

# Friday Times

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## REGISTER TODAY

for the **COVID-19 vaccine**

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# Ministers receive second dose of COVID-19 vaccine

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# The wild dogs of Shuwaikh



KUWAIT: Stray dogs walk around Shuwaikh Industrial. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



Scribber's Notebook

By Jamie Etheridge

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**A**cross from my office lies an empty patch of desert, flat and littered with trash. Heavy trucks often park in zigzagged lines on the edge of it. Workers crisscross it on their way to the car garages, welding shops and printing houses of industrial Shuwaikh. The place seems empty, abandoned but it isn't. A pack of wild dogs with loose jaws, hungry eyes and the ferocity of a hibernating bear woken in winter have staked out this no-man's land as its own.

The dogs are not really wild. Not the lean, graceful salukis native to the Arabian Peninsula. They are not Arabian wolves, *canis lupus arabs*, found in the deserts of Saudi Arabia, Egypt or Jordan. The wild dogs of Shuwaikh are mostly strays, mixed-breed mutts or former pets abandoned on the sides of the road or escaped from the pet souq in neighboring Al-Rai. Of course there aren't just roving packs of street dogs in Shuwaikh. There are increasing numbers of them to be found in all areas of the country - from Salmiya to Kabd, from Ahmadi to Kuwait City.

Most have carved out a niche territory from the

desert lots left undeveloped and serving as illegal parking lots, alleyways and the spaces behind buildings where dumpsters overflow and food might be found.

In Shuwaikh, the dogs help keep rats in the area to a minimum because they are hungry. Many of them starve or suffer because they actually are domesticated pets, not wild animals prepared for living the hardscrabble existence of feral pack life.

They are rarely fed by the people who work here and as a result, the dogs hunt for whatever vermin skulk around the edges of dumpsters and in the back alleys. The dogs are also hyper territorial and only allow the members of their own pack into the area. Stray dogs from other parts of Shuwaikh or across the highway in Al-Rai seldom venture here.

But they can be a menace. These street dogs have become feral and sometimes attack humans. Staff members of our newspaper have been bitten trying to get to the bus or going to their cars at night. The dogs roam freely up and down the roads and though they seem wary of cars, they still can get hit sometimes. These dogs are not meant to be living outdoors, on their own, in the wild.

The suffering of these animals, their abandonment, is the failing of society. It is well known that people buy pets from the souq when they are small, cute puppies and then dump them when they become older and require more effort.

Beyond our own individual failings, there is a failing of stewardship. The pet industry is poorly regulated and harmful to animals. The government needs to establish an

authority that can oversee the entire industry, especially now as dogs as pets has become a more common reality in Kuwait. Rather than the Municipality poisoning them, there needs to be a comprehensive plan for rehoming pets, spaying and neutering and caring for those that are abandoned.

We also need to change our mindset, to recognize that it is our responsibility to care for this planet - and its diversity of life.

Take this example: In 1995, after 70 years of absence, caretakers in Yellowstone National Park in the United States reintroduced wolves. Within a few years, biologists and ecologists began noticing an entire cascade of effects that included changes to elk feeding patterns, beaver populations, riverbank reeds, grasses and plants, fox, mice and even the path and flow of rivers.

The reintroduction of wolves in Yellowstone is now a widely studied case for ecologists interested in understanding how connections between individual animals can impact an entire ecological system. This may seem far removed from Kuwait, but there are lessons to be drawn from this experience applicable to anywhere in the world.

But before we begin to assume this stewardship, we need to become more educated and knowledgeable about the planet, about ecosystems, about animals and caretaking. We need to shift from piecemeal, reactionary thinking to a holistic viewpoint that considers not only our survival and flourishing, but how we as a species can support all life on this planet.

# Kuwait Times

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# DESERT VIBES:

## Far from the urban sprawl



People enjoy the outdoors.



The faraway lights of the city are seen from Mutlaa Ridge.

By Shakir Reshamwala

**M**utlaa Ridge and the surrounding areas of Jal Al-Zour and Khuwaisat have become popular spots for weekend outings in Kuwait. After winter camping was banned by authorities and the ever-changing restrictions on travel outside Kuwait due to the pandemic, daylong trips to the desert have become extremely popular.

Barbequing - although banned - can be found everywhere, while telescopic LED rod lights have made it possible to remain till late at night in the otherwise pitch black desert. Off-roaders too have got into the action, with beefed-up SUVs competing to reach the highest point on the ragged slopes of the ridge before retreating. If you prefer something less muscly, quad bikes can be rented by the hour.



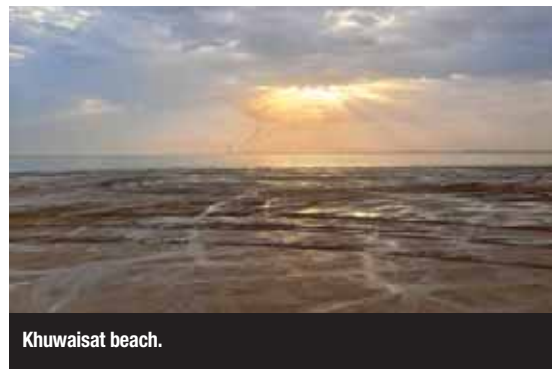
Picnickers on Mutlaa Ridge.



The 'Grand Canyon' at Jal Al-Zour camping area.

For lovers of luxury, there are plenty of glamping options, complete with elaborate 'kashta' setups. And if you've forgotten to bring along snacks or camping essentials, mobile baqalas are everywhere, selling everything from bottled water to ice to charcoal and grilling accessories. Fancy a bite that you don't have to cook up yourself? Food trucks offer a variety of mostly fast food and hot and cold beverages.

After a hectic week in the city, spending some time in the calm desert environs is a welcome relief. Just make sure you take your trash with you at the end of the day, as it is sadly evident that many are not doing so.



Khuwaisat beach.



Desert bashing is a popular pastime.

## Local

# COVID-19 drastically changed people's lifestyles, but not always negatively

By Nawara Fattahova

The pandemic has persisted for much longer than we expected when it first reached Kuwait. Everybody thought it's a matter of a few weeks and then it'll be over, but the coronavirus is among us till today. It's been more than 10 months since the first case was discovered in Kuwait, with the spread of COVID-19 completely changing our lives. The pandemic has been a disaster for some people, a negative change for most people, but also a positive change for others.

Fatma's life has changed a lot due to the pandemic - for the better. "I worked at a company and was very busy with my work and career. I have lost my job now, in the sense that this business sector hasn't started operating yet and most probably I won't return. So I started my own small business, and now I'm focusing on my health and family much more. I'm spending more quality time with my family and am enjoying this lifestyle much more," Fatma told Kuwait Times.

Fatma has also cut her expenses. "I was spending much more before the pandemic. I was living in a four-bedroom apartment - now I've moved to a smaller apartment, but I'm happy. At the beginning of the pandemic, I was stuck abroad and I had to stay for over two months there. I lived in a one-bedroom apartment with my family, yet it was one of the happiest moments of my life," she added.

Ahmad believes the pandemic has made his life healthier. "The lockdown brought about changes in my lifestyle, which became more healthy. As people tend to eat more and move less, this results in gaining weight, so I started eating more healthy and diet food. Also, I am now going to the gym six days a week from twice a week before the pandemic. The other critical change in my life was not travelling, something that I'm used to doing every year. As soon as the situation gets better, I will travel," he vowed.

Ghanima lost her job during the pandemic, but does not regret it. "I wasn't very happy in my job anyways. But my routine changed completely. In the beginning, I was depressed over sitting all the time at home with my husband and kids. The daily routine got messed up - there was no exact time for going to bed and waking up, and even for meals. Also, my husband had to close his shop during the lockdown, but now he is working, so part of our normal life is back," she said.

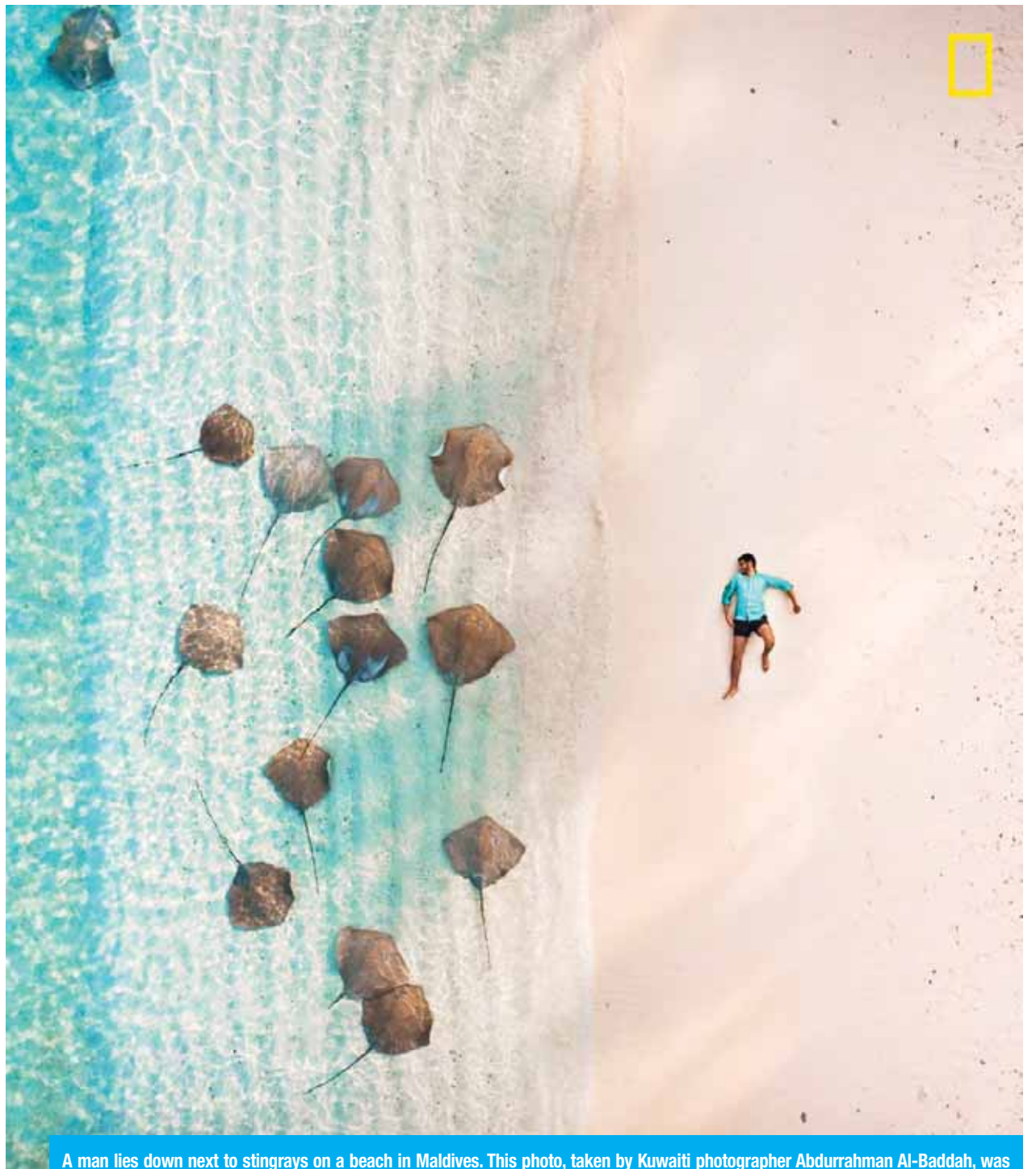
Ghanima learnt new things too. "Due to the long closure of beauty salons, I had to dye my hair myself, which I used to do at the salon. Salons are now open again, but I still dye my hair at home," she added.

For Abu Abdullah, there have been two major changes during the pandemic. "I couldn't travel and participate in tournaments around the world as I usually do every year. An unhealthy diet and lack of exercise also caused a rise in my blood sugar levels. I also should have learnt how to be frugal with my money and take extra care of my health, but I didn't. I see people getting back to normal habits and not following increased precautions regarding hygiene, like not bringing their own prayer mats to the mosque," he explained.

The pandemic was positive for Sahar. "My life was much better during the lockdown. I had more time to spend with my baby while working from home - it was a privilege that I never imagined. I spent more time with my husband and learned how to cook. And as the bank stopped cutting installments, I was receiving my whole salary and had more money to buy the things that I needed. Nothing from my habits changed - since I was pregnant and delivered right before the pandemic, life had already changed," she stated.

Marilyn has adopted a few habits that have become an essential part of her life. "Wearing a facemask is now an automatic ritual when I step out of the house. If I leave without it, I immediately go back to take it. Also, I go straight to wash my hands as soon as I reach home. I have stopped going to shopping malls almost completely, and am keen to avoid crowds and gatherings," she said.

For Noora, the pandemic and 2020 in general was a whole year of depression and isolation. "I lost my frequent habit of travelling - it's been more than a year since I travelled. I lost all social activities that I used to attend during the year, including exhibitions, weddings, plays, cinema and so on. I also don't kiss friends when we meet, which is common in our community. I think this habit may continue even after the pandemic is over," she rued.



A man lies down next to stingrays on a beach in Maldives. This photo, taken by Kuwaiti photographer Abdurrahman Al-Baddah, was recently featured in National Geographic Arabia Magazine.

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## Local

# E-platform facilitates domestic workers' return to Kuwait from 'high-risk' nations

## Step-by-step explainer of helpers' return, quarantine, PCR test process

**KUWAIT:** 'BelSalamah' is an electronic platform aims to facilitate return of domestic workers from the 'high-risk' countries, with which travel is banned, to Kuwait, in line with specific procedures and mechanisms that take into account the required health measures. The project prepared by the National Aviation Services (NAS), which operates at Kuwait International Airport, aims to decrease the cost of return that the sponsor will pay, in addition to relocating the 14-day quarantine to be in Kuwait instead of a transit country. The program return costs KD 270 (\$980) for every worker registered under Article 20 of the residency law, which applies to domestic helpers. The cost includes a 14-day quarantine, according to health requirements, meals, security and three PCR tests. The tickets are not included in the return program, as they are different depending on destination. Additional flights of the return of passengers will be organized, in cooperation of Kuwait Airways, Al-Jazeera Airways and the other companies working at Kuwait International Airport, in line with the common agreements and the standard rates approved by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

NAS' Director General Mansour Al-Khozaym said in an interview that all domestic workers must hold a document from a laboratory accredited by their countries showing they tested negative, adding that it will appear through the 'BelSalamah.com' platform to help them travel at the time and the date specified via the platform. When arriving in Kuwait, the passengers will be subjected to another PCR test, he added. He noted that if the tests' results are negative, the workers will be transferred directly to the designated places for a 14-day quarantine, in line with the health requirements. By the end of the 14-day quarantine, the workers will undergo a third PCR test, and can go with their sponsors' homes if the results are negative, he noted. Those who have positive results, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health (MoH) will be responsible for transferring them to another quarantine facilities, he stated. The platform seeks to help the sponsor bring back the worker to Kuwait rapidly and safely, and at a less price, Khozaym stressed.

Through this platform, other travelers, airport employees and citizens can be protected, he said, adding that it also helps meet travel requirements

during the (COVID-19) pandemic while reducing waiting times and travel restrictions. He expected the return of thousands of domestic workers to Kuwait, stressing the importance of operating the airport, in line with the health standards in collaboration with the State's institutions to ensure a safe return. The NAS developed the system to ensure the validity and reliability of the PCR certificate, and its compatibility with the laboratory issued it and the health protocols set by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Health, he made clear. Khozaym noted that the company would follow up the passengers in the country of departure, guide them to the laboratories close to them, and help them book flights. After the passenger's arrival, the company will transfer them to the place of quarantine, he said, and the third stage is related to the follow-up of the worker inside the quarantine until they are handed over to the sponsor. He stressed that the sponsor can receive the worker after being fully assured of their safety.

Khozaym affirmed that the company offers full facilitations for workers coming to Kuwait that include logistical matters, security, daily meals



and all their needs. This will be through 30 hotels and hotel apartments that the company has booked to provide those services. The 'Bel-Salamah' platform was proposed on December 7, with the aim of registering data of domestic worker's return, and technical and financial matters pertaining to the quarantine and services since the worker's arrival at the airport until their transfer to the places of the quarantine. —KUNA

### News in brief

#### KPA chief meets Turkish envoy

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Ports Authority (KPA) Director General Sheikh Yusuf Abdullah Al-Sabah said yesterday KPA seeks to provide finest services through its ports in accordance with the New Kuwait 2035 Vision. During the visit of the Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Aisha Hilal to KPA, the Director General pointed out the contribution of specialized international companies with expertise to developing Kuwaiti ports, including Turkish firms. Meanwhile, Turkish ambassador said the commercial and economic relations between the two countries have developed such as trade exchange and Turkish products sent to Kuwaiti ports. —KUNA

#### Charity launches new campaign

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Al-Salam Humanitarian and Charity Society new campaign "Nawaf Al-Ahmad Humanitarian Trucks" to help the Syrian and Yemeni people will kick off today and will last until February 20. In a statement, the Society's Director-General, Dr Nabil Al-Aoun, said that this campaign comes to complete the "Sabah Al-Ahmad Humanitarian Trucks" campaign, which started in the past years. More than 1,800 camps in Syria and about 1,000 camps in Yemen will benefit from the campaign, he added. —KUNA

#### Kuwait oil price up

**KUWAIT:** The price of the Kuwaiti crude oil rose 71 cents to \$56.65 per barrel Wednesday against \$55.94 the day before, according to Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. In international markets, Brent oil went down 52 cents to stand at \$56.06 pb, while Texas crude dropped 30 cents to reach \$52.91. —KUNA

## Pakistan ready to meet Kuwait labor market demands

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Director General of the Public Authority for Manpower Ahmad Al-Mousa met with the Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait Syed Sajjad Haider and Pakistan's Deputy Head of Mission Tahreem Ilyas yesterday to discuss issues related to the Pakistani workers in Kuwait, in addition to other topics of common interest. Syed Sajjad Haider hoped that the number of Pakistani laborers in Kuwait would increase in the future.

"Pakistan is ready to provide experienced and skilled manpower according to



the demands of the Kuwaiti labor market," he noted. The meeting was attended by officials from the Public Authority for

Manpower including Dr Mubarak Al-Azmi, Jaber Al-Ali, Mohammad Al-Muzeini and Khaled Al-Sabah.

## Company charged in KD 1.8 million money laundering case

**KUWAIT:** The public prosecution pressed charges in a case that was filed based on a complaint from a group of individuals who claim that they were conned by real estate fraudsters. The prosecutor's report indicated that the company in question committed money laundering crimes that amount to around KD 1.8 million. The accused company officials reportedly obtained the money by tricking victims into believing that they own residential and touristic housing units, which is contrary to the truth. The public prosecution said that the first accused, an expatriate, used his authorization to manage and sign at two local banks on behalf of the company, to obtain the money and

transfer it from the company's account to his own, and then to bank accounts he owns in Germany and Turkey, in an attempt to cover up the illegal activity. "The funds were deposited in personal accounts of the accused after they made victims believe they owned licensed projects that were promoted during real estate exhibitions held between 2014 and 2019," Coordinator of the plaintiff group Hassan Al-Bahrani said. He added that the court, during its first session, charged the company officials; an expat and a Kuwaiti with money laundering, scam and embezzling a total of KD 1.860 million.

Bahrani said that the group he represents contributed largely by helping the victims to formulate and present the complaint to the prosecution and commerce ministry, so the prosecution could carry out its investigations, during which it found the amount of money deposited in the accused's personal accounts at 17 million Qatari Riyals, 139,000 Kuwaiti Dinars, 615,000 Euros, and 24,000 Bahraini Dinars. He said with this case, the number of companies that are sent to the criminal court on money laundering charges reached is seven, with a total embezzled amount of more than half a billion dinars, while the number of affected persons reached more than 10,000 citizens and expats. —Al-Qabas



## Local

# Ministers receive second dose of COVID-19 vaccine

## More than 20,000 people received first dose



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine yesterday. - Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah exits the vaccination center after receiving the second dose.



Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah points to the link to the digital vaccine certificate on the 'Mosafer' app.



Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah shows the QR code in the digital vaccine certificate.

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received yesterday the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine as part of the national vaccination campaign at Kuwait Vaccination Center in Kuwait International Fairgrounds in Mishref. His Highness the Prime Minister was accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Khaled Al-Saleh and the Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah, who also took the second dose of the vaccine.

Sheikh Dr Basel said during the event that more than 20,000 people have already received the first dose of the vaccine in Kuwait, adding that after receiving the second dose, each individual will receive a report through SMS stating that they are vaccinated.

The health minister spoke to reporters yesterday covering the inauguration of Hall 6 at Kuwait International Fairgrounds, which is dedicated for people to receive their second dose. Sheikh Dr Basel revealed that nearly 250,000 people have already registered online to get vaccinated, further urging the entire population to do the same.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Basel mentioned a project in cooperation with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, in order to issue digital vaccination certificate that will be linked with the Public Authority of Civil Information. The certificate shows that its holder has received the first and second doses, the minister said, adding that it comes with a QR code to be scanned at airports around the world for verification, adding that the code will be activated every 10 minutes to guarantee it remains valid.

In the meantime, Sheikh Dr Basel warned that the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over. "The situation in Kuwait is good to the point that many people think that the pandemic is over, but the truth is that it still exists around the world," he said. He added that the quarantine periods were increased to three weeks in some countries, and recommended that people must remain cautious and wear masks, social distance and be careful about personal and society health.

About handling the vaccines, Sheikh Dr Basel said the ministry trained health care providers to handle various types of vaccines, and

that the electronic system was activated six months ago to avoid wasting vaccine quantities and mistakes that may occur. "We will not allow for mistakes to happen in vaccination similar to what happened in some countries, including one where one person received five vaccinations," he indicated. He said that each vaccination hall has a capacity of up to 10,000 persons, but vaccination is linked to the availability of the vaccine, with new shipments arriving weekly.

When asked about the condition of having a vaccination certificate to enter the country, he said Kuwait has not yet stipulated having a vaccination certificate for arrivals, but authorities have already linked the digital certificate with 'Mosafer' app just in case any other country may require it.

The minister further noted that international organizations believe that the pandemic will remain until early 2022, and in case the entire world population is vaccinated, "we can say that the pandemic is over, and new infections will be treated as individual cases such as the case with other diseases like the Swine Flu."

