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Amir commends ministry of health's frontline workers

Sheikh Nawaf hails 'national spirit' of people in confronting the pandemic



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Hmoud Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. — KUNA

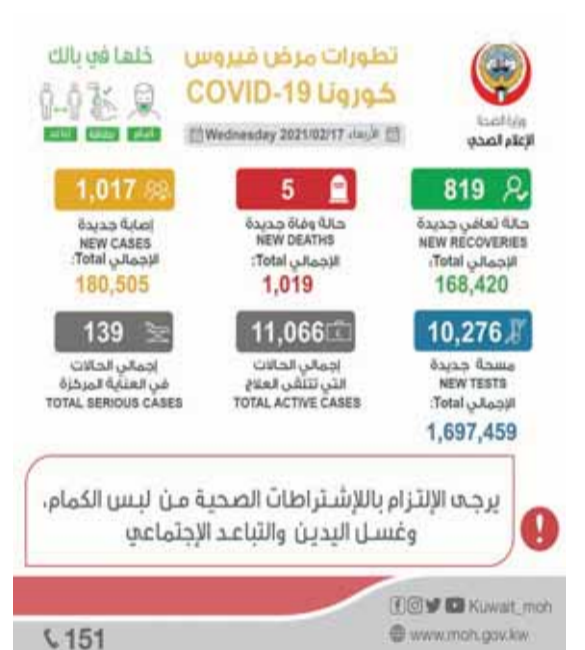
KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday commended government authorities' efforts, namely the ministry of health, whose healthcare workers are on the frontline in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. HH the Amir made the remarks during a reception of Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Hmoud Al-Sabah, who briefed the Amir about health conditions in the country and preventive measures implemented by the health ministry to confront the pandemic.

Sheikh Basel also spoke about "dangerous developments" of the pandemic, which requires further efforts to curb its spread with the objective of preserving the health system in Kuwait. He also briefed HH the Amir about the presentation he made at the National Assembly and the "smooth" vaccination campaign.

HH the Amir reiterated confidence in

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah for the efforts carried out by the government to confront the pandemic. He praised government authorities, foremost the health ministry, for being on the frontline in the fight against COVID-19, which reflected the "high national spirit" of the people of this dear country. HH the Amir also appreciated the prime minister's cooperation with parliament members to address all issues concerning citizens.

The health ministry yesterday registered 1,017 new COVID-19 cases over a 24-hour period, raising the total number of infections to 180,505, while five fatalities were recorded, taking the death toll to 1,019. Health Ministry Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said 819 people recovered from the virus, taking total recoveries to 168,420. —KUNA



334 Indians died due to COVID-19 in Kuwait in 2020

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: In 2020, 334 Indians died due to COVID-19 out of 1,279 deaths of Indians registered in Kuwait, Indian Ambassador Sibi George told an open house at the Indian Embassy yesterday. Addressing community members, he said the embassy registered 572 more death cases in 2020 than the 707 cases in 2019.

Deaths due to natural causes also rose to 786 in 2020 from 551 in 2019, an increase of 235. "The situation is not looking very good this year. In January 2021, we had 101 deaths of Indians registered at the mission, against 55 deaths in January 2020 and 63 deaths in January 2019. At the same time, this number is smaller than the most difficult months of last year, when we lost 288 Indians in July and 172 in August," the ambassador revealed, expressing condolences to the families of the deceased.

In the first week of February, the embassy issued an advisory to the community in view of the evolving COVID-19 pandemic situation. "We have seen that in recent weeks, there has been a spike in cases. I reiterate to all to adhere to and abide by the regulations and procedures announced by the government of Kuwait to combat and limit the spread of the coronavirus as part of our individual and collective responsibility to deal with the pandemic," George said. He said the embassy is ready to provide assistance including meeting the medical expenses of all emergency medical cases on a "means tested basis".

The ambassador held a meeting with the Indian Community Support Group (ICSG) on Tuesday, where he discussed the next steps in view of the emerging pandemic situation. He said the embassy will continue to provide air tickets to all deserving cases and make travel arrangements to those who need medical escort. As part of India's evacuation mission 'Vande Bharat Mission', over 180,000 Indians have traveled back to India from Kuwait. The mission is still operational, he added.

Continued on Page 2

Trump urges Reps to dump McConnell

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump urged Republican senators Tuesday to dump Mitch McConnell as their leader in the Senate following his withering criticism of the former US president after his impeachment trial. In his most extensive comments yet on politics since stepping down from power on Jan 20, Trump also claimed credit for some Republican gains in the Nov 3 election and threatened to use his influence against party candidates who don't align with him.

"The Republican Party can never again be respected or strong with political leaders' like Sen. Mitch McConnell at its helm," Trump said in a statement. "Mitch is a dour, sullen, and unsmiling

political hack, and if Republican Senators are going to stay with him, they will not win again."

The attack came after McConnell said on Saturday that even though he had voted to acquit Trump at his impeachment trial, the former president was nevertheless "practically and morally responsible" for the Jan 6 storming of the US Capitol.

After 50 Democratic senators and seven Republicans voted that Trump was guilty - a majority in the 100-seat Senate, but not the two-thirds needed for a conviction - McConnell let loose, excoriating Trump for the attack that saw five people die and the halls of the US legislature ransacked by his supporters.

He called Trump's actions leading up to the siege, including a White House rally where the then-president urged followers to descend on Congress, "a disgraceful dereliction of duty". "These criminals were carrying his banners. Hanging his flags. And screaming their loyalty to him," McConnell said.

But Trump blamed the wily veteran lawmaker, who for four years as majority leader kept the

Autopsy offers new clues 3,600 yrs after pharaoh's murder

CAIRO: A high-tech study has offered new clues into the killing of a pharaoh who ruled Egypt over three millennia ago, the antiquities ministry said

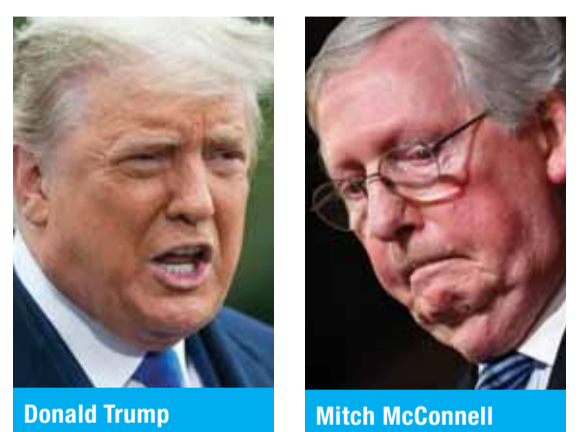
yesterday. Seqenenre Tao II, "the Brave", reigned over southern Egypt some 1,600 years before Christ. He famously led Egyptian troops against the Hyksos, a dynasty of West Asian origin which had taken over the Nile Delta.

Seqenenre's body had been examined by X-ray in the 1960s, revealing head wounds adeptly concealed by embalmers and giving rise to theories that he was killed in battle or a palace assassination. But after conducting CT scans

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CAIRO: A handout picture released yesterday shows a CT scan performed on the mummy of ancient Egyptian King Seqenenre-Taa-II. — AFP



Senate aligned with the Republican president, for losing party control of the body. He claimed credit for McConnell's own win of another six-year term representing Kentucky in the Senate, where the 78-year-old has served since 1984.

Continued on Page 2

World's oldest DNA sequenced from mammoths

PARIS: Teeth from mammoths buried in the Siberian permafrost for more than a million years have yielded the world's oldest DNA ever sequenced, according to a study published yesterday, shining the genetic searchlight into the deep past. Researchers said the three specimens, one roughly 800,000 years old and two over a million years old, provide important insights into the giant Ice Age mammals, including the ancient heritage of the woolly mammoth.

The genomes far exceed the oldest previously sequenced DNA - a horse dating between 780,000 to 560,000 years ago. "This DNA is incredibly old. The samples are a thousand times older than Viking remains, and even pre-date the existence of humans and Neanderthals," said Love Dalen, a professor of evolutionary genetics at the Centre for Paleogenetics in Stockholm, senior author of the study published in Nature.

The mammoths were originally discovered in the 1970s in Siberia and held at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. Researchers first dated the specimens geologically, with

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Local

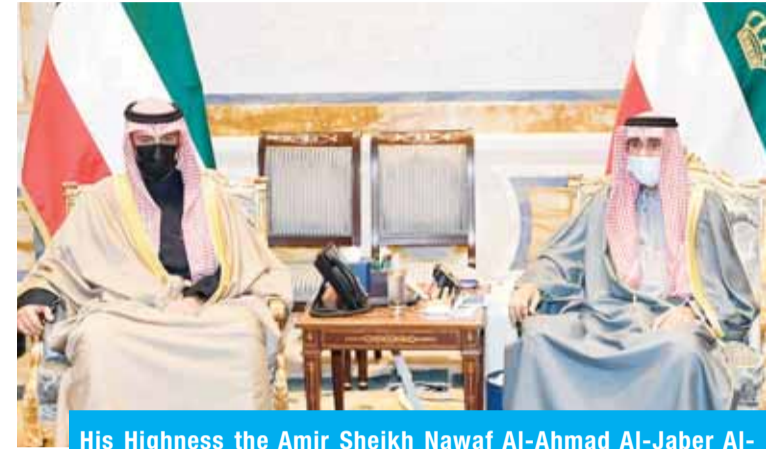
Amir receives Crown Prince, Speaker, Prime Minister



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzuq Al-Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



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

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-

Sabah. His Highness the Amir received National Assembly Speaker Marzuq Al-Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. He then received

Speaker Ghanem and His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled separately. His Highness the Amir also received Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-

Saleh. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled and Saleh yesterday at Bayan Palace. — KUNA

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister hands Amir's letter to Saudi King



RIYADH: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Dr Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad delivers to his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah Al Saud (left) a letter from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. — KUNA

RIYADH: A letter from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud was delivered by Kuwait's Foreign Minister Dr Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad to his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah Al Saud. The letter covers the deep-rooted brotherly ties between the two countries and their peoples, and means of supporting and promoting them in all domains and at all levels. This came during the official visit paid by Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad to the Saudi capital, Riyadh.

The two ministers also held talks in which they discussed the deep-rooted brotherly relations between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. They dealt with close cooperation in all domains and the develop-

ments in the region. In addition, they discussed regional and international developments. Assistant Foreign Minister for Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Affairs Ambassador Nasser Al-Mezain, Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for Foreign Minister's Office Affairs Ahmad Al-Shuraim and some senior officials at the ministry were present in the meeting. Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Ahmad met with the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf. During the meeting, the two discussed the outcome of GCC 41st summit in Al-Ulla and the latest development in the region and international arena. — KUNA

Minister inaugurates new DGCA building



KUWAIT: Officials walk outside the Directorate General of Civil Aviation's (DGCA) new building yesterday. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation's (DGCA) new building is a qualitative leap in modernizing the infrastructure of the aviation sector in the country, said Minister of State for Services Affairs and Minister of State for Housing Dr Abdullah Marafi yesterday. In a statement on the sidelines of the building's inauguration ceremony, in the presence of the DGCA President Sheikh Salman Al-Homoud Al-Sabah, the minister affirmed that the building will provide an appropriate and advanced environment to serve the civil aviation employees. The building is characterized by a wonderful architectural facade, very advanced in design and con-

struction, and it is one of the modern buildings in the country, he added. Furthermore, the minister expressed his appreciation to all those who contributed to the success of this project, whether workers in the civil aviation, the contractor implementing the project, the consulting office and all relevant government agencies. Meanwhile, DGCA spokesman Saad Al-Otaibi stressed that the new building will achieve a qualitative leap to develop the general performance in the civil aviation and provide the appropriate environment for the employees with greater efficiency and higher productivity. — KUNA

World's oldest DNA sequenced...

Continued from Page 1

comparisons to other species, like small rodents, known to be unique to particular time periods and found in the same sedimentary layers. This suggested that two of the mammals were ancient steppe mammoths more than a million years old. The youngest of the trio is one of the earliest woolly mammoths yet found.

They also extracted genetic data from tiny samples of powder from each mammoth tooth, "essentially like a pinch of salt you would put on your dinner plate," Dalen told a press briefing. While it had degraded into very small fragments, scientists were able to sequence tens of millions of chemical base pairs, which make up the strands of DNA, and conduct age estimates from genetic information.

This suggested that the oldest mammoth, named Krestovka, is even older at approximately 1.65 million years old, while the second, Adycha, is around 1.34 million years old, and the youngest Chukochya is 870,000 years old. Dalen said the discrepancy for the oldest mammoth could be an underestimation in the DNA dating process, meaning the creature was likely around 1.2 million years old, as suggested by the geological evidence.

But he said it was possible the specimen was indeed older and had thawed out of the permafrost at one point and then become wedged in a younger layer of sediment. The DNA fragments were like a puzzle with millions of tiny pieces, "way, way, way

smaller than you would get from modern high quality DNA", said lead author Tom van der Valk, of the Science for Life Laboratory, Uppsala University.

Using a genome from an African elephant, a modern relative of the mammoth, as a blueprint for their algorithm, researchers were able to reconstruct parts of the mammoth genomes. The study found that the older Krestovka mammoth represents a previously unrecognized genetic lineage, which researchers estimated diverged from other mammoths around two million years ago and was ancestral to those that colonized North America.

The study also traced the lineage from the million-year-old Adycha steppe mammoth to Chukochya and other more recent woolly mammoths. It found gene variants associated with life in the Arctic, like hairiness, thermoregulation, fat deposits and cold tolerance in the older specimen, suggesting mammoths were already hairy long before the woolly mammoth emerged.

Siberia has alternated between dry and cold Ice Age conditions and warm, wet periods. Now climate change is melting the permafrost and revealing more specimens, Dalen said, although higher rainfall could mean remains are washed away. He said new technologies mean it may be possible to sequence even older DNA from remains found in the permafrost, which dates back 2.6 million years.

Researchers are keen to look at creatures such as the ancestors of moose, muskox, wolves, and lemmings, to shine a light on the evolution of modern species. "Genomics has been pushed into deep time by the giants of the Ice Age," said Alfred Roca, a professor in the Department of Animal Sciences at the University of Illinois, in a comment piece published in Nature. "The wee mammals that surrounded them might soon also have their day." — AFP

India and in transit in Dubai and elsewhere, George said the embassy is in constant touch with authorities to facilitate their early return to Kuwait. "But we are not sure when they can come to Kuwait. Our missions in Dubai and Abu Dhabi are extending all possible help to those stranded in Dubai. I am continuing my meetings with the Kuwaiti leadership to raise all issues of interest and concern of the community," he added.

334 Indians died due to COVID-19...

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On the issue of Indians who are stranded in

Autopsy offers new clues 3,600 yrs...

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and producing 3D images, archaeologist Zahi Hawass and Cairo University radiology professor Sahar Salim concluded that he was killed in an "execution ceremony" after being taken prisoner on the battlefield.

The CT scan "revealed details of the head injuries, including wounds that had not been discovered in previous examinations and had been

skillfully hidden by embalmers," the Ministry of Antiquities said in a statement. The researchers then studied these injuries against various Hyksos weapons stored at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, including an axe, a spear and several daggers.

The mummy's "deformed hands indicate that Seqenenre may have been captured on the battlefield, and his hands were tied behind his back, preventing him from deflecting the fierce attack" on his head, the statement said. Their study, published in Frontiers of Medicine, also revealed bone scans showing that the pharaoh was around 40 years old when he died. Researchers have spent decades trying to decipher the death of Seqenenre, whose body was found in the late 19th century and had visible wounds on its face. — AFP

Trump urges Reps to dump

Continued from Page 1

"My only regret is that McConnell 'begged' for my strong support and endorsement before the great people of Kentucky in the 2020 election, and I gave it to him," Trump said. "Without my endorsement, McConnell would have lost, and lost badly."

Trump further blamed McConnell for the party's loss of two Senate seats in a Georgia runoff election on Jan 5, handing control of the Senate to Democrats. Many analysts however blame that loss on Trump himself, for his unsettling refusal to accept President Joe Biden's strong November 3 election victory, based on groundless claims of fraud. It was that claim, both McConnell and Democrats say, which incited the unprecedented attack on Congress on Jan 6.

In another line of personal attack, Trump took aim at McConnell's wife, Taiwan-born Chinese-American Elaine Chow, who was transportation secretary in Trump's cabinet but resigned in protest after the Jan 6 Capitol assault. "McConnell has no credibility on China because of his family's substantial Chinese

business holdings," Trump wrote.

With his impeachment trial looming, the ex-president had been almost completely silent on politics since moving into his Mar-a-Lago country club in Palm Beach, Florida nearly one month ago. But he used the blast against McConnell to assert his continuing claim to leadership of the Republican party. He threatened to use his continuing popularity among the Republican base to support any Republican candidates - the next national election is in Nov 2022 - who support his agenda.

"If Republican Senators are going to stay with him, they will not win again," he said. "Where necessary and appropriate, I will back primary rivals who espouse Making America Great Again and our policy of America First. This is a big moment for our country, and we cannot let it pass by using third rate 'leaders' to dictate our future!" he added.

Meanwhile McConnell came under criticism from Biden for his position on the new administration's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 economic relief bill. McConnell and other Republicans have declined to endorse the Biden package of stimulus measures, calling it too expensive. Asked about McConnell's reported comments that he could unite his party around opposition to the bill, Biden said: "It may unify Republicans but it will hurt America badly." — AFP

Local

Kuwait registers 1,017 new COVID cases, five deaths

Pandemic causes heavy losses on all levels

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MoH) registered yesterday 1,017 additional COVID-19 cases over a 24-hour span, increasing the total number of infections to 180,505, while five fatalities were recorded, raising the death toll to 1,019, as the percentage of overall recoveries out of total infections showed a 93.3 percent survival rate. Plus, 819 fresh recovery cases were added to a total of 168,420 cured people, MoH's Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said during the 1067th regular press conference.

Active cases amounted to 11,066 with 139 of them in intensive care units (ICU) as of yesterday, the ministry confirmed. Health authorities conducted 10,276 swab tests to a total of 1,697,459, he revealed, which meant that 9.9 percent of swab tests performed in 24 hours were positive. 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.

Heavy damage

Dr Sanad had said Tuesday that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to heavy damage to all health, economic, educational and social sectors globally. Dr Sanad said pointing out the approval of several vaccines that aim to reduce the ratio of possible infections, thanks to efforts made by scientists over months. He affirmed the importance of vaccination to get out of this pandemic and noted that there are

two parallel paths to deal with this crisis: implementing continually preventive measures and accelerating the process of vaccination.

