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Kuwait Times ZAIN HUAWEI

Compliance or lockdown: Virus here to stay 'till Judgment Day'

Citizens account for 60% of cases, expats not main cause of pandemic



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh gestures as he speaks with Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah during a special National Assembly session yesterday on measures taken by the government to limit the spread of COVID-19. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The government yesterday issued a stern warning to the public to comply fully with health measures or face a total lockdown to contain a steep rise in the number of new coronavirus cases. Speaking during a special session of the National Assembly, Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah bluntly said if people do not comply with using facemasks and observing social distancing, "we will be compelled to impose a total lockdown".

The health minister declared "the pandemic will not end and will stay with us until the Day of Judgment", adding the only way to face it is through vaccination. Later, he explained COVID-19 is caused by a virus and this virus will continue to exist and people will deal with it like any other virus through medication and vaccination.

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah said Kuwait is facing a second wave of the deadly pandemic that saw 50 deaths in the past 15 days, and "if we do not cooperate...the situation will be difficult for all". The prime minister warned the situation is "very disturbing" as the number of cases at intensive care units and hospi-

talizations have substantially increased. He noted many countries larger than Kuwait are continuing with lockdowns, but expressed hope Kuwait will not reach that stage.

"We will be compelled to take tougher measures. If there will be no compliance (with health measures), we will be compelled to impose more closures and a total lockdown" in a bid to prevent the entry of new coronavirus variants, the health minister said.

Sheikh Basel denied that expatriates, who form more than two-thirds of the population, were the main source of infection. "It's untrue that expats are the ones who transfer the infection. Only very few cases come from abroad. Infection is widespread among citizens, who account for 60 percent of the cases, and expats 40 percent, many of them domestic helpers," the minister said.

He said as many as 454,000 people have registered online for the COVID vaccination, 215,000 of whom are citizens and the rest expats. As many as 137,000 people, including 119,000 Kuwaiti citizens (87 percent of those inoculated), have received the first shot of the vaccine. Around 38,000 people have received the second shot.

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News in brief

National holidays announced

KUWAIT: The Civil Service Commission announced yesterday that all ministries, government authorities and public institutions will be closed from Feb 25 to 28 on the occasion of the national and liberation days. Thursday and Friday are official holidays, while Saturday and Sunday have been considered as rest days. Official work will resume on March 1. — KUNA

5G can interfere with aircraft

PARIS: The latest generation of smartphones, 5G, can interfere with aircraft altitude instruments, the French Civil Aviation Authority warned yesterday as it recommended they should be turned off during flight. This interference can cause errors "in instruments that are extremely critical during landing", said the agency. — AFP (See Page 8)

39 dead in India bus crash

NEW DELHI: Thirty-nine people were killed yesterday when a bus plunged into a deep canal in the state of Madhya Pradesh, officials said. The accident happened when the bus, which was carrying more than 50 passengers, veered off a bridge and crashed into the 9-m-deep canal in Sidhi district early yesterday. Officials said the driver and six others swam to safety. — AFP

Bitcoin surges past \$50,000

LONDON: Bitcoin soared above \$50,000 for the first time yesterday after jumping almost 75 percent so far this year as heavyweight companies back the world's most popular virtual currency. At around 1235 GMT, bitcoin hit an all-time high of \$50,547.70, a 4.4-percent gain since Monday. It later pulled back to stand at \$49,213.54. — AFP (See Page 8)

Domestic helper recruitment fee includes airfare

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The ministry of commerce and industry confirmed to Kuwait Times yesterday that the official fee for recruiting domestic helpers from abroad includes the cost of the air ticket of the worker. Ministry decree 33/2021, published in the official gazette Kuwait Al Youm last week, set the fee for hiring domestic workers through

recruitment agencies at KD 890, or KD 390 if the sponsor provides the passport of the worker to the agency.

As the decree doesn't mention details about what this fee includes, some agencies are trying to take advantage of people's lack of information. A recruitment agency contacted by Kuwait Times said the fee does not include airfare, while other agencies said it includes the price of the air ticket.

"The agency is obliged to pay for the ticket, otherwise the customer can file a complaint against the agency. But the fee of KD 890 does not include quarantine charges, which is set by the ministry of health," a commerce ministry official told Kuwait Times. One of the agencies said the quarantine fee is around KD 170, but Kuwait Times could not confirm the exact

charges as the ministry of health did not respond to repeated queries.

Previously, the fee for importing domestic workers was different depending on their nationality, and prices differed from one agency to another. But this new decree set a unified fee that applies to all nationalities and all agencies.

Ali Al-Shammouh, Secretary General of Kuwait Union for Domestic Labor Offices, told Kuwait Times earlier this month that Kuwait will face an acute shortage of approximately 160,000-180,000 domestic helpers by Ramadan (in mid-April). He said the shortage existed even prior to the coronavirus pandemic, but worsened when the airport was closed during the lockdown last year. Many domestic helpers then left the country for good following the reopening of the airport.

UN slams Iraq rocket attack as 'reckless'

ARBIL, Iraq: The United Nations warned yesterday that tensions in Iraq could escalate after a rocket attack killed a foreign contractor for the US military and wounded at least 14 others in the Kurdish regional capital Arbil. The hail of more than a dozen rockets late Monday was the first attack in nearly two months targeting Western military or diplomatic installations in Iraq after a series of similar

incidents blamed on pro-Iranian Shiite factions.

"Such heinous, reckless acts pose grave threats to stability," the UN top representative in Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, wrote on Twitter, calling for "restraint" on all sides. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken earlier said he was "outraged" and pledged American support in holding those responsible to account.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi said that "the terrorist act that targeted the Kurdistan region aims to create chaos" and vowed to keep Iraq from becoming a "backyard" where regional conflicts play out. The barrage of 107 mm

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ARBIL: A worker clears shattered glass yesterday outside a damaged shop following a rocket attack the previous night in the capital of the northern Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region. — AFP

Saudi pushes firms to move Mideast HQs to kingdom

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia on Monday heaped pressure on foreign companies to move their Middle East headquarters to the kingdom, saying it will stop signing contracts with firms with hubs in oth-

er countries from 2024. The bold ultimatum could intensify competition for business and foreign capital between the kingdom and other Gulf states, especially its principal ally the United Arab Emirates, as they reel from an economic slump.

"Saudi Arabia intends to cease contracting with companies and commercial institutions with regional headquarters not located in the kingdom," the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported, citing an unnamed official source. "The cessation will include agencies, institutions and funds owned by the government and will take

effect January 1, 2024."

The decision seeks to "create more jobs, limit economic leakage, increase spending efficiency and guarantee that the main goods and services purchased by the different government agencies are made in the kingdom", it added. Saudi Arabia, the biggest Arab economy, has been struggling to attract foreign investment, a key pillar of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's "Vision 2030" economic diversification plan to boost non-oil revenue.

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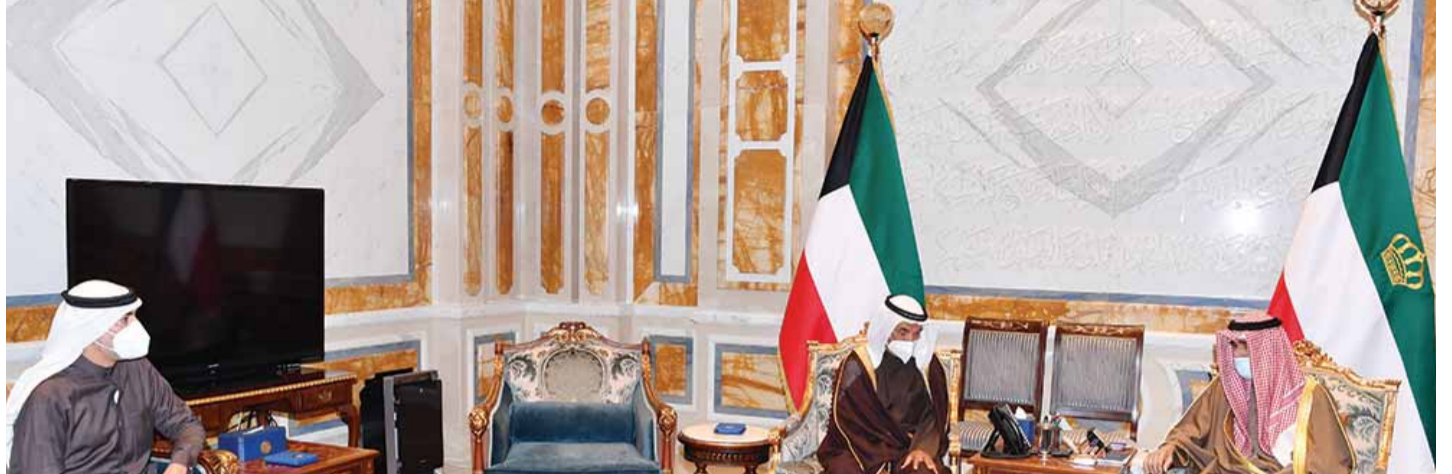
Local

Amir receives 2021 King Faisal Prize winner

Programmer honored for efforts in Arabizing computer programs



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Chairman of Sakhar Computer Programming Company Mohammad Al-Sharekh.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received the Chairman of Sakhar Computer Programming Company Mohammad Abdulrahman Al-Sharekh on winning 2021 King Faisal Prize granted by King Faisal Foundation for his efforts in Arabizing computer programs and enriching the Islamic arena and Arab culture.

His Highness the Amir wished him more success to continue his remarkable bid and hoist the country's flag in regional and international forums. President of Amiri diwan Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Saud Al-Sabah attended the meeting. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh

Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad at Bayan Palace yesterday.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences yesterday to Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia over passing of Princess Lamyia bint Hathloul bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. His Highness the Amir prayed to Allah the Almighty to bestow blessings upon the deceased and to grant solace to the royal family. 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. — KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Damage caused to SMEs painful: PM

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah said the damage caused to the owners of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) was "painful," and the same goes for the educational attainment of students and the failure of athletes to practice their activities. "But the greater pain is the continuing epidemic situation amid the rise (of cases)," he said in a speech at the extraordinary session of the National Assembly, held yesterday to discuss governmental procedures and policies in dealing with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and the mutated strains.

"Today we completed a year and we welcome a new one, and now, after 45 days of the new year, we have begun to enter into an alarming situation, as the number of deaths in the past 15 days has reached 50 cases," said the Premier. "Occupancy of intensive care beds and hospital admissions has increased largely, as we are heading towards reaching five intensive care units at Mubarak Hospital," he noted. "We must pause and examine this matter and adhere to what needs to be done. Yes, we suffer from

the damage of small and medium businesses, and we suffer from the damage to our children's educational achievements, and we suffer when athletes do not practice their activities, but the biggest pain is when we see the situation continues to rise," he stressed.

"With cooperation, solidarity, understanding, acceptance and implementation, yes, we went through losses, but we passed the stage of ascension, then stabilized, and now we have a second wave. If we do not cooperate, stand together and understand what is required to do, the situation will be difficult for everyone, the whole world has been affected and we must deal with reality," he continued. "The readings that the officials had prepared are based on careful follow-ups and analysis that reached conclusions that the executive and legislative authorities must take into account. We all appreciate their hard work and dedication." His Highness expressed his thanks to the members of the National Assembly for submitting the request to hold this extraordinary session, which shows the interest of the National Assembly in following up the government's actions towards the pandemic.

Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Faisal Al-Medlej had affirmed earlier that SME owners are one of the main and important cornerstones of commercial sustainability and development in Kuwait. According to His Highness the Prime Minister's directives, the Board of Directors of the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises Development formed a committee to look into the defaulting projects and financiers, said the minister. He stated that a committee was formed in mid-January, consisting of NGOs, federations concerned with these projects, and consultants from the Ministry of Commerce, to help solve any existing problems the SMEs owners are facing. The minister also said that the Financial Security Law was one of the very important draft laws that were discussed in the previous legislative term of the National Assembly, but was not approved. Therefore, the committee presented a more comprehensive view towards the beneficiaries of this law.

The Cabinet on Monday had examined a petition presented by entrepreneurs of SMEs, in the aftermath of the



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah attends an extraordinary session of the National Assembly to discuss procedures to deal with COVID-19 yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

resolution closing some commercial businesses and decided to financially support this segment of the labor force, according to the law of establishing the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise Development. Additionally, the Cabinet decided to assign the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise Development to work out

mechanisms for disbursement of the funds for the eligible businessmen. The decision is effective as of March and valid for three months. Another decision stipulates assigning the competent authorities to delay payment of the State services fees to the entrepreneurs whose businesses have been shut for three months. — KUNA

Compliance or lockdown: Virus....

Continued from Page 1

The health minister warned there are new strains of the pandemic and their health and economic impacts will be immense if they enter the country. "The pandemic is spreading rapidly... all arrivals at the airport are tested for the disease," the minister said.

An official from the health ministry, Mohammad Al-Saeedan, said the situation now from a clinical point of view is similar to the period before imposing the first lockdown last year. "We must be ready for any decision," he warned.

The Assembly session was called by a group of MPs to debate new measures imposed by the government and compensation for small and medium businesses affected by partial closures. Around 24 opposition MPs boycotted the session on the grounds that the government represented in the

meeting had resigned and the prime minister has taken long to form a new Cabinet.

During the debate, lawmakers criticized the government for taking the partial closure decision and called for compensating small and medium businesses. MP Hesham Al-Saleh wondered what measures authorities have taken against expats who had allegedly produced fake PCR test certificates. The minister said it is not possible to prove that a certain PCR test is fake, and insisted all arrivals are tested at the airport.

MP Saadoun Hammad criticized the slow pace of the vaccination program, saying the United Arab Emirates has vaccinated five million people already, pointing out the UAE is not different from Kuwait.

At the end of the debate, the Assembly passed a number of recommendations calling on the government to speed up legislation to compensate businesses. The recommendations called on the government to review the latest measures imposed around two weeks ago. It also called on authorities to apply tough measures against the entry of expats into the country and delaying all forms of loan repayment for a year. It also called for speeding up the vaccination drive.

their intent to relocate their headquarters to Riyadh at last month's Davos-style Future Investment Initiative forum in the capital, SPA said. Monday's announcement "will not affect any investor's ability to enter the Saudi market or to continue their business with the private sector", SPA said. But the decision will pile pressure on private sector companies heavily dependent on lucrative Saudi government contracts.

"Pressing multinationals to establish headquarters in Saudi Arabia centers upon the belief that foreign companies benefitting from the Saudi market should bolster their physical presence in the country," Robert Moglemicki, a resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, told AFP. "This is ultimately a reevaluation of the sustainability of Saudi Arabia's economic development model and not an intentional commercial challenge to the UAE. If done successfully though, it is likely to have a commercial impact on the UAE." — AFP

UN slams Iraq rocket attack...

Continued from Page 1

rockets - the same caliber used in recent attacks in Baghdad - was fired Monday evening from around eight kilometers west of Arbil.

They appeared to be aimed at a military complex inside the Arbil airport that hosts foreign troops deployed as part of a US-led coalition that has helped Iraq fight jihadists since 2014. But they struck all over the city's northwest, including in residential districts where they wounded five civilians, the Arbil health directorate told AFP. Coalition spokesman Wayne Marotto said three rockets hit Arbil airport and killed one civilian contractor, who he said was neither an Iraqi nor US national. Another nine people were wounded, including eight civilian contractors and one US soldier, he said.

A shadowy group calling itself Awliya al-Dam (Guardians of Blood) claimed the attack and in a follow-up statement yesterday vowed to keep targeting US forces in Iraq. Over the past year, around a dozen previously unheard-of formations have claimed responsibility for rocket attacks on Western diplomatic and security installations.

US and Iraqi officials have told AFP they believe such factions to be "smokescreen" entities for more prominent pro-Iran groups including Kataeb Hezbollah and Asaib Ahl al-Haq. Those factions are members of the Hashed al-Shaabi, a powerful state-sponsored armed network whose pro-Iran members often act independently of the government.

The ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) accused groups "under the guise of the Hashed al-Shaabi" of being behind the attack - a bold claim given the Hashed's status as being part of Iraq's state security network. The Kurdish region's premier Masrour Barzani pledged with his counterpart in Baghdad, Kadhemi, to launch a

joint probe into the incident.

The new violence has revived fears of a possible conflict on Iraqi soil between Tehran and Washington, two rivals who have long tried to draw Iraq into their respective spheres of influence. Iran yesterday condemned the attack and strongly denied rumors it was involved in the incident.

The rockets left small craters in the paved streets of Arbil and in plaster walls of buildings. The attack "put our lives at risk," said resident Nariman Mohammad, 51. "I don't see any meaning to any of this. We're also people, and we want to live." Arbil airport, after being closed to flights throughout the morning, resumed its normal schedule at noon, a government spokesman told AFP.

Western military and diplomatic facilities have been targeted by dozens of rockets and roadside bombs since late 2019, but most attacks have been on Baghdad, not Arbil. Following the deaths of US service members in two incidents in 2019 and 2020, former US president Donald Trump ordered several bombing raids on Kataeb Hezbollah. Iraqi and even US officials have told AFP in recent weeks that it was not clear whether Joe Biden's administration would pursue the same "tripwire" response.

Since Iraq declared victory over the Islamic State group in late 2017, the coalition presence has been reduced to fewer than 3,500 troops, of whom 2,500 are American. Most are concentrated at the military complex at Arbil airport, a coalition official told AFP, adding that the phased drawdown had left "gaps" in the security structure.

Arbil has been targeted very rarely, although Iranian forces fired missiles at the same airport in January last year, a few days after Washington assassinated prominent Iranian general Qasem Soleimani at Baghdad airport. Both Iran and hardline Iraqi armed groups have repeatedly pledged to take revenge for Soleimani's killing. The same groups have recently vowed to boost their military activity in Iraq's Kurdistan region, ostensibly against a Turkish incursion. — AFP

Saudi pushes firms to move Mideast...

Continued from Page 1

Many multinationals doing business in the conservative kingdom prefer to have their regional headquarters in the neighboring UAE and other glitzy Gulf capitals that offer a relatively more liberal lifestyle and permit alcohol. Under a previous government initiative known as "Program HQ", Saudi Arabia - which has sought to shake-off its austere image by allowing cinemas, concerts and sporting extravaganzas - offered multinational companies tax breaks and incentives to relocate their Middle East headquarters to the kingdom.

Twenty-four international companies declared

Local

Kuwait registers 964 new COVID cases, five deaths

Govt voices alarm at spike in coronavirus cases

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MoH) registered yesterday 964 additional COVID-19 cases over a 24-hour span, increasing the total number of infections to 179,488, while five fatalities were recorded, raising the death toll to 1,014. Plus, 810 fresh recovery cases were added to a total of 167,601 cured people, MoH's Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said during the 106th regular press conference.

Active cases amounted to 10,873 with 141 of them in intensive care units (ICU) as of yesterday, the ministry confirmed. Health authorities conducted 10,328 swab tests to a total of 1,687,183, 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.

Deep alarm

The Cabinet's weekly session on Monday was marked with deep alarm following a presentation made by the minister of health about the latest status of the pandemic in the country, amid mounting cases and deaths. Following the session, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet

Affairs Anas Al-Saleh stated that it kicked off with a briefing by Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah about the latest local health status with respect to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Statistics showed a spike in the cases of infections, deaths and patients who receive medical treatment as well those being admitted at the intensive care units, amid decline of recovery rates, minister Dr Basel affirmed during the session.



ICU patients rise to 141

He attributed the drastic increase of the cases and infections to non-compliance by the health terms, holding gatherings and social occasions' activities. The ministers expressed profound concern at the "phenomenal slack and complacency" with respect to applying the health conditions, trig-

gering a second pandemic wave in the country. The cabinet urged the public to take all necessary precautions and remain vigilant to spare themselves infection with the contagion and curb its spread.

Moreover, the government urged everybody to rapidly seek to get the vaccination against the virus noting that the extraordinary health situation warranted cooperation from all in the country. After revising recommendations by the ministerial committee for emergency response to the coronavirus, the Cabinet decided to task the fire force and the National Guard to aid the health authorities in enforcing the health precautions and ensure serious abidance in various sectors. Online teaching will continue in the private and public sectors until stabilization of the pandemic status in the country.

