

**3** EPA issues licenses to dispose Rahaya tires



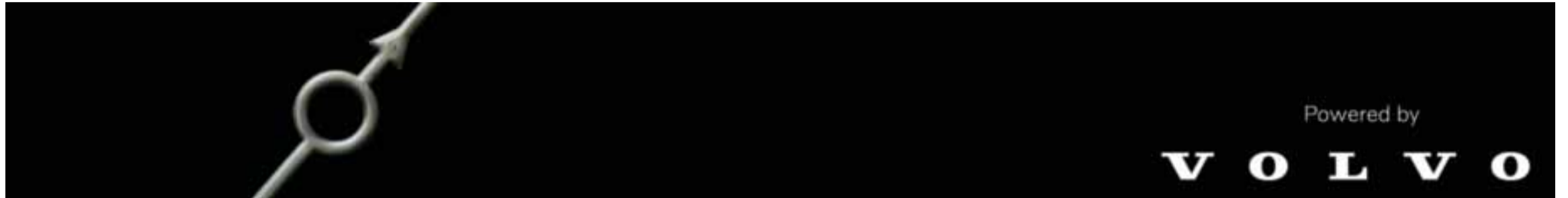
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# Iran seizes South Korean oil tanker in Gulf waters

Tehran starts enriching uranium to 20% • US aircraft carrier to stay in Gulf

## Amir sends message to Qatari leader



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah conveys a verbal message from HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani yesterday on the solid and brotherly relations between Kuwait and Qatar and regional and international developments. — KUNA

TEHRAN: Iran's Revolutionary Guards said yesterday it had seized a South Korean-flagged tanker in Gulf waters for breaking "maritime environmental laws". "A ship owned by South Korea was seized by our force's (navy) this morning," the Guards said on its website Sepahnews. "This tanker was headed from Saudi Arabia's Al Jubail port and was seized due to the repeated infringement of maritime environmental laws," it added. It identified the ship as the South Korean-flagged Hankuk Chemi, which it said was carrying 7,200 tons of "oil chemical products".

South Korea's foreign ministry yesterday demanded the "early release" of the oil tanker. "The foreign ministry... is demanding an early release of the vessel," it said in a statement, adding that it had confirmed the safety of the tanker's crew. Seoul dispatched its anti-piracy unit to the Gulf immediately after receiving reports the ship had



A picture obtained from the Iranian news agency Tasnim yesterday shows a South Korean-flagged tanker being escorted by Iran's Revolutionary Guards after being seized in the Gulf. — AFP

been seized, according to the defense ministry.

News of the seizure comes amid renewed regional tensions particularly as Iran marks the first anniversary of the assassination of its revered commander Qasem Soleimani in a US drone strike in

Jan 2020. Tehran yesterday also announced it had started the process to enrich uranium to 20 percent purity at its underground Fordo facility, state media reported, in a move which drew swift international concern.

Continued on Page 2

## Kuwait makes three oil and gas discoveries

KUWAIT: Kuwait has made three oil and gas discoveries, including one next to the giant Burgan field, the country's biggest, potentially helping to boost the reserves of OPEC's fourth largest producer.

Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Mohammad Al-Fares announced yesterday the discovery of two new oilfields of Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) in different regions of the country, in addition to the discovery of the extension of the northern part of the Great Burgan field. In a statement to KUNA, Fares said the first discovery was in Houma field

Continued on Page 2

## Outrage as Trump asks to 'find' votes; Pelosi re-elected

WASHINGTON: The release on Sunday by US media of a stunning audiotape in which President Donald Trump pressured Georgia's secretary of state to "find" enough votes to overturn his election defeat there to Democrat Joe Biden sent shockwaves across Washington. The tape, a rebel push by scores of Republican lawmakers to challenge Biden's electoral win later this week, a pair of runoff elections in Georgia to decide control of the US Senate and expected pro-Trump protests in

Washington are combining to set the stage for a fiery week in American politics.

Lawmakers got back to work Sunday on Capitol Hill, where Democrat Nancy Pelosi was narrowly reelected as speaker of the House of Representatives, but the real political fireworks are to come later in the week. Following the release of the recording, Democrats and a few Republicans heaped scorn on the outgoing president, who fired off a tweetstorm of unsubstantiated claims of fraud in the Nov 3 election.

The taped conversation between Trump and fellow Republican Brad Raffensperger, first obtained by The Washington Post, includes vague threats by Trump that Raffensperger and another official could face "a big risk" if they failed to take moves toward overturning Biden's victory.

Continued on Page 2



WASHINGTON: Speaker Nancy Pelosi holds the gavel on the House floor in the US Capitol after becoming speaker of the 117th Congress on Monday. — AFP

## Court rejects extradition of Assange to US

LONDON: A British judge yesterday blocked WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's extradition to the United States to face espionage charges, finding he was at serious risk of suicide. District Judge Vanessa Baraitser said the 49-year-old Australian publisher's actions in leaking secret documents went "well beyond" that of a journalist,

and he would have been "well aware" of the dangers the leak posed.

But facing the "harsh conditions" likely in the US jail system, Assange's mental health would deteriorate, "causing him to commit suicide" with the determination of a person with autism spectrum disorder, she ruled, siding with a diagnosis by psychologists. Inside the Old Bailey court in central London, Assange wiped his forehead as the decision was announced while his fiancée Stella Morris burst into tears and was embraced by WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson.

Continued on Page 2



LONDON: Supporters of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange celebrate outside the Old Bailey court after a judge ruled that Assange should not be extradited to the United States yesterday. — AFP

## Gulf hunts fuel Pakistan falcon trafficking

KARACHI: For years, Pakistan has stood at the nexus of the falcon trade, both as a source of the birds of prey, and then as a destination to hunt with them. Falcon poaching is officially banned, but demand for the birds is rising, according to the World Wildlife Fund in Pakistan. It estimates that up to 700 falcons were illegally smuggled out of the country last year alone,

often by organized criminal networks.

Their destination is normally Gulf countries, where falconry is a treasured tradition. Owners treat the birds "like their own children", said Margit Muller, the director of Abu Dhabi's falcon hospital, which treats 11,000 falcons annually, a number that has more than doubled in the past 10 years.

Every winter, lavish hunting parties from the Gulf flock to Pakistan's sprawling deserts, where they are given permits to use their falcons to hunt houbara bustards, a migratory bird wrongly prized as an aphrodisiac and classified as vulnerable by conservationists. — AFP (See Page 13)



KARACHI: In this picture taken on Nov 23, 2020, members of the Pakistan Falconry Association take care of falcons, confiscated by Pakistani authorities from smugglers, at a shelter. — AFP

### News in brief

#### PCR test must on arrival

KUWAIT: All passengers arriving in Kuwait are required to undergo a PCR test at the airport, according to a statement by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. Travelers to Kuwait will have to undergo a PCR test up to 96 hours prior to their departure, register on the Shlonik app and quarantine at home for 14-days upon arrival. Those leaving Kuwait must register on the Kuwait Mosafer platform and conduct a PCR test if needed.

#### Chronic patients have priority

KUWAIT: The health ministry said people with chronic diseases and special needs should be prioritized as a mass inoculation campaign against COVID-19 continues, with health workers and the elderly already at the front of the line. The shots will be administered on a "priority basis" through online pre-registration. The measure also aims to protect the most exposed groups and those higher at risk of developing COVID-19 complications, the ministry statement added. — KUNA

## Local

# Kuwait's Amir to participate in 41st GCC Summit today

## Sheikh Nawaf receives Crown Prince, state officials



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



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



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



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



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



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

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is scheduled to depart Kuwait today to Saudi Arabia to head the State of Kuwait's delegation participating in the 41st GCC Summit. His Highness the Amir had received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir received as well Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh. In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince received Speaker Ghanem and His Highness Sheikh Sabah

Al-Khaled at Bayan Palace. His Highness Sheikh Mishal also received Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali, Saleh, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

### Enhancing cooperation

The Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) 41st Summit kicks off today at the invitation of the Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud with the participation of the member states' leaders. The summit is hosted in the historic city of Al-Ula in northwest Saudi Arabia amid the exceptional circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which reflects the keenness of the Gulf leaders to continue coordination and cooperation under the umbrella of this interconnected system. On Sunday, the

GCC Secretary-General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf pointed out that the economic file will be the title of the fifth decade of the GCC's march by strengthening and supporting joint action to contribute to restoring economic recovery, restoring growth and returning to normalcy after the pandemic and achieving sustainable development goals.

Saudi Arabia is hosting the GCC Summit for a third consecutive year. The GCC leaders are scheduled to discuss a number of important issues to enhance the process of cooperation and integration among the member states in political, defense, security, economic and social fields, in addition to discussing regional and international political developments and the reflection of the security situation in the region on the six GCC states.

### Chronology

The first summit was held in Abu Dhabi in May 1981. The Emirati capital also held the summit in 1986, 1992, 1998, 2005 and 2010. Riyadh hosted the summit in 1981, 1987, 1993, 1999, 2006, 2011, 2015, 2018 and 2019. The Qatari capital, Doha, hosted the summit in 1983, 1990, 1996, 2002, 2007 and 2014. Kuwait hosted the summit seven times; in 1984, 1991, 1997, 2003, 2009, 2013, and 2017. The GCC summit was held in the Bahraini capital, Manama, in 1982, 1988, 1994, 2000, 2004, 2012 and 2016. Oman's Muscat hosted the summit in 1985, 1989, 1995, 2001 and 2008. The GCC is a regional inter-governmental political and economic union consisting of all Arab states of the Arabian Gulf - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. — KUNA

## Kuwait makes three oil and...

Continued from Page 1

northwest of the country, with production capacity of 1,452 barrels per day (bpd) of light oil. The second was in Al-Qashaniya in northern Kuwait, with production capacity of 1,819 bpd of light oil and 2.78 million cubic feet of associated gas per day. This discovery has great economic importance as it sheds light on large undiscovered areas in the western and northwestern parts of Kuwait, which will contribute directly to increasing oil reserves and the production capacity according to KOC's 2040 strategic plan, he said.

Fares also noted the two new discoveries add strategic importance to the northern part of Kuwait, as the area has not been explored before. A conventional oilfield was also discovered in the north of the Great Burgan field, as oil flowed in commercial quantities from several wells drilled during 2020 to determine the extent of the field, with a daily production rate of more than 2,000 barrels, Fares added.

The results give KOC access to easy and low-cost reserves, which supports the company's efforts to maintain its competitive advantage between countries and oil companies, indicating that the company will drill new wells in the discovered fields to boost production, he said. Fares praised the success of KOC in achieving these three discoveries in 2020, despite the conditions that the country faced in light of the COVID pandemic. — KUNA

## Iran seizes South Korean oil tanker...

Continued from Page 1

It is the latest and most important suspension of nuclear commitments by Iran under a landmark 2015 deal, starting in 2019, and in response to US President Donald Trump's dramatic withdrawal from the accord in May 2018, with the US imposing crippling economic sanctions on Tehran.

"The process for producing 20 percent enriched uranium has started at Shahid Alimohammadi enrichment complex (Fordo)," government spokesman Ali Rabiee said, quoted on the website of the state broadcaster. According to the official, President Hassan Rouhani ordered the enrichment "in recent days", and "the gas injection process started as of hours ago".

The UN nuclear watchdog confirmed yesterday that Iran had started the process of enriching uranium to 20 percent. "Iran today began feeding uranium already enriched up to 4.1 percent U-235 into six centrifuge cascades at the Fordo Fuel Enrichment Plant for further enrichment up to 20 percent," a statement from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said.

The statement added that "IAEA inspectors were present at the site to detach the Agency's seal from a cylinder with the feed material" and that "the cylinder was then connected to the feeding line to start the production of uranium enriched up to 20 percent". A total of 1,044 IR-1 centrifuges were being used in the process, the IAEA said.

The European Union yesterday said that Iran's enrichment program would be a "considerable departure" from deal. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reacted angrily to the news of enrichment. "Iran's decision to continue violating its commitments, to raise the enrichment level and advance the industrial ability to enrich uranium underground, cannot be explained in any way except as the continued realization of its intention to develop a military

nuclear program," Netanyahu said in a statement yesterday. "Israel will not allow Iran to manufacture nuclear weapons."

The seizure of the South Korean-flagged tanker came at the request of Hormozgan Province's maritime organization and upon the order of the provincial prosecutor, Sepahnews said. The arrested crew were from South Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Myanmar, the Guards said, without giving further details. A photo released by the website appeared to show three speedboats and a patrol boat approaching the tanker. The Guards' statement did not specify where the tanker was seized or transferred to.

The British body, United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, said in a message that there had been "an interaction" in the Strait of Hormuz between a merchant vessel and Iranian authorities early yesterday, which had caused the ship to "make an alteration of course North and ... into Iranian waters". Fars news agency had earlier reported that the ship "has been seized in Persian Gulf waters (...) and transferred to our country's ports."

Meanwhile, the US reversed a decision to bring an aircraft carrier home from the Gulf Sunday, with the Pentagon saying that due to "recent threats" by Iran the USS Nimitz would stay in position. The Nimitz has been patrolling Gulf waters since late November, but in a statement issued on Dec 31, acting US defense secretary Christopher C Miller ordered the vessel to "transit directly home to complete a nearly 10-month deployment".

The New York Times, quoting US officials, said this move was part of a "de-escalatory" signal to Tehran to avoid a conflict in President Donald Trump's last days in office. However, Miller issued a new statement changing course on Sunday. "Due to the recent threats issued by Iranian leaders against President Trump and other US government officials, I have ordered the USS Nimitz to halt its routine redeployment," he said.

"The USS Nimitz will now remain on station in the US Central Command area of operations. No one should doubt the resolve of the United States of America." He did not elaborate on the threats involved. — Agencies

## Court rejects extradition of...

Continued from Page 1

Moris, who has two young sons with Assange, said the ruling was "a victory" but she would not celebrate until he was free and also appealed to US President Donald Trump. "End this now," she said outside the court. "Tear down these prison walls, that our little boys have their father, for Julian, the press, for all of us." His supporters had gathered since early morning, defying police warnings to disperse because of coronavirus restrictions. They erupted in cheers and shouted "Free Assange!" The ruling follows more than a decade of legal controversies. Assange and his lawyers have long argued that the protracted case was politically motivated. However, the US government gave notice it will challenge the decision, and has two weeks to lodge its grounds to appeal. Assange was remanded in custody until a bail hearing tomorrow.

Any decision to block extradition should meet a high bar given Britain's treaty obligations, Baraitser said. But she rejected US experts' testimony that Assange would be protected from self-harm, noting that others such as disgraced US financier Jeffrey Epstein had managed to kill themselves in custody

## Outrage as Trump asks to 'find'...

Continued from Page 1

"There's nothing wrong with saying, you know, um, that you've recalculated" the vote tally, Trump is heard saying on the tape. "You're off by hundreds of thousands of votes." Raffensperger is heard responding: "Well, Mr President, the challenge that you have is, the data you have is wrong."

Biden won the long Republican-leaning state by fewer than 12,000 votes - a narrow margin, but one that has remained unchanged through a series of recounts and audits. "The current margin is only 11,779. Brad, I think you agree with that, right?" Trump says. "So look. All I want to do is this. I just want to find 11,780 votes."

Making Trump's call more surprising is the fact that even a hypothetical reversal in Georgia, which has 16 Electoral College votes, would not overturn victory by Biden, who won by a margin of 306 to 232. Ahead of the release of the audio, Trump tweeted about the call, saying that Raffensperger "was unwilling, or unable, to answer questions such as the 'ballots under table' scam, ballot destruction, out of state 'voters', dead voters, and more." Raffensperger tweeted back, also ahead of the release of the audio, saying: "Respectfully, President Trump: What you're saying is not true. The truth will come out." After the release, the White House declined to comment. Some political commentators

despite wardens' supervision. "For this reason I have decided extradition would be oppressive by reason of mental harm and I order his discharge," she said.

The US non-profit Freedom of the Press Foundation said the case against Assange was "the most dangerous threat to US press freedom in decades". "The extradition request was not decided on press freedom grounds; rather the judge essentially ruled the US prison system was too repressive to extradite." Fugitive US whistleblower Edward Snowden said he hoped the ruling would mark "the end" of the case against Assange.

Assange is wanted on 18 charges in the United States relating to the 2010 release by WikiLeaks of 500,000 secret files detailing aspects of military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. If convicted in the United States, he faces up to 175 years in jail. Before the ruling, both Germany and a UN rights expert expressed concern over the human rights and humanitarian problems presented by the extradition.