Despite a rise in the recovered cases, the proportion of recoveries still stood at 93.4 percent as of Tuesday, he said, attributing this to an increase in infections. The number of cases is higher than the recovery rate during the past period, Dr Sanad said, hoping for a decline in cases and a rise in recoveries. The ratio between infections and swab tests hit 9.3 percent on Tuesday, compared with 9.2 on Monday, he stated. The infected cases since the beginning of February until Tuesday reached 13,645, he noted, pointing



Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad

to a rise in intensive care units' patients. He also spoke about an increase in death rate that reached 55 deaths in 16 days. Dr Sanad lauded all medical staff and those who work in hospitals' wards and ICUs. —KUNA



819 recoveries in 24 hours

US Ambassador visits Jahra Nature Reserve



KUWAIT: As part of wider cooperation efforts between the Environment Public Authority and the Embassy of the United States of America, the Director General of the Public Authority for the Environment, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Hamoud Al-Sabah and Deputy Director General of Technical Affairs, Dr Abdullah Al-Zaidan, hosted US Ambassador Alina

Romanowski at the Jahra Nature Reserve yesterday. Romanowski was briefed about the reserve's biodiversity and the different habitats. During the visit, the Ambassador participated in planting mangrove trees along the coast of the reserve as part of Kuwait's coastal environment rehabilitation project.

"It was inspiring for me to see how the Kuwait

Environment Public Authority (KEPA) is preserving a beautiful natural environment like Al-Jahra Nature Reserve. The Reserve is home to some really unique and precious plants and animals, and I hope that all Kuwaitis will have the chance to experience the Reserve in the future," Ambassador Romanowski said. She added that, "We at the US Embassy are

ready to work with KEPA and other Kuwaiti institutions to share knowledge from the United States about environmental conservation and operating public nature reserves." The project launched in 2018, and mangrove seeds were planted along the coasts of Al-Jahra reserve, Al-Subbiya and on Boubyan island.

Interior ministry official, US Commander discuss cooperation

KUWAIT: Kuwait Ministry of Interior Undersecretary Lt Gen Essam Al-Naham discussed areas of joint cooperation with

Commander of the US Naval Forces Central Command Vice Admiral Samuel Paparo yesterday.

Joint strategic security partnership, maritime cooperation and the importance of bilateral relations between the Kuwait Coast Guard and the US Navy were amongst the addressed topics, read a ministry press release. Meanwhile, the US Vice Admiral expressed his country's appreciation for Kuwait's role in promoting security and peace in the region, presenting the Kuwaiti senior officer with a memorial shield on the occasion. —KUNA



News in brief

Scientific bureaus to supervise products

KUWAIT: Scientific bureaus that are affiliated with pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies will be established in Kuwait to supervise, follow up, and update information of products and services introduced to the public, said an official at the Health Ministry yesterday. Assistant Undersecretary for Drug and Food Control Dr Abdullah Al-Bader said bureaus will be tasked with following up the latest developments and research in pharmaceutical and medical devices, adding that such entities will help regulate products and provide the best services as well as chances for work.

Trafficking convict arrested

KUWAIT: Police arrested the Manpower Authority's former director general Hassan Al-Khader to serve his four-year jail sentence for human trafficking, known in the media as the Bangladeshi MP case, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday. Former Interior Ministry assistant undersecretary for nationality and passports Maj Gen Mazen Al-Jarrah and former candidate from the fourth constituency Nawaf Al-Mutairi, who received similar sentences, are still at large.

Athletes' vaccination Saturday

KUWAIT: Public Authority for Sport stressed total compliance with health protocols must be observed when sports activities resume. Director General of PAS Humoud Fulaitah met heads of sports associations and asked them for the names of athletes and administrative and technical personnel to be sent to the health ministry to vaccinate them from Saturday, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday. The authority said any facility that does not comply with the protocols will be shut down without warning. Associations have asked PAS to exclude players who are scheduled to participate in events outside the country from institutional quarantine, but were told this issue will be discussed with concerned authorities.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan down 67.2%

TOKYO: Kuwait's trade surplus with Japan tumbled 67.2 percent from a year earlier to JPY 22.8 billion (\$215 million) in January, down for the 10th month in a row due to sluggish exports, government data showed yesterday. Kuwait stayed in black ink with Japan for 13 years on a monthly basis, as exports still offset imports in value, the Finance Ministry said in a preliminary report.

Kuwaiti overall exports to Japan plummeted 58.8 percent year-on-year to JPY 35.1 billion (\$331 million) for the 10th straight month of decline. Imports from Japan also fell 21.7 percent to JPY 12.4 billion (\$116 million), down for the ninth month. Middle East's trade surplus with Japan declined 42.2 percent to JPY 367.0 billion (\$3.5 billion) last month, with Japan-bound exports from the region shrinking 37.3 percent from a year earlier. Crude oil, refined products, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and other natural resources, which accounted for 93.1 percent of the region's total exports to Japan, plunged 39.2 percent.

The region's overall imports from Japan slid 19.3 percent on weak demand for automobiles, steel and electric equipment. Japan's global trade balance returned to deficit in January, marking the first red ink in seven months at JPY 323.9 billion (\$3.1 billion). Exports from the world's third-biggest economy rose 6.4 percent from the year before, the sharpest increase since October 2018, fueled by robust shipments to China and the rest of Asia, such as semiconductor production equipment, plastic and nonferrous metals.

Imports decreased 9.5 percent on falling energy prices, chiefly crude oil and petroleum products. China remained Japan's biggest trade partner, followed by the US. The trade data are measured on a customs-cleared basis before adjustment for seasonal factors. —KUNA

in my view

Challenges delay Cabinet formation

By Azzah Al-Ghamdi

local@kuwaittimes.net

In this article I will focus on the most important issue in Kuwait - the delay in the Cabinet's formation and the reason for it. The results of the 2020 parliament election caused trouble from the beginning, which led to the resignation of the Cabinet.

The Cabinet is not responsible for this trouble, because the prime minister very carefully chooses ministers who are acceptable to the society. The election of the National Assembly speaker was the start of this trouble, because the Cabinet voted for Marzouq Al-Ghanem and not Bader Al-Humaidi, so many MPs vowed to punish the Cabinet.

On the other hand, many MPs want to control political decisions and weaken the Cabinet to make the parliament the main decision-maker. But this is not acceptable for many in Kuwait, because we all know what that means and what the results will be.

The first thing is there will not be equality in the distribution of leadership positions and job opportunities. Many will want all positions for their relatives, and this is not acceptable by many segments in Kuwait.

They also want the Cabinet to be publicly elected, but this is against the Kuwaiti constitution and the Kuwaiti regime. Most MPs in this parliament are against the Kuwaiti constitution and want to change many of its articles, and this is also not acceptable.

Because of these political crises, the premier can't announce the new Cabinet formation, because he knows that the problem is not with the formation - the problem is bigger than that. Moreover, with the pandemic, how can the Cabinet manage all these crises?

This entire crisis has shown the Cabinet is strong and the prime minister dealt with it intelligently to calm the political climate. This crisis has also shown that we still do not have enough knowledge to understand democracy and what is exactly needed to be able to build our country.

Because of this crisis, important projects have been delayed. People need jobs, homes and entertainment, while infrastructure needs to be built. All this stopped because of the continuous crises we face from the parliament.

MPs want to resolve their own issues and are not thinking of the nation. The society needs stability in relations between the two authorities. People are waiting to see what will happen in Kuwait amid all these crises.

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

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A shot of Kuwait's famed Mutlaa Ridge by photographer Daniela Buiting (Instagram: @pics_of_kuwait). To have your photo considered for Kuwait Times' Photo of the Day, send to local@KuwaitTimes.com or via direct message to Kuwait Times' Instagram account @kuwaittimes. Photos should be high resolution, with no processing or editing.

Kuwait donates medical supplies to Iraq's Kurdistan



IRBIL: The State of Kuwait delivered \$1 million worth of medical equipment and drugs to Iraq's Kurdistan to help the region face the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), a Kuwaiti diplomat said yesterday. General Consul of Kuwait in Irbil Dr Omar Al-Kandari revealed that his country was coordinating with the World Health Organization (WHO) to deliver Kuwait's contribution as part of the 'Kuwait by your side' campaign. The diplomat affirmed that the State of Kuwait was keen on providing all sort of assistances to Iraq including assistance in the medical field.

Meanwhile, WHO Representative in Iraq Dr Ahmad

Zouiten commended the Kuwaiti contributions to Iraq, which was reflective of the strong relations linking the two countries. He indicated that the current upward spread of COVID-19 infections required solidarity and cooperation to rid the world of the current pandemic status. Similarly, Iraq Kurdistan's Health Minister Dr Saman Barzanji lauded Kuwait's support of Kurdistan's efforts in the fight against COVID-19, affirming that the region will better handle the situation thanks to the Kuwaiti contribution. Last year, Kuwait donated \$10 million to help Iraq handle the spread of the coronavirus. —KUNA

Pakistan Sports Association organizes blood donation drive

KUWAIT: Pakistan Sports Association Kuwait, a well-known sports organization in Kuwait, organized its 6th Annual Blood Donation Camp recently at Kuwait Central Blood Bank in Jabriya, in accordance with anti-COVID precautions. This blood donation drive was dedicated to the founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. A noble cause to serve humanity, Pakistan Sports Association and its members volunteered for the different activities of organizing the camp and most notably, a large turnout of its members and associates turned up with enthusi-

asm honoring the occasion.

Well known personalities from different communities visited the camp and appreciated the well-disciplined and successful drive. The delegates were briefed on different stages the donated blood goes through, how it is preserved and how a bottle of donated blood can save up to three lives. They also commended and appreciated the efforts of reaching to masses with a great message and achieving a large turnout for such a great cause in very difficult situation of the pandemic.

Founder and Director General of Pakistan Sports Association Kuwait, Muhammad Irfan Adil, President Maqbool Ahmed, Vice President Muhammad Younas Shahid, thanked blood bank management, sponsors, media partners, community supporters, donors, volunteers, team members and all the community heads including all media representatives for visiting the blood donation camp. People from all walks of life and nationalities visited the camp and donated blood for the noble cause.



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.

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Millions struggle without power as deadly winter storm grips US
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Myanmar protesters stage biggest rallies since troop deployments
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Libyans mark 10th anniversary of uprising

Revolution ended dictatorship, but threw country into violent chaos

TRIPOLI: Libyans marked the 10th anniversary yesterday of the start of the uprising that toppled longtime ruler Muammar Gaddafi, ending decades of dictatorship but throwing the country into violent chaos. In western Libya, festive crowds gathered in public squares to watch anniversary fireworks and military parades, but in the east, which has had a separate government for years, the mood was more somber.

Ahead of the anniversary, UN envoy Jan Kubis held talks with Libyan leaders Tuesday on his first visit to the North African nation since taking up the post. Kubis underlined the importance of consolidating a fragile October ceasefire between the country's warring alliances that has given Libyans a ray of hope after years of deadly fighting between the rival governments in the east and west, a UN statement said. He also stressed the importance of a "smooth transition of power" following successful talks in Switzerland which resulted in the formation of a new, unified interim executive authority earlier this month. On the eve of the anniversary, cities across western Libya, including the capital Tripoli, hosted military parades and fireworks displays.

Streets have been decked out with lights and banners, while fresh coats of paint have spruced up Tripoli's old city. In the capital's Martyrs' Square, officials watched as a memorial flame was lit.

Despite coronavirus restrictions, crowds waved flags, sang and took photographs as vendors sold balloons in the national colors red, green and black. Formerly known as Green Square, the Tripoli landmark is where Gaddafi delivered many of the maverick policy

addresses and anti-Western tirades that marked his four decades in power before his ouster and murder in the climax of the NATO-backed uprising.

'Mad' to celebrate

Celebrations were lower-key in eastern Libya, the longtime fiefdom of a rival administration dominated by military strongman Khalifa Haftar.

It was the defeat of a drive on Tripoli by Haftar's forces in June last year that led to the progress in UN-backed talks on a settlement. Authorities in the east have declared Wednesday a national holiday but they stopped short of announcing a program of celebrations. Heavy snowfall was recorded in the region's Jebel Akhdar mountains, adding a chill to the commemorations.

Even in the region's main city Benghazi—where the revolution began 10 years ago—no official events were planned. "Going out to celebrate... would be mad because the revolution has been a catastrophe that has wrecked years of stability," said Khamis Al-Sahati, an eastern-based activist.

At the local level, much of Libya remains in the hands of a mosaic of neighborhood militias born out of the rebel groups that toppled Gaddafi.

Some stand accused of war crimes that have gone unpunished because of the militias' importance to the rival alliances in power in Tripoli and Benghazi. "Justice has yet to be delivered to victims of war crimes and serious human rights violations including unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, torture, forced displacement and abductions committed by militias and armed groups," human rights group Amnesty



TRIPOLI: Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) Fayez Al-Sarraj attends a torch-lighting ceremony in Martyrs Square in the capital Tripoli on the eve of the 10th anniversary of the revolution, on Tuesday. —AFP

International said in a statement.

On the international level, many of the foreign forces whose intervention helped fuel the conflict of recent years remain on the ground. UN chief Antonio Guterres, in telephone talks with Libya's newly appointed leaders Tuesday, called for all foreign troops and mercenaries to leave, his spokesman said. During the battle for Tripoli in 2019-2020, Haftar

received military support from Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, while the rival Government of National Accord was backed by Turkey.

"The secretary general stressed the UN's support to Libya's elections, the monitoring of the ceasefire and the need for withdrawal of foreign forces," UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. In December, there were around

20,000 foreign troops and mercenaries deployed inside Libya, according to the UN. Asked if the world body had noticed any start of a withdrawal of foreign forces, Dujarric said the UN was not aware of any pullout. "I have not gotten to hear any updates on foreign troops leaving," he said. "We want that to happen, obviously as soon as possible." —AFP

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُسْلِمُونَ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ انْجَمِي إِلَى رَبِّكَ رَاضِيَةً مَُرْضِيَةً قَادِحَتِي فِي عَيْسَاءِي وَأَدْحَسَتِي حَيْثَتِي

صدق الله العظيم

CONDOLENCES

Chairman and President/CEO and all staff

KEO International Consultants

offers deepest sympathy and heartfelt condolences to

Al Qenaat Family

On the demise loss of

Faisal Sultan Al Essa

Founding Partner

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

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا نَرْجُو

International

Millions struggle without power as deadly winter storm grips US

Storm-related deaths cross 200 amid record-low temperatures

WASHINGTON: Millions were left without power as a winter storm gripped the southern and central United States Tuesday with record-low temperatures in ill-prepared areas, and a tornado claiming three lives. More than 20 storm-related deaths have been registered so far, including in traffic accidents in Texas, Kentucky and Missouri, according to local media. In hardest-hit Texas—where freezing conditions prompted utility companies to implement rotating blackouts—a woman and girl died from carbon monoxide poisoning after using a car to generate heat, according to NBC News.

In Houston on Monday, a homeless man was killed “possibly from exposure,” according to the Harris County Sheriff’s Department, and the city’s police chief said another man had been found dead after potential exposure to low temperatures. A man in Louisiana died when he hit his head after slipping on ice, and a 10-year-old Tennessee boy died after he and his six-year-old sister fell through the ice into a pond Sunday.

President Joe Biden on Tuesday vowed to provide additional emergency resources for those affected by the “historic storm.” He also thanked “road workers, highway patrol officers, and first responders who are taking swift action in horrific conditions to save lives,” according to a White House statement. The winter storm spawned at least four tornadoes, according to Atlanta-based weather.com, including one in coastal North Carolina late Monday that killed at least three people and injured 10 more.

“It is estimated that at least 50 homes were affected in the incident and several power lines were damaged, causing power outages,” Brunswick County Emergency Services said in a statement. Photos and video broadcast by US media showed downed trees, flattened homes and smashed cars. According to the Poweroutage.us tracking site, more than three million residential, commercial and industrial customers were without electricity in Texas as of Tuesday evening.

Plow shortage

In the state capital Austin, the temperature dropped to 10 degrees Fahrenheit (-12 degrees Celsius) — well



TEXAS: Pike Electric service trucks line up after a snow storm on Tuesday in Fort Worth, Texas. — AFP

below February’s average low of 45F. By contrast, thermometers in Anchorage, Alaska read 20F.

Rare wintry scenes played out in Houston, where locals built snowmen and sledged. “It’s lovely to see the white but very dangerous at the same time because people here don’t know how to drive in it,” Houston resident Michael, who only gave his first name, said.

“You know they’re driving too fast.” In Mississippi, residents woke up to discover much of the Deep South state transformed into a snow-and-ice-covered landscape. Authorities were reportedly struggling to clear roads, as they did not have snow plows because the state so rarely needs them. Officials across the US urged residents to exercise caution in navigating the perilous conditions. Weather-related emergencies have been declared in Texas, Alabama, Oklahoma, Kansas, Mississippi and Oregon—where nearly 200,000 customers were without power.

Across the southern border, Mexican officials said six people died after temperatures plunged and frozen pipelines bringing natural gas from the United States

caused rolling power outages. Four died in Monterey, three of them homeless people who succumbed to exposure and one person who died at home from carbon monoxide poisoning from a heater. Two agricultural workers also died in neighboring Tamaulipas from hypothermia. The National Weather Service (NWS) said the winter storm will move towards the northeast US before “making a beeline for eastern Canada.”

“But not before it causes heavy snow and freezing rain in parts of the eastern Great Lakes and New England,” the NWS said. New York governor Andrew Cuomo on Monday ordered emergency services to prepare for sleet, ice and freezing rain. “This massive weather system is making its way across the country and ready to deliver a one-two punch of snow, ice and heavy winds across the entire state for the next two days,” he said in a statement. Further inland, Chicago was expecting to see up to 14 inches of snow before the end of the cold snap. The weather had caused almost 60 flight cancellations at local airports by Tuesday morning, the local ABC affiliate reported. — AFP

African migrants cross the Americas

NECOCLI, Colombia: Ahmed Kabeer fled his homeland of Sudan where he was tortured and traveled thousands of miles to find himself in a new hell: the ominous jungle that straddles Colombia and Panama. Unlike hundreds of thousands of other African migrants that crowd into precarious boats and launch into the Mediterranean Sea hoping to reach Europe, Kabeer’s aim is the United States. “There is a route” through Latin America, said Kabeer, who has a huge scar on his left leg and walks with a limp. Kabeer is one of 23 people from the other side of the world who—along with hundreds of Haitians and Cubans—are waiting in a camp to cross the daunting Darien Gap having fled war and poverty. They are united by anxiety. Following a forced pause due to the pandemic, the moment has come to cross the jungle corridor between Colombia and Panama that spans more than 250 kilometers (155 miles). Almost 700 migrants have been held up in Necocli, Colombia for weeks.

They set up a makeshift camp in the village while waiting for the border with Panama to reopen. Arriving in South America was the easy part for Kabeer, 34. “I find it’s not very difficult that Brazil gives visas for people,” he said. From Brazil he went to Peru and Ecuador before arriving in Colombia. The route to the US passes through Panama and on northwards through Central America. Visas won’t be a problem now given the porous borders he will cross, but he’ll need money for bribes.

Tortured

Kabeer’s odyssey began in 2003 when war broke out in the Darfur region of Sudan amidst accusations of ethnic cleansing against the government of then-president

Omar Al-Bashir. The next year, Kabeer’s mother and uncle were murdered. He set off through several countries in Africa and the Middle East before he was expelled from Israel in 2018.

