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MPs submit bill to impose fees on money transfers

Return of maids to resume Jan 17 • Airlines to bear cost of two PCR tests

Dems move to impeach Trump



WASHINGTON: Army National Guard members walk past a painting of the Declaration of Independence being ratified while guarding Capitol Hill yesterday. — AFP

WASHINGTON: US Democrats began the process yesterday of impeaching President Donald Trump for a historic second time, accusing him of "incitement of insurrection" over his supporters' deadly storming of the US Capitol. The move - which threatens to torpedo the single-term president's future political ambitions - could make for a frenetic culmination of four years of controversy ahead of Joe Biden's January 20 inauguration.

Democrats introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives calling for Vice President Mike Pence and the cabinet to remove Trump - who has been absent from the public spotlight for days - as unfit for office under the Constitution's 25th amendment. But Republicans blocked an immediate vote on the resolution and Democrats followed up by introducing an article of impeachment of Trump for "incitement of insurrection".

Continued on Page 2

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Five lawmakers yesterday submitted a draft law calling to impose a 2.5 percent fee on money transfers out of Kuwait to help the domestic economy and stop the flight of capital out of the country. MP Osama Al-Shaheen said he submitted the bill along with MPs Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi, Hamad Al-Matar, Khaled Al-Otaibi and Shuaib Al-Muwaizri, because billions of dinars are transferred out of the country every year.

Shaheen said that based on figures, around KD 21 billion has been transferred out of Kuwait in the past five years - around KD 4.2 billion on average every year. He said based on these figures, it is

expected that some KD 100 million will be collected every year from such fees.

In previous parliaments, MPs had submitted similar laws stipulating a five percent tax only on expat remittances to their home countries. This proposal calls to impose the 2.5 percent fee on all money transfers out of the country. Shaheen said such a fee will minimize the amount of capital leaving the country every year. Separately, MP Hesham Al-Saleh said he will submit a draft law calling to impose taxes on money remittances out of Kuwait. He also submitted amendments to the audiovisual law calling to abolish the jail term in the law to guarantee freedom of speech.

Continued on Page 2

Qatar-Saudi flights resume after thaw

RIYADH: Qatar-Saudi flights resumed yesterday as the neighbors normalize ties under a landmark agreement that ended a bitter three-year rift and allows families to reunite. Saudi Arabia and its allies the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt in June 2017 slapped a blockade on Qatar that included closing airspace to the country over claims it backed Islamist groups and was too close to Iran - charges Doha has always denied.

The quartet agreed to lift the restrictions at a Gulf Cooperation Council summit last week in the Saudi desert city of Al-Ula, after a flurry of diplomatic activity by outgoing US President Donald Trump's administration. The first commercial flight between Qatar and Saudi Arabia in three and a half

years, a Qatar Airways service to Riyadh, took off from windswept Doha airport around 1100 GMT and touched down around 1200 GMT.

Families hugged and laughed as they were reunited in the gleaming arrivals hall of Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport where two men waited holding large bunches of flowers which they gave to two women who arrived with a child. "Thank God, may God save the (Saudi) King, the Crown Prince and the rulers of all the Gulf. It's a great feeling," said one tearful man on being reunited with his nephew in Riyadh. "I am very happy! Thanks to God we have been reunited again," said his newly arrived nephew as the family kissed and embraced.

At Doha, airport staff filmed aircraft taxiing on the runway, anxious to ensure they got a clip of the relevant plane taking off, according to an AFP correspondent on the ground. A Saudi Airlines plane was also to fly yesterday from Riyadh to Doha, with services from Jeddah expected to start at a later date.

Continued on Page 2

News in brief

Sultan issues succession law

MUSCAT: Oman's sultan has issued a new law on the appointment of a crown prince for the first time in the country's history, according to a royal decree. Sultan Haitham bin Tariq issued two royal decrees yesterday, one for parliament and one for a new succession mechanism, state television reported. "The most significant (element)... is establishing a specific and stable mechanism for transfer of the governing authority and a mechanism to appoint a crown prince," said a royal decree read on state TV. — AFP

Bahraini bodybuilder 'seized'

MANAMA: Bahrain has accused Qatar of seizing one of the kingdom's champion bodybuilders during a fishing trip even as Manama normalized its relationship with its neighbor. "Bahrain has strongly condemned the Qatari coastguard's arrest of Bahraini bodybuilding champion Sami Al-Haddad while he was on a fishing cruise with a number of his companions in the Bahraini territorial waters," the foreign ministry said late Sunday. — AFP

Turkey probes WhatsApp

ISTANBUL: Turkey's competition authority yesterday opened an investigation into WhatsApp's decision to share more of its user data with its parent company Facebook. The encrypted messaging app last week asked more than a billion of its users outside the European Union and Britain to accept the new terms or lose access to WhatsApp on Feb 8. The Turkish Competition Authority said yesterday it was opening an investigation and requiring WhatsApp to suspend the data sharing obligation on its users. — AFP

Saudi launches car-free city

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia, the world's top crude exporter, announced Sunday the launch of an eco-city "with zero cars, zero streets and zero carbon emissions" at its futuristic NEOM mega development. The \$500 billion NEOM project, set to be built from scratch along the kingdom's picturesque Red Sea coast, is billed as a development evocative of a sci-

fi blockbuster.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman unveiled plans for a city, dubbed "THE LINE", in a presentation broadcast on state TV. It consists of "a city of a million residents with a length of 170 kilometers that preserves 95 percent of nature within NEOM, with zero cars, zero streets and zero carbon emissions," he said. "We need to transform the concept of a conventional city into that of a futuristic one," added the de facto leader of the Arab world's leading economy, regularly ranked among the world's most polluting countries. — AFP



NEOM, Saudi Arabia: A handout picture shows Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman launching 'The Line' green city on Sunday. — AFP

US brands Houthis as 'terrorists'

SANAA: Yemen's Houthis were defiant yesterday after Washington said it will designate the Iran-backed rebels as terrorists, a last-ditch move under President Donald Trump that aid groups and US lawmakers warned would deepen the country's humanitarian crisis. Unless Congress blocks the decision, the Houthis will be blacklisted on Jan 19 - one day before the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, whose aides had hoped to push to end Yemen's devastating six-year war.

Houthi political commander Mohamed Ali Al-Houthi condemned the US move in a tweet and said they had "the right to respond". "The Yemeni people don't care about any designation from Trump's administra-

tion, as it is a partner in killing Yemenis and starving them." Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh also condemned the US announcement, warning "it's likely the bankrupt US government will do further damage to its reputation" in Trump's final days in office.

The decision, announced by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, could complicate Biden's promised efforts to restart diplomacy with Iran and reassess Washington's alliance with Saudi, which has led an offensive in Yemen. The designation aims to hold the rebel movement "accountable for its terrorist acts, including cross-border attacks threatening civilian populations, infrastructure and commercial shipping," Pompeo said Sunday.

The Houthis have "led a brutal campaign that has killed many people, continues to destabilize the region and denies Yemenis a peaceful solution to the conflict in their country". The Yemeni government said the Houthis

Continued on Page 2



SANAA: Fighters loyal to Yemen's Houthi rebels raise their fists and chant slogans as they visit the grave of slain Houthi political leader Saleh Al-Sammad at Al-Sabeen Square yesterday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait authority, UK agency join hands to protect marine environment

Paper's publishing a landmark in promoting environmental research

KUWAIT: UK Government's Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) and the Kuwait Environment Public Authority (EPA) reached an important milestone in their relationship with the joint publication of a review paper in an international marine science journal. The published work describes the status of biodiversity in the marine environment surrounding Kuwait. It highlights the importance of preserving healthy and productive seas, which are vital for both food and water security along with providing unique coastal habitats, which will help reduce the impacts of climate change.

Cefas and EPA have been working together to address the challenges of marine environmental management by strengthening regulation, developing the evidence to inform decision making, and building capacity for long-term sustainable environmental management. This program of work is supporting Kuwait to sustainably use its significant marine resources and realize the potential of its marine-based economies.

Economic resource

Dr Brett Lyons, Scientific lead for the Cefas team in the Gulf said: "The coastline and waters surrounding Kuwait are vitally important in terms of an economic resource, through industries such as fishing and those associated with tourism and other recreational activities. Having clean and healthy seas are essential for improving the quality of life of residents who enjoy using the beach or spend time out at sea on a regular basis. The seas around Kuwait are also home to a unique mix of ecosystems, plants and animals, such as coral reefs, turtles and endangered species of shark that are both

regional and globally important."

He added: "But currently the Gulf is facing a dual climate and biodiversity crisis, with sea water temperatures expected to rise three times faster than the global average. The Gulf already experiences environmental extremes and is one of the world's warmest seas. Globally around a million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction. The data and assessments generated during this work program will contribute to Kuwait's reporting requirements for United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, the publication of our work in an international marine science journal helps to demonstrate that Kuwait is developing a

marine monitoring program that meets International best practice and is producing data that will contribute to the regional understanding of the Gulf's marine environment."

Very precious

Dr Abdullah Al-Zaiden, Deputy Director of EPA

said: "Our marine environment is very precious and is instrumental to our economy, culture and future prosperity. Kuwait now faces a multitude of environmental challenges, which necessitates better marine monitoring and management. We have been working with Cefas to develop management plans to help protect our marine environment. In parallel we have been developing a program of rehabilitation projects, including mangrove plantations to help restore and improve coastal environments. These will ultimately help to support biodiversity, acting as a nursery ground for important commercial species, and help protect the coast from sea level rise linked to climate change. To support this, we recently met with representatives from the diplomatic community, the United Nations



KUWAIT: UK's CEFAS and EPA scientists collaborating on projects to assess Kuwait's marine environment.

Development Programme and World Bank to discuss how we can coordinate efforts internationally to better protect our marine environment."

Michael Davenport, British Ambassador to Kuwait said: "Protecting our marine environment is a global challenge which requires co-ordinated action between international agencies. Therefore, I am delighted to see EPA and UK's leading Government marine science agency, Cefas, continuing to work together to address this important issue here in Kuwait. Healthy coastal areas will better support important ecosystems that are essential breeding grounds for many species of fish and

shellfish. It is vital we support and cherish our coastal habitats, as maintaining and rehabilitating them will be an important tool in the fight against the impacts of climate change. We recently hosted a virtual roundtable to hear about the work done by EPA to rehabilitate the marine environment." This event was attended by an international coalition, including representatives from the French and Italian Embassies, UNDP and World Bank. Such nature-based solutions will be a priority area for discussion when the UK hosts the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties, or COP26, in Glasgow in 2021.



KUWAIT: People shop at the main fish market in Sharq yesterday. Shrimping ban in Kuwaiti waters was set to begin on December 31, 2020, but it was postponed until February 1, 2021 similar to the case in neighboring countries. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



Dems move to impeach...

Continued from Page 1

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi slammed Republican lawmakers for blocking the resolution. "The House Republicans rejected this legislation to protect America, enabling the president's unhinged, unstable and deranged acts of sedition to continue," Pelosi said in a statement. "Their complicity endangers America, erodes our democracy, and it must end."

"This was an attempted coup, to overthrow the government, and we have a responsibility as Congress to respond to that," Congressmen David Cicilline, who introduced the resolution, told

reporters afterward. "We have a particular responsibility to hold everyone accountable who was involved in any way, from the president on down," he said.

Trump has been largely silent in recent days - making few statements and holding no news conferences. Twitter, his favored public platform, has banned him for language that could incite violence. He plans to travel to Texas today in one of his final trips as president, reportedly to claim success in delivering on his pledge to build a border wall to keep immigrants from Mexico out of the US.

As Democrats began to act, the US Capitol building was open to lawmakers and staff but under tight security and ringed by a metal fence after Wednesday's assault by Trump supporters that left five people dead. Inside, some windows and doors that were broken and breached by rioters remained boarded up with plywood, while reinforced glass on the outside doors near the Rotunda bore cracks from repeated battering. — AFP

MPs submit bill to impose...

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In a related development, opposition MP Hamdan Al-Azemi said yesterday that new Finance Minister Khalifa Hamada has invited bids for installing and operating a system to manage integrated taxes. He warned the minister against going ahead with the project, saying that there is no legislation for taxation in the country to warrant establishing such a system. Azemi insisted that all MPs will strongly reject any attempt by the government to impose taxes on citizens, saying Kuwait is among major donor countries.

At its weekly meeting yesterday, the Cabinet yesterday decided to resume the return of domestic helpers from Jan 17, but insisted on the application of health measures. The process was launched several weeks ago but suspended last month after the suspension of commercial flights at Kuwait airport in order to protect Kuwait from a new strain of the coronavirus. The return of domestic helpers will be

organized through an online website.

The Cabinet also decided that all people arriving in Kuwait must produce a negative PCR test taken at least 72 hours before arrival. This decision will be effective from Jan 17. The Cabinet decided that airline companies will bear the cost of two coronavirus tests to be conducted on passengers - on arrival at the airport and another during the quarantine period. The Cabinet urged all citizens and expats to take the vaccination against the coronavirus because of the dangerous situation after the spread of the new virus strain.

Meanwhile, around 20 opposition MPs yesterday held a meeting to assess the situation in light of the Cabinet's reported resignation last week. The resignation however has not yet been announced, although ministers are boycotting National Assembly meetings.

MP Thamer Al-Suwait said the meeting was held to coordinate future moves in light of domestic political developments. He said the meeting also discussed various constitutional options and stressed the need to respect constitutional principles that guarantee popular supervision. MP Saleh Al-Mutairi said the meeting stressed that those who commit mistakes will be held to account regardless if the government has resigned or not.

US brands Houthis as...

Continued from Page 1

deserved the designation for "continuous efforts to prolong the conflict and cause the world's worst humanitarian crisis", while Riyadh said the move would help put "an end to the activities" of the rebels.

Pompeo also designated three leaders of the movement as terrorists, including their chief Abdul Malik Al-Houthi. He pointed to a Dec 30 attack on an airport in Yemen's second city Aden, which killed 26 people and was blamed by the Saudi-backed government on the Houthis. The Houthis control the capital Sanaa and much of the north, and are already under US sanctions.

The designation is likely to dissuade any third parties from transacting with the Houthi authorities for fear of US prosecution. Aid groups had warned Pompeo against the blacklisting, saying they have no option but to deal with what is the de facto government in northern Yemen. "This is pure diplomatic vandalism," David Miliband, president of the International Rescue Committee, said in a statement. "The last thing the Yemeni people need is further interruption of aid and

economic flows."

The Norwegian Refugee Council said the US must ensure sanctions do not block aid from entering "a country already in the middle of a full-blown humanitarian catastrophe". Save the Children said the measures come as data shows "millions of people in the country are edging closer to famine". It could "threaten the supply of lifesaving food, fuel and medicine," they warned. French aid group Action Contre la Faim (ACF) said the designation would have "an immediate impact".

Key US lawmakers yesterday urged a speedy reversal. The designation "is a death sentence for thousands of Yemenis", tweeted Senator Chris Murphy, a prominent member of Biden's Democratic Party. "It will cut off humanitarian aid, make peace talks nearly impossible and empower Iran. Biden should reverse this policy on day one." Representative Gregory Meeks, the Democrat who heads the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the move was "only pushing a political solution to the conflict further out of reach".

As Trump's administration ramps up pressure on Iran, it could frustrate Biden if he seeks to ease sanctions and return to a nuclear deal. US officials and analysts say Iran has armed the Houthis, but some experts question the extent of cooperation. Some suggest Tehran is primarily interested in bogging down Saudi Arabia. — AFP

Qatar-Saudi flights resume after...

Continued from Page 1

Just as the first flight to Riyadh was preparing to take off, Qatar Airways tweeted that services to Jeddah and Dammam would resume later in the week.

Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have both opened their airspace to Qatari aviation under the deal but there has been no word on when the first direct flights will take off to or from those two nations. Yesterday's flight flew straight across Bahrain according to specialist flight tracker FlightAware.

Saudi Arabia's closure of its airspace forced

Qatar Airways aircraft to fly over Iran, Riyadh's archrival and long-time adversary of Washington, paying significant overflight fees to Tehran in the process. The New York Times has reported that Qatar pays \$100 million annually to fly over the Islamic republic, citing diplomatic sources. The schism also complicated regional travel, divided families and raised costs faced by Qatari businesses.

US national security adviser Robert O'Brien said in November that allowing Qatari planes to fly over Saudi Arabia via an "air bridge" was a priority for the outgoing Trump administration. The economic hit of the crisis, coinciding with low oil prices and the coronavirus downturn, was felt across the region. Well-heeled Saudis were unable to visit Doha for holidays and long weekends while expats living in Qatar were unable to visit popular destinations like Dubai without tedious detours via Kuwait or Oman. — AFP

Local

Kuwait announces 527 new COVID-19 cases, two deaths

New vaccine shipment arrives as inoculation capacity set to increase

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health announced yesterday logging 527 new coronavirus cases detected in the past 24 hours, raising the caseload to 154,841. Ministry spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad reported two deaths that were pronounced within the same period, putting the death toll at 945. He added that 10,087 swab tests were taken during the same period, as the total reached 1,337,514. The ministry had earlier announced that 366 patients have recovered within the same period, putting the total number of recoveries at 149,373. The number of patients in intensive care units reached 50 as of yesterday, while the total number of patients receiving treatment stood at 4,523, Dr Sanad noted.

In other news, the second shipment of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine arrived in Kuwait on Saturday, Al-Anba Arabic daily reported yesterday quoting an informed source. Priority in vaccination is currently given to frontline and health care workers, people above the age of 65 and

people that suffer from chronic diseases. All residents of Kuwait, including citizens and expatriates, can register on the health ministry's website to get vaccinated free of charge.

The new batch of the vaccine was transported



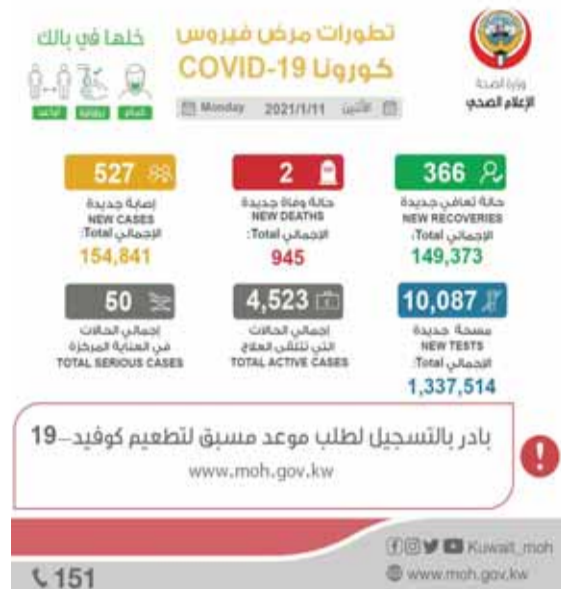
366 patients recovered in 24 hours

immediately to the vaccination center at the Kuwait International Fairground in Mishref, where it is being stored in refrigerators, the source said. The report does not mention the

number of doses included in the second batch, but the source says it is enough to vaccinate targeted categories until the third batch arrives. The first batch had arrived on December 23, and included 150,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine.