Assange has a history of depression and a respiratory condition that makes him more vulnerable to COVID-19, which has infected several inmates at the high-security prison where he has been held in London. He has also complained of hearing imaginary voices and music during his detention. UN special rapporteur on torture Nils Melzer has urged Trump to pardon Assange, saying he is not "an enemy of the American people". — AFP

compared the call to the Watergate tapes that led to the fall of past US president Richard Nixon. Carl Bernstein, one of the reporters who helped bring down Nixon's presidency, called it "the ultimate smoking gun tape". Under Georgia law, Raffensperger can legally have taped the conversation without Trump's consent.

Democrats reacted furiously. Vice President-elect Kamala Harris slammed it as "the voice of desperation" and a "bald-faced, bold abuse of power by the President of the United States" during a rally in Savannah, Georgia. One moderate Republican, Congressman Adam Kinzinger, tweeted: "This is absolutely appalling. To every member of Congress considering objecting to the election results, you cannot - in light of this - do so with a clean conscience."

News of the Trump tape came hours after the US Congress opened its new session Sunday. Pelosi, the highest-ranking woman in the history of US politics, will serve another term as speaker of the House after her reelection. Pelosi, 80, faced a scare when five fellow Democrats defected and voted "present" or for someone else during the floor vote. But the woman who is third in line to the presidency secured her fourth - and perhaps final - non-consecutive term as House speaker by earning 216 votes versus 209 for Republican leader Kevin McCarthy.

In a symbolic gesture beginning the 117th Congress, McCarthy formally handed the speaker's gavel over to Pelosi, who raised it in triumph as Democrats cheered and applauded. "We begin the new Congress during a time of extraordinary difficulty," Pelosi told the chamber, noting the toll of 350,000 dead and 20 million infected by COVID-19. — AFP

Local

# Assembly starts sessions with controversial probe

## MPs warns to hold premier to account

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The new National Assembly begins its regular sessions of the new term today with an anticipated heated debate in which opposition MPs will demand a judiciary and parliamentary probe into events that took place at the inaugural session more than two weeks ago. Opposition MP Thamer Al-Suwait said MPs will demand to refer those who carried out the events of the "Black Tuesday" to the public prosecution for a criminal investigation.

They will also demand the formation of a parliamentary committee with a full mandate to investigate what happened at the inaugural session. Suwait also warned that he and other lawmakers will hold the prime minister to account, as he was a witness to the events.

Lawmakers opposed to the election of speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem claim that dozens of supporters of Ghanem, including his brother Khaled, were allowed into the assembly session illegally. The group caused an uproar during the election, insulting opposition MPs and stirring chaos in the gallery before the sitting temporary speaker evicted them.

MPs also claim that the assembly secretariat had leaked illegal ballot papers for the speaker election which raises the prospect of forgery. The assembly office has already formed its own investigation panel and asked lawmakers to provide it with evidence.

However, opposition MPs called its formation a "farce" saying it includes members who are a par-

ty to the problem. MP Osama Al-Munawer said the formation of the panel is unprecedented and he and nine other MPs submitted a motion to cancel the committee and form a parliamentary investigation panel.

### Human rights

In the meantime, the assembly's human rights panel yesterday invited Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah for a meeting this week to assess the human rights situation in the country.



### Call for human rights' assessment

especially the case of a stateless man who committed suicide and the case of another stateless man who was brutally murdered by four citizens, including a serviceman.

MP Munawer also said he has submitted a proposal banning the government from granting aid to foreign countries without the prior consent of the National Assembly. MPs have charged the govern-



KUWAIT: The National Assembly.

ment of being generous to foreign governments while ignoring Kuwaiti citizens' needs.

The assembly manpower development committee has sent a letter to the national assembly asking for permission to conduct a comprehensive study

on the employment of citizens and the policy of replacing expats employed in the public sector with Kuwaitis. MP Hesham Al-Saleh asked authorities why Kuwait municipality appointed expat legal consultants while refusing to appoint citizens.



KUWAIT: This file photo shows used tires in the northern area of Rahya. — KUNA

## EPA issues licenses to dispose used tires in Rahaya

KUWAIT: The Environment Public Authority (EPA) issued yesterday new licenses to companies to dispose used tires in the northern area of Al-Rahya, and to evacuate South Saad Al-Abdullah residential site from any hazardous materials, in preparation to be handed over to the Public Authority for Housing Welfare. EPA Chairman of the Board of Directors and Director General of the

Authority Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah said that the issuance of these licenses came as a result cabinet decisions assigned to EPA to supervise the condition of Al-Rahaya area and take the necessary measures to get rid of used tires in that area as soon as possible. Sheikh Abdullah added that this step also came to recycle tires, convert them to be used in factories, and use them in industries and activities to convert waste into energy inside and outside Kuwait. The chairman added the step is also to improve the environment in the country and contribute to waste recycling activities. He mentioned that the number of tires in that region ranges between 30 and 50 million, according to the concerned authorities' reports. — KUNA

## Minister receives Fire Force guide

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh received Kuwait Fire Force Chief Lt Gen Khaled Al-Mekrad, who presented to him a copy of the structural guide of Kuwait Fire Force for 2020. Deputy General Director for Human Resources Development Maj Gen Mohammad Al-Shalti accompanied Mekrad in the visit.



## Minister refers roads' damages report to Nazaha

KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works Dr Rana Al-Fares referred a report to Public Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) about damages in roads caused by rain fall and amongst recommendations was improving designing criteria of rain drainage networks in future projects. Ministry Spokesman Abdullah Al-Ajmi said Fares, also Minister of State for Municipal Affairs, approved the technical recommendations of the report. He said roads paved since April 2019 were not damaged. Roads that were damaged were old, said Ajmi, and it was the contractor's responsibility to fix them in accordance with the contract. — KUNA



KUWAIT: This December 31, 2020 file photo shows a damaged road near the Friday Market. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

## Firemen battle two blazes

KUWAIT: Firemen put out a blaze reported in an Industrial Shuwaikh garage yesterday, and another that gutted a heavy duty vehicle in Dhajeej. No injuries were reported in both incidents, and investigations went underway to reveal the causes of the fires.



Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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## Local

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## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Stray cats wander as people are seen in the background in a market in Kuwait City. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## News in brief

## Kuwait hopeful for oil market recovery

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Dr Mohammad Al-Fares said, prior to his participation in the OPEC+ meeting yesterday, that Kuwait supports decisions that would maintain the oil market stability, especially considering negative consequences due to COVID-19, according to a press statement issued by the Oil Ministry. OPEC+ demonstrated its pioneering role in maintaining the stability of oil markets in order to ensure the common interest of consuming and oil-producing countries, encouraging the confidence among investors in the oil industry, he underlined. While the effects of the second COVID-19 wave overall must be cautioned, with the start of vaccines distributed to several countries worldwide, it is expected that the demand for oil will gradually recover, especially during the second half of 2021, which opens up a chance to overcome the damages to the global economy after the COVID-19 wave recedes, consequently the demand for oil and petroleum products grows, he mentioned.

## More Kuwaitis apply for private sector jobs

**KUWAIT:** The number of Kuwaitis applying for jobs in the private sector increased in 2020 for the first time in eight years, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday, quoting official statistics. An estimated 52.3 percent of Kuwaitis who registered for jobs in the Public Authority for Manpower's employment system have shown a desire to work in the private sector, compared to 39.8 percent in 2019, according to the 2020 national labor report issued by the authority. Meanwhile, the number of Kuwaitis registered as looking for jobs in 2020 dropped by 2,038, so the number of those waiting for a job by the start of 2021 reached 16,260 citizen, the report showed.

## Shortage in 2021 calendars in Kuwait?

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** By the end of December till early January, people usually receive calendars from companies and friends. This year however, many have complained of a paucity of calendars. "I normally get five to 10 calendars every year and I give them away to people I know. But I am very disappointed that I got nothing this year. The desk calendar is very important to me because every time I go to the office, I can check the date and my appointments for the day. I write everything on the calendar on my desk, but I

don't have one now," said Noor, an Egyptian expat. "After my cellphone, the calendar is the next very important thing for me as I am a secretary. I received one calendar this year but I gave it away, thinking I will get more from other companies. It's the fourth of January today and I am afraid of not getting any more calendars," she told Kuwait Times. Noor said the calendar is easier to refer to when you need to make an immediate decision. "I don't use a smartphone to view my appointments. It is easier to use a calendar," she added.

A well-known computer institute in Kuwait City told Kuwait Times they not only cut their calendar budget, but also decided to get rid of other unnecessary expenses because of the low number of enrollees, and also because attitudes have changed. "The digital calendar is in. The smartphone is there and the digital calendar can be viewed any time. So we stopped printing calendars," said Faruk, the owner of the institute.



## Statement by Drugs Controller General of India on COVID-19 vaccine

**NEW DELHI:** The Subject Expert Committee of Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) met on 1st and 2nd January, 2021 and made recommendations in respect of proposal for Restricted Emergency Approval of COVID-19 virus vaccine of M/s Serum Institute of India and M/s Bharat Biotech as well as Phase III clinical trial of M/s Cadila Healthcare Ltd.

The Subject Expert Committee consists of domain knowledge experts from the fields of pulmonology, immunology, microbiology, pharmacology, pediatrics, internal medicine, etc.

M/s Serum Institute of India, Pune has presented a Recombinant Chimpanzee Adenovirus vector vaccine (Covishield) encoding the SARS-CoV-2 Spike (S) glycoprotein with technology transfer from AstraZeneca/Oxford University.

The firm submitted safety, immunogenicity and efficacy data generated on 23,745 participants aged 18 years or older from overseas clinical studies. The overall vaccine efficacy was found to be 70.42 percent. Further, M/s Serum was granted permission to conduct Phase-II/III clinical trial on 1600 participants within the country. The firm also submitted the interim safety and immunogenicity data generated from this trial and the data was found comparable with the data from the overseas clinical studies. After detailed deliberations Subject Expert

Committee has recommended for the grant of permission for restricted use in emergency situation subject to certain regulatory conditions. The clinical trial ongoing within the country by the firm will continue.

M/s Bharat Biotech has developed a Whole Virion Inactivated Corona Virus Vaccine (Covaxin) in collaboration with ICMR and NIV (Pune), from where they received the virus seed strains.

This vaccine is developed on Vero cell platform, which has well established track record of safety and efficacy in the country and globally.

The firm has generated safety and immunogenicity data in various animal species such as mice, rats, rabbits, Syrian hamster, and also conducted challenge studies on non-human primates (Rhesus macaques) and hamsters. All these data has been shared by the firm with CDSCO. Phase I and Phase II clinical trials were conducted in approximately 800 subjects and the results have demonstrated that the vaccine is safe and provides a robust immune response. The Phase III efficacy trial was initiated in India in 25,800 volunteers and till date, around 22,500 participants have been vaccinated across the country and the vaccine has been found to be safe as per the data available till date.

The Subject Expert Committee (SEC) has reviewed the data on safety

and immunogenicity of the vaccine and recommended for grant of permission for restricted use in emergency situation in public interest as an abundant precaution, in clinical trial mode, to have more options for vaccinations, especially in case of infection by mutant strains. The clinical trial ongoing within the country by the firm will continue.

M/s Cadila Healthcare Ltd, has developed a Novel Corona Virus-2019-nCoV-Vaccine using DNA platform technology. The firm initiated Phase-I/II clinical trial in India in more than 1000 participants which is ongoing.

The interim data suggests that the vaccine is safe and immunogenic with three doses when administered intradermally. Accordingly, firm has sought permission to conduct Phase-III clinical trial in 26000 Indian participants, which has been recommended by the Subject Expert Committee. M/s Serum and M/s Bharat Biotech vaccines have to be administered in two doses. All the three vaccines have to be stored at 2-8° C.

After adequate examination, CDSCO has decided to accept the recommendations of the Expert Committee and accordingly, vaccines of M/s Serum and M/s Bharat Biotech are being approved for restricted use in emergency situation and permission is being granted to M/s Cadila Healthcare for conduct of the Phase III clinical trial. —Indian Embassy

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## Pressure grows on Macron over French vaccination 'fiasco'



OXFORD: 82-year-old Brian Pinker receives the Oxford University/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine from nurse Sam Foster at Churchill Hospital yesterday. —AFP

# Britain rolls out AstraZeneca shots

## Kidney patient, 82, gets first jab • Virus vaccinations gather pace

**LONDON:** Britain yesterday began rolling out the Oxford-AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine, a possible game-changer in fighting the disease worldwide, while China raced to inoculate millions with a domestically made jab. Britain started the new drive with 530,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, as it struggled to control a severe wave of infections that has threatened to overwhelm the public health system and prompted the government to warn tougher curbs can be expected.

The vaccine, developed by AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford, is seen as advantageous by many experts because it does not require very cold temperatures for storage like the ones from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna. That could mean greater access to the vaccine for less wealthy parts of the world in the fight against the coronavirus, which has infected nearly 85 million people with more than 1.8 million known deaths.

"I'm very pleased that I got the Oxford vaccine," said Brian Pinker, an 82-year-old retired maintenance manager who Britain's NHS said was the first to receive the AstraZeneca jab. Pinker has been having dialysis for kidney disease. "The vaccine means everything to me. To my mind it's the only way of getting back to a bit of normal life," Pinker said at Oxford's Churchill Hospital.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock told the BBC

that Britain's fight against a resurgent virus has been "significantly accelerated" with the introduction of the AstraZeneca vaccine. The virus has claimed 75,000 lives in Britain. Britain has already vaccinated around one million people after approving the Pfizer vaccine in early December and hopes to give shots to tens of millions in the next three months, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in a BBC interview.

Vaccinations were also under way in European countries like France, Germany and Greece. But the French government yesterday faced growing pressure to accelerate its vaccination drive, with President Emmanuel Macron reportedly also furious over the slow pace of progress. Just a few hundred people have received the jab so far in France, compared with over 200,000 in Germany and around one million in Britain.

### Stumbling US vaccine rollout

In Beijing, thousands lined up to receive shots as Chinese authorities raced to inoculate millions ahead of the Lunar New Year mass travel season in February. Beijing has already administered around 4.5 million doses of largely unproven emergency vaccines this year - mostly to health workers and other state employees destined for overseas jobs, according to authorities.

Elsewhere, American officials on Sunday rejected claims by outgoing President Donald Trump that the country's death toll of more than 350,000 was exaggerated, as they defended the stumbling rollout of vaccines in the world's worst-hit nation. The United States has a known case-load of more than 20 million, and the Trump administration has faced intense criticism for its handling of the pandemic, which has hammered the US economy.

It has started giving people the Pfizer and Moderna shots, but the 4.2 million people vaccinated so far are far below the official predictions of 20 million by the new year. More than 13 million vaccine doses have been distributed nationwide, but efforts to inoculate health workers and vulnerable people have been hampered by logistical problems and overstretched hospitals and clinics.

"There have been a couple of glitches, that's understandable," top US expert Anthony Fauci said, adding it was a challenge "trying to get a massive vaccine program started and getting off on the right foot." Troubling reports have emerged of vaccines going bad due to poor organization, lack of healthcare professionals to administer them or, in one isolated case, sabotage.

Moncef Slaoui, chief advisor to the US government's military-led vaccine effort, said another

alternative was being explored for the Moderna vaccine: Administering half doses twice. "We know it induces identical immune response," Slaoui said, adding that officials are in discussions with Moderna and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) about the proposal.

### Indian approvals

India, with the world's second-largest number of known cases, approved the emergency use of two COVID-19 vaccines on Sunday, paving the way for one of the world's biggest inoculation drives. The South Asian giant has set an ambitious target of inoculating 300 million of its 1.3 billion people by mid-2021, and it gave the green light to the AstraZeneca vaccine as well as one developed by local pharmaceutical firm Bharat Biotech.

But Indian authorities, like many across the world, must overcome public skepticism about the vaccine, often promoted by social media campaigns and conspiracy theories that offer no credible evidence. A recent survey of 18,000 people across India found that 69 percent were in no rush to get vaccinated. Israel, however, has claimed the fastest start to vaccinations so far, saying on Sunday that two million people - around a fifth of its population - would have received both the required shots by the end of January. —AFP

## Under dark clouds, lawmakers kick off new US Congress

**WASHINGTON:** Sporting a black mask, Democrat Nikema Williams is well aware of Washington's toxic political divisions and the challenges of a deadly pandemic - the newly elected African American congresswoman is a COVID survivor. "It's a new day in Congress," Williams said as she walked the halls of Capitol Hill Sunday, her first official day as a US lawmaker.

Williams, from Georgia, is taking over the House seat of none other than legendary late civil rights icon John Lewis. Her priority in the opening weeks? Given that she "didn't know if I was going to live or die" during her three-week illness, Williams said her top priority is building up a national response to the coronavirus. By constitutional mandate a new Congress is sworn in every two years on Jan 3, which accounts for this rare weekend session.