He returned to Sudan but a year later was captured by the security forces. Kabeer insists he was tortured due to his tribal association. A scar stretching down his calf to his Achilles tendon bears witness to his suffering. He fled again to Egypt this time and opened a small business. But he was robbed. In desperation he traveled as a tourist to Sao Paulo last year. Upon arrival he continued another 5,000 kilometers (3,100 miles) over land.

“I only want a safe place where I can speak English... like USA, like Canada,” he said. It will likely take seven to 10 weeks just to reach Mexico. “It’s a route that is not safe 100 percent so I will find some difficulties,” Kabeer acknowledged. The probability of suffering “physical and psychological violence is very high throughout the whole journey, especially between Colombia and Panama,” a spokesperson for the International Organization for Migration said.

But these migrants feel the risks are worth it. “In Africa there are a lot of problems... there’s no work, there’s a lot of corruption,” said Karifala Fofana, a Guinean occupying a tent next to Kabeer’s. “Even if you’ve finished your studies, even if you’re intelligent,” he said. “If you’re not from a rich family... you’re screwed.” Flashlights, batteries and machetes are essential for the next step. The crossing of the Darien Gap happens mainly at night and can take five or six days. As well as coming across swamps and snakes, there is the risk of running into drug-traffickers transporting cocaine into Central America. Locals say they have little sympathy for migrants, though authorities can be more welcoming. Last year, between January and October, Panama intercepted 287 Africans in the jungle and transported them to temporary accommodation while waiting for Costa Rica to grant them entry. — AFP



NECOCLI, Colombia: African migrants gather at a makeshift camp in Necocli, Colombia. — AFP

New PM Draghi to unveil plan to rescue Italy

ROME: Italy’s new Prime Minister Mario Draghi is due to unveil his rescue plan for the country yesterday, two weeks after he was called in to tackle the coronavirus crisis. The former head of the European Central Bank (ECB), known as “Super Mario” for his role in saving the euro, was scheduled to address the Senate before submitting his government to a vote of confidence. The lower house of parliament, the Chamber of Deputies, was due to hold its own vote today—although there is little suspense, as he has the support of almost all the main political parties.

Italy has high hopes of the 73-year-old economist,

who has already gone down in history with a 2012 speech in which he pledged to do “whatever it takes” to shore up the European single currency.

In his new mission, Draghi needs equal determination. He was sworn in on Saturday as Italy’s 30th prime minister in 75 years of republican history, ending a month-long political crisis that played out in the middle of a raging coronavirus pandemic. The country’s death toll is approaching 100,000, and there is rising concern about a new surge in cases brought about by the spread of British, Brazilian and South African variants. Meanwhile, the economy shrank by almost nine percent last year, one of the worst results in the eurozone, and close to 450,000 people lost their jobs—mostly women and young people. In a short acceptance speech on February 3, after President Sergio Mattarella asked him to form a government, Draghi called for national unity in the face of a “difficult moment”.

Long-awaited overhaul

He listed as his immediate priorities “defeating the

pandemic, completing the vaccination campaign and relaunching the country” with the “extraordinary resources” offered by the European Union.

Italy expects to receive more than 200 billion euros (\$240 billion) from the EU’s post-coronavirus recovery fund, but in return, it is expected to commit to potentially difficult or unpopular reforms. The Senate speech will give Draghi the chance to finally unveil his agenda for the country, after weeks in which he hardly spoke in public, working mostly behind the scenes.

“[It] will be the first time in which we will reasonably have the chance to listen to Draghi for more than two minutes,” political analyst and media expert Lorenzo Pregliasco said. Speeding up vaccinations, protecting businesses and workers and revamping an economy that struggled even before the pandemic struck are obvious priorities for Italy’s new leader. He is also expected to promise long-awaited overhauls of Italy’s stifling bureaucracy, labyrinthine tax code and snail-paced justice system, and fresh investment in its underperforming schools and universities. — AFP

News in brief

Vaccines for all by end July: Biden

MILWAUKEE, United States: President Joe Biden said Tuesday that all Americans will have access to COVID-19 vaccines before August. Biden has previously predicted that vaccines might be available to all by spring, but the White House has recently toned down its optimism, citing difficulties both with availability of vaccines and ability to deliver them. Asked when all Americans would be vaccinated, Biden told a CNN town hall meeting with members of the public: “By the end of July this year.” “By the end of July we’ll have 600 million doses, enough to vaccinate every American,” he said. — AFP

Brazil lawmaker arrested

RIO DE JANEIRO: A Brazilian congressman allied with President Jair Bolsonaro was arrested Tuesday on the orders of a Supreme Court justice after he posted a video online in which he insulted and threatened the high court’s judges. Daniel Silveira, an ex-cop serving his first term in Brazil’s lower house of Congress, was arrested by federal police at his home in Petropolis, in Rio de Janeiro state, on a warrant issued by Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes. “At this moment, 11:19 pm, the federal police are here in my house with an arrest warrant issued by Alexandre de Moraes,” Silveira said in a video posted on Twitter as the raid unfolded. — AFP

NZ ends snap virus lockdown

WELLINGTON, New Zealand: New Zealand lifted a snap COVID-19 lockdown in its largest city Auckland yesterday, with Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern expressing confidence the outbreak was contained. The stay-at-home order for the city of almost two million was issued on Sunday after three community cases emerged, the first lockdown in Auckland for almost six months. Ardern said close contacts of the three cases, all members of the same family, had all since tested negative, with the exception of three people now in isolation. — AFP

NZ ends bid to find bodies

WELLINGTON, New Zealand: A marathon effort to retrieve the remains of 29 miners killed more than a decade ago in one of New Zealand’s worst industrial accidents was called off yesterday after workers found their path blocked by a tunnel collapse. The miners died at the South Island’s Pike River pit in November 2010 after a blast triggered by a build-up of flammable methane gas. The government at the time promised to retrieve the entombed remains but suspended operations due to fears of further explosions, angering families of victims. — AFP



A cyclist rides along a cycling lane in Cyprus’ southern port city of Limassol while in the background is seen the Cyprus-flagged oil tanker Carmelia. — AFP

Virus-stranded cruise ships tread water off Cyprus

MONI, Cyprus: Half a dozen cruise ships have been stranded for up to nine months off Cyprus, looming large over a fishing village on the holiday island hit by the coronavirus pandemic. Cyprus was quick to impose a stringent lockdown last March, shutting its air and sea ports as COVID-19 began to overwhelm hospitals elsewhere in Europe.

The Mediterranean island, whose economy relies heavily on tourism and shipping, opened its waters two months later to cruise liners for refuelling and anchorage. Carnival, one of the world’s largest cruise operators, took up the offer, and its luxury ships have been anchored off the village of Moni since May, with the cruise industry immobilized by the pandemic.

Lying around two kilometers (just over a mile) offshore, six cruise ships figure prominently and have become an attraction for snap-happy Cypriots. “These ships are stuck here because there is nowhere to go; there is no business for the time being,” said Marios Chrysanthou, captain of the nearby Saint Rafael marina, which is used to resupply and rotate the quarantined crews. “I never saw anything like this,” he said. “During our winter time they (normally) go to Australia or America, but this virus situation is everywhere now.” Some of the ships have come and gone, but others have been anchored off Cyprus for nine months. “Our ships are off the coast of Cyprus awaiting return to service,” said Negin Kamali, spokeswoman for Princess Cruises. “We are continuing to assess the possibilities for future sailings,” she told AFP in an email. — AFP



PARIS: A baby has been born following a uterus transplant for the first time ever in France, the hospital treating mother and infant said yesterday. — AFP

First baby born in France after uterus transplant

PARIS: A baby has been born following a uterus transplant for the first time ever in France, the hospital treating mother and infant said yesterday. Such births are extremely rare but not unprecedented, and come after a cutting-edge procedure to transplant a healthy uterus into a woman whose own is damaged or missing.

The baby, a girl weighing 1.845 kilograms (4.059 pounds), was born on Friday, according to the team at the Foch hospital outside Paris. “Mother and baby are doing well,” Jean-Marc Ayoubi, head of gynaecology, obstetrics and reproductive medicine at the hospital, told AFP. The 36-year-old mother, whose name was given only as Deborah, was born without a uterus as she suffered from a rare condition known as Rokitansky Syndrome, which affects about one in 4,500 women. She received a uterus transplant in March 2019 — performed by the same team that delivered the baby—from her own mother, then aged 57. The first ever birth after a uterus transplant was in Sweden in 2014. It came one year after the transplant surgery in a case that was documented in the medical journal The Lancet. Other such births have been documented in the US and Brazil, but they remain rare. The cases offer hope to women suffering from similar reproductive problems, as an alternative to adoption or surrogacy. — AFP

International

Myanmar protesters stage biggest rallies since troop deployments

Suu Kyi's lawyer 'hoping for best, preparing for worst'

YANGON: Myanmar's anti-coup protesters returned to the streets in force yesterday with the biggest demonstrations since troops fanned out around the country to quell opposition to the new military junta. Much of the country has been in open revolt since the military deposed Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's government at the start of the month and charged her under an obscure import law.

Tens of thousands rallied in Yangon, with protesters blockading roads with vehicles to stop security forces from moving around the nation's biggest city. "We have to fight until the end," Nilar, a 21-year-old student who asked not to use her real name, said.

"We need to show our unity and strength to end military rule. People need to come out on the streets." Yesterday's crowds came in defiance of more violent efforts by the regime to bring resistance to heel, following nationwide street protests and a disobedience campaign encouraging civil servants to strike.

Demonstrations over the past two days had been noticeably smaller since troops were deployed around Yangon on the weekend. But social media platforms were flooded with calls for a show of force by protesters in the hours before the junta imposed a third consecutive overnight internet blackout.

By noon, there were anti-coup demonstrations across Myanmar, from the remote highlands region of Chin state to a small town in the Irrawaddy delta that saw a parade of protesters hoisting Suu Kyi posters. Right outside the capital Naypyidaw, tens of thousands of people from different sectors—including engineers, doctor, and teachers—marched through the logging town of Pynmana carrying

signs saying "Help Myanmar".

UN special rapporteur Tom Andrews warned that reports of soldiers being brought into Yangon could lead to the situation there spiraling out of control. "We could be on the precipice of the military committing even greater crimes against the people of Myanmar," he said.

Meanwhile, the lawyer representing Myanmar democracy hero Aung San Suu Kyi said yesterday he is preparing for the worst in a trial he fears could take six months. Attorney Khin Maung Zaw is defending the ousted civilian leader, who was detained during the February 1 coup on an obscure charge under the country's import and export law for having walkie-talkies at her home.

Yesterday, the military regime hit Suu Kyi with a second criminal charge, accusing her of holding an election campaign event last year which the junta claims breached coronavirus restrictions under natural disaster management laws. "We hope for the best but are prepared for the worst," Khin Maung Zaw told AFP by phone, adding he is hoping for a fair trial. The veteran human rights lawyer said he applied yesterday for permission to speak to his client and receive instructions ahead of the next court hearing on March 1. "When will this be granted? I don't know," he said.

'Not what China wants to see'

Military spokesman Zaw Min Tun said Tuesday that both Suu Kyi and Win Myint were in a "safer place" and "in good health". "It's not like they were arrested—they are staying at their houses," the general told a press conference. More than 450 people have been arrested since the coup, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners moni-



YANGON: Protesters block a major road during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon yesterday. —AFP

toring group. Western powers and the United Nations have repeatedly condemned the leaders of Myanmar's new military administration, which insists it took power lawfully.

China had initially not criticized the coup, which Chinese state media described as a "cabinet reshuffle". However, Beijing's ambassador to Myanmar said Tuesday that the current situation in the country

was "absolutely not what China wants to see". From a classical orchestra playing a revolutionary song to viral breakdancers performing Michael Jackson anthems—young Myanmar anti-coup protesters are using music as a weapon against the country's generals. Since the military ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, big cities and isolated villages alike have mounted a revolt. —AFP

Kim Jong Un's wife makes first public appearance in a year

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's wife made her first public appearance in over a year, state media reported yesterday, after speculation her absence could be coronavirus-related, or because of a potential pregnancy. Ri Sol Ju, believed to be in her early 30s, joined her husband at a concert commemorating the birthday of his father and predecessor Kim Jong Il.

The anniversary celebrating the second member of the Kim dynasty to lead the now nuclear-armed North Korea is known as the Day of the Shining Star, and is one of the country's most important public holidays. North Korea's official Rodong Simun newspaper published photos of the couple smiling broadly and applauding the performers at the Mansudae Art Theatre in Pyongyang. As the General Secretary came to the auditorium of the theatre together with his wife Ri Sol Ju amid the welcome music, all the participants burst into thunderous cheers of "Hurray!" the official KCNA news agency reported.

None of the audience members or performers wore facemasks in the pictures. Ri was last seen in January 2020 at an event for the Lunar New Year holiday. Her extended absence prompted questions over her health, whether she might be in seclusion to avoid any risk of coronavirus infection, or pregnant—the couple are believed to have three children.



PYONGYANG, North Korea: This picture shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (center) and his wife Ri Sol Ju (left) watching a performance for celebrating the birth anniversary of Chairman Kim Jong Il at the Mansudae Art Theatre in Pyongyang. —AFP

The impoverished country has been under self-imposed isolation since closing its borders in January last year, to try to protect itself from the pandemic that has swept the world since first emerging in neighboring China. Kim has repeatedly insisted that the country has had no coronavirus cases, although outside experts doubt those assertions. Yesterday's report and photos came a day after South Korea's National Intelligence Service told lawmakers that Ri was "playing well with her kids", and was refraining from public activities due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Before her lengthy absence, Ri joined her husband on numerous "field guidance trips" and for

meetings with foreign leaders, including the South's president Moon Jae-in and China's Xi Jinping. "Because of COVID, no foreign leaders made visits to the North last year, nor was Kim able to make such trips that would require his wife's attendance," Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said.

"It looks like Ri just focused on raising her kids, ensuring they are safe and well." A former star singer, Ri, believed to be in her early 30s, emerged into the public eye in 2012. She is regarded as one of the most high-profile women in the isolated, deeply patriarchal nation, alongside her husband's sister and close adviser Kim Yo Jong. —AFP

Indian minister loses high-profile #MeToo defamation case

NEW DELHI: A former minister lost a defamation suit yesterday against a woman who had accused him of sexual harassment, a high-profile case in India's #MeToo movement, her lawyer said. In 2018, Priya Ramani became the first of a string of women to go public with allegations against MJ Akbar, a former high-profile newspaper editor who went on to become a junior minister in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. She was inspired by the #MeToo movement against sexual assault that sprang up in the United States and spread worldwide following accusations against Hollywood

movie mogul Harvey Weinstein in 2017.

Ramani wrote an article about the inappropriate behavior of an un-named editor the same year and one year later alleged it was Akbar. She said she was 23 when Akbar called her to a Mumbai hotel for a job interview more than 20 years ago. "You know how to pinch, pat, rub, grab and assault," she wrote. Akbar called the allegations "baseless". Soon after, he stepped down as junior foreign minister and sued Ramani for defamation, saying it had caused "irreparable damage to (my) reputation and goodwill". Ramani's lawyer Rebecca John told AFP after yesterday's judgment that it was an "incredibly gratifying moment".

"The fact that a woman was being dragged to a criminal court in defamation proceedings to silence her and other women from coming out and speaking the truth was in itself a very important reason for me to take up the matter," John added. "I spoke



JAIPUR, India: In this file photo Indian journalist MJ Akbar participates in a debate entitled "Kashmir Kashmir" during the third day of DSC Jaipur Literature Festival. —AFP

because women before me spoke up," Ramani said at a literature festival in 2019. "I spoke so people after me can speak up." —AFP

Australian PM under fire for handling of rape scandal

SYDNEY: Australia Prime Minister Scott Morrison was under mounting pressure yesterday after a former government staffer who said she was raped in parliament accused the government of revealing sensitive details of the case. Critics have demanded an overhaul of what has been called a toxic and sexist culture in Canberra politics, after Brittany Higgins this week alleged she was sexually assaulted by a male colleague two years ago.

The 26-year-old has said she was treated like a "political problem" when she reported the incident in now-Defense Minister Linda Reynolds' office and the case was badly mismanaged. Higgins said yesterday the government had now publicized key elements of the alleged attack that had not been shared with her previously. "The continued victim-blaming

rhetoric by the prime minister is personally very distressing to me and countless other survivors," she said in a statement to local media. "The government has questions to answer for their own conduct."

The prime minister initially defended his government's approach to the case before apologizing, but yesterday faced further questions about what he knew and when. Morrison has claimed he knew nothing of the allegation until five days ago. "I'm not happy about the fact that it was not brought to my attention, and I can assure you people know that," Morrison told reporters in Canberra. But it has emerged that staffer who handled Higgins' initial complaint now works in Morrison's office.

And Higgins has told local media that a "fixer" for Morrison called her to "check in" late last year when other women accused two male ministers of sexism and bullying. Former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull—also a member of the conservative Liberal Party—declared it "inconceivable" that the case was not discussed at high levels. "I find it incredible. That's to say very, very, very hard to believe, that the Prime Minister's office would not have been aware of that incident as soon as it occurred," he told public broad-

caster ABC. "I mean, if they weren't, it was a complete failure of the system." The opposition Labor party is ratcheting up the pressure on the government, suggesting Reynolds should resign for her failings.

"If I was the prime minister and these events had occurred and a minister in my cabinet had kept any information from me or my office, then they wouldn't be still maintaining that position," leader Anthony Albanese told Sky News. On Tuesday Morrison announced two female government officials would lead reviews into the sexual assault complaints process and workplace culture in the parliament. But critics believe that work needs to be carried out at arm's length from the government.