There is no timetable for when the third batch might arrive, but ministry sources quoted in an Al-Qabas daily report three days ago predicted Kuwait to receive a new shipment every week or 10 days. The sources also expected the maximum vaccination capacity to increase from 1,400 to 2,000 this week, and noted that more than 10,000 people have already been vaccinated.

Kuwaiti medical authorities have not reported any cases of side effects among people who have received the vaccine, Dr Fahad Al-Ghemlas, Public Health Director at the Ministry of Health, said. He also revealed in an interview published in Al-Jarida Arabic daily yesterday that Hall 6 at Kuwait International Fairground is going to be opened soon to join Hall 5, noting that Hall 6 alone has a capacity of 150 vaccination units.



Info Minister rejects KUNA's recurring mistakes

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi yesterday expressed rejection of recurring errors by Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) in its news-cast recently. The minister has affirmed his rejection of irresponsible acts that harm the history of the official news agency. Minister Mutairi, in a press statement, said KUNA's Deputy Director General and the team involved in the incident would be subject to investigations to determine circumstances of the issue and bring slack staff into account for the sake of ensuring that such mistakes do not recur in the future. Such errors will not be allowed in the future, he has emphasized. The news agency plays a crucial role in coverage of local and international news with utter credibility and transparency as it is a reliable source, however the errors that have taken place affect its eminent status, the information minister added. Moreover, Minister Mutairi has affirmed that he will work for improving the situation at the news agency. — KUNA



Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi

Deputy FM meets Tunisian Ambassador



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets Tunisian Ambassador to Kuwait Al-Hashemi Ajeeli. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah met yesterday with the new Tunisian Ambassador to Kuwait Al-Hashemi Ajeeli. The two sides discussed bilateral relations, as well as regional and international developments, Kuwait's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Assistant Foreign Minister for Deputy Foreign Minister's office Ayham Al-Omar attended the meeting. — KUNA

Oil Minister holds talks with OAPEC official

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Oil Minister Dr Mohammad Al-Fares held talks with Secretary General of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) Ali bin Sabt on current developments in the oil and gas sectors at the Arab and international levels. Kuwait's Ministry of Oil said in a joint statement, yesterday, that Dr Al-Fares, also Minister of Electricity and Water, discussed with the OAPEC secretary general most significant activities by the organization after the latest OAPEC meeting, held in December 2020, during which a scheme to overhaul the organization was approved. The endorsed



Dr Mohammad Al-Fares meets OPAEC Secretary General Ali bin Sabt. — KUNA photos

plan was designed to provide support for the OAPEC General Secretariat activities that are being planned and executed in tandem with current innovations in the gas and oil industries. Meanwhile, the minister hosted the UN Secretary General's Envoy Dr Tareq Al-Sheikh, accompanying figures and a number of ambassadors to the State of Kuwait, as they discussed issues of common concern. — KUNA



Oil Minister Dr Mohammad Al-Fares meets UN Secretary General's Envoy Dr Tareq Al-Sheikh, accompanying figures and a number of ambassadors to Kuwait.

News in brief

33,414 work permits for stranded expats cancelled

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower canceled 33,414 work permits for expatriate workers whose permits expired while they were abroad, spokesperson Aseel Al-Mezzyd said yesterday. A total of canceled permit reached 91,854, she added.

Attempted murder

KUWAIT: A Gulf national attempted to kill a young bedoon man in Mansouriya after differences between the two escalated, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday. The suspect ran over the victim, leading to several fractures that required his admission to the ICU. The case is being considered as a felony. A bedoon called interior ministry operations and said a Gulf national deliberately ran over his son before escaping. An attempted murder charge was filed as police are looking for the suspect.

Reckless behavior

KUWAIT: Traffic officers in Ahmadi detained a driver for reckless behavior and violation of traffic law, reported Al-Rai. Police received several calls about the driver in Dhaher, as he caused the closure of various streets and junctions, until he was found and arrested. The suspect is a Kuwaiti in his 20s. His car was impounded as several violations were registered against it.

Two ambulances donated

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) donated two fully equipped ambulances for the Palestinian Red Crescent. KRCS Chairman of Board of Directors Dr Hilal Al-Sayer said that the donation comes within the spirit of continuous cooperation between both sides in various humanitarian fields. This donation will save many lives and cover part of the hospitals' need for ambulances to transport patients through the Palestinian Red Crescent, he said.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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NCCAL mourns late pioneer of Kuwait literature Ansari

KUWAIT: Secretary-General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature (NCCAL) Kamel Al-Abduljalil mourned yesterday member of the Kuwaiti Writers Association, writer, researcher and historian Khaled Al-Ansari, one of the distinguished pioneers of Kuwait's literature and history. Abduljalil said in a statement that Ansari has had clear fingerprints in Kuwait literature as he is one of the few researchers in documenting history and dialects. He also contributed to documenting the history of Failaka Island, its inhabitants and its civil life, as he also contributed to enriching many magazines and Kuwaiti newspapers with rich articles that helped in development of the Kuwaiti and Gulf cultural movement, he added.

Ansari was commissioned by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences to review and evaluate a book on Failaka and was also assigned to prepare a historical map of Failaka Island by the Kuwaiti Research and Studies Center. Abduljalil extended his sincere condolences and sympathy to the family of the deceased and the cultural community that lost a distinguished writer and a pioneering researcher. —KUNA



Khaled Al-Ansari

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Traditional fishing dhows lined up at the Shamlan Harbor in Sharq yesterday. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shalkh

MILSET-Asia announces robotics competition winners

KUWAIT: The regional office of the International Organization for Science and Technology (MILSET) announced yesterday winners of Kuwait's 2021 competition on robotics and industrial applications for students. The office said Abdulwahab Al-Kandari won the first place, Mohammad Al-Enezi won the second place, and Yousef Al-Tamimi won the third place. The deputy head of the organization and head of Asia regional office, Adnan Al-Meer, said during the inauguration that the training programs and projects for Kuwaiti youth is designed to provide comprehensive training on modern science and technologies to enhance their capabilities. The representative of the Youth Ministry, Mohammad Al-Mutairi, said that the competition began in September until last December, and the second season will start in February until next May in order to increase the youth skills creativity. The regional director of MILSET Asia office,



KUWAIT: Participants in Kuwait's 2021 competition on robotics and industrial applications for students. —KUNA

Dawood Al-Ahmad, said that the competition is organized for students who win the annual school competition for robots and depends on the design and programming of a line-tracking robot individu-

ally. This competition shows the participants efficiency on programming the robot on a path with different angles and to adjust the speed of the robot to reach the goal in a short time. —KUNA

IWG hosts Indonesian Cultural Day

KUWAIT: The International Women's Group (IWG) in cooperation with the Indonesian Embassy in Kuwait organized the Indonesian Cultural Day on Sunday, which was live-streamed to members and guests. The President of the IWG, Ambreen Mustafa, wife of the Pakistan Ambassador, opened the event with a warm welcome and New Year wishes to all participants; noting that the IWG was honored to host the Indonesian Cultural Day in the presence of the Ambassador of Indonesia.

Tri Tharyat, the Ambassador of Indonesia to the State of Kuwait, delivered an enlightening speech covering various aspects of Indonesia's magnificent natural beauty with its stunning landscapes and

beaches, its rich culture, and unique artistic heritage. In closing, the Ambassador thanked Mustafa and the IWG for their help and support in the organization of this special event. A celebration cake was cut by the Ambassador and the IWG President, who presented the Ambassador Tri Tharyat with a commemorative shield.

A special film displayed the diverse natural beauty of Indonesia including the hills, mountains, coasts and sandy beaches, showcasing a picturesque backdrop for a colorful, and unique culture. This was followed by a stunning presentation of classical and folk dance and music, beautifully performed by groups from Bali Island.

Mustafa, on behalf of the IWG Board, expressed her thanks to the Indonesian embassy for the organization of this event and the performers were honored with certificates of appreciation for their participation. In closing, Mustafa also noted her gratitude to the IWG Board members for their support and hard work in making the event a resounding success.



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Crew on crashed Indonesian jet did not declare emergency: Investigator

A year on from first COVID-19 death, Wuhan basks in recovery



LONDON: Robert Williams, 84, receives an injection of COVID-19 vaccine at a mass vaccination hub at Robertson House in Stevenage, north of London, yesterday. Seven mass coronavirus vaccination sites opened across England yesterday as the government races to dose millions of people while a new strain of the disease runs rampant across the country. —AFP

WHO to probe virus origins in China

Nations struggle with surges, England opens mass vaccination sites

BEIJING: A World Health Organization team will finally reach China this week to start probing the origins of the coronavirus, more than a year after the pandemic began and following accusations Beijing tried to block the investigation. Infection numbers surged across Europe, with Germany warning of the "hardest" days ahead as Britain raced to vaccinate as many people as possible to contain a virus that has infected close to 90 million people worldwide and killed nearly two million.

The human and economic toll of the pandemic has caused anger and frustration worldwide, giving even greater political significance to the WHO's long-awaited investigation mission to China.

The 10-member WHO team will arrive Thursday and "conduct joint research cooperation on the origins of COVID-19 with Chinese scientists", Beijing's National Health Commission said in a statement that provided no further details. Beijing has faced international criticism over its lack of transparency during the early days of the pandemic. The United States and Australia have led international calls for an inde-

pendent inquiry, enraging China.

Seven mass coronavirus vaccination sites opened across England yesterday as the government races to dose millions of people while a new strain of the disease runs rampant across the country. The sites include football stadiums and a horse racing course, and are located in cities including Bristol, London, Newcastle and Manchester.

They are to vaccinate thousands per week and several more sites are expected to follow, according to NHS England. Hospitals and pharmacies are set to begin offering the vaccine later this week, with the government hoping to have doses available for 12 million of England's 56 million population by mid-February, starting with the most vulnerable.

More than 1.2 million people have already been vaccinated in England, since the roll-out began of the Pfizer-BioNTech jab on December 8. Britain has since approved the Oxford-AstraZeneca and Moderna jabs. "We are mobilizing the government, NHS (National Health Service) and the armed forces as part of a mas-

sive national effort," said health minister Matt Hancock.

The state-run NHS risks being overwhelmed and the country is in its third lockdown until at least mid-February, with predictions the restrictions could last even longer. "The next few weeks are going to be the worst weeks of this pandemic in terms of numbers into the NHS," England's chief medical officer Chris Whitty told BBC television yesterday.

Double down

"What we need to do, before the vaccines have had their effect... is we need to really double down" on observing lockdown measures, he added. Vaccines minister Nadhim Zahawi also urged the public to follow the rules, which some have criticized for not being strict enough.

The recovery of Wuhan is in sharp contrast to the many parts of the world where the pandemic is still raging, fuelled by new variants that are prompting governments from Israel to Australia to reimpose restrictions, including lockdowns and even curfews. The surges in

Europe and North America have hit even as COVID-19 vaccines were approved and rolled out in record time.

Virus deaths in Germany crossed 40,000 on Sunday, with Chancellor Angela Merkel warning that the country had yet to feel the full impact of socializing over Christmas and New Year period. The coming weeks will be "the hardest phase of the pandemic" so far, Merkel said, with hospitals stretched to their limits. Pope Francis and Britain's Queen Elizabeth II became the latest high-profile figures over the weekend to join the global vaccination campaign as officials try to overcome skepticism over jabs developed in record time. "There is a suicidal denial which I cannot explain, but today we have to get vaccinated," the Pope said Sunday, denouncing opposition to shots.

While wealthier nations in Europe and North America have already started their vaccination drives, India—with the world's second-biggest virus caseload—will begin giving shots to its 1.3 billion people from Saturday in a colossal and complex undertaking. —AFP

Biden taps career diplomat Burns as CIA chief

WASHINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden yesterday announced William Burns as his pick to lead the Central Intelligence Agency, tapping a retired veteran diplomat who helped lead secret talks with Iran. Burns spent over three decades in the US foreign service, including a stint as ambassador to Russia from 2005-2008, and high-ranking jobs in the State Department. "Bill Burns is an exemplary diplomat with decades of experience on the world stage keeping our people and our country safe and secure," Biden said in a statement released by his

transition team.

Burns, who holds a masters and doctoral degrees from Oxford University, also served as US ambassador to Oman from 1998-2001. He retired from the foreign service in 2014 and is the president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, an international affairs think tank in the United States. Burns had been considered a likely candidate to lead the State Department under Biden, given his deep experience with Iran.

He was involved in back-channel negotiations that set the stage for the 2015 deal to limit Iran's nuclear capabilities. "The fact that we did it quietly or secretly caused a certain amount of controversy," he said in a 2016 interview.

"But the reality is that after 35 years without sustained diplomatic contact between the United States and Iran, there was a huge amount of baggage, a lot of mistrust, and a lot of grievances." —AFP



William Burns

French woman fights to prove she's alive

PARIS: A 58-year-old French woman, who was wrongfully declared dead in a long-running dispute with a former employer, went to court yesterday in the city of Lyon to try resurrect her existence. Reports of Jeanne Pouchain's death have been greatly exaggerated as AFP discovered when it met her at her home in the southeastern town of Saint-Joseph, near Lyon, recently. Pouchain has been trying to prove she's alive ever since a labor court, allegedly acting on information provided by a former employee of Pouchain's cleaning company, noted her down in November 2017 as dead. The ruling, which capped a nearly two-decade-long wrongful dismissal suit, turned Pouchain's life upside down. Wiped from official records, she lost her ID card, driver's license, bank account and health insurance.

She accuses her former employer of fabricating her death to try to win damages from her purported heirs—her husband and son—after two failed attempts to sue Pouchain herself. "It's a crazy story," Pouchain's lawyer Sylvain Cormier told AFP. "The plaintiff claimed that Mrs Pouchain was dead, without providing any proof, and everyone believed her. No-one checked," he added. Her former employee was not available for comment. The woman took a case against Pouchain after losing her job with Pouchain's cleaning company when it lost a big contract in 2000.

In 2004, a labor tribunal ordered Pouchain to pay



PARIS: Jeanne Pouchain shows some papers in Saint-Joseph. —AFP

the woman over 14,000 euros (\$17,000) in damages, but because the case had been taken against her company and not Pouchain herself the ruling was never enforced. In 2009, the woman took a case against Pouchain directly, but that case was thrown out, only to return in 2016 before an appeals court, which, believing Pouchain to be dead, ordered her husband and son to pay damages.

A lawyer for Pouchain's former employer has accused her of having a hand in her own demise, saying she played dead to try avoid litigation, by for example refusing to answer correspondence. Pouchain, who is seeking to have the court declaration of her death declared a fake, has denied those accusations. She described her life as being in limbo. "State agencies tell me I am no longer dead, but that I am not yet alive. I'm in the making!," she told AFP. —AFP

US launches work on consulate in disputed Western Sahara

MOROCCO: The United States on Sunday started the "process of establishing" a consulate in contested Western Sahara, after Washington recognized Morocco's sovereignty there in exchange for Rabat normalizing ties with Israel. US ambassador David Fischer visited the port of Dakhla, 1,440 kilometers (895 miles) southwest of Rabat in the far south of Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara, to mark the start of work on a diplomatic office. "It is such an honor for me to visit this stunningly beautiful and critically important region of Morocco, and to begin the process of establishing a US diplomatic presence here," Fischer said, according to the US embassy.

Western Sahara is a disputed and divided former Spanish colony, mostly under Morocco's control, where tensions with the pro-independence Polisario Front have simmered since the 1970s. Last year, Morocco joined the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan in agreeing to normalize ties with Israel under US-brokered deals. In return, US President Donald Trump fulfilled a decades-old Moroccan goal by backing its contested sovereignty over the barren but phosphate-rich region, which lies next to key Atlantic fishing zones. Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita said Sunday that "Morocco feels stronger in its legitimate fight for its territorial integrity... with the support of its friends." The Algerian-backed Polisario Front fought a war for independence from 1975 to 1991 and controls about one fifth of the desert territory. —AFP

News in brief

TV preacher jailed for 1,000 years

TURKEY: A Turkish Muslim televangelist who surrounded himself with scantily-clad women on TV was jailed for more than 1,000 years yesterday for sex crimes, local media reported. Adnan Oktar preached conservative views while women he called his "kittens"—many of whom appeared to have had plastic surgery—danced around him in the TV studio. The 64-year-old was detained in June 2018 as part of a crackdown on his group by the financial crimes unit of the Istanbul police. He was sentenced to 1,075 years for crimes including sexual assault, sexual abuse of minors, fraud and attempted political and military espionage, the private NTV broadcaster reported. —AFP

Sri Lanka to rebuild Tamil war memorial

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's government said yesterday it would rebuild a memorial to Tamil civilians killed in the country's civil war that was demolished at the weekend. The destruction of the monument at Jaffna University—depicting arms sticking out of a mound—prompted protests and threats of a general strike in areas where Tamils are a majority. The government had earlier condemned the structure as a memorial to "terrorists", saying it glorified Tamil Tiger guerrillas who were crushed in 2009 at the end of a 37-year-long war. —AFP

UK to ban imports linked to Uighurs

LONDON: Britain is set to announce plans outlawing the import of goods suspected of using forced labor in China's Xinjiang province, media reported yesterday, in a move which would further strain ties between London and Beijing. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab is expected to reveal his plans, which are also set to include tougher laws on exporting goods or technology that could be used for repression, to MPs this week, according to The Sun and Guardian newspapers. Britain and China's relationship has grown increasingly frosty over the last two years, particularly over London's criticism of the crackdown on democracy campaigners in Hong Kong and its offer of citizenship for its residents. —AFP

International

A year on from first COVID-19 death, Wuhan basks in recovery

'Wuhan is the safest city in China now, even the whole world'

WUHAN, China: A year ago, China announced the first death from a new virus in Wuhan — 12 months later, COVID-19 has claimed 1.9 million lives in an unrelenting march across the world.

But in the central Chinese city of 11 million where the first known outbreak started, the virus has been extinguished and residents are proud of its revival. Yesterday morning, the anniversary slipped by unmarked in Wuhan—commuters moved freely to work while parks and riverside promenades buzzed with walkers in a city determined to banish its tag as the coronavirus ground zero.

In a sparse report on January 11, 2020, China confirmed its first death from an unknown virus—a 61-year-old man who was a regular at the now-notorious Wuhan wet market linked to many of the early cases. The world would soon become grimly familiar with the disease that killed him as COVID-19.

