



3 French envoy hails Kuwait's role in Gulf reconciliation



6 Trump backer seen in horned fur hat charged in Capitol violence



13 Omanis revive memory of village engulfed by desert



15 Leeds stunned by Crawley; Chelsea, Man City advance



REGISTER TODAY
for the COVID-19 vaccine [See Page 16](#)

MoE scraps first semester exams at public schools

Assembly committee votes to limit public sector jobs to Kuwaitis

Kuwait identifies 13 more martyrs

KUWAIT: Kuwait identified 13 more of its martyrs through DNA tests conducted by the ministry of interior's forensics department, the head of the POWs and missing persons committee at the ministry of foreign affairs Rabea Al-Adsani said yesterday.

The martyrs are Bader Hussein Murad Al-Kandari, Suleiman Kadhim Qatie Ali Taher, Tariq Mohammad Ahmad Abdullah Al-Yaqout, Abdulrahman Abdulaziz Abdullah Al-Showaimani, Abdulmahdi Abdulhameed Mohammad Maarafi Behbehani, Essa Mohammad Zaman Mohammad, Kamil Abdulrahman Mohammad Nasser Al-Fayez, Mohammad Saad Masoud Al-Ahmad, Mohammad Saleh Mohammad Suleiman Al-Muhaini, Mosfer Shabib Mohammad Al-Dousari, Mahdi Habeeb Ali Zaid Al-Boloushi, Mustafa Hussein Ahmad Mohammad Al-Qattan and Yousif Zaid Zamel Saud Al-Zamel.

The remains of the martyrs arrived in Kuwait from Iraq along with the remains that were identified



in November, Adsani said. He hailed the sacrifice and courage of Kuwait's martyrs to defend their land during the Iraqi invasion in 1990. He thanked the Iraqi authorities, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UN mission for facilitating the process, adding that it wasn't easy to identify the bodies since they had been interred for a very long time. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The education ministry announced yesterday that there will be no paper or online exams for the first semester of the current scholastic year (2020-2021) at public and private Arabic schools. Acting undersecretary Faisal Al-Maqseed said in a statement after a meeting with ministry officials that studies will continue online at all levels and in all schools.

Maqseed indicated there are several proposals regarding the method of assessing students' levels. In July last year, the Cabinet ended the 2019-2020 academic year and announced all students were deemed to have passed. The current academic year began in October.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly's legal and legislative committee yesterday approved draft laws calling to ban the appointment of expats in public jobs unless there are no Kuwaitis to fill the vacancies. Currently, around 100,000 expats are employed in public sector jobs in government ministries and state bodies, along with over 300,000 Kuwaitis.

Head of the committee MP Khaled Al-Enezi told reporters the committee cleared the bills and referred them to the con-



cerned panel that should study and give the final approval before sending them to the house for passage. Enezi said the bills state that no foreigner will be appointed in public sector jobs unless no Kuwaiti citizen applies for the said job. The aim of the bills is to nationalize all jobs in the public sector.

The Assembly has passed a number of laws in the past, all calling to speed up the replacement of expats in public sector jobs. Enezi also said the committee cleared a draft law calling to establish a special agency for alternative energy, saying Kuwait is far behind in this field.

Also, leading opposition MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri yesterday called for appointing a

new prime minister capable of taking decisions and fighting corruption. It was reported last week that the Cabinet, formed just three weeks ago, submitted its resignation to HH the Amir after three opposition lawmakers filed to grill HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah.

The resignation has not been announced but the government boycotted Wednesday's Assembly session and ministers have been boycotting Assembly panel meetings. Muwaizri said the new prime minister must be capable of carrying out much needed reforms and resolving crises that have hounded the country for decades, like the housing problem. He claimed only five percent of the Kuwaiti people are monopolizing the wealth of the country, "and this situation should not be allowed to continue".

Muwaizri insisted that the government has so far failed to cooperate with MPs to issue a much-delayed general pardon to allow a group of Kuwaiti opposition former MPs and activists, who have been living in exile for over two years to escape prison terms, to return. The constitutional court meanwhile set Jan 20 to start hearing a number of challenges to the general election results.

A year after first death, coronavirus source still a puzzle

WUHAN, China: It is the world's most pressing scientific puzzle, but experts warn there may never be conclusive answers over the source of the coronavirus, after an investigative effort marked from the start by disarray, Chinese secrecy and international rancor. Jan 11 marks the anniversary of China confirming its first death from COVID-19, a 61-year-old man who was a regular at the now-notorious Wuhan wet market.

Nearly two million deaths later, the pandemic is out of control across much of the world, leaving tens of millions ill, a pulverized global economy and recriminations flying between nations. Yet China, which has broadly controlled the pandemic on its soil, is still frustrating independent attempts to trace the virus' origins and the central question of how it jumped from animals to humans.

There is little dispute that the virus which brought the world to its knees sparked its first known outbreak in late 2019 at a wet market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan where wildlife was sold as food, and the pathogen is believed to have originated in an undetermined bat species. But the trail ends there, clouded by a mishmash of subsequent clues that suggest its origins may predate Wuhan as well as conspiracy theories - amplified by US President Donald Trump - that it leaked from a Wuhan lab.

Establishing the source is vital for extinguishing future outbreaks early, leading virologists say, providing clues that can guide policy decisions on whether to cull animal populations, quarantine affected persons, or limit wildlife hunting and other human-animal interactions. "If we can identify why they (viruses) keep emerging, we can reduce those underlying drivers," said Peter Daszak, president of EcoHealth Alliance, a global NGO focused on infectious disease prevention.

Continued on Page 2

Black boxes of crashed plane found

JAKARTA: Body parts, twisted wreckage and clothing were plucked from waters off the Indonesian capital yesterday after a passenger jet with 62 people aboard crashed shortly after take-off a day earlier. Authorities have yet to say why the Sriwijaya Air Boeing 737-500 went into a steep dive about four minutes after it left Soekarno-Hatta international airport on Saturday afternoon.

But yesterday, they said that they had pinpointed the location of its black boxes - cockpit voice and flight data recorders - that could be key to explaining why the plane slammed into the Java Sea off the sprawling city's coast. The search and rescue agency said it had collected body bags filled with human remains, as well as debris from the wreckage, in waters about 23 m deep.

Passengers Ihsan Adhlan Hakim and his new bride Putri were headed to Pontianak, the city on Indonesia's section of Borneo island which had been flight SJ182's destination, about 90 minutes away.

"He called me to say that the flight was delayed due to bad weather," Hakim's brother Arwin said from Pontianak, where a wedding celebration had been planned for the newlyweds. "That was the last time I had contact with him."

Beben Sofian, 59, and her husband Dan Razanah,

Elated Qataris stream into Saudi Arabia

SAUDI ARABIA: Qataris celebrated crossing their border with Saudi Arabia yesterday, calling the kingdom "our second country", as Doha readied its strict coronavirus measures for Saudis to enter following a Gulf diplomatic thaw. Drivers arrived at the Salwa border crossing in Saudi Arabia, 500 km east of the capital Riyadh, from the Qatari land crossing at Abu Samrah for the second day following its re-



Indonesian navy divers hold wreckage from Sriwijaya Air flight SJY182 during a search and rescue operation at sea near Lancang island yesterday. — AFP

opening, AFP correspondents reported. "Coming from Qatar is like coming to our second country, where there's no difference between them and us in their traditions," said Mohammed Al-Marri, a Qatari who had travelled into Saudi Arabia. Since the re-opening of the border, 167 Qatari cars had entered Saudi Arabia, while 35 Qatari vehicles had crossed back into Qatar, said Ali Lablabi, general manager of Salwa's customs department. "This happiness - no one can describe it," said Ghaith Al-Marri, a Qatari. "There are people who started crying" when the border re-opened, he said.

Qatar Airways and Saudi Airlines announced Saturday on Twitter that they would begin resuming flights between their countries from today. Qatar has announced strict coronavirus control measures for those arriving from Saudi Arabia. Doha will

require travellers to present a negative coronavirus test, undergo another test at the frontier and quarantine in a government-approved hotel for one week.

Just one hour from the Salwa border crossing lies Al-Ahsa, a desert oasis where Qatari shoppers once kept the local economy humming, crossing over to buy affordable supplies including dates and milk. The deep-pocketed residents of gas-rich Qatar - one of the world's wealthiest countries per capita - also pumped millions of riyals into Saudi hotels, date plantations and other real estate.

But the money dried up when the embargo shut the Qataris out, unleashing economic pain and dividing extended families on both sides, an unintended consequence of a policy meant to hurt Doha's government. — AFP

Continued on Page 2

Local

Kuwait Amir receives newly-appointed members of the Constitutional Court

Sheikh Nawaf meets Crown Prince, senior state officials



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Minister of Justice Dr Nawaf Al-Yassin, President of the Constitutional Court Justice Mohammad Jassem bin Naji and the newly-appointed members of the Constitutional Court. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Minister of Justice Dr Nawaf Al-Yassin, President of the Constitutional Court Justice Mohammad Jassem bin Naji and the newly-appointed members of the Constitutional Court

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received, at Seif Palace yesterday, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received National Assembly speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, and Deputy Premier and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh. His Highness the Amir also received Minister of Justice Dr Nawaf Al-Yassin and President of the Constitutional Court Justice Mohammad Jassem bin Naji. They were accompanied by Justices Fuad Khaled Al-Zuwayed,

Adel Ali Al-Bahoh and Waleed Ibrahim Al-Mejel who took oath before His Highness the Amir on the occasion of their appointments as members of the Constitutional Court. The meeting was attended by Amiri Diwan Minister Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah, Amiri Diwan President Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Al-Sabah, Deputy Amiri Diwan Minister Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Sabah, Director of His Highness the Amir's Office and Amiri Diwan Undersecretary Ahmad Al-Fahad and head of Amiri Diwan Protocols Sheikh Khaled Abdullah Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received Speaker Ghanem, Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali, Saleh, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser

Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. His Highness Sheikh Mishal also received minister Yassin, judge Naji and the newly-appointed members of the Constitutional Court. Furthermore, His Highness the Prime Minister also received the Justice Minister and the Constitutional Court's new members.

In other news, His Highness the Amir congratulated, in a cable yesterday, Sultan Haitham bin Tareq of Oman on the anniversary of his ascension to the throne. His Highness the Amir commended the "fraternal and historic" relations between Kuwait and Oman, and the development achievements in the Sultanate. His Highness the Amir wished Sultan Haitham good

health, and for Oman and its people further progress and prosperity under his leadership. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables.

Separately, His Highness the Amir expressed condolences to Indonesian President Joko Widodo over the victims of the ill-fated Indonesian airplane which plunged into the Java Sea, killing all passengers. His Highness the Amir prayed to Allah Almighty to bestow blessings upon the deceased, and solace to their families. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister also extended condolences to President Widodo over the victims of the ill-fated plane. — KUNA

Black boxes of crashed...

Continued from Page 1

Data from FlightRadar24 indicated that the airliner reached an altitude of nearly 11,000 feet (3,350 m) before dropping suddenly to 250 feet. It then lost contact with air traffic control. The transport minister said Saturday that the jet appeared to deviate from its intended course just before it disappeared from radar.

"The aircraft's final moments are... very concerning as the speed that (it) was flying at that altitude was much lower than expected," said Stephen Wright, professor of aircraft systems

at Finland's Tampere University. "The last seconds saw the aircraft rapidly descend from 10,000 feet to the sea in a matter of 20 seconds, which implies a catastrophic event or something deliberate."

But he added that the crash can "only be fully explained once the black boxes and wreckage can be properly analyzed". Sriwijaya Air, which operates flights to destinations in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, has said little so far about the 26-year-old plane, which was previously flown by US-based Continental Airlines and United Airlines. — AFP

A year after first death...

Continued from Page 1

China won early kudos for reporting the virus and releasing its gene sequence in a timely manner, compared with its cover-up of the 2002-03 SARS outbreak. But there has also been secrecy and shifting stories. Wuhan authorities initially tried to cover up the outbreak and later spent precious weeks denying human-to-human transmission.

Early on, Chinese officials declared flatly that the outbreak began at the Huanan Seafood Market in Wuhan. But Chinese data in Jan 2020 showed that several of the first cases had no known links to the now-shuttered market, suggesting a source elsewhere. China's story morphed again last March when top Chinese disease control official Gao Fu said the market was not the source, but a "victim", a place where the pathogen was merely amplified.

But China has since failed to publicly connect any dots, releasing scant information on animal and environmental samples taken at the market that could aid investigators, experts say. And it has kept foreign experts at arm's length, with a planned mission by World Health Organization virus sleuths now in limbo after China denied them entry. On Saturday, a top Chinese health official said the country was now "ready" for the 10-strong team and opened the door to a visit to Wuhan. Yet "the specific time is being determined", National Health Commission vice minister Zeng Yixin told reporters.

What the scientists will be allowed to see or may expect to find a year on is also in doubt. Experts say authorities may have destroyed or scrubbed away crucial evidence in a panicked initial response. "Every outbreak goes the same way. It's chaotic and dysfunctional," said Daszak. "They didn't do a great job on the animal investigation early on," he added. "In some ways, they were quite open, in others they were less than open."

The reasons for China's secrecy are unclear, but the ruling Communist Party has a history of suppressing politically damaging information. Whistleblowers and citizen reporters who shared details of the terrifying early weeks of the virus on the Internet have since been muzzled or jailed. Beijing may want to hide regu-

latory or investigative lapses to avoid domestic embarrassment or global "blowback", said Daniel Lucey, a Georgetown University epidemiologist who closely tracks global outbreaks.

The Wuhan market might not even be the issue, Lucey adds. He notes that the virus was already spreading rapidly in Wuhan by Dec 2019, indicating that it was in circulation much earlier. That's because it may take months or even years for a virus to develop the necessary mutations to become highly contagious among humans. The market-origin theory is "just not plausible whatsoever", Lucey said. "It occurred naturally and it had to have been many months earlier, perhaps a year, perhaps more than a year."

Augmenting the doubt, in December China said the number of coronavirus cases circulating in Wuhan may have been 10 times higher early in the epidemic than revealed by official figures at the time. The trail has now gone cold, with the drip of subsequent clues only adding to the confusion, including findings that the virus may have existed in Europe and Brazil before Wuhan's outbreak, unconfirmed suggestions which China has seized upon to deflect blame.

Daszak remains hopeful the source can be found, especially after US President Donald Trump's re-election loss. He blames Trump for killing cooperation with China by politicizing the virus - typified by his "China virus" label - and his administration's promotion of the conspiracy theory that China created it in a lab, which scientists reject. "I'm confident we will eventually find out the bat species it came from and the likely pathway," Daszak said.

Others are less certain. Diana Bell, a wildlife disease expert at the University of East Anglia who has studied the SARS virus, Ebola and other pathogens, said focusing on a particular origin species is misguided. She says the overarching threat has already been exposed: A global wildlife trade that fosters a "combustible mix" of trafficked species, a known breeding ground for disease outbreaks. "(The species) actually doesn't matter. We don't need to know the source, we just need to stop that sodding mixing of animals in markets," she said. "We need to stop the wildlife trade for human consumption." — AFP

Zain reopens Farwaniya branch with fresh look



KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the reopening of its main branch in Farwaniya with a new and fresh look. The reopened branch leaps in its design beyond the traditional branch concept by offering the latest tech products and smart devices from the world's biggest brands, as well as providing a wide range of digital services to serve Zain customers, who make up the biggest family of subscribers in Kuwait.

Zain celebrated the occasion with its customers by giving away valuable gifts and smart devices to the first 100 customers who visited the new reopened branch to complete any transaction. The company's plan to reopen the branch in a fresh look came after the great success witnessed by a group of other branches - including Mishref Cooperative Society, Kuwait International Airport, and Al-Hamra Shopping Center's branches - that were all recently reopened in a similar fashion and considered the first of their kind by a telecom operator in Kuwait.

Zain's reopened branch in Farwaniya, opposite Ali Fahad Al-Dewailah Street, features the latest special and exclusive offers for prepaid and postpaid customers, while also offering the best customer care and digital services. The branch also offers tech enthusiasts with a wide range of the latest electronics and original accessories from the world's biggest tech brands, including laptops, video game consoles, drones, headphones and speakers, cases and covers, and much more.

The new branch also offers customers a chance to try Zain's super-fast 5G network and learn about the huge capabilities behind this revolutionary technology. Additionally, the branch features a dedicated section for Zain LIFE's innovative home security solutions, including smart cameras, motion sensors, smart smoke detectors, and more.

Zain affirmed its utmost adherence in implementing strict health precautionary measures within the reopened branch to protect the health and safety of both customers and staff. This includes health measures such as sanitization and body temperature check-ups, as well as social distancing protocols and more.

Zain implements many strict precautionary measures within all its

branches located all around the country. This includes full sanitization of all branches, furniture, and devices/equipment, as well as thermal cameras to detect body temperatures from a safe distance. See-through dividers separate customers and staff in a safe manner during transactions, while enabling sound to pass efficiently in order to achieve the best customer experience possible.

Zain has also supplied all branches and self-service machines with awareness stickers and banners to remind customers of health guidelines and social distancing goals while waiting. Some seats were marked unavailable inside every branch to guarantee a safe space between customers while seated.

Zain has trained branch staff on all health guidelines and precautions, including wearing face masks at all times, not allowing anyone to enter the branch in case they do not follow the needed precautionary measures or show an unaverage body temperature reading. Branches are also periodically sanitized as per the highest health standards before opening, and K-NET pay machines, pens used for signatures, and other equipment are sanitized after each transaction. Any important/official papers will be stored in a safe place and not kept exposed.

Zain has reopened a number of other branches with the same above concept to ensure offering the best customer experience in a bigger number of locations. Reopened branches include Mishref Cooperative Society, Kuwait International Airport, Al-Hamra Shopping Center, Saad Al-Abdullah Cooperative Society, Al-Salam Cooperative Society, Mubarak Al-Abdullah Cooperative Society, Al-Jabriya, Aswaq Al-Qurain, and Hawalli.

Zain always aspires to new levels of excellence in all services it offers to its customers. Through the reopening of these branches, Zain affirms its continuous efforts in meeting its customers' needs and aspirations, and delivers its promise of offering the best services and latest technologies. The company constantly looks at ways to improve the retail experience for its customers, including providing them with the latest solutions to better serve their needs through the biggest network of branches in Kuwait.



Local

Kuwait played 'key mediator' role in GCC reconciliation: French envoy

French Defense Minister Florence Parly to visit Kuwait next week

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Ambassador of France to Kuwait Anne-Claire Legendre lauded Kuwait for the critical role it played as a key regional mediator in bringing about reconciliation amongst GCC states. Speaking to the local media at her residence in Jabriya yesterday, Legendre said Paris welcomes this result very warmly. "We hope it will bring further positive results for regional stability. Kuwait has been playing a critical role in these negotiations and we would not be where we are today without Kuwait's mediation role," she said.

Asked whether Kuwait could play a bigger role in other important regional issues, Legendre said Kuwait, through its GCC reconciliation efforts, had proven itself as a key regional mediator, upholding a long tradition of Kuwait being able to speak to all powers in the region and finding ways towards dialogue and reconciliation.

Speaking to local reporters for the first time after presenting her credentials to HH the Amir on Dec 22, 2020, Legendre expressed readiness to work with Kuwait in all areas. "I am glad to meet the members of the press for the first time. We are looking forward to working side by side with the authorities here in 2021. Our relationship with Kuwait is a deeply-grounded historic partnership. We not only enjoy a very strong political relationship, but also in security, economy, culture and beyond," she said.

"2021 will be a very important year for all of us. We start with renewed ambitions, especially for French-Kuwait relations, because we are going to celebrate two important celebrations and anniversaries. Thirty years ago, France was part of the liberation of Kuwait, so we are celebrating this very

important commitment by France to Kuwait's security, a commitment that has continued. On January 16, 1991, President Francois Mitterrand announced that France was ready to enter military operations against Iraqi soldiers who had invaded Kuwait," Legendre said.

"Fourteen thousand French soldiers were involved in the liberation (of Kuwait) 30 years ago and 10 were killed, so this is something that will be commemorated as well in France," she added. Ambassador Legendre indicated that she expected more high-level visits to Kuwait this year, noting that a strategic dialogue was upgraded in November from the administrative to the ministerial level, which shows "how much we want to deepen our dialogue and political relations".

Health cooperation

Legendre said both countries were seeking more cooperation within the health sector in light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as well as partnership in a variety of fields including defense, where France is very eager on protecting its interests, in addition to the interests and security of its allies such as Kuwait.