Women lawmakers from minor parties on Wednesday wrote to Morrison demanding an "urgent external review" of current policies and the establishment of an independent body to oversee future workplace complaints, which are currently handled by the Finance Department. "We think it's really important that there be for an independent pathway for people who have experienced (this) — and we know there's been many similar situations to Brittany," MP Rebekha Sharkie said. —AFP

News in brief

Slovakia tightens border curbs

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia: Citing the danger of new coronavirus strains spreading in Europe, Slovakia tightened border controls yesterday as it battles one of the highest coronavirus mortality rates in the world. The health ministry said anyone crossing Slovakia's borders will have to self-isolate for 14 days upon arrival and some less frequented border crossings will be closed altogether. "The new regime on borders is intended to prevent the spread of novel coronavirus mutations," Health Minister Marek Krajci said earlier. Slovakia on Monday had already begun closing some smaller border crossings with Poland to passengers and goods traffic. —AFP

Lukashenko rival in court

MINSK, Belarus: A leading Belarusian opposition figure went on trial yesterday in the former Soviet nation that was gripped by months of anti-government protests last year. Viktor Babaryko had planned to run against Alexander Lukashenko but was arrested in June ahead of elections and charged with bribery and money laundering. Lukashenko has ruled Belarus with an iron fist for two decades and claimed a landslide victory in the August polls, sparking huge protests that swept the country for months. Babaryko was accused by KGB security services of receiving bribes and "laundering funds obtained by criminal means" when he was head of Belgazprombank, the Belarusian branch of a bank belonging to Russian energy giant Gazprom. —AFP

First vaccine doses enter Gaza

JERUSALEM: An initial batch of 1,000 coronavirus vaccine doses donated by Russia entered Gaza yesterday. Israel's defense ministry told AFP, after it had blocked a shipment earlier this week. The Sputnik V doses were "being transferred from the Palestinian Authority (in the West Bank) to the Gaza Strip in accordance with the PA's request and the approval of the (Israeli) political echelon", said the Israeli military department responsible for civil affairs in the occupied Palestinian territories (COGAT). It added that "the vaccine shipment is now making its way to the Erez crossing" that connects Israel to the blockaded Gaza Strip, an enclave which is controlled by the Islamist group Hamas. —AFP

Turkey detains Russia IS suspect

ISTANBUL: Turkish border guards have detained five Russians, including a woman suspected of being a member of the Islamic State group, and a Libyan who were attempting to cross from Syria, officials said yesterday. It was not immediately clear whether all six were suspected of being members of the jihadist group. "Our border guards stationed in Hatay's Narlica district (in southern Turkey) caught six people including one Libyan and five Russian nationals who were attempting to illegally cross into Turkey from Syria," the ministry tweeted in English. "One of the Russian nationals was a woman identified as a wanted Daesh member," it said, using an Arabic acronym for the extremist group. —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2021

Zain ranks first as 'Best Mobile Operator' in Kuwait during 2020

Company recognized by Service Hero Index for ninth time

KUWAIT: For the ninth time, Zain - the leading digital service provider in Kuwait - ranked first in the 'Best Mobile Operator' category in Kuwait for the year 2020 by Service Hero, the Arab World's only 100 percent consumer powered customer satisfaction index. The announcement came during the virtual awards ceremony held over video conferencing technology to adhere to the health guidelines posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Zain ranked first for achieving the highest customer satisfaction scores by providing the best quality service standards to the Kuwaiti market. The award came after an in-depth evaluation by Service Hero's independent advisory council, which recognized Zain's leadership in offering the best innovative digital services, as well as its relentless pursuit of excellence and innovation with the aim of achieving superior digital lifestyle transformation for its customer base, considered the biggest in Kuwait.

Zain received the award for achieving high rates of customer satisfaction. The recognition from Service Hero for the ninth time demonstrates Zain's commitment in providing its customers with the highest levels of service, further reinforcing its efforts in maintaining the values of its brand. The company is motivated to continue its pledge in providing innovative services to meet the needs of its customers as well as to facilitate their personal, professional, and business needs.

Last year, Zain received 'Kuwait's Fastest Fixed Broadband Network' award for Q1-Q2 2020 from Speedtest by Ookla, the global leader in transparent Internet testing applications, data and analysis. The award reflected Zain's efforts in offering the largest and most powerful 5G network in Kuwait since commercially launching fifth generation wireless technology back in June 2019.



Zain Kuwait Service Hero Award 2021

Zain was the first operator to offer 5G technology in the GCC region via the Kuwaiti market with nationwide coverage of all areas. The company succeeded in designing the first integrated network for 5G services built on a world-class infrastructure, ultimately transforming the telecom sector across the country and region. Service Hero's assessment method is statistically rigorous, robust, and relevant. From representative sample sizes to service quality checks and ratings scales, Service Hero's Index provides a rigorous annual snapshot of consumer feelings.



Zain headquarters

Based in Kuwait, Service Hero is the only consumer powered customer satisfaction index in the Middle East. The company is a member of ESO-MAR (European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research) and adheres to the global organization's principles and guidelines for self-regulation and ethical practice. Service Hero is overseen by an Independent Advisory Council to assure results that are impartial, objective, and accurately reflect consumers' preference, making the company's findings a credible benchmark that offers transparent and

relevant insight for companies.

It is comprised of academics and business professionals representing leading institutions and corporate establishments in Kuwait and the UAE, including the American University of Kuwait, Australian College of Kuwait, Gulf University for Science and Technology, Abu Dhabi University, and Zayed University.

Since 2010, Service Hero has measured around 330,000 validated consumer assessments covering more than 600 private sector companies.

Brexit clouds life in Spanish sun for British second home owners

MADRID: After retiring from her teaching job in 2019, Jane Pennington-Fryer looked forward to spending the cold, damp British winters at her home in southeast Spain each year. But since Britain's exit from the EU came into effect on January 1, she can no longer stay as long as she would like at the duplex she bought with her husband in 2018 in Puerto de Mazarron, a resort on Spain's Mediterranean coast.

The couple arrived at their home in Spain in October and had hoped to stay until the end of April, as in other years. Post-Brexit rules, however, mean they will have to leave by March 31. "We are gutted really because we have worked all our lives towards getting a property abroad in the hope we could spend time there," Pennington-Fryer, from northwest England, said.

'Very unfair'

Between 800,000 and one million Brits own property across Spain, mainly along its sun-baked, southern coast. The roughly 370,000 Britons registered as residents can still come and go as they please but British tourists and those

who have not taken residency-even those with a home there-can now only spend a maximum of 90 days in the country during any 180-day period.

If they want to stay longer they have to apply for a long-stay visa, with no guarantee of success.

"This doesn't work for somebody who wants to spend all winter or all summer in Spain," said Andrew Hesselden, a 40-year-old communications consultant who divides his time between London and the island of Majorca. Hesselden heads a group representing some 900 people lobbying Madrid to allow Brits to use their homes for 180 days in any 365-day period.

Spaniards and other European Union nationals can currently stay in Britain for up to 180 days without a visa, he pointed out-a situation he called "very unfair".

The limit on the length of time Brits can now stay affects retired people as well as young people looking to telework from Spain for extended periods. And that also means lost business for Spanish firms, he argued. "It doesn't make sense for Spain, it doesn't make sense for British people."



Plymouth fishing boat trawlerman Nick Hampshire prepares the net of the stern trawler 'Nicola Anne' for the first trawl of the day, at sea off the south-west coast of England. —AFP

'Hate to leave'

Chris Robinson, a 68-year-old retired manager, estimates he spends around 30,000 euros (\$36,000) a year when he and his wife stay at their villa in Almeria, southern Spain. The money goes on eating out, playing golf, building maintenance and other expenses.

Under the post-Brexit rules "there is going to be 60, 70 days where we want to be in Spain but we can't be," he told AFP by telephone from his home in Sheffield, England. Robinson said he now

regrets selling a property he owned in Florida where he could stay for 180 days continuously. He is considering selling his Spanish villa if there is no change in the post-Brexit rules in the next year. "It is a wonderful place where we are, we like it, we have a lot of friends there and I would hate to have to leave," he said. Like all those who spoke to AFP, he said he opposed Brexit because he understood the threat it posed to their life in Spain. "I actually consider myself to be European, I am totally anti-Brexit." —AFP

Spend 'big,' Biden says in push for massive package

MILWAUKEE, United States: President Joe Biden sidestepped a divided Congress and went straight to the nation Tuesday with a primetime televised town hall in Wisconsin seeking support for his \$1.9 trillion economic rescue package. "Now is the time we should be spending. Now is the time to go big," Biden told the live CNN audience in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

With lawmakers reeling from the aftermath of Donald Trump's impeachment acquittal, Biden used his first official trip away from Washington as president to address ordinary voters.

His stimulus package would more than double the previous measure passed by Congress, after intense debate, in December. The administration says massive injections of money, including \$1,400 checks sent to many Americans, are vital to preventing a sluggish economic recovery from stalling altogether.

Another major goal of the spending spree is

to boost the COVID-19 vaccine rollout—a logistical, medical and financial challenge upon which Biden's entire first term may hang. But the stimulus bill's price tag, as well as some of the spending details, leaves most Republicans in Congress skeptical.

Support from country

Biden's choice of Wisconsin for the town hall was no coincidence: he won the battleground state by just 20,000 votes against Trump in November and it will feature prominently again in the 2022 midterms and 2024 presidential race. Today, he will go to another swing state when he tours the Pfizer plant in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where coronavirus vaccines are being manufactured.

And on Friday, Biden will pursue his stimulus bill pitch on the international stage when he addresses the virtual G7 leaders' meeting and the Munich Security Conference. The White House says he will stress "the importance of all industrialized countries maintaining economic support for the recovery and collective measures to build back better."

With slim majorities in both the House and Senate, Democrats could force through Biden's package without Republicans at all. But Biden

took office insisting he would seek cross-party solutions, turning the page on Trump's ultra-divisive style. So he is keen to break through to at least some Republicans.

Last week, Biden met in the Oval Office with a group of Democratic and Republican governors and mayors to discuss the COVID relief package. As local and regional officials most immediately caught up in the consequences of the twin health and economic crisis, they were a relatively receptive audience.

"You folks are all on the front lines and dealing with the crisis since day one," Biden noted.

In Wisconsin, he insisted that only the "fringes" are keeping the country apart, where in reality "it's not nearly as divided as we make it out to be." His efforts seem to be paying off—among voters at least, if not yet with congressional Republicans.

A Quinnipiac poll this month showed nearly 70 percent of Americans support the stimulus package, while a CNBC poll reported 64 percent believe the price tag is sufficient or not even enough. Only 36 percent said it was too much. Biden himself is on a solid footing with nearly 55 percent average approval ratings. Trump may still hold a powerful grip over the Republican voter base but his final average approval rating on leaving office was a measly 38.6 percent. —AFP

Analysis

New WTO chief's pile of problems

GENEVA: The coronavirus pandemic, log-jammed trade talks and a long-delayed meeting of member states are just a few of the crises awaiting Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as she takes the helm of the World Trade Organization next month. The WTO needs a kiss of life—and fast—and the first female and first African director-general of the global trade body will have to hit the ground running as she takes on the job in the middle of a major global recession.



Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

Revive the ministerial conference

The WTO's top decision-making body meets once every two years, usually at the end of the year. Many countries use it as a deadline to get trade negotiations moving forward. After the December 2017 conference in Buenos Aires, the next meeting should have taken place in Nur-Sultan in June 2020 — having been put back six months to avoid the bitter winter in Kazakhstan's capital. But the COVID-19 pandemic forced it to be postponed indefinitely. Okonjo-Iweala wants the meeting held before the end of the year, but the WTO's 164 member states will have to reach a consensus on the date and location, most likely during the WTO general council meeting on March 1 and 2.

Reboot stalled trade talks

For years, the WTO has made virtually no progress on major international trade agreements. Negotiations on cotton and fishing subsidies are stalling, while others such as electronic commerce, launched in January 2019, are struggling to take off—all of which risks leaving the WTO looking like an institution stuck in yesterday's problems.

"I think the WTO is too important to allow it to be slowed down, paralyzed and moribund," she told AFP in an interview. "That's not right." Okonjo-Iweala, 66, has raised environmental issues and has made the fishing subsidies talks one of her immediate priorities, to show that the WTO can still produce results.

Her predecessor Roberto Azevedo watched on helplessly as trade hostilities brewed between the United States, China and the European Union. Washington and Brussels are urging the WTO to revise China's status in the organization, with the United States accusing Beijing of taking advantage of its developing economy classification to motor ahead. Some hope Okonjo-Iweala's more political interpersonal skills rather than trade background can help inject some confidence back into the system. "She can contribute to strengthening multilateralism by using her influence," Peter Ungphakorn, a former WTO secretariat staff member, said. —AFP

Business

Airbus looks to A321 XLR to propel recovery from virus

Aircraft picked up over 450 orders since 2019 Paris Air Show

PARIS: The COVID-19 pandemic has hit aircraft manufacturers hard but Airbus is already looking towards a new plane to help drive its recovery and get a leg up on rival Boeing.

The A321 XLR will be the latest in Airbus's single-aisle A320 family when deliveries begin in 2023. The XLR stands for extra-long range and the aircraft can more than handle crossing the North Atlantic, opening up the possibility airlines can use it on routes that have been the preserve of wide-body long-range aircraft up to now. Since the model was first presented at the Paris Air Show in June 2019 the aircraft has picked up more than 450 orders, including 37 last year.

Airbus, which has said its new orders plunged 65 percent in 2020 to 268, releases earnings results today. Boeing already reported last month an annual \$13.8 billion loss for its commercial aircraft division, with revenues slashed in half by the pandemic to \$16.1 billion. "The XLR continues to enjoy a very strong market demand," Airbus commercial chief Christian Scherer said recently.

Among the 24 clients for the A321 XLR are American Airlines and compatriot United Airlines, which have ordered 50 each, while Australia's Qantas wants 36. The aircraft is positioned at what is known as the "middle of the market" in the aviation industry—the gap between single-aisle narrow-body aircraft and twin-aisle wide-body planes. The only aircraft to have served this segment was the single-aisle Boeing 757, which had a range of approximately 4,000 nautical miles (7,400 kilometers), and ended production in the mid-2000s. This was enough range for the aircraft to make it across the North Atlantic, although it was complicated for airlines to use it in practice as in case of strong winds it would need to make a refuelling stop, throwing the travel plans of passengers



LONDON: A Virgin Atlantic Airbus A330 passenger plane is seen above a hotel coming in to land at London Heathrow Airport in west London. The A321 XLR will be the latest in Airbus's single-aisle A320 family when deliveries begin in 2023. — AFP

with connecting flights into chaos. While the longest-range aircraft so far the Airbus A320 family met the range of the Boeing 757, it is only with the XLR and its range of 4,700 nautical mile that airlines will be able to use the aircraft on North Atlantic routes without worry.

Before the pandemic the aircraft was seen as a flexible option for airlines to test and develop new routes with less traffic in a more profitable manner as it carries fewer passengers than Airbus's wide-body aircraft, the A330 and A350.

Recent political instability coupled with the coronavirus has hammered the economy, which contracted a record of 6.1 percent last year. Unemployment is currently at 6.6 percent, the highest in 16 years. But bellwether luxury property sales suggest the superrich are weathering the storm just fine.

The price paid by the unidentified buyer for the property at 21 Borrett Road—a newly built luxury apartment tower—beat the previous price per square foot record set in 2017. And it comes a week after a consortium set a new record when it paid \$935.2 million—or \$6,450 per square foot—for a piece of land on The Peak, the mountain that dominates Hong Kong Island and remains the city's most exclusive neighborhood. Hong Kong is a city of stark contrasts—where impoverished elderly people can be seen collecting cardboard to recycle on streets filled with supercars and luxury goods stores.

The cramped financial hub regularly tops various rankings of cities with the least affordable housing in the world, with even the cheapest apartments far out of reach for most workers.

Successive governments have failed to tackle inequality or the yawning shortage of housing, something that helped fuel huge democracy protests in recent years. A 2019 report by real estate firm CBRE ranked Hong Kong as the most expensive city for residential property, with an average price of \$2,091 per square foot. It listed the average property price in Hong Kong as \$1.2 million—far above second-placed Singapore at \$874,372.

A report that year by UBS said a "skilled worker" needed 22 years of income to afford a 60-square-metre (645-square-foot) flat, up from 12 years a decade ago, with salaries staying largely the same since 2008. But the ultra-wealthy have seen their fortunes continue to grow.

According to Knight Frank's global wealth report, the number of billionaires in Hong Kong grew from 40 in 2013 to 71 in 2019, giving the city one of the highest ratios of billionaires per capita in the world. — AFP

\$59m Hong Kong flat sale sets new Asia record

HONG KONG: Hong Kong may be in its worst recession in years but its luxury property market is still thriving after a five-bedroom apartment broke records with its \$59 million price tag.



HONG KONG: This general view shows residential buildings at 21 Borrett Road in Hong Kong yesterday where a five-bedroom, 3,378 square-foot penthouse flat has sold for \$59.3 million. — AFP

While there have been more expensive properties sold in Hong Kong, the 3,378-square-foot penthouse in the affluent Mid-Levels neighborhood set a new benchmark for price per square foot at \$17,500. The HK\$459.4 million sale, reported by local media on Wednesday and recorded in the development's register of transactions, illustrates the stark inequality in Hong Kong.

NBK International Economic Report

Faster economic recovery expected but virus path remains still a risk

KUWAIT: Benchmark equity markets were mostly weaker in January as worries over the economic impact of new restrictions in some countries, the slow pace of vaccine rollout and vaccine efficacy against new virus strains partially clipped earlier risk appetite, overshadowing the prospect of large US fiscal stimulus likely to be implemented by the end of the quarter. This came as the IMF revised up its forecasts for world economic growth this year – to 5.5 percent from 5.2 percent in October – incorporating a more positive post-pandemic recovery story due in large part to stronger US growth (up 2 percent to 5.1 percent) relative to its previous pre-vaccine projections. The path of the virus of course remains key to the global recovery story, with developing markets potentially lagging due to lower vaccine access and less capacity for policy support. Meanwhile, Brent crude oil rallied to above the \$60/bbl mark for the first time in a year, helped in particular by large, unilateral if time-bound cuts in oil output by Saudi Arabia.

Biden digs in on stimulus proposal

President Biden's first weeks in office have focused on tightening health measures to cope with the virus pandemic and advancing his huge proposed fiscal stimulus package to support an economic recovery showing signs of waning. The latter risk was underlined by another soft month for the labor market in January, which saw a rise of just 49,000 (mostly government) jobs with layoffs in the virus-exposed leisure and hospitality sectors continuing. Biden's team now looks more determined to push through the \$1.9 trillion (8 percent of GDP) stimulus including individual checks of \$1,400, even if it means abandoning a bipartisan deal with congressional Republicans who want a smaller

boost. Criticism of the Biden plan has even come from former (Democratic) Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, who argued that it is excessive, potentially inflationary and a risk to financial stability. The Biden team continues to argue that given the precarious economic picture and stress on household finances, the risk of too much stimulus is smaller than the risk of too little. The aim is to approve the deal by mid-March when key unemployment benefits are set to expire.

Eurozone economy enters double-dip downturn

Lockdown and curfew measures imposed across much of the Eurozone since December have seen new virus cases fall significantly, but the economic cost has been large and may now be extended due to sluggish vaccine rollout and as governments threaten to keep restrictions in place to address new virus strains. The Eurozone economy entered a double-dip downturn in 4Q20, although GDP contracted a less-than-feared -0.7 percent q/q with Germany (+0.1 percent, helped by a temporary VAT cut) and Spain (+0.4 percent, which suffered the largest drop in Q2) managing to eke out small gains. GDP in 1Q21 is expected to decline again, with the PMI falling further below the 'no change' 50 mark at 47.8 in January and some countries suffering Brexit-related disruptions to trade. Regional output is unlikely to reach pre-pandemic levels until mid-2022, with the IMF recently lowering its 2021 growth forecast to 4.2 percent from 5.2 percent before.

