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for the **COVID-19 vaccine**

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# Bill to allow ‘understanding’ between employers, workers

Assembly to debate health measures, compensation, demographics



By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday that he and a group of lawmakers filed a draft law to allow employers and expat workers reach an “understanding” under the prevailing tough economic conditions. “Why should we reach the point of either firing (expat) employees or they sue their employers for non-payment of salaries,” Ghanem told reporters at the Assembly.

The proposed legislation would allow an employer and expat employees reach an agreement acceptable to both sides regarding payment of wages. Under Kuwaiti law, employers are not allowed to reduce the salary of their workers without their consent, and if they lay them off, the employers must pay full end-of-service indemnity.

But under the severe economic conditions triggered by the coronavirus pandemic, many busi-

nesses, especially small and medium ones, sustained heavy losses either due to closures or because of poor trading activity. In the previous Assembly, MPs filed a similar law calling to allow employers to reduce the salaries of their employees, but insisted that Kuwaitis working in the private sector must be excluded from any such actions. The law did not pass.

Ghanem urged the legislative and financial affairs committees of the Assembly to speed up studying and approving the bill to allow the Assembly to debate it and pass it. The speaker also said he and a group of lawmakers also filed another draft law calling on the government to compensate small- and medium-sized businesses affected because of the closures due to the coronavirus.

He said he expects the government to cooperate on approving the law in order to provide compensation for such businesses. Ghanem said the government should either allow businesses to

operate normally or compensate them.

The Assembly is due to convene a special session today to discuss the measures taken by the government and the way it is dealing with the new strain of the coronavirus. The Assembly will also discuss compensation for small businesses and government actions to rebalance the population structure, currently in favor of expats.

Meanwhile, MP Osama Al-Munawer yesterday submitted a proposal calling to distribute 25 percent of annual profits made by the state-run Public Institution for Social Security to Kuwaiti pensioners to help them cope with the high cost of living.

The legal and legislative committee yesterday rejected a draft law calling to grant Kuwaiti citizenship to widows and ex-wives of Kuwaiti men if they have children. The committee also decided to refer a number of draft laws dealing with bedoons or stateless people to the interior and defense committee.

## News in brief

### 1% vaccinated in Mideast

**CAIRO:** The World Health Organization said yesterday that only around one percent of the wider Middle East region’s population had received a first coronavirus vaccine shot. The UN body released its data for what it calls the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMRO) of nearly 600 million people, stretching from Morocco to Pakistan - but excluding Israel. — AFP

### Okonjo-Iweala named WTO boss

**GENEVA:** Nigerian economist Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was appointed yesterday as the first female and first African head of the World Trade Organization, at a special general meeting. “WTO members have just agreed to appoint Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as the next director-general,” the global trade body said, adding that the former Nigerian finance minister and World Bank veteran will take up her post on March 1. — AFP

### Iraq re-imposes partial lockdown

**BAGHDAD:** Iraq will re-impose partial lockdown measures until early March after detecting a new strain of the coronavirus, including among children, its health minister announced yesterday. Hassan Al-Tamimi said referred to the strain as the one “which spread in the UK”, and said it had been detected in some Iraqi children. — AFP

### Jaguar to go fully electric from 2025

**LONDON:** Jaguar, the Indian-owned luxury car brand, will produce only electric vehicles from 2025 and restructure its UK non-manufacturing operations, the company announced yesterday. “By the middle of the decade, Jaguar will have undergone a renaissance to emerge as a pure electric luxury brand,” — AFP

### Minaj’s dad killed in hit-and-run

**NEW YORK:** The father of rapper Nicki Minaj has died after being struck by a hit-and-run driver near New York City, police said Sunday. Robert Maraj, 64, was walking on a road in Mineola, Long Island at 6:15 pm on Friday when he was hit. The driver left the scene of the accident, and Maraj was taken to hospital, where he was pronounced dead on Saturday. — AFP (See Page 13)

## Turkey slams US after PKK executes 13 Turks in Iraq

**ANKARA:** Turkey yesterday accused the United States of supporting “terrorists” and summoned its ambassador after Washington declined to immediately back Ankara’s claim of Kurdish militants executing 13 of its nationals in Iraq. The Turkish interior ministry also announced the detention of hundreds

of people it accuses of links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) rebels that allegedly shot dead the 13 hostages in an Iraqi cave.

The PKK blamed Turkish airstrikes for the deaths in a diplomatically-charged episode that delivers an immediate challenge to the new US administration of President Joe Biden in the Middle East. Ankara on Sunday said the hostages - most of them soldiers and police - were executed as Turkish forces advanced in a rescue operation launched in the mountains of northern Iraq last week.

The Turkish anger was directed at a US State Department statement on Sunday saying Washington “deplores the death of Turkish citizens”

but awaits further confirmation of Ankara’s version of events. “If reports of the death of Turkish civilians at the hands of the PKK, a designated terrorist organization, are confirmed, we condemn this action in the strongest possible terms,” the State Department said.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan branded Washington’s response “a farce”. “You said you did not support terrorists, when in fact you are on their side and behind them,” he said in televised remarks. The Turkish foreign ministry then summoned US Ambassador David Satterfield to express Ankara’s displeasure “in the strongest possible terms”.

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Scuba divers approach a coral reef while on a dive in the Red Sea waters off the coast of Eilat on Feb 9, 2021. — AFP

## Red Sea reefs ‘under threat’ from oil deal

**EILAT:** Israeli environmentalists are warning that a UAE-Israeli oil pipeline deal threatens unique Red Sea coral reefs and could lead to “the next ecological disaster”. The agreement to bring Emirati crude oil by tanker to a pipeline in the Red Sea port of Eilat was signed after Israel normalized ties with the Gulf Arab nation late last year and should come into force within months.

With experts warning of possible leaks and spills at the ageing Eilat port, and the Israeli environmental protection ministry demanding “urgent” talks on

the deal, activists mobilized last week. They held a protest in a parking lot overlooking Eilat’s oil jetty against what they see as a disaster waiting to happen, chanting that profits will be made “at the expense of corals”.

“The coral reefs are 200 meters from where the oil will be unloaded,” said Shmulik Taggar, an Eilat resident and founding member of the Society for Conservation of the Red Sea Environment. “They say the tankers are modern and there won’t be any problem,” he said, warning however that “there’s no way there won’t be a malfunction”.

He predicted that with the projected arrival of two to three tankers a week, traffic will be “back-to-back”. This, he said, would also impact the aesthetic of a city promoting ecological tourism. “You can’t sell green tourism when you have oil tankers by the dock,” he said.

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## Former Argentine president Menem dies aged 90

**BUENOS AIRES:** Argentina’s former president Carlos Menem, who marked his country with a neoliberal approach to the economy, died in a Buenos Aires clinic on Sunday at the age of 90. Menem had been in poor health and was hospitalized several times in recent months for pneumonia. Incumbent President Alberto Fernandez, who declared three days of national mourning for Menem, tweeted his “deep regret” at the news of his passing and extended condolences to Menem’s family.



Carlos Menem

Menem was to be buried yesterday in the Islamic cemetery in Buenos Aires next to his son, Carlos Menem, Jr, who died in 1995 in a helicopter accident. The former president’s wake began Sunday night at the Congress building, where Vice President and Senate leader Cristina Kirchner received Menem’s family and coffin, draped with the Argentine flag. An emotional Fernandez and his wife, Fabiola Yanez, arrived an hour later and offered their condolences to the family. After that, the doors were opened to admit the hundreds of mourners lined up outside.

Born in July 1930 into a family of Syrian immigrants, which earned him the nickname “The Turk”, Menem prided himself on never having lost an election. He served two terms as president, from 1989 to 1999. After withdrawing from the race for a third term, he was elected to the Senate in 2005, and was re-elected several times since.

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## Local



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak yesterday at Bayan Palace. — KUNA Photos

## KNG Deputy Chief meets Dean of Diplomatic Corps



KUWAIT: Deputy Chief of Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received in his office yesterday Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Senegal to Kuwait Abdou Lahad Mbacke. The two sides highlighted the exceptional relations between Kuwait and Senegal, and discussed issues of mutual interest, Kuwait National Guard said in a press statement.

## Fire Force Chief meets Turkish Ambassador



KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force Chief Lt Gen Khaled Rakan Al-Mikrad received Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Ayse Hilal Sayan Koytak yesterday. Both sides discussed issues of mutual concern in the field of fire sciences and dis-

aster management, Kuwait Fire Force said in a press statement. Senior Kuwait Fire Force officials including Deputy Chief for Engineering and IT Affairs Maj Gen Mousa Akbar attended the meeting.

## FRONTLINE HEROES OF KUWAIT

### Student Art Competition 2021



It is our pleasure to welcome each and every youngster to our Student Art Competition. We hope that everyone is ready to create beautiful artworks and show support for our heroes of Kuwait! We're searching for great art – so get your paintbrushes, color pencils, crayons and markers ready. Let your talent flow and start painting. Good luck to our young artists!

- The competition is open to students aged 6-18 years with categories (6 - 8 years) (9 - 11 years) (12 - 14 years) (15 -18 years) and special abilities students.
- The competition is open to all schools in Kuwait (government and private).
- Submissions are open from February 14, 2021 till March 31, 2021.
- 5 winners from each category will receive valuable prizes.
- All participants will receive a certificate of appreciation.
- All schools and individuals interested in participating in this competition are welcome.
- You can use any drawing sheet, but of A3 size.
- All artwork must be hand drawn and not computer generated.
- All paintings should be submitted by email along with the participation form at [painting@kuwaittimes.net](mailto:painting@kuwaittimes.net) in PDF format ONLY.

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## Red Sea reefs 'under threat'...

Continued from Page 1

The Jewish state and the UAE established ties last year as part of the US-brokered "Abraham Accords". One of the deals that followed was a Memorandum of Understanding between Israel's state-owned Europe-Asia Pipeline Company (EAPC) and a new entity called MED-RED Land Bridge Ltd - a joint venture between Abu Dhabi's National Holding company and several Israeli firms.

In October, EAPC announced a "binding MoU" with MED-RED to bring crude from UAE to Eilat and then transport it by pipeline to Israel's Mediterranean city of Ashkelon for onward export to Europe. Taggar argued that deals benefitting the fossil fuel industry at the expense of the environment are "not in the spirit of our times". "It might have been appropriate in the 1960s

and 1970s, before we were a developed state," he said.

Activists argue the deal evaded tough regulatory scrutiny because of EAPC's status as a state-owned firm working in the sensitive energy sector. While coral populations around the world are under threat from bleaching caused by climate change, the reefs in Eilat have remained stable due to their unique heat resistance.

Eilat's coral beach reserve extends some 1.2 km off the city's coast, protecting reefs that are home to a rich variety of marine life. But their proximity to the EAPC port puts them at grave risk, Nadav Shashar, professor of marine biology at Beersheba's Ben Gurion University, told AFP.

The infrastructure is not set up to prevent accidents and only designed "to treat pollution once it's already in the water," said Shashar, who is also head of marine biology and biotechnology at Eilat's Interuniversity Institute for Marine Science. Shashar, one of 230 experts who petitioned Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu against the deal, argued that with the increase of shipments, "the result will be a constant leak of oil pollution". — AFP

## Former Argentine president Menem...

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Menem identified as a follower of Peronism, the leftist movement based on the legacy of former president Juan Peron that today covers a broad spectrum of political leanings in Argentina. He pursued an aggressive privatization policy that many saw to be in direct contrast to his stated political ideology.

His name is synonymous with the "Argentine miracle", a period when his decision to fix the exchange rate of the peso to the US dollar brought economic stability and an end to hyperinflation. But this approach is widely considered to have led to the economic crisis of 2001, when debt stood at \$100 billion, the country defaulted on repayment,

the currency's value plunged and unemployment skyrocketed.

By the end of Menem's second term, the public deficit stood at \$6 billion, unemployment was at 14 percent and poverty affected a third of the population. But things were to get worse. Menem cultivated a playboy image, drove a Ferrari, played golf and was a friend of the jet-set. Despised by the middle class for his flamboyance, the aficionado of luxury watches enjoyed both the admiration of the poor and the self-serving support of the wealthy.

He was widely criticized for extending a presidential amnesty to leaders of the military dictatorship of 1976-1983. His presidency was tarnished by multiple accusations of corruption and scandals. But while Menem was investigated in several cases, he never served jail time. In 2001 Menem was ordered held in pre-trial home detention for a case involving arms smuggling to Croatia and Ecuador, but he was freed weeks later under a Supreme Court ruling and ultimately let off. — AFP

## Turkey slams US after PKK...

Continued from Page 1

Later yesterday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu that "PKK terrorists" were responsible for the deaths of Turkish hostages in northern Iraq. "The Secretary expressed condolences for the deaths of Turkish hostages in northern Iraq and affirmed our view that PKK terrorists bear responsibility," State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

The PKK militants have been waging an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984 that is thought to have left tens of thousands dead. The group is recognized as a terrorist organization by Washington and most of Turkey's other Western allies. But Washington works in Syria with another Kurdish militia that Turkey views as a branch of the PKK.

A breakdown in peace talks between the PKK and Ankara in 2015 was followed by Turkish military cam-

paigns against the militants across the region and mass arrests of pro-Kurdish politicians and officials in Turkey. The Turkish interior ministry said yesterday that it had detained 718 people - including the heads of pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) - in cities and districts across the country in a series of coordinated raids.

The HDP is Turkey's second-largest opposition party. It denies all formal links to the PKK but also questions Turkey's account of the 13 deaths. We "express our deepest regret and condolences to the families and loved ones of those 13 people who by no means were capable of protecting themselves against an armed attack," the HDP said in a statement on Sunday.

The incident threatens to escalate tensions across Iraq and Syria while delivering an early test to Erdogan's relations with Biden. Turkey has long accused the Iraqi government of being too tolerant of the PKK. Ankara also wants Washington to renounce the Kurdish militia in Syria it has been backing against President Bashar Al-Assad because of its alleged links to the PKK. It instead wants Washington to reaffirm its support for Turkey's anti-terror campaign. — AFP



## Local

# Kuwait's COVID-19 infections jump by 823, six new deaths

## MoH categorically denies reports about safety of vaccines

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MoH) registered yesterday 823 additional COVID-19 cases over a 24-hour span, increasing the total number of infections to 178,524, while six fatalities were recorded, raising the death toll to 1,009. Plus, 772 fresh recovery cases were added to a total of 166,791 cured people, as the percentage of overall recoveries out of total infections showed a 93.4 percent survival rate, MoH's Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said during the 105th regular press conference.

Active cases amounted to 10,724 with 138 of them in intensive care units as of yesterday, the ministry confirmed. Health authorities conducted 8,935 swab tests to a total of 1,676,855, which meant that 9.2 percent of swab tests performed in 24 hours were positive, he revealed. Dr Sanad urged everyone in Kuwait to comply with the precautionary measures against the virus and maintain social distancing. He recommends that everyone should visit MoH's official accounts and official authorities in the country to view the instructions, recommendations, and everything that would contribute to crush the virus.

### Baseless reports

Meanwhile, the health ministry announced that there were no records of deaths, admissions at

intensive care units or "unexpected side-effects" from vaccinations that have been administered against the novel coronavirus in the country. Reacting to baseless reports that have gone viral on social media, the ministry has affirmed in a statement that the vaccinations accredited in Kuwait are effective and safe. "A specialized technical team

coronavirus vaccine as part of a deal that will see doses supplied on a weekly basis. With the arrival of more doses, Kuwait's vaccination campaign looks poised to reach its target of inoculating the "wider population," said Dr Abdullah Al-Bader, the ministry's Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Assistant Undersecretary. As more vaccination sites continue to open nationwide, in addition to some 15 centers launched to date, Kuwait's inoculation drive against COVID-19 is expected to move into higher gear, added the official. The vaccination centers will also be equipped with the easy-to-store Oxford/AstraZeneca shot, which has already been given the regulatory go-ahead in Kuwait, he said.

### Rise in Jahra

As coronavirus cases are on the rise in Jahra governorate, which previously used to have the lowest infection rate, health sources warned against complacency in complying with health protocols and gatherings, as some people believe the pandemic is over or has become less dangerous. Sources quoted in an Al-Rai Arabic daily report published yesterday warned against holding social activities such as weddings, dinner parties and condolence gatherings and frequenting and gathering at diwanis, adding that these are the main reasons for the increase in the spread of the virus, hospital



Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad

admittance and ICU cases. Sources said the number of COVID-19 wards at Jahra Hospital have been increased, with three operating now out of six designated wards, with a new ward operating weekly. The sources also warned against the poor rate of registration for the coronavirus vaccine by Kuwaitis in Jahra - the lowest in the country.

## Speaking about the problem is half the treatment: Psychologist

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** It's been a year since the first case of COVID-19 was registered in Kuwait. People are tired of the pandemic, which almost nobody expected would last this long. Although most businesses have resumed work, many didn't reopen, which caused huge losses for the owners and staff. The situation had a negative psychological effect on many people that even led to suicides.

Apart from losing jobs or businesses, even the fact of being somehow locked in the country and not be able to travel has had a great negative effect on people. This in addition to other activities that people have not been able to practice for almost a year, and it seems not anytime soon too.

At the beginning of the pandemic and imposition of a curfew, various groups of psychologists and psychiatrists started providing consultations online or through the phone to help people suffering from psychological problems or fears. But most of these volunteer groups stopped their services in the summer of 2020 when the situation improved.

But many people are still suffering, and doctors are still receiving patients. Kuwait Times spoke to

psychologist Dr Khaled H Al-Muhanadi to learn more about the continuing negative effects of the pandemic on people. "People felt relieved and comfortable during the positive curves of the pandemic, which was first in the summer when the number of new cases dropped, and the second was when we received the vaccine. People felt optimistic during these periods, hoping the pandemic will be over soon," explained Dr Muhanadi.

### Three phases

"People passed through three phases of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They experienced anxiety, loss of appetite, isolation and fear in the first phase. In the second phase, they slightly started adapting to convince themselves that the situation is getting back to normal, and started going out. Finally, people started accepting the situation and adapted to health measures, including wearing facemasks, washing hands and social distancing," he pointed out.

"Some people may experience a setback after some time. Such crises and natural disasters have different effects on different persons. The majority of people get well by themselves, but usually children suffer from fear and anxiety. These problems may grow with them and develop into new problems such as obsessive-compulsive disorder," stressed Muhanadi.

The present setback is that people feel as if they are back at the beginning of the pandemic. "There are three categories of people. The first group is

careless, and they will continue their life normally, even breaking the law and not respecting health measures - they are called the opposition. These persons are present in large numbers, but their number increases even more during a crisis or pandemic. These can be businesspeople for instance, who are used to having freedom, but now they can't perform normally," he said.

"The second category of people will enter into a psychological crisis and be affected negatively. The third are people who are disciplined, but may get close to the other categories due to the long period of crisis and start suffering from psychological problems. All of this depends on the government's procedures. If they don't explain the situation to the public, then more people will rebel against the laws and decisions of the ministry of health and won't accept the continuous lockdown and restrictive measures," he added.

### Speaking about it

Awareness is important. "People are suffering from PTSD and refuse to live in the same way as last year. These people need awareness. They



Dr Khaled Al-Muhanadi

should be transparent and speak about their problems honestly with us, and this is half the treatment. In general, speaking about their feelings and problems brings relief. Those who don't speak about their problems and consider this as shameful become isolated, and their problems persist. Suppression causes disease, but if they talk, it will relieve them," stressed Dr Muhanadi.

Rumors negatively affect our community. "Some social media networks will have news about the side effects of vaccines, for instance, while other media speak about the benefits. People will get confused, and this creates groups of anxious people who believe in conspiracy theories. Here comes the role of the official media to broadcast the correct news," he noted.