Little is still known about the first victim, including his name, while the market where the first reported clusters of cases were traced back to has remained closed, surrounded by boarding. After a long wrangle, China on Monday said independent experts from the WHO will be allowed into the country from Thursday, with the international community hoping they can visit the market and retrace in detail those early days of the virus in Wuhan.

'Safest city in the world'

The city has now bounced back and residents are reveling in the freedoms they enjoy. "Wuhan is

the safest city in China now, even the whole world," 66-year-old resident Xiong Liansheng told AFP yesterday. Commuters headed to work and others strolled along the riverfront—a sharp contrast to the countries still under strict lockdowns and restrictions.

"The Wuhan people's awareness of epidemic prevention and control is very high—even my two-year-old grandson will wear a mask when going out," said Xiong.

Elderly couples danced, some masked, but hands clasped as social distancing withered in the winter sunshine in a busy park next to the Yangtze river. "Most cases in China are imported from overseas now and our country has a good control of it," said Zhong, an 80-year-old woman giving only one name. "All the Wuhan people feel very safe in the city, and we come here and dance happily everyday."

China has faced criticism at home and abroad over its initial handling of the virus, including attempts to silence whistleblowers and failure to report cases for days in early January.

Two weeks after confirming the first death, Wuhan and the surrounding province were put under lockdown. Chinese authorities are trying to stamp out a series of local outbreaks, reporting 103 new infections on Monday—the highest figure since July last year—most in northern Hebei province.

Transport links have been cut and schools closed in an effort to contain the cluster. There are also mounting fears that travel plans for hundreds



WUHAN: Elderly people dance in a public area along the Yangtze River in Wuhan yesterday as the city marks the first anniversary of when China confirmed its first death from the COVID-19 coronavirus. — AFP

of millions of people for the Lunar New Year next month may be ruined as virus controls tighten. But it is a fraction of the daily infections in the United

States, Britain and many European countries. China's official toll stands at 4,634 deaths from COVID-19. — AFP

Facebook shuts Uganda accounts ahead of vote

KAMPALA: Facebook has shut a slew of accounts belonging to Ugandan government officials accused of seeking to manipulate public debate ahead of elections Thursday, the internet giant said yesterday. The East African nation is holding presidential and parliamentary elections after a tense and bloody campaign, with incumbent President Yoweri Museveni, 76, facing a stiff challenge from the popstar-turned-politician Bobi Wine, 38.

"This month, we removed a network of accounts and pages in Uganda that engaged in CIB (Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour) to target public debate ahead of the election," Facebook's head of communication for sub-Saharan Africa, Kezia Anim-Addo, said in an email. "They used fake and duplicate accounts to manage pages, comment on other people's content, impersonate users, re-share posts in groups to make them appear more popular than they were."

Anim-Addo said the network was linked to the government ministry of information and communications technology. "Given the impending election in Uganda, we moved quickly to investigate and take down this network."

Museveni's senior press secretary Don Wanyama, who saw both his Facebook and Instagram account shut down, accused the company of seeking to influence the election. "Shame on the foreign forces that think they can aid and plant a puppet leadership on Uganda by disabling online accounts of (ruling party) NRM supporters," he said on Twitter. "You won't take away President Kaguta Museveni" he added, using the president's second name. —AFP

India returns Chinese soldier

BEIJING: India has returned a Chinese soldier detained for straying over the contested Himalayan frontier, China's military said yesterday, of a remote flashpoint area between the two countries.

The soldier was apprehended Friday on the Indian side of the high altitude border where rival troops fought deadly battles in June last year. He was returned to Chinese forces at noon yesterday, according to the official People Liberation Army Daily.

The military newspaper said the soldier had "lost his way due to darkness and complicated terrain." The soldier was handed over "according to a relevant agreement between China and India," the PLA Daily said. The Indian army later confirmed it had returned the individual. The soldier's detention was the second on the high altitude border since 20 Indian border soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese troops were killed in a violent skirmish last year.

Both sides have since poured tens of thousands of troops and heavy weaponry into the tension zone in the Ladakh region, currently in the grip of freezing winter temperatures. Another Chinese soldier was briefly held by Indian forces in the same region in October.

India and China have disputed their frontier for seven decades and fought a brief war in 1962. The two sides blame each other for the current standoff. The neighbors have held several rounds of disengagement talks but failed to ease the military buildup. — AFP

Italian mobsters face 'maxi-trial'

ROME: Hundreds of suspected members of the 'Ndrangheta, Italy's most powerful mafia group, will face a judge this week as the country's biggest "maxi-trial" of the past three decades gets underway. The trial against the crime syndicate and its accomplices—among them politicians, civil servants, police and white-collar businessmen—is expected to last more than two years.

With 355 defendants, over 900 prosecution witnesses and 400 lawyers, the trial also features an unprecedented 58 state witnesses ready to break their code of silence, or "omerta", and expose the clan's long-buried secrets. Held inside a specially outfitted building in the heart of 'Ndrangheta territory in Calabria, Italy's poorest region, the trial beginning tomorrow targets just one group, the Mancuso family and its affiliates. During a recent hearing, it took three hours to read the names of

the defendants, which include boss Luigi Mancuso, "The Uncle"—who spent nearly 20 years in prison before going underground—and dozens of others with nicknames straight out of Hollywood, like "The Wolf", "Fatty", "Sweetie", "Blondie", "Little Goat", and "The Wringer".

'Deeply rooted'

The trial is a show of strength for the state in the backyard of the 'Ndrangheta, which controls tons of cocaine flowing into Europe. Taking to the court will be Italy's most famous anti-mafia prosecutor, Nicola Gratteri, who has lived under police escort for more than 30 years. As a child, the 62-year-old Calabrian played football with many of those he put behind bars decades later.

He has vowed to take down "this asphyxiating 'Ndrangheta, which truly takes the breath and the heartbeat from the people". The trial's size is only eclipsed by Italy's first "maxi-trial" of 1986-1987 in Palermo against Sicily's Cosa Nostra and its web of connected families.

That now-legendary event saw 338 people convicted. Prosecutors Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino were later assassinated by the mob.



A view taken on December 15, 2020 in Lamezia Terme, Calabria, from one of the detained defendants' cells, shows the inside of a new bunker room built for the upcoming 'Rinascita-Scott' maxi-trial in which more than 350 alleged members of Calabria's 'Ndrangheta mafia group and their associates go on trial this week. — AFP

The scope of the upcoming trial is more limited, targeting one of the estimated hundreds of 'Ndrangheta families whose tentacles spread globally. Still, it is significant not only for its size but also for the inclusion of so many lawyers, politicians, public administrators and entrepreneurs who help the 'Ndrangheta operate, said Federico Varese, professor of crimi-

nology at Oxford University. "It makes the point that there's a society outside the criminal organization that's colluding and helping," he said. "Obviously it's shocking that you have a criminal group so rooted in the territory you have to put hundreds of people on trial," Varese said. "This trial shows how deeply rooted the 'Ndrangheta is in society." —AFP

Billionaire Georgia party leader says quitting politics

TBILISI, Georgia: The billionaire leader of Georgia's ruling party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, who is widely seen as the Western-backed country's most powerful man, announced yesterday he was quitting politics. Ivanishvili made the announcement after his Georgian Dream party claimed a narrow victory in a tightly-contested parliamentary election last year that sparked protests. "My mission has been accomplished," the country's richest man said in a statement.

"I have made the decision to finally retire from politics and fully distance myself from the reins of power," Ivanishvili said he was stepping down as party chairman ahead of his 65th birthday next month and that it was time to "advance young people to the forefront".

Paramedics struggle to find hospital beds in virus-hit Mexico

TOLUCA, Mexico: For paramedics dealing with a surge in coronavirus infections in Mexico, finding an available bed for patients in overwhelmed hospitals has become a daily lottery. "For there to be room, one person has to be discharged or die. It's tough but it's the truth," said Angel Zuniga, a Red Cross coordinator in the city of Toluca southwest of the capital.

"One goes in and another comes out," Zuniga added. In Mexico City and neighboring areas, 64 of 78 hospitals were in a "critical" state on Friday with beds available in only a handful of them, according to the authorities. In the capital itself, home to nine million people, 86 percent of hospital beds were occupied. The problem is not confined to the public sector. Private clinics, where many coronavirus patients turn in the hope of finding a place, are also overcrowded. Some turn away patients unless they give a deposit of 170,000 pesos (about \$8,400).

"They say 'take him away' and we'll go back to

the street again," looking for another hospital, Zuniga said.

He said he was "returning to my pre-2011, private lifestyle". Georgia held a parliamentary election in October and November but protests broke out after the first round and the opposition boycotted the second round. Georgian Dream scored a narrow victory against opposition parties, which accused it of "massively falsifying" the results, claims the ruling party denied.

Georgia became a darling of the West after Mikheil Saakashvili came to power in the 2003 Rose Revolution and instituted reforms to boost democratic institutions and battle corruption.

But a brief war with Russia in 2008 and political infighting has dimmed hopes of the country joining NATO and the European Union. In power since 2012, Georgian Dream has seen its popularity fall due to discontent over its failure to address economic stagnation and perceived backsliding on commitments to democracy. Critics accuse Ivanishvili—who is widely seen to be calling the shots in Georgia—of persecuting political opponents and creating a corrupt system where private interests permeate politics.

Saakashvili was forced to flee Georgia at the end



In this file photo, one of Georgia's richest men, Bidzina Ivanishvili, speaks to the media in Tbilisi. — AFP

of his second term as president in 2013. Ivanishvili became prime minister after Georgian Dream first won a parliamentary election in 2012. He stepped down in 2013 but since then he has been widely believed to be the man in charge in the tiny Black Sea nation. He made a political comeback in 2018, when he took over as leader of Georgian Dream. — AFP

the street again," looking for another hospital, Zuniga said.

'You become desperate'

Even when there is room for another patient, it sometimes takes hours before they are admitted. "It's frustrating, but if we collapse, the healthcare system will collapse too. So, we always try to stay positive," said Miguel Angel Moreno, a paramedic from Naucalpan near the capital.

"As humans, there's obviously a point at which you become desperate." On top of the emotional stress comes the physical toll and discomfort of having to wear a protective suit for hours.

"Fatigue is always an issue," said senior paramedic Ana Yesi Hernandez. "Sometimes it takes them three to four hours to find a spare bed in a hospital."

Mexico's official COVID-19 death toll, the fourth highest in the world, now stands at nearly 134,000, with more than 1.5 million cases registered. The authorities acknowledge that the real figure is probably much higher due to limited testing. On Friday authorities scrapped plans to reopen non-essential activities in the capital. "The city is today at its highest level of hospitalization since the start of the pandemic," Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum said.

Paramedics say the patients they are seeing



TOLUCA: Paramedic of the Mexican Red Cross Jesus Carmona poses for a photo after having transferred a COVID-19 patient to an emergency room in Toluca. — AFP

now probably got sick while gathering to celebrate Christmas. Soon they expect to see those who caught the virus during the New Year holiday. They are praying for some respite after that wave subsides. Beyond that they are counting on the vaccination program that the government began on December 24, with priority going to health workers. "We all have high hope for the vaccine," Zuniga said. — AFP

International

Crew on crashed Indonesian jet did not declare emergency: Investigator

Divers search plane wreckage for black boxes

JAKARTA: The crew of an Indonesian passenger jet that crashed off Jakarta at the weekend with 62 people aboard did not declare an emergency or report technical problems before it suddenly plunged into the sea, an investigator said yesterday. So far, inspectors have so far been unable to say why the 26-year-old plane crashed just four minutes after takeoff, but they do know the location of the black boxes.

A recording of conversations with air traffic control pointed to routine exchanges, and there was no communication as the Sriwijaya Air Boeing 737-500 plunged about 10,000 feet (3,000 meters) in less than a minute before slamming into the Java Sea, said National Transportation Safety Committee investigator Nurcahyo Utomo. "It's like a normal conversation and nothing suspicious," he said.

"There's no talk of an emergency or something like that." The preliminary data suggested it was "most likely" that the plane was intact when it hit the water Saturday, he added.

"But we don't know at this stage" what caused the crash, Utomo said. His comments came as divers searched waters off Jakarta for black boxes-cockpit voice and flight data recorders—that could be crucial to help explain why the plane went down.

Meanwhile, divers searched waters off Jakarta yesterday for black boxes from a passenger jet that crashed at the weekend with 62 people aboard, as investigators took up the grim task of identifying victims' remains. Retrieving the boxes-cockpit voice and flight data recorders—will likely help

explain why the Sriwijaya Air Boeing 737-500 plunged about 10,000 feet (3,000 meters) in less than a minute before slamming into the Java Sea.

Switched flight

There were 62 Indonesian passengers and crew aboard the half-full flight, including 10 children. The jet's captain, Afwan—a 54-year-old father of three, who like many Indonesians goes by one name—was a former air force pilot with decades of flying under his belt, according to local media.

Some of the 2,600 personnel working in the recovery effort involving dozens of boats and helicopters are hauling body parts, twisted piece of wreckage and passengers' clothing from shallow waters about 23 meters (75 feet) deep. Body bags filled with human remains are being taken to a police hospital where investigators hope to identify victims by matching DNA from their remains to living relatives.

Rapin Akbar, who gave a blood sample to the hospital, had five relatives on board including an older sister, a nephew and his wife and their seven-month-old baby. They were flying back to Pontianak, the city on Indonesia's section of Borneo island, about 90 minutes away.

"(My nephew) had planned to go back to Pontianak on Sunday but changed his mind and decided to fly on Saturday instead," Akbar said. "He called me to say the flight was delayed and sent me a picture of their baby. It was (their) first."



JAKARTA: Rescuers lay out body bags containing human remains recovered from the crash site of Sriwijaya Air flight SJ182 at the port in Jakarta on Sunday. — AFP

Despite the name, black boxes are usually bright orange with reflective stripes, and all commercial planes are obliged to have them on board. Built to survive at vast depths and in extreme heat, they are fitted with a beacon which can emit a signal for one month. The devices record information about the speed, altitude and direction of the plane as well as flight crew conversations.

Black box data help explain nearly 90 percent of

all crashes, according to aviation experts. The probe into Saturday's crash is likely to take months. Aviation analysts said flight-tracking data showed the plane sharply deviated from its intended course before it went into a steep dive, with bad weather, pilot error and mechanical malfunction among the potential factors. "Something quite dramatic has happened after takeoff," said Stephen Wright, professor of aircraft systems at Finland's Tampere University. — AFP

India readies coronavirus vaccine rollout

NEW DELHI: India aims to begin vaccinating its 1.3 billion people against coronavirus from Saturday, a colossal and complex task compounded by safety worries, shaky infrastructure and public skepticism. In one of the world's biggest rollouts, the planet's second-most populous nation hopes to inoculate 300 million people—equal almost to the entire US population—by July. First to get one of two vaccines granted "emergency approval" will be 30 million health and other frontline workers, followed by around 270 million people aged over 50 or deemed high-risk all over the vast nation.

About 150,000 staff in 700 districts have been specially trained, and India has held several national dry runs involving mock transportation of vaccines and dummy injections. Authorities will use the experience from holding elections in the world's biggest democracy, and from regular child immunization programs for polio and tuberculosis.

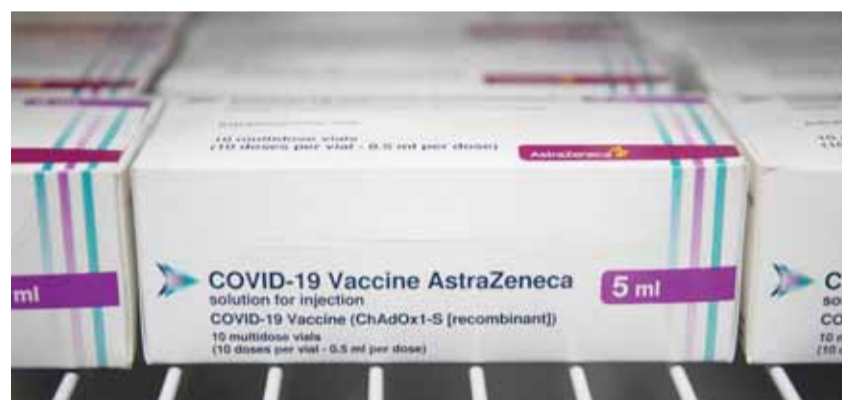
But in an enormous, impoverished nation with often shoddy transport

networks and one of the world's worst-funded healthcare systems, the undertaking is still daunting. Regular child inoculations are a "much smaller game" and vaccinating against COVID-19 will be "deeply challenging", said Satyajit Rath from the National Institute of Immunology.

The two vaccines approved by India—AstraZeneca's Covishield, made by local partner the Serum Institute, and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin—need to be kept refrigerated at all times. A total of 29,000 cold-chain points, 240 walk-in coolers, 70 walk-in freezers, 45,000 ice-lined refrigerators, 41,000 deep freezers and 300 solar refrigerators are at the ready.

Bicycle transport

India has four "mega depots" to take delivery of the vaccines and transport them to state distribution hubs in temperature-controlled vans, but the final leg will be tough. In one recent exercise in rural Uttar Pradesh—where summer temperatures exceed 40 degrees Celsius (105 Fahrenheit)—a health worker was pictured transporting boxes of dummy vials on his bicycle. In Kashmir, currently being pummeled by snowstorms, databases of priority groups—and of staff to administer the vaccines—were still being prepared last week, officials said. During the last dry run on Friday, workers at one health center in



BRISTOL: Boxes of vials of the Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine are seen in a refrigerator at Ashton Gate Stadium. — AFP

Bangalore had to use a cellphone hotspot to go online because their network was down.

There are also concerns about the government's aim to manage the entire process digitally via its own app, CoWIN—of which there are already several fake versions. As of yesterday, it also remained unclear whether the government has yet to agree a price per jab with the Serum Institute. Tens of millions of shots are reportedly sitting at Serum's factory in the western city of Pune waiting for an agreement before a fleet of refrigerated trucks can take them to the airport.

Skeptics

More than 150,000 Indians have

died from COVID-19 and the economy is one of the worst-hit worldwide, with millions losing their livelihoods. "I look forward to getting the vaccine and living without fear and the mask all the time," migrant worker Shatrughan Sharma, 43, told AFP in the capital, New Delhi. "The last year was very tough for us." But like in other countries, there is skepticism about the vaccine, fuelled by a torrent of misinformation online. A recent survey of 18,000 people across India found that 69 percent were in no rush to get a COVID-19 shot. Public trust was not helped by Bharat Biotech's indigenous vaccine being controversially given "restricted approval" without data from Phase 3 human trials. —AFP

China warns 'counterstrike' against US move on Taiwan

BEIJING: China yesterday threatened a "counterstrike" against a move by the United States to lift restrictions on official contacts with Taiwan as military tensions grow between Beijing and the self-ruled island. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Saturday Washington would lift "complex internal restrictions" on contacts with Taipei by diplomats, after a year of mounting US-Chinese friction on topics including human rights, trade and the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic. Beijing says Taiwan is an inviolable part of China to be reclaimed, by force if necessary, and opposes any diplomatic recognition of the democratic island.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said Beijing "strongly condemns" the move and accused the United States of violating the terms of Washington's diplomatic relations with Beijing. "Any action that harms China's core interests will receive a resolute counterstrike from China," Zhao warned, urging Pompeo to retract the decision or face "severe punishment". It was not clear what the change means in practice, with Pompeo saying executive branch communications with Taiwan will be handled by the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), which is owned by the US government and serves as the de facto embassy.