Despite the weak conditions, the European Central Bank (ECB) kept policy unchanged in January (deposit rate at -0.5 percent, PEPP asset purchases of \$1.85 trillion), preferring to give previous stimulus more time to play out. The prospect of additional loosening has been

With the pandemic having decimated air traffic, airlines are likely to have even more need for such aircraft as they rebuild their route networks. "It's fitting very well with the market needs," said Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury. "It was the case before the pandemic but we think this is going to be even more the case after the pandemic," he added.

Not a niche

An A321 XLR "costs much less to buy and service" as well as fly than a wide-body aircraft, said Jerome

Malaysian durian trade battered as lockdown bites

RAUB, Malaysia: Durians falling from trees are collected in nets on a farm in Malaysia, where a long lockdown has slowed domestic demand and left traders more reliant on China's appetite for the world's smelliest fruit. Grown across tropical Southeast Asia, fans love the "king of fruits" for its bittersweet flavors and creamy texture although critics compare its odor to rotting garbage, and it is banned from many hotels and on public transport.

A first lockdown in Malaysia did not do too much damage to demand but a serious Covid-19 resurgence has prompted authorities to re-impose curbs for a longer period, hitting the economy again and hammering the durian industry. With the roadside stalls where



RAUB, Malaysia: Workers inspecting the quality of durians at a collecting center in Raub in Malaysia's Pahang state as traders become more reliant on China's appetite for the world's smelliest fruit. — AFP

slightly clouded by a very sharp jump in core inflation to a more than five-year high of 1.4 percent y/y in January from 0.2 percent in December, bringing it closer to the bank's near-2 percent target.

In the UK, the Bank of England as expected left policy on hold in February (Bank rate at 0.1 percent and total asset purchases of £895 billion), though warned banks to prepare for a possible move to negative interest rates no sooner than six months into the future if the recovery needs supporting. The Bank lowered its 2021 growth forecast to 5.0 percent from 7.3 percent three months earlier due to the impact of the latest lockdown which began early January and will hit growth hard in 1Q21. However while stressing the uncertainties, it remained optimistic in its baseline outlook, forecasting a strong pick-up from mid-year as the UK's relatively rapid vaccine rollout bears fruit, consumers' spending appetite returns helped by accumulated savings and as initial frictions caused by new trading arrangements with the EU (including customs checks and additional paperwork) dissipate. Growth in 2022 could reach an even faster 7.3 percent.

Japan factory output

Japan's factory output declined further in December, falling 1.6 percent, as dwindling production of general machinery and cars offset strength in inorganic and organic chemicals. Meanwhile, household spending fell 0.6 percent y/y in December for the first time in three months. For 2020, household spending was down 6.5 percent, the worst decline on record, adversely affected by the coronavirus pandemic and the October 2019 sales tax hike.

Chinese activity cools

The Chinese manufacturing PMI dipped in January, to 51.3 from 51.9 in December, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. The slowdown in activity, though the second in a row, was attributed to the onset of the slow 'off-season' for firms ahead of the Chinese Lunar cele-

Bouchar, an aviation specialist at consulting firm Oliver Wyman. Especially as "pilot training—an important element of costs—can be mutualized between long-haul operations and those for short- and medium-haul flights," he told AFP. The various versions of the A321 account for nearly half of the 6,355 single-aisle aircraft on Airbus's order book.

Airbus's Scherer believes that the XLR "is going to be the main proportion of our A321s. I don't see it as a niche". Boeing currently has nothing comparable to the XLR to offer. Last year, preoccupied with the 737 MAX crisis and saddled with a debt of nearly \$64 billion, Boeing decided to not go forward with what it called its New Midsize Aircraft (NMA) project.

The plan was for delivering by 2025 an aircraft that could transport up to 275 passengers nearly 9,000 km. For Teal Group aviation analyst Richard Abouafia, this means Airbus has seized the middle market just as "Covid-19 accelerates the shift to the middle market".

He said "Boeing faces a very serious mid-market challenge". If Boeing won in the 2000s with its choice of developing the long-range B787 Dreamliner while Airbus went with the super-jumbo A380, this time the situation is reversed. The decision to cancel the NMA "will cost Boeing dearly, at least for the decade to come", said Bouchar.

But Boeing may not be giving up on the middle market segment. Comments by CEO David Calhoun last month left the impression it was working on such a plan. He said the firm was taking its time but that its engineers were advancing "so that we're ready when that moment comes to offer a really differentiated product". The Aviation Week trade journal has reported that Boeing has begun to sound out its suppliers about an aircraft that could enter service at the end of the decade. — AFP

people usually eat the fruits largely empty of customers, sales have plummeted. "Compared to last year, the local sales are not as good," Eric Chan, a trader and managing director of Dulai Fruits Enterprise, said. On the farm in Raub, outside Kuala Lumpur, some of the precious fruits are caught in nets stretched out under trees to ensure they don't suffer any damage.

Many are destined for China, where the virus emerged but which has largely tamed its outbreak and is once again recording economic growth. "If there are no exports, or when there is no stock for the export, I think (such a scenario) will collapse the whole industry," said Top Fruits managing director Tan Sue Sian. The trade in durians has exploded over the past decade, largely driven by China's growing appetite, with prices of the once cheap fruit selling for 60 ringgit (\$14) or more a kilo.

The fruit was once exported to China only as pulp and paste but in 2019 officials there allowed the shipment of frozen whole fruits, in a further boost to the industry. Durians can be found in Malaysia at all times of the year, though the fruit has bumper harvests at certain times. — AFP

brations (The Spring Festival). The recent appearance of some COVID-19 cases was also a factor. Activity in the services sector also cooled. The IMF, in its January WEO Update, pegged China's growth at 8.1 percent this year, following 2020's increase of 2.3 percent, which was the lowest in more than 40 years.

India releases FY22 budget

India's economy continued to show signs of recovery in January amid improving sentiment due to the loosening of COVID restrictions, lower virus cases and the rollout of vaccines. The manufacturing and services PMI's reached three and four-month highs of 57.7 and 52.8 respectively, extending the improvement observed during 4Q20. This follows two consecutive quarters of steep GDP contractions in 2Q and 3Q as the pandemic and high virus infection rates brought the economy to a near halt. Looking forward, the economy may receive a boost from an expected pickup in government spending of about 3.4 percent of GDP according to what remains of the FY20/21 (ending April) budget, though total stimulus spending over the year remains muted compared to EM peers.

Oil tops \$60 on vaccine optimism

Vaccine rollout optimism and OPEC+ supply cuts continue to underpin the oil market rally, helped to a lesser extent by US stimulus hopes, seen as supporting overall demand, and US dollar weakness. Brent crude is up more than 20 percent year-to-date at \$62.4/bbl (as of 12 February), recently topping the \$60 level for the first time in just over a year, following a gain of 8 percent in January. This is due mainly to Saudi Arabia's surprise decision in early January to unilaterally cut crude production by 1 mb/d in February and March over and above the general trend of OPEC+ compliance in 2020 (101 percent in December). Additional compensatory cuts from non-compliers such as Iraq could also help firm the market.

Business

Six finalists for Lexus Design Award 2021 announced

Shortlist gathers innovative design solutions for a better tomorrow

KUWAIT: Lexus International has recently announced the six finalists for the Lexus Design Award 2021, each of whom will enjoy a once-in-a-lifetime experience and mentorship from renowned design leaders as they prototype their ideas with a budget of up to 3,000,000 yen (over \$28,000) per project. The finalists were selected by a distinguished jury from among 2,079 entries submitted by creators in 66 countries.

This year marks the ninth edition of the Lexus Design Award, which was established to support up-and-coming creators to demonstrate and further develop their talents. The program recognizes fresh design talent and showcases their innovations on a prominent and respected international platform. In selecting this year's six finalists, judges looked for innovative ideas that embodied the three key principles of the Lexus brand — Anticipate, Innovate, and Captivate — with an emphasis on design that leads to a better tomorrow.

Lexus Design Award 2021 Finalists:

1. **CY-BO** by Kenji Abe (Japan)
Sustainable, reusable packaging material that can be assembled like cells.
2. **Heartfelt** by Gayle Lee and Jessica Vea (New Zealand & Tonga, based in New Zealand)
A device that enables virtual hugs.
3. **InTempo** by Alina Holovatiuk (Ukraine)
Mitts that may help distract from stressful situations by novel usage of rhythm and music.
4. **KnitX** by Irmandy Wicaksono (Indonesia, based in USA)
Digital 3D knitting of functional, electronic textiles for multi-modal visual, auditory, and tactile material interaction.
5. **Solar Desalination Skylight** by Henry Glogau (Dual New Zealand & Austria, based in Denmark)
A device that uses seawater to create natural diffused light, drinking water, and leftover salt for energy creation.
6. **Terracotta Valley Wind** by Intsui Design (China, based in Japan)
A terracotta evaporative cooling system for subway stations utilizing train-induced wind to function.

Lexus Design Award 2020 judge Greg Lynn commented: "In the middle of a changing climate and a global pandemic, there was a predictable urgency to the problems being addressed by the designers. Across all the proposals we saw, there was also a humanity and intimate scale."

Kei Fujita, Chief Representative of Middle East & Central Asia Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, said: "Our six finalists have embarked on an inspiring journey as they harness their creativity to develop forward-thinking solutions that can shape a better future for all. I'm extremely impressed by the standard of entries considering the challenges presented by the global pandemic, an event that has truly demonstrated the impor-



Lexus Design Award judges

Lexus Design Award mentors

...tance of innovation."

Fujita added: "This unique platform empowers the next generation of creators and reflects the passion for design and craftsmanship at the heart of the Lexus brand. I would like to thank everyone involved in the success of the Lexus Design Award, together with our customers around the world, for their constant support on our drive to create amazing experiences."

In mid-January, the six finalists participated in a five-day workshop with the four Lexus Design Award 2021 mentors, namely Joe Doucet, Sabine Marcelis, Mariam Kamara, and Sputniko!. The mentors' passion for nurturing young talent combined with a richly challenging curriculum resulted in highly instructive and productive sessions that fully engaged both the finalists and the mentors.

Following the workshop, mentor Mariam Kamara commented: "The mentoring sessions have been quite stimulating. I was struck by the level of optimism and commitment the finalists have shown in their designs. In this new COVID-19 reshaped world, their vision and sensitivity are a gift to us all. Each one of them was incred-



Lexus LC Convertible

by passionate about their projects and demonstrated a strong motivation to delve deeper and do the necessary research to strengthen the final result. Though the mentoring was remote, a combination of powerful online tools and well-prepared finalists made for a fluid, productive, and enjoyable process. I look forward to seeing where they take their designs in the coming months."

Finalists will continue to work with the mentors as they develop their prototypes toward the Grand Prix selection. A judging panel featuring renowned design leaders Paola Antonelli, Dong Gong, Greg Lynn, and Simon Humphries will select the Grand Prix winner in April 2021 based on their final prototypes and presentations.

Ooredoo takes part in KuwaitTech Virtual Event 2021

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, participated in the KuwaitTech Virtual Event (KTE), Kuwait's largest virtual expo and summit, as the strategic sponsor. The event took place between 16 and 17 February 2021, and gathered tech-enthusiastic, developers and leading national and international companies from different sectors in which they demonstrated their latest innovations.

The outstanding event showcased the latest information and communications technology (ICT) products and services, high-tech gadgets, consumer electronics and advanced smart technology across all sectors. It included more than 50 guest speakers and participants from various sectors, in which industry leaders and experts have revealed the latest international technologies, trends, and digital services that aim to facilitate the individuals' lives.

The expo also explored the efforts of the government in order to position the State of Kuwait a leading regional financial, commercial, cultural and trade hub, which goes in line with Kuwait vision 2035 "New Kuwait".

"We, at Ooredoo Kuwait harness all our capabilities as part of our constant endeavor to drive development and improve digital services in order to improve the quality of living for individuals. Our sponsorship and participation in the KuwaitTech Virtual event 2021 was yet another opportunity for us to leave a print by exploring our latest services, innovations and technologies such as artificial intelligence" said Essa Haider, Director Network Planning & Design, Ooredoo Kuwait.



Essa Haider

Gulf Bank welcomes salary account grand prize winner Alotaibi

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank welcomed the grand draw prize winner of the 2020 Salary Package, Saud Eid Amer Alotaibi, at the Bank's main branch. During the course of the winner's visit, the representatives of senior management at Gulf Bank, handed the winner his cash prize of 100 times his salary.

Gulf Bank held the draw last Thursday at Kuwait Pulse FMI 88.8 in the presence of a representative each from the Ministry of Commerce and Ernst & Young. Regarding the visit, Mohammad Al-Qattan, General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, said: "We are very pleased to receive Saud Eid Amer Alotaibi, the lucky customer who won the Gulf Bank's annual Salary Account draw prize for 2020. We would like to remind customers that they are still eligible to participate in next month's Salary Account draw for the chance to win a cash prize worth 12 times their salaries, and that they are also eligible to win next year's annual grand draw prize."

This year, Gulf Bank's Salary Account is offering clients a wide range of exclusive offers, including the ability to choose between an interest-free loan, a cash prize of KD 200, or a free credit card, with these offers being valid for workers in both the public and private sectors. Gulf Bank is also providing special offers for frontline workers in appreciation of their continuous efforts in combating the pandemic.

Frontline workers salary package

Gulf Bank recently tailored a special offer for employed Kuwaiti frontline workers who wish to transfer their salaries



Mohammad Al-Qattan



to Gulf Bank. Upon transferring their salaries, these clients will immediately receive a set of benefits, including a cash gift of KD 200, or an interest-free loan of up to KD 10,000 or a special car loan offer from approved showrooms. They will also be eligible to receive a Visa or MasterCard credit card with all annual fees waived for the first year, a free MasterCard World card (upon KD 5,000 expenditure). The frontline offer also consists of other benefits, including a free safety deposit box for a period of one year upon opening the account, free concierge services, preferential FD rates, and a customer segment upgrade. The new frontline offer is open to Kuwaiti employees working in the Fire Brigade, National Guard, Civil Aviation (including Kuwait Airways) and in the following Ministries: Health, Defense, Information and Interior.

Salary package - exclusive offer

As part of the vast range of services and benefits available to Salary Account customers, Gulf Bank offers its clients the opportunity to choose the most appropriate benefits from a wide selection of attractive options. With the 2021 Kuwaiti Salary Offer, new customers who transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank are automatically enrolled in the monthly draws, giving them the chance to win cash prizes of up to 12 times their salary. Customers are also enrolled in a yearly draw of Kuwait's largest salary prize, a cash prize of up to 100 times the winner's salary.

Gulf Bank's Salary Account also gives new customers the opportunity to receive either a KD 200 cash gift upon transferring their salaries to Gulf Bank, or an interest-free loan of up to KD 10,000. Customers must have a minimum salary of KD 500 and are eligible for the offer following their first salary transfer to Gulf Bank.

Customers can also enjoy additional benefits like a Visa or MasterCard credit card free of charge for a year. They can also apply for a loan of up to KD 70,000 with a repayment period of 15 years, or a consumer loan of up to KD 25,000.

Salary Account draws

Gulf Bank conducts monthly and annual Salary Account draws, in which all salaried customers who transferred their salaries to Gulf Bank in 2019, 2020 and 2021 are automatically enrolled. During the monthly draws, Salary Account customers have the chance to win a prize of up to 12 times their salaries and can even win up to 100 times their salaries in the annual draw.

It is worth noting that Gulf Bank is the only bank in Kuwait that offers its salaried customers the opportunity to win sums of these amounts on a monthly and annual basis, as a reward for transferring their salaries to Gulf Bank. To learn more about Gulf Bank's activities, customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's branches or log on to www.e-gulfbank.com.

ABK advocates importance of 'Let's Be Aware' campaign

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) echoed its support and advocacy for the recently launched "Let's Be Aware" campaign. Initiated by Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association in cooperation with local banks, the initiative was spearheaded to enhance financial awareness among all segments of society. The campaign steers financial institutions to bolster their social responsibility efforts towards educating customers on their rights across all banking operations. It includes key information on relevant banking services and practices,

such as the mechanism of filing complaints, bank cards, fraud management, advice of cybersecurity protocols, in addition to important guidelines on loans and borrowing.

Loai Muqames, CEO of ABK - Kuwait reaffirmed ABK's support for the vision and initiatives of the Central Bank of Kuwait, as well as its commitment to the improvement of financial awareness within the society commenting: "A number of key subjects have already been covered since the onset of this important campaign. We believe that investing in heightened awareness of financial best practices and security will lead to improved trust in the services and potential of the financial sector. An environment of improved personal transaction capabilities leads to a better economic climate overall, thereby boosting the nation's stature and ranking in key global benchmarks of financial literacy and inclusion, and access to advanced insights.

"The evolution to a digital lifestyle is evident in all aspects of life, and impacts everyone, especially the finance sector. As much as we appreciate that

banking customers are quick to adopt new, advanced methods of banking, we also want to ensure that they are equipped with the correct, relevant information to safeguard their experience and resources. The 'Let's Be Aware' campaign is a visionary initiative, and we hope that our customers - and everyone in Kuwait - will benefit from this platform to learn about their rights as well as their responsibilities."

Since the onset of the global crisis, the Central Bank of Kuwait, with the support of the Kuwait Banking Association, has helped mitigate the economic impact on the nation, and this latest initiative adds to the Central Bank's track record of ensuring financial and economic stability in Kuwait.



