



4 Violent, 'brutal' crimes on the rise in Kuwait



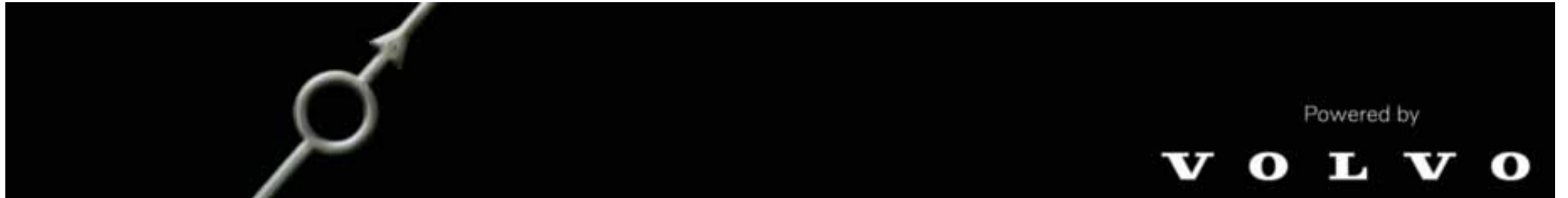
6 UK shuts schools as Germany braces for extended lockdown



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Gulf states sign 'solidarity and stability' agreement

Full ties restored between Qatar and quartet • Amir congratulates GCC leaders

• GCC summit honors late Amir Sheikh Sabah, Sultan Qaboos

• Saudi Crown Prince embraces Qatari Amir on arrival



AL-ULA, Saudi Arabia: (From left) Kuwaiti Amir HH Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Omani Deputy Prime Minister Fahd bin Mahmoud, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Bahraini Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, Dubai Ruler and UAE Prime Minister and Vice President Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum and Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Nayef Al-Hajraf pose for a photo before the opening session of the 41st GCC summit in this northwestern Saudi city yesterday. — AFP photos (See Pages 2 & 3)



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman welcomes HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (left) and Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani (right) upon their arrival in Al-Ula for the GCC summit yesterday.



AL-ULA, Saudi Arabia: Gulf leaders signed a "solidarity and stability" deal yesterday after the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Qatar publicly embraced, bringing Doha back into the regional fold after a three-year rift. Saudi Arabia had led a coalition of countries in the Gulf and beyond to cut ties and transport links with Qatar in June 2017, charging that it was too close to Iran and backed radical Islamist groups - allegations Doha denied.

Those countries, along with Oman and Kuwait which have mediated between the two sides, signed a rapprochement deal in the Saudi city of Al-Ula, after Riyadh overnight reopened its land, sea and air borders to Doha. Saudi foreign minister later said

full ties have been restored between Qatar and the four nations that had severed relations with Doha. "What happened today is... the closure of the folder of all points of difference and a full return of diplomatic relations," Prince Faisal bin Farhan told a press conference at the conclusion of the landmark regional summit.

HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah congratulated GCC leaders for concluding the Al-Ula Declaration, which "reminds us of huge endeavors" the late Amir HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah made to make this declaration possible. "As I congratulate you on this historic achievement,

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World Bank tips fragile recovery for MENA in 2021

DUBAI: The World Bank yesterday predicted a moderate economic recovery for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in 2021, while highlighting the many challenges still posed by the coronavirus pandemic. The Washington-based institution said the pandemic had seen the region's economies shrink by about 5.0 percent in 2020, inflicting heavy job losses and a sharp increase in the number of people living below the poverty line of less than \$5.50 a day.

"Among oil exporters, growth is expected to recover to 1.8 percent this year, supported by normalizing oil demand, the scheduled easing of the OPEC+ oil production cuts, policy support, and the gradual phasing out of domestic pandemic-related restrictions," it said in a report.

Saudi Arabia, the largest economy in the Arab world, will benefit from the resumption of public projects, which had been postponed at the beginning of the crisis, and the recovery of demand after a sharp rise in VAT, it said, tipping a 2.0 percent expansion. Growth should also accelerate to 1.5 percent in Iran thanks to the recovery of domestic consumption and

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3 MPs file to grill PM amid heated debate

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Kuwait yesterday appeared headed for political turmoil after three opposition MPs filed to grill HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and more than 30 lawmakers publicly declared their support of the grilling. The number of supporters is well over the 25

MPs required to declare non-cooperation with the prime minister, leading to either dismissing the premier or dissolving the National Assembly elected just a month ago.

The filing of the grilling came after chaotic scenes during the Assembly's first regular session after Deputy Speaker Ahmad Al-Shuhoumi, who chaired the session, rejected two motions by opposition MPs to form a parliamentary investigation committee to probe events that took place at the inaugural session on Dec 15.

Shuhoumi insisted that it is unconstitutional to form a parliamentary panel to investigate events at an

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Iran claims Seoul holding \$7bn as destroyer arrives

TEHRAN: Iran yesterday accused South Korea of holding \$7 billion of its funds "hostage" but stressed that Tehran's seizure of a Korean tanker in Gulf waters was not a tit-for-tat move. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on Monday sent out naval speedboats to seize the Hankuk Chemi with 20 crew aboard, accusing it of "breaking maritime environmental law". South Korea has demanded the

release of the ship and dispatched its anti-piracy unit to the region. "We are not hostage-takers," Iran's government spokesman Ali Rabiee told a press conference. "We are used to such allegations. But ... it is the government of Korea that has taken over \$7 billion of ours hostage on baseless grounds". He added that the seizure was based on a court order after

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KUWAIT: MPs attend a parliament session at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



This undated picture released yesterday shows South Korean Navy's destroyer ROKS Choi Young. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Amir thanks Saudi King for hosting 41st GCC Summit

Sheikh Nawaf hails historic, solid Kuwaiti-Saudi ties



AL-ULA, Saudi Arabia: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is welcomed by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman upon his arrival to Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia, to attend the 41st GCC Summit. — Amiri Diwan and Saudi Royal Palace photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah waves as he arrives to Kuwait after attending the 41st GCC Summit.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah welcomes His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah back to Kuwait.

AL-ULA, Saudi Arabia: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah expressed in a cable yesterday his thanks and appreciation for Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz for the warm welcome and hospitality during participation in the 41st GCC Summit, held in Al-Ula. In his cable, His Highness the Amir praised the Saudi King for naming this summit after the Late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and Sultan of Oman Qaboos bin Said Al-Said, which represented a gesture of dedication to past leaders. His Highness the Amir also extended his congratulations to GCC leaders for Al-Ula summit's final communique in which they affirmed commitment to unity among GCC countries, which represented a regional and Arab achievement that would bolster Gulf and Arab unity, and in turn benefit people in the Gulf and Arab world. His Highness

the Amir also wished good health for the Saudi King and prosperity to the people in the kingdom under his leadership.

His Highness the Amir had earlier stressed the historic and brotherly solid ties between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. His Highness the Amir, in a statement



Commitment to unity among GCC states

upon his arrival to Al-Ula city, expressed happiness, appreciation and brotherly sentiment feelings towards the Kingdom, its leaders and people. His Highness the Amir also wished the Gulf and Arab

countries all success to achieve their people aspirations. Upon his arrival in Saudi Arabia to head Kuwait's delegation partaking in the GCC 41st Summit, His Highness the Amir was received by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, GCC Secretary-General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf and Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Sabah.

Upon his arrival back to Kuwait after heading Kuwait's delegation at the summit, His Highness the Amir was received by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, accompanied by Parliament Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and several senior officials.

His Highness was accompanied by Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Amiri



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah leads state officials welcoming His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah back after attending the 41st GCC Summit.

Diwan Chief Sheikh Faisal Saud Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of the Amiri Diwan and Director Ahmad Fahad Al-Fahad, the head of Amiri Protocol Sheikh Khaled Al-

Abdullah Al-Sabah Al-Nasser Al-Sabah, Head of Media and Cultural Affairs at Amiri Diwan Yousef Hamad Al-Roumi and several state officials. — KUNA

Gulf states sign 'solidarity...'

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the signing of Al-Ula Declaration, we remember the faithful and constructive role of His Highness the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah ... who hugely contributed to the success of this agreement," HH the Amir said in a speech.

The Amir also thanked US President Donald Trump and his advisor Jared Kushner for contributing to the "noble objective" and concluding the agreement. He appreciated keenness of the leaders of the GCC and Egypt to exert further efforts to achieve aspirations of the people. "Calling our declaration the solidarity agreement reflects our keenness and conviction in its importance, and it reflects on the other hand our conviction that restoring it is a continuation of our desire for unity of our Arab nation," he said.

HH the Amir expressed gratitude to the Saudi King and his government for naming the summit the summit of "Sultan Qaboos and Sheikh Sabah" in appreciation of the two Gulf leaders' service of Arab and Islamic causes. Sheikh Nawaf also thanked King Salman bin Abdulaziz, his government and people for hosting the GCC summit, welcomed Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shukri and commended Cairo's support for the security and stability of the region. He also welcomed Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul Gheit and Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Yusuf Al-Othaimen.

Al-Ula Declaration

"There is a desperate need today to unite our efforts to promote our region and to confront challenges that surround us, especially the threats posed by the Iranian regime's nuclear and ballistic missile program and its plans for sabotage and destruction," said Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The Al-Ula Declaration "affirms our Gulf, Arab and Islamic solidarity and stability", he told the meeting, in comments echoed by other leaders.

The details of the agreement were not immediately released. But the warm welcome Prince Mohammed extended to Qatar's ruler Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, with the pair embracing at the airport and then chatting animatedly, indicates a significant breakthrough.

Sheikh Tamim, visiting Saudi for the first time since the crisis began, was whisked with the other leaders

through Al-Ula's dramatic Martian landscape to the shimmering Maraya Concert Hall, a mirrored structure situated in a nearby valley. Later, Saudi state media tweeted a photo of the young Saudi leader behind the wheel of his sports utility vehicle, taking Sheikh Tamim on a tour of the area.

Saudi state media said Prince Mohammed met separately with Sheikh Tamim after the pair publicly embraced at the airport. "During the meeting, they reviewed bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries and ways of consolidating the Gulf Cooperation Council joint action," the official Saudi Press Agency said.

"These are first steps or a first phase of reconciliation that will be followed by other steps. Some may belittle that progress, but resuming open direct communication and avoiding verbal attacks is progress," said Kuwait University assistant professor Bader Al-Saif. "The other states... will follow suit and pursue similar reconciliatory steps."

Washington had intensified pressure for a resolution to what Doha calls a "blockade", insisting Gulf unity is necessary to isolate US foe Iran as the curtain falls on Trump's presidency. Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser who shuttled around the region to seek a deal, attended the signing in Al-Ula. "The Trump administration will claim this as another victory for sure," said Royal United Services Institute analyst Tobias Borch.

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah announced on state television Monday that an agreement had been struck to open all the borders between Saudi and Qatar with immediate effect. Drivers south of Doha on the usually calm Salwa highway towards the Saudi border at Abu Samra sounded their horns and waved their arms from their car windows in the wake of the announcement, an AFP correspondent reported.

Saudi media, which is influential throughout the region, quickly adopted a tone in stark contrast to past coverage of Qatar which had focused on past transgressions and alleged crimes, instead talking about "unity" and "fraternity".

Saudi commentators appeared on Doha-based broadcaster Al Jazeera for the first time in years, and a major Saudi media group deleted the song "Teach Qatar" - which details its supposed failings - from its YouTube channel. Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, who is also the ruler of Dubai, said the summit had brought unity to the region. "The changes and challenges surrounding us require strength, cohesion and real Gulf cooperation," he tweeted. — Agencies

slow recovery of domestic demand. However, it is expected to reach only 2.7 percent in Egypt, the most populous country in the region, following the "collapse" of various sectors, notably tourism and gas extraction.

The World Bank warned that regional economies faced a variety of hurdles as they try to get back on their feet. "The recovery is contingent on containment of the pandemic, stabilizing oil prices, no further escalation of geopolitical tensions, and the assumption of a vaccine rollout in the second half of the year," it said. — AFP

Iran claims Seoul holding \$7bn...

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the tanker had "caused oil pollution in the...Gulf. It was warned beforehand, and the (seizure) request was a technical one."

South Korea will dispatch a delegation to Iran soon to resolve the tanker situation "through bilateral negotiations," said its foreign ministry spokesman Choi Young-sam. Seoul's defense ministry said yesterday a destroyer carrying members of South Korea's anti-piracy unit had arrived in waters near the Strait of Hormuz and was "carrying out a mission to ensure the safety of our nationals", without giving details.

Seoul said the 300-strong Cheonghae unit had been in the region since late last year and would not engage in an offensive operation, an unnamed military official told the South's Yonhap News Agency. "The issue should be resolved through diplomacy. The unit is focused on the safety of our people who use the waterway after the seizure incident," they added.

South Korea's vice foreign minister Choi Jong-kun will go ahead with a previously planned three-day trip to Tehran early next week, the foreign ministry spokesman added. The vice minister's visit had been arranged prior to the seizure, as Tehran seeks the release of the billions of dollars held in Seoul over US sanctions.

Rabiei said South Korea had refused to pro-

3 MPs file to grill PM amid...

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Assembly session, while opposition MPs stressed that it is within the constitutional right of the Assembly to investigate what happened at the opening session. Heated exchanges and arguments forced Shuhoumi to adjourn the session until today, when more arguments and debates are expected on the issue. Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem is expected to chair today's session.

Opposition lawmakers Thamer Al-Suwait, Bader Al-Dahoum and Khaled Al-Otaibi in their grilling accused the prime minister of ignoring the outcome of the general election by appointing provocative and unqualified ministers in the new Cabinet. They also accused him of interfering in the election of the speaker by supporting the candidate whom the majority of lawmakers rejected, saying this reflects a dangerous attitude. They also accused him of violating the constitution by failing to submit the government's program as required under the constitution.

A number of MPs called for filing a non-cooper-

vide Iran with the funds "even regarding goods that are not sanctioned" by the United States, noting that "our nation's historical memory will not forget this".

US President Donald Trump in 2018 withdrew Washington from a landmark nuclear agreement with world powers and then reimposed and reinforced crippling sanctions on Iran. Iran's Guards said the Korean vessel was carrying 7,200 tons of "oil chemical products" after stopping at a Saudi port and was crewed by personnel from South Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam and Myanmar.

The incident was the first seizure of a major vessel by the Iranian navy in more than a year. In July 2019, the Guards seized the British-flagged oil tanker Stena Impero in the sensitive Strait of Hormuz for two months for allegedly ramming a fishing boat.

It was at the time widely seen as a response after authorities in the British overseas territory of Gibraltar had detained an Iranian tanker and later released it over US objections. Tehran denied the two cases were related.

Iran also said yesterday it had stepped up its uranium enrichment. The Islamic republic said it was now refining uranium to 20 percent purity - far above the level permitted under its 2015 agreement with world powers, but significantly below the 90 percent required for an atomic bomb - in a step Washington condemned as "nuclear extortion". It was the most striking suspension yet of Tehran's commitments under its landmark deal with six nations, which has been fraying ever since US President Donald Trump withdrew from it in 2018 and reimposed crippling sanctions. — AFP

ation motion against the prime minister at the end of the grilling. To pass, the motion needs the support of just 25 lawmakers. But with well over 30 MPs announcing they back the grilling, any non-cooperation motion is expected to pass. If the Assembly votes to back the non-cooperation motion, HH the Amir can either dismiss the prime minister and appoint a new premier or dissolve the Assembly and call for snap polls within two months.

During the debate on the motions to investigate events at the opening session, MP Bader Al-Humaidi, who lost the speakership contest to Ghanem, said he considers himself to be the legitimate speaker because he was the choice of the people, unlike Ghanem who was supported by the government.

Opposition lawmakers also rejected a decision by the Assembly office to form a four-member committee from its members to investigate what happened. Two members, Osama Al-Shaheen and Farz Al-Mutairi, yesterday resigned from the committee. Opposition MPs say that a group of supporters of Ghanem were illegally allowed into the gallery during the opening session, and insulted MPs and caused chaos before they were evicted. They also say that fake ballot papers for the speaker's election were distributed to some MPs and demanded a criminal investigation.

World Bank tips fragile recovery...

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tourism and the mitigation of the effects of COVID-19, they added. Growth in other countries in the region is expected to reach 3.2 percent in 2021 due to the easing of travel restrictions and a

Local

Saudi Crown Prince lauds late Kuwait's Amir, Oman's Sultan

GCC summit to unify the ranks, says UAE's Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed



AL-ULA, Saudi Arabia: His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah signs the solidarity agreement between Gulf Cooperation Council countries during the 41st GCC Summit in Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia yesterday. — Amiri Diwan photos



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman signs the agreement.



Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim Al Thani signs the agreement.



UAE's Vice President, Prime Minister, and Dubai Governor Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al-Maktoum signs the agreement.



Bahrain's Crown Prince and Prime Minister Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa signs the agreement.



Oman's Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs Fahad bin Mahmoud Al-Said signs the agreement.

AL-ULA, Saudi Arabia: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman yesterday lauded the late great leaders, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah of the State of Kuwait and Sultan Qaboos of Oman, for playing a major role in boosting joint GCC action. In his keynote statement inaugurating the 41st GCC Summit, Prince Mohammad, also the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, said upon orders by King Salman bin Abdulaziz, the top-level conference was named "Summit of Sheikh Sabah and Sultan Qaboos," in appreciation for their good actions for backing up the "blessed GCC march."

He also lauded efforts by the United States of America and "other parties" in this respect, adding that the summit declaration that would crown the top-level meeting affirms solidarity and stability in the Gulf, Arab and Islamic regions, as well as "calls for bolstering the bonds of brotherhood among our states and peoples for serving their aspirations." Crown Prince Mohammad underscored high urgency for rising up to the regional challenges namely "threats posed by the nuclear program of the Iranian regime, its ballistic missiles' program and its schemes of sabotage and annihilation that have been adopted by their agents." He urged the GCC states to "act seriously in the face of the Iranian schemes that threaten regional and international peace and security."

Solid brotherhood
Meanwhile, UAE's Vice President, Prime Minister, and Dubai Governor Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al-Maktoum described as positive the 41st GCC Summit and affirmed it would pave the way for "unifying the ranks and solidifying the brotherhood" among the GCC countries. Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed said in a tweeted statement, carried by the official news agency 'WAM', that the surrounding

Arab League welcomes summit's outcome

challenges warrant real and in-depth unity and cooperation among the GCC countries. He thanked Saudi Arabia for hosting the successful summit and renewed confidence in the council march. "We also renew our optimism that the coming years will bring stability, security and achievements for our peoples."

In the meantime, the Arab League highly welcomed the outcome of the summit, and appreciated

the efforts exerted by involved Arab countries to end the rift, at a difficult time where Arabs are facing huge challenges. In a statement, the Arab League Secretary General of the League Ahmad Aboul Gheit, affirmed that "any effective measure that leads to calm and normalcy among Arab countries will be in the interest of the collective Arab unity, and it for sure it is welcome, and in turns would strengthens the power and influence of the Arab League." Aboul Gheit added, "there is no doubt that the huge challenges facing the Arab world call for healing the rift as soon as possible and achieving consensus between Arab brothers. The League's Chief noted, "there is no doubt any Arab differences should be solved for the sake of Arab security, which we all need as soon as possible." Aboul Gheit stressed on working to reinforce a positive situation that emerged from the "Al-Ula summit" and build on it to enhance confidence.

Separately, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas lauded the State of Kuwait for healing the "rifts among the brethren, the Arabian Gulf states, and holding the crucial summit in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." The Palestinian news agency 'Wafa' quoted president Abbas as praising the GCC summit hoping that it would be followed with successful action at the levels of re-unifying the countries, the Arab ranks and facing the challenges. Conciliation among the brothers, the Gulf states, bolsters joint Arab action

and defense "of our nation's causes notably the Palestinian cause," he further said.