The ambassador said France and Kuwait have a roadmap for health cooperation and acknowledged there is room for improvement. "We signed an agreement for training more health professionals; we have an agreement we signed in 2012 to train more doctors, but we want to go further and include leading medical educational institutions to develop their training capacity in Kuwait, especially in the field of oncology and management of hospitals," Legendre said. "We share the same DNA when it comes to multilateral actions on health. We both agree that all must have access to

the COVID vaccine."

On defense and security, Legendre said this area is critical to Paris' relationship with Kuwait. "That is why French Defense Minister Florence Parly will visit Kuwait next week to reiterate our commitment to Kuwait's defense and security and regional stability. This means we are ready to cooperate and boost Kuwait's capabilities in terms of defense and security by training cadets. Many of them are trained at the best military academy in France. We want to enhance training programs not just for top military officers, but also special forces, specifically for fighter jet pilots and coastguard and border patrols," she said.

"We are also supporting the capabilities of Kuwait in terms of military equipment. At the end of 2020, we delivered two military helicopters to the Kuwait Air Force and National Guard and 28 more are coming. This is the time for critical partnership, even during the pandemic. In 2020, we also delivered 300 armored vehicles to the defense ministry and National Guard. Our defense forces conduct military exercises with the Kuwaiti armed forces every two years," Legendre mentioned.

Education and culture

On education and cultural cooperation, Legendre said this area is also very important to France, with cooperation in this field starting in 1966. "I am glad to say that Kuwait is the very first country in the region that signed education and cultural cooperation with France. We want to strengthen our cooperation in education. We have many agreements with educational institutions here. We want to create more programs to benefit both countries' peoples. We partnered with Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research; we want to encour-



KUWAIT: Ambassador of France to Kuwait Anne-Claire Legendre speaks to the local media yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

age more Kuwaiti students to study in educational institutions in France, along with students who want to learn French," she said.

In the business and economic sectors, Legendre said Kuwait and France enjoy a mutually beneficial economic relationship. "In 2019, bilateral trade between the two nations amounted to €800 million, with French exports totaling €526 million. Military aircraft and commercial aircraft delivered to Kuwait boosted the French side. Trade remains high even in this time of pandemic and because of the strong partnership between Airbus and Kuwait Airways. We have a strong presence in cosmetics, textiles, machinery, pharmaceutical and agricultural products. We are glad Kuwait loves French brands," she said.

Kuwait reports 414 new COVID cases, one death

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health announced yesterday logging 414 new coronavirus cases registered in the previous 24 hours, raising the caseload to 154,314. Ministry spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad reported a single new death, putting the death toll at 943. The ministry had earlier announced that 279 patients have recovered within the same period, raising total recoveries to 149,007. The number of patients in intensive care units reached 46 as of yesterday, with the count of confirmed cases that continue to receive medical care standing at 4,364. The number of swab tests conducted over the same period was at 7,781, with the tally of such examinations standing at 1,327,427. —KUNA

Work permit fees for GCC citizens, bedoons increased

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower issued its new fee list based on a decision by Minister of Commerce and Industry and State Minister for Economic Affairs Faisal Al-Medlej. The decision effectively increases work permit fees for GCC citizens and bedoons working in Kuwait, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported.

The fees for several services are as follows:

1. Issuing a signature authorization for an employer's file - KD 5.
2. Issuing a work permit for GCC citizens - KD 10 per year.
3. Renewal of a work permit for GCC citizens - KD 10 per year.
4. Issuing a work permit for illegal residents (bedoons) - KD 10 per year.
5. Renewal of a work permit for illegal residents - KD 10 per year.
6. Issuing an employee status certificate - KD 1
7. Issuing a career progress report of an employee - KD 1.

Kuwaiti lawyers

Meanwhile, the same newspaper reported yesterday that Municipality Minister Rana Al-Fares is seeking to resume appointing Kuwaitis in the legal department with the rank of (lawyer B), which had been sus-

pending for 15 years by a decision made by the Civil Service Commission chief on Aug 13, 2005. Fares sent a letter to Commerce and Industry Minister and State Minister for Economic Affairs Faisal Al-Medlej saying this move is in agreement with the government's plan to Kuwaitize public jobs, the importance of enabling national cadres to occupy such jobs, and based on article 26 of the Kuwait constitution that states: "Public office is a national service entrusted to those who hold it. Public officials, in the exercise of their duties, shall aim at the public interest. Aliens may not hold public offices except in the cases specified by law." Fares said experienced and competent citizens are available to occupy legal jobs.

Expat teachers

Separately, Al-Qabas quoted an educational report which revealed that the education ministry is not in need of 372 teachers who are stranded abroad after their residency permits expired, and represent 54 percent of the total number of stranded such teachers which stands at 693 teachers. The report that was prepared by the public education sector based on data received from education zones and administrative affairs showed there are 321 teachers of both genders needed by the ministry who cannot be let go in 12 specialties, and their residency permits should be renewed. The report included a list of the names and specialties of teachers who cannot be let go, including 234 male and 87 female teachers - 19 of biology, 35 of physical education, 19 of music, 4 of geology, 16 of art and craft, 91 of mathematics, 28 of science, 17 of philosophy, 6 of physics, 24 of chemistry, 53 of English and 7 of French, in addition to technical supervisors in music and English.

Embassy calls to halt travel to UK unless necessary

KUWAIT: Kuwait Embassy in the United Kingdom called on citizens Saturday wishing to travel to Britain not to travel at the present time, except for most urgent matters, due to the large increase in COVID-19 infection rates, as well as the comprehensive closure measures currently applied in the UK. In a press release, the embassy called on citizens who urgently will travel to the UK "to undergo a PCR test and obtain a certificate proving that they are not infected with the virus, provided that it was issued 72 hours before the date of departure to Britain." According to new procedures, the new measures by British authorities will begin at the start of next week, as well as filling out a form to determine the whereabouts of the traveler during their stay in Britain. The embassy also urged Kuwaiti citizens who are currently in Britain for treatment or other binding matters to exercise extreme caution and not go out unless it is important, and to adhere to the guidelines of the British health authorities in order to preserve their safety and contact the embassy in case they need any help or inquiry on the emergency phone number 02075903400. —KUNA

In my view

Failure of an American democratic system?

By Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri



It is certainly not the America the world knows; it was an unimaginable day. There are two ways to interpret what has happened in DC. One is to see it as the failure of a democratic system. But it's more accurate to see it as the extreme manifestation of a system that allows people to have a voice. The incoming administration needs to mend the divisions in American society. But it is important to also remember that in other political systems, the protests would not have been allowed to have a voice; the protestors would've been killed, jailed or beaten down.

President Biden will need to rebuild a divided nation during a period of continued chaos, death and suffering resulting from the persistence of the novel coronavirus. However, history has proven that America can overcome tragedies, no matter how big they are, and provide a level of solutions and implementation mechanisms that seek equality and justice for all. It is a true democratic country in which the decisions are made by the decision-makers who are the American people themselves. Therefore, what happened cannot be measured and analyzed by comparisons or contrasts with other countries and different systems of government.

America's rule and its democracy allows actions sometimes severe, misguided or appalling, but will always have a reaction that upholds the rule of law no matter what. And that's why people trust the so-called American system. Mistakes will happen, but along with them corrective measures too.

The new Biden administration has nominated a "Justice Team" experienced and well respected for the Justice Department management headed by Supreme Court nominee Judge Merrick Garland, who said "I would not have accepted this nomination, if I had not been assured that the department would return to its original purpose of providing equal justice under the law." All criminals will be treated equally under the law.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf



CAPT plays key role in public procurement

KUWAIT: The Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) implements government public procurement programs for the supply of goods and products, delivery of services and execution of construction work on behalf of relevant government entities. Osama Al-Duaij, Acting Secretary General at CAPT, spoke to Kuwait Times about the agency's work.

"CAPT's role in servicing relevant government entities and bidders includes registration, classification and qualification of general contractors, suppliers, service providers and consultants," Duaij said. "Regulating public procurement procedures, control of public procurement processes, enforcing public tender rules and procedures of bidding and awarding are also within its ambit, along with control and audit of variation orders, extensions and renewals of existing contracts, managing complaints and taking proper action through the CAPT board of directors and the complaints committee."

According to Duaij, governance, transparency and providing equal opportunities are the main principles upon which the Central Agency for Public Tenders performs its work, provides its services and carries out its duties.

"The procedural work of CAPT General Secretariat includes procedural review and audit of prequalification and tender documents, procedural review and audit of prequalification results and awards reports, tendering and announcements, awarding process, procedural review and audit of variation orders and extension and renewal of existing contracts' requests and documents," he told Kuwait Times. Preparing the agenda of the board of directors, organizing board of directors' meetings, issuing meeting minutes and following up the execution of the board of directors' decisions are also done by CAPT.

"The technical activities of CAPT General Secretariat include registration of general contractors, service providers, consultants and suppliers, classification of general contractors and consulting service providers, technical review and audit of prequalification and tender documents, technical review and audit of pre-qualification results and tender awards reports, review and technical audit of the documents of variation orders and extension and renewal of existing contracts," Duaij explained. "CAPT General Secretariat's supportive services include administrative and financial affairs, complaints and legal studies, legal cases and investigations, development and training, statistics and research, development and support of information systems and operation and maintenance of information systems," he added.

Foreign general contractors and consulting firms have to follow the registration requirements and procedures at CAPT. "Required documents include an application for registration to be submitted electronically including the company name, address, telephone number, fax number, official email address and the authorized signatory's name and job title. The license of the company should be certified by the Embassy of Kuwait in the country

of its headquarters, in accordance with the procedures specifying the nature of services provided. The authorized signatory should be approved in accordance with the procedures established by government agencies," Duaij outlined.

"All submitted documents should be approved and certified by the Embassy of Kuwait in the country of the company's headquarters or certified by the justice ministry of Kuwait and ministry of foreign affairs of Kuwait after being legally translated. All required documents should be uploaded as colored copies in Arabic and English in PDF format. All the submitted documents must be valid," Duaij said, detailing the registration procedure.

"Non-compliant applications submitted with incomplete documents will not be reviewed. After submitting all required documents, the payment link for the registration fees will be sent by email. The consulting service provider registration certificate will be sent by email after the application has been approved by the board of directors," he added.

Applicants should meet the following requirements to place a successful bid

Pre-qualification documents includes:

- 1.0 Instructions for applicants.
- 2.0 Documents and forms:
- 2.1 Applicant's data
- 2.2 Applicant's activities
- 2.3 Nature of goods, products, work and services
- 2.4 Registration status at CAPT
- 2.5 Classification status at CAPT
- 3.0 Administrative, financial and technical data.
- 4.0 Requirements:
- 4.1 Previous work
- 4.2 Experiences
- 4.3 Equipment
- 4.4 Financial capabilities
- 5.0 Pre-qualification criteria:
- 5.1 Primary criteria points.
- 5.2 Secondary criteria points.
- 5.3 Measurability.
- 5.4 Passing rates.
- 5.5 Passing rates justification.

Tender documents and terms of reference includes

- 1.0 Criteria for bid evaluation:
- 1.1 Objectivity.
- 1.2 Inclusion of primary and secondary evaluation points.
- 1.3 Measurable and quantifiable evaluation criteria.
- 1.4 Registration status at CAPT.
- 1.5 Classification status at CAPT.
- 2.0 Tender documents:
- 2.1 Instructions for bides
- 2.2 CAPT-issued standard contract
- 2.3 General conditions
- 2.4 Special conditions
- 2.5 Technical specifications and terms of reference
- 2.6 Work program
- 2.7 Schedule
- 2.8 Quantities



KUWAIT: Acting Secretary General at CAPT Osama Al-Duaij.

- 2.9 Prices
- 2.10 Templates
- 2.11 Bases for evaluation and criteria

Main Reasons for Rejection of bids

- 1.0 Bid formula:
- 1.1 Bid formula not submitted.
- 1.2 The amount mentioned in numbers differs from what is mentioned in letters.
- 1.3 Submitting a signed unsealed bid formula.
- 1.4 Submitting a bid formula without stamp or signature.
- 1.5 Submitting a sealed bid formula without signing or vice versa.
- 1.6 Making an amendment to the amount, whether in letters or numbers without signing.
- 2.0 Bid bond:
- 2.1 Submitting an un-certified check from the bank.
- 2.2 Submitting a modified bid bond without attaching the original.
- 2.3 Providing bid bond addressed to the entity.
- 2.4 Submission of bid bond for a period of less than 90 days.
- 2.5 Submitting the bid bond amount less than what is required in the offering announcement.
- 3.0 Envelopes:
- 3.1 Submitting marked envelopes
- 3.2 Mentioning the company name on the submitted envelope.

Bid evaluation includes

- 1.0 Verification:
- 1.1 Arithmetic errors not exceeding 5%
- 1.2 Arithmetic errors exceeding 5%
- 1.3 Abnormally low prices.
- 1.4 Exaggerated prices in plus or minus.
- 2.0 Eligibility:
- 2.1 Classification.
- 2.2 Pre-qualification.
- 2.3 Limited tenders.
- 3.0 Bid Guarantee:
- 3.1 Submitting of bid bond.
- 3.2 Validity of bid bond.

News in brief

Japanese envoy congratulates FM

KUWAIT: Japan's Ambassador to Kuwait Masato Takaoka congratulated Kuwait's Foreign Minister for his recent honoring by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. "It gives me pleasure to congratulate Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on receiving the Order of Kuwait of the First Class as an appreciation for his invaluable role to achieve the Gulf reconciliation," the ambassador said in a statement released by the Japanese Embassy yesterday.

Embassy in Jakarta advises travel halt

KUALA LUMPUR: The Kuwaiti embassy in Jakarta yesterday called on citizens to consider delaying travel to Indonesia at this time because the airport is closed to foreign arrivals. The embassy indicated in a statement that the Indonesian authorities announced additional strict measures starting from today as a result of the increasing cases of Coronavirus (COVID-19) during the past weeks in all Indonesian cities including its capital, Jakarta. The embassy called on citizens already in Indonesia who needs assistance to contact the following numbers: +62 815 1515 1511, +62 812 81813758 and +62 815 1325 2597.

Embassy in Spain warns citizens

MADRID: Kuwait's embassy in Madrid yesterday called upon citizens in various Spanish cities to be careful during the Philomena snowstorm that hit the country. In a statement, the embassy called on citizens to adhere to the guidelines by the Spanish authorities, as the storm disrupted public transportation and vehicles movement. The Spanish authorities announced a state of maximum emergency to be declared until Wednesday evening. The embassy called on citizens to contact the diplomatic mission in case of emergency on the following numbers: (+3) 465-111-1116 and (+3) 491-386-9666.

45 years of relationship between Vietnam and Kuwait: Let's move forward together

By Ambassador-Designate of Vietnam to Kuwait Ngo Toan Thang

Not long after the unification of the North and South of Vietnam, on January 10, 1976, Vietnam and Kuwait established diplomatic relations, creating an important milestone in the history of Vietnam's foreign relations in the world. As the first country in the Gulf to establish diplomatic relations with Vietnam, Kuwait has made a great contribution to the relationship between Vietnam and the Gulf countries in particular and with other countries in the Middle East in general.

Throughout the historical relationship between the two countries, Vietnam and Kuwait has witnessed many memorable milestones. Immediately after the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, in February 1976, special envoy of the Vietnamese Government, Nguyen Co Thach, then Deputy Foreign Minister, paid an official visit to Kuwait, and he was well received with hospitality and respect. In June 1993, Vietnam's Trade Representative Office in Kuwait was established, which is the first commercial representative office of Vietnam in the Gulf region. Ten years later, the cooperation between the two countries was strengthened. Vietnam officially opened the embassy in Kuwait (2003). And it should be noted that many exchange visits of leaders at all levels between the two states has been made so far testified the friendship relationship between Vietnam and Kuwait.

Since then, the efforts of leaders and people of the two countries have been demonstrated in many activities that have contributed to boost the relationship between Vietnam and Kuwait. The outstanding progress in the Vietnam - Kuwait relations is the achievement in trading and economic sector, reflected by the obvious figure of \$3.6 billion in two-way trade turnover achieved in 2019. Moreover, a number of mechanisms of cooperation and agreements in other fields such as sports, culture, arts, etc have been signed.

To achieve such great achievements, many factors are needed and one of them is the trust - a natural but sustainable substance that helps promote the development of Vietnam - Kuwait relations and overcomes every challenges facing the two countries.

Since the official visit to Kuwait by the Former President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Le Duc Anh in May 1995, the two sides have benefited from each other's strengths to create effective, sustainable and effective cooperation that brings along many mutual interests. Economic cooperation - a prominent highlight in Vietnam - Kuwait relations over the years has been continuously strengthened. Vietnam - a southeast Asian country with an extremely abundant young labor workforce has contributed to the production of many valuable products for export to Kuwait and the Gulf region such as ceramic, electronic and agricultural products. Meanwhile, Kuwait has taken advantage of its strengths in the crude oil field to contribute to the construction of Nghi Son oil refinery with a total investment of \$9 billion in Vietnam (tripartite project including Kuwait, Japan and Vietnam). In recent years, although the world econ-

omy is slowing down, the investment commitments and trade exchanges between the two sides are still being made and increased, thus keep the momentum of development of both Vietnam and Kuwait. This is thanks to the flexibility and long-term commitment of investment funds from Kuwait, including the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) and the Kuwait Investment Authority, to support Vietnam undertakes a number of important infrastructure projects as well as disaster recovery.

Economic and trade cooperation also brings opportunities for cultural exchanges and mutual understandings between the two countries in other fields. In February 2016, on the 40th anniversary of relations between the two countries, Kuwait officially recognized Vietnam's market economy, contributing to enhancing political trust between the two sides. In the field of education and training, Vietnam has launched Arabic language courses to provide qualified staff in many fields, in accordance with the requirements of not only Kuwait but also many countries in the Middle East. Vietnam appreciates the annual Arabic scholarships granted by the Kuwaiti government.

With achievements of the past 45 years, we can proudly affirm that the two countries Vietnam and Kuwait have developed together and moved forward with the belief of a good future so as to continually promote the friendly relationship between the two countries, thus helping the Vietnamese and Kuwaiti people to understand each other better and the long-standing traditional and friendly cooperation between the two countries to be further enhanced.

In 2021, there will be many activities and events taking place to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. These activities are expected to help Vietnam and Kuwait tourism sector recover after a long period of serious impacts caused by the COVID-19 epidemic. Then, new opportunities for cooperation in other fields will blossom again, ensuring the stable development of a good relationship between Vietnam and Kuwait in particular and between Vietnam and the Gulf countries in general.

The 45-year long journey of the relationship between Vietnam and Kuwait originated from the belief of a future of peace, friendship, cooperation and development. That belief will also be a solid base for Vietnam and Kuwait to move forward, helping to build the bridge of friendship and solidarity between the Gulf countries and the Southeast Asian countries in the interest of peace, stability and prosperity around the world.



Ambassador-Designate of Vietnam to Kuwait Ngo Toan Thang

KUWAIT TIMES
ESTABLISHED 1961
THE FIRST DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

STAY CONNECTED

- Read Kuwait Times now on your phone for **FREE**
- Send Subscribe to **+965 944 88888**
- Enjoy the first daily paper in Kuwait on your phone

P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait
Tel: 24833199 - 24833358 - 24835616/7 | Fax: 24835620 - 24835621
E: info@kuwaittimes.net



Trump backer seen in horned fur hat charged in Capitol violence

Pope, Queen Elizabeth join vaccine drive as German deaths top 40,000

Page 7

Page 6



SAN DIEGO: Counter-protesters spray pepper spray as they clash with people during a "Patriot March" demonstration in support of President Trump on Saturday in the Pacific Beach neighborhood of San Diego, California. —AFP

Fans trash Twitter's Trump ban on Twitter

Trump speaks of creating his own platform

NEW YORK: Friends, family and advisors to Donald Trump have been bitterly complaining that Twitter's ban of the president after his supporters stormed the US Capitol amounts to an assault on free speech by radical leftists. Ironically, given the enormous influence of the platform, they have aired their grievances first of all on ... Twitter—a choice underscoring the platform's huge readership and the relative paucity of alternatives.

"Free speech is dead & controlled by leftist overlords," tweeted Donald Trump Jr, the president's older son. Asked Rudy Giuliani, the president's personal lawyer, "Who will be silenced next?"

And Mike Pompeo-posting not as secretary of state but on his personal account-tweeted: "Sadly, this isn't a new tactic of the Left. They've worked to silence opposing voices for years."

For influential Republican senator Ted Cruz, the decisions by Twitter and some other social media were "absurd & profoundly dangerous." "Why," he went on, "should a handful of Silicon Valley billionaires have a monopoly on political speech?"

Every one of the above messages was posted on

Twitter, the social network that for years has been Trump's preferred means of communicating with the public—and sometimes even with other world leaders. But on Friday, amid widespread fury after he encouraged the supporters who forced their way into the US Capitol in a bloody and chaotic melee, Twitter banned him permanently. It was taking the rare measure, it said, "due to the risk of further incitement of violence." Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitch joined in suspending the president's accounts.