## Kuwait lists 560 new COVID cases, zero deaths

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait listed 560 new coronavirus infections and no virus-related deaths yesterday, taking the totals to 156,434 and 946 respectively, the health ministry said. The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood yesterday at 5,427, with 49 of them in intensive care units, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, who revealed that some 10,360 swab tests were taken over the same period, bringing the total up to 1,369,781. The ministry had earlier reported that 252 patients had been cured of the virus over the same period, raising the total of those to have overcome the disease to 150,061.

Dr Sanad had earlier said that Kuwait has become one of the countries that witnessed a decline and stability in COVID-19 infection numbers, but cautioned to continue with health preventive measures. This happened thanks to

Allah, and cooperation of society's people and institutions as well as keenness on implementing precautionary measures, he added in a news conference Wednesday. He expressed his optimism about this stable situation, calling for, at the same time, continuing to adhere to these measures. MoH's hospitals are witnessing a decline in number of patients at wards and intensive care units, reaching 8 and 10 percent respectively, he noted. He highly lauded the Ministry's medical staff, and the main partners of different official bodies and institutions for their cooperation to combat the virus pandemic.

Sanad noted that the MoH wishes the safety of humanity in all parts of the earth, especially in the areas that are seeing an increase in numbers of the virus pandemic. He prayed to Allah Almighty to eradicate this epidemic and protect everyone. The world has witnessed the UK's approval of using COVID-19 vaccine that has been developed by Oxford University, he said. He hoped that Kuwait would get this vaccine after the completion of some local and global measures taken to ensure its safety and effectiveness. He renewed his call for all citizens and residents to avoid travelling outside Kuwait at present, "unless absolutely necessary." —KUNA

## MP proposes permanent residency for children of Kuwaiti women

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** MP Ali Al-Qattan yesterday submitted a draft law calling on authorities to grant children of Kuwaiti women from their foreign husbands permanent residence permits to save them trouble renewing their residencies every year. Qattan said that the measure will provide needed stability to families of Kuwaiti women married to foreign husbands.

Kuwait, like a majority of Arab countries, does not grant children of Kuwaiti women from foreign husbands Kuwaiti citizenship and treats them like expats who are required to obtain a legal residence permit to be able to live in the country. Kuwaiti women can also sponsor their non-Kuwaiti children.

Meanwhile, MP Osama Al-Shaheen cited Finance Minister Khalifa Hamada as denying

the government has any plan to impose taxes to boost state revenues. The finance ministry came under fire by MPs in the past few days after inviting bids from private companies to set up a modern system for taxes.

The move sparked fears among lawmakers that it was a prelude to imposing taxes on citizens and warned the minister and the entire government of actions.

Shaheen said that the finance minister said the project was aimed at modernizing the taxation system for minor taxes that were imposed since 1955 and there is no plan to impose additional taxes.

MP Saifi Al-Saifi yesterday submitted a draft law calling to include citizenship disputes under the authority of courts. At present, citizenship issues are considered sovereignty matters and courts are not allowed to handle them.



China logs first COVID death in 8 months

## Locked-down Tunisia marks decade since dictator's fall

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WASHINGTON: Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and Assistant Speaker Katherine Clark, alongside House Impeachment Managers Representatives Joe Neguse and Eric Swalwell look on as Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi signs the article of impeachment during an engrossment ceremony after the House of Representatives voted to impeach President Donald Trump at the Capitol on Wednesday. — AFP

# Trump impeached for second time

## Unprecedented move comes a week after mob attacked Capitol

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump became the first US president in history to be impeached twice when the House of Representatives voted to charge him with inciting last week's mob attack on Congress. "Today, in a bipartisan way, the House demonstrated that no one is above the law, not even the president of the United States," Democratic Speaker Nancy Pelosi said after Wednesday's vote.

The Senate will not hold a trial before Jan 20, when Democrat Joe Biden assumes the presidency, meaning the real estate tycoon will escape the ignominy of being forced to leave early. He is set, however, to face a Senate trial later, and if convicted he might be barred in a follow-up vote from seeking the presidency again in 2024. "Donald Trump has deservedly become the first president in American history to bear the stain of impeachment twice over," said Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer, who in a week's time will become Senate leader. "The Senate is required to act and will proceed with his trial."

In the House of Representatives, the only question was how many Republicans would join the lockstep Democratic majority in the 232-197 vote. Ten Republicans broke ranks, including the

party's number three in the House, Liz Cheney. "I am in total peace today that my vote was the right thing and I actually think history will judge it that way," said Adam Kinzinger, a vocal Trump critic and one of the Republicans who crossed the aisle.

Holed up in the White House, Trump issued a videotaped address in which he made no mention of impeachment. Instead, the comments focused on an appeal for Americans to be "united," avoid violence and "overcome the passions of the moment."

Biden, who inherits the pandemic and an ailing economy amid many other woes, welcomed Wednesday's decision but urged the Senate to address his priorities such as approving cabinet nominations while also dealing with Trump's trial. "I hope that the Senate leadership will find a way to deal with their Constitutional responsibilities on impeachment while also working on the other urgent business of this nation," Biden said in a statement.

Despite Trump's denunciation of violence following the mayhem inflicted by his followers when they invaded Congress, fears of unrest are high. Armed National Guards deployed across the capital, and downtown Washington streets

were blocked to traffic. In the Capitol building, guards in military fatigues and carrying assault rifles assembled, some of them grabbing naps early Wednesday under the ornate statues and historical paintings.

Pelosi also announced fines of up to \$10,000 for lawmakers who refuse to go through newly installed metal detectors after several Republican lawmakers pushed past police even after setting them off. "It is tragic that this step is necessary, but the Chamber of the People's House must and will be safe," she said.

Trump survived a first impeachment almost a year ago when the Republican-controlled Senate acquitted him of abusing his office to try and get dirt on Biden's family before the election. This time, his downfall was triggered by a speech he delivered to a crowd on the National Mall on January 6, telling them that Biden had stolen the presidential election and that they needed to march on Congress and show "strength."

The mob then stormed into the Capitol, fatally wounded one police officer, wrecked furniture and forced terrified lawmakers to hide, interrupting a ceremony to put the legal stamp on Biden's victory. One protester was shot dead, and three other people died of "medical emergencies,"

bringing the toll to five. Pelosi told the chamber before the vote that Trump "must go". "He is a clear and present danger to the nation that we all love," she said. The top Republican in the House, Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, said that while Trump deserves censure, hurriedly impeaching will "further divide this nation".

Trump, who has been stripped of his accounts by Twitter and Facebook and finds himself increasingly ostracized in the business world, is struggling to impose his message - let alone any kind of resistance. His refusal to accept any responsibility for the horrifying scenes on January 6 has infuriated allies and opponents alike. The main question now is to what extent former Republican allies in the Senate will turn on their party's figurehead once the Democrats take over control of the chamber.

Current Senate leader, Republican Mitch McConnell, says he will not call for an impeachment trial before Trump's Jan 20 exit. However, he said he is open to the possibility of voting to convict Trump in a later trial after Biden becomes president. "I have not made a final decision on how I will vote and I intend to listen to the legal arguments when they are presented to the Senate," McConnell said. — AFP

## International

# Locked-down Tunisia marks decade since dictator's fall

## Few are celebrating as COVID-19 cases spiral

**TUNIS:** Tunisia marked 10 years yesterday since its street revolution sent autocratic ruler Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fleeing into exile, but few are celebrating amid a lockdown as COVID-19 cases spiral. Habib Bourguiba Avenue, a symbol of the revolution in the capital Tunis, was deserted and under police guard. "It's a subdued January 14," a photojournalist said as a convoy of police cars drove by.

In past years, demonstrators have rallied to recall the momentous events that sparked the wider Arab Spring revolts and to push for further change, but not this year as the world is battling the pandemic. "Normally we would have demonstrated in the street to demand social justice, because successive governments still haven't responded to that demand," said Alaa Talbi of the non-government Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights. "But this January 14, I'll stay home for the first time in 10 years, because the health crisis is acute and we need strong measures."

With over 50 novel coronavirus deaths a day and many hospitals reaching capacity, authorities imposed a four-day lockdown from yesterday, leaving city centers quiet, in sharp contrast to a decade ago. Back in 2011 the world's eyes were on the Mediterranean country where mass protests had broken out following the self-immolation of the desperate young street vendor

Mohamed Bouazizi.

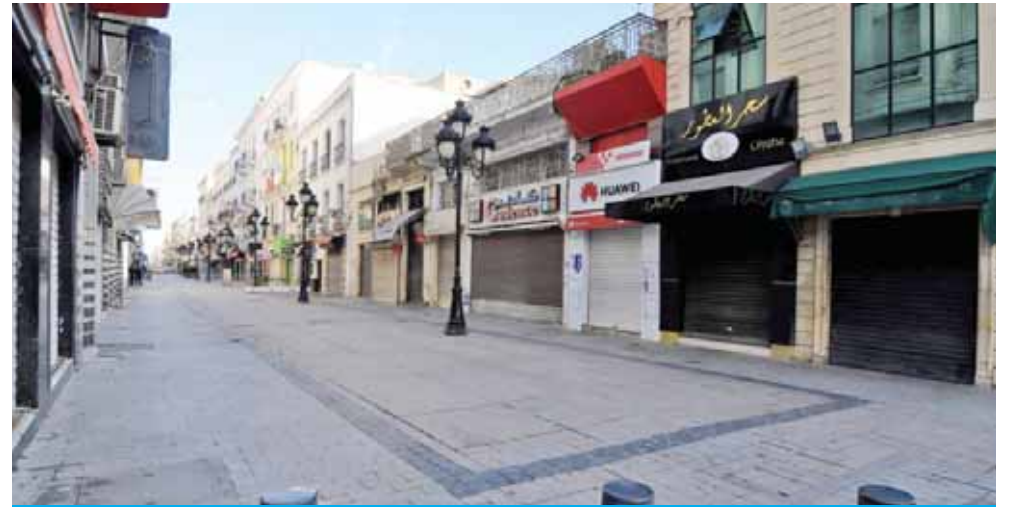
An unprecedented crowd thronged the streets outside the powerful interior ministry a decade ago Thursday, demanding an end to Ben Ali's repressive 23-year rule with deafening cries of "quit!" That evening Ben Ali fled to a luxurious, discreet exile in Saudi Arabia. He never set foot on Tunisian soil again and died in Jeddah in 2019. His fall triggered a string of uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East, toppling other dictators long seen as untouchable.

### 'No regret'

While other countries were plunged into war or returned to even more repressive rule, Tunisia successfully transitioned to democracy - albeit one still riven by corruption and economic pain. Looking back at those heady days, "we might be disappointed, but that doesn't mean we regret" the uprising, Talbi said. "Ten years is not a long time to transform a system in place for decades.

"We can be proud of our steps forward... We have installed a new political system, we've agreed on a constitution, even if it hasn't been fully implemented, and we've respected electoral deadlines." But, he warned, "now we need an economic transition".

Tunisia's economy, heavily reliant on foreign lending, shrank by nine percent last year, con-



**TUNIS:** Cafes and shops are shuttered in the capital amid a lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic yesterday as the country marks 10 years since its revolution. — AFP

sumer prices have spiralled and one third of young people are unemployed. The key tourism sector, already on its knees after a string of deadly jihadist attacks in 2015, was dealt a devastating blow by the pandemic.

Crucial phosphate and oil production have been hampered by protest blockades in margin-

alized areas, where people demand jobs and investment. With few prospects at home, many Tunisians have looked abroad for a better life. Tunisians made up the largest number of irregular migrants, over 12,000, who arrived in Italy last year on boats crossing the Mediterranean - five times more than the previous year. — AFP

## Lebanon enters full lockdown to stem virus uptick

**BEIRUT:** A full lockdown started in Lebanon yesterday, with residents barred even from grocery shopping and dependent on food deliveries, in a bid to slow a surge in novel coronavirus cases. The new restrictions were only loosely respected in some areas of the country, however, after mass protests in recent years against a political elite held responsible for a deepening economic crisis.

The lockdown, ordered after some hospitals started to run out of intensive care beds, includes a 24-hour curfew until Jan 25. Non-essential workers are barred from leaving their homes, and supermarkets are supposed to operate delivery services only. Those wishing to request an emergency exemption - to see a doctor for example - can do so by sending a mobile phone text message or by filling in a form online.

In the capital, roads were quieter than usual on Thursday morning, while non-essential shops remained shuttered. But in areas of Beirut where there were no security forces, some people ventured out to buy groceries from local shops. On social media, users circulated a picture of a traffic jam at one of the entrances to the capital.

The strict lockdown came into effect after caretaker health minister Hamad Hasan was admitted to hospital for treatment for COVID-19 on Wednesday evening, state media said. Its announcement on Monday raised fears of food shortages in impoverished and remote regions where deliveries are not readily



**BEIRUT:** The usually bustling seaside corniche promenade in the capital is deserted as Lebanon enters its first day of strict lockdown yesterday. — AFP

available. For several days, Lebanese have flooded supermarkets and chemists in a desperate bid to stock up.

Some are worried the new restrictions will pile additional suffering on the country's poorest. Charity Save the Children said it accepted the need for a strict response to the coronavirus uptick, but said it was "very concerned that vulnerable families and their children will be left to deal with a catastrophe on their own". Lebanon, a country of more than six million, was already grappling with its worst economic downturn in decades when the pandemic hit. — AFP

## Qatar releases Bahrain bodybuilder

**MANAMA:** Qatar released three Bahrainis including a bodybuilding champion and his companion who Manama says were unlawfully seized by Doha while fishing, Bahrain's interior ministry said yesterday. Bahraini bodybuilding champion Sami Al-Haddad was detained on Jan 8 along with a friend, according to Bahrain, which insisted they were in the country's own territorial waters.

A third man, Habib Abas, a fisherman allegedly detained by Qatar in a separate incident on Dec 3, was also freed, Bahrain's interior ministry added in a statement. "The Interior Ministry... was notified by the Foreign Ministry about the release (of the) three Bahrainis arrested by the Qatari Coast and Border Guard," Bahrain's Interior Ministry said.

Bahrain was among a group of four countries led by regional power Saudi Arabia that imposed an economic blockade on Qatar in June 2017, accusing it of being too close to Iran and funding extremists. The quartet's freeze ended earlier this month at a regional summit. But Bahrain has separately repeatedly clashed with Doha over the enforcement of maritime boundaries, with several incidents in recent months which have seen Qatar's coastguard intercept Bahraini vessels.

The released trio were flown home via Oman, the statement said. But "their seized boats weren't released, bringing the total number of Bahraini boats that are still confiscated in Qatar to 50," it added. Bahrain has recently opened its airspace to Qatar following the resolution of the Gulf crisis. Direct flights between the two nations have yet to resume. Bahrain's foreign minister has invited a Qatari delegation to visit "as soon as possible". — AFP

## International

# German crematorium struggles in pandemic

## Stacks of coffins stored in hallways

**MEISSEN, Germany:** Some coffins are marked “infection risk”, others have “corona” scrawled in chalk, many have the box for “no memorial service” ticked, though the hall for such ceremonies has been turned into a temporary mortuary anyway. As Germany’s Meissen crematorium struggles to cope with an explosion in deaths from the coronavirus pandemic in the region, coffins are stacked up to three high or even stored in hallways awaiting cremation.

Largely spared in the first wave of the outbreak, the eastern state of Saxony has topped Germany’s worst-hit zone for weeks in the second wave. In the three decades he has worked at the crematorium in Meissen, Joerg Schaldach has not seen such high numbers of deaths sustained over such a long period of time. “It started in mid-November, the numbers kept rising,” Schaldach, who runs the site, told AFP.

“The problem is that the cold storage capacity is now full. We are in a state of catastrophe,” he said, explaining that there was no choice but to use the memorial hall to hold bodies. Benches and chairs usually used by mourners at memorial services have been stacked up at the back. In their place are rows of wooden coffins, many with the telltale transparent film used to double-seal the bodies of COVID patients.

“We’re now getting 400 in a week for cremation”, twice that of typical fatalities during the winter, said Schaldach. As he spoke, his colleagues were shifting more coffins into the memorial hall in a bid to make space in the actual mortuary, which opens out to a loading bay where others were arriving.

### ‘No longer afraid’

In the parking area, undertaker Matthias Moebius has already been waiting for an hour for space to unload the casket in his vehicle. “They’re packed right up to the door,” he said, pointing to where they would normally unload the coffins. “Usually it takes 10-15 minutes, we drive in, unload, go to the office with the paperwork, and we’re off,” he said. “These days, it’s closer to 90 minutes.”

Behind him is a queue of casket vehicles - three other undertakers are waiting. Moebius, who has been in the job for 20 years, said this winter had brought more work “by far” than he has ever had to handle. To cope, Meissen crematorium is running 24 hours, seven days a week, with two furnaces in operation to cremate 60 bodies every day.

Staff are working overtime and giving up their weekends. Retirees have returned to help and even family members are chipping in. Ingo Thoering, 76, who had worked at the crematorium since 1999 before his retirement, has come back to lend a hand even though his age places him in the risk group. He accompanies coroners as they carry out the final viewing of corpses to ascertain their identities and determine if any qualify as suspicious cases. Shrugging off the infection threat, Thoering said: “Fear is of no use at work. At my age, I’m no longer afraid.”

### ‘Come move the coffins’

Germany shuttered restaurants and cultural or leisure facilities from November, and later also closed schools and most shops in December to halt the second wave. But yesterday, the country saw a new high in daily



MEISSEN, Germany: Employees move coffins with the lettering ‘corona’ through the mourning hall before cremation at a crematorium on Wednesday. —AFP

deaths, at 1,244. Overall, the death toll stands at 43,881, according to the Robert Koch Institute. Other crematoriums in coronavirus hotspots have also warned they are at their limit. The city of Dresden on Wednesday said that a hall used to store flood protection equipment would serve as a temporary mortuary. Nuremberg has brought in cold storage containers as the crematorium ran out of space. Across the border on Monday, the Czech Republic said it was prohibiting cremations on its territory of bodies “imported” from neighboring countries.

Schaldach believes that German authorities could have done more earlier to prevent the second wave of infections, including imposing

mandatory testing at elderly care homes or tougher mask requirements. “They were caught napping in the summer,” he said. He believes corona deniers who travelled from all over Germany to the city of Leipzig in Saxony for a huge demonstration in November could have also helped spread the disease.

“What I would like to say to the corona sceptics is: Come and join us, help us move the coffins. “We have stacked up a whole lot of coffins—that means we have moved 750 tons of deceased (people). “Some have the idea that all this is a movie scene that was shot in the summer,” he said. “The corona deniers... can come and touch all these (coffins) for themselves.” —AFP

## UK abuse victims get code word to ask pharmacist’s help

**LONDON:** British pharmacies yesterday launched a campaign encouraging domestic abuse victims to give staff a code word to access help. The pandemic and lockdowns have led to a global surge in domestic violence and child abuse as victims have found it even harder to flee attackers if they are living together.

According to UN data released in late September, lockdowns have led to increases in complaints or calls to report domestic abuse of 25 percent in Argentina, 30 percent in Cyprus and France and 33 percent in Singapore. The new scheme involves the 2,300 branches of Boots, the UK’s largest pharmacy chain, as well as 255 independent pharmacies, the government said.—AFP

## WHO deplures 95% of vaccines limited to 10 countries

**COPENHAGEN:** The World Health Organization’s European branch yesterday said 95 percent of vaccine doses so far administered worldwide were limited to 10 countries and called for a more equitable distribution. In terms of total doses the top countries are the US, China, the UK, Israel, United Arab Emirates, Italy, Russia, Germany, Spain and Canada.

“Collectively, we simply cannot afford to leave any country, any community behind,” WHO’s regional director for Europe, Hans Kluge, said at an online press conference. Kluge said the WHO was working to get the vaccine to every country but, “it needs every country capable of contributing, donating and supporting equitable access and deployment of the vaccines, to do so.”

According to website Our World in Data, over 32 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered so far. In the WHO’s European Region, which comprises of 53 countries and includes Russia and several countries in Central Asia, 31 countries have launched vaccination programs.

But despite the start of vaccination campaigns the speed of transmission observed in some countries due to new more contagious variants, especially the so-called English and South African ones, was worrying, according to Kluge. “This is a concerning situation,” he said.

In the European region, 25 countries, including Russia, have recorded cases of the strain first discovered in the UK, and dubbed “VOC 202012/01”. “So far, we understand there is no significant change to the disease this variant produces, meaning the COVID-19 is not more, nor less, severe,” Kluge said. “At the same time, we are concerned for two reasons: This variant has a higher transmission rate. Secondly is the question of what does this mean for vaccines,” Kluge added.

However, Kluge also stressed that there were still reasons to be optimistic. “2021 will be another year of the coronavirus, but this will be a more predictable year, the situation will be easier to control.” —AFP

## International

# Historic snowfall chills Madrid slum to the bones

## Police blame electricity shortage on illegal cannabis plantations

**MADRID:** “We’re not animals but dogs live better than us,” sighs Lidia Arribas, who lives without electricity in a vast slum near Madrid where temperatures hit historic lows this week. Days after its heaviest snowfall in 50 years, Madrid woke on Tuesday to its lowest temperatures in decades, with the mercury plummeting to minus 10 degrees Celsius. And the brutal cold has hit particularly hard in Canada Real Galiana, one of Europe’s largest slums, where for months more than half of its nearly 8,000 residents have had no electricity for heating or light.

Police blame the shortage on the illegal cannabis plantations whose lamps, extractors and fans use so much power that they cause widespread electrical outages in the surrounding area. The crisis posed by the power cuts and the cold snap has been denounced by UN human rights experts, NGOs and Oscar-winning Spanish actress Penelope Cruz.

“I’m really angry with the authorities... everyone passes the buck... nobody does anything,” says Arribas, a 37-year-old mother-of-three, torch in hand as she walks back to her home where mildew covers the walls. Curled up in a blanket, her seven-year-old daughter Ainara says she always sleeps with her “head under the covers” to protect herself from the cold and the damp.

With no electricity, she and her brother and sister cannot get any of the online homework set by their school, and neither the fridge nor the washing machine are working. An unofficial settlement built along a 16-km stretch of land flanking the southeastern section of Madrid’s M50 ring road, Canada Real is home to a community largely of Moroccan or gypsy origin who live in extreme poverty. Built along a former cattle trail, this sprawling shantytown has existed for decades, with this most recent power cut affecting some 4,000 residents.

### Infants with hypothermia

Without heating, the brutal freeze has left many struggling to cope. On Sunday night, a three-year-old girl was taken to hospital “showing signs of hypothermia”, says Conrado Gimenez, head of the Fundacion Madrina NGO which provides residents with food, blankets and gas bottles. A similar case occurred last month and was flagged by UN human rights experts who warned the power cuts were “endangering the health of some 1,800 children” in Canada Real.

