2008 album "Fearless"-which includes the hits "You Belong With Me" and "Fifteen"-Swift said she was including six more "never before released songs from the vault," a fresh take on the album set for release April 9. In the summer of 2019 Swift began publicly sparring with industry mogul Scooter Braun over his company's purchase of her previous label, which gave him a majority stake in the master recordings of her first six albums.

The heated feud and her bold promise to re-record those works ignited discussion over who keeps the keys to an artist's work, and the conditions under which young musicians sign contracts. The owner of lucrative masters-one-of-a-kind source material used to create vinyls, CDs and digital copies-is able to dictate how songs are reproduced and sold. Record companies have almost always kept those rights, justifying the arrangements by the financial risks labels take in supporting performers throughout their contracts.

Swift said she had been actively trying to regain control of her masters, but in November 2020 said she learned the rights to her first six albums were sold to the private equity company Shamrock Holdings, reportedly for more than \$300 million. That same month was the moment she was allowed to contractually begin re-recording her albums-which she had promised to do in a bid to devalue the original recordings. — AFP

JAZZ LEGEND AND FUSION PIONEER CHICK COREA DIES OF CANCER

Chick Corea, the American jazz composer and electric keyboard trailblazer whose visionary fusion work stretched the traditional boundaries of genre, has died of a rare form of cancer. He was 79. Corea's illness "was only discovered very recently," read a statement posted on his Facebook page Thursday. "I want to thank all of those along my journey who have helped keep the music fires burning bright," read a message the 23-time Grammy award winner left prior to his February 9 passing, which his team released in the statement.

"It is my hope that those who have an inkling to play, write, perform or otherwise, do so. If not for yourself then for the rest of us. It's not only that the world needs more artists, it's also just a lot of fun." The dynamic composer and bandleader, whose compositions-turned-jazz standards included "Spain," "500 Miles High" and "La Fiesta," was among a select group of talent alongside Herbie Hancock and Keith Jarrett to emerge as some of the 20th century's most influential pianists. Over his more than half-a-century-long career Corea established himself as a revolutionary of the 1970s jazz fusion era, experimenting with rock and electronic sounds to shake the genre into the contemporary era.

"We have a mission to go out there and be an antidote to war, and all of the dark side of what happens on Planet Earth," he told the NPR program "Jazz Night in America" in 2018, explaining the role of the artist. "We're the ones that go in and remind people about their creativity."



In this file photo Chick Corea holds his Grammy after winning Best Jazz Instrumental Album Trio, "Fingerprints", in the press room during the 57th annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. — AFP

'Joy of creating'

Born Armando Corea to a family of Italian-Americans in Chelsea, Massachusetts in June 12, 1941, the musician was introduced to the piano at a young age by his jazz trumpeter father, and took an early interest in bebop. The pianist who also played the drums performed local gigs in high school and began musical studies at both Columbia and Juilliard before quitting to play full time. In the early 1960s he worked with greats including Stan Getz and Herbie Mann, later replacing Hancock in Miles Davis' band, an icon Corea influenced into his electronic period that included classics like "Bitches Brew."

Corea routinely used a ring modulator to create his pioneering effects on the electric piano, at a time when synths were rarely seen onstage. The musician known for his improvisational chops started his own free jazz group, Circle, which was active from 1970-1971, when Corea began expanding on the percussiveness of the piano by plucking the strings inside the instrument's body. In 1971 he co-founded his most famous group, Return to Forever, melding acoustic and electronic instrumentation with a Latin American bent.

A pioneer of solo piano shows, Corea was a master of everything from classical to standards to swing and Latin jazz, touring relentlessly until the pandemic halted live concerts. "This man changed my life thru his music and we were able to play together many times," tweeted Sheila E., an acclaimed jazz drummer and Prince protege. "Chick, you are missed dearly, your music and brilliant light will live on forever."

Corea's mammoth discography earned him more than 67 Grammy nominations. He has more jazz Grammys than any other artist, and is up for two awards at next month's ceremony honoring music's brightest: Best Improvised Jazz Solo for "All Blues" and Best Jazz Instrumental Album for "Trilogy 2." Corea was named a National Endowment of the Arts Jazz Master in 2006. At the time of his death he was member of the Church of Scientology and lived in Clearwater, Florida. "Throughout his life and career, Chick relished in the freedom and the fun to be had in creating something new, and in playing the games that artists do," the statement announcing his death read.

"Though he would be the first to say that his music said more than words ever could," the statement said, Corea left a message imparting upon his "amazing musician friends who have been like family" that "it has been a blessing and an honor learning from and playing with all of you." "My mission has always been to bring the joy of creating anywhere I could," read Corea's words. "And to have done so with all the artists that I admire so dearly-this has been the richness of my life." — AFP

Singapore swap shops offer alternative to fast fashion

Singaporean Sue-Anne Chng used to wear a different outfit on all 15 days of the Lunar New Year, when it is customary to don new clothes to symbolize a fresh start. But this year she will wear second-hand items exchanged for her old clothes at a store catering to people concerned about the impact of fast fashion on the environment. Several swapping initiatives, from permanent shops to pop-up events, have appeared in the affluent city-state in a bid to encourage consumers to make the most of what is already in their closets. The fashion industry is responsible for up to a



This picture shows shoppers browsing through secondhand clothes at a pop-up swap event organized by a group of volunteers in Singapore. — AFP photos

tenth of global carbon emissions, according to the United Nations' environment program.