Loai Muqames

Classifieds

Thursday, February 18, 2021

Kuwait Times
 Now you can browse
www.kuwaittimes.net
 e-mail: info@kuwaittimes.net



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 66819 - 66817
 Fax: (+965) 24348714
www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Rather hot and Partly cloudy to cloudy with moderate to fresh south easterly wind changing to north westerly wind later on with speed of 25 - 60 km/h causing rising dust with a chance for rain that might be

BY NIGHT: Rather cold and Cloudy with moderate to fresh north westerly wind with speed of 25 - 60 km/h causing rising dust with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

| WEATHER WARNING | | | Fresh wind + dust | |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|--------------------------------|--|
| STATION | MAX. EXP. | MIN. REC. | SFC. CHART 17/02/2021 0000 UTC | |
| KUWAIT CITY | 29 °C | 21 °C | | |
| KUWAIT AIRPORT | 32 °C | 18 °C | | |
| ABDALY | 32 °C | 19 °C | | |
| BUBYAN | - °C | - °C | | |
| JAHRA | 34 °C | 18 °C | | |
| FAILAKA ISLAND | - °C | - °C | | |
| SALMIYAH | 24 °C | 18 °C | | |
| AHMADI | 24 °C | 18 °C | | |
| NUWASIB | 31 °C | 15 °C | | |
| WAFRA | 32 °C | 15 °C | | |
| SALMY | 32 °C | 19 °C | | |

| 4 DAYS FORECAST | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-------|---|--------------|-------|----------------|--------------|
| DAY | DATE | WEATHER | Temperatures | | Wind Direction | Wind Speed |
| | | | MAX. | MIN. | | |
| Thursday | 02/18 | Rather cold and Clouds will decrease gradually with a chance for rain that might be thundery at | 18 °C | 15 °C | NW | 25 - 50 km/h |
| Friday | 02/19 | Rather cold | 18 °C | 11 °C | NW-VRB | 08 - 28 km/h |
| Saturday | 02/20 | Rather cold and Clouds will increase gradually with a chance for scattered rain | 18 °C | 12 °C | SE-VRB | 08 - 28 km/h |
| Sunday | 02/21 | Fair and some scattered clouds will appear | 20 °C | 14 °C | VRB-NW | 06 - 26 km/h |

| PRAYER TIMES | |
|--------------|-------|
| Fajr | 05:05 |
| Sunrise | 06:26 |
| Zuhr | 12:02 |
| Asr | 15:14 |
| Sunset | 17:39 |
| Isha | 18:56 |

| RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| MAX. Temp. | 32 °C |
| MIN. Temp. | 12 °C |
| MAX. RH | 64 % |
| MIN. RH | 14 % |
| MAX. Wind | S 46 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

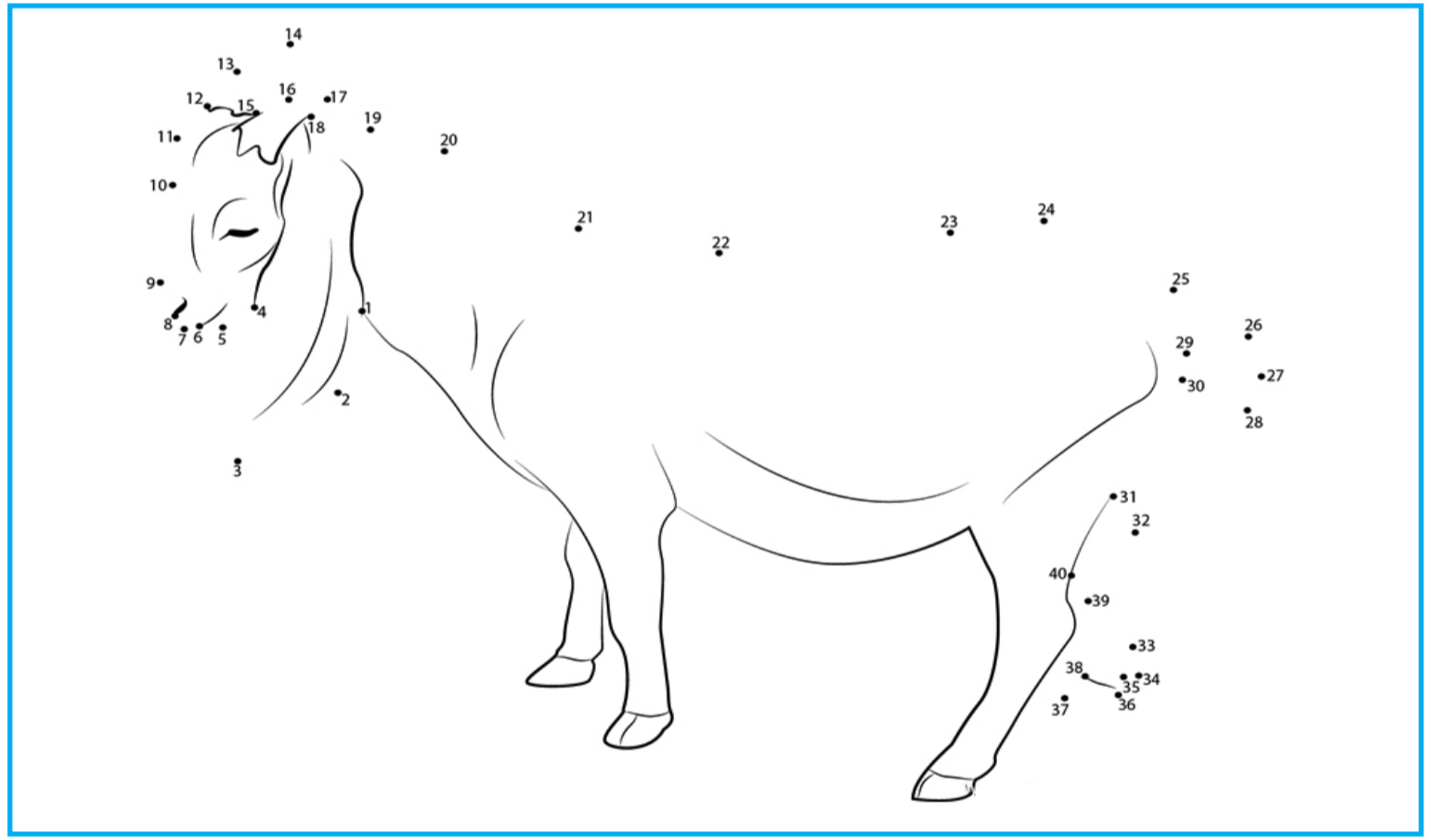
Marketing

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

ADVERTISE
ANALYTICS
BRAND
BUYER
CHANNEL
CONSUMER
CONTENT
COST
CUSTOMER
DEMOGRAPHIC
DEVELOP
DISCOUNT
DISTRIBUTION
END-USER
FORECAST
FUNNEL
IMAGE
LABEL
LAUNCH
MAIL ORDER
MARKETING
MOTIVATION

PACKAGING
POINT OF SALE
POSITIONING
PRODUCT
PUBLIC RELATIONS
REGISTERED
RESEARCH
SALES
SELLER
SPONSOR
TRADEMARK

Join the Dots



STAR TRACK

| | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p>Aries (March 21-April 19) Changes in your home could cause temporary frustration that creates some tension with family members. Perhaps you're moving, cleaning, or refurbishing, and everyone is getting in everyone else's way. The best way to handle this situation is to try to get the job done as quickly as possible. Once it's done, Aries, tempers will subside and all will be fine.</p> | <p>Cancer (June 21-July 22) A person you're attracted to may seem to be interested in someone else. This could bring up your insecurities and jealousy. Don't make yourself crazy. Cancer. Try to learn the facts before letting the situation get the better of you. Invitations to more than one social event for the same night might force you to make an uncomfortable choice. Make the choice that's best for you.</p> | <p>Libra (September 23-October 22) A visitor who needs a little sympathy could visit you today. Your friend probably wants some advice about some problems. He or she could also bring information involving new scientific or metaphysical studies that you find fascinating. This information could trigger your own insights. Write down your ideas. You will want to remember them.</p> | <p>Capricorn (December 22-January 19) Jealousy could rear its ugly head today, Capricorn. This may involve a romantic relationship. Jealousy is often groundless. If you want to avoid an upset, try a little communicating. This is definitely the time to make the effort to turn a disadvantage into an advantage. Strong emotions can work for you under some circumstances. A passionate reconciliation is better than an angry estrangement.</p> |
| <p>Taurus (April 20-May 20) Miscommunication with someone far away could lead to bruised egos, heightened emotions, and angry phone calls. Don't get sucked into a quarrel, Taurus. Try to sort out the problem. Changes in your neighborhood could cause trouble getting around, so be prepared for blocked streets and heavy traffic. Walk, if you can. It will clear your head and get you where you're going more quickly.</p> | <p>Leo (July 23-August 22) Someone is keeping secrets from you. We all have private issues we don't wish to share, Leo, but this affects you. Your intuition will probably tell you who this person is. Try to get him or her to open up without exerting pressure. Unfinished tasks could be driving you crazy. You may try to run through them quickly, causing too much stress. Get the most crucial done and let the others go.</p> | <p>Scorpio (October 23-November 21) Some important plans, perhaps for a vacation or involving education in some way, could be temporarily blocked by circumstances beyond your control, Scorpio. This can cause considerable upset and might even set your temper on edge. You may be tempted to take your frustrations out on others. It would be far more productive to find ways to make your plans work, even if there's a delay. Go to it.</p> | <p>Aquarius (January 20- February 18) Nervous tension could cause a temporary malaise that keeps your energy low today. Tasks and chores need to be done, Aquarius, so you will probably drag yourself up and try to finish them in spite of the way you feel. Try not to get overworked, and try not to take your weariness out on others. It's better to let work go than make yourself and everyone else more stressed out.</p> |
| <p>Gemini (May 21-June 20) Your psychoanalytical talents could be put to work today when misunderstandings come up. Your friends aren't likely to be thinking clearly and may not respond to reassurances, Gemini. Use your intuition to determine the best way to defuse the situation. Finances might cause some worry now, but your ingenuity and fiscal sense should put things right. Go out and have a good time tonight.</p> | <p>Virgo (August 23-September 22) Perhaps you planned to attend a group event but circumstances beyond your control got in the way. Maybe it was canceled. This could cause some disappointment for you and others, Virgo. Find something else to do. A project of your own is likely to need some attention, and this challenge could keep you engrossed for hours. Tonight, treat yourself to dinner out.</p> | <p>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21) A letter or phone call could bring upsetting news about money, Sagittarius. Your first reaction may be to blame yourself or someone else, but the circumstances are probably beyond anyone's control. Chances are good that it can be set right. Before anyone gets too upset, it's best to investigate and find out what needs to be done. It may take some effort, but all will be well.</p> | <p>Pisces (February 19-March 20) A group with which you're affiliated may be temporarily torn apart by politics and quarrels. If so, Pisces, it's best to stay out of it. A friend could be having trouble and come to you for advice and help. Don't get too frustrated by his or her weaknesses. This could be a frustrating day for you - one best spent working on your own projects. All will be better tomorrow.</p> |

Lifestyle | Features



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

Amanda Gorman poem to be published in French

A poem by Amanda Gorman, the young star of President Joe Biden's inauguration, is being translated into French, the Editions Fayard publishing house said yesterday. The inauguration poem by the 22-year-old US National Youth Poet Laureate, "The Hill We Climb", is due out in hard copy next month in the United States and the French version will follow in May.

It is being translated by up-and-coming music star Marie-Pierré Kakoma, who

goes by the stage name Lous and the Yakuza. The Belgian-Congolese singer was recently nominated for France's top Victoires de la Musique awards. Gorman's captivating performance on January 22 has rocketed her to superstardom. She has picked up millions of social media and celebrity fans, a modeling contract and she also opened this month's Super Bowl. — AFP

French court sentences four over fatal Madonna stage collapse

A French court yesterday handed suspended prison sentences to four people charged over the collapse of a stage as it was being set up for a 2009 concert by pop superstar Madonna, which killed two workers. Judges in the southern city of Marseille, where the concert was to take place, convicted the four of involuntary manslaughter and injuries, while acquitting three others ordered to stand trial. Eight other workers sustained injuries in the accident, which occurred when one of four cranes putting up metal scaffolding for the stage knocked into the structure's roof.

Charles Criscenzo, 52, of France and Charles Prow, a 23-year-old Briton, were killed at Marseille's Velodrome stadium, and one of the injured workers committed suicide two years later. Madonna herself did not appear at the trial, saying she was not involved in the technical details and denying any pressure to



This file photo taken shows the Marseille's Velodrome Stadium after the collapse of a stage set up for a Madonna concert in which two stage hands died. — AFP

build the stage more quickly. She did present her condolences to the victims' families.

After a 10-year investigation, Jacqueline Bitton, 73, at the time head of the French operations for the US concert promoter Live Nation, received the most severe sentence, a suspended two-year prison term and a fine of 20,000 euros (\$24,000). Tim Norman, 65, head of the British firm Edwin Shirley Group (ESG) that owned the stage, received a suspended two-year term as

well as a 15,000 euro fine. A manager at a French subcontractor hired by ESG, Tour Concept France, was given a suspended 18-month sentence and a 10,000 euro fine, while a British foreman hired for the job by ESG got 18 months suspended. Live Nation France was ordered to pay a 150,000 euro fine, and Tour Concept 50,000 euros. — AFP

RIHANNA SPARKS NEW INDIA OUTRAGE WITH TOPLESS HINDU GOD PHOTO

Pop icon Rihanna has been accused of mocking a Hindu god after she was pictured topless with a pendant of Ganesha around her neck, sparking a furor in India. Images of the lingerie photoshoot come just weeks after she upset the Indian government by commenting on huge farmers' protests that pose a major challenge to New Delhi. The latest offending tweet to the superstar's more than 100 million Twitter followers is part of promotions for Rihanna's lingerie line Savage X Fenty. The photo was also shared on her Instagram account, which has 91.4 million followers.

Social media users and politicians in India yesterday said her post was "derogatory", accusing her of disrespecting Hindu gods and hurting local sentiment. "It's appalling to see how @Rihanna shamefully mocks our beloved Hindu God #Ganesha," tweeted Ram Kadam, a state legislator from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist party.

"This exposes how #Rihanna has no idea or respect for Indian culture, tradition and our issues here," he added. The right-wing World Hindu Council said it had filed police complaints against



In this file photo Barbadian singer Rihanna poses on the red carpet upon arrival at The Fashion Awards 2019 in London. — AFP photos

Facebook and Twitter for hosting the picture and demanded action against Rihanna's social media accounts. Earlier this month tweets from Rihanna and other celebrities on protests in India by farmers against new agriculture laws sparked anger at India's foreign ministry, which called their comments "sensationalist". Critics say Hindu nationalism has been on the rise in officially secular India under Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party. — AFP



In this file photo activists of the United Hindu Front (UHF) hold a placard and a picture of Barbadian singer Rihanna during a demonstration in New Delhi after Rihanna's support to Indian farmers protesting against the central government's recent agricultural reforms.

Comet from edge of solar system killed the dinosaurs

Sixty-six million years ago, a huge celestial object struck off the coast of what is now Mexico, triggering a catastrophic "impact winter" that eventually wiped out three-quarters of life on Earth, including the dinosaurs. A pair of astronomers at Harvard say they have now resolved long standing mysteries surrounding the nature and origin of the "Chicxulub impactor." Their analysis suggests it was a comet that originated in a region of icy debris on the edge of the solar system, that Jupiter was responsible for it crashing into our planet, and that we can expect similar impacts every 250 million to 750 million years.

The duo's paper, published in the journal Scientific Reports this week, pushes back against an older theory that claims the object was a fragment of an asteroid that came from our solar system's Main Belt. "Jupiter is so important because it's the most massive planet in our solar system," lead author Amir Siraj told AFP. Jupiter ends up acting as a kind of "pinball machine" that "kicks these incoming long-period comets into orbits that bring them very close to the Sun." So-called "long-period comets" come from the Oort cloud, thought to be a giant spherical shell surrounding the solar system like a bubble that is made of icy pieces of debris the size of mountains or larger.

The long-period comets take about 200 years to orbit the Sun, and are also called sungrazers because of how close they pass. Because they come from the deep freeze of the outer solar system, comets are icier than asteroids, and are known for the stunning gas and dust trails that they produce as they melt. But, said Siraj, the evaporative impact of the Sun's heat on sungrazers is nothing compared to the massive tidal forces they experience when one side faces our star.

"As a result, these comets experience such a large tidal force that the most massive of them would shatter into about a thousand fragments, each of those fragments large enough to produce a Chicxulub size impactor, or dinosaur-killing event on Earth." Siraj and his co-author Avi Loeb, a professor of science, developed a statistical model that showed the probability that long-period



In this file photo Director Steven Spielberg and daughter Sasha Spielberg (aka Buzzy Lee) arrive for the 83rd Annual Academy Awards held at the Kodak Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Buzzy Lee, Spielberg's daughter, soundtracks breakup on debut

Buzzy Lee is a musical alias that hides a famous name: Sasha Spielberg, daughter of the legendary American film director Steven Spielberg. But there is little hiding on her confessional debut album, "Spoiled Love". "I definitely put it all out there," she tells AFP. "I said everything I would say to my diary-in fact, one of the songs, "Circles", includes a real diary entry." Lee, 30, has parked her car on the side of the road in Los Angeles for the phone interview—"the most LA way to do an interview ever!" she says, laughing.

But much of her melodic new album has its roots in a broken relationship in France, and there are plenty of other Gallic influences, from her love of Anglo-French singer-songwriter Charlotte Gainsbourg to the cheese-flavored names she used for working song titles ("Brie" made the cut, but sadly not "Camembert" and "Gruyere"). The album was recorded with Chilean-American producer and electronic artist Nicolas Jaar, a close friend since they met aged 18 on their second day of college. By coincidence, they both have film directors for fathers—even if Alfredo Jaar is best known for his photography and visual art-and that influence emerges in their collaborations, especially the new album's pair of instrumental tracks. "I tend to think very cinematically-ha, of course!" she says. "Most of my songs start like soundtracks, an imaginary

score... then I put words and melodies in there are words. Sometimes there aren't."

'Angelic with an edge'

Lee made a few appearances in her father's films as a young girl but it was the piano that really drew her. She formed a group-Wardell-with her brother, Theo, for a time, before teaming up with Jaar as the band Just Friends. "It's hard for us to be in a room and not make music," she says. It was Jaar who was able to harness her voice in a way that matched the confessional tone of her songs. "With my band... I was constantly belting and singing out and Nico taught me to turn it back inwards and make it more intimate as though I'm singing into someone's ear," she says. It's a style she admires in Gainsbourg, which she describes as "angelic with an edge".

Chatty and quick to laugh in person, did she find it hard to lay herself bare for the album? "It would have been more frightening if it had come out when it was finished, but because of COVID it was pushed by about a year and I'm happy I've had that year of reflection and space, so it's not as scary," she says. The delay means she already has another full album of songs ready to go, due to be recorded in the coming days. "I'm not wasting time!" she says.—AFP



This photo shows author Amir Siraj.



Dinosaur tracks fossilized on the ground on the edge overlooking Bull Canyon near Manti in the La-Sal National forest Utah side.

comets would hit Earth that is consistent with the age of Chicxulub and other known impactors. The previous theory about the object being an asteroid produces an expected rate of such events that was off by a factor of about ten compared to what has been observed, Loeb told AFP.

'A beautiful sight'

Another line of evidence in favor of the comet origin is the composition of Chicxulub: only about a tenth of all asteroids from the Main Belt, which lies between Mars and Jupiter, are made up of carbonaceous chondrite, while most comets have it. Evidence suggests the Chicxulub crater and other similar craters, such as the Vredefort crater in South Africa that was struck about two billion years ago, and the million-year-old Zhamanshin crater in Kazakhstan, all had carbonaceous chondrite. The hypothesis can be tested by further studying these craters, ones on the Moon, or even by sending out space

probes to take samples from comets.

"It must have been a beautiful sight to see this rock approaching 66 million years ago, that was larger than the length of Manhattan Island," said Loeb, though ideally we'd like to learn to track such objects and devise ways to deflect them if necessary. Loeb added he was excited by the prospect of the Vera Rubin Observatory in Chile becoming operational next year. The telescope might be able to see tidal disruption of long-period comets "and will be extremely important in making forecasts for definitely the next 100 years, to know if anything bad could happen to us."