Official sources

Dr Sanad had said on Monday that people should be aware of inaccurate information that undermine the efforts of all workers in the health sector facing the Coronavirus pandemic. Dr Sanad added that misleading information threatens all the work made so far against the virus. He noted that misguided news about the vaccines could throw people off from the truth, and interrupt the implementing of the safety measures announced by the government. The spokesperson also said that WHO also warned peo-



ple about inaccurate information and the dangers of the spread of rumors between people. He stressed on following official sources of information about the pandemic and to ignore all other means of misguided information, especially in social media and any other technological way that can spread information vastly and quickly. — KUNA

Salon, gym, barbershop, massage parlor workers express grievances

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Some workers in Kuwait again face a no work-no pay situation for the entire month of February, after salons, barbershops, gyms and massage parlors were ordered by the Cabinet to shut down for a month (from Feb 7) due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Anwar, an Indian barber in Mirqab, recalled they had struggled for six months last year. "We were closed in 2020 for six months when the government imposed lockdowns and curfews. Now in 2021, we were told to close for 30 days, which can be extended. I don't know what will happen to us. In fact, I am considering giving up my job in Kuwait and going back to India," he said.

Anwar's barbershop has five employees, who all confirmed they are not getting paid this month. "We cannot blame the owner, because we agreed when we joined we will work on a 50-50 percent basis without any salary. It means the income will be divided in two - 50 percent goes to the owner and 50 percent to the barbers. Now there is no income, so we are not getting anything as well," he told Kuwait Times.

The problem, according to Anwar, is sending money to his family in Andhra Pradesh. "I have two kids and a wife to feed - that is why I need money badly. But for more

than a week now, I am at home doing nothing. My wife told me to come back home, and maybe we can survive in India," he said.

But Anwar has saved something for rainy days. "Saving is very important. In times like these, I can survive because I have some money in the bank. I can buy food and pay rent at least. My family is living with my parents, so they are okay. But I hope this doesn't last long," he said. Anwar admitted he provides home service for those he knows. "We are talking about one or two home visits per day. I accept 500 fils or KD 1 for nearby home visits. I don't go to far-away places," he said.

Pay cut

Ron, a gym receptionist in Khaitan, draws a monthly salary of KD 350. But his boss told him for the month of February, he will only pay him KD 150. "I did not complain because I am new to the job. I previously worked at a children's entertainment facility. From March to October 2020, we were not paid at all. When I got this job in November, I was really happy and grateful. But only after two months, we are closed again," he said.

Ron - who has two children in the Philippines - survived because he accepted a janitor's job, supervised by a cleaning company. "If not for them, I wouldn't have been

able to eat and pay rent. I got KD 1 per hour for cleaning the houses of Kuwaitis," he said.

Myrna, a salon worker in Sabah Al-Salem, doesn't know how she will pay the rent this month and remit money to her family. "I am stressed by just thinking about where will I get money this month for my house rent and to send to my family. I have five kids and they are all studying. My husband is also working, but doesn't earn much being a tricycle driver. When I told my husband I am facing a tough life in Kuwait, instead of supporting me and saying positive words to give me strength, he expressed his own similar situation back home," she told Kuwait Times.

"So for me, the message is clear - he cannot do anything. It means I will have to do something for my family. I am tired! All I get is hardship and grievances left and right. Oh God, bless us," Myrna lamented. "I am about to give up, but I still pray that God will help me and my family survive."

Tom, a masseur at a five-star hotel in Kuwait, also expressed disappointment at the sudden closure of their business. He said his monthly house mortgage payments will be affected again. "I have two homes mortgaged back home. Without a regular monthly income, how can I pay? I don't do home service because we are not allowed to do so by the management. If I am caught, I will be terminated as per the company policy. They said they will pay 50 percent of our salary, but I earn more than my salary in tips," he said. Tom is unmarried, but most of his income goes into his home investments and the rest to his nephews and nieces.



KUWAIT: Jahra police arrested three Asians involved in brewing illicit liquor in Rehaya. After authorities received information about a liquor brewery in the Rehaya scrap area, a field force was formed and went to the scene. After the information was confirmed, a warrant was obtained to destroy the factory. The three suspects were sent to concerned authorities.

News in brief

Expats' vaccination in six weeks?

KUWAIT: Kuwait plans to start vaccinating expats in six weeks, depending on if the vaccination process go on at the current pace and the continued arrival of contracted shipments, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday, quoting Health Ministry sources. The first group of expats to be vaccinated will be domestic helpers, especially that this group is considered among the most exposed to infection or transmitting due to close contacts, the sources said.

45 hotels for quarantine

KUWAIT: Forty-five hotels applied for registration on the "Kuwait-Mosafer" platform, as institutional quarantine is required at 3-, 4- or 5-star hotels from Feb 21 for all citizens and expats arriving in Kuwait for seven days at their expense, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday quoting official sources at the Kuwait Hotel Owners Association. The sources said this number can be increased due to the large number of hotels wanting to be involved, especially since hotel revenues dropped by over KD 100 million during the pandemic.

80,000 domestic helpers

KUWAIT: General Manager of National Aviation Services (NAS) Mansour Al-Khuzaim said the "belsalama" project - which was prepared at the government's request - has achieved great success. Around 80,000 domestic helpers benefited from it, most of whom are from India, Philippines and Bangladesh. Khuzaim said "belsalama" allows a sponsor to submit an application for the return of the helper, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday. After meeting all requirements, three PCR tests will be conducted - the first in the country where they are coming from through approved laboratories, the second upon arrival and the third after institutional quarantine is complete. Khuzaim said the plan was for the project to start on Dec 14, but due to government requirements, it was postponed until all procedures were completed. He said the response was excellent, adding issuance of new visas began on Jan 17. About reducing the cost, Khuzaim said there are many positives about the platform, including direct flights, hotel quarantine, meals and health procedures, along with three PCR tests. He added the platform's prices are reasonable.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.



US embassy commemorates Kuwait's national celebrations



KUWAIT: US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski (left) and Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah pose with the glass sculpture. — Amiri Diwan photos



Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah speaks during the event.



US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski delivers her speech.

News in brief

Kuwait denounces Irbil attack

KUWAIT: Kuwait yesterday denounced the rocket attack on the city of Irbil, the capital of the Kurdistan region of Iraq yesterday and caused several casualties. In a statement, the Foreign Ministry affirmed that such criminal acts will not discourage Iraq from continuing its efforts in restoring security and stability. The statement also stressed Kuwait's solidarity with Iraq and its support in all measures it takes to preserve its security and stability. Kuwait's foreign ministry expressed condolences to the victims' families, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. — KUNA

Cabinet condemns Houthi attacks

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Cabinet expressed strong condemnation of the attacks against civilians and civil areas in Saudi Arabia, noting that these activities, launching booby-trapped drones and ballistic missiles by the Houthi militia, pose a threat to regional stability, constitute blatant violation of international laws and covenants and undermine international efforts aimed at establishing peace and ending the conflict. During its weekly meeting Monday, the Kuwaiti government also called on the United Nations Security Council to take immediate measures to repel the criminal attacks in a manner that may preserve security and peace in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region. — KUNA

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah patronized yesterday an event at Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC) featuring a commemoration by the US embassy in celebration of Kuwait's 60th National Day and 30th Anniversary of the Liberation. The US embassy unveiled a glass sculpture at the JACC celebrating 60 years of strong diplomatic relations between the State of Kuwait and the United States of America. Delivering a speech at the event, representative of His Highness the Amir, Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah said "On behalf of His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, I wish to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to you for this celebration. It is a great honor that we meet here today to take part in the State of Kuwait's celebration of its 60th anniversary of Independence and the 30th anniversary of the Liberation of the State of Kuwait."

"The bilateral relations between the United States and the State of Kuwait have been exceptional in all fields," affirmed Sheikh Ali, adding "Today, we are looking forward to writing a new chapter in the history of our two countries, which have always been characterized by close cooperation and mutual respect as witnessed over the last 60 years."

"This solidarity reminds us of the firm stand the United States had taken to lead the international coalition to support and liberate Kuwait," he asserted. He said "We proudly recall all the sacrifices the United States had made ... I express my country's sincere gratitude to the people of your friendly country for defending the principles of freedom and sovereignty, which reflect the solid relations between

both friendly countries. In conclusion, I extend to you once again and on behalf of His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, our sincere appreciation and gratitude for this great honor."

Meanwhile, US Ambassador to the State of Kuwait Alina Romanowski said in her speech, "My deepest appreciation goes to Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah and the Amiri Diwan for agreeing to exhibit the sculpture at this world-class venue, Kuwait's premier center for the arts. I also thank Rana Al-Hamad and the staff here at Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed Cultural Centre for helping us install the sculpture and hosting today's ceremony." The Ambassador continued "The incredible sculpture that we are about to unveil is a gift from the people of the United States to His Highness Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the people of Kuwait. I hope that visitors to the Cultural Centre will be able to enjoy it for years. This sculpture is a symbol of what people can accomplish when we work together, despite challenging and even tragic conditions."

"Thirty years ago, the United States stood by "our Kuwaiti friends to build an international coalition that expelled Saddam Hussein's forces from Kuwait," the Ambassador pointed out, adding, "After the liberation, the US military and companies worked together with Kuwaitis to put out the fires caused by the retreating forces and help rebuild Kuwait. In the 30 years since, the United States and Kuwait have built a partnership covering not just defense and security, but also trade, investment, education, and collaboration on regional and humanitarian issues. And just as our peoples worked hand-in-hand to overcome the

tragedies of the invasion, the American and Kuwaiti artists who built this sculpture did not let the COVID-19 pandemic put a stop to the cultural partnership between our countries."

Ambassador Romanowski said, "Artists from the Corning Museum of Glass in New York, along with Lubna Saif Abbas and Mohammad Al-Duwaisan from Yadawi, found creative ways to collaborate over video conference and design the amazing piece that you're about to see. The American artists shipped their contributions to Kuwait, and then the Yadawi artists added their own brilliant and unique touches to the piece. The whole time, the artists kept in close contact to ensure that everyone provided ideas for the final piece."

"And thanks to the Amiri Diwan, we are able to display this wonderful creation at the most fitting place: the cultural center named after Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad, the visionary leader of Kuwait who led this country out of the invasion and into a new era of prosperity," added the Ambassador. "Sheikh Jaber and his successor Sheikh Sabah were great friends of the United States. Today, we honor the important contributions they made to build peace and security in Kuwait and in the region. The United States is just as committed to Kuwait's security and prosperity today as it was thirty years ago. Whatever challenges may come, Kuwait can always rely on the United States as a partner and an ally."

"Thank you again to our Kuwaiti friends for hosting this event. I look forward to unveiling this beautiful piece, and to the future of the US-Kuwait partnership," the Ambassador concluded. After the speeches, the sculpture was unveiled at the JACC. — KUNA

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.
- Participants in the ages 6 - 8 years may use marker colors only.
- 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 at painting@kuwaittimes.net in PDF format ONLY.
- Participant must include on the bottom of the artwork the following: name, age, email address, phone number and school in legible font.

Senegal president honors Kuwaiti ambassador

DAKAR: Senegal President Macky Sall has bestowed Kuwait's Ambassador in Dakar Saleh Al-Saqabi with the Order of the Lion Grand Cross Badge in appreciation of his contributions in strengthening both countries' relations. A farewell reception was held at the Palace of the Republic in the capital Dakar for ending Al-Saqabi's diplomatic tenure, Kuwait Embassy in Senegal said in a statement yesterday. During the reception, Ambassador Al-Saqabi conveyed greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and expressed gratitude and appreciation for the Senegalese President for the support he had received that contributed in boosting the level of relations between the two friendly countries. President Sall decorated Al-Saqabi with the Order of the Lion Grand Cross Badge in appreciation of further promotion of ties and cooperation between Senegal and Kuwait, said the statement. — KUNA



DAKAR: Kuwait's Ambassador in Dakar Saleh Al-Saqabi poses with Senegal's Order of the Lion Grand Cross Badge. — KUNA



KUWAIT: An archive photo showing clouds over Kuwait City. — KUNA

Weather turbulence peaks tonight, says meteorologist

KUWAIT: A weather turbulence is expected to climax tonight with passage of a cold wave, Kuwait's meteorological center reported yesterday, noting that the turbulence will begin to clear up as of tomorrow afternoon. The turbulence was

forecast to begin yesterday with expected rainfalls and robust winds, Kuwait Control and Meteorological Center (KCMC) reported. KCMC forecaster Yasser Al-Bloushi said an incoming Mediterranean-originating low depression would reach the country, creating clouds and medium and light rainfalls that may turn thunderous at times. Simultaneously, strong winds at 60 km per hour will whip the country, causing dusts and weak visibility lower than 1,000 meters. Severe drop in temperatures is expected in some regions and sea waves are expected to rage at more than seven feet high. — KUNA



Milk and music: Indian villages support protesting farmers

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This NASA handout illustration obtained Monday shows a descent illustration to Mars, of the spacecraft containing NASA's Perseverance rover slowing down using the drag generated by its motion in the Martian atmosphere. — AFP

NASA wants to fly a helicopter on Mars

Perseverance rover to touch down on Mars tomorrow

WASHINGTON: More than a century after the first powered flight on Earth, NASA intends to prove it's possible to replicate the feat on another world. Transported aboard the Mars 2020 spacecraft that arrives at the Red Planet on Thursday, the small Ingenuity helicopter will have several challenges to overcome—the biggest being the rarefied Martian atmosphere, which is just one percent the density of Earth's.

Ultralight

It might be called a helicopter, but in appearance it's closer to mini-drones we've grown accustomed to seeing in recent years. Weighing just four pounds (1.8 kilograms), its blades are much larger and spin about five times faster — 2,400 revolutions per minute—than would be required to generate the same amount of lift back on Earth. It does however get some assistance from Mars, where the gravity is only a third of that on our home planet.

Ingenuity has four feet, a box-like body, and four carbon-fiber blades arranged in two rotors spinning in opposite directions. It comes with two cameras, computers, and navigation sensors. It's

also equipped with solar cells to recharge its batteries, much of the energy being used for staying warm or cold Martian nights, where temperatures fall to minus 130 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 90 degrees Celsius).

The helicopter is hitching a ride on the belly of the Perseverance rover, which will drop it to the ground once it has landed then drive away.

90 second flights

Up to five flights of gradual difficulty are planned, over a window of one month, within the first few months of the mission. Ingenuity will fly at altitudes of 10-15 feet (3-5 meters) and travel as far as 160 feet (50 meters) from its starting area and back. Each flight will last up to a minute and half—compared to the 12 seconds the Wright brothers achieved with the first powered, controlled flight in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina in 1903.

Like the Perseverance rover, Ingenuity is too far away from Earth to be operated using a joystick, and is therefore designed to fly autonomously. Its onboard computers will work with its sensors and cameras to keep it on a path programmed by its

engineers. But the outcome of these flights will be learned only after they took place.

What's the goal?

NASA describes Ingenuity's mission as a "technology demonstration": a project that seeks to test a new capability together with the astrobiology mission of Perseverance. If it's successful, however, it "basically opens up a whole new dimension of exploring Mars," said Bob Balaram, Ingenuity's chief engineer. Future models could offer better vantage points not seen by current orbiters or by slow-moving rovers on the ground, allowing the helicopters to scope out terrain for land-based robots or humans. They could even help carry light payloads from one site to another—such as the rock and soil samples Perseverance will be collecting in the next phase of the Mars 2020 mission.

Rover to touch down

After a seven-month journey, NASA's Perseverance rover prepares to touch down on Mars tomorrow after first negotiating a risky landing procedure that will mark the start of its multi-year

search for signs of ancient microbial life. The Mars 2020 mission, which set off late from Florida in late July, includes the largest ever vehicle to be dispatched to the Red Planet.

Built at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, it weighs a ton, has a robotic arm that's seven feet (two meters) long, has 19 cameras, and two microphones to record the Martian soundscape. Should it arrive intact, Perseverance will be only the fifth rover to successfully complete the journey since Pathfinder in 1997. All have been American and the last, Curiosity, is still active.

China last week placed its Tianwen-1 spacecraft in orbit around Mars carrying both a lander and a rover, which it is hoped to land in May. At around 3:55pm EST Thursday (2055 GMT), Perseverance will place its six wheels on a landing site described as "spectacular" by Ken Farley, a NASA scientist.

Jezero Crater, a 28-mile-wide (45-kilometer-wide) basin located in the Martian northern hemisphere, had been considered for previous missions, but was considered too difficult to land in until now. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the mission control room will have fewer people than normal. —AFP

Zero COVID in Europe: Possible or pipe-dream?

PARIS, France: Hit the virus quick and hard, undergoing drastic short-term measures in order to allow life to return to normal. Several nations in Asia and Oceania have pursued "Zero COVID" strategies. Can European countries do likewise?

Three-fold advantage

In Auckland, two million New Zealanders have been confined to their homes since Monday because of three confirmed COVID-19 cases. Across Europe, tens of thousands of cases are confirmed every day, yet very few cities are in lockdown. As vaccine schemes stutter across the continent, more and more experts are pleading for states to follow the example of New Zealand and others and move to stamp out the virus.

"There's a three-fold advantage for countries who have adopted" the Zero COVID approach, said Antoine Flahault, an epidemiologist from the University of Geneva. "On a disease level they are the uncontested world champions in terms of number of deaths per inhabitant. On a social level they have resumed: bars, restaurants, cultural and sporting activities, schools and universities are open as normal."

"Distancing measures are virtually non-existent," he said. "And from an economic point of view, places like Taiwan and China have seen positive GDP growth in 2020." He said this approach was preferable to the "mitigation strategy that most Western nations had adopted", that is "organizing between waves how to live with the virus". For Martin McKee, professor of European Public Health at the London School of Health and Tropical Medicine, "living with the virus" is not an accurate term. "What does that actually mean?" he told AFP.

"We don't think it's acceptable to have a situation (where) you're trying to keep it under control but not succeeding, you're continually having resurgences and more lockdown, because we don't see how anybody can plan ahead for holidays, wedding, investing in a new restaurant, for anything."

What's more, the more the virus is allowed to circulate the greater the chances of a meaningful mutation emerging, such as the British and South African variants that are more transmissible. — AFP



BUENOS AIRES: Handout picture released by the Argentine Senate showing Zulema Menem (second right) and her sons Luca Bertoldi Menem (left) and Malek Pocovi Menem (center), her mother Zulema Yoma (second left) and her half-brother Carlos Nair Menem (right) mourning next to the coffin with the remains of late former Argentine president and senator Carlos Saul Menem, as he lies in state at the funeral chapel set at the Congress in Buenos Aires. — AFP

Carlos Menem buried with military honors

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina: Former Argentine president Carlos Menem was buried Monday in a ceremony with military honors in a Buenos Aires cemetery next to his late son.

"Although he professed the Catholic religion, he will rest alongside my brother" Carlos Menem, Jr, said the ex-leader's daughter Zulemita Menem. Menem, Jr died in a helicopter crash in 1995 that his mother, Zulema Yoma, claimed was a terrorist attack and that Menem himself later blamed on the Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah. Born into a Muslim family, Menem later converted to Catholicism in order to pursue a political career, since the Argentine constitution stipulated the president had to follow that faith.

During his first term, he changed the constitution in 1994 to remove this requirement while also shortening the term from six years to four and allowing for a single consecutive re-election.

President Alberto Fernandez has declared three days of mourning over the death of his fellow Peronist, who was 90. Menem had been in poor health in recent months and was hospitalized several times. He was receiving treatment in hospital for a urinary infection, which led to a heart attack.

His body lay in state in the Argentine Congress, where he served as a senator until his death, before he was buried in an Islamic cemetery in the west of Buenos Aires.

Menem was known for his political about-face that saw him implement free market policies, privatizations and a political alliance with the United States. A charismatic hedonist, he deviated from the general nationalist, populist and leftist policies of the Peronist movement.

