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

India starts vaccine drive as global deaths top 2 million

Lebanon hits record coronavirus deaths, infections



KUWAIT: Environment Public Authority and Kuwait coastguard personnel remove the carcass of a whale found near Jaber Causeway yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

NEW DELHI: India kicked off one of the world's largest coronavirus vaccination drives yesterday as the pandemic spread at a record pace and global COVID-19 deaths surged past two million. The World Health Organization has called for accelerating vaccine rollouts worldwide as well as ramping up efforts to study the sequencing of the virus, which has infected more than 93 million people globally since it was first detected in China in late 2019.

India, home to 1.3 billion people, has the world's second-largest caseload. The government has given approvals to two vaccines - though one is yet to complete clinical trials - aiming to inoculate around 300 million people by July. One of the first to receive a jab in the eastern city of Kolkata was 35-year-old health worker Santa Roy, who told AFP he now saw a "ray of hope" after witnessing people die of the coronavirus.

Authorities say they are drawing on their experience with elections and child immunization programs for the drive, which is a daunting task in an enormous, impoverished nation with often shoddy transport infrastructure and one of the world's

worst-funded healthcare systems. Regular child inoculations are a "much smaller game" and vaccinating against COVID-19 will be "deeply challenging", said Satyajit Rath from India's National Institute of Immunology.

The government has readied tens of thousands of refrigeration tools and about 150,000 specially trained staff to try and overcome some of those challenges. The vaccines will also have high security, so that doses do not end up being sold on India's large black market for medicines. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Friday said he wanted "to see vaccination under way in every country in the next 100 days so that health workers and those at high risk are protected first".

His call came as infections snowballed, with 724,000 new cases recorded on average per day globally over the past week, according to AFP's tally - a record 10 percent increase on a week earlier. The worrying spikes in deaths and infections come as concerns and criticism grow over vaccine logistics and supply issues in many parts of the world.

Continued on Page 2

WhatsApp delays data share update after backlash

SAN FRANCISCO: WhatsApp on Friday postponed a data-sharing change as users concerned about privacy fled the Facebook-owned messaging service and flocked to rivals Telegram and Signal. The smartphone app, a huge hit across the world, canceled its Feb 8 deadline for accepting an update to its terms concerning sharing data with Facebook, saying it would use the pause to clear up misinformation around privacy and security.

"We've heard from so many people how much confusion there is around our recent update," WhatsApp said in a blog post. "This update does not expand our ability to share data with Facebook." It said it would instead "go to people gradually to review the policy at their own pace before new business options are available on May 15".

The update concerns how merchants using WhatsApp to chat with customers can share data with Facebook, which could use the information for targeted ads, according to the social network. "We can't see your private messages or hear your calls, and neither can Facebook," WhatsApp said in an earlier blog post. "We don't keep logs of who everyone is messaging or calling. We can't see your shared location and neither can Facebook."

Location data along with message contents is encrypted end-to-end, according to WhatsApp. "We're giving businesses the option to use secure hosting services from Facebook to manage WhatsApp chats with their customers, answer questions, and send helpful information like purchase receipts," WhatsApp said in a post. "Whether you communicate with a business by phone, email, or WhatsApp, it can see what you're saying and may use that information for its own marketing purposes, which may include advertising on Facebook."

Technology experts note that WhatsApp's new requirement of its users makes legally binding a policy that has been widely in use since 2016. Facebook aims to monetize WhatsApp by allowing businesses to contact clients via the platform, making it natural for the internet giant to centralize some data on its servers.

