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Some arrivals exempt from mandatory hotel quarantine

Interior minister urges travelers to abide by new instructions



KUWAIT: The Central Bank building and Souq Sharq are illuminated in the colors of the national flag yesterday as Kuwait prepares to celebrate its 60th National Day and 30th Liberation Day. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation said on Friday that Kuwaiti patients and students, unaccompanied under-18-year-old travelers, diplomats and medical staff arriving from coronavirus high-risk countries are exempt from hotel quarantine, provided that they quarantine at home for the entire 14-day period.

As of Sunday, Feb 21, arrivals from these countries via direct flights will have to quarantine at a local hotel for 14 days at their own expense, the DGCA said in a press statement. Those arriving from other countries will have to quarantine at a local hotel for only seven days at their own expense and isolate themselves for another seven days at their homes. The DGCA added that all travelers have to register on its Kuwait Mosafer platform. Those who do not register will not be allowed to board the plane, it warned.

Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah on Thursday called on travelers to abide by all health and regulatory instructions related to the fight against the coronavirus. The minister also asked all travelers to and from Kuwait to register on the Kuwait Mosafer application for all health and safety instructions and guidelines, according to a statement by ministry's department of security media and public relations.

Sheikh Thamer said all travelers have to make prior reservations for hotel quarantine and pay for two PCR tests in Kuwait. The minister called on both nationals and residents to be committed to the instructions set by the health authorities to curb the spread of COVID-19. Travelers will be allowed to travel only after registering on the Kuwait Mosafer app and complete hotel reservation measures, he stressed. — KUNA

News in brief

US reaffirms Saudi partnership

RIYADH: Washington has reaffirmed its "strategic defense partnership" with Riyadh in the face of increased attacks by Yemeni rebels. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin condemned the Houthi attacks in a telephone conversation Thursday with his Saudi counterpart, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. — AFP

Women 'limit behavior'

VIENNA: A huge majority of young European women limit where they go or who they spend time with for fear of assault or harassment, according to a report published Friday. "Shocking, 83 percent of women aged between 16 and 29 limit where they go or who they spend time with to protect themselves," the report from the Vienna-based Fundamental Rights Agency said. — AFP

Trump ally violated embargo

WASHINGTON: Private security contractor and ally of former US President Trump Erik Prince violated a United Nations arms embargo on Libya, UN investigators have found. The confidential report to the Security Council said Prince deployed a force of foreign mercenaries and weapons to strongman Khalifa Haftar. The accusation exposes Prince to possible UN sanctions, including a travel ban. — AFP

Google fires AI researcher

SAN FRANCISCO: Google said Friday it fired a lead artificial intelligence ethics researcher, following controversy last year over the tech giant's dismissal of a black colleague who was an outspoken diversity advocate. "I'm fired," Margaret Mitchell announced on Twitter. Google told AFP that after reviewing "this manager's conduct, we confirmed that there were multiple violations of our code of conduct, as well as of our security policies." — AFP

World tops 200m vaccine doses; G7 boosts funding

PARIS: The number of coronavirus vaccine doses administered worldwide passed 200 million yesterday, an AFP count showed, as wealthy G7 countries pledged to more than double aid to support access

for the less well-off. With 45 percent of injections so far among the rich club - which accounts for just 10 percent of the global population - the G7 on Friday said its aid to projects like the World Health Organization's Covax now amount to \$7.5 billion.

The increased pledges from the US, Germany, France, Britain, Italy, Japan and Canada came as permanent UN Security Council member Britain showed a draft resolution to other countries on the global body, calling for wealthy nations to share doses with poor and war-torn states. Seen by AFP, the text "emphasizes the need for solidarity, equity,

and efficacy and invites donation of vaccine doses from developed economies to low- and middle-income countries and other countries in need."

Meanwhile Russia pressed ahead with its home-grown vaccination program, saying 120,000 doses of its third authorized coronavirus vaccine, CoviVac, will reach people by March, following in the footsteps of the Sputnik V and EpiVacCorona shots. The new vaccine, still in final stage clinical trials, was produced by the state-run Chumakov Centre based in Moscow and employed a different method

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Kim files for divorce from Kanye

LOS ANGELES: Reality TV star Kim Kardashian has filed for divorce from rapper Kanye West after almost seven years of marriage, her publicist told AFP Friday. The mega-celebrity couple's divorce proceedings came just weeks after US media reported the pair were living separately and going through counseling dealing with "regular relationship issues". Celebrity gossip site TMZ - which broke the news Friday - said the separation was

"as amicable as a divorce can be".

Kardashian, 40, is asking for joint custody of the couple's four children, it added, with her lawyer Laura Wasser reportedly handing in the divorce papers Friday. Kardashian's publicist confirmed the divorce filing but did not provide further details. The pair, who began dating in 2012 and married in a lavish ceremony in Italy two years later, rapidly became one of the world's most instantly recognizable couples.

But their union has been dogged for months by reports in the gossip press that their marriage was on the rocks as West has battled with mental health issues and launched an improbable and controversial foray into

Continued on Page 2



LOS ANGELES: US media personality Kim Kardashian West and husband US rapper Kanye West attend the WSJ Magazine 2019 Innovator Awards at MOMA in this Nov 6, 2019 file photo. — AFP

Food poverty hits foreign students in UK

LONDON: On a recent rainy evening in East London, dozens of young people lined up outside a cramped community hub to collect rice, vegetables and other food essentials. In the line were foreign students who came to Britain to pursue their dreams of higher education, but have found

themselves plunged into pandemic-driven poverty.

"Finding food here is hard - prices are higher compared to India," said Jay Patel, an Indian student among those waiting outside the Newham Community Project, a local charity handing out the foodstuffs. The 19-year-old, who is studying at the University of Greenwich in southeast London, said he has been unable to get a part-time job during the health crisis and could not ask his family back in India for money. The food bank, which conducts the handouts

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LONDON: An international student leaves after collecting food packages from the Newham Community Project food bank on Feb 16, 2021. — AFP

Local

Kuwait lists further 862 COVID-19 cases, five deaths

Slight drop in number of patients in hospitals, ICUs

KUWAIT: Kuwait said 862 people tested positive for coronavirus with five related deaths reported yesterday, taking the total cases and deaths to 183,322 and 1,039 respectively. The health ministry had reported 976 new infections and seven deaths on Friday. Meanwhile, total recoveries rose to 171,260 as the ministry announced 934 new recoveries yesterday and 920 on Friday.

The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood yesterday at 11,023, with 146 of them in intensive care units (ICU), according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad. This is down from 11,100 hospitalized patients and 148 ICU patients announced on Friday. Dr Sanad added yesterday that health

workers conducted 7,601 swab tests over the past 24 hours, while the number of swabs announced Friday was



934 recoveries in 24 hours

10,016, bringing the total to 1,725,698. He renewed the call to the public to continue observing social distancing. Furthermore, he recommended visiting the ministry and official bodies' accounts on social media to get

acquainted with recommendations and guidelines regarding the virus.

The slight drop in infected cases and patients in hospital comes as a slight relief as authorities mull all scenarios to help curb the spread of the novel coronavirus since the recent spike. The government had Thursday quashed rumors that a decision to impose a lockdown to contain the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. "No decision has been issued to impose a partial or total lockdown. However, all options to face the consequences of the COVID-19 are on the table of the health authorities," government spokesman Tareq Al-Mazrem said on his Twitter account. He called on all to comply with health measures and to stay away from

rumors. The government had shut down salons, barbershops, gyms and massage parlors for a month starting from February 7, and ordered commercial shops, restaurants, cafes and malls to close at 8:00 pm.

Meanwhile, the airport prepares today to welcome flights under strict regulations, which includes a mandatory quarantine in a local hotel for 14 days for arrivals from high-risk countries through direct flights, and seven days in a hotel for arrivals from non-high-risk countries, followed by a seven-day home quarantine period. Travelers must register in the 'Kuwait Mosafer' platform, and those who fail to do so will not be allowed to board the plane, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation warned.



Six rescued from Um Al-Haiman house fire



KUWAIT: Firemen rescued six persons who were trapped in a house in Um Al-Haiman yesterday. Um Al-Haiman and Mina Abdullah Fire Stations responded to an emergency call reporting the fire, and they were able to evacuate the house before tackling the blaze. Five children and a woman were taken to hospital as investigations are underway to determine the cause of the fire, Kuwait Fire Force said in a press statement.

World tops 200m vaccine doses; G7...

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of development from Sputnik and EpiVacCorona, using an inactive virus. "Today Russia is the only country in which there are already three vaccines for the prevention of COVID infection," Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin said.

And New Zealand began what director-general of health Ashley Bloomfield called a "small but important step in a long journey" by launching jabs for high risk citizens and those returning from overseas, along with border and quarantine workers. Neighboring Australia is set to start its own scheme tomorrow.

In Argentina, health minister Gines Gonzalez Garci resigned late Friday after it emerged that he had been helping friends skip the line for vaccine shots. President Alberto Fernandez called on him to quit after a 71-year-old journalist, Horacio Verbitsky, announced on the radio that his long-standing friendship with the minister helped him get vaccinated in his office ahead of the general population. Local media reported that other people close to the government were also vaccinated at the health ministry.

In Romania, the government pushed the coun-

try's thousands of homeless people up the priority list for vaccines, placing them on a par with the elderly and the chronically ill and reaching 300 in the first days of the drive. "These people are among the most exposed to infection risk. It's hard for most of them to follow infection control measures," junior health minister Andrei Baciu told AFP. Even as countries move forward with vaccinations, the death toll is ticking upwards, with an AFP tally reaching more than 2.45 million worldwide by 1100 GMT yesterday, with almost 111 million cases.

Despite the still alarming figures, it could be an uphill struggle to get some vaccinated as skepticism remains entrenched. US President Joe Biden on Friday reassured people the shots were safe as he visited a Pfizer factory in Michigan. "Please, for yourself, your family, your community, this country, take the vaccine when it's your turn and it's available. That's how we beat this pandemic," he said.

And with vaccines yet to reach the majority of people almost everywhere, countries continue to resort to familiar methods to limit infections. Senegal's government said yesterday it would extend for a further month an overnight 9 pm to 5 am curfew, first introduced in early January in capital Dakar and the western Thies region.

Meanwhile French health minister Olivier Veran said he had asked a top local official to "toughen up" a curfew in southeastern city Nice and the surrounding Alpes-Maritimes department faced with rising cases - or even return to a "partial or full lockdown". —AFP

Kim files for divorce...

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US politics. West, 43, has opened up about his struggles with bipolar disorder.

In July last year the mercurial entertainment mogul launched a bid for the US presidency with a rambling speech during which he revealed he had wanted to abort his daughter, and broke down in tears. He also posted a series of tweets, later deleted, that accused his wife and mother-in-law of trying to lock him up, and suggested he was seeking a divorce.

Kardashian called on the media and public to show "compassion and empathy" following her husband's erratic behavior. "Those that understand mental illness or even compulsive behavior know that the family is powerless unless the member is a minor," Kardashian said in her lengthy Instagram post in July. The couple has four children: Seven-

year-old daughter North, son Saint, five, daughter Chicago, three, and 21-month-old son Psalm.

Aside from family visits, West has been living at his sprawling ranch in Wyoming in recent months, while Kardashian and the children stayed in California. It would be the first divorce for West and the third for Kardashian, who came to fame with the US reality TV series "Keeping Up with the Kardashians" which followed the lives of her family members in Los Angeles.

Chicago-raised rapper and record producer West has won 21 Grammys. He burst onto the rap scene on his production chops, before delivering a string of critically acclaimed studio albums, selling over 20 million copies. He has made a very public turn to Christian evangelism in recent years, finally releasing his long-awaited gospel album.

The pair began dating in 2012 while Kardashian was going through divorce proceedings with second husband Kris Humphries. First child North was born in June 2013, and the couple married the following year at a 16th-century fortress in Florence, Italy after a pre-wedding celebration held at Versailles palace in France. — AFP

Food poverty hits foreign...

Continued from Page 1

three nights a week, has become a lifeline for Patel and other foreign students facing a similar plight. "I actually arrived at the wrong time," he added of coming to the UK. "It's a very difficult situation. Without this support, I guess we would have to start starving." Britain - which is among the hardest hit countries in Europe from the coronavirus, registering nearly 120,000 deaths and severe economic fallout - is a popular destination for foreign students. Repeated lockdowns across the country, requiring all hospitality venues and non-essential retail shops to close, have led to millions losing their jobs. Students, who often work in low-pay roles in restaurants, bars and stores, have struggled in particular.

Despite frigid temperatures and driving rain, the line outside the Newham Community Project remained long throughout the evening until the doors closed at 11:00 pm. Volunteers have become familiar with some of the regulars, who have been visiting the food bank every week for more than six months.

Inside, they busily pack bags with the packets of rice and other essentials, including ingredients to make vegetarian or halal meals. The grassroots organization, first formed in 2008 to help the neediest in Newham - one of the more deprived areas of the British capital - began its food distribution efforts during the first lockdown last April, when Ramadan began. "We started with about 20 food packs a day but slowly, within a couple of weeks, we were getting 800 students," said manager Elyas Ismail. "We saw

the need was enormous, so we've just decided to carry on. And the numbers have just been basically increasing every week." Ismail estimated he now helps around 2,000 households weekly - including some groups of up to 15 students crowded into single flats, given London's high rental costs.

The majority of foreign students in Britain are non-European, with more than 400,000 coming in 2020, mostly from China and India, according to the Higher Education Statistics Agency. At the Newham food bank, almost all are from India. Ismail noted they are typically from poor families. Often their parents sold jewelry and other possessions of value to fund their children's relocation to the UK.

Volunteer Aamena Ismail, 21, added that their student visas do not allow them to access any government support. "It's honestly heartbreaking, they come in hoping for a better life," she said. "The UK government needs to take into account that this policy is just unfair."

Alpef Shaik, 23, is one such student who came to Britain to fulfill the dream of his uneducated parents that he get "a better education" for himself. Six months after his arrival to complete a masters course at the University of East London, the pandemic hit and resulting lockdowns began. "Things changed very much and it got worse, worse, worse," he told AFP, noting it scuppered his studies and part-time job. Shaik said the costs of living and studying in the UK were now "not worth it". "I'm paying for a Rolls-Royce and I'm getting an old normal Toyota car," he added.