First steps

Also yesterday, Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem expressed his congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the people of Kuwait and the GCC after the beginning of the first steps of reconciliation among GCC countries. "The first steps of the GCC reconciliation was embodied in the arrival of the GCC leaders and delegations to Saudi Arabia to attend the 41st GCC Summit in Al-Ula province," said Ghanem in a press statement. Ghanem praised His Highness the Amir's efforts in the past few weeks in mediation and convergence of views between GCC countries, "which every person in the region can appreciate." He added that "His Highness the Amir's effort in mediation have successfully reached its goals after the continuation of the role of His Highness the late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for the past few years, and it is a reason for every Kuwaiti to be proud of." The speaker also praised the GCC leaders' response to Kuwait's efforts which ended in a "fraternal embrace" between the leaders in Saudi Arabia. —KUNA

EU commends Kuwait's role in healing Gulf rift

BRUSSELS: The European Union (EU) praised and expressed support to Kuwait's mediation efforts yesterday for the successful reconciliation among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. "This is a very welcome news. This is a very good piece of positive news because for over three years this prolonged crisis within the Gulf Cooperation Council has been undermining the unity and the corporation within the GCC. It had also had a negative spill over beyond the Gulf region," EU lead spokesperson for foreign affairs and security policy, Peter Stano, told an online press conference in Brussels. "We commend in this respect very much the mediation role played by Kuwait all along, as well as by the US," he said.

"We continue supporting Kuwait's ongoing mediation efforts to achieve the final solution in ending this crisis. And the EU remains ready for the strengthening of our longstanding partnership with a reinvigorated GCC and its member states," stressed the EU spokesperson. He noted that the 27-member European Union has been always supporting an intra-Gulf solution, negotiated solution to this crisis by engaging with all the main stakeholders and by continuously calling for dialogue. "Of course we welcome the announcement which indicates a normalization of the situation, the announcement on the reopening of the borders between Saudi Arabia and Qatar and the airspace also,

ahead of today's GCC summit," said Stano. "This is an important step. This will hopefully lead to restoring the unity of the GCC and towards the resumption of the full cooperation within this regional grouping," he added.

New chapter

Meanwhile, the Chair of the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula, Hannah Neumann, appreciated Kuwait's constructive role in easing tensions in the region and hoped that the Gulf Cooperation Council summit will open a new chapter in their relationship. "Saudi Arabia's decision to reopen its air space and land border to Qatar is a welcome development. It will certainly help easing tensions in the region, tensions which had detrimental impact on so many lives," she said yesterday. "I very much appreciate Kuwait's constructive role as a mediator between the two countries," said the German MEP who is also the Vice chair of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights. "(Yesterday's) meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council will be an opportunity to open a new chapter in the history of Qatar's relations with other GCC countries, including Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates - both also involved in the blockade," she added.

Dialogue and diplomacy

In the meantime, UN General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir has welcomed reopening of borders between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, appreciating the State of Kuwait's contributions to this breakthrough. Bozkir, in a tweet late Monday, encouraged resolution of disputes through dialogue and diplomacy. The reopening of borders is a very important step towards reconcili-

ation in the Gulf region, he said.

Kuwait Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah had announced that Saudi Arabia and Qatar have agreed to reopen air traffic, land and sea borders starting from Monday evening. His Highness the Amir

of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah earlier called Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim Al Thani and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman and proposed reopening of borders. Keenness on unity among brethren would signal the turn of a new page in intra-Gulf rela-

tions, noted Sheikh Dr Ahmad. His Highness the Amir's proposal and the GCC agreement would eventually pave the way for this upcoming summit to be one of reconciliation among Gulf countries, in addition to Egypt, Sheikh Dr Ahmad pointed out. —KUNA

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KUFPEC, EGAS sign exploration, production deal

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration Company (KUFPEC) signed yesterday an exploration and production agreement with the Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company (EGAS), in Ras Knayes marine, offshore Egypt in the Mediterranean Sea. In a statement to the press, KUFPEC said that its share in the agreement amounted to 25 percent, as it comes in partnership with Total (the operator) at 35 percent, (Shell) 30 percent, and the Egyptian National Oil Company 10 percent.

The block covers an area of 4,550 sq km, extending from five to 150 km from the shore, with water depths ranging from 50 to 3,200 meters, the Herodotus Basin is a frontier basin, and the agreement commitments include a 3D seismic campaign during the first three years, it added. It also pointed out that the agreement came as part of the company's exploration growth strategy and this Block builds on KUFPEC's recent success and announcement of achieving first oil discovery from well GNN-4 in the Gulf of Suez Geisum and West Tawila Concession on 18 June 2020.

The statement quoted KUFPEC Acting CEO Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Sabah as saying that entering this sector reflects the company's desire and commitment to participate in exploration activities to enhance its current position as well as its investments in Egypt. KUFPEC is an international upstream company engaged in Exploration, Development and Production of crude oil and natural gas outside of Kuwait and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation. —KUNA

'Brutal' crimes' rate on the rise in Kuwait

Pandemic, financial problems add stress that lead to crimes, says psychologist

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Newspapers are full of reports of brutal and violent crimes that take place every week. The latest example is a killing that took place over the weekend in Qusour, where four Kuwaiti men stabbed a beedoon to death, cut off his ear, then ran him over by a vehicle to make it look like a car accident.

On New Year's Eve, a huge fight took place in Khairan, where tens of young men fought. They were later arrested. Also, five men mugged an Egyptian man in Qairawan and sped off. On the same night, a man set a mosque in Salmi on fire for unknown reasons. Also on Dec 31, an Egyptian man killed his Kuwaiti sponsor over a financial dispute.

Meanwhile, a Kuwaiti man attacked a doctor at Sabah Al-Nasser polyclinic for not giving him an injection, which according to the doctor was dangerous for his health. Then a woman filed a case at the police station reporting she was beaten and robbed by a man and woman, who kicked her out of her house in Surra.

Psychologist Dr Mohammed Al-Khaldi said these cases of violence are not normal for the Kuwaiti society. "It is still a small number compared to our population. We have a mix of different cultures in the community, and differences between cultures may sometimes cause conflicts that lead to violence," he told Kuwait Times.

According to him, religious morals became weak as the world opened up. "In the past we used to have only a few TV channels, while now we have over 2,000 channels. Watching all these channels has brought new values. When I teach my children something, they see a different thing applied in reality. Due to these open horizons, we live in a global village," added Khaldi.

Firemen battle Rumaihiya house blaze

KUWAIT: Firemen battled a blaze reported in a Rumaihiya house yesterday. The fire had started in a ground floor kitchen. Firemen cut the power and evacuated the house before extinguishing the flames. No injuries were reported. An investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire. Meanwhile, firemen were called to rescue a man whose finger was stuck in his vehicle's fuel tank opening. They used a special tool to free his hand without harm.

Life's stresses

"Unemployment or a bad financial situation causes stress. This may be reflected in violence. If the person doesn't release the stress, they might explode and beat up their family members, for instance. Some people can release stress by practicing sports, others through eating, and so on. Teenagers usually release stress by fighting in public places. I think the law should be applied in a stricter way, and more policemen should be present in malls and public places. Parents should control their children as well," he concluded.

Dr Fahad Al-Tasha, Mental Health Specialist and Vice President of the Kuwait Psychological Association (KPA), noted that violence has developed with time. "Violence today has new tools and has spread widely in the community. Crimes have also progressed, with new types of violence not seen 30 years ago. Violence in the past was in schools, but now it's in the neighborhood and even inside the family. During the lockdown, KPA provided free psychological help or consultation through the phone, and here we noticed the high number of cases of violence inside families," he explained.

Pandemic's repercussions

"Those who lost their jobs or businesses during the pandemic are under great stress. This may lead to violence. Also, social relations changed due to COVID-19, as people were not meeting due to the fear of infection. Moreover, the absence of schools and online education increased the level of violence, as children are sitting at home and don't have real interaction with teachers and other students. Many people postponed their plans due to the pandemic to study, start a busi-



ness and others, which led to stress," Tasha said. "The easy access and availability of drugs has made it easy to be consumed by young people. The abundance of wealth has also made it easy to buy drugs. When addicts can't get drugs for any reason, they use violence against their family or other people," he added.

Security authorities should place combatting violence among their priorities. "I hope the parliament will set up a special committee on violence, rather than having a committee for negative phenomena. NGOs should also play a role in spreading awareness. Parents should be monitoring their children all the time, especially when playing videogames, which are responsible for many cases of violence. The latest was the arrest of youngsters who were recruited by Daesh through online games. Also, the laws should be amended and punishment should be tougher to be a deterrent from committing crimes," stressed Tasha.



KUWAIT: The scene inside the house after the fire was put out.



A fireman uses a special tool to free the man's finger.

CONDOLENCES

Kuwait Times management and staff convey our deepest condolences to our colleague

Sabastian D'Souza

and his family members

on the sad demise of his

Father

May God rest his soul in peace

Kuwait registers 312 new COVID cases, zero deaths

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health announced yesterday recording 312 new infection cases with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) during the past 24, raising the caseload to 152,027. No new deaths were recorded during the same period of time, thus the fatalities' toll remained at 938. The ministry had earlier announced registering 273 recovery cases during the past same period, putting the whole number of the recuperated patients at 147,784. MoH official spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said that the number of patients who continued to receive medical care at intensive care units reached 55 as of yesterday, adding that the count of the confirmed infection cases in hospitals amounted to 3,305. Dr Sanad said the number of swab tests conducted during the same period amounted to 5,180 with the overall count of such examinations hitting 1,277,197. He further called upon the



public to abide by precautionary measures, observe social distancing and keep an eye on official websites to be aware of directions and recommendations regarding the disease and safety precautions. —KUNA

Bangladesh commends Kuwait's contributions



KUWAIT: Bangladesh's Ambassador to Kuwait MD Ashikuzzaman meets Chairman of Kuwait Red Crescent Society Dr Helal Al-Sayer. —KUNA photos



Bangladesh's Ambassador to Kuwait MD Ashikuzzaman presents a memento to Chairman of Kuwait Red Crescent Society Dr Helal Al-Sayer.

KUWAIT: Bangladesh's Ambassador to Kuwait MD Ashikuzzaman commended yesterday Kuwait's assistance of the needy, and victims of natural and man-made disasters. Ashikuzzaman, speaking after meeting with Chairman of Kuwait Red Crescent Society Dr Helal Al-Sayer, said KRCS has great humanitarian contributions specially with the

Rohingya Muslim refugees in Bangladesh. KRCS, he said, was carrying out important humanitarian roles regionally and internationally. He said he and Sayer discussed humanitarian issues of mutual interest, describing the meeting as constructive and fruitful. Sayer said KRCS would continue its relief aid for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. —KUNA

Kuwaiti oil price up

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil barrel rose \$2.11 to stand at \$52.75 per barrel on Monday, compared with \$50.64 pb last Thursday. Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. In international markets, Brent crude oil went down 71 cents to reach \$51.09 per barrel, while West Texas crude dropped 90 cents to reach \$47.62 pb. Meanwhile, the OPEC daily basket price gained 12 cents during Monday's

transactions to stand at \$51.36 per barrel (pb), an OPEC bulletin said yesterday. It added average price of the basket for 2020 was \$41.47 pb. The OPEC Reference Basket of Crudes (ORB) is made up of the following: Saharan Blend (Algeria), Girassol (Angola), Djeno (Congo), Zafiro (Equatorial Guinea), Rabi Light (Gabon), Iran Heavy (Islamic Republic of Iran), Basra Light (Iraq), Kuwait Export (Kuwait), Es Sider (Libya), Bonny Light (Nigeria), Arab Light (Saudi Arabia), Murban (UAE) and Merey (Venezuela). —KUNA



China court sentences ex-banker to death for \$260m bribes, bigamy

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(Left) Democratic candidates for Senate Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock and US President-elect Joe Biden stand on stage during a rally outside Center Parc Stadium in Atlanta on Monday. (Right) US President Donald Trump gives a thumbs up as Republican incumbent senator Kelly Loeffler speaks during a rally Dalton, Georgia on Monday. —AFP



Georgia could shape Biden presidency

Races for the Senate have come down to the wire

ATLANTA: After an unprecedented campaign that mobilized US President Donald Trump and his successor Joe Biden, the people of Georgia started voting yesterday in two US Senate runoffs that could shape the first years of the new Democratic presidency. For nearly 20 years Georgia has voted reliably Republican in the presidential election and Senate contests.

But Biden pulled out a shock victory in Georgia in November, one of several states that he flipped to win the White House, and the races for the Senate have come down to the wire in the biggest, most expensive congressional runoffs in US history. At stake is control of the upper chamber, now in the hands of Republicans.

Polls opened at 7:00 am (1200 GMT) in the southern state. A record three million-plus people have voted early, election officials say, and final results may not be known for several days. A staggering \$832 million has been spent on the two contests, including spending in the primary and general elections, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

The Republican and Democratic parties have made Georgia their political ground zero, with

thousands of volunteers leaving no door unknocked and current and future presidents and vice presidents barnstorming the state for every last vote. If Democrats flip both seats they win back the Senate, effectively handing Biden all levers of political power in Washington and helping him enact his ambitious legislative agenda.

"One state - one state! - can chart the course, not just for the next four years but for the next generation," Biden told a rally in Atlanta where he campaigned Monday with the races' two Democrats. Republicans argue that keeping Senate control would serve as a check on the incoming Biden administration. "The stakes in this election could not be higher," Trump told a raucous rally in Dalton, Georgia hours after Biden's Atlanta showing. "Make sure your vote is counted."

The races feature Republican incumbent senators Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue, both wealthy businesspeople-turned-politicians, against black pastor Raphael Warnock and documentary producer Jon Ossoff. Noting that "the whole world is watching", Trump implored Georgians to re-elect the Republicans. The runoffs are "your last chance

to save the America that we love", he said.

'Freedom, not socialism'

Trump, still scheming to overturn the election results and lashing out at Republicans who oppose his efforts, jetted to Georgia amid a scandal over his blatant attempt on a phone call to pressure state officials to reverse the certified vote and hand him victory. A recording of the call between Trump and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger was published by The Washington Post.

On the tape, Trump told Raffensperger he wanted to "find 11,780 votes" - one more than Biden's margin of victory in Georgia - and repeatedly and falsely claimed that he won the state, an assertion refuted in recounts and in the courts. But while Republican officials in Georgia defied the outgoing president's outrage to assert that Biden's victory is clear, Trump supporters at his rally in Dalton, a rural and conservative stronghold, said they remained convinced that he had won.

Like Trump, they touted unproven conspiracy theories that Democrats committed massive fraud to steal the vote. Nevertheless the allegations of a

rigged election will not dissuade them from voting for the Republican senators yesterday, deeming the stakes too high. "Because I believe in freedom, and I don't believe in socialism," said Kimberley Hauri, a 50-year-old accountant from Atlanta. Democrats on the other hand are galvanized by Biden's narrow victory in the state on Nov 3, a first since 1992.

They are counting on a large mobilization of Black voters, but also hope some Republicans could be discouraged from voting due to Trump's relentless accusations of fraud. One day after the runoffs, Congress will meet in a joint session to certify the Electoral College vote that confirmed Biden as the presidential winner. Certification is usually a formality. But while Republican heavyweights like Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell have acknowledged Biden's victory, dozens of House Republicans and 12 Senate Republicans loyal to Trump - including Loeffler - have signaled they will raise objections to the certification. Such a move will prompt a controversial debate in both chambers about the allegations of electoral fraud. Large street demonstrations in support of Trump are also planned today in Washington. —AFP

Iran eyes Biden but could conflict still erupt with Trump?

WASHINGTON: Iran has opened the new year with a gambit to pressure President-elect Joe Biden, but fears are rising that conflict could erupt instead with Donald Trump, who still commands US military might in his chaotic final stretch. Iran announced Monday it was stepping up uranium enrichment well beyond the limits in a 2015 nuclear accord negotiated with former president Barack Obama - and indicated it would reverse course if Biden lifts Trump's crippling sanctions after taking over on January 20.

Tensions have soared since Trump walked out of the accord in 2018, and have escalated further in recent days, with the United States flying B-52 bombers over the Gulf and abruptly reversing a decision to bring home an aircraft carrier. In an unusual statement that sounded more like the White House than the Pentagon, acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller said late Sunday he was keeping the USS Nimitz in the Gulf due to Iranian threats against US officials including Trump personally.

"We have a new form of deterrence now - schizophrenic deterrence. We don't know what we're doing," said Vipin Narang, an expert on nuclear strategy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Instead of looking tough by reversing the Nimitz's return, "it may send the wrong signal-which is that it's total chaos in Washington right now and if you're going to take a shot, maybe this is the time you want to do it."

Narang said the risk of the United States initiating military action remained low but warned that Trump was becoming more unpredictable as he rages and seeks to overturn his

election loss. "If I were Iran right now, I would actually be thinking that it's possible that Trump is so unhinged and so angry about the election that he may overreact to any slight provocation," Narang said. Trump had warned that he would hold Iran accountable for the killings of any Americans after the US embassy in Baghdad was hit a week ago by rockets blamed on Shiite paramilitaries allied with the clerical state. But Sunday's anniversary of the US drone attack in Baghdad that killed Iran's best-known general Qasem Soleimani passed without violence, despite angry demonstrations and Tehran's calls for vengeance.

Pressure through enrichment

Iran said it would enrich uranium to 20 percent purity, far above the 3.67 percent allowed under the nuclear accord. But experts noted that the step was quickly reversible and that higher enrichment does not in itself bring Iran much closer to building a nuclear bomb, a goal that Tehran denies. Corey Hinderstein, who focused on implementation of the 2015 deal while at the US Energy Department, said that Iran likely wanted to keep the focus squarely on its nuclear program and discourage Biden from broadening diplomacy.

Jake Sullivan, who is set to be Biden's national security advisor, said in a CNN interview Sunday that the incoming administration eventually wanted to secure limits on Iran's ballistic missile capabilities. "I think that Iran in taking this step is both signaling that they are in a position to quickly ramp up their nuclear activities, and I think they believe they're creating space to limit the negotiation once the new administration comes in," said Hinderstein, now a vice president at the Nuclear Threat Initiative.

Previous standoffs

"Unfortunately, we don't have a very clear understanding of what is driving decision-making for the remainder of the Trump administration. If they so choose, they could see this



A handout photo made available yesterday shows Iranian military officials inspecting drones on display prior to a military drone drill at an undisclosed location. —AFP

as a significant escalation."

Despite hawkish threats and the imposition of sweeping sanctions on Iran, Trump had boasted in his unsuccessful campaign of starting no new wars and, in a break with top aides, called off a planned attack on Iran in 2019. Israel has fewer qualms about the use of force on Iran, which it sees as its main enemy, and was widely suspected in a brazen November attack on Tehran's outskirts that killed top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

Israeli media have reported that one of its submarines has

headed to the Gulf and Defense Minister Benny Gantz recently warned of the possibility of unspecified "events". But even Trump's allies see Iran as looking ahead to Biden. Jack Keane, a retired general whose Fox News appearances are frequently watched by Trump, said in a segment Monday that the recent deployments showed "the huge capability that the US military has". "But I don't believe the Iranians are going to do anything," he said. "They don't want to do anything to interfere with the potential to have a negotiation with president Biden, who they are hoping will remove the sanctions." —AFP

WHO in tricky territory in hunt for virus origins

BEIJING: A year after the outbreak started, WHO experts are due in China for a highly politicized visit to explore the origins of the coronavirus, in a trip trailed by accusations of cover-ups, conspiracy and fears of a whitewash. Under the global glare, Beijing delayed access for independent experts into China to probe the origins of the pandemic, reluctant to agree to an inquiry. But the WHO now says China has granted permission for a visit by its experts, with a 10-person team expected to arrive shortly for a five or six week visit - including a fortnight spent in quarantine. Chinese authorities this week refused to confirm the exact dates and details of the visit, a sign of the enduring sensitivity of their mission.

COVID-19 was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019, before seeping beyond China's borders to wreak havoc, costing over 1.8 million lives and eviscerat-

ing economies. But its origins remain bitterly contested, lost in a fog of recriminations and conjecture from the international community - as well as obfuscation from Chinese authorities determined to keep control of its virus narrative. The WHO team has promised to focus on the science, specifically how the coronavirus jumped from animals - believed to be bats - to humans. "This is not about finding a guilty country or a guilty authority," Fabian Leendertz from the Robert Koch Institute, Germany's central disease control body who will be among the team to visit, told AFP in late December. "This is about understanding what happened to avoid that in the future, to reduce the risk." But doubt has been cast over what the WHO mission can reasonably expect to achieve and the state pressure they will face, raising fears that the mission will serve to rubber stamp China's official story, not challenge it.