Though Siraj and Loeb calculated Chicxulub-like impactors would occur once every few hundreds of millions of years, "it's a statistical thing, you say, 'on average, it's every so often' but you never know when the next one will come," said Loeb. "The best way to find out is to search the sky," he concluded. — AFP



In this file photo a Tyrannosaurus rex (T-Rex) skeleton, named STAN is on display during a press preview at Christie's Rockefeller Center in New York City. — AFP photos

Lifestyle | Features



Youths play an online multiplayer game at an internet cafe in Iran's capital Tehran.



A youth plays an online multiplayer game at an internet cafe in Iran's capital Tehran.

'We just want to play': Iran gamers battle reality of US sanctions

Iran's millions-strong legion of gamers revel in online worlds, but they have to fight daily real-life obstacles imposed by US sanctions in their quest to level up and keep playing. "It's a problem between governments and a pain for the consumer," said 24-year-old gamer and game journalist Amir Golkhani. "We have no political demands. We just want to play," he told AFP. Sanctions reimposed in 2018 by former US president Donald Trump do not directly target the gaming industry. But the risk of punitive measures prevents companies from offering services to Iranians. At shops near central Tehran's Imam Khomeini square, the situation appears normal—shelves are stocked with the latest games and consoles.

Surprisingly, both the Sony PlayStation 5 and Microsoft Xbox Series X can be found on sale, even though they are nearly impossible to acquire in many countries since the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted global supply chains. But neither company is officially present in the Islamic republic due to Washington's punishing sanctions, and their products are imported or smuggled into Iran from countries nearby. Iran's blacklisted banking system also means players, with no access to internationally recognized credit cards, need to use fake identities and addresses—and sometimes middlemen in other countries—to register accounts and make online purchases.

There are at least 32 million gamers among Iran's population of 80 million, according to a September report by the Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation. It found that the most popular games in Iran were Pro Evolution Soccer, Clash of Clans, FIFA, Call of Duty and PUBG (PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds). "Gaming is one of the few things helping me escape life's realities," said Farshad Rezayi, a 32-year-old chef and avid gamer. Sanctions have almost deprived him of that outlet too, he added.

'Same game but cheaper'

One way for Iranians to cheaply and easily access games is a local spin on the "gameshare" function found on most consoles and computer platforms. Iranian shops use VPNs or other methods to mask their locations and create

accounts seemingly from abroad. They then purchase games for those accounts using overseas credit cards or gift cards, and sell the access to several gamers, who share what's locally known as a "capacity account", referring to usage-online, offline or both. For the hugely popular PlayStation 4, for instance, shops sell access to single-game accounts for between 20 and 60 percent of the regular price, according to use.

The store makes a profit by peddling one account to several people, while the player avoids shelling out the full cost of owning the game—usually \$60 or more in the unregulated Iranian market, accord-

copyright. Foreign products are not protected by Iran's limited copyright laws—Microsoft Windows copies are almost always pirated, Netflix shows are downloaded with a single click, and video games for PC are usually counterfeit versions. Capacity accounts are the "moral" alternative to almost zero-cost game pirating, Rezayi said.

'Always looking for workarounds'

"I have to support the developer who is helping me have fun. They'd give up if everyone just pirated things," Rezayi added. Omid Sedigh Imani, a Tehran-based video game critic and streamer, echoed such feelings saying he consid-

er subscription that offers hundreds of games for \$10 a month. But to sign up, Iranians have to go through a middleman for payment, and fake their location and account details. "I can't tell Xbox support that I'm an Iranian," game journalist Golkhani said, adding that Iranians pretended they were foreigners because Xbox servers reject users connecting from Iran, and accounts that are detected are likely to be banned.

"We're forced to use VPNs, to set different DNSs" to bypass the restrictions, he said, referring to different methods to mask users' locations. But doing so often meant connection quality was poor, he said. Critic Imani claimed some



Shops selling game and consoles are pictured in the central market of Iran's capital Tehran.

ered hacked accounts and pirating to be "theft". Still other gamers have found ways to purchase games on their own accounts by using a go-between. "We need middlemen in another country like Russia, Turkey," said Sadeq Kia, a 25-year-old aspiring professional gamer, fresh off a competitive match at a gaming centre in Tehran.

He said the go-between sold gift cards that allowed players to top up their accounts and make online purchases. Iranian consumer culture is "always looking for workarounds", critic Imani said. While endorsing shared accounts for gamers on a budget, Imani advocated using services like Xbox Game Pass-a

companies were "softer" on Iranians and "definitely know what is happening". Industry giants including Microsoft, Epic Games and Riot Games have blocked Iranians from using their gaming services, often without explanation. Coupled with Iran's broad internet censorship, it means gamers have few options. "We haven't done anything wrong. It's just the same old story of being Iranian," Imani said. "And politics is out of our hands." — AFP

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A vendor displays a PlayStation 4 (PS4) game at his shop in the central market of Iran's capital Tehran.



Youths play an online multiplayer game at an internet cafe.



A vendor sells PlayStation 4 (PS4), PS5 and Xbox game consoles at a shop in the central market of Iran's capital Tehran. — AFP photos

Fortnite's Epic takes Apple feud to Europe

Fortnite maker Epic Games yesterday lodged a complaint against Apple with EU antitrust authorities, deepening its bitter feud with the iPhone-maker over its app store. Apple and Epic have been caught in a fierce battle over whether Apple's tight control of the App Store, and its 30-percent cut of revenue, is abusive.

The fight took a dramatic turn in August when Apple expelled Fortnite, one of the world's most popular games, from its app store after Epic released an update that dodges revenue-sharing with the iPhone maker. Apple does not allow users of its popular devices to

download apps from anywhere but its App Store, and developers have to use Apple's payment system which takes its cut. "We will not stand idly by and allow Apple to use its platform dominance to control what should be a level digital playing field," said Epic Games CEO Tim Sweeney in a statement. The company said the lawsuit "complements"

other legal proceedings it has launched in the United States, Australia and Britain.

The war over the Apple app store has widened to Facebook, where CEO Mark Zuckerberg has accused Apple of imposing rules for outside developers that it does not apply to its own services. This echoes the accusations of Spotify,

which also believes Apple has given unfair advantage to its Apple Music service over other streaming services. With its European complaint, Epic joins Spotify and other developers who successfully spurred the EU into action with their own complaints. Those gripes pushed the EU's powerful competition authority to open a series of cases against Apple in June, involving both its app store and its Apple Pay payment service.

Apple has angrily called the complaints by Spotify and others as "baseless", describing them as sour grapes by companies that do not want to play by the same rules as everyone else. Apple—along with Google, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft—is also targeted in Europe by a new draft legislation, the Digital Markets Act, which aims to limit their omnipotence. But the plan, unveiled in December, is only at the beginning of a legislative process that could last years. — AFP



COVID ENDANGERS FRANCE'S CHERISHED LUNCH TRADITION

The coronavirus crisis has already taken a heavy toll on the French way of life and now it's bringing unwanted change to the nation's eating habits—by forcing workers to eat at their desks. Until the COVID-19 pandemic struck, triggering the closure of restaurants and cafes, a communal midday meal of several courses, perhaps with some wine, was still a feature in the professional life of millions. At lunchtimes everyday across the country, restaurants in city centers would be filled to capacity in what seems a vision from a vanished era.

But now taking lunch alone seated at a desk in front of a computer, long looked down on with pity as the preserve of the hard-pressed "Anglosaxon" worker and until now officially illegal, has been adopted en masse by French employees. "In other cultures, it's a bit more every-one-for-themselves, but in France it's a moment to eat together, to take time out as a group, among colleagues," said Romain Passelande, who co-founded the Les Petites Tables website devoted to affordable lunching in Paris. "Employees in a company, even if they work a lot, will take this moment together," the 38-year-old said.

Eating in front of a computer screen was previously illegal under the gigantic French labor code, an annual red book of several thousand pages, which expressly forbade having lunch "in spaces used for work". While working from home is still strongly encouraged, at the start of the month the employment ministry announced it would issue a decree authorizing eating in the workplace for the first time—recognition of the new reality for millions of white- and blue-collar workers.

Gossip and grumbling

Closed restaurants are not just depriving employees of a moment to relax and indulge in the national pastime of talking about food. Shuttered brasseries might also be having an outside effect on the internal dynamics of companies compared with other countries. Lunch is traditionally the time to exchange office gossip, grumble about problems, or brainstorm ideas in an informal setting. It is also a useful time to chat to the boss.

This is all encouraged by the labor code, which obliges small companies to provide a separate space for employees to eat, while those with more than 50 employees must provide a work canteen or lunch vouchers. "While for others taking lunch is a moment to eat, for the French lunching is about conversing over a meal and wine," said Stephane Rozes, an academic and political scientist who heads CAP, a consultancy firm. "The French are struggling with COVID-19 in how it is limiting our small-talk about the weather and other things, but also work issues and the organization of our companies," he added. Over lunch, "formal hierarchical relationships dissolve between subordinates and managers, and it encourages more horizontal conversations with people from other services," he said.

'Missed it so much'

Restaurants have been closed for in-person eating in France since late October when the country entered its second lockdown. Most are surviving thanks to heavy state subsidies for loss of earnings and payroll costs, and also trying to earn a bit from take-out orders, which are permitted. The government has given no firm indication of when the hard-hit hospitality sector will be allowed to reopen given the risks of transmission between unmasked eaters at a time when the country is battling to avoid a third lockdown. The only type of restaurant still permitted to operate are the work canteens, which are now the scenes of often noisy conversations as colleagues yell at one another from their social-distanced chairs.

Passelande, whose website is at a standstill, believes that the new normal of eating in the office will disappear once life returns to the pre-COVID era. "I think people will go out more," he said. "We will have missed it so much, just like the cinema and exhibitions. For so many of the people I know, Paris is all about life in restaurants. All the good moments are spent around a glass or plate of something." — AFP

Liverpool seize control over RB Leipzig in Budapest

Salah - Mane duo put Reds on brink of quarter-finals

BUDAPEST: Liverpool rediscovered lost form and seized the initiative against RB Leipzig in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 clash by cruising to a 2-0 win in a chilly Budapest on Tuesday. Clinical early second-half strikes from Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane, both courtesy of dreadful defensive errors, proved decisive and leave the German side facing a formidable task in the return leg on March 10.

The win moves Jurgen Klopp's men to the brink of the Champions League quarter-finals and also ends a run of three straight defeats that has left the English champions 13 points behind leaders Manchester City in the Premier League. "It was a game we wanted it was a game we needed tonight," Klopp told BT Sport afterwards. "Leipzig can be a real monster. The way they play in the Bundesliga they overrun teams, they can be really physical in everything and tonight we controlled them in an exceptional way."

"They had their moments because of the quality they have but we controlled the game so tonight I think we got the result we deserved," he said. The first leg was moved from Leipzig to the Hungarian capital due to Germany's strict COVID-19 travel restrictions. Despite the enforced relocation, Julian Nagelsmann's side, on a four-game winning streak at home where they are second behind Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga, started briskly and almost went ahead on four minutes.

Marauding left-back Angelino teed up fellow Spaniard Dani Olmo for a close-range diving header past Alisson but the effort only rattled the post. Soon after Angelino again exploited space on the left but his left-footed volley skewed harm-

lessly across the goalmouth. Instead it was Liverpool, striving to reverse their slump and badly in need of a Champions League lift, who gradually created more chances, often benefiting from loose defending.

Busy Salah

First, Salah, busy throughout, forced a block from Leipzig's Hungarian goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi on the quarter hour. Ten minutes later Mane, out-jumping Nordi Mukiele, headed a Firmino cross just over after the Brazilian striker and Salah had combined well on the right. Shortly before half-time, Andy Robertson shaved the crossbar when his lob from distance almost caught out the Budapest-born Gulacsi dashing back after making a clearance outside his box.

Although Leipzig perked up on the restart with Alisson Becker saving from Christopher Nkunku, the German side, were made to pay for two calamitous mistakes early in the second half. In the 53rd minute, Salah pounced on a sloppy back-pass by Austrian midfielder Marcel Sabitzer and ran unchallenged to smoothly slot past Gulacsi. Five minutes later, Mane doubled Liverpool's lead in similar fashion, smartly finishing after Mukiele had scuffed a clearance. "We made two huge mistakes which would be punished at any level," Nagelsmann told DAZN.

"Mistakes happen, we didn't play badly and we have to live with the result, we have to score twice just to take the game (return leg) to extra time, but we will try to do our best," he said. With Swedish playmaker Emil Forsberg sidelined by a knee injury and lacking a talismanic goalscorer, Leipzig rarely



BUDAPEST: Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah (center) and Leipzig's Korean forward Hwang Hee-chan (left) vie for the ball during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match between RB Leipzig and FC Liverpool at the Puskas Arena in Budapest on Tuesday. — AFP

threatened to pull one back.

Liverpool were left to cruise to victory, keeping alive their hopes of silverware via Champions League glory this season despite their domestic woes. "We were for two years really good and then

this year we had some problems," said Klopp. "That's absolutely normal and I have no problem with that. It's just a lot of people probably expected us to slip again because of the situation and the boys didn't," he said. — AFP

Klopp urges Liverpool to build on win

BUDAPEST: Jurgen Klopp has urged Liverpool to build on their impressive Champions League last 16 away win against Leipzig which ended the Reds' miserable run of recent results. Liverpool threw off the shackles of three straight Premier League defeats with a slick performance and clinical finishing to dominate Leipzig in the first-leg tie in Budapest on Tuesday.

Goals by Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane in quick succession early in the second half capitalized on glaring errors in the Leipzig defense. However with Liverpool still 13 points behind leaders Manchester City in the Premier League table, Klopp knows the Reds must keep improving. "We're not children anymore, it's not as though we won that game and everything is fine again," Klopp told reporters at the Puskas Arena.

The Liverpool manager was heartened to see his side exploit the chances created and bounce back after morale-sapping defeats to Leicester City, Manchester City and Brighton in recent weeks. "We played dominating football, which hasn't happened often," admitted Klopp, who singled out goalkeeper Alisson Becker for making key saves to deny Leipzig. "We kept a clean sheet, we scored two goals, we forced our opponent to make the mistakes we have pretty much made in the last few weeks."

The first leg tie was switched from Leipzig due to Germany's strict Covid-19 travel restrictions and

was played behind closed doors in Budapest. Liverpool have one foot in the quarter-finals of Europe, but Klopp expects Leipzig to put up a fight in the return leg on March 10. "If you watch Leipzig more often, you would know their game can look completely different to tonight," said Klopp. "We looked at their line up (before kick-off) and we had no idea of the system they would play, they could have played six or seven different systems."

An uncharacteristic mistake by Leipzig captain Marcel Sabitzer resulted in the loose pass, which was snapped up by Salah to score the opening goal. Then Leipzig center-back Nordi Mukiele slipped attempting a clearance, which left Senegal forward Mane unopposed to fire past Peter Gulacsi in the Germans' goal. "I think people expected us to slip up and thought it would be a tricky tie for Liverpool, but we did it," said Klopp. "Whatever they tried, we had answers. They had chances but that the majority of the time we controlled the game well and that doesn't happen a lot against Leipzig."

Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson insisted the "job is only half done" after the Reds' win. "Overall, it was a pleasing performance, a good win but it is only half the job done," Henderson told BT Sport. "We just wanted to keep going, keep fighting. We've had a lot of difficult situations throughout the season. Tonight was a good step in the right direction, but we need to continue with that and if we do we'll get good results along the way."

On the other hand, Julian Nagelsmann's Leipzig face an uphill task in the return leg on March 10. "We weren't so brave with the possession we had, we made two huge mistakes which would be punished at any level," Nagelsmann told DAZN. "We created chances, which we didn't take, which will be a big topic for the second leg. It won't be easy, we



BUDAPEST: Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp reacts during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match between RB Leipzig and FC Liverpool at the Puskas Arena in Budapest on Tuesday. — AFP

have to score twice just to take the game (return leg) to extra time, but we will try to do our best. Liverpool will respect us and we have to be confident for the second game, because there is no other alternative." — AFP

Harden scores 38 as Nets overcome huge deficit vs Suns

LOS ANGELES: James Harden spearheaded the biggest halftime comeback in franchise history, scoring 38 points and the short-handed Brooklyn Nets rallied to stun the Phoenix Suns 128-124 on Tuesday. Harden caught fire late as the Nets stormed back from a 21-point halftime deficit to snap the Suns' season-best win streak at six NBA games. The Nets trailed by as much as 24 points. "We had nothing to lose but to fight back," said Nets coach Steve Nash. "We took advantage of outstanding defense in our own end and James made some big shots."

Harden added 11 assists, Joe Harris scored 22 points and Jeff Green scored 18 points off for the Nets, who won their fourth consecutive game despite playing without Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving. Durant missed his second consecutive game with a hamstring injury and Irving is bothered by a sore back. Chris Paul scored 17 of his 29 points in the fourth quarter and Devin Booker added 22 with seven assists in the loss in front of a pandemic limited crowd of 3,000 fans at the PHX Arena in Arizona.

It looked like the red-hot Suns might post a wire-to-wire win until Brooklyn took its first lead on a Harden three-pointer with 31 seconds remaining in the fourth. "The first five to six minutes of the third quarter our offense was in the mud," said Suns coach Monty Williams. "We gave one of the best offensive teams in the league life." The game marked the return of first-year coach Nash to Phoenix, where he earned MVP honors in 2005 and 2006.

Elsewhere, Damian Lillard drained three clutch three-pointers in four possessions late in the final quarter as the Portland Trail Blazers squandered a 24-point lead but held on to beat the Oklahoma



PHOENIX: James Harden #13 of the Brooklyn Nets drives the ball against Devin Booker #1 of the Phoenix Suns during the second half of the NBA game at Phoenix Suns Arena on Tuesday in Phoenix, Arizona. — AFP

City Thunder 115-104. Lillard finished with 31 points for the Blazers, who posted their fifth consecutive victory. Lillard drained the first of his three threes with just over four minutes left in the final quarter as he and Gary Trent combined to score 12 unanswered points to extend the Blazers win streak to five straight games. Lillard scored 14 of his 31 in the fourth quarter as Portland made 20 baskets from beyond the arc. He also had seven rebounds at Chesapeake Energy Arena in Oklahoma.

Even Lillard's teammates were in awe. "I went up to him and told him, 'You crazy, man!'" Enes Kanter said. "He's like a cheat code. I've never seen anything like this before and I've played with some great, great players." Trent added 19 points and Kanter had a game-high 21 rebounds. Luguentz Dort delivered 23 points and Hamidou Diallo came

off the bench to score 17 for the Thunder, who took the lead halfway through the fourth after holding Portland to two-of-13 shooting to begin the final quarter. "I feel like it just takes will and fight," Diallo said. "And I feel like with this group of guys that we have here, we're never going to give up, no matter what we're down."