“Children in Canada Real Galiana are truly suffering, and their health is at risk,” they said. “Now that winter is closing in - and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic - electricity must be restored.” Lidia Arribas’ next-door-neighbor Yolanda Martin says she is “more afraid of the cold than of COVID”. “I get up in the morning and my blankets have frozen, it’s pitch dark and I can’t have a shower,” says this 47-year-old whose lips are blue with cold.

Out of work since May, her only source of heat and light is a chiminea which sits in the middle of her home. “It will be minus 11C tonight, as cold as hell, but we’re surviving with the little firewood we have left,” she told AFP. “We’re breaking tables and stuff



LA CANADA REAL, Spain: Yolanda Martin, 47, stands in the living room of her house in sector 6 of this shantytown on the outskirts of Madrid on Jan 12, 2021 following a heavy snowstorm. — AFP

that isn’t worth much to throw on the fire.”

### Cannabis farms bleeding power

Two policemen patrolling the area, which is notorious for supplying the capital with drugs, say the power cuts are caused by cannabis farms set up in homes in the area. This week, Spanish energy giant Naturgy, which supplies free electricity to Canada Real, began cutting power to several suspect homes in order to get the network back up and running. Local residents and Pedro del Cura, mayor of Rivas-

Vaciamadrid where part of the shantytown is located, are calling for more capacity be given to the network.

They also fear that power could be cut to homes with no links to the drugs trade. Despite the cold, Arribas is still hopeful they will be reconnected to the grid so she can warm the house for her children, whose only consolation these days is the neighborhood’s running snowball fights. “We mustn’t lose hope,” she says, her eyes downcast. “Somebody has to listen to us because we can’t carry on like this. It’s really very hard,” she sighs. “It’s very sad.” — AFP

## Fines for lawmakers who refuse to walk through detectors

**WASHINGTON:** US lawmakers who refuse to go through metal detectors installed at the House of Representatives after last week’s Capitol riot will be fined, Speaker Nancy Pelosi said late Wednesday. The fine for the first offense will be \$5,000, and \$10,000 for the second, Pelosi said in a statement. Fines will be doctored directly from members’ salaries. “It is tragic that this step is necessary, but the Chamber of the People’s House must and will be safe,” Pelosi said as she announced the measure.

Tighter safety rules came into effect after a mob of supporters of President Donald Trump violently broke into the building on January 6 in an attempt to stop the certification of Joe Biden as the next US president. Five people died in the day of violence. Metal detectors were installed at the entrances to the US House for the first time Tuesday in response to the riot.

Magnetometers have been used for years at all

visitor and staff entrances to the Capitol and many other federal buildings. But lawmakers have been allowed to go around those security screenings provided they were wearing their congressional pin. Since the metal detectors were installed several Republican lawmakers have pushed past police even after setting off the metal detectors.

On Wednesday, first term Republican lawmaker Lauren Boebert, who had threatened to bring her firearm, was in a standoff with police when she refused to hand over her bag after the metal detector started beeping.

“Sadly,” Pelosi wrote, just days after the new safety protocols were in place, “many House Republicans have disrespected” the Capitol police “by verbally abusing them and refusing to adhere to basic precautions keeping members of our Congressional community, including the Capitol Police, safe.” — AFP

## Europhile selected to be Estonia’s first woman PM

**TALLINN:** Estonia’s pro-business opposition leader Kaja Kallas was nominated yesterday to become the Baltic eurozone member’s first woman prime minister, pending the support of parliament. Kallas, leader of the Reform Party, is a staunch europhile and the daughter of former Estonian prime minister Siim Kallas. The 43-year-old would replace Juri Ratas, who resigned on Wednesday after his Centre Party came under investigation for corruption.

His resignation brings down the governing center-right coalition, which includes the far-right EKRE party. “Both the Estonian people and I are expecting that Estonia would quickly have an active and competent government, which focuses on handling the pandemic and the economic crisis,” President Kersti Kaljulaid said in a statement.

Kallas’s party came first in parliamentary elections in 2019 but did not win an outright majority and then failed to build a ruling coalition. Kallas previously served in the European Parliament and was regularly included on lists of the most influential MEPs. She is a passionate proponent of innovation who argues that regulations must not hinder the digital technological revolution.

Focused on the rights of small and medium-sized businesses, Kallas believes that borders in the digital world prevent innovative companies from emerging. She now has 14 days to win majority support in parliament. Her Reform Party and the Centre Party have announced that they are starting unofficial coalition talks. The two parties have alternated in government over the nearly three decades since Estonia broke free from the crumbling Soviet Union. Both strongly support Estonia’s EU and NATO membership, which they see as a buffer against Soviet-era master Russia. They have favored austerity to keep spending in check, giving the country one of the eurozone’s lowest debt-to-GDP ratios. — AFP



TALLINN: Kaja Kallas, leader of the Reform Party, smiles as she leaves the presidential office Kadriorg yesterday. — AFP

## International

# Uganda holds election under internet blackout

## Museveni seeking sixth term in office

**KAMPALA:** Ugandans voted yesterday under heavy security and an Internet blackout in an election pitting veteran leader Yoweri Museveni against a former pop star which sparked one of the bloodiest campaigns in years. Voting in Kampala took place under heavy military and police presence, with no violent incidents reported by the time polling stations closed.

Museveni is seeking a sixth term in office, having ruled for almost four decades, against singer-turned-MP Bobi Wine, 38, whose popularity among a youthful population has rattled the former rebel leader. After a campaign marred by arrests, bloodshed and harassment of the opposition and journalists, the internet was shut down on the eve of the election, further fuelling fears the vote would not be free and fair.

In the Kololo neighborhood of Kampala, polling agents opened ballot boxes onto a black tarp and counted each vote aloud as tallying began. Results are expected tomorrow. Wine said several of his party's polling agents had been arrested during the morning, as he cast his vote on the outskirts of Kampala alongside his wife before a crowd of dancing and singing supporters. "In 22 districts our teams are on the run because they are being surrounded and pursued by police and soldiers as if they are criminals," he said.

Soldiers marched in Kamwokya, the crowded Kampala slum where Wine grew up and is hugely popular, while convoys of riot police patrolled the capital. Museveni voted in his home district of

Kiruhura in rural western Uganda, about 250 km from the capital. "The president has voted, he is sure of winning, but he will accept the result of the election so long as they are free and fair," Don Wanyama, the presidential spokesman, told AFP.

### Delayed voting

Wine is the strongest of 10 opposition contenders. But Museveni has never lost an election, and most observers expect he and his ruling National Resistance Movement will emerge victorious. Nevertheless optimism was high in the opposition heartland of Kamwokya, where voters jostled into tight queues despite efforts to impose social distancing after weeks of rising coronavirus cases.

"I am here to change the leadership of this nation because for years, they've been telling me they will secure my future. They have not done that," said driver Joseph Nsuduga, 30. Some 18 million voters are registered for the presidential and parliamentary vote. "I continue to encourage all Ugandans to turn out and vote," Wine said.

Voting was delayed in several locations in Kampala and queues snaked for hours, with Wine complaining of problems with the biometric machines used to confirm voter identities. "People have been waiting for so long," said Kyazike Eva, 50. The opposition frontrunner has vowed non-violent street protests should Ugandans feel the election was stolen.



MAGERE, Uganda: Voters queue at a polling station yesterday. —AFP

### Generation gap

Museveni has warned that using violence to protest the result would amount to "treason". He has ruled Uganda without pause since seizing control in 1986, when he helped to end years of tyranny under Idi Amin and Milton Obote. Once hailed for his commitment to good governance, the former rebel leader has crushed any opposition and tweaked the consti-

tution to allow himself to run again and again. But he is still held in high regard by older Ugandans who remember the relative stability and security that Museveni returned to the country. "These young people, they want change, but they don't know what Museveni did for us," said Faith Florence Nakalembe, 58. But her children, also standing in line in Kamwokya to vote, desperately want change. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Fourth peacekeeper dies

**BAMAKO:** A UN soldier among peacekeepers who were attacked in Mali on Wednesday has died from his wounds, bring the death toll to four, the United Nations said yesterday. A detachment of Ivorian peacekeepers was travelling between Douentza and Timbuktu in the northwest when it hit one or more roadside bombs before coming under fire, its MINUSMA peacekeeping mission said. Three were killed, and "a fourth Blue Helmet has sadly died of his wounds," MINUSMA spokesman Olivier Salgado said on social media. Several other peacekeepers were injured. —AFP

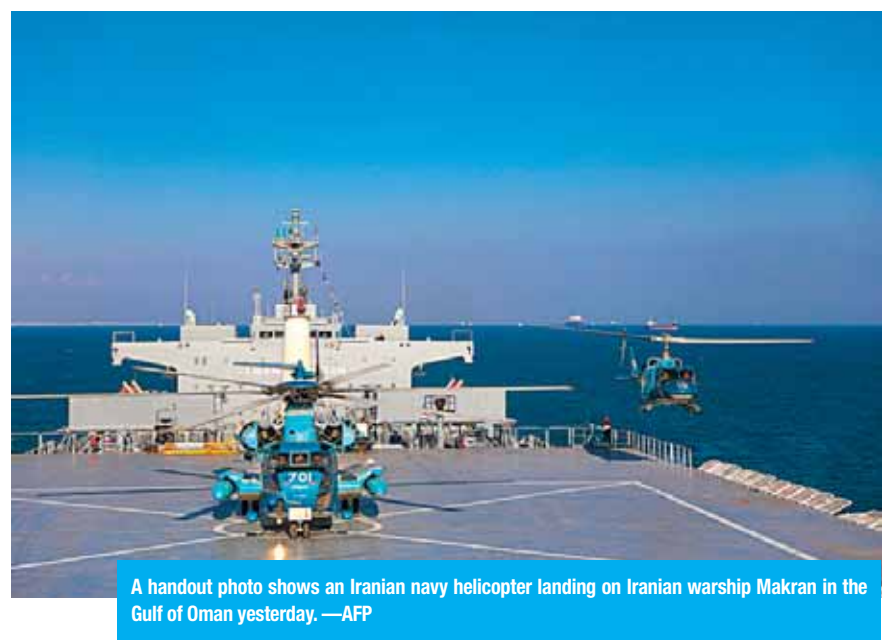
#### French officers convicted

**RENNES, France:** A French court yesterday gave suspended jail terms to three soldiers convicted over the death by drowning of a trainee officer during an initiation ritual at the country's most prestigious military academy. Jallal Hami, 24, drowned overnight on Oct 29, 2012, while crossing a swamp as part of an exercise meant to teach the Saint-Cyr officer school's traditions to new recruits. A total of seven soldiers, including a general, were tried for manslaughter. A court in Rennes sentenced an army captain, a commanding officer and a soldier who has since left the military to suspended terms of between six and eight months. —AFP

## Iran Guards deny losses in Israel strikes in Syria

**TEHRAN:** An Iranian Revolutionary Guards official denied yesterday that recent Israeli strikes on eastern Syria led to any deaths, the Fars news agency reported. "This attack caused no human losses," Ahad Karimkhani, deputy political head of the Guards' foreign operations arm, the Quds Force, was quoted as saying. The "attacks that (Israeli forces) carry out under different pretexts are blind and with no strategic goals", Karimkhani said. He vowed that attacks on "resistance axis positions in Syria will certainly face a serious and severe response".

Syria's state news agency SANA said Wednesday that the "Israeli enemy carried out an aerial assault on the town of Deir Ezzor and the Albu Kamal region," without giving further details. A Britain-based war monitoring group said the air strikes killed 57 people, including Iran-backed fighters. The overnight raids tar-



A handout photo shows an Iranian navy helicopter landing on Iranian warship Makran in the Gulf of Oman yesterday. —AFP

geted arms depots and military positions and were the deadliest such strikes since the start of the Syrian conflict, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Iran has been a staunch supporter of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad in the civil war that has ravaged the country

since 2011. Israel has carried out hundreds of air and missile strikes on Syria since the war broke out, most of them against what it says are Iranian-linked targets. The conflict has killed more than 387,000 people and displaced more than half of Syria's pre-war population. —AFP

## International

# Wikipedia founder says social media giants mishandled Trump

## Online resource one of the last examples of early web utopianism

**LONDON:** Twitter and Facebook repeatedly mishandled Donald Trump as he pushed baseless claims, including his assertion that US presidential election he lost was rigged, Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales told AFP. The two social media giants indefinitely suspended Trump after his supporters stormed the US Capitol on January 6, an attack on the seat of democracy that on Wednesday led to Trump's second impeachment.

Wales told AFP in an interview to mark Wikipedia's 20th anniversary on Friday that responsibility for the unprecedented events in Washington rested "100 percent at the feet of Donald Trump". But he said Twitter and Facebook had consistently "struggled with misinformation, disinformation" peddled by the firebrand former New York real estate tycoon who is due to leave office next week. "With Donald Trump, they did a poor job of dealing with him for a very, very long time," Wales said. "He was clearly spreading disinformation, he was clearly being abusive to people."

### Eyeballs v knowledge

In the 20 years since it was founded, Wikipedia is now one of the most popular websites in the world, with in excess of 55 million articles in 300 languages. It is read more than 15 billion times every month. It is also, as Wales first envisaged, "a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge". The Internet entrepreneur's decision in 2003 to make the site non-profit is one reason he believes

Wikipedia has not faced the same backlash and difficult decisions as Twitter or Facebook.

"They (social media platforms) have a business model that says, 'We need as many eyeballs as possible, we need as many page views as possible'," the 54-year-old said. "Now it's also damaging for their brand. So they have to deal with that. But I think they're going to struggle."

Facebook and Twitter have become closely associated with the deeply divisive culture wars in the United States and the spread of misinformation worldwide. In contrast, Wikipedia is considered one of the last examples of early web utopianism, supporters say. In the early 2000s, though, falsehoods and user vandalism on Wikipedia sparked a debate on web regulation. But the online resource is now more likely to be held up as an example of the best the Internet has to offer, the American-British entrepreneur says. "I always say, we were never as bad as they said we were and we're not as good as they think we are," he said. "But we still know Wikipedia isn't perfect. We still have a lot of work to do."

### 'Building it to last'

Wales is also aware Wikipedia is fundamentally different from social media platforms. "We have a very clear mission to create an encyclopedia. So everything we do we judge against that standard," he said. "(That is) a very different mission statement from a social network that says, come and post what you think, post

your opinions. "Because the truth is, lots of people have really horrific opinions."

Wales admits that Wikipedia still has challenges to overcome, and has faced questions about the diversity of the thousands of "Wikipedians" - the community of editors and administrators who keep the site running. In 2021, Wikipedia will implement a uniform code of conduct with corresponding sanctions against insults and harassment, which have targeted minority groups within the community in the past, across all 300 of its different language versions.

Wales said formulating the code of conduct "did take longer than it should have", but that was because the community was so large "it takes a long time to work through things and get buy-in and understanding". The goal for the next 20 years, though, will be remarkably similar for the first two decades. In 2006, Wales set the goal of having 100,000 entries in Wikipedia for every language with more than one million speakers. "We're still at least 20 years from that," he said. — AFP



Jimmy Wales

## Twitter chief says Trump ban sets 'dangerous' precedent

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Twitter chief Jack Dorsey on Wednesday backed the messaging platform's ban of US President Donald Trump, but said it sets a "dangerous" precedent and represents a failure to promote healthy conversation on social networks. "Having to ban an account has real and significant ramifications," Dorsey said in a string of tweets about his take on the company's decision late last week to permanently bar the president.

"While there are clear and obvious exceptions, I feel a ban is a failure of ours ultimately to promote healthy conversation," Dorsey said, inviting feedback from users. Trump's access to social media platforms that he used as a megaphone during his presidency has been largely cut off since a violent mob of his supporters stormed the Capitol in Washington last week.

In addition to Twitter, bans have also been put in place by Facebook, Instagram, Twitch and Snapchat, while YouTube temporarily suspended his channel. However Twitter was the Republican billionaire's go-to tool, which he used to directly communicate on a daily basis with some 88 million followers, posting everything from proclamations to accusations and spreading misinformation via the platform. Social media operators say the embittered leader could have used his accounts to foment more unrest in the run-up to President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration. On Monday, Twitter took things one step further, announcing it had also suspended "more than 70,000 accounts" linked to the far-right QAnon conspiracy theory that claims Trump is waging a secret war against a global liberal cult of Satan-worshipping pedophiles.

### Overdue or overdone?

Twitter's decision to permanently suspend Trump is considered overdue by critics who argue he has gotten away with abuses, but has worried free-speech advocates and drawn criticism from various NGOs and leaders. The company said in a blog



Jack Dorsey

post explaining its decision that after close review of the president's recent tweets it had "permanently suspended the account due to the risk of further incitement of violence."

Twitter also blocked efforts by Trump to sidestep the ban of his @realDonaldTrump account when he posted tweets from the official presidential account @POTUS and the @TeamTrump campaign account. "We understand the desire to permanently suspend him now," ACLU senior legislative counsel Kate Ruane said at the time. "But, it should concern everyone

when companies like Facebook and Twitter wield the unchecked power to remove people from platforms that have become indispensable for the speech of billions."

Even German Chancellor Angela Merkel weighed in, stating Monday through her spokesman that she believed freedom of opinion should not be determined by "the management of social media platforms". Dorsey said Wednesday that while he believes Twitter made the right decision to ban Trump, it "sets a precedent I feel is dangerous: the power an individual or corporation has over a part of the global public conversation."

"This moment in time might call for this dynamic, but over the long term it will be destructive to the noble purpose and ideals of the open internet," he said. Dorsey rejected the notion that social media giants coordinated efforts, reasoning that it was more likely they each came to the same conclusion about the potential for violence. Image-centric social network Snapchat on Wednesday became the latest platform to permanently ban Trump. "Last week we announced an indefinite suspension of president Trump's Snapchat account," the platform told AFP. "In the interest of public safety, and based on his attempts to spread misinformation, hate speech, and incite violence, which are clear violations of our guidelines, we have made the decision to permanently terminate his account." — AFP

## Former presidential hopeful Yang to run for New York mayor

**NEW YORK:** Former US presidential hopeful and tech entrepreneur Andrew Yang has announced he will run for mayor of New York City in an election this year that he is an early favorite to win. Yang, 46, announced his run on Twitter Wednesday, posting a video of him skateboarding with his wife on the Brooklyn Bridge. The son of Taiwanese immigrants - running as a Democratic candidate - said he would aim to reverse the fortunes of a city shaken by the coronavirus pandemic.

"I moved to New York City 25 years ago. I came of age, fell in love, and became a father here. Seeing our City in so much pain breaks my heart," he wrote. The lawyer turned tech entrepreneur would become the city's first-ever Asian-American mayor. His mastery of social networks, fervent support within the "Yang Gang," and fundraising skills placed him among the heavyweights of the presidential election.

But he eventually threw in the towel after the New Hampshire primary in Feb 2020 in a race won by President-elect Joe Biden. Yang has been criticised by some for spending too much time outside the city he aims to lead. He spent the last few weeks in Georgia, helping the Democrats to win two key seats in the US Senate. The election to decide Bill de Blasio's successor is scheduled for Nov 2, but in the Democratic stronghold of New York the race will effectively start in the party's mayoral primary on June 22.

Economic recovery is set to be a central theme in the election to lead a city that suffered a severe financial hit when coronavirus was first recorded there in the spring. Many businesses have closed, unemployment and crime are rising, and a budget crisis is looming, raising fears that the city may return to its dark days of the 1970s and 1980s. Around 30 candidates will jostle to win the Democratic primary. — AFP

## International

# Bolsonaro increasingly isolated as Trump leaves

## Brazilian president's reputation has been tarnished

**BRASILIA, Brazil:** When Jair Bolsonaro became Brazil's president in January 2019 he nurtured relationships with other like-minded, far-right governments, but as the political tide turns he now finds himself and his country increasingly isolated. Boasting close ties with US President Donald Trump, Bolsonaro was emboldened and unapologetic for a worldview often criticized as sexist, racist and homophobic, as well as his disdain for the environment.

But two years later Argentina has replaced the market-friendly Mauricio Macri with center-left President Alberto Fernandez, while in the United States Democrat Joe Biden will succeed Republican Donald Trump as president next week. Yet Bolsonaro, often dubbed the "Tropical Trump", shows few signs of caring.

### 'Ever more isolated'

The Brazilian president remains unwavering in his support for neoliberal economic policies, social conservatism and provocative anti-establishment rhetoric. Diplomatically he's pushing Brazil ever further from its main economic partners: China, the United States, the European Union, and Argentina. "This aggressive stance against everything" aimed at "mobilizing his internal base" for his 2022 re-election bid will lead

him down a blind alley, says Oliver Stuenkel, a professor in international relations at the Getulio Vargas Foundation.

"In the long term this stance won't work because Brazil will become ever more isolated and it will take years for Brazil to recover its influence," he said. Bolsonaro was the last major world leader to congratulate Biden on his election victory more than a month after the event, and has backed Trump's unsubstantiated claims of electoral fraud.

"Bolsonaro needs external politics to convince his base that he's not a traditional politician" since "he can no longer present himself as the person who's going to end corruption or old school politics" now that he's made overtures to traditional political parties, said Stuenkel. Bolsonaro has alienated China over his threat to exclude Huawei from the race to develop 5G in the country, and for disparaging remarks about the Chinese Coronavac COVID-19 vaccine.

His reputation among many EU countries and the incoming Biden administration has been tarnished by his poor record on containing deforestation and wildfires in the Amazon rainforest, as well as his threat to scupper the EU's trade deal with the South American MERCOSUR bloc. And just last week he hit out at neighbor Ar-



**PALM BEACH, Florida:** In this file photo taken on March 7, 2020, US President Donald Trump speaks with Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro at Mar-a-Lago. — AFP

gentina for legalizing abortion - a bill that was supported by Fernandez. He said "the lives of Argentine children" were being extinguished "with State consent."

In a Cabinet meeting in April, Foreign Minis-

ter Ernesto Araujo, who has often spoken out against globalization, said he was convinced that Brazil could be sitting "at the table of the four, five or six countries that will define the new world order" post COVID. — AFP

## Turkmenistan and Afghanistan open new rail, power links

**ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan:** Turkmenistan and Afghanistan have inaugurated new transport, power and communications links, Turkmenistan said yesterday, as the ex-Soviet republic touts its role rebuilding Afghanistan's conflict-torn economy. A trio of Turkmen foreign ministry statements said Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Turkmen leader Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov had participated via teleconference in opening ceremonies for a new branch of the railway connecting the two countries, a new power transmission line and a fibre optic line.