The upcoming visit will not be the first time COVID-19 has brought WHO teams to China. A mission last year looked at the response by authorities rather than the virus origins, with another in the summer laying the groundwork for the upcoming probe. But this time the WHO will wade into a swamp of competing interests, stuck between accusatory Western nations and a Chinese leadership determined to show that its secretive and hierarchical political system served to stem, not spread, the outbreak. —AFP

Geopolitics made pandemic far worse: Expert

GENEVA: Geopolitical tensions in play before the COVID-19 pandemic colored the international health response, dramatically deepening the crisis, a renowned political scientist and global health expert told AFP. Over a year after the novel coronavirus first surfaced in China, more than 1.8 million people have died and nearly 86 million have been infected with the virus worldwide. It did not have to be this bad, said Ilona Kickbusch, the founding director and chair of the Global Health Centre in Geneva.

Without the trade wars and other tensions raging in 2019, "January 2020 would not have played out the way it did," she said in an interview. "Geopolitics ... put the world in this situation." Previous global health crises have occurred during times of great geopolitical tension, said Kickbusch, but countries have in recent decades generally managed to rise above their differences to cooperate to combat deadly diseases. The world managed to come together to eradicate small-

pox at the height of the Cold War, she pointed out. Even when SARS, another coronavirus, surfaced in China and caused havoc between 2002 and 2003, the global reaction was one of cooperation and a push for more transparency, she said. Back then, Beijing acknowledged it had made mistakes, reorganized its health ministry and created the China Centers for Disease Control. Other countries gave it the benefit of the doubt and called for more cooperation.

"SARS actually led to China (understanding) that they needed to be much more integrated into the (global) system," Kickbusch said. "It was a period of opening."

That stands in stark contrast to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, she said: "There is a closing of the mind, quite clearly, on all sides." Before the crisis, geopolitical tensions had bled into the global health response, she said, pointing to how the US-China trade war had morphed into a "geopolitical blame game". As a result, she said, "China clamped down totally (and) the US did what it did," and in the end "the whole world has suffered".

One of the casualties of the confrontational pandemic response could be much-needed clarity around the animal source of COVID-19. The origins remain bitterly contested, amid recriminations and conjecture from the international community, and obfuscation from Beijing determined to keep control of its virus narrative. —AFP

International

Britain shuts schools as Germany braces for extended lockdown

France vows faster vaccine rollout; Italy delays high school start

LONDON: Britain closed its schools yesterday ahead of a new national lockdown, with Germany set to extend its own restrictions as Europe battles surging coronavirus infections. The British government announced an extra £4.6 billion (\$6.3 billion, 5.1 billion euros) to help battered businesses following Monday's announcement of tough new measures across England, which include a full shutdown of restaurants, pubs and non-essential retail. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are also bringing in strict lockdowns.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the new English measures—initially set to last six weeks—in a televised address just hours after Britain celebrated the rollout of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, seen as a potential COVID-19 game-changer as it could prove more accessible to poorer nations than alternative jabs. Senior British minister Michael Gove warned of “very, very difficult weeks” as the country struggles to contain a new coronavirus strain believed to spread faster.

Meanwhile pressure is growing on European authorities to speed up vaccine approvals and hasten the economic recovery from a pandemic that has infected more than 85 million people worldwide, with more than 1.8 million known deaths. Spain—expected to show the biggest slump of any western economy—registered a nearly 23-percent jump in unemployment in 2020, government figures showed yesterday. National governments in some European countries are also under fire for a slow start in deploying vaccines that have already been approved—particularly France, which has vaccinated only 2,000 people so far, compared to 264,000 in Germany.

Russian-German vaccine production?

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Vladimir Putin have discussed the possibility of jointly producing vaccines in a phone call, according to the Kremlin. While Germany is using the vaccine jointly developed by Pfizer and the Mainz-based company BioNTech, Russia has put into mass circulation its home-made jab—Sputnik V—which has been viewed with skepticism in the West. Mass vaccinations are considered key to breaking the back of a pandemic that has severely restricted activities that involve large gatherings. The ease of storage and use of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, compared with the ultra-low temperatures needed for the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna alternatives, could mean greater access for less wealthy nations in the fight against the virus.

Mexico and India have approved the Oxford-AstraZeneca jab, while Rwanda, which yesterday banned transport in and out of the capital Kigali in a bid to combat surging infections, said it was in touch with its makers to purchase doses. The efforts to accelerate vaccinations come as concerns grow about the potentially more trans-



BERLIN: A lone pedestrian walks through Leadenhall market in the City of London, as Britain enters a national lockdown in London yesterday. — AFP

missible variant detected in Britain—which has since been found in other countries, including in Italy yesterday—spreading out of control. Chinese firm Sinopharm has said its vaccine—with a claimed effectiveness of 79 percent—remains effective against the new variant. In the United States, the worst-hit nation in the world, the rollout of vaccines has been plagued by logistical problems and overstretched hospitals and clinics.

But authorities also face the challenge of conspiracy theories spread on social media that could increase vaccine skepticism—and even sabotage.

That threat was illustrated last week in the state of Wisconsin, where a pharmacist was accused of intentionally spoiling hundreds of Moderna doses because of a baseless conspiracy theory. Steven Brandenburg, who appeared before a judge Monday, “told investigators that he believed that Covid-19 vaccine was not safe for people and could harm them and change their DNA”, according to a police statement quoted by local media.

Italy extends curbs

Italy yesterday postponed the return of high schools as part of new coronavirus restrictions, as a charity warned thousands of students were dropping out after months of distance learning. Teenagers will return to class on January 11 instead of January 7, when younger children go back to school—but then still only for half their time, under a new government order. Many face further delays as several regions had already decided to postpone the return of high schools until the end of January, judging them too risky.

Italian teens have only been in face-to-face classes for a few months in the past year due to the spring lockdown and further restrictions imposed at the start of a second wave in the autumn. Italy has been one of the countries’ worst hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, with more than 75,000 deaths so far. The charity Save the Children warned Tuesday that the pandemic had “severely affected” the lives of millions of youngsters and said distance learning had caused “perhaps irreparable damage”.

French dispute

The French government, under pressure for lagging behind EU neighbors in rolling out COVID vaccinations, promised yesterday to dispense jabs much more quickly and catch up. Health Minister Olivier Veran said more than 2,000 people had been vaccinated on Monday—compared to 264,000 so far in Germany—and that the “cruising speed of vaccinations will catch up with our neighbors in the coming days”.

The French government has been playing catch-up with its neighbors since the start of an EU-wide vaccination drive on December 27. Opposition politicians have slammed the slow progress as a “scandal” and said France had become the laughing stock of the EU. President Emmanuel Macron, under pressure to take personal responsibility, met officials including Prime Minister Jean Castex on Monday to discuss the logjam. “By Thursday we will increase numbers in a major way,” Veran told RTL radio, saying that “we will be on an exponential curve”. France would now “amplify, accelerate and simplify” its vaccination strategy, he said. — AFP

Assange case threat to investigative journalism: Analysts

WASHINGTON: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange dodged a bullet Monday when a British judge refused to extradite him to the United States to face charges under an espionage law, but experts say his case remains an ominous threat to press freedom. Judge Vanessa Baraitser said the US charges were justified against the 49-year-old transparency advocate, who stunned the world in 2010 with the publication of hundreds of thousands of classified military and diplomatic documents.

But Baraitser ruled that his mental health problems raise the risk of suicide in a US jail. Her decision, and the US Justice Department’s determination to appeal it, left in place the first-ever use of the US Espionage Act to prosecute someone for publishing state secrets, long held as allowed under the US Constitution.

That leaves his case, and the department’s view of his activities, an ongoing threat against journalists who cover national security and defense issues, where leaked classified information is crucial. Bruce Brown, executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, called Baraitser’s agreement with the US indictment of Assange “deeply troubling,” even if she would not extradite him.

“The mere act of publishing secrets that the US government doesn’t want the public to see is not akin to spying,” he said in an emailed statement. “The government’s legal theories in this case remain dangerous to core tenets of freedom of the press.”

The British court “endorses the US prosecution

Egypt Al-Jazeera contributor denied medication

NEW YORK: A freelance Egyptian journalist who worked for pan-Arab news channel Al-Jazeera and was arrested on false news and terrorism charges is being denied medication in custody, the Committee to Protect Journalists said. Aamer Abdelmonem is among at least 27 journalists the CPJ says have been imprisoned in Egypt in relation to their work, several of them for Qatar-based Al-Jazeera.

Egypt labels the channel as a mouthpiece for the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, a charge Qatar denies. “Egyptian journalist Aamer Abdelmonem is already in failing health, and to detain him during a global pandemic blatantly endangers his life,” CPJ’s Middle East and North Africa program coordinator, Sherif Mansour, said in a statement dated Monday.

“Egyptian authorities must immediately release Abdelmonem, drop all the charges against him, and grant him the medical attention he needs.” On December 31, the journalist’s daughter, Mariam Aamer,



MELBOURNE: A mural of Australia’s Julian Assange is seen in a laneway in Melbourne yesterday, after a judge in London ruled that the WikiLeaks founder should not be extradited to the US to face espionage charges for publishing hundreds of thousands of classified military and diplomatic documents in 2010. — AFP

even as it rejects the US extradition request,” said Jameel Jaffer, director of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University. “The result is that the indictment of Assange will continue to cast a shadow over investigative journalism,” he said on Twitter.

WikiLeaks’ 2010 release of the US files rocked the US government, exposing the underside of the US military and diplomatic operations. President Barack Obama’s administration considered charging Assange, who founded and controlled WikiLeaks.

But they decided that charging Assange could mean also prosecuting powerful US news organizations for publishing similar material, legal fights likely to be lost. While WikiLeaks asserted it was constitutionally protected as a journalistic endeavor, in 2017 the intelligence and justice chiefs of President Donald Trump’s new administration rejected that view and pushed for an indictment.—AFP

told news website Darb that prison authorities had denied her multiple requests to deliver insulin, eye medication and prescription glasses to her father, who is a diabetic and has cataracts in both eyes.

Abdelmonem was arrested in his Cairo home on December 19. The following day, state prosecutors charged him with spreading false news and assisting a terrorist organization, and remanded him in custody pending trial. Following his arrest, state security officers interrogated Abdelmonem about his recent work for Al Jazeera and his former work as the editorial director of the independent newspaper Al-Shaab, which was banned in 2014.

In his recent articles on Al Jazeera’s website, Abdelmonem criticized the Egyptian government’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. In July last year, another Egyptian journalist who had worked for Al-Jazeera, Mohamed Monir, 65, died of the novel coronavirus, his daughter said, days after he was released from detention on charges of “membership of a terrorist group, dissemination of false news and improper use of social networks”. Since President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi took office in 2014, his government has cracked down heavily on any display of dissent. Those suspected of supporting the government of former Islamist president Mohamed Morsi, whose ouster Sisi led as army chief in 2013, have been particular targets. — AFP

News in brief

Istanbul police detain 17

ISTANBUL: Turkish police yesterday detained 17 people after hundreds attended a student-led protest against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s appointment of a rector to a top university in Istanbul. Officers conducted dawn raids in 13 districts in the city, Istanbul police said in a statement, while operations were continuing to catch 11 other suspects. At least 1,000 people demonstrated outside Bogazici University’s campus on Monday in response to a January 1 presidential decree in which Erdogan appointed Melih Bulu as the public institution’s rector. Bulu ran as a candidate in the 2015 election for Erdogan’s ruling party. — AFP

Mexico OKs AstraZeneca vaccine

MEXICO CITY: Mexico on Monday authorized the coronavirus vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford for emergency use in the country, which has one of the world’s highest Covid-19 death tolls. Deputy health minister Hugo Lopez-Gatell announced on Twitter that Mexican regulators had approved the vaccine, which has also been authorized by Britain, India and Argentina. Lopez-Gatell said the vaccine could be available in March. “It depends on the private entities that work on it to specify the production capacity,” he explained later during a routine afternoon conference. — AFP

Breaker podcasting team joins Twitter

SAN FRANCISCO: Podcasting platform Breaker on Monday said its team is becoming part of Twitter to apply its expertise to audio experiences at the one-to-many messaging service. Financial terms of the deal to acquire the people behind four-year-old Breaker, based in San Francisco, were not disclosed. “I’m joining Twitter to help build @TwitterSpaces,” Breaker co-founder Leah Culver said in a tweet. “While I’ll very much miss @breaker, I’m so excited to help create the future of audio conversations.” Breaker co-founder Erik Berlin announced the acquisition in a blog post, saying he and Culver will help create new experiences for users at Twitter. — AFP

US right-wing group head arrested

WASHINGTON: The chairman of the right-wing Proud Boys group was arrested Monday in Washington over the torching last month of a Black Lives Matter banner taken from a church during violent protests, police said. Enrique Tarrío, 36, was taken into custody as the US capital braces for demonstrations against lawmakers’ certification this week of Joe Biden as the next US president. Tarrío, who had just arrived in the city from Florida, was charged with destruction of property at the Asbury United Methodist Church, a mainly African American church where he and others allegedly burned the banner during violent protests on December 12. — AFP

Staff jailed for Palace thefts

LONDON: A Buckingham Palace kitchen assistant has been jailed for eight months after admitting stealing medals, official photos and other items, and selling some on eBay, police said. Adamo Canto, 37, was sentenced in court on Monday after pleading guilty to three counts of theft between November 2019 and August 2020, the Metropolitan Police said. Police said they recovered a “significant quantity” of stolen items when they searched his staff quarters in Buckingham Palace, Queen Elizabeth’s London residence, where he had worked as a catering assistant since 2015. The goods were worth up to £100,000 (\$136,000, 111,000 euros) in total, and some were listed for sale on the eBay auction. — AFP

UN opens new Ethiopian refugee camp in Sudan

GENEVA: The United Nations said yesterday it had begun moving some of the more than 56,000 Ethiopian refugees in Sudan to a newly-opened camp, with the existing facility nearly full.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, said tents to shelter up to 5,000 people have so far been set up at the new Tunaybah camp. More were to be pitched in the coming days. Since Sunday, 580 refugees have been transferred to the camp and given a hot meal on arrival, a UNHCR spokesman told reporters in Geneva.

Refugees are continuing to flee the unrest in Ethiopia’s northern Tigray region, with 800 having crossed the border with eastern Sudan since the New Year. “Latest arrivals tell of being caught in the conflict and being victims of various armed groups, facing perilous situations including looting of their houses, forcible recruitment of men and boys, and sexual violence against women and girls,” said spokesman Andrej Mahelic.—AFP



ROME: Conte, a once obscure law professor who has never himself been elected, has so far proved surprisingly adroit at navigating the choppy waters of Italian politics.

Virus-hit Italy gripped by political crisis

ROME: Italy’s Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte has more than enough on his plate as he deals with a raging coronavirus pandemic, but also faces the more immediate challenge of staying in office.

Despite a soaring COVID-19 death toll and with a deadline looming to come up with a credible plan to spend billions of euros in EU recovery funds, the government has been consumed for weeks by internal sniping from former premier Matteo Renzi. Renzi has threatened to withdraw his small but pivotal Italia Viva (Italy Alive) party from the centre-left coalition that Conte heads, which would force its collapse.

“The situation is, in technical terms, a disaster,” the politician, who led Italy from 2014 to 2016, said in an interview with the Rete 4 channel broadcast late Monday. Asked about the chances of Conte keeping his job, he said: “We’ll see.” Renzi has complained about slow progress in rolling out coronavirus vaccinations and delays in school reopenings, and has lambasted Conte for seeking to concentrate power in his hands.

This includes setting spending priorities without enough consultation for the 196 billion euros (\$240 billion) Italy expects to receive as part of a post-virus EU recovery plan, which is due to be submitted to Brussels by mid-April. Italy has recorded more than 75,000 deaths from coronavirus, the highest toll in Europe, and the associated lockdowns and restrictions have hit the economy hard.

The leaked draft spending plan includes more than 50 priorities, with only nine billion euros for Italy’s cash-strapped health system. “This cannot work, there’s too much money on handouts and too little on investments,” Renzi said. The showdown with Conte is expected to come to a head in the coming days, when ministers meet possibly as early as today to discuss the EU plans.

Conte could try to placate Renzi with a cabinet reshuffle, either by persuading some ministers to step down or by resigning himself to seek a new mandate from President Sergio Mattarella with a revised list of cabinet ministers. But this option is, of course, fraught with risks.—AFP

International

China court sentences ex-banker to death for \$260m bribes, bigamy

Lai abused his position to obtain 'extremely large' sum

BEIJING: The former chairman of one of China's largest state-controlled asset management firms was sentenced to death yesterday for soliciting \$260 million in bribes, corruption and bigamy. Lai Xiaomin, a former Communist Party member, gave a detailed televised confession on state broadcaster CCTV last January, which showed footage of safes and cabinets stuffed with cash in a Beijing apartment allegedly belonging to him.

Lai had abused his position in attempting to obtain the vast sum, the court in Tianjin said, describing the bribes as "extremely large" and labeling the circumstances "particularly serious".

He had shown "extreme malicious intent," the court ruling added. The former chairman of the Hong Kong-listed China Huarong Asset Management Co., a distressed debt group—was also found guilty of bigamy after living with a woman "as man and wife for long periods" outside of his marriage and fathering illegitimate children. Lai's downfall began in April 2018 as investigators removed him from his job and stripped him of his party position.

He was also alleged to have used his position to embezzle over 25 million yuan (\$3.8 million) in public funds between 2009 and 2018. During his

TV confession, Lai said he "did not spend a single penny, and just kept it there... I did not dare to spend it."

CCTV also showed luxury cars and gold bars reportedly accepted by Lai as bribes. The channel often broadcasts interviews with suspects admitting to crimes before they have appeared in court—a practice that has long been condemned by lawyers and rights organizations as forcing confessions under duress. The court said Lai would have all personal assets confiscated and be stripped of his political rights. Photos published by the court show Lai standing up and facing the judge to be sentenced, flanked by two police officers wearing face masks.

The sentencing brings an end to one of the country's biggest financial crime cases, and comes as Beijing takes an increasingly tough stance on corporate crime. Critics have said the wide-ranging anti-corruption campaign launched under President Xi Jinping has also served as a way to target his opponents and those of the Communist Party leadership.

But since Xi came to power, only one high-ranking official has been executed—Zhao Liping, who was convicted of homicide in 2016. Three other senior Communist Party members have been sentenced to



TIANJIN: This handout photo taken on August 11, 2020 and released by the Second Intermediate People's Court of Tianjin, shows Lai Xiaomin (center), former chairman of China Huarong Asset Management Co, standing during his trial at the Second Intermediate People's Court in Tianjin. — AFP

death but later given a reprieve.

The former head of Interpol, an ex-spy chief and a Xinjiang governor accused of "trading power for

sex" are some of the other high-profile officials to suffer spectacular falls from grace in recent years in the anti-corruption purge. — AFP

India plans to cull thousands of birds over avian flu

SHIMLA: Tens of thousands of poultry will be slaughtered in India after an outbreak of deadly avian influenza was found to have killed scores of birds across the country, officials said yesterday. At least six Indian states have stepped up efforts to contain two strains of bird flu—H5N1 and H5N8—in recent days after the deaths of thousands of migratory birds, ducks, crows and chickens.

H5N8, an Avian influenza subtype among poultry and wild birds, has spread across several countries since early last year. Officials in northern Himachal Pradesh state said carcasses were found over the past week at a Himalayan lake that witnesses large flocks of migratory birds during the winter season.

"The death toll in the last week or so at the Pong lake crossed 2,400 migratory birds. Over 600 birds died on Monday," state wildlife chief Archana Sharma said. Samples sent to the Indian National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases tested positive for H5N1, officials added.