Clothes cause emissions in a wide variety of ways-from their manufacture to transportation and washing by the consumer. On a recent trip to her favorite store, The Fashion Pulpit, Chng took

sumption habit was insane," she said. "I realized I had more than 50 percent of my wardrobe unworn, but I still felt like I didn't have anything to wear."

She pays Sg\$599 (US\$450) for a yearly membership at The Fashion Pulpit, which allows her unlimited swaps and visits-about 80 percent of her wardrobe



Shopper Nadia Kishlan (left) browsing through secondhand clothes at a pop-up swap event organized by a group of volunteers in Singapore.



Sue-Anne Chng sorting through clothes in her walk-in closet at home in Singapore.

FRANCE'S FEMALE DERVISH TAKES TRANSCENDENCE ONLINE

One of the world's few female whirling dervishes, Rana Gorgani has opened up Sufism to a wider audience, and is now making surprising spiritual connections over Zoom thanks to the pandemic. French-Iranian Gorgani, 37, used to think of whirling—a sort of “moving meditation” through which Sufis seek to commune with the divine—as something that should remain behind closed doors. Despite growing up in France, she was initiated into the practice while visiting Iran, a place where Sufis often face persecution by the authorities and dancing in general is frowned upon.

She had never intended to perform the whirling in public—that was something normally reserved for men. But a decade ago, she decided she wanted to share its beauty with a festival audience in Montpellier. “After some minutes, I panicked and stopped for a few seconds. It felt like I was breaking some rule,” she recalled. “But I started turning again, and heard a roar of applause, and I told myself ‘everything is OK.’” When people came up to her after the show, with tears in their eyes, to thank her—she realized this was something she wanted to pursue full-time.

‘Extremely intense’

Sufi whirling, sometimes known by the Arabic name Sama (which means “listening”), sees performers twirl in distinctive wide robes in a rhythmic turning that mirrors the movement of the Earth around the Sun. It's more than a dance, said



French-Iranian Rana Gorgani, 37, used to think of whirling as something that should remain behind closed doors. — AFP photos

Gorgani—“it's a prayer, an act of devotion to the divine”. A traditional part of Sufism, particularly in Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, it is normally only practiced by women when they are separated from men. But for Gorgani, in Sufism—a more spiritually focused approach to Islam founded by followers of 13th century spiritual poet Jalal al-Din Rumi—the soul is neither masculine nor feminine.

To be female and a dervish “does not go against this spirituality”, she said. “In

Europe, I am lucky to be able to express myself artistically and freely.” Her parents fled Iran after the revolution, and it was during her first visit there at the age of 14 that Gorgani became interested in Sufism. She has since taken part in many ceremonies in Iran and Turkey, but often secretly. Now her performances have been forced online by the pandemic, but she has been “touched and moved” by the number of people reaching out to learn more about Sama.

Her first Zoom class, during France's first lockdown, attracted around 100 people and the numbers have continued to grow as she delivers performances on every new and full moon. To her surprise, the experience has been “extremely intense”, with participants saying they are in profound need of meaning and connection. “I think I've helped some people reveal something to themselves,” she said. While rooted in her studies in the anthropology of music and dance, she

nonetheless likes to mix up the soundtrack, opting not only for traditional Sufi music, but also live piano and even traditional French tunes such as those of Jacques Brel. “Wherever I find a state of grace,” she said. — AFP

Young Singapore chefs serve up hope for street food's future

After the pandemic torpedoed his chance to work at a Michelin-starred New York restaurant, Lim Wei Keat returned to his roots by becoming a Singapore street-food chef cooking local fare. The 25-year-old is among a growing number of young street-food vendors—known as “hawkers” locally—fueling hopes that a new generation will preserve the city-state's culinary traditions. Singapore is full of open-air food courts offering a wide variety of cuisines influenced by the Southeast Asian nation's ethnic Chinese, Indian and Muslim populations.

Even after the city-state ballooned into an affluent financial hub, the hawker tradition lived on, and remains a central part of everyday life for many. The United Nations recognized this tradition as “intangible cultural heritage” in December, describing the centers where hawkers toil as “community dining rooms” that bring together people from diverse backgrounds. But many chefs are heading toward retirement—their median age is 59 — and young Singaporeans often shun the trade, stoking fears that hawker traditions and their delicious dishes could be lost.

Lim stumbled into becoming an apprentice hawker, only choosing to do so as he could not take up an internship at a US restaurant last year due to coronavirus travel curbs. But he feels he has found his true calling. “Local dishes would disappear if young people did not take over stalls or learn (to cook) these dishes,” Lim told AFP. He got the apprentice-



This photograph shows hawker apprentice Lim Wei Keat (center in red) preparing a dish at a chicken rice stall in Singapore. — AFP photos

ship through government initiatives aimed at safeguarding the street food culture, which has helped dozens of younger chefs join the trade.

‘This flavor will disappear’

Hawkers usually focus on just one or two dishes, from fried rice noodles and turnip cake to curry puffs. Lim chose an ever-popular traditional favorite—Hainanese chicken rice—and likes to cook it the old-fashioned way. “I love chicken rice, so why not start with something that I love and I'm passionate about?” His men-

tor, 61-year-old Neo Cheng Leong, has been selling the dish for 30 years. He makes it from scratch every morning at his stall, cleaning the chicken, poaching it at just the right temperature, then cooking the rice in chicken broth, with ginger and scallion-infused oil.

Cuts of the tender meat are served with a plate of the resultant fragrant rice with garlic chilli sauce and sweetened soy sauce, all for just Sg\$3 (\$2.3). His two sons, both in their early 20s, are studying at university and have no interest in taking over the stall after seeing how hard their

parents worked for three decades, said Neo. “If I don't teach (apprentices) then this flavor will disappear from Singapore,” Neo told AFP. Once Lim has completed his government-training program—which includes two months of training under Neo, and cooking for a panel of judges—he can rent a stall at a heavily subsidized rate for 15 months.