Reddit, a news and discussion website that is normally fairly permissive, on Friday closed a forum popular with Trump fans, saying it was inciting hate. The question now is where Trump and his supporters will turn next. Donald Trump Jr., himself fearing exclusion from Twitter, has asked his followers to send him their email contacts—hardly the most reactive form of communications—so he can keep them abreast of news.

A new platform?

In a quickly deleted tweet, the president himself on Friday spoke of creating his own platform "in the near future," without providing any detail. Conservative

platforms popular among Trump's fiercest supporters, like Parler and Gab, have drawn growing numbers of users. Gab saw "record traffic" on Friday night and Saturday, according to its creator Andrew Torba, and had to add computer servers to handle it.

He reported 12 million visits in 12 hours, adding, "Exploding growth right now." Launched in 2016, Gab positions itself as a platform promoting "freedom of expression" but has become known above all for its far-right—even neo-Nazi—user base. In 2018, when an assault on a Pittsburgh synagogue claimed 11 lives, investigators discovered earlier anti-Semitic posts by the shooter on Gab.

Several companies have banned Gab, including PayPal, Visa and the Apple and Google app stores. Parler faced more severe consequences: after it, too, was banned first by Google and Apple in their app stores, Amazon confirmed it was suspending the social network from its cloud computing services, effectively pushing it offline. All three tech giants said Parler, which briefly became the top free app in the Apple store Saturday before it was removed, had

failed to tackle violent content on its platform.

Given the riot at the Capitol this week, there was a "serious risk that this type of content will further incite violence," Amazon said in a letter to Parler first reported by BuzzFeed. Once the preferred platform of the far-right fringe, Parler—launched in 2018 — now draws more traditional conservative voices, like those of Fox News star and close Trump ally Sean Hannity, as well as the Republican governor of South Dakota, Kristi Noem.

Another Parler regular, influential political commentator Mark Levin, said Friday he had "suspended" his own Twitter account "in protest against Twitter's fascism." Levin also mentioned his account on Rumble, a site which, like YouTube, broadcasts videos but promises its users they will "never be censored for political or scientific content." Yet, all these alternative platforms are so closely identified with the right—even the extreme right—that, especially as tech companies move against them, they seem unlikely ever to draw followings like Trump's 88 million Twitter followers. —AFP



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo US President Donald Trump and US Vice President Mike Pence (left) speak during election night in the East Room of the White House in Washington, DC, early on November 4, 2020. —AFP

Mike Pence to attend Biden inauguration

WASHINGTON, DC: Mike Pence will attend the upcoming inauguration of Joe Biden, multiple media reports said Saturday, the vice president becoming the latest longtime loyalist to abandon an increasingly isolated President Donald Trump. Relations between Trump and Pence—previously one of the mercurial president's staunchest defenders—have nosedived since Wednesday, when the vice president formally announced Biden's victory in November's election.

A mob of far-right demonstrators stormed the US Capitol the same day in a failed bid to stop Congress from certifying Biden's win, in a riot blamed on Trump that left five dead. Multiple media reports on Saturday cited senior administration officials as saying that Pence—who was forced to take shelter from the intruders during the riot—had decided to attend Biden's inauguration on January 20.

The president-elect earlier in the week said Pence would be welcome at his formal swearing-in, due to take place in a scaled-down format due to the coronavirus. "I think it's important that as much as we can stick to what have been the historical precedents of how an administration changes should be maintained," Biden told reporters. "We'd be honored to have him there, and to move forward in the transition."

In his final tweet before being removed from Twitter on Friday, Trump said he would not attend the inauguration. The outgoing president has been accused of provoking Wednesday's violence, and now faces an unprecedented second impeachment, expected to begin today. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi warned that Democrats would launch the process unless Trump resigned or Pence invoked the 25th Amendment, in which the cabinet removes the president from office. While Pence has not spoken publicly on the subject, the New York Times reported Thursday he was against invoking the mechanism, never used before in US history. —AFP

Spain races to clear snow before cold snap freezes roads

MADRID: After the worst snowstorm in decades, Spanish officials were racing yesterday to clear the roads of snow before a cold snap transforms them into icy death traps. Storm Filomena killed three people during its passage through Spain and kept emergency services workers and army snow ploughs busy through Saturday freeing 2,500 drivers trapped in their vehicles.

The storm also brought heavy rains before moving through eastern Spain into southern France. Spain's weather forecasters AEMET predicted heavy frost overnight Sunday to Monday in large parts of Spain. In mountainous areas temperatures would drop below -10 Celsius (14 Fahrenheit), con-

ditions that could last until Thursday, the agency added. "Our aim is to make the most of every minute before Monday when the drop in temperature happens," to clear the roads, Madrid's mayor Jose Luis Martinez-Almeida said late Saturday.

"From then, until the end of the week, it's going to be very difficult to get about," he told Sexta television. The capital Madrid and the surrounding region was one of the areas worst hit by the snow, with levels of snowfall not seen since 1971.

The army also had to clear the snow from Madrid airport, one of the region's worst hit by the snowstorm, which had forced the cancellation of flights from late Friday. They are not due to be reopened until Sunday afternoon at the earliest. They also had to clear access to the city's hospitals, still struggling to cope with the country's coronavirus crisis.

The storm, through Friday and Saturday, left much of the country under dozens of centimeters of snow, an amount rarely experienced in Spain, blocking many major roads. More than 700 major routes



MADRID: A man clears the snow outside the Atocha train station in Madrid yesterday. Snowstorms in Spain left three people dead and caused chaos across much of the country, trapping motorists and shutting down the capital's air and rail links. —AFP

were still impossible yesterday morning said the government, with rail travel to and from Madrid also cancelled, at least until Sunday afternoon. —AFP

Algerian ex-PM admits selling gold bars on black market

ALGIERS: Former Algerian premier Ahmed Ouyahia, on trial for corruption, admitted Saturday to receiving gold bars from Gulf donors then selling them on the black market, the official APS news agency reported. Ouyahia and fellow ex-prime minister Abdelmalek Sellal are accused of covertly financing the 2019 re-election bid of then-president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who resigned shortly afterwards amid mass anti-government protests.

Their retrial opened Saturday after the supreme court in November annulled their earlier convictions following an appeal, APS said. Both had served under former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

Several former ministers and other well-known figures are also on trial over the same affair, APS said. Ouyahia was questioned Saturday over the source of assets in his bank accounts, totalling over \$5 million. He said some had come from black market sales "of gold bars, which he received as a gift, in his capacity as prime minister, from leaders of Gulf countries," APS added. The 60 gold bars were

estimated to be valued at some \$2.5 million. Ouyahia said he had previously kept quiet about the matter so as "not to undermine the relations between Algeria and certain friendly countries".

He also admitted to not having declared the sums to tax inspectors. The trial of Ouyahia and Sellal in December 2019 was the first in a series of high-profile corruption cases launched after Bouteflika resigned earlier that year. It was also the first time since Algeria's independence from France in 1962 that former prime ministers had been put on trial.

Ouyahia was prime minister four times between 1995 and 2019, and had been sentenced to 15 years behind bars. Sellal, who served from 2012 to 2017 and managed four of Bouteflika's election campaigns, was sentenced to 12 years in jail. The pair were sentenced to further jail time in separate cases last year. Bouteflika, who was Algeria's longest-serving president, was forced to resign in April 2019 after losing the backing of the army amid enormous street protests against his decision to seek a fifth term.

Authorities then launched a string of investigations against high-ranking former officials and business figures, several of whom have been convicted. But the state has also cracked down on opposition figures, and many see the trials as score-settling between rival officials rather than a genuine effort at reform. —AFP

Old gripes reborn as IS accusations tie Iraqis to camps

HASANSHAM CAMP, Iraq: Languishing in a tent in northern Iraq, Nour yearns to return home but can't because she is accused of supporting jihadists—an allegation she insists has been designed to obscure a land dispute. The 22-year-old's family is one of hundreds rights groups fear will remain stuck indefinitely in limbo due to long-standing wrangles being repackaged by neighbors or authorities into accusations they belong to the Islamic State group.

Exacerbating their situation, authorities have since autumn sped up long-stated plans to close displacement camps across Iraq where 200,000 people still live. Nour's brother left their hometown near the northern city of Mosul and joined the jihadists in 2014, the year IS seized a third of Iraqi territory in a lightning offensive.

But even before her brother's departure stoked unwelcome attention, the family had already been locked for years in a dispute with an influential local sheikh. "He resented us because we owned land that he claimed belonged to him," said Nour. —AFP

International

Trump backer seen in horned fur hat charged in Capitol violence

Chansley charged with 'knowingly entering a restricted building'

WASHINGTON: Authorities announced new arrests and charges Saturday over the violent incursion into the US Capitol, including a tattooed man in a horned headdress whose image was beamed around the world. That man, Jacob Anthony Chansley, also known as Jake Angeli, and two others—one of them a newly elected state official from West Virginia—were charged in federal court in connection with the violence, according to the US attorney's office for the District of Columbia.

Chansley was charged with "knowingly entering or remaining in any restricted building or grounds without lawful authority, and with violent entry and disorderly conduct on Capitol grounds."

The statement alleged that Chansley was "the man seen in media coverage who entered the Capitol building dressed in horns, a bearskin headdress, red, white and blue face paint, shirtless, and tan pants," while carrying a long spear with an American flag tied to it. Chansley's seeming resemblance to singer Jay Kay sparked a worldwide buzz on social media, prompting the Jamiroquai frontman to issue a statement making clear that he was nowhere near Washington when the pro-Trump mob stormed the Capitol. Chansley describes himself as a "digital soldier" of the far-right QAnon conspiracy theory that claims Trump is waging a secret war against a global liberal cult of Satan-worshipping pedophiles.

A police statement said Chansley called the FBI

on Thursday to confirm his presence on Capitol Hill, telling law enforcement agents he came as part of a group from Arizona "at the request of the President that all 'patriots' come to DC on January 6, 2021."

He had been spotted many times at pro-Trump events in Phoenix in recent months, wearing his distinctive headpiece. The two other men were Derrick Evans, 35, a recently elected member of the West Virginia House of Delegates, and Adam Johnson, 36, of Florida.

Several of the intruders made their identification simple. Evans was seen in video that he streamed live on his Facebook page, according to the US attorney's office, shouting as he crossed the threshold into the Capitol. "We're in, we're in! Derrick Evans is in the Capitol!"

After calls from colleagues that he step down, Evans on Saturday submitted a letter of resignation to the state's governor. "I take full responsibility for my actions, and deeply regret any hurt, pain or embarrassment I may have caused my family, friends, constituents and fellow West Virginians," Evans said in a statement reported by local media.

"I hope (my resignation) helps to begin the healing process, so we can all move forward and come together as 'One Nation, Under God.'" Johnson was seen in widely circulated photos showing him smiling and waving as he carries the lectern of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi through the Capitol Rotunda.

Police identified him in part through a photograph posted to a social media account with the



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo taken on January 06, 2021, supporters of US President Donald Trump, including Jake Angeli alias Jacob Anthony Chansley (center), a QAnon supporter, enter the Capitol in Washington, DC. —AFP

username "Adam Johnson," showing the suspect posing in a Capitol hallway. The lectern was found one day later, abandoned in a corridor. The Justice

Department said Friday that 15 others had been charged over the incursion, including one man accused of possessing bombs. — AFP

News in brief

Belgium virus death toll 20,000

BRUSSEL: The number of fatalities in Belgium from the new coronavirus crossed 20,000 yesterday, health officials said, with more than half the dead from retirement care homes. The country, with a population of 11.5 million, has recorded 662,694 cases and 20,038 deaths since the pandemic broke out, the Sciensano public health institute said. Belgium counts all deaths of people who have had a positive Covid-19 test among virus fatalities, giving it one of the world's highest death rates with 1,725 per 100,000 people, according to an AFP tally. During the first wave of the pandemic Belgium also included people who died and may have had the virus but did not necessarily have a test. UK helps raise \$1 billion in global vaccine donations. — AFP

UK raises \$1bn in donations

LONDRES: Britain said yesterday it has helped raise \$1 billion (818 million euros) from global donors towards the drive to help "vulnerable countries" access coronavirus vaccines, by match-funding contributions. The UK said, in addition, it has committed \$548 million to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC), after matching with £1 every \$4 pledged by other donors. Canada, Japan and Germany are among the countries to make contributions that it matched, helping the AMC raise more than \$1.7 billion in total so far. The fund will allow for the distribution of one billion COVID-19 vaccine doses to 92 developing countries this year, according to Britain's Foreign Office. Cuba to test COVID vaccine candidate in Iran. — AFP

Cuba to test COVID vaccine in Iran

HAVANA: Cuba will test its most advanced COVID vaccine candidate, in Iran, the research center that developed it announced on Saturday. State-run Finlay Vaccine Institute (IFV) and the Pasteur Institute of Iran signed an agreement in Havana that will see a Phase 3 clinical trial in Iran, to "move forward faster in immunization against COVID-19 in both countries," the IFV announced on Twitter. The news came on the heels of Iran's supreme leader on Friday banning the import of American and British-produced vaccines against COVID-19, saying they were "completely untrustworthy." Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a tweet, accompanied by the hashtag #CoronaVaccine: "It's not unlikely they would want to contaminate other nations." Nine arrested as Danish virus-curb protests turn violent. — AFP

Danish virus-curb protests violent

COPENHAGEN: Nine people were arrested in Denmark on Saturday after demonstrations against the country's coronavirus restrictions turned violent in two cities including capital Copenhagen, police and local media said. Between 200 and 250 people had gathered in Copenhagen and dozens in the city of Aalborg in Denmark's north, according to media reports citing police accounts. Organized by a group calling itself "Men in Black", the demonstrations targeted restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Protesters shouted: "Freedom for Denmark, we have had enough," according to media reports. In TV broadcasts and video posted to social media, police in riot gear could be seen clashing with protesters in Copenhagen, who lit fireworks and threw bottles. Austrian minister resigns in student plagiarism scandal. — AFP

Hawley: Young US senator accused of stoking riots

WASHINGTON: Josh Hawley is a young Republican senator with eyes on high office, but his objection to the election results and his support for Trump loyalists who went on to ransack the US Capitol leave him accused of having blood on his hands.

The confident 41-year-old conservative who is Missouri's junior senator has made no effort to hide his presidential ambitions. Now his political future hangs in the balance as he faces mounting criticism after becoming the first senator to publicly support efforts to block the electoral votes in swing states that supported Joe Biden for president. On Wednesday morning, Hawley raised a clenched fist at nearby Trump supporters as he walked into the Capitol where lawmakers would begin the final cer-

tification of the election.

It was a show of solidarity with—and perhaps an inspiration for—men and women who went on to storm the building in their violent efforts to overturn the election result and keep in Donald Trump power. The gesture could haunt his political career. Barely an hour after the first pump, the US Capitol was overrun in a deadly riot that laid siege to the seat of American democracy. "Violence is not how you achieve change," a clearly shaken Hawley said later that night on the Senate floor, after police expelled the intruders and secured the building. But the damage had already been done, and for Hawley the dominos fell quickly.

Fellow Republican senators denounced him. He lost a book deal. Donors are reportedly irate.

And the Republican Party is cleaving in two over Trump's baseless conspiracy theories that Biden's Democrats somehow stole the election.

'A dangerous threat'

Hawley faced stinging rebukes from his state's two main newspapers, including the St. Louis Post Dispatch which slammed his "tardy, cover-his-ass

Kyrgyzstan populist tipped for easy win

BISHKEK: Kyrgyzstan went to presidential polls yesterday in its first elections since a political crisis embroiled the ex-Soviet country and saw a populist freed from jail who is now tipped to top the ballot. Sadyr Japarov's journey from prison to presidential frontrunner is an example of the dramatic changes in political fortunes in the Central Asian country that is both more unpredictable and pluralistic than its authoritarian neighbors.

But critics of combative Japarov, 52, who became acting leader during the October unrest, fear his victory could tip Kyrgyzstan towards the strongman rule dominant in the ex-Soviet region.

Voters began trickling into polling stations in frosty conditions at 8:00 am (0200 GMT). In the capital

Bishkek, where cold winters usher in a thick blanket of smog courtesy of polluting heating systems and ageing transport, many voters said they intended to back Japarov—who was convicted for hostage-taking-at the ballot box.

"He has promised to raise salaries, pensions," said Vera Pavlova, 69, who admitted that she knew little about other candidates. "I haven't seen their posters anywhere. Only Japarov's."

In addition to picking a new president Kyrgyz are choosing between parliamentary and presidential forms of government, with Japarov backing greater powers for the post he is seeking.

Crime, corruption

Japarov, who was sprung from jail by supporters during the crisis before a court overturned his conviction, has styled himself as an uncompromising opponent of organized crime and systemic corruption. He has poured scorn on critics, some of whom have speculated that criminal networks are behind his rise to power. But he struck



BISHKEK: An elderly woman votes during Kyrgyzstan's presidential election and a referendum on government system in the village of Gornaya-Mayevka outside Bishkek yesterday. — AFP

a unifying tone in his last campaign appearance on Friday in Bishkek. "Let us come together... treat each other with understanding and respect. We are one country, one people," he told a crowd of several thousand people.

With a threadbare economy bat-

tered by the coronavirus pandemic, Kyrgyzstan's next leader is likely to be even more dependent on goodwill from allies Russia—a destination for hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz migrants—and neighboring economic giant China. — AFP

In vaccine-skeptic France, some medics also hesitate

PARIS: As the French government seeks to ramp up its lagging COVID-19 vaccination campaign, it faces a tricky challenge: convincing all doctors to back the jabs, even though some share the same hesitations as the general population. Despite France's record of pioneering vaccine work, surveys show it has become one of the most skeptical countries in the world after the emergence of a powerful "anti-vax" movement that has pushed conspiracy theories.

At the end of 2020, only 40 percent of French people planned to get inoculated against the coronavirus, while a new poll on Friday showed that the figure had risen to 56 percent—still far below the average of other developed countries. Pierre Verger, a researcher who studies attitudes to vaccination among French GPs, published his latest data on Friday that revealed a smaller but significant level of hesitation among GPs.

Around half (47 percent) of 1,200 doctors surveyed declared that they would "certainly" get a COVID-19 jab, the study backed by the DREES public health research body found. The rest expressed doubts to a greater or lesser extent: 29

percent said they would "probably" get vaccinated, while one in 10 (11 percent) would "probably not" or "definitely not". Another 14 percent did not answer, the research in October and November showed.

"We're a long way from having mass commitment and acceptance," Verger told AFP, saying the results confirmed those of a previous study in 2014. "If the level of hesitation among doctors does not go down, it will be a brake on the vaccination campaign under way," he added.

This is a concern for the French government as it tries to accelerate after a slow start—but it has implications for all countries with significant public opposition to the new COVID-19 vaccines.

By implying the pandemic was a manufactured emergency to benefit pharmaceutical companies, Perronne has become a top-selling author and a leading light in anti-vax circles, along with oncologist Henri Joyeux from the southern city of Montpellier. Antoine Bristielle, a researcher who recently authored a report on vaccine skepticism for the Jean-Jaures Foundation, a think-tank, said doctors are trusted to combat these views in a way that politicians and national scientific institutions are not.

"In France, people place a lot of confidence in their GPs to get information about vaccines," he told AFP. "If your GP says 'go and get vaccinated,' it's a powerful message. On the other hand, if they are hesitating themselves, it can increase skepticism."



A nurse injects a dose of Pfizer/BioNTech Comirnaty COVID-19 vaccine to a colleague in the vaccination center of the Haut-Leveque hospital in Pessac, near Bordeaux. — AFP

'Is it safe?'

Verger and Bristielle say they believe doctors will grow more confident if the government continues to be transparent with studies and data, a view endorsed by Paris-based infectious diseases specialist Solen Kerneis. She said she felt "emotional" and delighted this week after administering her first jab to a nurse colleague at the Bichat public hospital in Paris. But she understands why some colleagues might be hesitating. "The main question posed by a vaccine that has been developed so quickly is 'is it safe?'" she said. — AFP

International

Pope, Queen Elizabeth join vaccine drive as German deaths top 40,000

Merkel warns worst is yet to come as global death toll crosses 1.9 million

ROME: The pope and Britain's Queen Elizabeth became the latest high-profile figures to join the global vaccination campaign against the coronavirus as Germany yesterday reported 40,000 fatalities since the pandemic began a year ago. And German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned that the worst was still to come.

More than 1.9 million people worldwide have now died from the virus, with new variants adding to soaring cases and prompting the re-introduction of restrictions on movement across the globe — even as with mass inoculation drives underway. Pope Francis urged people to get the vaccination saying he would be inoculated against the virus himself next week when the Vatican begins its campaign and denouncing opposition to the jab.