The 500 kilovolt, 153-km power transmission line connecting Kerki in Turkmenistan to Sheberghan in Afghanistan is the first leg of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) power project part-financed by the Asian Development Bank. Afghanistan's fourth largest city, Mazar-i-Sharif, is among the cities slated to receive Turkmen electricity, according to the foreign ministry readout.

Afghanistan and Turkmenistan have been connected by rail since late 2016, and the latest branch extends the line down from the Afghan border settlement of Akina (also spelled Aqina) to Andkhoy, another Afghan town 30 km south. According to the Turkmen foreign ministry readout, the opening was "marked by the solemn dispatch from the Akina station towards the city of Andkhoy of a train consisting of 20 cars loaded with export products from Turkmenistan". — AFP

## Turkey launches vaccination drive with Chinese jab

**ISTANBUL:** Turkish doctors and nurses rolled up their sleeves yesterday as the nation of 83 million people launched a coronavirus vaccination drive with China's Sinovac jab. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca received the first shot of CoronaVac live on television after formally approving the vaccine Wednesday despite contradictory data about its efficacy rate. Preliminary studies involving more than 7,000 volunteers in Turkey showed CoronaVac to be 91.25 percent effective.

But a bigger trial in Brazil showed 50.4 percent efficacy and a third one in Indonesia pointed to a 65.3 percent success rate, raising concerns about transparency from the Chinese manufacturers. Turkish television was plastered with images yesterday of healthcare workers receiving their first doses as officials tried to raise awareness and acceptance of the vaccine.

"Our citizens should not worry," Professor Recep Demirhan, chief physician at a city hospital on the Asian side of Istanbul, told reporters as he received his shot. "We have conducted preliminary testing of all vaccines coming to Turkey and they are safe," he said. One opinion poll conducted in November showed about half of Turkish respondents unwilling to take the jab.

After covering Turkey's 1.1 million healthcare workers, the vaccination program will move on to essential workers and people aged 65 and above. "This vaccination drive is needed to return to our normal, old way of life," Koca said on Wednesday. "We see the light at the end of the tunnel and I believe the coming days will be bright."

Turkey has signed up for 50 million doses of CoronaVac.



**ANKARA:** A health worker receives an injection of the Chinese Sinovac vaccine at Ankara City Hospital yesterday. — AFP

Twenty million of them are due to arrive by the end of the month. The official Anadolu news agency reported that Turkey also sent 20,000 doses to the breakaway state of northern Cyprus, which is recognized only by Ankara. In December, Turkey also reached a deal to receive 4.5 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech jab by late March. Officials hope to receive up to 30 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech jab, although talks are still ongoing.

Turkey, which has registered 23,325 COVID-19 deaths and 2.3 million virus infections, has seen its official daily death tolls slip back down to under 200 after imposing weekend lockdowns and other daily restrictions in November. Last month, it began requiring passengers arriving from abroad to submit negative PCR tests. — AFP



# COVID fails to deter India's massive Ganges pilgrimage

## Fines could be imposed for breaching health regulations

**HARIDWAR:** Hundreds of thousands of Hindu pilgrims descended on the banks of the Ganges River yesterday trusting in faith rather than masks to shield them against the coronavirus pandemic during the giant Kumbh Mela festival. Up to one million people were expected in the city of Haridwar for the first day of the pilgrimage, even though India has the world's second highest number of cases, more than 10 million, and has recorded more than 150,000 deaths. Most of the hordes, aged between three and over 80, who walked into the revered but freezing river in the morning mist did not have masks and social distancing was an organizational nightmare.

Senior police official Senthil Avoodai K Raj, who predicted between 500,000 and one million people would enter the city on the day, said that thousands of thousands of security forces in the crowds were trying to tell people to wear masks. He added that fines could be imposed for breaching COVID-19 regulations. "The pandemic is a bit of a worry, but we are taking all precautions," said organizer Siddharth Chakrapani. "I'm sure Maa Ganga will take care of their safety," he added, referring to the Hindu goddess of forgiveness and purification. According to Hindu mythology, gods and demons fought a war over a sacred pitcher containing the nectar of immor-

ality. Drops fell at four different locations, which now alternate as hosts for the immense gatherings. Kumbh Mela is recognized as a cultural heritage by UNESCO, and its last edition in Allahabad in 2019 — attracted around 55 million people over 48 days. This year Haridwar is the host, and several million people are expected to throng the holy city in the northern state of Uttarakhnad state over seven weeks.

### 'Not like Europe'

Taking a dip in the Ganges is considered a sacred rite by Hindus, who come from across India and beyond its borders to participate. "Its tradition. People eagerly wait for the Kumbh, waiting to take a bath. Yes, there is a pandemic but people will come because of tradition. People are coming from very far away," said 53-year-old Inderaj Singh. Uma Rani's job of putting coloured 'tilak' marks on the foreheads of pilgrims took a huge hit during the pandemic as visitor numbers to Haridwar collapsed. The 42-year-old hoped the Kumbh Mela would bring new business. "I only work for two hours in the evening and earn around two hundred rupees (\$2.50). The tourists make this town - without them there's nothing. I feed my children with whatever Ganga maa gives me," she said.

Holy men known as sadhus-boasting flamboy-



**GANGASAGAR, India :** Hindu pilgrims pray after taking a holy dip at the confluence of Ganges and the Bay of Bengal during the Gangasagar Mela on the occasion of Makar Sankranti. — AFP

ant dreadlocks and smoking cannabis—are a regular feature at the Kumbh Mela, camping by the river and offering blessings to those who come for the holy immersion. The river banks teemed with pilgrims and vendors while families laid out plastic

sheets to put their belongings on while they took turns to plunge in the river. Most were oblivious to the threat of coronavirus. "India is not like Europe... when it comes to immunity we are better," said 50-year-old Sanjay Sharma. —AFP

## Sobbing relatives bury Indonesia plane crash victim

**JAKARTA:** Sobbing friends and relatives filed into a Jakarta cemetery yesterday to bury the remains of a flight attendant from the crashed Indonesian passenger jet, as divers restarted their hunt for its second black box. Okky Bisma, 29, was the first confirmed victim of Saturday's disaster after fingerprints from his retrieved hand were matched to those on a government identity database. There were 62 crew and passengers, including 10 children, on the Sriwijaya Air Boeing 737-500 when it plunged about 10,000 feet (3,000 meters) in less than a minute before slamming into the Java Sea just after take-off from Jakarta.

At least five other victims have since been identified, as forensic examiners sort through mangled human remains retrieved from the wreckage-littered seabed in the hope of matching DNA with relatives. At the cemetery, Bisma's wife Aldha Refa clutched a portrait of her husband and sprinkled flower petals on a mound of dirt where his coffin was buried. "Rest in peace up there darling and wait for me... in heaven," Refa, also a flight attendant, wrote in a tribute posted on social media this week.

"Thank you for being the perfect husband when you were on earth." Funeral traditions in Indonesia, the world's biggest Muslim-majority nation, call for a quick burial of the dead. But the identification process could take weeks or more, prolonging the agony for some distraught families. Bisma's family gave up hope of recovering more remains and decided instead to bury what divers had retrieved, said his father Supeno Hendy Kiswanto. "Today we're still mourning, but we surrender to Allah for what



**JAKARTA:** Aldha Refa, the wife of Okky Bisma, a flight attendant and one of the 62 people aboard Sriwijaya Air flight SJ182 grieves at his funeral in Jakarta yesterday. — AFP

has happened," Kiswanto told the ceremony. "Death is in the hands of God... Let's pray Allah grants him a place in heaven."

Nearly 270 divers were on hand yesterday as authorities restarted the underwater hunt, which was called off a day earlier due to bad weather and rough seas. "The main focus (today) will be the diving," Rasman MS, the search-and-rescue agency's operations director, said earlier yesterday. "We're not just looking for one thing—victims, the cockpit voice recorder and debris are all priorities." Investigators said they had extracted and cleaned a memory module from a retrieved flight data recorder and hope to be able to read critical details on the device soon, with the focus now on finding the plane's cockpit voice recorder. —AFP

### News in brief

#### US envoy chides China

**TAIPEI:** Washington's envoy to the United Nations held a virtual talk with Taiwan's president yesterday after her visit to the island was scrapped in a diplomatic volte-face during the chaotic last days of the Trump administration. Ambassador Kelly Craft praised Taiwan's success in fighting the coronavirus while criticizing China for blocking the island from global bodies during a video discussion with President Tsai Ing-wen. "Unfortunately, Taiwan is unable to share those successes in UN venues, including the World Health Assembly, as a result of PRC obstruction," Craft tweeted, referring to the People's Republic of China. Taiwan has been praised for its pandemic response, with fewer than 850 cases and seven deaths. —AFP

#### Park to be jailed 20 years

**SEOUL:** South Korea's top court upheld a 20-year prison sentence for disgraced former president Park Geun-hye yesterday, in the final ruling over the corruption scandal that brought her down. The decision brings to an end an extended legal process that involved multiple trials and appeals, including a previous Supreme Court hearing. The country's first female president was impeached in 2017 after huge street protests against her rule. She was convicted the following year of bribery and abuse of power and jailed for 30 years. A series of appeals, a retrial and further appeals followed which reduced her sentence to 20 years. —AFP

## International

# China logs first COVID death in eight months

## WHO huddles on new coronavirus strains

**WUHAN:** China recorded its first COVID-19 death in eight months yesterday, as experts huddled to discuss worrying new strains of the coronavirus that are spreading rapidly around the globe. The gathering in Geneva of the World Health Organization's emergency committee comes as their colleagues landed in Wuhan for a long-delayed mission to find the origins of the virus. More than 91 million people have been infected, with almost two million of them dying, according to figures widely thought to be an underestimate.

Much of the planet is enveloped in a second or third wave of the disease, with populations chafing under painful and economically damaging restrictions. China—where the virus first emerged—has again locked down millions of people as it fights to control a fresh outbreak that has now claimed its first victim, sparking anguish on social media. The hashtag “New virus death in Hebei” quickly ratcheted up 100 million views on the Twitter-like Weibo platform. “I haven’t seen the words ‘virusdeath’ in

so long, it’s a bit shocking! I hope the epidemic can pass soon,” one user wrote.

The death comes as a politically sensitive investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic finally got under way with the arrival of a 10-strong team in Wuhan, where the virus emerged in late 2019. Mission leader Peter Ben Embarek said the group would start with a two-week quarantine at a hotel before the probe begins in earnest. But, he warned, it “could be a very long journey before we get a full understanding of what happened”. Beijing has argued Wuhan might not be where the virus originated, only where it was first identified. “I don’t think we will have clear answers after this initial mission, but we will be on the way,” Embarek added.

### Disneyland

Regardless of the virus’s origins, scientists say large-scale vaccination is the only way to escape its ravages. Programs have spluttered into life in a

number of countries, although progress is slower than many are hoping. In the United States, where more than 4,000 people are dying every day from the disease, around 10 million have received a first shot. California’s Disneyland threw open its doors Wednesday as a vaccination site, with 81-year-old Gary Dohman near the front of the queue. “Easy-piece of cake, nothing to it. Didn’t even feel it go in,” he said after getting his injection.

“I’ve been cooped up in a house for 10 months, can’t go anywhere. I want to get my second shot and do a little traveling.” There was some good news for those who have already had COVID-19, with one British study suggesting that recovery confers immunity for at least five months for most people. The research will be welcomed by Britain’s under-pressure healthcare workers struggling to cope with surging caseloads caused in part by a new, more infectious strain of the virus.

That strain, and another identified in South Africa, was going under the microscope in Geneva yesterday when the WHO’s emergency committee gathers. The newly identified variants have been logged in dozens of countries. The committee normally gathers every three months, but the WHO said the director-general pulled the meeting forward “to consider issues that need urgent discussion”.

Sport has provided a measure of diversion for many trapped in their homes, but top-flight athletes were warned this week they had to lead by example. English Premier League bosses told clubs they could be sanctioned if players hug or shake hands after goals. “We are fortunate to be able to continue to play and bring our competition to fans at home and around the world,” EPL chief executive Richard Masters said. “This brings justified additional scrutiny and the Premier League must take the lead in setting the right example to follow.” —AFP



**WUHAN:** Vladimir G Dedkov (center), a member of the World Health Organization (WHO) team investigating the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, boards a bus following the team’s arrival yesterday. — AFP

## Hong Kong national security police make 11 new arrests

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kong’s national security police arrested 11 people in dawn raids yesterday, including a veteran human rights lawyer, on suspicion of helping a group of activists make a failed bid to flee the city by speedboat. “Eleven people were arrested by the national security department for ‘conspiracy to assist offenders,’” a senior police source told AFP. The officer confirmed those arrested were suspected of aiding 12 Hong Kong pro-democracy activists caught last August by Chinese coastguards as they tried to flee by boat to Taiwan.

Those on board were facing charges in Hong Kong for crimes linked to huge and often violent democracy protests that convulsed the finance hub in 2019. The arrests come a week after national security police detained more than 50 of the city’s most

prominent democracy activists for subversion, one of the new crimes listed in a sweeping national security law that Beijing imposed on the city last year. Among those detained yesterday was Daniel Wong, a veteran human rights lawyer and an outspoken supporter of Hong Kong’s democracy movement. “National security police arrived at my home around 6.10 am and I do not know at the moment which police station they will take me to,” Wong wrote on his Facebook page.

The 71-year-old is also the founder of a restaurant in Taipei which hires and helps Hong Kongers who have fled to the democratic island. Willis Ho, a former student leader, confirmed her mother was among those arrested. Last month a Chinese court jailed 10 of the 12 fugitives for up to three years for

“organizing and participating in an illegal border crossing”. Two teenagers were returned to Hong Kong to face charges including attempted arson and possession of offensive weapons.

It is not the first time people have been arrested on suspicion of trying to help the group escape Hong Kong. In October, nine people were detained by the city’s new national security unit and later granted bail. The national security law mandates up to life imprisonment for any offence Beijing views as “secession, subversion, collusion with foreign forces and terrorism”. At least 90 people have been arrested since the law’s enactment, including US-born human rights lawyer John Clancey, prominent activist Joshua Wong and pro-democracy media mogul Jimmy Lai. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Detained Canadians allowed calls

**BEIJING:** Two Canadians detained in China for over two years on spying charges were allowed to call their families out of “humanitarian considerations” over Christmas, Beijing said yesterday. Relations between Beijing and Ottawa have spiraled since China detained former diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor in 2018 - days after the arrest of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou in Vancouver on fraud charges. While languishing in detention, the pair have had virtually no contact with the outside world. Virtual consular visits only resumed in October after a nine-month hiatus which authorities said was due to the coronavirus. — AFP

#### Hong Kong’s first website blocked

**HONG KONG:** A Hong Kong Internet provider said yesterday it had blocked access to a website following a police order, the first confirmed takedown using a new national security law imposed by Beijing last year. Unlike mainland China, Hong Kong has open internet access, but critics of Beijing fear powers given to the police under the new law could herald the end of that freedom. Internet users noticed the website HKChronicles was unreachable from some Hong Kong-based devices last week, and its owner put out a statement saying she believed authorities were blocking access. Police declined to comment, but yesterday Hong Kong Broadband Network—one of the city’s internet service providers—confirmed a takedown order had been issued. — AFP

#### 2 experts remain in Singapore

**GENEVA:** Two experts on an international mission to investigate the origins of COVID-19 in China are still in Singapore after testing positive for COVID antibodies, the WHO said yesterday. The World Health Organization said earlier that the international team of experts had landed in Wuhan for the long-delayed mission, but it later tweeted that two had yet to make it there. “Two scientists are still in #Singapore completing tests for #COVID19,” the UN health body said in a tweet. “All team members had multiple negative PCR and antibody tests for COVID-19 in their home countries prior to travelling,” it said. — AFP

Friday Times

FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 2021

# Lifestyle

www.kuwaittimes.net

A woman walks under festive light decorations in central Moscow.— AFP

**World's oldest known cave painting found in Indonesia**

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## Lifestyle | Feature

## Hogwarts, Humankind, Horizon: 2021's hottest video games



Horizon Forbidden West

Gamers, grab your controllers: 2021 is set to be a big year for video games, with some hugely-awaited titles expected after Microsoft and Playstation launched new next-generation consoles in November. Here are five of the most-anticipated games planned to come out this year—unless the coronavirus pandemic continues to play havoc with release schedules.

**Horizon Forbidden West**

The follow-up to 2017's Playstation exclusive Horizon Zero Dawn is an action role-playing game set in a post-apocalyptic world where humans duel with giant mechanical creatures. Horizon Forbidden West, set in an American West that has become wild again, tells the latest adventure of young huntress Aloy, who must find the source of a mysterious and deadly plague and uncover a slew of age-old secrets along the way. With breathtaking graphics and a vast open world to explore, Sony hopes the game will put it ahead of its arch-rival Microsoft when the game launches on PlayStation 4 and 5 in the second half of 2021.

**Hogwarts Legacy**

The return of Harry Potter? Not quite—there's no Harry, Ron or Hermione, but wizards, goblins and supernatural beasts abound in this action-packed dive into J.K. Rowling's universe, courtesy of Avalanche Software. The game, which follows in the path of the Fantastic Beasts films, heads back to the end of the 19th Century, an uncharted time for the Harry Potter series. The wild ride of wizardry, in which gamers can create their own character and soak up the virtual ambiance of an 1800s Hogwarts, will be released this year on Sony and Microsoft consoles.



Hogwarts Legacy

**Humankind**

French studio Amplitude is set to release this Civilization-style strategy game in April for Windows, Apple and Stadia. Players must guide their civilization across six eras from the nomadic age onwards as they compete with historically-based rivals to see if they can triumph through skilful tactics and technology. Depending on the culture they choose, players can aim to win via a range of tactics, including armed combat or trade.

**Deathloop**

Another French studio, Arkane, is behind this first-person shooter in which players take on the role of Colt, an assassin stuck in a time loop. The game, which takes elements from the studio's Dishonored saga, is due out on PS5 and Windows on May 21, and on Microsoft's new Xbox Series X/S next year.

**12 Minutes**

Another game stuck in a time loop is this offering from Barcelona's Nomada studio, in which the protagonist is seen in his flat in daily situations with his partner. Spoiler: Murder soon follows—but the player has to repeatedly navigate a 12-minute cycle to solve the ensuing mystery. The game is scheduled to hit shelves some time this year and will be available on Windows and Xbox One/Xbox Series X/S.

**Coming soon?**

God of War Ragnarok, the latest installment in the smash hit series, turns from its traditional focus on Greek mythology to Norse deities. It is slated for release on Playstations this year, but has already been delayed and is not expected

to hit shelves much before the end of the year. Microsoft had initially planned to release "Halo Infinite", the latest installment starring the hero Master Chief, along with its launch of the Xbox Series X/S in November. But it was postponed for around a year after the graphics in a trailer received a thumbs down on social media. Another long-awaited sequel is The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild 2 developed by Nintendo for its Switch console. The first Breath of the Wild Zelda action-adventure game was a huge success, selling millions of copies and receiving wide acclaim with its open-ended gameplay.

**Not yet**

What you'll not be seeing in 2021, however, is Grand Theft Auto VI, The Elder Scrolls VI or Final Fantasy XVI—gamers will have a wait a little longer for these much-anticipated sequels. —AFP



God of War Ragnarok



Humankind



Deathloop



12 Minutes

# Rare Tintin painting could break auction record

An original painting by Tintin creator Herge could set a new record for a comic book sale when it goes to auction in Paris yesterday. The online sale is widely expected to confirm the huge appetite for memorabilia of Tintin, whose adventures have entertained people of all ages since the 1930s. The previous world record for comic book art was set in 2014, when a double-page ink drawing that served as the inside cover for Tintin volumes published from 1937 to 1958 sold for 2.65 million euros (\$3.6 million at the time). The small painting being offered on Thursday, measuring 34 cm square (13 inches), features Tintin and his dog Snowy emerging from a porcelain jar in front of a menacing depiction of a Chinese dragon.

It was intended for the cover of "The Blue Lotus" from 1936 but was judged too expensive to reproduce by the publisher, which ultimately used a simplified version of the same scene, auction house Artcurial says. The volume, the fifth in the Tintin series, is considered a milestone in Herge's development of the character with its more dynamic and realistic storylines alongside his meticulous artwork. The auction house estimates it will sell for 2.2 to 2.8 million euros, despite clear fold marks. The sale had originally been set for November. In 2016, an original drawing from Tintin's "Explorers on the Moon" book sold for 1.55 million euros, a record for a single comic book page. Herge, a Belgian whose real

name was George Remi, sold some 230 million Tintin albums by the time of his death in 1983.

## A gift?

According to the owners-heirs of the Tintin publisher Louis Casterman—the drawing on sale Thursday was given as a present by Herge to Casterman's son, who kept it folded up in a drawer. Other experts have cast doubt on this, saying the drawing might have been folded by Herge himself when he sent it by post to his publishers. "The theory that it was a gift to a child is outlandish," Benoit Peeters, an Herge expert who wrote a biography of the author, told French daily Le Monde in September.

"When Herge gave away sketches or drawings he always dedicated them, let alone for the son of his editor," Peeters said. "What's most likely is that Herge never asked for it back, so it was given to Casterman's son." Nick Rodwell, the British husband of Herge's second wife and rights holder Fanny Vlamynck, has said the work rightfully belongs in the Herge museum in Belgium. For Philippe Goddin, a former secretary general of the Herge Foundation (now called Studios Herge), Casterman's claim the painting was a gift is "highly suspect." "But the Castermans have done nothing wrong by putting the picture on sale. They believed the legend their father passed down," he told AFP. —AFP



An IA worker compares the cover of Herge's Tintin album *The Blue Lotus* (right) to the artist's original painting for the cover at the Brussels Artcurial gallery. —AFP

## Virus again delays Japan 'Super Mario' theme park opening

The opening of the first ever "Super Mario" theme park has been delayed again as Japan battles a surge in coronavirus cases, Universal Studios Japan said yesterday.

Nintendo's long-awaited foray into amusement parks was originally set to open in July 2020 ahead of the Tokyo Olympics. But like the Games, its launch was delayed by the coronavirus pandemic, with a new date set for February 4. Featuring a real-life Bowser's Castle and an interactive "Mario Kart" ride, the attraction, part of the existing USJ park in the western city of Osaka, had been expected to draw huge crowds. After the government extended a virus state of emergency to Osaka this week to stem a surge in COVID-19 cases, the organizers decided to postpone the opening for the second time.