Mohammed Ahmed, 25, came to London to support his wife, who is studying at the private BPP University, but now also fears their future is in jeopardy. "Due to this pandemic situation, we can't fulfill our expectations," he said. "If the situation continues like this, I'll need to go back to my country, because we can't survive." — AFP



PORTAGE, Michigan: US President Joe Biden tours the Pfizer Kalamazoo Manufacturing Site with CEO of Pfizer Albert Bourla on Friday. — AFP

Local

Group demands clear plan to resume classes in Kuwait

‘Education First Kuwait’ says classes should return as soon as possible

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: A year after in-person classes were halted, a group called ‘Education First Kuwait’ has demanded the education ministry must lay down a clear roadmap for face-to-face classes to resume as soon as possible. Dr Duna Al-Mashaan, education consultant and one of the group’s advocates, spoke to Kuwait Times on the one-year anniversary of school closures in Kuwait at Bcurious Preschool in Shuhada.

“One year is very long. Countries around us in the Middle East and even other countries in the West are back to traditional classes, of course with strict implementation of health protocols. If they can, why can’t we,” she asked. Mashaan said until now there has been no clear plan or path for action to go back to traditional face-to-face classes, adding “365 days without traditional classes affects the learning abilities of our students and can affect our children’s academic and mental abilities too.”

“We must do something about this. We call upon the government to set a clear roadmap for schools on where to go and the fastest way to return to the traditional school setting. September is coming, the next school year is coming, but there is no clear plan yet. They only talk about bringing back traditional classes, but any plan has to be rolling by now because other countries around us in the Middle East are back to traditional schooling,” Mashaan said.

‘Live with COVID’

“We have to learn to live with COVID - this COVID will stay till kingdom come! We need a plan; we need radical actions in the sector of education because we are already left behind. It is affecting our children, so we want to see a plan.

When will be the start of face-to-face classes - we need to know by now,” she demanded.

According to Mashaan, the government must understand that based on studies, face-to-face classes are not likely to be main COVID superspreader events. “Based on previous studies, face-to-face classes are not spreaders of the disease, but restaurants and gatherings at diwanis and weddings are. New York schools are at 0.5 percent infection rates only compared to the community spread of over 3 percent. In Qatar, there is only a 0.7 percent infection rate, while the community spread is much higher at 12-13 percent,” she said.

Education First Kuwait is advocating for a hybrid form of face-to-face classes. “If there are 20 students in one classroom, 10 must come to school and the other 10 must attend online classes at home and vice-versa - alternate students who attended classes at school today and the next day,” Mashaan said. “We need to be creative; we need to ask our government to allow traditional classes as soon as possible. If they plan to do this in September, by now we should be ready with a clear path forward.”

Children ‘unhappy’

Based on studies, according to Mashaan, the closure of schools only brought children unhappiness, uneasiness, lack of motivation and loss of social skills. Because of non-traditional schooling, children are beginning to



Dr Duna Al-Mashaan



engage in dangerous activities such as unsupervised Internet browsing, bullying of siblings and withdrawal, she added.

“Children need to socialize to develop their sense of self. They can see themselves through their peers. They are missing this part of growing up and we need to be reminded that we are in charge of these children. We have to do our part and not deny them and not deprive them of this important part of their social being,” Mashaan said.

Dr Mashaan graduated from The College of William & Mary with a PhD in Education Policy, Planning and Leadership. She earned her Master’s degree from New York University in Early Children’s Education, specializing in Montessori education. Mashaan has carried out cutting-edge research in the field of child education at some leading US universities, and also applied her findings at some of New York’s finest early childhood schools.

Mashaan said her group has been trying their best to talk to Kuwait’s decision- and policy-makers since April last year to recon-

sider their decision to suspend face-to-face classes and their desire to go back to traditional classes as soon as possible.

Rakan, an eighth-grade student at an international school in Kuwait, said he misses traditional school very much, especially his classmates. “I miss the stories we shared every day; the laughter and running around the school campus. I am a grade-8 student and am not very keen on continuing schooling online. I miss my classmates and my regular activities like football, swimming and tennis. Before, I was preoccupied with all these activities, but they all stopped. I hope we can go back to school and to regular sports activities very soon,” he told Kuwait Times.

Rakan said one year is too long for online home schooling. “I am more motivated studying if I can see my peers and classmates in a regular classroom setting. There are assignments and deskwork in the online setup, but face-to-face classes are far different from being at home with limited spaces,” he said.

UNESCO: COVID caused biggest educational disruption in history

PARIS: The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had caused possibly the biggest educational disruption in history with the closure of schools and universities in many countries, Director General of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Audrey Azoulay said Friday. In an exclusive statement to KUNA, Azoulay indicated that closures had added up to problems facing education prior to the spread of the virus with major shifts affecting almost all educational entities worldwide. If the situation continued, the losses will be immeasurable especially in the case of children who will have their mental health at risk,

she indicated. Azoulay urged for keeping schools open and also called for reopening educational institutes at the nearest possible opportunity with necessary health guidelines and precautions put in place.

The Director General pointed out that UNESCO supported online studying and distance learning, but stressed that it should not replace education at schools and universities. Being at school and interacting with students and teachers are very important aspects of the educational process and it is necessary for governments and organizations to find means to protect students’ health and also boost their academic interests and wellbeing. When the pandemic reached its peak in the spring of 2020, around 1.6 billion students abstained from going to schools in some 190 countries, an equivalent of 90 percent of students worldwide.

Over a year had passed since COVID-19 spread and above 800 million students are facing disruption in education due to partial closure of schools or decreasing school hours, revealed Azoulay who added the gap in funding education annually might increase to \$200 billion especially in poor coun-

tries. The pandemic had affected the education of female students and also led to students in lower- and middle-income countries to lose four months’ worth of education while their counterparts in high-income countries also lost about six weeks of education, Azoulay said.

The UNESCO Director General also warned that some 450 million students worldwide were not able to benefit from distance education, pointing out that four out of five students in Africa were unable to use this method compared to their counterparts in Western Europe and North America where one out of seven students have this privilege. In regards to impact of COVID-19 on culture, Azoulay said that some 54 percent of World Heritage sites are closed or partially closed and affects employment with workers becoming on the verge of poverty due to the fact that some 13 percent of museums around the world will not reopen due to hard lockdowns.

UNESCO, she stressed, will stand in solidarity with cultural sites’ employees in addition to artists to keep art and culture alive. She added that UNESCO encouraged supporting artists in the cultural sector by buying their products and urged



Audrey Azoulay

cyber platforms to review their tax policies for said products to help culture and art thrive once more. Authorities of course must also play their part in supporting cultural sector employees within the grand plan of recovery from the impact of the coronavirus. —KUNA

Bhutan Ambassador congratulates Kuwait

KUWAIT: The Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the State of Kuwait released the following statement congratulating the government and people of Kuwait on the occasion of the 60th National Day and 30th Liberation Day of Kuwait:

“On the joyous occasion of the 60th National Day and the 30th Anniversary of the Liberation Day of the friendly country of Kuwait, His Majesty the King and the Royal Family of Bhutan, the government and the people of Bhutan, join me in sending our warm felicitations and Tashi Delek to His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and the friendly people of Kuwait.

“Over the years, Kuwait has witnessed rapid development in various fields. Politically, the government has succeeded in establishing deep rooted principles of democracy, people’s participation in decision making, freedom of speech and expression. Economically, there is rapid progress in its path to transform the country into an economic and financial hub in the region. In diplomatic front, His Highness the Amir continues to be the leading voice on the world stage for peace, moderation and friendly relations.

“I am confident that the close and deep rooted ties of friendship, understanding and cooperation between Bhutan and Kuwait, will continue to grow under the wise, dynamic and enlightened leadership of our two leaders, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait and His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, King of Bhutan.

“May I avail this opportunity to extend our sincere congratulations and best wishes for His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister, personal well-being, happiness and health as well as for continued peace, progress and prosperity of our friendly people of Kuwait.”

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

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GCC concerned over Somalia developments

RIYADH: The Gulf Cooperation Council described the death and injury of several people in Somalia amid clashes as "tragic," saying it was concerned about these recent developments. According to reports, armed clashes erupted on Friday between security forces and gunmen at the capital, Mogadishu, leading to the casualties. In a statement, GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf urged calm and for the sides to resolve their differences peacefully, through negotiations and constructive dialogue, to reach national consensus.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's Foreign Ministry said the Saudi government was following with "great concern" the recent developments in Somalia, which have reportedly seen people killed and wounded at the capital Mogadishu. According to reports, several people were killed and injured amid armed clashes between government forces and armed protesters. In a statement, Riyadh urged "calm and de-escalation," calling on Somalis to reach a "solution by peaceful means through dialogue in a way that preserves the security, stability and unity" of the country.

In the meantime, Egypt called on all Somali parties to exercise restraint, adhere to peaceful means and dialogue, and hold free, fair and transparent elections. In a statement, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that it follows up closely and with more attention with the political developments in Somalia after the outbreak of violence in the capital Mogadishu. The statement affirmed Egypt's call for all political parties in Somalia to "work together to address the causes of the current crisis and reach a solution for it." It also called on all partners to provide support and assistance to Somalia "to overcome the current situation and achieve peace and stability in the country." The statement affirmed Egypt's call and support for all political efforts aimed at resolving the current political situation that would guarantee the Somali people's hopes for security, stability, development and eliminating the threat of terrorism.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The Friday Market decorated to celebrate Kuwait's 60th National Day and 30th Liberation Day. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Ooredoo celebrates Kuwait's National Days

KUWAIT: February is Kuwait's special month. On the occasion of the country's independence and liberation anniversaries, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, launched its unique national song as a commemorative gift to Kuwait and its people. The song is intended to develop and promote a culture of initiative, making young individuals its main characters and boosting their creativity, talent, citizenship and solidarity, in adherence to national values.

At the same time, the song also comes as part of Ooredoo Kuwait's corporate social responsibility program and in its constant efforts to unleash young people's creativity and innovation, and mirror the diversity in Kuwait's cultural music and heritage. The song's video blends between the traditional Kuwaiti heritage and culture with contemporary and trendy youth culture, to reflect the deep-rooted love and devotion that the people from across all Kuwait's diverse society have for their country. The lyrics, like-

wise, are a blend of classical Arabic and Kuwaiti dialect, to reflect the same spirit of harmony between the traditional and the modern in contemporary Kuwait. This perfect blend makes the song a shining example to others.

Every life has a rhythm, every rhythm has a pattern, and every pattern has a segment that admires it. Thus, each segment has its unique way to celebrate life and its occasions, some prefer spending time in serenity scrolling their devices, while others tend more to discover music that fills them with emotions, and of course for those who love to meditate, prefer sitting on the seashore contemplating its accelerating waves and the reflection of the city lights on its surface, so their imagination reaches the sky.

Not to forget our beloved children, they have their innocent way to celebrate. Some of them love elegance and celebrate their white clothes that simply resemble their innocence and childhood. There, Ooredoo Tower stands tall in the midst of the accelerating technological civilization, preserving the originality and heritage of which our beloved country, Kuwait, is proud of. Ooredoo Kuwait believes in the patriotic song as one of the most important national symbols of the state, which is

based on raising the spirits of the people, strengthening and solidifying the citizens' relationship with their homeland.

Moreover, the name of the song was inspired by the fact that Ooredoo Kuwait is close to all and only one step away from customers to better serve them, meet all their demands and improve their experience. The song is sung by Kuwaiti artists, Abdulaziz Louis and Queen G, written by lyricist Saad Al-Musallam, and produced and executed by Senyar Group. Commenting on the launching of the song, Yousef Al-Shallal, Director of Marketing at Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "we seize every opportunity to share the community its pride in the homeland. Today, we celebrate the independence of the State of Kuwait, appreciating the country we live in, and honoring young talents."



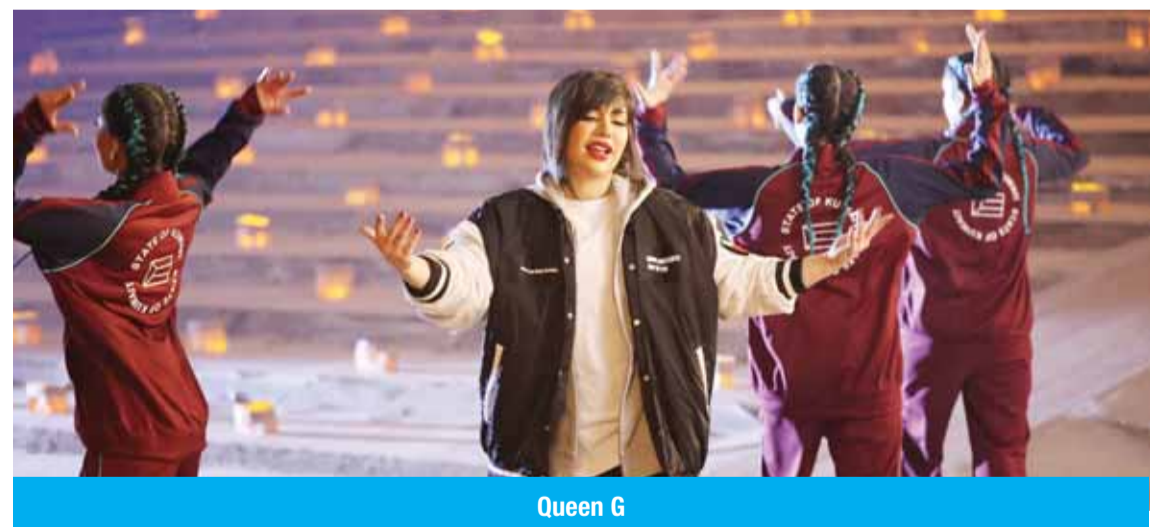
Yousef Al-Shallal



A scene from the music video.



Abdulaziz Louis



Queen G

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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The National Day

Kuwaiti oil price down to \$61.39 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by \$2.66 to \$61.39 per barrel Friday as opposed to \$64.05 the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. Globally, the price of the Brent crude went down by \$1.02 to \$62.91 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which went down by \$1.28 to \$59.24 pb. — KUNA





Biden declares America and transatlantic alliance 'back'

Six people shot with live rounds at Myanmar anti-coup protest



Asylum seekers wait outside the El Chaparral border crossing port as they wait to cross into the United States in Tijuana, Baja California state, Mexico on Friday. —AFP

First group of 25 asylum-seekers enters US

Biden immigration reforms take effect, but thousands still stuck in limbo

TIJUANA, Mexico: A first group of 25 asylum-seekers crossed the US border Friday under President Joe Biden's sweeping immigration reforms, while thousands more waited in Mexico hoping that they, too, would be allowed in. Under former president Donald Trump's "Remain in Mexico" program, tens of thousands of non-Mexican asylum seekers—mostly from Central America—were sent back over the border pending the outcome of their applications. Biden's administration moved quickly to start dismantling the controversial policy, officially called the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), with a first stage that began on Friday.