‘What's wrong with you?’

Still, there are many challenges that make it hard to lure young Singaporeans from better-paid office jobs, such as rising costs and long hours. And then there is the stigma. “Back in the day, it was really seen as a profession for those who have no route into life,” said K.F. Seetoh, an influential critic and entrepreneur who created a popular guide for hawker food. “There's still a school of people who would say ‘what, you want to be a hawker? What's wrong with you?’”

Hawkers are also forced to keep prices low to compete with rivals, meaning that making ends meet in one of the world's most expensive cities can be tough. Shawn Aw, a chef who runs a noodle stall with his 60-year-old mother, admitted it was hard work and said he only made around Sg\$1,000 (\$750) per month—far below Singapore's median wage, Sg\$4,500 (\$3,370), according to official data. “You definitely have to come in early and go home late... it's a bit tough, you have to work hard,” the 32-year-old told AFP. — AFP

Stonehenge likely made with stones from older monument

Remains of an ancient monument in west Wales indicate stones that stood at the site may have been dismantled and used to build the Neolithic standing circle Stonehenge, a new study suggested Friday. Researchers believe some stones used at Stonehenge, near Salisbury in southwest England, were used in an earlier monument 175 miles away in southwest Wales. The team behind the discovery from University College London (UCL) said there were key elements linking Stonehenge, built in 3000 BC, with the earlier stone circle named Waun Mawn.



They suggest bluestones—distinct blue and grey stones that originated in Wales—may have been moved by the ancient builders of Stonehenge as their society migrated. The findings, due to be published in the journal *Antiquity*, would explain why the monoliths were moved so far when most similar standing circles from the time were built close to their quarries. Waun Mawn is one of the oldest stone circles in Britain and the country's third largest.

Its surrounding region was an important and densely settled area until 3000 BC when activity seems to have abruptly ended. “It's as if they just vanished. Maybe most of the people migrated, taking their stones—their ancestral identities—with them,” archaeologist Mike Parker Pearson, from UCL, said. With an estimated 80 bluestones erected on Salisbury Plain, it is likely that Waun Mawn, in the Preseli Hills in Pembrokeshire, was not the only monument recycled at Stonehenge, he added. “Maybe there are more in Preseli waiting to be found. Who knows? Someone will be lucky enough to find them,” he said.

Scientific dating of charcoal and sediment from the holes where stones stood at the Welsh site, reveal it was erected roughly 400 years before Stonehenge, a UNESCO World Heritage site. There are also indications the builders of Stonehenge copied the monument in Wales. Waun Mawn has a diameter of 360 feet—the same as the ditch that encloses Stonehenge—and both are aligned on the midsummer solstice sunrise. — AFP



Hawker apprentice Lim Wei Keat preparing chicken at a chicken rice stall in Singapore.



This photograph shows hawker apprentice Lim Wei Keat displaying chickens at a chicken rice stall in Singapore.



This photograph shows KF Seetoh, founder of Makansutra, talking to an AFP reporter during an interview at the Makansutra Gluttons Bay hawker food centre in Singapore.



A hawker showing a thumbs-up while delivering a bowl of mee soto noodles to a customer at the Makansutra Gluttons Bay hawker food center in Singapore.



Hawker Neo Cheng Leong (right) and his apprentice Lim Wei Keat at Neo's chicken rice stall in Singapore.

Nets dominate in Durant's return to Golden State

Jazz beat the Heat for seventh straight win

LOS ANGELES: Kevin Durant made a triumphant return to the San Francisco Bay Area Saturday, scoring 20 points to boost the Brooklyn Nets to a convincing 134-117 NBA victory over the Golden State Warriors. Durant won titles with the Warriors in 2017 and 2018, earning NBA Finals MVP honors each year before suffering a torn Achilles tendon in the 2019 championship series and then departing Golden State for the Nets.

His return came in the new arena in San Francisco that the Warriors moved into last season, where the lack of fans in the stadium made his appearance a more muted affair. "It was good to see everybody," said Durant, who had hugs for former teammates Draymond Green and Stephen Curry and Warriors coach Steve Kerr. "Wish Klay (Thompson) was healthy, but it's good to be back in the Bay Area. I loved my time here, I loved playing for this team. But I'm glad we got a good 'W.'" Durant added, Durant was back on the floor after a week in quarantine because of NBA coronavirus protocols. But the All-Star forward meshed seamlessly with star teammates Kyrie Irving and James Harden, with the Nets not only delivering offensively but also shutting down the potentially explosive Warriors offense.

Irving scored 23 points to lead six Nets players in double figures. Harden added 19 with 16 assists and the Nets held the Warriors to 48.9 percent shooting — 26.5 percent from three-point range — in a comfortable win. Curry, coming off a 40-point performance against the Orlando Magic, led the Warriors with 27 points, making 10 of 17 from

the field but just two of nine from three-point range. After six lead changes in a tight first quarter, the Nets took control, never trailing from the second period on. "We moved the ball, we had, what 35 assists, 13 turnovers? If we do that every night we put ourselves in a good position to win."

The Warriors played a video tribute to Durant in the first quarter, and said they'd do more to celebrate his time with the club when he returns again with fans in the arena. "I think it does mean something to him but he hasn't shown it," said Nets coach Steve Nash, who acknowledged that without fans and with nearly two years elapsed, Durant's return was "a comeback game that is less than what it may have been."