In Minneapolis, LeBron James sparked the offense with 30 points and 13 rebounds as the reigning NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers shook off the absence of Anthony Davis to beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 112-104. Lakers also got 24 points from Dennis Schroder and 17 off the bench from Montrezl Harrell in the win. "We're not expecting one person to try to pick up A.D.'s productivity. Nobody's going to be able to do that. He just brings too much to the table. But we all can do more," James said. — AFP

Europa League returns amid COVID relocation complaints

LONDON: Manchester United and Arsenal face tough ties when the Europa League returns for the knockout stages tonight amid complaints over the relocation of various matches due to coronavirus restrictions.

Both legs between Arsenal and Benfica have been moved to neutral venues with Thursday's first clash taking place in Rome and the second leg in Athens. United's trip to Real Sociedad this week has also been switched to Turin with no elite sport exemption allowed for the English giants to travel to the Basque Country due to concerns over new strains of COVID-19.

Real Sociedad's director of football, Roberto Olabe, criticized UEFA for what he sees as an unfair advantage should the Spanish side have to play the second leg in Manchester. "It does not seem coherent to me that as the home team, we play on a neutral field and as a visitor, we do it there," he told Diario Vasco. "I would like the return to be also on a neutral ground or for UEFA to appoint a single venue for a one-game tie as it did last year."

United were involved in the final stages of last year's competition when one-off ties, all held in Germany, were used to make up for lost time due to the pandemic halting games across the continent for three months. The Red Devils manager, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, is also in favor of a return to the one-game format to ease the fixture burden with his side still involved in three competitions.

If United progressed to the finals of both the Europa League and FA Cup, they could still have 26 games to play before the end of the season, meaning they would be in action twice a week until late May. "It's not a decision we made but when one game is in a neutral venue, it's a disadvantage to the team that doesn't have the home game," said Solskjaer. "That's out of our hands. We can't say we'd go to Turin and play one game, I wouldn't mind that at all, it would be one game less."

Carrot of Champions League

However, there are no guarantees that Solskjaer's side will progress against Real Sociedad, who boast a collection of some of Europe's most exciting young talents, allied to the experience of David Silva, who was a consistent thorn in United's side during 10 years at Manchester City.

Swedish forward Aleksander Isak has scored six times in his last five La Liga games, while Spanish international Mikel Oyarzabal is the latest supreme talent to come through the club's youth academy, following in the footsteps of Xabi Alonso and Antoine Griezmann. Despite a flying start that took them to the top of La Liga, La Real have slipped to fifth and may now see winning the Europa League as their best chance of securing Champions League football next season.

The carrot of a return to the Champions League is even more pressing for Arsenal. After 19 seasons in Europe's premier club competition between 1998 and 2016/17, the Gunners have spent the last four seasons in the Europa League with severe financial repercussions. Sitting 10th in the Premier League, a top-four finish looks beyond Mikel Arteta's men. Tottenham Hotspur are another side who may have to pin their hopes of a Champions League return on Europa League success as they face Austrian side Wolfsberg, with the first leg moved to Budapest. — AFP

Sports

Mbappe hat-trick stuns Barca to put PSG in sight of quarter-finals

PSG 'too strong' even without Neymar, Di Maria

BARCELONA: Kylian Mbappe ripped Barcelona apart on Tuesday by scoring a stunning hat-trick in a 4-1 rout to put Paris Saint-Germain on the brink of the Champions League quarter-finals. Mbappe underlined his status as the rising superstar of world football with a ruthless display of finishing at Camp Nou that will go down as one of this competition's most devastating individual performances.

The 22-year-old eclipsed Barca's Lionel Messi, whose opening goal from the penalty spot had been reduced to nothing more than a footnote by the final whistle. Moise Kean also headed in midway through the second half, carelessly left unmarked from a free-kick as PSG pulled away to win this first leg, and perhaps the tie.

Barcelona will no doubt draw upon the spirit of their astonishing 'Remontada' in 2017, when they won the second leg 6-1 to overturn a 4-0 deficit from the opening game in Paris. It will certainly serve as a warning for PSG but without fans, and with Mbappe, all hopes of a repeat for Ronald Koeman's side from look faint at best. Mbappe ran them ragged all night long. "The great footballers write their stories in the biggest matches," said Mauricio Pochettino. "We had no doubts before the game and even less now that we are seeing a top, top player."

Koeman had gambled on the fitness of Gerard Pique, who had not played a game in almost three months due to a knee ligament injury. But to rub salt into the wounds, Pique trudged off late on just as PSG were running riot. This was a chastening experience for Koeman's youthful side, who had shown signs of a resurgence in recent weeks in La Liga but were exposed against an opponent of an altogether different class.

Koeman was even asked if he wanted to continue as coach but was defiant. "I accept a defeat and

go to work. If I was a person who was very happy when we win and then with a result like today said I have no desire to continue, that would be crazy. I know where we are, we have to change, we are not at the end of this road, we are halfway through."

Even without the injured Neymar and Angel Di Maria, PSG were too strong, a breathless, entertaining first half giving way to a French obliteration in the second. PSG's new boss Pochettino pumped a fist at the end, after a huge early boost to his credibility.

Early warning signs

The warning signs for the hosts came early as Mbappe sped in behind their central defense after 52 seconds, only for Marc-Andre ter Stegen to clear just in time. For half an hour, the chances just kept coming, at both ends. Antoine Griezmann scuttled through but was denied by Keylor Navas at the near post and then Pedri made up for a mis-control by dashing back to prevent Mauro Icardi's finish from trickling in.

Messi's pass led to Barca's opener, a clipped ball over the top attracting the gaze of Layvin Kurzawa as he tracked back and inadvertently tripped Frenkie de Jong in front of him. Messi slammed the penalty into the top corner. PSG were briefly shell-shocked and for the next five minutes, Koeman's men chased a second, with Messi freeing Ousmane Dembele in the area but he failed to connect.

Yet as they gained in confidence, they also left gaps and PSG hit back. Mbappe had already seen a flicked finish blocked by Pique and moments later he made sure, taming Marco Verratti's astute pull-back with one touch before feathering another expertly around Clement Lenglet in the six-yard box and unleashing past Ter Stegen.



BARCELONA: Paris Saint-Germain's Italian forward Moise Kean (right) scores a header during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match between FC Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain FC at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Tuesday. —AFP

Now the Parisians were on top, with Kurzawa thwarted by Ter Stegen's fingertips and Barca relieved to reach half-time. But Mbappe was relentless, motoring past opponents every time he got the ball and never letting up. Ter Stegen had to save a deflected shot from Kean before PSG took charge with two goals in five minutes.

Pique could only hack away Alessandro

Florenzi's cross to the feet of Mbappe, who clipped in his second, and then Kean headed home, left free at the back post by Lenglet. Navas almost gifted Barcelona a lifeline when his clearance met Griezmann's left foot and the ball drifted just wide of his own post. Instead, Mbappe landed the knock-out blow, teed up on the counter-attack and curling beautifully in the far corner. —AFP

Europe's media hails 'hurricane' Mbappe

PARIS: Europe's media lavished praise on PSG's "hurricane" superstar Kylian Mbappe after a stunning Champions League hat-trick blew away Lionel Messi's Barcelona at the Nou Camp on Tuesday. The 22-year-old's goals in the round of 16 first-leg tie made him the first-ever player to score a hat-trick against Barcelona in the knockout stages of the elite competition.

French daily L'Equipe called the striker "atomic" and the team a "formidable collective force" which stopped the genius of Messi, who is considered one of the greatest footballers of all time. It called PSG's stars "Galacticos" on its front page and said "it will be necessary to consider stopping football" if the Parisians do not qualify for the quarter-finals after securing a 4-1 first-leg lead.

'Historic display'

Spain's Madridista press, while hailing the young Frenchman, was more critical of the Barcelona performance. Madrid daily AS did not

hold back, saying Barcelona had seen in PSG "a mirror that reflects their image" of a team that now "terrorizes, subdues and destroys them".

"Mbappe went through the Camp Nou and devastated it like a hurricane, with a historic display, one that will remain etched in memories forever," wrote the Marca daily, also from Madrid. Missing other top stars Neymar and Angel Di Maria, PSG were "led by an unstoppable Kylian and a colossal Verratti," it said, calling Barcelona "light years away from the great dominators of the continent, once again humiliated in the Champions League."

"Mbappe destroys Barca in the Nou Camp," read the headline in Barcelona daily Mundo Deportivo. "Barca remain very, very far from the level required for the Champions League," it read. The other Barcelona sports daily, Sport, said Barca were "pulverised by PSG" and Mbappe "has proven to be an uncontrollable giant".

'Changing of the guard'

British tabloid The Sun said the match pointed to a "changing of the guard at the head of world football" as speculation mounts that Messi will part ways with his longtime club at the end of the season. "Lionel Messi,



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Spanish defender Gerard Pique (left) challenges Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match between FC Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain FC at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Tuesday. —AFP

for so long the planet's greatest player not only of his day but of all time, was completely upstaged by Kylian Mbappe," it wrote. It said the "electric Frenchman" of just 22 years "now looks ready to claim Messi's crown as the king of world football" after his hat-trick.

The Daily Telegraph echoed that sentiment, saying that if it was Messi's

final European adventure with Barcelona "it might well be remembered as the season in which the crown was ripped from his head". It said Mbappe produced "one of the great European hat-tricks of recent years" while Messi faded from the game "like a light bulb losing power". The PSG star delivered "nothing short of a masterclass," it concluded. —AFP

PSG banish memory of 'remontada'

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe had already won the World Cup and scored in the final, but he had not yet produced a Champions League performance on the level of his devastating display that blew away Lionel Messi and Barcelona on Tuesday.

His hat-trick, capped by the emphatic finish at the end of an 85th-minute counter-attack, secured a stunning 4-1 win for Paris Saint-Germain — without Neymar — in their last 16 first leg that leaves the French club on the brink of the quarter-finals.

The 22-year-old terrorized Barcelona right-back Sergino Dest all evening long and led PSG's fightback after they fell behind to Messi's first-half penalty. "When Kylian shines in the big matches it makes the difference," captain Marquinhos told French broadcaster RMC Sport after a result that should help exorcise some old demons for the Qatar-owned club.

Much of the talk coming into Tuesday's match was about what happened the last time these sides met in Catalonia. Four years ago, at the same stage of the competition, PSG arrived at the Camp Nou having won the first leg 4-0 and departed on the end of a historic, humiliating 6-1 hammering. Yet that game has turned out to be devastating for Barcelona.

PSG responded to the embarrass-

ment of the infamous "remontada" (Spanish for "comeback") by buying the architect of their downfall that night, paying a world record fee of 222 million euros (\$264m at the time) to activate Neymar's release clause.

Barcelona squandered the money received and now find themselves in possibly ruinous debt while also having squandered the last years of Messi at his peak. If last season's 8-2 quarter-final demolition at the hands of Bayern Munich was not to be the end for the Argentine with Barcelona in the Champions League, then Mbappe's devastating display surely is. PSG did not even need Neymar, who is nursing a groin injury, to pull off a memorable result for recently-appointed coach Mauricio Pochettino. Nor did they need Angel Di Maria, who is also sidelined.

Will he stay in Paris?

Amid all the talk that Neymar is close to signing a new contract to keep him in Paris beyond the end of his existing deal in 2022, Tuesday's game was a reminder of the importance of Mbappe to the PSG project. He humiliated Barcelona and in doing so may well have convinced Real Madrid president Florentino Perez of the need to find the funds to bring him to the Bernabeu.

Mbappe's contract expires at the end of next season. He has not yet decided whether to sign a new deal with his hometown club. It could still get far worse for Barcelona, should Mbappe end up in Madrid and PSG decide to replace him with Messi, whose own contract expires in June. That is possible.

Inevitably, Mbappe was asked about



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi walks off the pitch at the end of the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match between FC Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain FC at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Tuesday. —AFP

his contractual situation in the wake of what is his signature Champions League performance for PSG. "The question often comes up but it is not only that. It would be, in inverted commas, 'stupid' to make a decision about my future based on one good or bad game," he said. "It would be ridiculous to say I wasn't going to sign a new contract if we had lost. It is a long-term thing, my decision won't be based on one or two games, but I have always said I was happy here and I am even happier after a match like this."

Last season's beaten finalists will surely not let this first-leg advantage slip, even if Neymar may not be fit for the return. Without the Brazilian alongside him, Mbappe became just

the second player to score a Champions League hat-trick against Barcelona at the Camp Nou, following in the footsteps of Andriy Shevchenko, who achieved the feat for Dynamo Kiev in 1997.

Mbappe is also, after four and a half years at the club, now PSG's third top scorer of all time. With 110 goals, only Edinson Cavani and Zlatan Ibrahimovic remain ahead of him. "I always wanted to give my best for Paris Saint-Germain. These colors mean a lot to me," said the former Monaco star. "I have not always had the breaks and maybe there will be other games where I don't turn up, but I will never hide. I might make mistakes, get things wrong, but I will never hide." —AFP

Koeman faces scrutiny after PSG halt Barca revival

MADRID: Ronald Koeman said Barcelona were not ready yet to win the biggest trophies but Paris Saint-Germain showed them on Tuesday how far they have to go. Kylian Mbappe ran riot at Camp Nou, his hat-trick signing off one of the great individual performances of the Champions League era and elevating his status to arguably the most dangerous player in the world.

The 22-year-old certainly outshone Lionel Messi, even if snap comparisons are perhaps unfair on the Argentinian, given the mismatch in the teams each had behind them. This was not a contest between Mbappe and Messi nor a failure on Messi's part that his Barcelona side were overrun, outclassed and ultimately obliterated, a 4-1 defeat putting PSG within sight of the quarter-finals.

Instead, it was a reality check for Koeman's Barca, a brutal assessment of where they are in their recovery and a measuring of the distance still to be covered before they can rejoin Europe's elite. "I know where we are," said Koeman. "We have to change but we are not at the end of this road, we are halfway through."

The problem for Koeman was not the result, which many had expected before Neymar's injury and a string of encouraging displays in La Liga raised false hope. If the mauling by Bayern Munich last season was the end of something for Barcelona, a cycle finished and players subsequently discarded, Koeman's project is, in theory, just beginning.

Of those that played on Tuesday, Pedri is 18 and Sergino Dest 20, with Oscar Mingueza, Francisco Trincao and Riqui Puig all 21. Ousmane Dembele and Frenkie de Jong are both 23. For some of these players, this was the biggest game of their careers and it showed, the usually immaculate Pedri miscontrolling a pass or De Jong stumbling into an opponent instead of gliding by.

And yet what may trouble the players, Messi and perhaps Barcelona's incoming president next month was the extent of the gap, how by the end the full-time whistle felt like a relief. In an interview with Movistar television afterwards, De Jong struggled to find the words. "I don't know, there is one leg left," he said. "It will be very difficult, we all know that, but we will try."

'We have to change'

"There is always another match," said Koeman. "But after a 1-4 (loss) at home I'm not going to lie to you, there is very little chance." He had gambled on the fitness of Gerard Pique and then took him off with 12 minutes left, not for injury but preservation. "There was no need to take risks," said Koeman, who was even asked if he had the desire to carry on. "Fortunately I'm a fairly honest and up-front person," Koeman said. "If I was someone who gets happy when we win and then after a result like today said I had no desire to continue, that would be crazy. I know where we are. We have to change but we're not at the end of this road, we're halfway through."

Before kick-off, Koeman had arrived at the stadium gates in his car, with Barcelona fans cheering as they saw him and chanting his name. Since his appointment last summer, Koeman has stabilised Barca, instilled a sense of purpose and promoted youth. —AFP

Tsitsipas upsets Nadal in Melbourne

Barty's over for Aussie hopes • Williams vs Osaka today

MELBOURNE: Stefanos Tsitsipas ended Rafael Nadal's Grand Slam record bid in five gripping sets yesterday as home hopes were dashed when top-ranked Ashleigh Barty was knocked out in the Australian Open quarter-finals.

Greece's Tsitsipas looked down and out after losing the first two sets but after edging the third he was a different player, taking the upper hand over a subdued Nadal to win 3-6, 2-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-4, 7-5. Tsitsipas, 22, stunned

Roger Federer in the 2019 last 16 before being halted by Nadal in the semis, but he turned the tables to set up a last-four meeting with Russia's Daniil Medvedev.

Underlining the scale of the upset, it was only the second time Nadal has lost a Grand Slam five-setter from two sets to love after his defeat to Fabio Fognini at the 2015 US Open. "I don't know what happened after the third set — I fly like a little bird, everything was working for me," the fifth seed said. "The emo-

tions at the end were indescribable, they were something else."

The defeat will sting for Nadal, who was drawing closer to a 21st major title and sole ownership of the all-time men's record he currently shares with the injury-sidelined Federer. Tsitsipas's reward is a meeting tomorrow with Medvedev, his third Grand Slam semi, with top-ranked Novak Djokovic or Russian qualifier Aslan Karatsev waiting in Sunday's final.

The classic encounter played out in front of 15,000 empty seats at Rod Laver Arena, with fake crowd noises added to the TV broadcast, on the last day of a snap, state-wide coronavirus lockdown. Up to 7,477 fans — about half capacity — will be allowed at the center court from today after Victoria's state government eased the restrictions. However, fans will no longer be able to see Barty, the world number one whose dreams of ending Australia's 43-year wait for a domestic winner were dashed by the unlikely figure of Karolina Muchova.

In hot conditions, Barty raced through the first set but Muchova dominated after a medical timeout for dizziness, winning 1-6, 6-3, 6-2 to reach her first Grand Slam semi-final as the Australian crumbled. "I was a bit lost on the court and my head was spinning so I took a break," said Muchova, while Barty, a semi-finalist last year, called her latest near-miss "heartbreaking". But the top seed added: "Will it deter me, will it ruin the fact we've had a really successful start to our season? Absolutely not."

Muchova will face Jennifer Brady in the last four after the 22nd seed beat her fellow American and close friend Jessica Pegula 4-6, 6-2, 6-1. Brady's achievement is notable, as she is the last woman standing among those who served a hard 14-day quarantine after arriving in Australia — unlike other players, who were allowed out of their hotels for five

hours a day to train. "I felt the pressure from her. She's such an aggressive player," said Brady, who also reached the semis at last year's US Open. "I was looking to push her back and get more on offense. I think I played a really good third set."

Medvedev and Andrey Rublev were both unbeaten this year but their all-Russian quarter-final was disappointing. Medvedev, older and higher-ranked, took control after a tight first set, winning 7-5, 6-3, 6-2 as his rival

struggled in the intense afternoon heat.



"We had some unbelievable rallies and after the point it's tough to breathe," said Medvedev, the 25-year-old world number four. "I think I'm one of the first players to make Andrey that tired on the court so I'm quite happy." Defending champion Djokovic plays Karatsev in today's men's semi-final, while Muchova faces Brady and Serena Williams plays Naomi Osaka in the women's last four. — AFP



MELBOURNE: Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas (right) and Spain's Rafael Nadal greet each other after their men's singles quarter-final match on day ten of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP



MELBOURNE: Czech Republic's Karolina Muchova (right) shakes hands with Australia's Ashleigh Barty after their women's singles quarter-final match on day ten of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP



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