A group of 25 migrants crossed the border by bus from the Mexican city of Tijuana accompanied by representatives of UN refugee agency UNHCR, according to an AFP journalist. A shelter official in San Diego, who asked not to be named, later confirmed that they had arrived at a hotel there, although their final destinations were unknown.

'Inhumane policy'

The American Civil Liberties Union welcomed their arrival as "an important step in rebuilding" the US asylum system. "But thousands are still suffering right now stuck in limbo under this inhumane policy," ACLU San Diego spokesman Edward Sifuentes said. "We urge the adminis-

tration to quicken the process to safely welcome all people who suffered under MPP. For the families who have been forced to live in danger, there is no more time to wait."

According to the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS), there are approximately 25,000 active cases. Mexico says 6,000 remain on its territory. Candidates are tested for the coronavirus before crossing, a senior DHS official said.

Only those who have begun the process of applying for asylum will be considered for entry. Tensions were high on the border as migrants waited to see if they would be allowed to cross over.

"Nobody knows anything. There's tension. Stress is mounting," Cuban lawyer Joel Fernandez said.

The 52-year-old crossed 11 countries to arrive in January 2020 in a camp in Matamoros across the border from Texas where he is staying with hundreds more migrants. "I've withstood all the tests that God put in front of me on this difficult journey," he said. "Now I want the prize: to have my residency, to work, to bring my wife, my children."

'Can't go back'

In Tijuana, hundreds of migrants spent the night next to the border fence hoping to be allowed in. But

closed military zone, despite the absence of signs indicating such restrictions, while a soldier threatened to confiscate AFP's vehicles.

Palestinian and Israeli anti-occupation activists say the army has used the military zone classification as a tool to further restrict Palestinians from accessing land in Area C.

"It is not really a military zone. The soldiers train much further," Abu Awad said, while eating a salad and sheep's milk cheese. He echoed the sentiments of others in the Palestinian Bedouin community who say they have lived in the Jordan Valley since well before the Israeli occupation began in 1967 and do not need a permit to set up tents.

"These lands are ours. The soldiers come here as invaders but we will not leave," he said.

Our weapon is our presence

After the soldiers left, two Israelis arrived bringing toys and clothes for Bedouin children, playing on a nearby mound of earth. One, named Burma, lost a son in Lebanon when Israel's army occupied parts of its northern neighbor, while the other, Shoshi, had served in the air force.

"We also brought waterproof nylon tarps to protect their tents, but we left them elsewhere because the soldiers were here," said Shoshi, smiling mischievously. "The Bedouin will pick them up at night and bring them to their camp on donkeys," she explained.

The game of cat-and-mouse in Humsah al-Baqia is part of the larger Palestinian effort to push back against Israel's continued absorption of Area C, Palestinian experts said.

Parts of the Jordan Valley were earmarked for Israeli annexation under former US president Donald Trump's now defunct Middle East peace plan, which was enthusiastically cheered by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. While the Trump plan may be dead, Israel continues to approve the construction of Jewish settler homes.

Settlements have boomed since Netanyahu returned to office in 2009, with some 475,000 Jews now living in West Bank communities widely regarded as illegal under international law, alongside some 2.8 million Palestinians. Some see the Bedouin as a bulwark against settlement expansion.

"Israel wants Palestinians to leave these lands so it can bring in more settlers," said Muataz Basharat, a senior Palestinian Authority official, while visiting Humsah Al-Baqia. "We are defending our land. Our weapon is their presence," he added, gesturing to two Bedouin men. —AFP

already-fragile state. Farmajo and leaders of the country's federal states have been unable to resolve squabbles over how the vote is to be conducted, after hopes of hosting Somalia's first one-person, one-vote ballot since 1969 were abandoned due to security and political problems.

A coalition of opposition candidates have said they no longer recognize Farmajo as president and had vowed mass protests until he steps down. A small group of protesters attempted to march down the main airport road, when shots rang out, sending them ducking for cover, according to AFP footage of the incident.

It was unclear who opened fire first, but one witness Yusuf Mohamed reported a "heavy exchange of gunfire" between security forces and armed guards protecting opposition supporters. —AFP

most recognized that they had not yet initiated an asylum procedure. "The truth is I don't have an appointment," said Haitian migrant Geraldine Nacice, who has family waiting for her in the United States.

"I can't go back to my country any more. There's war in Haiti right now," she said, referring to the political turmoil shaking her country. The "Remain in Mexico" program was part of Trump's hardline plan to fight undocumented immigration, along with the construction of a border wall and a policy which separated children from thousands of migrant families.

After Biden took office on January 20, his administration announced that it would reverse the most controversial measures. On Thursday, Biden's Democrats unveiled legislation for his plan to create a path to cit-

izenship for 11 million undocumented immigrants already living in the United States.

In the Mexican border city of Ciudad Juarez, a 37-year-old who fled domestic abuse in El Salvador with her four children said she was optimistic things would get better under Biden.

The woman, who asked not to be named for safety reasons, had a US court hearing in December 2019. But the pandemic and Trump's tough immigration policies mean her asylum case has seen little progress. Her dream is for her children to have a good education.

"It's hard to tell your children that everything is going to be fine when you feel like the world is crashing down on you," she said. —AFP

Set up, demolish, repeat: Israel targets Bedouin tent community

KHRBAT HUMSAH, Palestinian Territories: With a mosaic of shattered glass lying at her feet, remnants of a solar panel smashed by Israeli soldiers, Fadwa Abdelghani wearily recounted the military's latest order to leave her home. "The (Israeli) soldiers came here 30 minutes ago and told us we had to go," the Palestinian Bedouin told AFP.

"We're afraid they will come back and destroy everything," she said, referring to her tent community in Humsah Al-Baqia in the occupied West Bank. Humsah Al-Baqia sits in the Jordan Valley, a fertile and strategic patch of land that runs from Lake Tiberias to the Dead Sea, which has emerged as a flashpoint in the struggle over the West Bank. It is in the West Bank's so-called Area C, occupied Palestinian territory that remains under full Israeli military control.

Under Israeli military law, Palestinians cannot build structures in the area without permits, which are typically refused, and demolitions are common. Israeli rights group B'Tselem has accused Israel of creating "a Kafkaesque reality that leaves Palestinians almost no way to build legally".

In November, Israel's army demolished the homes of nearly 80 Palestinian Bedouin in Humsah al-Baqia, in a rare operation targeting an entire village at once.

Since then the Bedouin have repeatedly gone back to Humsah Al-Baqia and re-erected their tents, only to see Israeli forces return to tear them down again. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Israelis demolished 62 structures in Humsah Al-Baqia through the first half of February, "leaving 60 people, including 35 children displaced".

Closed military zone

Shortly after AFP arrived in Humsah Al-Baqia to meet Abdelghani and her black-bearded husband Abu Awad, the Israeli army showed up again. They insisted the area was a

Gunfire in Mogadishu as political tensions soar

MOGADISHU: Gunfire broke out in Mogadishu on Friday when the opposition tried to march against delayed elections in the Somali capital, sending months of political tensions bursting into the open.

Somalia missed a deadline to hold an election by February 8, when President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, better known by his nickname Farmajo, was due to step down, sparking a constitutional crisis in the

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International

Six people shot with live rounds at Myanmar anti-coup protest

Rallies mourn anti-coup protester death

MANDALAY, Myanmar: A raid on a shipyard in Myanmar's second-largest city turned violent yesterday when police and soldiers fired live rounds and rubber bullets at protesters gathering to stop arrests. At least five people were injured by rubber bullets, a photographer at the scene reported, while emergency medical staff treating the injured confirmed at least six others were shot with live rounds.

Much of the country has been in uproar since the military deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi in a coup on February 1, with hundreds of thousands of demonstrators taking to the streets to protest against the junta. Authorities have arrested hundreds of people since the putsch, many of them civil servants who had been boycotting work as part of a civil disobedience campaign. Yesterday, hundreds of police and soldiers gathered at Yadanarbon shipyard in Mandalay, on the Irrawaddy river. Their presence sparked fears among nearby residents that authorities would try to arrest workers for taking part in the anti-coup movement.

Protester dies

Meanwhile, demonstrators gathered across Yangon yesterday to mourn the death of an anti-coup protester, as Washington urged the leaders of Myanmar's new military regime to refrain from violence and relinquish power.

A doctor in Naypyidaw on Friday confirmed the death of Mya Thwate Khaing, a 20-year-old who was shot in the head during a protest in Myanmar's capital last week. She has since become a symbol of resistance for protesters, who have hoisted her photos high in demonstrations and even unfurled a massive banner of artwork from a bridge showing the moment she was shot.

"Please all join this protest movement to be more successful. That's all I want to say," her sister Poh Poh told reporters after her death. Yesterday, thousands gathered at the main junctions of Yangon, Myanmar's largest city—though the crowds appeared smaller than in recent days.

They held spontaneous vigils for Mya Thwate Khaing on the streets, lighting candles and laying roses by a banner with her picture. "We can't accept the police crackdowns because these are undisciplined, beyond our laws," said protester Win Zaw, 46. "I feel that the bullet that hit Mya Thwate Khaing's head has also hit our heads."

Banging pots and pans in what has become a signature gesture of defiance, protesters started yelling at the police to leave. But police opened fire with live rounds, rubber bullets and slingshot balls, dispersing the alarmed protesters.

"Six men with gunshot wounds arrived to our team. Two are seriously injured," a medical aide to doctors on the scene told AFP, declining to provide his name for fear of repercussions.

One of the men was hit in the abdomen and remains "in critical condition", he said. "We transferred those who were seriously injured and in a critical condition to another place for intensive care, but we cannot reveal the place." A doctor on the scene confirmed that some protesters had been injured by live rounds. "We do not have enough medicine for them to be treated here," he said, explaining the transfer. Around the protest site, empty bullet cartridges were found, as well as slingshot ammunition including metal balls. One woman received a head wound from a rubber bullet and emergency workers quickly administered first aid to her.

A Facebook video streamed live by a resident on the scene appeared to carry non-stop sounds of gunshots. "They are shooting cruelly," said the resident, who appeared to be taking shelter on a nearby construction site. "We have to find a safer place." Since the nationwide protests started two weeks ago, authorities in some cities have deployed tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets against demonstrators.

There have been isolated incidents of live rounds being fired. An anti-coup protester who was shot in the head during a February 9 demonstration in



MANDALAY: A wounded man is carried on a stretcher by a medical team after security forces opened fire on protesters during a demonstration against the military coup in Mandalay yesterday. —AFP

Naypyidaw died on Friday. Her doctors had confirmed to AFP that her injury was from a live bullet.

International condemnation

Condemnation of the violence has been fierce, and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has held talks with allied countries in recent days to press for a firm international response.

"We reiterate our calls on the Burmese military to refrain from violence against peaceful protesters," spokesman Ned Price told reporters Friday. "We will work with partners and allies to press the

Burmese military to reverse its actions." The military regime has so far weathered a chorus of international condemnation. The US, Britain and Canada have all announced sanctions targeting the country's top generals.

The junta has justified its power seizure by alleging widespread electoral fraud in November's elections, which Suu Kyi's party won in a landslide. But since its power grab, it has instated multiple internet shutdowns, blocked some social media sites, and arrested hundreds—often in the middle of the night. —AFP

India's glacier disaster highlights Himalayan dangers

CHAMOLI: Long before this month's deadly flash flood in a remote Indian Himalayan valley, Kundan Singh Rana knew that all the construction work in the fragile region would one day mean disaster.

"The rivers, mountains and trees are like our gods and any sacrilege will have consequences," Rana told AFP in his village, overlooking the hydroelectric project that was obliterated by what was believed to be a glacier collapse on February 7. "The Rishi Ganga river and our mountains have been scarred beyond repair by human greed. This flood is God's retribution," the 43-year-old farmer said.

Scientists may not share his belief in divine punishment, but they agree that the blame for this latest disaster which killed 60 people and left 150 others missing lies largely with human activity.

The anthropogenic impact includes the shrinking of glaciers in the Himalayas, one of the regions hardest hit by global warming. The recent disaster is

thought by experts to have been caused by a chunk of glacier 15 football fields long and five across breaking off, bringing with it part of a rock face.

This dammed up a small river high in the mountains until the mass of backed-up water broke through with awesome ferocity and speed. The roaring deluge of water, rocks and soil hurtled down a V-shaped valley, sweeping away homes, roads and bridges as well as around 200 people, many of whom have still not been found almost two weeks on.

Climate change and development

The latest catastrophe "is clearly a fallout of climate change and in itself a tell-tale of our future", H.C. Nainwal, one of the several glaciologists who visited the site, told AFP. In the Indian Himalayas, some 10,000 glaciers are receding at a rate of 100 to 200 feet (30 to 60 meters) per decade.

The runoff can form glacial lakes which can then burst their banks in spectacular and destructive fashion. The other factor can be heard in the regular thuds of dynamite ringing through the valleys of Uttarakhand state, where the recent flood struck.

Some of this explosive activity is for new roads to beef up the disputed border with China following last year's clash that left 20 Indian soldiers dead. An 800-kilometre (500-mile) highway is also being

built to connect four religious sites—a pet project of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

But the biggest problem is the construction of hydroelectric plants across the vast network of Himalayan rivers, part of India's drive to boost renewable energy. Over 75 small and large power projects are operational in Uttarakhand and dozens more are planned—many without proper attention to the potential risks, experts say.

No trust in the government

Experts say that these projects make other devastating flash floods more likely, while also increasing the risk of landslides. The dangers were plain to see in 2013 when a flash flood killed 6,000 people in Uttarakhand and devastated the region.

In its wake, India's top court appointed a scientific committee that recommended no more hydro plants be built in the area—advice which is being ignored. Locals in the area—home to a famous 1970s campaign to protect trees—say that they have seen none of the promised economic benefits of the development and that their concerns have been ignored. They launched a campaign in 2019 and petitioned a court over illegal sand mining and the dumping of muck in the Rishi Ganga river that they said was contributing to landslides and floods.

But deforestation for infrastructure projects,



Army soldiers build a temporary bridge for residents near Rainsi village of Chamoli district following a flash flood thought to have been caused when a glacier broke off on February 7. —AFP

sand mining and quarrying continues.