"We sincerely apologize for the trouble caused to guests... who were looking forward to the opening. The opening date will be decided and announced after the state of emergency is lifted," USJ said. While Japan's outbreak remains comparatively small, medics say hospitals are under heavy strain in the worst-affected areas. The emergency declaration, in place in 11 of the country's 47 prefectures, lasts until February 7. It asks restaurants and bars to close early, with residents urged to avoid unnecessary outings and working from home strongly encouraged. —AFP



In this handout illustration image released by Nature, somewhere in Southwestern North America, during the late Pleistocene, a pack of dire wolves (*Canis dirus*) are feeding on their bison kill, while a pair of grey wolves (*Canis lupus*) approach in the hopes of scavenging. —AFP

## 'Game of Thrones' dire wolves far apart from other canines

Prehistoric dire wolves made famous by the TV series "Game of Thrones" prowled the Earth for thousands of years before being wiped out at the end of the Ice Age. Known as *Canis dirus*—"fearsome dog"—they hunted down and feasted on large mammals, so when species such as giant bison went extinct dire wolves lacked prey, contributing to their decline. But a study published Wednesday in *Nature* points to another reason the top predators may have died out around 12,000 years ago after lording over the food chain for nearly a quarter of a millennium—their inability to breed with other wolf species. Anatomical similarities had led scientists to suggest that grey wolves and dire wolves could be close enough genetically to produce offspring, as did modern humans and Neanderthals. "Our genetic results show these two species of wolf are much more like distant cousins, like humans and chimpanzees," said co-lead author Kieren Mitchell from Australian Adelaide University. —AFP

## Tom Hanks to host Biden inauguration TV show

Joe Biden has cast himself as a unifier for the nation, but there is someone else the incoming administration hopes can help start healing a divided United States next week: universally beloved actor Tom Hanks. The "Forrest Gump" star will host a special program broadcast simultaneously on all major US networks on the night of Biden's inauguration, American media reported. The 90-minute show entitled "Celebrating America" will feature musical performances from Jon Bon Jovi, Justin Timberlake and Demi Lovato.

"I'm SO honored to announce that I will be joining @JoeBiden & @KamalaHarris for their special event," Lovato wrote on Twitter. The broadcast—organized by the Presidential Inaugural Committee—will replace the usual festivities at the swearing-in ceremony, canceled this year because of the coronavirus pandemic. Aretha Franklin sang at Barack Obama's first inauguration in 2009, while Beyonce performed at his second four years later. Trump had to settle for less well-known artists in 2017 due to his unpopularity in the entertainment world. Country singer Toby Keith headlined the event. The Hanks-hosted prime-time special on Wednesday, January 20 will start at 8:30 pm Eastern Time and will be aired on ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN and MSNBC. It will pay tribute to "American heroes," including workers on the frontlines in the fight against COVID-19. —AFP



In this file photo actor Tom Hanks speaks onstage during the 25th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards show at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. —AFP

## Lifestyle | Features

## Beyond blackface: Paris Opera tackles race clichés in repertoire

Has the rarefied world of French ballet come under the sway of American-style “cancel culture?” The director of Paris Opera, home also to France’s top ballet company, has been accused of political correctness “gone mad” for appearing to suggest he will no longer stage classical ballets that perpetuate racial stereotypes. “Some works will no doubt disappear from the repertoire,” Alexander Neef said in an interview with Le Monde’s weekly magazine M about the recent push by black and mixed-race dancers and staff for greater diversity in the corps de ballet and its productions. Le Monde seemed to suggest that some audience favourites, including Rudolf Nureyev’s versions of “Swan Lake,” “The Nutcracker” and “La Bayadere,” could be affected by the “revolution,” sparking an outcry.

Right-wingers seized on the interview as proof of growing self-censorship by individuals or institutions fearing the wrath of anti-racism activists. Far-right leader Marine Le Pen slammed what she called the “anti-racism gone mad” of the “pseudo-progressive” camp in a tweet liked by thousands of people. The Paris Opera sought to quickly tamp down the controversy. In a statement it assured that there had “never been any question of dropping Nureyev’s works from the repertoire” and that Neef’s remarks had been misinterpreted. But the debate continued to rage regardless.

## Edible insects move closer to European plates

The EU’s food watchdog on Wednesday paved the way for diners across Europe to tuck into insects as it gave safety approval for human consumption of dried yellow mealworm. The move by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is the preliminary step needed before officials can decide whether to allow the beetle larvae to be sold to consumers across the 27-nation bloc. The ruling is the first completed risk assessment of an insect food product application by the agency as it looks to approve a potential boom sector that could provide a sustainable source of protein. It could “pave the way for the first EU-wide approval,” Ermolaos Ververis, scientific officer in EFSA’s NUTRI unit, said in a statement.

“Risk evaluation is a decisive and necessary step in the regulation of novel foods by supporting policy makers in the EU in making science-based decisions and ensuring the safety of consumers.” The EFSA said it had found the mealworms—or *Tenebrio molitor* larva—were safe to be eaten “either as a whole dried insect or in the form of powder” after an application from French insect-rearing firm Micronutris. “Its main components are protein, fat and fibre,” the statement said, but warned that more research needed to be done on possible allergic reactions

### ‘Self-censorship’

Reacting to Neef’s remarks, Le Monde’s editor-in-chief Michel Guerrin warned that France was “slowly going down the American road, consisting of the runaway self-censorship of artists and programmers in order to avoid trouble.” Celebrities, brands, leaders and ordinary people on both sides of the Atlantic have fallen foul of “cancel culture”—calls to deny a public platform to people or products seen as objectionable. Examples range from the HBO Max streaming platform removing the film “Gone With the Wind” in order to add historical context about slavery, to a London museum notifying visitors to a major Gauguin exhibition about his sexually predatory behavior in the South Pacific.

In 2015, then Paris Opera Ballet chief Benjamin Millepied sought to tackle issues of racism and diversity in the French ballet scene head-on by banning dancers from blacking their faces for “La Bayadere” and renaming its “Danse des Nègrillons” (“The Dance of the Little Negroes”) as “The Dance of the Children.” Millepied quit a year later after encountering resistance to the changes, but his drive against what he called ballet’s “insidious racism” endured.

### Colonial view

In the past five years the Paris Opera has ended the practice of blackface, and dancers of colour finally have tights and pointes in shades



In this file photo Dancers participate in a dress rehearsal of the ballet “Le Corsaire” by composer Adolphe Adam and directed by Alexei Ratmanski on the stage of Bolshoi theater in Moscow. — AFP

matching their skin tone. But the bigger challenge of how to tackle racial stereotyping in the repertoire still looms. Spurred on by the Black Lives Matter movement, a group of black and mixed-race dancers last summer issued a manifesto slamming productions that “exaggerate and deride” the characteristics of non-white dancers, among other issues. In “La Bayadere,” a ballet to music by Austrian composer Ludwig Minkus, Hindu fakirs are depicted as servile, even though in India the holy men are widely respected.

In Alexander Glazunov’s “Raymonda,” meanwhile, the Saracen—a term used in Europe in the

Middle Ages for Arab Muslims—is depicted as a sinister character. For dance historian Sylvie Jacq-Mioche, these 19th-century ballets reflect the “exoticism” with which non-European cultures were viewed during the colonial era and which also permeated other art forms, including the works of painter Eugene Delacroix. Neef has commissioned a historian and a rights advocate to come up with proposals on how to address works that contain “racist clichés or situations that could be deemed racist” as part of a major study on diversity in Paris ballet and opera. — AFP



In this file photo packs of pre-cooked insect burgers based on protein-rich mealworm are seen on a supermarket shelf in Geneva. — AFP

to the insects. The burgeoning insect farming industry in Europe welcomed the decision and said they hoped to see authorities give permission for yellow mealworms to be marketed to the public by the middle of this year. “The release of this document indeed represents an important milestone towards the wider EU commercialization of edible insects,” Antoine Hubert, president of the the International Platform of Insects for Food and Feed, said in a statement. The Italy-based EFSA has more insect investigations on its plate and is also set to examine if crickets and grasshoppers are fit for consumption. Insects are widely eaten elsewhere on the globe with an estimated 1,000 species finding their way onto dinner plates of some 2 billion people in Africa, Asia and Latin America. — AFP

## US pigeon becomes feathered fugitive after straying 9,000 miles

An American pigeon believed to have strayed 9,000 miles (14,480 kilometers) from home had Australian authorities in a flap yesterday after it turned up in a Melbourne backyard having evaded strict quarantine rules. Kevin Chelli-Bird discovered the emaciated pigeon tagged with an ankle band outside his home on Boxing Day, local media reported. Dubbed “Joe” after US President-elect Joe Biden, the bird went missing during a US race in October, Chelli-Bird told the Herald Sun newspaper, and has been tracked to an owner in Alabama.

“The only thing we can think of is, in this race he was blown off course and out to sea, landed on a boat and hitched a ride,” he told the newspaper on Wednesday. “Perhaps he was sick of (Donald) Trump and decided to leave.” The pigeon’s epic journey sent local media into a flutter but as the news reached authorities, the bird became a fugitive for skipping Australia’s strict entry procedures. “As it was not legally prepared for import or imported, the health status of this bird and any others it has been in contact with at its origin and prior to arrival in Australia is unknown,” a Department of Agriculture spokeswoman said in a statement.

“It poses a direct biosecurity risk to Australian bird life and our poultry industry.” It will have to be humanely destroyed if it came from the United States without passing through quarantine, according to the department. Recent press coverage is unlikely to save Joe; Australian officials previously threatened to euthanise dogs belonging to movie star Johnny Depp and then-wife Amber Heard, after they failed to declare the pets on immigration papers. The Hollywood pair managed to save their Yorkshire terriers with a quick flight out of the country. However, as Joe’s owner is still to speak up, the feathered fugitive may have to wing it.—AFP



## Mini robot fish swim in schools, just like the real thing

Inspired by how schools of fish intuitively synchronize their movements, Harvard scientists have engineered miniature underwater robots capable of forming autonomous swarms. Each robotic fish, known as a “Bluebot,” is equipped with cameras and blue LED lights that sense the direction and distance of others inside water tanks. They swim using flapping fins rather than propellers, which improves their efficiency and maneuverability compared to standard underwater drones.

“It’s definitely useful for future applications—for example a search mission in the open ocean where you want to find people in distress and rescue them quickly,” said Florian Berlinger, the lead author of a paper about the research that appeared in *Science Robotics* on Wednesday. Other applications could include environmental monitoring or inspecting infrastructure. Existing underwater multi robot systems rely on individual robots communicating with each other over radio and transmitting their GPS positions.

The new system moves closer to mimicking the natural behavior of fish, which show complex, coordinated behavior without following a leader. The 3D printed robots are about 10 centimeters (4 inches) long, and their design was partly inspired by Blue tang fish that are native



This handout photo shows a lit Bluefish.

to the coral reefs of the Indo-Pacific. The robots use their camera “eyes” to detect other robots in their peripheral vision, then engage in self-organizing behavior, which include flashing their lights simultaneously, arranging themselves in a circle, and gathering around a target. Berlinger described a test in which the robots were spread out across a water tank to seek out a light source.

When one of the robots found the light, it sent out a signal to the others to gather around, in a demonstration of a search-and-rescue mis-



This handout photo shows a Blueswarm intermingling with real fish.— AFP photos

sion. “Other researchers have reached out to me already to use my Bluebots as fish surrogates for biological studies on fish swimming and schooling,” said Berlinger, explaining that the robot collectives can help us learn more about collec-

tive intelligence in nature. He hopes to improve the design so that it doesn’t require LEDs and can be used outside laboratory settings such as in coral reefs.—AFP

## World’s oldest known cave painting found in Indonesia

Archaeologists have discovered the world’s oldest known cave painting: a life-sized picture of a wild pig that was made at least 45,500 years ago in Indonesia. The finding described in the journal *Science Advances* on Wednesday provides the earliest evidence of human settlement of the region. Co-author Maxime Aubert of Australia’s Griffith University told AFP it was found on the island of Sulawesi in 2017 by doctoral student Basran Burhan, as part of surveys the team was carrying out with Indonesian authorities.

The Leang Tedongnge cave is located in a remote valley enclosed by sheer limestone cliffs, about an hour’s walk from the nearest road. It is only accessible during the dry season because of flooding during the wet season—and members of the isolated Bugis community told the team it had never before been seen by Westerners. Measuring 136 by 54 centimeters (53 by 21 inches) the Sulawesi warty pig was painted using dark red ochre pigment and has a short crest of upright hair, as well as a pair of horn-like facial warts characteristic of adult males of the species.

There are two hand prints above the pig’s hindquarters, and it appears to be facing two other pigs that are only partially preserved, as part of a narrative scene. “The pig appears to be observing a fight or social interaction between two other warty pigs,” said co-author Adam Brumm. Humans have hunted Sulawesi warty pigs for tens of thousands of years, and they are a key feature of the region’s prehistoric artwork, particularly during the Ice Age.

### Early human migration

Aubert, a dating specialist, identified a calcite deposit that had formed on top of the painting, then used Uranium-series isotope dating to confidently say the deposit was 45,500 years old. This makes the painting at least that age, “but it could be much older because the dating that we’re using only dates the calcite on top of it,” he explained.



This undated handout photo shows a dated pig painting at Leang Tedongnge in Sulawesi, Indonesia. — AFP

“The people who made it were fully modern, they were just like us, they had all of the capacity and the tools to do any painting that they liked,” he added. The previously oldest dated rock art painting was found by the same team in Sulawesi. It depicted a group of part-human, part-animal figures hunting mammals, and was found to be at least 43,900 years old.

Cave paintings such as these also help fill in gaps about our understanding of early human migrations. It’s known that people reached Australia 65,000 years ago, but they would probably have had to cross the islands of Indonesia, known as “Wallacea.” This site now represents the oldest evidence of humans in Wallacea, but it’s hoped further research will help show people were in the region much earlier, which would resolve the Australia settlement puzzle. The team believes the artwork was made by Homo sapiens, as opposed to now extinct human species like Denisovans, but cannot say this for certain. To make handprints, the artists would have had to place their hands on a surface then spit pigment over it, and the team are hoping to try to extract DNA samples from residual saliva. — AFP

## Don’t pimp my ride: Afghanistan retires ‘39’ number plates

Afghan traffic authorities are retiring license plates containing the number “39” because the figure has long been associated with pimping and prostitution. Vice President Amrullah Saleh said a decree to that effect would be introduced this week, eliminating what had become a tempting source of bribery by traffic officials. “The number (39) will be removed from the traffic system. It is said that people pay \$300 bribes to avoid the number,” he said in a Facebook post. The origin of 39’s street meaning is lost in time, but said to be linked to a notorious pimp in the western city of Herat, whose car registration plate contained the number.

Now, anyone driving a car sporting the figure risks being linked to an underground sex industry that is taboo in the devoutly Muslim nation. New car owners have resorted to paying bribes to avoid being issued license plates with the digits. “At the traffic department they ask you if you want number 39 or not,” said Hakim, a car dealer in the capital. “If you don’t, then they ask for a bribe.” He said nobody would buy a second-hand car with the digits because they consider it “shameful”.

“Last year, I had to sell two cars at almost half the price because they had 39 in their number plates,” Hakim told AFP. The association has even spread beyond vehicles, and Afghans can be teased or shunned for having telephone numbers or addresses featuring the digits.— AFP



# Amid Nile dam tensions, Egypt recalls Aswan 50 years on

**H**alf a century since Egypt's ground-breaking Aswan dam was inaugurated with much fanfare, harnessing the Nile for hydropower and irrigation, the giant barrier is still criticized for its human and environmental toll. It is also a stark reminder amid high tensions today as Addis Ababa fills its colossal Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) upstream-of just how

volatile politics over the life-giving, but finite, Nile water resources can be. The Aswan High Dam was spearheaded in the early 1950s by charismatic pan-Arabist president Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Egypt, where the river provides some 97 per cent of water for more than 100 million people, is the final section of the Nile's 6,650-kilometre (4,130-mile), 10-nation journey to the

Mediterranean. For millennia, the North African country was at the mercy of the seasonal rise and fall of the river, dependent on the rainfall in nations far upstream. But the 111-metre-high and 3.6-kilometre-wide Aswan High Dam, dwarfing the far smaller Aswan Low Dam built under British rule in 1902, crucially gave Cairo power to regulate the flow.



A general view shows a felucca sailing at the Nile River in the Egyptian city of Aswan.

Pictures show the Ramses II complex at the ancient Egyptian temple of Abu Simbel, some 1120 kms south of the Egyptian capital Cairo.





### Water power

It was a “very important hydro-political act”, said geographer and author Habib Ayeub, a Nile expert who has taught at universities in Cairo and Paris. The dam was inaugurated on January 15, 1971, three months after Nasser’s death, by his successor Anwar al-Sadat. For the first time, “an Egyptian president decided to manage the Nile within Egypt”, to develop agriculture and the economy in the country, Ayeub added. For Egypt, an otherwise desert nation where 97 percent of the population lives along the green and fertile Nile banks, the dam revolutionised its relationship with the land. “The dam offered a reprieve to Egyptians by giving them enough water... and protecting them from the hazards of floods, which could be absolutely catastrophic,” said Ayeub.

It also brought electricity to much of the country, a move Nasser said was key to developing

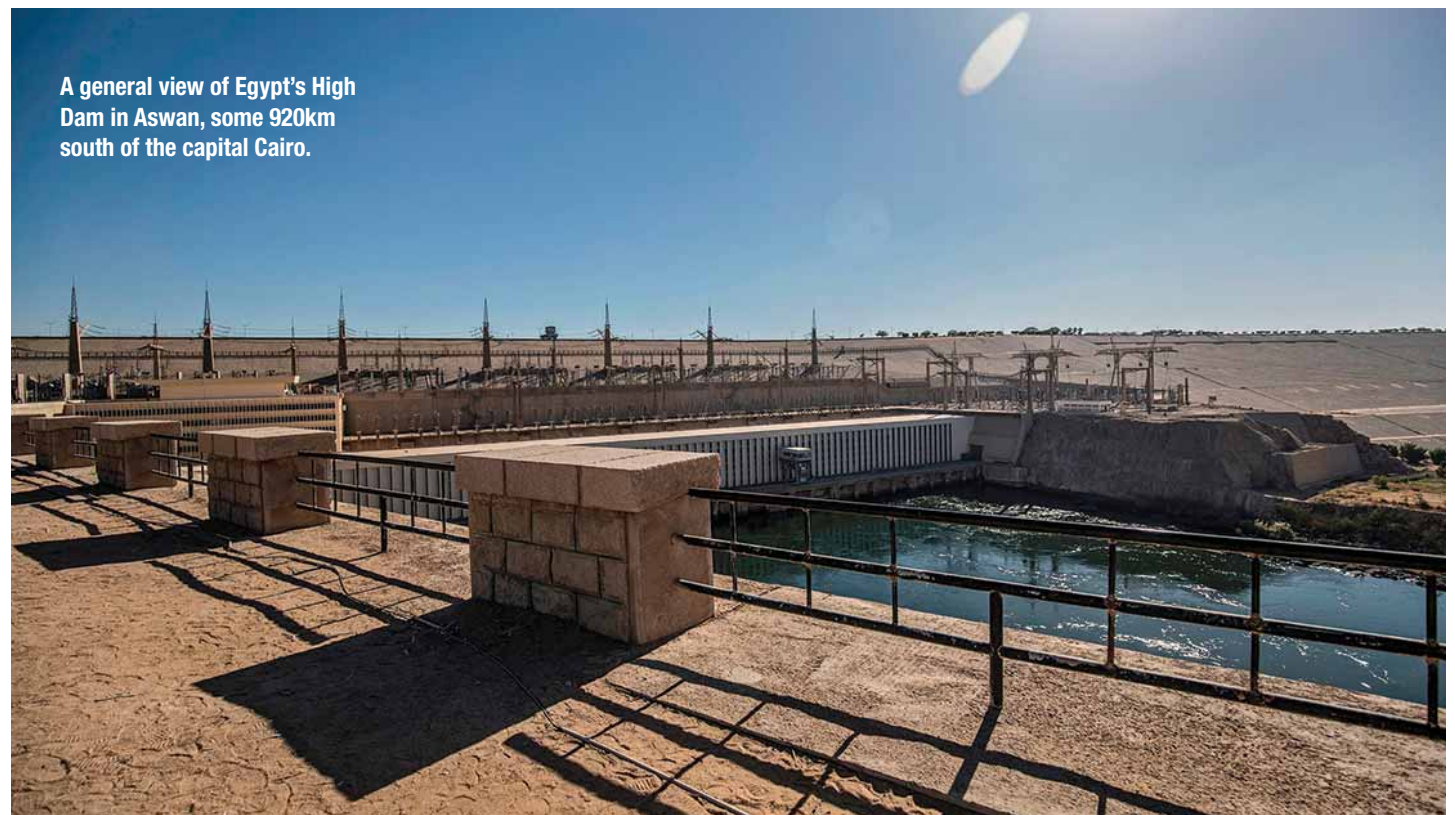
the nation. Abdel Hakim Hassanein, who overlooks the river from his home close to the dam, some 700 kilometres south of Cairo, praised its construction. “We didn’t have electricity before, we used oil lamps,” the 68-year-old said, adding that work at the dam remains a key source of local jobs. Ethiopia, the second most populous nation in Africa, today uses similar arguments, saying its 145-metre (475-foot) GERD Blue Nile

barrier-set to be Africa’s largest hydro-electric dam-is vital to provide power for its 110 million people. But Egypt, with the Arab world’s largest population, sees the GERD as an existential threat.

### ‘Belly of the desert’

In the 1960s, many Egyptians also saw the Aswan dam as a threat to their lives-in a different

A general view of Egypt’s High Dam in Aswan, some 920km south of the capital Cairo.



A general view of Nasser Lake, the reservoir of Egypt’s Aswan High Dam, around 920 kilometers south of Cairo.