He was president from 1989 to 1999, during which time he introduced the controversial monetary policy to peg the peso to the US dollar. Even more controversially, though, he pardoned the military leaders who were tried for crimes against humanity during the 1976-83 military dictatorship—a move later reversed by another Peronist, Nestor Kirchner (2003-07). — AFP

Israel accused of blocking vaccines to Gaza

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian Authority on Monday accused Israel of refusing to allow some 2,000 coronavirus vaccine doses destined for Gaza health workers into the blockaded coastal strip.

The health ministry of the PA, based in the occupied West Bank, had planned to send the Russian Sputnik V doses to Gaza, a separate territory run by the Islamist group Hamas. But on Monday evening, the ministry said Israel had blocked the transfer.

Israel carries "the full responsibility of this arbitrary move" said minister Mai al-Kaila in a statement, saying her ministry was coordinating with international organizations to organize the delivery as soon as possible. COGAT, the Israeli authority that runs civilian affairs in the occupied Palestinian territories, said the PA had requested to transfer 1,000 vaccine doses to Gaza but that "this request is waiting for a political decision".

Israeli sources had told AFP in recent days that the transfer was not a simple administrative measure under the purview of COGAT, but rather a political decision possibly linked to talks between Hamas and Israel. The two sides have fought three wars since 2008, and Israel has demanded the liberation of two Israeli hostages reportedly still in Gaza as well as the remains of two soldiers killed in the last war, in 2014.

Earlier Monday, the PA said it had pushed back the rollout of its vaccination campaign in the West Bank due to a delay in deliveries. It had said it was anticipating a shipment by the middle of this month, enabling it to start vaccinating the general public in the occupied West Bank while sharing stock with Hamas. "There has been a delay in the arrival of the vaccine," Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said ahead of a weekly cabinet meeting, without providing further details. — AFP

International

UN cautions battle for Marib threatens millions of Yemenis

Houthi rebel advance on Yemen's last northern stronghold 'very alarming'

DUBAI: The UN's humanitarian chief said yesterday he was "very alarmed" by a Houthi rebel advance on the Yemeni government's last northern stronghold, saying an assault on Marib could endanger millions of civilians.

The Iran-backed Houthis have this month resumed an offensive to seize oil-rich Marib, some 120 kilometers (75 miles) east of the rebel-held capital Sanaa. The city's loss would be a major blow for Yemen's government, which is backed by a Saudi-led coalition, but also for the civilian population and the hundreds of thousands of displaced people sheltering in desolate camps in the region. "I'm very alarmed about the military escalation in Marib and its impact on the humanitarian situation," Mark Lowcock, the UN undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs, said in a tweet.

"An assault on the city would put two million civilians at risk, with hundreds of thousands potentially forced to flee with unimaginable humanitarian consequences. Now is the time to de-escalate, not to add even more to the misery of the Yemeni people," Military officials told AFP that the rebels had advanced towards the city on two fronts overnight after heavy fighting with government forces. Dozens from both sides have been killed in the past 24 hours alone, they said. The total casualty toll from the battle for Marib is unknown but reports indicate it is now in the hundreds.

"The rebels have advanced north and west of the city after seizing Al-Zor (in Sirwah district) up to the western sides of Marib dam, and tightened their grip on hills overlooking supply lines for several fronts," one of the officials said. The military coalition, which entered Yemen's conflict in 2015, has been pounding rebel positions, and the Houthi-run Al-Masirah television yesterday reported 13 airstrikes in several areas in Marib.

Once a sanctuary

The fighting is endangering sprawling camps for internally displaced people, many of whom have fled several times before ending up in Marib, the only part of



SANAA: Saudi-backed government troops repel a Houthi rebel offensive on oil-rich Marib, some 120 kilometers (75 miles) east of Yemen's rebel-held capital Sanaa. — AFP

the north not in Houthi hands. Until early 2020, Marib city was spared the worst of Yemen's six-year-old conflict, due to its strategic importance with its rich oil and gas reserves, and also because of its location near the border of regional power Saudi Arabia. It became a sanctuary for many in the early years of the war, taking in those hoping for a new start. But that relative stability went with fighting last year and after a lull since October-residents once again risk being in the line of fire as the two sides battle for control.

"If fighting moves towards populated areas or these displacement sites, we will see people flee again and towards locations to the east and south of Marib city with even less resources," International Organization for Migration spokeswoman Olivia Headon said.

"Much of this is desert area so just think about what any displacement in that direction would mean for families' access to water," Headon said around 650 families had been forced to flee in the recent upsurge of fighting

and that another shift in the frontlines would lead to further waves of displacement. Yemen's grinding conflict has claimed tens of thousands of lives and displaced millions, according to international organizations, sparking what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The upsurge in violence comes shortly after Washington decided to remove the rebels from its list of terrorist groups—a move that would come into effect yesterday—in order to ensure aid is unimpeded, and to pave the way to restart peace talks. Observers say the Houthis want to capture Marib as leverage before entering into any negotiations.

The rebels have also escalated attacks against Saudi Arabia. Its state media said yesterday that another "booby-trapped drone" launched by the Houthis had been intercepted and destroyed near Abha airport, which earlier this month was struck by an attack that left an aircraft in flames. — AFP

Ethnic clashes test 'melting pot' in Nigerian city

IBADAN, Nigeria: The ruins of Shasha market, in the southwest Nigerian city of Ibadan, were still smoldering three days after deadly ethnic clashes. Trader Ibrahim Adelabu surveyed what was left of the business he had built. His one blessing was that his family had escaped unhurt. Soldiers patrolled the streets and an armored personal carrier guarded the market entrance as Adelabu joined others, picking through the debris of houses and stores while residents wailed with grief nearby. "This place used to be my house and shops," said the 51-year-old trader, an ethnic Yoruba, as he showed AFP the wreckage of his building reduced to rubble.

"Where do you want me to start from now? I lost 25 million naira (around \$65,000). My joy is that my family escaped being lynched." Tense calm returned on Monday to Ibadan, capital of southwest Oyo state, after the clashes between the Yoruba who dominate the region and traders from the Hausa community, who mainly hail from Nigeria's north. Ethnic tensions are not uncommon in Africa's most populous country, where more than 250 ethnic and linguistic groups live side by side and where some southern states see a federal government that favors the north.

Yoruba and Hausa residents in Ibadan say the explosion of violence shocked many in a city where communities lived mostly in peace for decades. But southern states have seen a surge in intercommunity tensions in recent months over northern Fulani herders who move south for grazing cattle, often putting them in confrontation with Yoruba farmers.

Fiery rhetoric from some southern officials blaming northern Fulani for a surge in crime and kidnappings in their regions has stoked tensions.

The Ibadan clashes were serious enough for President Muhammadu Buhari, himself a Fulani from the

north, to call for unity, urging religious and community leaders to work together. The Ibadan clashes erupted after a disagreement between a Hausa laborer and a Yoruba trader, and spread quickly, residents said. The toll remains unclear, and the authorities while lamenting loss of life have remained tight-lipped about details. Residents said two Yoruba youths had died in the violence, while Haruna Yaro, the special assistant to the Hausa community leader in the market, said 23 Hausa traders and laborers had been killed. Oyo state police did not immediately return calls seeking confirmation.

Several thousand Hausa traders took refuge in the palace of the local leader of the Hausa community and have now fled the area, Hausa representatives said. "The Hausas are tenants in the community. We have been living together for years," Adelabu said.

"But we are surprised that they turned against us, looting and destroying our properties," Vice President Yemi Osinbajo said Shasha market was supposed to represent the country's unity—a "melting pot," he said, where northern traders would bring their goods to the southwest. "For decades, traders from the North have done business with their brothers from the Southwest and they have lived in peace and even inter-married," he wrote on Twitter. Yaro, the Hausa community representative in the market, told AFP "a minor misunderstanding" had ended in carnage. "We have been living together as neighbors for over 40 years. Hoodlums from town hijacked and started killing, looting and burning houses and shops," he said. Yaro said Hausa leaders had reached out to Yoruba leaders to make peace. "I was born and bred here. I speak Yoruba fluently," he said. "I don't have any other place to go." The clashes came at a time of increased tensions between northern Fulani herders and southern farmers, one of Nigeria's most persistent security problems. Buhari has warned against using ethnicity for political leverage, but some regional leaders accuse him of not acting decisively because he is himself an ethnic Fulani. Some southwestern leaders have blamed Fulani herders for an increase in criminal activity, and mobs have attacked some Fulani settlements. Oyo State Governor Seyi Makinde on Monday appealed for calm and called for a full investigation in the Ibadan violence. — AFP



IBADAN: A woman carries wares recovered from burnt shops as she walks past a three-storey building burnt during deadly ethnic clashes between the northern Fulani and southern Yoruba traders at Shasha Market in Ibadan, southwest Nigeria, on Monday. — AFP

Iran, Russia start joint naval drill in Indian Ocean

TEHRAN: Iran's armed forces yesterday launched a joint naval drill with Russia in the north of the Indian Ocean designed to "enhance security" of maritime

trade, state television reported. The "Maritime Security Belt Exercise" is to cover an area of 17,000 square kilometers (6,500 square miles) and include units from the Iranian army and the elite Revolutionary Guards as well as Russia's navy, the broadcaster quoted drill spokesman Rear Admiral Gholamreza Tahani as saying. "The purposes of this drill are to enhance security of international maritime trade, confront maritime piracy and terrorism, and exchange information," he added.

Russia's Baltic Fleet said in a statement on Monday that three ships will take part in the drill.

News in brief

Slovenia govt survives no-trust vote

LJUBLJANA, Slovenia: Slovenian conservative Prime Minister Janez Jansa's government on Monday survived a no-confidence vote brought by opposition parties who accuse him of trying to turn the country into an "authoritarian democracy". The motion, filed by center-left opposition parties, was backed by 40 votes, with seven MPs voting against and six invalid ballots-leaving the opposition short of the 46 required to bring down the government. This was the second attempt in as many months to oust Jansa, a similar motion in January having failed due to several coronavirus-related absences among MPs. — AFP

Cameroon arrests troops, police

YAOUNDE, Cameroon: Cameroon's army said on Monday it had arrested several soldiers and police for torturing a suspected "terrorist" in the country's conflict-scarred anglophone region. A 10-minute video posted on social media showed men in military uniforms armed with Kalashnikov rifles and a machete slapping a semi-naked man and kicking him in the head. "Two gendarmes, two soldiers and four police officers" were "caught up in this unacceptable act", army spokesman Cyrille Serge Atonfack Guemo said in a statement, adding that they had been "immediately arrested". — AFP

S Africa to seek jail time for Zuma

JOHANNESBURG: The chair of a South African judicial panel investigating mass state corruption said Monday he would seek jail time for former president Jacob Zuma after he failed to appear before the commission. The 78-year-old Zuma, who has repeatedly snubbed the commission probing graft during his nine-year tenure, refused to comply with a Constitutional Court order for him to appear on Monday. "The commission will approach the Constitutional Court and ask it to impose a term of imprisonment on Mr Zuma if it finds that he is guilty of contempt of court," said Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo. — AFP

Nigeria evaluating four COVID jobs

ABUJA: Nigeria is evaluating four coronavirus vaccines for possible approval, including Russian, Indian and Chinese jabs, the health minister said. Nigeria's national drug agency has dossiers for Russia's Sputnik V vaccine, the Covishield-branded AstraZeneca shot made by India's Serum Institute, Covaxin by India's Bharat vaccines and China's Sinopharm. "Some of them are nearly ready for results," Health Minister Osagie Ehanire said at a briefing. Officials said Nigeria expects to receive 16 million doses of vaccines against the disease soon. — AFP

DR Congo mine boss named PM

KINSHASA, DR Congo: DR Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi on Monday named the head of state-owned mining giant Gecamines as prime minister, following a prolonged tussle for power with allies of his predecessor. Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde Kyenge, 43, whose appointment was announced in a decree read on nationwide television, succeeds Sylvestre Ilunga Ilukumba, who was forced out after a coalition between supporters of Tshisekedi and former president Joseph Kabila broke down. The months-long crisis was seeded in the outcome of elections in December 2018 that led to the first peaceful transition of power in the Democratic Republic of Congo's history. — AFP

French agency reveals Russian hacks

PARIS: France's national cybersecurity agency said Monday it had discovered a hack of several organizations that bore similarities to other attacks by a group linked to Russian intelligence. It said the hackers had taken advantage of a vulnerability in monitoring software sold by French group Centreon, which lists blue-chip French companies as clients, such as power group EDF, defense group Thales, or oil and gas giant Total. The French ministry of justice and city authorities such as Bordeaux are also named as Centreon customers on the group's website. — AFP

Exercises will include "liberating a commercial ship abducted by pirates", and fighting fires, it said. According to Tahani, the Indian navy will also join the exercise, in a message of "peace and friendship for neighboring and regional countries".

Iran's state news agency IRNA said the drill is to last three days. The Iranian army said the exercises will also "expand bilateral relations" with Russia. Iran, China and Russia held a similar drill in the area in 2019, and the Islamic republic participated in "Caucas 2020" drills held in Russia last September. — AFP



A local farmer walking in a swarm of desert locust in Meru, Kenya. — AFP

Kenya's locust hunters on tireless quest to halt ancient pest

MERU, Kenya: As dawn breaks in central Kenya, a helicopter lifts off in a race to find roosting locusts before the sun warms their bodies and sends them on a ravenous flight through farmland. Pilot Kieran Allen begins his painstaking survey from zebra-filled plains and lush maize farms, to dramatic forested valleys and the vast arid expanses further north, his eyes scouring the landscape for signs of the massed insects.

The chopper suddenly swings around after a call comes in from the locust war room on the ground: a community in the foothills of Mount Kenya has reported a swarm. "I am seeing some pink in the trees," his voice crackles over the headphones, pointing to a roughly 30-hectare (75-acre) swathe of desert locusts. Reddish-pink in their immature-and hungriest-phase, the insects smother the tips of a pine forest.

Allen determines that nearby farms are at a safe distance and calls in a second aircraft which arrives in minutes to spray the swarm with pesticide. On the ground, having warmed to just the right temperature, the thick cloud of locusts fills the air with a rustling akin to light rainfall. But a few hours from now, many will be dead from the effect of the poison. Last month alone, Allen logged almost 25,000 kilometers (15,500 miles) of flight—more than half the circumference of the world—in his hunt for locusts after a fresh wave of insects invaded Kenya from Somalia and Ethiopia. Like other pilots involved in the operation—who have switched from their usual business of firefighting, tourism, or rescuing hikers in distress—he has become an expert on locusts and the dangers they pose. "Those wheat fields feed a lot of the country. It would be a disaster if they got in there," he says pointing to a vast farm in a particularly fertile area of Mount Kenya.

Second wave

Desert locusts are a part of the grasshopper family which form massive swarms when breeding is spurred by good rains. They are notoriously difficult to control, for they move up to 150 kilometers (90 miles) daily. Each locust eats its weight in vegetation daily and multiplies twenty-fold every three months. The locusts first infested the east and Horn of Africa in mid-2019, eventually invading nine countries as the region experienced one of its wettest rainy seasons in decades.

Some countries like Kenya had not seen the pest in up to 70 years and the initial response was hampered by poor co-ordination, lack of pesticides and aircraft, according to Cyril Ferrand, a Nairobi-based expert with the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). A slick new operation to combat a second wave of the pests has improved control and co-operation in Kenya, Ethiopia and parts of Somalia.—AFP

International

Milk and music: Indian villages support protesting farmers

Farmers fear farm reforms will place them at mercy of big corporations

MAKRAULI, India: Blasting catchy pro-farmer songs from a speaker, an electric-blue tractor rattled down an Indian village road collecting pails of milk—just some of the donations sustaining massive protest camps outside New Delhi. More than two months after the first farmers set up camps on the capital's borders, tens of thousands more have joined them, calling for the repeal of new agriculture laws. The farmers, who have slept outdoors through the winter cold, are being supported by an army of small villages in the northern states neighboring Delhi. "This campaign, this farmer movement, isn't theirs—those who are sitting there—alone," Sumit Arya, the 35-year-old head of Makrauli Khurd, a village about two hours' drive from the main protest sites, said. "The movement belongs to all of us, the rural villagers."

Makrauli, home to 4,000 people, is a hive of activity every morning with men and women bringing vegetables and wood to collection points. On Tuesdays, villagers carry small metal buckets full of milk freshly squeezed from their cows to the back of trailers, where men like Ajit Singh gently pour them into larger cans. "We can't give our time there but we can take care of their food and water needs and whatever they need in winter," the 58-year-old farmer said as he sat on a bed of hay in a trolley.

Around him, villagers raised their fists and chanted "zindabad" ("long live"), in reply to someone yelling "kisan ekta" ("farmers united") — a rallying cry often heard at the protests. The government says the agriculture sector needs to be modernized. But farmers fear the deregulation will place them at the mercy of big corporations. Farming has long been a political minefield in India, with nearly 70 percent of the 1.3-billion-strong population drawing their livelihood from agriculture. The protests—which turned deadly in late January when a tractor rally in Delhi turned into a rampage—have become one of the biggest challenges to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government since it came to power in 2014.

5 Bangladesh Islamists sentenced to death for writer's murder

DHAKA, Bangladesh: Five Islamist extremists were sentenced to death yesterday over the brutal murder of a Bangladeshi-American writer and rights activist six years ago. Avijit Roy, a prolific blogger and the author of 10 books including the best-selling "Biswisher Virus" ("Virus of Faith"), was hacked to death outside Bangladesh's largest book fair by machete-wielding extremists in February 2015. The murder, part of a reign of terror by extremists at the time, enraged the Muslim-majority nation's secular activists who staged days of protests. The judge at Dhaka's Special Anti-Terrorism Tribunal found six people guilty, sentencing five to death and one to life in prison, prosecutor Gohar Sarwar Zakir told AFP.

Two of them were tried in absentia, including sacked army officer Syed Ziaul Haque who was accused of



MAKRAULI, India: In this photograph villagers give milk and other supplies to be sent to the farmers protesting at the Tikri Delhi-Haryana state border, in Makrauli village in the northern Indian state of Haryana. — AFP

Passion and community

Since the start of the sit-in protests in late November, a support network has sprung up to care for the sprawling camps. Tractors pulling trolleys laden with wood, rice, flour, sugar and vegetables leave villages like Makrauli on daily or weekly rotations for the camps. They are joined by farmers and their families eager to spend the day or several nights at the sites. "We strike up friendships... Two or three tractors keep going from our village to keep their spirits up," Ajay Punia, 18, said on a trailer en route to Delhi from Makrauli with 11 others aged 14 to 65.

The villagers played songs of resistance, as green and yellow farmer union flags and the Indian tricolor fluttered from the tractor. Moments later, two trolleys carrying about 30 people—mostly women—from

another village passed by and the two groups pumped their fists into the air and chanted slogans. Beside the highway, people waved their support. By the time the villagers pulled up at a big protest camp at the Tikri border with Delhi, energy levels were high. The trolley stopped at a community kitchen run by Makrauli and several nearby villages, and the boys and men climbed out and sat in a straight line on a mat. They were served freshly made roti with pea-and-potato curry and a cup of fresh milk—brought from Makrauli earlier in the day by another tractor. "Without this brotherhood, nothing works. Even in our village, different castes are a part of it," Arya said. "People are getting increasingly pulled towards this (protest)... And whatever its length, we are not backing out." — AFP

leading the group that carried out the attack—known as Ansarullah Bangla Team, or Ansar al Islam. Roy was born in Bangladesh in 1972 and moved to the United States in 2006 from where he continued to criticize the government for the jailing of atheist bloggers. A defense lawyer said they would appeal the verdict in a higher court. It comes less than a week after eight Islamist extremists were sentenced to death for the murder of a publisher who brought out books by secular writers, including two by Roy.

The attacks were part of a wave of violence between 2013 and 2016 targeting secular activists, bloggers and atheist writers at a time of heightened political tensions. Several top Islamist political party leaders were hanged over the violence under the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The Bangladesh government has since set up two major anti-terrorism police units to crack down on Islamist extremists.