Most of the dead were Central Asian high-altitude bar-headed geese—one of the world's highest flying birds—that migrate to South Asia in their thousands during the winter season. Local authorities have banned the sale and export of poultry in



SHIMLA: Tens of thousands of poultry will be slaughtered in India after an outbreak of deadly avian influenza was found to have killed scores of birds across the country, officials said yesterday. — AFP

the region and have stepped-up testing to control the spread.

The mass deaths came amid a cull of nearly 35,000 poultry in southern Kerala state, where an H5N8 virus outbreak killed up to 12,000 ducks. Authorities said the slaughter was ordered within a one kilometer (0.6 mile) radius of the infection epicenter. In northern Haryana state authorities said nearly 150,000 chickens died mysteriously across several poultry farms in Barwala district. Neighboring Punjab also reported similar deaths.

More than 20 farms said their flocks were wiped out by an "unknown disease" and samples have been sent to labs for testing.

Western Rajasthan and central Madhya Pradesh states have also reported hundreds of crow deaths caused by H5N1 and H5N8 over past weeks. Rajasthan had already seen nearly 4,500 crows and herons die over several months from avian flu. India has witnessed bouts of devastating bird flu outbreaks in recent decades, most seriously in 2008, when millions of poultry were culled. — AFP

Police 'were cowards' in Pakistan Hindu temple attack

ISLAMABAD: Police officers showed "cowardice and negligence" in failing to confront a mob that attacked and set fire to a Hindu temple in northwest Pakistan, the provincial police chief said yesterday. Around 1,500 Muslims last week descended on the temple—in a remote village of northeast Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province—after protesting against renovations being made to an adjoining building owned by a Hindu group.

"There were 92 police officials at the spot, but they showed cowardice and negligence," provincial police chief Sanaullah Abbasi admitted at a Supreme Court hearing into the case in Islamabad. Around 12 police officials have been suspended, Abbasi told reporters outside the court.

He said the protestors remained peaceful until an inflammatory speech by cleric Molvi Shareef—who

also led a mob in a previous demolition of the temple in 1997. "They went with an impunity," Pakistan's Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed said of the mob, who used sledgehammers to knock down the walls of the temple before setting the building ablaze last week. Pakistan's top court, in an unprecedented move, has also ordered authorities to submit a separate report on the attack.

Discrimination and violence against religious minorities are common in Pakistan, where Muslims make up 97 percent of the population and Hindus around two percent. Similar incidents in the past have faced little scrutiny, with police refusing to investigate over fears it could ignite further rioting by Islamic hardliners. While no Hindus live in the area, devotees often visit the temple and its shrine to pay homage to the Hindu saint Shri Param Hans Ji Mahaaraj, who died there before the 1947 partition of India that gave birth to Pakistan.

It is the fourth holiest Hindu worship site in the conservative Muslim country. The provincial government has said it would pay for the restoration of the temple, but the court suggested the cost be covered by those arrested over the attack. "You have to



ISLAMABAD: Shoab Suddle (second left), member of the one-man Commission for Minorities Rights, leaves with member of parliament Ramesh Kumar (R) after a hearing over an attack on a Hindu temple, in Islamabad yesterday. — AFP

recover money from the people who did this, from this Molvi and his followers," Ahmed said. The court was told so far 109 arrests related to the case were made, including nine who led the mob. — AFP

New Venezuela parliament leaves Guaido out in cold

CARACAS: A new Venezuelan parliament will be sworn in with the party of President Nicolas Maduro now in almost complete control and the main thorn in his side, Western-backed opposition leader Juan Guaido, out in the political cold.

Venezuelans have lived almost two years with both men laying claim to the presidency, but with Maduro labeled a dictator and subject to Western sanctions and Guaido recognized as the country's legitimate leader by the United States and more than 50 other nations.

In a move some criticized as a strategic error, the opposition led by Guaido boycotted December 6 legislative elections that returned a large majority for Maduro's party. The National Assembly formerly enjoyed an opposition majority. This means that, Guaido will be out of his job as National Assembly speaker, losing the limited institutional legitimacy he had, and leaving foreign governments backing his claim to the presidency in a difficult position.

"I do not think that this duality (of power) will continue for much longer," Benigno Alarcon, director of the Center of Politics and Government at Venezuela's Andres Bello Catholic University, told AFP. Maduro, he said, "has control of the country

through force" and a firm grip all state institutions.

This means, among other things, he could use COVID-19 restrictions on movement to ban any possible protests against his rule. At the same time, Guaido is faced with increasingly feeble opposition mobilization. A referendum-style consultation called by Guaido and held over five days in December for people to condemn the December 6 vote and Maduro with it, failed to muster the large numbers of opposition supporters that participated in the protests of 2019. "It is very likely that... Guaido will remain an opposition leader in exile," said Rafael Alvarez, analyst at the firm Iuriscorp.

'Usurper'

On January 23, 2019, Guaido proclaimed himself interim president before a large crowd after the then-opposition controlled parliament branded Maduro a "usurper" fraudulently reelected in May 2018. This bold step marked a turning point in the political crisis in recession-hit Venezuela.

It unleashed fresh protests against Maduro, and Guaido's popularity soared to around 80 percent, according to polling firms such as Datanalisis. But the president refused to cede, and the standoff continues to this day. In December, the opposition-led National Assembly passed a decree allowing itself to continue functioning in parallel with the new Maduro-majority chamber until fresh elections are held in 2021.

But political scientist Jesus Castillo-Mollendo said the unilateral ruling has no basis in law.

Nor does it seem to enjoy much popular support, added Alarcon. "Inside Venezuela, everyone knows



In this file photo, Venezuelan opposition leader and self-proclaimed acting president Juan Guaido gestures during a plenary session of the National Assembly at the San Antonio municipal theatre in San Antonio de Los Altos south of Caracas. — AFP

that this position is more symbolic than anything, that there is no way of exercising it because there is no control of the institutions," he said.

What will Biden do?

Guaido insisted in a recent interview with AFP that he had no intention of leaving the country, despite threats of imprisonment. All eyes now turn to the presidency of Democrat Joe Biden after the departure of Donald Trump, whose administration imposed heavy sanctions in a bid to force Maduro to leave, without success. "We may see different strategies of approaching the crisis, without abandoning the pressure," said Alvarez of Biden's likely approach. — AFP

News in brief

UK PM postpones India trip

LONDON: Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday postponed a post-Brexit trip planned this month to India after the COVID crisis worsened in Britain, Downing Street said. "The prime minister spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi this morning, to express his regret that he will be unable to visit India later this month as planned," a spokesperson said, blaming a fast-spreading strain of the virus. Johnson announced a new England-wide lockdown on Monday following the emergence of the virulent new strain, explaining urgent action was needed to prevent spiraling numbers of cases overwhelming health services. "The prime minister said that it was important for him to remain in the UK so he can focus on the domestic response to the virus," Downing Street said Johnson had told his Indian counterpart. — AFP

Migrants die en route to Canary

MADRID: Four migrants died during a perilous journey from the coast of Africa to Spain's Canary Islands, which last year registered a huge surge in arrivals, rescuers said yesterday. The four were found dead on arrival when a rickety boat carrying 47 migrants landed in Tenerife at dawn, the emergency services said on Twitter, citing Red Cross officials. "This morning a boat carrying 47 sub-Saharan migrants landed on El Cabezco beach in Tenerife. Red Cross medics have confirmed four deaths," it said. Three others were hospitalized with "burns and other injuries," it said. — AFP

Rwanda restricts movement

KIGALI: Rwanda yesterday banned transport in and out of the capital Kigali and extended an evening curfew for another three weeks amid a deadly second wave of the coronavirus. Rwanda, which in March last year was one of the first countries in Africa to impose strict lockdowns, has registered 105 deaths from COVID, half of them recorded in December alone. On Monday evening the prime minister's office released a statement ordering the new measures, effective yesterday and for the next 15 days. — AFP

HK's judicial independence

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's outgoing top judge made a plea yesterday to maintain judicial independence as China state media and a growing host of pro-Beijing figures call for an overhaul of how the financial hub's courts are run. Semi-autonomous Hong Kong owes much of its business success to a transparent and internationally respected common law legal system that stands in stark contrast with the opaque, party-controlled courts in authoritarian China. But that system has come under sustained pressure in the politically charged wake of 2019's huge pro-democracy protests and Beijing's subsequent crackdown. — AFP

Jihadists kill soldiers in Mali

PARIS: An Al-Qaeda-linked jihadist group has claimed responsibility for an attack that killed two French soldiers in Mali. They died on Saturday when their vehicle hit an explosive device in the northeast, just days after three others were killed in similar fashion. The deaths brought to 50 the number of French soldiers killed in the West African nation since France first intervened in 2013 to help drive back jihadist forces. The Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM) said it "detonated an explosive device" as the vehicle was passing, "bringing the toll to five in less than a week", in a statement released by its propaganda platform Al-Zallaqa late on Monday. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 6, 2021

ZAIN REFLECTED NATIONAL SPIRIT, LED SOCIAL INNOVATION IN 2020

Company shouldered public sector since start of pandemic, continued to support social initiatives virtually

KUWAIT: By all measures, 2020 has been an exceptional year, having presented numerous health, economic, and social challenges to the entire world. With the year closing, Zain has found itself to have reflected a spirit of national unity and commitment in the social sustainability values it has always adopted year after another. The company was one of the very first national organizations that supported the country's efforts in combating the COVID-19 pandemic since the first few days of the crisis back in March of last year.

Zain has showcased the spirit of responsibility as a leading national company by making its human and tech resources available to shoulder the public sector and maintain the nation's wellbeing. The company also launched numerous social awareness campaigns aimed at elevating the health and safety of the community. Not only that, but Zain was also keen on continuing its support of social, educational, and cultural initiatives - which it has always been a top supporter of - in a virtual format this time to adhere to official health measures and guidelines to keep everyone involved safe.

Zain's tireless efforts have extended throughout the year, where it has launched its own social initiatives, supported existing educational, academic, and environmental programs, in addition to handling the crisis, all under its corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy. Being one of the biggest private sector leaders in the country, Zain was keen on reflecting its role by supporting the public sector, especially during crises which show the nation's true soul.

In the following report, Zain showcases some of its most notable efforts and sustainable initiatives that extended throughout the year 2020, especially those that came as a contribution to protect the community from the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic early in the year:



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah inspects 'Shlonik' Operations Center in the presence of ministers and Bader Al-Kharafi.

tional circumstances at the start of the pandemic.

This initiative came as a response to the emergency meeting that Zain was present at along with the related entities and the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA). Through this initiative, Zain tried to offer a contribution to support customers during these times that affected all life aspects, both personal and professional.

Offering meals

As a contribution to support the enormous efforts exerted by the authorities at the start of the pandemic, Zain offered over 40,000 meals in collaboration with the Kuwait Food Bank, where a large number of the meals was distributed during the week dedicated by the Ministry of Health at Kuwait International Fairgrounds in Mishref to conduct tests for residents who recently

came to support the country's tremendous efforts to fight the spread of COVID-19 in Kuwait.

Furthermore, as part of its commitment to make its tech capabilities available to business customers during the pandemic, Zain offered a wide range of digital and cloud solutions to corporate customers, allowing them to increase operational efficiency and empower remote working during the crisis. Some of the most notable services included thermal camera solutions, distance learning services, Zain Health digital platform, and much more.

Zain also provided business customers with Cisco Webex video conferencing tools for three months free to support them to engage in digital transformation and work remotely during the pandemic. The company also provided SME customers with an opportunity to post-

home-quarantined users via the app. Over 114,000 COVID-positive cases were recorded via the app, where they were successfully prevented from coming into contact with others. In addition, the app is currently monitoring over 42,000 active users who are undergoing home quarantine.

Education programs and supporting youth

Throughout the year 2020, Zain supported numerous education and training programs that aimed at enriching the local education and youth sector, most of which came in a virtual format to adhere to health measures posed by the pandemic. The company awarded the two winning teams of the "Most Innovative Product/Service" category for university and high school students at the 14th annual INJAZ Company Program Competition. The event was held online by INJAZ Kuwait with the participation of over 50 students from across Kuwait's high schools and universities.

Zain also participated in recognizing the winners of the KON Social Entrepreneurship Program during the virtual ceremony held online. The company's participation came as part of its Gold sponsorship of the program for the third year running, which in turn came as part of its Strategic Partnership with LOYAC that continued last year for over 16 consecutive years.

In addition, Zain was the main partner of the Kuwait Virtual Graduation 2020, a unique online event that was streamed online and via Kuwait TV to celebrate the graduation of over 40,000 students from the class of 2020, including high school, university, and vocational college graduates from both the public and private sectors. The virtual event came under the patronage of HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

As part of its keenness to train Arab

entities, including the UN Women Regional Office for Arab States. This joint effort reflected Zain's commitment to support initiatives and programs that shed light on the importance of protecting and empowering women, as well as those that enrich gender equality and inclusion within communities and workplaces.

Zain also took part in Alnowair's 'Let's Do it Kuwait' campaign, which coincided with World Cleanup Day on 19 September with the participation of nearly 5000 volunteers. The event, considered the biggest national cleanup campaign in the history of Kuwait, witnessed the presence of Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan, along with many public and private sector officials, diplomats, and representatives of global organizations. The event also featured the Kuwait Army, Ministry of Health, Ministry of State for Municipal Affairs, and the Environment Public Authority.

Zain's participation in this national campaign came as part of its extended partnership with Alnowair, the non-profit initiative that aims at bringing positive, social behavioral change in Kuwait. The partnership fell under Zain's Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy, through which the company is keen on supporting such innovative initiatives that contribute to reflecting a positive image of the Kuwaiti society.

Virtual Zain Great Idea accelerator program

At the end of 2020, Zain announced the launch of the sixth edition of its Zain Great Idea (ZGI) tech startup accelerator program, which comes in an all-virtual format to adhere to the health guidelines posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The program comes in joint collaboration with Brilliant Lab, a startup Accelerator Service from Kuwait, and Mind the Bridge, a global organization based in Silicon Valley that bridges the world through entrepreneurship education for startups, enterprises, and investors to succeed in global markets.

ZGI offers a refreshed opportunity for local talents and Kuwait's entrepreneurial community, as it has been one of the most successful initiatives Zain presented to the Kuwaiti market as part of its comprehensive innovation and entrepreneurship strategy. Throughout five successful editions, ZGI empowered, trained, and invested in hundreds of creative and driven Kuwaiti youth, of which many now own thriving and active Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to this day in local and regional markets.

The pandemic did not pose a barrier that prevented Zain from renewing its commitment to Kuwait's entrepreneurial community. On the contrary, Zain saw it as a challenge to reintroduce the program more exceptionally than ever, as the company is the first to believe in technology's excellence as an effective and high-efficient tool to develop skills and train talents.

Eligible applicants will participate in the virtual Bootcamp phase. Throughout four weeks, they will learn the essentials of accelerating their tech startups via workshops, training sessions, and panel discussions featured by world-class facilitators and trainers from top international institutions, including IE Business School, MIT, Stanford, and more.

If the startup passes the judging panel, entrepreneurs will have the opportunity to benefit from Zain's leading experiences in areas that are essential to any startup, including marketing, advertising, customer care, public relations, digital partnerships, business/consultancy/legal services, and much more.

At the end of the program, all finalists will be hosted at a virtual Zain Demo Day event, through which they will present and pitch their final startups to investors, business partners, and others, giving them the opportunity to transform their ideas and startups into a profitable business.



Eaman Al-Roudhan with ZGI entrepreneurs at a previous event.

Collaborating with MoH

After the Ministry of Health (MoH) announced a number of emergency measures in March 2020 to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), Zain immediately announced its collaboration with the ministry to spread health awareness and contribute to all its efforts in combatting the pandemic.

As part of this collaboration, Zain offered its customers free calls to any of MoH's three hotlines, enabling them to inquire about any health or medical information related to COVID-19 directly from the ministry's expert team to ensure they receive correct information from official and certified sources.

Zain also provided MoH with free bulk SMS messages to send medical awareness content to the community during this period. In addition, the company posted many awareness messages in collaboration with the ministry's team on its official social media channels, and broadcasted official MoH awareness videos on COVID-19 in seven different languages.

Free Internet and calls

At the end of March, Zain also offered its customers 5 GBs of daily Internet caps and free local voice calls for a period of one month as part of its commitment towards its customers during the excep-

tioned the country. The meals were a contribution by the company to ease the long waiting times while in line. Many meals were also distributed at Kuwait International Airport's gates dedicated for residents who were returning back to their countries because of the crisis.

The company also offered many smartphone charging stations at Kuwait International Airport to serve Kuwaiti citizens who were returning home as part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' evacuation plan to bring Kuwaitis back home from all over the world during the pandemic. This contribution aimed at facilitating communication between returning Kuwaitis and their families as soon as they arrive to Kuwait. Zain was also continuously distributing a large number of meals to them in collaboration with the Kuwait Food Bank and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

Supporting business customers and SMEs

During early April 2020, Zain collaborated with the Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC), a subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), to supply the quarantine center project at Al-Zour area - that was executed by KIPIC - with a telecommunications and networking digital infrastructure. The collaboration

poned bill payments for three months without service discontinuity to support them during the economic crisis that came as a result of the pandemic.

Shlonik app

During April 2020, specifically during the beginning of the country's evacuation plan to bring thousands of Kuwaiti citizens back home at the beginning of the pandemic, Zain developed 'Shlonik' app for smartphones in joint collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT). The app's development and launch came to support the enormous efforts exerted by the authorities to tackle the pandemic.

Shlonik (which translates to 'how are you' in the Kuwaiti dialect), was designed by Zain's team with world-class standards under direct and continuous supervision from the Ministry of Health's team. The app utilizes the latest tech solutions to monitor the compliance of citizens who return to Kuwait from abroad in home quarantine instructions. The app is also an essential tool to pair with the smart wrist bracelet that was distributed at Kuwait International Airport to anyone who underwent home quarantine.

As of today, 'Shlonik' was downloaded over 623,000 times, where the Ministry of Health's teams monitored over 390,000

youth on essential digital skills, Zain partnered with Maharat Min Google, a virtual initiative launched by Google in collaboration with INJAZ. 50 Zain employees have taken part in the program to train young people on a variety of the most essential digital skills demanded by jobs in the Arab world today.

Zain also sponsored a virtual lecture hosted by Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) in partnership with Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem Cultural Centre (ASCC). The event, held on Instagram Live, featured Aisha Bowe, a former engineer at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and focused on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields.

Ending violence against women and supporting environmental efforts

Towards the end of 2020, Zain supported the United Nations Secretary-General's UNITE by 2030 to End Violence against Women campaign (UNITE Campaign). The initiative called for global action to increase awareness, galvanize advocacy efforts, and share knowledge and innovations to address violence against women and girls around the world.

Zain's contribution to this global campaign came as a continuation of its collaboration with the United Nations' various



Zain and KIPIC's teams at Al-Zour Quarantine Center.



Eaman Al-Roudhan with Kuwait Army officials during Alnowair's Kuwait cleanup campaign.

Business

Tesla appears to have plenty of momentum after meteoric 2020

Prices remain high despite Musk promise on Tesla's electric cars

NEW YORK: After shares rocketed higher in 2020 on surging auto deliveries, Tesla enters 2021 with plenty of momentum even as its vision of taking electric cars mainstream remains a way off. The auto industry disruptor led by Elon Musk wowed Wall Street yet again over the weekend, reporting annual car deliveries of 499,550, just shy of its 2020 target of half a million, but well above analyst estimates. The disclosure capped a year that saw Tesla report a series of profitable quarters and join the S&P 500, establishing the company as one of the world's most valuable businesses and elevating Musk to the second-wealthiest person behind Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos.

Shares were higher again Monday, finishing with a gain of 3.4 percent at \$729.77, after the stock engineered a more than 700 percent ascendance in 2020. The company's market capitalization of nearly \$700 billion means it is worth more than General Motors, Ford, Toyota, Honda, Fiat Chrysler and Volkswagen combined. Tesla watchers do not think Musk will be able to match that kind of valuation surge in 2021, but expect continued progress as the carmaker adds production capacity and pushes the envelope on new technologies, including autonomous autos.