The AIT was founded in 1979, when the United States extended diplomatic recognition to mainland China under a historic agreement requiring it to end formal recognition of Taiwan. But Washington remains a staunch ally of Taipei and is bound by Congress to sell it weapons for self-defense. It opposes any move to change Taiwan's current status by force. Military tensions between mainland China and Taiwan have grown sharper in the past year—reaching their worst since the mid-1990s, some analysts say. Chinese jets made a record 380 incursions into Taiwan's defense zone last year, a military official said Tuesday. Beijing's animosity has increased dramatically since Tsai Ing-wen won election as Taiwan's president in 2016 — she rejects Beijing's insistence that the island is part of "one China". —AFP



PYONGYANG: This picture shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attending the 8th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) in Pyongyang. — AFP

N Korea's Kim assumes late father's mantle

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has had his official party title changed, state media reported yesterday, assuming a position previously held by his late father in what analysts said was a move to bolster his authority. The North Korean economy is struggling in the face of self-imposed coronavirus isolation, and is subject to multiple sanctions over its banned nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. At the same time, nuclear talks with the United States have been deadlocked since the collapse of the Hanoi summit between Kim and President Donald Trump in February 2019.

The ruling Workers' Party of Korea "unanimously adopted" a decision to elect Kim as general secretary at its congress on Sunday, the official KCNA news agency reported. "All the delegates expressed full support with stormy applause in great excitement," it said. The South Korean military said it detected signs that a military parade may have been staged Sunday night for the congress. The last such gathering five years ago had named Kim as party chairman in what was largely

seen as a formal coronation for the leader, who was in his early 30s at the time. The new title comes after Kim pledged at the meeting to strengthen his nuclear-armed nation's military capabilities, and called the US his country's "foremost principal enemy". He also admitted that "almost all sectors fell a long way short of the set objectives" in North Korea's previous economic plan.

Experts said the new nomenclature was largely symbolic, with the congress changing job titles to reinstate a previously scrapped party secretariat system. North Korea is more isolated than ever after closing its borders last January to protect itself against the coronavirus that first emerged in neighbour and key ally China. "It's another indirect way of admitting that plans introduced in 2016 — including the new chairman system—did not really work out," said defector-turned-researcher Ahn Chan-il of the World Institute for North Korea Studies in Seoul.

"Kim wanted to create a new image for himself and his era—that's different from his father's—by becoming a 'chairman', but it looks like he feels the need to stress his connection to his father in order to consolidate his leadership during this difficult time." Kim's father Kim Jong Il has remained the party's Eternal General Secretary since soon after his 2011 death, while the current leader's grandfather Kim Il Sung, North Korea's founder, is the country's Eternal President despite dying in 1994. —AFP

News in brief

Biden to receive second dose

WASHINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden received his second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine yesterday, his office announced, three weeks after his first injection was broadcast live on TV to boost public confidence in the jab. Biden, 78, told Americans "there's nothing to worry about" when he got his first dose of the Pfizer vaccine at the Christiana Hospital in Newark, Delaware on December 21. His team said that his second jab would also be done in front of the media, without giving further details. More than 374,000 people have died from the coronavirus in America. — AFP

Australian charged over oil scandal

SYDNEY: Australian police yesterday charged a man in connection with allegations a Sydney-based firm paid \$78 million in bribes to secure lucrative Iraqi oil contracts. The man, who was not named by police, was identified in media reports as former Leighton Holdings executive David Savage. Police said a 60-year-old was charged with two counts of knowingly providing misleading information contrary to the Corporations Act. He was arrested on his release from 14 days in hotel quarantine after returning to Australia from France. — AFP

Russia vaccinated 1.5m with Sputnik

MOSCOW: Russia announced yesterday that 1.5 million people around the world had received its Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine as part of an initiative Kremlin critics have described as a geopolitical push. The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), which has financed the development of the Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine, confirmed the figure to AFP without offering a breakdown of where the jab was distributed. "We cannot say how many of them are in Russia and in the rest of the world," RDIF spokesman Arseny Palagin said, adding that individual nations could release data separately. —AFP

Micronesia records first COVID case

KOROR: The remote Pacific nation of Micronesia recorded its first case of COVID-19 yesterday, ending its run as one of the few places on Earth without the coronavirus. President David Panuelo acknowledged the development was "alarming" for the country's 100,000 inhabitants but said the case had been contained at the border. "For this reason, citizens across the nation should remain calm," he said in a televised address. "Do not panic because the situation is contained." Panuelo said the positive test came from a crewman on a government ship "Chief Mailo", which had been in the Philippines undergoing repairs. — AFP

Brisbane lifts virus lockdown

AUSTRALIA: Australia's third-largest city lifted stay-at-home orders yesterday, after mass testing and tracing across Brisbane found no new coronavirus cases despite fears over a contagious strain entering the community. More than two million people were ordered into a snap lockdown Friday after a cleaner at a quarantine hotel contracted the UK variant of COVID-19 from a returned traveller. Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk said the lockdown would be lifted at 6pm local time yesterday after tens of thousands of tests detected zero cases of transmission. —AFP

Business

TUESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2021

Digital health in spotlight as virus shifts tech show focus

CES to showcase technology for remote patient visits, biosensors and gadgetry

WASHINGTON: Digital health care is in the spotlight at the tech industry's big event this week amid a pandemic that has highlighted the importance of remote services, with a potentially lasting impact on medical delivery. The Consumer Electronics Show, which is being held online from yesterday, will showcase technology for remote patient visits, biosensors and a range of other gadgetry that can help people avoid doctors' offices and waiting rooms.

Demand for telehealth services was projected to have risen 64 percent in the US alone, according to Frost & Sullivan researchers, underscoring the need for better communications platforms, home monitoring devices and more. "We have learned that going into waiting rooms with other sick patients can be problematic and people are looking for other ways of getting care," said Samir Qamar, a family physician and founder of MedWand, which is expected to launch its device with 10 diagnostic tools for remote care this year.

Qamar, who is speaking at a CES panel, said the pandemic also exposed gaps in telemedicine including a lack of accessible internet for some population segments.

"One of the big problems is the lack of ability to examine patients remotely," Qamar told AFP.

Companies have been developing remote tools that can be used at home, including stethoscopes, otoscopes, heart and blood pressure monitors, but need to show they are highly accurate in order to gain regulatory approval, Qamar noted. CES exhibitors will be showing devices that monitor the

elderly living alone for signs of medical issues, wearables that help with early detection of disease as well as various diagnostic tools.

Also on display will be an array of workplace health gadgets, from smart thermometers to air purifiers and sanitizing robots. "Crazy devices such as personal air purifiers that were viewed with amusement last year will be viewed as much more relevant this year," said Richard Windsor, an independent technology analyst who pens the Radio Free Mobile blog.

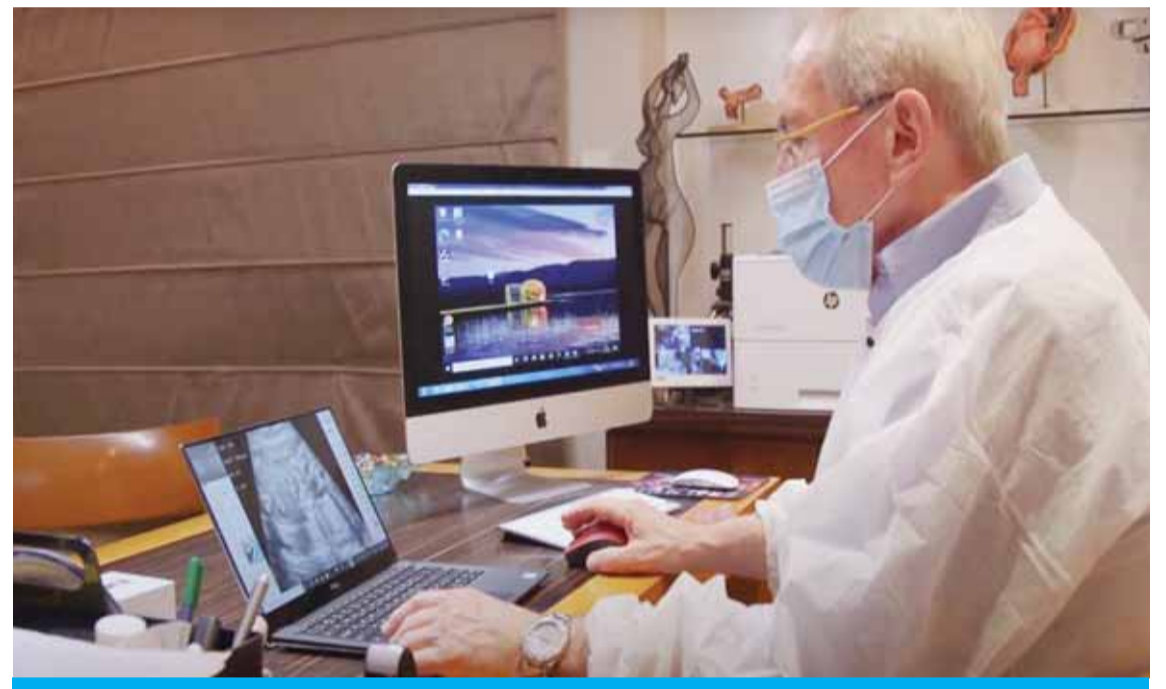
Digital records, analytics

Another important element for remote medical care is keeping track of health data and using analytics tools to better understand the risks for COVID-19 as well as other diseases, notes Bettina Experton, chief executive at the digital health platform Humetrix, a longtime CES exhibitor.

With more people turning to telemedicine, "sometimes the physician might not have an existing relationship with the patient, so there is a critical need for their medical history," Experton said.

"We have developed various mobile applications with medical history which you can share with the push of a button." The platform, which is available for individuals and insurers, also uses artificial intelligence to help assess risks for people affected by the coronavirus.

Similarly, Tokyo-based Axion Research will be unveiling an early-detection system that predicts disease risks, including for cancer and Alzheimer's, using AI to "map" people's health outlook.



Pregnant women can now perform at-home ultrasound scans with a smartphone device. —AFP

Fitness evolves

While CES has long focused on consumer products for fitness, this has increasingly been applied to the healthcare field as technology advances, said Robin Murdoch of the consulting group Accenture, who follows the show. "It has been focused on the

consumer side of health and fitness, but there is some crossover," Murdoch said. "You now have smartwatches and other devices which monitor your pulse, your blood oxygen and more, and that provides a lot of data" that can be applied for medical purposes. —AFP

Big tech show goes on, in virtual format

SAN FRANCISCO: The big tech show goes on, but online only: the 2021 Consumer Electronics Show kicked off yesterday aiming to create connections and showcase the latest in robotics, smart devices, digital health and more.

Some 1,800 exhibitors will be participating in the show, forced to go online-only by the coronavirus pandemic. The new format will be a challenge for one of the world's largest trade events. In previous years, the Las Vegas extravaganza pulled in more than 4,000 exhibitors from startups to big multinationals, with upwards of 175,000 attendees.

The event opens with a media day—normally packed with press conferences in Las Vegas ballrooms—replaced with streamed video presentations from companies, such as Hisense, LG, Samsung and Sony.

The Consumer Technology Association, the trade group producing the event, will also unveil its forecast and trends for 2021. Gary Shapiro, president and chief executive of the group, said the first all-digital show would be "showcasing the latest trends and innovation in artificial intelligence, 5G, digital health, smart cities, vehicle tech and beyond."

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.

CES has more than 300 speakers lined up, and a



Some 1,800 exhibitors will be participating in the show, forced to go online-only by the coronavirus pandemic.

heightened focus on sessions diving into issues such as privacy and 5G internet. Sessions will be immediately available for replay on demand, and remain accessible until mid-February, according to CES organizers.

When the virtual show floor opens today, attendees will be able to click into online exhibition booths for demos and chats. Some unveilings that would normally draw crowds in Las Vegas are going ahead in the virtual space: Audi is set to launch its electric sports car, and LG will show off a large bendable display for gamers; other companies will be releasing gadgets adapted to superfast 5G wireless networks which are gaining traction. But some analysts say the lack of in-person events has pushed many participants to the sidelines.

"A large part of the show is likely to be missing in

action," said Richard Windsor, an independent technology analyst who writes the Radio Free Mobile blog. Windsor said health tech will be at "the top of the agenda" for the pandemic-hit event, which he said will likely be "a diminished experience" compared with prior shows. Show organizers said they hope to deliver a new kind of experience which can be useful to the expected online crowd of 100,000 or more.

"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." —AFP

Brexit, COVID threaten 250,000 small UK firms

LONDON: More than one quarter of a million small British businesses face bankruptcy this year without more state help amid coronavirus and post-Brexit trade fallout, a study showed yesterday.

"A record number of small business owners are planning to close their firms over the coming twelve months, putting the UK on course to lose more than a quarter of a million businesses," the Federation of Small Businesses estimated after last month quizzing 1,401 firms on their outlooks.

The FSB meanwhile said that Britain's financial support measures in response to Covid-19 did not "keep pace" with tightening lockdown restrictions. It added in its study that exporters were "feeling the strain as (the) new EU-UK trade deal beds in" following Britain's recent exit from European Union single market and customs union.

FSB National Chairman Mike Cherry called on the UK government look at how emergency debt facilities could help small businesses to survive. And he urged the adoption of "transition vouchers" to help firms cope with uncertainty surrounding the



LONDON: A digital display at a bus station warns pedestrians of the new strain of coronavirus COVID-19. — AFP

Brexit trade deal that came into force on January 1. "Our exporters are trying to get across what a new EU-UK trade agreement means for them without the cash they need to make adjustments," Cherry said.

"Direct funding to help them manage new obligations in the form of transition vouchers is urgently needed. "This government can stem losses and protect the businesses of the future—but only if it acts now," he added. —AFP

HK tracker fund stops investing in China firms on US ban list

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's original stock market tracker said yesterday it would make no new investments in firms listed by Washington as having links to China's military as it also recommended Americans no longer invest in the fund.

The announcement is the latest stark illustration of how tensions between the world's two biggest economies are causing headaches for international firms in Hong Kong, which has long served as China's gateway to global markets. Outgoing US President Donald Trump issued an order in November banning Americans from investing in Chinese firms deemed to be supplying or supporting the Asian giant's military. Yesterday the Tracker Fund of Hong Kong (TraHK) — which has some US\$14 billion in assets—said it was complying with that order.

"In light of the Executive Order, TraHK will not make any new investments in a sanctioned entity with effect from 11 January 2021," the company wrote in a statement to the stock exchange. "TraHK is no longer appropriate for US Persons to invest. You should consider whether this is an appropriate investment for you," it added. Yesterday Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and JPMorgan Chase also said they would delist some 500 structured products in Hong Kong to comply with the same executive order.

TraHK was set up by Hong Kong's government following the 1998 Asian financial crash and is the city's biggest exchange traded fund. It is run by the Asian arm of State Street Global Advisors, a massive US asset management firm.

Investors and businesses have been scrambling to respond to Trump's often vaguely-worded executive orders targeting China. Last week the New York Stock Exchange confirmed, after a dizzying few days of reversals and confusion, that it was delisting three state-owned Chinese telecom giants.

Trump also signed an executive order banning transactions involving Alipay, WeChat Pay and other apps linked to Chinese companies, drawing strong criticism from Beijing.

Over the weekend China published new rules to protect its firms from "unjustified" foreign laws that will allow Chinese courts to punish global companies for complying with foreign restrictions and sanctions. Hong Kong-based firms are finding themselves acutely vulnerable to the crossfire of these spiralling tensions and competing restrictions.

Last year the US imposed sanctions on multiple Chinese and Hong Kong officials over Beijing's crackdown on democracy supporters in the city. The restrictions bar financial institutions from doing any transactions with the sanctioned individuals. —AFP

Business

How Aussie doctor's at-home COVID test won US approval

How 'a bit of a hobby' turned out to be a mass virus detection tool

BRISBANE: An Australian doctor who began inventing virus detection tools as a "hobby" is now helming a mammoth effort to ship the first non-prescription home COVID-19 tests cleared by US regulators. Sean Parsons is the founder of Ellume, a medical tech firm based in a suburban industrial park, where rows of factory workers in sterile clothing swiftly assemble sleek grey kits roughly the size and shape of home pregnancy tests.

Ellume's product delivers results in just 15 minutes and will soon be available over the counter in pharmacies across the country worst-hit by the pandemic. "We're making the first product that's headed for the US. So it is an important day," Parsons told AFP on a recent tour of his company's Brisbane facility.

At the time, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in Washington had just approved Ellume's kits for emergency use and the company was manufacturing 16,000 tests a day. It is now rapidly scaling up production, aiming to hit 100,000 units a day this month and one million by mid-year.

"The objective is to diagnose as many people as possible—millions of people with coronavirus—to enable and encourage them to reduce the transmission within the community," Parsons said.

The single-use kit comes with a self-administered nasal swab that is slotted into a tube containing a small analyzer capable of detecting the virus. A free smartphone app walks users through the process and pairs with the analyzer over Bluetooth to download test results.

Though the vaccine rollout is already underway in the US, the pathway to herd immunity is expected to be long and rocky, and Parsons is confident his tests will be needed for "many years" to come.

"There will be people that are not just worried about having coronavirus, but people who choose to not be vaccinated for whatever reason," he said. "Testing at scale in the community is here to stay, as we see it."

'A bit of a hobby'

The seed for Ellume was planted during the swine flu pandemic in 2010, when Parsons worked in a busy Brisbane hospital filled with worried people seeking tests. As his shift was ending, the doctor treated a teenager who later tested positive for the disease. "If he could have obtained the results earlier and not spent four hours in the waiting room spreading it to goodness knows how many people, then we could have offered even better care," Parsons said.

He tinkered away at the side on an invention he hoped would eventually help rapidly detect flu-like illnesses. It started as "a bit of a hobby" but by late 2011 Ellume had attracted enough investment for Parsons to fully devote himself to the venture.