More than 100 suspects have been killed in anti-terror raids and hundreds detained. Around half a dozen Islamist militant outfits have been banned. Bangladesh cricket star Shakib Al-Hasan has become the latest target of radicals, and had to be given an armed bodyguard after he was threatened for attending a Hindu ceremony in India. — AFP



DHAKA: Police escort a convicted man after a Bangladesh anti-terrorism court sentenced five Islamist extremists to death over the brutal murder of Avijit Roy, a Bangladeshi-US writer and rights activist, in Dhaka yesterday. — AFP

India police seek more arrests in tweeted protest 'toolkit'

NEW DELHI: Indian police Monday said they were searching for two activists after detaining a climate campaigner for allegedly helping to create a guide for anti-government farmers protests shared by environmentalist Greta Thunberg. Disha Ravi, 22, was arrested on Saturday in Bangalore and brought to the capital New Delhi to face court, where she was remanded in police custody for five days. Delhi Police said they had issued arrest warrants for two others—Nikita Jacob and Shantanu, whose surname was not disclosed—for allegedly working with Ravi to draft the so-called "toolkit". "Shantanu was not found at his house. We are still searching for him... When the investigation team reached Nikita's residence, it was learnt that she has absconded," Delhi Police's Joint Commissioner of Police for Cyber Crime, Prem Nath, told reporters.

"As such for Nikita and Shantanu we have taken NBWs (Non-Bailable Warrants) from the honourable court." The toolkit was tweeted by Swedish activist Thunberg in early February. "The main aim of the toolkit was to create misinformation and disaffection against the lawfully enacted government", Nath said. Police also

claimed the trio had been in touch with a Canadian-based organization, Poetic Justice Foundation, that was allegedly pro-Khalistani, a movement representing Sikh separatists. Farmers have been camping on the outskirts of Delhi since late November and calling for the repeal of new agriculture laws, in one of the biggest challenges to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government since it came to power in 2014.

The protests turned deadly in late January when a planned tractor rally by farmers in Delhi became a rampage, leaving one person dead. Authorities have since issued criminal complaints against several journalists, activists and an opposition politician, accusing them of sedition and conspiracy over their reporting and tweets on the rally. The government demanded that Twitter block hundreds of accounts commenting on the protests. The social media giant later said it had suspended some accounts permanently while blocking others from being viewed within India. The foreign ministry was also angered by tweets on the farmers by international personalities including pop superstar Rihanna and Thunberg, calling them "sensationalist".

Ravi's arrest has been criticized by opposition politicians and activists. "The Indian state must be standing on very shaky foundations if Disha Ravi, a 22 year old student of Mount Carmel college and a climate activist, has become a threat to the nation," opposition leader and former finance minister, P. Chidambaram, tweeted. "Arrest of 21 yr old Disha Ravi is an unprecedented attack on Democracy." — AFP

News in brief

\$13,000 fine in Navalny's case

MOSCOW: A Russian prosecutor yesterday asked a Moscow court to fine opposition figure Alexei Navalny 950,000 rubles (\$13,000/10,600 euros) for allegedly defaming a 94-year-old veteran. The prosecution also asked for a three-and-a-half year suspended sentence Navalny received in 2014 to be converted into real jail time as the alleged defamation occurred during the suspended sentence. Another Moscow court earlier this month already converted the suspended sentence to jail time over Navalny allegedly violating the terms of the suspended sentence while recovering from a poisoning attack in Germany. — AFP

Kazakhstan Sputnik drive starts

NUR-SULTAN, Kazakhstan: Kazakhstan will be the first country in the world to locally produce Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine, after a pharmaceutical company received government authorization to make the job, the company said yesterday. The company, called the Karaganda Pharmaceutical Complex (KPC), "was granted certification" to produce the vaccine by Kazakhstan's health ministry on Monday. KPC said in a statement on the Telegram messenger service. A spokesman for the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), which financed the development of the two-dose jab, told AFP that Kazakhstan is the first country to begin local production of Sputnik V. He said Brazil, India and South Korea are expected to follow. — AFP

Peru names 6th FM in a year

LIMA: Peru on Monday appointed its sixth foreign minister in less than a year following a fresh resignation over a growing coronavirus vaccinations scandal. Veteran diplomat Allan Wagner, 79, was sworn in less than 24 hours after Elizabeth Astete became the second top official to step down over the scandal. Peru has been gripped in recent days by the news that government officials received the COVID-19 vaccination weeks or even months before the South American country launched its immunization program. Health minister Pilar Mazzetti stepped down last week following a newspaper report that former president Martin Vizcarra had received a shot of the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine in October. — AFP

Guinea Ebola death toll rises

CONAKRY, Guinea: Five people have died of Ebola virus in Guinea, the health agency said on Monday, as the government and aid groups began to roll out their response to the outbreak. Guinea announced the outbreak on Saturday—the first in West Africa since a 2013-2016 epidemic that left more than 11,300 dead in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. According to an epidemiological report by the country's health agency dated February 15, five people have now succumbed to the virus, rising from a death toll of four reported earlier on Monday. Only one of the victims was confirmed positive for Ebola, with the remaining four listed as "probable cases". — AFP

N Zealand-Australia row erupts over 'terrorist' dual national

WELLINGTON, New Zealand: New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern angrily accused Australia yesterday of shirking its responsibility for a dual national arrested in Turkey with alleged links to the Islamic State militant group. Ardern said the woman had been a dual Australian-New Zealand citizen until authorities in Canberra cancelled her passport, leaving her situation in Wellington to deal with. In an unusually blunt message to her counterpart Scott Morrison, Ardern said Canberra was "wrong" to expect New Zealand to accept the woman, who she said had strong ties to Australia.

"Any fair-minded person would consider this person an Australian and that is my view too," Ardern said in a statement. "We believe Australia has abdicated its responsibilities." The 26-year-old woman was arrested with her two children near the Syrian border this week by Turkish authorities, and identified as a member of the Islamic State Group. Local media reported the woman had been taken to a Turkish court in the southeastern province of Hatay for interrogation. The Turkish defense ministry described the family as New Zealand nationals who had been trying to enter the country "illegally from Syria" and "were caught by our border guards".

But Ardern said the woman had not lived in New Zealand since she was six, and so it was "wrong that New Zealand should shoulder the responsibility" for her. "(The woman) has resided in Australia since that time, has her family in Australia and left for Syria from Australia on her Australian passport," she added. Morrison defended his government's decision as in "Australia's national security interests". "We do not want to see terrorists who fought with terrorism organizations enjoying privileges of citizenship, which I think they forfeit the second they engage as an enemy of our country," he said during a press conference in Canberra. — AFP



HONG KONG: Hong Kong veteran activists Martin Lee (center right) and Albert Ho (Right) are greeted by pro-democracy activist and supporter Raphael Wong (second left) on arrival outside the West Kowloon Magistrates Court in Hong Kong yesterday. — AFP

Veteran Hong Kong activists on trial over huge democracy rally

HONG KONG: Veteran Hong Kong activists flashed protest salutes and accused authorities of "political persecution" as they went on trial yesterday for organizing one of the biggest democracy protests to engulf the city in 2019. The nine defendants include some of the city's most prominent pro-democracy campaigners, many of whom are non-violence advocates who have spent decades campaigning in vain for universal suffrage. Among them are Martin Lee, an 82-year-old barrister who was once chosen by Beijing to help write Hong Kong's mini-constitution, and Margaret Ng, a 73-year-old barrister and former opposition lawmaker.

Media tycoon Jimmy Lai, currently in custody after his arrest under Beijing's new national security law, is also among those on trial. Others are leading members of the Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF), the coalition that organized a series of huge rallies throughout 2019. They each face up to five years in jail if convicted. As they entered court yesterday, some of the activists flashed a three-finger salute, a symbol now used across Asia to protest authoritarianism. Others stood behind a banner which declared: "Peaceful assembly is not a crime, shame on political persecution."

The group is being prosecuted for organizing an unauthorized assembly on August 18, 2019 — one of the biggest in Hong Kong that year as people took to the streets for seven straight months calling for democracy and greater police accountability. Organizers estimated 1.7 million people turned out—almost one in four Hong Kong residents—though that number was difficult to independently verify. Those involved described it as the second-largest protest of 2019, with demonstrators marching peacefully for hours under a sea of umbrellas and thundery skies.

At the start of yesterday's trial—which is expected to last 10 days—all except two defendants pleaded not guilty to the charges. Former CHRF convenor Au Nok-hin pleaded guilty to two charges of organizing and taking part in an unlawful assembly while former lawmaker Leung Yiu-chung pleaded guilty to taking part in the march but not guilty to organizing it. Protests in Hong Kong can only go ahead with the permission of authorities and rights groups have long criticized the use of unauthorized assembly prosecutions. This week's trial caused controversy before it began. British lawyer David Perry, hired by the Hong Kong government to be the lead prosecutor, stepped down last month following withering criticism from both the UK government and British legal bodies over his decision to take the job. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2021

A year after Diamond Princess, cruise industry eyes return

Analysts say smooth sailing is not likely before second half of 2021

TOKYO: David Abel and his wife Sally might have had the cruise from hell last year on the coronavirus-hit Diamond Princess, but they can't wait to get back to sea. A year after the ill-fated ship went into quarantine off Japan, the cruise industry is hoping passengers like the Abels will help steer them to calmer waters. Analysts say smooth sailing isn't likely before the second half of 2021 at the earliest, but bookings are already picking up.

The Abels both caught coronavirus on the Diamond Princess, but they've booked five cruises for late 2021 and early 2022, and are eyeing a sixth.

"We can't wait to get back to sea," David Abel told subscribers to his YouTube page in an early February video. "There's nothing better than waking up in the morning in the world's most exciting and interesting cities. We love the sound of the ocean."

He acknowledged some people "have concerns" but insisted he believes "cruises will be one of the safest types of vacations human beings could ever take". When the Diamond Princess arrived off the Japanese city of Yokohama on February 3, 2020, the global death toll from the mysterious "new coronavirus" was around 400 and Japan had registered a handful of infections.

Carrying 2,666 passengers and 1,045 crew, the Diamond Princess was supposed to be meandering around Asia, but things quickly changed when a passenger tested positive after leaving the boat.

By February 4, Japanese authorities quarantined the ship and all on board. Testing showed the virus had spread widely. Over 700 people on board would eventually test positive for the virus and 13 people died.

Sarah Arana, an American social worker, looks back on the experience as "incredibly surreal." "I don't have

any regrets about it," the 54-year-old told AFP, saying she felt she had a front-row seat to the pandemic's start and the science around handling the virus.

'Not brilliant'

A year on, the lessons learned from the pandemic mean tough restrictions for the cruise industry. Canada has barred cruise vessels from its waters until February 2022. And the US Centers for Disease Control advises against cruises, though authorities released rules last year for a phased resumption.

Operators will be required to have a lab on board for virus testing, and trips must last no more than seven days, with masks mandatory on board. No surprise then that most cruises in the area have not resumed. Carnival Cruises now hopes to restart US operations in late April, as does Royal Caribbean. Norwegian Cruise Line is targeting early May. But there is cause for hope said Patrick Pourbaix, director general for France, Belgium and Luxembourg at MSC Cruises, which restarted Mediterranean cruises last August.

Its worldwide bookings for summer are at 60 percent of pre-pandemic levels, with winter 2021-22 at 80 percent - "not brilliant, but not catastrophic," Pourbaix said. One Filipino former Diamond Princess crew member, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told AFP he is desperate to return to work despite his experience on the ship.

"We were very afraid," he said. "We knew the virus was spreading but we were being asked to work."

But being unemployed has been "very difficult... very stressful", he said, and he believes operators will ensure staff safety when cruises resume. Matthew Smith, an



YOKOHAMA: In this file photo taken on February 16, 2020, a police car drives past the Diamond Princess cruise ship, with people quarantined onboard due to fears of the new COVID-19 coronavirus, at the Daikoku Pier Cruise Terminal in Yokohama port. — AFP

American lawyer who was on the Diamond Princess, said he and his wife look back on photos from their cruise with very different emotions. "For her, the photos bring back memories of a very unhappy experience... I see pictures of a unique experience, an adventure of sorts, that I have no bad feelings about," he said.

Smith said he had found the last year in the United States "much more of a miserable experience", and the

couple currently have three cruises booked.

Arana, the social worker, feels differently, saying she will never board another cruise ship, in part after learning operators have limited liability for what happens to passengers. But after her quarantine on board the Diamond Princess, she does have some advice for those considering a trip: "Get a balcony cabin... Make sure that you've got that balcony and fresh air!" —AFP



ISTANBUL: A physical imitation of a Bitcoin at a crypto currency "Bitcoin Change" shop, near the Grand Bazaar, in Istanbul. Bitcoin soared above \$50,000 for the first time yesterday after surging by almost 75 percent this year. — AFP

Bitcoin surges past \$50,000 for first time

LONDON: Bitcoin soared above \$50,000 for the first time yesterday as an increasing number of corporate heavyweights back the world's most popular virtual currency. At around 1235 GMT, Bitcoin hit an all-time high of \$50,547.70, marking a 4.4-percent gain since Monday.

Bitcoin, once the preserve of internet geeks and hobbyists, has since exploded in popularity and has now rocketed by almost 75 percent in value so far this year. "The crypto king has crossed the 50K price level for the first time as institutions are all over it," said AvaTrade analyst Naem Aslam.

"There is a lot of FOMO (fear of missing out) among traders as the price is going through the roof and we have limited supply." It later pulled back to stand at \$49,080.30 at about 1345 GMT.

"The rally has still a lot of power left and the move is going to continue towards the actual target of \$100,000," Aslam told AFP. "Of course, there will be some bumps but investors should consider them as an opportunity to bag some bargains."

Bitcoin has been on a meteoric rise since March, when it stood at \$5,000, spurred by online payments giant PayPal saying it would allow account holders to use cryptocurrency. The unit blasted its way past \$45,000 last week after Elon Musk's electric carmaker Tesla invested \$1.5 billion in the virtual unit.

In a further boost, Tesla also unveiled plans to accept the cryptocurrency from customers buying its vehicles. Wall Street player BNY Mellon then jumped aboard the Bitcoin bandwagon, announcing plans to accept digital currencies.

The moves came after Mastercard also announced it would accept the unit, even as many regulators remain skeptical. Adding further legitimacy, Twitter chief Jack Dorsey revealed last week that he and rap mogul Jay-Z were creating a fund aimed at making bitcoin "the internet's currency".

Bitcoin, which was launched back in 2009, hit the headlines in 2017 after soaring from less than \$1,000 in January to almost \$20,000 in December of the same year. The virtual bubble then burst in subsequent days, with bitcoin's value then fluctuating wildly before sinking below \$5,000 by October 2018. However, strengthening corporate support has transformed the outlook this time around, commentators say. —AFP

Amazon to make devices in India for the first time

MUMBAI: Amazon will begin making Fire TV sticks in India, the US tech giant said yesterday, its first device manufacturing line in the country as it fights for a share of its booming e-commerce market.

Amazon is locked in a battle for dominance with Walmart-backed Flipkart and Reliance, owned by India's richest man Mukesh Ambani, as well as thousands of local traders who have accused the US firm of

driving them out of business. Its latest announcement comes as Prime Minister Narendra Modi ramps up his flagship "Make in India" drive, aimed at urging foreign companies to manufacture goods in the South Asian nation and reduce imports. "We are delighted to announce Amazon's first manufacturing line in India to produce hundreds of thousands of Fire TV Stick devices every year catering to the demands of the Indian customers," Amit Agarwal, head of Amazon India, said in a statement.

"This further reiterates our commitment to the Government of India's 'Make in India' initiative," he added. The announcement followed last year's pledge by Amazon owner Jeff Bezos to invest \$1 billion in the country and create a million new jobs. The firm will work with a subsidiary of Taiwanese manufacturer Foxconn to begin production of Fire TV

sticks at a factory in the southern city of Chennai later this year. Communications minister Ravi Shankar Prasad welcomed the announcement, saying it would "enhance domestic production capacities, and create jobs as well".

"India is an attractive investment destination and is poised to become a major player in the global supply chain in the electronics and IT products industry," he added.

The nation of 1.3 billion people has seen huge job losses due to the coronavirus pandemic, with a months-long lockdown causing the economy to contract by nearly a quarter between April and June last year. As infections have slowed however, hopes of an economic recovery have taken hold, with New Delhi forecasting 11 percent growth in the 2021-22 financial year. — AFP



SINGAPORE: People walk during lunch time at the Raffles Place financial business district in Singapore yesterday. — AFP

Singapore rolls out new budget boost for virus-hit firms

SINGAPORE: Singapore yesterday unveiled a fresh multi-billion-dollar package to help pandemic-battered businesses and fund a vaccination drive, as part of the city-state's annual budget. The coronavirus has plunged the financial hub into its worst-ever recession, with the crucial aviation and tourism sectors hit particularly hard as global travel ground to a halt. Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat announced the new package totalling Sg\$11 billion (US\$8.3 billion) as he unveiled the budget in parliament.

A substantial chunk will be allocated to helping

workers and businesses still affected by the pandemic, including in the travel and aviation sectors. More than 40 percent of the funds will go to financing public health and measures to ensure a safe reopening of the economy, he said.

This includes inoculation efforts-vaccines are given for free to all residents-as well as the tracking of people possibly exposed to a coronavirus carrier. Heng said close to 250,000 people have received their first dose, and 55,000 have had their second jab. The latest package of financial aid is on top of the nearly Sg\$100 billion rolled out last year. Singapore's economy, which shrank a record 5.4 percent last year, has started regaining strength in recent months but Heng warned that the recovery is uneven.

"The global battle against Covid-19 is still far from over. Many places are still experiencing high levels of infection." Singapore has had a relatively mild outbreak with nearly 60,000 cases and 29 deaths, and in recent times has recorded very few local transmissions. — AFP

5G phones may interfere with aircraft: Regulator

PARIS: The latest generation of smartphones, 5G, can interfere with aircraft altitude instruments, the French Civil Aviation Authority warned yesterday as it recommended they should be turned off during flight. "The utilization of 5G devices onboard aircraft could lead to risks of interference that could potentially result in errors in altitude readings," a spokesman for the agency said.

The potential phenomenon is due to "signal interference from a close frequency source of a strength that is similar or even superior to that of altimeters." This interference can cause errors "in instruments that are extremely critical during landing," said the agency, known by its French acronym DGAC. It sent a bulletin on the issue to airlines last week, recommending that 5G phones should either be turned off completely or put in "airplane mode" during flight.

Most countries have long required that mobile phones be turned off or placed in airplane mode due to concerns that previous generations of mobile telecommunications networks can interfere with a plane's navigation and communication equipment. The DGAC also recommended that in cases of disruption to an aircraft's equipment that the flight crew immediately notify air traffic controllers who can then alert authorities at the airport. DGAC also noted that it had laid out conditions for the positioning of 5G base stations in order to limit the risks of interference during landing at French airports.

The strength of signals from 5G base stations placed near France's main airports has been restricted, said the DGAC, which has been conducting additional testing since November when French telecommunications operators were given the green light to begin rolling out 5G services. It is continuing to monitor 5G base stations around all French airports in cooperation with the agency responsible for radio frequencies. — AFP

Business

Interview with Kuwait TV

Diraya campaign necessary to protect economy and society, says Al-Othman

‘Banks are stronger than fraudsters and we are able to protect our customers’

KUWAIT: Mohammed Al-Othman, GM-Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) affirmed that NBK is keen to provide awareness to customers regarding their rights, and to protect them from fraud, achieve financial inclusion, and provide all prerequisites for top-notch services to all customers, which is the main goal of “Diraya” campaign recently launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait.



Mohammed Al-Othman

Al-Othman said: “NBK extends all types of support to key strategic initiatives of the Central Bank of Kuwait, the latest of which is “Diraya” campaign, which targets the best interests of the national economy and society.”

In an interview with Kuwait TV, Al-Othman pointed out that NBK harnesses all its capabilities and digital channels to provide awareness to customers, as part of the bank’s endeavors to participate in the success of the campaign lasting until the end of this year.

Ongoing awareness

Al-Othman noted that NBK exerts consistent efforts to provide awareness to its customers being a fundamental part of its strategy, and it always uses all communication channels to make them aware of the need to keep their PIN codes, and the data of their financial and personal accounts private, and not to share them with anyone contacting them and claiming to represent the bank, as the same applies to one-time password (OTP).