"I think that commitment and respect of measures will be much lower than at the beginning of the pandemic. Many people will not respect the rules. Also, when the vaccine arrived, over 68 percent of the population refused to get vaccinated. But today, after the media highlighted important personalities who got vaccinated, more people are willing to get the vaccine and the percentage of rejecters dropped to 54 percent. I suggest the media show those who are getting the vaccine and that they are in good health. Transparency is important during this crisis. Media should also interview those who got infected and how they contracted the virus. Also, people should see the patients who are suffering in the ICU. This is my message to the ministry of information," concluded Muhanadi.

### News in brief

#### Funeral visits timings set

**KUWAIT:** Director of the funerals affairs directorate at Kuwait Municipality Faisal Al-Awadhi issued a circular with regards to work at cemeteries and timings of visits and burials, effective Feb 17. Awadhi said that due to the current circumstances in the country and instructions of the Cabinet and health authorities to control the spread of the novel coronavirus, it decided that cemeteries will open for visits from 10 am to 2 pm, visit duration is 30 minutes only, masks must be worn and social distancing observed, burials can be held every 30 minutes and at any time as decided by cemetery officials in coordination with the deceased's relatives. Also, only three persons from the deceased's side can enter the corpse washing room, while only 20 first-degree relatives of the deceased can be present at the burial.

#### Institutional quarantine

**KUWAIT:** Deputy Director General for Kuwait International Airport Affairs Saleh Al-Fadaghi issued a circular to airlines operating at Kuwait airport that they will bear the cost of the PCR test of all passengers arriving at Kuwait airport through the "Kuwait-Mosafer" platform. The circular mentioned that the decision implements the Cabinet's order to impose institutional quarantine on all passengers arriving in Kuwait for seven days starting Feb 21. Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday. The circular added airlines must comply with the Council of Minister's decisions and not allow passengers to board if they do not meet all requirements mentioned in the decision and haven't registered on the said platform. Those in violation will face legal action.

#### Citizenship through fraud

**KUWAIT:** The Nationality and Passports Directorate General arrested a Syrian man who "bought" Kuwaiti nationality in 1986 for a large sum of money. He was sent to the investigations office for interrogation before referral to the public prosecution, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday. Nationality detectives received tips about a Syrian who obtained Kuwaiti nationality by fraudulent means. Investigations were carried out and the information was confirmed. As authorities prepared to arrest the suspect, he seemed to sense it and flew to Qatar, where he remained for three months. He was arrested upon his return. The suspect confessed to buying Kuwaiti nationality to enjoy its advantages.

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## News in brief

## Amir sends condolences

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah expressed his deepest sympathies on Sunday over the passing of former Argentine President Carlos Menem. In a cable he sent to Argentina's President Alberto Fernandez, His Highness the Amir remembered the deceased's "overwhelming" support for Kuwait, in addition to his innumerable accomplishments. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the Argentine president. — KUNA

## Premier congratulates Libya

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday congratulated over a phone call the newly-elected prime minister of the government of national unity of Libya, Abdulhamid Al-Dabaiba, wishing him success, and the State of Libya further progress and prosperity. The two sides also discussed the bilateral relations between the two countries. His Highness stressed Kuwait's keenness to support all efforts aimed at achieving stability in Libya and preserving its sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. The Libyan prime minister praised Kuwait's efforts in achieving stability, security and peace in Libya, hailing the strong bilateral relations between the two countries. — KUNA

# British Ambassador visits Al-Qurain Martyrs Museum

## 'One of the symbols of Kuwaiti resistance'



KUWAIT: British Ambassador to Kuwait Michael Davenport is seen during his visit to Al-Qurain Martyrs Museum.

KUWAIT: The British Ambassador to Kuwait Michael Davenport sent the following message to the press following a visit to Al-Qurain Martyrs Museum yesterday:

"Kuwait celebrates this month the 30th anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait. I thought it would be fitting to mark this occasion with a visit to one of the symbols of Kuwaiti resistance during this period and that is Al-Qurain Martyrs Museum. I would like to thank Dr Kamel Al-Abduljaleel, the Secretary General of NCCAL for hosting us during this visit. The story of Al-Qurain martyrs is the story of courage and self-sacrifice in the face of military might. It is a story, which will inspire Kuwaitis for many generations to come.

"The story of the Kuwaiti resistance is the story of the Kuwaiti people who stood up to the invading force to defend their families and country. Al-Qurain martyrs museum reflects this spirit of resistance and sacrifice. I'm honored to visit this museum to remember what happened during that day of February 1991 shortly before the liberation of Kuwait.

"The UK deployed over 50,000 troops, which was the largest single deployment since the Second World War. The British forces along with other allies entered Kuwait on February 24 to liberate Kuwait after seven long months of occupation. On the same day a group of 12 Kuwaiti men were martyred in Al-Qurain. 47 British personnel also lost their lives in the battle to liberate Kuwait and I'm proud that the sacrifice of those military personnel and the 12 Kuwaitis in Al-Qurain as well as other Kuwaitis

and other nationalities was rewarded with the liberation of Kuwait and its people.

"The British involvement in the liberation of Kuwait is another episode in history where the UK sent forces to defend Kuwait. The UK sent forces to defend Kuwait against a possible Iraqi military intervention in 1961. The British involvement in 1961 and 1991 reflects the UK's strong commitment to Kuwait's security and stability.

"While we remember the liberation of Kuwait, we also remember the suffering of the Kuwaiti people and the destruction of so much of their property and natural resources. The Kuwaitis with the support of friends and allies have won the war, but they have also won the battle of reconstruction thanks to their determination and fighting spirit.

"The visit to Al-Qurain martyrs museum gave me the opportunity to remember the past and reflect on how the Kuwaitis and the British fought shoulder to shoulder to liberate Kuwait. But we also build on this glorious past by enhancing current defense cooperation between the two countries. Both the UK and Kuwait have excellent defense relations, which are reflected in joint exercises and other forms of defense cooperation.

"I would like to conclude with the words of HM the Queen when she said 'our relationship runs deep and the United Kingdom is proud to have played its part in Kuwait's recent history.' As we played our role in Kuwait's recent history with the liberation of Kuwait, we are determined to play our role in Kuwait's future for many years to come."



## Municipal Council panel to preserve heritage

KUWAIT: The Municipal Council approved forming an interim committee to preserve the country's historic and heritage sites. The decision was taken at a session chaired by the deputy chairman Abdullah Al-Mehri yesterday. The five-member

temporary commission will be in charge of specifying heritage locations in the capital, in addition to pin pointing locations of neighborhoods in old Kuwait, as well as naming streets and all spots at the popular Mubarakia Market. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Scenes from yesterday's Municipal Council session. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

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Protests escalate after Myanmar's junta cuts internet, deploys troops

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## Republicans see 'battle for soul of party' after Trump acquittal



SEATTLE, Washington: A skier makes his way down a hill in Seattle, Washington. —AFP

# Wintry 'polar plunge' wallops much of US

## An 'unprecedented' winter storm system to sweep US this week

WASHINGTON: An "unprecedented" winter storm system will sweep the United States this week, the National Weather Service warned yesterday, with Arctic air driving a "polar plunge" that is expected to break record-low temperatures. The coast-to-coast cold front has already pushed its way across Canada and into parts of northern Mexico, and much of the continental United States has been shivering under chilly temperatures for days, with about half of all Americans now under some sort of winter weather warning.

Temperatures have dropped across the country, with only parts of the southeast and southwest dodging it. The cold snap has led to heavy snowfalls and ice storms that have caused a spike in electricity demand and power outages.

Ice on the roads was blamed for several deadly accidents including a 100-car pile-up in Texas last week that left at least six people dead. "Over 150 million Americans are currently under winter storm warnings, ice storm warnings, winter storm watches, or winter weather advisories as impactful winter weather continues from coast to coast," the National Weather Service (NWS) said.

"This impressive onslaught of wicked wintry weather across much of the Lower 48 (states) is due to the combination of strong Arctic high pressure supplying sub-freezing temperatures and an active storm track escorting waves of precipitation." At least seven states—Alabama, Oregon, Oklahoma, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi and Texas—have declared weather-related emergencies, CNN reported.

The NWS described conditions as an "unprecedented and expansive area of hazardous winter weather" that will set record lows. "Hundreds of daily low maximum and minimum temperatures have been/will be broken during this prolonged 'polar plunge', with some February and even all-time low temperature records in jeopardy," the NWS said. In a large area known as the Southern Plains that spans parts of Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas, temperatures are expected to fall as much as 45 degrees Fahrenheit (25 Celsius) below typical readings for the time of year.

Florida will remain the warmest spot in the continental United States, with highs above normal and temperatures generally around 80 Fahrenheit (27 Celsius). —AFP

## In one US city, vaccines for everyone 18 and over

CENTRAL FALLS, Rhode Island: Most countries are still only vaccinating the elderly and healthcare workers, but one US town hit hard by the coronavirus is already offering doses to everyone age 18 and over. Central Falls—with a population of 20,000 people in Rhode Island—is home to a large Hispanic population, many of whom are undocumented migrants. The city is one of the most densely populated places in the United States and is one of the areas in Rhode Island worst affected by the pandemic. The small East Coast state's government recommends that vaccines are only given to high-risk groups such as frontline workers and people over age 75. But Central Falls is going its own way, opening up vaccinations to all adults. "Everybody that lives or works here is a priority," Mayor Maria Rivera told AFP during a mass vaccination drive on Saturday.

The pandemic spread like wildfire through Central Falls' close-knit community, where it is common for multiple families to live under the same roof. The city is more than 66 percent Latino and 13 percent Black. Central Falls has recorded the highest rate of positive cases and hospitalizations in Rhode Island. More than 3,500 cases have been reported, with 21 deaths and 190 hospitalizations as of January. The health toll has also been compounded by an economic one. "At the beginning of COVID... there were so many residents that were losing their jobs, and they didn't have money and they couldn't apply for benefits," recalls Rivera. When vaccines became available in December, the city offered injections to over-75s, then over-65s, before lowering the age threshold to 50 and then slashing it to 18 in recent weeks.

### Right thing to do

"If we don't fix the problem, where the problem is, we are just going to continue spreading this disease," said Rivera. The city was preparing to administer around 700 doses at Central Falls High School on Saturday. Mayor Rivera's team has gone door-to-door making sure residents have all the information they need, including in Spanish and Cape Verdean Portuguese. "This was the first vaccination for the general public, probably the first in the nation," said Eugenio Fernandez Jr, founder of Asthenis, a pharmacy that works with low-income neighborhoods. When Suzanne Wallace, a nurse practitioner, learned about Central Falls' troubles, she knew she had to come volunteer to administer shots. "It felt like it's the right thing to do," she said. Dozens of locals sat on chairs more than six feet apart inside the school gymnasium, waiting to be observed after receiving their shot. —AFP



CENTRAL FALLS, United States: Close to 700 doses of the Moderna Covid-19 Vaccine will be given out today at Central Falls High School in Central Falls, Rhode Island. —AFP

## Kosovo anti-establishment party set for landslide win

PRISTINA, Kosovo: Kosovo's left-wing reformists were headed for a landslide victory in parliamentary elections, initial results showed yesterday, handing them a strong mandate for change from voters fed up with the political establishment. The opposition Vetevendosje (Self-determination) party took home around 48 percent of the vote, according to a tally of more than 90 percent of ballots cast in the Sunday vote.

The triumph nearly doubled the party's last electoral showing in 2019, reflecting a hunger for new leadership in troubled Kosovo. "This great victory is an opportunity to start the changes we want," the party's firebrand leader Albin Kurti, long a thorn in the establishment's side, said in a victory speech. "The election was indeed a referendum on justice and employment and against corruption and state capture," the 45-year-old added, while warning of "many obstacles" ahead. The snap poll came after a tumultuous year in which the coronavirus pandemic deepened social and economic crises in the former Serbian province, which declared independence 13 years ago after a separatist war led by ethnic Albanian rebels. Already one of Europe's poorest economies, Kosovo is now struggling through a pandemic-triggered downturn, with vaccinations yet to start.

But for Vetevendosje's supporters, Sunday's results sparked hope of better days, with fans honking horns, setting off fireworks and gathering in the main square in the capital Pristina to cheer their victory. The next two largest parties trailed far behind, with around 13 and 17 percent respectively for the ruling centrist Democratic

League of Kosovo (LDK) and the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) — a party of former rebels who have long dominated politics in the country. Both camps admitted defeat, with the LDK's outgoing Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti pledging to be a "constructive opposition" in parliament.

### Tear gas in parliament

Once known for provocative stunts such as unleashing tear gas in parliament, Vetevendosje began as a street movement in the 2000s protesting against local elites and international influence in Kosovo, which was a UN-protectorate after the war. It entered electoral politics in 2011 and has tamped down its more radical antics in recent years. The party ran on an anti-corruption platform, accusing past leaders of squandering Kosovo's first years of independence through graft and mismanagement while ordinary people suffered. For most of the past decade, Kosovo has been run by the former commanders who led the late 1990s rebellion against Serb forces.

If they were once feted as independence heroes, the political elite have now become the face of the social and economic ills plaguing the population of 1.8 million, where average salaries are around 500 euros (around \$600) a month and youth unemployment tops 50 percent. "The people are waiting for change, they are waiting for the removal of that which has hindered us, such as corruption and nepotism," Sadik Kelemendi, a doctor, told AFP before

via videolink. The meeting comes a year after France boosted its Sahel deployment, seeking to wrench back momentum in the brutal, long-running battle. But despite touted military successes, jihadists remain in control of vast swathes of territory and attacks are unrelenting.

Six UN peacekeepers have been killed in Mali this year alone, and France has lost five soldiers since December. Islamist fighters in the Sahel first emerged in northern Mali in 2012, during a rebellion by ethnic Touareg separatists which was later overtaken by the jihadists. France intervened to rout the insurgents, but the jihadists scattered, taking their campaign into the ethnic powder keg of central Mali and then into Burkina Faso and Niger.

Thousands of soldiers and civilians have been killed, according to the UN, while more than two million people have fled their homes. The crushing



PRISTINA: Supporters of Vetevendosje (Self-determination) movement celebrate their victory in the parliamentary election in Pristina on Sunday. —AFP

casting his ballot in snow-covered Pristina.

The former rebels were also weakened this year by the absence of top leaders, including ex-president Hashim Thaci, who were detained in November by a court in The Hague on war crimes charges dating back to the 1998-99 rebellion against Serbia.

### New generation

Vetevendosje now has a clear path to a ruling majority if they team up with minority parties, who are reserved 20 seats in the 120-member assembly, half for the Serb community. The party also finished first in the last 2019 election, but with little over a quarter of the vote they only lasted some 50 days in power before their shaky coalition with the LDK crumbled. The stronger showing this time has been attributed in part to Kurti's new alliance with acting President Vjosa Osmani, 38, who recently left the LDK to join Kurti, turning the two into charismatic duo on the campaign trail. —AFP

toll has fuelled perceptions that the jihadists cannot be defeated by military means alone.

Jean-Herve Jezequel, Sahel director for the International Crisis Group (ICG) think tank, told AFP that conventional military engagement had failed to deliver a knockout blow. The jihadists "are capable of turning their backs, bypassing the system, and continuing," he said. Last Tuesday, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian called for a "diplomatic, political and development surge" to respond to the situation. Last year, France upped its Barkhane mission in the Sahel from 4,500 troops to 5,100 — a move that precipitated a string of apparent military successes. French forces killed the leader of the notorious Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Abdelmalek Droukdel, as well as a military chief of the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM). —AFP

## France to meet Sahel leaders as it mulls troop drawdown

N'DJAMENA, Chad: France and five allies gathered yesterday to discuss the Sahel's jihadist insurgency, with Paris looking for support enabling it to cut French troop numbers in the strife-torn region. Leaders of the so-called G5 Sahel—Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger—are to attend the two-day summit in the Chadian capital N'Djamena, with French President Emmanuel Macron attending



## International

# Republicans see ‘battle for soul of party’ after Trump acquittal

## Stark divide facing Republican Party is on full view after impeachment vote

**WASHINGTON:** A day after the Senate acquitted Donald Trump in a historic second impeachment trial, America was weighing how long a shadow the former president will cast-over his party, and over the country. The Senate on Saturday voted 57-43 to convict Trump of inciting the January 6 assault on the US Capitol.

It was a stinging rebuke, with seven Republicans joining all Democrats in the most bipartisan impeachment vote ever, but it fell far short of the 67 votes needed for conviction. With Trump hinting afterward at a possible political future, even as other Republicans said it was time to move on, the stark divide facing the party was on full view.

One frequent Trump critic, Republican Governor Larry Hogan of Maryland, on Sunday predicted a “real battle for the soul of the Republican Party.” “This is not over,” he told CNN, adding he would have voted to convict Trump.

### ‘Need to work with Trump’

Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana was one of the seven Republicans to vote to convict; he predicted Sunday that Trump’s still-strong hold on Republicans would fade. “I think his force wanes... I think our leadership will be different going forward,” he told ABC’s “This Week.” Several Republicans, even while voting to acquit Trump, expressed dismay over his role on January 6 and in the weeks before, as he stoked anger with false claims the November election was stolen from him.

But one of the former president’s fiercest defenders, Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, insisted Sunday that Trump, with his fervent following, retains a huge political role as the party looks ahead to the 2022 midterm elections. He called Trump the “most vibrant member of the Republican Party,” adding, “We need to work with President Trump—we can’t do it without him.”

Despite Trump’s acquittal, Democrats insisted Sunday they had achieved a moral and political victory by securing some Republican votes in the Senate trial while permanently tarring Trump’s name and clearing the way for President Joe Biden to quickly advance his agenda.

“We clearly won in the court of public opinion,” Representative Don Beyer told CNN.

### Party base

Trump has flirted with the idea of running for the White House again in 2024. A conviction Saturday would have likely barred him from holding federal office again. Merely hinting at a possible run will keep him in political conversations—and allow him to continue raising large amounts of money.



**WASHINGTON, DC:** In this file photo the US Capitol Building is pictured January 20, 2017 in Washington, DC. A day after the Senate acquitted Donald Trump in a historic second impeachment trial, America was weighing how long a shadow the former president will cast — over his party, and over the country. — AFP

Yet a number of Republicans have distanced themselves from the former president, who after all lost the election to Biden by seven million votes while also seeing his party lose control of the Senate.

Several Republicans are lining up to seek the presidential nomination in 2024, and they are eager to leave him in the party’s past. One of them, Nikki Haley, a former governor who served Trump as ambassador to the United Nations, was blunt in an interview posted Friday by Politico, saying Trump was increasingly isolated and had “lost any sort of political viability.”

But Republicans who have openly opposed Trump have faced fierce blowbacks from the party’s base, and many remain fearful of his tendency to exact payback from critics. Trump has been deprived, however, of a key weapon he used against political enemies—Twitter. It is unclear whether he can generate the same levels of enthusiasm among Republicans as he did in the past.

And Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell—who voted against conviction, saying a former president could not be impeached—nonetheless identified another major challenge facing Trump.

In a blistering attack Saturday, McConnell said “there’s no question—none—that President Trump is practically and morally responsible for provoking the events” of January 6.

He stressed that as a civilian Trump faces potential civil and criminal legal vulnerability on a range of issues, adding: “He didn’t get away with anything yet.” As the party’s de facto leader now, McConnell seemed determined to quash any future role for Trump and try to guide Republicans back in a more traditional direction. Meantime, some members of both parties have called for creation of a bipartisan commission to examine the January 6 events—not unlike the panel that examined the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks—which could further tarnish Trump’s reputation.

Trump for now remains secluded in his Florida club. In his statement Saturday, he welcomed the verdict, denouncing the proceedings as “yet another phase of the greatest witch hunt in the history of our country.” He then added: “We have so much work ahead of us, and soon we will emerge with a vision for a bright, radiant, and limitless American future.” — AFP

quarantine system and provide another layer of security against new variants at the border,” Health Secretary Matt Hancock said in a statement on Sunday.