"In 2020 Tesla had a really unprecedented streak of positive developments, positive news flow in the story," said CFRA Research analyst Garrett Nelson, who is bullish on Tesla, but has a hold on the stock and a 12-month target of \$750 a share. "Now we're getting to a point where it's hard to identify what the next positive might be."

Still unaffordable to many

The surge reflects optimism as construction con-

tinues on new Tesla factories in Texas and Germany, which will join existing plants in California and Shanghai that are ramping up production.

A note Monday, Wedbush analyst Daniel Ives cited "white hot" demand in China for electric vehicles as an added source of confidence. The transition into 2021 will prove to be "a major inflection of EV (electric vehicle) demand globally," with the technology hitting 10 percent of global cars in 2025 compared with three percent now, Ives said. "We believe that the China growth story is worth at least \$100 per share in a bull case to Tesla as this EV penetration is set to ramp significantly over the next 12 to 18 months."

There are also reasons to expect greater uptake of electric cars in the United States as President-elect Joe Biden has pledged to build 500,000 electric vehicle charging stations as part of his campaign to address climate change. Musk has expressed determination to cut the price for Tesla's electric cars, which currently start at \$37,990 in the US market.

The Tesla chief is developing battery design, material and production innovations that combine to cut the cost per kilowatt hours by 56 percent. That should enable Tesla to field a \$25,000 model in "three years-ish," Musk said in September, adding, "it is absolutely critical that we make cars that people can actually afford."

Overvalued?

Musk has "a history of achieving fairly lofty goals," said iSeeCars executive analyst Karl Brauer, adding that Musk has attained targets "that might seem unrealistic." Share prices tend to reflect bets on the future,



BEIJING: People look at a Tesla Model Y car at a Tesla showroom in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

and Tesla's pole-position on electric autos and other technologies have been the source of its rise.

Still, some analysts believe shares have soared to unrealistic levels. "Tesla's performance in 2020 was impressive, but not as impressive as the increase in its shares, which we continue to believe are overvalued," said a note from JPMorgan Chase, which has an "underweight" on the equity. "We think global mass

adoption of pure electric vehicles is still years away, but Tesla is the leader in the space," Morningstar said in a note last month. "Tesla will have growing pains, recessions to fight through before reaching mass-market volume, more competition, and needs to pay off debt. It is important to keep the hype about Tesla in perspective relative to the firm's limited, though now growing, production capacity." — AFP

NYSE scraps plan to delist China telecom firms

NEW YORK: The New York Stock Exchange abandoned plans to delist three state-owned Chinese telecom companies on Monday, reversing a decision that further dented already strained relations between the world's two superpowers. In a brief statement, the stock exchange said it "no longer intends to move forward with the delisting action" for China Telecom, China Mobile and China Unicom.

No detailed reason was given for the sudden reversal, which the exchange said came after "further consultation with relevant regulatory authorities". In response, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said the initial US move to delist the three companies "reflected the arbitrariness, capriciousness and uncertainty of its rules and systems".

"This will harm US national interests and its own image," she added. Shares in the three state-owned telecoms firms jumped on the news. In Hong Kong trading of China Unicom, which at one point soared 11 percent, ended up at more than eight percent.

China Mobile climbed more than five percent and China Telecom added more than three percent.

Mainland Chinese shares reversed earlier losses, while the yuan rose around 0.7 percent against the dollar. Jackson Wong, at Amber Hill Capital, said the move was "quite unexpected".

"Some funds that had an obligation to unload these shares will now need to buy them back. Some

investors are also starting to pricing in a scenario that the decision to halt delistings could be a start of a de-escalation" in China-US tensions, he added. The reversal comes just four days after the NYSE said it was ending trading in the companies to comply with an order by the Trump administration barring investment in firms with ties to the Chinese military. Donald Trump signed an executive order in November banning Americans from investing in Chinese companies deemed to be supplying or supporting the country's military and security apparatus, earning a sharp rebuke from Beijing.

The 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. It was one of a series of executive orders and regulatory actions that have targeted China's economic and military expansion in recent months.

Trump's order prohibits US companies and individuals from owning shares in any of the companies, which also include video surveillance firm Hikvision and China Railway Construction Corp.

National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien said at the time 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. Under his "America First" banner, Trump has portrayed China as the greatest threat to the United States and global democracy, pursued a trade war with it, harangued Chinese tech firms, and laid all the blame for the coronavirus pandemic at Beijing's door. China had criticized the moves to delist its companies and threatened countermeasures. — AFP

Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said later that, to his knowledge, police had so far only accessed contact-tracing data on one occasion, during a murder probe. Human Rights Watch accused the government, which is regularly criticized for curtailing civil liberties, of "undermining the right to privacy".

The admission "exposes how the government has been covertly exploiting the pandemic to deepen its surveillance and control over the population," Phil Robertson, the group's Asia deputy director, told AFP. Singaporean freelance journalist and activist Kirsten Han said she was disappointed but not surprised. "Looking at the government's record, I felt that it would be quite predictable that if they can do it, they will," said Han. "It's unfair and shows how little protection we have for our privacy against the government."

Speaking in parliament yesterday, Balakrishnan said the government was just being open when it made the admission. "We want to be completely above board and transparent," he said. But there was much anger online, with some Singaporeans

lions of pounds in support since early 2020 when the nation went into a first lockdown over the coronavirus, sending national debt soaring.

At the heart of the support is the state's furlough scheme paying the bulk of wages for millions of private sector workers. The Bank of England is also pumping out vast sums of cash to prop up the devastated economy.

"Throughout the pandemic we've taken swift action to protect lives and livelihoods and today we're announcing a further cash injection to support businesses and jobs until the spring," Sunak said yesterday. He added that more than 600,000 business properties would benefit from the new support.

The new lockdown is aimed at containing a severe wave of infections with a new coronavirus strain believed to spread faster. Similar to a first March-June lockdown last year, schools are shut and there is a ban on leaving home for all but exercise and essential shopping.

It comes despite the UK rolling out vaccines against COVID-19 and as the nation adjusts to



SINGAPORE: A user displays yesterday the TraceTogether token, used for the contact tracing system to prevent the spread of COVID-19. — AFP

saying they felt betrayed. The city-state has only suffered a mild outbreak, with about 58,000 cases and 29 deaths. Many countries have rolled out contact-tracing programs that work via a smartphone app, but take-up has been low in some due to privacy concerns. — AFP



In this file photo Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak speaks during a virtual press conference on the novel coronavirus pandemic inside 10 Downing Street in central London. — AFP

finally exiting the EU single market and customs union. "The new strain of the virus presents us all with a huge challenge—and whilst the vaccine is being rolled out, we have needed to tighten restrictions further," said Sunak. — AFP

OPEC+ to continue talks for deal on Feb production

LONDON: The members of the OPEC group of oil producing countries and their allies will continue talks, a day after they adjourned without reaching a deal on February production levels.

Twenty-three countries in total are trying to reach a compromise between those who favor keeping in place current cuts to production levels because of market uncertainty created by the coronavirus pandemic, and those who favor releasing an extra 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) onto the market next month. The two heavyweights among the producers gathering on Tuesday, Saudi Arabia and Russia, are on opposing sides of the debate, with Riyadh urging caution and Moscow keen to boost production.

Yesterday's video-conference meeting is expected to restart at 1430 GMT and is part of a more regular schedule of monthly meetings brought about because of price volatility in the wake of the pandemic. Demand for crude cratered under the effects of the virus in 2020 and oil producing nations have been trying to adjust their output accordingly in order to support prices.

The last OPEC+ last videoconference summit, held from November 30 to December 3, "paved the way for a gradual return of 2 million barrels per day to the market over the coming months" in the words of OPEC's general secretary Mohammed Barkindo, while leaving room for adjustments in reaction to market movements. The first step to implementing that agreement was an increase in 500,000 bpd in January with a commitment to meeting at the beginning of each month to set production levels for the following month. — AFP

Mollenkopf to step down as Qualcomm CEO

SAN FRANCISCO: Qualcomm said yesterday that Steve Mollenkopf would step down as chief executive this year after guiding the dominant mobile chipmaker through the rapidly expanding smartphone era.

The California tech firm said Cristiano Amon, 50, currently president, would succeed Mollenkopf as CEO, effective June 30. Mollenkopf, 52, became CEO in March of 2014 and will be retiring after some 26 years with the company.

Qualcomm's fortunes rose as a key supplier for iPhones and other smart devices, but Apple has recently begun making its own microprocessors. During Mollenkopf's tenure, Qualcomm was found guilty of antitrust violations in a case brought by US officials, and later overturned on appeal. The company also became embroiled in a patent court battle with Apple.

Mollenkopf led Qualcomm's efforts as the wireless sector moved from 3G to 4G and is now transitioning for superfast 5G systems. "I am immensely proud of all that we have accomplished at Qualcomm and the position the company currently enjoys as the world's leader in wireless technologies," Mollenkopf said in a statement. — AFP

UK launches new £4.6bn plan to help virus-hit firms

LONDON: The UK yesterday launched an extra £4.6-billion package for virus-battered businesses as it entered a fresh national lockdown set to last weeks. The financial support, equivalent to \$6.3 billion or 5.1 billion euros, "will help businesses to get through the months ahead—and crucially it will help sustain jobs, so workers can be ready to return when they are able to reopen", finance minister Rishi Sunak said in a statement. Sunak announced grants for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses worth up to £9,000 per property to help businesses through the next several months.

Other impacted businesses would share £594 million, added the chancellor of the exchequer.

The UK government has already pumped out bil-

Business

Ooredoo Group and Ericsson sign five-year, strategic 5G agreement

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Group and Ericsson have signed a global frame agreement for the supply of 5G radio, core and transport products and solutions, as well as related implementation and integration services for all 10 of the Group's operating companies in Qatar, Indonesia, Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Palestine, Tunisia, Myanmar and Maldives.

The agreement covers Ericsson Radio System, including MINI-LINK 6000 products that are capable of the 10 Gbps, Ericsson Cloud Core, Cloud Infrastructure and Ericsson Cloud Communication solutions. This will enable end-to-end 5G support to digitally transform and modernize Ooredoo's existing mobile networks across its operating companies. These solutions will also significantly shorten time-to-market for new services and improve Ooredoo's network performance to meet the growing expectations of consumers and enterprises.

Ericsson Radio System is already deployed and live in several of Ooredoo's operating companies. In Ooredoo Qatar's network, Ericsson Radio System, using the 4G+5G Ericsson Spectrum Sharing solution, has facilitated a fast nationwide 5G coverage. Furthermore, in preparation of Ooredoo Qatar's network to host multiple global sporting events, Ericsson is deploying its latest 5G

- The strategic, 5-year agreement will enhance the digital experience for people, enterprises and industries across Ooredoo's operating companies in 10 countries
- The deal includes Ericsson Radio System, Ericsson Cloud Core, Cloud Infrastructure, Ericsson Cloud Communication, and Ericsson microwave solutions
- Ericsson 5G products and solutions to help Ooredoo launch new functionalities with faster time-to-market



Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulla Al-Thani (left) and Fredrik Jejdling

mid-band Massive MIMO radios to create a unique digital experience for millions of sports fans in the stadiums, at home, or on-the-go.

Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulla Al-Thani, Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer, Ooredoo Group says: "Today's agreement represents another step in the longstanding and successful partnership between Ericsson and Ooredoo, which enables our company to continue network expansion, enhancement and digital transformation. Ericsson is bringing state-of-the-art global technologies to the countries we operate in, which enables us to provide the latest digital solutions

for communities to enjoy the best of the internet, including connecting the most remote areas, supporting start-ups digitally and providing immersive experiences for sports fans at upcoming mega-sporting events."

With a turnkey responsibility, Ericsson will deliver a comprehensive portfolio of telecom services. Under the agreement, Ericsson will provide hardware and software expansions of the core network, radio network and transmission network, as well as enhanced mobile multimedia functionality for new service offerings.

Fredrik Jejdling, Executive Vice President and

Head of Business Area Networks, at Ericsson says: "5G as a platform for innovation will speed up Ooredoo's journey towards digital transformation. It will fuel new use cases that cater to evolving consumer and enterprise demands. It is with great pride that we strengthen our collaboration as we continue supporting Ooredoo's ambition of delivering high-performing networks and superior user experience."

Ericsson's expertise in network design, deployment and integration as well as software upgrades will support Ooredoo's transition to advanced multimedia services. Under the agreement, Ericsson will also provide support and maintenance services.

Electric cars account for 50% of Norway car sales in 2020

OSLO: Norway became the first country in the world where electric cars accounted for more than 50 percent of new registrations in 2020, according to figures published Tuesday by an industry group. According to Opplysningsradet for Veitrafikken (OFV, "Information Council for Road Traffic"), electric vehicles accounted for 54.3 percent of the new car market last year, up from 42.4 percent a year earlier.

The four best-selling models in the Nordic country were the Audi e-tron, the Tesla Model 3, the Volkswagen ID.3 and the Nissan Leaf—all fully electric. The fifth placed car — the Volkswagen Golf—can be bought in a rechargeable version but the statistics do not differentiate the engine types.

In December, electric car sales set a monthly record in Norway with 66.7 percent, with the numbers boosted by the arrival of new models, OFV said. Industry group Norsk elbilforening (Norwegian Electric Vehicle Association) said separately to AFP that Norway was the first country to break the overall 50 percent threshold.

Norway, the largest producer of oil in Western Europe, is making headway in electric mobility thanks to heavy subsidies. The Nordic country, where electricity is primarily produced from hydroelectric dams, aims to have all new cars being "zero emission" by 2025. —AFP

Spain jobless grew by 23% in 2020

MADRID: The number of registered jobless in Spain jumped by nearly 23 percent in 2020, with the country suffering one of the hardest economic blows from the coronavirus pandemic, government figures showed yesterday. By the year's end, the number of people out of work had risen by 724,532 from the figure a year earlier to 3,888,137, labor ministry data showed. In December alone, an extra 36,825 people registered as unemployed. At the height of the pandemic in March and April, that figure stood at nearly 600,000 people.

By the end of 2020, the number of people still on furlough stood at 755,000, official figures showed with the government scheme set to remain in place until the end of January. A total of 360,000 jobs were destroyed during the course of 2020 when the number of people making social security contributions is taken into account.

"We are ending a dreadful year for employment," said Lorenzo Amor, deputy head of the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organizations (CEOE) who called on the government to extend its ERTE furlough scheme, which has already been renewed twice. Union bosses say the furlough scheme has been vital, with Unai Sordo, secretary general of the Workers' Commissions (CCOO) admitting without it and other safeguards, there "could have been another 2 million unemployed".

But the scheme has cost the public purse a huge amount, adding to the ballooning deficit and public debt in Spain which had chalked up an impressive recovery in recent years from the devastation wreaked by the financial crisis of 2008. Heavily dependent on tourism, Spain is expected to show the biggest slump among western economies this year, with the IMF expecting growth to contract by 12.8 percent. —AFP

Markaz: Vaccine approval helps GCC markets recover

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre 'Markaz' stated in its 2020 Markets Review Report that GCC equity markets staged a strong recovery towards year-end after pharmaceutical firms Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca, announced the deployment of their respective COVID-19 vaccines. The vaccines were approved and purchased by several governments; including many GCC countries. These developments raised investors' hopes of an eminent recovery in global economic growth in 2021 and helped GCC stock markets recover their losses.

Markaz's report also referred to Kuwait's inclusion in the MSCI Emerging Markets Index, which took place in November 2020. Among Kuwait's sectors, insurance was the top performing sector in 2020, rising 24 percent. Financial services, the sector with the largest market capitalization by aggregate, was down 13 percent for the year. With regards to stocks in Kuwait's premier stock segment, Human Soft Holding Company was the top performer with a yearly gain of 24 percent. The Kuwait All

Share index declined by 11.7 percent, while its index PE ratio stood at 20, a premium of 33 percent compared to S&P GCC index.

Regionally, Markaz's report stated that the S&P GCC composite index erased most of the losses for the year and is marginally down 1.7 percent for the year. Saudi Arabia (Tadawul) and Qatar stocks ended 2020 in the green, rising 3.6 percent and 0.1 percent, respectively. Abu Dhabi, Oman, Bahrain and Dubai stocks ended the year with losses of 0.6 percent, 8.1 percent, 7.5 percent and 9.9 percent, respectively. The report also stated that among Saudi blue chips, Al-Rajhi Bank was the top performer in 2020, gaining 13.3 percent. Other GCC Blue chips include UAE's Abu Dhabi National Energy Company (TAQA) that rose 170 percent this year and Qatar's Ezzan Holding which rose 191 percent.

Global equity markets witnessed a strong rebound after substantial falls in March, with the MSCI World Index finishing the year up 14.1 percent. US markets (S&P 500) recovered from

"This was maybe inevitable anyway as a result of the (Christmas) festivities taking place in the midst of an already severe wave of COVID-19 but the new variant has thrown another spanner in the works."

He added: "The mood may sour further if these lockdowns do not bring the virus back under control soon." England's six-week lockdown, which began at midnight, emulates the first national coronavirus curbs in place from March to June—but goes further than another instituted in November when schools remained open.

In recent months, governments worldwide have tightened or prolonged lockdown restrictions to combat the health crisis. Asian equities mostly rebounded yesterday on hopes that new lockdowns and ongoing vaccine rollouts would help beat the coronavirus crisis, dealers said. Yet Wall Street struggled in the first session of 2021 on Monday, pulling back from records also on anxiety over the Georgia Senate run-off elections—which will decide the balance of power in the upper house of Congress.

While analysts are broadly upbeat

European stocks dip after new UK lockdown

LONDON: European stock markets drifted lower yesterday, echoing a subdued performance on Wall Street overnight, as investors fretted over a worsening coronavirus crisis after Britain imposed a fresh lockdown. London stocks dipped 0.1 percent in midday deals after the UK government implemented new national restrictions set to last weeks—but also announced an extra £4.6-billion package for virus-battered businesses.

In early afternoon eurozone deals, Frankfurt and Paris each lost 0.3 percent. World oil prices edged upwards before the outcome of this afternoon's output meeting of the OPEC crude producers' cartel and its allies. "The mood has soured somewhat as a result of the national lockdowns which are once again coming into force or being extended," OANDA analyst Craig Erlam told AFP.

German jobless rate stable in December

FRANKFURT: German unemployment held steady in December, official data showed yesterday, as government measures that closed most shops over the Christmas period caused a jump in those on short-time work. The seasonally adjusted jobless rate in Europe's top economy stood at 6.1 percent in December, the same as in November, after three months of falls, according to the BA federal labor agency.

Unemployment fell by 37,000 people, seasonally adjusted, to 2.7 million, although the figure is still nearly half a million higher than in December 2019.

Germany tightened virus restrictions last month, closing non-essential shops after already shuttering culture and

leisure facilities in November. The shutdowns prompted employers to rely more heavily on a government-subsidized scheme that allows them to reduce workers' hours to avoid layoffs.

BA data showed another 660,000 people were placed on short-time employment between December 1 and 28. Most observers expect the curbs to continue until the end of January as infection rates remain stubbornly high in the country. Germany yesterday reported 11,897 new coronavirus cases and 944 deaths, ahead of a meeting between Chancellor Angela Merkel and regional leaders to decide on extending the shutdowns.

"The rising number of short-time workers, as well as the longer-term impact from the ongoing second lockdown and a high risk of insolvencies in 2021, clearly argue against too much optimism," said ING bank analyst Carsten Brzeski. BA chairman Detlef Scheele said the pandemic was having a

Regional Market Trends – December 2020

Equity	Last close	December%	2020 %
S&P GCC	114	0.7	-1.7
Saudi Arabia (TASI)	8,747	-0.7	3.6
Qatar (QE Index)	10,262	1.7	0.1
Abu Dhabi (ADI)	4,965	1.6	-0.6
Kuwait (All Share PR Index)	5,459	1.6	-11.7
Dubai (DFMGI)	2,420	3.0	-9.9
Bahrain (BAX)	1,478	0.8	-7.5
Oman (Muscat SM)	3,644	0.4	-8.1
Commodities			
IPE Brent (\$)	51.8	8.8	-21.5
Gold (\$)	1,896.5	6.7	25.0

Source: Refinitiv

the lows of March, where it reached new highs by October, and ended the year up 16.3 percent. On the other hand, UK (FTSE 100) index ended the year down 14.3 percent due to Brexit and COVID-19 concerns. Emerging markets increased by 15.8 percent for the year as investors became optimistic about riskier assets due to vaccine development and continued monetary easing measures by central banks in the US and Europe.