"There is a suicidal denial which I cannot explain, but today we have to get vaccinated," the pontiff tells Canale 5 in an interview to be broadcast later. Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and her husband Prince Philip received their COVID-19 vaccinations on Saturday, said Buckingham Palace.

A source told the Press Association news agency that the queen, 94, and Philip, 99, were given the injections by a royal household doctor at Windsor Castle. More than 1.5 million people in Britain have so far been inoculated, in the biggest immunization program in national history, with the elderly, their carers and health workers first in line. Countries across the world are following suit with coronavirus shots approved including those by Pfizer-BioNTech

and Moderna and domestically made jabs from Russia and China. Britain is racing to protect as many people as possible as a new variant believed to be more contagious pushes infections and deaths to unprecedented levels.

Health authorities announced more than three million coronavirus infections since the pandemic began last year. The total UK death toll stands at 80,868, one of the highest in Europe.

'Worse to come', warns Merkel

Germany's topped 40,000 fatalities yesterday, the center for disease control announced. In her weekly video message, Chancellor Merkel had warned Saturday that the full impact of socializing over the Christmas and New Year's period had yet to be felt. The coming weeks will be "the hardest phase of the pandemic" so far, she said, with hospitals stretched to their limits. More than 1.9 million people have been infected so far, with almost 17,000 new cases added since Saturday.

Belgium also passed a significant threshold yesterday, recording 20,000 deaths, more than half in retirement care homes, said health officials. With a population of 11.5 million people, that gives it one of the highest death rates in the world, at 1,725 per 100,000 people, according to an AFP tally.

Cases and deaths also continue to spiral in the United States, the world's worst-hit country. With the 24-hour death toll exceeding 3,000 in recent days — more than 4,000 on Saturday — the total



Nursing staff take the details of a key worker as she waits to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at the Life Science Centre at the International Centre for Life in Newcastle upon Tyne, northeast England, on Saturday. — AFP

figure stands at 372,051 fatalities, according to Johns Hopkins University.

India will launch one of the world's most ambitious coronavirus free vaccination drives next Saturday, aiming to reach 300 million people by July, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said. India is the second worst-hit country with more than 10 million cases, though the death rate is one of the

world's lowest.

Cuba, meanwhile, said it would test its most advanced COVID vaccine candidate in Iran, after Tehran banned the import of already-proven US and British-produced vaccines. Governments are being forced to reintroduce restrictions that helped slow the spread of the virus last year, but badly disrupted their economies. —AFP

Kazakhs vote in opposition-free parliamentary vote

NUR-SULTAN, Kazakhstan: Voters headed to parliamentary polls in Kazakhstan yesterday with the ruling party expected to score a big win and the oil-rich country's only registered opposition force boycotting the ballot. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, 67, had pledged gradual political reform in the authoritarian Central Asian nation since being eased into his post by Nursultan Nazarbayev, who called time on nearly three decades as head of state in early 2019.

But 80-year-old Nazarbayev retains powerful positions, including the chairmanship of the Nur Otan party that controls the lower house and boasts 800,000 members among a population of 19 million.

The party is expected to win a commanding majority in the lower house polls featuring four other competing parties that are viewed as proxies. The only party that styles itself as the opposition, the National Social Democratic Party (NSDP), ruled itself out of the contest in November, calling the move a "protest" against a rigged system.

At a polling station in the capital Nur-Sultan a 50-year-old man named Nurzhan told AFP that many Kazakhs "have stopped believing in progress." "But I still hope (things) can be better," he said, explaining his decision to head to the polls despite freezing conditions.

The ex-Soviet country has never held an election deemed free or fair by Western vote monitors. A notable candidate on the ballot is Nazarbayev's eldest daughter, 57-year-old Dariga Nazarbayeva, who is representing Nur Otan. Her return to politics comes just eight months after Tokayev fired her from the position of senate speaker—a role that places the occupant second in line to the presidency.

The dismissal, which was not explained, triggered speculation over a power struggle in Kazakhstan's leadership. But the new president regularly lavishes praise on his mentor's achievements and has pledged to continue his strategic course. The two men appeared together at a Nur Otan party congress in November.

After voting Sunday at a polling station in Nur-Sultan-renamed in



NUR-SULTAN: A woman with a child votes during Kazakhstan's parliamentary election in Nur-Sultan yesterday. — AFP

Nazarbayev's honour when he stepped down-Tokayev said he planned to unveil new reforms before the parliament on January 15.

He also pledged police would behave "within the framework of the law" after various opposition groups announced plans to protest on Sunday and rights groups said dozens of activists were arrested or fined in the build-up to the vote. "Protest moods exist in all countries of the world, as it turns out," Tokayev said.

'Alarm' over vote transparency

The World Bank has estimated Kazakhstan's economy shrank 2.5 per-

cent in 2020 as it grappled with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic—a first year-on-year recession in two decades.

But suffocating authoritarianism has left few outlets to voice dissatisfaction with the status quo. The NSDP faced off with the ruling party in the last three parliamentary votes, missing out on the legislature each time. The party's decision not to participate in the upcoming elections came as France-based fugitive banker and long-time regime nemesis Mukhtar Ablyazov called on opposition activists to vote for NSDP, even as he cast doubt over its opposition credentials. — AFP

Landslides kill more than 11 in Indonesia

JAKARTA: At least 11 people were killed, including a six-year-old boy, and scores more were missing after deadly landslides hit Indonesia's West Java province, authorities said yesterday. Torrential rains triggered the disaster on Saturday evening in the town of Sumedang, where a second landslide buried residents and a rescue team that had been searching for the initial victims, said Bandung rescue agency spokeswoman Seni Wulandari. "We're still documenting how many are missing after the second landslide because there were many people who joined the original rescue effort," she said.

At least one survivor was seriously injured, while 11 people were confirmed dead, Wulandari said. Fatal landslides and flash floods are common



INDONESIA: Rescuers searching for survivors after landslides killed at least 11 people in Sumedang yesterday. — AFP

across the Indonesian archipelago, where seasonal downpours are frequent and relentless. In September last year, at least 11 people were killed in landslides on Borneo island while a few months

earlier, landslides in Sulawesi killed dozens. Indonesia's disaster agency has estimated that 125 million Indonesians—nearly half the country's population—live in areas at risk of landslides. — AFP

Pakistan hit by nationwide power blackout

ISLAMABAD: Power was gradually being restored to major cities across Pakistan yesterday after it was hit by a massive electricity blackout, officials said. The electricity distribution system in the nation of more than 210 million people is a complex and delicate web, and a problem in one section of the grid can lead to cascading breakdowns countrywide.

The latest blackout was caused by "an engineering fault" in southern Pakistan at 11:41 pm local time on Saturday (18:41 GMT), which tripped the system and caused power plants to shut down, power minister Omar Ayub Khan told a press conference in Islamabad.

"Our experts are trying to determine the exact location of the fault," Khan said that will take "another few hours as the area is still covered in dense fog", but that power had been partially restored in most areas of Punjab, the

most populous province, as well as the economic hub Karachi in the south.

"We hope to bring the system back to its full capacity by this evening, but it will take some time for nuclear and thermal power plants to get operational," Khan tweeted. People were cracking jokes and exchanging memes on Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, mostly ridiculing Prime Minister Imran Khan's government and its performance after the breakdown.

"Power breakdown in Pakistan is blackmailing Imran Khan," tweeted Musarrat Ahmedzeb in reference to the premier's recent statement accusing Shiite protesters of blackmailing him after killing of 10 miners. "What a start for the new year... let us seek Allah the Almighty's mercy," read another tweet, while a message on WhatsApp said: "new Pakistan sleeps in a night mode".

There were no immediate reports of disruption at hospitals, which often rely on back-up generators. Netblocks, which monitors internet outages, said web connectivity in the country "collapsed" as a result of the blackout. Connectivity was at "62 percent of ordinary levels", it said in a tweet. — AFP

Bomb kills three in Afghan capital

KABUL: An Afghan journalist-turned spokesman for the country's public protection force was killed along with two colleagues yesterday by a bomb targeting their vehicle, officials said. The murder of Zia Wadan, who previously worked for several media networks, appeared to be the latest in a series of targeted killings that have rocked Afghanistan, especially Kabul. Wadan and his colleagues were killed in morning rush-hour traffic in an eastern part of the capital, interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian told reporters. "A vehicle carrying Zia Wadan was targeted with an IED... as a result, Wadan and two of his colleagues were killed," Arian said, adding that another person was wounded. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, but President Ashraf Ghani blamed it on the Taliban.

"The spike in violence by the Taliban is against (the) spirit of commitment for peace and indicates the group still pursues their hawkish attitude to take innocent lives and damage public facilities," the presidential palace said on Twitter, quoting Ghani. Wadan was spokesman for the National Public Protection Force (NPPF), a security service under the interior ministry that deploys guards to international organizations across Afghanistan. —AFP

News in brief

Zimbabwe journalist to be jailed

HARARE: Zimbabwe police have re-arrested award-winning journalist and government critic Hopewell Chin'ono, as well as one of his defenders, for allegedly posting false information on social media, prosecutors and lawyers said. Chin'ono was detained in July last year ahead of banned anti-graft and anti-government protests he backed through his Twitter account. He was charged with inciting public violence and released on bail one month later. The journalist was behind bars again in November for allegedly obstructing justice after tweeting about a gold smuggling case involving political elites. Another tweet landed Chin'ono back in jail on Friday, this time for sharing a video he claims shows a police officer beating a baby to death in the capital Harare. Israel records four S. African COVID-19 variant cases. — AFP

Israel records four S African cases

JERUSALEM: Israel's health ministry said Saturday four people had tested positive for the novel coronavirus strain first detected in South Africa, with the new British variant already recorded. The cases were discovered after testing of travellers arriving from South Africa. The two new strains are more infectious than previous variants of the virus. Amid surging cases, Israel last month reimposed a national lockdown. On Friday it tightened restrictions further as the daily caseload remained high. Israel has launched a nationwide vaccination program and more than 70 percent of Israelis over the age of 60 have received a first dose, with 1.7 million jabs administered, according to the health ministry. — AFP

Niger 'won't abandon' jihadist-hit west

OULLAM: Niger's interior minister on Saturday promised not to "abandon" the country's troubled west at a meeting of local leaders, a week after its worst-ever jihadist massacre against civilians. Last Saturday, around 100 attackers riding motorbikes killed over 100 civilians in hours-long attacks on two villages in the jihadist-plagued region of Tillaberi, 120 kilometers (75 miles) north of the capital Niamey. Now the central government wants to "strengthen cohesion along the border." Interior Minister Alkache Alhada told political, religious and community leaders at a meeting in the town of Ouallam. Niamey "will not abandon you and will always be by your side," he added. Former Italian minister Salvini faces hearing in migrant affair. — AFP

Salvini faces hearing in migrant affair

ROME: Italian political leader Matteo Salvini appeared Saturday before a Palermo judge in connection with a 2019 incident during which he blocked migrants at sea while he was the interior minister. Salvini, head of the far-right political party known as the League, is suspected of sequestration and abuse of power for having refused to allow around 100 migrants to land in Italy in August 2019. He had blocked a ship, the Open Arms, from docking in a port, forcing it to anchor off the island of Lampedusa while conditions on board deteriorated. The migrants that had been picked up at sea were finally able to disembark on the orders of a local prosecutor. — AFP

Business

MONDAY, JANUARY 11, 2021

Major CES gadget show turns to tech for virtual salvation

Digital version of CES dubbed to be a 'true broadcast experience'

SAN FRANCISCO: The Consumer Electronics Show known for crowds, sensory-overload, and deal-making is relying on technology it has long hawked to put pizzazz into its first virtual event, kicking off today. The deadly pandemic that has derailed in-person conferences around the world during the past year forced the Consumer Technology Association to follow suit with an online version of the annual gathering in Las Vegas.

"CES is one of the most experiential events in the world, where attendees can actually see and touch and experience the latest innovations," CTA spokeswoman Jean Foster said during a briefing ahead of the show. "And while we can't recreate that magic that happens in Las Vegas, we can bring our audiences a new and unique whole digital experience." Show organizers worked with Microsoft to build an online platform, and help exhibitors craft video presentations, digital press kits, and chat forums for engaging with attendees. "We really built around the concept of people being able to interact with each other," Foster said, noting that Microsoft Teams video-conferencing software was a strong component of the platform.

'Broadcast experience'

The digital version of CES will be a "true broadcast experience," the centerpiece of which will be an online "anchor desk" staffed by social media and tech news veterans. The anchor desk will stream interviews, announcements, analysis, and keynote presentations, as well as recap daily events and preview what is ahead, according to Foster.

More than 100 hours of CES programming is



In this file photo, Verizon Communications Hans Vestberg speaks onstage at the 2019 Global Citizen Festival: Power The Movement in Central Park in New York.

planned, with many presentations captioned in more than a dozen languages. Digital CES is relying on artificial intelligence to match interests indicated in attendee profiles with exhibitors, hoping to put a software spin on the serendipity of stumbling upon cool products on show-floors. Software will recommend people or exhibitors to connect with, and provide tools for online meetings or chats.

Mellow media day?

A media day typically packed with press conferences in Las Vegas ballrooms will be replaced with streamed video presentations from companies, the list of which includes Hisense, LG, Samsung and Sony.



LAS VEGAS: In this file photo taken on January 10, 2020, attendees walk through the Las Vegas Convention Center on the final day of the 2020 Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas, Nevada. Forced by the pandemic to go online, the massive annual gathering for the technology industry normally held in Las Vegas still wants to be a place for connections, even if virtual. — AFP photos

Freed from the Las Vegas time zone, CES press conferences will start early-morning New York time and continue into the evening.

Presentations from keynotes to press conferences will be shorter than they have been at real-

life CES events to account for limited attention spans and allow time for fielding questions. CES has more than 300 speakers lined up, and a heightened focus on sessions diving into issues such as privacy and 5G internet. — AFP

Brexit deal's 'rules of origin' spark trade confusion

LONDON: Many British businesses are swiftly discovering that they must now pay duties on exports bound for the European Union, despite the breakthrough Brexit free trade deal clinched over Christmas. The development, which has already helped spark sliding freight traffic to Ireland, is part of trade disruption that has become increasingly evident this year after Britain's Brexit divorce was finalised on December 31. Trade has also been badly hampered by new COVID-19 border restrictions, with the roll-out of testing for lorry drivers as Britain races to curb a rampant variant of the deadly virus.

At the heart of the Brexit deal, which came into force on January 1, is the so-called "rules of origin" condition applied to all goods crossing the border. The rules of origin, a key aspect of all major trade deals, can rapidly turn into a costly headache for businesses.

Under the Brexit provision, any good will be subject to a customs levy if it arrives in Britain from abroad and is then exported back into the European Union. For example, if a British clothing retailer imports Chinese-made textiles, then it would then have to pay a customs charge if it re-exports the items into a member nation of the EU's single market and customs union. Put simply,

the rules therefore determine whether an export is considered British or not.

'Businesses blindsided'

"It is clear that many UK businesses exporting to the EU are going to be hit by tariffs," said Michelle Dale, senior manager at the Manchester office of chartered accountants UHY Hacker Young. "Businesses have also been completely blindsided by the 'rule of origin' part of the deal, which leaves them at a major competitive disadvantage when selling in the EU."

"Unfortunately, not enough was done to prepare them for this. It takes years to build an effective supply chain—and using non-EU suppliers is often the best option both in terms of cost and quality." The Brexit agreement, which was sealed four and a half years after Britons voted to leave the European Union, grants zero customs duties if at least roughly 50 percent of an exported product is made in the UK.

That applies to the majority of UK exports—but certainly not all of them. And the provision is all the more important because the EU accounts for more than half of Britain's trade.

The London-based Institute of Government think tank argues however



In this file photo, members of the crew of the trawler 'Good Fellowship' process the day's catch after berthing in Eyemouth Harbour in the Scottish Borders. — AFP

that the complexity of supply chains means that proof of origin can be difficult for businesses to ascertain—and hard for authorities to assess. A raft of British retailers are reportedly rushing to assess the impact of critical deliveries to EU nations, including London's top-end department store Fortnum and Mason. Collapsed UK high-street department store Debenhams has already shut its online website in Ireland due to uncertainty over post-Brexit trade rules.

'We need a solution'

"At least 50 of our members face potential tariffs for re-exporting goods

to the EU," said William Bain, trade policy adviser at the British Retail Consortium industry organization. "We are working with members on short-term options and are seeking dialogue with the (UK) government and the EU on longer-term solutions to mitigate the effects of new tariffs," he added.

High-street retail giant Marks & Spencer warned Friday that the trade deal would "significantly impact" business in the Czech Republic, Ireland and France. The deal however removes tariffs for Britain's largely foreign-owned carmaking industry, which avoids customs duties for cars manufactured with components made abroad. — AFP

complained Eusebio Correa, a 57-year-old career taxi driver. "The military that should be providing security are now chauffeurs in uniform."

'Respect' for the uniform

Sourcing fuel for vehicles is a major issue in Venezuela, but especially in remote Tachira state and its capital San Cristobal. Fuel shortages have led to people waiting at gas stations for days at a time to fill their tanks, or alternatively turning to the black market, where prices are considerably higher.

That added cost has subsequently pushed up the price of taxi rides. But since the military controls gas stations, soldiers don't face the same restrictions the general population does. "This uniform that I wear represents respect. With the uniform, I can come and go anywhere," admitted the sergeant.

The salaries of the rank and file may have plummeted alongside everyone else's earnings in a country that has been in recession for seven years, but the military as an institution remains powerful.

It is the main power propping up the government of President Nicolas Maduro.

The military also controls oil, mining and food distribution companies, as well as customs and several key ministries. Venezuela's opposition and some rights organizations claim many top military officials have gotten rich through corruption.

The taxi-driving sergeant said he started "escaping" his barracks to moonlight once the country was put under a coronavirus lockdown. "For the release permits, sometimes I ask for medical leave. You even



Venezuela's military control the country's gas stations — taxi drivers complain that this gives soldiers moonlighting as drivers for extra cash an unfair advantage. — AFP

make up stuff to your own colleagues. I know many who do this job, right up to our superiors," said the sergeant. Under the lockdown, regular comings and goings were restricted—and only authorized via passes issued by the military.

In Tachira state, there are "military taxi drivers" of every rank, right up to generals, several insiders familiar with the business told AFP. A 32-year-old lieutenant, who also asked for anonymity, said he had thought about getting into driving but has so far decided against it for security reasons. — AFP

Soaring COVID-19 infections eroded US job recovery

WASHINGTON: Hiring in the United States likely stalled at the end of 2020, economists say, as coronavirus infections soared and Washington lawmakers squabbled over a massive spending bill that was approved only at the last minute.

The Labor Department will release the December jobs report, the final report for a year that saw the US economy unraveled by the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to rage even as vaccines are being rolled out. Business closures to stop the virus from spreading sent the unemployment rate skyrocketing in April from its record-low level, and though it has since decreased, the forecast among analysts is for little improvement from the 6.7 percent jobless rate reported in November.

"I think things have slowed down," said William Spriggs, chief economist of the AFL-CIO trade union federation. "We'll continue to see what we saw in November, which is the bounce-back is really grinding to a halt," he said. The report follows Labor Department data showing new applications for jobless benefits remained at a high level in the final week of the year. "The underlying story here is clear. A combination of COVID fear and state-mandated restrictions on activity in the services sector is squeezing businesses, and no real relief is likely until a sustained decline in pressure on hospitals emerges," said Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics.

Worse than it looks

The US was gripped by twin crises in 2020: the pandemic and its economic fallout.

The seemingly unstoppable COVID-19 outbreak has infected more than 21.3 million people and killed nearly 362,000 as of Thursday, according to Johns Hopkins University. Efforts to stop the virus by ordering many businesses to close or restrict activities caused massive layoffs beginning in March that moderated over the summer as those regulations were relaxed.

But many states tightened rules again as COVID-19 cases began climbing in the winter, slowing the recovery in the labor market. That has kept weekly new jobless claims above the single worst week of the 2008-2010 global financial crisis, with a seasonally adjusted 787,000 filings in the week ended January 2, 2021, the Labor Department said.

Another 161,460 people, without seasonal adjustment, filed claims under the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program for workers not usually eligible for government benefits—a smaller than normal number only because that program briefly lapsed at the end of December. "Brace (for) job creation to be flat-to-negative when the data (for) December comes out tomorrow," Diane Swonk of Grant Thornton wrote on Twitter, predicting an increase of 100,000 jobs that "is not significantly different than zero for the month." — AFP

Venezuela's new taxi drivers: Moonlighting soldiers

SAN CRISTOBAL: In crisis-hit Venezuela, even soldiers are struggling to make ends meet on meager salaries rendered practically worthless by the highest inflation in the world and have taken to moonlighting-as taxi drivers. Some have taken to sneaking out of their barracks to pick up customers needing a lift—a job that can earn them 60 times their monthly salary with just one trip.