The minister said Monday the government had resolved well publicized problems with Heathrow Airport, Britain’s major aviation hub. “We’ve been working with the airport and with the border force to make sure everybody knows the process,” he told Times Radio. “We’ve worked through all those issues with them. And it does appear to be going smoothly this morning,” he added. The 11-night quarantine, costing £1,750 (\$2,420, 2,000 euros), includes transport, food, accommodation and security costs, as well as other essential services and testing.

Passengers must have a negative COVID-19 test result from within three days of travel, and book and pay for the package before setting off for Britain. They will then take further tests on the second and eighth days of their stays. The hotel occupants will be able to leave their rooms only in “very limited circumstances”, with exercise among them but requiring “special permission” from staff or security.

Anyone refusing to take tests risks a fine of between £1,000 and £2,000, while those who do not self-isolate could have to pay between £5,000 and £10,000. A limited list of exemptions from the measures include hauliers travelling from Portugal, defense personnel, government contractors and diplomatic missions.—AFP

## UK rolls out hotel quarantine for ‘high risk’ country returnees

**LONDON:** The UK government will introduce mandatory hotel quarantine rules for arrivals from dozens of countries deemed “high risk” for coronavirus variants, as it tries to stop new strains spreading. The new policy requires all UK citizens and permanent residents entering England from 33 countries on a wider travel ban list to self-isolate at their own expense in approved hotels for 10 days and take several COVID-19 tests.

Other visitors from the countries currently on the so-called “red list”, which includes all South American nations, South Africa and Portugal, are currently barred from visiting under lockdown rules. Arrivals found to have given false information about being in one of the countries 10 days before travel could receive up to 10 years in prison—which has drawn criticism for being excessive. The government says it has signed contracts with 16 hotels so far, securing nearly 5,000 rooms near English airports, with a further 58,000 rooms on standby. “The rules coming into force today will bolster the



**LONDON:** The UK government will introduce mandatory hotel quarantine rules for arrivals from dozens of countries deemed “high risk” for coronavirus variants, as it tries to stop new strains spreading. —AFP

## France ‘helped Rwanda genocide suspects escape’

**PARIS:** Authorities in Paris helped suspects in the 1994 Rwanda genocide to escape while under French military protection, according to a diplomatic cable, rekindling Kigali’s allegations France secretly supported Hutu forces behind the killings. The document, written by France’s envoy to Rwanda and obtained by AFP Sunday

from a lawyer researching France’s actions during the genocide, suggested that Paris knew suspects had sought refuge in a “humanitarian safe zone” controlled by French soldiers. The soldiers had arrived in June 1994 as part of the UN-mandated Operation Turquoise to stop the massacres that left at least 800,000 people dead, mainly among the Tutsi ethnic minority.

French envoy to Rwanda Yannick Gerard wrote to his superiors to ask what to do with the genocide suspects, in a cable found in the archives of an adviser to Francois Mitterrand, the French president at the time. “We have no other choice... but to arrest them or place them immediately under house arrest to wait for international judicial authorities to decide their case,” Gerard wrote, in excerpts of the cable first published by French investiga-

### News in brief

#### Biden call to reform US gun laws

**WASHINGTON:** US President Joe Biden on Sunday called on Congress to enact “commonsense” gun law reforms, three years after the school shooting in Parkland, Florida. “This administration will not wait for the next mass shooting to heed that call,” Biden said in a statement marking the Valentine’s Day shooting in 2018 that left 17 people dead and brought fresh attention to America’s lax gun laws. “We will take action to end our epidemic of gun violence and make our schools and communities safer.” Biden said he wants Congress to pass laws that would require background checks on all gun sales and ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. — AFP

#### Thousands of Haitians protest

**PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti:** Several thousand people demonstrated Sunday in the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince, saying the government was trying to establish a new dictatorship and denouncing international support for President Jovenel Moise. The protests were mostly peaceful, although a few clashes broke out between some demonstrators and police, who fired tear gas and rubber bullets. Protesters waved the national flag and chanted, “Down with the dictatorship!” Officials loyal to Moise claimed last Sunday they had foiled an attempt to murder him and overthrow the government. Police arrested 23 people, accusing them of an “attempted coup.” — AFP

#### DR Congo militia kills 11 civilians

**BUNIA, DR Congo:** Insurgents killed at least 11 civilians and three soldiers in the northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo on Sunday, the army said. Fighters from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) attacked the town of Ndalya in Ituri region, killing at least 11 civilians, Ituri province army spokesman Lieutenant Jules Ngongo said. He added that in the ensuing fighting “three members of the armed forces fell on the battlefield” and the troops “neutralized four ADF elements”. “The enemy retreated into the bush,” he said. “We are still pursuing them so that we can put the people out of danger.” — AFP

#### 1,000 Serbia clubbers defy COVID ban

**BELGRADE:** Around 1,000 partygoers were caught at a Belgrade nightclub flouting anti-virus restrictions in Serbia, which has banned gatherings of more than five people, the interior ministry said Sunday. Three suspected organizers were held for 48 hours, the ministry said in a statement. A report on RTS television said the three faced a fine as well as possible jail terms of up to three years. Flouting of the measures is fairly regular, but parties in the Balkan country of seven million rarely exceed a few dozen participants. Serbia’s cafes and restaurants must close at 8 pm. — AFP

#### Zuma snubs anti-graft panel again

**JOHANNESBURG:** South Africa’s embattled former president Jacob Zuma failed to appear yesterday before a judicial panel probing corruption during his nine-year tenure, again defying a court order for him to testify. Zuma, 79, who has snubbed previous summonses by the commission, refused to comply with the order from the constitutional court which ruled last month that he has to appear before the panel this week. The court in January ruled that Zuma had no right to remain silent during the proceedings. He accuses the commission of bias and has demanded that its chair, deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo, recuse himself from the anti-graft inquiry. — AFP

#### Nigerian president appeals for unity

**ABUJA:** Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari has vowed to protect all religious and ethnic groups in the country after deadly clashes erupted between different communities at a market in the southwest over the weekend. Long-standing rivalry over access to land and resources between northern Fulani herders and southern Yoruba farmers are behind renewed ethnic tensions across the south. At least one person was killed after a dispute erupted on Friday at Shasha market in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo state. Buhari in a statement late on Sunday “condemned such violence and gave assurance that his government will act decisively to stop the spread of any such violence.” —AFP



**CENTRAL FALLS, United States:** In this file photo Doris Norman is inoculated with the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine by nurse practitioner Suzanne Wallace at Central Falls High School in Central Falls, Rhode Island.— AFP

## A dark past clouds COVID vaccine for African Americans

**WASHINGTON:** Gary Jackson doesn’t want the COVID vaccine even though the virus kills Black people at a starkly higher rate—a daunting problem experts say the United States must confront in controlling its disastrous outbreak. By some measures, African Americans have died from coronavirus at the highest rate of any group in the country. Yet they are also the most skeptical of getting the new vaccines, which have been shown to be safe and effective in trials. It is a dangerous situation with roots in racism and broken trust, but which is key to curbing the emergence of worrying new strains and saving lives from the world’s biggest outbreak. “I’m just not sure (getting vaccinated) is in my best interest,” said Jackson, 39, as he repaired a car window in the capital Washington. “I feel like we are always last or are guinea pigs, the ones that get tested on,” he added.

Whether people trust the medical establishment and its treatments weighs heavily in their decision whether to get vaccinated, yet racism in America taints both areas.

### Fear of vaccines

A notorious example is the Tuskegee study, in which US government scientists monitored Black men with syphilis for 40 years starting in 1932, but didn’t give them treatment in order to observe the infection take its course. Tuskegee, however, wasn’t an isolated incident. “Dangerous, involuntary and nontherapeutic experimentation upon African Americans has been practiced widely and documented extensively at least since the 18th century,” according to Harriet A. Washington’s 2006 book “Medical Apartheid.” The Nation of Islam, which the Southern Poverty Law Center considers a hate group, has employed this grim past to urge African Americans to boycott the COVID-19 shot.

“Don’t let them vaccinate you with their history of treachery through vaccines,” says a Nation of Islam webpage that includes a Tuskegee study photo of a Black man with a syringe stuck in his arm. Figures released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in February said 46.5 percent of Black people don’t intend to get the COVID vaccine, compared with 32.4 percent of Hispanics and 30.3 percent of whites. —AFP



## International

# Protests escalate after Myanmar's junta cuts Internet, deploys troops

## Suu Kyi to face court this week: Lawyer

**YANGON:** Myanmar's junta deployed extra troops around the country and choked the internet yesterday as it intensified a crackdown on anti-coup protests, but defiant demonstrators again took to the streets. The military has steadily escalated efforts to quell an uprising against their seizure of power two weeks ago, which saw civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi detained along with hundreds, including members of her democratically elected government. The generals imposed an hours-long internet shutdown yesterday morning and ratcheted up the military's presence across the country overnight, including armored vehicles in Yangon, the nation's commercial hub and biggest city.

But fresh protests again flared in the city, including near the central bank where troops were deployed. "Patrolling with armored vehicles means they are threatening people," said 46-year-old Nyein Moe, among the more than one thousand gathered in front of the bank. "People are marching on the streets and they don't care to be arrested or shot. We can't stop now. The fear in our mind is going away." Hundreds of engineering and technology students also protested in a northern district of Yangon, according to an AFP journalist.

Meanwhile, Myanmar's deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi will appear in court via video conference this week over charges brought against her by the new military junta, her lawyer said yesterday. Army chief General Min Aung Hlaing has justified the February 1 coup by alleging widespread voter fraud in November's elections, which Suu Kyi's National

League for Democracy (NLD) party swept. Two days after the putsch, the 75-year-old Nobel laureate was hit with the unusual charge of violating Myanmar's import and export law, after a search of her house found walkie-talkies.

President Win Myint-who, like Suu Kyi, was detained in a dawn raid on February 1 — was charged with violating coronavirus restrictions when he took part in a campaign event last September that drew hundreds. Monitoring group NetBlocks reported that a "state-ordered information blackout" had taken Myanmar almost entirely offline early yesterday. Internet connectivity was later restored around the start of the working day, with Netblocks saying the blackout lasted around eight hours. But the monitor noted that most users in Myanmar were still barred from social media.

### Declaration of war

Intensifying fears the military was going to impose a far harsher crackdown, troops in the northern city of Myitkyina fired tear gas then shot at a crowd on Sunday night. A journalist at the scene said it was unclear whether police had used rubber bullets or live rounds. Local media outlets said at least five journalists monitoring the protest were detained and released yesterday. They also published pictures of some people wounded in the incident. A joint statement from the US, British and European Union ambassadors urged security forces not to harm civilians.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres echoed



**YANGON:** A protester holds up a poster featuring Aung San Suu Kyi during a demonstration against the military coup at in front of the Central Bank of Myanmar in Yangon yesterday. —AFP

that call. Through his spokesman, he also asked the military to "urgently" allow Swiss diplomat Christine Schraner Burgener to visit Myanmar "to assess the situation first hand". The US embassy advised American citizens to shelter in place and not risk

defying an overnight curfew imposed by the regime. UN special rapporteur Tom Andrews said the junta's efforts to rein in the burgeoning protest movement was a sign of "desperation" and amounted to a declaration of war against its people. —AFP

## Auckland enters lockdown as UK variant found

**AUCKLAND, New Zealand:** New Zealand's biggest city began a snap three-day lockdown yesterday, forcing two million people to stay at home, as authorities scrambled to contain the nation's first outbreak of the highly contagious UK variant. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern ordered the 72-hour lockdown for Auckland after three family members were found to be infected in the North Island city. Schools and non-essential businesses have been forced to close and residents barred from leaving the city except for a few essential reasons.

The health ministry said genomic sequencing has since showed two of the cases were caused by the strain that was first detected in Britain. Tests from the third person were still pending. "This result reinforces the decision to take swift and robust action around the latest cases to detect and stamp out the possibility of any further transmission," the ministry said. Authorities said testing of the family's close contacts had so far found no further cases, raising hopes the lockdown will end quickly.

But health officials are still unsure how the strain entered the largely coronavirus-free country. New Zealand's director-general of health, Ashley Bloomfield, said the initial focus was on the mother's workplace at a company providing laundry services to international flights—"because of its obvious connections to the border". He cautioned it was "too soon to rule in or out" any source of transmission



**AUCKLAND:** The restaurant and bar area of Wynyard Quarter, normally busy with America's Cup crowds, is deserted as the city enters a level 3 lockdown in Auckland yesterday. —AFP

and the woman had not been at work for eight days before testing positive.

### 'Not again'

As tracing and testing ramped up, the streets of central Auckland were largely empty yesterday, with torrential rain helping to discourage people from venturing outdoors. Coronavirus testing centers were busy, though, and there were long lines of vehicles stopped at police roadblocks as people tried to leave the city despite the lockdown. Auckland has been ring-fenced from the rest of New Zealand, with travel in and out of the metropolis highly restricted for the next three days.

Neighboring Australia also suspended a quaran-

tine-free travel "bubble" with New Zealand for the duration of the lockdown. It was the first clampdown in nearly six months in the Pacific island nation, which has been widely praised for its handling of the pandemic with just 25 deaths in a population of five million. The remainder of the country was placed on a lower alert level, with people required to wear masks on public transport and gatherings limited to a maximum of 100 people. "I know we all feel the same way when this happens-not again," Ardern said as she announced the measures on Sunday. "But remember, we have been here before, that means we know how to get out of this-together." Ardern's office meanwhile announced that the first batch of coronavirus vaccines arrived in New Zealand yesterday. —AFP

## Catalan separatists boost majority in Spain regional poll

**BARCELONA:** Catalan separatist parties boosted their parliamentary majority in a regional election that was overshadowed by the pandemic and marked by low turnout, more than three years after a failed bid to break away from Spain. With Spain still grappling with a third wave of coronavirus infections, the vote in the wealthy northeastern region was held under tight restrictions to reduce the risk of contagion.

With 99 percent of the votes counted, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's Socialists won the most votes but the three separatist parties together were set to get 74 seats in the 135-seat assembly. That is up from 70 seats won in the last election in December 2017, just months after Catalonia's failed secession bid which led to the jailing of several separatist leaders.

To reduce the risk of virus transmission in the region, polling stations were set up in spacious venues like food markets, the area around FC Barcelona's football stadium and the bullring in Tarragona. Voters had to wear face masks, use disinfectant gel provided at polling stations and stand apart while lining up in rainy weather to cast their ballots. During the last hour of voting, which was reserved for people infected with COVID-19, polling station workers wore gloves, facial screens and white protective gowns.

The Socialists had 33 seats, up from 17 in the last vote when they finished fourth. Sanchez had hoped the election-Catalonia's fifth in a decade-would end separatist rule in the region which accounts for a fifth of Spain's economy.

He fielded his health minister Salvador Illa as his candidate in the hope that his high profile in the fight against the pandemic would help win votes. While separatist parties have been deeply divided over strategy since the failed secession bid, they were not punished by voters and for the first time



**BARCELONA, Catalonia:** In this handout photo released by the Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSC), the party's candidate Salvador Illa (right) and PSC leader Miquel Iceta celebrate their results in the regional elections in Catalonia. —AFP

won over 50 percent of the vote, against 47.5 percent four years ago. The more moderate ERC got 33 seats, the hardline JxC got 32 and the radical CUP nine seats.

### 'Amnesia' jibe

The result leaves the ERC's main candidate, 38-year-old jurist Pere Aragonès, best placed to become Catalonia's next leader. "We have stopped an operation by the (Spanish) state to expel separatists from institutions," he said after the results were announced.

Illà had argued it was "time to turn the page" after over a decade of Catalan nationalists governments focusing on separatism but Aragonès dismissed his approach during the campaign as "amnesia". He has said his party would not turn the page while independence leaders remained in jail over the failed secession bid. Catalonia is currently governed by a coalition led by JxC, which is prone to confrontation with Madrid, and the ERC, which is open to dialogue and has helped Sanchez's minority government pass laws at the national level. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Bali police hunt fugitive Russian

**DENPASAR, Indonesia:** Indonesian police are on the hunt in Bali for a Russian fugitive wanted by Interpol after he escaped from custody while waiting to be deported from the resort island, authorities said yesterday. CCTV footage released by the authorities showed Andrey Kovalenko sneaking out of the immigration office in Denpasar detention center on Thursday while officials were busy finishing his transfer paperwork, and running outside. Police said Kovalenko was wanted by Interpol but declined to specify what crime he committed overseas. "We are still investigating this case and we have deployed all our resources" to search for him, Bali police's head of general crimes, Djuhandani Rahardjo Puro told a press conference yesterday. —AFP

#### SK coastguard ex-chief acquitted

**SEOUL:** A former South Korean coastguard chief was cleared of negligence yesterday over bungled rescue operations for one of the country's deadliest maritime disasters, when more than 300 people were killed, most of them schoolchildren. The Sewol ferry capsized off the south coast in April 2014, and many of the students—who were on a school trip—obeyed orders to stay in their cabins as the vessel slowly sank. The disaster triggered public fury when it emerged that then-president Park Geun-hye was uncontactable for several hours as the incident unfolded. The Seoul Central District Court found Kim Suk-kyoon, who led the coastguard at the time, not guilty in connection with the botched rescue efforts. —AFP

#### Indonesian landslide kills four

**JAKARTA:** At least four people have died and 14 are missing after a landslide caused by torrential rains swept away several homes in Indonesia, officials said yesterday, with hundreds forced to flee their flooded homes. Twenty-one people were initially reported missing, but three individuals were rescued after the disaster that struck Sunday evening in a rural part of East Java. Indonesia's Search and Rescue Agency said it had found four bodies, but were still looking for 14 people reported missing. —AFP

#### Baby death in monkey attack probed

**CHENNAI:** Police in southern India said they were probing the death of an eight-day-old baby after monkeys allegedly threw the child from the roof of her home. The police told AFP on Sunday that twin infant girls were sleeping at their house in Tamil Nadu state when they were attacked by monkeys on Saturday. Their mother, Bhuvaneshwari, heard the children crying, saw them being taken from the bedroom and then started screaming, a police official said. She rushed to the outside terrace and saw the monkeys with the children on the roof. —AFP

#### Czech PM's party loses ranking

**PRAGUE:** Billionaire Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis's populist party lost top spot in opinion polls for the first time since 2017, a survey showed Sunday, as his government was accused of a bungled response to the coronavirus pandemic. The centrist populist ANO (YES) movement scored 26.5 percent voter support in a poll published by public broadcaster Czech Television eight months ahead of a general election scheduled for October. —AFP

## Himalaya flood disaster hits Delhi water supply

**NEW DELHI, India:** Fallout from a devastating flash flood in a remote north Indian valley hit the capital New Delhi more than 500 kilometers downstream yesterday, when water supplies were cut to tens of thousands of residents. Authorities blamed the high quantities of mud and debris from the February 7 deluge, which left more than 50 dead and 150 missing, for the shortages.

The Rishiganga valley in Uttarakhand state is 530 kilometers upstream to the northeast of Delhi but its water is a key supplier for the capital. Authorities would not say how long taps would be shut down. The flood swept through the valley devastating a power complex and destroying roads and bridges. Rescuers are just starting to pull out bodies from a tunnel engulfed by mud and debris where more than 30 workers were believed to be trapped. The flood is believed to have been triggered by a chunk of glacier sliding down a mountainside or a glacial lake breaching its banks. Water from the valley flows into the Ganges and from there to Delhi.