Oil prices closed at \$51.8 per barrel at the end of the year, posting a

yearly loss of 21.5 percent. Oil markets recovered some of the losses from earlier in the year buoyed by favorable results in COVID-19 vaccine trials, which raised hopes of swift demand recovery for oil as governments around the world could fully reopen their economies and oil-dependent sectors, like travel and tourism, could make a comeback. Oil prices were also supported by production cuts by the OPEC+ group to reduce over-supply, which are set to continue in 2021 as well.



about the long-term outlook this year, the nascent Covid-19 vaccine programs have yet to have an impact, meaning the first few months of this year will likely be bumpy. "The upside compared to last year is that there are now multiple vaccines being rolled out so we can see the light at the end of the tunnel—but that does not mean we cannot see significant economic damage in the interim," noted Erlam. The task ahead was laid bare by data showing almost 280,000 Americans were infected in one day, while the country's death toll passed 300,000. Separately, bitcoin was sitting at \$31,000 after seeing recent wild swings saw it hit a record near \$35,000 before diving to \$28,000 within the space of a day. —AFP



This file photo shows an aerial view of the coal-fired power station of German energy giant RWE in Niederaussem, western Germany. —AFP

"very visible" impact on Germany's labor market. "The stabilizing effect of short-time work has, however, secured employment and prevented higher

unemployment," he added. Before the coronavirus, Germany's unemployment rate had hovered at a record low of around five percent. —AFP

Classifieds

Wednesday, January 6, 2021

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www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind with speed of 08 - 28 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

BY NIGHT: Cold and Partly cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 08 - 26 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 05/01/2021 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	21 °C	15 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	22 °C	10 °C		
ABDALY	25 °C	08 °C		
BUBYAN	21 °C	11 °C		
JAHRA	23 °C	12 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C		
SALMIYAH	21 °C	16 °C		
AHMADI	- °C	- °C		
NUWAISIB	21 °C	11 °C		
WAFRA	22 °C	09 °C		
SALMY	20 °C	10 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Wednesday	01/06	Fair and some high clouds will appear	21 °C	08 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 26 km/h
Thursday	01/07	Fair and Partly cloudy	20 °C	08 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 28 km/h
Friday	01/08	Fair and Partly cloudy and some scattered clouds will appear	20 °C	09 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 24 km/h
Saturday	01/09	Fair and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain later on	21 °C	07 °C	VRB	08 - 22 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:18
Sunrise	06:43
Zuhr	11:53
Asr	14:45
Sunset	17:04
Isha	18:26

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	23 °C
MIN. Temp.	11 °C
MAX. RH	84 %
MIN. RH	25 %
MAX. Wind	NW 25 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

CHANGE OF NAME

I. Ebrahim s/o Mohame Akber Ali holder of Indian Passport No. P6321046 issued in Kuwait on 08/11/2016, Gadajasrajpur Bohra Colony, Galiakot Teh Sagwara, Dungarpur, Rajasthan 314026, India, have changed my name to Ebrahim Chikhly for all purposes. **(C 5829) 5-1-2021**

FOR SALE

Audi A8LLR 2006 bought new KD 30,000 now KD 3,000 full option JE Design km 190K Black/Beige only 2 in Kuwait. Contact 55351199. **(C 5826) 6-1-2021**

Hospitals

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

Clinics

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

NOTICE
 October 22, 2020

Rajesh Raveendran, son of Mr. Raveendran Sudevan, resident of Raveesh Bhavan, Vadasserikonam, Varkala, Trivandrum, Kerala 695143 and Ms. Sana James, daughter of Mr. Joseph James, resident of Love Dale, Ottakkal, Thenmala PD, Kollam, Kerala 691308 both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22533315, 00965 - 22533125).

(Raveer Bhari)
 Second Secretary (Cons)
 and Marriage Officer.

Embassy of India, Kuwait.
 Email: cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in

EMERGENCY 112

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call MSALHOTLINE 128

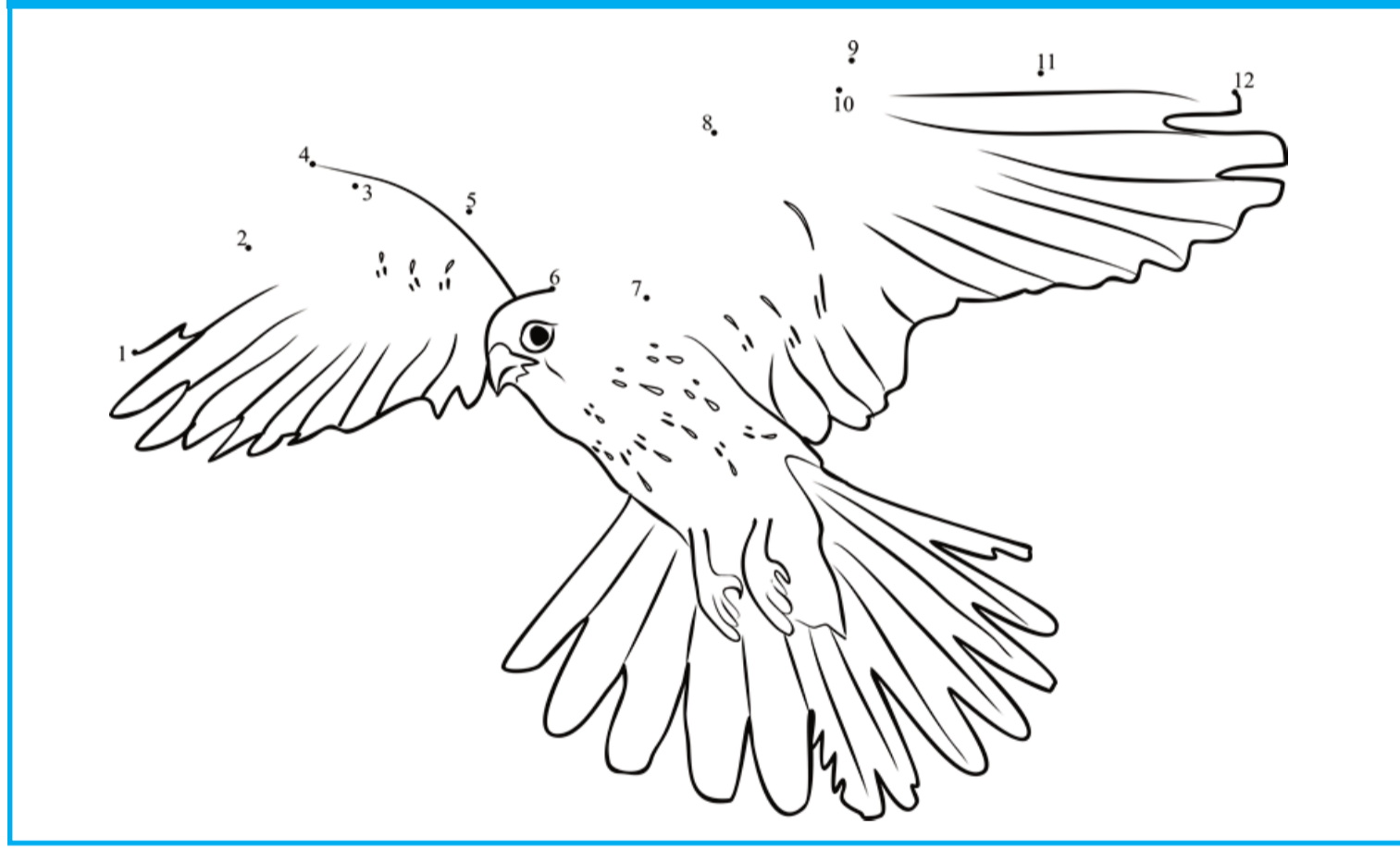
Word Search

Play a Tune

O	X	B	E	N	O	H	P	O	X	A	S
T	R	I	A	N	G	L	E	M	A	X	A
T	E	P	M	U	R	T	A	C	Y	F	C
K	C	J	Q	K	F	R	C	L	A	L	L
Z	O	L	H	I	I	O	O	C	O	U	A
Y	R	U	O	M	R	P	I	J	L	T	R
P	D	G	B	D	H	N	N	T	L	E	I
I	E	A	I	O	O	A	I	U	E	M	N
A	R	O	N	M	B	P	R	B	C	U	E
N	N	E	R	Z	Y	C	R	A	S	R	T
O	S	A	O	R	G	A	N	A	D	D	F
T	H	R	A	T	I	U	G	O	H	I	K

ACCORDION	HARMONICA	TRIANGLE
BANJO	HARP	TRUMPET
CELLO	MARIMBA	TUBA
CLARINET	ORGAN	XYLOPHONE
DRUM	PIANO	
FLUTE	RECORDER	
GIUITAR	SAXOPHONE	

Join the Dots



STAR TRACK

<p>Aries (March 21-April 19)</p> <p>Close relationships should grow closer today, and new relationships become close ones. You're likely to feel extremely warm and loving toward most of the people you know, and they should reciprocate that feeling. Romantic relationships, especially, could grow more intimate and physical. You like the way you feel, Aries, but want to express it outwardly through gifts or intimacy.</p>	<p>Cancer (June 21-July 22)</p> <p>Powerful feelings of love well up today, particularly toward family members. Communication between you and those you love is likely to be heightened. Cancer, as you learn to speak your mind while not being too blunt. Romantic matters could thrive now, as you will be in the mood to physically express your feelings. Old friends form stronger bonds, while you discover common interests with new friends.</p>	<p>Libra (September 23-October 22)</p> <p>Relations with family or other members of your household should be especially warm now. Mutual goals and shared wins and losses are likely to bring you closer. Communication with friends and other acquaintances should be open and honest without being blunt, Libra, providing you with a rewarding day. You probably won't spend much of your day alone. Make the most of it.</p>	<p>Capricorn (December 22-January 19)</p> <p>The early part of the day might find you sluggish and indecisive, Capricorn, but later you should be psyched up and ready to go. Today marks the beginning of a new period in which you should set your ideas in motion. Action is the key. Think before you speak and use caution when talking about other people. Make sure your discussions about others don't turn into gossip.</p>
<p>Taurus (April 20-May 20)</p> <p>Relations with family or other members of your household should be especially warm now. Mutual goals and shared wins and losses are likely to bring you closer. Communication with friends and other acquaintances should be open and honest without being blunt, Taurus, providing you with a rewarding day. You probably won't spend much of your day alone. Make the most of it.</p>	<p>Leo (July 23-August 22)</p> <p>Messages from close friends expressing their love and admiration for you may seem to arrive out of the blue. Your accomplishments over the past few weeks may have caused them to see you in a new light. Today you will experience the full force of their feelings. The doors of communication are open for you. You could decide to spend the day getting to know your friends all over again.</p>	<p>Scorpio (October 23-November 21)</p> <p>You should be in a warm and romantic mood today, Scorpio. You will want to schedule an intimate evening with your partner, but you probably won't feel like staying in. You desire an evening out, perhaps to a restaurant, concert, or play. Regardless of how you usually feel, tonight you won't have any reservations about showing affection in public. Enjoy your evening.</p>	<p>Aquarius (January 20- February 18)</p> <p>Close relationships could lead to a feeling of spiritual unity today. In fact, Aquarius, you might feel as if those who share your interests are actually your family now. If you're involved, expect to experience warm and passionate feelings toward your partner. If not, don't be surprised if someone new comes on the scene. Shared intellectual interests might be what bring you together.</p>
<p>Gemini (May 21-June 20)</p> <p>You should feel loving today toward just about anyone you like and respect. Clear communication with friends, lovers, and children could enhance your understanding of them, and vice versa. The bonds in these relationships will be strengthened, perpetuating the good feelings you've felt all year. Current bonds grow more devoted, while new ones become close. Keep the lines of communication open.</p>	<p>Virgo (August 23-September 22)</p> <p>You're always one to face things logically, Virgo, and today you turn that logic, along with your intuition, toward reassessing some of your values. Your judgment is especially acute, so any decisions you make or any new avenues you want to explore are likely to be just what you need now. Relations with friends, lovers, and family should be warm, loving, and close.</p>	<p>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)</p> <p>The mutual exploration of spiritual and intellectual ideas could bring you closer to friends and lovers. Fascinating discussions open new horizons to all participants. You may be overcome by the strong feeling of unity. By day's end, you could experience a strong spiritual longing to study whatever the topic of conversation was. Don't hesitate. It can only help you grow.</p>	<p>Pisces (February 19-March 20)</p> <p>Love, sex, and romance are on your mind today, Pisces, so you will want to spend as much time as possible with your lover. You could also grow closer to your friends, resulting in a powerful feeling of unity. Right now you have the gift of being able to exercise good judgment when it comes to values in life. If decisions need to be made along this line, this is the time to make them.</p>

Lifestyle | Features



Artists disguised as the Three Kings Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar arrive aboard a boat to Bogatell Beach in Barcelona yesterday during Epiphany celebrations. For children, it's the most wonderful time of the year, when Spaniards turn out to welcome the gift-laden Three Kings. But this year's glittering parades have been torpedoed by the pandemic.



Children wave at artists disguised as the Three Kings Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar as they arrive aboard a boat to Bogatell Beach in Barcelona during Epiphany celebrations.



Artists disguised as the Three Kings Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar ride a hot air balloon in Seville during Epiphany celebrations. — AFP photos

PANDEMIC RAINS ON SPAIN'S GLITTERING EPIPHANY PARADES

For children, it's the most wonderful time of the year, when Spaniards turn out to welcome the gift-laden Three Kings. But this year's glittering parades have been torpedoed by the pandemic. In Spain, it's not Father Christmas nor Christmas Eve that beguiles all the children, but the Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar who arrive bearing gifts on the night of January 5. Every year, millions flock to the streets across Spain to watch the fairytale parades welcoming the royal visitors, with music, dancing and bucket-loads of sweets that are hurled into the excited crowds. But with all outdoor gatherings banned to slow the spread of the virus this year, local authorities across the country have been scrambling for creative ways to keep the magic of "Reyes" alive.

Kings sail into Barcelona

In Barcelona, organisers have been working on a detailed plan "since the summer", fearing even back then that life would not yet have returned to normal come January. "It's a really traditional celebration - total madness, a real family event with dancing, lights, floats and everyone packing the streets to watch,"



King Melchior waves to children from his float during the Three Wise Men's traditional parade on the eve of the Epiphany celebrations in Madrid.

said Esteve Carames, in charge of Barcelona's Reyes festivities, which normally sees 700,000 people massed along the three-kilometer route. This year, however, the Three Kings will be arriving by boat. The royal landing will be broadcast live from Barcelona's port on TV, after which they will screen footage of a parade recorded in advance.

Barcelona has also set up an open-air amusement park based on The Three Kings. With a capacity for 400 visitors, it has lights, music and scenery, but no

actors and nothing that can be touched. The 50,000 free tickets to enter the park, which is open from December 28 to January 5, were snapped up in just four hours. Somewhat surprisingly, this year's festivities have been more expensive than previous years, coming in at around 1.2 million euros (\$1.5 million) compared with 800,000 euros in a normal year, given the extended duration of the events.

Behind closed doors

In Madrid, which normally puts on

some of Spain's biggest parades, drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors, City Hall is putting on a live televised event inside a cultural centre with no spectators present. "It is the most special night of the year and we wanted the magic to be felt throughout the city," said Andrea Levy, one of the capital's top cultural advisers.

And fireworks will be set off "to mark the arrival of the Magi," she said. Many other places have either filmed events ahead of time or will broadcast the event



Artists disguised as the Three Kings (left to right) Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar arrive in a hot air balloon in Seville yesterday during Epiphany celebrations.

live - as they are doing in the southeastern city of Alcoi, home to one of the oldest parades in Spain, dating back to 1866. In the southern city of Granada, the Three Kings will tour the city in an open-top bus for four hours without stopping, in order to avoid people gathering to watch. Other places have turned to social networks to post videos for children or to organize games. — AFP

Pandemic overshadows Japan's tuna auction

Tokyo's annual New Year tuna auction ended yesterday without the usual jaw-dropping bidding war, with the country's "Tuna King" holding back on gunning for the top fish, citing the pandemic woes affecting the restaurant industry. The most expensive fish of the day - a 208-kilogram (459-pound) bluefin caught off the northern Aomori region of Japan, known for its quality tuna - was bought by another bidder for 20.84 million yen (\$202,000).

That is just a fraction of the millions of dollars that sushi businessman and self-proclaimed "Tuna King" Kiyoshi Kimura has shelled out in recent years to secure the bragging rights that come with buying the auction's top tuna. Last year, Kimura paid \$1.8 million for a 276-kilogram (608-pound) bluefin, and in 2019 he paid a record \$3.1 million for a 278-kilogram (613-pound) fish. But Kimura said he wanted to show restraint this year as the raging pandemic has caused so much suffering to restaurants and other businesses.

"I didn't go for the highest bid this year because this is the time for self-control," Kimura told journalists who gathered to see him after the pre-dawn auction at the Toyosu fish market. "I didn't think it was appropriate to go all festive this time," he said. Kimura usually uses his purchases to secure national news coverage for himself and his successful sushi chain. Normally, after winning the annual bidding war and taking



Wholesaler Yukitaka Yamaguchi (back) watches as staff members carry one of the auctioned tuna at a restaurant in Ginza, after the New Year's auction at Toyosu fish market in Tokyo yesterday.

his expensive investment back to one of his restaurants, he fillets the fish with a sword-like blade, creates sushi out of it and serves it to customers at no extra charge, all in front of an army of television cameras.

The most expensive tuna this year was acquired jointly by a famous wholesaler named Yukitaka Yamaguchi, a fre-

quent guest on television shows who supplies top sushi restaurants, and a major food business, according to local media. For this year's auction, fish wholesalers wore masks and sanitized their hands as they examined the texture of tail meat from fresh and frozen tuna by touching, smelling and sometimes tasting pieces of it. Spectators

were not allowed to attend the event, now held at a market called Toyosu after the city's world-famous fish market relocated there from its old site, Tsukiji, in 2018. — AFP

DATING APPS DON'T DESTROY LOVE, SWISS STUDY SHOWS

Contrary to warnings that dating apps are encouraging superficial and short-lived flings over true romance, a Swiss study showed that app users were more likely to be seeking long-term relationships. Mobile apps have revolutionised the way people meet around the world, and are quickly becoming the main way couples form in many countries. Unlike traditional dating sites, which require detailed user profiles, smartphone apps like Tinder and Grindr are largely based on rating photos with a swipe review system. This has raised fears about the impact on the ways we interact, fall in love and create lasting connections. But a study conducted at the University of Geneva (UNIG), and published in the PLOS ONE journal, indicates that app-formed couples actually have stronger "cohabitation intentions" than couples who meet offline.

"Large parts of the media claim they have a negative impact on the quality of relationships since they render people incapable of investing in an exclusive or long-term relationship," report author Gina Potarca, a researcher at UNIG's the Institute of Demography and Socioeconomics, said in a statement. "Up to now, though, there has been no evidence to prove this is the case." Potarca used a 2018 family survey by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, analysing responses from over 3,000 people who were in a relationship and had met their partner in the past decade.

Her analysis showed that couples who met through an app were more motivated by the idea of living together than others. "The study doesn't say whether their final intention was to live together for the long- or short-term," she said, adding though that since expressed desire to marry remained high across the board, "some of these couples likely see cohabitation as a trial period prior to marriage." The study also found that couples formed via dating apps expressed stronger desires and intentions to have children than others. — AFP



A staff member stands in front of pieces of meat from one of the auctioned tuna at a restaurant in Ginza, after the New Year's auction at Toyosu fish market in Tokyo yesterday.