"I'm a father and given the situation in the country, my salary is worth nothing," a 39-year-old sergeant told AFP under the condition of anonymity. "I do my taxi journeys and I earn much more than in my other job—that's why I do it," he added. The sergeant can earn more than \$500 for driving passengers from San Cristobal on the border with Colombia to the capital Caracas, some 800 kilometers (500 miles) to the northeast.

His monthly wage as a soldier—nine million bolivars—is worth just eight dollars.

However, regular taxi drivers are furious and say members of the armed forces have an unfair advantage: their uniform. "They don't get stopped at police checkpoints" where drivers are often asked for a bribe, and "they don't have problems getting fuel,"

Business

Gulf Bank opens new branch in Crystal Tower for wealth management clients

Branch boasts a distinctive modern design, equipped with state-of-the-art technology

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has opened its latest branch at Crystal Tower in Kuwait City. The new branch will cater exclusively to Gulf Bank's wealth management clients, and boasts a distinctive modern design, equipped with state-of-the-art technology designed to provide a seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank has dedicated its latest branch in service of its wealth management clientele as part of its commitment to fulfilling the client segment's unique banking requirements. Gulf Bank is currently the only bank in Kuwait with a dedicated branch for Wealth Management clients that provides an additional sense of privacy and convenience for customers. Commenting on the new branch, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Consumer Banking, Mohammed Al-Qattan, said: "At Gulf Bank, we take pride in paying special attention to the unique needs and requirements of all our customers. This is especially true for our Wealth Management clients, whose distinct lifestyles and banking needs require tailor-made services and solutions. We look forward to providing our Wealth Management

clientele with even more services that can enable them to conduct their banking requirements with the utmost ease and convenience."

Since 2010, Gulf Bank has offered its Priority and Private Banking clientele access to a suite of banking and investment products and services designed specifically around their banking needs. Gulf Bank's wealth management clients benefit from exclusive offerings designed to add even more ease and comfort to daily banking transactions.

Wealth management services are continuously updated to ensure they satisfy the requirements of clients, who often require customized services and solutions. Wealth Management services are currently available to Gulf Bank's Priority Banking clients, i.e. clients with an account balance of KD 50,000 up to KD 500,000 in cash or investable assets, or a monthly salary transfer of KD 3,500 and more. Wealth management services are also available to Gulf Bank's Private Banking clients, i.e. clients with an account balance of KD 500,000 in cash or investable assets.

To learn more about Gulf Bank's various products and services, customers can visit one of the Bank's branches, or visit the Gulf Bank website at www.e-gulfbank.com. Customers can also use the WhatsApp service on 1805805 for round-the-clock



Mohammed Al-Qattan



assistance from Gulf Bank representatives, or call the Customer Contact Center on the same number.

Gulf Bank is one of the leading conventional banks in Kuwait with total assets of KD 6 billion for year ending 31 December 2019. The Bank provides a broad offering of consumer banking, wholesale

banking, treasury, and financial services through its large network of more than 50 branches and more than 200 ATMs in Kuwait.

The Bank was founded in 1960 and is listed on the Kuwait Stock Exchange (Boursa Kuwait) since 1984.



Samsung forecasts 25.7% jump in Q4 operating profit

SEOUL: South Korean tech giant Samsung Electronics flagged a jump of more than 25 percent in fourth-quarter operating profit, with pandemic-induced working from home driving demand for devices powered by its chips. The world's biggest manufacturer of smartphones and memory chips said in an earnings estimate that it expected operating profit of 9 trillion won (\$8.23 billion) for October to December, up from 7.16 trillion won a year earlier. The prediction was slightly short of analyst forecasts of 9.34 trillion won, compiled by market researcher FnGuide, but Samsung shares jumped on the news, closing 7.12 percent higher in Seoul.

The coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc with the world economy, but has also seen many tech companies boom. LG Electronics, South Korea's second-largest appliance firm after Samsung, forecast its highest-ever fourth-quarter operating profit on Friday, projecting it would soar more than five-fold year-on-year to 647 billion won.

And South Korea as a whole saw a return to quarter-on-quarter growth in Q3 last year, driven by a better-than-expected exports performance. Samsung Electronics is crucial to the country's economic health—its overall turnover is equivalent to a fifth of the national gross domestic product.

It is the flagship subsidiary of the giant Samsung group, by far the largest of the family-controlled conglomerates known as chaebols that dominate business in the world's 12th-largest economy. Samsung's operating profit and 61-trillion-won sales forecast were both lower than its third-quarter figures, when its mobile and chip businesses were boosted by US sanctions against Chinese tech giant Huawei. Analysts say a stronger won, and rival Apple's October launch of its flagship iPhone 12, were among the factors behind the quarter-on-quarter decline in profits.



SEOUL: A man walks past an advertisement for the Samsung Galaxy Note20 Ultra smartphone at the company's showroom in Seoul. —AFP

"Samsung's midrange and value smartphones account for about 80 percent of its mobile sales," said Jusy Hong, a director at market researcher Omdia. "But Chinese firms—such as Xiaomi, Vivo and Oppo—have also been expanding their share in the midrange phone market, in regions including India and Southeast Asia."

Leader's retrial

Looking forward, analysts said the company's outlook for 2021 was fairly stable, driven by continued demand for memory, and growth in the consumer electronics and chip-manufacturing businesses. They also expected Samsung's mobile business to improve, with the firm unveiling its latest lineup of flagship Galaxy phones next week.

Meanwhile, the global chip-manufacturing industry is expected to see record revenue this



year, with the stay-at-home economy persisting because of the pandemic, according to Taipei-based market tracker TrendForce. "2021 will be a year for the growth of Samsung foundry (chip-manufacturing) business," Sujeong Lim, an analyst at market observer Counterpoint, told AFP.

"Demand for semiconductors such as 5G, IoT (Internet of Things), and high-performance smartphones is exploding." The Q4 figures come about two months after the burial of late chairman Lee Kun-hee, who turned Samsung Electronics into a global powerhouse.

But his son, and the firm's de facto leader, Lee Jae-yong, is awaiting the verdict in his retrial over a sprawling corruption scandal, which could see him return to prison. The ruling is due later this month and a conviction could deprive the firm of its top decision-maker after prosecutors requested a nine-year jail term. —AFP

Amazon pushes Parler offline after Capitol attack

SAN FRANCISCO: Amazon will suspend Parler, the tech giant confirmed Saturday, sending the social media network offline after it was banned by Apple and Google for allowing "threats of violence" in the wake of a deadly riot at the US Capitol. The Parler social network has become a haven for conservatives who say they have been censored by other social media platforms.

It had soared in popularity in recent months, becoming the No 1 free app on Apple's App Store on Saturday after the much larger Twitter decided to permanently ban US President Trump from its platform for his role in inciting violence at the Capitol. Messages of support for the Wednesday's rioters along with calls for new demonstrations had flourished on the platform, leading Google to remove it from its app store on Friday, followed by Apple on Saturday. Amazon then moved to wipe it from its cloud hosting Amazon Web Services, pushing it offline entirely.

In a letter to Parler first published by BuzzFeed, Amazon said the network was not acting quickly enough against violent content on the platform. "We've seen a steady increase in this violent content on your website, all of which

violates our terms of service," the letter, the contents of which were confirmed to AFP by Amazon, said. Given the riot at the Capitol this week, the letter continued, there was a "serious risk that this type of content will further incite violence."

It will suspend the account just before midnight Pacific Standard Time on Sunday (0759 GMT Monday).

As the group hosts Parler's data on its cloud service, this should prevent it from functioning, at least temporarily.

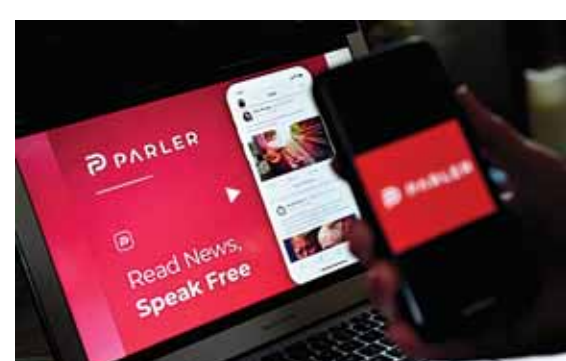
'Threats of violence'

The founder of Parler, John Matz, confirmed on his profile that there was a possibility the network would be unavailable "for up to a week" as it searches for a new host.

"We will try our best to move to a new provider right now," he said. Amazon's decision has much more far-reaching impact than the moves by Google and Apple.

They had made it more complicated to download the Parler app, but users could still access it if it was already downloaded or if they were using an internet browser. "We have always supported diverse points of view being represented on the App Store, but there is no place on our platform for threats of violence and illegal activity," Apple said in a statement Saturday.

"Parler has not taken adequate measures to address the proliferation of these threats to people's safety. We have suspended Parler from the App Store until they resolve these issues."



ARLINGTON: In this file photo, an illustration picture shows social media application logo from Parler displayed on a smartphone with its website in the background in Arlington, Virginia. —AFP

Google pulled Parler from its app store for allowing "egregious content" that could incite deadly violence like that seen at the Capitol. Angry Trump supporters swarmed the building on Wednesday as lawmakers met to certify Joe Biden's November 3 election win, leaving five people—including a policeman—dead.

Other mainstream social media networks like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitch have also suspended Trump following the attack on the Capitol. Matz has said the platform has "many options" for moving ahead.

Parler started in 2018 and was initially a home for the extreme right, but now it attracts more traditional conservative voices including Republican lawmakers. —AFP

German car sales, output posts historic slump

FRANKFURT: Germany's key car market plunged in 2020 to its lowest levels since reunification, data showed Saturday, with output and sales down dramatically due to the coronavirus pandemic.

A total of 2.9 million cars were registered in Europe's largest economy last year, down 19 percent, with production of 3.5 million vehicles reaching the lowest volume in 45 years, according to the VDA auto federation. Efforts to halt the spread of the coronavirus shuttered factories early in the year and the latest lockdown, set to last until the end of January, have closed brick-and-mortar dealerships.

"We expect the German passenger car market to recover in 2021," VDA president Hildegard Mueller said in a statement. "Nevertheless, the very strong pre-corona level isn't expected to be reached for the time being."

The slump makes for numbers not seen since before the country's reunification. The last time fewer than three million cars were registered was 1989. The 19 percent fall in 2020 was only eclipsed in 2010, after a year in which sales had been inflated by a scrappage premium. But in a glimmer of hope, in December 2020, just over 310,000 cars were registered in Germany, an increase of 10 percent on the same month of 2019.

Germany's government introduced a temporary VAT reduction in July, which "had an effect" ahead of its expiry at the end of the year, the VDA said. Exports of German-made cars were down 24 percent at 2.6 million vehicles. The news comes as German manufacturers struggle to adapt to European Union emissions targets and make the costly switch to electric vehicles.

Mueller argued that the slump in sales was bad for the environment, as without renewing the car fleet, "older cars stay longer on the streets". The market share of electric cars continues to rise, tripling in the year to reach 6.7 percent of new registrations. Including hybrids, e-vehicles accounted for 13.5 percent of new registrations at 395,000, a share that rose more than a fifth in the last quarter of the year. —AFP

New Zealand central bank hit by cyber attack

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's central bank said yesterday it was responding with urgency to a "malicious" breach of one of its data systems, a third-party file sharing service that stored "sensitive information". Reserve Bank of New Zealand governor Adrian Orr said the breach had been contained and the system was taken offline but it would take time to determine what information had been accessed.

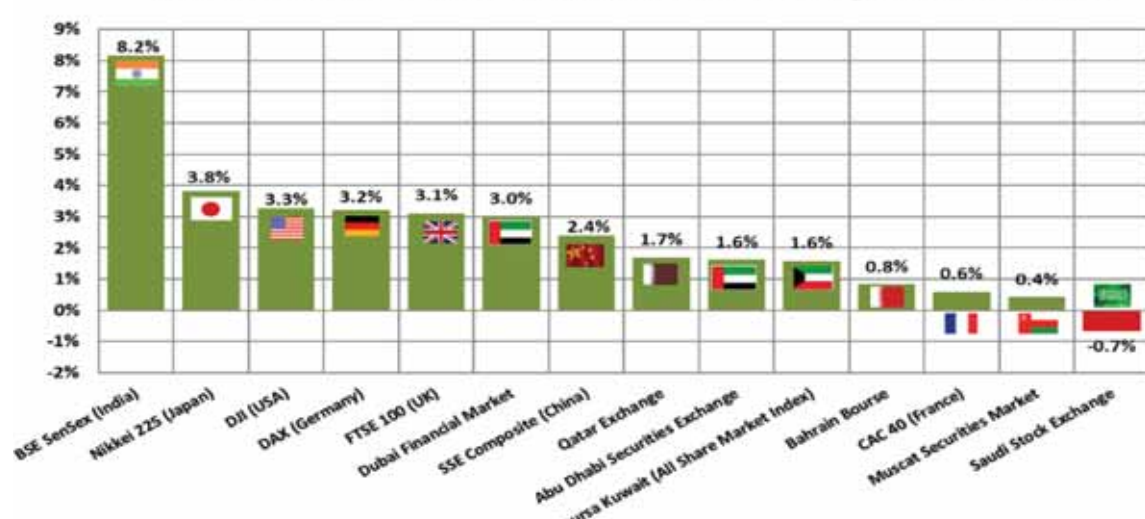
"We are working closely with domestic and international cyber security experts and other relevant authorities as part of our investigation and response to this malicious attack," Orr said. "The nature and extent of information that has been potentially accessed is still being determined, but it may include some commercially and personally sensitive information," he added. "It will take time to understand the full implications of this breach, and we are working with system users whose information may have been accessed."

In its latest report, the government agency CERT (Computer Emergency Response Team) said cyberattacks had increased 33 percent year-on-year in New Zealand. The country's stock exchange was targeted by sustained DDoS (distributed denial of service) attacks last August, forcing trading to be halted on four consecutive days. —AFP

Business

Kuwait's budget for 2020/2021 may record a deficit of KD 11bn: Al-Shall

Global economy on track to lose 4.3% of its volume due to pandemic

Performance of Selected Stock Markets During December 2020

Performance of Selected Stock Markets at the end of Dec 20 versus end of Dec 19


KUWAIT: The global economy is expected to lose 4.3 percent of its volume or \$3.9 trillion. Also, unemployment rate multiplied and 83.3 million individuals were infected by COVID-19 and 1.8 million people passed away. Some still believe that the pandemic is a conspiracy by some pharmaceutical companies to control people and gain billions of dollars.

The probable negative impacts have been mitigated by President Biden winning the presidential elections on November 3rd 2020, in the USA which would suggest cooling the trade war led by President Trump against China, which even affected his allies. This coincided with the beginning of containing COVID-19 crisis. Therefore, the global economy might restore most 2020 losses though with less figures than 2019.

GCC economies received two blows, the first one was a sharp drop in oil prices due to an inter-oil war within the "OPEC+" Group and prices collapsed sharply after the repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis. Most GCC states began to lose their high credit ratings. Expected economic losses range between 2 percent the least for Qatar and 9.4 percent the highest for Oman (according to the World Bank report issued last week). Brent Mix oil prices during the second quarter of 2020 scored \$29.3 per barrel, which is close to its production cost for some non-traditional oils. GCC economies are still weak though they began to improve.

Average Brent mix prices for the fourth quarter of 2020 scored \$43 per barrel. Most GCC states compressed their public expenditures, increased their non-oil revenues, and adopted long-term strategies to diversify their income. Kuwaiti economy is expected to have lost 7.9 percent of its volume in 2020, according to the World Bank report. Despite the dual blow mentioned previously, the economic administration did not adopt any measure suggesting its awareness of the deep blow and the necessity of due surgical action. As a result, the unsustainable economic repercussions accelerated. Kuwaiti oil average price for 2020 scored \$41.5 per barrel losing -35.5 percent from the \$64.3 per barrel average for 2019. This decline might increase the budget deficit from KD 3.9 billion (2019/2020 budget) to KD 10-11 billion (for the 2020/2021 budget). Once again, this means the loss of sustainable public finance. After the general reserve depletion to face liquidity, the government adopted non-constitutional and non-prudent measures by selling non-liquid assets from the general reserves by KD 2.3 billion. Then it adopted what is more dangerous by withdrawing what has been transferred from the general reserve to the future generations reserve for three fiscal years.

Due to the global economic crisis and the dual blow to the global economy, the Central Bank of Kuwait reduced the discount rate on the Kuwaiti dinar to its lowest record rate at 1.5 percent on 16/03/2020 after reduction of the basic interest rate on the US dollar to nearly 0 percent on 15/03/2020 to contain the probable impacts of the crisis. A committee chaired by the CBK Governor was formed last April to support the companies and individuals to ward against transforming a temporary liquidity crisis to a permanent solvency crisis that would transfer the repercussions into the banking sector. That was achieved by the least cost to the exhausted public treasury. The Capital Markets Authority (CMA), Boursa Kuwait and the Kuwait Clearing Co continued their work to preserve the promotion of Kuwaiti shares' attraction within a visibly developed niche, which led to promoting Boursa Kuwait to the Emerging Market's level on MSCI Index on November 30, 2020.

Despite the dual blow and the loss of the AllShare Market index by -11.7 percent in 2020, Boursa liquidity rose by 35.5 percent compared to 2019 total liquidity and scored KD 10.754 billion.

Foreigners' contribution to liquidity rose from 19.2 percent in 2019 to about 26.5 percent in 2020. Foreigners' ownership in the Kuwaiti banking sector scored about KD 1.894 billion as of 30/12/2020, although Kuwait did not adopt any measure to solve the public budget liquidity crisis or the economic reform.

Parliamentary elections

As for the political arena influencing the public administration formation, parliamentary elections on December 5th 2020, resulted in a considerable qualitative and quantitative change in the National Assembly composition. This significant change was mainly due to the popular wrath due to the spread of corruption and waste in public finance and the failure of the two wings of power (the Executive and the Legislative) to achieve anything significant. Despite the significant indicators to change the adopted approach to contain the anger, the forming of the new cabinet followed the same old approach and since the formation of the new cabinet is committing similar mistakes of former governments.

Oil and public finance

By the end of December 2020, the 9th month of the current fiscal year 2020/2021 ended and the average price for Kuwaiti oil for December scored \$49.4 per barrel. The average Kuwaiti oil price during the first three quarters of the current fiscal year (April 2020-December 2020) scored \$37.8 per barrel, higher by \$7.8 per barrel or by 26.1 percent than the hypothetical price estimated in the current budget of about \$30 per barrel, but lower by \$17.2 per barrel or by -31.2 percent than the hypothetical price for the past fiscal year of \$55 per barrel. The average oil price in the last fiscal year 2019/2020 which ended at the end of last March scored \$61.6 per barrel, the average price per barrel for the first 9 months of the current fiscal year is lower by 38.6 percent or by \$23.8 lower than the average barrel price for the past fiscal year, and lower by 56 percent or by \$48.2 below the net parity price of the current budget at \$86, according to the Ministry of Finance estimates and after deducting the 10 percent in favor of the future generations reserve, the break-even price decreased after the government stopped transferring that percentage to the future generations reserve.

Kuwait is supposed to achieved KD 800 million in oil revenues in December. If we assume a modest increase in production level during the remaining three months of the current fiscal year according to the recent OPEC agreement, and with the assumption that the price of a barrel of oil is stable for the period January 2021-March 2021 at an average level of \$52, it is expected that total oil revenues, after deducting production costs for the entire current fiscal year to be at KD 8.6 billion, a value that is higher by KD 3 billion than the estimated in the budget for the current fiscal year at KD 5.6 billion. With the addition of about KD 1.9 billion in non-oil revenues, the total budget revenues for the current fiscal year will score about KD 10.5 billion. Comparing that figure with total expenditures appropriations in the amount of about KD 21.5 billion, the public budget for the fiscal year 2020/2021 may record a deficit of about KD 11 billion and perhaps a little less if oil prices rise higher than our estimates, and nine months of data provide an indication close to the hypothetical deficit volume. The actual deficit remains a variable dependent on the movement of oil prices and oil production during the next three months.

Trading features at Boursa Kuwait

Kuwait Clearing Company issued its report regarding "Trading Volume according to Nationality and Category" for the period from 01/01/2020 to 31/12/2020 which is published on the official website of Boursa Kuwait. The

report indicated that individual traders still form the largest trading group but their contribution is declining in terms of selling and purchasing shares. They acquired 39 percent of total value of sold shares (44.3 percent for 2019) and 37.8 percent of total value of purchased shares (40.5 percent for 2019). Individual investors sold shares in the amount of KD 4.214 billion and purchased shares in the amount of KD 4.082 billion with a net trading of selling by KD 132.222 million. The second largest contributor to liquidity is the companies/establishment sector and their purchases rose alongside their sold shares.