Raghav Chadha, vice-chairperson of Delhi's water board, urged residents to use water "judiciously" as two of the city's main water treatment plants were unable to operate at full capacity due to the dirty raw water. He said teams were "deployed round the clock" cleaning filters and "flushing high ammonia raw water". Delhi, which has a population of over 20 million, faces water shortages every summer. Sixty percent of the water supplied in Delhi comes from the Yamuna River and about 34 percent from the Ganges. Both have faced severe pollution problems in recent years. —AFP



TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2021

# Business

## Pandemic threatens New York's iconic yellow taxis

### School closures, tourism woes and working from home culture hit rides

**NEW YORK:** They were omnipresent on the streets of New York day and night, as emblematic of the Big Apple as the Empire State Building or Yankees caps. But the pandemic has made yellow taxis scarce and facing an uncertain future. On a February morning in a parking lot near La Guardia Airport, a few dozen of the yellow cabs patiently queue in the freezing cold to catch a fare from one of the terminals.

"This lot used to be full with hundreds of cabs and even a line outside," says 65-year-old Joey Olivo, recalling the days before coronavirus. "Now there is only about 50 and you wait two hours, when before you'd wait 20 minutes," adds Olivo, a taxi driver for three decades.

Widespread working from home, school closures and no tourists means rides have plummeted for Olivo, as they have for all of New York's cabbies. "It's been pretty bad. My earnings dropped 80 percent. I went from making maybe \$1,000 a week to making two or 300 dollars a week," he told AFP.

Olivo, who lives in Brooklyn, is trying to put a brave face on his situation, joking that he is lucky his wife "makes good money" as a nurse, otherwise "I would have had a rope around my neck."

#### 'Free fall'

New York taxi drivers, most of whom are first-generation immigrants, were once able to make \$7,000 a month or more if they worked long hours seven days a week. Competition from Uber, Lyft and other vehicle-for-hire firms had already drastically dented their income, but with the pandemic it is in "free fall," says Richard Chow, a 62-year-old taxi driver originally from Myanmar.

Chow is not feeling the press as much as most,

because he bought his license, called a "medallion" in New York, for \$410,000 in 2006. In the years that followed, medallion prices soared, inflated by a nexus of bankers, investors and lawyers.

In 2009, his younger brother Kenny Chow paid \$750,000 for his license. In 2014, the cost of medallion reached \$1 million. The arrival of thousands of new drivers working for Uber and others has caused the medallion bubble to burst and condemned thousands of cabbies who had bought medallions at a high cost on credit to fall into debt or bankruptcy. Kenny Chow and at least seven other drivers, including of black cars and limousines, committed suicide in 2018, underscoring a dire situation that has been worsened by the pandemic. "The pandemic has just been devastating," said Bhairavi Desai, executive director of the Taxi Workers Alliance.

"Before the pandemic, ridership had been down by 50 percent. Since the pandemic, it's down closer to 90 percent," she said. "The parts of the city that are the most deserted are the parts of Manhattan where drivers depend on in order to earn their living, and the airports," Desai added.

Hence the scarcity of yellow taxis. Out of some 13,000 licenses, only about 5,000 taxis are running regularly at the moment, according to the union. Some 7,000 others aren't even leaving their garages. According to William Pierre, a driver from Haiti, it is no longer profitable.

He continues to drive even though his daily earnings barely exceed \$100 to \$150, which he shares 50/50 with the company that leases the car to him. "I don't want to stay home. I want to be out there to feed my family," he says. So could the yellow taxis, which replaced checkered-striped cabs in the 1960s, actually disappear?



A yellow cab taxi driver walks between cars as he waits in line at a taxi hold at LaGuardia Airport in New York City. —AFP

#### 'Cultural icon'

Olivo and Pierre believe business will pick up eventually, even though they agree it will never be the same again. Desai fears yellow cabs "will slowly phase out" if the city government does not erase drivers' debts. Her union is stepping up protests and dozens of drivers briefly blocked traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge on Wednesday.

"You know you are in NYC when you see that yellow," says Desai, adding that the taxis are famous

the world over. "It's a cultural icon... a 24-hour service that is part of the economic, social and cultural fabric of our beautiful city." New York's Democratic mayor, Bill de Blasio, has promised to help the taxi drivers provided the city, economically ravaged by the pandemic, is bailed out by the federal government. "If we can get the kind of stimulus support we deserve. I think it opens the door to coming up with a solution to help taxi drivers and families who have suffered so much," he said on Wednesday. —AFP

## Tech giants 'close' to deals with Australian media

**SYDNEY:** Google and Facebook are "very close" to deals with major Australian media to pay for news, a top government official said yesterday, as the tech giants scramble to avoid landmark regulation.

Australian Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said talks with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Google CEO Sundar Pichai had made "great progress" in resolving a standoff being closely watched around the world. Australia is poised to adopt legislation that would force digital companies to pay for news content, something that would create a global precedent and, according to Facebook and Google, wreck the way the internet works.

The companies have threatened to partially withdraw services from the country if the rules become law, sparking a war of words with Canberra. But that disagreement appeared to ease Monday, with Frydenberg telling public broadcaster ABC that talks with the companies "made great progress over the course of the weekend". "I think we're very close to some very significant commercial deals," he said, "and in doing so that will transform the domes-

tic media landscape."

The agreements could be enough to see Facebook and Google avoid the most severe parts of the legislation—including binding arbitration to ensure they are not using their online advertising duopoly to dictate terms in deals with media companies. Following Frydenberg's remarks, SevenWest Media, owner of broadcaster 7NEWS and The West Australian newspaper, announced Monday a new agreement for its content to be hosted on Google's News Showcase product.

The Sydney Morning Herald reported the first major deal with a large Australian news organization was worth more than Aus\$30 million (US\$23 million) a year. SevenWest chairman Kerry Stokes said it was a "great outcome" and hailed the government's work on its news media bargaining code as "instrumental in the outcome of this ground-breaking agreement".

The firm will join several smaller local publishers on News Showcase, which Google said had received more than one million views since launching in Australia eight days ago.



Google and Facebook face a crackdown in Australia over using content from media organizations. —AFP

Frydenberg's comments suggest major Australian media organizations, such as Rupert Murdoch's News Corp and Nine Entertainment, could be close to reaching similar deals. A Google spokesman said the company was in discussions with publishers both "large and small" while a Facebook spokesperson said the firm had been negotiating to "land commercial deals that reflect the commercial value of news content on our platform". Peter Lewis, director of the Centre for Responsible Technology at the Australia Institute think tank, said the

platforms' current willingness to negotiate showed regulation was "essential".

"Any deals that Google and Facebook do will only occur because of the prospect of the bargaining code-so it is already doing its job," he said. Frydenberg hinted to local media that amendments could be made to the code before it is presented to parliament Wednesday, but his office declined to provide details. Lewis said the treasurer's discretion on what to include in the code-such as designating which tech firms are covered-was "a critical leverage point for the government". —AFP

## China overtakes US as EU's biggest trading partner

**BRUSSELS:** China last year overtook the United States as the EU's biggest trading partner, the EU statistics agency Eurostat said yesterday. Britain meanwhile, which is no longer part of the European Union, was the third-largest trading partner for the bloc, behind China and the United States, the agency said.

The supremacy of China came after it suffered from the coronavirus pandemic during the first quarter but recovered vigorously with consumption even exceeding its level of a year ago at the end of 2020. This helped drive sales of European products, particularly in the automobile and luxury goods sectors, while China's exports to Europe benefited from strong demand for medical equipment and electronics.

The dethroning of the US comes as the EU and China are seeking to ratify a long-negotiated investment deal that would give European companies better access to the Chinese market. Eurostat said the trade volume with China reached 586 billion euros (\$711 billion) in 2020, compared to 555



BRUSSELS: China last year overtook the United States as the EU's biggest trading partner, the EU statistics agency Eurostat said yesterday. —AFP

billion euros (\$673 billion) for the US. The agency said EU exports rose by 2.2 percent to 202.5 billion euros while at the same time, imports from the People's Republic of China increased by 5.6 percent to 383.5 billion euros.

EU exports to the United States fell by 13.2 percent in the same period and imports by 8.2 percent. In addition to the COVID-19 crisis, transatlantic trade has been impaired by a series of tit-for-tat feuds that have resulted with tariffs being on steel and products such as French champagne or Harley-Davidson motorcycles. Eurostat said trade with the UK plummeted in 2020, the year Britain officially left the bloc, though it was in a transition period to blunt the effects of Brexit until December 31. —AFP

## WTI crude breaks \$60 a barrel on oil supply worries

**HONG KONG:** US oil prices rallied past \$60 a barrel yesterday for the first time in more than a year, fuelled by concerns about supplies as Texas is hit by a severe cold snap that traders warn could slash output. West Texas Intermediate surged 2.19 percent to \$60.77 in Asian trade, its highest since January last year before the oil market collapsed as the coronavirus pandemic battered demand.

Crude has been rallying for months on the back of optimism over an expected recovery in the global economy, Joe Biden's stimulus package, and hopes that slowing virus infection rates and vaccine roll-outs will see a surge in demand as life gradually returns to a semblance of normality. Brent broke the \$60 marker last week, while both contracts have rallied more than 20 percent since the start of the year. A decision by OPEC and other major producers to slash output last spring has also provided crucial support, particularly after prices crashed into negative territory in the early days of the pandemic. Saudi Arabia's announcement last month that it would reduce production even further in February and March added to the price gains. —AFP

## World's biggest wealth fund makes push for more women on boards

**OSLO:** Norway's sovereign wealth fund, one of the world's biggest investors, wants to see more diversity, especially gender equality, on the boards of the companies in which it invests, a document published yesterday showed. "The board (of a company) should have a diversity of competences and backgrounds," read a new policy document from the fund, the world's biggest with more than \$1.3 trillion in assets.

"Boards where either gender has less than 30 percent representation should consider setting targets for gender diversity and report on progress," it said. The policy document also reviewed the arguments for and against diversity.

On the one hand, diversity enriches the decision-making process with a variety of points of view, it illustrates the quality of the recruiting process which is not limited to a small circle, and it increases the legitimacy of decision-makers. On the other hand, the effects of diversity on financial earnings are not yet documented in serious academic studies, it can complicate recruiting by eclipsing other competences, and the process of feminisation is already ongoing without the involvement of shareholders. The fund's management concluded that "diversity will likely bring additional perspectives and approaches to the board's discussions and ultimately improve the quality of its decision-making process," it said.

"While there are many different dimensions to diversity, we are particularly concerned by persistent under-representation of women on boards," it added. With holdings in some 9,200 companies, the fund-yesterday valued at 11.14 trillion kroner (\$1.32 trillion, 1.09 trillion euros) — controls the equivalent of 1.5 percent of the world's market capitalization. Its decisions are closely watched by other investors and are therefore highly influential. Several countries, including Norway, France, Germany and the Netherlands, have imposed quotas to ensure that more women are represented on boards of directors. —AFP





## Business

## NBK Economic Report

# Kuwait credit growth at 3.5% in 2020 following a weak Q4

## Business lending growth muted in Q4, ending year at 3.5%

KUWAIT: Domestic credit ended the year on a weak note, falling by 0.6 percent in Q4, with growth at 3.5 percent in 2020. After a strong run in Q3, the increase in household lending normalized in Q4 while business credit growth turned negative.

Business lending was weak in Q4, with growth standing at 3.5 percent in 2020 (+4.3 percent in 2019). The “other” business credit category (presumably credit to sectors that do not fall under any of the mentioned categories and credit to conglomerates) grew by 9.1 percent in 2020, accounting for 35 percent of the increase in business credit in the year, while credit to the oil and gas sector expanded by 8.4 percent in 2020. Real estate, the sector’s heavyweight, increased by 3.5 percent to account for 43 percent of total busi-

ness credit by the end of 2020. The other main categories of business credit were relatively weak with trade and industry up around 2 percent in 2020, while construction fell by 4.6 percent.

Household credit growth normalized in Q4 with the

year’s growth standing at 6.3 percent (+5 percent in 2019). Housing loans increased by 6.3 percent in 2020, significantly exceeding the 2 percent expansion seen in 2019. In contrast, the growth in personal consumption loans softened to 11.2 percent in 2020, following a 36 percent surge in 2019 after the central bank loosened some lending limits in November 2018. While the growth trends of housing loans and personal consumption loans differed markedly in 2019 and 2020, the more important observation is that the growth of the combined pool (ie total household credit) was similar in both years.

Credit for securities purchase and for non-bank financial institutions was a drag on growth in 2020, falling by 2 percent and 16 percent, respectively. Credit

### Monetary indicators

	KD millions				% m/m				% y/y			
	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Dec 20	Sep20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Dec 20	Sep20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Dec 20
Total system liquidity (M2)	40,509	40,488	40,068	39,567	0.4	-0.1	-1.0	-1.3	5.7	5.2	4.8	3.8
Currency in circulation	2,296	2,323	2,231	2,235	-1.9	1.1	-4.0	0.2	24.8	23.0	21.4	18.2
Private sector deposits	38,212	38,165	37,837	37,332	0.6	-0.1	-0.9	-1.3	4.8	4.3	4.0	3.0
KD deposits	36,028	35,912	35,642	35,273	0.5	-0.3	-0.8	-1.0	6.7	6.3	5.8	4.6
Sight deposits	10,640	10,387	10,430	10,540	1.6	-2.4	0.4	1.1	21.0	20.9	19.2	22.6
Savings deposits	6,306	6,340	6,374	6,430	1.0	0.5	0.5	0.9	23.2	24.4	26.1	25.8
Time deposits & CDs	19,082	19,185	18,838	18,303	-0.2	0.5	-1.8	-2.8	-3.9	-4.5	-5.3	-8.5
Foreign currency deposits	2,184	2,253	2,195	2,059	1.4	3.2	-2.6	-6.2	-19.2	-19.7	-18.2	-18.7

especially following a steep fall in December.

Looking ahead, we expect credit growth of around 4 percent to 5 percent in 2021. Business credit will likely benefit from a rebound in economic growth and higher government spending in 2021 (including capital spending, especially if the rebound in oil prices is sustained), although a lower projected emergency working-capital funding (a phenomenon witnessed strongly in 2020 given the pandemic) might be a drag on growth. As for household credit, while lending to citizens will likely continue to be robust given relatively secure jobs and an increasing population, lending to expats is expected to be muted given shrinking expatriate numbers.

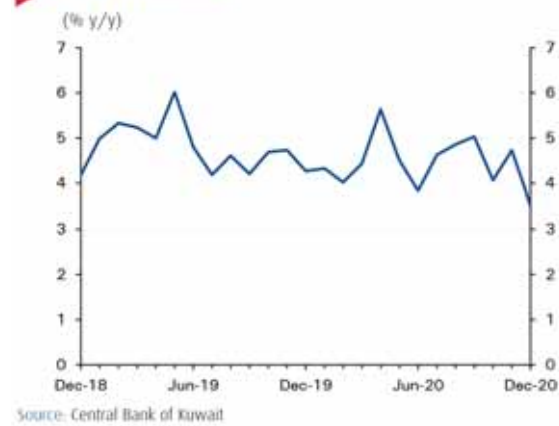
Domestic deposit growth weakened sharply in Q4, ending the year at 3.8 percent with private-sector deposits up 3 percent, way better than the 1.7 percent drop seen in 2019. Private-sector deposits had witnessed a boost during the year from the deferral of household loan repayments and the lower spending avenues, given much less travel abroad and the impact of the lockdown. For example, their growth peaked at 5.4 percent YTD by the end of September, which coincided with the end of the household loan deferral period. Money supply (M2) broadly tracked private sector deposits, increasing by 3.8 percent in 2020.

Looking at the breakdown of KD private sector

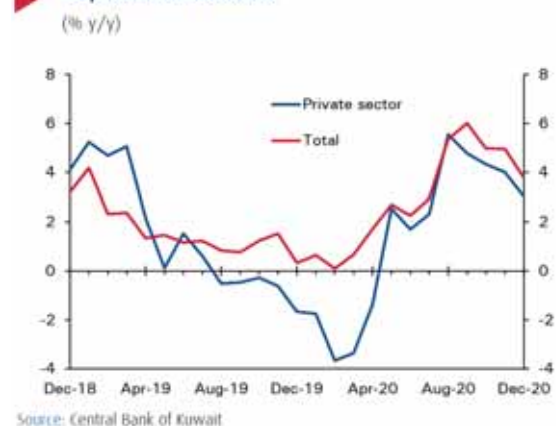
deposits, the share of time deposits dropped significantly in 2020 (from 59.3 percent to 51.9 percent), as the share of sight and savings deposits increased from 40.7 percent to 48.1 percent, with one driver of that change being the steep fall in interest rates last year. For the second year in a row, the growth in government deposits surpassed the private-sector one, standing at 7.5 percent in 2020 with government deposits representing almost 18 percent of the total by the end of 2020. After soaring by 55 percent in 2019, non-resident deposits dropped by 3 percent in 2020, exhibiting an opposite trend vis-à-vis private-sector deposits. The comfortable domestic liquidity situation, decreasing interest rates locally, and banks’ shedding of relatively expensive institutional deposits to support their net interest margins may have been reasons for the fall in non-resident deposits in 2020.

The sector’s simple loans-to-deposits ratio stood at 88 percent at the end of 2020, in line with its level at the end of 2019, indicating comfortable room to increase lending going forward. Finally, if the rebound in oil prices is sustained, this will likely feed through higher deposits in the system, while the ongoing record-low interest rate environment will probably be more conducive for the increase of sight and saving deposits compared with the more expensive time deposits.

### Credit to Residents



### Deposits from Residents



ness credit by the end of 2020. The other main categories of business credit were relatively weak with trade and industry up around 2 percent in 2020, while construction fell by 4.6 percent.

Household credit growth normalized in Q4 with the

for securities purchase has now trailed overall growth for five years in a row, which decreased its share of total credit from 9.3 percent in 2015 to 6.5 percent in 2020. After surging by 21 percent in 2019, credit to non-residents inched up by just 1.3 percent in 2020,

hit the economy hard. Thailand has registered more than 24,500 coronavirus cases, with a jump of about 20,000 infections since late last year, after a second wave that stemmed from the country’s largest seafood market.

Some 40 million tourists had been expected to arrive in 2020, but as international travel ground to a trickle, their absence hammered the country’s services sector, bruising entertainment, retail, hotels and restaurants. The kingdom’s freefalling economy has been a factor in the youth-led protest movement that is calling for premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha’s resignation, constitutional reform and changes to the once-untouchable monarchy.

Asked about the political climate, Danucha implied it was delivering a further blow. “The Thai economy relies on investment and exports. The political situation will affect investors’ confidence,” he said. The country’s economy was struggling even before the pandemic, which laid bare the deep inequality between the haves and have-nots of Thai society.

In response to the pandemic slump, the government implemented a record, 1.9 trillion baht (\$59.7 billion) stimulus package, cash handouts and tax incentives. Further economic improvements will depend on managing the pandemic and boosting visitors, Danucha said. “The outbreak and vaccine rollout, together with tourism recovery, are the main economic factors this year.” — AFP

## Thailand economy shrinks on collapse in tourism sector

BANGKOK: Thailand’s pandemic-shattered economy suffered its worst full-year performance in more than two decades, data showed yesterday, with officials citing the toll of both a gutted tourism industry and ongoing political upheaval.

Last year’s 6.1 percent contraction was the worst since a 7.6 percent decline during the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and officials said they expect the economy to expand at a much slower pace than initially predicted in 2021. The downgrade-to 2.5-3.5 percent growth from an previous estimate of 3.5-4.5 percent came despite a slight improvement in the final three months of the year. “It has rebounded from the previous quarter due to the government’s stimulus package that boosted spending,” Danucha Pichayanan, the secretary general of the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC), said at a news conference.

Although the kingdom was largely spared the worst of the virus, pandemic-spurred partial lockdowns have



BANGKOK: Thailand’s pandemic-shattered economy suffered its worst full-year performance in more than two decades, data showed yesterday, with officials citing the toll of both a gutted tourism industry and ongoing political upheaval.