"We used to trust the government and believed that it was working for our welfare but that's not the case," Surinder Singh, 55, said. "Any dam or road that threatens our lives and the mountains will be fought tooth and nail." —AFP

Virus outbreak hits Chinese in Cambodia

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia: An outbreak of coronavirus has hit the Chinese expat community in Cambodia, the country's Premier Hun Sen said yesterday, a setback in the Southeast Asian nation's otherwise successful containment efforts. The kingdom has so far fared well in tackling the virus and life in the capital Phnom Penh has largely returned to normal.

But a group of Chinese nationals who underwent testing to obtain medical certificates for overseas travel recorded positive results yesterday, sparking fears of a

wider outbreak in the community.

"We have discovered a big community infection with 32 cases... this is a bad situation for us," Hun Sen said during a speech broadcast on state-run TV.

"Those found positive today are all Chinese." The increasing presence of Chinese businesses across the kingdom has heightened anti-Chinese sentiment among some Cambodians, and Hun Sen urged people not to discriminate against Chinese nationals because of the latest outbreak.

The strongman prime minister, one of the world's longest serving leaders, is a staunch ally of Beijing, and Cambodia receives billions of dollars in soft loans and investment from China. Early in the pandemic many countries closed their borders to China, where the virus was first detected, but Hun Sen refused to follow

suit and even travelled to Beijing to meet with leader Xi Jinping last February in a show of solidarity. "Because it happened to Chinese nationals, please don't discriminate against the Chinese," Hun Sen said in his speech yesterday. He urged residents to wear masks and practice social distancing. The infections were sourced to a nightclub, now closed, and authorities are contact-tracing to track down any other cases, the prime minister said.

Much of Phnom Penh will remain open—including schools. But a small island connected to the city known as Koh Pich—or "Diamond Island"—is now under partial lockdown, with police blocking all road access yesterday morning. The last local infection in Cambodia was in November. So far, the country has detected more than 500 cases but has not recorded any deaths. —AFP

Nigeria's protesters trapped between trauma and fear

LAGOS: The Lekki tollgate in Lagos, Nigeria's sprawling megacity of 20 million people, has frozen in time since October when security forces shot at peaceful protesters. At least 10 people were killed by security forces on October 20, Amnesty International said at the time, a charge Nigeria's army has denied.

Four months have passed since then, but signs of that brutal night are still visible at the tollgate: walls are riddled with bullets and glass windows are shattered. Cars travel in and out freely but the company in charge of collecting the toll money has not yet returned.

Red graffiti proclaiming #EndSARS is everywhere. The hashtag, named after the SARS police force accused of abuses, has come to represent the movement against brutality and bad governance that swept Africa's most populous country last October.

Dabiraoluwa Adeyinka, who was at Lekki on October 20, said some of her friends just want to forget, to erase what happened from their memories. But she "can't afford to keep quiet".

"I was on stage, asking people to sit down and raise their flags, then they started shooting. Immediately people were falling," said the young woman, pointing to where she had been standing on the back of a truck transformed into a stage.

"I witnessed about six bodies lifeless on the floor," Adeyinka said.

Since then, she and her friends have been trying to help those who were



LAGOS: Protesters sit in the back of a police pick-up truck as they are being detained after being arrested during a demonstration against police brutality, at the Lekki tollgate in Lagos. —AFP

injured that night, and to "be a voice for those who are afraid to talk". —AFP

CONSUMER PROTECTION DEPARTMENT

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REMEDY

As a precautionary measure, Mercedes-Benz AG, via its Mercedes-Benz service partners, will replace the fuel tank vent line on the affected vehicles. The required work will certainly be carried out free of charge.

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Business

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2021

IMF dismisses inflation concerns over massive US stimulus plan

Gopinath's argument contradicts critics of Biden's \$1.9tn package

WASHINGTON: Fears that inflation could spiral out of control due to a massive US stimulus package are overblown, IMF chief economist Gita Gopinath said Friday. Her argument contradicted critics of US President Joe Biden's proposed \$1.9 trillion rescue package for the world's largest economy, who say the amount is excessive, and even those Democratic economists who have also raised concerns about price spikes.

Gopinath estimated that with the full amount of stimulus, inflation "would reach around 2.25 percent in 2022, which is nothing to be concerned about," she said in a blog post. Some economists, including former Treasury secretary Larry Summers, have urged caution saying excess spending could spark an inflationary spiral that the Federal Reserve would find difficult to control.

Rising prices would erode purchasing power while higher interest rates to control inflation would send the cost of borrowing soaring in an economy already awash in debt amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Gopinath noted the "concerns about an overheated economy that could push inflation well above the comfort zone of central bankers." But she said "the evidence from the last four decades makes it unlikely." In the decade following the global financial crisis, US annual inflation barely cracked the Federal Reserve's 2 percent target, and in December the rate was just 1.3 percent.

And Gopinath said the proposed government aid will push US GDP up five to six percent over three years, which would recoup the 3.5 percent contraction in 2020. The IMF has consistently supported a large US stimulus plan to recover from the Covid-19-induced recession that has left millions jobless.

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen late Thursday repeated the administration view that

"the price of doing too little is much higher than the price of doing something big." Yellen noted that inflation has been very low for over a decade, and while it remains a risk "it's a risk the Fed and others have tools to address."

Market turbulence

Yellen, like US central bank chief Jerome Powell, who succeeded her in the post, stressed that true unemployment in the US is close to 10 percent-above the government's official rate of 6.3 percent last month-and about nine million people remain unemployed, which she says justifies the size of the government aid. But growing signs that the economy is coming back to life as businesses reopen amid an accelerating vaccination campaign have caused markets to begin to fret about impending price hikes.

The yield on 10-year Treasury notes, a benchmark for inflation expectations, has been rising sharply since October, and accelerated since the start of the year to around 1.3 percent, the highest since before the pandemic. Those fears got a boost from a spike in the producer price index (PPI), which showed wholesale inflation surged 1.3 percent in January, the largest since the index was revamped in December 2009.

But Powell last week brushed off inflation concerns, saying after prices collapsed last year, some sharp increases are expected but would be unlikely to last.

In the current environment, "we want to see actual inflation," before the Fed would take any steps to raise interest rates or roll back the massive bond-buying program, Powell said. His colleague John Williams at the Fed's New York branch said he was "not really concerned about stimulus ... right now being excessive."

He said the central bank is not worried about



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo, Gita Gopinath, the Chief Economist of the International Monetary Fund, speaks in Washington, DC. Fears that inflation could spiral out of control due to a massive US stimulus package are overblown, IMF chief economist Gopinath said on Friday. — AFP

Treasury yields and so far is not seeing any signs of excessive behavior by businesses or households. Gopinath, the IMF economist, acknowledged "the danger of market turbulence" due to temporary price swings, or bad news about new virus variants.

But she said that in the wake of the crisis "considerable slack remains in the global economy" which would dampen price pressures, and worldwide supply chains have largely not suffered disruptions, removing another potential source of rising costs. — AFP

Diraya Campaign releases video on types of bank cards

KUWAIT: To enhance financial awareness across all segments of society and as part of the banking sector's social responsibility, the Central Bank of Kuwait-supervised "Be Aware" Campaign (Diraya in Arabic) introduced a video detailing the different types of bank cards.

The video addresses the different types of bank cards and the advantages and facilities that come with each, for example, ATM, pre-paid, and credit cards that can be used to purchase goods and services via the internet and points of sale and to withdraw cash via ATMs in Kuwait and

abroad. The video goes further, offering advice on how to avoid bank card scams, as well as important tips on using the cards abroad, withdrawal transactions fees, safe and secure use of the cards, and avoiding suspicious transactions. The video also addressed the key advantages provided by credit cards, whether the customer opts to use them in Kuwait or abroad.

In a statement, the CBK stressed the importance of public campaigns to raise awareness of customers' rights, which the Bank aims to protect through its instructions to the banking sector and the measures and precau-



tions it urges. Such campaigns are also important to support customers with the boom in electronic payment means and channels.

"Diraya" is a year-long financial awareness campaign launched on 26 January 2021. The CBK-supervised campaign is managed by the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) with the

participation of all Kuwaiti banks. The overall objective is to increase public awareness of the banking sector's role and how customers can use banks' diverse services most advantageously.

More information on the "Diraya" campaign and its objectives, as well as campaign content, is available through its official website: www.dirayakw.com

Bitcoin goldrush sparks fears of speculative bubble

LONDON: Bitcoin has enjoyed a record-breaking week after electric carmaker Tesla and Wall Street finance giants sparked a goldrush for the world's most popular virtual currency, but bubble fears persist. Investors and mega-corporations alike have been wooed by dizzying growth and the opportunity for profit and asset diversification.

The unit blasted past \$50,000 on Tuesday following a week in which Tesla invested \$1.5 billion in bitcoin and vowed customers could use it to buy vehicles and both New York bank BNY Mellon and credit card titan MasterCard announced plans to support bitcoin.

The cryptocurrency then vaulted higher, topping \$52,000 on Wednesday after investment fund giant BlackRock also confirmed a push into the booming sector.

Yet this week's astonishing ascendancy of bitcoin has sparked renewed fears of a big bubble which the market had last experienced four years ago.

'Riding the crypto wave'

US software firm MicroStrategy meanwhile announced plans on Wednesday to sell convertible bonds in order to buy more bitcoin, raising eyebrows in some quarters. "Suddenly it feels like 2017 again when everyone wanted (to) ... ride the crypto wave," warned OANDA analyst Craig Erlam.

"If companies' fundamentals are going to become closely tied to movements in bitcoin because they have suddenly become speculators on the side, we are going to be in bubble territory before you know it."

The unit had previously hit the headlines in 2017 after soaring from less than \$1,000 in January to



almost \$20,000 in December of the same year.

The virtual bubble then burst with bitcoin's value then fluctuating wildly before sinking below \$5,000 by October 2018. "Bitcoin is an asset that is incredibly volatile and is very risky," said professor Matthieu Bouvard at the Toulouse School of Economics.

"At the same time, we have been saying for ten years that bitcoin will collapse-but it's still there," he told AFP, adding that the unit's volatility would decline as its popularity broadens.

One bitcoin is currently worth five times more than a year earlier, while the combined value of all units in global circulation is almost \$1.0 trillion.

'Digital gold'?

Industry professionals maintain however that bitcoin is a new and ground-breaking financial unit of the future. Eric Demuth, chief executive of cryptocurrency broker Bitpanda, describes bitcoin as the "new digital gold" that is prized by investors who seek to diversify assets and guard

against inflation.

"Bitcoin will soon be added to the balance sheet of central banks," Demuth told AFP.

A number of central banks have indeed announced plans for bank-backed digital units, but are highly skeptical over bitcoin because of its shadowy nature-and the fact that it remains unregulated. European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde declared this month that bitcoin was "not a currency" and was a "highly speculative" asset requiring global regulation.

At the same time, Europe represents just ten percent of bitcoin purchases from investment funds, according to cryptocurrency data provider ByteTree. US companies have meanwhile been quicker than their European counterparts to embrace the unit.

"The difference between the US and Europe in that regard is the same with pretty much any kind of adapting to new technology. It always takes just a bit longer. In the US, they started two years ago," noted Demuth. —AFP

French village says 'non' to Musk's space-age Internet

SAINT-SENIER-DE-BEUVRON, France: To realize his dream of satellite-powered internet, tech billionaire Elon Musk needs to install antennas around the world. In northern France, a village hopes he'll decide to keep those antennas far away.

Saint-Senier-de-Beuvron, population 350, is none too thrilled to have been picked as a ground station for Musk's Starlink project for broadband from space.

"This project is totally new. We don't have any idea of the impact of these signals," said Noemie Brault, a 34-year-old deputy mayor of the village just 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the majestic Mont Saint-Michel abbey on the English Channel. "As a precaution the municipal council said no," she explained.

Musk, founder of SpaceX and electric carmaker Tesla, plans to deploy thousands of satellites to provide fast internet for remote areas anywhere in the world. It's a high-stakes battle he is waging with fellow billionaire Jeff Bezos of Amazon as well as the London-based start-up OneWeb.

Antennas on the ground will capture the signals and relay them to individual user terminals connected by cable. Starlink's contractor had already secured French regulatory approval to install nine "radomes"-three-meter-tall (10-foot) globes protecting the antennas-in Saint-Senier, one of four sites planned for France. In December, Saint-Senier issued a decree to block construction on the field.

But the refusal was based on a technicality, and the contractor, Sipartech, told AFP that it plans to refile its request, which the council will likely be unable to block. — AFP



Saint-Senier-de-Beuvron, population 350, is none too thrilled to have been picked as a ground station for Elon Musk's Starlink project for broadband from space.

Business

Burgan Bank wins 'Elite J P Morgan Quality Recognition Award' for 2020

Only bank in Kuwait to have won the award for the period from 2001-2020 consecutively

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank recently received the coveted 'Elite Quality Recognition Award' for the year 2020 from J P Morgan Chase, in recognition of its consistently high-quality performance. The award highlights the bank's advanced standards maintained in the complete range of clients' US Dollar funds transfer operations by the management and staff.

J P Morgan Chase commends the bank for achieving 99.72 percent straight-through processing (STP) in the MT103 category and 99.97 percent for the MT202 category of payments, thus, entitling Burgan Bank to the 'Elite Quality Recognition Award' in both categories. Highlighting the best-in-class straight-through processing (STP) rates, Burgan Bank was among the few banks across the MENA region to receive the Elite level of the award for both its customer and bank transfers.

Upon the methodology and mechanism, the 2020 Quality Recognition Awards are divided into two groups, each designated by a SWIFT message type (MT) within which the awards are presented to those who exemplify to optimal level of performance. The MT103 awards are based on a minimum of 10,000 US dollar MT103 debit transactions wherein the Quality Recognition Award applies from 90 percent to 98.99 percent Straight Through Rates while the Elite Quality Recognition Award is

applied for 99.0 percent and higher Straight Through Rates. The MT202 awards are based on a minimum of 8,000 US Dollar MT202 debit transactions, which constitutes the Quality Recognition Award for achieving greater than or equal to 98.00 percent Straight Through Rates followed by the Elite Quality Recognition Award that is for achieving 99.7 percent Straight Through Rate and higher.

Commenting on the bank's accomplishment, Venkat Menon - Group Chief Operations and Technology Officer, Burgan Bank said: "As the only Bank in Kuwait to have won the J P Morgan Chase Quality Recognition Award for the period from 2001-2020 consecutively, we are proud of the efforts of the Processing teams across various Operations departments i.e. International Funds Transfers, Treasury Operations and Customer Trade Services who have worked towards achieving one of the highest STP rates for the USD dollar transfers ensuring premium quality, efficiency and reliability, which have maintained Burgan bank's leadership and operational excellence. This also ensures that client payments reach their destination in the shortest possible time."