A wholesaler walks along the lined up frozen tuna ahead of the New Year's auction at Toyosu fish market in Tokyo, Japan yesterday. — AFP photos

Lifestyle | Features



A Palestinian woman washes her hands with tap water in the town of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza Strip. The densely-populated Gaza Strip has long lacked sufficient drinking water, but a new project helps ease the shortage with a solar-powered process to extract potable water straight from the air.



Russian-Israeli businessman Michael Mirilashvili, owner of Watergen, a company that developed a machine which transform air humidity into drinkable water, talks to AFP at his offices in the Israeli city of Petah Tikva.



A picture shows a solar-powered water generator that extracts potable water straight from the air donated by Watergen in the Palestinian town of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza Strip. — AFP photos

ISRAELI FIRM IN GAZA EXTRACTS DRINKING WATER FROM THE AIR

The densely populated Gaza Strip has long lacked sufficient drinking water, but a new project helps ease the shortage with a solar-powered process to extract potable water straight from the air. Unusually, the project operating in the Islamist-run Palestinian enclave, which has been blockaded by Israel since 2007, is the brainchild of a Russian-Israeli billionaire, Michael Mirilashvili.

The company he heads, Watergen, has developed the atmospheric water generators that can produce 5,000 to 6,000 liters of drinking water per day, depending on the air's humidity. With just a few machines operating in Gaza, Watergen is far from meeting demand for the two million people who live in the crowded coastal enclave wedged between Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea.

"But, it's a start," said Fathi Sheikh Khalil, an engineer with the Palestinian civil society group Damour, which operates one of the machines because Israeli firms cannot work in Gaza. The strip, plagued by severe economic woes and regular power shortages, has also been facing a worsening water crisis for years. Its overused aquifer has been degraded by saltwater intrusion and contaminated by pollutants, making most available water salty and dangerous to drink and forcing the import of bottled water.

Only three percent of Gaza's own water meets international standards,

according to the United Nations, which had in 2012 predicted that ecological pressures would have made Gaza "unliveable" by now. Multiple studies have linked rising rates of kidney stones and high incidence of diarrhoea in Gaza to the consumption of sub-standard water. Several players are working to solve the water shortage, including the European Union, which is supporting a massive seawater desalination plant.

'Help our neighbors'

Watergen's offices are located in a glass tower in Tel Aviv, some 80 kilometers north of Gaza. Mirilashvili bought Watergen after moving to Israel in 2009, and the company has since exported its machines to more than 80 countries. The company CEO and president has a colorful personal history, including time spent in a Russian prison following a kidnapping conviction in a trial the European Court of Justice later found was flawed. A religious Jew with a picture of a prominent Orthodox rabbi on his office wall, Mirilashvili told AFP that when he learnt about Gaza's water crisis, he immediately wanted to help. "Our goal was that everyone on Earth could be supplied with drinkable water... It was immediately clear that we had to help our neighbors first."

Israel tightly controls imports to Gaza and Mirilashvili acknowledged that getting his machines approved



A Palestinian boy drinks water from a tap in the town of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza Strip.

"took some time". Israel's army "liked the idea, but needed to check the equipment," he said. Watergen's technology is suited to Gaza because it runs on solar panels, an asset in the enclave where the one power plant, which requires imported fuel, lacks the capacity to meet demand. Mirilashvili lamented that he cannot see his machines at work, as Israelis are forbidden from entering the strip.

'Present from God'

Watergen has donated two machines, which cost \$61,000 each, to Gaza. A third machine was sent to the strip by the Arava Institute for Environmental Research, based on a kibbutz in southern Israel. One of the machines, a metal cube that roars as it

runs, is located at the town hall in Khan Yunis in southern Gaza. After capturing humidity, the machine condenses it into water and then filters it into instantly drinkable water.

When the air's humidity level is above 65 percent, Watergen's machines can produce about 5,000 litres of drinking water per day, said Khalil of the Palestinian group Damour. An additional 1,000 litres can be produced when the humidity level exceeds 90 percent. Some of the water is consumed by city hall employees and some transported to a local hospital for patients with kidney problems, Khalil said. "One or two machines won't change anything," he told AFP. But "it shows there is a solution".

Asked about working with a company based in Israel, which has fought three wars with Hamas since 2008, Khalil said: "We accept help from anyone who wants to help us." Hamas did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Mirilashvili said he did not believe Gazans see Watergen as a gift from him, an Israeli citizen and observant Jew. "They understood that this miracle is not from me," he told AFP. "This is a present from God. They understood that when God gives you something, you need to accept it." — AFP

Britain music festivals face 'existential crisis'

Coronavirus has plunged Britain's summer music festivals into "existential crisis", the umbrella organization for the UK music industry warned yesterday and called for greater government support. In a report, UK Music said COVID-19 had caused an "existential crisis for the live sector and UK music festivals" and that the 2020 season had been "wiped out" by the virus. "There is a real threat that the vast majority of the 2021 season will not happen either," the organisation said.

Every year, thousands of Britons and tourists flock to the country's summer music festivals, which UK Music argued were "pillars of our culturally rich live music scene and showcase an incredible variety of musical genres". The country's famous Glastonbury music festival, for instance, generates over £100 million (\$136 million 111 million euros) for the economy of the south-west of England, UK Music said. Music festivals as a whole employ 85,000 people directly each year, it said.

Britain-one of the countries worst affected by the global health crisis, with over 75,000 deaths-has seen its £5.8-billion music industry hit hard by the pandemic. A series of nationwide lockdowns, the most recent of which was announced on Monday evening, and months of other restrictions to curb the spread of the virus have shuttered music venues. In July, the music sector was given a lifeline of £250 million from the government's £1.6-billion Cultural Recovery Fund to help keep the arts afloat during the outbreak.

UK Music is now calling on authorities to give an approximate date for when venues might be able to reopen and for the creation of a government-backed reinsurance scheme for the sector. UK Music's chief executive, Jamie Njoku-Goodwin, said it was "in the national interest for the sector to be supported and helped back to normal". "If the right support and reassurance is not put in place for event organizers, artists and venues now, then there is a serious risk that much of the summer live music season will be cancelled," he said. — AFP

Turkey's social divides laid bare in Netflix hit

One is a headscarf-wearing cleaning lady from the poor suburbs of Istanbul, the other a jet-setting psychiatrist who breaks glass ceilings and harbors suspicions about conservative Islam. Together, the two women make for a compelling story in a hit Netflix series that has pushed boundaries and won plaudits for its unflinching portrayal of Turkey's deep social divides.

The psychological thriller "Ethos" ("Bir Baskadir") is Turkey's latest slick streaming export, adding to an expanding list of local productions to make it big abroad. But director Berkun Oya's eight-part series goes where no previous Turkish TV drama has dared, feeding a national conversation that was once confined to bohemian art houses screening intellectual films.

Prejudice

Enveloping its characters in empathy and attempting to demystify "otherness", the series has triggered online debates about prejudice in Turkey's booming digital community-the core audience of Netflix. "Ethos" strikes a particular nerve because polls show Turkey is sharply polarized along social and political lines. A study published by the US-based German Marshall Fund in December showed 75 percent of Turkish respondents not wanting their child to marry a supporter of a political party they feel "most distant to".

Sixty-one percent said they did not want to be neighbors with that party's supporters, and 86 percent labelled their political opponents "hypocrites". Into this chasm steps Meryem. Karayel,

ethnic Kurds, cosmopolitans and provincial farmers, religious traditionalists and the secular. In "Ethos", the two women speak almost different tongues. Meryem relies on Islamic phrases such as "may Allah bless you" and calls Peri "abla" (big sister). This is all too much for Peri, who tells her own therapist that far-off Latin America felt more familiar than her native land. "I went to Peru last year-the other side of the world. Even with people whose language I don't understand, I felt more at home," Peri says.

A covered woman was always like a "monster to my mom", she says, adding: "She even nagged about our housekeeper's headscarf." Yet some criticize this divide as too crude. "In the Western world, Turkey is imagined through the filter of certain cliches," the historian Gurpinar said. "Seculars and conservatives is the most obvious one. Veiled women versus unveiled 'modern' women is another. Superficially, they also set the boundaries in the series."

'Her own way'

Zeynep K. Serefoglu Danis, chairwoman of the KADEM academic committee whose deputy director is President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's younger daughter Sumeyye Erdogan Bayraktar, also said "Ethos" was not without its faults. The portrayal of the lead character as an uneducated headscarf-wearing woman has led some conservative women with degrees to "rightfully ask 'why aren't we represented?'" Danis told AFP.

"But I believe a fictional production can't promise to give a panoramic view of society." Bayraktar wears a headscarf and was schooled at Indiana University in the United States and the London School of Economics. Danis said the show's writers should have gone "beyond the ordinary" in their depiction of a showdown between traditional and modern women.

But she applauded the series for allowing Meryem to find her own way out of social confinement and helping Peri come to terms with a different world at the same time. "We see a free and determined woman in Meryem who is able to trace her own thoughts and emotions," said Danis. "Peri is not Meryem's solution. It is Meryem who shakes up Peri's mental world by her very presence, it is Meryem who finds her own way out through talking." — AFP

'Monster'

Young, vibrant and growing, the nation of 83 million straddles Europe and Asia, cojoining Turkish nationalists and



Photo shows a poster of 'Ethos' (bir baskadir) Netflix series on a laptop's screen. The psychological thriller 'Ethos' (Bir Baskadir) is Turkey's latest slick streaming export, adding to an expanding list of local productions to make it big abroad. — AFP

"The series managed to find a balance between a popular work and a thoughtful film," said Dogan Gurpinar, a historian at Istanbul Technical University. Released on November 12, the series stars Oyku Karayel, who plays Meryem, a cleaner who never went to high school and turns to her neighborhood "hodja", or religious cleric, in times of trouble. Suddenly, she crosses paths with the high-flying therapist Peri, played by Defne Kayalar, who is not only secular but also profoundly unhappy about Turkey's social course.

TOP FRENCH POLITICAL EXPERT ACCUSED OF INCEST IN NEW BOOK

One of France's most prominent political commentators has stepped down from his academic and media posts after being accused in a new book of the incestuous sexual abuse of his stepson. Olivier Duhamel, who has described the allegations as "personal attacks", is accused in the book, written by his stepdaughter Camille Kouchner, of abusing her twin brother when they were aged 14.

The book "La Familia grande", which is due to be published on Thursday but has been serialized in L'Obs magazine and Le Monde, has shocked French intellectual circles given Duhamel's prominence and close connection to the elite. While many commentators have seen France as being slow to break longstanding taboos over the abuse of minors this is not the first such controversy to make headlines over the last year.

Publisher Vanessa Springora, in a book published in January last year, accused prize-winning writer Gabriel Matzneff of abusing her while she was a minor. Film star Adele Haenel in November 2019 accused director Christophe Ruggia of sexually harassing her when she was in her early teens. Haenel and other French actresses also in February last year walked out of France's Cesar awards after filmmaker Roman Polanski—who is wanted in the US for the statutory rape of a 13-year-old girl in 1977 - won best director.



A man reads Camille Kouchner's book 'La Familia Grande' in Paris. — AFP

'I knew and said nothing'

Duhamel said on Twitter that following the allegations he was resigning from all his posts, including as head of the National Foundation of Political Sciences (FNPS) a body that oversees the hugely prestigious Sciences Po university. "I am stepping down from my posts after being the target of personal attacks as I want to preserve the institutions in which I work," said Duhamel, who also until now presented a show on Europe 1 radio and is an analyst on LCI TV. Camille Kouchner, now 45 and a lecturer, and her twin brother are the children of France's former foreign minister and co-founder of the Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) medical charity Bernard Kouchner and academic Evelyne Pisier, who died in 2017.

Kouchner and Pisier separated and she went on to marry Duhamel. "I was 14 years old and let it go ahead. I was 14, I knew and said nothing," Camille Kouchner wrote in the book, according to the published extracts. In the book, she names her brother only as "Victor" in order to protect his privacy. But Le Monde said he had read the text twice and was happy for his sister to speak on his behalf. "I confirm that what my sister has written concerning the actions of Olivier Duhamel towards me is correct," "Victor" told Le Monde.

In an interview with L'Obs, Kouchner said the book revealed to what extent Duhamel's and Pisier's group of leftist intellectual friends, some of them household names in France, knew what was going on. "Of course, I thought my book might seem obscene because of my family's fame. Then I thought to myself, this is exactly what needs to be done," she said. In a statement released by his lawyer, Bernard Kouchner said that a "heavy secret that has been weighing on us for too long has happily been lifted. I applaud the courage of my daughter Camille". — AFP

Sports

Photo of the Day



Red Bull Air Force Team is seen prior flying over the Dead Sea, Jordan. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Japan sumo champion Hakuho tests positive for coronavirus

TOKYO: Record-breaking sumo champion Hakuho has tested positive for COVID-19 just days before the New Year tournament, the Japan Sumo Association said yesterday. The JSA said Hakuho was tested after noticing a loss of smell, and that other members of the Miyagino stable who are thought to have come into contact with him would be tested yesterday.

The Mongolian-born 35-year-old, who has won a record 44 tournaments and holds sumo's highest rank of yokozuna, had been preparing for the 15-day New Year Grand Sumo Tournament, which starts Sunday in Tokyo. A JSA spokesperson said his participation in the basho, or tournament, was as yet undecided, but the competition was set to go ahead as scheduled.

Hakuho's infection comes after 11 members of the Arashio stable tested positive last week following the infection of top-division wrestler Wakatakakage. Local media reported that the new cases included stablemaster Arashio, a hairdresser and eight lower-division wrestlers. A goyji, or referee, from a different stable also tested positive on Monday after complaining of a fever and cough. A 20-year-old sumo wrestler died in Japan last May after contracting the virus and suffering multiple organ failure. But Hakuho is the first wrestler from the sport's top ranks to test positive for the virus. He has been dealing with a knee injury and has not completed a tournament since March, when he won the Spring Grand Sumo Tournament in Osaka. — AFP

Antetokounmpo's 43 points fuel Bucks to 125-115 victory

Tatum scores 40 in Celtics NBA win

LOS ANGELES: Milwaukee's two-time reigning Most Valuable Player Giannis Antetokounmpo poured in 43 points Monday, powering the Bucks to a 125-115 NBA victory over the Detroit Pistons. Antetokounmpo connected on 17 of 24 shots from the field. He made a brace of three pointers and was simply unstoppable in the paint. His was just one of the outstanding performances on a night that featured a 40-point outburst from Boston Celtics star Jayson Tatum and a triple-double for Luka Doncic of the Dallas Mavericks.

Antetokounmpo set the tone early in Milwaukee, scoring 30 of the Bucks' 67 first-half points. Detroit managed to trim the deficit to 118-110 with 2:38 left to play, but Antetokounmpo stopped their momentum with a block of a driving Sekou Doumbouya shot, then grabbed the rebound of teammate Donte DiVincenzo's miss for a put-back basket that effectively ended the Pistons' comeback bid. "The blocked shot and the put-back was big," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said, adding that he wouldn't have

liked to see the deficit whittled further.

Detroit, playing without star Blake Griffin, also saw rookie Killian Hayes go down in the third quarter with a hip injury that kept him out the rest of the game. Boston's Tatum scored 21 of his season-best 40 in the second quarter as the Celtics rallied from an early deficit to beat the Toronto Raptors 126-114. Tatum connected on 11 of 19 shots from the field and was a perfect 13-for-13 from the free throw line as he fell one point shy of matching his career best.

The first meeting of the teams since Boston eliminated Toronto in the second round of the playoffs in September was in Tampa, Florida, where the Raptors are based, amid continuing coronavirus restrictions on travel to Canada. The Dallas Mavericks won a Texas tussle with the Rockets in Houston on the back of Doncic's first triple-double of the season. Doncic, who sat out Sunday with a quadriceps contusion, returned with a vengeance with 33 points, 16 rebounds and 11 assists as Dallas held off a late Rockets

push for a 113-100 victory.

The Slovenian star, still just 21, notched his 26th career triple-double. Tim Hardway Jr. added 30 points off the bench for Dallas, who led by as many as 16 in the third quarter. The Rockets, with 23 points from Christian Wood and 21 from James Harden, tied it up with 10 minutes remaining, but the Mavericks relentlessly pulled away again.

While Mavs coach Rick Carlisle conceded that Doncic came into the season "behind the curve" on his conditioning, he said his young star is clearly going in the right direction. "You can tell on the floor," Carlisle said. "You can see that he's getting better and better as each day goes by." The Philadelphia 76ers improved their league-leading record to 6-1 with a 118-101 victory over the Charlotte Hornets. Tobias Harris scored 22 points to lead seven Sixers players in double figures in the wire-to-wire win. Joel Embiid added 14 points and 11 rebounds, Danny Green contributed 13 points, and Ben Simmons had 12 points, 10 rebounds and six assists for Philadelphia.

Knicks find a way

New York's Julius Randle scored 28 points and pulled down 17 rebounds and Austin Rivers drilled a late three-pointer that helped the Knicks erase a 15-point third-quarter deficit in a 113-108 victory over the Hawks in Atlanta. In a back-and-forth battle, the Knicks seized an early double-digit lead only for Atlanta to take a four-point lead into halftime.

The Hawks pushed their lead to 15 with less than five minutes left in the third, but they couldn't hang on. "We didn't play great but we found a way to win," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said. Indiana's Malcolm Brogdon delivered the game-winner as the Pacers broke the New Orleans Pelicans' hearts 118-116 in overtime, having rallied from six points down with less than a minute remaining in regulation. There was no such drama for Golden State as Stephen Curry followed up Sunday's 62-point outburst with 30 points, nine rebounds and eight assists in the Warriors' 137-106 romp over the Sacramento Kings. — AFP

Red bull desert wings get their first taste of the dunes

KUWAIT: The 2021 Dakar Rally served up dunes for the first time and the change of terrain had a massive impact on the leaderboards. Stage Two ran from Bisha to Wadi Ad-Dawasir and featured 457 kilometers against the clock. With a host of navigation challenges as well as soft sand dunes - this was a classic Dakar stage. During the stage a three-way tussle emerged at the front of the car race that looks set to dominate the coming days at the Dakar. A stage win today for Nasser Al-Attiyah has lifted him to third overall, behind race leader Stephane Peterhansel and second placed Carlos Sainz.

"Today we went flat out from start to finish and everything worked really well for us." - Nasser Al-Attiyah Peterhansel now leads the general classification with a gap of 6m37s over fellow MINI JCW Buggy driver Sainz. Peterhansel, Sainz and Al-Attiyah have 13 Dakar car race wins between them and that number looks set to increase this year. "The dunes came near the start when we were carrying lots of fuel. The priority was not to get stuck." - Stephane Peterhansel

Kuba Przygonski and Sebastien Loeb have established themselves in the Top 10 after two stages while Ginie De Villiers and Cyril Despres remain in the hunt. It was a tough day at the Dakar for Red Bull KTM Factory Racing as they slipped off the top of the general classification. Two-time Dakar winner Toby Price opened the stage and immediately faced navigation challenges. The Australian also suffered a fuel tank issue which slowed him down. "I had to conserve fuel because I only had my front tanks. It was tough but it's something we can sort out tonight in the

bivouac." - Toby Price

Price's team-mate Sam Sunderland also conceded over 20 minutes to new race leader Joan Barreda. The news was worse for the third Red Bull KTM Factory Racing rider as Matthias Walkner endured technical issues and lost over two hours on first place. "It seems that whoever is opening each stage is losing a lot of time because of the nature of the terrain. It's not easy to have a mistake free run." - Sam Sunderland. Laia Sanz has been getting into her rhythm over the past two days at the Dakar. The top placed female biker at the previous 10 editions of the Dakar is out to keep her impressive record intact.