## Vivendi shares soar on plan for Universal Music spin-off

PARIS: Investors flocked into the French media conglomerate Vivendi yesterday after it unveiled plans to spin off the lucrative Universal Music Group, a move long sought by analysts as well as its own top shareholders.

Vivendi owns 80 percent of UMG, whose artists and catalogue range from the Beatles to Lady Gaga, after recently selling 20 percent to China’s Tencent group. In December, Universal shocked many in the industry by announcing a deal to secure the rights to Bob Dylan’s entire back catalogue of songs, reportedly

for more than \$300 million. On Saturday, the company said it would study the distribution of 60 percent of UMG to Vivendi shareholders in order to reduce what it called a “conglomerate discount.”

“Vivendi’s leading institutional shareholders have been pressing for a number of years for a split or the distribution of Universal Music Group,” it said. Vivendi said UMG, which would be listed on the Amsterdam stock market, could be worth at least 30 billion euros (\$36.4 billion).

The deal, set to be voted on at a shareholder meeting in March, sent Vivendi’s stock rocketing 18 percent higher to 30.82 euros in Paris. The company’s other assets range from movies and TV production to publishing and advertising. “In 2022, Vivendi should be refocused on all its other main units (mainly Groupe Canal+, Editis and Havas) alongside its minority holdings” including UMG as well as Lagardere, Prisa and Spotify,” the Paris brokerage OddoBHF commented in a note. — AFP



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Sibi George addresses the virtual event “Invest in Tamil Nadu - A State Facilitation Event”

## Invest in Tamil Nadu - A state facilitation event

KUWAIT: Embassy of India in Kuwait, with the Indian Business Network (IBN) organized a virtual event “Invest in Tamil Nadu - A State Facilitation Event” on 9 February 2021. The event was organized in association with Guidance Tamil Nadu, which is the nodal agency of the State government of Tamil Nadu for investment promotion and single-window facilitation.

“Invest in Tamil Nadu” event is another event by the embassy organized as part of the States Facilitation Program by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. Embassy has previously conducted trade, tourism and investment promotion events for the Indian states of Gujarat, Punjab as well as the north-eastern states of India. The aim of the virtual conference was to bolster trade and investment linkages between Kuwait and India, especially in the state of Tamil Nadu, which is a well-diversified industrial state of India, and is one of the most sought-after investment destinations due to its strategic location, conducive business environment, state-of-the-art infrastructure, proactive governance and favorable ecosystem.

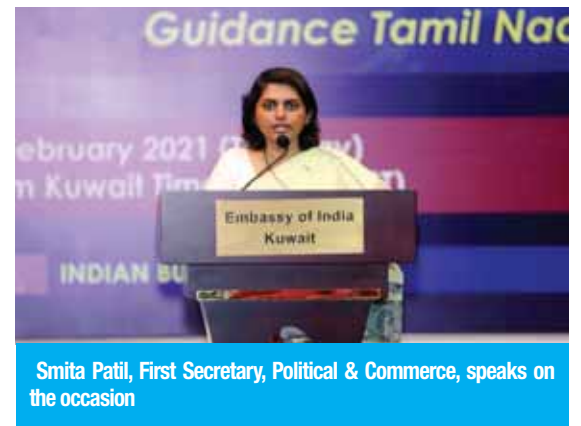
## Nissan says not in talks with Apple on self-driving cars

TOKYO: Japanese auto maker Nissan said yesterday it is not in talks with Apple to develop self-driving cars, a week after Hyundai also denied reports it was discussing the top-secret project with the US tech giant. Apple’s Project Titan is devoted to electric autonomous vehicles and has been in the works for several years-but details of the venture have been kept under wraps by the notoriously tight-lipped company.

Nissan’s denial came after the Financial Times reported that the iPhone maker had approached it in recent months about a tie-up related to the project, which did not go ahead. “We are not in talks with Apple. However, Nissan is always open to exploring collaborations and partnerships to accelerate industry transformation,” the Japanese firm said.

A source close to Nissan told AFP that the company “doesn’t need Apple to sell” its cars.

“When you make a product under the Apple brand, you give your soul-and your profit margins-to Apple,” the source said on condition of anonymity. “We are not interested in giving Apple the best that we offer. This



Smita Patil, First Secretary, Political & Commerce, speaks on the occasion

Addressing the gathering, Sibi George, Ambassador of India to Kuwait highlighted the historically friendly relations between Kuwait and India and spoke about the embassy’s vision and continuous efforts to engage the business, trade and investment sectors in India and Kuwait. Dr Neeraj Mittal, MD & CEO, Guidance Tamil Nadu, in his address emphasized the progressive policy framework and incentives offered by the Government of Tamil Nadu and added that the state has been receiving a stream of foreign investments despite the pandemic. Israr Ahmed, Regional Chairman, Federation of Indian Export Organizations (Southern Region) spoke about the trade and investment opportunities available for those interested in doing business with Kuwait and Tamil Nadu.

Presenters from Kuwait included Eng Khaled Hamdan Al-Saif, Vice Chairman and CEO, NAFESCO, Kuwait, and Chairman, NAFESCO India LLP who spoke in detail about his company’s experience of opening a subsidiary base in India and the variety of opportunities offered by India for Kuwaiti businesses and investors. M R Raghu, Executive Vice President - Research, Kuwait Financial Centre (Markaz) made a presentation on business climate in Kuwait and gave insights useful for Indian companies doing business with Kuwait. The event saw virtual participation from a large number of business and professional community members in Kuwait as well as India. More information on the conference may be obtained from the Embassy’s social media handles on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.



YOKOHAMA: A man walks past company signage at the Nissan Motor global headquarters in Yokohama, Kanagawa prefecture yesterday. — AFP

should be under the Nissan brand.” The denial followed a similar statement from South Korea’s Hyundai and its affiliate Kia last week after reports said Apple had wanted to discuss a potential partnership to develop electric vehicles and batteries. Apple first revealed its self-driving tech aspirations in 2016 and Chief Executive Tim Cook later said he saw autonomous driving systems as a “core technology” for the future. —AFP



## Business

# NBK holds lecture for ‘Tamakan’ program trainees titled ‘High Impact Tools for Teams’

## Lecture given by a leading international expert in stimulating innovation in teams

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) organized a lecture for “Tamakan” program trainees titled “High Impact Tools for Teams”. The lecture was given by Professor Stefano Mastrogiacom, one of the world’s leading experts in the field of project management and building highly professional teams.

The lecture comes as part of the activities of “Tamakan” training program, which is hosted by the bank at various training sites at its headquarters for three months, until 8 April 2021, in which the bank provides trainees with courses aimed to develop their skills and qualify them to navigate their way into the labor market.

This virtual lecture aimed to discuss tools Mastrogiacom has been crafting for the past 20 years, as well as sharing his powerful toolkit to create alignment, build trust and get results fast. He also shared his expertise on how to rediscover the joy of teamwork using high-impact tools for teams which he recently published in his new book in January 2021.

Mastrogiacom presented concepts related to the psychological safety of the team and boosting confidence in speaking out and participation by raising new ideas or inquiries, as well as expressing any concern about a specific issue within the work environment, without the fear of

being punished.

The lecture shed light on the conditions for a successful teamwork environment, as well as the cooperation skills that are the main characteristic sought by successful managers in their employees.

The lecture showcased inspiring creative examples around the world such as Google, addressing the ideas of managers looking for ways to motivate teams, create a constructive work environment and improve group productivity within the organization. Stefano Mastrogiacom is one of the leading experts in the fields of project management, team building and design thinking. He has been leading digital projects and advising project teams in international organizations for more than 20 years (Cartier, Doctors Without Borders, Pictet, Rothschild, Caterpillar, World Economic Forum). He is also an author, consultant and professor at Lausanne University in Switzerland, and has many publications including “High-Impact Tools for Teams”.

It is worth mentioning that “Tamakan” program aims to develop the personal skills needed to become compelling candidates for employment, in addition to motivating Kuwaiti youth to explore their inherent potentials and energies and unleashing the creativity of young cadres.



The program attended by 40 trainees adopts the Blended Learning approach, and focuses on many themes and workshops about creativity and innovation, design thinking, business model design, career exploration and innovative de-risking solutions. It is worth mentioning that National

Bank of Kuwait sponsors various social initiatives serving Kuwait National Development Plan, including empowering youth and enhancing education, stemming from the bank’s belief that the youth are Kuwait’s true wealth, and the cornerstone for national development.

## Cronies, corruption: How Algeria’s auto sector hit the wall

**ALGIERS:** Shuttered assembly plants, jailed bosses, laid-off workers. Algeria’s once ambitious plans to create a flagship auto industry have turned into a fiasco. The country’s recent years of political turmoil have also seen its foreign joint venture factories close and cronies of its ousted president Abdelaziz Bouteflika end up behind bars.

Algeria’s dream of creating thousands of jobs has collapsed and the country is in dire need of new vehicles. The government is putting on a brave face.

Industry Minister Ferhat-Ait Ali pledged last month that it is “preparing the revival of this industry on solid foundations, which break with the practices of the past”. Algeria’s auto industry was born in 2012 when French maker Renault partnered with the government in Algiers to build the first plant two years later near Oran, the country’s second biggest city.

Other companies followed suit. South Korea’s Hyundai opened its assembly plant in 2016 in Tiaret, and Germany’s Volkswagen started operations the next year in Relizane. The sector became a priority as the North African country sought to reduce imports, compete in the sector with regional rival Morocco, and diversify its economy in the face of falling oil revenues, which had been the source of over 90 percent of its export earnings.

Morocco’s own bet on the automobile industry has paid off. It is now the country’s top export sector after the Renault-Nissan group opened two factories in the kingdom in 2012 and 2019, followed by its rival PSA, which opened one in 2019, attracted by incentivizing fiscal and customs policies.

### ‘Disguised imports’

But Algeria’s industry became embroiled in controversy from early 2017, when authorities started to denounce as “disguised imports” the practice of foreign carmakers bringing in “semi knocked-down” (SKD) units. SKD units are partially stripped down at the origin and reassembled on arrival, requiring minimal labor input.

The government investigated Hyundai after images spread on social media showed almost completely-built imported models that required little more work than putting on the wheels. In July 2017, former industry minister Mahdjoub Bedda, who is now in prison on graft charges related to the wider scandal, suspended all new car assembly projects. After Bouteflika, under pressure from mass demonstrations, was ousted by the army in April 2019, several assembly plant bosses were convicted of corruption.

His successor, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, pledged to review the entire auto sector as soon as he came to power in December that year. “Some projects cannot be described as an industry because they are simply disguised imports,” he charged the day after his election.

Algeria then banned the import of spare parts for assembly plants, sounding the death knell for the young industry already struggling after the incarceration of its key executives.

Volkswagen suspended production indefinitely in December 2019 and put 700 employees on technical unemployment. In May 2020, the Algerian subsidiary of South Korea’s Kia closed its assembly line, throwing 1,200 employees out of work.

### Corruption trials

The automobile scandal was at the heart of the first major corruption trials of the post-Bouteflika era. They exposed that companies owned by tycoons linked to Bouteflika’s inner circle were favored and benefited from undue privileges, such as state incentives and tax exemptions. The scandal led to the imprisonment of former prime ministers Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal and two industry ministers. The ex-premiers were convicted of “misappropriation of public funds, abuse of power and granting undue privileges” as well as illegal financing of ailing Bouteflika’s aborted 2019 re-election bid. —AFP

## Boubyan Bank becomes AWS activate provider

**KUWAIT:** Boubyan Bank has announced that its incubation program for startups, Boubyan Incubation Program, became an AWS Activate Provider in Kuwait. This will help in empowering entrepreneurs and startups, and provides them with cloud computing resources from Amazon Web Services (AWS) to help them innovate and grow. This comes in line with Boubyan Incubation Program’s focus on providing the best services and solutions to support the initiatives of young Kuwaitis and Kuwaiti startups taking part in its incubation program.

Hamad Al-Fouzan, AGM & Head of Innovation and Partnerships at Boubyan Bank stated: “Ever since the growth of digital services accompanied by the accelerated developments in Kuwait and the wider region, Boubyan Bank has been one of the first institutions to support this trend. The bank continues to invest in digital services along with creating awareness on the importance of using modern technologies in all our daily transactions to boost the business environment and support Kuwaiti projects and startups looking for digital services.”

Al-Fouzan went on to add: “Boubyan Bank’s management will continue cooperating with many

companies that support digital services such as AWS, which provides many advantages and services for entrepreneurs and startups in order to help them build the infrastructure of their projects and enable them to achieve their success and growth.”

Participants in Boubyan Incubation Program for startups will get access to the resources they need to quickly get started on AWS - including credits, tech support, training, exclusive offers, and go-to-market support along with tailored guidance, education and resources based on unique startup profile. Startup builders will also take advantage of personalized recommendations and guided pathways to technical training, mentorship, and customer growth opportunities for their startups.

Speaking about Boubyan Incubation Program for startups, he explained: “This program has been specifically designed to support the initiatives of young Kuwaiti entrepreneurs and startups in addition to providing them with some resources and services that serve as an integrated training environment. This aims to upskill them and to reinforce the culture of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, helping them translate their ideas and innovations into viable economic projects. By doing so, we will help promote entrepreneurship as we offer services and training programs to entrepreneurs that will increase the chances of success and sustainability for their projects.”

Al-Fouzan stressed: “In Boubyan Bank, we always seek to offer innovative simple solutions that help cement our relationships with customers and provide them with excellent services, including

offering creative and innovative solutions. Boubyan Bank is very focused on this and has a fully dedicated department for innovation that works on providing outstanding banking and non-banking services. It is safe to say that Boubyan Bank has succeeded in changing the traditional idea about the banking sector.”

Vinod Krishnan, Head of Middle East, AWS said, “We are excited to support Boubyan Bank incubation program to empower the Kuwaiti startup ecosystem. Boubyan Bank understands the power of cloud technology in inspiring entrepreneurship and driving innovation. Through the AWS Activate program, we look forward to working with Boubyan Incubation Program’s startup community, including fintech companies and others, and helping them leverage all that AWS has to offer for them to build new businesses and see them grow.”

AWS is a subsidiary of Amazon that provides cloud services. It is a leader in providing cloud-computing services with on-demand online IT resources on a pay-as-you-go basis. Instead of purchasing physical data centers, owning and maintaining them, customers get access to advanced cloud services such as storage, AI, databases and so much more and only paying for what they use.



Hamad Al-Fouzan

## Japan economy shrinks for first time since 2009

**TOKYO:** Japan’s pandemic-hit economy shrank in 2020 for the first time in more than a decade, but the contraction was less than expected and it ended the year on a strong note thanks to a pick-up in exports and huge government support. Still, analysts warned the near-term outlook could be bumpy as fresh virus restrictions dampen domestic consumption, and with borders still closed to tourists less than six months before the postponed Olympics.

The world’s third-largest economy shrank 4.8 percent last year, its first annual contraction since 2009 at the height of the global financial crisis. However, the figure was better than forecast in a Bloomberg survey of analysts thanks to a strong October-December performance, which saw the economy expand 12.7 percent from the previous quarter on an annualized basis.

Government stimulus measures of about \$3 trillion since the Covid-19 pandemic began provided crucial support. The news helped send Tokyo’s Nikkei 225 index rallying more than one percent to break 30,000 for the first time in more than three decades.

Shahana Mukherjee, an economist at Moody’s Analytics, said better-than-expected growth in the fourth quarter was driven by Japan’s “resilient trade position” with exports up and a smaller rise in private consumption. “The intense domestic third COVID-19 wave moderated Japan’s recovery momentum in the last months of 2020,” she said. “But with exports continuing to recover and the Pfizer vaccine approval coming through, the months ahead should see a stronger revival,” Mukherjee added.

Like other countries, Japan was plunged into a steep recession at the start of 2020 — suffering its worst second quarter on record-as virus containment measures throttled economic activity, while a 2019 consumption tax added to the weakness. A slowdown in new cases allowed business to bounce back in the second half, with domestic demand and net exports contributing to the improvement, the cabinet office said. Spending on housing and corporate investment also rebounded, it added.

### Olympic question

However, infections began surging to new records in late December, prompting the govern-



TOKYO: A Shinkansen N700A series, or high speed bullet train, is pictured arriving in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

ment to impose a fresh virus state of emergency in much of the country including Tokyo and Osaka and while the long-term outlook is positive, there was a warning for the start of 2021.

“A decline in GDP appears unavoidable in Q1 2021 due to the state of emergency declared by the government in a number of Japanese prefectures,” said Naoya Oshikubo, senior economist at SuMi Trust, in a note published ahead of Monday’s figure.

Japan’s virus measures are limited, with bars and restaurants requested but not obliged to close by 8pm while working from home is strongly recommended. There are no blanket stay-at-home orders.

Oshikubo said the relative leniency of these emergency measures could help mitigate the expected contraction in the first quarter. But observers said the economy will not likely receive the much-needed boost from the summer’s postponed 2020 Olympics, even as organizers insist the event will go ahead even if the pandemic is not fully under control. With doubts over whether foreign spectators will be allowed to attend, and plans for athletes and officials to stay isolated during the Games, there will not be much chance for spending, said Anwita Basu, head of country risk for Asia at Fitch Solutions. “The growth outcome of zero spectators and Games not being held would be roughly the same,” she told AFP.

Anti-virus measures and other delay-related costs have added 294 billion yen (\$2.8 billion) to the event’s price tag, which has ballooned to at least 1.64 trillion yen-making Tokyo 2020 potentially the most expensive Summer Olympics in history. But with people’s everyday financial priority to “get over the COVID hump and normalize their day-to-day living... I’m not sure psychologically the Games are going to be welcomed (in Japan)”, Basu added.

“The consumption sentiment could even get lower if they decide to carry on with the Games.” —AFP

## Burgan Bank grants its customers a chance to win 60 cash prizes

**KUWAIT:** In celebration of the 60th anniversary of Kuwait’s Independence Day, Burgan Bank announces a special one-of-a-kind draw that gives all its customers a chance to win, regardless of the account they hold. On this festive occasion, 60 lucky Burgan Bank customers will win 60 cash prizes. To be eligible, customers have to withhold a Burgan Bank account before 28/02/2021. The draw will take place on 1 March 2021 in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce.

Nasser Al-Qaisi - Chief Retail Banking Officer of Burgan Bank said, “This special offer comes to celebrate this special occasion and national holidays and as an appreciation to our customers for their loyalty and continuous commitment to Burgan Bank. As an expression of our gratitude to them, we have launched this unique draw that will provide an unforgettable valuable experience this special month.”

To learn more about Burgan Bank’s latest offers or any of its products and services, customers can visit any of the bank’s branches or Burgan Banks Instagram page on @BurganBankKuwait or contact the call center or via WhatsApp at 1804080. Burgan Bank extends its best wishes and greetings to the public in celebration of this joyful month.



Nasser Al-Qaisi



## Business

## KFH Earnings Webcast FY-2020

## KFH's financial results confirm its successful strategy: Al-Roshood

**KUWAIT:** Acting Group Chief Executive Officer (GCEO) at Kuwait Finance House (KFH), AbdulWahab Al-Roshood, highlighted the Bank's financial performance indicating KFH has, by the grace of Allah, reported net profit attributable to the shareholders of the bank of KD 148.40 million for the year ended 2020; a decrease of 40.9 percent compared to last year.

Al-Roshood said during KFH Earnings Webcast FY-2020 that was held on February 11 at 2 pm (Kuwait), that the net financing income for the year ended 2020 reached KD 614.22 million; an increase of 15.8 percent compared to last year. Total operating expenses for the year ended 2020 reached KD 296.04 million; a decrease of 2.7 percent compared to last year.