The incoming freshman class consists of 59 new members including Williams and, on the opposite side of the aisle, members such as the far right conservative Marjorie Taylor Greene, who supports the controversial and widely debunked Q Anon conspiracy movement. Sunday looked decidedly different than other opening days, with members wearing face masks as they raised their right hands to take their oath of office.

Social distancing was mandated - but not always adhered to - on the House and Senate floor to undertake one of their first tasks, the election of speaker of the House. Democrat Nancy Pelosi narrowly won a vote to remain in the role after serving as speaker for the past two years.

But a dark political cloud hung over Washington. And the divisions were underscored when a staggering audio tape was released Sunday in which President Donald Trump asked Georgia officials to "find" enough votes to overturn his election defeat, sending shockwaves through Washington.

"To say the 117th Congress convenes at a challenging time would indeed be an understatement," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell told his chamber after Vice President Mike Pence swore in new members. "From political division to a deadly pandemic to adversaries around the world, the hurdles before us are many and they are serious."

### 'Clean conscience'

Tomorrow, a joint session of Congress is set to certify the Electoral College vote that confirms Joe Biden as the next president. But Republican rebels will throw the centuries-old process - whose certification vote is normally a drama-free



WASHINGTON: Members of the house depart after the first session of the 117th Congress in the House Chamber at the US Capitol on Monday. —AFP

formality - into turmoil.

Several loyalists to outgoing President Donald Trump have signaled they oppose certification, repeating Trump's baseless argument that the Democrat stole the election through massive fraud. The outlandish gambit is all but assured to fail, but the explosive nature of contesting the process itself will be a strain on democracy.

Republican Congressman Adam Kinzinger urged Trump loyalists to reconsider opposing certification in light of the Georgia tape. "This is absolutely appalling. To every member of Congress considering objecting to the election results, you cannot - in light of this - do so with a clean conscience," he tweeted. Republican incoming congressman Scott Fitzgerald of Wisconsin said he remained unsure about siding with the rebels or voting to confirm Biden's presidency. "I haven't figured it out yet," he told AFP.

For Williams, the path was clear, however: "The voters have spoken, and it's time that we move forward with a peaceful transfer of power," she said. New US Senator John Hickenlooper, a seasoned former governor of Colorado and a 2020 Democratic presidential hopeful, said he was honored to be in his new role but waved off concerns about tomorrow's vote. "On January 20 Joe Biden is going to become the president," he told AFP. "Obviously there's a lot of politics between now and then."

Pence, who oversees tomorrow's vote, ignored reporters' questions about how he will handle the potentially disruptive scenario. But Emanuel Cleaver, a House Democrat and ordained minister, appealed for divine intervention as he delivered the chamber's opening prayer and sought strength for lawmakers to control their "tribal tendencies" and work together. "God, at a moment when many believe that the bright light of democracy is beginning to dim, empower us with an extra dose of commitment to its principles," Cleaver said. —AFP

## Biden, Trump in Georgia for runoff rallies

**ATLANTA:** Donald Trump and Joe Biden headed to Georgia yesterday to rally their party faithful ahead of twin runoffs that will decide who controls the US Senate, one day after the release of a bombshell recording of the outgoing president that rocked Washington. If Democratic challengers defeat the Republican incumbents in both races today, the split in the upper chamber of Congress will be 50-50, meaning incoming Vice President Kamala Harris will have the deciding vote.

The dueling rallies by the outgoing president and his successor were set to be the final exclamation mark on a two-month blitz in the southern state awash in campaign donor cash. But instead, Sunday's release of Trump's stunning conversation with Georgia's Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a fellow Republican, only succeeded in diverting attention from the Senate races, a must-win for his party.

Trump still refuses to concede that he lost to Biden in November, despite multiple recounts and court rulings undermining his case. The Republican billionaire has also continued to make repeated accusations of voter fraud and election rigging without providing evidence. In the audio recording, Trump urges Raffensperger to "find 11,780 votes" - one more than Biden's margin of victory - and makes vague threats that Raffensperger and his general counsel could face "a big risk" if they failed to honor his request.

Raffensperger is heard responding: "Well, Mr. President, the challenge that you have is, the data you have is wrong." Vice President-elect Harris slammed the call as a "bald-faced, bold abuse of power by the president of the United States" during a Sunday rally for the Democratic Senate candidates in Savannah, Georgia.

But Trump still has support within his party. Republican Senator Kelly Loeffler, who has been an ardent Trump supporter, did not answer a question about the recording during a campaign event. And before news of the tape reached the public, many pro-Trump voters said Sunday they believed that the president had won Georgia.



SAVANNAH, Georgia: US Vice President-Elect Kamala Harris speaks at a rally in support of Democratic US Senate candidates at Garden City Stadium yesterday. —AFP

### Control of power

Months after the presidential election, Georgia is still in full campaign mode, with buses ferrying candidates around to small-town rallies, signs everywhere and door-to-door canvassing. The trips by Trump and Biden underscore the importance of the upcoming poll - but Trump's visit could backfire if the repercussions from the tape linger. Georgia has not sent a Democrat to the Senate in 20 years. Victory by challengers Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff over Loeffler and David Perdue, respectively, would give the Democrats - and Biden - a major boost, as they already control the House of Representatives.

### 'Trump 2020'

Trump's appearance on behalf of Loeffler and Perdue is expected to be his last major rally before leaving the White House on January 20. The former real estate mogul will likely be received as a hero in Dalton, a town in a rural, conservative district in northwestern Georgia. "Trump 2020" signs still abound throughout the region - they are indeed more plentiful even than those for Loeffler, 50, and Perdue, 71. Biden will be in the state capital Atlanta, where he will campaign with Warnock, a 51-year-old Black pastor, and Ossoff, a 33-year-old audio-visual producer. Vice President Mike Pence will campaign in a rural area south of Atlanta.

"Everything is at stake" in the runoffs, Harris said Sunday. "The future of our country will be very much in the mix." Republicans are also saying the future of the United States is in jeopardy. "We are the firewall to socialism coming to America," Loeffler told supporters in the scenic town of Cartersville. Polls show the candidates are neck-and-neck in both races. —AFP



International

# French-Irish teen's Malaysia death ruled misadventure

## Family of Nora Quoirin 'utterly disappointed' by the verdict

**KUALA LUMPUR:** A French-Irish teenager with learning difficulties died by misadventure after disappearing in the Malaysian jungle on a family holiday and no one else was involved, a coroner ruled yesterday. The family of Nora Quoirin said they were "utterly disappointed" by the verdict, which also saw the coroner rule there was no sign the 15-year-old was murdered or sexually assaulted.

The teen's body was discovered after a massive hunt through the rainforest following her disappearance from a resort outside Kuala Lumpur in 2019. Police insisted there was no foul play and an autopsy conducted in Malaysia found that she probably starved and died of internal bleeding after days in the jungle.

But her parents believed she had been abducted, saying the teen would never have climbed out of the window of the chalet where they were staying in the dead of night, as authorities believe. However, following an inquest in Malaysia, Coroner Maimoonah Aid ruled she died by misadventure, indicating it was accidental rather than a crime. "After hearing all the relevant evidence, I rule that there was no one involved in the death of Nora Anne," she told a court in the city of Seremban.

"It is more probable than not that she died by misadventure." The teen likely left the family accommodation "on her own and subsequently got lost," she said, handing down her ruling online due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The schoolgirl's body was found in a stream in the jungle near the resort after a 10-day hunt that included hundreds of rescuers, helicopters and snif-

fer dogs. But the family said in a statement the ruling "focused exclusively on physical evidence and physical mobility-which we believe, presents a very incomplete/select theory on how Nora came about her death".

Her parents watched the ruling being delivered online. Their Malaysian lawyer, S. Sakthiyvel, said the family had a further legal avenue-applying for a revision of the verdict at the High Court-and were thinking about whether to pursue it.

### Family were 'jet-lagged'

The coroner took two hours to deliver the verdict, going through the testimony from over 40 witnesses that was presented during the inquest from late August to December. As well as saying there was no evidence to support the theories of homicide or sexual assault, she decided against an "open verdict"-something which the teen's family had pushed for. Instead, Maimoonah suggested the teen may have been left disoriented after a long and exhausting trip from Britain and activities at the Dusun resort on the day of their arrival in August 2019. "The family (were) all jet-lagged and tired," she said. "Nora Anne had also shown her level of tiredness increase."

This made it likely that the teen, in a "strange and new place", had wandered out of the London-based family's accommodation of her own accord on their first night at the resort, she said.

During the inquest, the teen's parents said they heard mysterious "muffled noises" coming from the accommodation the night of the schoolgirl's disap-



In this file handout from the Royal Malaysia Police taken and released on August 10, 2019, Meabh Jaseprine Quoirin (center) and Sebastian Marie Philippe (right), the parents of missing 15-year-old Franco-Irish teenager Nora Quoirin, stand with the police as they continue to search for her in Seremban. — AFP

pearance, fuelling their belief she was snatched.

In their testimony, police had reiterated their view the teen had wandered off alone and defended their approach, insisting a thorough search was conducted. But her parents, who testified via video-link, criticized authorities for their response to their daughter's disappearance as too slow.

The five-hectare (12-acre) resort is next to a patch of thick jungle and in the foothills of a mountain range. The teen had a condition known as holoprosencephaly, where the brain fails to develop normally. She had limited verbal communication and could only write a few words. She attended a school for young people with learning difficulties. — AFP

## Scores mourn miners killed in Pakistan attack

**QUETTA:** Thousands of mourners from a minority community in Pakistan on Monday protested alongside the bodies of miners killed in an attack claimed by the Islamic State group. The 10 miners were kidnapped before dawn on Sunday as they slept near the remote coal mine in the southwestern mountainous Machh area — 60 kilometers southeast of Quetta city, local government official Abid Saleem said.

Up to 2,500 protesters gathered with eight of the bodies in coffins and blocked a bypass on the outskirts of Quetta, capital of oil and gas-rich Balochistan province, demanding justice. "We will not end our protest until the arrest of all the assassins," chief of Balochistan Shiite Conference, Agha Daud, said. "The latest wave of killings will spread to other cities

including Quetta if a decisive action is not taken at this stage," he added. Security officials who did not want to be named told AFP the attackers first separated the miners before tying their hands and feet and taking them into the hills to kill them. At least four were beheaded, they added.

Two of the miners were Afghans and their bodies have been sent to Afghanistan for burial, a local security official said. Officials on Monday clarified ten people had died in the attack, revising a previous death toll of 11. Extremist group IS claimed the attack, according to SITE Intelligence, which monitors jihadist activities worldwide. Ethnic Hazaras make up most of the Shiite population in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan—the country's largest and poorest region, rife with ethnic, sectarian and separatist insurgencies. They have proven to be particularly vulnerable with their distinct Central Asian features making them easy targets for Sunni militants who consider them heretics.

Pakistani officials have long denied the presence of IS in the country, but the group has claimed a number of



QUETTA, Pakistan: Mourners from the Shiite Hazara community react as they gather with the coffins of the miners who were killed in an attack by gunmen in the mountainous Machh area, during a sit-in protest at the eastern bypass, on the outskirts of Quetta yesterday. — AFP

attacks in the past including a bombing at a vegetable market in 2019. Though Pakistan's mines are notorious for poor safety standards, such attacks against miners are rare.

Pakistan has long been a cauldron

of unrest and sectarian violence, with the official Islamic Republic home to myriad sects of Islam and religious minorities that have been targeted by violent extremists for decades. — AFP

## US military blames Taliban for killings

**KABUL:** The US military yesterday blamed the Taliban for a spate of assassinations of prominent Afghans, the first time Washington has directly accused the insurgent group of the killings.

The charge comes as the Afghan government and Taliban were yesterday to resume peace talks in Qatar, as both sides seek an end to the long-running conflict. "The Taliban's campaign of unclaimed attacks and targeted killings of government officials, civil society leaders & journalists must... cease for peace to succeed," Colonel Sonny Leggett, spokesman for US forces in Afghanistan, said on Twitter.

The deputy governor of Kabul province, five journalists, and a prominent election activist have been among those assassinated since November. Afghan officials blame the Taliban for the killings, but the headline group has denied the charge, while the rival Islamic State group says its fighters were responsible for some of them.

Leggett's statement comes as the Taliban accused US forces of carrying out air strikes against insurgents in Kandahar, Nangarhar and Helmand provinces in recent days. The Taliban said the strikes violated an agreement signed in February that paved the way for the withdrawal of all foreign forces by May 2021. Leggett said the US would continue to defend Afghan forces against Taliban attacks.

Violence has surged across Afghanistan, with the Taliban and government forces fighting daily across swathes of rural areas. The Taliban carried out more than 18,000 attacks



KABUL: In this file photo, members of the Afghan security forces stand at the site of an attack in Kabul. — AFP

in 2020, Afghanistan's spy chief Ahmad Zia Siraj told lawmakers Monday.

Nishank Motwani of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit said the insurgents would not claim responsibility

for the killings while peace talks were ongoing, but nevertheless wanted to demonstrate to its cadre "that the Taliban are who they are and have not changed". — AFP

## PM weighs virus emergency for Tokyo

**TOKYO:** Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said yesterday he was considering declaring a state of emergency in the greater Tokyo area over a "very severe" third wave of coronavirus infections. Speaking at a regular new year press conference, Suga also said he hoped vaccinations would begin in Japan in late February, adding that he would be among the first to receive one.

He urged people to avoid non-essential outings, and said the government would introduce legislation to penalize businesses that flout requests to shorten hours or close, as well as provide incentives to those who abide by such calls. Suga also insisted the government was still committed to holding the virus-post-

poned Tokyo 2020 Olympics this summer, saying the Games would be "proof that mankind overcame the virus". Suga, who took office in September, has faced increasing pressure over his government's response to record numbers of new infections.

Tokyo yesterday recorded 884 new infections, and said the number of serious cases—those on a ventilator or ECMO machine—rose to a record 108. On Saturday, Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike, joined by governors from three neighboring regions, called on the central government to impose a state of emergency in their areas.

But the government has been reticent to take measures that could send the economy back into reverse, soon after it exited a recession. However, Suga said he realized "a stronger message was necessary". "The national government will consider issuing a state of emergency," he said, adding that it would prioritize measures to reduce infection risks from drinking and dining.



TOKYO: (From Left) Saitama Governor Motohiro Ono, Chiba Governor Kensaku Morita, Japan's Economy Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike and Kanagawa Governor Yuji Kuroiwa speak with media in Tokyo after a meeting where the respective governors met with Japan's minister in charge of the coronavirus response, calling for a new state of emergency to be imposed in their areas. — AFP

Japan imposed a first state of emergency in spring, allowing local governors to call on businesses to close and to request people to stay at home. The measure carries no penalties for non-compliance, but the requests were widely observed this

spring. The scope of any new emergency remains unclear, though the Nikkei daily reported the government would not seek school closures. Suga said "limited and focused measures" would be effective, without specifying further. — AFP

## Beijing vaccinates thousands in COVID-19 jab drive

**BEIJING:** Thousands of people lined up in Beijing to receive a COVID-19 vaccine as China races to inoculate millions before the Chinese New Year mass travel season in February. More than 73,000 people in the Chinese capital have received the first dose of the vaccine over the last couple of days, state media reported Sunday, including community workers and bus drivers.

Health authorities on New Year's Eve granted "conditional" approval to a vaccine candidate made by Chinese pharma giant Sinopharm, which the company said had a 79 percent efficacy rate.

An AFP journalist saw people being bussed into a temporary vaccine center at a central park, after being instructed to fill in electronic forms about their health status and any allergies at an outside gate.

Some were wearing two layers of surgical face masks. One man surnamed Gu, a catering worker in his 30s, told AFP his employer had booked him a vaccine appointment at the center, and that he wanted the jab "for peace of mind." "I believe any adverse effects will be controllable," he said.

Footage from state broadcaster CCTV showed queues outside local hospitals and community health centers as people waited to read consent forms and have their temperatures taken before getting the jab. Health officials said gyms and empty factories were among centers being used for the vaccination program. China plans to vaccinate millions this winter in the run-up to Lunar New Year in mid-February. Beijing has already administered around 4.5 million doses of largely unproven emergency vaccines this year—mostly to health workers and other state employees destined for overseas jobs, according to authorities. — AFP

## Australian 'lives and homes' at risk as fire nears Perth

**PERTH:** An out-of-control bushfire threatened lives and homes in Australia's west coast city of Perth yesterday, with locals told to shelter in place from toxic fumes. Residents in several suburbs south of Perth have been warned to be on watch as around 150 firefighters battled a blaze which has razed more than 230 hectares since Saturday. The local emergency department downgraded the fire from earlier "emergency" level, but warned there was still "a possible threat to lives and homes as a fire is burning in the area and conditions are changing".