This sector acquired 35.5 percent of total purchased shares (29.9 percent for 2019) and 31 percent of total value of sold shares (22 percent for 2019). The sector purchased shares worth KD 3.830 billion and sold shares worth KD 3.345 billion becoming the only sector with net trading of purchasing by KD 484.455 million, and if its contribution continues to growth at a steady rate it could end up as the largest contributor in Boursa Kuwait transactions during the year 2021. The third contributor is the clients' accounts (portfolios) and their contribution has dropped, it captured 23.1 percent of total sold shares (26.7 percent for 2019) and 22.4 percent of total purchased shares (23.2 percent for 2019). This sector sold shares worth KD 2.492 billion and purchased shares worth KD 2.416 billion, with a net trading balance of sold shares by KD 75.600 million.

The last contributor to liquidity is the investment funds sector and their contribution has declined, it acquired 6.9 percent of total sold shares (7 percent for 2019) and 4.3 percent of total purchased shares (6.4 percent for 2019). The sector sold shares worth KD 742.309 million and purchased shares worth KD 465.676 million, with a net trading of most selling at KD 276.633 million. Boursa Kuwait still continues to be a domestic market with Kuwaiti traders forming the largest trading group. They sold shares worth KD 8.203 billion capturing 76 percent of total sold shares (84.3 percent for 2019), and purchased shares worth KD 7.674 billion acquiring 71.1 percent of total purchased shares (77.3 percent for 2019).

As such, their net trading balance was -most selling- by KD 528.454 million. Percentage share of other foreign investors out of the total purchased stocks value scored 25.4 percent (18.1 percent for 2019), foreign investors purchased shares worth KD 2.738 billion and sold shares worth KD 2.180 billion, 20.2 percent of total sold shares (10.7 percent for 2019); thus their net trading value was -the 5 only purchasing - by KD 557.668 million. This means that the other foreign investors' confidence in the local Boursa is higher and increasing. GCC Investors' share out of total sold shares scored 3.8 percent (5 percent for 2019) worth KD 410.891 million, while value of their purchased shares scored 3.5 percent (4.6 percent for 2019) and worth KD 381.667 million.

Their net trading was selling by KD 29.214 million. Relative distribution among nationalities changed from its predecessor and was at 73.5 percent for Kuwaitis, 22.8 percent for traders from other nationalities and 3.7 percent for GCC traders, compared with 80.8 percent, 14.4 percent and 4.8 percent for Kuwaitis, other nationalities and GCC traders respectively, for the same period of 2019. This means Boursa Kuwait remained domestic with the major share for the local investors with more traders from outside the GCC region than their GCC counterparts, and individual traders still form the majority.

Number of active accounts between the end of December 2019 and the end of December 2020 rose by 45.3 percent, compared with a rise by 18.1 percent between the end of December 2018 and the end of December 2019. Number of

The following tables summarize Last weeks performance of Boursa Kuwait

Description	Week 1	Week 52	Difference %
	07/01/2021	31/12/2020	
Working days	4	5	
AlShall Index (32 Companies)	489.9	487.2	0.6%
Boursa All Share Market Index	5,537.2	5,546.0	-0.2%
Value Trade (KD)	134,923,661	117,716,810	
Daily average (KD)	33,730,915	23,543,362	43.3%
Volume Trade (Shares)	899,994,868	1,006,454,430	
Daily average (Shares)	224,998,717	201,290,886	11.8%
Transactions	36,489	34,578	
Daily average (Transactions)	9,122	6,916	31.9%

Most Active Sectors & Companies

Description	Value Traded	% of Total
	KD	Market
Sectors		
AHLI UNITED BANK (B.S.C)	25,079,428	18.6%
NATIONAL BANK OF KUWAIT	20,570,825	15.2%
KUWAIT FINANCE HOUSE	12,604,616	9.3%
MOBILE TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY	8,560,292	6.3%
GULF BANK	8,398,841	6.2%
Total	75,214,002	55.7%
Description	Value Traded	% of Total
Sectors	KD	Market
BANKS SECTOR	73,485,694	54.5%
FINANCIAL SERVICES SECTOR	23,470,040	17.4%
INDUSTRIALS SECTOR	12,720,079	9.4%
REAL ESTATE SECTOR	9,614,577	7.1%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR	8,925,403	6.6%

AlShall Index is a value index, i.e. it is based on a weighted market value by 100% according to IFC formulas, with the index's basic value being 100 (as of August 1st 1990).

ALSHALL

ALSHALL INDEX	Week 1	Week 52
	07/01/2021	31/12/2020
Increased Value (# of Companies)	14	9
Decreased Value (# of Companies)	15	16
Unchanged Value (# of Companies)	3	7
Total Companies	32	32

Company Name	THU	THU	DIFF	CLOSE	DIFF
	07/01/2021	31/12/2020	%	2020	%
1 National Bank of Kuwait	583.9	579.7	0.7	579.7	0.7
2 Gulf Bank	173.9	178.0	(2.3)	178.0	(2.3)
3 Commercial Bank Of Kuwait	521.2	516.0	1.0	516.0	1.0
4 Ahli Bank Of Kuwait	137.5	136.8	0.5	136.8	0.5
5 Kuwait International Bank	235.6	236.7	(0.5)	236.7	(0.5)
6 Ahli United Bank	317.0	318.1	(0.3)	318.1	(0.3)
7 Burgan Bank	226.6	227.7	(0.5)	227.7	(0.5)
8 Kuwait Finance Bank	2,294.0	2,276.1	0.8	2,276.1	0.8
Banking Sector	568.8	565.6	0.6	565.6	0.6
9 Commercial Facilities Company	135.7	137.1	(1.0)	137.1	(1.0)
10 International Financial Advisors	194.3	179.6	8.2	179.6	8.2
11 National Investments Company	164.8	169.9	(3.0)	169.9	(3.0)
12 Kuwait Projects Company (Holding)	411.4	416.7	(1.3)	416.7	(1.3)
13 Coast Investment & Development Co.	65.6	66.3	(1.1)	66.3	(1.1)
Investment Sector	187.4	188.9	(0.9)	188.9	(0.8)
14 Kuwait Insurance Company	87.5	84.9	3.1	84.9	3.1
15 Gulf Insurance Company	497.0	495.1	0.4	495.1	0.4
16 Al-Ahlein Insurance Company	177.8	185.3	(4.0)	185.3	(4.0)
17 Warba Insurance Company	70.5	70.5	0.0	70.5	0.0
Insurance Sector	178.6	178.8	(0.1)	178.8	(0.1)
18 Kuwait Real Estate Company	200.4	206.1	(2.8)	206.1	(2.8)
19 United Realty Company	98.1	95.9	2.3	95.9	2.3
20 National Real Estate Company	217.3	219.7	(1.1)	219.7	(1.1)
21 Salsal Real Estate Company	2,160.2	2,031.0	6.4	2,031.0	6.4
Real Estate Sector	234.9	229.9	2.2	229.9	2.2
22 The National Industries	156.4	157.2	(0.5)	157.2	(0.5)
23 Refrigeration Industries Co	345.2	348.2	(0.9)	348.2	(0.9)
24 Gulf Cable & Electrical Industries	295.4	301.8	(2.1)	301.8	(2.1)
Industrial Sector	179.1	181.0	(1.0)	181.0	(1.0)
25 Kuwait National Cinema	473.9	470.8	0.7	470.8	0.7
26 The Public Warehousing Co	4,025.4	3,990.0	0.9	3,990.0	0.9
27 Mobile Telecommunications Co (ZAIN)	1,171.7	1,153.0	1.6	1,153.0	1.6
28 Safat Energy Co	32.2	30.6	7.8	30.6	7.8
Services Sector	1,633.5	1,616.2	1.2	1,616.2	1.2
29 Livestock Transport & Trading Co	152.5	146.7	4.0	146.7	4.0
30 Danah Alasaf Foodstuff Company	10.8	10.8	0.0	10.8	0.0
Food Sector	451.8	450.4	0.3	450.4	0.3
31 Sharjah Cement Co	175.8	175.8	0.0	175.8	0.0
32 Umm Al-Qaiwain Cement Industries	525.4	551.8	(4.8)	551.8	(4.8)
Non Kuwaiti Companies	144.9	146.2	(0.9)	146.2	(0.9)
AlShall Index	489.9	487.2	0.6	487.2	0.6

active trading accounts in the end of December 2020 was at 24,983 or 6.2 percent of total accounts, compared to 36,982 accounts in the end of November 2020, i.e. 9.2 percent of total accounts for the same month, a drop by 32.4 percent during December 2020.

Comparative performance of selected stock markets

The performance of December was positive for most of the selected markets during which 13 markets achieved gains and one market achieved losses. As a result of this performance, seven markets achieved gains at the end of 2020 compared to the end of 2019, and seven other markets achieved losses compared to the same period including 5 GCC markets.

The biggest gainer in 2020 was the Japanese market whose index gained 16 percent, compared to the gains by about 18.2 percent achieved at the end of 2019. The second biggest gainer was the Indian market which gained about 15.8 percent versus 14.4 percent gains at the end of 2019. The third biggest gainer was the Chinese market with 13.9 percent gains, followed by the US market with about 7.2 percent gains for the Dow

Jones Index, and then the Saudi market (the best performing GCC market) with about 3.6 percent gains.

The Qatari market was the least profitable and achieved very slight gains of 0.1 percent. The UK market was the biggest loser at the end of 2020 affected by Brexit as it lost -14.3 percent. The second-biggest loser was Boursa Kuwait with losses at -11.7 percent for its All-Share Market index, and then Dubai market, Muscat market, and the Bahrain market that lost 9.9 percent, 8.1 percent and 7.5 percent respectively. The Abu Dhabi market managed to limit its loss in 2020 to just 0.6 percent. It is expected that the positive performance of most sample markets will prevail as the world is expecting to compensate for the losses of its economy in 2021.

The performance of Boursa Kuwait for last week was more active, where the traded value, traded volume, number of transactions and the general index (AlShall index) increased. AlShall Index (value weighted) closed at 489.9 points as of last Thursday, showing an increase by 2.7 points or by 0.6 percent compared with its level last week (end of 2020).

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199

DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
Consultant Pediatrician

Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American Board in Pediatrics-Canadian Board in Pediatric Emergency

Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368 Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B

Dr. Hamoud Abdullah Alarouj
ENT Consultant, Laryngologist

- ◆ Kuwait Board of Otolaryngology.
- ◆ Laryngology Fellowship, McGill University- Canada.
- ◆ Fellow of the European Board of Otolaryngology – Head & Neck surgery.
- ◆ Member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.
- ◆ Member of the British Laryngological Association.
- ◆ Member of the European Laryngological Society.
- ◆ Member of the Canadian Society of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.

Experienced In:

- Management of benign and malignant vocal cord lesions.
- Vocal cord augmentation.
- Diagnosis and treatment of spasmodic dysphonia.
- Adenotonsillectomy using latest techniques.
- Myringotomy and ventilation tube insertion.
- Surgery for the deviated nasal septum.
- Endoscopic sinus surgery.
- Diagnosis and treatment of allergic rhinitis.
- Tympanoplasty.
- Diagnosis and treatment of vertigo.
- Thyroid surgery
- Diagnosis and treatment of snoring.

2536 0000
www.royalehayat.com

ROYALE HAYAT HOSPITAL

Our Doctors Provide care For the entire Family

Book your appointments today!

Dr. Kiran Turaka Ophthalmologist
Dr. Zareena Zahir Ophthalmologist
Dr. Hasan Khan Senior Cardiologist
Dr. P. Seshendra Nath Orthopedic Consultant (AUSTRIA) Specialised in Neck, Shoulder Hip and Knee

50721507
24551555
www.exircenterkw.com

EXIR MEDICAL SUBSPECIALITIES CENTER
Block No.4 Jahra - Kuwait

Tel : 24568857 / 24568859 info@exircenterkw.com www.exircenterkw.com

Scope of Clinical Practice:

- ◆ General & Laparoscopic Surgery
- ◆ Single Port Surgery
- ◆ Treatment of Colo-Rectal Diseases, including Colorectal Cancer
- ◆ Surgical Treatment of Inflammatory Bowel Abscess
- ◆ Treatment of Perianal Fistula & Complex Perianal Fistula (complications)
- ◆ VAAFT Procedure (Treatment of Fistula through Fitzulscope)
- ◆ Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
- ◆ Colonoscopy & Gastroscopy
- ◆ Stomach Balloon insertion & removal
- ◆ Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
- ◆ Gallstones & Abdominal Hernias Surgery

◆ Colonic Hydrotherapy & Fecal Incontinence Treatment
◆ Laparoscopic mini bypass
◆ Transanal minimally invasive surgery

Academic Certificates, Trainings & Fellowships:

- ◆ American Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of American College of Surgery
- ◆ Canadian Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
- ◆ American Board of Colo - Rectal Surgery
- ◆ American Board of Surgical Critical Care

Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad
Surgery Department
Consultant General Surgery, Laparoscopic & Colo – Rectal Surgeon

دار الشفاء
Dar Al Shifa Hospital
Tele:1802 555

daralshifa
Email: aalhaddad@daralshifa.com

Dr. Rany Essam Mitwally
Senior Registrar

Dr. Ahmed Hosni Abd Elhamid
Consultant

Dr. Abeer Khattab
Specialist

Optthalmology Services

- Cataract Surgery
- Glaucoma
- Retina
- General Ophthalmology
- Follow-Up All Treatments

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA @hadclinicw

Tel: 1828282
Whatsapp Us +965-6000 2184

To advertise on this Page
Call: 24833199 ext:101,102 or Direct line: 24835616 / 24835617
or email: ads@kuwaittimes.com

DR. MOHAMMAD AL HAJRY
Canadian Board of Otolaryngology
Head & Neck Surgery and Facial Plastics.
Fellow of Royal College of Surgeons-Canada
A rare Subspecialty in Microscopic Ear Surgery, Cochlear implant & Ear diseases

- ◆ Diagnosis/Treatment of General Ears, Nose, and Throat conditions in adults & pediatrics
- ◆ Minimally invasive Endoscopic sinus surgery including Balloon sinuplasty
- ◆ Minimally invasive Microscopic & Endoscopic Ear surgery
- ◆ Diagnosis & treatment of Otolgy and Audiology (Hearing loss, Tinnitus & balance disorders)
- ◆ Facial Plastic and reconstructive surgeries (Rhinoplasty, Otoplasty, Fillers & Botox injections)
- ◆ Diagnosis & treatment of snoring & obstructive sleep apnea in clinic without surgery
- ◆ Diagnosis & Treatment of voice and swallowing disorders.
- ◆ Diagnosis & Treatment of Head and Neck benign & malignant tumours.

@Malhajry
Salmiya, Belajat Street, Tel: 1881122

IC INTERNATIONAL CLINIC

American Board Certified in General Surgery
Member of the Society of American Gastrointestinal & Endoscopic Surgeons (SAGES)
Higher specialization in Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary surgery & Organ Transplantation
Member of many prestigious surgical societies.

- ◆ Day case surgeries
- ◆ Diagnosis, treatment and follow up of all surgical emergencies
- ◆ Surgery for morbid obesity (sleeve, gastric bypass)
- ◆ Hernia repair
- ◆ Surgery for reflux disease
- ◆ Minor surgeries (lipoma, sebaceous cyst, ingrowing nail)
- ◆ Hemorrhoids, fistula & anal fissure surgeries
- ◆ Breast surgeries
- ◆ Thyroid & adrenal surgeries
- ◆ Cholecystectomy & laparoscopic appendectomy
- ◆ Liver, pancreas & bile ducts surgeries

Dr. Hani Haider
General Surgery Consultant

http://www.international-clinic.com Tel: 1886677

DR. FAHAD S BUHAIMED
Consultant Cosmetic Dermatologist & Hair Transplant, NY

ACADAMIC CERTIFICATES:

- o Dermatology board certified.
- o Fellowship training program in cosmetic dermatology and hair transplant, New York, USA.
- o Member of American cosmetic dermatology society.
- o Referee reviewer of International Journal of Dermatology.

SPECIALIZED IN:

- o Dermatology & Cosmetic Treatments.
- o Laser Treatments.
- o Hair Transplant & Restoration.
- o Body & Face Contouring.
- o Injectable Fillers & Botox.

SHARQ, Ahmad Allaber st., Building bb, Floor 13.
Tel: (+965) 22060777
@Drbuhaimed, @Renovabb, @dardonabb
Email: drbuhaimed@beautybeyond.com.kw
www.beautybeyond.com.kw

DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laprosopic and Bariatric Surgery

Academic Certificates – Training

- ◆ Kuwait Board of General Surgery.
- ◆ (IFSO) member .
- ◆ Faculty member of (BEST).
- ◆ Member of Kuwait Surgical Association.

Scope of clinical Practice.

- ◆ Bariatric surgeries.
- ◆ Gallbladder stones surgeries.
- ◆ Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- ◆ G.I. surgeries.
- ◆ Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- ◆ Anal surgeries.

email: wbuhaimed@gmail.com Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228 Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building

Dr. Ahmad Alaeddine
Head of Cardiology departmenta at Dar Al Shifa hospital

- Consultant Interventional and conventional cardiologist.
- Specialised in the Diagnosis and treatment of all adult cardiac diseases, including those cases that need urgent intervention in Cath lab (primary angioplasty).

دار الشفاء
Dar Al Shifa Hospital
Tele:1802 555

daralshifa

Falcons over Liwa desert



Emirati Ali Mansouri trains a falcon in the Liwa desert, some 250 kilometers west of the Gulf emirate of Abu Dhabi. —AFP photos



An Emirati youth plays in the sand dunes in the Liwa desert.



Emirati Ali Mansouri (left) trains a falcon in the Liwa desert.



Emirati youths run across a sand dune in the Liwa desert.



Emirati Ali Mansouri (left) trains a falcon in the Liwa desert.



Emirati Ali Mansouri (second left) trains a falcon in the Liwa desert.

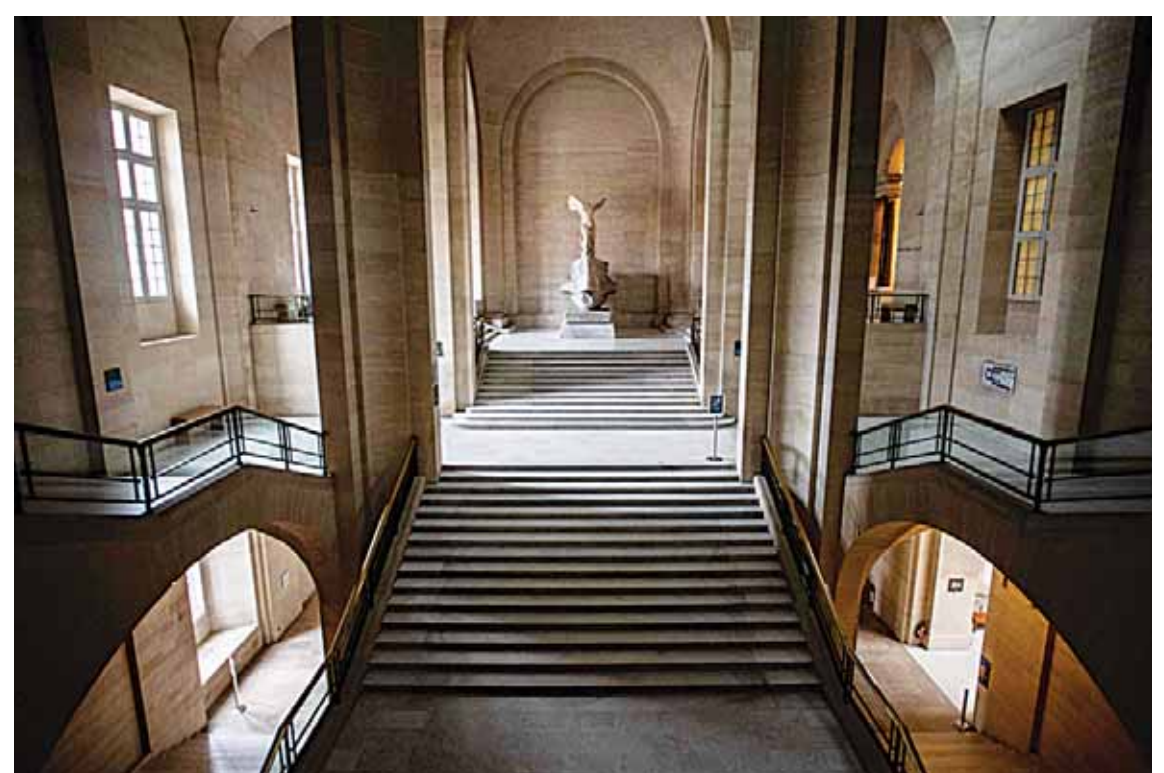


Emirati Ali Mansouri trains a falcon in the Liwa desert.