The Turkish Competition Authority said it is opening an investigation and requiring WhatsApp to suspend the data sharing

Continued on Page 2

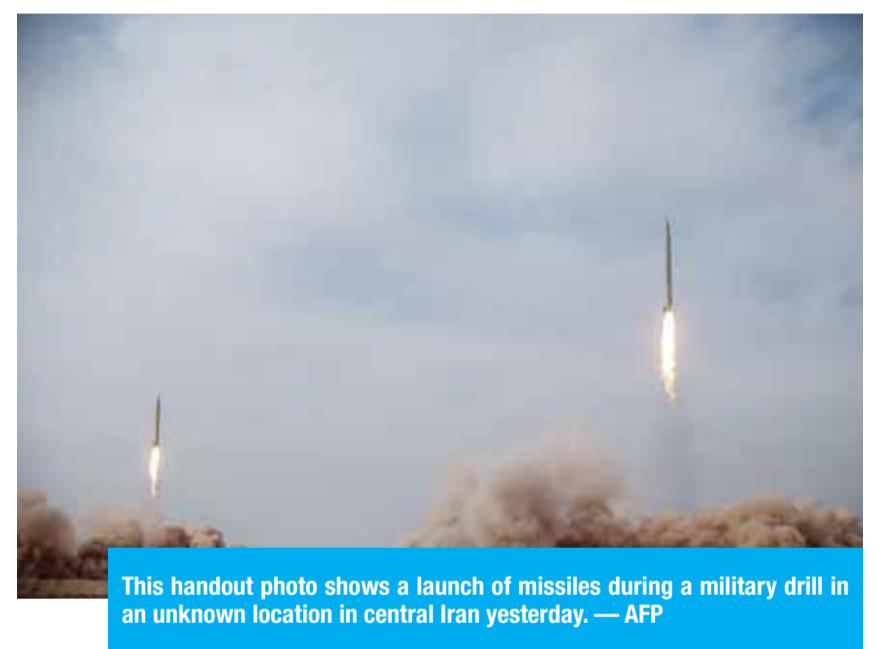
Iran test-fires missiles on targets at sea

TEHRAN: Iran's Revolutionary Guards test-fired ballistic missiles against targets in the Indian Ocean as they wrapped up a two-day exercise, their official website reported yesterday. The missiles of "various classes" targeted "the enemy's battleships and destroyed them from 1,800 km away," according to the Sepahnews website. The missiles were fired from central Iran at targets located in the northern Indian Ocean, the Guards said. A video released by state television showed two missiles being launched and targets being hit at sea.

Iran's armed forces chief of staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri was present on the second day of the drill, alongside Guards chief Major General Hossein Salami and aerospace commander Brigadier General Amirali Hajizadeh. "One of our major goals in defense policies and strategies is to be able to target enemy ships, including aircraft carriers and battleships, using long-range ballistic missiles," Salami said, quoted by Sepahnews.

Bagheri said the launch showed Iran was ready to respond to any "ill will" by its enemies, warning that in such cases "they will be targeted and destroyed by our missiles". "We do not intend to carry out any attack," he said, adding the exercise showed Iran's readiness to defend itself "with all its strength" against any aggressor.

Continued on Page 2



This handout photo shows a launch of missiles during a military drill in an unknown location in central Iran yesterday. — AFP

Nepal team claim first winter ascent of Pakistan's K2

ISLAMABAD: A team of Nepali climbers made history yesterday after becoming the first to summit Pakistan's K2 in winter, on the same afternoon a Spanish mountaineer fell and died lower down the perilous peak. Dozens of climbers have been competing over the past few weeks to summit the world's second highest mountain, the last peak

above 8,000 m to be topped in wintertime. "WE DID IT," tweeted Seven Summit Treks, a trekking company leading one of the expeditions. "The Karakorum's 'Savage Mountain' been summited in most dangerous season: winter. Nepalese climbers finally reached the summit of Mt K2 this afternoon at 17:00 local time."

But the success was overshadowed by the death of a Spanish climber, Sergi Mingote, lower down the mountain. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez described him as a "great sportsman" on Twitter, writing: "He wanted to keep on making history... and a tragic accident ended his life." The Alpine Club of Pakistan said in a statement that the climber fell while descending to Base Camp shortly before 4 pm.