When the coronavirus pandemic struck, the firm had already invented a nanoparticle testing system used to make an at-home influenza test and had embarked on a partnership to bring tuberculosis testing into communities.

'We need to be ready'

As early as February—before Australia had slammed shut its international borders to forestall the pandemic—Parsons and his team were "pouring their energies" into adapting their work for COVID-19 testing. That attracted a \$31 million investment from US government agencies, setting the stage for the at-home test to be



BRISBANE: In this picture taken on Dec 21, 2020, employees work on the production line of a COVID-19 home test unit at the production facility of Australian digital diagnostics company Ellume. —AFP

delivered there first.

A clinical trial found it to be 96 percent as effective as lab testing—positioning it as a complement to traditional methods and eventually convincing the FDA to grant emergency use authorization.

Ellume's focus remains squarely on the US but Parsons wants to expand globally and hopes for EU approval later this year. And while it

took more than eight years to create the technology and eight months to tailor it to detect COVID-19, Parsons is already looking ahead to how they can more quickly address the next major disease outbreak.

"We're also building this capacity to respond to a future pandemic," he said. "That is inevitable, and we need to be ready." —AFP

Conservative website Parler forced offline

SAN FRANCISCO: The conservative social network Parler was forced offline yesterday, tracking websites showed, after Amazon warned the company would lose access to its servers for its failure to properly police violent content. The site's popularity soared in recent weeks, becoming the number one download from Apple's App Store after the much larger Twitter banned US President Donald Trump from its platform for his role in inciting a riot at the US Capitol last week.

Messages of support for Wednesday's attack in Washington DC—along with calls for more demonstrations—had flourished on the platform, leading Google to remove it from its app store on Friday, followed by Apple on Saturday. Amazon then confirmed it would suspend the platform from its cloud hosting services for allowing "threats of violence."

Stocks struggle after bumper week, bitcoin plunges

LONDON: Equities mostly dropped yesterday after last week's strong showing, while bitcoin plunged 20 percent as volatile trading returned to markets. The dollar climbed, while oil prices declined, also after big gains last week. "It was a strong run-up last week so we are likely just seeing a little pause for breath," noted Neil Wilson, chief market analyst

at Markets.com. "Looking ahead this week we are focused on the start of the fourth-quarter earnings season on Wall Street." Bitcoin was the standout, losing a fifth of its value from Sunday to \$32,388, before going back up to above \$35,000. The cryptocurrency last week smashed record after record, eventually surging past \$40,000.

With small investors at risk of big losses amid the volatility that saw bitcoin rocket by one third in value last week, Britain's financial watchdog on Monday urged caution. The Financial Conduct Authority "is aware that some firms are offering investments in cryptoassets, or lending or investments linked to cryptoassets, that promise high returns", it said in a statement. "Investing in cryptoassets, or investments

and lending linked to them, generally involves taking very high risks with investors' money. "If consumers invest in these types of product, they should be prepared to lose all their money," the FCA added. Wall Street closed out last week with more record-highs, with investors broadly upbeat on the prospect of a further massive stimulus for the US economy.

"After being bullish for several months, we are definitely becoming more cautious on the stock market up at these levels," said Matt Maley, at Miller Tabak + Co. Gains last week were driven by US stimulus hopes and as countries begin rolling out coronavirus vaccines, helping to offset surging cases of the disease that has triggered fresh lockdowns worldwide. —AFP

after last week's violence in DC as new users, furious over Twitter's ban on Trump, flocked to the app. In one now-deleted post, an account purporting to belong to Lin Wood, a pro-Trump lawyer, called for Vice President Mike Pence to be put in front of a firing squad—threats which US media have reported led to a secret service investigation. —AFP

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FRANKFURT: A display showing the German Stock Market Index DAX is pictured at the stock exchange in Frankfurt, Germany. —AFP

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Pakistan suspends power plant staff after blackout

ISLAMABAD: Seven staff at one of Pakistan's biggest power plants have been suspended after a technical fault sparked a massive grid breakdown at the weekend, plunging the entire country into darkness. The blackout hit all of Pakistan's major cities, including the capital Islamabad, economic hub Karachi and the second-largest city Lahore, lasting around 18 hours in most areas.

The employees at Guddu thermal power plant in Sindh province were suspended "on account of the negligence of duty", according to the Central Power Generation Company, which operates the facility.

Guddu plant, built in the 1980s, is one of the country's largest and generates power from furnace oil and natural gas. The suspended staff included a manager and six junior employees.

The blackout, which started shortly before midnight on Saturday, was caused by an engineering fault which tripped the system and caused power plants across the country to shut down. Pakistan's electricity supply system is a complex and delicate web, and a problem in one section of the grid can lead to cascading breakdowns countrywide. There were no reports of disruption at hospitals, however, which often rely on backup generators.

The outage marked Pakistan's second major power breakdown in less than three years. In May 2018, power was partially disrupted for more than nine hours, while in 2015 an apparent rebel attack on a key supply line plunged around 80 percent of the country into darkness. —AFP

The unique value proposition of megacommunities during pandemic

By Leslie Raimondo and Samer Abi Chaker

The COVID-19 pandemic, one of the largest health crises of modern times, has triggered a series of economic, social, and environmental repercussions. Long-term public health implications are anticipated, driven by reduced access to healthcare services, the limited capacity of GCC healthcare systems, and the known prevalence of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic conditions, some exacerbated by the lockdown.

Healthcare systems' financial sustainability is at risk from significant reductions in revenue and sizeable financial losses across providers in the GCC. Given these are national emergencies, many GCC providers are required to treat patients irrespective of their insurance eligibility, likely leading to further financial pressure on payers and providers.

While the vaccine rollout has started, difficulties are anticipated in mass vaccination programs. Production and distribution of vaccines might be delayed as manufacturers acquire the necessary approvals to launch. Many countries across the world will compete for their share of doses.

While these challenges are not necessarily new, it

is the unique overlay of economic, social, environmental, and health implications in today's interconnected world that amplify them. Individually, GCC governmental authorities, private sector entities, and/or civil society organizations (e.g., NGOs, schools, universities, religious communities) certainly possess the knowledge and experience to overcome these challenges. However, pooling this knowledge and experience can generate greater impact.

As countries gradually shift their focus to managing the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic—a hallmark of the disaster recovery phase—megacommunities can be an effective approach to actively engage a wide array of stakeholders.

A megacommunity is based on the premise that some challenges are so large that they cannot be addressed by a single sector, but they can be effectively addressed by public, private, and community-based sectors working together. By leveraging an interconnected collaborative network, megacommunities can overcome the daunting challenges of large-scale disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic. For megacommunities to work, five critical elements need to be present:

1. A three-sector flat organization

To best address the needs of affected populations, the megacommunity will need to involve leaders from the government, private sector (including healthcare providers, insurers, manufacturers, etc.), and the nonprofit sector at all times. More importantly, megacommunities' intrinsic model of interdependence requires a flat organization and leadership structure, which is more effective than conventional hierarchical leadership in disaster recovery situations.

2. Overlap of vital interests

For megacommunities to succeed, participants must share a common goal; in this case, a swift recovery from the pandemic. A megacommunity can be a powerful way to translate these shared interests into workable, sustainable actions. The GCC is conducive to this overlap of interests with governments and private organizations eager to address the multiple challenges and re-launch economic activity, and NGOs seeking sustainable impact as demand for their services increases.

3. Convergence

More than an overlap of interests, megacommunity members have to converge towards a clearly articulated mutual action. In the context of COVID-19, megacommunity members will need to focus on addressing challenges such as ensuring financial viability of healthcare providers, maintaining a robust medical supply chain and immunizing vulnerable communities.

4. Network structure

The multi-sector nature of a megacommunity tends to generate a networked environment that complements the efforts of participating members with those of external connections. Members should continuously widen the network, involving as many external connections as possible. For example, they can better understand the needs of local communities by tapping into diverse information sources within the network, for efficiently deploying resources and effective interventions.

5. Adaptability

Unlike typical organizational partnerships, rigidly

defined by service level agreements, megacommunities are more adaptable. This enables them to cater to varying needs of local communities across the GCC. Reliance among different members can be shifted, depending on immediate needs, and engage new entrants without establishing authority over them.

Today, GCC HEPR authorities have a unique opportunity to capitalize on the unprecedented engagement of governmental, private sector, and civil society stakeholders to mitigate or even eliminate the pandemic's impact. It is also a chance to devise novel and more effective ways of tackling longstanding and new challenges brought forward by COVID-19. The GCC has numerous examples of successful collaborations, consortiums, or workgroups whose mission is to advance and protect the health of the community—take for instance, the recent Abu Dhabi-based "Hope Consortium" that is focused on solving the logistical challenges associated with vaccine supply for the UAE and the world.

However, current health emergency preparedness and response models still do not recognize megacommunities as a stakeholder group, and without official recognition, megacommunities cannot be engaged effectively in disaster response activities. As a result, to fully realize their potential, it is important for relevant authorities to update existing plans, framework, and concepts of operations to include mechanisms for the formation, integration, and engagement of megacommunities across all four mission areas: Preparation, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery.

Note: Leslie Raimondo is Senior Vice President at Booz Allen Hamilton and Samer Abi Chaker, Senior Associate at Booz Allen Hamilton, MENA

Business

Gulf Bank's 'WISE' Investments rolls out two new investment portfolios

Islamic portfolios designed to meet customers' goals and preferences

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank is celebrating the fourth anniversary of its digital investments' platform, WISE Investments, and is introducing new investment portfolios and saving plans to meet customers' growing financial needs.

Gulf Bank's WISE Investments is an advisory and portfolio management service that follows an award winning investment strategy, providing Gulf Bank clients with the opportunity to invest in international markets in an easy, transparent and cost-efficient way. The principle of WISE Investments is to invest through international, diversified portfolios while achieving the ideal risk-adjusted return in the long term. Gulf Bank's new WISE portfolios will serve customers that prefer Sharia-compliant investments and clients that favor high-yielding portfolios, capitalizing on the current platform's technology that has shown real value to existing customers.

Commenting on the new products and plans, Dalya Al-Qassem, Head of Investment Management at Gulf Bank, said: "We are thrilled to share our new

portfolios, which we have launched to suit our clients' growing goals and preferences. Through our two new portfolios, the 'Islamic' portfolio and the 'Income' portfolio, we are proud to offer our customers with a Sharia-compliant opportunity, as well as provide new asset classes, including gold. We strive to offer only top, hand-picked securities from leading fund providers in the world such as "iShare by BlackRock" to guarantee the satisfaction of our growing client base, while fulfilling their unique financial requirements."

As a low-cost investment solution, the WISE platform continues to prove its advantages over other investment alternatives in the long term. Aside from robust returns, WISE customers enjoy a high level of transparency and constant flexibility with their portfolios which inspired us to introduce new varied saving plans. The objective of the new plans is to encourage the youth to actively manage their finances in an effort to safeguard their futures.

It is worth noting that despite the uncertainty

and volatile markets due to COVID-19, Gulf Bank's WISE portfolios continued to exceed the returns of some of the major markets in the past three years. WISE portfolio with a conservative strategy posted 23 percent total return since inception in 2017, with an average annualized return of 7.1 percent. In turn, WISE's aggressive investment strategy has achieved a return of 38 percent since its inception with an average annualized return of 10.8 percent.

Al-Qassem continued: "We would also like to take this opportunity to thank our loyal customers for their confidence and trust in the WISE platform during the most challenging times of the pandemic and unpredictable economic development surrounding international markets. We promise to keep enhancing our investment solutions to provide our clients with only the finest, cutting-edge investment tools and alternatives. Gulf Bank's CMA-certified Investment Advisors, who are experienced in the local and global markets, will always place their clients' interests as their utmost priority. They will

build a uniquely tailored Investment Policy Statement (IPS) that clearly states each customer's financial goal, investment horizon and risk appetite in order to assist and guide our customers in attaining their investment goals and grow their wealth."

To learn more about WISE Investments with Gulf Bank, customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's branches or log onto <https://www.e-gulfbank.com/en/personal/investment/wise>. Customers can also use the WhatsApp service on 1805805 for round-the-clock assistance from Gulf Bank representatives, or call the Customer Contact Center on the same number.



Dalya Al-Qassem

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for three months with a rate of return at 1.125 percent.

Dr Martens shoemaker eyes stock market float

LONDON: Iconic British footwear brand Dr Martens yesterday took steps to launch on the London stock market, seven years after it was acquired by the private equity group Permira.

The maker of boots and shoes, whose internet sales have boomed worldwide during coronavirus lockdowns, "announces that it is considering an initial public offering", Dr Martens said in a statement. Permira, which bought Dr Martens for £300 million (332 million euros, \$404 million) in early 2014, said it would sell down its stake under a flotation. Dr Martens, which sells more than 11 million pairs of boots and shoes annually in more than 60 countries, saw revenues jump by around one fifth to £318 million in the six months to September from a year earlier.

Chief executive Kenny Wilson yesterday said the company was targeting "significant global growth potential" with the help of increased investment from a stock-market listing. "Our iconic brand appeals to a diverse range of consumers around the world who wear our footwear to express their individual style. "We have invested massively to ensure that we deliver the best digital and store experiences to connect with our wearers, and through this we are driving our long term, sustainable growth," he added in the statement. Dr Martens has 130 retail stores worldwide, with online sales representing one-fifth of all revenues. —AFP

JPMorgan halts all political donations

NEW YORK: JPMorgan Chase said it is suspending all US political donations following the attack on the Capitol by a pro-Trump mob, joining a growing list of American corporations holding back funding since the violence. The political action committee at JPMorgan, the country's largest bank by assets, will stop making any financial contributions to Republican and Democratic leaders for at least six months, a spokesperson told AFP Sunday.

"The focus of business leaders, political leaders, civic leaders right now should be on governing and getting help to those who desperately need it most," said Peter Scher, the bank's head of corporate responsibility. "There will be plenty of time for campaigning later."

Other companies have opted to specifically target the Republican officials who on January 6 voted against certifying the results of the presidential election. That day's assault saw a mob of angry Donald Trump supporters storm the US Capitol shortly after the president reiterated baseless election conspiracies to the crowd. Five people died in the ensuing riot, including one police officer.

Billionaire investor Nelson Peltz, Ben & Jerry's ice cream company and the AFL-CIO—the largest trade union federation in the US—have since called for Trump's immediate departure from office. Hospitality giant Marriott International said it will halt donations to "those who voted against the certification of the election," a spokesperson told AFP Sunday.

The Blue Cross Blue Shield Association of health insurance companies had already announced Friday it intended to suspend all contributions to "those lawmakers who voted to undermine our democracy."

"While a contrast of ideas, ideological differences and partisanship are all part of our politics, weakening our political system and eroding public confidence in it must never be," the group's director general, Kim Keck, said in a statement. —AFP

Corruption trial of Israeli magnate opens in Switzerland

GENEVA: French-Israeli diamond magnate Beny Steinmetz went on trial in Geneva yesterday over allegations of corruption linked to mining deals in Guinea, after a drawn-out international investigation. Steinmetz, who travelled from Israel to take part in the two-week trial, has denied wrongdoing in the case, which involves allegations of multi-million-dollar bribes paid to top Guinean officials to win lucrative mining rights.

The 64-year-old businessman, who made his fortune in diamonds, faces charges of corrupting public officials and forging documents following a six-year inquiry. The trial participants are separated by plexiglass barriers due to the coronavirus pandemic, with Steinmetz and his lawyer Marc Bonnant allowed to share the same space.

"We will plead his innocence," Bonnant told AFP last week. Swiss prosecutors accuse Steinmetz and two partners of bribing a wife of former Guinean president Lansana Conte and others in order to win mining rights in the south-eastern Simandou region.

The area is thought to contain the world's biggest untapped iron ore deposit.

Steinmetz has previously dismissed the allegations as baseless and an attempt by political enemies to smear him. Prosecutors say Steinmetz obtained the mining rights shortly before Conte died in 2008 after about \$10 million (8.2 million euros) was paid in bribes over a number of years, some through Swiss bank accounts.

'Pact of corruption'

Prosecutors claim Steinmetz and representatives in Guinea entered a "pact of corruption" with Conte and his fourth wife Mamadie Toure. She is a key witness in the trial and is scheduled to testify tomorrow, though it remains unclear if she will come.

Bonnant spent much of the first morning discussing her protected status as a state witness in the United States, where she lives. He argued that this status, which protects Mamadie Toure



Geneva's prosecutor Yves Bertossa arrives at Geneva's courthouse for the trial of French-Israeli diamond magnate Beny Steinmetz over alleged corruption linked to mining deals in Guinea yesterday. —AFP

from prosecution for her alleged role in the corruption scheme, does not exist under Swiss law and should invalidate any testimony she might give. "This is a case of witness subornation," he told the court.

Bonnant maintains his client "never paid a cent to Ms Mamadie Toure" and says she was not married to Conte, she was his mistress, meaning she could in any case not be considered a corruptible official under Swiss law. The lawyer also claims there are serious questions around the handling of the case by Claudio Mascotto, the prosecutor initially in charge of the investigation that began in 2013.

He asked the judge to add Mascotto, who is no longer prosecuting the case, to the witness list over a secret trip he allegedly took to Israel in March 2017, which he said tainted the case.

'Curse of natural resources'

Geraldine Viret, a spokeswoman for investigative NGO Public Eye, told AFP the case was a "sad illustration of the problematic curse

of natural resources", showing how a country as rich in resources as Guinea could continue to wallow in poverty. Conte's military dictatorship ordered global mining giant Rio Tinto to relinquish two concessions to BSGR for around \$170 million in 2008.

Just 18 months later, BSGR sold 51 percent of its stake in the concession to Brazilian mining giant Vale for \$2.5 billion. "The profit was colossal, about twice Guinea's state budget at the time," Viret said.

But in 2013, Guinea's first democratically elected president Alpha Conde launched a review of permits allotted under Conte and later stripped the VBG consortium formed by BSGR and Vale of its permit. In February 2019, Steinmetz reached a deal with Guinean authorities, who lifted corruption charges against him in exchange for him giving up his remaining rights to the Simandou mine. However, Geneva has continued to press ahead with its case, which could see Steinmetz jailed for up to 10 years if convicted. —AFP

China consumer prices rise in December

BEIJING: China's consumer prices rebounded in December, official data showed yesterday, as food prices picked up due to weather difficulties and rising demand ahead of the Lunar New Year festival. In December, the consumer price index (CPI) rose more than expected at 0.2 percent on-year, said the National Bureau of Statistics, with prices increasing for fresh produce and meats such as pork, beef and mutton ahead of next month's nationwide holiday.

"Due to continued low temperatures, the production, storage and transportation costs of fresh vegetables and fruit increased," said NBS senior statistician Dong Lijuan.