Sherif Abdelsalam - Executive Director and Head of GCC & Turkey Financial Institutions Group at J P Morgan Bahrain added that Burgan Bank is again amongst the 1 percent of clients that achieved best-



in-class straight-through processing (STP) rates for 2019. This reflects Burgan Bank's commitment to first class payment processing services catering to its underlying customer base.

Since 1997, J P Morgan Chase have given this award to acknowledge the consistent, high-quality performance of their clients' fund transfer operations management and staff.

UK court shakes up gig economy with ruling against Uber

LONDON: Britain's top court on Friday ruled that drivers for US ride-hailing giant Uber are entitled to workers' rights, in a judgment with huge implications for the so-called "gig economy".

The Supreme Court's unanimous ruling that the drivers are workers followed a protracted legal battle with the Silicon Valley taxi and delivery company. "This has been a gruelling four-year legal battle for our members-but it's ended in a historic win," said Mick Rix from the GMB trade union.

"The Supreme Court has upheld the decision of three previous courts, backing up what GMB has said all along: Uber drivers are workers and entitled to breaks, holiday pay and minimum wage."

The court ruled that the service performed by drivers was "very tightly defined and controlled by Uber" so they could not be considered to be self-employed. The drivers were "in a position of subordination and dependency... such that they have little or no ability to improve their economic position through pro-

fessional or entrepreneurial skill," added the ruling.

"The drivers were rightly found to be 'workers'," the judges concluded.

Uber said it respected the verdict and "will now consult with every active driver across the UK to understand the changes they want to see", according to Jamie Heywood, its manager for northern and eastern Europe. Lower courts had ruled in 2016, 2017 and 2018 in favor of a group of 20 Uber drivers who argued they were entitled to employee status given the length of time they had been working through the Uber app, and the way that the company oversaw their work.

Uber insisted that the drivers were self-employed since they choose their own hours and place of work, and often find passengers through rival apps. The complainants can now ask an employment tribunal for compensation, which could trigger far-reaching changes affecting all ride-hailing drivers.

'Nail in coffin'

Lead claimant James Farrar said he was "delighted" by the ruling,

in a press release.

Walmart reported a fourth-quarter loss of \$2.1 billion from the accounting for asset sales, compared with profits of \$4.1 billion in the year-ago period.

Revenues rose 7.3 percent to \$152.1 billion as the company pointed to a bounce from a strong holiday shopping season and a lift from a fresh US government stimulus package enacted at the end of 2020. For all of 2020, Walmart reported profit of \$13.5 billion, down 9.8 percent. Annual revenues jumped 6.7 percent to \$524 billion.

'Essential' store

Designated as an "essential" store as a venue for groceries and other consumables, Walmart was among the beneficiaries from coronavirus shutdowns in the spring when other retailers were forced to close. Sales soared throughout the year even as Walmart struggled at times to keep up with demand for at times unexpected items, such as bandanas, which were used earlier in the pandemic as face masks. Throughout 2020, Walmart hired more than half a million people, including new staff to deliver items



LONDON: A protesting Uber driver waves a flag near the UK headquarters of Uber Technologies in London. The UK Supreme Court ruled that the service performed by drivers was "very tightly defined and controlled by Uber" so they could not be considered to be self-employed.

claiming it would "fundamentally reorder the gig economy" in Britain-in which people do short-term work without formal contracts, or work without guaranteed hours. Lawyers Paul Jennings and Rachel Mathieson, who represented former Uber drivers, said the case will have an "enormous impact" on London's 45,000 Uber drivers.

Rix tweeted that Friday's decision was "another nail in the coffin" for the gig economy, which employs an estimated 5.5 million people in Britain. Couriers for the Deliveroo food app

are already fighting in the Court of Appeal in London for the right to collective bargaining.

Uber claimed that it has already changed the way it works since the legal action began, and has been looking at alterations to its business model in the United States after adverse court rulings in California. Its business model was however buoyed in November in California, which passed a referendum effectively overturning a state law requiring them to reclassify their drivers and provide employee benefits. — AFP



RICHMOND: In this file photo, delivery vans are parked in front of a Walmart store in Richmond, California. — AFP

and interface at curbside with customers, and other workers to fill in for those on leave.

At a presentation to Wall Street analysts, Walmart executives said they planned new investments on automation and supply chain improvements. "This year just really fast-forwarded things in terms of customer behavior,"

McMillon said. "We think the vast majority of that behavior is going to last."

McMillon said the spending would boost e-commerce offerings and the attractiveness of "Walmart +," a subscription plan that includes grocery delivery and is a rival to Amazon's "Prime" service. — AFP

Walmart reports strong 4Q sales

NEW YORK: Walmart reported another round of strong sales Thursday amid the coronavirus pandemic as it announced significant investments in higher employee wages and technology for growing e-commerce demand. The retail giant, which has become a one-stop shop for many consumers during the pandemic, said the new investments will bolster delivery and curbside pickup programs connected to e-commerce and lift wages for some 425,000 US workers.

But shares fell sharply on the announcements, which included a disappointing fourth-quarter loss and a forecast for slower US sales growth and slightly lower profits in the coming year.

"Our business is strong, and we're making it even stronger with targeted investments to accelerate growth," said chief executive Doug McMillon

Environmental degradation poses triple threat to humans: UN

PARIS: Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution pose a triple threat to human health and prosperity that may be averted only by transforming how we power our economies and feed ourselves, the United Nations said. A scientific assessment by the UN Environment Programme found that galloping economic growth has come at a devastating cost to the planet and urged governments, businesses and people around the world to act to reverse the damage before it is too late.

Drawing on findings from other major assessments on climate and biodiversity from expert international panels, the report titled "Making Peace With Nature" said a rapid shift to renewable energy and eliminating habitat loss are essential to preventing "unacceptable risk" for future generations.

"For too long, we have been waging a senseless and suicidal war on nature," said UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres. "The result is three interlinked environmental crises: Climate disruption, biodiversity loss and pollution threaten our viability as a species." Lead report author Robert Watson told AFP that the three crises threatened far more than nature.

"They undermine food security, water security and human health," he said. The report found that the global economy had grown nearly fivefold in the last 50 years fuelled by a tripling in extraction of natural resources and energy.

Yet amid such prolific growth, the burden of the environmental fallout is borne by the poorest and most vulnerable, it said. Although average prosperi-

ty has doubled over the last five decades, around 1.3 billion people are classed as poor and 700 million go to bed hungry each night.

The assessment said that environmental degradation was undermining progress on ending poverty and hunger and warned that pandemics such as COVID-19 were increasingly likely in future as we continue to strip away species' natural habitats. "This is not the first pandemic caused by animal to human infection, so we really have to think how we can prevent the next one," said Watson, a veteran climate and biodiversity researcher.

"By cutting down vegetation, we humans go into areas we didn't used to go into and therefore we interact with wild animals." Despite a record drop in emissions last year as the pandemic curbed international travel, the world is on track to be at least three degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2100. That is a far cry from the aims of the Paris climate deal, in which nations promised to limit warming to "well below" 2C and to a safer cap of 1.5C if possible. — AFP

GameStop players tell US lawmakers no manipulation

SAN FRANCISCO: Key players involved in the trading frenzy centered on GameStop shares told skeptical US lawmakers on Thursday that their actions were above board and in line with ordinary stock market business. Founders of free stock-trading app Robinhood and online forum Reddit were among those to testify at a House of Representatives financial services committee hearing.

Unprecedented recent volatility—with moves of up to 400 percent for shares in the GameStop video game store—prompted calls for regulators to review the role of social media, hedge funds and trading platforms which some allege manipulate the market.

The situation has pitted Wall Street's hedge funds, which often take "short" positions on shares they see as likely to fall, against a social media-driven move to "squeeze" big institutional investors.

"I am not trying to throw anyone under the bus," Robinhood co-founder and chief executive Vlad Tenev said as he was barraged with questions during a virtual hearing held in online video format.

"All I can say is Robinhood played it by the books," Keith Gill, an amateur investor renowned on Reddit's WallStreetBets forum for snapping up GameStop shares early and cheap, testified that he bucked market wisdom based on his own research and not because he was out to rattle hedge funds.

'Significant losses'

"The idea that I used social media to promote GameStop stock to unwitting investors and influence the market is preposterous," said Gill. "When I wrote and spoke about GameStop and social media with other individual investors, our conversations were no different from people in a bar or on a golf course, or at home talking or arguing about a stock."

He told lawmakers he grew up playing video games and still believes GameStop "has the potential to reinvent itself as the ultimate destination for gamers."

Gill, who is also a YouTube star known on the platform as Roaring Kitty, was the lone amateur trader at the hearing, which was titled "Game Stopped? Who Wins and Loses When Short Sellers, Social Media, and Retail Investors Collide." Gabriel Plotkin, founder and chief investment officer at Melvin Capital Management, said in his testimony that the fund did not manipulate trading.

He added that Melvin abandoned its short positions on GameStop with "significant losses" when the shares jumped \$17 to a peak of \$483. Plotkin contended people on Reddit forums were encouraging trade in GameStop as a way to punish the hedge fund and that "many of these posts were laced with anti-Semitic slurs directed at me and others." The wave of buying boosted the share price of struggling companies, including GameStop and movie theater brand AMC Entertainment.

But the share prices fell sharply when the frenzy subsided.

The events led to some retail investor apps such as Robinhood—which says its goal is to "democratize finance for all"—to temporarily limit trading in some of the most volatile stocks, drawing the ire of critics.

For some Reddit users, GameStop's dizzying rocket ride is a case of the masses rebelling against one-percenters hoarding the world's wealth. Subreddit WallStreetBets, which boasts some 9.1 million members, has been an online rallying spot for those urging people to buy and hold GameStop shares. — AFP

Classifieds

Sunday, February 21, 2021

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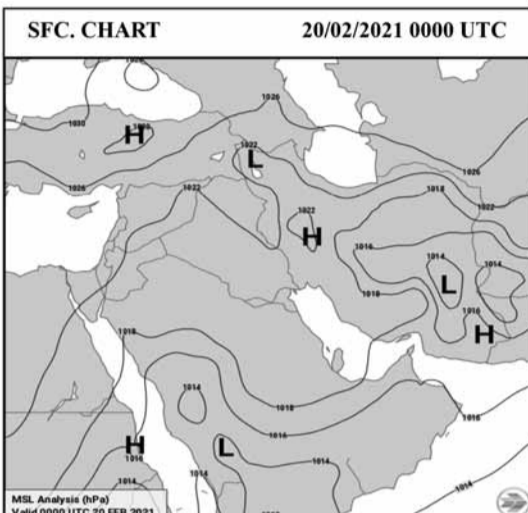
Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light variable wind to light to moderate north easterly wind with speed of 06 - 26 km/h and some high clouds will appear.

BY NIGHT: Rather cold to Cold and Partly cloudy with light to moderate north easterly wind to light variable wind with speed of 06 - 26 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING: No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	21 °C	12 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	20 °C	06 °C
ABDALY	22 °C	05 °C
BUBYAN	- °C	- °C
JAHRA	21 °C	09 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	19 °C	15 °C
AHMADI	18 °C	16 °C
NUWAISIB	19 °C	11 °C
WAFRA	21 °C	06 °C
SALMY	18 °C	06 °C



DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	02/21	Fair and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for scattered rain	22 °C	09 °C	VRB-NE	08 - 30 km/h
Monday	02/22	Fair and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for scattered rain	21 °C	12 °C	NW-NE	12 - 38 km/h
Tuesday	02/23	Rather cold and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	18 °C	11 °C	NE-NW	10 - 40 km/h
Wednesday	02/24	Rather cold and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	16 °C	11 °C	VRB-NW	08 - 40 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:03
Sunrise	06:22
Zuhr	12:02
Asr	15:15
Sunset	17:41
Isha	18:58

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	20 °C
MIN. Temp.	06 °C
MAX. RH	88 %
MIN. RH	17 %
MAX. Wind	N 32 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated. UPO

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

NOTICE
 February 11, 2021

Mr. Praveen Mullanukuzhiyil Sasi, son of Mr. Mullanukuzhiyil Krishnan Sasi, resident of, Mullanukuzhiyil House Peringuzha, Peramballoor PO, Muvattupuzha, Ernakulam, Kerala 686673 and Ms. Sruthy Viswan, daughter of Mr. Viswanathan Kunnumprath Neelakandan, resident of Kunnumprath House, Payappur, Mundankal P.O., Kottayam Kerala 686574 both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) 22533125.