Secretary Karrar Haidri added the club was helping to coordinate the evacuation of the body, but with weather conditions expected to be poor overnight, it would be done today morning. The name "Savage Mountain" comes from the punishing conditions there - winds can blow at more than 200 km per hour and temperatures can drop to minus 60 degrees Celsius. Since the maiden attempt in 1987-1988, just a handful of winter expeditions have been tried on the storied 8,611-metre (28,250-foot) peak in the Karakoram range along the Chinese border. None had got higher than 7,650 m until yesterday, when the good conditions allowed the successful team to push ahead.

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Trump to leave town before inauguration

WASHINGTON: By the time Joe Biden is sworn in as the 46th US president Wednesday, his scandal-tainted predecessor Donald Trump will already be far away, having helicoptered out of the White House a last time earlier that morning, an official said Friday. Trump will be the first president in a century and a half to snub the inauguration of his successor.

An official who asked not to be

identified said Trump would go to his Mar-a-Lago golf club in Florida, which is his legal residence and will become home after the White House. He is expected to be out of town well before Biden is sworn in on the steps of the Capitol building at exactly noon.

After spending more than two months trying to overturn the results of the November election, pushing false conspiracy theories about fraud, Trump's presence had not been expected at the inauguration. The final straw came on Jan 6 when Trump gathered a huge crowd of supporters on the National Mall and once more claimed that they had to fight to stop a fraudulent election.

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WASHINGTON: National Guard troops are seen on the lawn of the US Capitol building on Friday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait lists 435 new COVID cases, no deaths

Total cases up to 157,399, deaths at 947

KUWAIT: Kuwait listed 435 new coronavirus infections and no virus-related deaths yesterday, taking the total to 157,399 and 947 respectively, the health ministry said. Kuwait had announced 530 new cases and one death on Friday. Meanwhile, the health ministry announced 349 recoveries yesterday, compared to 268 on Friday, raising total recoveries to 150,678.

The number of patients hospitalized stood yesterday at 5,774, including 48 in intensive care units, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad. This is down from 5,688 on Friday, although the number of ICU patients remained the same, according to ministry data. Dr Sanad also revealed yesterday that

health workers conducted 8,651 swab tests over the previous 24 hours, and 10,862 the day before, bringing the total up to 1,389,294.

Meanwhile, the health ministry posted further explanations on COVID-19 vaccine certificate yesterday. In a post on their Twitter account, the ministry showed that once a person receives both doses of the vaccine, they will receive a vaccination card, a text message with a link to the vaccination report, and a digital vaccine certificate on the 'Mosafer' app. Health Minister Dr Basel Al-Sabah had said Thursday that this digital certificate will be made available in case it becomes required for travel to certain countries in the future.



349 recoveries in 24 hours



435

إصابة جديدة
NEW CASES
الإجمالي
157,399

48 إجمالي الحالات في العناية المركزة
TOTAL SERIOUS CASES

تطورات مرض فيروس كورونا COVID-19

Saturday 2021/1/16 السبت

0

حالة وفاة جديدة
NEW DEATHS
الإجمالي
947

5,774 إجمالي الحالات التي تتلقى العلاج
TOTAL ACTIVE CASES



وزارة الصحة
الإعلام الصحي

349

حالة تعافي جديدة
NEW RECOVERIES
الإجمالي
150,678

8,651 مسحة جديدة
NEW TESTS
الإجمالي
1,389,294

حرصاً على سلامتكم، تنصح وزارة الصحة بتجنب السفر في الوقت الحالي.



Kuwait_moh
www.moh.gov.kw

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KUWAIT: Firemen battle a blaze reported in Shuwaikh yesterday.



Coastguard arrests 10 attempting to enter Kuwait

KUWAIT: Coastguards arrested 10 people who entered Kuwait illegally through Abdullah Port yesterday. Police headed to the scene after receiving a call about a number of people jumping out of a boat and into territo-

rial waters. People were able to arrest nine men, who admitted that they came from Iran on a boat that dropped them off and turned back. Coastguards were able to arrest the boat's sailor while he was on his way back to

Iran. The suspects, all Iranian, were taken to the proper authorities for further action.