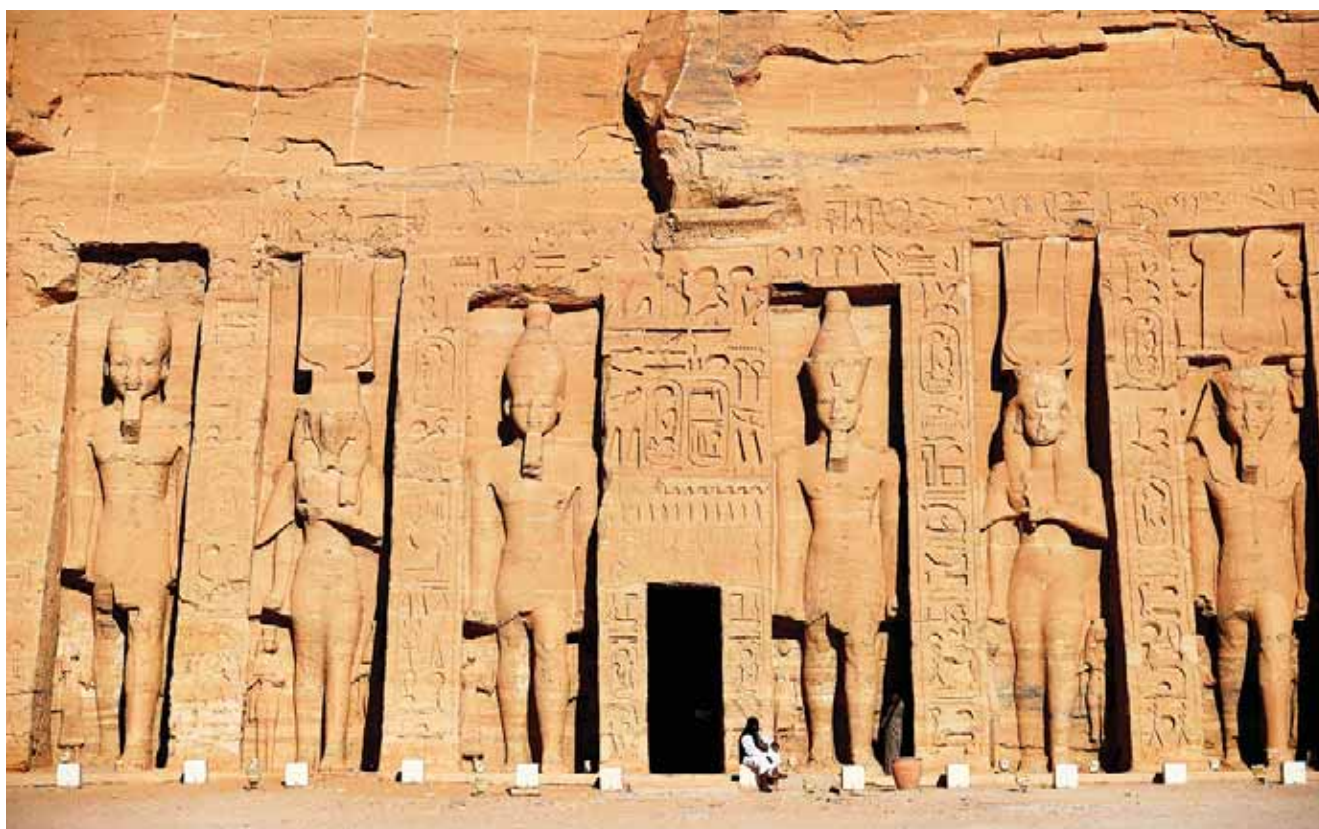
**The Nefertari complex at the ancient Egyptian temple of Abu Simbel.**

way. The lake behind the dam flooded the homeland of Egypt's Nubian people, forcing tens of thousands to leave. "For the Nubians, the High Dam is a symbol of oppression," said rights activist Fawzi Gayer. "It wiped out a civilization." Gayer was born just after his family was relocated to a dusty town its Nubian residents call Abu Simbel "Displacement". "We're talking about a community with a Nilotic identity that breathes the Nile... and we have been thrown into the belly of the desert," said Gayer.

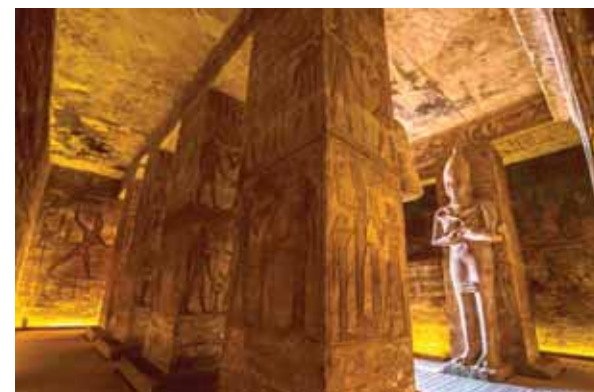
"The elderly died of shock." The Nubians' long-running demand for a "right of return" was included in the 2014 constitution, but their lands have been swallowed by the 355-kilometre-long Lake Nasser, which stretches south into Sudan. It was not only people who had to move; the waters threatened to drown the three-millennium-old Pharaonic temples at Abu Simbel, kick-starting a massive UNESCO-led rescue mission that took eight years. The ancient complex, including giant stone carved statues, was dismantled and moved to a new



**The temple of Nefertari at Abu Simbel archaeological site in southern Egypt on the Nile's western bank.**



**The Nefertari complex at the ancient Egyptian temple of Abu Simbel, some 1120 kilometers south of the Egyptian capital Cairo.**



**The Ramses II temple at the archeological site of Abu Simbel.**



**The interior of Ramses II temple at the archeological site of Abu Simbel.**



A general view of Egypt's High Dam in Aswan, some 920 kilometers south of the capital Cairo.

location, in one of the world's biggest archaeological rescue operations. There were environmental consequences too. The creation of the giant lake also upset the river's delicate ecosystem, holding back the fertile silt deposits, causing erosion and increasing use of chemical fertilizers.

#### 'Political bomb'

For Ayeb, the dam also "proved to be a political bomb". In building Aswan, Egypt and Sudan agreed a Nile water sharing deal, but did not include any other upstream nations, including Ethiopia. "It created the foundations for the break-up of the Nile basin as a framework for a common

good," said Ayeb. Today, Addis Ababa, Cairo and Khartoum are mired in long-running fractious talks over the filling and operation of the GERD dam. But, according to Ayeb, the critical challenge for Egypt is the management of the water it gets at present.

"Even if Ethiopia stopped its dam, there wouldn't be enough water," he said, arguing Egypt should halt desert irrigation—where nearly half the water is lost by evaporation—and stop agricultural exports. Ayeb believes Cairo needs a new water and agricultural policy entirely. "Egypt must change everything," he said. — AFP



A detail of the Ramses II complex, part of the UNESCO World Heritage site known as the "Nubian Monuments", at the ancient Egyptian historic site of Abu Simbel.

## Aswan High Dam: Nasser's dream, Nubian nightmare

It was the dream of Egypt's pan-Arab nationalist president Gamal Abdel Nasser, but the inauguration of the Aswan High Dam 50 years ago came at a big cost.

Opened on the mighty Nile on January 15, 1971 with the help of the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War, the dam was to generate electricity for the whole region, increase agricultural land and reduce flooding. However, its construction led to the expulsion of tens of thousands of indigenous Nubians for the creation of a huge artificial lake, that also threatened hundreds of ancient monuments. Pharaonic and Greco-Roman temples, including those of Rameses II at Abu Simbel, risked being submerged. Opponents also complained that the project reduced both the amount of Nile silt that fertilized the land when the river flooded and the size of the fertile Nile Delta, the country's breadbasket.

#### Nasser's dream

Since seizing power in 1954 after ousting General Mohamed Naguib, Nasser had dreamt of a mega-project to make a dam on the Nile, which would allow him to increase Egypt's cultivable land by a third. The British had already built a dam at Aswan during the colonial era in 1902, but the country's rocketing population had outgrown it. But in 1956, the United States and Britain withdrew a pledge to fund the construction of the Aswan High Dam after Egypt moved closer to the Soviet bloc.

In retaliation, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, sparking a crisis in which Britain, France and Israel united to attack Egypt, before being forced to pull out in humiliation after 10 days of fighting under pressure from Washington. But Moscow stepped in to finance the dam. On January 9, 1960, Nasser launched the building work, setting off a 10-ton dynamite explosion. Four years later, Nasser and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev together officiated over the flooding of the dam,

with Nasser pointing to "a lasting symbol of friendship" with the USSR.

#### Nubian exodus

But the project necessitated one of the world's biggest archaeological rescue operations ever, with a massive ancient Egyptian temple complex dismantled and hoisted to higher ground to prevent it being swamped by the rising waters. The original site is today completely submerged by Lake Nasser, and the Nubian population was forced to flee its "Garden of Eden" along the fertile Nile for the arid south or the cities.

The two Abu Simbel temples—named after their village location—were carved out of cliffs overlooking the Nile from 1298 BC to 1235 BC. The groundbreaking UNESCO-led project to relocate around 20 gigantic monuments ended in the autumn of 1968, after an eight-year international effort involving hundreds of workers.

#### Half Egypt's power

On January 15, 1971, three months after Nasser's death, his successor Anwar al-Sadat inaugurated the High Dam at a ceremony, which took place under an enormous triumphal arch. Portraits of Nasser hung on each side of the dam, which also houses a giant hydro-electric plant with 12 turbines. The dam can hold more than 160 billion cubic meters (5,650 billion cubic feet) of water per year in Lake Nasser.

Its turbines produce 10 billion kilowatts of electricity, to this day around half of the country's power supply. For 11 years, 36,000 Egyptian workers and more than 2,000 Soviet experts toiled on the dam. The USSR paid 40 percent of the building cost, while the remainder was paid with Egyptian cotton. — AFP

Kids Page

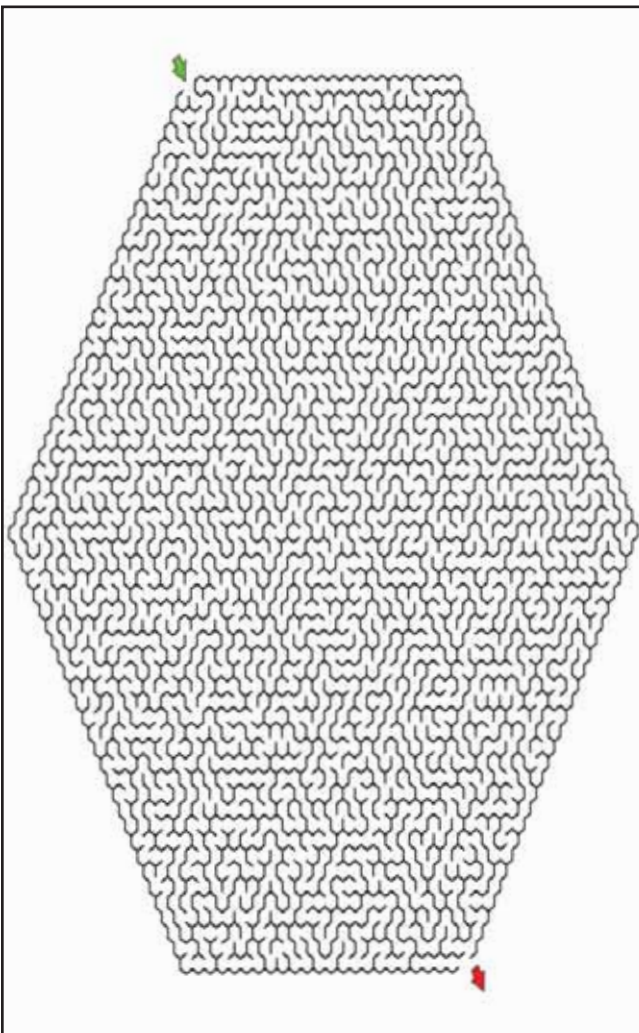
Word Search

Shall We Dance?

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

- |            |           |        |
|------------|-----------|--------|
| BALLET     | HULA      | SALSA  |
| BALLROOM   | HUSTLE    | SLOW   |
| BELLY      | LAMBADA   | SQUARE |
| BOLERO     | LIMBO     | SWING  |
| BREAK      | LINE      | TANGO  |
| CAN-CAN    | MACARENA  | TAP    |
| CHARLESTON | MAMBO     | TWIST  |
| DISCO      | MINUET    | WALTZ  |
| FLAMENCO   | POLKA     | ZYDECO |
| FOXTROT    | QUADRILLE |        |
| HIP HOP    | RUMBA     |        |

Kids Mazes



Color It



Illustration by  
 SUPER  
 COLORING

### Join the dots



### Word Scramble

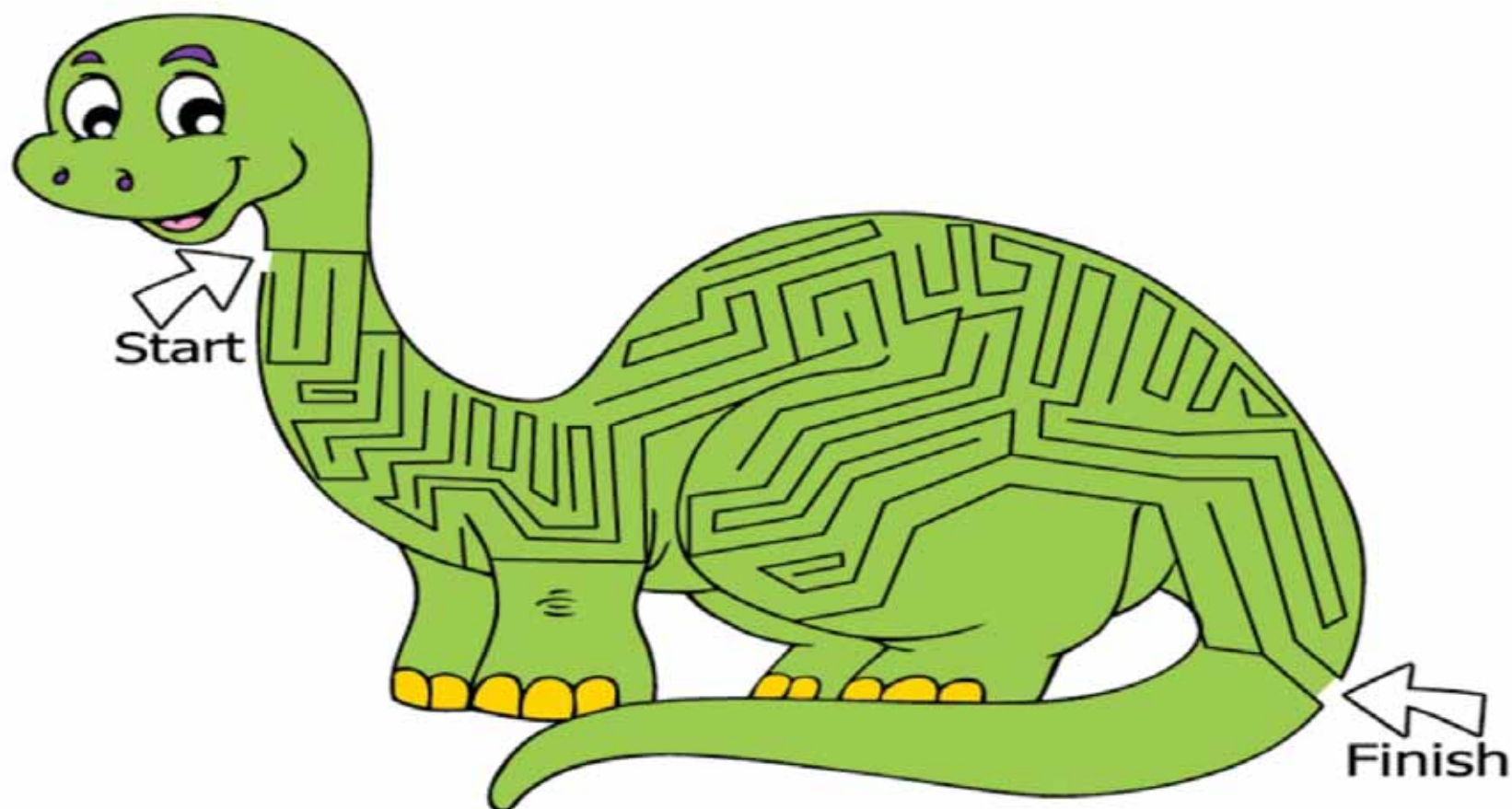
**Chinese New Year**

**DIRECTIONS:** Unscramble the letters to form terms associated with Chinese New Year. Watch out! A few have more than one word in the term.

1. EYMNO \_\_\_\_\_
2. LML00FNU \_\_\_\_\_
3. MPINGDLU \_\_\_\_\_
4. ILYAFM \_\_\_\_\_
5. RNAODG \_\_\_\_\_
6. INACH \_\_\_\_\_
7. ASGNEOR \_\_\_\_\_
8. MOBAOB \_\_\_\_\_
9. IAZODC \_\_\_\_\_
10. DCBANNUEA \_\_\_\_\_
11. RUALN \_\_\_\_\_
12. NLEEEOPV \_\_\_\_\_
13. CLGDOKUO \_\_\_\_\_
14. FEIWOSRKR \_\_\_\_\_
15. NLNRAET \_\_\_\_\_
16. DRE \_\_\_\_\_
17. EFATVISL \_\_\_\_\_
18. GIFST \_\_\_\_\_
19. RESITOPRY \_\_\_\_\_
20. ACNEADR \_\_\_\_\_



### Find the way



# CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times

248 33 199

Friday, January 15, 2021

**DR. MOHAMMAD AL HAJRY**  
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- o Referee reviewer of International journal of Dermatology.

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**DR KHALED ALMERRI**  
 Consultant Interventional Cardiology  
 Department: Heart & Vascular Center

**Specialized in:**

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- 2- Diagnosis and treatment of coronary artery diseases
- 3- Diagnosis and treatment of heart failure, cardiomyopathies and valvular diseases.
- 4- Diagnosis and treatment of high blood pressure and high cholesterol.
- 5- Diagnosis and treatment of syncope, palpitations and cardiac arrhythmias.
- 6- Non-invasive diagnostic procedures echocardiography, exercise stress test, and 24 hour blood pressure and Holter monitoring

**Dr. Hamoud Abdullah Alarouj**  
 ENT Consultant, Laryngologist

- ◆ Kuwait Board of Otolaryngology.
- ◆ Laryngology Fellowship, McGill University- Canada.
- ◆ Fellow of the European Board of Otolaryngology – Head & Neck surgery.
- ◆ Member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.
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- ◆ Member of the European Laryngological Society.
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# Health workers 83% protected after COVID infection

**PARIS:** Healthcare workers who have recovered from COVID-19 are largely protected against falling ill again for at least five months, a British study has found, but researchers warned some people could still carry and transmit the virus. Healthcare workers are among those most exposed to the SARS-Cov-2 coronavirus, as countries across the world have grappled with waves of infections in the year since it first emerged.

Researchers from Public Health England's SIREN study detected 44 potential reinfections out of 6,614 participants, who had already tested positive for antibodies in a five-month period between June and Nov 2020. In their first pub-

lished report - which has not yet been peer reviewed - the authors said this represents an 83 percent rate of protection from reinfection.

But they warned that although antibodies may confer some protection from becoming ill with COVID-19, early evidence from the next stage of the study suggests that some of these individuals carry high levels of virus and could continue to transmit it to others. "This study has given us the clearest picture to date of the nature of antibody protection against COVID-19 but it is critical people do not misunderstand these early findings," said lead author Susan Hopkins, senior medical advisor at Public Health England and the

SIREN study lead. "We now know that most of those who have had the virus, and developed antibodies, are protected from reinfection, but this is not total and we do not yet know how long protection lasts. Crucially, we believe people may still be able to pass the virus on."

Independent experts welcomed the paper from the SIREN study, which has recruited almost 20,800 healthcare workers - including frontline clinical staff - to undergo regular testing to see if they have the virus or antibodies to show a past infection. Danny Altmann, professor of immunology at Imperial College London and British Society for Immunology spokesperson, said Siren had col-

lected a "really important" dataset of healthcare workers. But he added it could be "disappointing to put hard numbers to the idea that immunity to this virus is seemingly so variable and feeble that there is a greater than one in 10 chance of suffering reinfection even at five months, let alone now, when many UK healthcare workers are more than nine months out from infections in the first wave".

Julian Tang, honorary associate professor/clinical virologist at the University of Leicester, said the study suggests natural infection protection rates "are comparable to the current COVID-19 vaccines" adding that immunization would likely boost natural immunity. — AFP

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# Classifieds

Friday, January 15, 2021

## CHANGE OF NAME

I, **Abdul Salam Abdul Gafoor Hassan** holder of Indian Passport No. Z1959357 resident of Mehsala, District Rigad, Maharashtra, has changed my name to Abdul Salam Abdul Gafoor Gantare for all purpose. (C 0207) 13-1-2021

(Surname) hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Sohrab Khan. (C 0206) 12-1-2021

## EMERGENCY



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

## 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

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Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
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Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
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## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY DAY:** Fair and Partly cloudy to cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind with speed of 08 - 30 km/h .

**BY NIGHT:** Cold and Cloudy with light to moderate south easterly wind with speed of 12 - 35 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain later on.

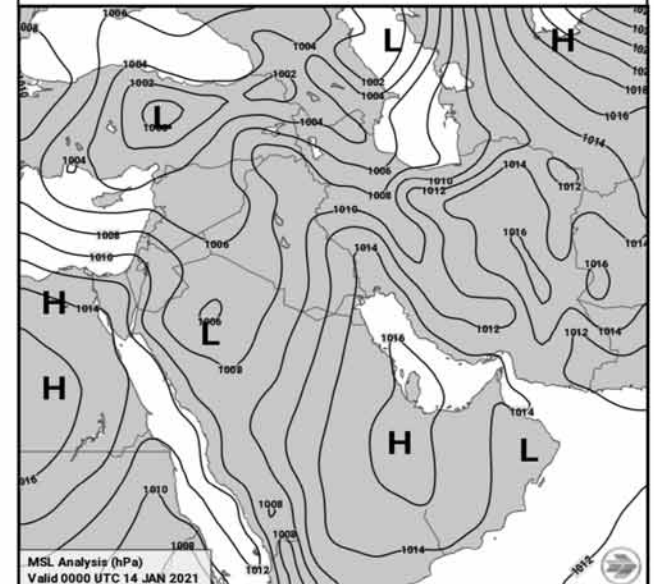
### WEATHER WARNING

No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	22 °C	12 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	22 °C	06 °C
ABDALY	24 °C	06 °C
BUBYAN	18 °C	08 °C
JAHRA	23 °C	09 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	20 °C	14 °C
AHMADI	- °C	- °C
NUWAISIB	20 °C	08 °C
WAFRA	22 °C	05 °C
SALMY	19 °C	07 °C

### SFC. CHART

14/01/2021 0000 UTC



### 4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	01/15	Fair and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain	23 °C	08 °C	SE-NW	12 - 40 km/h
Saturday	01/16	Fair and Partly cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery later on	22 °C	06 °C	NW-VRB	10 - 35 km/h
Sunday	01/17	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	22 °C	07 °C	VRB	08 - 22 km/h
Monday	01/18	Fair and Partly cloudy	21 °C	07 °C	VRB	08 - 22 km/h

### PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:20
Sunrise	06:44
Zuhr	11:57
Asr	14:51
Sunset	17:11
Isha	18:32

### RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	22 °C
MIN. Temp.	03 °C
MAX. RH	73 %
MIN. RH	23 %
MAX. Wind	W 21 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated.