(Ranveer Bharti)
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 Embassy of India, Kuwait.
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Word Search

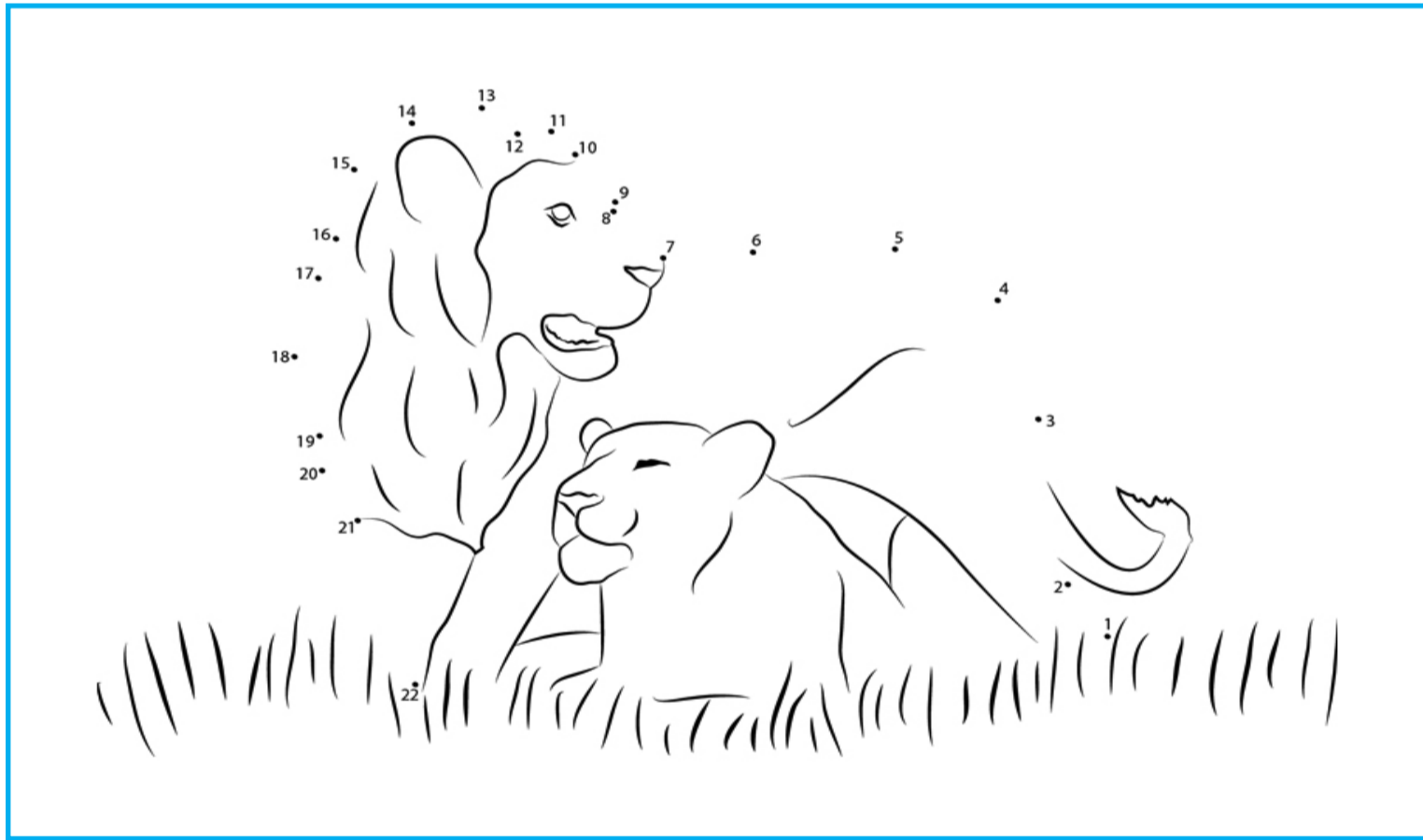
My Favorite Hobby
 Word Search

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

BICYCLING
 BOATING
 BOWLING
 CAMPING
 COOKING
 CRAFTS
 DANCING
 ENTERTAINING
 FISHING
 GARDENING
 GOLF
 HIKING
 HORSEBACK RIDING
 HUNTING
 MOVIES
 MUSIC
 PAINTING
 PLAYING CARDS
 READING
 RUNNING
 SEWING

SHOPPING
 SKIING
 SPORTS
 SWIMMING
 TENNIS
 THEATER
 TRAVELING
 WALKING
 WRITING

Join the Dots



STAR TRACK

<p>Aries (March 21-April 19)</p> <p>Romance blossoms for you today, Aries, and commitment or marriage may be just over the horizon. You and your beloved may have recently reached a new understanding that has bonded you more tightly. Don't feel silly if you spend the day together walking around in a romantic haze. That's perfectly acceptable - it's part of the joy of love, and it could well last for a while. Make the most of it.</p>	<p>Cancer (June 21-July 22)</p> <p>Has a new housemate recently moved in, Cancer? If so, you can expect this person to live with you for a while. This is good, because he or she is likely to be very loving, supportive, and able to bear his or her share of the household responsibilities. You and this person, along with any others who live with you, could become very close and possibly even friends for life.</p>	<p>Libra (September 23-October 22)</p> <p>Artistic activities or those involving healing are enhanced today, Libra. Whatever you try is going to be more a part of your very being than it would be at other times. Love, art, psychic or spiritual activities - all should take on a new meaning for you at this time. This condition should last for a long time. Make the most of this energy now and your skills should continue to grow.</p>	<p>Capricorn (December 22-January 19)</p> <p>Career and financial successes might finally come your way after months and perhaps years of striving, Capricorn. The emotional support you receive from those who've been working with you can be very gratifying, and it's likely to last for a long time. If you like what you're doing, chances are you will be doing it for a while. If you're committed to your profession, keep up the good work.</p>
<p>Taurus (April 20-May 20)</p> <p>Service to others might take up a large part of your day, Taurus, perhaps on an artistic level or maybe in the form of sharing psychic or healing energy. Don't think your efforts are unappreciated. Those you're helping may be reticent about saying anything, but your efforts aren't lost on them. Think of it like a bank. Your friends will be there for you when you need them.</p>	<p>Leo (July 23-August 22)</p> <p>A love letter or perhaps a poem or other artistic work dedicated to you could make your day, Leo. A warm feeling of being cherished and adored could stay with you throughout the day as a result. Hang on to this rosy glow when things get rocky, especially on the job. The feelings expressed in this communication will probably last for a long time, so be prepared.</p>	<p>Scorpio (October 23-November 21)</p> <p>Love takes on an idealized and fairytale aura today, Scorpio, as you and a current or potential partner spend time alone, talking or just enjoying being together. The warmth, affection, and high regard you have for each other are apparent to everyone. The nice thing about it is that these feelings are likely to last. Look forward to many such days.</p>	<p>Aquarius (January 20- February 18)</p> <p>A complex creative project could require some in-depth research today, Aquarius, and you could spend much of the day online or in the library. This is probably a subject you love, so you won't mind the time you put in. The inspiration that comes your way could well last for a while. You might be able to treat this project as a business enterprise and give it more substance.</p>
<p>Gemini (May 21-June 20)</p> <p>The words for today are "romance" and "creativity." Gemini. Romance is enhanced by passion generated by a gratifying love relationship that will probably last for a long time. This same relationship, and its emotions could give rise to artistic inspiration that can produce works of a quality that surprises even you. Don't exhaust yourself. Know when to stop.</p>	<p>Virgo (August 23-September 22)</p> <p>A love relationship that's been around for a long time could be enhanced today by an increased level of sensuality, Virgo. Intense emotion could pervade your being, making it difficult to concentrate on much else. You will probably spend the day looking forward to when you can be alone with your beloved. The passion that pervades your lovemaking now is worthy of a romance novel.</p>	<p>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)</p> <p>A meditation circle or other group activity devoted to spiritual pursuits could be on your agenda today, Sagittarius. It's important that you attend, as you need a little peace and quiet, as well as the support from others in the group. The affection you all feel for one another permeates the evening. Bask in it and write down any revelations that come to you.</p>	<p>Pisces (February 19-March 20)</p> <p>Financial growth adds to a growing sense of self-worth, Pisces, especially since your current situation should continue. You may have a vivid, emotional dream. Perhaps it involves a long-term love interest, and your relationship is fast approaching the do-or-die stage. The meaning of the symbols should be fairly clear. What do they mean to you and how can you apply them to your situation?</p>



This photo released by NASA shows the Perseverance rover being lowered by the Sky Crane to the surface of Mars on Feb 18, 2021. — AFP photos



An image from the Perseverance rover as it landed on the surface of Mars.



An image from Perseverance rover of the surface of Mars and one of the rover's wheels after landing.

NASA'S PERSEVERANCE ROVER BEAMS BACK SPECTACULAR NEW IMAGES

NASA on Friday released stunning new photographs from Perseverance, including one of the rover being gently lowered to the surface of Mars by a set of cables, the first time such a view has been captured. The high-resolution still was extracted from a video taken by the descent stage of the spacecraft that had transported the rover from Earth.

At that moment, the descent stage was using its six-engined jetpack to slow to a speed of about 1.7 miles (2.7 kilometers) per hour as part of the "sky crane

maneuver," the final phase of landing. "You can see the dust kicked up by the rover's engines," said Adam Steltzner, Perseverance's chief engineer, who estimated the shot was taken about two meters (six feet) or so above the ground.

The three straight lines are mechanical bridges holding the rover underneath the descent stage, while the curly cable was used to transmit the data from the cameras to Perseverance. When the rover touched down, it cut the 6.5-m-long cables, allowing the descent stage to fly away for its own safe landing.

Another new image, taken by the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter, captures Perseverance as it was parachuting down through the atmosphere at hundreds of miles an hour. Perseverance has also been able to upload its first high-resolution, color photo showing the flat region it landed on in the Jezero Crater, where a river and deep lake existed billions of years ago.

A second color image shows one of the rover's six wheels, with several honeycombed rocks thought to be more than 3.6 billion years old lying next to it. "One

of the questions we'll ask first is whether these rocks represent a volcanic or sedimentary origin," said NASA deputy project scientist Katie Stack Morgan.

Volcanic rocks in particular can be dated with very high precision once the samples are brought back to Earth on a future return mission - an exciting development from a planetary science perspective. As the first images came in, "it was exhilarating, the team went wild," said mission operations system manager Pauline Hwang. "The science team immediately started looking at all those

rocks and zooming in and going, 'What is that!' - it couldn't have been better."

The first two images were released on Thursday shortly after the rover landed, but they were lower resolution and in black-and-white because of the limited data rate available. NASA hopes to have more high resolution photos and videos in the coming days, but doesn't know yet if it has successfully recorded sound on Mars for the first time using microphones. That might be known later this weekend or early next week, said Steltzner. — AFP



Customers eat in their car outside the Padi House restaurant. — AFP photos

Lockdown-weary Malaysians get appetite for drive-in dining

Motorists parked beside the Padi House restaurant chain wave their hands out of their windows to signal to waiters, who come to take their orders that will be eaten on the spot. Lockdown-weary Malaysians have jumped at the chance for an unusual eating-out experience allowing them to enjoy restaurant food despite coronavirus curbs - in-car dining.

side Kuala Lumpur - came up with a plan to bring their menus and meals to car-bound customers.

"We serve the food on proper plates for (people) to dine in their car like they are dining in a restaurant," Chong Kar Yan, the company's social media marketing manager, told AFP. Their first drive-in dining site, in a car park beside one of their restaurants, proved such a hit they have now opened a second at another outlet in the city.

"I do feel safer eating in a car compared to a restaurant because we do sanitize the car," said customer Narinderjit Singh, when AFP made a visit to one of the in-car dining sites. "I sit at home throughout the day, I work from home - this gives me the opportunity to go out."

Officials recently relaxed rules, allowing people to dine inside restaurants again, as the number of daily cases declined. But Padi House will continue offering in-car dining, an option welcomed by customers who remain worried about the virus. Malaysia is still recording close to 3,000 cases a day and several deaths. "The good thing about this is that you'll reduce your interaction with other people, so that you can avoid COVID-19," said customer Ahmad Yunus Faez. — AFP



This picture taken on Feb 9, 2021 shows a waiter serving a customer using the "dine-in car" service outside the Padi House restaurant in Cyberjaya, outside Kuala Lumpur.

The Southeast Asian nation is struggling with a virus resurgence that last month prompted officials to re-impose restrictions, including a ban on dining inside restaurants. To get around this, the chain - which serves a mix of local and Western fare in the city of Cyberjaya out-

Dead whale washes up on Israeli shore after storm

The carcass of an almost 17-m fin whale has washed up on a southern Israeli shore, an AFP photographer said Friday, in the aftermath of a storm that caused massive tar pollution. Powerful winds and unusually high waves pummeled Israel's entire Mediterranean coastline over Tuesday and Wednesday, with tons of tar staining beaches from Rosh Hanikra, just south of Lebanon, to Ashkelon just north of Gaza.

The rare appearance of the dead whale, of the second-biggest mammal species in the world after the blue whale, was initially thought to have been connected to the tar pollution. The tar, itself apparently released by a ship

unloading oil or by old tar lifted by the storm from the seabed, killed many marine creatures.

That had sparked theories that the 16.9-metre (55-foot) male fin whale, weighing an estimated 25 tonnes, had



also fallen victim to poisoning. But Israel's Nature and Parks Authority said Friday that experts had determined that the decayed state of the whale, discovered on Thursday at the southern Nitzanim beach near Ashkelon, meant it had died some two weeks ago. "The whale's arrival cannot be linked to the tar pollution," the authority said in a statement. The environmental protection ministry vowed to locate the source of the pollution, saying it was on a rare scale and that the cleanup was set to be "long and difficult". Volunteers from a network of NGOs began cleaning up the beaches along with the ministry, which allocated emergency funds to the relevant municipalities to expedite the manual cleaning. — AFP

People gather around a dead fin whale that washed ashore on a beach in the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon on Friday. — AFP

Chatty robot Franzl cheers up German patients

Cleaning robot Franzl makes sure floors are spotless at the Munich hospital where she works, and has taken on a new role during the pandemic: Cheering up patients and staff. "Can you move out the way, please? I need to clean," trills the robot in German when people block her pre-programmed cleaning route.

"You need to move! I really want to clean!" she squeaks at those who still don't get out of the way. And if that doesn't work, digital tears begin to stream from her LED-light eyes. "Visitors are not allowed in the pandemic, so Franzl entertains the patients a bit," says Constance Rettler of Dr Rettler, the company in charge of cleaning the Neuperlach hospital that provided the robot.

Three times a day, Franzl bustles through the clinic's entrance hall, her feet automatically mopping the floors. Amused patients take photos of her, and some even stop to chat to the meter-high robot. "Ah, there you are my friend," cries one elderly lady with a drip on her arm upon catching sight of Franzl. "One of our recent patients came down three

times a day to talk to her," smiles Tanja Zacherl, who oversees hospital maintenance.

Extra employee

Created by a company in Singapore, Franzl was originally named Ella and spoke English before coming to Munich early this year. Yet her German is perfect as she tells her interviewers that she "never wants to grow up" and that cleaning is her passion. When prompted, she can also sing classic German pop songs and even rap.

Rettler is adamant that the robot is not taking jobs away from real human beings but instead is supposed to "support" her flesh-and-blood colleagues, who have become harder to come by during the coronavirus pandemic. "With the pandemic, there is lots of extra disinfecting work to be done in hospitals," says Rettler. "While Franzl is cleaning the floors, our employees can concentrate on doing that."

A robot has its limits however. It is still unable to get into tight corners, and if it hits an obstacle, it bursts into tears and remains stuck until rescued by a human. Yet Franzl also has a reason to be cheerful. After a test phase of several weeks, she appears to have settled in at the Neuperlach hospital. Rettler's company has therefore decided to keep her there permanently rather than deploy her elsewhere. — AFP



Cleaning robot 'Franzi' cleans in the entrance area of a hospital in Munich Neuperlach, southern Germany, on Feb 12, 2021. — AFP

KAMALA HARRIS' STEPDAUGHTER MAKES CATWALK DEBUT IN NY

US Vice President Kamala Harris's stepdaughter Ella Emhoff made her catwalk debut in a video released Thursday, a month after her outfit at the presidential inauguration went viral. The 21-year-old Emhoff walked the runway for the Proenza Schouler label as part of New York Fashion Week. The parade was filmed a few weeks ago, with the coronavirus pandemic ruling out a traditional show.