It is not known what triggered the fire. Hazardous and reeking fumes emanating from a burning rubbish tip are also causing concern, with locals told to "shelter in place for safety".

Several roads were forced to close and motorists have been told not to travel to the fire-stricken area.

There are other wildfires in and around the Perth metropolitan area too, including one that forced the evacuation of a retirement village on Sunday in the southeast suburb of Gosnells. About 60 people were moved to safety and an evacuation center has been set up in the area. — AFP

# Business

TUESDAY, JANUARY 5, 2021

## Smooth sailing for Channel traffic as post-Brexit deal flows ramp up

### 3,000 trucks pass through Tunnel from France to Britain since Jan 1

**CALAIS:** Goods flowed smoothly across the Channel between Britain and France yesterday, the first working day since the completion of Brexit last week. Nearly 3,000 trucks have passed through the Channel Tunnel from France to Britain since the UK left the EU customs union and single market at midnight on December 31, in the final act of its divorce from the EU.

"Everything is going very well," a spokesman for Getlink, the operator of the tunnel, which is used both by passenger and freight trains, said. In the port of Calais, staging post for ferry crossings to the English port of Dover, there were also "no queues and no congestion" yesterday, the port's deputy director Benoit Rochet said.

With just 21 ferries scheduled to sail for England yesterday, compared with over 30 on a normal day, "traffic is very slow," he said. Eleven months after Brexit, the free movement of people and goods between Britain and its EU neighbors came to an abrupt end on December 31 when an 11-month transitional period expired.

Under a new "smart border" technology devised by France to keep goods moving smoothly post-Brexit, companies on either side of the Channel are required to fill out customs forms online before shipping their goods. Only two trucks arriving at the tunnel in Calais were prevented from boarding shuttles to Britain because the drivers did not have the proper shipping doc-

uments, Getlink said yesterday.

The drivers were rerouted to a new customs building to complete their paperwork, the spokesman said. Under the new rules, trucks arriving in Calais or Dover must present shipping documents containing a barcode, which is scanned and forwarded to customs officials on the other side of the world's busiest shipping route.

Once this is done the trucks can either be waved through with a green light or subjected to extra checks if given an orange one. Many British importers had stocked up on goods from the Continent in December to avoid their consignments getting held up by border controls after January 1.

Around 60,000 passengers and 12,000 trucks cross the Channel between Britain and France each day. French officials expect trade flows to progressively return to normal over the course of the month.

#### 'Success' for French ports

The potential for chaos was brought home to traders and travellers on either side of the Channel in the run-up to Christmas, when thousands of trucks remained blocked on roads leading to Dover after France temporarily closed the border over coronavirus fears. Yesterday morning, however, traffic was smooth on the French side of the frontier. "I think that, as far as French ports are concerned, Brexit has been rather a success," the head of pub-



Two trucks take the direction of the Channel Tunnel shuttles yesterday in Coquelles. Goods flowed smoothly across the Channel between Britain and France yesterday, the first working day since the completion of Brexit last week. —AFP

lic order for the northern Hauts-de-France region, Michel Lalande, told France Bleu local radio.

France has spent around 40 million euros (\$54

million) and hired 700 extra customs, immigration and veterinary staff to prepare for the return of a border with Britain. —AFP

## OPEC+ meeting to set February production levels

**LONDON:** Members of the OPEC group of oil producers and their partners will meet via videoconference to decide production levels for February, which it hopes to continue boosting. The OPEC+ ministerial meeting comes after the COVID-19 pandemic tanked the market for crude in 2020 and will start earlier than planned, at 1330 GMT.

Despite a slight recovery of prices towards the end of last year, the 13 members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), led by Saudi Arabia, and their ten allies, led by Russia, are still suffering under a highly volatile market. After their last videoconference summit, held from November 30 to December 3, the OPEC+ members agreed to raise production levels by half a million barrels per day in January. At the same meeting, OPEC+ agreed to meet at the beginning of each month to decide on any adjustments to production volumes for the following month.

That agreement "paved the way for a gradual return of 2 million barrels per day to the market over the coming months," OPEC's general secretary, Mohammed Barkindo, said on Sunday.

Analyst Helima Croft from RBC said yesterday that given continuing uncertainty over coronavirus vaccine rollouts and climbing infection figures in many countries, OPEC and its allies would "likely play



it safe and forego any additional output increase for now".

#### Stumbling blocks

OPEC members typically meet twice a year at the cartel's headquarters in Vienna, but last year, summits were scheduled more frequently to maintain a strong influence on the oil market amidst the pandemic. Despite demand remaining uncertain, analysts have said that OPEC+ demonstrated that it can manage the market.

Prices for both North Sea Brent Crude and West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude hit ten-month highs yesterday, at \$53.33 and 49.83 respectively. Though far lower than the prices seen at the start of 2020, crude is well up on the lows seen last year, particularly in March, when Moscow and

Riyadh embarked on a brief but intense oil price war that caused prices to plummet.

Russia and Saudi Arabia are respectively the second and third biggest oil producers in the world after the United States. On April 20, WTI crude collapsed to minus \$40.32 per barrel-meaning producers paid buyers to take the oil off their hands.

Relations between the two oil giants have eased since then, with the Russian and Saudi energy ministers meeting in mid-December in a display of unity. It remains difficult, however, to predict the evolution in demand due to developments in the pandemic. Despite the heft of the OPEC+ club, countries outside the system have a major impact on the oil market; principally the United States which is still producing 11 million barrels of crude per day. — AFP

## Workers at Google parent Alphabet form union

**WASHINGTON:** Employees at Google and other units of parent firm Alphabet announced the creation yesterday of a union, stepping up a period of activism targeting Silicon Valley giants. The Alphabet Workers Union, affiliated with the Communications Workers of America, aims to represent well-compensated tech workers as well as temporary workers and contractors, according to a statement.

The new labor group is focusing not only on pay and benefits as most unions but also a role in ethical decisions by the tech giant and protection from arbitrary firings for activism. "We hope to create a democratic process for workers to wield decision-making power; promote social, economic, and environmental justice; and end the unfair disparities between TVCs (temporary, vendors and contractors) and FTEs (full time employees)," the union's website said.

As of the end of December, the union had some 200 members. Large tech firms, which offer generous compensation to soft-



ware engineers and other skilled workers, have largely avoided labor drives but have faced growing unrest over workplaces issues in recent years.

At Amazon, which has tens of thousands of warehouse workers, organizing drives have focused on working conditions and safety during the pandemic. One of the catalysts at Google was the recent firing of Timnit Gebru, a Black artificial intelligence ethics researcher and outspoken diversity activist.

The company also faced a backlash

from employees over its involvement with a Pentagon project known as Project Maven, which Google eventually ended. "This union builds upon years of courageous organizing by Google workers," said Nicki Anselmo, a Google program manager and union member. "From... opposing Project Maven, to protesting the egregious, multimillion dollar payouts that have been given to executives who've committed sexual harassment, we've seen first-hand that Alphabet responds when we act collectively." — AFP

## US stocks pause near records to open 2021

**NEW YORK:** Wall Street stocks were opened essentially flat but near records yesterday in the first session of 2021 after a volatile but ultimately bullish 2020 for US equities. After tumbling early in the year due to COVID-19 lockdowns, US stock indices won solid gains for the year in a rally fed by accommodative Federal Reserve policies and expectations for an economic recovery in 2021 with widespread use of coronavirus vaccines.

About 20 minutes into trading, the Dow Jones Industrial Average stood at 30,545.23, down 0.2 percent, while the broad-based S&P 500 was unchanged at 3,756.36, after both finished 2020 at all-time highs. The tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index added 0.1 percent to 12,906.78.

The economic calendar was light yesterday, but the week ahead includes data on the manufacturing and services sector, as well as the all-important official jobs report for December.

Among individual names, Tesla surged five percent after reporting over the weekend it delivered a record number of cars in 2020, just narrowly missing its half a million target for the year. MGM Resorts dropped 1.4 percent after British gaming company Entain turned down an £8.0 billion (\$10.9 billion, 8.9 billion euros) takeover offer, saying MGM undervalued the business.

Wall Street indices had finished 2020 at all-time highs, a surprising conclusion to a year in which the United States endured a recession caused by the deadly COVID-19 pandemic that continues to plague

the country. The Dow and S&P 500 finished at fresh records, capping a year in which they, along with the Nasdaq, scored significant gains even amid elevated joblessness, rising hunger and acute pain in sectors such as hospitality, airlines, oil and gas and the performing arts.

"For Main Street, it was a terrible year," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare. "For Wall Street, it was a fantastic year."

The broad-based S&P 500, which swooned below the 2,200-point level at its nadir in March, finished the year at 3,756.07, up 16.3 percent for the year. European equity markets had a mixed year, with Frankfurt higher, but Paris declined and London suffered its worst year since the global financial crisis.

The gains in US indices seemed impossible in March, when exchanges were forced to suspend trading as stocks went into freefall as much of the US economy was shut down to combat the coronavirus.

The US didn't fully manage to get the virus under control, and concludes 2020 with its highest-ever single-day death toll of more than 3,900 people. Yet, markets pivoted quickly from the fear of a depression-like collapse after the Federal Reserve stepped in with extraordinary stimulus and Congress mobilized to enact its biggest-ever fiscal package, the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act.

Stocks began regaining ground in late March and rose for much of the summer. Volatility picked up again in the fall ahead of the November presidential election and as the infections spiked.

But Wall Street engineered a strong late-year rally as COVID-19 vaccines were approved and began to be rolled out, fueling hope for an economic recovery in the new year. However, analysts see risks ahead in the first part of 2021. — AFP





## Business

# Shareholders of PSA approve mega-merger with Fiat Chrysler

## Date for making merger operational to be announced 'very soon'

PARIS: Shareholders of French automaker PSA voted yesterday to approve a merger with the US-Italian group Fiat Chrysler, a move that catapults the new company, "Stellantis", into the fourth position of the world's carmakers by volume. Approval for the three merger resolutions tabled at PSA's annual shareholder meeting-held online—was nearly unanimous, PSA chief Carlos Tavares said.

Fiat Chrysler shareholders are due to begin voting on the deal at 2:30 pm (1330 GMT), and Tavares said the date for making the merger operational would be announced "very soon". The outcome of the votes was seen as a foregone conclusion, coming two weeks after the European Commission gave conditional approval to the deal announced in late 2019. The 50/50 tie-up, which was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, is considered crucial for the two groups to undertake investments needed to transition to clean car technology.

It also allows Fiat Chrysler to strengthen its presence in Europe, while the French group will regain a foothold in the US. "This merger is a matter of survival for both Fiat and PSA," said Giuliano Noci, a professor of strategy at Milan Business School, citing "enormous technological and strategic challenges" faced by both as well as damage wrought by the pandemic.

The accord brings together PSA's Peugeot, Citroen and other brands with Fiat Chrysler's stable that includes their namesake brands as well as Jeep, Alfa Romeo and Maserati. By number of cars sold, Stellantis and its workforce of over 400,000 will now rank behind Volkswagen, the Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi alliance, and Toyota—though it will be the third-largest automaker by revenue.

PSA and Fiat expect the merger to allow them to achieve billions of euros in synergies each year.

### Weathering COVID

"Only the most agile, with a Darwinian spirit, will survive," PSA chief Carlos Tavares, who will take the helm of the merged group, said in November. The European Commission had been worried the merger could affect competition in Europe's lucrative van market, with PSA and FCA together accounting for 34 percent of market share. To assuage those concerns, the commission said PSA would continue an agreement with Toyota to manufacture vans to be sold under the Japanese brand in Europe.

The disruptions wrought by COVID-19, which ground manufacturing to a halt for several weeks in the first half of 2020, forced PSA and Fiat to change the terms of their tie-up to ensure it remained a merger of equals. FCA

agreed to lower an exceptional dividend to be distributed to shareholders, while PSA agreed to share its 46-percent stake in French automotive equipment maker Faurecia among all shareholders of the new company, rather than its shareholders alone as agreed previously. The two companies have so far shown relative resilience in the face of the pandemic.

Fiat Chrysler posted net profit of 1.2 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) for the third quarter, compared with losses of 1.04 billion euros (\$1.27 billion) in the second quarter—when auto sales plummeted as much of the world was in coronavirus lockdown.

### French union concerns

PSA sold 589,000 fewer vehicles in the third quarter but sold them for more money as part of a strategy to maximize profitability and cash flow, which lifted turnover by 1.2 percent. When the merger was announced, Tavares assured no plant would be closed, but unions in France remain skeptical. "On the whole it's a good insurance policy for the future of our group. Those who don't make the shift risk being left by the wayside," a representative for the CFCTC union at PSA, Franck Don, said. But he wondered: "What synergies will they find and what consequences will that have for sites in France?" —AFP



In this file photo (from left) Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) CEO, Michael Manley, and FCA Chairman John Elkann attend the presentation of the new sports car of Italian luxury vehicle manufacturer Maserati, the Maserati MC20 at the Modena racetrack. — AFP



COLOMBO: Fishermen work on their fishing net at the beach in Elakanda. Sri Lanka yesterday ordered tight foreign exchange controls after announcing a 3.9 percent contraction in the economy that accentuated concerns over its ability to repay foreign debt. — AFP

## Sri Lanka tightens foreign exchange after worst GDP fall

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka yesterday ordered tight foreign exchange controls after announcing a 3.9 percent contraction in the economy that accentuated concerns over its ability to repay foreign debt.

Central Bank of Sri Lanka Governor W D Lakshman said the coronavirus pandemic caused a record fall in the tourism and trade-dependent economy last year as he announced the figure. He said the central bank will keep lending rates below 10 percent to help revive the battered economy but there will be tighter controls on imports.

A ban on non-essential imports, including all types of vehicles, imposed in March has already been extended through 2021 and Lakshman suggested there could be more controls. "For the sus-

tainability of the low interest rate structure, it is essential that foreign exchange leakages for non-essential imports and outward investment are minimized," he said without giving details.

The central bank chief insisted however that Colombo will honor its foreign debt obligations amounting to about \$4.0 billion a year. International rating agencies have slashed Sri Lanka's credit worthiness after raising fears over the island's ability to repay its debt.

Sri Lanka's economy has steadily grown in recent decades with the exception of 2001 when there was a 1.4 percent GDP contraction after Tamil separatists bombed the country's main airport and crippled tourism. The record decline in 2020 follows a setback after the 2019 Easter Sunday jihadist bombings which killed 279 people at three hotels and three churches.

Sri Lanka was emerging from the devastating attacks when the coronavirus pandemic halted international travel in March. The island is battling a new wave of infections with the number of cases increasing to more than 44,000 from 3,300 in October. — AFP

### 'Kicking off 2021 in style'

"The FTSE 100 is kicking off 2021 in style... With Brexit finally here, there are precious few signs of initial difficulties," said IG analyst Joshua Mahony. Britain finally left the EU's single market and customs union late on December 31, ending almost 50 years of integration with the continent. Customs border checks have returned for the first time in decades, and despite the free-trade deal allowing Britain continued access to Europe's nearly 450 million consumers, queues and disruption from additional paperwork are expected. Investors are meanwhile hopeful that the ongoing roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines — with the first UK patient receiving the Oxford University/AstraZeneca's jab — will help offset surging infections and herald a return to normality. "Markets are being helped by the Oxford-AstraZeneca story as there is a growing feeling that the pharma sector is in a better position to tackle the health crisis," said CMC Markets analyst David Madden.

### M&A in focus

European stocks were also propelled yesterday by merger and acquisition activity on the first trading day of the New Year. British betting company Entain, which owns high street chain Ladbrokes, revealed it has turned down a takeover offer worth £8.0 billion (\$10.9 billion, 8.9 billion euros) from US casino giant MGM. The news sent Entain's share price soaring almost 30 percent to 1,462 pence, topping the FTSE 100 risers board. "Entain Group understandably leads the way after a rejected takeover bid from MGM Resorts highlighted the potential for a new enhanced offer in the near future," added Mahony. In Paris, shareholders in French automaker PSA almost unanimously approved a merger with US-Italian group Fiat Chrysler, in a deal that will create the world's fourth-largest carmaker by volume. In early afternoon deals, PSA shares won 2.4 percent to 22.91 euros in Paris, while Fiat shares added 2.1 percent to 14.96 euros in Milan. Elsewhere, Asian equities mostly bounded higher on the first business day of the year. With uncertainty over Brexit and a new US stimulus gone, sights are now on the economic recovery from the calamity that was 2020. Investors are also keeping tabs on the US, where Georgia has two runoff elections that will decide which party holds control of the Senate. — AFP

## Singapore's virus-hit economy suffers worst fall in 2020

SINGAPORE: Singapore's economy suffered its worst ever annual contraction in 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic hammered the city-state's vital trade and tourism sectors, official data showed yesterday.