UP.0



# Business

FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 2021

**34** Tech show offers transport solutions for COVID world



**35** Indonesian plane crash follows years of reforms



**36** German economy sees biggest blow since 2009 financial crisis



## Ooredoo launches offers on Samsung Galaxy S21 Series 5G

Preorders start today until Jan 23, 2021 online and in branches

**KUWAIT:** It's another turning point in the history of Ooredoo Kuwait and Samsung, and no wonder they outperform themselves with every new product and offer they launch. People have their eyes prospecting on the companies' latest products and offerings, in which both are rewarding their customers in a unique way.

For the first time, Ooredoo Kuwait starts its preorders on the latest Samsung Galaxy S21 Series 5G - which was announced by Samsung live yesterday, Jan 14, 2021 - with limited offer starting today until Jan 23, 2021, customers who preorder any of the latest devices will have the chance to take the full offer details, along with valuable gifts valued KD 92.

Ooredoo Kuwait revolutionized



**Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications**

S21 Plus, and Galaxy S21 Ultra, on Ooredoo ADD for existing in commitment customers starting from KD 11.

Customers can also purchase any of the latest Galaxy devices with Ooredoo's 5G Shamel Pro plans starting from KD 26 per month with non-stop local calls and roaming internet, non-stop 5G Internet, and up to KD 320 gifts (devices and digital vouchers). Preorders will be also bundled with free gifts including; Galaxy Buds Pro, or Galaxy Buds live, Galaxy SmartTag, and Samsung care+. Offer is valid until

Jan 23, 2021.

Samsung Galaxy S21 is a 5G flagship series in Samsung Smartphone portfolio. The series includes three models; Galaxy S21, Galaxy S21 Plus, and Galaxy S21 Ultra. Boasting powerful AI and Samsung's most advanced pro-grade camera system, brightest screen, and an adaptive display that supports a refresh rate from 10Hz to 120Hz at Quad HD+ resolution, the Galaxy S21 Ultra 5G promises to break barriers and deliver new meaning to every user.

The device comes equipped with the same Contour Cut Camera Design, a new quad camera featuring a dual pixel 12MP Ultra wide lens, an improved 108MP wide lens, and the enhanced 108MP sensor with laser auto focus provides 64 times richer color, more than 3 times wider dynamic range. Thanks to the winning combination of Single Take and AI processing, photos and video can be taken and saved at the same time, with snaps captured in 33MP when creating 8K videos.

What's more, the S Pen experience synonymous with other products part of the Galaxy Ecosystem has also been brought together with the Galaxy S21 Ultra 5G. Users can draw, take notes, and edit their photos using the S Pen, while Wi-Fi 6E

**SAMSUNG Galaxy S21 Series 5G**

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delivers up to 4x faster connectivity thanks to expanded Wi-Fi bandwidth for seamless smartphone experiences like never before.

Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "Led by our customers' aspirations, who always demand the best, the latest and

most innovative experiences, we have developed unique offerings that add value and innovation to their daily lives." For preorders, customers can visit any of Ooredoo Kuwait branches, authorized resellers, or online.

For more information, visit [www.ooredoo.com.kw](http://www.ooredoo.com.kw) or call 121.



**Samsung Galaxy S21 is a 5G flagship series in Samsung Smartphone portfolio**

the mobile devices preorder era. For the first time in Kuwait, customers can preorder any of the latest Samsung Galaxy S21 series 5G devices; Galaxy S21, Galaxy

## Business

# Mobile Net: Cuba's new revolution

## Many now wonder how they ever lived without it

**HAVANA:** Since arriving in Cuba just two years ago, mobile Internet has revolutionized life here - helping people find food, fuel and even medicine amid crippling shortages, and helping them organize protests in a country where waving a placard can land you in deep trouble. Many in the Americas' only communist-ruled state now wonder how they ever lived without it.

On the WhatsApp group Red Solidaria (Solidarity network), questions about basic necessities abound: "Flour please?!", "Has anyone seen toilet paper?", or even "Does anyone know where to find milk?". Other online groups allow people to sell or exchange hard-to-come-by products: one user who goes by Gaby is looking to swap shower gel for toilet paper and soft drinks, while Leo is offering cooking oil and soap in exchange for baby food.

Yet more online groups see people rely on the tenacity of product scouts. On a platform called Que hay? (What is there?), photos of toothpaste, soap and cheese are uploaded from a supermarket by a user who had queued for four hours just to get in. "There's a lot of stuff here," the patient patron, Wendy, advises other would-be clients, some of whom thank her for sharing the intel.

Up until Dec 2018, when mobile internet first arrived, Cubans wishing to use the Internet had to find one of several dozen Wi-Fi hotspots in public parks or squares, and pay dearly for an unreliable connection. And even that initial access only became possible in 2015. Today, with most people now using 4G service, more than a third of all Cubans - some 4.2 million of the is-

land nation's 11.2 million inhabitants - are surfing the web from their smartphones.

"It seems so natural to us today, but sometimes I stop and think that two years ago, we didn't have it, and I think: 'How was that possible?'" said Marta Deus. For the 32-year-old, the internet opened the door to entrepreneurship.

### A 'revolution'

Since July, Deus has run an Internet and mobile app-based home delivery company named Mandao - a first for Cuba. Already, Mandao's delivery bikes and their bright yellow cooler bags are ubiquitous on the streets of Havana, delivering some 100 meals daily from 70 client restaurants - a business model significantly boosted when city dwellers were ordered to stay home to quell the spread of the coronavirus.

Mobile Internet "has been a complete revolution," Deus said. Apart from food and tips on where to find gasoline, some online groups are dedicated to helping people find medications, which are in constant short supply. "It is much easier today to find someone who has what you need: without these groups, this would have been impossible. It would have been a matter of luck," said Ricardo Torres, an economist at the University of Havana.

The sea change in Internet use in Cuba also has yielded new outlets for recreation and making friends. Yasser Gonzalez, 35, wanted to organize a group of cycling enthusiasts. He says thanks to Facebook access, he started organizing events. The first major ride through Havana came in 2015... with four bikers taking part.



HAVANA: Cuban Yasser Gonzalez uses his cell phone to connect to the Internet at the Malecon on Nov 24, 2020. — AFP

Now, more than 100 people show up for monthly rides.

And it's not just riders who check out his Facebook page. One day, he got a message from a city government employee about plans for a new bike trail along the Malecon, which lines the coast in Havana. "I can now sometimes join meetings at which they discuss city infrastructure plans," Gonzalez told AFP.

Of course, there are downsides too - the

government can see what's going on in the public groups. Authorities in Havana canceled one of Gonzalez's cycling events in October, officially because of the pandemic. "How can they cancel an event that we can really demonstrate is safe for people?" he asked. Gonzalez tweeted directly at Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel about the event. A few days later, he was questioned by police, who he said warned him not to pursue the issue. — AFP

### News in brief

#### PSA sales slump on virus hit

**PARIS:** France's PSA, in the process of merging with Fiat Chrysler, said yesterday its 2020 sales plunged 27.8 percent to 2.5 million vehicles as the coronavirus pandemic shut down economies worldwide. Sales in Europe, its main market, were down 29.7 percent at 2.1 million, while in China they plunged nearly 58 percent to 45,965 vehicles, continuing a rapid decline from 740,000 in 2014. PSA, which groups the Peugeot, Citroen, DS, Opel and Vauxhall brands, said the pandemic had boosted online sales and it expected to sell 100,000 vehicles this way in 2021, up from 40,000 last year. — AFP

#### Norwegian drops long-haul

**OSLO:** Norwegian Air Shuttle, a pioneer in low-cost long-haul flights, said yesterday it would drop long distance routes and focus on Europe as it tries to restructure and avoid bankruptcy. "The board today presented the company's new business plan based on a simpler structure and a network of European routes with no long-haul," Norwegian said in a statement, adding at a press conference that the move would affect more than 2,000 jobs. — AFP

## Tech show offers transport solutions for COVID world

**WASHINGTON:** The global pandemic has put the brakes on a number of mobility trends, prompting the transportation industry to rethink strategy. New options on display at the all-digital 2021 Consumer Electronics Show underscore the changes in mobility during the global health crisis, with more personal vehicle use and less emphasis on sharing.

Interest in electric vehicles meanwhile has accelerated in the wake of the stunning growth of Tesla, with many parts of the world seeing increased adoption. And more options are being offered for personal "micromobility" and delivery amid the surge in online commerce. General Motors offered its vision at CES this week, unveiling a new BrightDrop brand of electric delivery vans along with previews of its newer Bolt, Cadillac and Hummer electric vehicles.

"Before the pandemic, shared mobility was the name of the game," said Axel Schmidt, global auto analyst with Accenture. "Covid-19 has put the brakes on this." The vehicles shown at CES appeared to be taking a page out of Tesla's book by touting performance and design features. The GMC Hummer EV set to start production this year features powerful acceleration, hands-free driving and "crab walk" mode which can navigate difficult terrain by turning its wheels up to 10 degrees.

"It has a crazy amount of power and celebrates the performance

possibilities of electric propulsion," said GM engineer Aaron Pfau of the mega-truck. Audi meanwhile flaunted its concept high-performance RS e-tron GT sports car, which can accelerate to 100 km per hour in around three seconds. It represents "the future of electric high-performance cars," Audi's Michael Loehe said in a CES streamed presentation. Schmidt of Accenture said that electric car drivers "are surprised by the power and performance."

Additionally, the electric powertrain allows for more design flexibility "so you have different space concepts" in a vehicle. Schmidt said autonomous driving, a feature at CES in previous years, has taken a back seat as the technology is refined. Autonomous driving - whose goals have been pushed back amid technical challenges - is still in an "evolutionary" period, according to Schmidt and unlikely to go mainstream in the next few years.

### Micromobility still hot

So-called "micromobility" meanwhile remained a hot topic with the showcasing of the Segway Ninebot smart electric bike and a presentation from Italian bike-sharing startup Vaimoo, which uses artificial intelligence and geolocation to keep the two-wheelers available where needed. Cake, the Swedish e-bike maker, unveiled an electric food delivery box to keep meals hot or cold for the fast-growing trend during the pandemic. The temperature-controlled box from Sweden's Dometic is designed for the Cake-made bikes and is expected to launch later this year. The companies said global food deliveries have already increased by 60 percent from 2017, and are likely to grow further in the coming years. While the pandemic has shifted transport trends - with many people avoiding mass transit and shared rides - a big question is how long these changes will last, according to Schmidt. — AFP

## Business

# Indonesian plane crash follows years of reforms

## Archipelago is one of world's fastest-growing aviation markets

**SINGAPORE:** The mystery plunge of a passenger jet into the sea is another dark chapter in Indonesia's horror aviation history, although safety standards have improved in recent years, analysts say. The Southeast Asian archipelago is one of the world's fastest-growing aviation markets, with air transport vital in connecting its thousands of islands. But the industry is notorious for ill-maintained runways, a lack of trained pilots and a wide range of other safety issues.

More than 700 people have died in a plane crashes over the past decade, according to the Aviation Safety Network. The latest occurred on Saturday, when a Sriwijaya Air Boeing passenger jet carrying 62 people suddenly dropped into the sea just minutes after take-off from the capital, Jakarta. No explanation has yet been given for the crash of the 26-year-old plane, with investigators still trying to retrieve one of the black boxes and identify all off the victims.

If the tragedy is due to problems over safety, there will be a renewed focus on whether efforts to overhaul the industry had succeeded as well as thought, according to analysts. "We had made good progress in our aviation sector," Chappy Hakim, former chief of staff of the Indonesian air force and now an independent analyst, told AFP.

### 'Broken system'

The nadir for the industry came in 2007, when the European Union and United States banned Indone-

sian carriers from flying into their airspace over safety concerns. At that time, "the system was broken," Gerry Soejatman, a Jakarta-based independent aviation analyst, told AFP. "The audit system wasn't working, the surveillance wasn't working - nothing was working."

On New Year's Day in 2007, an Adam Air plane plunged into the sea off Sulawesi island, killing all 102 people on board. The airline was later banned from flying. Indonesian authorities said the pilots lost control after becoming preoccupied with malfunctioning navigational equipment. The worst disaster in Indonesia's aviation history came a decade earlier, when an Airbus A-300B4 operated by national carrier Garuda Indonesia crashed in a smog-shrouded ravine. The tragedy left 234 dead.

### Overhaul

The industry overhaul began in 2009, when the government enacted a major new aviation law that sought to better regulate the sector and improve safety standards, a key move. This was followed by a flood of investment to meet new standards, and the situation started to improve. Indonesian authorities and airlines "worked very hard to improve training facilities, they bought new aircraft from Airbus and Boeing," said Shukur Yusuf, an analyst with aviation consultancy Endau Analytics.

In addition, the sector's exponential growth - which had left carriers struggling to hire enough



Divers bringing up a bag filled with body parts to a search and rescue boat off the coast north of Jakarta yesterday. —AFP

trained pilots for their new jets - slowed a few a years ago, said Soejatman. "That gave the airlines more breathing space to get more people, to spend time on training," he said. This did not solve all problems.

In 2014, an AirAsia jet crashed, killing 162 people. The following year, a Trigana Air plane went down in the remote east of Indonesia with the loss of 54 lives. Still, the efforts bore fruit, with the US lifting its ban

on Indonesian carriers in 2016, followed two years later by the EU. Indonesia had one major accident after the lifting of the bans - a 2018 crash of a Lion Air Boeing 737 MAX aircraft off Jakarta that claimed 189 lives. But that was blamed on a faulty anti-stall system in the new jet. A crash of the same model in Ethiopia six months later prompted a worldwide grounding of the MAX. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Xi pens letter to Starbucks tycoon

**BEIJING:** China's President Xi Jinping has asked former Starbucks chairman Howard Schultz to help promote trade between Washington and Beijing in a rare missive to a foreign business figure, state media reported yesterday. Xi, responding to an earlier message from Schultz, urged the multi-billionaire to "continue to play an active role in promoting China-US economic and trade cooperation", the official Xinhua news agency said. China will "provide a broader space for companies from all over the world, including Starbucks and other American companies, to develop in China", Xi wrote in his letter. —AFP

#### South Korean chatbot suspended

**SEOUL:** A popular South Korean artificial-intelligence-driven chatbot with the persona of a 20-year-old female student was taken down this week after it was accused of bigotry towards sexual minorities, the #MeToo movement and the disabled. Lee Luda, developed by Seoul-based startup Scatter Lab to operate within Facebook Messenger, became an instant sensation for her spontaneous and natural reactions, attracting more than 750,000 users after its launch late last month. Luda's AI algorithms learned from data collected from 10 billion conversations on Kakao Talk, the country's top messenger app. —AFP

## Spotty report card on climate for top asset managers

**PARIS:** The world's top 30 fund managers, collectively holding \$50 trillion in assets, get mixed marks on steering the global economy into alignment with Paris climate targets, according to a report released yesterday. The annual assessment from London-based think tank InfluenceMap graded investment giants across three criteria: support for climate-related shareholder resolutions, the greenness of portfolios, and engagement with the companies in those portfolios.

"Given the huge influence these asset managers have over the global economy, it is vital they take action to ensure the world can meet the climate goals of the Paris Agreement," said InfluenceMap executive director Dylan Tanner. The 2015 climate treaty enjoins nations to cap global warming at "well below" two degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels, and 1.5C if possible. On current trends, the planet will heat up at least 3C.

With 1.1C of warming so far, the world has seen a crescendo of deadly extreme weather, including superstorms made more destructive by rising seas. When it comes to public encouragement for companies to green their business models and lobbying practices, European asset managers continued to outperform their US counterparts, the report showed.

Among the top 10 firms, each with at least \$1.5 trillion under management, Legal & General IM, AllianzGI/PIMCO

and Amundi all got top marks. Fidelity Investments, Capital Group and Goldman Sachs AM - all US-based - were at the bottom of the class. BlackRock, the world's biggest asset manager with more than \$7 trillion under management, improved its grade in 2020 after announcing steps to divest from coal.

But the US-based giant got a failing mark when it came to supporting shareholder resolutions calling for more proactive climate policies. Such shareholder initiatives have become an increasingly powerful driver of change in companies, as well as a signal to the broader market. "More and more, we are seeing investors wanting to know that corporate lobbying and business models are aligned with Paris targets," said Tanner.

Vanguard, Capital Group and Fidelity Investments all scored even more poorly than BlackRock in this area.

At the same time, 2020 saw BlackRock and two other top 10 fund managers join the Climate Action 100+ investor initiative, a "promising development" that could speed up corporate transition toward carbon neutrality, according to InfluenceMap.

Finally, a portfolio analysis of the world's largest funds-looking at 3,000 companies with more than \$20 trillion in market capitalisation-showed that they deviated strongly from the Paris temperature target, especially in certain sectors.

"The world's automakers are not transitioning to electric vehicles at a fast enough pace, the coal production sector is winding down too slowly, and the power sector is not phasing out fossil fuel generation nor introducing renewables quickly enough," Tanner told AFP.

Sectors and companies that fail to accelerate the transition to low carbon economies face a massive risk of stranded assets, he added. —AFP

## Business

# German economy sees biggest blow since 2009 financial crisis

## Output shrank 5.0 percent year-on-year

FRANKFURT: Germany's economy suffered its biggest contraction last year since the 2009 financial crash, as it was hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, official data showed yesterday. Output shrank 5.0 percent year-on-year, as "almost all economic sectors were markedly affected by the corona pandemic", the federal statistics agency Destatis said.

The downturn ended 10 years of growth, Destatis added, though its figure was better than the government's own forecast, which had anticipated a decline of 5.5 percent. In 2009, in the midst of a global economic crisis, gross domestic product (GDP) had plunged by 5.7 percent. "Measured against the original fears after the outbreak of the pandemic, this sad result is also a success in damage limitation," said Fritzi Koehler-Geib, chief economist at the KfW public bank.

The 2020 German slump is smaller than others recorded in France, Italy or Spain, where GDP is projected to have declined by 9.3, 9.0 and 11.1 percent respectively, according to European Central Bank forecasts. The pandemic's first wave caused the worst quarterly drop in GDP on record, when output plummeted 9.8 percent in the three months from April to June.

But the economy recovered, expanding by 8.5 percent in the third quarter, before slowing down again following a resurgence of the virus. Germany owes much to its robust industrial base,

including the car sector and machine makers, even though manufacturing, which accounts for about a quarter of the economy, was particularly hit by pandemic restrictions, Destatis said.

Physical retail trade declined substantially as online trade boomed, the agency said, while restrictions closing hotels, restaurants and bars led to a dramatic decline in hospitality. Yet, with many businesses shutdown again since November, the 2020 GDP data "must be seen as a positive surprise," said Uwe Burkert, head economist at LBBW bank.

### Second wave

Like its neighbors, the country of 83 million people has been hit hard by a resurgence in coronavirus cases, prompting the shuttering of bars, gyms, cultural and leisure centers in November, followed by non-essential shops in December. But unlike during the first wave, the latest restrictions did not close Germany's export-oriented factories or manufacturing businesses, meaning they have had less impact on the economy than earlier in the year.

Industrial orders jumped 2.3 percent in November month-on-month, Destatis data showed, while manufacturing production rose 0.9 percent. Both indicators have been rising for several months, buoyed by a recovery in demand from China where the virus has been largely contained. "The German economy was



WOLFSBURG, Germany: This file photo taken on Dec 4, 2018 shows Volkswagen cars presented at the carmaker's storage facility auto tower. — AFP

less affected by the second round of restrictions than by the first," Destatis president Georg Thiel commented.

It means that, while "it now seems likely that

GDP will decline in the first quarter of 2021," according to Andrew Kenningham at Capital Economics, "it should expand rapidly after that as the vaccination program is rolled out." — AFP

### News in brief

#### Tesla asked to recall 158,000 cars

WASHINGTON: US regulators asked Tesla Wednesday to recall 158,000 cars in the United States because of a safety-related defect. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in a letter to Tesla that a problem with the cars' display screen and related failures result in loss of rearview camera and other safety-related vehicle functions. The agency said the defect has been found in certain 2012 through 2018 Tesla Model S cars and 2016 through 2018 Model Xs. The request is a major headache for the company, as 158,000 vehicles represent nearly one-third of all cars delivered by the manufacturer in 2020. — AFP

#### High streets could lose 400,000 jobs

LONDON: Main shopping streets in England's towns and cities could lose another 400,000-plus jobs after coronavirus passes, as Britons continue to work from home and buy online, accountants KPMG said yesterday. COVID-19 has already ravaged the UK retail sector, with tens of thousands of jobs being lost and big-name bankruptcies, although supermarkets have boomed. "The reduction in commuter footfall (and) the accelerated shift to online shopping is exacerbating the vacuum in city and town centers, with less people calling in to shop," said the KPMG study of 109 towns and cities. — AFP

## China trade surplus with US widens to \$317bn in 2020

BEIJING: China's trade surplus with the United States widened last year, underlining the failure of Donald Trump to narrow the gap during his tenure, while demand soared for electronics and medical equipment during the coronavirus pandemic. The pickup came on the back of a jump in exports through most of last year as China's factories kicked back into gear from the second quarter following a strict lockdown that managed to broadly contain COVID-19 and allow economic activity to return.

Trump had made addressing the gaping trade gap with China a priority when he took office four years ago, and signed a partial agreement with Beijing to boost the country's purchases of goods such as soybeans. But Chinese customs data showed the surplus with the US climbed 7.1 percent to \$316.9 billion in 2020. The figure is a 14.9 percent jump from 2017's surplus of \$275.8 billion - which was already a sensitive political issue due to Trump's claims that China held unfair practices and killed US jobs.

While the world's second-largest economy suffered a record contraction in the first quarter of last year as the coronavirus essentially brought all activity to a halt, it soon recovered as lockdowns around the country were eased and people went back to work. Total exports rose 3.6 percent, though imports shrank 1.1 percent.