Booker shines for Suns

In Phoenix, Devin Booker scored 36 points to pace the Suns in a 120-111 victory over the Eastern Conference leading Philadelphia 76ers. Chris Paul added 18 points and 10 assists and the Phoenix bench delivered 56 points as the Suns won their fifth straight and their eighth in nine games.

The Suns shot 60.8 percent from the field, leaving Sixers coach Doc Rivers to bemoan his team's defensive breakdowns — especially when the reserve unit was on the floor. "It's funny, the first eight minutes, I thought defensively, were pretty good, and then right when we went to the bench is when our defense struggled," Rivers said. Center Joel Embiid led the Sixers with 35 points. Ben Simmons and Tobias Harris added 18 apiece.



SAN FRANCISCO: Draymond Green #23 of the Golden State Warriors and Kevin Durant #7 of the Brooklyn Nets look on during the game on Saturday at Chase Center in San Francisco, California. — AFP

In Salt Lake City, Donovan Mitchell scored 26 points, Bojan Bogdanovic delivered 19 as the red-hot Utah Jazz defeated the Miami Heat 112-94 for their seventh straight win. Rudy Gobert tallied 16 points, 12 rebounds and had three blocks while

Mitchell scored eight points in a decisive third quarter as the Jazz turned a five-point halftime lead into a 21-point cushion. Kendrick Nunn led Miami with 23 points, while Jimmy Butler and Max Strus each had 15 points in the loss. — AFP

Djokovic defies injury to reach Australian Open last eight

MELBOURNE: Eight-time winner Novak Djokovic fought through what he had described as a tournament-ending injury to beat Milos Raonic and reach the Australian Open quarter-finals on yesterday. Naomi Osaka and Serena Williams survived scares to go through but US Open champion Dominic Thiem was a major casualty when he fell to Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov. Simona Halep avenged her crushing French Open defeat by Polish teenager Iga Swiatek to set up a meeting with Williams, while Taiwan's Hsieh Su-wei reached her first Slam quarter-final at the age of 35.

Djokovic, the world number one, had raised the alarm over an abdominal injury after his five-set battle with Taylor Fritz, but he showed few outward signs in his 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 win. However, the 17-time Grand Slam winner said he had spent "every single hour" since Friday's win trying to recover, and wasn't sure he would play until he warmed up before the match.

"If it was any other tournament than a Grand Slam I would retire from the tournament, that's for sure," said Djokovic, who becomes just the second

player after Roger Federer to win 300 Grand Slam matches. "But because it's a Grand Slam, I want to give my best alongside my team to try to recover and get on the court."

The defending champion will next meet German sixth seed Alexander Zverev, who beat Serbia's Dusan Lajovic 6-4, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 as he seeks his first Grand Slam title. Earlier, Japan's Osaka edged a thriller with fellow major-winner Garbine Muguruza, and Williams came through a physical test against Aryna Sabalenka to maintain her bid for a record-equaling 24th Grand Slam title.

Osaka, Williams fight on

In an empty Rod Laver Arena, with fans barred on the second day of a five-day, state-wide coronavirus lockdown, Osaka was on the verge of elimination at 3-5, 15-40 on her serve in the third set. But the three-time major champion rattled off four points in a row and then twice broke Muguruza's serve to prevail 4-6, 6-4, 7-5. "I felt like I was intimidated because she was playing so well," said Osaka, after her first meeting with last year's beaten finalist. "On the stressful points, I had to play within myself."

Osaka now faces an all-Asian quarter-final with Hsieh, who beat Marketa Vondrousova 6-4, 6-2 to reach her first Slam quarter-final in 16 years of trying. Williams, 39, was also meeting Sabalenka for the first time and she had to weather an onslaught from the Belarusian to reach the last eight 6-4,



MELBOURNE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic hits a return against Canada's Milos Raonic during their men's singles match on day seven of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

2-6, 6-4. "I knew it wasn't going to be easy, she was teeing off on every shot," said the American, who will play Halep in the quarter-finals.

But a fatigued-looking Thiem, coming off a five-set win over Australia's Nick Kyrgios, slumped in straight sets to Dimitrov who took it 6-4, 6-4, 6-0 in just over two hours. Dimitrov's victory against Thiem, the third seed and last year's runner-up, sets up a quarter-final with surprise package Aslan Karatsev, who is into the last eight on his Grand Slam debut. "Whether it's a fairytale or not, it's a match and you've got to be ready," Bulgaria's Dimitrov said of the unheralded Russian. "I've

seen a little bit of his matches, clearly he's a dangerous player."

Karatsev beat Felix Auger-Aliassime in five sets to become the first player in 25 years to reach the quarter-finals on his Grand Slam debut. The 27-year-old, a virtual unknown before the tournament started, battled back from two sets down to upset the Canadian 3-6, 1-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-4. Halep won just three games against Swiatek, 19, at last year's Roland Garros, but she turned the tables with a 3-6, 6-1, 6-4 win. "I knew she would hit strong, but after the first set I tried to make her run and she started to miss," said the Romanian. — AFP

Spezia teach Milan 'lesson' ahead of derby

ROME: AC Milan's charge for a first league title in a decade took a big hit on Saturday after they were deservedly beaten at promoted Spezia. Seven-time European champions Milan had the chance to stretch their lead over Inter to five points ahead of the latter's match against Lazio last night, and put 10 between themselves and third-placed Juventus who lost 1-0 at Napoli earlier in the evening. But goals from Giulio Maggiore and Simone Bastoni on a historic night for Spezia has put them in a tough spot, with the Milan derby coming up next weekend. "It was beyond even my wildest dreams," said Bastoni, whose spectacular strike was his first in Serie A. "If we carry on playing like this, we can achieve great things."