But the 5.8 percent decline was not as bad as feared—official forecasts had predicted a fall of up to 6.5 percent—as economic activity picked up with the easing of curbs. The financial hub plunged into its first recession since the 2008 global financial crisis in the second quarter when the government closed most workplaces as part of drastic measures to contain infections.

One of the world's most open economies, Singapore is seen as a bellwether for the health of global trade, and its economy's dramatic deterioration rang alarm bells. But curbs were eased in the second half of the

year and key sectors of the economy, such as manufacturing, have begun to recover.

In the fourth quarter, the economy shrank 3.8 percent year-on-year, less than expected, according to preliminary growth data released by the trade ministry. Song Seng Wun, a regional economist with CIMB Private Banking, told AFP the contraction was not as bad as feared due to strong exports of some goods.

Song said he expects a "rebound of around six percent" this year. "We are seeing businesses continuing to benefit from the further easing of restrictions and stronger global demand for (microchips) and medicines," he said. Singapore's small economy is typically hit first by external shocks before ripples spread across the region. However, it usually also recovers quickly from any downturn.

The city-state won praise for keeping the pandemic in check in the early stages only for serious outbreaks to emerge later in crowded dormitories housing low-paid migrant workers. But its outbreak has slowed markedly in recent weeks, and only a handful of cases are being recorded a day. Authorities last week began a coronavirus vaccination campaign, making it among the first Asian nations to roll out inoculations. — AFP



SINGAPORE: Dark clouds move over the city skyline in Singapore. Singapore's economy suffered its worst ever annual contraction in 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic hammered the city-state's vital trade and tourism sectors, official data showed yesterday. — AFP

## European stocks usher in New Year with bumper gains

LONDON: European stock markets rallied yesterday, boosted by fervent takeover activity, Brexit relief and vaccine-driven economic optimism on the first trading day of 2021. London's FTSE 100 shares index firmed 3.0 percent higher on its first day since Britain finalized a divorce from the European Union last week, as dealers noted no signs of the Brexit chaos some had feared.

The pound scored a 2.5-year peak at \$1.3704 to extend last week's impressive run after the announcement of a breakthrough Brexit trade deal on Christmas Eve. It later pulled back somewhat. Oil hit ten-month highs before a virtual gathering of crude producing cartel OPEC and its allies to decide February output levels, after coronavirus ravaged demand in 2020. Bitcoin retreated yesterday to \$30,600, one day after surging to an all-time pinnacle near \$35,000 as risk-seeking investors piled into the cryptocurrency.



TOKYO: A man holds onto a bull during a ceremony marking the opening of the stock market at the Korea Exchange in Seoul yesterday on the first trading day of the new year. — AFP

## Tesla delivered record number of cars in 2020

WASHINGTON: Tesla delivered a record number of cars in 2020, the company said, just narrowly missing its half a million target for the year. The pioneering high-end electric vehicle maker delivered 180,570 cars to customers and produced 179,757 in the fourth quarter of the year, it said in a statement. Tesla's previous record was 139,300 vehicles delivered in the third quarter of 2020.

For the full year, Tesla delivered 499,550 cars to customers, just shy of its target of half a million, and produced 509,737 units. The firm said its delivery count was conservative and that final numbers could vary by up to half a percentage point or more. Tesla chief and co-founder Elon Musk hailed the figures as a "major milestone" for the firm.

"At the start of Tesla, I thought we had (optimistically) a 10 percent chance of surviving at all," the mercurial tech entrepreneur tweeted. Tesla's entry-level Model 3 and its crossover Model Y accounted for nearly 86 percent of deliveries, with the balance split between the luxury Model S sedan and the Model X SUV. The company also said Saturday that production of its Model Y had begun at its Chinese plant in Shanghai, with deliveries expected to begin shortly.

Tesla has long aimed to manufacture electric cars for the masses and in September Musk, the world's second richest person, said developments in battery technology meant the firm was looking at fielding a \$25,000 model in around three years' time. The company joined the prestigious Standard & Poor's 500 stock index on December 21. — AFP

## Moody's acquires CRE solutions provider Catylist

NEW YORK: Moody's Corporation announced yesterday that it has acquired Catylist, Inc., a provider of commercial real estate (CRE) solutions for brokers. The acquisition advances Moody's Analytics (MA) CRE platform, substantially enhancing its coverage of property-level data and expanding its range of analytical solutions to the broker market.

"Calylist offers deep insights into CRE markets through its impressive scope and coverage, intuitive user interface, and innovative research services for brokers," said Stephen Tulenko, President of Moody's Analytics.

"The acquisition of Catylist complements Moody's analytical capabilities and augments our growing suite of CRE tools that integrate rich and relevant data with powerful analytics. We look forward to continuing to invest and enhance our CRE capabilities to help our customers make better decisions." Catylist's innovative platform provides CRE brokers with a comprehensive suite of data, analytical tools and verified property listing information. Combined with Moody's existing CRE capabilities, Catylist's powerful proprietary tools, research, and market information enable customers to analyze inventory, pricing, and vacancy trends.

"Moody's is widely recognized for excellence in data and analytics, and their evolving commercial real estate capabilities have made them a trusted name in the industry," said Ronald D. Marten, CCM, the Founder, President and CEO of Catylist. "We're excited to continue growing our business and to serving the evolving needs of the sector as part of a dynamic company like Moody's."

The acquisition builds on Moody's 2018 purchase of Reis, Inc., a leading CRE data and analytics provider. Catylist's data, including information sourced directly from brokers, will further inform and enhance Moody's extensive and growing network of CRE products and services.—AFP

## Business

# China telecom firms slide after NY delisting as oil giants fret

## Trump bars investment in firms with ties to Chinese military

**HONG KONG:** Shares in China's big three state-owned telecom companies slid in Hong Kong yesterday during the first day of trading since the New York Stock Exchange announced it was delisting the firms.

Friday's move by the NYSE seeks to comply with an order by outgoing US President Donald Trump barring investment in firms with ties to the Chinese military. As trading began in Hong Kong, China Mobile Communications, China Telecommunications Corp and China Unicom (Hong Kong) Limited all dipped more than three percent.

Shares in China's state-owned oil giants were also down on fears they could be the next to be delisted in the United States. CNOOC Ltd was trading down 3.06 percent while PetroChina dipped more than two percent.

The delisting comes as relations between the world's two biggest economies spiral downwards over sore points ranging from trade and the coronavirus to Hong Kong and the mass incarceration of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. In November, Trump signed an executive order banning Americans from investing in Chinese companies deemed to be supplying or supporting Beijing's military and security apparatus, earning a sharp rebuke from China.

China's telecom giants are thinly traded in the US and make the vast majority of profits at home, meaning the delisting was little more than symbolic.

Citigroup said the expulsion from New York might encourage "short term selling pressure" but would have little long term impact. "Chinese telcos' operations are mainly domestic focused and their sound fundamentals along with recovery trends and positive cash flows will not be affected by the delisting," the bank wrote in a research report, according to Bloomberg News.

Trump's order listed 31 companies it said China was using for the "increasing exploitation" of US investment capital to fund military and intelligence services, including the development and deployment of weapons of mass destruction. National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien said at the time that the order would prevent Americans from unknowingly providing passive capital to Chinese companies-listed on exchanges around the world—that support the improvement of Beijing's army and spy agencies.

China has criticized the move and threatened countermeasures. The plunge in US-China ties has generated mixed fortunes for Hong Kong's stock exchange, the fourth-largest in the world.

The bourse finished 2020 with its worst performance in two decades as the city remains mired in a deep recession. But the year also witnessed a bumper crop of IPOs as Chinese firms chose to list closer to home because of the rising geopolitical tensions. —AFP



**HONG KONG:** Shares in China's big three state-owned telecom companies slid in Hong Kong after the New York Stock Exchange announced their delisting.

## CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

**KUWAIT:** The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for six months with a rate of return at 1.250 percent.

## Skeptical Isle: Britain's story foreshadowed Brexit

**BRUSSELS:** In September 1946, surveying the ruins of a continent ripped apart by war, Winston Churchill could see only one way to rebuild and preserve peace. "We must build a kind of United States of Europe," Britain's victorious war time leader told an audience at Zurich University.

On December 31, 2020 under Prime Minister Boris Johnson—who once wrote a biography of Churchill-Britain finally left the European Union's single market. Another 27 countries remain inside the EU, and several more are keen to join, but Britain has always been an awkward fit. Does its island history explain why?

### Parting of the waves

Until around 6500 BCE, the rocky promontory that would become Great Britain was attached to the coast of mainland Europe by the low-lying wilderness of "Doggerland". As the Ice Age glaciers retreated, the hills and swamps were flooded and Doggerland became the bed of what is now the North Sea, and Britain stood alone.

The Mesolithic humans who had once hunted and gathered there were now pushed back to either shore. British and European history would remain closely entangled, but also now physically divided.

### Island of immigrants

Celtic tribes from the mainland displaced or mixed with pre-historic Britons and some, like the Belgae and the Dumnonii, lived on both sides of the Channel. Invasion by the Roman Empire bound the archipelago into the Classical world until the fifth century, then—as the legions left—Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Scots arrived.

Various generations of Norse and Danish vikings raided and settled, until the Norman invasion of 1066 brought most of the island under a French-speaking monarchy. With continental rulers, the influence of the Catholic church was consolidated, and for a while the kings of England held vast tracts of land in what would become modern France.

### Turning point

Under Henry VIII, England left the Roman church, putting the island on a collision course with the Catholic crowned heads of Europe. In 1558, the forces of Mary Tudor, Queen of England and Ireland, lost control of the port of Calais to the French, and Britain's history began to diverge from that of the mainland.

Elizabeth I defeated a Spanish invasion fleet in 1588, and her kingdom turned its eyes to the sea, becoming a maritime power rather than continental one. French historian Francois-Charles Mougel sees this as a "180-degree" pivot that would set Great Britain apart from its neighbors, perhaps for good.

Ties with the mainland were not wholly cut. The British royals intermarried with the great houses of Europe, trade often flourished and wars often erupted. But by the 19th century—after the British Empire had allied with smaller continental powers to defeat Napoleonic France—London ruled a global domain. —AFP

## Chief characters in Britain's Brexit saga

**LONDON:** Here are some of the key figures who have played pivotal roles in Britain's drawn-out Brexit saga, from the 2016 referendum on European Union membership to its eventual departure from the single market and customs union.

### Nigel Farage

A eurosceptic member of the European Parliament and former leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), Nigel Farage campaigned to leave the EU for 25 years. It was a surge in support for UKIP in the first half of the last decade that helped push then-prime minister David Cameron into calling the 2016 vote.

By focusing his campaign on mass immigration, Farage attracted controversy. Following the surprise victory by the "Leave" side, he initially said he would withdraw from frontline politics.

But he returned in 2019, denouncing what he saw as a "betrayal" of Brexit under then-premier Theresa May. Farage then founded the Brexit Party which stormed into first place in European Parliament elections in May last year. But after Boris Johnson replaced Theresa May as prime minister, Farage found his new party marginalized.

It failed to win any seats in the 2019 December general elections, despite fielding around 275 candidates.

### David Cameron

Prime minister for six years from 2010, David Cameron called the vote on EU membership and led the so-called "Remain" campaign. When the

country backed Brexit, he had little choice but to resign, admitting he could not be "the captain that steers our country to its next destination". Cameron has since stayed largely out of the limelight, but gave a flurry of interviews in September 2019 to mark the publication of his memoirs.

He told ITV that Johnson, by then prime minister, had never truly believed in Brexit and had told Cameron it would be "crushed like a toad" in the referendum. Cameron has also insisted that he does not regret calling the vote, but deeply regretted the defeat of the Remain camp and the resulting divisions and crises.

### Theresa May

Theresa May did not back Brexit in 2016, but emerged as the "safe hands" candidate to lead the governing Conservatives and become prime minister after Cameron's departure. May vowed Britain would leave the single market and end freedom of movement. But she was severely weakened after she opted to hold a snap general election in June 2017, which saw the Conservatives lose their parliamentary majority.

She subsequently faced near-constant rebellions and chastening defeats, and eventually stepped down as leader in July 2019 — after parliament had rejected her Brexit divorce deal three times.

### Boris Johnson

The former London mayor was a figurehead in the official Leave campaign, urging Britain to "take back control" from Brussels, where he was once an EU-bashing political correspondent. Boris Johnson was then made foreign secretary by Theresa May, but his two-year stint ended when he resigned over her Brexit strategy. Johnson retained a high pro-

ties for less European political integration.

### British opt-outs

The Maastricht Treaty in 1992 ushers in a new era of political and economic integration. Britain secures an opt-out from some provisions, including joining a planned single currency. After infighting over Europe in his governing Conservative Party, prime minister John Major survives a confidence vote on July 23, 1993.

### UK votes to leave

In a June 23, 2016, referendum organized after the Conservatives come to power in 2015, Britain votes by 52 percent to 48 percent to quit the EU. Prime minister David Cameron, who had campaigned to remain, resigns. The following year Cameron's successor, Theresa May, starts the two-year countdown to Britain leaving the bloc with a formal letter of notice to EU president Donald Tusk.

Britain and the EU reach agreement on a divorce deal in November 2018.

### Impasse

Britain's lower house of parliament votes against the deal on January 15, 2019, the first of three times it will do so. Brexit is delayed to March 29, then to June 30, then to October 31.

Leading Brexit campaigner Boris Johnson replaces May as prime minister on July 24, vowing to take Britain out of the EU with or without a deal.



file, using his weekly column in The Daily Telegraph to attack May's approach, and was well-placed to take advantage when she eventually stood down.

He easily won a Conservative Party leadership contest, and then defied expectations by securing new divorce terms with Brussels. He scored a thumping majority in 2019's general election on a pledge to "get Brexit done", promising he had an "oven-ready" deal.

Johnson had vowed to finalize trade deals with both the soon-to-be 27-member EU, and the United States, in 2020. He defied naysayers by securing the EU deal—albeit at close to the last minute on Christmas Eve—but his promise of a transatlantic pact by the end of the year fell by the wayside.

### Dominic Cummings

Dominic Cummings was the brains behind "Vote Leave"—and was popularized by actor Benedict Cumberbatch in a TV dramatization of the referendum campaign. But his combative tactics and abrasive personality made him enemies across the

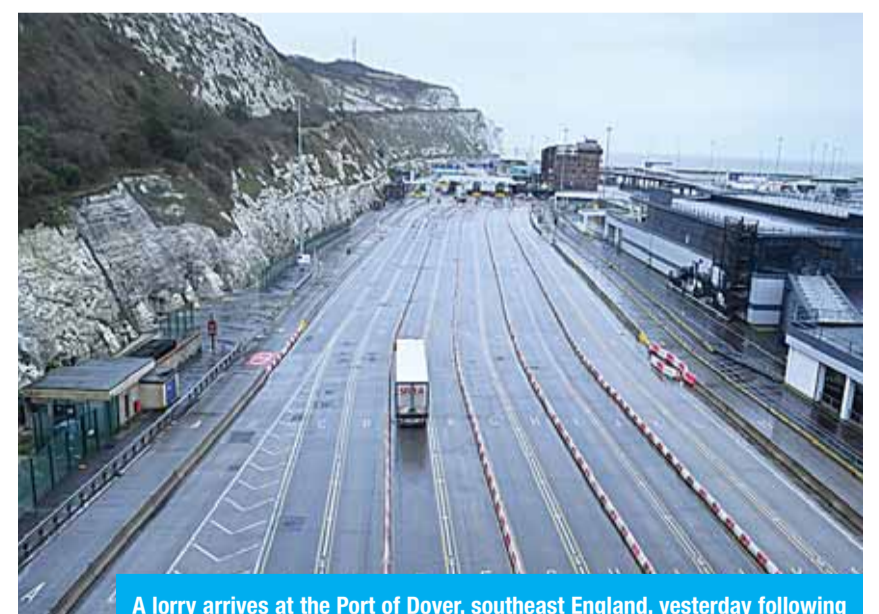
political spectrum, and in November he was forced to leave as Johnson's most senior adviser. His aggressive campaigning strategy, including an infamous Brexit campaign bus emblazoned with a questionable promise of funding for healthcare, made him a hate figure for Brexit opponents.

Former Conservative prime minister Cameron called him a "career psychopath", and he was unpopular with many MPs from the ruling party and even staunch Brexiters.

### Michel Barnier

Michel Barnier, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator, has been ever present in the process since Britain voted to leave the bloc, heading Brussels' team in the first phase of divorce talks. The former French minister and veteran politician has been commended across Europe for his handling of the tricky and high-profile task and for keeping the other 27 members united behind his strategy.