In December, however, both exports and imports rose more

than expected, at 18.1 percent and 6.5 percent respectively. "With the pandemic under control in China, factories and export-oriented companies have resumed normal operations earlier than most other countries, allowing China to meet global demand better," said Axi strategist Stephen Innes.

The country posted a trade surplus for last month of \$78 billion, which analysts said was "at or near record levels". Customs spokesman Li Kuiwen told reporters Thursday that "facing unprecedented difficulties and challenges, our country's imports and exports delivered a brilliant report card", adding that the outcome was "significantly better than expected".

Li said outbound shipments of electronics rose, with increases seen in notebook computers and household appliances, as well as medical instruments and equipment. Iris Pang, ING chief economist for Greater China, told AFP that China's exports likely did well as "other exporters for most of the year had been in difficult positions because of COVID-19", shifting more orders to China.

On the US-China surplus, she said coronavirus restrictions in the US would also have hit export capacity. "The other thing is, during COVID-19, some commodity prices went down and affected the value of what China imported," she said, adding that Beijing will likely continue to fulfil its terms of the trade deal with the US, barring added demands from Washington.

Lu Ting, chief China economist for Nomura, noted that China's imports from the US jumped 45 percent on-year in December, "pointing to Beijing's continued effort to fulfill its commitments on the phase-one trade deal". US-China relations have deteriorated to their worst in decades under the Trump administration, largely because of the trade war that saw Washington hit Chinese imports with huge tariffs-drawing retaliation and tit-for-tat moves. — AFP

# Ronaldo v Lukaku as title chasing Juventus, Inter clash

## Milan face struggling Cagliari with a chance to extend lead

**MILAN:** Cristiano Ronaldo's Juventus and Romelu Lukaku's Inter Milan clash on Sunday in what could be one of the defining matches of the Serie A season. The game in the San Siro is between the top two in Serie A last season when Juventus won a ninth consecutive league title just one point ahead of Inter.

It also pits the division's top two scorers against each other. Ronaldo has 15 goals; Lukaku has 12. Both teams are favorites this campaign with Inter second, three points behind leaders AC Milan, with Juventus fourth, seven points adrift of top spot with a game in hand. As Antonio Conte's Inter and Andrea Pirlo's Juve battle it out, Milan have a chance to increase their advantage at the half-way point this season as they travel to struggling Cagliari. Juventus, Inter and Milan are all coming off grueling Italian Cup fixtures midweek, needing 120 minutes of play each to advance to the quarter-finals.

Conte brushed aside concerns ahead of a match

which could determine his side's chances of a first Serie A title since 2010. "Every victory provides you with pure energy, wins recharge the batteries," insisted the former Juventus and Chelsea coach. "We've got time to recover ahead of Sunday's match, which is an important test to ascertain the level we're at and see the extent to which we've reduced the gap compared to last season."

Inter's focus is now on domestic trophies with their European ambitions stifled. After an eight-match winning run, the Lombardy side have lost momentum, dropping five points in two games with defeat to Sampdoria and drawing at Roma. Inter have not beaten Juventus since September 2016 — with a run of five defeats and two draws. By contrast, after a stuttering debut, Pirlo's champions have bounced back with three wins in a row including 3-1 over AC Milan in the San Siro a week ago.

The clash is between a team with the best attack

in the league, with Inter scoring 43 goals, against the one with the tightest defense with 16 goals conceded. Friday's Rome derby kicks off the weekend of football behind closed doors, with third-placed Roma looking to get back winning after last weekend's 2-2 draw to Inter against local rivals Lazio, in eighth. Atalanta and Napoli, two points behind Juventus, in the European places, host Genoa and Fiorentina respectively. AS Roma midfielder Pellegrini will be the only Rome-born player for either team on the pitch in the city derby. The 24-year-old Italian international came through Roma's youth system, and has scored 13 goals in 127 games. Pellegrini was decisive the last time Roma beat Lazio in September 2018, scoring and setting up another in a 3-1 win. "Pellegrini embodies our project," said Roma's new general manager Tiago Pinto. "He's a young, talented player with a great love for Roma. We will do everything possible to negotiate his (contract) renewal." —AFP



**TURIN:** Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo warms up prior to the Italian Cup (Coppa Italia) round of sixteen football match Juventus vs Genoa on Wednesday at the Juventus stadium in Turin. —AFP

## Santos beat Boca to secure all-Brazil Copa Libertadores final

**SANTOS:** Santos defeated Argentina's Boca Juniors 3-0 to set up an all-Brazilian Copa Libertadores final after a one-sided semi-final victory in Sao Paulo on Wednesday. Goals from Diego Pituca, Yeferson Soteldo and Lucas Braga fired the Sao Paulo giants into a January 30 final against city rivals Palmeiras.

With the tie finely balanced after a goalless first leg in Buenos Aires last week, the two sides battled it out behind closed doors at the Vila Belmiro stadium because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Santos, the team of legendary forward Pele, will now face Palmeiras at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana stadium in a final pushed back from November 2020 due to the global health crisis.

After hitting the woodwork within seconds of the kick-off on Wednesday, Santos took the lead on 17 minutes when Pituca punished hesitation in the Boca defence to turn a left-footed shot into the bottom corner from close range.

Venezuelan international Soteldo then doubled the lead for Santos in the 49th minute with a magnificent individual strike, picking the ball up on the left flank about 30 yards from goal before cutting in and unleashing an unstoppable right foot shot into the top corner.

Two minutes later and Santos made the game safe with a well-worked goal that saw Marinho dart down the right flank before cutting a low cross into the path of Braga, who swept in the finish for 3-0. Despite numerous attempts, six-time cup winners Boca could just not find the goal, failing to break through a spirited defense and outplayed by their rivals.

Palmeiras completed a 3-2 aggregate victory over Argentina's River Plate on Tuesday in their Sao Paulo second leg. Santos has lifted the Copa Libertadores three times, in 1962, 1963 and 2011, and will be looking to become the first Brazilian team to win the continental crown four times. Palmeiras by contrast has just one Libertadores title, in 1999, since the tournament started in 1960. —AFP

## Juve join Napoli, Inter, Milan in Italian Cup quarters

**MILAN:** Tunisian midfielder Hamza Rafia came off the bench to score an extra-time winner on his debut as Juventus battled past Genoa 3-2 to reach the Italian Cup quarter-finals on Wednesday. Rafia, 21, came on with quarter of an hour to go in regular time and scored his first Juventus goal after 105 minutes in Turin.

Andrea Pirlo's side had let a two-goal advantage slip to allow Genoa back into the game. "Had we made the most of all the opportunities we had in the first half we would have avoided complicating our lives," said Pirlo.

"We could have managed the double advantage better to avoid extra time and save some strength for Inter (this weekend). But I'm satisfied, there were many lads on the pitch for the first time so there may have been some lapses."

Cristiano Ronaldo started on the bench with forward Alvaro Morata and defender Giorgio Chiellini returning from injury. Chiellini set up Dejan Kulusevski to open the scoring after two minutes in the Allianz Stadium.

Kulusevski then sent through for Morata to double their tally after 23 minutes. But five minutes later Lennart Czyborra headed in to revive Genoa hopes. Filippo Melegoni curled in the equaliser from outside the box, beating veteran keeper Gianluigi Buffon with quarter of an hour to go.

Ronaldo came off the bench with two minutes to go in regular time. The



**TURIN:** Juventus' Tunisian midfielder Hamza Rafia (center) celebrates after he scored during the Italian Cup (Coppa Italia) round of sixteen football match Juventus vs Genoa on Wednesday at the Juventus stadium in Turin. —AFP

Portuguese forward had a role in the winner, sending Morata through to tee up Rafia with Brazilian Arthur saving Juventus by heading off the line three minutes later. Juventus, the record 13-time winners, next meet either Sassuolo or SPAL.

Romelu Lukaku headed in an extra-time winner as Inter Milan set up a quarter-final clash with city rivals AC Milan with a 2-1 win over Fiorentina. Holders Napoli advanced with a hard-fought 3-2 win over Serie B leaders Empoli. —AFP

## Bess five-for as England skittle Sri Lanka for 135

**GALLE:** Off-spinner Dom Bess claimed five wickets as England bowled out Sri Lanka for 135 after the hosts elected to bat in the opening Test yesterday. Bess, who returned figures of 5-30, com-

bined with paceman Stuart Broad, who took three wickets, as Sri Lanka were all out in two sessions before heading for an early tea.

It was the lowest first-innings score seen at Galle, well below Sri Lanka's 181 against Pakistan in 2000. The hosts suffered a pre-match jolt when skipper Dimuth Karunaratne was ruled out of the first of the two Tests with a fractured thumb.

Stand-in-captain Dinesh Chandimal scored 28 and put up some resistance in a 56-run stand with Angelo Mathews, who made 27 on his return from a hamstring injury. Broad struck twice in an over to send back opener Lahiru Thirimanne, who had scored four, and Kusal Mendis for nought to spell early trouble for the hosts. —AFP

## Sports

# Barca reach Spanish Super Cup final after Ter Stegen penalty heroics

## Barcelona face Real Madrid or Athletic Bilbao Sunday

**MADRID:** Marc-Andre ter Stegen's heroics ensured Barcelona edged past Real Sociedad on penalties on Wednesday to reach the Spanish Super Cup final, without the injured Lionel Messi. Messi was watching on as Ter Stegen did his best to fill the void in Cordoba, the goalkeeper immense both in the shoot-out and during normal time, which had finished 1-1.

Frenkie de Jong's header was cancelled out by a penalty from Mikel Oyarzabal, who then missed in the shoot-out, one of two crucial saves made by Ter Stegen before 21-year-old Riqui Puig hit the winning shot. "I wasn't down to take one but we needed one more taker and I stepped forward," said Puig.

Barca advance to meet either Real Madrid or Athletic Bilbao in the final on Sunday, when Messi is expected to be available again, although coach Ronald Koeman was cautious at full-time. "We have to wait," he said.

Koeman's team have a mountain to climb in La Liga's title race but they are improving, now nine games unbeaten and with a trophy in their grasp. This is the second year of the Spanish Super Cup's new format, which has four teams playing each other in a semi-final and final.

Athletic Bilbao and Real Sociedad joined after reaching the final of last season's Copa del

Rey, which is still to be played, while Barcelona finished runners-up to Madrid in La Liga. Yet while last season's version controversially took place in Saudi Arabia, the pandemic means this year's semis are in Cordoba and Malaga, with the final to be played in Seville.

Barca were the better side in the first half but had Ter Stegen to thank for not conceding early as Alexander Isak sped into the area only to see his chipped finish saved by the goalkeeper. It was De Jong's dash to the near post that brought the first goal, an Antoine Griezmann cross hanging just long enough for the midfielder to get there first and direct a superb header in.

Yet De Jong gave Real Sociedad a way back just after half-time, the ball striking him on the hand and allowing Oyarzabal to equalise from the spot. Barca nearly pulled ahead instantly as De Jong swivelled in the box, only to take an unnecessary extra touch. Ousmane Dembele fired just wide and Trincao, on as a substitute, also had a chance to win it before the 90 minutes were up.

Zaldúa unleashed in extra time but Ter Stegen tipped over. Dembele's finish was saved too while Adnan Januzaj poked wide at the end of a brilliant run and then hit the post with a free-



**CORDOBA:** Barcelona players celebrate their victory after the penalty shoot-out in Spanish Super Cup semi-final football match between Real Sociedad and FC Barcelona at the Nuevo Arcangel stadium in Cordoba on Wednesday. —AFP

kick. Into the shoot-out, and Jon Bautista's first attempt was parried away by Ter Stegen, only for De Jong to hit the post.

But Oyarzabal, who had scored earlier from the spot, this time missed, Ter Stegen guessing right again. Dembele scored before Willian Jose

struck the post. Miralem Pjanic tucked in and so did Mikel Merino under pressure. Griezmann could have won it but ballooned over before Januzaj converted for 2-2, which left it up to Puig to win it for Barca, the youngster slamming home for a spot in the final. —AFP

## Neymar helps PSG to Champions Trophy triumph over Marseille

**LENS:** Neymar scored on his return to action for Paris Saint-Germain as they beat arch rivals Marseille 2-1 to win this season's Champions Trophy. The Brazilian rolled home an 85th minute penalty to put PSG two goals ahead following Mauro Icardi's first-half opener to give new coach Mauricio Pochettino the first trophy of his reign in the French capital, and managerial career. "I hope to win more titles, but the first will always be special," said Pochettino. "We deserved this victory, we played a good match."

The Champions Trophy is the French equivalent of a Super Cup, usually contested at the start of the season by the league champions and French Cup winners. With PSG winning both last season, Marseille had been selected as their opponents as the Ligue 1 runners-up. This season's edition was delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic. Hopes were high for a feisty tussle in Lens after Marseille's league win at PSG in September ended with five red cards and Neymar accusing Marseille

center back Alvaro Gonzalez of racism in the aftermath. However it was a largely tame encounter in northern France, with the most noteworthy incident being substitute Neymar's goalscoring return after a month away. The 28-year-old hadn't featured for the French champions since being stretchered off with an ankle injury during a 1-0 defeat to current league leaders Lyon on December 13. Icardi thought he had given PSG the lead with a 22nd minute tap-in, only to have the goal ruled out for off-side after Kylian Mbappe strayed past Marseille's back line to collect Leandro Paredes' defense-splitting pass.

Seven minutes later it was Mbappe's turn to have a goal chalked off when he started his run too early to connect with a long pass from his captain Marquinhos. Icardi finally put dominant PSG ahead six minutes before the break with a goal typical of his poacher's style, first meeting Angel Di Maria's raking long ball with a close-range header that Steven Mandanda pushed onto the post. The Argentine was quickest to follow up as the ball dribbled back out from the goal, and he tapped in his second goal in as many games since returning from injury. He almost doubled his side's lead in first half stoppage time when he hit a left-footed strike back off the crossbar. —AFP

## 'Shocked' Bayern Munich knocked out of German Cup

**BERLIN:** Bayern Munich head coach Hansi Flick was "shocked" as the holders crashed out of the German Cup on Wednesday after defeat at second division Holstein Kiel, who won a nail-biting penalty shoot-out 6-5 as the second round tie finished 2-2 after extra-time. "It's a shock. We are enormously disappointed," Flick told Sky. "It's all the more annoying that we conceded an equalizer which made it 2-2 in the last second (of normal time). Congratulations to Kiel. We have to put it behind us and do things better."

Bayern forward Thomas Mueller said the defeat was "brutal". This is the first time Bayern have been knocked out of the cup by a non-Bundesliga club since losing to then fourth-tier Magdeburg in 2000/01. After Bayern midfielder Marc Roca was the first player to miss with his team's sixth penalty, Kiel's Fin Bartels converted the winning spot-kick to spark wild celebrations. The upset means this is the first time European champions Bayern have been eliminated from a cup competition since Flick took charge in November 2019.

Bayern were 2-1 up thanks to goals by Serge

Gnabry and Leroy Sane, either side of a superb Bartels strike, before a last-gasp header by Kiel captain Hauke Wahl on 95 minutes took the game to extra time, then penalties. "Even if it sounds stupid after a cup defeat against an underdog from Kiel - luck wasn't on our side," said Mueller.

"It's certainly not FC Bayern's best phase," he added as the European champions also crashed to a 3-2 league defeat at Borussia Muenchengladbach last Friday. "Being knocked out is brutal, we have to let that sink in first." The German FA gave Bayern permission to postpone the cup tie from late December. Bayern fielded a near-full strength side with only top-scoring striker Robert Lewandowski, who made a second-half cameo, and centre-back Jerome Boateng started on the bench.

Lewandowski's stand-in Gnabry gave Bayern the lead after only 14 minutes. When Kiel goalkeeper Ioannis Gelios parried a Thomas Mueller header, it fell straight to the feet of Germany winger Gnabry who tapped into an empty net.

Having started 2021 top of the second division after five straight wins, Kiel caused nervous looks in Bayern's ranks when Bartels, 33, put them level. The former Bremen veteran sprinted onto a long ball, avoided the challenge of Bayern defender Bouna Sarr and fired past Manuel Neuer eight minutes from half time. However, Sane restored the lead just three minutes after the break. —AFP

## Sports

# Harden joining Brooklyn Nets in blockbuster deal

## Move ends Houston drama, reunites Harden, Durant in 'new super team'

**LOS ANGELES:** James Harden is joining the Brooklyn Nets in a blockbuster NBA trade from the Houston Rockets, US media reported Wednesday. ESPN and The Athletic reported that the 2018 NBA MVP will head to the Nets in a trade that will see Harden reunited with former Oklahoma City Thunder team-mate Kevin Durant.

The 31-year-old played alongside Durant for three seasons in Oklahoma City between 2009 and 2012. ESPN reported that the complex deal also involved the Indiana Pacers and Cleveland Cavaliers. In exchange for Harden, Houston received multiple players and draft picks as well as guard Caris LeVert. LeVert was traded immediately to the Pacers in exchange for Victor Oladipo. There was no immediate confirmation of the deal by Houston or Brooklyn.

Harden's move raises the prospect of the Nets emerging as a new super team, with the unhappy Rockets ace joining forces with Durant and Kyrie Irving. Harden's exit from the Rockets had loomed ever closer, with team-mates complaining of his attitude in the locker room.

On Tuesday, Harden had lashed out after the Rockets were thumped 117-100 at home by the Los Angeles Lakers. "I love this city," Harden said. "I literally have done everything that I can. I mean, this situation is crazy. It's something that I don't think can be fixed."

Team-mate John Wall, who arrived in Houston this year from the Washington Wizards, accused Harden of not being committed to the team. "When you have certain guys that don't want to buy in, it's hard," said Wall.

On Wednesday, Harden was barred from team practice following his outburst. "We felt it was best for James and best for the group for him not to be at practice," Rockets coach Stephen Silas told reporters on a video call. Silas said Harden's criticisms had been "hard to hear." "Especially when you don't believe it and you know it not to be true," he said.

The Rockets' DeMarcus Cousins meanwhile accused Harden of being "disrespectful" to the Houston locker room. "Will he ever need to play with us again? I don't know, quite honestly don't care," Cousins said. "He can feel however he wants to feel with the organization but the other 14 guys in the locker room have done nothing to him. So for us to be on the receiving end of some of the disrespectful comments and antics, it's completely unfair to us."

Harden, an eight-time NBA All-Star and a prolific scorer, joined Houston in 2012 after starting his career in Oklahoma City. However he was unable to guide the Rockets to an NBA Championship during that time, and instead suffered a string of playoff disappointments, with Houston failing to make the NBA finals once in eight straight playoff appearances. — AFP



**SAITAMA:** In this file photo taken on October 10, 2019 Houston's guard James Harden answers a question after the NBA Japan Games 2019 pre-season basketball match between Houston Rockets and Toronto Raptors in Saitama, northern suburb of Tokyo. —AFP

## Nets await trade with dominant display, Lakers win

**LOS ANGELES:** The Brooklyn Nets limbered up for the expected arrival of James Harden in a blockbuster NBA trade with a 116-109 victory over the New York Knicks on Wednesday. Star forward Kevin Durant scored 26 points to lead seven Nets players in double figures — a performance all the more impressive with just nine Brooklyn players available.

News that the Houston Rockets would send their disgruntled star Harden to Brooklyn in a four-team deal electrified the league on Wednesday. It had yet to be confirmed, but the four players reported to be on their way out of Brooklyn — Caris LeVert, Jarrett Allen, Rodions Kurucs and Taurian Prince were unavailable and, according to coach Steve Nash, not at Madison Square Garden. Durant, however, scoffed at the suggestion the proposed deal had made for "drama and chaos" around a team already dealing with the absence of Kyrie Irving for undisclosed personal reasons.

### Conference challenge

"The game simply is enough for us," Durant said. "The guys are coming out there enjoying playing every day no matter what the circumstance is. There's a lot going on throughout the season, and in this world right now, but basketball is one thing everybody in this locker room enjoys."

Durant, back this season after missing an

entire campaign recovering from a torn Achilles tendon, played on back-to-back nights for the first time, logging 30 minutes and connecting on 10 of 18 shots from the field, including three from three-point range.

The Nets, with Durant and Irving healthy, were already expected to contend in the East. The addition of former MVP Harden — the league's top scorer the past three seasons — would enhance their ability to challenge in a conference led by the Milwaukee Bucks in the past two seasons.

The Bucks notched their third straight win, 110-101 over the Pistons in Detroit, on

the back of a triple-double from two-time defending NBA MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo. Antetokounmpo delivered 22 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for his 20th career triple-double.

Jrue Holiday added 21 points as five Bucks players scored in double digits in the comfortable win. Brook Lopez drained three three-pointers in the first quarter and Milwaukee finished with 19 baskets from beyond the arc in a game they led by as many as 23 points. It was just one lopsided result on a night that saw the reigning champion Los Angeles Lakers rout the Thunder 128-99 in Oklahoma City. The Lakers improved their league-leading record to 10-3 and remained unbeaten in seven games on the road — their best road start ever in a season. — AFP



**NEW YORK:** Kevin Durant #7 of the Brooklyn Nets shoots the ball during the game against the New York Knicks on Wednesday at Madison Square Garden in New York City, New York. —AFP

## Stanley Cup champion Lightning beat Hawks in season opener

**LOS ANGELES:** The Tampa Bay Lightning got their Stanley Cup title defense off to a roaring start on Wednesday by dominating the Chicago Blackhawks 5-1 on the same night they unveiled their second Stanley Cup championship banner.

Canadian forward Steven Stamkos had a goal and two assists and goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 22 shots in the season opening night of the 2020-21 NHL regular season which included a five-game slate. The Lightning began the 56-game season Wednesday but they won't be defending their title in front of home fans right away due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The team showed off their new championship banner at center ice in front of some family members of the players. They have decided to wait to raise it to the rafters until ticket-buying fans are allowed back into the arena which won't take place before at least February 7. Tampa beat the Dallas Stars in six games in last season's playoff final and this banner will join the one they captured in 2004 by beating the Calgary Flames in seven games. Stamkos, Ondrej Palat, Mathieu Joseph, Anthony Cirelli and Brayden Point scored goals for the Lightning who improved their league-leading winning percentage to 19-7-2 in season openers.

Dylan Strome scored late in the game on a power play for Chicago, and goalie Malcolm Subban stopped 28 of 33 shots in his 61st NHL start. Tampa played without star forward Nikita Kucherov who will undergo hip surgery and is expected to miss the entire season. In Philadelphia, American Joel Farabee finished with a goal and four points as the host Philadelphia Flyers scored three unanswered goals in the final period to beat Sidney Crosby's Pittsburgh Penguins 6-3. — AFP



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