Emhoff wore three different looks for Proenza Schouler: A long grey jacket with matching slashed trousers, a black trench coat and a dark pantsuit. "That was my first ever fashion experience," said Emhoff, during a talk with two of Proenza Schouler's designers on the New York Fashion Week website. "I have to say I was a little nervous. I definitely lost a little sleep the night before."

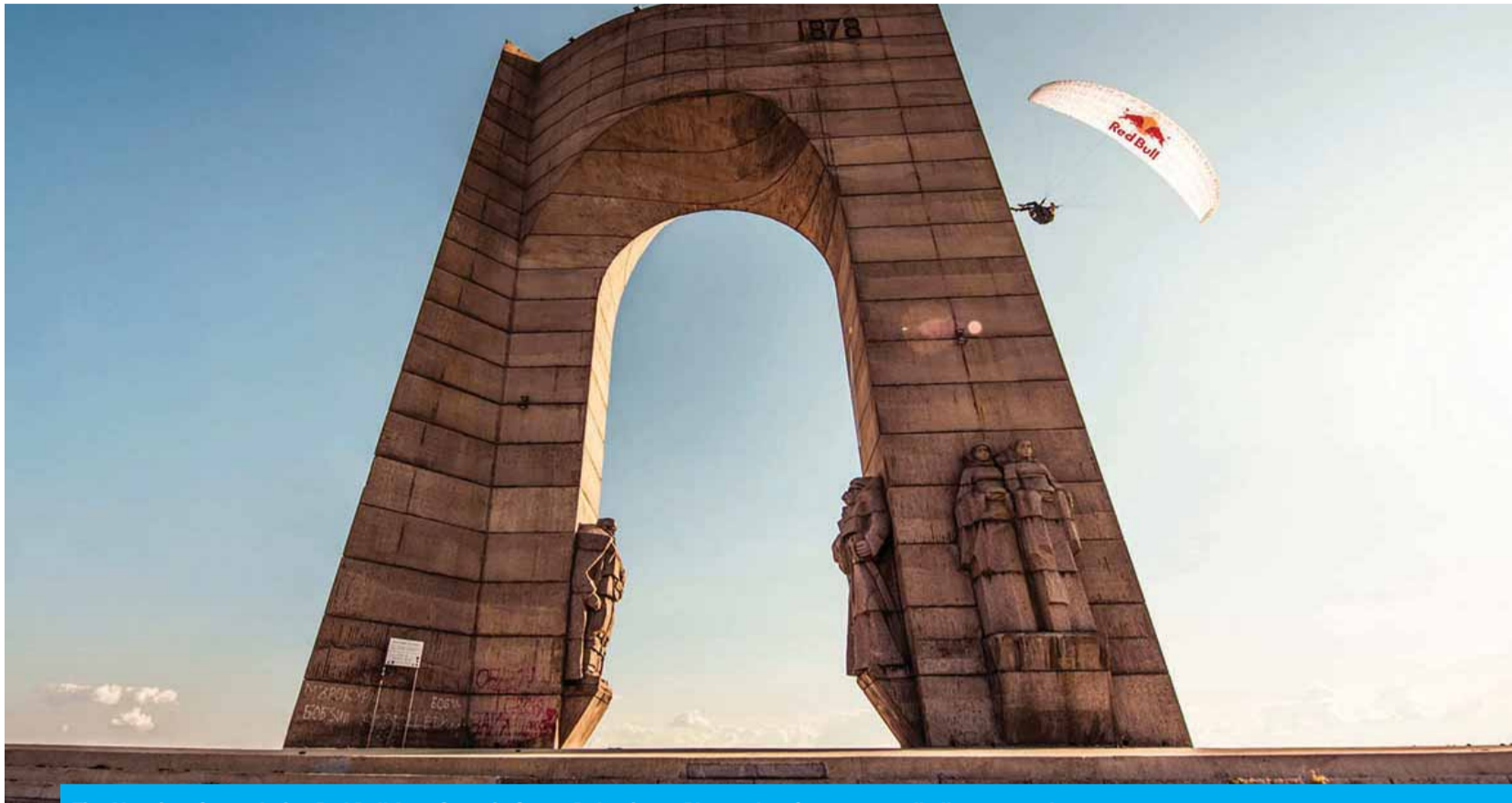
Emhoff is the daughter of Harris's husband Doug Emhoff and his first wife Kerstin Mackin. Ella Emhoff signed with the prestigious modeling agency IMG Models in late January after she wore a Miu Miu coat to Joe Biden's and Harris's swearing-in ceremony. The final-year student at the Parsons School of Design in New York is also a knitwear designer.

On Thursday, she released a collection of five items that included two sweater vests and a long striped dress. Only one of each item was made and they quickly sold out on the website Mall, which is an online marketplace for emerging designers. — AFP



Ella Emhoff, stepdaughter of US Vice President Kamala Harris, poses during her fashion debut for Proenza Schouler's Fall Winter 2021 collection on Feb 18, 2021 in New York. — AFP

Photo of the Day



Tim Alongi performs during Red Bull Acro Cross in Sopot, Bulgaria. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

MLB has 13 positive COVID tests ahead of first workouts

NEW YORK: Nine players and four staffers tested positive for COVID-19 during intake screening before Major League Baseball begins full-squad pre-season workouts, MLB and the players union said Friday. The first set of results under the MLB COVID-19 health and test plan found 13 positives spread over 11 clubs from 4,336 total samples collected, a positive rate of 0.3 percent. Tests were required of all active MLB roster players, non-roster invitees to spring training camps and staff members as part of a screening process that included a five-day home quarantine, temperature checks plus saliva and antibody tests. The 2021 MLB health and safety protocols were agreed upon by the league and MLB Players Association after recommendations by medical experts and infectious disease specialists. Those who clear the intake process become subject to regular monitoring testing. There were 2,298 such samples taken and none was returned positive. Clubs open workouts this month with the first pre-season contests planned for February 28 ahead of the scheduled April 1 start of the regular season. — AFP

Rejuvenated Clippers snap Jazz win streak, Murray hits career high 50 points

Pistons vs Knicks rescheduled to March 4

LOS ANGELES: Kawhi Leonard returned from a leg injury to score 29 points as the revitalized Los Angeles Clippers beat the NBA-leading Utah Jazz in the second of a two-game set on Friday in Los Angeles. With both Leonard and Paul George back in the lineup after sitting out with injuries, the Clippers held on to beat the Utah Jazz 116-112 to snap the team's nine-game winning streak.

Leonard returned after a three-game absence due to a bruised leg, George missed seven-games with a sore toe. Both couldn't play in the Clippers' 114-96 home loss on Wednesday to the red-hot Jazz. The Jazz's trademark during their win streak has been finding different ways to get the job done, but that didn't matter on Friday as they were outbounded by the Clippers 45-38.

The Clippers had five players in double figures, including both Leonard and George, who scored 15 as they beat the Jazz for the first time this season. Lou Williams added 19 points, Patrick Beverley had 17 and Marcus Morris chipped in 17 off the bench for the Clippers. Donovan Mitchell scored 35 points, Bojan Bogdanovic added 23 points, and reserve Jordan Clarkson contributed 19. Mike Conley scored 16 points for Utah, who lost for just the second time in 22 contests.

In other games on Friday, Philadelphia's Joel Embiid and Denver's Jamal Murray each scored a career high 50 points, with Murray becoming the first ever to reach the mark without attempting a free throw and Embiid also grabbing a whopping 17 rebounds. All-Star Embiid led the 76ers to a 112-105 victory over the Chicago Bulls. He added 17 rebounds, five assists, four blocks and two steals in a dynamic game in Philadelphia.

Embiid was 17 of 26 from the field and 15 of 17 from the free-throw line as he eclipsed the 49 points he scored against the Atlanta Hawks one year ago. "My teammates found me. I am pretty happy about what we did," Embiid said. "I have got to get the job done. That's my job, that's why they pay me."

Tobias Harris contributed 22 points, 12 rebounds in the win. Danny Green scored 13 points and reserve Dwight Howard had 10 rebounds. It was Philadelphia's second consecutive win without Ben Simmons, who skipped the game with a stomach illness. Zach LaVine led the Bulls with 30 points, Wendell Carter added 15 and Thad Young scored 12 as Chicago had its two game win streak halted.

Canada's Murray scored a regular season career-high 50 as the Nuggets crushed the Cleveland Cavaliers 120-103 in Cleveland. Murray, who scored 50 points in two playoff games last season, surpassed his previous high of 48 points in Denver's 115-107 win over the Boston Celtics in November 2018. "Once I saw a few go down it just took off from there," Murray said.

Murray, whose mother is from Syria and father was born in Jamaica, made 21 of 25 shots from the floor and drained eight threes for the Nuggets, who led 69-50 at halftime. Oddly enough, he did not have a free throw, making it the highest scoring game in NBA history without a free throw attempt. "It's kind of cool to make history. It's a cool stat," Murray said. Michael Porter scored 22 points in the first half, and Nikola Jokic earned 16 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists for the Nuggets. Jokic turned 26 on Friday.

American Collin Sexton scored 23 points, and Jarrett Allen tallied 20 points and 10 rebounds for the Cavaliers, who extended their losing streak to nine



LOS ANGELES: Donovan Mitchell #45 of the Utah Jazz drives to the basket during the game against the LA Clippers on Friday at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

games. Nikola Vucevic also recorded his third career triple-double with 30 points, 16 rebounds and 10 assists to lift the Orlando Magic to a 124-120 win over the Golden State Warriors in Florida.

The league tweaked its schedule on Friday. The

Detroit Pistons will now visit the New York Knicks on March 4. The game had been planned for the season's second half, after next month's all-star break. Instead, it will be played on the final day before the break. — AFP

Despite risks, Nairobi gives cycling a spin in pandemic bike push

NAIROBI: Nairobi, morning rush hour: the only cyclist on a busy highway, Steven Odhiambo is narrowly overtaken by a fast-moving minibus. "It's just a jungle, just fighting for your space on the road," says the 30-year-old video editor, who picked up cycling again at the onset of the pandemic after 20 years without a pedal stroke.

It is a risky business but since the outbreak of the

coronavirus, Odhiambo has avoided crowded public transport and taken his chances on two wheels navigating the hectic roads of the Kenyan capital. The other choice is cramming into a 'matatu': colorfully painted minibuses jammed with some 15 commuters that hurtle around the city streets.

"I am much safer on a bicycle," said Odhiambo, adding that he was able to social distancing, and travel faster because he's not stuck in traffic. He wears a bright yellow vest and blows a whistle to make his presence known on his morning rides to the office.

It is a harrowing 15-kilometre (nine miles) journey without the protection of bike lanes, and he must navigate between antiquated trucks, speeding SUVs and motorcycles criss-crossing the lanes. Despite the perilous conditions, not to mention two minor accidents, Odhiambo has no intention of backpedalling.



NAIROBI: Cyclists take part in the monthly Critical Mass Nairobi (CMS) group-bike ride around the capital city whose two objectives are getting more people commuting on bicycles, partly as a counter measure against the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus at crowded public transport termini and buses and to revolutionize urban transport system to enhance safety for non-motorized road users at Nairobi's Uhuru Park January 30, 2021. — AFP

He says he lost 20 kilograms (44 pounds) getting in the saddle, and made significant savings on transport thanks to a used bike he purchased for about 15,000 Kenyan shillings (\$136 or 115 euros). "The best way to sensitize people about cycling and going green is to show people the benefit of it," he said.

Growing trend

Odhiambo is among a growing number in Nairobi switching to cycling since the pandemic, despite a critical lack of bike paths. It is a promising sign in a city where air pollution has increased 182 percent since the 1970s, according to a recent study by the University of Birmingham, and traffic jams cost an estimated \$1 billion in lost productivity every year.

In his store for used bikes in the city Centre, Jimmy Karumba said he experienced at least a 50 percent rise in sales in last year. The shopkeeper, who mainly sold children's bikes before the pandemic, said he welcomed many adult customers looking to avoid public transport and stay fit.

In May, Benard Asin founded Spin Kings, a group dedicated to biking enthusiasts, and witnessed a surge to around 300 members in a matter of weeks. "I was even speechless. I didn't expect it to pick up that fast," the 27-year-old social worker said. "I can say 99 percent started cycling after the pandemic." While most remembered the basics "many people didn't know about changing gears," he said.

'Cyclists' lives matter'

Cyprine Odada of Critical Mass, an alliance of cyclist groups that holds monthly rides of up to 1,000 people in Nairobi, said the pandemic had shown policymakers that biking was popular and not exclusively transport for the poor. "Weirdly, COVID has been good for cycling," said Odada.

Many novices have sought out Critical Mass for advice about staying safe, said the 34-year-old urban planner. Cycling is far from harmless in Nairobi: 69 cyclists died last year in the capital, according to the National Transport Authority. Between the scarcity of bicycle paths and often total absence of footpaths "our roads are a death trap," said Odada. In the city, some bikers have taken to wearing t-shirts emblazoned with the slogan: "Cyclists' lives matter." —AFP

India's Kohli says he suffered from depression

NEW DELHI: Indian cricket superstar Virat Kohli has revealed that he struggled with depression and felt like the "loneliest guy in the world" after failing with the bat during a tour of England in 2014. Kohli, one of the highest-paid athletes in the world with a net worth of \$26 million, also said that a chat with the legendary Sachin Tendulkar helped him through the mental-health crisis.

The 32-year-old batsman made the revelations on a podcast with English commentator and former cricketer Mark Nicholas. "I did (feel depressed). It's not a great feeling to wake up knowing that you won't be able to score runs and I think all batsmen have felt that at some stage that you are not in control of anything at all," said Kohli, who is adored by millions of fans for his tough and competitive on-field persona. "You just didn't understand how to get over it. That was a phase when I literally couldn't do anything to overturn things...I felt like I was the loneliest guy in the world."

The Indian skipper averaged just 13.50 from five Tests in that series, which India lost 3-1 after drawing the opener. Kohli said he felt lonely despite having supportive people in his life. "Personally, for me that was a revelation that you could feel that lonely even though you are a part of a big group," said the cricketer, who married top Bollywood actor Anushka Sharma in 2017. "I won't say I didn't have people who I could speak to but not having a professional to speak to who could understand what I am going through completely, I think is a huge factor."