The European Commission has asked Barnier—an ex-EU commissioner—well-versed in the mysteries of the bloc's law—to remain in the post for the next stage of negotiations. —AFP



A lorry arrives at the Port of Dover, southeast England, yesterday following Britain's departure from the European Union. —AFP

### New deal, new delay

With the clock ticking, on October 17 European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and Johnson announce agreement on a new draft Brexit accord. The British parliament delays its vote on the text, forcing Johnson to ask Brussels for a new Brexit postponement. It is set for January 31, 2020.

At a snap election in December 2019, Johnson's Conservatives secure a large parliamentary majority, ensuring easy

passage for his divorce deal.

### Brexit a reality, but...

On January 31, 2020, Brexit eventually happens. Crucial talks on future ties and trade with the bloc then start in March, but break deadline after deadline as negotiators try to avert a no-deal Brexit on December 31. The two sides finally announce a deal on December 24 and Britain leaves the European customs union and single market at 2300 GMT on December 31. —AFP





Cobbler and Sarail hound breeder Joton Rabidas (right) stands with Sarail hounds at his house in Sarail. Tall and lean with a powerful chest, pointed ears and bi-colored fur, the rare hound named after the border town of Sarail has been treasured in the South Asian nation for centuries. — AFP photos

## Race to save Bangladesh hound from extinction

In a rickety hut on the border with Bangladesh and India, two brothers are among the last local breeders of the Sarail hound, a dog on the brink of extinction. Tall and lean with a powerful chest, pointed ears and bi-colored fur, the rare hound - named after the border town of Sarail - has been treasured in the South Asian nation for centuries.

Their sharp eyesight and renowned hunting skills have earned them roles with the military and police, and as guard dogs, while masters love them for their devotion. MAG Osmani, who led Bangladesh's freedom fighters to victory against Pakistan in the 1971 war of independence, is said to have been saved by one of two Sarails he owned when he was attacked.

But pure-bred Sarails - believed to have descended from English greyhounds and sighthounds owned by Mughal-era feudal landlords, or from hunting dogs brought by Arab traders - are dwindling in numbers with just dozens remaining in Bangladesh, according to some estimates. "Many families in this town once had Sarail (hounds)," Topon Rabidas, the younger brother said. "But nowadays only a few... families keep it, often for guarding or to ornament their houses with a piece of local history." Topon, 38, and his brother Joton, 40, are proud of their family's legacy of keeping Sarails for generations.

But the cost of rearing their dogs - a



Kaiser Tamiz Amin, a 58-year-old financial executive, interacts with his Sarail hound at his house in Dhaka.

pair of two-year-old males both named Lion - is taking its toll on the poor family. In the densely populated country of 168 million where some 30 percent of people live below the poverty line and access to land is scarce, Sarails are viewed as a luxury beyond the reach of ordinary Bangladeshis. The brothers, both cobblers, say they mate the pair with bitches owned by neighbors and sell the puppies for up to US\$500 each so they can buy the huge amounts of chicken and beef devoured by them.

### 'Uphill battle'

About 100 kilometers away in the capital Dhaka, wealthy owners are trying to save the breed, with few government resources devoted to conservation since a failed attempt to breed Sarails collapsed in the 1970s. More recently, they have set up a Facebook group to exchange information about their dogs and to arrange mating sessions. Kaiser Tamiz Amin, a 58-year-old banker who manages the group, has owned Sarails for two decades and believes just 30 to

40 pure-breds are left. "This is going to continue to be an uphill battle but we will get there," Amin said at his home in one of Dhaka's most expensive neighborhoods. "With the help of (genetics) experts, we hope to restore this breed to its original perfection."

Back in the Rabidas' tiny tin and bamboo shanty home, the brothers are worried their children might not carry on the family tradition of rearing Sarails due to the high cost. "My grandfather told us to keep at least two of these hounds at home in memory of your ancestors," Joton Rabidas said. "When a dog dies, our entire family mourns. Every pup is just like a family member to us... But I am not sure whether our next generation would continue breeding these hounds." — AFP



Cobbler and Sarail hound breeder Joton Rabidas holds a Sarail hound on a leash at his house in Sarail.



Photo shows Sarail hound puppies at the house of cobbler brothers and Sarail hound breeders Joton Rabidas and Topon Rabidas in Sarail.



A Sarail hound sits in a kennel at the house of cobbler brothers and Sarail hound breeders Joton Rabidas and Topon Rabidas in Sarail.

## THE STORY BEHIND 'OLOTURE', NIGERIA'S NETFLIX DRAMA

Clad soberly in a chequered knee-length dress, Tobore Ovuorie hardly seems as if she once walked the streets of Lagos in a revealing outfit and high heels. A freelance reporter with a burning desire to uncover the truth about a sordid backstreet trade, Ovuorie dressed as streetwalker to infiltrate a prostitution ring. She took on the dangerous mission after a friend left for Europe, became a sex worker and died, leaving Ovuorie shocked and beset with questions. Today, Ovuorie's remarkable story has been turned into a hit Netflix film, "Oloture," which has shone a bright light on one of Nigeria's darkest trades.

"I needed to do justice, to know the truth. I wanted to know the process, the back story about these ladies," the 39-year-old reporter told AFP. By dressing up, she sought to gain the prostitutes' trust-the first step to introducing her to a "madam", a pimp. After eight months working undercover in 2013, Tobore Ovuorie emerged with a terrifying account about the victims of sex trafficking. Some were sent to Europe, where they were coerced into becoming sex workers. Others were forced to participate in orgies organized by local politicians. Some became victims of organ trafficking for ritual crimes.



Journalist Tobore Ovuorie, 39, speaks of how she passed herself as a prostitute in West Africa's largest economic hub, after a friend of hers who left for Europe and became a sex worker died. On screen, Oloture is the hero of a Netflix drama, a journalist who infiltrates a prostitution ring, but in real life, Tobore, who inspired the film, is the shadow of her former self. — AFP

She published her story in 2014 in the Nigerian newspaper Premium Times and Dutch investigative magazine, Zam Chronicles, inspiring a production company in Nigeria to adapt it for the screen. Released in October on Netflix, the story has been widely watched and applauded in its home country, Africa's most populous market. "Sometimes investigative journalists in search of the story become the story," director Kenneth Gyang told AFP. "But in this case, the reporter was also "the torch that led us into the lives" of victims, he said.

### Disillusion

Sex trafficking is rife in Nigeria, in particular in southern Benin City, a recruiting ground for criminal gangs who smuggle women to Europe. How many are trafficked is unknown but in Italy, authorities say that between 10,000 and 30,000 Nigerians are prostitutes. Several thousand others are stuck in Libya or other African countries, often exploited by criminals who make them believe they will one day reach Europe.

In the film, a journalist named Oloture, playing the part of Ovuorie during her investigation, heads to neighboring Benin with a dozen other girls. From there, their "madam" promises they will depart to Europe in exchange for money (up to \$85,000, 70,000 euros) that they will have to repay once they arrive in Italy. Very quickly, the journey turns sour. Instead of heading to the border, their minibus stops in a gloomy training camp on the outskirts of Lagos.

There, the girls are roughed up and divided into two groups: "street" prostitutes and "special" prostitutes reserved for wealthier clients. On screen, the most gripping character is Linda, a young uneducated woman from a poor rural background, who becomes friends with Oloture. Linda "represents many of those young ladies and how they get in disillusion" said Ovuorie, who came across such a character during her investigation. For the director, it is exciting that the film is a success in Nigeria. "We have to see how to make this film available in remote places for young vulnerable women who might be susceptible to be trafficked to Europe," said Gyang.

### Emotional toll

On social media, the movie-and its ending-have triggered passionate debate. "For most of these ladies there is never any light at the end of the tunnel," said Gyang, "so why would you try to make a film that would end on a happy note?" Ovuorie said that what she saw and experienced during her investigation still haunts her-she is trying to find the women she was meant to go to Europe with, and tell their stories. Her work has inflicted a heavy emotional cost, she said. "I'm a shadow of myself, I try to smile, to look bright, but most of the time it's been just me fighting to hold onto life". — AFP

## Arrested Palestinian DJ released on bail

A prominent Palestinian disc jockey arrested after a dance event at a Muslim religious and cultural site last week has been freed on bail, her father said Monday. Palestinian Authority police arrested Sama Abdulhadi, 30, on December 27, the day after she performed at Nebi Mussa, the burial place of Moses under Islamic tradition, near the city of Jericho. Initially denied bail, according to her parents, Palestinian

rights groups demanded her freedom along with 100,000 signatories to an online petition. Her father, Saad Abdulhadi, told AFP that she was released Sunday evening after payment of a \$3,500 guarantee to attend a future court hearing, whose date has yet to be fixed.

She is banned from travelling in the meantime, he added. Sama Abdulhadi is considered by many to be the first

Palestinian woman to have become a professional disc jockey and Israeli daily Haaretz has called her the "Palestinian Techno Queen". Video of the electronic music event posted on social media showed men and women dancing together at the gathering, sparking public anger and accusations of desecration of the site, where there is a mosque.

At the request of Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Shtayyeh, a com-

mission of enquiry was set up "to determine what happened at Nebi Mussa". Saad Abdulhadi said that his daughter had official permission to stage the event at Nebi Mussa, which is also a tourist site. He said that the police crackdown was ordered to placate conservative public opinion. "Unfortunately, the arrest of my daughter was decided to please the street," he said. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Hielko Van Rijthoven, a conservationist working with Wings of Change examines one of the falcons seized by Pakistani authorities from smugglers, in the port city of Karachi. Since learning to capture birds as a teen, Muhammad Rafiq has amassed a small fortune in Pakistan trapping and trafficking falcons—including some endangered species—for wealthy Gulf Arabs. — AFP photos



Hielko Van Rijthoven (right), a conservationist working with Wings of Change examines a falcon seized by Pakistani authorities from smugglers, in the port city of Karachi.

# POACHERS' PARADISE: GULF HUNTS FUEL PAKISTAN FALCON TRAFFICKING

Since learning to capture birds as a teen, Muhammad Rafiq has amassed a small fortune in Pakistan trapping and trafficking falcons—including some endangered species—for wealthy Gulf Arabs. A single falcon can fetch up to tens of thousands of dollars on the black market, which allowed Rafiq to renovate his family home. "Every season, dealers come from Karachi and leave their contacts with us, and we call them back if we catch something," said the 32-year-old, from a nearby coastal village.

He recently trapped a peregrine falcon on a one-week hunting mission. "I desperately needed money," he told AFP. "And God has listened to me." For

years, Pakistan has stood at the nexus of the falcon trade, both as a source of the birds of prey, and then as a destination to hunt with them. Falcon poaching is officially banned, but demand for the birds is rising, according to the World Wildlife Fund in Pakistan. It estimates that up to 700 falcons were illegally smuggled out of the country last year alone, often by organized criminal networks.

Their destination is normally Gulf countries, where falconry is a treasured tradition. Owners treat the birds "like their own children", said Margit Muller, the director of Abu Dhabi's falcon hospital, which treats 11,000 falcons annually, a number that has more than doubled in the past 10 years. One conservationist told AFP an Arab falconer usually owns around five to six hundred birds, most of which will be captured in the wild in Pakistan or Mongolia. Wild birds are prized over those bred in captivity because they are believed to be better hunters, though there is no evidence to support those claims.

### 'Pimps for the Gulf'

Every winter, lavish hunting parties from the Gulf flock to Pakistan's sprawling deserts, where they are given permits to use their falcons to hunt houbara bustards, a migratory bird wrongly prized as an aphrodisiac and classified as vulnerable by conservationists. These excursions have cast a spotlight on the deep ties between Pakistan and its allies in the Gulf. For decades, the Gulf states have propped up Islamabad's ramshackle finances with generous loans, with one of the expectations being that they can continue to use Pakistan as a hunting playground.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and two other royals were granted permission to catch bustards by Prime Minister Imran Khan's government in December last year, a soft diplomacy tactic that Khan had openly disagreed



Wayne Davis, an ornithologist working with Avian Environmental Consultants, examines a falcon seized by Pakistani authorities smugglers, in the port city of Karachi.



Kamran Khan Yousafzai, a conservationist and president of the Pakistan Falconry Association, puts an eye mask on a falcon as he works on the rehabilitation of dozens of falcons seized by Pakistani authorities from smugglers, in the port city of Karachi.

with when he was in the opposition. The government also presents falcons as gifts to world leaders. "Our officials are working like pimps for the Arabs," a government official requesting anonymity told AFP. A brief ban on the bustard hunts was overturned in 2016 by the Supreme Court, but conservationists are now pushing for the export of falcons to be regulated in an ongoing case at the Islamabad High Court.

### Demand rising

Every year, falcons escape the harsh Siberian winter and fly thousands of miles to warmer regions, including southern Pakistan. During the migratory season, wildlife traffickers descend on villages along the Arabian Sea coastline, offering fishermen cash to briefly abandon their boats and try their hand at poaching. "We pay them in advance, send food to their families and if they catch a bird that is precious, we happily give them motorbikes," said one trafficker who spoke to AFP on the condition of anonymity. A range of tactics

can be employed—sticky liquids, net traps or, most commonly, using smaller birds as bait.

Poachers especially target the peregrine falcon, whose populations remain stable—but also the saker, which is endangered. Bob Dalton, a veteran falcon conservationist, helped oversee the rehabilitation of dozens of falcons seized by Pakistani authorities in October, with officials estimating the cache to be worth well over \$1 million. "The illegal trade is growing, there is more money being spent, more pursuit from the Gulf," he told AFP. "With the exception of one or two species, most falcon populations are in decline or on the point of being unstable."

### Regulating the market

With ongoing efforts to curtail rampant poaching failing, some officials in Pakistan have suggested regulating the falcon trapping market, inspired by a scheme involving another rare native species, the markhor—an elusive mountain goat with striking twisted horns found

in Pakistan's mountainous north. Every year, foreigners shell out tens of thousands of dollars for a handful of trophy hunting permits, providing a financial incentive for communities to prevent poaching.

Naeem Ashraf Raja, the director of biodiversity at the ministry of climate change, said markhor numbers have rebounded as a result of this controversial conservation method. With hunting parties set to descend on Pakistan again over the next few months, Kamran Khan Yousafzai, the president of Pakistan's Falconry Association, said the country desperately needs to implement a sustainable wildlife program. "Arab falconers can't resist coming to Pakistan. They have been coming to these hunting grounds for generations, and unless they face any real problems, they are not going to search for new destinations." — AFP



Photo shows falcons seized by Pakistani authorities from smugglers at a shelter in the port city of Karachi.

## Celebrity vaccinations cause outrage in Poland

A hospital in Warsaw is under fire for giving out COVID-19 vaccine shots to celebrities and politicians, causing public outrage and sparking a government investigation that began yesterday. Poland, which like much of Europe began its vaccination campaign on December 27, is currently only supposed to be vaccinating medical workers under a government plan.

But the Medical University of Warsaw hospital last week said it had also vaccinated 18 cultural figures who are intended to serve as ambassadors for the vaccination campaign. The hospital said it had given out a total of 450 shots, including 300 for its own staff members and 132 for their families and patients. The list of patients included some politicians.

Among the celebrities were actress Maria Seweryn, who is 45, singer Michal Bajor, 63, and Edward Miszczak, a 65-year-old TV journalist. The unusual vaccinations first came to light when Leszek Miller, an MEP and former prime minister and regular patient at the hospital, tweeted a picture of a medical record showing he had received the vaccine on December 30. Some local politicians in other parts of Poland, including members of the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, have also been heavily criticized for receiving the vaccine out of turn.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki told PAP news agency on Saturday that "observing the rules of the vaccination

sequence is an expression of respect for the rules of social solidarity". "There is no justification for breaking the rules," he said, calling it "a real scandal". Government spokesman Piotr Muller on Monday said a government investigation had begun adding: "I hope that there will be punishment as early as today for all the guilty parties."

Sanctions could include financial penalties and disciplinary proceedings, he said. Poland is due to begin vaccinating seniors, teachers and members of the armed forces later this month. Only after that will the vaccine become available to the rest of the population of 38 million people. Michal Dworzcyk, the government official in charge of vaccinations, said on Monday that just over 50,000 people had been vaccinated in Poland so far and he expected 2.9 million to be vaccinated in the first three months of 2020. — AFP



## BOND ACTRESS, 'THAT '70S SHOW' STAR TANYA ROBERTS DIES AT 65

Former Bond actress and "That '70s Show" star Tanya Roberts has died in Los Angeles at the age of 65, media reports said. Roberts, who had been hospitalized since December 24 after she collapsed while walking her dogs, died on Sunday, her publicist Mike Pingel told The Hollywood Reporter. "I'm devastated. She was brilliant and beautiful and I feel like a light has been taken away. To say she was an angel would be at the top of the list," he said. "She was the sweetest person you'd ever meet and had a huge heart. She loved her fans, and I don't think she realized how much she meant to them."