Spezia, who had to restart from the fourth tier in 2008 after going bankrupt, have impressed in their first ever Serie A season and move up to 14th, nine points away from the relegation zone after another exciting performance. Vincenzo Italiano's side showed why observers in Italy back them to stay up, pushing Milan onto the back foot from the start and not letting them have a single shot on target despite the presence of talisman Zlatan Ibrahimovic. In fact it was Gianluigi Donnarumma who kept the away side level early on, making one fantastic save with 13 minutes gone to push Riccardo Saponara's powerful effort out from under the bar.

However the Italy stopper could do nothing in the 56th minute when after a sweeping passing move Maggiore found himself completely unmarked within spitting distance of the goal and slotted the home side ahead. Bastoni doubled the hosts' lead 11 minutes later with a screamer of a strike, meeting Nahuel Estevez's pass from a free-kick to flash an angled shot past Donnarumma's despairing dive. Substitute Mario Mandzukic's weak header wide in stoppage time was a sign of how little resistance Milan had put up in a dreadful display. "We need to react and we will do," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli. "It's a valuable lesson: if we don't perform to a certain level, we will be embarrassed like this."

Insigne sinks Juve

Spezia's win means that Juventus' title bid is still just about on course despite Lorenzo Insigne scoring his 100th Napoli goal in a 1-0 win over the champions. Italy attacker Insigne's 31st-minute penalty secured a big three points for Napoli coach Gennaro Gattuso, whose job is widely reported to be under threat after a poor run of results. "We're happy with the result but most of all the display, because we worked as a team and fought together... We're still a united team and we brought the win home," said Insigne, who had missed his previous three penalties against Juve.

The 29-year-old scored the winner after Giorgio Chiellini had been caught by VAR officials striking Amir Rrahmani with his hand while challenging for the ball, a decision that angered Juve coach Andrea Pirlo. The win puts Napoli fourth, level on 40 points with Roma and Lazio and two behind Juve who stay seven points behind Milan. Gattuso, already without key players such as Dries Mertens, then lost goalkeeper David Ospina who injured himself in the warm-up. — AFP

Windies sweep Bangladesh Test, India eye victory

DHAKA/CHENNAI: Rahkeem Cornwall took centre stage as spinners picked up all 10 wickets in the West Indies' 17-run victory over Bangladesh in the second and final Test yesterday to complete a series whitewash. Cornwall took 4-105 while Kraigg Brathwaite (3-25) and Jomel Warrican (3-47) grabbed the remaining wickets as Bangladesh were bowled out for 213 on the fourth day. Mehidy Hasan hit two sixes and three fours late in the day to add drama after the hosts lost their ninth wicket but the West Indies kept their cool to deny them a come-from-behind win. The tourists, missing most of their top stars who feared travelling during the coronavirus pandemic, jumped with joy after Cornwall took a catch at slip off Warrican to dismiss Mehidy for 31 and end the innings.

Set a target of 231 runs, opener Tamim Iqbal hit a quickfire 50 and put on 59 with Soumya Sarkar (13). Brathwaite removed both openers before Cornwall and Warrican put the West Indies in control. Brathwaite broke through off his first delivery as Soumya departed with an edge ricocheting off the gloves of wicketkeeper Joshua Da Silva before flying to Cornwall at slip. Tamim raced to a fifty off 43 balls — including nine fours — before giving Shayne Moseley a catch at short cover. Warrican claimed Bangladesh captain Mominul Haque (26) and Mushfiqur Rahim (14), while Cornwall got rid of Mohammad Mithun (10) and Liton Das (22).

The West Indies smelled a win once Cornwall dismissed Taijul for nine. Mehidy and Nayeem Hasan defiantly put on 25 for the ninth wicket, reviving home hopes. But Brathwaite removed Nayeem (14) in the final over of scheduled play, forcing an extension. Taijul earlier finished on 4-36 while Nayeem took 3-34 as Bangladesh bowled out the West Indies for 117



DHAKA: West Indies' players pose with the Test tournament trophy after winning the second Test cricket match against Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. — AFP

in their second innings. Bangladesh took seven wickets for 76 runs in little over a session on the fourth day after the tourists resumed on 41-3. Cornwall won the man of the match award for his nine wickets while Nkrumah Bonner was named player of the series. The West Indies won the first Test by three wickets.

Ashwin spins out England

In Chennai, India built a commanding lead of 249 after spinner Ravichandran Ashwin helped skittle England for 134 on day two of the second Test yesterday. The hosts were 54 for one at stumps yesterday. Rohit Sharma on 25 and Cheteshwar Pujara on seven. India are in sight of a victory that would level the four-match series after their crushing defeat in the opening Test.

Sharma, who hit 161 in India's first innings, survived a stumping chance on 20 when England wicketkeeper Ben Foakes failed to gather the ball to his left off Moeen Ali. Jack Leach trapped Shubman Gill

leg before for 14 with his left-arm spin and the opener walked back after an unsuccessful TV review. Ashwin had earlier claimed five wickets as England collapsed in response to India's 329, conceding a lead of 195. England assistant coach Graham Thorpe said it was one of the most difficult batting pitches he had seen. But Ashwin said batsmen have to adapt on a spinners' pitch like they do on tracks that favor fast bowlers. It was the veteran off-spinner's second successive five-wicket haul and his 29th in 76 Tests. Left-arm spinner Axar Patel and fast bowler Ishant Sharma took two wickets each. England's Foakes made an unbeaten on 42 off 107 balls.