"It was a really fast stage and I'm happy with the rhythm I'm starting to find. Hopefully I can improve day by day." - Laia Sanz. Also, still on course to match their personal goals at the 2021 Dakar are Daniel Sanders, Stefan Svitko, Camille Chapeliere, CS Santosh and Mohammed Jaffar. "This is already the longest desert race I have done in my life and so far we've only had two stages! There's still such a long way to go." - Mohammed Jaffar

The lead changed hands once again in the Lightweight Vehicles category with Chaleco Lopez now holding top spot. Yesterday's stage winner Cristina Gutierrez sits in fourth overall, less than three minutes behind Lopez. "The sand was nice, and it was a great Dakar stage." - Chaleco Lopez. Gutierrez's fellow Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team drivers Seth Quintero and Mitch Guthrie Jr. also completed the 457km timed special stage, as did Mattias Ekstrom. "My main goal today was to try and stay in the car all day and not have any issues. That's exactly what we did." - Seth Quintero

A second consecutive stage win in the truck race for Dmitry Sotnikov has given him a cushion of over 17 minutes in the general classification. Sotnikov's Kamaz team-mates Anton Shibalov and Ayrat Mardeev are also in the Top 5. Ignacio Casale is seventh overall on his return to the truck category. "The feeling today was very nice. There were lots of dunes and strong competitors all



Mohammed Jaffar



Sam Sunderland



Sebastien Loeb

around me." - Ignacio Casale. There are more dunes for the 2021 Dakar Rally convoy to tackle tomorrow on Stage Three. The 403-kilometre timed special

stage will skirt the edges of the notorious Empty Quarter desert before returning competitors to the Wadi Ad-Dawasir bivouac.

Australia, India resume 'arm-wrestle' as COVID dominates Test build-up

SYDNEY: Australia and India resume their "arm-wrestle" Test series at 1-1 tomorrow after a build-up marred by a coronavirus outbreak in Sydney and concerns over a potential biosecurity breach by the Indian team. The four-Test series is finely poised after India, crushed by eight wickets in Adelaide — where they fell for their record low of 36 — emphatically bounced back in Melbourne. Spearheaded by stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane, who is deputizing during Virat Kohli's paternity leave, they levelled the series with their own eight-wicket win.

"The first two Tests have been tough cricket, it's 1-1 and that probably shows how close the series is," said Australia coach Justin Langer, describing the series as an "arm-wrestle". "We are very, very determined to get out of the blocks hard on Thursday." The series has also been eventful off the field with Sydney, which has raced to contain a new COVID-19 cluster, only confirmed as host of the third Test after the Melbourne game.

The Sydney Cricket Ground has slashed its available capacity from 50 to 25 percent - about 10,000 fans - after a public backlash over the potential health risks. Separately, five Indian players were spotted dining inside a Melbourne restaurant, in apparent contravention of biosecurity protocols. Australian officials have also played down reports claiming India are not keen on having the final Test in Brisbane, due to stricter quarantine arrangements there.

The weather could affect plans for both teams, with showers forecast for tomorrow and Friday. Run-shy Australia are set to make at least one change, with David Warner expected to return after missing the first two Tests with a groin strain, while fellow opener Joe Burns has been dumped. Warner's opening partner is still unknown. Will Pucovski has been given the all-clear from a concussion and could make his debut, although Marcus Harris is also waiting in the wings. — AFP

Sports

Liverpool stumble again in a 1-0 Southampton defeat

Klopp admits Liverpool suffering a 'rusty moment'

SOUTHAMPTON: Jurgen Klopp admitted Liverpool are suffering a "rusty moment" after a 1-0 defeat at Southampton extended the defending champions' winless run in the Premier League to three games. Danny Ings's stunning second-minute goal earned three points which moved Southampton into sixth and led to Saints manager Ralph Hasenhuttl breaking into tears of joy on the final whistle.

Liverpool remain top of the table on goal difference over Manchester United, but have now played a game more than the Red Devils, who they face in their next league game at Anfield on January 17. "That's a rusty moment we have to admit it," said Klopp, whose side last failed to win in three straight Premier League games back in May 2018. "Only if you know the problem can you solve the problem, we are not blind. We have to fight and play through this."

A first league defeat in three months may hasten Liverpool's search for a centre-back in the January transfer window. Without the injured Virgil van Dijk, Joe Gomez and Joel Matip, Klopp started two of his first-choice midfielders from their title-winning campaign, Fabinho and Jordan Henderson, together at the heart of his defense. Southampton had not scored in their last three games to temper their hopes of a push for European football, but took just two minutes to break the deadlock in style through former Liverpool striker Ings.

Trent Alexander-Arnold did not deal with James Ward-Prowse's angled free-kick into the box and Ings perfectly hooked his shot over Alisson Becker into the far corner. "It's not only the slow start, but the slow start made life massively difficult tonight," added Klopp. Southampton had key absentees themselves with goalkeeper Alex McCarthy missing

due to a positive test for coronavirus, while Oriol Romeu, Jannik Vestergaard and Che Adams were out injured. Fraser Forster was making his first Saints appearance since May 2019, but the former England international was rarely tested to earn his clean sheet.

'Perfect gameplan'

The visitors could easily have found themselves 2-0 down before the break when Southampton substitute Nathan Tella was inches away from his first senior goal. If Klopp's men were too passive in the first-half, they started the second-half with the intensity they have made their trademark in recent seasons as Southampton were pinned inside their own half. Sadio Mane was the visitors' biggest threat on his return to St Mary's as Jack Stephens made a last-ditch challenge to block his route to goal before Kyle Walker-Peters was lucky to escape without conceding a penalty for obstructing another burst from the Senegalese into the box.

Thiago Alcantara was making just his second Liverpool start since a much-anticipated move from Bayern Munich, but even the Spaniard's range of passing could not cut through Southampton's determined defense. "I started believing we can do it in the 92nd minute, not earlier," said Hasenhuttl. "They are so strong in front you always believe something can happen. We had to have a perfect gameplan today and luck. Without luck against such a team you cannot win." Mane had Liverpool's only shot on target 15 minutes from time when his tame effort was easily held by Forster low to his left.

Southampton could have sealed a huge win moments later when Alisson was caught well off his



SOUTHAMPTON: Southampton's English defender Jack Stephens (center) vies with Liverpool's Brazilian midfielder Roberto Firmino (right) during the English Premier League football match between Southampton and Liverpool on January 4, 2021. —AFP

line by Yan Valery, whose shot lacked the power to beat Henderson in a race to the goal line. Liverpool so often dug themselves out of problems with late goals in romping to the title last season, but have failed to do so over the festive period, also dropping

points against struggling West Brom and Newcastle. United and Manchester City now hold the upper hand in the title race as they can both move ahead of Liverpool should they win their games in hand. —AFP

Uruguayan players' union brands English FA 'racist'

LONDON: The Uruguayan Football Players' Association (AFU) launched a scathing attack on the English Football Association (FA) on Monday for banning Manchester United striker Edinson Cavani over a social media post the governing body ruled was in breach of anti-racism rules. Cavani posted a message on Instagram shortly after scoring twice in United's 3-2 win over Southampton where he thanked a friend for his congratulations using the commonly used Spanish term "negrito" (small black person).

The former Paris Saint-Germain striker swiftly deleted the post and issued an apology after being made aware of the connotations in English, with the player releasing an apologetic statement saying he

was "completely opposed to racism". That did not stop the FA imposing a three-match ban and a £100,000 (\$137,000) fine. The sanction has sparked outrage in Uruguay with the country's Spanish language academy saying the FA had made a "questionable resolution" as a result of its "poverty of cultural and linguistic knowledge."

In a lengthy statement the AFU went further, accusing the FA themselves of racism for not acknowledging the context in which the post was sent. "Unfortunately through this sanction the English Football Association expresses absolute ignorance and disdain for a multicultural vision of the world," said the AFU. "It has not just punished one person, but also a whole culture, our way of life, which is truly a discriminatory and racist act."

Cavani has already served one match of his suspension in United's 2-1 win over Aston Villa on Friday. But the AFU still called for it to be overturned to clear his name from a racism charge. "We request the FA to immediately overturn the sanction imposed on Edinson Cavani and reinstate the good name and honor in the world that has been so



Manchester United's Uruguayan striker Edinson Cavani

unfairly tarnished by this reprehensible decision." The AFU statement has been widely shared by prominent players such as Atletico Madrid striker Luis Suarez, who himself was at the centre of a racism storm during his time in England with Liverpool. —AFP

Premier League continues amid new lockdown

LONDON: Premier League football and other forms of elite professional sport in England will be allowed to continue despite new national lockdown restrictions announced by the British government on Monday. Nearly 56 million people in England will return to a full coronavirus lockdown, possibly until mid-February, to try to cut spiraling infection rates, Prime Minister Boris

Johnson said in a televised address. The measures, which include the closure of primary and secondary schools, will come into effect Wednesday, he said after Scotland announced similar measures to come into force from midnight (0000 GMT). But a list of exemptions published by the UK government allowed "elite sportspeople (and their coaches if necessary, or parents/guardians if they are under 18) — or those on an official elite sports pathway — to compete and train".

One key point in determining whether a sporting competition can go ahead will be if it has, as the Premier League does, a testing regime and the provision of bio-secure bubbles in place. Matches, however, will continue to be played behind closed doors.

Prior to Johnson's announcement, England Netball announced their home series with Jamaica, scheduled for late January, had been postponed because of international travel restrictions between Britain and the Caribbean island imposed as a result of the pandemic.

A lockdown similar to the one introduced in England in March last year as a result of a rising number of COVID-19 cases means outdoor gyms, golf courses and tennis courts will close, with amateur outdoor team sports prohibited. Johnson's announcement followed a statement earlier on Monday by Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister of Scotland, that will see professional sport continuing in Scotland despite rising numbers of COVID-19 cases. —AFP

The Crown Prince Cup tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Qadesiya faced off against Tadhamon while Kuwait battled Burqan as the four teams made it to the semi-finals of the HH the Crown Prince Cup tournament. The final two quarter-final matches saw Qadesiya defeat Arabi 1-0 with great difficulty while Tadhamon defeated Jahra 2-1. Qadesiya started the match by scoring a goal in the 2nd minute only to be disallowed by the referee after consulting with the VAR. Qadesiya lost several scoring opportunities as Arabi's goalkeeper kept his net intact.

The second half continued the same as the first half until the 74th minute when the referee awarded Qadesiya a penalty kick after confirming his decision by VAR. Bader Al-Mutwaa succeeded in scoring a goal in two attempts as the referee made him kick it for the second time. The referee then issued a red card to Qadesiya's Redha Hani for a foul play.

Arabi was not able to take advantage of Qadesiya's deficiency. Arabi's Bandar Al-Salama had an opportunity to score and demanded a penalty kick but the referee decided it was an offside — again after consulting the VAR. Abdallah Ammar from Arabi was issued a red card following a reckless foul against Eid Al-Rashidi. The match ended with 1-0 after a lengthy added time.

In an earlier match, Tadhamon made sure they were among the four final teams when they met Jahra by winning their match 2-1. Tadhamon's



Yousuf Enaizan scored first, then Yousuf Al-Rashidi equalized for Jahra. As the regular time was about to end,



Tadhamon was awarded a foul through which Rashed Al-Mutairi scored the winner.



Solskjaer wants trophies to show for Utd progress

LONDON: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer believes winning the League Cup would be a "big step" in Manchester United's development as he prepares for today's semi-final showdown with Manchester City at Old Trafford. United went out to Pep Guardiola's men in the final four of the competition last season, before losing in the semis of the FA Cup and Europa League.

However, the Red Devils had a third-place finish in the Premier League behind City and runaway winners Liverpool to show for Solskjaer's first full season in charge. United have pushed on again this season in the league to find themselves level on points with Liverpool at the top of the table with a game in hand on the champions.

"A semi-final is a chance to get to the final, to get your hands on a trophy in the next round and for this team it would be a very, very big step getting your hands on a trophy," said Solskjaer. —AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH LEAGUE CUP	
Manchester United v Manchester City	22:45
beIN Sports HD 1	
SPANISH LEAGUE	
Athletic de Bilbao v FC Barcelona	23:00
beIN Sports HD 3	
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE	
Cagliari Calcio v Benevento	14:30
beIN Sports HD 4	
Atalanta v Parma Calcio	17:00
beIN Sports HD 5	
Bologna FC v Udinese Calcio	17:00
beIN Sports HD 8	
Crotone v AS Roma	17:00
beIN Sports HD 6	
SS Lazio v ACF Fiorentina	17:00
beIN Sports HD 7	
UC Sampdoria v Inter Milano	17:00
beIN Sports HD 4	
US Sassuolo Calcio v Genoa	17:00
beIN Sports HD 3	
Torino v Hellas Verona	17:00
beIN Sports	
SSC Napoli v Spezia Calcio	20:00
beIN Sports HD 1	
AC Milan v Juventus	22:45
beIN Sports HD 4	
FRENCH LEAGUE	
Lorient v AS Monaco	21:00
beIN Sports HD 6	
Stade brestois 29 v Nice	21:00
beIN Sports HD 9	
FC Metz v Bordeaux	21:00
beIN Sports HD 8	
Strasbourg v Nimes Olympique	21:00
beIN Sports HD 10	
Nantes v Stade Rennais	21:00
beIN Sports HD 7	
Olympique Marseille v Montpellier	23:00
beIN Sports HD 8	
Stade Reims v FCO Dijon	23:00
beIN Sports HD 10	
Lyon v Racing Club de Lens	23:00
beIN Sports HD 9	
Saint Etienne v Paris Saint-Germain	23:00
beIN Sports HD 6	
LOSC Lille v Angers	23:00
beIN Sports HD 7	

14 Antetokounmpo's 43 points fuel Bucks to 125-115 victory



15 Uruguayan players' union brands English FA 'racist'



15 Liverpool stumble again in a 1-0 Southampton defeat



South Africa complete series win

South Africa beat Sri Lanka by 10 wickets for series sweep



JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's Aiden Markram (center) watches the ball after playing a shot as Sri Lanka's wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella (left) looks on during the third day of the second Test cricket match between South Africa and Sri Lanka at the Wanderers stadium in Johannesburg yesterday. — AFP

JOHANNESBURG: Dimuth Karunaratne's century could not prevent South Africa from completing a 2-0 series win on the third day of the second Test against Sri Lanka at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg yesterday. South Africa won by 10 wickets after Sri Lanka were bowled out for 211 in their second innings. Set to make 67 runs to win, the hosts sealed their victory half an hour after lunch. Karunaratne, the Sri Lankan captain, made 103 after starting the day on 91. His dismissal started a collapse in which Sri Lanka lost their last six wickets for 35 runs. Lungi Ngidi took four for 44 and fellow fast bowler Lutho Sipamla

ripped through the tail to take three for 40. Karunaratne and Niroshan Dickwella started brightly after Sri Lanka resumed on 150 for four. Karunaratne went to a 123-ball century with two successive off-side boundaries off Anrich Nortje but an attempted pull off the same bowler looped off a top edge to backward square leg. Ngidi followed up with the wicket of Dickwella in the next over when a leading edge carried to mid-off and there was minimal resistance from the rest of the batting. Aiden Markram batted aggressively at the start of the final innings but escaped when he edged a loose drive

against Vishwa Fernando with his score on 14 in the last over before lunch.

Kusal Mendis dived forward from second slip and appeared to take a good catch but a television review showed he had taken the ball on the bounce. Markram finished on 36 not out while Dean Elgar followed up his 127 in the first innings with 31 not out. Elgar made 253 runs in the series and was only dismissed twice. It was South Africa's first Test series win since they defeated Pakistan 3-0 in South Africa in 2018/19. A surprise 2-0 home defeat against Sri Lanka in the same series started a

sequence of three successive series losses. South Africa will depart soon for their first series in Pakistan since 2007/08. The first of two Tests starts in Karachi on January 26. Sri Lanka will return home on a chartered flight and go straight to Galle, where they will play two Tests against England, starting on January 14. Sri Lanka were hit hard by injuries in South Africa. Four players were injured during the first Test and could not play in Johannesburg, while leading fast bowler Suranga Lakmal and opening batsman Oshada Fernando were unable to play in either match because of injuries. — AFP

'Freak' Williamson's masterful 238 leaves Pakistan in trouble

CHRISTCHURCH: Kane Williamson underscored his ranking as the world's premier batsman with a masterful double century as New Zealand took control of the second Test against Pakistan yesterday. In between the showers at Hagley Oval in Christchurch, Williamson was in classic form, batting for nine hours 33 minutes for his 238 and leading New Zealand to an imposing 659 for six declared to lead Pakistan by 362.

At stumps on day three, the tourists were already in trouble at eight for one, with Kyle Jamieson adding to his five-wicket haul in the first innings by removing Shan Masood for a duck. It was a relentless performance from Williamson who became only the second New Zealander after Brendon McCullum to score four double centuries.

Daryl Mitchell, who wondered if he would ever get a bat while Williamson was at the crease, described his skipper as "a freak who's set us up with a chance to win". Williamson delayed the declaration until Mitchell completed his maiden century and the all-rounder said despite his unbeaten 102 off 112 balls it remained a good pitch for the bowlers and should produce a result. "If we put it in the right areas and bang those hard lengths, there is a lot of pace there and hopefully we can put Pakistan under some pressure and see what happens," he said.

Williamson should have been out for 177 on the first ball after the first of two rain stoppages, but as



CHRISTCHURCH: New Zealand's captain Kane Williamson plays a shot on day three of the second cricket Test match between New Zealand and Pakistan at Hagley Oval in Christchurch yesterday. — AFP

has happened several times in the Test the chance was put down, this time by Azhar Ali, who earlier in the day had dropped Henry Nicholls short of his century. Pakistan spinner Zafar Gohar, who went for an expensive 159 off 32 overs on debut, said the fielding errors hurt. "The dropped catches cost us. There is no reason to drop catches but it happens in cricket," he said. "Dropping Kane Williamson cost us a lot of big runs."

Williamson and Nicholls had rebuilt the innings after New Zealand were reduced to 71 for three on Monday's second day. By the time Nicholls was dismissed early in the afternoon session for 157, the pair had put on 369, the third-best all-time partnership for New Zealand and a record for the fourth wicket. The day had resumed with New Zealand 286 for three, 11 runs in arrears and with conditions favourable for the bowlers who had cloud cover and a ball only five overs old. —AFP

Al-Attiyah wins Dakar 3rd stage

WADI AD-DAWASIR: Qatari driver Nasser Al-Attiyah won the third stage of the Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia yesterday, holding off the challenge of French arch-rival Stephane Peterhansel. The three-time winner of the Dakar sped through a 403km loop around Wadi ad-Dawasir, the gateway to the Empty Quarter, a vast sand desert that covers much of the southern Arabian Peninsula, in 3hr 17min 39sec to take the victory.

Already winner of the prologue and Monday's second stage, Al-Attiyah finished 2:27 ahead of Toyota teammate Henk Lategan of South Africa. "I'm quite happy," said Al-Attiyah, also an Olympic bronze medalist in the skeet at the 2012 London Games. "Today we really pushed a lot and Mathieu (Baumel, co-pilot) did the navigation well. Everything is working very well like we need it to. "I'm really quite happy with the pace, because to open and to win the stage is good." Peterhansel, a 13-time Dakar winner, consolidated



WADI AD-DAWASIR: Toyota's driver Nasser Al-Attiyah of Qatar and his co-driver Mathieu Baumel of France compete during Stage 3 of the Dakar Rally 2021 around Wadi Ad-Dawasir, in Saudi Arabia yesterday. — AFP

his lead in the overall standings with a third-placed finish, 4:05 off the pace.

The Frenchman, whose previous Dakar victories came seven times in a car and six on a motorbike, said a mixed terrain including big rocks, sandy canyons, dunes and a fast plateau had made it "a really complete stage". "The result is not perfect because of the puncture," he said in reference to an early incident. "But I'm really happy with the job done by Edouard Boulanger, my co-pilot. In the complicated places, he did a really good job.

I'm happy with the car and I'm

happy with the co-pilot, so it's good for the next day."

Two-time winner Toby Price clocked 3hr 33min 23sec in winning the motorbike category for his 13th Dakar stage win, the Australian KTM rider tracking down Argentinean Kevin Benavides (Honda) in a gripping race. Price, winner of the Dakar in 2016 and 2019, finished just 1:16 ahead of Benavides-later extended by a 2min penalty for the Argentine - and now sits third in the overall standings behind new American leader Skyler Howes and Frenchman Xavier de Soultrait. —AFP