The index is a key gauge of retail inflation, and the rebound follows the first negative reading in over a decade the month before as food costs fell. Yesterday, Dong said that consumer demand was picking up due to New Year's Day and the upcoming Lunar New Year, bumping up prices of other food items. But pork prices, which rocketed previously after an African swine fever outbreak ravaged pig stocks, continued to drop by 1.3 percent on-year last month as supplies of the staple meat recovered.

For the full year of 2020, consumer prices rose 2.5 percent on-year. "Consumer prices may slip back into deflation over the next couple of months due to a jump in pork prices a year ago, but this should prove temporary," said Capital Economics' senior China economist Julian Evans-Pritchard.

On Friday, China's first live hog futures began



NANJING: Customers shop for vegetables at a market in Nanjing, in China's eastern Jiangsu province yesterday. —AFP

trading, which officials hope will help halt price fluctuations. High food inflation has triggered urban unrest in the past and rising prices is a concern not just for farmers but also the country's leaders.

Iris Pang, chief economist for Greater China at ING said consumer prices should hold steady moving forward, with prices stabilizing and vegetable costs dropping after winter.

She added: "I expect that as vaccinations

progress, there will be more demand for consumer goods and... prices should increase." Meanwhile, the producer price index (PPI) which measures the cost of goods at the factory gate, fell 0.4 percent on-year last month—better than November's 1.5 percent drop. "Domestic demand recovered steadily, coupled with the continued rise in prices of some international commodities," said Dong. For the whole of 2020, PPI fell 1.8 percent on-year. —AFP

Classifieds

Tuesday, January 12, 2021

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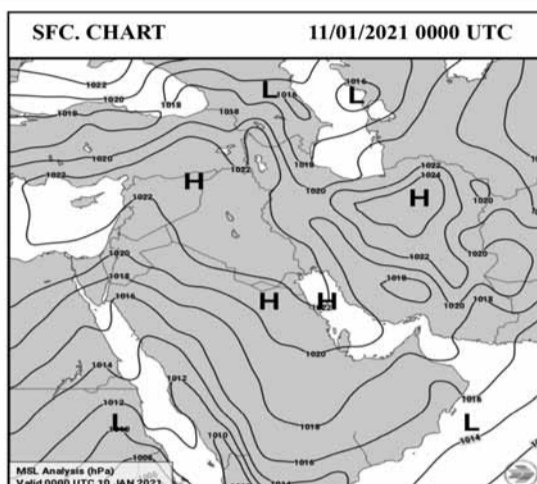
Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 12 - 32 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Cold with light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 12 - 32 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING: No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	19 °C	12 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	20 °C	07 °C
ABDALY	22 °C	05 °C
BUBYAN	18 °C	09 °C
JAHRA	21 °C	10 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	19 °C	13 °C
AHMADI	- °C	- °C
NUWAISIB	19 °C	09 °C
WAFRA	20 °C	06 °C
SALMY	19 °C	05 °C



DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Tuesday	01/12	Fair	20 °C	06 °C	NW	10 - 32 km/h
Wednesday	01/13	Fair	21 °C	07 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 28 km/h
Thursday	01/14	Fair and Partly cloudy to cloudy	22 °C	06 °C	VRB-SE	10 - 30 km/h
Friday	01/15	Fair and Cloudy to partly cloudy	22 °C	07 °C	SE-NW	15 - 40 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:17
Sunrise	06:44
Zuhr	11:56
Asr	14:49
Sunset	17:09
Isha	18:29

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	20 °C
MIN. Temp.	05 °C
MAX. RH	84 %
MIN. RH	23 %
MAX. Wind	NW 21 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated. UP.0

Hospitals

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

Clinics

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

CHANGE OF NAME

I, **Muzzammil Khan** holder of Indian Passport No. R8108878 & Civil ID No. 278081006338 has changed my name from Muzzammil Khan to Sohrab Khan as Sohrab (Given Name) and Khan (Surname) hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Sohrab Khan. (C0206) 12-1-2021



Airlines	Number
Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Oman Air	22958787
Turkish Airlines	22453820/1

EMERGENCY 112

Word Search

Crime Fiction



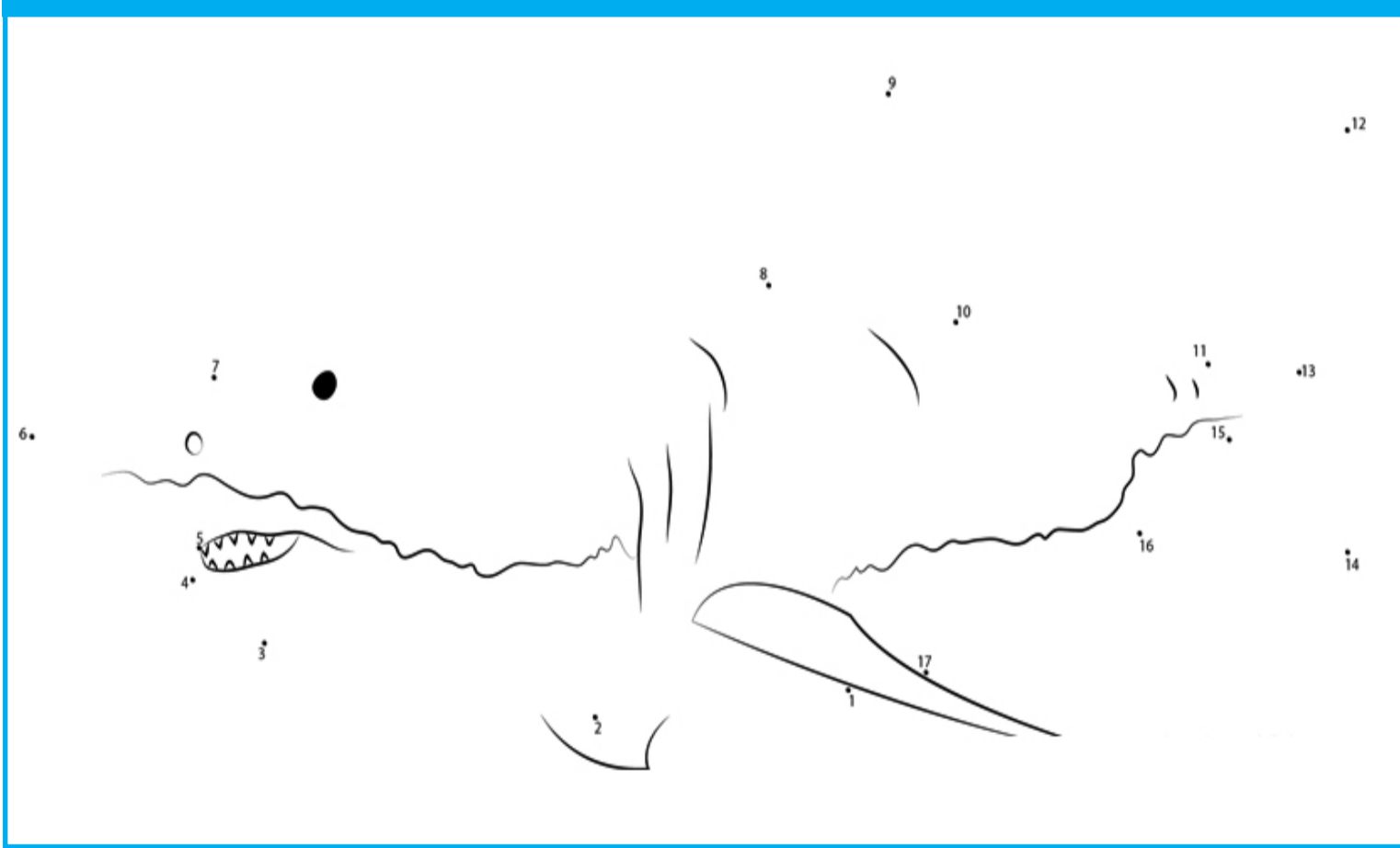
DIRECTIONS:
 Find and circle the vocabulary words in the grid. Look for them in all directions including backwards and diagonally.



- | | | |
|--------------|----------------|-------------|
| ACCOMPLICE | FLATFOOT | PRIVATE EYE |
| ALIBI | FORENSICS | RED HERRING |
| BREAKTHROUGH | GUMSHOE | SLEUTH |
| CAPER | HUNCH | SUSPENSE |
| CLUE | INVESTIGATOR | VILLAIN |
| CRIMINAL | METHOD | WHODUNIT |
| DEDUCTION | MODUS OPERANDI | WITNESS |
| DETECTIVE | MOTIVE | |
| EVIDENCE | MYSTERY | |
| FEMME FATALE | OBSERVATION | |



Join the Dots



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Books and conversations with friends could take up most of your day, Aries. The intellectual stimulation could have positive and negative effects on your health. Positive because it raises your enthusiasm and puts you in an enthusiastic state of mind, and negative because it might get you so excited that you forget to eat or rest. Enjoy all the excitement but don't forget to take a break.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Some great news could come today that turns your life upside down momentarily. Cancer, you will find it very exciting. New neighbors could move in and you might spend some time getting acquainted. Much of your day could be spent seeking information in a field that interests you. Expect a busy day, but remember to rest now and then. A walk in the evening might be a good idea.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Today you may take up the study of astrology, numerology, alchemy, or other occult discipline. Your intellectual abilities are particularly sharp, Libra, so you may want to combine them with your tendency toward mysticism. This should keep you busy for much of the day, but you need to watch out for intellectual overload. You don't want to forget what you've learned. Take notes.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

This should be a stimulating day, Capricorn. The possibility of a journey might arise unexpectedly. This could be exciting as some close friends or a romantic partner might accompany you. A new turn in your intellectual or spiritual interests could have your mind going a thousand miles an hour. You will want to learn more about it. The Internet could have useful information. Make the most of it.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

If you're currently romantically involved, expect your relationship to reach a new understanding and sense of unity, Taurus. If you aren't involved, you could meet someone special today, and it might be like love at first sight. An instant bond could form between you because of mutual intellectual interests. You might have a lot to talk about, as your own projects are going better than you'd hoped.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

News might bring exciting opportunities for increasing your income, Leo. Perhaps you will learn of ways to start your own business. Maybe the demand for people with your skills has increased. You might discover the efficiency some new technology for managing your finances. Discussions with others should bring many new ideas your way. Make the most of them.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

New friends, new goals, and new attitudes could all appear on the scene, Scorpio. Unexpected developments within a group are likely to require reevaluating a course of action. This is probably a positive development, and it could be exciting, but it's going to mean some immediate adjustments. As your mental energy is still sharp, this shouldn't be too difficult.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Unexpected economic developments might make a sudden and positive difference in your situation, Aquarius. Perhaps your field becomes more competitive, and people with your skills are more in demand. Whatever it is, you can expect more money to come your way in the future. Legal papers could be involved, as could some interesting people you haven't met before. Your mind is likely to be buzzing.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

An old friend you haven't seen in a long time could turn up. This should be a pleasant surprise, Gemini, as you will have a lot of catching up to do. You might have good news, as you've been busy and could have come across some very exciting information. Take a walk at the end of the day or you might not be able to sleep.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Discussions could bring some exciting information your way that alters your thinking slightly. You tend to be oriented toward social, political, or humanitarian issues, Virgo. Today you might have the chance to put your talents to work. Someone could ask you for assistance. You have the mental and physical energy to go for it, so it's likely that you will, though perhaps not right away.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

If you've been aiming for a specific career goal, Sagittarius, it might suddenly manifest with the current planetary energy. You could be catapulted into the public eye in some way. The possibility of an increased income could arise, although it might be speculative at this point. Your mental energy continues high, so you should be able to easily grasp all the ins and outs of your situation.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Your social life might suddenly be busier than you expected, Pisces, perhaps because of the appearance of some interesting new people. This could involve a group with which you're affiliated, perhaps one with a humanitarian focus. Expect to be busy over the next few weeks, as this trend isn't likely to slow down soon. Stimulating conversations could set your mind going a mile a minute.

Lifestyle | Gossip

Jordan and Harvey make relationship Instagram official



Michael B. Jordan and Lori Harvey have made their relationship Instagram official. The 33-year-old actor shared a series of professional photographs with the 24-year-old model on the social media app over the weekend, and captioned the post with a black love heart and exclamation marks, seemingly confirming they are dating. Lori also took to her own profile to post a series of polaroids from the same shoot of the pair looking loved-up in front of a Christmas tree. Romance rumors were swirling around the couple during the Thanksgiving break, when they were seen in Lori's native Atlanta. While the day before New Year's Eve, they were spotted stepping off a plane together in Salt Lake City, where they reportedly ringed in 2021 together in the wintery ski resort. Lori has previously been romantically-linked to the likes of Diddy, his son Justin Combs, Future and Trey Songz. While

she was engaged to Dutch footballer Memphis Depay in 2017. Last year, Michael took over from John Legend to be crowned Sexiest Man Alive by PEOPLE magazine and he admitted it's a "good club" to be joining. He said: "It's a cool feeling. You know, everybody always made that joke, like, 'Mike, this is the one thing you're probably not going to get.' But it's a good club to be a part of." The 'Black Panther' star - who rarely speaks about his love life - also spilled in the November issue of the publication that he was seeking a girlfriend with a "sense of humor". He said: "A sense of humor, true understanding - because (an actor's) life is not conducive to a relationship, it's really not. 'Somebody that's nurturing ... That's probably why I'm still single, but yeah, it's a list.'" The 'Just Mercy' actor has previously been linked to the likes of Swedish singer Snoh Aalegra, model Cindy Bruna and actress Kiki Layne.



Styles fell for Wilde's 'independent nature'

The One Direction star met the actress and filmmaker on the set of their movie 'Don't Worry Darling', and they have reportedly started up a romance. Speaking to Us Weekly, a source said: "Harry likes that Olivia is so driven and confident and smart. Her intelligence and independent nature were the first things that drew him to her." It comes after it was claimed Harry and Olivia were spotted holding hands whilst at a friend's wedding over the weekend, and the pair have actually been dating for "a few weeks". An insider said: "They were in Montecito this weekend for a wedding. They were affectionate around their friends, held hands and looked very happy. They have dated for a few weeks." And their friendship was said to have "quickly turned romantic". An insider added: "What started out as a close friendship, quickly turned romantic. Everyone saw it coming. During

breaks, he hasn't been able to stay away and visited her trailer." Olivia split from Jason Sudeikis last year but he is hopeful about "repairing things" with Olivia. A source said of the former couple: "He is absolutely heartbroken about the split. There is still a lot of love there, and he would like to have hope that maybe there's a way for them to repair things. But what happens next remains to be seen." Before Harry was romantically linked to Olivia, a source claimed he has adopted a "go-with-the-flow attitude" towards his love life but is open to finding someone special. The insider said: "He's got some options in the pipeline in terms of who he'd like to date under the right circumstances, but nothing intense or formal. He's in no hurry at all. It's a genuine, go-with-the-flow attitude, although it goes without saying he certainly won't be single forever."

Dave Grohl feels 'concerned' for young music artists

The Foo Fighters rocker admits he worries about younger musicians just starting out in the industry and how they have to learn to "navigate success". He told The Sunday Times' Culture magazine: "Still, to this day, I'll see a new artist in their early twenties having to navigate success and feel concerned for them. Because at that point in life it's hard for anyone to be prepared for the ... the trauma that comes with it. I look back, I think I was 22 when Nirvana became popular, and obviously I didn't bear the same weight that Kurt did, but I had an incredibly naive attitude, like, 'Oh my God, I have a credit card now. I can take my friends out for drinks. I can have my own apartment!' It sounds ridiculous, but my experience was as simple as that." Dave previously insisted "preservation" of smaller music venues is "crucial" for the future of the music industry as he praised the Save Our Stages Act in the US, a \$900 billion bill that will go towards preventing

the permanent closure of independent music venues amid the pandemic. In a statement issued to the band's social media pages, Dave wrote: "A huge, heartfelt thank you to everyone who supported the Save Our Stages Act, which passed yesterday as a part of the economic stimulus bill. The preservation of America's smaller, independent venues is not only crucial to the millions of concert goers whose lives are bettered by experiencing their favourite artists in the flesh, but to the future of music itself, as it gives the next generation of young musicians a place to cut their teeth, hone their craft, and grow into the voices of tomorrow. The absence of live music this year has left us all longing for that communal feeling of connection, one that is best felt when joined in a song." The Save Our Stages Act brings us one step closer to sharing that feeling again, one that I hope we can all experience again very soon. Everyday we're one step closer. (sic)



Ricky Gervais asked to do stand up show in space

Ricky Gervais was offered the chance to be the first comedian to do a stand up show in space. The 'Office' star has revealed he was asked to perform a 15 minute set in space but he declined as he doesn't want to take the "risk" as he's even "careful crossing the road". He said: "I was offered one of these things where you go up into space for 15 minutes. And it was like a group of billionaires and they offered me the chance to be the first comedian to do a stand up show in space. I went no. I am not going to risk it. I am careful crossing the road." Ricky also joked people would have spent hundreds of thousands of pounds to go into space and would much rather be focusing on the view from out their window rather than

watching him. Speaking on The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon, he added: "Also these people have paid \$300,000 to go into space and have a look around. And then they go there and it's Ricky Gervais doing 10 minutes. They can watch me on YouTube. And now they have blown three hundred thousand? Look out the window. That is the other thing when they say let's go into space - We are in space now - right in the middle. There is nothing you can see up there that you cannot see from here. It is like me getting out of my chair and walking over there and saying I can see the chair from there - but you were in the chair."