He explained that due to the negative economic consequences resulted from the Corona virus pandemic, investment income for the year decreased by 105 percent compared to last year. Consequently, net operating income decreased to KD 499.56 million for the year ended 2020; a decrease of 2.1 percent compared to last year.

Cost to income ratio improved to reach 37.2 percent for the year ended 2020, compared to 37.4 percent for last year. Also, earnings per share for the year ended 2020 reached 19.52 fils; a decrease of 41.1 percent compared to last year. Al-Roshood pointed out that the Board of Directors has proposed 10 percent cash dividends to shareholders and 10 percent bonus shares subject to general assembly and concerned authorities' approval. Shareholders' equity reached KD 1.936 billion at the end of year 2020.

Total assets increased to reach KD 21.502 billion, ie, an increase of KD 2.111 billion or 10.9 percent compared to the end of last year. Financing portfolio reached KD 10.748 billion, i.e., an increase of KD 1.274 billion or 13.4 percent compared to end of last year.

Investment in Sukuk reached KD 2.742 billion; an increase of KD 450 million i.e., a growth of 19.6 percent compared to end of last year. Depositors' accounts reached KD 15.317 billion i.e., an increase of KD 1.765 billion or 13.0 percent compared to the end of last year.

In addition, the capital adequacy ratio reached 17.53 percent which is above the minimum required limit. This percentage confirms the solid financial position of KFH. Al-Roshood said that despite the negative economic consequences of Coronavirus, the recent financial results confirm the successful strategy of KFH, its solid financial position, high creditworthiness, and efficient capability to handle the exceptional conditions.

He added that profit rates fell in 2020 because of the additional precautionary provisions taken by KFH in the face of Corona virus repercussions and to maintain good levels of asset quality and strong capital base. Al-Roshood pointed out that KFH led the arrangement and marketing of the KD 400 million Islamic tranche in a mega KD 1 billion syndicated credit facility for KPC, in cooperation with Kuwaiti banks, where KFH contributed KD 304 million in financing.

He said that KFH succeeded in arranging several Sukuk issuances for many local and international banks as well as governments, noting that KFH Group led \$500 million Sukuk for First Abu Dhabi Bank, KD 150 million Sukuk to Warba bank, the first Kuwaiti Dinar-denominated Sukuk issuance.

He added that KFH was involved in arranging deals including \$750 million Sukuk for Boubyan, \$500 million Sukuk for Bahrain Mumtalakat Holding Company ("Mumtalakat"), USD one billion Sukuk for Dubai Islamic Bank, \$500 million Sukuk for Sharjah Islamic Bank and \$50 million Sukuk for (KFH-Turkey).

For more details regarding the Acquisition, Al-Roshood explained that KFH has disclosed to the regulatory authorities and the market the latest developments in this regard, indicating all these disclosures were published via the official website of Boursa Kuwait and any new development will be updated as and when it comes available.

#### Shadi Zahran, Group Chief Financial Officer (GCFO)

Meanwhile, Group Chief Financial Officer (GCFO) at KFH, Shadi Zahran said that KFH Group has achieved Net Profit After Tax attributable to Shareholders for the year ended 31st December 2020 of KD 148.4 million lower by KD 102.6 million or 40.9 percent compared to LY 2019 of KD



AbdulWahab Al-Roshood



Shadi Zahran



Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem

**Zahran: KFH dominates saving accounts with a market share of 40.4%**

**Al-Mukhaizeem: Successful digital transformation strategy and keenness to provide innovative banking solutions**



251 million.

The lower profits are mainly due to lower investment income and higher provisions and impairments.

He added that net financing income has increased by KD 84 million or 15.8 percent compared to last year mainly due to lower Finance Cost in Kuwait and Turkey. The decrease in Finance Cost is mainly due to decrease in benchmark rates across the globe, improvement in CASA deposits at Kuwait and group level, and lower distributable profits impacting distribution to depositors mainly Mudaraba depositors.

Net Operating income at KD 499.6 million decreased by KD 10.5 million or 2.1 percent compared to last year; the decrease is mainly from Investment income by KD 136.7 million and fees & commissions by KD 6 million as a result of lower business and investment activities due to COVID-19 lockdown during 2020, offset by the increase in Net Financing Income by KD 84 million and Net Gain from Foreign Currencies by KD 35.9 million and lower operating expenses by KD 8.2 million.

The decrease in investment income by KD 136.7 million is mainly due to lower gains on sale of investments due to the adverse economic environment in 2020, in addition to loss on Islamic derivative transactions (mainly currency & commodity swaps entered by our subsidiary Kuwaiti Bank "KTPB"). Zahran explained that KTPB enters into swaps in order to obtain TL funding while the associated cost is recorded under other investment income in

accordance with the IFRS, however, for internal performance analysis and management reporting we consider this cost as part of financing cost. He pointed out that the other non-yielding income contribution increased from 19 percent - 24 percent. With the impact of the COVID-19 related government support of KD 7.8 million reported under other income. As a result, the non-financing income dropped from KD 284.1 million last year to KD 181.4 million lower by 36.2 percent

Total Operating Expenses at KD 296 million has decreased by KD 8.2 million or 2.7 percent compared to prior year. The decrease is mainly due to lower staff cost by KD 10 million. The reduction in operating income off-set by the reduction in operating cost leading to Cost to income ratio maintained at the same level of 37.21 percent (last year was 37.36 percent).

Zahran explained that Average Yielding Assets is up by 9 percent compared to 2019 and 16.3 percent compared to 2018, resulted from the growth in both Financing receivables and Sukuk. (avg. financing receivables is up by KD 0.8 billion and avg Sukuk is up by KD 0.6 billion). Group Net Financing Margin at 3.27 percent shows 17bps increase over 2019 average of 3.10 percent.

He added that Average Yield decreased by (80)bps due to the Drop in Discount Rate by CBK and Fed rates. However, average Cost of Fund declined by 97bps due to increase in CASA deposits in the major entities of the

group and drop in distributable profits for Mudaraba Deposits. With regards to provisions, Zahran illustrated that the group total provisions and impairment charge increased by KD 87.2 million or 44.3 percent to reach KD 284.1 million for 2020. He said that Credit provisions charge net of recoveries for the year at KD 159 million was at the same level as 2019, although last year KFH recorded KD60 million additional general provision against financing receivables of our subsidiary in Turkey, in view of adverse economic outlook. This provision still maintained in our books.

Zahran mentioned: "In 2020 the negative impact of COVID-19 was considered as part of KFH prudent approach towards provisioning. Also, in addition to recording specific provision against customer segments, the charge of the general provisions amounted to KD63 million includes significant precautionary general provisions charge over and above the minimum general provision requirement of CBK." He highlighted that the current credit provisions level in KFH group books exceeds ECL "Expected Credit Loss" required as per CBK IFRS 9 by KD 227.5 million as of Dec 2020.

With regards to Impairments against investments and others, he said that the charge at KD 125 million was higher by KD 86.9 million compared to 2019. He said: "In the view of potential deterioration of banks assets quality and expected delay in economic recovery, prolonged adverse impact of COVID-19, The group investments and others impairment charge of KD 125 million includes impairment on investments in associates and others of KD 69.6 million whose operations were impacted in 2020 due to COVID-19 and government enforced lockdowns."

Zahran added that the impairment charge also include: ECL "Expected Credit Loss" on Sukuk portfolio of KD 28.4 million; which is mainly due to the increase in portfolio and downgrade in sovereign ratings of Turkey and Bahrain during 2020 considering the majority of our investment in Sukuk is issued by sovereign. And impairment of real estate of KD 27 million includes pre-cautionary impairment loss of KD 15 million over and above impairment losses recorded based on recent properties valuation.

Looking at the right side of the slide He pointed out that banking entities contribution to net operating income (before provisions) increased by 4 percent to form 99 percent and that reflects the higher impact of COVID 19 on the group non-banking entities operations.

Total Assets at KD 21.5 billion increased by KD 2.1 billion or 10.9 percent in 2020. Financing receivables at KD 10.7 billion increased by 13.4 percent

Zahran explained that growth in financing receivables witnessed in both: Corporate and Retail Banking and was mainly contributed with double digit growth from Kuwait, Turkey, and Bahrain, while other demonstrated slower growth with focus on asset quality.

Investments in Sukuk at KD 2.7 billion increased by KD 0.5 billion or 19.6 percent compared to last year 2019 with major growth contribution from Kuwait Turk Participation Bank in Sovereign Sukuk. The growth in Financing Receivables and Sukuk portfolios followed similar positive growth in deposits in all markets which we operate in. The growth in deposits for 2020 was KD 1.8 billion or 13 percent reflecting depositors' confidence in KFH group. Zahran added that the favorable deposits mix continues to show very

healthy contribution from CASA deposits which now represents 53.3 percent of total group deposits as at the end of 2020 compared to 44.3 percent at the end of 2019.

It is also worth to mention that KFH Kuwait dominates the saving accounts with market share of 40.4 percent (as per CBK latest published reports, November-20). Customer deposits as a percentage of total funding at 82.4 percent reflects healthy funding mix and shows robust liquidity.

In the last slide looking at the key performance ratios which reflects the lower profitability due to COVID 19 impact.

- ROAE from 13.00 percent to 7.63 percent
- ROAA from 1.40 percent to 0.90 percent
- C/I slightly improved from 37.36 percent to 37.21 percent, and
- EPS from 33.12 fils to 19.52 fils

NPL ratio increased to reach 2.20 percent (as per CBK calculation) in 2020 compared to 1.88 percent for 2019. Provisions Coverage ratio for Group is 223 percent in 2020 compared to 231.5 percent for 2019.

#### Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem, Group Chief Strategy Officer (GCSO)

Group Chief Strategy Officer (GCSO) at KFH, Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem, covered highlights of the Kuwait operating environment with an overview on KFH. He also shared KFH's strategy, as well as year-end 2020 results.

Al-Mukhaizeem said during KFH Earnings Webcast FY-2020, that in 2020, the world witnessed many events that our generation had not witnessed before, such as the repercussions of the COVID-19 virus from general lockdown, and negative oil prices. The State of Kuwait was not immune to the repercussions of the pandemic, as the lockdown was carried out from March to September, and Kuwaiti banks postponed loan payments a period of 6 months, as a contribution to revive the economy and reduce burdens on citizens and residents.

He added that the Central Bank of Kuwait kept interest rate at 1.5 percent after the last cut of 100 basis points on the 16th of March 2020. On the other hand, according to the IMF latest forecasts, GDP growth is expected to witness a decrease in 2020 compared to a slight growth in 2019.

Al-Mukhaizeem indicated that Boursa Kuwait completed the Kuwaiti capital market's inclusion into the MSCI Emerging Markets Indices with the successful implementation of the first tranche of index inclusion at the end of November 2020. He added that Boursa Kuwait has received also approval from the Capital Markets Authority to restructure its promotion requirements for its "Premier Market". He clarified that the new parameters are expected to raise transparency and increase the issuer base in the "Premier Market" by potentially increasing the number of mid to large sized companies in it, all of which will reflect positively on the development of the Kuwaiti capital market and benefit its investors.

Further, Al-Mukhaizeem pointed out that "KFH" enjoys a high creditworthiness, indicating Fitch Ratings affirmed Kuwait Finance House Long-Term Issuer Default Rating at 'A+' with a Stable Outlook, and Moody's assigned A2 long-term deposit rating with a Stable Outlook as well. In addition, KFH Group has recently been named the number one safest Islamic Bank in the GCC by Global Finance Magazine.

He said that KFH announced the successful launch of the digital service "opening bank account online" for new customers, citizens and residents within minutes without having to visit the branch. KFH inaugurated revamped Hateen and Airport branches featuring digital platforms, display screens, tablets and self-service interactive solutions.

Al-Mukhaizeem expressed pride at the efficiency of KFH's digital services as transactions completed by its customers through KFHonline on the website or the mobile app exceeded 140 million transactions in 2020. This emphasizes the successful digital transformation strategy of KFH and its keenness to provide innovative banking solutions via mobile and alternative channels to enable customers to complete their transactions around the clock, from anywhere, easily and safely.

He concluded by confirming that KFH continues supporting the national economy, financing mega-projects (such as Oil and Gas) and contributing to the development plans and projects in Kuwait and the region.



## Lifestyle | Features



## SKATING-MAD DUTCH SEIZE RARE CHANCE TO HIT ICY CANALS

The Dutch, who love to ice skate, on Sunday had a rare chance to hit the canals after they froze over for the first time in almost three years. Some however hit the ice a bit too hard, taking tumbles that landed them in hospital despite an official plea to spare overstretched emergency services. In Amsterdam, dozens of skaters took to the Prinsengracht, an iconic canal in the city center on Sunday, even though the ice was not thick enough in all places. At least one person broke through, but was able to make it to safety unaided, local media reported.

Prime Minister Mark Rutte had warned against mass skating to avoid the risk of spreading Covid-19 as well as injuries that could clog up hospital emergency rooms. But in Kinderdijk, western Holland, dozens laced up their skates for a spin near windmills that are often seen on postcards and have been listed as UNESCO world heritage sites. "Most people are usually still in bed on a Sunday morning at this time. But this ice is so beautiful, it's a fever, it grips you and you have to get out and go skating," said Cok Hartkoorn, 71, who looked on from the canal bank.

"This might not happen again for a few years. You have to take the opportunity when you can." Marleen Bouman, 49, added: "Skating is so nice because we're all together in it. We're outside,



we're moving. In these tough corona times that's a rare thing."

### Dutch tradition

Skating, like cycling, is a Dutch tradition, and almost everyone is said to have a pair of skates ready for when the canals freeze over. Many had hoped that a popular competition, the Elfstedentocht, or Eleven Cities Race, would be held for the first time in nearly

a quarter-century this year. But Rutte said skating had to be limited to pairs under anti-coronavirus restrictions. Last held in 1997, the ultra-endurance marathon follows a gruelling 200 kilometer route along the northern Friesland province, and completing it is considered a true test of character. Despite it not being held, emergency rooms were twice as busy as usual on Saturday as people turned up with broken wrists and

other injuries suffered during falls, medical staff associations noted on Twitter. A week-long cold snap was due to end yesterday, and many municipalities have warned it will soon be time to get off the ice. — AFP



Skaters glide on the ice near windmills in the village of Kinderdijk. — AFP photos

## Simon Cowell is 'ramping up' security at his London home

The 'X Factor' boss was the victim of a burglary in 2015 when a thief stole almost £1 million worth of jewelry and two passports while, his partner Lauren Silverman and their son Eric, seven, were asleep, and he's taking no chances on risking it happening again so has splashed out to secure a secret "blind spot" back entrance. A source told The Sun newspaper's Bizarre column: "After the terrifying experience he had a few years ago Simon doesn't want a repeat. He is only too aware of the threat of burglary and being in the public eye means he's a potential target.

"When he bought the place he made plans for top-of-the-range security and these arrangements are ramping up his efforts even further. The most important thing to Simon is the safety of his family. No expense spared." The 61-year-old music mogul was granted planning permission to undertake the unspecified security measures last month, and that's not the only changes he's making to the abode as last week, work started on building a swimming pool. Darren February was jailed for eight years for the raid, but was already serving eight-and-a-half years for causing death by dangerous driving after a killing a man a week after the burglary by driving a stolen car on the wrong side of the road.

In a victim impact statement read to the court in 2017, Simon told how he felt in "constant fear" of his home and family being targeted again. He said: "The whole incident has been very traumatic and there is a constant fear that it may be repeated and that it may be worse next time. "This incident has caused me great concerns about the security of my family. "On reflection I am very scared of what could have happened to my son if the burglar had

gone into his room. "I could not bear to think of the consequences and also a lot would have happened if the burglar had come into our room." And Simon said he, Lauren, and Eric's nannies have "become much more anxious over safety issues relating to my son's care and well-being" since the burglary. He added: "My son was in the house that night and I am naturally very concerned over what could have happened if the burglar had entered my son's room, as any parent in the same situation would be." — Bang Showbiz



Simon Cowell

## Nicole 'Snooki' Polizzi is battling coronavirus

The 'Jersey Shore' star has revealed she is spending Valentine's Day "isolated" in her room, with her symptoms first starting as a cold but before long she was "napping all day", prompting her to get tested. Taking to Instagram, she wrote: "Happy Valentine's Day! This ones a bit different ... I have Covid. I've been isolated in my room since I found out. My family & I have been super cautious & careful, so this is super scary. My symptoms started out as just a bad sinus cold.

Headache, Stuffy nose & mild cough. Then I felt super tired and ended up napping all day which made me go get tested. Today i just feel groggy. I ended up losing my taste and smell last night. It's fricken weird. I had a greasy cheese pizza & couldn't taste a damn thing. WHAT A

## JENNER AND BOOKER MAKE ROMANCE INSTAGRAM OFFICIAL

Kendall Jenner and Devin Booker have made their romance Instagram official. The 25-year-old supermodel has been romantically linked to the NBA star since April last year, and the pair were also spotted together in Tahiti, where they celebrated Kim Kardashian West's 40th birthday in October. Kendall and Devin have kept tight-lipped about their relationship status, but on Valentine's Day Kendall posted a cute snap of the Phoenix Suns player cuddling her on top of a kitchen surface on her Instagram Story and had a huge grin on her face. The cat-walk beauty also tagged her man in the post. An insider had previously claimed the duo love spending time together. The source said: "She invited him to Kim's birthday and knew it would be easy for him to hang out with her family and friends."



Kendall Jenner and Devin Booker

However, a separate source had previously insisted that Kendall and Devin's romance is not "super serious", though that doesn't appear to be the case anymore. It had been claimed that the brunette beauty - who has previously dated Blake Griffin and Ben Simmons - wasn't looking to make a long-term commitment to any one person. An insider shared: "Kendall likes to float around and not be tied down to one person." While last June, it was claimed that Kendall was "talking to a couple [of] different guys" - including Devin. The source added: "She has so many men after her it's crazy." The 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians' star previously dated basketball star Ben Simmons on and off between 2018 and 2019, and the pair were thought to have reconciled in January 2020. However, sources at the time insisted they were "not officially back together".

An insider said: "They both like having a no-strings-attached type of relationship with each other, for the most part. They both work and travel frequently and don't find it very realistic to be in an exclusive relationship with one another." Kendall - who is a half-sister to Kim Kardashian West, Khloe Kardashian and Kourtney Kardashian and the older sibling of Kylie Jenner - previously explained why she has made a concerted effort to keep her love life private. She shared: "I got a glimpse of how my sisters dealt with [the attention] and it's cool to learn from that. "For me, a lot of things are very special and very sacred, like my friends and relationships, and I personally think that bringing things into the public makes everything so much messier."

—Bang Showbiz

SIN. The rest of my family tested negative, so i am here hiding out in my bedroom until this is over. Slide over to the next pic. I woke up to roses and chocolates thrown on my floor from my family. Still showing my quarantine ass Love on Valentine's Day! Appreciate all of your concerns, but I am ok! Please stay safe everyone! (sic) Her fans and friends have rushed to social media to wish her well. One wrote: "I love you mama rest up and get better soon!!! ... (sic)" Whilst another added: "Get better lovey ... shout if you need me (sic)" A third shared: "DAMN IT, ugh she gotchu! Glad the family is safe & negative, get better soon boo, miss yew lots. (sic)". — BangShowbiz



Nicole 'Snooki'



Lifestyle | Features

# Prince Harry, Meghan expecting second child

Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan Markle are expecting their second child, a spokesman said in a Valentine's Day announcement. The couple released a black-and-white image of them under a tree, all smiles, with Markle, 39, showing signs of pregnancy. "We can confirm that Archie is going to be a big brother," the spokesman said, referring to the couple's son. "The Duke and Duchess of Sussex are overjoyed to be expecting their second child." The announcement came 37 years to the day newspapers in Britain carried the news Prince Charles and Princess Diana were expecting Harry, their second child. Meghan and Harry, 36, who is Queen Elizabeth II's grandson, quit frontline royal duties in March last year and now live in California.