Al-Othman said, “Today, with the launch of the campaign, the stimulus will be greater for these efforts. We are confident that the campaign will bear

its fruits, and banks, led by the Central Bank of Kuwait, will be stronger than fraudsters, and we will succeed in protecting our customers’ data and accounts.”

Al-Othman pointed out that the Central Bank’s initiatives to protect customers’ rights are not a new thing, as its decisions and guidelines for the banks have always targeted their best interests.

Digitization and increased responsibility

Al-Othman mentioned that the coronavirus pandemic accelerated customers’ reliance on digital channels for their transactions, which required doubled and accelerated efforts, and this shows that the Central Bank has chosen the right time to launch the initiative.

“The mobile is now NBK’s largest branch, and most of the transactions are made using NBK Mobile

Banking and NBK Online Banking, Supervisory. This places a great responsibility on the bank and its customers, as the acceleration in the pace of digital transformation is associated with risks that require the combined efforts of banks, customers and regulatory authorities,” he added.

Customers’ rights

In line with the campaign’s focus on protecting customers’ rights, Al-Othman explained that banks are committed to informing customers of their rights in compliance with the instructions of the Central Bank in this regard, saying: “We provide our customers with all information related to financing including interest, installments, loan amount, payment method and the monthly deduction to income ratio, then we allow a two-day contemplation period before concluding the transaction, even if the customer provided immediate acceptance in order to give them enough time to review all the details.”

Al-Othman urged customers to follow banks’ accounts on social media platforms, which are keen to educate customers and help them protect their rights, money and data.

Financial inclusion

“Diraya” campaign focuses on achieving financial inclusion, involving all segments of society in the formal financial system, and introducing them to safe and appropriate saving and investment channels for all segments. In this context, Al-Othman explained that NBK started launching Zeina Account for the children

segment decades ago, and is constantly working on developing banking products and services for the youth, and providing services that meet the needs of the salaried segment of employees, in addition to investment solutions and private banking services for high net worth customers with the aim of covering all segments of the society.

Social responsibility

Al-Othman highlighted to NBK’s efforts in serving customers with special needs, which are of the key pivots of the campaign and which is paid special attention by the Central Bank, as seen in its mandate for banks to assign a fully-equipped branch for serving special needs customers in every governorate.

Al-Othman added, “We are committed to assigning a fully-equipped branch in every governorate to service our special needs customers by making many modifications to the facilities, equipment and procedures necessary to provide all banking products and services to them.”

Al-Othman enumerated the various facilities provided by NBK to its special needs customers including: ATMs equipped with Braille keyboards and earphones, which allow visually impaired customers to make easy and secure withdrawals, Braille printing facilities, trained staff to provide services in sign language to hearing-impaired customers, offering iPads with speech-to-text functionality for visually impaired customers, as well as wheelchair access to branches, and reserved, clearly marked parking spaces for them.

NBK Economic Report

Kuwait inflation rises in 4Q20, ends at 3-year high

KUWAIT: Consumer price inflation edged up in 4Q20, stoked by rising food prices, to end the year at 3.0 percent y/y (+1.1 percent q/q), the highest level in more than three years. For the year as a whole, inflation came in at 2.1 percent (avg.) in 2020, almost double 2019’s rate of 1.1 percent, but in line with our expectations.

The pick-up in inflation was largely due to the food component of the consumer price index (16.7 percent by weight), with prices rising by 4.9 percent from 1.1

percent in 2019, a trend that was likely driven by ongoing supply-side disruptions brought about by the coronavirus pandemic. In contrast, the housing services component of the basket, the largest by weight (33.1 percent), has remained flat since June 2019. Core inflation, which excludes food and housing, also rose in 2020 to 2.7 percent (from 2.4 percent in 2019), on the back of general increases in household items and transportation, for example.

Food prices spike

Food price inflation came in at a multi-year high of 9.8 percent y/y in December (+7.0 percent q/q). Increases were across the board, but meat and poultry, fruit and vegetables witnessed significant price pressures. The rise in food costs could be a result of a combination of higher international food prices, partially linked to a fall in the US dollar, prolonged supply chain issues and price rises by local retailers as they pass on higher purchase prices (higher than warranted by the increase in food/logistical costs perhaps as they need to replenish their stocks at higher prices) to consumers.

Domestic demand was buoyant in part of 2020, both in terms of being pent-up, following weeks of lockdown in the second quarter of last year, and sustained, with international travel restrictions forcing more people to spend in the country rather than overseas for most of the year.

In contrast, housing costs remained flat at 0.0 percent y/y in December. Prices in this segment are typically reported every three months, but it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from this component as the index value has remained at 115 since June 2019. It did not vary, for example, during the height of the pandemic, when rents were under pressure due to

Table: Consumer price inflation

CPI component	% y/y annual average		%m/m			% y/y		
	2019	2020	Oct	Nov	Dec	Oct	Nov	Dec
Food & beverages	1.1	4.9	1.2	1.4	0.2	9.4	9.8	9.8
Tobacco & cigarettes	3.7	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.2	2.5	2.4
Clothing & footwear	1.3	3.8	1.3	0.4	0.7	5.4	5.6	6.2
Housing services	-0.8	-0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Furnishings & household maintenance	2.6	3.5	0.5	0.0	0.6	4.0	4.0	4.2
Healthcare	2.7	1.7	0.1	0.0	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.7
Transportation	3.4	2.7	0.0	0.0	0.4	3.3	3.4	3.3
Communication	5.1	4.0	1.0	0.3	1.4	4.0	4.2	5.3
Recreation & culture	2.8	3.8	1.0	0.1	0.7	6.4	6.4	7.2
Education	2.7	-3.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.1	15.1	15.5
Restaurants & hotels	0.7	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	-0.1	-0.1	0.0
Other goods & services	0.8	4.8	0.1	0.1	0.7	5.2	5.2	5.7
General index	1.1	2.1	0.5	0.3	0.3	2.5	2.8	3.0
* ex food and housing	2.4	2.7	0.5	0.1	0.6	2.3	2.4	2.7

Source: Central Statistical Bureau

expat departures and/or due to tenant’s demands for lower rents amid lower income. There is, of course, the possibility that these dynamics will feed through into the CPI survey at a later stage.

Core inflation stood at 2.7 percent y/y in December, higher than the 1.8 percent recorded at the end of the previous quarter. While inflation in most core components was accelerating, inflation in education (-15.2 percent) and restaurants and hotels (-0.1 percent) fell. The decline in education costs reflects the Ministry of Education’s decision to cut school fees by up to 25 percent for private schools, in tandem with tuition moving online for the 2020/2021 academic year. Increases at the end of 4Q were strongest in the recreation, clothing and miscellaneous goods and services sub-categories.

The increase in recreation (+7.2 percent y/y), was

mainly due to a considerable rise in the costs of information processing equipment (personal laptops/computers), led by the continued shift to computer-based learning and remote working. Clothing prices were up 6.2 percent, while miscellaneous goods and services costs rose 5.7 percent on the back of a continued rise in jewelry as gold prices have been elevated during the economic fallout of the pandemic.

Inflation to ease slightly in 2021

Looking ahead, inflation is forecast to moderate to around 1.5 percent in 2021. Supply chain disruptions should ease, and so should travel restrictions, thereby tempering some of the impulses emanating from improving economic activity. The departure of expatriates may also exert negative pressure on rents.

Russian magnate Potanin breaks wealth record

MOSCOW: Russia’s richest man Vladimir Potanin has set a new wealth record despite his mining giant Norilsk Nickel being slapped this month with a \$2 billion fine over an Arctic fuel spill. Potanin’s fortune has crossed the \$30 billion threshold, Forbes reported, in a new record for a Russian business owner.

Shares in the company, also known as Normickel, have risen by some 40 percent over the past year as a result of a sharp increase in prices of non-ferrous metals such as nickel and palladium. The Russian company is the world’s largest producer of palladium and one of the largest of nickel. Nickel in particular is used in electric vehicles, the demand for which is growing worldwide.

Potanin holds a near 35 percent stake in Norilsk. Its value has grown despite a court order on February 5 to pay a 146.2 billion ruble (\$1.99 billion) fine over a fuel spill last May.

More than 20,000 tons of diesel leaked into lakes and rivers in the Russian Arctic after a fuel reservoir collapsed at a power plant owned by the company. It has been working to improve its environmental image in the wake of the disaster. In recent months Norilsk Nickel announced the closure of two smelters in the towns of Monchegorsk and Nickel in Russia’s northwest. Both locations are considered to be among the most polluted in the world, in particular due to sulfur dioxide emissions. — AFP



MOSCOW: Metals magnate Vladimir Potanin during a meeting with Russian President at the Novo-Ogaryovo state residence outside Moscow. — AFP


Australia’s NAB reports flat profits for Q1

SYDNEY: The National Australia Bank (NAB) reported flat profits for the first quarter of its financial year yesterday, and said ongoing coronavirus lockdowns added to uncertainty going forward. The bank, one of Australia’s Big Four lenders, said net profits for the quarter ending December 31 were Aus\$1.7 billion (US\$1.3 billion), comparable to the same period in 2020.

The bank’s preferred measure of cash earnings was Aus\$1.65 billion (\$1.29 billion), up 1.0 percent on the corresponding period last year. But measured against the quarterly average of the second half of 2020, when Australia was still feeling the economic impact of the coronavirus crisis, cash earnings were up 47 percent. NAB chief executive Ross McEwan said “improving economic trends” were encouraging in Australia and New Zealand as both countries successfully contained the coronavirus pandemic.

“At an underlying level, performance has been sound in the current competitive, low-interest rate environment,” he said, adding that the bank had seen a sharp drop in loan repayment deferrals.

But McEwan said “health alerts” related to outbreaks of COVID-19 in major cities continued to create “uncertainties requiring further clarity”. Authorities have ordered snap lockdowns in recent weeks in the Australian state capitals of Brisbane, Perth and Melbourne and in New Zealand’s biggest city, Auckland, to prevent the spread of small outbreaks of highly contagious new COVID-19 variants.



كيبكو
KIPCO
شركة مشاريع الكويت (القابضة)
Kuwait Projects Company (Holding)

CONDOLENCES

The Management and Staff of
Kuwait Projects Company (Holding)
wish to offer their heartfelt condolences to

Ms. Joyce D’ Souza
on the sad demise of her

Mother

May her soul rest in peace and may
God grant comfort and strength to the
bereaved family members

Business

Kamco Invest launches web-based subscription platform 'iktatib.com'

Multi-featured platform in line with digitization strategy

KUWAIT: Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, announced the launch of iktatib.com, a new web-based subscription platform conveniently connecting investors with the latest equity offerings and debt issuances managed by Kamco Invest.

iktatib.com will provide registered investors access to subscriptions they are eligible to participate in. It will list initial public offerings, rights issues, bond and sukuk offerings, as well as other investment opportunities managed by Investment Banking at Kamco Invest. Gulf Insurance Group's (GINS.KW) capital increase was the first transaction to use this platform.

This platform utilizes technology to improve the investment experience and increases chances of success by reducing the burden on investors as it is a fully digital subscription process without the need to appear in person and sign physical documents.

This also comes as part of the digitization process for Kamco Invest and its plan to have a leading role in providing digital investment services and solutions to its clients.

To enhance the subscription experience for iktatib.com users, a calendar reminder feature has been incorporated into the platform to notify interested investors once they reach closer to the end of the transaction period. The platform is also ideal for investors outside the country to ensure timely access to investment opportunities. There are several payment methods available for users including executing transactions through the integrated Knet payment portal and wire transfers.

Given the recent upgrade of the Kuwaiti market to emerging market and the exposure international investors have on local equities, this platform will provide these investors the opportunity to participate in any right issues. Abdullah Al-Sharekh,

Managing Director of Markets and Investment Banking at Kamco Invest, said, "The platform will serve as a gateway to connect investors with opportunities managed by Kamco Invest. Our primary goal when developing 'iktatib.com' was to focus on a simple, user-friendly, fast, and reliable solution to streamline and automate the subscription process for a range of capital market products."

Al-Sharekh added, "The platform was successfully used in the recent Gulf Insurance capital increase and has received positive feedback from the issuing company as well as subscribers. We will



Abdullah Al-Sharekh

continue to use this platform to showcase our upcoming deals while simultaneously upgrading the user experience and developing value adding features. The platform supports the strategic approach behind Kamco Invest's digital transformation program, a program that aims to digitize the client journey by integrating new technologies and platforms to the Company's suite of offerings."

Throughout the year, Investment Banking successfully played the role of joint lead manager for six debt capital market transactions, two regional and four local offerings, for a total amount equivalent to \$2.6 billion. The team also acted as exclusive sell-side advisor to a healthcare group in Egypt and launched a strategic initiative to support companies in battling the ongoing crisis. Kamco Invest was awarded the 'Best M&A Bank in the Middle East - 2020' award from the highly accredited and internationally renowned Global Finance.

Huawei phones use dual biometric identification for extra security

KUWAIT: During this pandemic, a mask is a must. But, this creates a problem because we can't unlock our phones with facial recognition. But if you have a Huawei phone, you can use your fingerprint. With dual biometric identification, your Huawei phone can recognize you through either 3D facial recognition or fingerprint sensing, which improves privacy protection.

Fingerprint sensing is a technology we're all familiar with. The in-screen fingerprint sensing solution, also called invisible fingerprint technology, puts the fingerprint sensor behind the screen. The in-screen fingerprint sensor can recognize you without your touch. This is a mainstream technology used in borderless phones today.

3D facial recognition has huge advantages for security. It captures the depth of different parts of your face, draws a 3D image with image processing algorithms, and compares it with the image saved in the phone. Huawei's flagship phones use the advanced Time of Flight (ToF) facial recognition technology. It measures distance by sending a signal and timing how long it takes to be reflected back to the sensor. The ToF 3D sensor is more compact and demonstrates the excellence of Huawei phones' features.

As a leader in mobile phone innovations, Huawei supports both 3D facial recognition and in-screen fingerprint sensing for security. The encryption, verification, and storage of 3D facial recognition information



and fingerprint information are in an isolated Trusted Execution Environment (TEE). Facial and fingerprint feature data does not leave the user's phone or get uploaded to the cloud so ensuring that this information is secure.

In addition, you can also enable App Lock for important messaging apps. It asks for biometric verification

once you open an app for extra privacy. Be it for accessing your phone or even opening certain apps, with Huawei's dual biometric recognition standing guard, you can be assured that your privacy and safety is guaranteed. Meta description: With Huawei's dual biometric recognition features, users have the best of security for unlocking their phone or apps.

UK budget must extend virus support: Analysts

LONDON: Britain must use next month's budget to extend coronavirus financial support measures and tackle inequalities exacerbated by the COVID crisis before a gradual withdrawal as the virus lockdown is eased, analysts urged yesterday.

Finance minister Rishi Sunak, who delivers his annual budget on March 3, should focus on securing economic recovery instead of raising taxes to fix virus-ravaged public finances, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) and Citi bank analysts said in a joint report. Chancellor of the exchequer Sunak must also help the economy—which shrank by almost 10 percent due to the pandemic—adjust to the "triple challenge" of Brexit, COVID and the green energy transition, they added. "The budget needs to announce well-targeted extensions in emergency support to households and employers over coming months," it said. "It also needs to set out a plan for phasing them out. The economy cannot adjust and recover until most of this support has been removed.

"The chancellor also needs to set out plans for how to help the economy recover and adjust to a new normal," it added. The government's furlough jobs



LONDON: Finance Minister Rishi Sunak, who delivers his annual budget on March 3, should focus on securing economic recovery instead of raising taxes to fix virus-ravaged public finances.

support scheme, which was launched in March during Britain's initial COVID-19 lockdown, is scheduled to stop at the end of April. Economists fear that the demise of the scheme, which pays the bulk of wages for millions of private-sector workers, could spark a fresh surge in unemployment. The IFS said that lower-income households had not been able to save as much cash as richer counterparts, sparking greater inequality in society during the crisis.

"Any significant continuation of the furlough

scheme must be limited and carefully targeted," said IFS director Paul Johnson. "In the recovery phase, (Sunak) needs to support jobs and investment, but also crucially needs to recognize and address the multiple inequalities exacerbated by the crisis."

Britain's economy shrank by a record 9.9 percent last year on the fallout from the coronavirus, official data showed, but a rapid vaccines rollout has boosted the outlook.

Activity was also hampered by Brexit turmoil ahead of Britain's final exit from the European Union at the end of last year. "Over the year 2020 as a whole, GDP contracted by 9.9 percent, marking the largest annual fall in UK GDP on record," the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

Gross domestic product grew 1.0 percent in the fourth quarter or three months to December, after an upwardly-revised third-quarter expansion of 16.1 percent. The economy plunged into a historic recession in the first half and shrank a record 19 percent in the second quarter as the pandemic erupted.

Britain could still face a potential double-dip recession on the back of the latest lockdown that has been in place since January, but a vaccine-driven bounceback is widely forecast. "The further restriction measures implemented in early January in light of new, more virulent strains of coronavirus have placed a firm dent in the UK's path to recovery," said economist Sam Miley at the Centre for Economics and Business Research. —AFP

civil discourse," interim CEO Mark Meckler said in a statement. He added the network was determined to return despite being taken offline "by those who desire to silence tens of millions of Americans."

Parler, which claims to have over 20 million users, said it was back for users that already had its app. New users won't be able to get access until next week. Some users reported Monday on other social networks that they were having trouble connecting, including owners of Apple devices.

The January 6 attack, when Donald Trump's supporters stormed the US Congress building in Washington, was followed by questions over the influence of Trump and far-right groups on social media. The ex-president was banned from Facebook and Twitter over the incitement of rioters in the storming of the US Capitol.

"Parler is being run by an experienced team and is here to stay. We will thrive as the premier social media platform dedicated to free speech, privacy

and civil dialogue," Meckler said. Nevada-based Parler, which launched in 2018, operates much like Twitter, with profiles to follow and "parleys" instead of tweets. In its early days, the platform attracted a crowd of ultraconservative and even extreme-right users. It has since signed up many more traditional Republican voices.

Parler fired its chief executive John Matze soon after the deadly attack on the US Capitol. —AFP



weather conditions, while Australia's trade tensions with China impacted BHP's coal business. "On this note, we are continuing to sell everything we produce, successfully redirecting coals that would otherwise have gone to China," chief financial officer David Lamont added. "While we can't be sure of how the situation will evolve, we remain of the view that ultimately, Chinese steel mills will continue to require higher-quality steel-making coals to meet their efficiency and environmental objectives."

The company has previously said it plans to concentrate on coking coal, which is used to make iron and steel, and has not been the primary focus of efforts to reduce the impacts of climate change.

As part of its plan to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, BHP said it had inked renewable power contracts for its Queensland coal and Western Australia nickel operations. —AFP

New Ghibli Hybrid: First electrified vehicle in Maserati's history arrives in Kuwait

KUWAIT: The new Ghibli Hybrid, the first electrified vehicle in Maserati's history arrives in Kuwait. The new Ghibli Hybrid represents one of the most ambitious projects for Maserati and sets the seal on another step forward towards the brand's new Era. The choice to introduce the hybrid technology on the Ghibli sedan is no coincidence: this model, with over 100,000 units produced since its launch in 2013, perfectly embodies the Modena-based manufacturer's DNA.

The arrival of the new Ghibli Hybrid thus expands the Maserati range, which is now even more competitive and responsive to the demands of the market. The new Ghibli Hybrid is on display at the Maserati Kuwait showroom from 4th of February 2021. The showroom is located in Al Rai, 4th ring road at the Al-Zayani dealership.

Design

Ghibli Hybrid is immediately recognizable, thanks in part to the new design of both exterior and interior. The common denominator of the restyling, developed by the Centro Stile Maserati, is the blue colour, chosen to identify all cars with hybrid technology and the new world they represent.