Louvre visitor numbers plunge due to COVID restrictions



A picture taken on January 8, 2021 at the Louvre Museum in Paris shows a view of the empty entrance hall, as the Museum remains closed due to the sanitary situation. —AFP photos



A picture at the Louvre Museum in Paris shows the Winged Victory of Samothrace in an empty hall, as the Museum remains closed due to the sanitary situation.

The Louvre, the world's biggest museum, suffered a drop in visitor numbers of over 70 percent last year as COVID restrictions kept art lovers away, it said on Friday. Receipts fell by more than 90 million euros (\$110 million) compared with 2019. The Louvre, which closed for six months during French coronavirus lockdowns, saw visitor numbers plunge to 2.7 million in 2020, from 9.6 million in 2019 and 10.2 million in 2018, which was a record year. Visits by foreigners, notably from the United States,

China, Japan and Brazil, who usually make up three quarters of total visits, all but dried up, especially during the usually busy summer months. The museum managed to limit the damage with its blockbuster Leonardo da Vinci exhibition that attracted 1.1 million visitors and ended before the first French lockdown in the spring. The Louvre also used the downtime to boost its digital offering, with the number of online subscribers growing by over a million from 2019 to 9.3 million, and the louvre.fr website register-

ing 21 million hits. It also found new ways to raise cash, including with the worldwide distribution of the documentary "A Night at the Louvre: Leonardo da Vinci", destined for movie theatres, and "Bid for the Louvre", which it said had raised 2.4 million euros through the auction of works by living artists and of "once-in-a-lifetime experiences". A livestreamed New Year concert by DJ and songwriter David Guetta, part of a fundraising drive, attracted 16 million views. The French government

meanwhile reported Friday that income from tourism had dropped by 61 billion euros, or 41 percent, in 2020 to 89 billion. Tourism minister Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne called the annual shortfall "a shock", but said that France—the world's number one tourist destination—had weathered COVID relatively well. "France has been more resilient than other world destinations," he told France Television, thanks to visitors from neighbouring countries and French people holidaying at home. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features



This picture shows the walls of an abandoned house in the Omani village of Wadi Al-Murr. —AFP photos



Mohammed Al-Ghanbousi, a former inhabitant of Wadi Al-Murr, stands next to his abandoned house in the Omani village.

Omanis revive memory of village swallowed by desert



Former inhabitants of Wadi Al-Murr, gather near abandoned houses in the Omani village.



Photo shows the walls of an abandoned house in the Omani village of Wadi Al-Murr.

Encroaching sands have left little evidence that the Omani village of Wadi Al-Murr ever existed, but former inhabitants and curious visitors are coming to rediscover the hamlet engulfed by the desert. Salem Al-Arimi, originally from the area, looked out nostalgically over the expanse. According to local elders, "all the houses in the village were invaded by the sand that assailed them 30 years ago, forcing the inhabitants to leave their homes," he said. Building tops and sections of stone wall emerge here and there, bearing witness to those who once lived here. Deserts are expanding all over the world, pushed on by climate change, and affected populations have few weapons to fight back. Wadi Al-Murr's inhabitants, who mostly relied on pastoral activities, had to give up their village, swelling the ranks of those migrating to towns and cities.

Nostalgia

Located at the bottom of a valley nearly 400 kilometers (250 miles) southwest of the capital Muscat, Wadi Al-Murr is cut off from main roads and only reachable via a long, rough track. Its isolation, including from the electricity and water grids, contributed to its slide into obscurity. But that has not prevented erstwhile residents from returning to visit, along with trekking enthusiasts who take desert hikes in the region. Mohammed Al-Ghanbousi, a former inhabitant, said the moving dunes had re-exposed some dwellings after they were covered by sand. This phenomenon has prompted "nostalgic people

to visit the village, whose structures still stand because they are built from stone," he said. "The village has recently been included in trekking tours and also attracts photography enthusiasts," he added. A mosque that sits within the village, which in its heyday had about 30 houses and 150 inhabitants, is one building that has resurfaced. Mohammed Al-Alaoui said that when his mother learnt some homes had reappeared, she asked him to take her back. "She often wants to go, and she likes to be there while she relates her memories of the old days, and sheds a few tears," he said.

Tourism

Rashed Al-Ameri is among the Omani tourists who have come to discover the hamlet swallowed by the desert. He travelled from Sur, hundreds of kilometers away, with two friends who were also keen to see Wadi Al-Murr. Oman, which is trying to diversify its oil-reliant economy, is seeking to develop its tourism industry—capitalizing on its rich heritage, scenic coasts and stunning mountain geography. The sultanate attracted three million foreign tourists in 2019, but like almost everywhere else, the novel coronavirus pandemic reduced visitors to a trickle in 2020. Ameri is among those who believe Wadi Al-Murr could easily be included on Oman's tourist trail. "What amazed me was that the force of nature could erase an entire village," he said. "And what's more amazing is how this place, with its old walls, resists these assaults." —AFP



Mohammed Al-Ghanbousi, a former inhabitant of Wadi Al-Murr, kneels to pray on a sand dune among abandoned houses in the Omani village.



A former inhabitant of Wadi Al-Murr, walks near an abandoned house in the Omani village.

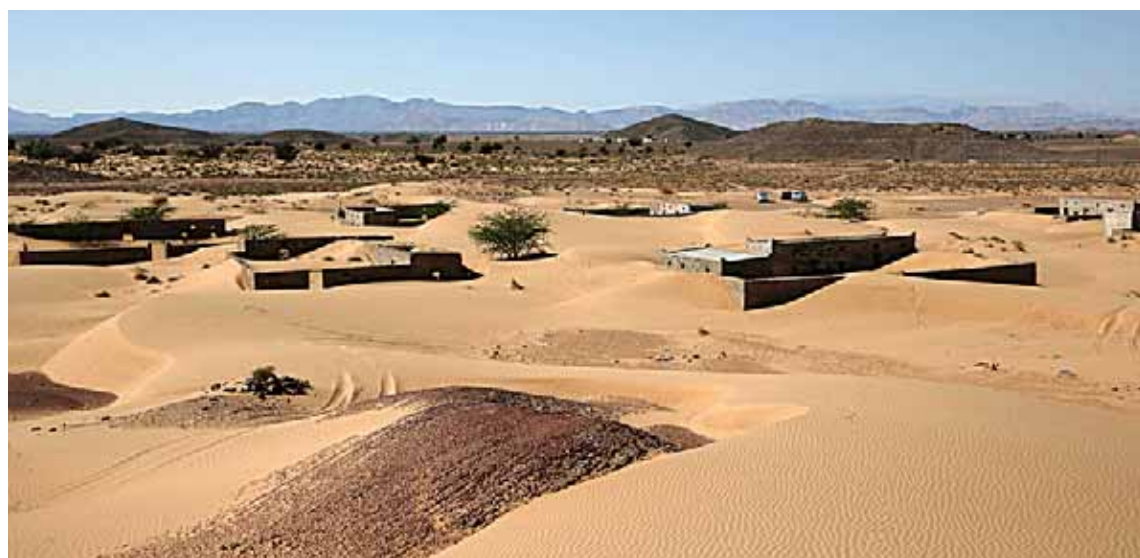


Photo shows abandoned houses in the Omani village of Wadi Al-Murr.



Former inhabitants of Wadi Al-Murr, walk near abandoned houses in the Omani village

Funny old world: The week's offbeat news

'Human remains' find turned out to be a potato

A dog walker in northeast England sparked a large-scale police search after reporting suspected human remains in a muddy field. But the suspected grisly find turned out to be a potato, officers said Friday. Northumbria Police said specialist teams and sniffer dogs were sent to scour the field in the Winlaton area of Gateshead, after a concerned member of the public contacted them on Tuesday. An accompanying photograph sent to officers appeared to show a human foot, the force said on its Facebook page. "Eventually we tracked down the 'scene' only to discover the toe was in fact a potato with a mushroom growing next to it," a spokesman said. "We can only praise the vigilance of the woman who made the call and if anyone does come across suspected human remains, please do the same and give us a call. "If it does turn out to be a vegetable, our police dogs will thank you for the treat!"

Crooked

Two Australian friends out fishing on their boat came across a naked man in "a nest up a tree" in a crocodile-infested mangrove swamp near Darwin. Key Joiner and Cam Faust offered the man—who had been living on snails—a drink and brought him back to civilization. "We didn't understand how he got there" and how he survived the crocs, said Joiner, given that his improvised "nest" was within easy snapping distance of the water. "We thought he must have had a big night after New Year's... and done himself a mischief in the bush," he added. But it turned out the man—who was covered in insect bites—was a fugitive wanted for armed robbery. He is now in hospital under armed guard. "We were going to visit him... then we thought, 'We might give that one a miss,'" Faust said.

Stole her heart and her car

A young American woman has been left devastated after her boyfriend left her and then stole her car. "She



had her heart and her car stolen," her dad wrote on Facebook as he appealed to neighbours in Connecticut to help track the cad down.

You can't take it with you

Staying in India, villagers in Bihar state took the corpse of a farm worker to a bank so they could get money from his account to cremate him. Canara Bank branch manager Sanjeev Kumar told AFP of the extraordinary posthumous withdrawal. "After over an hour (when his account book was produced), I gave them money and they finally left with his body for the cremation ground."

Brexit shmexit

Never mind Prime Minister Boris Johnson's father and sister applying for French nationality after Brexit, UK Independence Party backer Arron Banks' Leave.EU group which helped lead the campaign for Britain to quit Europe is now also jumping ship. It has moved its registered office to Ireland so it can keep its ".eu" internet address. —AFP

Home-turned-museum retains 'soul' of southern Iraq

An imposing house stands out among other buildings in Iraq's Samawah city—once a multi-generational family home, it's now a museum of a bygone age in the country's tribal south. Abdellatif Al-Jablawi, the property's owner and family patriarch, led a tour of the traditional house where he was born 80 years ago. At the time, three generations, from grandparents to grandchildren, lived in the house, with its intricate "shansheel" bay windows, wooden balconies and tall doors topped by elaborate lintels. "Over the generations, everyone preferred to rent elsewhere and the house emptied out," said Jablawi, now the oldest member of his family.



Al-Jablawi said the structure had been at risk of falling into ruin, when he decided to act. —AFP

The house is comprised of 13 rooms splashed with sunlight coloured by stained glass windows, including a grand ceremonial salon and kitchen, which Jablawi still calls "the fireplace," as it was known when he was young. The rooms are connected by steep, narrow stairs and walls of yellow brick, a historic building material still produced in southern Iraq. Jablawi said the structure had been at risk of "falling into ruin" when he decided to act. "I decided to buy back all the shares of the house... and, in 2015, I found an architect specialized in renovating heritage buildings," he said. "I told myself: 'This is our loyalty to the past.'" All told, the work to restore the building cost 250 million

dinars, or around \$171,000.

'Symbol of the city'

At the start, some family members were resistant to the project, said Ali, Jablawi's eldest son, standing in front of an old radio set in the inner courtyard, where a well recalls the days before running water. "We didn't agree with this project and the expense; we suggested he sell the dilapidated house to construct a building because we are in the commercial center of the city," he added. Jablawi categorically rejected this proposal, and his stubborn commitment to the plan eventually convinced the rest of his family. "The house has become a symbol of the city and it is open to every-

one, so we understood that our father was right," Ali said as he walked along the balcony that overlooks the inner courtyard.

The antiquities directorate in Muthanna province, one of Iraq's poorest, only provides logistical support in protecting heritage sites "when necessary", one of the directorate's officials Mustafa al-Ghazi told AFP. Before the novel coronavirus pandemic, the house regularly hosted cultural events and other evenings of poetry or music among carved wooden chests, carpets and cushions arrayed on the floor for family or tribal gatherings. In 2020, the house was the subject of a documentary, titled "The Soul of Samawah"—an honor for its proud owner. —AFP

Saudi Al-Rajhi denies 'Mr Dakar' on marathon stage

Explorer Horn in Saudi sands seeks a rally without petrol

SAKAKA, Saudi Arabia: Toyota's Saudi driver Yazeed Al-Rajhi took the Dakar Rally marathon seventh stage honors yesterday, the home hope denying Stephane Peterhansel, the overall leader in pursuit of his 14th title. Mini driver Peterhansel was on target to cross the line first at the end of the arduous 453km timed special featuring sand mountains between Ha'il and Sakaka.

But Al-Rajhi had other ideas, and with the benefit of his experienced co-driver Dirk Von Zitzewitz, an 18-Dakar veteran, he took command around 100km out. He secured his first stage win in the event since 2015 and his Dakar debut with 48sec to spare over Peterhansel, with Carlos Sainz third at 1min 15sec. In fourth came Qatari Nasser Al-Attiyah, who is now 7min 53sec behind Peterhansel in the overall standings with last year's champion Sainz over 40 minutes adrift in third.

Peterhansel, 55, first competed in the Dakar in 1988, the year leader Ari Vatanen's Peugeot 405 was infamously stolen in Bamako, with a ransom for its return demanded. It turned up eventually, but too late for Vatanen. Since then Peterhansel has made motorsport's toughest test an annual pilgrimage, and with 13 wins on both two and four wheels he has rightly earned his nickname 'Monsieur Dakar'.

He now has six podium finishes in seven stages and will be hoping to get his first win of 2021 on the board on Monday's eighth stage which sees the Dakar travelling circus heading west from Sakaka to the Red Sea resort of Neom.

In the motorbike category, defending motorbike

champion Ricky Brabec took the seventh stage win in a time of 4hr 37mins 44sec. The American, winner of the prologue, came in 2mins 07sec clear of Honda's Chilean rider Jose Ignacio Cornejo, the new overall leader.

But only by one second from Toby Price (KTM) with Sam Sunderland, the British 2017 champion, in third at 2min 11sec. Overnight leader Xavier de Soultrait slipped to fourth, 2min 34sec off the pace. Botswana's Ross Branch suffered a spectacular spill from his Yamaha early in the stage but thankfully escaped uninjured.

Rally without petrol

Mike Horn made his name by walking to some of the world's remotest spots but as the Dakar Rally resumed yesterday, he is in a diesel car, trying to navigate the Saudi Arabian desert with the aim of "conserving the planet". Horn, a 54-year-old Swiss based South African, is famed for exploits that include circling the Equator without using any motorized transport and walking to the North Pole in winter without dogs or motor vehicles.

He is competing in his second Dakar Rally, as navigator for veteran French driver Cyril Despres, in a traditional diesel-powered car with the objective of making such cars obsolete. In addition to competing, the car is designed to collect data as part of a project named Gen-Z which aims to enter a competitive hydrogen-powered car in the 2023 rally.

The car has been fitted with sensors by the French Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy



SAKAKA, Saudi Arabia: Toyota's driver Yazeed Al Rajhi of Saudi Arabia and co-driver Dirk Von Zitzewitz of Germany compete during stage 7 of the Dakar Rally 2021, between Saudi Arabia's northern cities of Hail and Sakaka yesterday. —AFP

Commission (CEA) which plans to manufacture the prototype that will run on an electric motor powered by a hydrogen fuel cell. "There's a real goal behind all this, and it's essential," said the 46-year-old Despres, who is in his 21st Dakar rally and has won the motorbike category five times. "That's new for me."

Horn first raced last year, when he and Despres lasted three stages. The explorer took heavy criticism for participating in a rally with a notorious

carbon footprint. "There are three things that made me come back," he said: "First of all the human adventure, then the competition, I like to win and to reach the end of my expeditions and of course collect data for research and for future generations."

"I can play an important part in changing the way we participate in motor sports," said Horn. "To conserve the planet to be able to leave a future to the younger generation is one of my life missions." — AFP

Nuggets beat short-handed 76ers

WASHINGTON: The Philadelphia 76ers were routed 115-103 by the visiting Denver Nuggets on Saturday, with the team so badly depleted by COVID-19 protocols and injuries that they were forced to dress an injured player.

The short-handed Sixers were down to just seven healthy players, pushing coach Doc Rivers to activate Mike Scott, who had a left knee injury, just so they could meet the league requirement to have a minimum of eight players. Scott sat on the team bench but didn't play. "COVID created this but the concern is not COVID now," Rivers said. "The concern is injuries."

The Sixers were missing a number of starters, including Seth Curry, who tested positive for the coronavirus on Thursday. Because of contact tracing, COVID-19 health protocols and injuries several other stars were also missing including Ben Simmons, Joel Embiid and Tobias Harris.

Before the game, Rivers said he felt it should have been postponed. "I don't think we should (play) but it's not for me to express that," Rivers said. "I do worry about our player health." Also missing were Matisse Thybulle, Shake Milton and Vincent Poirier. "I trust the league and I trust the doctors as far as health-wise," Rivers said. "I'm more concerned with health on the floor."

Saturday's game had a chance to be the season's second coronavirus-related game postponement. The Houston Rockets had their season opener against the Oklahoma City Thunder postponed because of a combination of positive tests and

contact tracing for Houston.

Nikola Jokic had 15 points and 12 assists and Gary Harris scored 21 points to lead the Nuggets. Jamal Murray and Will Barton had 14 points apiece for the Nuggets, who broke open a close game after halftime. JaMychal Green and Monte Morris added 12 points apiece.

Rookie Tyrese Maxey tallied a career-high 39 points on 18-of-33 shooting, Isaiah Joe added 13 and Dakota Mathias had 12 for Philadelphia, who lost their second in a row and had their 20-game home winning streak snapped.

Cameroonian star center Embiid was sidelined with back tightness while Australian guard Simmons was out with knee stiffness. "With the minutes we would have to ask (from Embiid), it would be insane to play him," Rivers said.

The Sixers started veterans Dwight Howard and Danny Green alongside rookie guards Isaiah Joe, Tyrese Maxey and Dakota Mathias. The Nuggets were without Michael Porter, who is in quarantine due to COVID-19 safety protocols. "They deemed it safe enough to play," Nuggets coach Mike Malone said. "To be honest, I think we're going to start seeing more of this."

Elsewhere, LaMelo Ball became the youngest player in NBA history to record a triple-double with 22 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists, and the Charlotte Hornets beat the Atlanta Hawks 113-105. The 19-year-old Ball is 177 days younger than Markelle Fultz when he set the triple double record.

Ball shot nine-of-13 from the floor as the Hornets handed the struggling Hawks their fourth straight defeat. Ball was the third overall pick in the 2020 entry draft. Tim Hardaway also scored 36 points and Trey Burke added a season-high 29 to lead the Dallas Mavericks to a 112-98 victory over the visiting Orlando Magic.

The Mavericks were without forward Dorian Finney-Smith and guards Josh Richardson and



CHARLOTTE: LaMelo Ball #2 of the Charlotte Hornets shoots the ball on Saturday at Spectrum Center in Charlotte, North Carolina. —AFP

Jalen Brunson due to COVID-19 health and safety protocols. Hardaway made eight of 13 three-point attempts as the Mavericks defeated Magic for the 14th time in the past 18 meetings. — AFP

Large turnout of registration for shooters' tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex is welcoming a large number of shooters to participate in the late Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah Tournament to be held on Jan 14-16. Club and National Guard shooters will compete in Olympic skeet and trap events for both men and women.

Obaid Al-Osaimi, Secretary General of Arab and Kuwait Shooting Federations, thanked the family of the late Sheikh Ali for joining Kuwait Shooting Sport Club's chairman and board members in organizing this tournament, and their continued support and encouragement of Kuwait's shooters to keep making achievements at all level.

Osaimi said the organizing committee held several meetings with various subcommittees in order to make sure everything is ready for the distinguished launch of the tournament, which is being officiated by an elite group of international Kuwaiti referees who are highly experienced. Shooting ranges are also ready with equipment and systems for this important event.

Notably, this tournament comes ahead of the HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Annual International Grand Prix, which gives Kuwait shooters an opportunity to get ready in a competitive atmosphere. The HH the Amir tournament will be held from Feb 12 to 19, 2021.



Obaid Al-Osaimi

India battle to save Sydney Test marred by crowd abuse allegations

SYDNEY: India were battling to avoid defeat against Australia after losing two wickets before the close of play yesterday in a third Test marred by allegations of racist abuse from the Sydney crowd. The hosts declared their second innings at tea on day four at 312 for six, leaving India needing a mammoth 407 to win and they reached 98-2 at stumps, still needing a further 309 runs with the four-match series locked at 1-1.