The news follows Markle's disclosure in The New York Times in November that she had suffered a miscarriage in July. A Buckingham Palace spokesman said: "Her Majesty, Duke of Edinburgh, Prince of Wales and the entire family are

delighted and wish them well." Misan Harriman, a friend of the couple who took the photograph they released, wrote on Twitter: "Meg, I was there at your wedding to witness this love story begin, and my friend, I am honored to capture it grow." The couple's departure last year-dubbed "Megxit" by the British press-was a far cry from 2018, when they married in a ceremony at Windsor Castle watched around the world.

The mood soured as reports circulated about a rift between Harry and his brother Prince William, second in line to the throne. Since leaving, they have launched several legal cases against news outlets alleging invasion of privacy-including one that ended on Thursday with a victory against Associated Newspapers in Britain. The cases have attracted criticism from some, as the couple are also launching themselves into the public eye with high-profile commercial projects.

**Multi-million dollar contracts**  
Last year, they launched a non-profit



In this file photo Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex and Britain's Meghan, Duchess of Sussex return in a horse-drawn carriage after attending the Queen's Birthday Parade, 'Trooping the Color' on Horseguards parade in London.

organization, Archewell, after giving up a "Sussex Royal" brand as part of the terms of their departure from frontline royal duties. They have started other

ventures, including signing a deal with Spotify to produce podcasts that tell "uplifting and entertaining stories". The couple also signed a contract, reportedly worth tens of millions of dollars, with streaming giant Netflix to produce "impactful" films and series. As well complaining about invasion of her privacy, Meghan, a former television actor, has also described past trolling of her as "almost unsurvivable".

In 2016, Harry issued an unprecedented statement denouncing "the racial undertones of comment pieces" and "the sexism and racism of social media trolls". Pressure from tabloids has dogged Harry throughout his life, and he blames them for the death of his mother Princess Diana. Harry and Meghan's latest announcement came days after Princess Eugenie, a granddaughter of the queen, gave birth to a baby boy. — AFP



In this file photo Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, and Britain's Meghan, Duchess of Sussex arrive to attend the annual Endeavour Fund Awards at Draper's Hall in London.— AFP photos



People turn on the flashlights of their mobile phones during Valentine Day's flashmobs in support of jailed opposition politician in Sanit Petersburg. — AFP photos



People turn on the flashlights of their mobile phones during Valentine Day's flashmobs in support of jailed opposition politician Alexei Navalny.

# Russians stage Valentine's Day flashmobs to support Navalny

Residents of Moscow and Saint Petersburg on Sunday staged Valentine Day's flashmobs in residential courtyards and public squares, lighting their phone flashlights in support of jailed opposition politician Alexei Navalny. Supporters of President Vladimir Putin's most prominent critic took to the streets in freezing temperatures following his team's call to stage 15-minute rallies and post pictures of the gatherings on social media on Sunday evening. It was not immediately possible to estimate the scale of the rallies but small groups of up to several dozen people were seen staging pro-Navalny flashmobs across Russia's two biggest cities.

Protester Alexander Kozhokar, one of around 50 people who lit their phone lights on Manezhnaya Square near the Kremlin, said he feared that Russia was turning into a "dictatorship." "I am afraid of thinking what will come next," the 28-year-old factory worker from the town of Mytishchi outside Moscow told AFP.

## 'Country in decay'

At a playground in southwestern

Moscow around 30 people gathered-some with dogs, others with children-lighting flashlights and arranging Christmas lights in the shape of a heart on the snow-covered ground. Protester Mikhail Orlov said he joined the playground flashmob to signal his unhappiness with Putin's policies. "The country is in decay, science is in decay," the 29-year-old engineer told AFP. Orlov said he saw like-minded people lighting flashlights in their windows in a gesture of solidarity.

Orlov's wife Maria said she was beginning to consider whether they needed to leave Russia. "I don't feel protected here," she said. In an affluent neighborhood in central Moscow, 28-year-old stand-up comedian Garik Oganisyan said he wanted to see political change. "I don't like what's happening in this country, how people are being sent to jail over re-tweets in an open and brazen manner."

In Saint Petersburg, pro-Navalny supporters also gathered in small groups, with some dancing and chanting "Russia will be free." Navalny's

team released pictures and videos of similar gatherings from cities across the country, with Russians lighting flashlights, sparklers and small lanterns. "Love is stronger than fear," said an electronic ticker tape on a residential high-rise in the Siberian city of Tomsk, according to one video. The rallies came after authorities last week sentenced Navalny to nearly three years in prison and unleashed a crackdown on his supporters, detaining more than 10,000 people.

Navalny's team then postponed mass demonstrations until the spring or summer, but urged supporters to use Valentine's Day to try out new and safer forms of protest. Officials had accused the opposition of acting on orders from NATO and warned that anyone violating the law on Sunday would be punished, but police did not interfere with the flashmobs.

## Women in solidarity chains

Earlier Sunday, several hundred women formed human chains in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, using

Valentine's Day to express support for Navalny's wife Yulia and female political prisoners. Around 300 women gathered on Arbat Street in Moscow's historic city center. "By forming a chain we want to show that we are for love and against violence," Darya Obraztsova, a 22-year-old student, told AFP.

In Saint Petersburg, around 100 women formed a chain near a monument to victims of political repression. Some clutched flowers, while others recited poems by Anna Akhmatova, one of Russia's most beloved poets. The new forms of opposition rallies in Russia are similar to human chains and decentralized protests staged by activists in neighboring Belarus. Navalny was arrested and jailed upon returning to Russia last month following months of treatment in Germany for a nerve agent poisoning.— AFP

# 'BACHELOR' HOST STEPS ASIDE OVER RACISM ROW

Chris Harrison, the host of US reality TV dating show "The Bachelor," has announced he is stepping down after he was widely criticized for comments he made about race. On Instagram Saturday, Harrison said he had been wrong to defend a current contestant who had to apologize for attending a sorority party at a former slave plantation. "By excusing historical racism, I defended it," the 49-year-old wrote. "I invoked the term 'woke police,' which is unacceptable," he added. "I am ashamed over how uninformed I was. I was so wrong. To the Black community, to the BIPOC community: I am so sorry. My words were harmful," Harrison wrote, using an acronym for Black, Indigenous and people of color.

Harrison, who has hosted "The Bachelor" since 2002, said that after consultation with Warner Bros. and ABC he will be "stepping aside for a period of time." He added he would also not participate in the "After the Final Rose Special." "The Bachelor" centers on a single man selecting a potential spouse from a group of women who compete for his affections. The current season features its first Black lead in the show's nearly two-decade history-Matt James. Fans of the hugely popular program petitioned for a Black lead last summer as massive Black Lives Matter protests swept the United States following the killing of George Floyd. Current cast member and perceived front-runner Rachael Kirkconnell has been criticized in recent weeks after photos emerged of her at an "Old South" themed party in 2018. Kirkconnell has apologized, saying her "ignorance was racist." —AFP



Chris Harrison



# Nicki Minaj's father killed in hit-and-run

The father of rapper Nicki Minaj has died after being struck by a hit-and-run driver near New York City, police said Sunday. Robert Maraj, 64, was walking on a road in Mineola, Long Island at 6:15 pm (2315 GMT) on Friday when he was hit, Nassau County Police Department said in a statement. The driver left the scene of the accident, and Maraj was taken to hospital, where he was pronounced dead on Saturday. "The investigation is ongoing," police added.

The statement did not specify Maraj's relationship to Minaj, but a police spokesman confirmed he was her father. Minaj, 38, was born in Trinidad and Tobago and raised in the Queens borough of New York City. —AFP

# French chef Darroze credits femininity for her five Michelin stars

In a business still dominated by men, French chef Helene Darroze credits a femininity, "emotional" touch for her unprecedented leap from three to five Michelin stars this year. Darroze is already a household name in France thanks to her appearances on "Top Chef"-famous enough even to have a Barbie doll in her image. And when the latest Michelin guide was published last month, the 53-year-old became the first woman to pick up two stars at once; a third for her London restaurant at The Connaught hotel and a second for Marsan in Paris.

That puts her in a tiny club of just seven women worldwide who run a three-star kitchen. She is adamant that her womanhood is the reason for her success: "Men and women are not made in the same way," she told AFP. "And it shows on the plate." "A man primarily wants to show off what he can do, whereas a woman wants to please. It is more about emotion, to which technique is added, rather than technique with emotion added later," she said. Darroze

is careful to stress that she has "great respect" for male chefs. But her message to the fast-growing generation of female chefs is "Live your passion as women... do not try to be someone else."

## 'Don't call me chef'

That attitude shows not only in her cooking, but in her approach to the workplace. She says she has been fortunate to be spared the misogyny suffered by many female counterparts in this "male environment" and has tried to avoid the abrasive, military style of the typical kitchen with its ranks and barking orders. "Problems aren't solved by yelling or throwing a spoon," she says.

Not all her efforts at creating an informal atmosphere have worked, however: "I never wanted to be called 'chef,' just Helene. But though I keep telling my colleagues that you don't earn respect with a title, a few still don't call me by my name." She now has more Michelin stars than any woman other than her compatriot Anne-Sophie Pic (who has eight) — an achievement she still "can't quite believe." But because of the pandemic, Darroze has not even been able to travel to Britain to celebrate with her team at The Connaught, or with her friend Clare Smyth of London's Core who also became a three-star chef last month.

## Comfort

Darroze is the fourth generation of her family to go into the business, and her restaurants are renowned for the Basque flavors of her home region in southwestern France. She almost didn't follow in



French chef Helene Darroze poses in her restaurant during a photo session in Paris. — AFP

the family footsteps, opting for business school in the 1980s ("It was the done thing"), until famed chef Alain Ducasse encouraged her to launch herself into haute cuisine at his Louis XV restaurant of Monte Carlo. Being a woman has imposed some difficult decisions throughout her career, not least delaying motherhood until the age of 40, when she adopted two Vietnamese girls. By then, she already had two Michelin stars.

Recipes such as poached lobster with tandoori butter, and grouse with foie gras and whiskey sauce, helped win her the

title of "Best female chef in the world" in 2015 from Britain's "50 Best Restaurants". Even someone of Darroze's skill has not escaped unscathed from the ravages of the past year, however: it has taken government support and a click-and-collect service at her other Paris restaurant Joia to stay afloat. But overall she is optimistic. "When all this is over, we will want a cuisine that comforts us." — AFP



## Sports

## Photo of the day



US football player Brenden Aaronson is seen at the FC Red Bull Salzburg club in Salzburg, Austria. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Twin volleyball stars suspended over bullying

**SEOUL:** Two twin South Korean women volleyball stars have been suspended from the national team over allegations of school bullying, reports said Monday, in the latest sporting abuse scandal to hit the country. Volleyball is one of South Korea's most popular spectator sports after the big three of baseball, golf and football.

Lee Jae-yeong and Lee Da-yeong, 24, both play for the Heungkuk Life Insurance Pink Spiders, the biggest women's team in the country, and were instrumental in securing South Korea's place at the Tokyo Olympics. They were accused of bullying last week by an online poster claiming to be a former middle school teammate, who listed 21 allegations including physical violence, stealing money, and threatening with a knife.

At least four other victims endured similar abuse, the poster said. The Lees admitted their "irresponsible behavior in the past" in an Instagram post and apologized. Their club suspended them indefinitely yesterday. "We are very sorry and feel deeply responsible for disappointing everyone who loves volleyball," the Pink Spiders said in a statement. "School violence is something that should never happen, and it cannot be tolerated for any reason."

Hours later, the players were banned from the national team for an unspecified period, Yonhap news agency reported. As well as their sporting prowess, the Lees have bolstered their celebrity status by appearing on various television programs. But the accusations over their past prompted widespread outrage in a country where bullying at school or in the workplace is a serious social problem. South Korea is a regional sporting power and regularly in the top 10 medal table places at the summer and winter Olympics. But in an already intensely competitive society, winning is virtually everything in its sports community — and physical and verbal abuse are rife. —AFP

## Nadal closes on Slams record, Barty raises home hopes at Australian Open

## Spaniard on course for title match with Djokovic

**MELBOURNE:** Rafael Nadal outclassed Fabio Fognini to close in on the all-time Grand Slam titles record yesterday as Ashleigh Barty ramped up hopes of becoming the Australian Open's first home winner in 43 years. Nadal said his lower-back stiffness was continuing to improve after his 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 against the flamboyant Italian, which set up a quarter-final against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas.

Fognini had registered a five-set win over Nadal at the 2015 US Open, but the Spaniard cantered to victory after recovering from 2-4 down in the second set. Nadal is now into his 43rd Grand Slam quarter-final, staying on course for a title match with eight-time winner Novak Djokovic who battled through an abdominal injury to reach the last eight on Sunday.

"I'm happy to be in the quarter-finals today — that means a lot to me, it's positive stuff," said Nadal, who is level with Roger Federer on 20 Grand Slam men's singles titles. Next up for Nadal is world number six Tsitsipas, who went through on a walkover after Italy's Matteo Berrettini pulled out with an abdominal strain.

The Melbourne tournament remained fan-free for a third day yesterday during a five-day lockdown in Victoria state to curb a coronavirus outbreak. As the action continued in front of empty stands, top-ranked Barty beat big-hitting American Shelby Rogers in impressive fashion to reach the last eight. Barty won 6-3, 6-4 to go into the quarter-finals without dropping a set as she bids to become the first Australian champion since Chris O'Neil in 1978.

"I love playing at home and sharing this with my friends and family," said Barty, who hit 21 winners. The former French Open champion next plays Karolina

Muchova, who came through two tight sets to beat Belgium's Elise Mertens 7-6 (7/5), 7-5.

## Russians are coming

Earlier, unseeded American Jessica Pegula reached her maiden Grand Slam quarter-final with victory over Elina Svitolina, her first over a top-10 player. Pegula, whose billionaire father owns the Buffalo Bills NFL team, overcame fifth seed Svitolina 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 to set up a meeting with fellow American Jennifer Brady, a 6-1, 7-5 winner against Croatia's Donna Vekic.

"I can't get more confident — it is my best result yet and I'm playing good tennis and today was a hard-fought win," said Pegula, 26. "Jen (Brady) is an awesome person. She's a great person," Pegula added. "She was texting me, I'm so happy, I'm so proud. This is awesome."

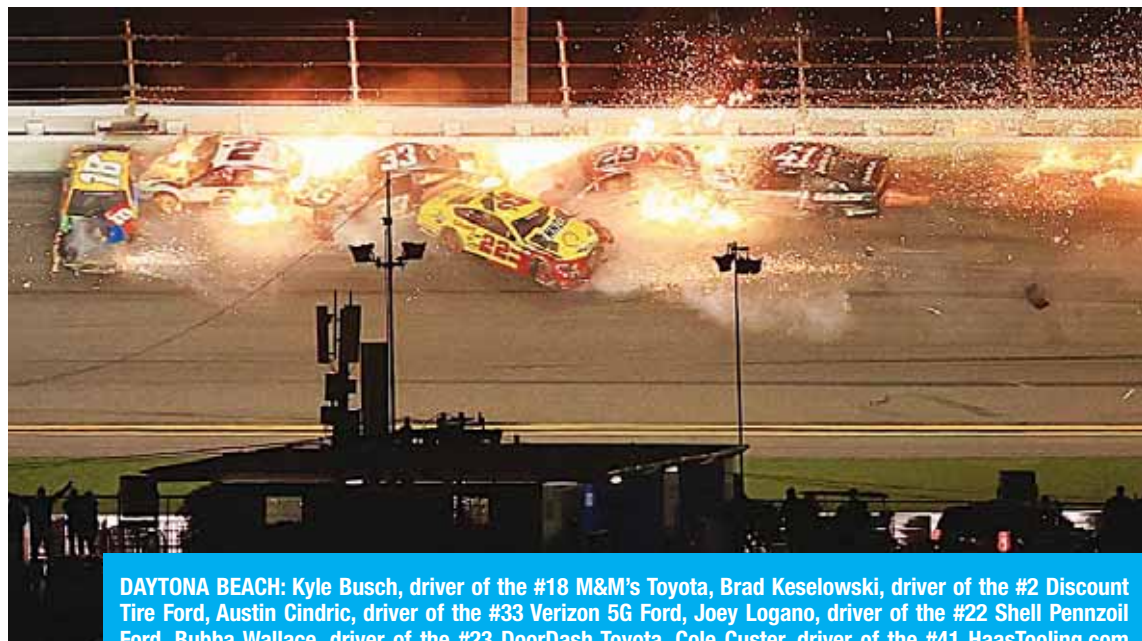
Elsewhere, fourth seed Daniil Medvedev and seventh seed Andrey Rublev both won to ensure an all-Russian quarter-final. Medvedev, the 2019 US Open runner-up, blew away American world number 192 Mackenzie McDonald 6-4, 6-2, 6-3 to extend his winning streak to 18 matches. Rublev, who is also unbeaten this year, went through when Norway's Casper Ruud retired after losing the first two sets.

The 22-year-old Norwegian had reached the last 16 at a Slam for the first time — emulating his father, Christian, who achieved the same feat at the 1997 Australian Open. With qualifier Aslan Karatsev already through to face Grigor Dimitrov in the top half of the draw, it means there will be three Russian men in the last eight of a Slam for the first time since the Open era began in 1968. —AFP



MELBOURNE: Australia's Ashleigh Barty hits a return against Shelby Rogers of the US during their women's singles match on day eight of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. —AFP

## McDowell wins crash-filled Daytona 500



DAYTONA BEACH: Kyle Busch, driver of the #18 M&amp;M's Toyota, Brad Keselowski, driver of the #2 Discount Tire Ford, Austin Cindric, driver of the #33 Verizon 5G Ford, Joey Logano, driver of the #22 Shell Pennzoil Ford, Bubba Wallace, driver of the #23 DoorDash Toyota, Cole Custer, driver of the #41 HaasTooling.com Ford, are involved in an on-track incident during the NASCAR Cup Series 63rd Annual Daytona 500 at Daytona International Speedway on Sunday in Daytona Beach, Florida. —AFP

**LOS ANGELES:** Michael McDowell won the rain-delayed Daytona 500 on Sunday, storming to an upset victory as a fiery last-lap crash unfolded in his rear view mirror. McDowell, who only led the NASCAR Cup Series race in the final lap, emerged from a skidding pile-up to grab the lead and win a three-car sprint at the Florida track. It was his first win in the Series in 357 starts. "So many years just grinding it out and hoping for an opportunity like this," McDowell said. "Such a great way to get a first victory — a Daytona 500. Are you kidding me?"

Defending series champion Chase Elliott finished second while Austin Dillon came in third. Kevin Harvick and Denny Hamlin rounded out the top five. Hamlin led the 200-lap race at the Daytona International Speedway for 98 laps as he tried to become the first driver in history to win three straight Daytona 500s. Bubba Wallace, who led for

one lap, drove the 23XI team car owned by basketball superstar Michael Jordan and Hamlin which was making its debut. Wallace finished in 17th place.

The race was delayed for five hours due to heavy rain, and the bad weather came after another dramatic wreck just 14 laps into the race. The crash involved 16 cars and took out drivers including Martin Truex, Aric Almirola, Ryan Newman, Alex Bowman, Matt DiBenedetto, Erik Jones, Jamie McMurray, Kurt Busch and Ryan Blaney. No one was seriously injured in the wrecks. "We were just getting pushed too hard too early," Stewart-Haas Racing's Almirola said. "It's a long, long race. We were in a fine position, just sitting there riding around in the top two, three and the 20 just came with a big run and hit me really hard in a bad spot and it turned me to the right and tore up our race car." —AFP

## Ashwin hits century as India near victory in second Test

**CHENNAI:** Ravichandran Ashwin hit a sparkling century and took a key wicket yesterday to edge India closer to a series-leveling victory in the second Test against England, who face a daunting target of 482 to win. The tourists, who lead the four-match series 1-0, were struggling at 53 for three at stumps on the third day in Chennai.