On the exterior, the blue color characterizes the three iconic side air ducts, the brake calipers and the thunderbolt in the oval that encloses the Trident on the rear pillar. The same blue colour reappears inside the car, in particular on the embroidered seams of the seats. The new Ghibli Hybrid also introduces new stylistic contents, starting from the new front grille, with bars redesigned to represent a tuning fork, a musical device that emits a sound of extreme purity, and which also evokes the Trident symbol itself. There are significant changes at the rear of the car, where the light clusters have been completely restyled, with a boomerang-like profile inspired by the 3200 GT and the Alfieri concept car.

Mild Hybrid

In perfect harmony with its DNA, Maserati has chosen a hybrid solution focused primarily on improving performance, while also reducing fuel consumption and cutting emissions. The hybrid technology exploits kinetic energy the car accumulates when in motion, recovering it and transforming it into electricity during deceleration and braking, and storing it in a battery.

The innovative powertrain, the outcome of in-depth engineering development work by the technicians and engineers of the Maserati Innovation Lab in Modena, combines an internal combustion engine (4 cylinders, turbo, displacement of 2.0 l) with a 48 volt alternator and an additional electric supercharger (e-Booster), supported by a battery. This solution is unique in its segment, and is the first in a new generation of powertrains, with the perfect trade-off between performance, efficiency and driving pleasure. The battery is mounted in the rear of the car, with benefits in terms of improved weight distribution.

This version weighs about 80 kg less than the Diesel. Thanks to maximum power output of 330 hp and torque of 450 Nm delivered from just 1,500 rpm, the new Ghibli Hybrid's performance data are very impressive: top speed of 255 km/h and acceleration from 0 to 100 km/h in 5.7 seconds. Ghibli Hybrid occupants will still revel in the unmistakable sound that characterizes all Maserati models, thanks to the optimised exhaust, which includes specially designed resonators.

The Maserati Intelligent Assistant multimedia system is latest-generation, based on digital inputs from Android Automotive, software that delivers an innovative User Experience fully customizable to the driver's personal preferences. The multimedia system's HD screen, with new graphics, more user-friendly and without surrounds, is increased in size from 8"4 to 10"1. A new instrument panel with digital devices and new graphics is also introduced.

Classifieds

Wednesday, February 17, 2021

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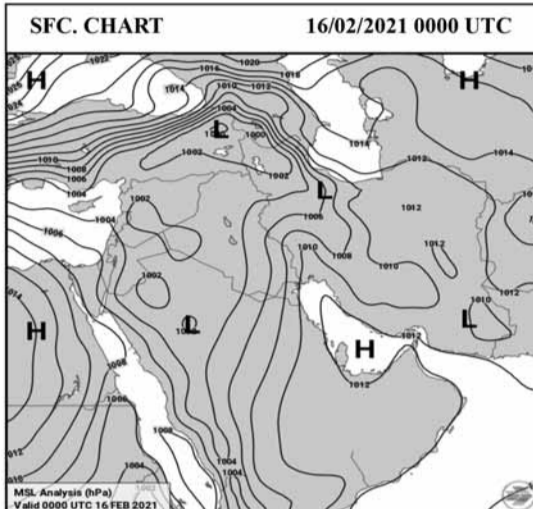
Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Rather hot and Partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southerly wind to south easterly wind with speed of 15 - 45 km/h with a chance for rising dust over open areas.

BY NIGHT: Rather cold and Partly cloudy to cloudy with moderate to fresh south easterly wind with speed of 20 - 50 km/h with a chance for rising dust.

WEATHER WARNING: No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	29 °C	19 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	32 °C	12 °C
ABDALY	32 °C	16 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	32 °C	15 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	29 °C	19 °C
AHMADI	26 °C	21 °C
NUWAISIB	30 °C	14 °C
WAFRA	33 °C	16 °C
SALMY	33 °C	16 °C



DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Wednesday	02/17	Unstable and Rather hot and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rising dust with a	31 °C	15 °C	SE-NW	25 - 65 km/h
Thursday	02/18	A significant decrease in temperature and Rather cold with a chance for rising dust and a chance	20 °C	11 °C	NW	15 - 50 km/h
Friday	02/19	Rather cold	19 °C	06 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 30 km/h
Saturday	02/20	Rather cold and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain	21 °C	05 °C	VRB-NE	06 - 32 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:07
Sunrise	06:27
Zuhr	12:02
Asr	15:13
Sunset	17:38
Isha	18:55

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	30 °C
MIN. Temp.	10 °C
MAX. RH	65 %
MIN. RH	17 %
MAX. Wind	S 21 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

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

Hospitals

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

Clinics

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

CHANGE OF NAME

We, Mr. Anthony John Thomas, & Mrs. Lavina Anthony Thomas have changed my minor son's name from Joel Thomas to Joel Anthony Thomas, Indian Passport - T8211875, Kuwait Civil ID Number - 308110100521, for all future purposes. (C 6220) 17-2-2021

Airlines

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

EMERGENCY ☎ 112

Word Search

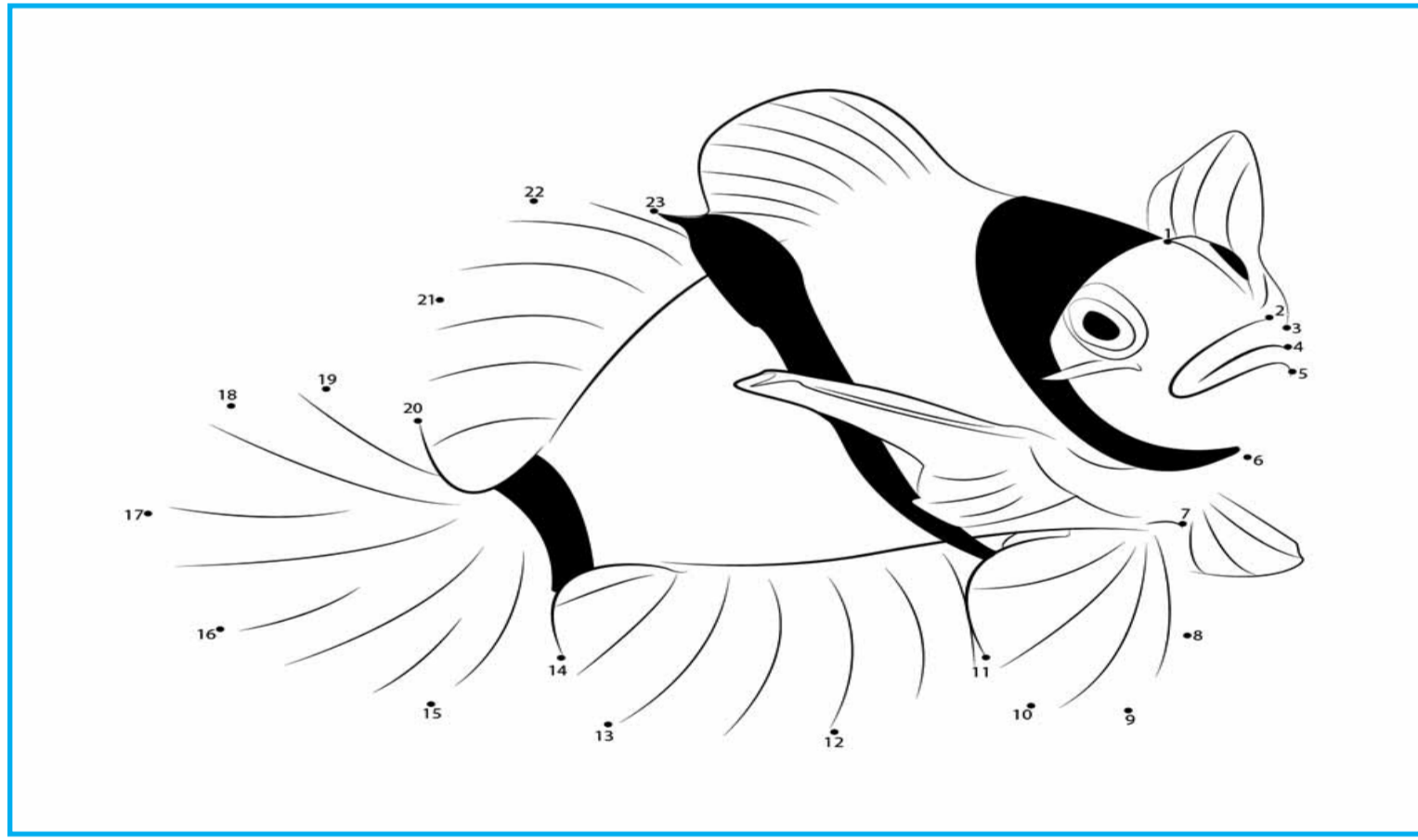
Physical Fitness Word Search

DIRECTIONS: Find and circle the vocabulary words in the grid. Look for them in all directions including backwards and diagonally.

ACTIVITY
AEROBIC
AGILITY
BALANCE
BODY COMPOSITION
CARDIO
COORDINATION
DAILY
DEHYDRATION
ENDORPHINS
ENDURANCE
ENERGY
EXERCISE
FLEXIBILITY
FREQUENCY
HEALTH
HEAT EXHAUSTION

HEAT STROKE
INTENSITY
MAX HEART RATE
MUSCLE
PROGRESSION
RESPIRATION
SPEED
SPORTS
STRENGTH
TARGET HEART RATE
THRESHOLD
TIME
TRAINING

Join the Dots



STAR TRACK

<p>Aries (March 21-April 19) A romantic evening at home with your partner could bring you two closer together, Aries. Your emotions are intense right now, however, so you need to use your intuition to judge exactly how much of your feelings you should reveal. An intellectual passion could also come your way. You might discover a new field of interest, and you will want to study it at home for hours.</p>	<p>Cancer (June 21-July 22) A surge of inner power could make you feel like you can move mountains, Cancer. If you've been contemplating actions that others believe impossible, this is the day to get them going. Career matters, romance, and creative projects could all be advanced today by careful effort on your part. Give it some thought, write down your ideas, consider all contingencies, and move ahead.</p>	<p>Libra (September 23-October 22) Emotions could be running high, Libra. Someone in your entourage may have a problem with an authority figure and political issues could come up. You're likely to feel especially powerful now, and so you might be tempted to throw your hat in the ring. It's better to stay out of anything political and channel that power and passion into your own project. That's likelier to bring positive results.</p>	<p>Capricorn (December 22-January 19) You should be feeling especially passionate now, Capricorn, especially regarding partnerships. Romantic partnerships definitely call for an evening alone together. Professional and creative ones, on the other hand, call for a new project that you both believe in. Look to events in distant states or foreign countries for inspiration. Something begun far away from home could capture your imagination.</p>
<p>Taurus (April 20-May 20) Information received from far away could compel you to learn more about the subject, Taurus. You might be inspired to use your new knowledge in a project that includes a partner. Your mind is insightful now. If you face decisions, this is definitely the day to follow your heart. Don't be surprised if you also find your telepathic abilities expanded.</p>	<p>Leo (July 23-August 22) Memories from your distant past could resurface today, Leo. You may wonder why you're suddenly thinking about them, but they probably represent a release of old emotional hang-ups that have been holding you back. By midafternoon you should feel more focused, determined, and ready to take on anything. This is definitely a great day to start a new project or complete an old one.</p>	<p>Scorpio (October 23-November 21) Heightened mental powers might make you spend a lot of time reading or doing research of some kind, Scorpio. Your curiosity is especially sharp right now. You might even consider advancing your education somehow, especially since new interests have been popping up for some time. New friends in fascinating fields might also have started you thinking. This is a good time to look into this.</p>	<p>Aquarius (January 20-February 18) If you haven't been feeling like yourself lately, Aquarius, a surge of inner power could push you over the top and make you feel strong and healthy again. You could decide to complete all your unfinished tasks today. You could get most of them done by day's end. Don't forget to take time out to enjoy yourself. You want to make the most of your newfound strength.</p>
<p>Gemini (May 21-June 20) Money matters may be advanced through using your intuition and inner power today, Gemini. You might have a hunch that your idea for making extra money might just work. Look into it at least. Don't let anyone talk you out of it until you know the facts. You might also rediscover a long-neglected talent that you find useful now.</p>	<p>Virgo (August 23-September 22) Today represents a new beginning in many ways. An old friend could reappear in your life and bring up memories that are both pleasant and disconcerting, Virgo. Don't worry too much about this. It probably represents a needed release. You may also get involved with a group that has goals you embrace. New friends could also come your way. Expect a few surprises from all sides today.</p>	<p>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21) Sagittarius, your intuition might increase today to the point where you feel like you could deduce the thoughts and motives of people you've never met before. Reading the news might bring you sudden insights as to how things are going to turn out. You could decide to put this ability to work to advance your financial condition. Do this if you can within reason. Your insights are probably correct.</p>	<p>Pisces (February 19-March 20) A surge of passion could dominate your day unless you find an outlet for it, Pisces. Romantic passion is high, so an intimate evening with a lover is a good idea. Creative passion is strong. You could have a sudden inspiration, perhaps influenced by a distant place. Don't be afraid to take time from your mundane chores to pursue this inspiration. Creativity is as important as anything else.</p>

Lifestyle | Features

HOPES DASHED AGAIN AS ITALY SKI RESORTS STAY SHUT

"It's so frustrating! They are having a laugh," vented skier Matteo Morsia, after the long-awaited reopening Monday of Italy's resorts was postponed at the last minute over fresh coronavirus fears. The 27-year-old trav-



elled 200 kilometers to the Italian Alps from Milan to take advantage of the first day of skiing this season-only for the government to announce on Sunday evening that they could not open. Morsia claimed a refund for his ski pass and returned home, but for those running the Cima Piazza Happy Mountain resort in Valdidentro, near Bormio, there is no such easy fix. "It's a disaster. For a week now, we have been readying the slopes

for the opening and preparing the health protocol," said Denis Trabucchi, a 35-year-old ski instructor.

"This last-minute announcement is unacceptable." He was particularly angry given scenes in many Italian cities this weekend of streets and outdoor restaurants packed with people enjoying the winter sun. "We see images of throngs of people in city centers, whereas we're here in the open air," he told AFP. Trabucchi is one of around 3,000 instructors in Italy's northern Lombardy region who have been on furlough since March 8, when the ski lifts closed under last year's coronavirus lockdown. Resorts had hoped to reopen before Christmas, then after New Year, and then on February 15. But in the first public act of Mario Draghi's new government that was sworn in on Saturday, this has now been delayed until March 5.

Political row

The Swiss and Austrian ski resorts are open, but Italy, like France, is still waiting for the green light. The timing of the latest postponement sparked outrage among business owners and politicians, with far-right leader Matteo Salvini—who is part of the new government—among those



A general view shows Bormio's world famous ski resort in the Italian Alps. — AFP photos

weighing in. "You can't say on Sunday that on Monday everything changes," he said—particularly in the winter tourism sector, which is worth between 10 and 12 billion euros a year, according to the agricultural body Coldiretti.

Luca Zaia, the governor of the northern Veneto region, added: "Our operators prepared the slopes, hired staff, turned on the heating in hotels... It's not just about support, they (the government) have to pay for the damage." The decision comes against a backdrop of warnings about a resurgence of Covid-19 infections in Italy, where more than 93,000 people with the virus have died since it hit the country one year ago. "The variants are a source of concern, we must continue to be vigilant," Health Minister Roberto Speranza said Sunday.

Lack of respect

Happy Mountain, a little resort with a spectacular view of the Cima Piazzini glaciers, was hoping to receive around 300 people for the opening day Monday—but instead, it was mostly deserted. Giovanni Battisti Migliori, a 61-year-old doctor with a salt-and-pepper beard and fluorescent sunglasses, was one of the few coming down the slope—but only after he walked up himself. "I'm so angry... it shows a lack of respect towards the snow sector," he said, boiling over despite the freezing temperatures.

The delay affects hundreds of companies, from ski lift operators to hotels, shops, restaurants. "The money they spent getting ready to reopen is all lost, it's money thrown out the window," said the mayor of Valdidentro, Massimiliano

Trabucchi. But not everybody is unhappy. "Opening up to skiers was good news for business, but less good for the virus," said Mauro Pancheri, 67, who owns the Bar Jolly, next to the legendary Stelvio Slope in Bormio. A few meters away, 2,000 pairs of skis are lined up in Celso Sport, waiting to be hired. "Our clients are renting snow shoes, but not skis," said its owner, Marina Compagnoni. "They made us believe that the slopes would reopen, but it's delayed again. All I want is some clarity so we can organize ourselves." — AFP



Children on excursions with their daycare groups, cross-country skiing on trails made of artificial snow in Oslo, Norway. — AFP photos

Norway moves mountains to bring skiing to the people

Norwegians, the saying goes, are born with skis on their feet. But with a lack of snow and the pandemic this year leaving many in despair, authorities are bringing snow and ski trails to downtown Oslo. For the past few weeks, big trucks have been dumping hundreds of cubic meters of fluffy white stuff, made by snow cannons perched on the hills outside the capital, in the city's still-green parks. Packed down or groomed with cross-country trails, the parks have transformed into winter wonderlands for skiing enthusiasts of all ages: little children on excursions with their daycare groups, active seniors, and office workers taking a break from their work-from-home schedule.



Miriam Heen Skotland out to cross-country ski in the Voldslokka park on her lunch break in Oslo.

"For three months, we've had very strict corona restrictions in Oslo, but we can still go outside," city councillor Omar Samy Gamal says, as a grooming machine behind him prepares a snowboarding hill in the Torshovdalen park. "Since we haven't had a lot of snow this winter, we're doing what we can to bring it to the people. We're bringing them a little bit of 'marka'," he says.

What's marka?

The word refers to the wooded hills outside Oslo, popular among urban dwellers for long walks, or more frequently, skiing

after work or at the weekend. The first snowfall of the season in early January caused long traffic queues, and, more worryingly during the pandemic, crowded commuter trains. "We don't want people packed together. We want them to keep their distance from each other, and the best way to ensure that is to make use of local public spaces," Gamal says.

Four Oslo parks—including that belonging to the royal palace—have already been or will be partially covered in artificial snow to quench locals' thirst for sledding and skiing. "It's extremely important to keep people active without everyone having to take the same train to leave town," says Miriam Heen Skotland, a psychologist out cross-country skiing in the Voldslokka park on her lunch break.

White Christmas?

Before working her night shift as a nurse, Karen Margrethe Igland has also strapped on her cross-country skis, just 10 minutes from her home. "I try to limit how much I use public transport. If I want to go to the 'marka', I have to take the train. So it's better to be able to come here on foot," she says. Climate change has made winters in Norway shorter. According to the Norwegian Meteorological Institute, Oslo has over the past 30 years lost 21 winter days, defined as days where the temperature dips below 0 degrees Celsius. The city could lose another 26 winter days by 2050, the Institute has warned.

"When I was young, it wasn't hard to predict the weather in winter: it was often cold and there was usually a lot of snow," Norway's Education Minister Guri Melby said in January when new climate measures were presented. "But for Christmas this year I wasn't sure whether I should buy my kids a sled, because the winters nowadays are much milder with a lot fewer snowmen and ski days," she said.

And in an almost sacrilegious move, Norway opened its first indoor ski center in early 2020. It is however currently closed to the general public because of virus restrictions. With Oslo fighting its battle against the thermometer, is it really reasonable to transport tons of snow by truck? The vehicles run on biodiesel, with hydrotreated vegetable oil, the city notes. "Using these carbon-neutral trucks to bring snow to the people so that they won't use their own car to drive to the 'marka', I think it's a pretty beneficial equation for the climate," says driver Tom Kjetil Tangen. — AFP

CREATOR OF MUCH-MOCKED ROMANIA STATUE ACCUSED OF FRAUD

A Romanian sculptor has been charged with fraud after a much-mocked sculpture of the Emperor Trajan—and ten others—turned out to be made of brass and not bronze as claimed, police said Monday. Ioan Bolborea, 65, is accused of selling the statues to the Bucharest municipality and thereby defrauding it of 3.7 million euros (\$4.5 million), a police spokesman told AFP. One of the statues, a depiction of a nude Roman emperor Trajan holding a she-wolf in his arms, was widely mocked after its installation in front of Bucharest's National History Museum in 2012.