Grimes has tested positive for coronavirus

The 32-year-old music star has revealed her diagnosis via social media, saying she's "weirdly enjoying" the experience. She wrote on Instagram: "Finally got COVID but weirdly enjoying the dayquil fever dream 2021 [plant and fairy emojis] (sic)" The singer didn't add any further details about her symptoms, but she did post a screenshot of SZA's 'Good Day' cover. She wrote: "This song is soooooo [planet, heart and star emojis] (sic)" In May, Grimes welcomed her son - whom she named X? A-Xii - with billionaire businessman Elon Musk. And the musician subsequently revealed that he's already become a fan of "radical art". She said: "I've watched 'Apocalypse Now' and stuff with my baby. He's into radical art. Like, he just actually is, and I don't think it's problematic to engage with them on that level." Grimes also revealed she was teaming up with the Endel app in a bid to create "a better baby sleeping situation". She explained: "When you have a baby, you're always using white noise machines. It's much easier to get them to sleep if you train them on some kind of audio situation. And so I was just like, could this be more artistic? In general, stuff for babies is really just creatively bad. I don't want your first introduction to the world to just be all this aimless crap." Meanwhile, Elon didn't appear to be particularly impressed by his own success, which was pointed out to him on social media. In response to the news, he tweeted: "How strange 'Well, back to work ... (sic)'"

Dame Joan Collins has had her COVID-19 vaccination

The 'Dynasty' star - who is 87-years-old - was given her first dose of the vaccination against coronavirus and admitted she was "honored" to receive the jab. Sharing a picture of herself getting the jab at a surgery in London, she captioned the snap: "Delighted to get @astrazeneca @ouhospitals #vaccine yesterday morning at the @nhsenglandldn Bloomsbury surgery - thank you Mr. @rajgill2585 and @dr_ammaraughes for a painless and seamless procedure! Same day as our Queen! #honored #registernow (sic)" The coronavirus vaccine is currently being rolled out in the UK to those over 80 first as well as those who work on the frontline as doctors and nurses, before being rolled out further. It comes after Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip received their vaccinations over the weekend. The British monarch, 94, and her husband, 99, were administered

with the vaccination on Saturday afternoon as they are in the over 80 group, who are some of the first people to be vaccinated. A doctor at Windsor Castle is said to have given them the vaccine. It is uncommon for the royals to issue statements on private health matters but it is believed the Queen decided to announce the news to avoid any speculation. Other stars to receive their jab include singer Sir Tom Jones, who is 80-years-old. And Sir Paul McCartney, who is 78, is keen to have the coronavirus vaccine. Speaking about his reasoning behind getting the jab, he said: "I know we'll come through this. It is great news about the vaccine. I'll have it as soon as I'm allowed. I'm a grandad and you don't want grandad to collapse. You've got to stay strong, that's all you can do, or you go under." —Bang Showbiz



Goldberg dreams of starring in 'Doctor Who'

Whoopi Goldberg wants to be the first American Time Lord on 'Doctor Who'. The 65-year-old actress and television personality had always wanted to be the first female Doctor in the BBC science fiction series and even pitched the idea of a US spin off. Speaking to The Daily Star, she said: "I wanted to be the first female Doctor, but they have one ... I said to him [Tom Baker], 'I love the idea of an American Doctor Who'. I'm still trying to do it." And Whoopi had previously revealed her idea was rejected by bosses. She said of her dream to star in a US version of the iconic show: "I wanted to be the first female Doctor ... [It could be] the American version of Doctor Who ends up in New York and it's me. We don't have a Doctor Who. We don't have that character who is travelling through dimension and time, and being an observer - sometimes a hindrance, sometimes a help. The idea of that just so made me happy. But they were like, 'Um, no.' So I was like, 'OK, I'm cool. I understand.'" And in 2017, Whoopi

again expressed her desire to lead the show. She said: "I always hope when I come to England the BBC will say, 'Hey we want you to do something [on Doctor Who]'. I would love that. You have a different quality now on television. The way you guys have always done shows has always been the smartest and we've finally just figured it out. I like the idea of doing things the way y'all do them. You do some really fun stuff like Black Mirror or, you know, I'm still dying to do Doctor Who."

Kardashian 'sobbing' as 'Keeping Up With The Kardashians' wraps filming

Kim Kardashian West was "officially sobbing" as 'Keeping Up With The Kardashians' wrapped. The reality star was left in tears as her family - Kylie, Kendall and Kris Jenner and Kourtney and Khloe Kardashian - filmed the last ever scenes of their reality show. Taking a selfie, she shared with her millions of Instagram followers: "Officially sobbing. Grateful for every single second." The 40-year-old star also shared a quick behind the scenes video with E! News, where she admitted it was "crazy" that the show was coming to an end. In the clip, she said: "We just finished filming forever, like ever, ever. We're done, we're never filming again - isn't that so crazy?! So we're having a drink with the crew in my backyard, hanging out. Cheers to - I don't know, 15 years; 20 seasons of craziness and lots of love." Kris previously claimed social media was to blame for the end of 'Keeping Up With The Kardashians' after 14 years because people aren't so focused on TV. Of the family's decision to end the show, she explained: "When

we first started, there was no Instagram or Snapchat or other social media platforms. The world has changed. Now there are so many, the viewer doesn't have to wait three or four months to see an episode. We can give them all of the information anyone would ever want to know in real time." And Khloe Kardashian feels "devastated" to be saying goodbye to the program. She said: "It's devastating for all of us. The day it happened, Malika and I were talking throughout the day, because you don't have to be a main character - you're still a part of this journey from day one, even if you were in the first episode or not. You have been you Simon, you Malika, you guys have been our family. You're on this journey with us and just for any chapter to end, that doesn't mean everything is ending for good. That just means there's room for another chapter to open. It's sad, but we've been doing this for 15 years. We get two weeks off a year. It's exhausting. We're all in a different place in our lives and some of us need a nap."



Lifestyle | Features

Prince Harry and Meghan Markle quit social media



Prince Harry and Meghan Markle

Prince Harry and Meghan Markle have quit social media after growing disillusioned by the "hate" they have found on sites like Facebook and Twitter, a UK newspaper reported on Sunday. The couple were rejecting social media in both a personal and professional capacity as part of their new "progressive role" in the United States, the Sunday Times said. A source close to the couple told the newspaper they had "no plans" to use social media for their new Archewell Foundation and were "very unlikely" to restart utilizing platforms personally. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex, who moved

to California last year after abruptly resigning from British royal duties, have previously had prominent presences online.

They amassed more than 10 million Instagram followers to their Sussex Royal account while they were working royals. But the couple have also previously complained about their treatment on social media, as well as in the British press. Meghan described past trolling of her as "almost unsurvivable" while Harry issued an unprecedented statement in 2016 denouncing "the racial undertones of comment pieces" and "the sexism and racism of social media trolls". Last year they

launched a wide-ranging non-profit organization, Archewell, after giving up their "Sussex Royal" brand as part of the terms of their departure from frontline monarchy duties.

They have started other creative ventures, including signing a deal with Spotify to produce podcasts that tell "uplifting and entertaining stories". The couple also signed a multi-year contract, reportedly worth tens of millions of dollars, with streaming giant Netflix to produce "impactful" films and series. Meanwhile Markle, a former television actress, narrated a wildlife documentary on Disney+ in 2020. —AFP



"Vodoun" dignitaries attend a voodoo ritual in a Zangbeto convent in Guezin, as part of the annual voodoo festival as sanitary measures are put in place to fight the spread of COVID-19. —AFP

Virus curbs dampen Benin's voodoo festival

Benin held its annual voodoo festival Sunday without the usual grand processions after authorities of the West African country banned large gatherings because of the coronavirus pandemic. Voodoo, more often called "vodun" in the region, originated in the Kingdom of Dahomey, now Benin and neighboring Togo. With a hierarchy of deities and tribal spirits of nature, the ancestral religion uses fetishes, magical practices and healing remedies, believed to be divine, and revered ancestors are believed to live alongside the living. The traditional processions staged in villages and cities across the country normally attract large crowds of believers as well as onlookers and tourists.

But this year only small groups of faithful took part in observances mostly held at voodoo convents. On the beach of Grand-Popo, a coastal village in southwestern Benin, around 50 faithful, all wearing masks and observing social distancing, carried out traditional sacrifices. "It is a blessing bestowed on this beach every January 10 and you can't miss the occasion for anything in the world," one believer, Odilus Sogan, told AFP. "We're a bit disappointed," added Metowanou Guedeoungue, a voodoo official. "The faithful have been asked to stay home." In normal times, "voodoo is celebrated with pomp and grandeur," he said.

In the economic capital Cotonou, a dignitary of the

sea goddess Mami, Hounnon Zekpon, did not lead the usual procession on the city's Fidjorosse beach. Dressed in white with a matching mask, Zekpon nevertheless held forth in the courtyard of his home which serves as a convent, with around a dozen believers carrying out sacrifices. The pandemic has had little impact on the country of around 11 million people, which has officially recorded some 3,300 cases and 44 deaths. The real toll is thought to be greater, however. While the authorities have balked at imposing lockdowns, they have banned large gatherings in the former French colony. Sunday's festivities generally respected the rules. "We don't want to be the ones blamed for COVID-19 infecting our country," said Baba Adeniyi, another voodoo dignitary.

He notes meanwhile that the virus came as no surprise to him. In November 2019, Le To Fa, a voodoo oracle, "predicted a serious disease for 2020", he said. "So we made a lot of sacrifices to ward off bad luck and protect the people." According to the latest available official figures, which date from 2013, practitioners of voodoo account for just 11 percent of Benin's population, against nearly 30 percent Muslim and 25 percent Christian. —AFP

'SEX AND THE CITY' REVIVAL COMING ON HBO

A revival of the hit show "Sex and the City" will come to HBO Max, the network announced Sunday, and will star all of its original leads except actress Kim Cattrall. The new series, titled "And Just Like That...", will consist of 10 episodes and feature Sarah Jessica Parker, Cynthia Nixon and Kristin Davis, HBO said in a statement. Parker played protagonist and narrator Carrie Bradshaw, Nixon and Davis played her best friends, lawyer Miranda Hobbes and art dealer Charlotte York, respectively. Cattrall, who played sexually liberated publicist Samantha Jones, was not mentioned in the statement. HBO did not specify why she was not returning.

The story will follow the three women as they navigate love and friendship in their 50s. HBO did not

specify a premiere date but said that production is set to start in New York City in late spring. Parker, who will also produce alongside Nixon, Davis and Michael Patrick King, posted a teaser trailer on Instagram Sunday. The short video is a montage of classic New York City shots, intercut with images of Parker's character Carrie Bradshaw's iconic computer screen, on which the phrases "And just like that..." and "The story continues..." are typed out. Parker's signature voiceover accompanies the clips.

"I grew up with these characters, and I can't wait to see how their story has evolved in this new chapter, with the honesty, poignancy, humor and the beloved city that has always defined them," said Sarah Aubrey, head of original content at HBO Max, in the statement.

The original "Sex and the City," which HBO described as "ground-breaking" in its statement, was created by Darren Star based on Candace Bushnell's eponymous 1997 book. It premiered in 1998 and ran for six seasons.

The show was also made into two movies that came out in 2008 and 2010. A prequel series, "The Carrie Diaries," premiered on the CW in 2013 and ran for two seasons. It is unclear if Star will return for the new series. While promoting his latest project, the Netflix series "Emily in Paris," he told industry specialist The Hollywood Reporter in October that he had no interest in returning to "Sex and the City." —AFP



In this file photo (From left) US actress Sarah Jessica Parker, US actress Kristin Davis, English actress Kim Cattrall and US actress Cynthia Nixon pose as they arrive at the UK premiere of "Sex and the City 2" in Leicester Square, central London. —AFP

Japan celebrates coming-of-age day despite virus surge



Twenty-year-old women dressed in kimonos gather outside Todoroki Arena during the "Coming-of-Age Day" celebration ceremony in Kawasaki, Kanagawa prefecture yesterday under a state of emergency over the COVID-19 pandemic. —AFP photos



Twenty-year-old women dressed in kimonos take pictures as they attend a "Coming-of-Age Day" celebration ceremony.



Twenty-year-old Japanese Serika Abe dressed in a kimono poses outside Todoroki Arena.



Twenty-year-old Japanese (from left to right) Keita Daisen, Sara Watanabe and Honoka Watanabe dressed in kimonos and a suit pose outside Todoroki Arena.



Twenty-year-old Japanese Kanon Nonomera dressed in a kimono poses outside Todoroki Arena.



Twenty-year-old men and women dressed in kimonos attend the "Coming-of-Age Day" celebration ceremony at Todoroki Arena in Kawasaki, Kanagawa prefecture yesterday.

Young adults dressed to the nines in kimonos gathered at venues in Japan yesterday to celebrate reaching the age of majority, although many of the usually jubilant events were cancelled over virus fears. More than a million people in Japan turn 20 this year, the age at which they can legally drink, smoke and get married without parental approval. They are traditionally feted each January on "coming-of-age day" with a formal ceremony, originally a rite of ancient samurai families—now often followed by raucous drinking sprees. But a record surge in COVID-19 cases and a month-long virus state of emergency declared in and around Tokyo has led many local authorities to scrap or postpone the 2021 festivities.

"I know there is a risk of infection, but I am here because it's an event that you only experience once in your life, and it's also a chance to meet friends who I haven't seen for a long time," student Naomi Ooba told AFP at an event in Kawasaki, southwest of the capital. "After the ceremony, I'm going to return straight home, but it's a shame that we can't go and eat with our friends, because of the virus," said another 20-year-old student called Ayane Uchino. Kawasaki and neighboring Yokohama are included in the state of emergency, which is less strict than the harsh lockdowns seen in other countries.

At Yokohama Arena, women in ornate kimonos, fluffy white stoles and masks sat in socially distanced seating for the ceremony, with the men dressed mainly in suits. The arena's capacity was limited to 5,000, with four separate ceremonies held on Monday. Participants were told to keep their distance and speak quietly to avoid spreading the respiratory disease. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has urged young people to follow the emergency measures, which ask residents to avoid non-essential outings and request restaurants and bars to close early. Last week he said more than half of recent new infections in greater Tokyo were among the under-30s.

The fishing city of Yaizu in central Japan held a "drive-in" Coming-of-Age event on Sunday, drawing some 470 vehicles to the harbourside celebration. "We are sad to miss a chance to meet as friends, but I'm happy to see the event held no matter how," a 20-year-old man in Yaizu told the Sankei Shimbun. Tama in western Tokyo held an online ceremony for residents entering adulthood. Before the event, the mayor apologized to participants, saying: "I'm sorry ... but it is true that infections are spreading. As an adult, please accept this." —AFP

Sports

Photo of the Day



Professional snowboarder Judd Henkes performs in North Carolina, USA. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Sheikh Mishal patronizes Crown Prince Cup final

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah patronizes the final match of His Highness the Crown Prince Football Cup between Kuwait SC and Qadsia SC. Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi will represent His Highness the Crown Prince in the match that takes place at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium at 7:00 pm this evening. — KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

Defiant India stand firm for draw in third Australia Test

Series heads to Brisbane for final chapter later this week

SYDNEY: A courageous and injury-wracked India pulled off a remarkable draw in a tense third Test against Australia yesterday as they survived against the hosts' much-vaunted bowling attack to take the series into a decider. They resumed day five at 98-2, needing a further 309 runs after being set a huge 407 to win when Australia declared their second innings at tea Sunday on 312 for six.

No team had 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. But India gave it a massive go, passing 288 in the final session to fray the nerves of Australian team throwing everything they had at them.

The visitors abandoned any hope of victory but they bravely clung on for the draw with Hanuma Vihari, nursing a hamstring injury, surviving 161 balls for just 23 runs and Ravi Ashwin, who had treatment on his ribs, making 39. The 256 balls they faced in their unbeaten partnership of 62 was the most by an India sixth-wicket pair on Australian soil, helping steer them to 334 for five at the close, 73 runs adrift.

Paine's costly drops

Their resistance was built on the back of an explosive 97 from Rishabh Pant and a typically gritty 77 from Cheteshwar Pujara, who passed 6,000 Test runs, but also helped by wicketkeeper Tim Paine dropping three catches.

"Our talk coming into this morning was to show

character and fight till the end, not to think about the result," said India skipper Ajinkya Rahane. "I'm really happy with the way we fought, especially today but throughout the game. There are few areas we can improve on, but special mention to Vihari and Ashwin. The way they batted in the end and showed character was really good to see."

An absorbing Test was marked by some high quality batting, led by man-of-the-match Steve Smith's innings of 131 and 81, and Pant's 97. But it will also be remembered for allegations India were racially abused by sections of the Sydney Cricket Ground crowd, with investigations under way and tough action promised against the culprits.

After Australia won the first Test in Adelaide by eight wickets and India bounced back in Melbourne by the same margin, the series now heads to Brisbane later this week for the final chapter. It will be a depleted India again at the Gabba, with fast bowlers Mohammed Shami and Umesh Yadav and batsmen KL Rahul out injured.

There are now doubts over the participation of all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, who dislocated his thumb in Sydney, and Vihari who could barely run during his rearguard knock. "I thought we created enough chances to win the game, this one's a tough to swallow," said Paine.

"I thought our bowlers were superb all day, Nathan (Lyon) tried everything, the quicks were awesome. "Just didn't hold our catches, myself in particular. You've got to cop the blame for that, wear



SYDNEY: Australia's Mitchell Starc (center) bowls to India's Ravichandran Ashwin during the fifth day of the third cricket Test match between Australia and India at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

it and move on to Brisbane."

Pant onslaught

Australia removed openers Shubman Gill for 31 and Rohit Sharma for 52 before stumps on day four, and when Lyon accounted for Rahane without adding to his overnight four in Monday's second over the end appeared nigh. But Pant, who took a

nasty blow to his elbow while batting in the first innings and didn't keep wicket on Sunday, surprisingly came in at number five ahead of Vihari and produced some fireworks. He came to the wicket with no strapping on his hurt elbow and, after settling in and surviving a missed catch by Tim Paine on three, began to hit out, smacking a four and a six off Lyon on consecutive balls. — AFP



NEOM, Saudi Arabia: Mini's Spanish driver Carlos Sainz and co-driver Lucas Cruz compete during stage 8 of the Dakar Rally 2021 between Sakaka and Neom, in Saudi Arabia yesterday. — AFP

Al-Attiyah adds another Dakar Rally stage win

NEOM, Saudi Arabia: Qatari driver Nasser Al-Attiyah won stage eight of the Dakar Rally yesterday, covering the 375 kilometers of the timed special between Sakaka and Neom in Saudi Arabia in just under three hours.

Three-time champion Al-Attiyah has now won four of eight stages of this year's edition as well as the prologue but still trails Frenchman Stephane Peterhansel by 4min 50sec. Last year's winner Carlos Sainz finished 52sec behind Al-Attiyah along the Red Sea coastline, with Peterhansel third as he stayed on course to capture a record-extending

14th Dakar title.

Sainz is third overall at 38min 55sec ahead of Tuesday's ninth stage, a 579km loop on sandy tracks around Neom that is expected to be one of the toughest of the rally. Chile's Jose Ignacio Cornejo extended his advantage in the motorbike category with his first stage victory of the event.

Cornejo gained over a minute on nearest rival Toby Price, having led by just one second on Sunday. American Ricky Brabec, winner of the 2020 rally, was almost three minutes adrift in third. French rider Xavier de Soultrait withdrew from the competition following a heavy crash on stage eight. He was taken to hospital in Tabuk for observation and had been fourth overall at the time.

De Soultrait was considered among the favorites and had briefly occupied first place last week following stage four. Britain's Sam Sunderland is third overall, 5min 57sec off the pace after crossing fourth in Monday's special, with Brabec in sixth at 17min 42sec. — AFP

Fatat club leads indoor women's football league

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Fatat women's football team beat Kuwait 5-2 recently and took the top place in the URC indoor women's football league with 16 points. Kuwait remain in second place with 10 points. The second match was between Qadsiya and Arabi. Qadsiya won 4-3 following an exciting match.