England lost half their side for 52 when Ashwin bowled Ben Stokes for 18. Foakes, taking the place of Jos Buttler who returned home after the opening win, put on 35 with Ollie Pope. The pair batted for over 50 minutes before pace bowler Mohammed Siraj struck with his first ball of the Test, removing Pope for 22. Patel then dismissed Moeen Ali for six. — AFP

Sports

Champions League knockout stages begin under COVID cloud

Wind of change blowing as UEFA scrambles to prevent 'Super League'

PARIS: This week the glamour of a tie between Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain heralds the dawn of the Champions League knockout phase, but the world's most lucrative and compelling club competition returns still overshadowed by the coronavirus crisis as well as by looming changes to the tournament itself. Four years ago, when PSG last visited the Camp Nou, they arrived with a 4-0 first-leg advantage and left eliminated after a 6-1 defeat on a night the 96,000 spectators present will never forget.

Neymar, now with the Parisians, will miss the return to his old home tomorrow due to injury. The fans will be missing too, yet the spectacle of a huge European game going ahead behind closed doors due to COVID-19 restrictions is no longer so unusual. What is new is the extent to which travel bans are creating havoc and have already forced UEFA to switch several ties to neutral venues.

RB Leipzig have been denied home advantage in their first leg against Liverpool tomorrow due to a ban by German authorities on travellers from the UK. That game now goes ahead in Budapest, which will also host Borussia Moenchengladbach against Manchester City the following week.

Similar restrictions on travellers from Britain entering Spain have forced Atletico Madrid's first leg at home to Chelsea to be moved 3,000 kilometers to Bucharest. "A last-16 Champions League tie is a huge event for Borussia Moenchengladbach, which we now cannot play in our own ground or with any fans in attendance," admitted Gladbach CEO Stephan Schippers. "Nevertheless, we're pleased that we can play the game at all and we are of conscious of the overall situation."

UEFA cede more ground

It may be football in an empty stadium, often on neutral ground, but the Champions League

knockout stages remain the absolute pinnacle of the club game, the theater in which so many memorable matches have been played in recent times. Even last year's 'Final Eight' behind closed doors in Lisbon produced Bayern Munich's stunning 8-2 mauling of Barcelona and Manchester City's shock loss to Lyon.

But this time it is impossible to ignore the specter of change hanging over the Champions League, with UEFA clearly prepared to cede more and more ground to the continent's biggest clubs in order to prevent a breakaway 'Super League' coming to fruition. There is widespread support for plans to revamp the group stage from 2024, as has been reported across the continent in recent days.

It is understood those plans would see the number of clubs taking part in the group stage increase from 32 to 36, with teams playing 10 group games instead of six in a so-called 'Swiss system' — one pool of 36 teams, with nobody playing anyone else more than once.

Teams will have to play as many as 19 games to win the trophy, compared to 13 now. The proposals are backed by the European Leagues organization, which last week said "the so-called 'Swiss Model' is an improvement compared to the more radical proposals that emerged in 2019", of four groups of eight.

Lesser of two evils?

The changes have been championed by Juventus chairman Andrea Agnelli in his role as head of the European Club Association. "Everything should be based on sporting merit, but we should remember where our fans of the future are. It is our strong view that more European matches are welcome," Agnelli said recently. "Do we want to approach the future with a nostalgic or a progressive view," he pondered. "I



PARIS: A giant banner reading "From L1 to the LDC (Champions League: we will support you until the final victory! Go Paris!" is displayed before the French L1 football match between Paris-Saint Germain (PSG) and Nice at the Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris on Saturday. —AFP

think it is our duty to think ahead and guarantee that football remains the best sport in the world."

A reformed Champions League is, in reality, the lesser of two evils compared to the possibility of a Super League. For despite the talk of sporting merit, Agnelli's Juventus and Europe's other financial heavyweights want to entrench a system that guarantees them access to the biggest competition there is. That is already the case.

The only club from outside the so-called 'Big

Five' leagues involved in this season's last 16 is Porto, twice European champions and still the last club from outside that elite to win the Champions League, in 2004. It would be a considerable surprise if they eliminated Agnelli's Juventus, for whom Cristiano Ronaldo is still the leading light aged 36. So much about the Champions League is predictable, but so much remains unpredictable, especially as the ageing Ronaldo and Lionel Messi approach the end of their glittering careers. —AFP

Lethal Messi leads Barca to win ahead of PSG test

MADRID: Barcelona might not be able to catch Atletico Madrid but they may fancy their chances against Paris Saint-Germain after Lionel Messi scored twice in a 5-1 thrashing of Alaves on Saturday. Messi fired in two sensational long-range efforts and would have had a hat-trick at Camp Nou had a dubious VAR decision in the first half not ruled Antoine Griezmann offside.

He did tee up a second of the night for the 21-year-old Francisco Trincao and was instrumental in Junior Firpo adding a fifth too, a flamboyant scoop freeing Griezmann to send a pass to Firpo at the back post. "Leo is focused, he's happy, he's ruthless. When we play those passes through the lines to him and he finds those gaps, everything is easier," said Ronald Koeman.

Victory means Barca trail Atletico by eight points again after the leaders temporarily pulled 11 clear thanks to a hard-fought 2-1 win over Granada earlier on Saturday. Atletico's win was a significant psychological boost on the back of slipping up for the first time in nine games at home to Celta Vigo earlier this week.