No team has ever bettered 288 to clinch victory in the fourth innings at the Sydney Cricket Ground, with Australia achieving that mark against South Africa in 2006. India's record run chase started steadily before losing openers Shubman Gill for 31 and Rohit Sharma for 52, leaving their hopes resting on Cheteshwar Pujara, who was nine not out, and captain Ajinkya Rahane, unbeaten on four.

Sharma and Gill lived dangerously against some early torrid bowling by Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins. But they settled in during a 71-run stand to begin playing their shots, with the graceful Sharma bringing up an 11th Test 50 before being caught at fine leg hooking a Cummins short ball.

Gill, who has cemented his place in the side after making a debut this series, again looked at home until he nicked a Hazlewood delivery to Tim Paine behind the stumps on 31. "The batsmen will walk in tomorrow believing they can do it," said veteran Ravi Ashwin. "That belief is very important when you step onto the pitch. "As a team, we are very hopeful we

can put together a good performance," he added.

Australia's declaration came after Cameron Green fell on the stroke of tea for an entertaining 84, his maiden Test half-century, with captain Tim Paine unbeaten on 39. Steve Smith made 81 and Marnus Labuschagne 73, with Ashwin and Navdeep Saini grabbing two wickets each.

Just before the break there was a near 10-minute interruption to play that saw six fans removed after Mohammed Siraj, fielding on the boundary, complained to the umpire. It was not clear what was said, but the incident followed India lodging a complaint on Saturday after allegations of racist abuse towards the

team by sections of the crowd.

The International Cricket Council launched an investigation with Cricket Australia apologizing to India and vowing anyone at fault faced "lengthy bans, further sanctions and referral to NSW Police". "We've seen it happen in different parts of the world and I'm really sad to see it happen in Australia," said Australia coach Justin Langer. "I think our series so far has been played in such great spirits ... it's a shame to see it getting marred by incidents like we're hearing about today and last night."

Australia had resumed the day on 103 for two after India were bowled out for 244 in the first innings in reply to Australia's 338, with Smith on 29 and Labuschagne 47. Labuschagne survived an appalling dropped catch by Hanuma Vihari on the day's second ball that left bowler Jasprit Bumrah clutching his face in disbelief. — AFP



SYDNEY: A policeman (center) stands guard among sections of the crowd as the game was halted after allegedly some remarks were made by the spectators on the fourth day of the third cricket Test match between Australia and India at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) in Sydney yesterday. —AFP



TOKYO: Olympic Rings are seen near the National Stadium, the main venue for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, in Tokyo on January 8, 2021. — AFP

Support for Olympics hits low in Japan

TOKYO: Support for holding the coronavirus-postponed Tokyo Olympics this summer has hit a new low in Japan, a poll found yesterday as the country battles a third wave of infections. Just over 80 percent of those asked by Kyodo news agency said the huge global event should be cancelled or postponed again — a jump from around 60 percent in a December 6 survey by the same outlet.

Kyodo said the survey asked 1,041 participants nationwide, who were selected by random dialing. Tokyo 2020 organizers have said another delay is out of the question and are insisting the Games will go ahead despite a state of emergency declared

in the greater Tokyo area this week over a surge in COVID-19 cases.

In yesterday's national telephone poll, around 35 percent of people told Kyodo they favored outright cancellation, while some 45 percent said the event should be postponed a second time. The month-long emergency in the capital and surrounding regions is less strict than harsh lockdowns seen elsewhere in the world and primarily targets restaurants and bars, which have been asked to close early.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said this week that Japan is committed to holding a "safe and secure" Olympics. He said he believed the public mood will change when the country begins vaccinations, currently scheduled for late February. But senior International Olympic Committee official Dick Pound told the BBC he could not "be certain" the Games will go ahead, because "the ongoing elephant in the room would be the surges in the virus". — AFP

Sports

Leeds stunned by Crawley in FA Cup, as Chelsea, Man City advance

Cup holders Arsenal beat Newcastle as Chorley shock virus-hit Derby

LONDON: Leeds suffered a humiliating FA Cup exit against Crawley as the League Two side swept to a shock 3-0 win, while Timo Werner ended his Chelsea goal drought and Bernardo Silva sparked for Manchester City as the Premier League giants eased into the fourth round yesterday.

After the spiking coronavirus pandemic wreaked havoc with matches across the third round on Friday and Saturday, the FA Cup was back on more familiar ground as Leeds became the competition's latest big name to be knocked out by a feisty underdog.

Crawley's unexpected success encapsulated the FA Cup's unique charm and football's restorative powers at a time when the sport is badly in need of some positive news. Numerous clubs have been hit by COVID-19 problems as the new variant sweeps across Britain, forcing Aston Villa and Derby to field entire teams of youth players while their senior stars went into self-isolation.

Villa's kids were beaten by Liverpool on Friday and Derby's youngsters lost to non-league Chorley, with Southampton's tie against Shrewsbury postponed after a virus outbreak at the League One side. Despite calls for the English season to be halted while the virus is contained, the FA Cup goes on for now and Crawley relished their chance to steal the spotlight.

Leeds sit 12th in the Premier League after a fine first season back in the top-flight, but boss Marcelo Bielsa paid the price for making seven changes at The People's Pension Stadium in leafy Sussex. Crawley, sixth in League Two, had survived an incredible 6-5 win against Torquay in the FA Cup first round, but this victory was even more remarkable.

On a fairytale day for Crawley, it was fitting that Nick Tsaroulla should open the scoring with his

first career goal in the 51st minute. Ashley Nadesan's low shot crept under Leeds keeper Kiko Casilla's weak attempted save to double Crawley's lead two minutes later.

Jordan Tunnicliffe delivered the final blow in the 70th minute, forcing the ball into the roof of the net after Leeds failed to clear a Sam Matthews free-kick. It is not the first time Leeds have endured FA Cup ignominy after Don Revie's stars were famously eliminated by Colchester in 1971, while the club's 2008 side were embarrassed by Histon and the 2017 squad lost to Sutton.

Werner back on track

Chelsea, eight-time winners of the FA Cup and runners-up last season, showed Leeds how to deal with an upset threat as they thrashed League Two team Morecambe 4-0 at Stamford Bridge. Two-time world heavyweight boxing champion Tyson Fury has a gym at Morecambe's Mazuma Stadium, but it was Chelsea who delivered the knockout blows.

Mason Mount marked his 22nd birthday in memorable fashion as the midfielder fired in from 25 yards in the 18th minute. Werner finally got on the scoresheet in the 44th minute, bundling home after Kai Havertz headed into his path. Callum Hudson-Odoi struck in the 49th minute and Havertz got the fourth in the 85th minute.

Romantics looking for a shock at the Etihad Stadium were left disappointed as Manchester City cruised to a 3-0 win against second tier Birmingham. Pep Guardiola made four changes from the team that beat Manchester United in the League Cup semi-finals on Wednesday.

Bernardo Silva was one of those who came in and he opened the scoring with a superb half-volley after eight minutes. Silva struck again with a



CRAWLEY: Crawley Town's Cypriot defender Nick Tsaroulla (C) shoots past Leeds United's Spanish goalkeeper Kiko Casilla to open the scoring during the English FA Cup third round football match between Crawley Town and Leeds United at Broadfield Stadium in Crawley, southern England yesterday. — AFP

close-range finish in the 15th minute and Phil Foden got the third in the 33rd minute.

Yesterday's standout tie sees Marine, of the eighth tier Northern Premier League Division One North West, host Jose Mourinho's Tottenham. It is the biggest gap — 161 places — between opponents in FA Cup history.

Marine's squad is made up of teachers, NHS

staff, bin men and factory workers, with the highest-paid player earning between £200 and £300 a week. If Marine cause the biggest shock in FA Cup history, fans in the Merseyside town of Crosby should look out for goalkeeper Bayleigh Passant, who visited a local shop to get beers to celebrate his side's second round win — still dressed in his full kit. —AFP

Inter stalled; Ibra returns as Milan bounce back

MILAN: Gianluca Mancini headed in a late equalizer as AS Roma stalled Serie A title rivals Inter Milan with a 2-2 draw in Rome yesterday. Antonio Conte's second-placed Inter lost further ground after their midweek defeat to Sampdoria to drop three points behind leaders AC Milan. Roma remain a further three points behind Inter in third.

Defender Mancini got his head to a Gonzalo Villar cross four minutes from time to keep Roma three points behind Inter in third. Conte's side had fought back after Lorenzo Pellegrini gave Roma the lead just after quarter of an hour in the Stadio Olimpico.

Milan Skriniar headed in the equaliser 11 minutes after the break with Achraf Hakimi putting Inter ahead seven minutes later with a superb long range shot that blasted off the crossbar into the net. But the visitors were unable to resist the Roman pressure in the last quarter of an hour with goalkeeper Samir Handanovic saving Inter several times, denying Mancini from close range before being beaten by the defender on the following corner.

Milan extends lead

Zlatan Ibrahimovic had returned from injury, coming off the bench for a late cameo appearance, as AC Milan defeated Torino 2-0 on Saturday to extend their lead at the top of Serie A. Last weekend, champions Juventus ended Milan's 27-match unbeaten run in the league dating back to March.

But Rafael Leao's goal and a Franck Kessie



MILAN: AC Milan's Swedish forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic enters the pitch during the Italian Serie A football match between AC Milan and Torino at the San Siro stadium in Milan on Saturday. — AFP

penalty in the first half ensured AC Milan moved four points ahead of Inter Milan before they played third-placed Roma yesterday. Ibrahimovic started on the bench, having been out of action since scoring a double against Napoli on November 22, with a thigh injury and then a calf problem.

"We had a clear program, if Ibrahimovic passed the last test yesterday he could have a small role as he did," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli. The 39-year-old Swede, who scored 10 goals in six league games before injury, replaced Leao with five minutes to go in a game the hosts dominated against lowly Torino.

"The important thing is that the muscular problem is behind him, now we'll have to help him find his way back because he was out a long time," con-

tinued Pioli. "He's such a strong player, a great stimulus for the whole team."

Leao opened the scoring on 25 minutes after Theo Hernandez combined with Brahim Diaz to send the Portuguese forward clear to beat Torino goalkeeper Salvatore Sirigu. Kessie calmly slotted in the second from the penalty spot in the 36th minute after a VAR review judged Torino captain Andrea Belotti to have tripped Diaz.

Ricardo Rodriguez missed a chance to score for Torino against his former club, rattling the crossbar before the break, with Sirigu denying Kessie from close range. Milan's injury woes were compounded when midfielder Sandro Tonali was stretchered off five minutes after the break after colliding with Simone Verdi. —AFP

upturn for the team too: this victory is Barca's third on the bounce. "We are calmer," said Barca coach Ronald Koeman. "We have to stay humble, to keep working and winning."

Messi's double, the second a sweetly-struck free-kick, came between two strikes from Antoine Griezmann, who is also enjoying a revival after a disappointing 18 months at Camp Nou. Some had wondered if Messi would ever get back to his best following an underwhelming start to the season but his latest contribution makes him the league's top scorer on 11 goals, five months after he tried to leave.

'Good Messi interaction'

"From day one, my interactions with Leo have been good," said Koeman. "We're used to this, if there are a couple of games where he doesn't score, there will be a couple of people who will be unhappy, but not me, never."

Koeman deserves credit for the rejuvenation of players like Griezmann, Ousmane Dembele and Frenkie de Jong, all of whom have improved significantly in recent matches. Barcelona's recovery has a long way to run, with unresolved issues on and off the pitch likely to resurface before the end of the season.

Yet Koeman will hope a corner has been turned and at a good time, with the Champions League last 16 tie against Paris Saint-Germain to come next month and a large chunk of the league calendar still remaining.

Barca's first goal was fortunate, after Roberto Soldado's lashed clearance saw the ball sliced backwards to Griezmann, who touched and shot past Rui Silva. Griezmann was the instigator for the second too, the Frenchman driving forward to the edge of the area before transferring inside to Messi. Messi was given the yard he needed to shift onto his left



PAMPLONA: Real Madrid's Spanish defender Sergio Ramos reacts during the Spanish League football match between Osasuna and Real Madrid at the El Sadar stadium in Pamplona on Saturday. — AFP

foot and curl home.

Messi made it three from a similar position, just on the edge of the box, this time with a free-kick, which he harpooned into the corner. Griezmann added a fourth by firing in a scooped pass from Dembele on the turn. Messi went off with almost half an hour left, his work already done, while Granada's Jesus Vallejo was sent off late on. Granada was spared the awful conditions that swept across much of the country, with the snowfall in Madrid on Friday the heaviest since 1971. —AFP

Pochettino gets first win with PSG, Lyon stay on top

PARIS: Mauricio Pochettino celebrated his first victory as Paris Saint-Germain coach on his home debut on Saturday as Moise Kean set the reigning champions on their way to a 3-0 win over Brest, but Lyon remain top of Ligue 1 after drawing at Rennes.

Substitutes Mauro Icardi and Pablo Sarabia added late goals for PSG who would have gone top on goal difference had Lyon not recovered from 2-0 down to earn a point in Rennes and extend their unbeaten run to 16 games. PSG are second at the season's halfway stage, a point behind the leaders and ahead on goal difference of third-placed Lille, who triumphed 1-0 at Nimes.

With Neymar still missing, it was not a vintage performance from PSG on a freezing Parisian night in an empty stadium — supporters are still barred from games in France with a nighttime curfew in place nationwide as part of the fight against coronavirus. That meant it was never going to be the return to the Parc des Princes that Pochettino — who was a popular player for PSG two decades ago — would have liked.

Nevertheless the Argentine will be relieved to have his first win in charge after his first game ended in a 1-1 draw at Saint-Etienne in midweek. "We have still only had a few days working together and we have had two very difficult, very competitive games," Pochettino said. "I am really satisfied with the effort put in by the players. It was an improved performance and an important victory."

Of his first game back at the Parc des Princes, he added: "It was very emotional. This stadium has one of the best atmospheres in football and we missed having the fans here, but I have had a superb welcome at this club and in this magnificent city since arriving."

Pochettino could now get his first piece of silverware when PSG play Marseille on Wednesday in the Champions Trophy, the French equivalent of a Super Cup that in normal times is the curtain-raiser to the season. It remains to be seen if Neymar, after four weeks on the sidelines, will be fit for that game, while defender Thilo Kehrer will be sidelined after news of his positive coronavirus test fell shortly before kick-off against Brest.

Pochettino again started playmaker Marco Verratti in an advanced role behind central striker Kean, with the latter opening the scoring in the 16th minute. Captain Marquinhos headed Angel Di Maria's corner against the post and Kean was on hand to nod in the rebound from barely a meter out. It was his 11th goal, and his ninth in Ligue 1, since signing on loan from Everton in October.

Brest, who sit in mid-table and are one of the best sides to watch in France, could have scored before that but Kaylor Navas clawed away Romain Faivre's early effort for the visitors. It was only in the final 10 minutes that PSG ran away with the game, as Kylian Mbappe set up Icardi — on in place of Kean — to get the second before Sarabia fired in to make it 3-0. — AFP

Zidane blasts snow-hit pitch as Real Madrid held

MADRID: Zinedine Zidane said Real Madrid's goalless draw with Osasuna on Saturday was "not a football match" and should have been called off after Spain was hit by a snowstorm. Madrid missed the chance to overtake Atletico Madrid at the top of La Liga and allowed Barcelona to creep closer after Lionel Messi scored twice in a 4-0 victory over Granada.

Atletico's match at home to Athletic Bilbao earlier on Saturday was postponed due to the snow, meaning Diego Simeone's side are top with three games in hand over their rivals. Osasuna's pitch in Pamplona was certainly affected by the snowfall, especially in the middle third, but large parts were green and the referee decided the game should go ahead.

"We played the game because they told us to play the game but the conditions were very difficult," said Zidane. "For me this was not a football match. In the end we played, and that's it." Real Madrid are due to play Athletic Bilbao in Malaga on Thursday in the Spanish Super Cup semi-finals. "We don't know what we're going to do now, whether we stay here tomorrow or if we're going to travel on Monday, we'll see," Zidane added. "It is not an excuse. What everyone wants to see is a football match and today the conditions were not met to see a football match."

Messi scored twice against Granada to make it four goals in three matches for him since the turn of the year and his resurgence has coincided with an

Sport Times

MONDAY, JANUARY 11, 2021

Buccaneers, Bills end NFL playoff droughts, Rams down Seahawks

LOS ANGELES: Six-time Super Bowl champ Tom Brady padded his postseason resume as both the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Buffalo Bills snapped long playoff win droughts with a pair of NFL wild-card victories on Saturday.

Brady completed 22 of 40 passes for 381 yards and two touchdowns as the Buccaneers won their first playoff contest in 18 years with a 31-23 victory over Washington. The Bills' Josh Allen threw for two touchdowns and rushed for another as the Bills bagged their first playoff victory in a quarter-century with a nail-biting 27-24 wild-card defeat of the Indianapolis Colts.

"If you could win 100-0, it's going to be the same result in the end," Brady said. "It's good to win and advance." Brady showed why the fifth-seeded Buccaneers brought him to Tampa as he got his new team to the playoffs for the first time since 2007 and their first win since the 2002 season Super Bowl.

Brady, whose nine Super Bowl starts are the most by any player in history, earned his NFL all-time leading 31st playoff victory. "He is a fighter. He plays hard and studies hard and he is the man for the job," said Buccaneers back Leonard Fournette, who had 19 carries for 93 yards.

Fournette added 39 receiving yards and a three-yard touchdown run. "It has been trying times for me this season. I got cut and now I am back in the playoffs," Fournette said. Washington's emergency quarterback Taylor Heinicke performed admirably in his first career playoff start. He threw for 306 yards with a touchdown and added an eight-yard

scoring run while starting in place of injured Alex Smith.

In Buffalo, Allen finished with 324 yards from 26 of 35 attempts to send the Bills into next week's AFC divisional round while the Colts were left ruing a decision not to kick an easy first-half field goal that ultimately proved the difference. It was the second-seeded Bills' first win in the postseason since December 1995, ending a run of five straight playoff losses.

The Colts, meanwhile, rallied from a 14-point deficit in the fourth quarter to come within a field goal of tying the game with two minutes remaining, only to come up agonizingly short. The Colts had one last chance to mount a game-winning drive, but the game ended when a desperate Hail Mary attempt from quarterback Philip Rivers was batted away by Bills safety Micah Hyde.

"It doesn't matter how it looks, it's the playoffs, it's win or go home," a relieved Allen said afterwards. Veteran Colts quarterback Rivers, who turned 39 last month, was uncertain over whether he would extend his career into an 18th season.

"If it's God's will that I'm in Indy with the Colts next year, then I'll be here," said Rivers, who made 27-of-46 for 309 yards and two touchdowns. "If not, I'll be on the sideline with a ballcap on my head, coaching football." The Bills' victory was one of three games on Saturday in an expanded wild card round.

Rams defense downs Seahawks

In the day's second game, the Los Angeles Rams powered to a 30-20 road victory over the Seattle Seahawks in a



LANDOVER: Quarterback Tom Brady #12 of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers passes during the game against the Washington Football Team at FedExField on Saturday in Landover, Maryland. — AFP

bruising battle between the two NFC West rivals. Defenses dominated throughout, with the Rams stifling the threat of Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson and receiver DK Metcalf.

The Seahawks defense was similarly aggressive, and knocked Rams quarterback John Wolford — chosen to start ahead of Jared Goff — out of the game with a brutal hit by Jamal Adams early in the first quarter. The Rams defense engineered the game's opening touchdown, Darius Williams picking off Wilson's

pass for Metcalf for a 42-yard pick six and a 13-3 lead.

The Seahawks responded immediately when Wilson hit Metcalf for a 51-yard touchdown but the Rams restored their 10-point cushion with a touchdown from running back Cam Akers that made it 20-10 at half-time. The Seahawks were always chasing the game from that point as Wilson was bottled up by the rampant Rams defense.

The knockout blow came in the fourth quarter, Samson Ebukam forcing a fumble

from a D.J. Reed punt return to give the Rams possession at the Seattle 36-yard line. On the following drive, Goff picked out a wide-open Robert Woods for a 15-yard score with the extra-point making it 30-13.

The Seahawks made it a 10-point game when Wilson picked out Metcalf with 2min 28sec remaining. But it was too little too late, and the Rams defense effectively sealed victory by sacking Wilson for the fifth time on the Seahawks' final possession. — AFP



Kuwait Times
Established 1961

The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf

REGISTER TODAY

for the COVID-19 vaccine

Free for all residents of Kuwait. To register visit:

www.moh.gov.kw

STEP 1: Click on COVID-19 VACCINE REGISTRATION **STEP 2:** FILL OUT BASIC INFORMATION **STEP 3:** SUBMIT FORM

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe, effective and approved by Kuwait's Ministry of Health