Roberts is best known for her role as geologist Stacey Sutton in the 1985 James Bond film "A View to a Kill," which starred Roger Moore in his last appearance as 007. Beside her Bond outing, Roberts starred in the 1982 sword-and-sorcery fantasy "The Beastmaster" and as the title character in "Sheena: Queen of the Jungle," a female version of

Tarzan which was nominated for five Golden Raspberry Awards and has gone on to become a cult classic. Other notable movie appearances included "Body Slam" and "Night Eyes."

Born in the Bronx, New York, in 1955, Roberts did some modeling and commercial work before getting her big acting break on the final season of "Charlie's Angels," where she played private investigator Julie Rogers helping the team of female crime fighters. "It was my first steady job, and it launched my career," Roberts said on her website. Nowadays Roberts is probably best known for her role in the sitcom "That '70s Show," where she played Midge Pinciotti, the dim-witted mother of Donna, played by Laura Prepon. "That '70s Show' was her favorite show, she really loved doing comedy," Pingel told USA Today. — AFP



Gerwyn Price

## Former rugby player wins world darts title

Former professional rugby player Gerwyn Price won a maiden world darts title on Sunday, defeating two-time champion Gary Anderson 7-3 in the final. Price, 35, who once played hooker for Neath and Glasgow Warriors as well as featuring in rugby league, is the first Welshman to win the world title.

He stormed into a 5-1 lead in the best-of-13 final and, although he faltered with the title in sight, Anderson failed to capi-

talize. "It's going to take a couple of days for it to sink in," Price told Sky Sports. "This means the world to me. I was looking over at the scoreboard and it was 6-3 and I thought, 'I've got a few darts, hopefully I can get more chances'." "But I bombed numerous opportunities and I was like, 'Please give me another chance' and I had to have Gary miss to give me one more opportunity." — AFP

## Sports

## Photo of the Day



Carlos Sainz of X-Raid Mini Team performs in Dubai, UAE. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Vlhova slaloms to Zagreb victory; Shiffrin takes 4th

**ZAGREB:** Slovakia's Petra Vlhova consolidated her lead atop the overall World Cup standings with victory in the slalom in Zagreb on Sunday, her 11th discipline win on the alpine skiing circuit. Vlhova timed 1min 59.08sec over the two runs to finish 0.05sec ahead of Austrian Katharina Liensberger, with Switzerland's Michelle Gisin in third place (+0.22sec).

Three-time overall World Cup champion Mikaela Shiffrin, a winner of 67 World Cup races, came in fourth spot, a further 0.05sec adrift. Vlhova had herself finished a disappointing fourth in the Semmering slalom on Tuesday, but she rebounded to claim the "Snow Queen" title traditionally given to winners in Zagreb. The first run, in warm, wet conditions, proved a challenge for the entire field.

The top racers all finished within striking distance with Vlhova holding a 0.32sec advantage over Liensberger, while Gisin sat in third place only 0.38sec back, just ahead of American Shiffrin. The second run did nothing to change the final results as Vlhova, Liensberger and Gisin all went 1-2-3, with Shiffrin landing just short of the podium. "It was a really hard day for me today," Vlhova said. "I had to find my confidence again and the entire day was a fight, especially the second run. I thought I was out of the podium picture, but I kept fighting through the finish. "When I saw I was only the 11th fastest in the second run, I thought I was for sure out of the podium, but then the green light showed up and I couldn't believe it." — AFP

# Golden State Warriors outgun Portland Trail Blazers 137-122

## Curry delivers throwback performance with career-high 62 points

**LOS ANGELES:** Two-time MVP Stephen Curry got his swagger back on Sunday night, scoring a career-high 62 points as the Golden State Warriors outgunned the Portland Trail Blazers 137-122. It was just like old times for Curry, arguably the greatest shooter in the history of the NBA. Curry, who played just five games in the coronavirus-shortened 2019-20 season due to a broken hand, drained eight of 16 from beyond the arc to score the most points by a Warrior since Rick Barry scored 64 in the 1970s.

The Warriors went wire-to-wire for the win at the Chase Center in San Francisco and Curry got into the zone early, delivering 21 points in the first quarter and capping his night with 17 points and several late threes in the fourth. Curry topped his previous high of 54 with two free throws with 2:23 to play and capped his night with a nothing-but-net three pointer with 42 seconds remaining. It was his seventh career 50-point game.

"I just try to stay humble and stay in the moment. As long as I keep being aggressive and decisive then good things will happen," he said. "I want to

make the right decisions. A lot of it is just not rushing things. I got to make sure I see everything right." The 50-point night was the NBA's first of the season, while the 60-pointer was the first for a Warrior since Klay Thompson had 60 in 2016. The only blemish for Curry was that his streak of free throws was snapped at a franchise-record 80 in the first quarter. The run dated to March 2019.

Elsewhere, Thomas Bryant stuffed the go-ahead dunk with 14.9 seconds left and the Washington Wizards held on for a 123-122 victory over the Brooklyn Nets. Bradley Beal led the Wizards with 27 points and 10 rebounds and assisted on Bryant's decisive basket, which stood up as Nets stars Kyrie Irving and Kevin Durant both missed on the final possession of the contest. It was a drama-filled finish at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn, where Timothe Luwawu-Cabarrot put the Nets ahead 122-121 with a wide-open layup with 28.2 seconds remaining.

After a timeout, a double-teamed Beal managed to find Bryant under the basket. Irving, who led all

scorers with 30 points, missed a three-pointer with less than six seconds remaining. Brooklyn corralled the rebound, but Durant's last-gasp effort also missed. "We've got two of the best players ever to touch a basketball on the other side, so it's a tough task, man, but I think we did an excellent job of accepting that challenge," Beal said of the Wizards defense.

Russell Westbrook finished with 24 points and 10 rebounds for the Wizards. In Memphis, reigning champions the Los Angeles Lakers notched their third straight road win, with LeBron James scoring 13 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter of a 108-94 victory over the Grizzlies in Memphis. The Grizzlies, without reigning Rookie of the Year Ja Morant and Jaren Jackson Jr. because of injury, used a 17-0 scoring run to take an 11-point lead at the end of the first quarter and led by as many as 12 in the first half.

But the Lakers closed the half on a 20-9 scoring run to lead by two at the interval and with a determined James leading the way finally pulled away in the final period. "We were doing a lot of jostling

with Memphis," James said. "At the start of the fourth, I wanted to try and implement myself and my scoring a little bit more. Get a bit more in attack mode and see if I could kind of open the game up - and we were able to do that." Spanish big man Marc Gasol, who started his NBA career in Memphis where he spent 11 seasons, played there for the first time since he was traded by the Grizzlies to the Toronto Raptors two seasons ago.

He finished with seven points, six rebounds for the Lakers - along with four stitches in a cut above his left eye received in a fall. Jayson Tatum delivered the game-winner in the Boston Celtics' 122-120 victory over the Pistons in Detroit, his fall-away jumper with 2.9 seconds left making the difference as the Celtics bounced back from a narrow loss to the Pistons on the same court on Friday. Elsewhere, Denver's Nikola Jokic posted his fourth triple-double of the season with 19 points, 12 rebounds and 12 assists and Jamal Murray scored 32 points for the Nuggets in a 124-109 victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves. — AFP

## Red Bull Desert Wings rock on to win 4 times

**KUWAIT:** The 2021 Dakar Rally is now well and truly underway as competitors were set a punishing 277-kilometre route on stage one. Rising to the challenge were the Red Bull Desert Wings squad who showed their off-road talents to take stage wins in the car, bike, lightweight vehicles and truck categories. Local hero and motocross athlete, Mohammed Jaffar jetted off into his very first participation at the gruelling rally. Despite a motorbike accident that resulted in a fracture, he ultimately emerged successful as he reached the finish line of stage one.

"I never pictured myself racing on these terrains. Despite causing some damage on my bike, what an incredible first day! I hope and look forward to completing the remaining stages." - Mohammed Jaffar Setting the fastest time in the Lightweight Vehicles category was Cristina Gutierrez. The newest edition to the Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team cleared every obstacle in her path and tonight she leads the Lightweight Vehicles general classification.

Gutierrez has previously finished four editions of the Dakar in the car category and has now announced herself in the Lightweight Vehicles race with a stage win at the first time of asking. The Spaniard is the first female Dakar stage winner since Jutta Kleinschmidt in 2005! "There were lots of very tricky things on the stage. We had one puncture, but I think everyone had at least one today. The work that my co-driver François did on the navigation was incredible because it was so tough today." - Cristina Gutierrez

Fellow Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team drivers Seth Quintero and Mitch Guthrie Jr. experienced differing fortunes on stage one. Dakar debutant Quintero remains in the hunt for the big prizes while a series of punctures looks to have ended Guthrie Jr's shot at glory this year. "This was my first proper Dakar stage and I'm super stoked to get it done." - Seth Quintero. Also well placed in the Lightweight Vehicles contest



are Chaleco Lopez and Mattias Ekstrom

"I had a clean run. Some very small navigation errors where we lost a maximum of one minute." - Mattias Ekstrom. Even reigning car class champion Carlos Sainz could not escape from the difficulties presented by stage one. Despite suffering a puncture and a navigational hiccup, it was Sainz who took the stage win and takes over top spot on the leaderboard. "There was a place where we got lost for three or four minutes, a place where lots of other cars got lost." - Carlos Sainz. Pushing Sainz all the way on stage one was his fellow MINI JCW Buggy driver Stéphane Peterhansel. 13-time Dakar winner Peterhansel eventually missed out on a stage win by just 26 seconds, but he has moved into second in the general classification.

"Navigation was not easy and there were a lot of rocks. It was so easy to get a puncture and we got one 30km from the end of the stage. Tomorrow's stage also looks tricky." - Stéphane Peterhansel Although they were unable to match the pace of Sainz, there were steady drives on Stage One for Giniel De Villiers, Kuba Przygonski, Nasser Al-Attiyah and Cyril Despres. The news was not so good for nine-time WRC champion Sebastien Loeb as the Frenchman endured a difficult day.

"We were lost after 15 kilometers for 15 minutes. Then we were in the dust of the cars that had past us. We had three punctures and we got lost a second

time." - Sebastien Loeb In the bike race, Toby Price leads the general classification after securing a stage win on the route to Bisha. It's a great start for the Red Bull KTM Factory Racing rider who is hunting a third Dakar victory. "There's still plenty of chopping and changing to come in the standings. I'll be doing my best to stay calm and let things cruise along." - Toby Price

Price was joined by his Red Bull KTM Factory Racing team-mates Sam Sunderland and Matthias Walkner in today's Top 5. "When we were in the big stones it felt like we were racing the Erzberg Rodeo back home in Austria." - Matthias Walkner. Also successfully completing the 277km bike stage between Jeddah and Bisha were Stefan Svitko, Daniel Sanders, Laia Sanz, Camille Chapelière, and CS Santosh. "Welcome to the Dakar! This was not an easy day to have as your first Dakar stage." - Camille Chapelière

In the truck race we have the familiar sight of Team Kamaz Master topping the rankings thanks to Dmitry Sotnikov's stage win. Sotnikov has twice finished as runner-up in the Dakar truck category, this year it looks like he's aiming to go one better. Tomorrow sees the Dakar convoy leave Bisha and head to Wadi Ad-Dawasir. Early in the mammoth 457km timed special stage will be a 30km section of dunes. It looks like things are not going to get any easier at the 2021 Dakar Rally.

## Browns among 6 to reach NFL playoffs

**WASHINGTON:** Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers threw for 240 yards and four touchdowns Sunday to give the Packers a 35-16 victory at Chicago, a home-field edge in the NFL playoffs and a first-round bye. Rodgers completed 19-of-24 passes with second-quarter touchdown tosses of 3 yards to Robert Tonyan, 13 yards to Dominique Dafney and 72 yards to Marquez Valdes-Scantling plus a late 6-yarder clincher to Davante Adams as the Packers finished 13-3 with the National Conference (NFC) top seed.

"It was a good win for us. We had a lot to play for," Rodgers said. "Very happy with our guys. Excited about the post-season. Excited to be the number one seed." The paths to next month's Super Bowl in Tampa run through frigid Green Bay and American Conference (AFC) top seeded defending champion Kansas City (14-2). But Rodgers won't ponder that. "We can't think about that yet," he said. "We're going to enjoy this week off, see who we play and wait

for a cold and possibly snowy game."

The regular season came to a dramatic conclusion as the Cleveland Browns reached the playoffs for the first time since 2002, edging Pittsburgh 24-22 to snap the NFL's longest active playoff drought. Half the NFL's 14 playoff berths were decided Sunday with Cleveland joined by the Baltimore Ravens, Tennessee Titans, Los Angeles Rams, Chicago Bears and Indianapolis Colts for the post-season chase that opens Saturday. AFC games next weekend find Indy at Buffalo, Baltimore at Tennessee and Cleveland again facing the Steelers in Pittsburgh.

NFC games find the Rams at Seattle, Chicago at New Orleans and Tampa Bay at Washington. Cleveland's Nick Chubb and Jarvis Landry each ran for a touchdown and Baker Mayfield threw for another as the Browns sealed their first playoff appearance since 2002. "We wanted this. I could see that determination," Browns coach Kevin Stefanski said. "It's not over. We've got work left to do. I like how this team responds when their back is up against the wall." Lamar Jackson threw for 113 yards and three touchdowns and ran 11 times for 97 yards to spark Baltimore over Cincinnati 38-3. — AFP



CLEVELAND: James Conner #30 of the Pittsburgh Steelers is tackled by Karl Joseph #42 and Myles Garrett #95 of the Cleveland Browns in the fourth quarter at FirstEnergy Stadium on January 03, 2021. — AFP

Sports

# Lewandowski nets twice; Bayern Munich roar back to stun Mainz

## Sancho shines as Dortmund beat Wolfsburg 2-0

**BERLIN:** Robert Lewandowski netted twice as Bayern Munich roared back from two goals down to earn a 5-2 home win over Mainz on Sunday which put the European champions back at the top of the Bundesliga. Mainz's 2-0 half-time lead was wiped out within 10 minutes of the restart as Bayern netted five unanswered second-half goals at the Allianz Arena. The result leaves Bayern two points clear of second-placed RB Leipzig, who had gone top after their 1-0 win at Stuttgart on Saturday.

According to Bayern coach Hansi Flick, the fight back should give them "self-confidence" to tackle their congested fixture list in the coming weeks. Mainz caretaker coach Jan Stewert insisted his side gave their all, but "you have to respect Bayern's quality". Joshua Kimmich marked his return from a knee injury by bagging Bayern's first, with Leroy Sane and Niklas Sule scoring before Lewandowski added two more goals to increase his league tally to 19. Lewandowski, named last month as FIFA's player of the year, has now netted 22 times in all competitions for Bayern this season.

"In the second half we came out with a completely different attitude," Kimmich told Sky. "We always know that we can turn games around, but of course it costs a lot of effort." Bayern were in trouble at the break after second-from-bottom Mainz clinically took their chances. Their striker Jonathan Burkardt nudged Jerome Boateng, who was knocked off balance while leaping for the ball, and sprinted away before firing the visitors into a shock lead on 32 minutes.

Boateng was booked for furiously arguing he had been fouled, but the goal was allowed to stand after a lengthy review. Mainz doubled their lead when centre-back Alexander Hack headed home a free-kick a

minute before the break. Flick substituted Boateng for Sule and switched Kimmich from midfield to right-back for the second period. The result was almost instant as Kimmich headed Bayern's first goal on 50 minutes, then set up Sane to score six minutes later.

On his 21st birthday, Mainz midfielder Leandro Barreiro had an own goal overturned when VAR spotted an offside Bayern player. "We were lucky that Mainz didn't score the third goal," Kimmich later admitted. However, the goals kept flowing as Sule tapped home a corner on 70 minutes. Lewandowski then converted a penalty on 76 minutes after Serge Gnabry had to be helped off after being fouled in a heavy tackle. The Poland striker added his second, and Bayern's fifth, from close range seven minutes from time.

### Sancho ends goal drought

Earlier, England winger Jadon Sancho scored his first Bundesliga goal this season to seal a 2-0 win for Borussia Dortmund at home against Wolfsburg to breathe life back into his side's fading title hopes. After crashing to a shock 2-1 defeat at Union Berlin before the league's two-week winter hiatus, Dortmund saw off a spirited Wolfsburg side. Dortmund finally broke the deadlock at Signal Iduna Park when Manuel Akanji's powerful header hit the net on 66 minutes before Sancho broke clear to score their second in added time. Having occasionally struggled this season, the 20-year-old Sancho capped a fine display in style after also providing the corner from which Akanji scored.