KUWAIT: A picture from the Fatat women's football team against Kuwait in the URC indoor women's football league.

Qadsiya is now in fourth place with 7 points, while Arabi is third on goal difference with 10 points.

Fatat scored five goals, making it hard for Kuwait players, who could only manage one goal in the first half. In the second half, Kuwait's players tried hard to make a comeback but failed, although they managed to score a second goal. Fatat goal-scorers were Noor Al-Hufaiti, Haifa Al-Qadari (2), Kawther Abbas and Naseema Ghulami. Kuwait's goals were scored by Fajer Al-Amer and Fajer Mohammad. In the other game, the second half was exciting after the yellow shirts were up by two goals, with the score at 4-2. The green shirts scored another and did their best to almost equalize, if not for goalkeeper Lura Ibrahim.



A picture from the Qadsiya and Arabi match in the URC indoor women's football league.

India skipper Kohli announces birth of daughter

NEW DELHI: Indian cricket superstar Virat Kohli, who pulled out of a Test series in Australia to attend the birth of his first child, said yesterday his Bollywood actress wife Anushka Sharma had delivered a girl. The captain, who returned to Mumbai after playing in the first Test in Adelaide, said Sharma and their daughter were doing well.

"Anushka and the baby are both healthy and we are feeling beyond blessed to start this new chapter of our lives," Kohli, 32, tweeted. The pair married in Italy in December 2017 after being in a relationship for several years.

Sharma, 32, is one of the highest-paid actresses in Bollywood. She was last seen on the big screen in the 2018 film "Zero", and has also been working on content for streaming platforms. The announcement came as India salvaged a hard-fought draw in the third Test in Sydney on Monday after being set a daunting target of 407. "Welcome to parenthood. A big hug to the little one, who'll give you happiness like you've never experienced before," tweeted fellow cricketer all-rounder Hardik Pandya. — AFP

Sports

First place Lakers thump Rockets, Clippers storm back to beat Bulls

Celtics v Heat postponed due to COVID-19 safety measures

LOS ANGELES: Anthony Davis scored a game-high 27 points as the Los Angeles Lakers delivered a dominating all-around performance on Sunday with a crushing 120-102 defeat of the Houston Rockets in Texas. The Lakers finally hit their stride in the new NBA season, running the Rockets ragged on offense and bottling up their top scorers on defense, especially three-time league scoring champion James Harden, who was held to 20 points and committed seven turnovers.

LeBron James scored 18 points as he and fellow all-star Davis had plenty of help from the bench. Talen Horton-Tucker (17 points), Montrezl Harrell (16) and Kyle Kuzma (13) all came off the bench to reach double figures for the Lakers, who are now a perfect 5-0 on the road to start the season.

The defending NBA champions scored a whopping 32 fast break points and 62 points in the paint, finally looking like the juggernaut team that many had envisioned at the start of the season. But where they really excelled Sunday was on defense, grabbing 39 defensive rebounds and forcing 13 steals.

"We've got to be a team who lead games with defense," said Davis, who returned to the lineup Sunday after sitting out with a sore groin. "Tonight we made shots, but there are going to be nights when we don't make shots and we can't control that. What we can control is

how we play defense. The coach came in at halftime and said our defensive effort was off the charts."

With both James (ankle) and Davis nursing nagging injuries, getting 54 points from their bench and holding the Rockets to just 46 points in the first half is good sign for the future. Davis also had three blocks.

"Our goal is to be the No. 1 defensive team in the league," said James. "We came in with the mindset to get stops and get out and do what we do on offense. We able to those things on both sides." Christian Wood paced the Rockets with 23 points while Harden also had nine assists. Houston shot just 12 for 41 from behind the arc.

Elsewhere, Kawhi Leonard scored a team high 35 points and surpassed 10,000 career points as the Los Angeles Clippers rallied to edge the Chicago Bulls 130-127. Leonard earned the bulk of his points during an explosive third quarter in which he scored 21, a career high for one quarter. He finished with seven three-pointers in the game, including one in the third period that allowed him to reach the milestone.

"We shot the ball well tonight and we got stops at the end of the game," said Leonard, who hit 14 of 22 shots. "I never make excuses." The Clippers scored the first basket of the game but did not lead again until the third quarter when Leonard drained his seventh basket from

beyond the arc.

Asked how he has been able to stay focused long enough to reach 10,000 career points, Leonard said, "Just hard work and dedication. I spend hours in the gym. I pretty much grind it out every day, and I have my mind set on a goal."

The Clippers were able to regroup Sunday after a crushing 115-105 loss two days earlier to the Golden State Warriors, when they surrendered a 20-point lead. Paul George had 28 points, seven rebounds and nine assists and Lou Williams came off the bench to score 21 points for the Clippers, who averted their first three-game losing streak of the season.

The Bulls hung in there, but suffered another disappointing close loss. They lost by two points to the Los Angeles Lakers on Friday and by four points to the Sacramento Kings two days earlier. Zach LaVine scored a season-high 45 points and he made 10 three-pointers for the Bulls, who lost their third consecutive game. Garrett Temple added 18 points and Patrick Williams had 17 points. LaVine's finished just shy of his personal high of 49 points.

The Clippers outscored the Bulls 42-35 in the third quarter to go into the fourth with the game tied 94-94. Nicolas Batum completed a four point play with 2:30 remaining in the fourth to give the Clippers the lead for good. In the final seconds, LaVine put up an airball from



HOUSTON: LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers puts up a layup during the second quarter of a game against the Houston Rockets at Toyota Center in Houston, Texas. —AFP

three point range and then George nailed two free throws to seal the victory. Elsewhere, Mike Conley had 22 points and Rudy Gobert grabbed 20 rebounds as the Utah Jazz slipped past the Detroit Pistons 96-86.

Celtics v Heat postponed

The Boston Celtics' home game against the Miami Heat didn't even get on

court, the contest postponed because of COVID-19 safety measures. Miami did not have the required number of available players to play the game while the Celtics were down to the NBA minimum of eight. Also, Nikola Jokic posted another double-double by finishing with 22 points and 10 rebounds for the visiting Denver Nuggets, who cruised to a 114-89 win over the New York Knicks. — AFP

Juventus beat 10-man Sassuolo, move to fourth

MILAN: Champions Juventus battled to a 3-1 victory over 10-man Sassuolo to close the gap on the top three in Serie A on Sunday. Andrea Pirlo's side won their third straight league match for the first time this season to move fourth, seven points behind leaders AC Milan with a game in hand.

"It was important to give continuity and win tonight, because otherwise the match played on Wednesday at San Siro was useless," said Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo whose side ended Milan's 27-match unbeaten run midweek.

Sassuolo played the entire second half a man down after Pedro Obiang saw red for a dangerous challenge on Federico Chiesa. Defender Danilo put Juventus ahead in the 50th minute when he fired home his first goal of the season.

But seven minutes later Sassuolo pulled level with Gregoire Defrel brilliantly finishing off a Hamed Junior Traore through ball. Substitute Aaron Ramsey gave Juventus the advantage again eight minutes from time when he tapped in a Gianluca Frabotta cross to claim his first goal of the campaign.

Cristiano Ronaldo completed the scoring deep into injury time, rifling in his 15th league goal this term. "It was a painful match, badly managed after our advantage, but the important thing was winning even if we were a little disorganised," added Pirlo.

It was a bruising clash for the reigning champions, who are chasing their 10th title in a row, as they lost forward Paulo Dybala and Weston

McKennie to injury in the first half. Midfielder McKennie pulled up after 18 minutes with a muscle problem and was replaced by Welsh international Ramsey.

Dybala was substituted three minutes before the break after receiving treatment for a knock to his left knee, with Swede Dejan Kulusevski coming on in his place. Juve are already without Alex Sandro,

Juan Cuadrado and Matthijs de Ligt who tested positive for coronavirus.

There was also a scare for forward Chiesa, who was left screaming in pain and clutching his left ankle following Obiang's tackle. But Alvaro Morata returned from injury, coming on for the final minutes of the game for his first outing in 2021. — AFP



TURIN: Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo runs with the ball during the Italian Serie A football match Juventus vs Sassuolo on Sunday at the Juventus stadium in Turin. —AFP

Live		Matches on TV	
		(Local Timings)	
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE			
Sheffield United v Newcastle United	21:00	beN Sports HD 1	
Wolverhampton Wanderers v Everton	23:15	beN Sports HD 2	
Burnley v Manchester United	23:15	beN Sports HD 1	
SPANISH LEAGUE			
Granada CF v Osasuna	21:00	beN Sports HD 3	
Atletico de Madrid v Sevilla FC	23:30	beN Sports HD 3	



KUWAIT: Jahra and Burgan players vie for the rebound during their Kuwait Basketball League playoff match Sunday night.

Jahra, Kuwait win in Basketball League playoffs

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: In an exciting match, Jahra basketball team won the first playoff game against Burgan 75-65 Sunday night. The second match saw Kuwait notch an easy win against Qurain with the score of 107-58. Kuwait Basketball League playoff rounds are of three matches each, with the winners qualifying for the next round to start on Jan 24.

Jahra saw themselves up 11-2 at the start of the match through accurate shooting by Abdelaziz Al-Humaidi. Burgan players were reckless and allowed Jahra to go up 26-12. The second quarter saw Burgan organize their attack and they reduced the gap to 8 points through Musaed Al-Otaibi and Saad Al-Rifaa, but Jahra did not take long to restore its dominance through players Mohammad Ashkanani, Fahad Khalid and Humaidi, and ended the first half with the score of 47-34.

Jahra continued scoring in the third quarter and led by 18 points, which made Burgan's coach to take time out to reorganize his defense and raise the pace of the match. Burgan were able to reduce the point difference to 10 points, but Humaidi's three-pointers ended the third quarter at 65-52. The fourth quarter saw Jahra players tiring, which was an opportunity for Burgan to reduce the difference to 5 points through their fast-paced play, but the experience of Jahra players saved the day for them, as the match ended at 75-65.

Who is Matthew Hoppe? Meet new Bundesliga star

BERLIN: Matthew Hoppe earned instant hero status at Schalke with his hat-trick in the 4-0 win over Hoffenheim on Saturday that saved his club from matching the Bundesliga record for the most consecutive games without a win. So who exactly is this latest young American to break through in Germany? At Schalke the 19-year-old is following in the footsteps of Texas-born Weston McKennie, who left the Gelsenkirchen club to join Juventus on loan at the start of this season.

There was also Christian Pulisic at Borussia Dortmund before he signed for Chelsea, while Hoppe's peers this season include Gio Reyna at Dortmund, Josh Sargent at Werder Bremen, RB Leipzig's Tyler Adams and Chris Richards at Bayern Munich. And then there is Pellegrino Matarazzo, the New Jersey-born coach of VfB Stuttgart. The Bundesliga has been good to American players in recent years and they have been good for Germany's top flight, helping raise its profile across the Atlantic. Hoppe, though, will settle for being revered in the blue half of the Ruhr region.

Chose Ruhr over San Diego
Hoppe is from southern California and joined Schalke in 2019 after playing for the Barcelona Residency Academy USA in Arizona. He scored 29 goals in 23 games in 2018/19 while playing for Barca's USA academy and committed to San Diego State University before being offered a trial with Schalke.

After moving to Germany, he did enough to impress in Schalke's reserves last season despite scoring a single goal in 16 games. The first team's dire form and lack of goals created a chance this season for Hoppe as Schalke's other strikers fell by the wayside. Vedad Ibisevic was sacked in November, Goncalo Paciencia picked up a knee injury



GELSENKIRCHEN: Schalke's US forward Matthew Hoppe (C) shoots to score a goal past Hoffenheim's German goalkeeper Oliver Baumann (L) during the German first division Bundesliga football match Schalke 04 v TSG 1899 Hoffenheim in Gelsenkirchen, western Germany, on Saturday. — AFP

and Wales forward Rabbi Matondo struggled before being loaned to English second-tier side Stoke City last week. Promoted to the first team in late November, Hoppe started on his Bundesliga debut, a 4-1 defeat at Borussia Moenchengladbach.

Christian Gross, Schalke's fourth coach this season, arrived in late December and has clearly spotted Hoppe's talent. The former Tottenham manager selected him for his first two games, including Saturday's thrashing as Schalke ended an astonishing run of 30 games without a win, one shy of the all-time Bundesliga record of 31 set by Tasmania Berlin in the 1960s.

'Unbelievably ambitious'
"I have no words," Hoppe said after becoming the first American to score a Bundesliga hat-trick on what was just his fifth appearance in the league. "The first goal was the easiest as it was pure instinct," he said of his deft chip which put Schalke on the path to a first league win since January last year. "I hope the team can keep fighting, stay confident and stay in the league." Hoppe needed just 21 minutes for his

three goals to become the third-youngest player to score a Bundesliga hat-trick. Ironically, Schalke are in their 30th straight season in the Bundesliga. One of Germany's best-supported teams, Hoppe's goals helped lift them off the bottom of the table, although they remain in the relegation zone, six points from outright safety after 15 games. "He will always remember this day in his career," Gross said of Hoppe.

The veteran coach described a player who "doesn't shy away from working extremely hard" in training and is "unbelievably ambitious, has tremendous commitment and only thinks about Schalke. "He wants to do whatever it takes to get us out of this situation. He's still very young and still has lots to learn in order to become a top-rate finisher, but we're working on that."

His hat-trick instantly made Hoppe Schalke's top scorer this season. Bayern are due in Gelsenkirchen in a fortnight, but Hoppe is not assured of his place with the Royal Blue still on the lookout for another striker. "Nothing has changed. We're working hard to strengthen the squad - especially up front," Gross said. — AFP

Sport Times

TUESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2021

Browns stun Steelers in NFL playoff return, Brees sets up Brady clash

LOS ANGELES: The Cleveland Browns ended their NFL playoff drought in spectacular style, exploding for 28 first-quarter points in a stunning 48-37 victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers on Sunday. The Browns, in the playoffs for the first time since 2002, shook off a spate of COVID-19 absences to notch their first postseason win since the 1994 campaign and send Pittsburgh quarterback Ben Roethlisberger and the Steelers home.

They booked a meeting with the reigning Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs as the Baltimore Ravens set up a showdown with the Buffalo Bills with a 20-13 come-from-behind victory over the Tennessee Titans in the day's other AFC clash. In the NFC, the New Orleans Saints ground out a 21-9 victory over the Chicago Bears, keeping 41-year-old quarterback Drew Brees's dream of a Super Bowl swansong alive.

Browns quarterback Baker Mayfield, 25, wasn't even born the last time Cleveland won a playoff game, but despite the pandemic-related disruption to his team's preparations he kept the Browns on track. "We believed," he said of predictions the depleted Browns — playing without a string of players as well as head coach Kevin Stefanski because of COVID protocols — would crumble. "The people on the outside don't matter to us, and we believed the whole time."

The Browns seized the lead in remarkable style on the opening play from scrimmage, when Pittsburgh's nine-time Pro-Bowl center Maurkice Pouncey sailed a shotgun snap over the Roethlisberger and Browns safety Karl Joseph fell on the fumble in the end zone for a touchdown.

Cleveland's MJ Stewart intercepted Roethlisberger on Pittsburgh's next series and Mayfield connected on a short pass to Jarvis Landry who turned and ran for a 40-yard touchdown that put Cleveland up 14-0. Kareem Hunt added two rushing touchdowns for the Browns — the second set up by another Roethlisberger interception to take a 28-0 lead — matching an NFL playoff record for points in the first quarter.

Roethlisberger opened the second quarter with

another interception, Pittsburgh finally getting on the board with a touchdown midway through the second quarter. The Browns responded with a TD drive and after a Pittsburgh field goal took a 35-10 lead into the interval.

Pittsburgh narrowed the gap with two third-quarter touchdowns, but Cleveland responded and when Browns linebacker Sione Takitaki intercepted a Roethlisberger pass with 3:16 remaining in the fourth quarter it was essentially over. Roethlisberger threw four interceptions while Mayfield, making his playoff debut, connected on 21 of 34 passes for 263 yards and three touchdowns without an interception.

Another young quarterback came through in Nashville, where Baltimore's Lamar Jackson threw for one touchdown and produced a dazzling 48-yard solo score to propel the Ravens. Jackson finished with 179 passing yards and 136 yards rushing.

It was the first postseason win of Jackson's career after two previous defeats, and the first time the reigning NFL MVP had helped his team overturn a double-digit deficit. "It feels great," Jackson said. "I'm happy we got it done."

The win was especially sweet for the Ravens, who were stunned by the Titans last season after entering the playoffs as the top seed in the AFC. It looked as if history was set to repeat itself as the Titans surged to an early 10-0 lead thanks to an AJ Brown touchdown and a Stephen Gostkowski field goal. With the Titans defense stifling Jackson, the Ravens were limited to a 33-yard field goal from Justin Tucker as half-time approached.

A moment of magic from Jackson transformed the game, the 24-year-old bursting through a gap and accelerating away for a touchdown. "That's one of the best runs I've ever seen," Ravens coach John Harbaugh said. "It's the best run I've ever seen by a quarterback. We needed points at that point. It got us back in the game."

That solo effort made it 10-10 at the break, and Jackson then led the Ravens on a 10-play, 77-yard



NEW ORLEANS: Drew Brees #9 of the New Orleans Saints dives in the end zone to score a one yard touchdown against the Chicago Bears during the fourth quarter in the NFC Wild Card Playoff game at Mercedes Benz Superdome Sunday in New Orleans, Louisiana. — AFP

drive to open the third quarter that ended with JK Robbins blasting through a crowd of bodies for a touchdown. The Ravens defense, meanwhile, had done a good job of containing the Titans' star running back Derrick Henry, who was restricted to just 40 yards throughout.

Gostkowski cut the Ravens' lead to four points with a 25-yard field goal early in the fourth quarter, but Baltimore restored their seven-point cushion when Tucker nailed a 51-yard effort with 4:23 remaining to make it 20-13. A late interception by Marcus Peters, picking off Ryan Tannehill's deep pass for receiver Kalif Raymond, sealed the Ravens win.

Brees steers Saints
In New Orleans it was Brees — playing what could

well be his final season in the NFL — who shepherded the Saints into a divisional round clash with Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers next weekend with a two-touchdown 265-yard performance. It will be the first playoff meeting between Brees and Brady.

The Saints made hard work of overcoming a Bears team who finished the regular season with an 8-8 record, however, and will likely need to raise their game against the Buccaneers. Brees threw touchdowns to Michael Thomas in the first quarter and Latavius Murray in the third quarter before feeding running back Alvin Kamara for a three-yard rushing touchdown in the fourth quarter. The New Orleans win means the Los Angeles Rams will travel to Lambeau Field to play the Green Bay Packers in the other NFC divisional game Saturday. — AFP



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