Dan Lawrence, on 19, and skipper Joe Root, on two, will resume batting Tuesday on the turning pitch. Left-arm spinner Axar Patel took two wickets including Dom Sibley, for three, and Jack Leach, who was sent in as nightwatchman, for naught. "There is spin on offer but it depends how much speed you hit (as a spinner). Bowling slow is not helping," Patel told reporters.

Pundits have criticised the pitch at M A Chidambaram Stadium with former England captain Michael Vaughan calling it a "Chennai beach". But Patel said no one should have reservations about the pitch. "When we go outside India and get seaming tracks, we don't say that the pitch has too much grass. People should change their mindset," he said.

England spin coach Jeetan Patel said the team will not throw in the towel. "We have got to keep staying positive. We have got stroke makers in the group and we want them to keep expressing themselves," said the former New Zealand spinner. "I am not going to say we are going to win this game but we are going to shake a stick at it."

Following up on his five wickets in the first innings, Ashwin got Rory Burns caught at slip for 25 to take his match tally to six. Ashwin scored his fifth Test century and first against England before India were bowled out for 286 in the final

session. Spinners Moeen Ali and Jack Leach claimed four wickets each. England have been battling to avoid defeat since a first innings collapse on the second day, and will have to mount a record run chase to secure a miracle victory.

## Freak run out

The Chennai-born Ashwin survived reprieves on 28, 56 and 70 runs. He then got to his hundred with an edge to the boundary, which was met by loud cheers from the home crowd. He put on a 96-run seventh-wicket stand with skipper Virat Kohli, who made 62 before falling to Ali's off spin. Ashwin got help from number 11 Mohammed Siraj to get to his century as they put on 49 runs for the final wicket. Olly Stone bowled Ashwin to end India's innings. "I don't know when I will play my next Test here, but I'm very pleased," said Ashwin. "I was just telling Siraj to look at the line of the ball and go wherever he wants. It was a funny thing and it was exciting to see how he (Siraj) celebrated and that says a few things about the dressing room."

Resuming the day on 54-1, India lost five wickets in the morning session with Ali and Leach combining to do some damage. Cheteshwar Pujara went for seven after a freak run out when his bat jammed behind the crease while attempting to get back following a flick to short leg. Sharma, who made 161 in India's first innings, added one to his overnight 25 before being stumped by wicketkeeper Ben Foakes off Leach. Foakes, who celebrated his 28th birthday yesterday, was in action again to send back his Indian rival Rishabh Pant, stumped for eight off Leach again. The stadium witnessed a security breach in the lunch break when a boy walked onto the ground from the stands near where players from both sides were practising. Security guards escorted him away. Fans have been allowed to watch the second Test action live in Chennai, the first time that has been permitted at a stadium in India since the coronavirus pandemic hit. —AFP



Sports

# Messi leading Barca revival, but PSG reminder of what could await

## Barca face Leo's potential suitors in Champions League last 16

**MADRID:** Lionel Messi put his arm around Ilaix Moriba, the 18-year-old born in the same year Messi made his Barcelona debut and who was now being given his own chance to play for the club's first team. Ilaix had just set up the opening goal against Alaves on Saturday when he was congratulated by his 33-year-old captain, whose task it is tonight to lead this youthful Barca to an unfancied victory against Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League last 16.

From nurturing the next generation of Barcelona talents to confronting one of Europe's richest, most ambitious clubs, the fork in the road for Messi's future is becoming clear. PSG may not be Messi's preferred choice this summer, especially if Manchester City decide the Argentinian is the final piece of the jigsaw for a team already ahead of the rest in the Premier League.

But the two clubs remain his most realistic destinations, both united in representing almost everything that staying put at Barcelona would not. Clubs ready, in theory, to win the biggest trophies immediately and able to spend whatever it takes to do it.

Meanwhile Messi's suspicions in August, when he sent the burofax requesting he depart for free, have arguably been confirmed. Barcelona appear neither ready to win the biggest trophies immediately nor able to spend what is needed to do it.

As it stands, Koeman's team sit third in La Liga, eight points behind Atletico Madrid. They were beaten by Athletic Bilbao in the Spanish Super Cup and trail Sevilla 2-0 after the semi-final first leg of the Copa del Rey. And yet while nobody knows what Messi will decide, perhaps not even Messi — who told La Sexta in December he "wouldn't be right to say what I'm going to do because I don't know either" — there is reason to think Barca's chances have not only survived the disappoint-

ments but been improved in spite of them.

### Barcelona stabilized

When Messi explained to goal.com why he wanted to go last summer, he reiterated his desire for a "winning project" but also said he "wanted to live my last years in football happily". He admitted how hard it was to tell his family they were leaving. For the first few weeks of the season, he seemed distracted, like a player giving his all while simultaneously wishing he was somewhere else.

Yet Barcelona stabilized under Koeman — never perfect and always far from the finished article — but with a renewed sense of purpose emerging. Koeman has enabled struggling players to flourish and promising youngsters to shine. Pedri, the 18-year-old attacking midfielder, has stood out, his eye for a pass chiming with Messi's quickness of thought. "In Pedri, Messi has found a reason to enjoy the game again," wrote Diario Sport in January.

Ansu Fati sparkled before injury struck in November while in defense, the 21-year-old Ronald Araujo, who is also expected to miss the first leg with an ankle problem, emerged as Koeman's most reliable central defender. Frenkie de Jong has excelled in recent weeks and Ousmane Dembele is enjoying his best spell at the club so far. Messi, like the team, has looked happy. "He is focused, he is happy, he has found that ruthless streak again," said Koeman on Saturday.

Excitement may prove misplaced or, at least, premature given there are no guarantees Barcelona's depleted defense will not cave against PSG and Kylian Mbappe, even with Neymar absent. Another humbling in Europe may not undo the good work Koeman has done but it would serve as a painful reminder to Messi of past failures and



**BARCELONA:** Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (left) celebrates with Barcelona's French midfielder Antoine Griezmann after scoring a goal during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and Deportivo Alaves at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on February 13, 2021. —AFP

ground to make up.

A positive result could do the opposite, providing affirmation of steps already taken and evidence that a move even to the richest clubs would bring no guarantees. Most importantly, there is an opportunity to rubberstamp what Koeman has started and to confirm the growing sense of a club slowly rebuilding again. With presidential elections due

next month, the reality is Koeman may not see this transition through but Messi can decide if his role in any revival will be fleeting or more fundamental. "There is only one person who can choose his future and it is him," said Koeman. "I would like him to stay for many more years and I'm trying to make sure he is happy like he is now. But his future is in his hands." —AFP

## Deprived of Neymar, PSG look to Pochettino to take down old foe

**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain knew what they were doing when they appointed Mauricio Pochettino as coach a little over six weeks before renewing their rivalry with Barcelona in the Champions League last 16. Tonight's game at the Camp Nou will be the ninth between the sides in the competition in eight years. History is on Barcelona's side, and in the era of the super club, going out in the first knockout round of Europe's elite competition is potentially disastrous.

PSG's exit at the hands of Barcelona at this stage in 2017 was certainly that, with an astonishing 6-1 second-leg demolition wiping out a 4-0 first-leg advantage. But the Qatar-owned club responded to that humiliation in stunning fashion, by buying the architect of their downfall, paying Neymar's release clause for a world record fee of 222 million euros (\$264m at the time) in a move that caused consternation in the Catalan capital.

PSG's hopes of gaining revenge over Barcelona on the pitch this time have been hit by the injury to Neymar which rules the Brazilian out of the trip to his old home, and could rule him out of the second leg on March 10 too. However, the hope is that Pochettino can get the better of his old foes. When it came to changing coach midway through this season, Pochettino was a natural choice to replace the sacked Thomas Tuchel in many respects. He is a former PSG captain, and was a free agent having pre-

viously done an excellent job at Tottenham Hotspur.

### 'Impossible to work for Barca'

Yet his relationship with Barcelona — or lack of it — also works in the Argentine's favor. The 48-year-old spent a large chunk of his playing career in Catalonia, but did so wearing the blue and white of Barcelona's city rivals Espanyol. He was part of two Copa del Rey winning sides at Espanyol, in 2000 and 2006. Pochettino then began his coaching career when he took over a struggling Espanyol team in early 2009. He quickly revived their fortunes and oversaw a 2-1 win over Pep Guardiola's Barcelona in the Catalan derby at the Camp Nou.

That remains one of the finest results of his managerial career, for all the sterling work he did at Tottenham, including taking them to the 2019 Champions League final. It also remains Espanyol's only win away to Barca in the last 39 years. He left in 2012, but the ties to Espanyol remain strong. "I would prefer to go and work on my farm in Argentina," he famously joked in 2018 when asked if he might ever coach Barcelona.

It was a theme he recently returned to during an interview with French broadcaster RMC Sport. "I have a real affection for Espanyol. I spent 12 years there as a player, five as coach. Seventeen years of my footballing life," he said. "I have spent more time there than at any other club, and they gave me the opportunity to become a coach. That is why, given the big rivalry, it would be impossible for me to work for Barca."

### Still finding his feet

Yet for all that, Pochettino must know elimination at the hands of Lionel Messi and co. would be a



**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain's Argentinian head coach Mauricio Pochettino gestures during the French L1 football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Nice (OGCN) at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris, on February 13, 2021. —AFP

huge setback for him so early into his reign in Paris. He has won eight and drawn one of 10 games so far, but none of the teams he has come up against yet are near the level even of the current Barcelona.

The absence of Neymar is an enormous blow, especially when added to that of Angel di Maria. Marco Verratti is a doubt, and Pochettino is still trying to put his stamp on the team. Kylian Mbappe, with four goals in Pochettino's 10 games, has not consistently produced his electrifying best for some time. The new coach has chopped and changed formations too. "We want the team to be confident playing in different systems, but it's not always easy to get a lot of work done in just 40 days," he insisted after Saturday's win against Nice. "We have to be ready, and the team will be ready." —AFP

## Energy-sapped Liverpool could learn from Leipzig

**LONDON:** Liverpool are badly in need of a Champions League lift to save their season, but with Jurgen Klopp's men seemingly devoid of confidence and showing signs of physical and mental fatigue, RB Leipzig are far from perfect opponents in the last 16. Barred from entering Germany due to coronavirus restrictions, the English champions head to Budapest for tonight's first leg on the back of three wins in their last 12 games in all competitions.

That run has ended their chances of silverware by retaining their league title or lifting the FA Cup, leaving the Champions League as Liverpool's only route to glory this season. However, there is little reason to believe there is a revival on the horizon for a squad that has been hamstrung by injuries all season and badly in need of rejuvenation. The loss of three center-backs — the talismanic Virgil van Dijk, Joe Gomez and Joel Matip — to season-ending injuries has had a devastating impact on Liverpool's season. Midfielders Fabinho and Jordan Henderson have been forced to deputize at the heart of the defense.

Without them, Liverpool's bite to quickly recoup possession in midfield has gone as has the pace of Van Dijk and Gomez to defend a high line. To compound matters, goalkeeper Alisson Becker, who has been fundamental to his side's success over the past two seasons, has made glaring errors to concede sev-

en times to Manchester City and Leicester in the last two games.

The injuries have also meant the core of Alisson, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Andy Robertson, Henderson, Fabinho, Georginio Wijnaldum, Sadio Mane, Roberto Firmino and Mohamed Salah have had to carry a huge burden of minutes in a season congested like no other. After four years of implementing Klopp's energy-sapping style of high pressing football, Liverpool's reserves have run dry.

"When you look at the percentage of Premier League minutes played from August 2018, this is a team that have gone to the well for three years and produced unbelievable moments, trophies for this club," former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher told Sky Sports. "This is not an attitude thing. This is not a team who think, 'We've won the league, we've made it'. They just haven't stopped for three years."

Carragher pointed to the transformational impact the three signings of Salah, Van Dijk and Alisson had in consecutive transfer windows in 2017 and 2018 to turn Liverpool from contenders for a top-four finish in Klopp's early years into champions. However, key to the recruitment of those three players was the sale of Philippe Coutinho to Barcelona for £142 million (\$197 million, 162 million euros) in January 2018.

With Salah and Mane turning 29 this year and Firmino 30 in October, the chance to cash in on another prize asset in their peak looks to have gone. Wijnaldum also looks set to leave for free when his contract expires at the end of the season. Without significant



**LEICESTER:** Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp (center) and Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah react at the final whistle during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Liverpool at King Power Stadium in Leicester, central England on February 13, 2021. —AFP

sales, even the Premier League champions cannot spend freely after a year of little matchday revenue. Leipzig's controversial ownership structure as part of Red Bull's sports empire may be not be popular with fans in Germany, but it has helped them become a model for successful player trading.

Dayot Upamecano's departure to Bayern Munich at the end of the season for 43 million euros is the latest big profit to be made on a player signed for just two million euros by another Red Bull-owned club Salzburg five-and-a-half years ago. Liverpool have been frequent shoppers from the Red Bull stable themselves in signing Naby Keita and Takumi Minamino, while Mane also made his name at Salzburg. Another

Leipzig center-back Ibrahima Konate has been rumored as the long-term solution to Liverpool's defense.

Despite losing the goals of another long-term Liverpool target Timo Werner to Chelsea, Leipzig are Bayern's closest challengers for the Bundesliga this season and knocked out Manchester United to reach the last 16 from a competitive group, also including Paris Saint-Germain. A steady stream of young new recruits such as Dani Olmo, Dominik Szoboszlai, Amadou Haidara, Christopher Nkunku, Konate and Angelino, has made Leipzig a force on the European stage and a lesson for Liverpool in how not to allow standards to slip with a stale squad. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Leipzig boss wary of Liverpool

**LEIPZIG:** RB Leipzig head coach Julian Nagelsmann is refusing to read too much into the Liverpool's poor recent results ahead of tonight's Champions League showdown in Budapest. Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool have won just three of their last 12 games and fly to Budapest for the last 16, first-leg tie against Leipzig on the back of three straight Premier League defeats. In contrast, Leipzig are only second in the Bundesliga behind world champions Bayern Munich after winning their last three league games. "They don't have the results crisis in the Champions League, but in the Premier League," Nagelsmann told reporters yesterday. "They have crossed off the (Premier League) title and their focus is now only on the Champions League." —AFP

#### Inter go top of Serie A

**ROME:** Romelu Lukaku scored twice to reach 300 career goals as Inter Milan moved above AC Milan to the top of Serie A with an impressive 3-1 home win over Lazio on Sunday. Lukaku's brace came in the first half as Inter made the most of their city rivals' surprising 2-0 loss at Spezia on Saturday. Inter, bidding for a first Scudetto since winning the treble under Jose Mourinho in 2010, are now one point clear of AC Milan, with Roma six points further back in third. The stage is set for a mouthwatering Milan derby at the San Siro next Sunday. —AFP

#### Arsenal hold off Leeds

**LONDON:** Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scored a hat-trick as Arsenal saw off a Leeds rally for a thrilling 4-2 win at the Emirates on Sunday. Aubameyang had not started a game for nearly a month after having to quarantine after visiting his mother, who is suffering from illness abroad. The Arsenal captain had previously scored just five league goals all season in a frustrating campaign for the Gunners, but he took full advantage of Leeds' expansive style to score his first Premier League hat-trick. —AFP

#### Lille reclaim top spot

**PARIS:** Lille returned to the top of Ligue 1 despite a 0-0 draw at home to Brest on Sunday, while Wissam Ben Yedder scored an injury-time equalizer for Monaco as their seven-game winning run was ended by a resurgent Lorient. Christophe Galtier's Lille failed to register a single shot on target as they dropped points for the first time in seven matches, moving back one clear of Paris Saint-Germain at the summit. Canada international Jonathan David had a goal disallowed for Lille in the second half following a handball in the build-up by center-back Jose Fonte. —AFP

Live		Matches on TV (Local Timings)
UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE		
FC Barcelona v Paris Saint-Germain	23:00	
beIN Sports HD 1		
RB Leipzig v Liverpool	23:00	
beIN Sports HD 2		



## Jokic shines as Nuggets dominate Lakers

### Lillard powers Portland over Mavs • Wizards cruise past Celtics

**WASHINGTON:** Nikola Jokic scored a triple double of 23 points, 16 rebounds and 10 assists to lead the Denver Nuggets to a one-sided 122-105 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers, who lost Anthony Davis when he aggravated an Achilles injury on Sunday. Canada's Jamal Murray scored 25 points, Zeke Nnaji had 16 and Facundo Campazzo tallied 15 for the Nuggets in the battle between the two teams that met in the Western Conference finals last season. Jokic recorded his sixth triple double of the season.

LeBron James delivered 22 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists for the Lakers, who had their seven game winning streak halted. Los Angeles wilted in the second half when Davis headed to the dressing room after re-injuring his right Achilles. Davis left with 2:39 left in the third quarter after he bumped legs with Jokic. He shot his free throws then limped off the court — he was scheduled for an MRI yesterday. "I don't want to mess around with this type of injury," he said. "Just trying to figure out the best steps." Davis, who finished with 15 points in 14 minutes, missed two games last week with tendonitis of the Achilles.

In Dallas, Damian Lillard delivered 34 points and 11 assists as the Blazers withstood a 44-point performance from Luka Doncic to edge the Dallas Mavericks 121-118 in the first game of a three game road trip. Lillard made a clutch three pointer with less than a minute to go after Dallas had gone on a 12-0 run to climb back into the contest. "I think we earned this win," said Lillard. "We played the kind of game we played, against what we've been up against through the game, it's rewarding in the end."

Gary Trent scored 17 points and Carmelo Anthony notched 15 off the bench for the Trail Blazers, who stretched their winning streak to four games in front of 2,200 fans at the American Airlines Center. Kristaps Porzingis scored 18 points for the Mavericks, who saw their four game win streak stop. "It didn't matter if I felt confident or not," Doncic said of his final shot. "I thought it was in. It went in and out, so I was disappointed and



DENVER: Nikola Jokic #15 of the Denver Nuggets shoots the ball during the game against the Los Angeles Lakers on Sunday at the Ball Arena in Denver, Colorado. — AFP

that's on me. I should have hit the shot."

Elsewhere, NBA scoring leader Bradley Beal poured in 35 points to spark the Washington Wizards over the Boston Celtics 104-91, delivering a rare home victory for what had been the league's second-worst squad. Beal went 10-of-18 from the floor, four-of-nine from three-point range, and 11-of-11 from the free throw line while the Wizards grabbed a season-best 54 rebounds and kept Boston to 32-of-90 shooting.

Japanese forward Rui Hachimura scored 15 points while Russell Westbrook had 13 points, 11

assists and nine rebounds for the Wizards, who improved to 7-17 overall but remained the NBA's worst team at home at 3-9. Jaylen Brown and Kemba Walker each scored 25 points to lead the Celtics, who fell to fifth in the East at 13-13. Jayson Tatum, a boyhood pal of Beal, had only six points on three-of-14 shooting. "It's always a battle. Jayson is a superstar," Beal said. "You always have to bring it. The mental has to be there. It always feels good to get a win."

Beal scored seven points in Washington's 15-8 run to start the game, with Boston opening two-

of-nine from the floor. Beal, who began five-of-five then missed his next six shots from the floor, had 12 in the first quarter as the Wizards opened a 29-22 edge. Washington seized a 55-43 halftime edge, matching the fewest first-half points the Wizards had allowed all season. An 11-0 run sparked by six points from Hachimura gave Washington a 77-53 edge. The Celtics responded with an 11-1 run but the Wizards ended the third quarter with an 11-3 spurt for an 89-67 advantage. Washington lifted the lead as large as 101-76 and cruised to the finish. — AFP

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