The artwork, based on a model by the sculptor Vasile Gorduz (1931-2008), portrays the genesis of the Romanian people from the merging of the Romans and the Dacians, with the wolf as a symbolic animal. The strange posture and the nudity of the male character, as well as the appearance of the wolf with a scarf recalling the Dacians' flag around its neck, prompted a wave of mockery at the time. Online critics quipped it was a monument to Bucharest's stray dogs, and even the museum's curator admitting it was of "doubtful artistic quality".

Suspicious about the material used were raised in 2017 when the statue was vandalized and the tail of the she-wolf was broken. When trying to fix it, experts noticed that the statue was made of brass, not bronze. Contacted by AFP, Bolborea refused to comment on the charges. The investigation started following several complaints from the Bucharest municipality regarding the quality of Bolborea's work, which at the time he rejected as "nonsense". — AFP



In this file picture people take photos next to the statue of Roman Emperor Trajan in front of the National History Museum in Bucharest, Romania. — AFP

Legend 'considered' starting his own fashion line

John Legend has "considered" starting his own fashion line. The 42-year-old singer - who has a penchant for suave fitted suits - hasn't found the time to branch out with his own clothing range yet, but hasn't ruled it out if the "right collaboration" comes along. Asked if he wants to have his own apparel line one day, John told WWD.com: "I've always considered it but I've been so busy doing other things, it hasn't been the first priority...yet. Again, I love collaborating with other artists and I see fashion as an art form. I don't claim to be an artist in that sense, but I do have my own taste and my own sensibility and if the right collaboration came along, I would be interested."

The 'All of Me' hitmaker is set to launch his first men's shoe collection with Sperry later this year, and has loved getting to interact more with the fashion world. He explained: "I've always had an interest in fashion - it's part of my job in some ways - but it's also been something I've taken a lot more interest in as I've developed in my career as an artist. There's just so much interaction with the fashion community and I have so much respect for what they do. So when Sperry offered me the opportunity to collaborate and try to bring our worlds together, I thought it was a great idea and a great way to build our partnership." Elsewhere,

the father-of-two insisted both himself and his 35-year-old model wife, Chrissy Teigen - with whom he has Luna, four, and Miles, two - love "expressing" themselves "through fashion" and working with designers on their looks.

Asked who the biggest fashionista in their relationship is, he replied: "I think we both love fashion. We both see it as a way to express ourselves and collaborate with really great artists. Expression is really the best word because it says, 'This is who I want to present to the world today.' Fashion is a cool part of our lives and we enjoy collaborating with great designers and expressing ourselves through fashion."



John Legend

Moss' 'uncomfortable' early modeling days

Kate Moss was made to feel "terribly uncomfortable" by photographers early in her career. The 47-year-old beauty was just 14 when she started modeling and despite her young age, she felt pressured to strip off, and admitted it's still a common expectation in the industry today. She told Reader's Digest magazine: "There were many shoots in the early days where I felt terribly uncomfortable. I think everyone understands the lifespan of a model, and the fact you will be starting young."

"That was the case with me, but even so there were some photographers who wouldn't agree to shoot you unless there was a nude element." That was very common then and still is now. "For a very young woman that could be incredibly intimidating." Kate - who has 18-year-old daughter Lila with former partner Jefferson Hack - also hit out at the "awful" 'heroin chic' label she was tagged with thanks to her slender frame and pale skin.

She said: "In the early days I became linked with the phrase 'heroin chic', which I always thought was awful. "There is no positive interpretation of that and I certainly never felt one. "At the end of the day I was always thin and

small and no amount of eating would put weight on me." Kate admitted she has to keep a closer eye on her diet these days than she used to. She added: "I see models now who are similar to me and sometimes the criticism they get is unfair because - up to a certain age at least - there are some of us who can just eat what we want without too many real consequences." "That definitely changes in later life though, as I found out after the birth of my daughter Lila." — Bang Showbiz



Kate Moss

Lifestyle | Features



An Iraq man sells nuts in the old bazaar in Arbil, the capital of the northern Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region. — AFP photos



An Iraq man folds a scarf at his shop in the old bazaar in Arbil.



An Iraq man sells nuts in the old bazaar in Arbil.

In Iraq, generous Mideast tradition of 'istiftah' lives on

As the sun rises over Arbil's historic bazaar, shopkeepers sweep their stoops and eagerly await the "istiftah"—the first customer of the day, believed to be a good omen. For a country as famously hospitable as Iraq, where lunch tables are often overflowing with platters of meat as big as truck tyres, the custom of "istiftah", which means "opener", is subtle but sweet. The first customer of the day gets to name his or her price for the goods or service being purchased, without the usual process of haggling and compromise that is quintessential to street markets.

"The first customer is exceptional," said Hidayet Sheikhani, 39. "He's carrying wealth and well-being straight from God to the businessperson in the early morning." Sheikhani sells traditional black-and-white embroidered scarves and hats in the bazaar in the bustling center of Arbil, the Kurdistan region's capital. Shopkeepers arrive in the bazaar's brick alleyways around dawn, roll up the metal shutters of their shops and pour an obligatory glass of sweet tea to start their day. It's a tradition as old as time—not only in Iraq, but all across the Middle East.

Sheikhani inherited it from his grandfather, who had a shop in the same marketplace a century ago. At the time, he said, the "istiftah" tradition set the tone for the rest of the day. Shopkeepers who

had not yet sold anything would put a chair outside their shop, as a signal to their colleagues. Those who had made their first sale would direct any incoming shoppers to the other shops, until everyone had had their "istiftah". Only then would they accept a second customer. That went for both Muslim and Jewish shopkeepers, said Sheikhani, as Arbil was home to a thriving Jewish community until the mid-20th century.

'God will make it up to me'

The origin of the "istiftah" tradition remains disputed. Some say it hails from the Hadith, a record of the words and actions attributed to the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), in which he pleads to God, "Oh Allah, bless my people in their early mornings". But Abbas Ali, a lecturer at the College of Islamic Studies in Iraq's Salahaddin University, said the custom's prevalence among other faiths indicates it may not be related to Islam at all. "It's possible it was merely an ancient custom that was practiced for a long time—and good traditions often become religious rituals," Ali told AFP.

Either way, it lives on, even among young businessmen. Jamaluddin Abdelhamid, a 24-year-old with a wispy goatee, sells roasted nuts, sweets and spices in the bazaar. "Often, a customer requests honey because they're sick. It usually costs 14,000 Iraqi dinars (less than \$10) per jar, but they ask for it at

10,000 and I agree because it's the 'istiftah'," he said. "I know God will make it up to me somewhere else in my day," said Abdelhamid. Rejecting a first customer's request—no matter how steep the

discount is—leaves him guilt-ridden. "I spend the whole day feeling sad, asking myself how I could have rejected God's blessing," Abdelhamid said.

still buys his groceries—bread, yogurt, cheese and vegetables—every morning from small shops near his home, showering the shopkeepers with prayers for blessings and good health as he walks



An Iraq man sits in his shop in the old bazaar.



An Iraq man opens his shop in the old bazaar in Arbil.

discount is—leaves him guilt-ridden. "I spend the whole day feeling sad, asking myself how I could have rejected God's blessing," Abdelhamid said.

Tradition under threat?

It goes beyond the old bazaar: even taxi drivers, plumbers and mechanics have adopted it. "Whatever cash I earn first in a day, I kiss it and raise it to my forehead as a sign of gratitude to God,"

to request something at no cost at all. "Even if it's my brother, I'll take something symbolic from him—even just 1,000 Iraqi dinars," Salim told AFP.

There's one creeping threat to the beautiful balance of the "istiftah": shopping malls. As Arbil has developed over the last decade, large malls have cropped up across the city, offering convenient and speedy shopping experiences to its residents. Mohammad Khalil

out. Interactions at malls, he complained, are comparatively cold. "There's no sense of istiftah there—everything is about the computer system," Khalil told AFP. "Most of the time, the people who work in the mall shops aren't the actual owners, so they don't even care about the tradition." — AFP



South African DJ Master KG

Warner Music demands German police pay up for 'Jeruselema' videos

German state said Monday it was forced to fork out for license fees to Warner Music after several police forces took part in the "Jeruselema" viral dance challenge. The song by South African DJ Master KG became a global hit last year after it was used as the soundtrack to a video by a group of dancers in Angola. Groups of staff at businesses, hospitals, police forces and other workplaces around the world have since filmed themselves dancing to "Jeruselema" as a way of spreading good cheer during the pandemic. But Warner Music has now written to many of these organizations in Germany demanding license fees amounting to several thousand euros in some cases, according to a recent report in the Focus weekly news magazine.

The interior ministry for Germany's most populous state North Rhine-Westphalia told AFP on Monday that it had "settled claims from Warner Music on behalf of several police forces" in the region. A spokesman for Duesseldorf University Hospital told national news agency DPA it had also received mail from Warner Music and had since taken down its video. The North Rhine-Westphalia Fire Brigades Association warned its members about the license fees in early January after learning about one such letter, a spokesman told DPA. Some local fire services have since deleted their videos or cancelled plans to make one, he said. Warner's move sparked sharp criticism on their Facebook page on Monday, with many users accusing the label of "shabby behavior". — AFP

SPANISH POLICE ARREST RAPPER HOLED UP IN UNIVERSITY

Spanish police yesterday arrested a rapper who barricaded himself inside a university after he was controversially sentenced to nine months in jail over a string of tweets, television images showed. Pablo Hasel, 32, had been given until last Friday night to turn himself in to begin serving his sentence after being convicted for glorifying terrorism, slander and libel against the crown and state institutions. At issue was a series of tweets attacking the monarchy and accusing police of torturing and killing demonstrators and migrants, with his case sparking protests in Madrid and Barcelona.

But Hasel, who is known for his radical leftist views and whose real name is Pablo Rivadulla, on Monday barricaded himself inside the University of Lleida, in the northeastern Catalonia region, with dozens of supporters to avoid arrest.



Catalan rapper Pablo Hasel is arrested by police at the University of Lleida, 150 kms west of Barcelona, yesterday where he had barricaded himself. — AFP

Spanish television showed images of police escorting him out of the university yesterday.

"They will never make us give in, despite the repression," Hasel said, his fist raised as he descended a staircase, wearing track pants and a sweatshirt and carrying a duffel bag. A Catalan police spokesman told AFP that officers entered the university early yesterday "to enforce the judicial ruling" on his arrest. Police in protective gear removed

chairs, garbage bins and other objects that had been set up as barricades to reach the spot where the singer was barricaded with his supporters. Hundreds of artists have signed a petition demanding Hasel's release, including film director Pedro Almodovar, Hollywood actor Javier Bardem and folk singer Joan Manuel Serrat.

Hasel said on Twitter Monday: "I'm locked inside the University of Lleida with quite a few supporters so they'll

have to break in if they want to arrest me and put me in prison." Last week, Spain's government pledged to reduce the penalty for "crimes of expression" such as the glorification of terrorism, hate speech, insults to the crown and offences against religious sensibilities in the context of artistic, cultural or intellectual activities. But in an interview with AFP last week, Hasel said he had no intention of turning himself in, accusing the government of making empty pledges. "I refuse to go of my own accord and knock on the prison door," he said.

"So they'll just have to come and kidnap me, which will show up the state for what it really is: a phoney democracy." Far-left party Podemos, the junior partners in Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's minority coalition government, criticized Hasel's arrest, saying all those who "consider themselves progressives should feel shame". Are their eyes covered? There is no progress if we refuse to recognize our existing democratic shortcomings," the party added in a tweet. The case echoes that of another rapper called Valtonyc who fled to Belgium in 2018 after being convicted of similar crimes. Spain is trying to have him extradited but Belgium has refused on the grounds that his offences are not a crime under Belgian law. — AFP

Canadian singer Raymond Levesque dies at 92 after contracting COVID-19

Canadian singer-songwriter Raymond Levesque, whose 1956 classic "Quand les hommes vivront d'amour" was an international hit, has died at the age of 92 after contracting COVID-19, Canadian media reported Monday. Poet, novelist, playwright and actor, Levesque composed hundreds of songs that became part of the fabric of Quebec's cultural life. His best-known work remains the pacifist hymn "Quand les hommes vivront d'amour" ("When Men Live by Love"), which was written partly in reaction to the Algerian war that France was waging at the time, and which has been covered by a variety of Canadian and French singers including Celine Dion and Eddie Constantine.

"All my condolences to the family and loved ones of the great Quebecer Raymond Levesque, author of one of the most beautiful songs of all time," Quebec Prime Minister Francois Legault



Canadian singer-songwriter Raymond Levesque

said on Twitter. Levesque had been committed to the idea of independence for Quebec and refused the Governor General's Award when it was offered to him in 2005 because it represented the British monarchy in Canada. After going deaf in the mid-1980s, he devoted himself to writing, particularly poetry and theater. He was hospitalized in Montreal after contracting COVID-19 and died Monday, according to his family, quoted by the media. Steven Guilbeault, the federal heritage minister, praised a "giant of the Quebec artistic scene." "Raymond Levesque is leaving us, but his hymn to peace will continue to awaken what is most beautiful in everyone's heart," he said on Twitter. — AFP

Father of salsa music Johnny Pacheco dies aged 85

Johnny Pacheco, the Dominican-born musician considered one of the fathers of salsa, died Monday at the age of 85 in New Jersey, his family said. A musician, composer and producer, Pacheco founded the Fania Records label, as well as the historic Fania All Stars band, which included salsa icons Celia Cruz, Hector Lavoe and Willie Colon. "With great pain in my soul and an emptiness in my heart I inform you that maestro Johnny Pacheco passed away this afternoon with great peace," his wife, Cuqui Pacheco, said in a statement published on the musician's official Facebook page.

"A thousand thanks for all your prayers and all the love you always gave him." Pacheco had been urgently hospitalized a few days ago for pneumonia. Born Juan Azarias Pacheco in Santiago de los Caballeros, in the northern Dominican Republic, on March 25, 1935, he emigrated to New York as a child with his family. There, he studied at the Juilliard arts school and began his



Dominican-born musician Johnny Pacheco.

musical career in the 1950s. He rose to fame with his band Pacheco y Su Charanga. He founded Fania Records in 1964 with attorney Gerald Masucci.

He recorded or composed more than 100 songs during his career, including "El Faisan" and "Quitate tu." "DEP (Rest In Peace) my dear friend and teacher," Colon tweeted after Pacheco's death was announced, calling his former bandmate "unique." — AFP

Sports

Photo of the Day



Participant trains for Red Bull X-Alps. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Kuwait resumes competitions under health guidelines

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi affirmed the importance of hosting sport events and competitions, and to hold their domestic and foreign competitions "in adherence with health preventive procedures." These procedures include no public attendance or sports fans in stadiums, in order to preserve good health to all members of the sports community, their families and society in light of the ongoing pandemic of coronavirus, the minister said in a press statement. Mutairi added that the ministerial coronavirus emergency committee had approved the precautionary measures that were agreed upon between representatives of clubs and local sports federations officials from the Public Authority for Sports in the meeting held Monday. Stressing such measures will be upheld "before, during and after the competitions, in accordance with approved guidelines setup by health authorities," Mutairi said.

The minister noted that one of the most important measures is "seeking to carry out vaccinations for the virus to all players, referees and officials in charge of matches, as well as conducting continuous (PCR) checks for them." The minister also referred to "permanently banning the presence of any public fans," calling on federations and clubs to "adhere to these measures that come in the interest of everyone." Mutairi praised all clubs for meeting the Cabinet's call to halt sports activity and friendly matches, which was issued on February 3 to combat the increasing spread of this epidemic in the country, saying "this mechanism and procedures will provide an opportunity for a safe return to sports activity." The minister expressed hopes that "these measures will enable youths to safely carry out their favorite activities, especially since many national teams in a number of games are awaiting important international participation." — KUNA

Clarkson on song as Jazz down Sixers, Clippers, Nets roll on

Wizards edge Rockets in Wall's return to Washington

LOS ANGELES: Jordan Clarkson erupted for 40 points off the bench as the Utah Jazz overpowered the Philadelphia 76ers 134-123 in the NBA's clash of the conference leaders on Monday. Clarkson produced a dazzling display of long-range shooting, making eight of 13 attempts from beyond the arc as Utah overturned an early double-digit deficit to score a convincing win at Salt Lake City's Vivint Arena.

Utah talisman Donovan Mitchell finished with 24 points while Australian veteran Joe Ingles delivered 20. Sixers star Ben Simmons saw a record-breaking 42-point display — the highest ever tally by an Australian player in an NBA game — end in defeat. Simmons was in superb shooting form, making 12-of-13 free throws while supplying 12 assists. Team-mate Tobias Harris had 36 points with 10 rebounds.

But the night belonged to Clarkson, whose high-scoring cameo saw the Jazz stretch their lead at the top of the Western Conference to 23-5, and extended the team's unbeaten streak to eight games. "It feels good," Clarkson said. "The biggest thing is we just got another win. We're trying to keep it going, trying to keep getting better every time we step on the floor. That's what it's about at the end of the day."

Philadelphia, who lead the Eastern Conference at 18-10, got off to a fast start, with Harris's floating jump shot putting the visitors 14 points clear at 24-10 midway through the first. Utah gradually chipped away at the lead, however, with Ingles cut-

ting the deficit to just seven points at the end of the first quarter. The Australian then got Utah to within one with a three-pointer early in the second period to make it 46-45.

Utah finally moved into the lead just before half-time, turning around six points clear at the break. Another Mitchell three-pointer put Utah 86-74 ahead in the third quarter, and they maintained a 12-point lead heading into the final period with the score at 106-94. Clarkson brought up his 40-point tally with a three-pointer to put Utah 121-112 ahead before the hosts closed out a decisive win.

Clippers, Nets win

In Los Angeles, a depleted Clippers side missing Kawhi Leonard and Paul George proved too strong for the Miami Heat in a 125-118 win at the Staples Center. Marcus Morris shouldered the scoring burden for the Clippers with 32 points, while Ivica Zubac had 22 off the bench. The Clippers improved to 21-8 to remain firmly on the heels of Utah at the top of the West. Jimmy Butler (30 points), Bam Adebayo (27) and Tyler Herro (27) led the Miami scoring.

In Sacramento, Kyrie Irving scored 40 points as Brooklyn extended their winning run to three games in a 136-125 win over the Kings. It was a second straight road victory for the Nets, who had beaten Golden State in their last outing on Saturday. James Harden added 29 points for Brooklyn, who improved to 17-12 and remain third in the Eastern Conference. In San Francisco, Steph Curry's sparkling form for



WASHINGTON: John Wall #1 of the Houston Rockets dunks the ball against the Washington Wizards on Monday at Capital One Arena in Washington, DC. — AFP

Golden State continued with 36 points, two rebounds and six assists in a 129-98 blowout for the Warriors over the Cleveland Cavaliers.

Elsewhere Monday, John Wall made a high-scoring return to former club Washington but finished on the losing side as the Wizards defeated the Houston Rockets 131-119. Wall, who was traded by

the Wizards in December as part of the deal that sent Russell Westbrook in the opposite direction, finished with 29 points and 11 assists. But Wall was outgunned by former team-mate Bradley Beal, who poured in 37 points while Westbrook added a triple double of 16 points, 13 rebounds and 15 assists for the visitors. — AFP

Ricciardo under pressure to deliver for McLaren, says Norris

LONDON: Lando Norris has warned his new McLaren team-mate Daniel Ricciardo he will be under pressure to deliver this season. British driver Norris will race alongside seven-time Grand Prix winner Ricciardo following the Australian's move from Renault. Ricciardo, 31, agreed a three-year contract with McLaren as the British team aim to challenge the sport's superpowers. In his opening two seasons, Norris was evenly matched with team-mate Carlos Sainz. Following the Spaniard's switch to Ferrari in place of four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel, the 21-year-old believes he can keep up with Ricciardo.

"I don't think the arrival of Daniel will make it any harder for me," said Norris as McLaren became the first team to launch their 2021 car on Monday. "I worked with Carlos who is an extremely good driver and there are things Carlos is going to be better at than Daniel and vice-versa. I don't believe Daniel is a big step above anything that Carlos has achieved, and there is more pressure on him because he has been in Formula One for longer and he has to come in and perform very well. It is harder for someone to go up against a much younger driver than it is for a younger driver going up against someone with more experience. I am in that earlier phase of my career but I still need to perform very well, and there are no



WOKING: A handout photo released on Monday by McLaren shows McLaren's British driver Lando Norris (right) and Australian driver Daniel Ricciardo posing by the new McLaren Formula 1 car MCL35M in Woking, southwest of London. — AFP

excuses for me anymore."