Kohli added that he heeded advice from Tendulkar about letting the feeling pass instead of fighting it. "If you start fighting that feeling, it grows stronger. So, that is the advice I took on board and my mindset really opened up from then on." Kohli is currently leading India against England in a four-Test home series tied 1-1. — AFP

Sports

King Novak faces 'challenger' Medvedev in Australian Open final

Djokovic eyes 18th Slam title to inch closer to Federer, Nadal

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic says going unbeaten in eight Australian Open finals will give him confidence in today's decider, but he'll need more than that to overcome "the man to beat" — red-hot Russian Daniil Medvedev. The Serbian world number one is into his ninth decider at Melbourne Park as he targets an 18th Slam title to close the gap on Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, who have 20 each.

It has been a rollercoaster ride to get there, with Djokovic uncharacteristically dropping five sets as he battled an abdominal injury that nearly forced him to pull out. But after his semi-final, Djokovic said he was feeling better than at any time during the past fortnight as he prepares to defend his crown against a man on a 20-match unbeaten streak. The Serb heads into the showpiece on Sunday evening with the phenomenal record of never losing a final on Melbourne's famous blue courts in eight attempts spanning 13 years. Djokovic will also be playing his 28th Grand Slam final, in contrast to the Russian's second. But the 33-year-old, who swept past qualifier Aslan Karatsev in the semi-finals, said while experience was clearly an advantage, Medvedev was also in electric form.

"Of course it contributes to more confidence, prior to coming into the finals knowing that I never lost in the finals or semi-finals just makes me feel more comfortable being on the court," he said. "But each year is different, although it does have a mental effect on me. Maybe on my opponents, I don't know, but on me it does definitely have a positive effect. But it's not a decisive factor in the way the match is going to go forward, because each year is different."

Medvedev is unbeaten since last November, includ-

ing a straight-sets drubbing of the Serb at the ATP Finals in London, with Djokovic deeming him "the man to beat". "He's just so solid. Also, I heard (commentator) Jim Courier calling him a master chess player because of the way he tactically positions himself on the court, and it's true," he said. "You know, he's definitely a very smart tennis player."

'He's the favorite'

Medvedev, who has dropped just two sets so far, insisted that despite having all the momentum he was still the underdog. "He's the favorite because he didn't lose. On eight occasions that he was here in the semis he won the tournament," said the 25-year-old.

"Me, I'm... the challenger, the guy that challenges the guy who was eight times in the final and won eight times. And I'm happy about it. I know that to beat him you need to just show your best tennis, be at your best physically maybe four or five hours, and be at your best mentally maybe for five hours," he added.

Despite playing down his chances, Medvedev, who also reached the 2019 US Open final, losing to Nadal, has the weapons to trouble Djokovic, with a big serve, unrelenting returns and exceptional movement as he targets a maiden Grand Slam title.

Twelve of his 20 straight wins have been against top-10 players and he has won three of his last four against the 17-time Grand Slam-winning Serb. "Playing Novak seven times already is just a huge experience," he said. "(But) I think when he's in the zone he doesn't miss. He goes down the line, cross, forehand, backhand, he doesn't miss. That's what is the toughest part of playing against him." — AFP



MELBOURNE: This combination photo shows Russia's Daniil Medvedev hitting a return during his men's singles semi-final match at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on February 19, 2021 (left) and Serbia's Novak Djokovic hitting a return during his men's singles quarter-final match at the same tournament on February 16, 2021. — AFP



MILAN: This file photo taken in Milan on February 15, 2021 shows a street art mural by an unknown artist on a wall near the San Siro stadium, depicting AC Milan's Swedish forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic headbutting Inter Milan's Belgian forward Romelu Lukaku, a gesture that occurred last January 26 during their Italian Cup quarter final match. — AFP

Ibrahimovic, Lukaku rematch as Milan rivals clash

MILAN: AC Milan and city rivals Inter renew their duel for top spot in Serie A today in a third clash this season between star strikers Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Romelu Lukaku as champions Juventus play catch-up. Antonio Conte's Inter went top after Lukaku scored twice in a 3-1 win over Lazio, one point ahead of Milan who dropped to second after losing to Spezia last weekend. Juventus will be looking for a boost against rock bottom Crotona after following their Napoli defeat with a Champions League last 16, first leg loss at Porto. Inter have the advantage of being fresher having been eliminated early from European action. AC Milan return to Italy after conceding a late goal in a 2-2 draw at Red Star Belgrade in the Europa league, a game in which midfielder Ismael Bennacer was injured. "Against Spezia it was not the real AC Milan. The important thing is to turn the page," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli. It will be the third derby this season with Milan winning the first 2-1 in the league.

Inter won a fiery Italian Cup quarter-final by the same scoreline, a game overshadowed by Ibrahimovic

and Lukaku squaring off and trading insults, with the Swede later sent off. Inter have won five of their last six meetings. But AC Milan can win both league games against Inter for the first time since 2010-11, when they went on to lift their most recent Serie A title.

Roma, seven points adrift of Inter in third place, can benefit from the Milan duel to close the gap, with the capital side travelling to 15th-placed Benevento, after a 2-0 Europa League win at Sporting Braga. Juventus, in fourth, one point behind Roma, should take all three points against Crotona tomorrow, despite being held by the side from Calabria in their last two meetings.

However, the Turin giants have an injury crisis with Leonardo Bonucci, Giorgio Chiellini, Arthur, Juan Cuadrado, Paulo Dybala and Alvaro Morata all uncertain. Champions League rivals Atalanta and Napoli go head-to-head today before the Bergamo side host Real Madrid in this year's elite European tournament.

Gennaro Gattuso's Napoli lost their Europa League tie at Granada and also have a long injury list with Dries Mertens, Kostas Manolas, Hirving Lozano and Elseid Hysaj, while Kalidou Koulibaly and Faouzi Ghoulam have to receive the all-clear from coronavirus. Lazio, seventh equal on points with Napoli and Atalanta, host Sampdoria, who they lost to 3-0 earlier this season. But the Romans are the form side in 2021 with 19 points from eight games, more than any other team in Serie A. On Friday, relegation rivals Cagliari and Torino clash with the Sardinians chasing a first win since November 7. — AFP

But Brest goalkeeper Sebastien Cibois, only playing his fourth senior game for the club, handed Lyon the opening goal.

The 22-year-old fluffed a clearance which allowed Brazilian midfielder Paqueta to walk the ball into an empty net. Brest's Paul Lasne was then caught in possession by Thiago Mendes who found Depay. The Netherlands attacker in turn set up Aouar to score.



BREST: Lyon's Dutch forward Memphis Depay scores a penalty during the French L1 football match between Stade Brestois 29 (FC Brest) and Olympique Lyonnais - Lyon (OL) at The Francis Le Ble Stadium in Brest, western France on Friday. — AFP

Lyon go top of Ligue 1

BREST: Lyon went top of Ligue 1 on Friday, making the most of a series of blunders by hosts Brest to win 3-2. Lyon were in cruise control with a 3-0 lead courtesy of goals from Lucas Paqueta in the ninth minute, Houssem Aouar after 28 minutes and a penalty from Memphis Depay just before the half-time break. However, the home side fought back with second-half goals from Brendan Chardonnet in the 52nd minute and Irvin Cardona 20 minutes later. "I am satisfied with this victory. It was in two phases—a first half with the wind for us but which we did not need to use," said Lyon coach Rudi Garcia of the wet and blustery conditions in the Brittany port city. "We played on the ground, on the move. In the second half, we expected a lot of pressure from the Brest players and our friend the wind, which encouraged their kick and rush." Brest coach Olivier Dall'Oglio said he was left with "regrets and bitterness". "Against teams like Lyon, we should not make these mistakes. We shot ourselves in the foot on the first and second goals."

Lyon lead the way on goal difference from Lille with champions Paris Saint-Germain a point further back in third. Lille are at Lorient today while PSG host Monaco in a game where Kylian Mbappe faces his former club. "Now we are going to watch those matches carefully and hope for a misstep," said Aouar. Mid-table Brest matched Lyon in the early stages as Garcia's men looked to bounce back from their defeat to Montpellier last weekend.

Arsenal boss hails Man City as 'best in Europe'

LONDON: Mikel Arteta believes his Arsenal team will be facing the best side in Europe when they take on Premier League leaders Manchester City at the Emirates Stadium today. City have won a club-record 17 successive games across all competitions and are 10 points ahead of second-placed Manchester United.

Arteta knows Guardiola well after working under the City boss in Manchester for three years before returning to manage Arsenal, having previously played for the Gunners. "I think they are the best team in Europe at the moment," Arteta said of City. "The way they are performing, the football they are playing and the consistency of the results, take all that and it makes them the best team. So we have a big but, as well, a very exciting challenge ahead of us."

City made an uncertain start to the season but are now hot favorites to win a third Premier League title in four years. Arteta said he was impressed by how they had regained their form. "What they have done is react to a difficult moment," he said. "They reacted in a really convincing way, all united and doing what they do best — being very consistent and winning games very comfortably. They have weaknesses like every team but at the moment teams have struggled a lot to find any of that because I think first of all defensively they have been really, really strong."

Arteta's praise for City was reciprocated by Guardiola, who predicted Arsenal would be title contenders in the near future. After City won 4-1 at the Emirates Stadium in the League Cup in December, the post-match inquest focused on whether Arteta would be sacked. Guardiola was one of the few to speak out in support of the Spaniard, with Arsenal languishing close to the relegation zone.

But Arsenal kept faith with Arteta and he has steered them into calmer waters thanks to the rapid development of promising youngsters Bukayo Saka and Emile Smith Rowe. "What the two months shows is that all managers need time," Guardiola said. "He (Arteta) is not an exception, but when I see the last two months every game Arsenal plays they are better than the opponent. They have quality and incredible

energy in (Emile) Smith Rowe, (Bukayo) Saka, (Pierre-Emerick) Aubameyang with the runs in behind, and they have the players with the quality in the middle to make the process quite well. Early in the future they will be a real contender to fight for the title."

Guardiola played down his influence on his former colleague, saying: "I didn't inspire him. What he knows he knows for himself. I'm not in this case absolutely any influence. What he is doing, the credit is for him and his staff." — AFP



ROME: Arsenal's Spanish manager Mikel Arteta gestures during the UEFA Europa League round of 32 first leg football match between SL Benfica and Arsenal at the Olimpico stadium in Rome on February 18, 2021. — AFP

Zaha to stop taking knee before league games

LONDON: Crystal Palace forward Wilfried Zaha says he is going to stop taking a knee before Premier League matches and instead wants to see concrete action to tackle racism. Players, officials and staff at Premier League and English Football League matches have been making the gesture before kick-off since the 2019/20 season resumed in June to show support for racial equality. Premier League club shirts also carried a Black Lives Matter slogan during the latter stages of last season before being changed for this campaign to feature a patch promoting the league's own anti-discrimination campaign "No Room For Racism".

But a number of players including Manchester United's Anthony Martial and Marcus Rashford have been targeted with racist abuse on social media in recent weeks. Several teams, including Championship side Brentford, have stopped taking a knee before games and Zaha feels it has become an empty gesture. The Ivory Coast international, 28, speaking at the Financial Times Business of Football Summit on Thursday, said his parents had told him he should be proud to be black and should "stand tall".

"It's becoming something that we just do now and that's not enough for me," he said. "I'm not going to take the knee, I'm not going to wear Black Lives Matter on the back of my shirt because it feels like it's a target. We're isolating ourselves, we're trying to say that we're equal but we're isolating ourselves with these things that aren't even working anyway, so that's my stand on it. Unless action is going to happen, don't speak to me about it." — AFP

Osaka dominates to win Australian Open

Third player ever to win first four major finals

MELBOURNE: Japan's Naomi Osaka dismissed Jennifer Brady in straight sets to win the Australian Open and underline her growing hold on women's tennis yesterday. Osaka edged a tight first set but controlled the second to win 6-4, 6-3 in 77 minutes in front of 7,381 fans at Rod Laver Arena. Third seed Osaka preserves her 100 percent record in Grand Slam finals after winning the 2018 and 2020 US Opens and the 2019 title in Melbourne.

The reigning US Open champion, who beat her idol Serena Williams in the Melbourne semi-finals, has now won two of the last three Grand Slams as her status and reputation soars. "We played in the semis of the US Open a couple of months ago and I told everyone that you're going to be a problem," Osaka told Brady at the trophy presentation. "And I was right. It's really incredible to me to see your growth over the past few months, it's really cool for me to see."

Osaka, 23, is only the third player after Monica Seles and Roger Federer to win their first four major finals, and will now rise to second in the world rankings. She saved two match points in the fourth round against Garbine Muguruza and swept past Williams in straight sets in the semis.

Yesterday, Osaka wore down fellow big-hitter Brady, and then lifted her racquet above her head in celebration of her win as the crowd roared. After sealing back-to-back Slam titles twice, Osaka has won half the majors she's contested since beating Williams to win her first in 2018.

"Thank you for coming and watch-



MELBOURNE: This handout photo released by the Tennis Australia yesterday shows Japan's Naomi Osaka holding the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup trophy after her women's singles final match against Jennifer Brady of the US on day thirteen of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne. — AFP

ing, it feels really incredible for me," she told the crowd, which was capped at half-capacity over coronavirus concerns. "I didn't play my last Grand Slam with fans so just to have this energy really means a lot."

US Open rematch

The Japanese survived a seesaw start to gain control, reeling off six straight games en route to the title. It



was a rematch of last year's epic US Open semi-final, described by some as the best match of 2020, but Osaka triumphed far more comfortably on this occasion. Before the match, Osaka had pinpointed her return as the key, but she was helped out by a shaky Brady who lost her serve in the fourth game after two double faults.

But Brady, the 22nd seed, hit back with a break and she continued to pile

pressure on Osaka's serve. A brilliant lob winner, showcasing her trademark athleticism, gave a pumped-up Brady a break point in the ninth game, but Osaka held on. Brady then played a sloppy game on serve to hand over the set to Osaka, who had a 20-0 record at Melbourne Park when winning the first set.

Osaka gained a stranglehold with an early break in the second set and fired

down an ace to skip out to a 3-0 lead, followed by a roar of "C'mon!". Brady attempted a late rally, but a calm Osaka was not to be denied. Brady's resilient run ended after serving 14 days' hard quarantine before the tournament, unlike other players who were allowed out of their hotel rooms to train. Despite the defeat, Brady will rise to a career-high 13th in the WTA rankings. — AFP

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