"It wasn't an easy win, but we stayed calm and I'm pleased that Sancho put in such a good corner and



MUNICH: Mainz's German defender Daniel Brosinski (Bottom) fouls Bayern Munich's French midfielder Corentin Tolisso during the German first division Bundesliga football match FC Bayern Munich v Mainz 05 on January 3, 2021. —AFP

the ball went in," Akanji told Sky. Dortmund moved up to fourth, eight points behind leaders Bayern. Dortmund striker Erling Braut Haaland returned from a hip injury after missing the previous seven games. Although short of match fitness, he went close with

several chances before coming off with 10 minutes left. Wolfsburg were unlucky not to be awarded a penalty after the ball struck the hand of Dortmund midfielder Axel Witsel, but no spot-kick was awarded after a long review. —AFP

## Lampard testing Abramovich's patience amid Chelsea collapse

**LONDON:** Frank Lampard knows the demands of being a Chelsea manager under Roman Abramovich more than most having played for nine different coaches during his playing career at Stamford Bridge. Now Lampard is the man in the firing line after Sunday's 3-1 defeat to Manchester City capped a run of one win in six games that looks to have extinguished any hope of a Premier League title challenge. Much more was expected of the Blues after a £220 million (\$300 million) spending spree in the transfer market at a time when most of European football's major powers were scaling back due to the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

After bankrolling the purchases of Kai Havertz, Timo Werner, Hakim Ziyech, Ben Chilwell and Edouard Mendy, Abramovich will have expected

more than Chelsea's position of eighth in the table nearly halfway through the season. Patience has not been a virtue of the Russian's 18-year reign as Chelsea owner and even a club legend like Lampard, who is the club's all-time top goalscorer, is unlikely to be afforded much more time to turn the situation around. The Athletic reported on Sunday that Chelsea are already lining up suitable candidates should the 42-year-old be sacked.

### Great expectations

Lampard does have some credit in the bank from his first season in charge, which took the club back into the Champions League despite a transfer ban and the sale of Eden Hazard to Real Madrid. But expectations have changed since the summer spending spree, even

if Lampard has always cautioned Chelsea will need more time to match the standards set by Liverpool and City in recent seasons. "The expectations are different this year because everyone looks and says 'you spent this amount of money'," Lampard said after a fourth defeat in six games.

"The reality is a lot of the players that have come in are new, young, have been injured, or not played together. There are a lot of expectations that are not real." But the manner of defeat to a City side depleted by coronavirus infections and who have struggled to score goals this season, offered little sign of what Lampard is trying to build towards. Chelsea's failure to launch a title challenge is all the more disappointing as Liverpool and City's standards have dropped in an unusual season, opening the door to the chasing pack.

As Manchester United and Tottenham have stepped forward to close the gap, Chelsea are trailing



Frank Lampard

Leicester, Aston Villa and Everton, leaving Lampard with the lowest points-per-game tally of any manager in the Abramovich era. The former England international's relationship with his players has also been questioned since his public rebuke of their attitude and commitment in a 3-1 defeat to Arsenal last weekend has not summoned the response he hoped for. Instead there were more examples of lethargy as Ziyech watched on, while Kevin De Bruyne surged past him to score City's third goal inside 35 minutes. —AFP

## Leicester can upset the Premier League established order

**LONDON:** Leicester have the potential to disrupt the dominance of the 'Big Six' in the Premier League, says Foxes manager Brendan Rodgers. The Northern Irishman's side lie third in the table after beating Newcastle 2-1 on Sunday. Leicester-

who in 2016 became the only club from outside the 'Big Six' to win the league title since 1995 - are a point behind leaders Liverpool, who visit Southampton later on Monday, and second-placed Manchester United.

Leicester have played a game more than several of their rivals in a wide-open title race, with just seven points separating Liverpool and United from West Ham in 10th. By comparison, Liverpool held a 27-point advantage over the team in 10th place after 16 games last season, as did Manchester City at a similar stage in the 2017-18 campaign. Rodgers says that while Leicester may be unable to compete

financially with the biggest clubs, they can make their presence felt on the pitch.

"We want to be a team that, year on year, can get European football," said Rodgers. "Our job is, can we disrupt the hierarchy? We might not financially - we don't have the finances to go and get that £70 million (\$96 million), £80m, £90m player-but we can in a football way." Rodgers said his initial goal is to qualify for European football next term. A loss of form at the end of last season cost Leicester a Champions League spot but they are into the knockout stage of the Europa League after topping their group. —AFP

## Crown Prince tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** HH The Crown Prince cup tournament (Round 8) had the current holder Kuwait Football Club face Al-Sahel on Sunday, and the match ended 2-0 in favor of Kuwait. Kuwait players had an almost total control of the match, but lacked the necessary execution and scoring tactics. Kuwait had some opportunities but Burgan's goal keeper was up to the task during the first half. The second half was different as Kuwait's Fahad Al-Hajiri scored in the 46th minute, and

a second goal was scored by Talal Fadhel in the 56th minute.

Meanwhile, Burgan beat Fahaheel 3-1 in a relatively competitive match. Burgan's goals came from shots by Yousuf Saad in the 29th minute, Khalid bin Yahya 96th and Geovani in the 115th. Fahaheel's lonely goal came in the 44th minute. Fahaheel were somehow better in the first half though they could not score. Burgan took the opportunity and scored in the 29th minute. Fahaheel's goal came towards the end of the first half from the penalty spot, as Mohammad Abdelhahi scored the equalizer. The second half remained without scores, so the teams resorted to extra time and Burgan was able to score twice.



## Africa roundup: Red cards as Uganda hold Cameroon in warm-up

**JOHANNESBURG:** Uganda drew 1-1 with host country Cameroon in a fiery African Nations Championship (CHAN) warm-up match despite having a player sent off after only 12 minutes. Ben Ocen was shown a straight red card following his reckless challenge on Alfred Meyong at Stade Ahmadou Ahidjo, the 42,500-capacity national stadium in Yaounde. Cameroon went ahead through Banga Bindjelme just a minute after Uganda were reduced to 10 men, but Milton Karisa leveled on 70 minutes and the home side had Basile Yamkam red-carded in the final minute. Here, AFP Sport rounds up African football news.

### Cameroon

Cameroon will face Niger and Zambia in other friendly matches as the central African nation prepares to host a major Confederation of African Football (CAF) male tournament for the first time since 1972. The Nations Championship kicks off on January 16 in Yaounde with a Group A clash between Cameroon and Zimbabwe, and Burkina Faso and Mali meet later in the second half of a double-header. Group winners and runners-up advance to the quarter-finals of a tournament reserved for footballers playing in their country of birth.

### Morocco

Ayoub el Kaabi, whose nine goals helped hosts Morocco win the Nations Championship for the first time three years ago, has been included in a 34-man preliminary squad for Cameroon. His CHAN feats won him a contract with Chinese outfit Hebei Fortune, but the 27-year-old has since returned home to play for two-time African champions Wydad Casablanca. Half the squad is composed of stars from the top three Moroccan clubs - Renaissance Berkane (seven) and Raja Casablanca and Wydad (five each).

### Zambia

Zambia surrendered a two-goal advantage in a 3-3 draw with fellow qualifiers Niger in another Yaounde warm-up match before the sixth edition of the Nations Championship. After an early Collins Sikombe goal for the Zambians was cancelled by Ibrahim Essa, Moses Phiri gave the southern African nation a 2-1 half-time lead. Sikombe doubled the advantage with his second goal before Essa netted again and Moussa Issa equalized with only three minutes remaining.

### Egypt

Five-time African champions Zamalek joined fierce rivals Al Ahly in second place in the Egyptian Premier League thanks to a 2-1 away victory over ENPPI. Both star-studded Cairo outfits have 10 points from four outings, one point less than frontrunners El Gouna, who have played one match more. Moroccan Achraf Bencharki and Youssef 'Obama' Ibrahim gave the White Knights a two-goal half-time advantage that was halved midway through the second half when Rami Sabry netted.

### South Africa

Mamelodi Sundowns took a three-point lead in the South African Premiership after edging Orlando Pirates 1-0 in a ninth-round showdown between previously unbeaten sides. Kenya defender Brian Onyango was the unexpected match-winner, heading into the net from close range on 35 minutes after Pirates failed to clear a free-kick. Defending champions Sundowns have 21 points from nine matches, three more than promoted Swallows, who host Cape Town City Tuesday. —AFP

**14** Packers grab bye as Browns among six to reach playoffs



**14** Golden State Warriors outgun Portland Trail Blazers 137-122



**15** Lewandowski nets twice; Bayern Munich roar back to stun Mainz



## Ronaldo's double lifts Juventus

10-man Milan stay top ahead of Inter



**TURIN:** Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo (center) shoots to score the opening goal despite Udinese's Italian defender Kevin Bonifazi (left) and Udinese's French defender Sebastian De Maio during the Italian Serie A football match Juventus vs Udinese on January 3, 2021. — AFP

**MILAN:** Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice as champions Juventus bounced back from their first Serie A defeat of the season by beating Udinese 4-1 on Sunday to move up to fifth place. The Milan clubs are top of the Italian league with Juventus 10 points adrift of the summit having played a game less. Leaders AC Milan stayed one point ahead of Inter with a 2-0 win over midtable Benevento despite playing an hour a man down. City rivals Inter crushed lowly Crotone 6-2 with Lautaro Martinez bagging his first hat-trick for the club.

But Milan restored their advantage thanks to a Franck Kessie penalty on 15 minutes and Rafael Leao's terrific curling strike from a tight angle shortly after half-time. Sandro Tonali's sending off after 33 minutes for a high tackle on Artur Ionita did not hold back Stefano Pioli's side. Gianluigi Donnarumma was solid in the Milan goal while Gianluca Caprari dragged a penalty wide on the hour. "We don't let ourselves be put under pressure by the results of the opponents," said Pioli whose side are unbeaten in 27

league games going back to March.

"We're ambitious, we're not hiding it and we aim to win the next match as well against Juventus (on Wednesday)." Ronaldo once again proved decisive for Juventus scoring a goal in each half to bring his league-leading tally to 14 this campaign and teeing up Federico Chiesa after the break. Paulo Dybala added the fourth deep into injury time as Andrea Pirlo's side moved on from their shock 3-0 loss to Fiorentina last time out. "It wasn't the best Juventus because we were coming off a bad defeat, we were a bit fearful at the beginning," said Pirlo.

"Slowly we grew and in the second half we did better. It's a delicate moment but we have to have confidence in what we can achieve and the determination to get there." At the San Siro, Martinez and Romelu Lukaku combined to devastating effect for Inter who have now won eight league games in a row. The strike duo were involved in five goals although midfielder Arturo Vidal was hauled off at half-time after conceding a penalty in a woeful display.

Antonio Conte's side had been pegged back 2-2 at the break with Niccolo Zanello scoring first with a 12th-minute header for the rock bottom Calabrians with the worst attack in the league. But Martinez picked up a Lukaku cross to pull the hosts level eight minutes later. Martinez had a role in Inter's second just after half an hour when Crotone defender Luca Marrone turned the ball into his own net under pressure from the Argentina forward. Vladimir Golemic put the sides level six minutes later after Vidal fouled Arkadiusz Reca, with a furious Conte replacing the Chilean with Stefano Sensi at the break.

### Roma stay third

Martinez restored the lead for Inter before the hour connecting with a Marcelo Brozovic through ball following a Lukaku back-heel, and headed in his third with 12 minutes to go off a rebound. Lukaku blasted in his 50th goal for Inter after 64 minutes but limped off after taking a knock to his right thigh 10 minutes later, before Achraf Hakimi rounded out the

win with three minutes to go. "There is great desire and it shows," said Conte as Inter target their first Serie A title since 2010 with their European campaign over this season. Roma held third place, six points behind Inter, with captain Edin Dzeko scoring with a quarter of an hour to go in a 1-0 win in the rain over former Roma coach Claudio Ranieri's Sampdoria. The capital side are ahead of Napoli who swept past Cagliari 4-1 with Piotr Zielinski scoring twice and Hirving Lozano and Lorenzo Insigne also on target late, the latter from the penalty spot.

In a clash of European rivals, Atalanta whipped Sassuolo 5-1 with Colombian Duvan Zapata scoring twice. The Bergamo side were again playing without captain Papu Gomez who has fallen out with coach Gian Piero Gasperini. Zapata and Matteo Pessina scored in the first half with the Colombian adding a second just after the break with Robin Gosens and Luis Muriel compounding the rout before Vlad Chiriches pulled a goal back. Sassuolo are sixth one point ahead of Atalanta who have played a game less. — AFP

## Barca triumph as Messi makes 500th Liga appearance

**MADRID:** Barcelona won 1-0 at bottom side Huesca on Sunday as Lionel Messi became the first foreigner to make 500 appearances in Spain's La Liga, while a late Luis Suarez goal secured leaders Atletico Madrid victory against Alaves. Messi returned for Barca after missing the final game of 2020 with an ankle knock and swung in a cross for Frenkie de Jong to divert home for the only goal on 27 minutes. Although Ronald Koeman's side began a potentially season-defining run of four consecutive away matches with a comfortable win, they remain a distant 10 points behind Atletico in fifth having played a game more.

"In general, aside from the last 20 minutes we played well," said Koeman. "We created a lot of danger, which isn't easy against a team that shuts up at the back. We got a great goal and we had two or three more chances to pull away." Barca dominated possession and created a number of chances but Huesca goalkeeper Alvaro Fernandez produced several fine saves to keep the hosts in touch. After De Jong's opener Messi was denied a second just before half-time when Fernandez superbly clawed away his free-kick heading towards the top corner.

The Argentine was again thwarted by the legs of Fernandez in the second half after combining well with Pedri, moments after Marc-Andre ter Stegen reacted sharply to keep out Rafa Mir's inventive back-heel. That was a rare threat from Huesca who have now won just once in 17 tries this season but had taken points off most visitors to their Estadio El Alcoraz so far, including Atletico in September. "We came out strong and very concentrated. It's the main base we need. If we have that, we improve a lot with the ball and if we get better in front of goal then we can have a very good start to the year," added Koeman.

### Suarez the savior

Earlier in the day, Suarez struck a 90th-minute winner for Atletico as they defeated 10-man Alaves 2-1 to move back above Real Madrid at the top. Marcos Llorente gave Atletico the lead at Mendizorroza shortly before half-time with a deflected strike from just outside the area. Diego Simeone's side appeared to have the game under control when Alaves defender Victor Laguardia was sent off on the hour following a VAR review for chopping down Thomas Lemar as the Frenchman ran towards goal.

Florian Lejeune headed against the post for Alaves before a spectacular own goal on 84 minutes from Felipe threatened to cost Atletico two vital points, the Brazilian centre-back drilling beyond Jan Oblak as he attempted to hack clear an attempted cross. — AFP

## 'Flat-out' Al-Attiyah wins second stage of Dakar Rally

**WADI AD-DAWASIR:** Qatari driver Nasser Al-Attiyah won the second stage of the Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia yesterday ahead of rivals Stephane Peterhansel and Carlos Sainz. The three-time winner of the Dakar sped through the 457-kilometre stage from Bisha to Wadi ad-Dawasir in 4hr 03min 14sec to take the victory after reigning champion Sainz won Sunday's opening stage. "It was a good day," said Al-Attiyah, who is aiming for a seventh Olympic skeet appearance in Tokyo later this year.

"Yesterday we lost a lot of time because we opened the way and it was not really good for us and we didn't take risks. "But today we went flat out and everything is working very, very well. The tyres were amazing and the car too, the pace from start to finish, no mistakes at all... there's still a long way, but it's a good start." Peterhansel, a 13-time winner of the race, leads the overall standings with Spaniard Sainz 6min 37sec behind and Al-Attiyah just over nine minutes back.

The Frenchman said he had been stressing about how to avoid getting bogged down in the first sand dunes of this year's Dakar. "It was the first dunes, but also the car was full of diesel which meant it was really heavy," said Peterhansel, whose 13 Dakar victories came seven times in a car and six on a motor-



**BISHA:** Toyota's Qatari driver Nasser Al-Attiyah and his co-driver Mathieu Baumel of France compete during Stage 1 of the 2021 Dakar Rally between Jeddah and Bisha in Saudi Arabia on January 3, 2021. — AFP

bike. "So, the priority was not to get stuck. After that, I have to say that we navigated well."

### 'Keep riding'

Spain's Joan Barreda took the second stage in the motorbike category, finishing ahead of American rider and title holder Ricky Brabec, who is also on a Honda. Brabec has a lot of time to claw back after trailing in almost 20 minutes behind Australian Toby Price in Sunday's first stage after losing his way in the desert terrain. Barreda, whose victory was his 25th on a Dakar special, said he had had no option but "to push with everything-I put it all in today". "I enjoyed this type of stage a lot. — AFP