Their advantage may prove too big to close but Barcelona's Champions League tie against PSG, which had the French side as firm favorites when the draw was made in December, now feels harder to

call. The question is whether a free-flowing Barca attack, full of talent and orchestrated by Messi, can hurt PSG enough to make up for what remains a shaky defence, depleted by injuries and vulnerable to the counter-attack.

"We're in good form," said Koeman. "We keep creating chances and improving in all aspects of our game. PSG are a great team but I see the tie as very balanced. We go into it with confidence, knowing we need to be at our best to go through." With Gerard Pique and the emerging Ronald Araujo both out injured, Frenkie de Jong filled in again in central defense, although the Dutchman has arguably been Barcelona's most improved player this year in the midfield three. Instead there was a start for Ilaix Kourouma in midfield, the 18-year-old academy product who assisted Trincao's opening goal but whose misplaced pass led to Luis Rioja briefly giving Alaves hope.

After Trincao had swept home, Messi thought he had made it two, pouncing on a rebound after Griezmann missed but the goal was ruled out, even though replays suggested Griezmann was onside. Messi made amends soon after, latching onto a Sergio Busquets pass, darting in-field and ripping a shot in off the post.

Late flurry wraps up win

Rioja capitalised on Ilaix's mistake just before the hour but Barca pulled away with three goals in six minutes. Pedri's pass freed Messi but he failed to round Fernando Pacheco and instead the ball spilled out for Trincao to score his second. Messi slammed a stinging strike into the top corner from 25 yards to make it 4-1



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi takes a free kick during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and Deportivo Alaves at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Saturday. —AFP

before perhaps the goal of the night came last. Messi scooping over for Griezmann, who volleyed to the back post where Firpo could not miss. Atletico had earlier swerved a second consecutive slip by squeezing past Granada at Los Carmenes, a victory secured by Angel Correa's fortuitous winner in the second half.

There was a hint of luck in Granada's equalizer too, Yangel Herrera's shot deflecting off Marcos Llorente, who had himself put Atletico in front only three minutes earlier. "The most important thing today was the fight and the energy of the team," said Simeone afterwards.

At the full-time whistle, he shook his fists and sprinted down the tunnel, his

relief evident at the end of a game that could easily have seen more points dropped for his side. Luis Suarez had scored in six of the previous seven games but for once the 34-year-old was not the matchwinner, with Llorente and Correa — two unsung heroes this season — instead proving the difference.

Llorente's goal was his seventh of the season while his lay-off for Correa was his sixth assist. "As coaches trophies are wonderful because they fill you with excitement and glory," Simeone said of Llorente. "But when you work with a footballer and see them grow, you feel even more joy and more enthusiasm to keep doing what you're doing." —AFP

Man City extend lead, but Guardiola wary of paying the penalty

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola said he will address Manchester City's problems from the penalty spot despite Rodrigo scoring in a 3-0 win over Tottenham on Saturday to open up a seven-point lead at the top of the table. The in-form Ilkay Gundogan also scored twice before hobbling off with a groin injury that will concern City just 11 days before their return to Champions League action against Borussia Moenchengladbach.

Guardiola is already turning his attention to European competition and is wary that City's dismal penalty record will cost them when the fine margins matter most in a Champions League knockout tie. Rodrigo — who had not scored for nearly a year — took responsibility after Gundogan and Raheem Sterling missed spot-kicks in recent weeks. Hugo Lloris should have saved the Spanish midfielder's effort as the French goalkeeper got a hand to it. "I admire and love the courage to take it," said Guardiola. "But the taker was not good, we were lucky."

Guardiola has speculated that goalkeeper Ederson could take over penalty duties and said his stunning long pass to set up Gundogan's second goal shows why. "If he can play that pass from 70 yards he can shoot from 12. His quality of the shot is good," added Guardiola. "The Champions League is coming and when you miss it is so hard." Victory for City stretched their

record-breaking winning run for an English top-flight team to 16 in all competitions. Guardiola's men have a game in hand on second-placed Leicester.

Tired Tottenham

Spurs, by contrast, have now lost five of their last six to remain four points off the top four, despite fourth-placed Liverpool's struggles. The fortunes of both clubs have changed dramatically since Tottenham were the last side to beat City 23 games ago. Victory that day took Jose Mourinho's men top of the table, but they have won just four of their 14 league games since to slide to eighth.

The visitors were unfortunate not to go in front when Harry Kane's stunning free-kick came back off the post. Mourinho bemoaned that moment, plus the toll playing extra-time in a 5-4 defeat to Everton on Wednesday had taken on his team. "It was a fresh team against a very tired team," said Mourinho. "We hit the post and 1-0 could give us that fuel that you need when you are especially tired."

However, they had a mountain to climb against a City side that have conceded just twice in their last 11 league games once the hosts were gifted an opener. Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg clipped Gundogan's heels inside the box and referee Paul Tierney pointed to the spot midway through the first half. "One more of these modern penalties to put us in a difficult situation," added Mourinho.

Lloris was even more at fault for City's second when Gundogan's tame effort on his weaker left foot slipped under the goalkeeper's grasp on 50 minutes. It was City's stopper who then had a big part to play in the third as Ederson's superb long pass picked out Gundogan's run from midfield



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola (right) taps fists with Tottenham Hotspur's Portuguese head coach Jose Mourinho following the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Tottenham Hotspur at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, on Saturday. —AFP

and he turned Davinson Sanchez before slotting into the bottom corner for his 11th goal in his last 12 league games.