Ricciardo is keen to get back on track after recording just two top-three finishes at Renault following his surprise decision to quit Red Bull. "I feel like this team has a bunch of momentum and there is good stability," he said. "When I first talked to McLaren in 2018 there were still quite a few moving parts. The results were not there on track, and they were trying to figure out their own structure. They have established that now and I am fitting into the puzzle as opposed to putting it all together."

Norris helped McLaren to third in last season's constructors' championship, their best result since Lewis Hamilton left for Mercedes at the end of 2012. He became the youngest British driver to finish on the podium after taking third at the opening round in Austria last year. Now he wants to establish himself as McLaren's number one driver, regardless of Ricciardo's arrival. "I have more responsibility on me now than the past few years to lead the team," Norris said. "It is a big opportunity for me to take up that lead and I will work very hard on doing that." — AFP

Ashwin stars as India thrash England to level Test series

CHENNAI: India captain Virat Kohli said yesterday his side showed more "grit" and "determination" to thrash England in the second Test, playing down complaints about the difficult pitch. With local hero Ravichandran Ashwin claiming eight wickets in the match and scoring 106 in the second innings, India completed a 317-run victory inside four days in Chennai.

Left-arm spinner Axar Patel claimed a five-wicket haul on his Test debut as England were out for 164 while chasing an unlikely 482 on day four. Some said the Chennai pitch, which crumbled from nearly the first day, was not fit for a Test. But England made no public complaint and Kohli rejected the criticism and said his side played a "perfect game".

"I think our application with the bat was outstanding," said the India captain. "The conditions were challenging for both sides but we showed more application and grit and determination to battle it out. We didn't panic out there looking at the hard turn and bounce on that pitch." Kohli highlighted that India scored 600 runs over two innings despite the conditions, and winning the toss made no difference. "So if you put up that kind of batting performance and you string in those important batting partnerships then we know that our bowlers are going to do the job."

England captain Joe Root conceded that his side were "outplayed in all three departments this week" and had to learn quickly before the third Test in Ahmedabad. But he added: "I would say it was a challenging wicket. I do think that it was an important loss to win." England, he said, now have to be "honest" and learn quickly to adapt to conditions in India. England, struggling since the opening day, kept losing wickets after resuming on 53-3 on day four. Root departed for 33 soon after lunch, falling to Patel. Left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav joined in to finish off the innings, taking Moeen Ali after he smashed 43 off 18 balls. — AFP

Sports

Ronaldo returns to Portugal as Juve battle to keep among Europe's elite

Italian giants face Porto in Champions League last 16

PORTO: Cristiano Ronaldo returns to his native Portugal for the first time as a Juventus player as his side face Porto tonight with the Italian giants fighting to keep up with Europe's most powerful clubs in the Champions League. On the field Juve are still finding their feet under novice coach Andrea Pirlo but they crave European glory more than anything having lost five Champions League finals since last winning the trophy in 1996.

Off the pitch, meanwhile, their chairman Andrea Agnelli is one of the leading figures behind plans to reform the continent's elite club competition. Agnelli, also the influential chairman of the European Club Association, has long been one of the main backers of a Champions League which guarantees access to an elite few and makes it harder for other clubs to gain entry.

Amid talk of a breakaway Super League which would undoubtedly feature his club, Italy's richest and most successful, the 45-year-old has given his backing to an expanded Champions League starting from 2024 onwards, guaranteeing more matches and, ultimately, more money.

"I think it is our duty to think ahead and guarantee that football remains the best sport in the world," Agnelli said recently, as he pondered the challenges of trying to ensure Generation Z doesn't lose interest in the sport. "Everything should be based on sporting merit, but we should remember where our fans of the future are. It is our strong view that more European matches are welcome."

Juventus have dominated Serie A for the last decade without managing to win the Champions League. Porto, meanwhile, are the only club from

outside the so-called 'Big Five' leagues in this season's last 16. Both are two-time European Cup winners. For the Turin side, success in Europe this season appears even more important as their domestic domination shows signs of faltering under Pirlo with hopes of a 10th consecutive Scudetto in peril.

A 1-0 defeat at Napoli on Saturday left Juventus eight points adrift of leaders Inter Milan, albeit with a game in hand. "This defeat will not bring us down," insisted Ronaldo. "Let's raise our heads and think about the Champions League." Porto, meanwhile, have drawn their last four games domestically and are 10 points behind league leaders Sporting Lisbon.

Ronaldo v Pepe

Juve's hopes will be on five-time Ballon d'Or winner Ronaldo, the Champions League record goalscorer with 134 goals, signed from Real Madrid in 2018 to deliver them the trophy. Ronaldo faces a Portuguese team for the first time since 2016 when with Madrid he beat his former club Sporting 2-1. But his last Champions League visit to the Estadio do Dragao dates back to a quarter-final, second leg in April 2009 with Manchester United.

The tie was poised at 2-2 after a tricky first leg at Old Trafford. But, six minutes in, Ronaldo gathered the ball 35 meters out to unleash a thunderbolt for the only goal of the game and send his side through. Ronaldo has played 12 European games against Portuguese teams, split between Benfica, Porto and Sporting. He has four goals against them and as many assists. "I expect to win but we know it's going to be very tough," Porto captain Pepe told UEFA.com.



TURIN: (From left) Juventus' Turkish defender Merih Demiral, Juventus' Italian defender Leonardo Bonucci, Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo and Juventus' Brazilian defender Alex Sandro take part in a training session yesterday at the Juventus training ground in Turin, on the eve of their UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match against Porto. — AFP

The 37-year-old played alongside fellow Portuguese international Ronaldo at Madrid where they won three Champions League trophies together. "In my opinion, they've got the best player in the world in Cristiano Ronaldo," continued the Brazil-born

defender. "I've never played against him. So we've our work cut out for us. It will be a special match, more between Porto and Juventus than the one between Pepe and Ronaldo. Porto have never yet beaten Juventus. I hope this can be the first time." — AFP

Haaland urges Dortmund to shake off blues at Sevilla

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund go into tonight's Champions League last 16, first-leg tie at Sevilla with star striker Erling Braut Haaland urging his team-mates to shake off their Bundesliga blues or risk a heavy defeat in Spain. "We just have to stick to the match plan and try to perform," Haaland told Sky Sports.

"Sevilla are a strong team. We just have to find our form again and do our best on the pitch to have a chance. If we play like we did in the last few games, we have no chance," Haaland warned with Dortmund having won just three of their last eight games in all competitions. The Norwegian striker netted six goals in Dortmund's first four group games before sitting out the last two European games with injury. Dortmund's fortunes have nosedived since Axel Witsel's strike sealed a 2-1 win at Zenit St Petersburg last December to confirm the Germans as winners of their Champions League group.

Joy at reaching the last 16 was dampened four days later when Dortmund's defensive weaknesses were brutally exposed in a 5-1 thrashing at home to Stuttgart. Lucien Favre was sacked as head coach the following day. His assistant, the 38-year-old Edin Terzic, was promoted to interim coach until the end of the season, but results have not improved of late.

On Monday, it was announced that Borussia Moenchengladbach's highly sought-after coach Marco Rose will take charge at Dortmund next season. The 44-year-old will be tasked with re-establishing Dortmund as the second power in German football behind Bayern Munich. Dortmund have picked up only 14 league points from a possible 30 since Terzic replaced Favre.

It took a late Haaland goal, his 23rd in as many games this season, to avert defeat in a 2-2 draw at



SEVILLA: Sevilla's Spanish coach Julen Lopetegui (center) arrives with his team for a training session at the Ciudad Deportiva Jose Ramon Cisneros Palacios training ground in the outskirts of Sevilla yesterday on the eve of the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match between Sevilla FC and Borussia Dortmund. — AFP

mid-table Hoffenheim last Saturday. The result left Dortmund sixth in the Bundesliga table and they are now 16 points behind leaders Bayern Munich. It took another Haaland goal for Dortmund to beat second-division Paderborn 3-2 after extra time in the last 16 of the German Cup earlier this month.

Sevilla 'outstanding'

In contrast, Sevilla have won all of their last nine games, including a 2-0 win over Barcelona in the semi-final of the Spanish Cup. "They have scored twice as many goals as they have conceded," warned Terzic. "If you compare form, Sevilla have a clear advantage, but the next round is our clear goal."

Morale has been low since a 2-1 league defeat to Freiburg 10 days ago - Dortmund's first loss against the club from Germany's Black Forest for more than a

decade. "Mistakes were made again that should not have happened," fumed Terzic, a verdict which could also apply to each of Dortmund's eight league defeats in 2020/21 — one more than the whole of last season.

While Haaland and England winger Jadon Sancho netted last Saturday, neither has been able to find the consistent form to drag Dortmund out of their lull. Club captain Marco Reus was so poor against Freiburg that he was only a second-half replacement against Hoffenheim. Dortmund's main concern is the fact they are currently six points from the Bundesliga's Champions League places. Dortmund would stand to lose 30 million euros (\$36 million) if they fail to qualify for next season's group stages. With Bundesliga games currently played behind closed doors due to the coronavirus pandemic, Dortmund already expect a financial loss of around 70 million euros across the season. — AFP

Lackluster Bale's Spurs return goes sour

LONDON: Gareth Bale faces a fight to salvage his tarnished reputation after the Tottenham forward's failure to live up to the hype surrounding his Premier League return. When Bale rejoined Tottenham on loan from Real Madrid in September, the emotional homecoming was hailed as a perfect fit for the player and the club where he rose to global stardom.

But just five months later, Bale has flopped so badly, amid a rift with Tottenham boss Jose Mourinho, that it is almost impossible to imagine the Wales captain's spell in north London being extended beyond this season. The 31-year-old looks a disinterested figure in his increasingly rare appearances for Mourinho's side. The dazzling form that persuaded Real to pay a then world record £85 million (\$118 million) to sign him from Tottenham in 2013 is now a distant memory.

Although Bale's move to Madrid went sour some while ago, there was a perception he was the victim of a personality clash with Real manager Zinedine Zidane rather than a player past his best. Despite winning the Champions League four times with Madrid — scoring in two finals — and lifting the La Liga crown twice, Bale's face never quite fit at the Bernabeu.

The flag bearing the slogan 'Wales. Golf. Madrid' that Bale memorably brandished after helping his country qualify for Euro 2020 was perceived as a swipe at the Spanish club over his lack of playing time. But, judging by his lackluster displays for

Tottenham, perhaps it said more about where club football lies in Bale's priorities.

While his passion for Wales still appears to burn brightly, Bale's complacent attitude to the teams that pay his reported £600,000 per-week wages — Tottenham and Real are sharing the cost — suggests a dulled appetite for the hard work required to succeed at the highest level.

Writing on the wall

Tottenham have played 22 league games since his return, but Mourinho has been so underwhelmed by Bale's contributions that he has made just two starts and five substitute appearances. Perhaps the writing was on the wall from the moment Bale's injury-delayed first appearance saw him come on with Tottenham 3-0 up against West Ham after 72 minutes, only to finish with a 3-3 draw.

When Bale scored the winner at home to Brighton in his second league appearance, it seemed he might be up and running. But that remains the only league goal of his loan and one of just four in a meager 16 appearances in all competitions. Mourinho exposed his concerns about Bale's attitude for the first time last week when he questioned the forward's decision to make an Instagram post proclaiming he had a good training session just hours before being left out of Tottenham's squad for their FA Cup defeat at Everton.

Claiming Bale had told him he was not fit enough to play, Mourinho said: "Since the beginning of the season in relationship to everything, I try to be very private and try to keep everything indoors, but I felt I needed to address the situation. Probably the post was not even his responsibility, I don't know? But the post was showing 'training session great and I am ready' and was totally wrong."

Bale was back in action as a late substitute in Tottenham's 3-0 defeat at Manchester City on



MANCHESTER: Tottenham Hotspur's Portuguese head coach Jose Mourinho (right) talks with Tottenham Hotspur's Welsh striker Gareth Bale following the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Tottenham Hotspur at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, on February 13, 2021. Manchester City won the match 3-0. — AFP

Saturday, but once again he struggled to make an impact. "I am looking at him, a world-class player, he comes back to the club he professes to love and it's as if he has been happy to sit on the bench," former Liverpool manager Graeme Souness said of Bale recently. Tellingly, Bale has been a Europa League specialist, starting all six group games to allow star forwards Harry Kane and Son Heung-min to rest. With Tottenham in poor form, Mourinho is likely to rotate his squad for their Europa League last 32 first leg against Austrian minnows Wolfsberg tomorrow. Yet, even if Bale is given one last chance to save his season, few would bet on him seizing it. — AFP

News in brief

Bayern held at home

BERLIN: Robert Lewandowski claimed his 25th Bundesliga goal this season with a brilliant volley as Bayern Munich needed three second-half goals to salvage a 3-3 draw at home to strugglers Arminia Bielefeld in heavy snow on Monday. Despite the draw, Bayern are still five points clear at the top of the Bundesliga. However, four days after winning the Club World Cup final in Qatar, Bayern struggled on their Bundesliga return in Munich as Bielefeld raced into a 2-0 lead. Bayern needed second-half goals by Lewandowski, Corentin Tolisso and a thunderbolt of a volley from Alphonso Davies to rescue a point. — AFP

Werner ends goal drought

LONDON: Timo Werner ended his Premier League goal drought as the Chelsea forward sealed a 2-0 win against Newcastle that lifted the Blues into fourth place on Monday. Werner netted late in the first half at Stamford Bridge after setting up Olivier Giroud's opener for Thomas Tuchel's revitalized team. Tuchel is yet to lose in six games since replacing the sacked Frank Lampard in January, with five successive victories in all competitions suggesting the former Paris Saint-Germain boss could prove a shrewd appointment. Chelsea are back in the Champions League places after climbing above West Ham on goal difference. Tuchel is also two points above his fellow German Jurgen Klopp, whose troubled champions Liverpool are languishing in sixth place. — AFP

West Ham bolster Euro bid

LONDON: West Ham boosted their unexpected bid to qualify for the Champions League with an emphatic 3-0 victory against lowly Sheffield United on Monday. David Moyes' side made it six wins from their last eight Premier League games as they swept aside the bottom of the table Blades at the London Stadium. An injury to Michail Antonio meant West Ham had to start without a recognized striker. But on-loan Manchester United forward Jesse Lingard provided the attacking menace as goals from Declan Rice, Issa Diop and Ryan Fredericks briefly moved the Hammers into fourth place. Chelsea went back above West Ham with their 2-0 win against Newcastle just hours later, but regardless of that result, Moyes has done a remarkable job to haul his team into European contention. — AFP

Greenwood inks new deal

LONDON: Mason Greenwood committed himself to Manchester United till 2025 yesterday with the club's manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer saying it is his responsibility to ensure the winger "reaches his phenomenal potential". The 19-year-old's new and improved deal which includes a one-year extension option comes after a series of impressive performances since he broke into the first team. Greenwood has been with the club since the age of seven and gone on to make 82 first-team appearances and earning himself one England cap. Solskjaer handed Greenwood his debut against Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League in March 2019 and has been delighted with his progress. — AFP

Racquet-smashing Djokovic into Australian Open semis

Williams, Osaka showdown set as Russian fairytale continues

MELBOURNE: Eight-time winner Novak Djokovic smashed his racquet en route to a tense, four-set win over Germany's Alexander Zverev to reach his 39th Grand Slam semi-final at the Australian Open yesterday. It was a patchy performance from the world number one, who is nursing an abdominal injury and drew deeply on his mental fortitude to win 6-7 (6/8), 6-2, 6-4, 7-6 (8/6).

"With this condition (injury), I need time to warm up and actually feel like I can rotate well," said Djokovic, who started sluggishly but finished with 23 aces and 48 winners, along with 56 unforced errors. "I started moving better and playing better. I served extremely well and I think I had slightly more aces than him, which for me is a miracle. "There were a lot of nerves out there and I feel emotionally a bit drained. "I kind of regained my focus after I broke that racquet and things started to shift to me in a positive direction."

Djokovic will be hot favorite to advance to Sunday's final when he plays Russian qualifier Aslan Karatsev, who continued his dream run with a 2-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-2 win against injured Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov. "I hadn't seen him play before the Australian Open," he said of 114th ranked Karatsev. "He's very physically strong and moves well. He has a lot of firepower from the back of the court. "He's motivated and has nothing to lose."

The Serb remains on track for a record-extending ninth Australian Open title and 18th Grand Slam trophy, nipping at the heels of rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, who both have 20. Djokovic and Zverev went the distance in a see-saw clash in the warm-up ATP Cup, foreshadowing what was ahead. Having played three straight grueling matches, a lethargic Djokovic dropped his opening service game and labored through the first set, which Zverev claimed in a tense tiebreaker to take the early lead. Djokovic's impenetrable game returned in a dominant second set marked by sliding retrievals and unrelenting punching from the baseline.

But Djokovic couldn't continue the momentum in the third set and his frustration boiled over when he was unable to crack Zverev's serve, as he smashed his racquet three times on the court. Djokovic, however, regrouped and gained a stranglehold by pulling off five straight games to edge ahead. The twists continued in the fourth set with Zverev running out to a 3-0 lead until Djokovic once again hit back. He proved nerveless in the decisive tiebreaker, finishing it off with an ace to clinch his 19th straight win at the Australian Open. Djokovic last tasted defeat in the fourth round in 2018, when he was upset by unseeded Hyeon Chung of South Korea. Zverev, who served 21 aces, lost to Dominic Thiem in last year's Melbourne semis, and fell agonizingly short against the Austrian in his only Grand Slam final at last year's US Open.

Semi-final showdown

Earlier yesterday, Serena Williams blasted past Simona Halep to set up an Australian Open semi-final showdown with Naomi Osaka, as Russian qualifier Aslan Karatsev extended his fairytale run. Williams took a step towards a record-equaling 24th Grand Slam title with a 6-3, 6-3 dismantling of second seed Halep, the American's nemesis in the 2019 Wimbledon final.

Williams, 39, said her level was improving ahead of her meeting with Japan's Osaka, who came out on top in their tempestuous 2018 US Open title match. "Definitely think this is the best match I have played this tournament, for sure," said the 10th seed. "Obviously I had to, going up against the number two in the world, so I knew I had to do better."

Their semi-final promises much after Osaka, the reigning US Open champion, looked in great touch in her 6-2, 6-2 win over Taiwan's Hsieh Su-wei. Displaying great focus against the awkward Hsieh, ranked 71 and playing her first Slam quarter-final aged 35, Osaka hit 24 winners and was detained on Rod



MELBOURNE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning against Germany's Alexander Zverev during their men's singles quarter-final match on day nine of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

Laver Arena for only 66 minutes. "I told myself just to be really intense from the beginning," said the Japanese star, the reigning US Open champion. I felt like I knew what to expect and that I couldn't afford to be lazy with my footwork or anything."

Elsewhere, 114th-ranked Karatsev became the first man to reach a Grand Slam semi on debut when he ousted a hobbling Grigor Dimitrov 2-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-2. The 27-year-old has knocked out three seeds on his run to the last four, where he will face world number one Novak Djokovic. "It's an unbelievable feeling," said Karatsev, whose career so far has been badly compromised by injury. "It was tough at the beginning for me

to hold my nerves, but I tried to find a way to play."

Karatsev becomes only the second qualifier to reach the Australian Open semi-finals after Bob Giltinan in 1977. He is also the lowest-ranked man to make the semis at a Slam since 125th-ranked Goran Ivanisevic at Wimbledon in 2001. After a five-setter with Felix Auger-Aliassime in round four, Karatsev had an easier ride against Dimitrov who was wincing with pain from the third set. The Bulgarian 18th seed, who was barely able to serve because of back spasms, took a medical timeout, but his movement was always hampered and he limped off the court after Karatsev's win. — AFP



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