Mourinho turned to two of his forgotten men, Dele Alli and Gareth Bale, to try and make an impact off the bench in the final quarter. The Tottenham boss took exception to a social media post by Bale, showing him training, after the Welshman ruled himself out of his side's FA Cup defeat to Everton on Wednesday. Bale has struggled to make any meaningful impact in his second spell at the club on loan from Real Madrid, but the 31-year-old showed flashes of his old self with a brilliant jinking run that forced Ederson into a flying save to preserve his sixth consecutive clean sheet at the Etihad. —AFP

PSG warm up for Barca clash with narrow victory

PARIS: Moise Kean's goal gave Paris Saint-Germain a 2-1 win over Nice on Saturday as they shrugged off the absence of Neymar to provisionally go back to the top of Ligue 1, while title rivals Lyon were beaten at home by Montpellier.

Kean struck in the 76th minute for his 10th Ligue 1 goal since joining PSG on loan from Everton, handing Mauricio Pochettino's side the points after Julian Draxler's opener had been cancelled out by Rony Lopes at a freezing Parc des Princes.

It was a morale-boosting result for PSG, three days before they face Barcelona in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie, and it allowed them to go top of the table on goal difference from Lille, who played Brest at home yesterday. PSG also benefited from a slip-up by Lyon, who are two points off the pace in third after a shock 2-1 home defeat at the hands of a mid-table Montpellier side. "Today in the circumstances I think we need to be happy. We are in the position we need to be in," PSG coach Pochettino told Canal Plus. "I think we controlled the game and deserved the victory. We didn't play great but I think it was a very professional performance."

PSG are expected to be without Neymar for at least the next three weeks after the world's most expensive player came off with a groin injury in a midweek French Cup win at second-tier Caen, a huge blow ahead of the trip to Barcelona.

Angel di Maria will also be out for that game, and the Argentine watched the visit of Nice from the stands next to Marco Verratti, another key player on the injury list just now. PSG were knocked out of the Champions League in the last 16 in each of Neymar's first two seasons with the club, defeats against Real Madrid and Manchester United both coming after the Brazilian suffered an untimely injury.

'No excuses'

After reaching the final last season, the fear now is that another injury to their talisman could prove fatal to their hopes against Barcelona. "We are missing some important players but we have a squad in whom we can trust," insisted Pochettino. "It is always better when you have everyone available but of course we are going to try to win the game and there can be no excuses."

Pochettino handed starts to Kean and Mauro Icardi alongside Kylian Mbappe in attack against Nice, as PSG sported a pink and violet-colored fourth kit with player names on the back in Mandarin to mark the Lunar New Year. The new look inspired the home side to go in front midway through the first half thanks to Draxler, who followed up to net after Icardi had turned Thilo Kehrer's cross onto the post, the German scoring on his first league start since October.

However, Nice drew level five minutes into the second half when Marquinhos attempted a pass out from the back but only succeeded in finding Lopes, who picked up the ball on the edge of the box and fired high into the net. Keylor Navas then turned Amine Gouiri's shot onto the bar with PSG on the ropes, but Pochettino's side grabbed the winner with just under a quarter of an hour left, Kean heading in after Icardi had returned Mbappe's center back across goal. —AFP

Man Utd falter again at West Brom

Wolverhampton gain revenge on Southampton

LONDON: Manchester United's faltering Premier League title challenge suffered another blow in a 1-1 draw at struggling West Brom as Wolves eased fears they could be drawn into a relegation scrap with a 2-1 win at Southampton yesterday. United have dropped points in five of their last seven league games to allow Manchester City to pull seven points clear, with a game in hand.

A point was enough to nudge Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men back above Leicester into second on goal difference. But that was of little consolation to the Red Devils against a West Brom side that had conceded 24 goals in taking just one point from their previous seven home games. Indeed, it was Sam Allardyce's men who had the better chances to win the game and give their dwindling hopes of beating the drop a boost.

United made the worst possible start when Conor Gallagher swung in a cross and Mbaye Diagne outmuscled Victor Lindelof to power home a header after just 80 seconds. "We gave ourselves a tough start," said Solskjaer, whose side have fallen behind in eight of their 12 away league games this season. "You've got 90 odd minutes to make amends so there is no need to panic but I didn't feel we built that momentum until too late in the first-half. "Second-half there was only one-way traffic but still there were a couple of moments where we could have lost the game."

The visitors struggled to make the most of their dominance of the ball until Bruno Fernandes produced a moment of magic with a dipping volley on his weaker left foot a minute before half-time. Sam Johnstone denied Mason Greenwood and Scott McTominay had an effort cleared off the line as United pressed for a winner after the break.

But it was Diagne who twice should have won the game late on as he was denied when one-on-one with David de Gea before blazing an enticing low cross over the bar. Johnstone was required once more deep into stoppage time when he tipped Harry Maguire's header onto the post. The draw only took the Baggies to within



WEST BROMWICH: Manchester United's Uruguayan striker Edinson Cavani vies for the ball with West Bromwich Albion's English defender Kyle Bartley (left) at The Hawthorns stadium yesterday. — AFP

12 points of safety as they remained second bottom.

Wolves moved 15 points clear of the drop zone after coming from behind to continue Southampton's miserable run. The Saints had beaten Nuno Espirito Santo's men to reach the FA Cup quarter-finals in midweek and

made a promising start when Danny Ings converted Stuart Armstrong's cross. Scoring goals has been a problem for Wolves without the injured Raul Jimenez, but they were gifted an equalizer from the penalty spot when Ryan Bertrand was penalized for handball.

Ruben Neves stroked home the spot-kick before Pedro Neto's strike 25 minutes from time earned just a second win in 11 league games. Southampton, who topped the table earlier in the season, have lost six league games in a row to slip to 13th. — AFP



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