Separately, firemen battled a blaze reported in a sanitary ware showroom in Shuwaikh yesterday, Kuwait Fire Force said. The flame spread over a 5,000-square-meter area, but firefighters managed to control the fire's spread and bring it under control. No injuries were reported, Kuwait Fire Force noted, adding that an investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire.



Two Iranian infiltrators who were caught.

WhatsApp delays data share update...

Continued from Page 1

obligation on its users. Several Turkish state organizations - including President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's media office - switched to Turkcell telecom's new messaging service BiP in response.

The terms of service tweak also put WhatsApp in the crosshairs in Italy and India, where a petition has been filed in a Delhi court. WhatsApp's notice to users lacked clarity and its privacy implications need to be carefully evaluated, Italian data protection agency GPDP said in a post at its website. GPDP said it has shared its concerns with the European Data Protection Board and reserved the right to intervene in the matter.

Facebook has come under increasing pressure from regulators as it tries to integrate its services. The EU fined the US social media giant \$110 million

(then \$120 million) for providing incorrect and misleading information about its 2014 takeover of WhatsApp concerning the ability to link accounts between the services. Federal and state regulators in US have accused Facebook of using its acquisitions of WhatsApp and Instagram to squelch competition and filed antitrust lawsuits last month that aim to force the company to divest them.

User privacy fears have been mounting, with Uber careful to stress that a change in app terms taking effect on Jan 18 has nothing to do with sharing data. Encrypted messaging app Telegram has seen user ranks surge on the heels of the WhatsApp service terms announcement, said its Russia-born founder Pavel Durov. "People no longer want to exchange their privacy for free services," Durov said without directly referring to the rival app.

Encrypted messaging app Signal has also seen a huge surge in demand, helped by a tweeted recommendation by billionaire tech entrepreneur Elon Musk. WhatsApp has sought to reassure worried users, even running full-page newspaper adverts in India, proclaiming that "respect for your privacy is coded into our DNA". —AFP

Commission said all vaccines ordered by the bloc for the first quarter would be delivered on time. But ministers from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden said in a joint letter that the situation was "unacceptable" and "decreases the credibility of the vaccination process".

Lebanon hit new daily records of 44 coronavirus deaths and over 6,000 new infections Friday, the second day of a lockdown aimed at preventing the country's creaking healthcare system from collapsing. The country of six million recorded 6,154 new infections over the past 24 hours, the health ministry said, as hospitals in Beirut reached full capacity.

The announcement came as the American University of Beirut's medical center, one of the country's top facilities, said that its intensive care units, COVID-19 units and emergency room were all full. "We are unable to find beds for even the most critical patients," it said in a statement. — AFP

transfer of power. Trump, who was impeached for a record second time in the wake of the Congress storming, has also broken with more discreet protocol by refusing to invite Biden and his wife Jill Biden to the White House for a traditional cup of tea in the Oval Office.

On Friday, Vice President Mike Pence did make the gesture of telephoning his incoming counterpart Kamala Harris, a source said. Although this came only five days before inauguration day - and more than two months after the election - The New York Times said Pence offered his congratulations and belated assistance to Harris, describing the exchange as "gracious and pleasant". — AFP

Nepal team claim first winter ascent...

Continued from Page 1

The 10 Nepali climbers had earlier been spread across different teams, but formed a new group in order to claim the feat in Nepal's name.

Despite being famed for their climbing expertise, there has never before been a Nepali climber on the first winter ascent of a peak over 8,000 m. One of the triumphant climbers, Nirmal Purja, who is also known as Nimsdai, described it as a "very special moment". "The whole team waited 10m below the summit to form a group then stepped onto the summit together whilst singing our Nepalese National Anthem," wrote Purja in a social media post.

"We are proud to have been a part of history for humankind and to show that collaboration, teamwork and a positive mental attitude can push limits to what we feel might be possible." At least one of the climbers, Mingma Gyalje Sherpa, had planned to reach the summit without using oxygen.

The news sparked joy throughout Nepal, long used to watching foreign climbers seize the records. "For decades, Nepalis have assisted foreigners to reach the summits of the Himalayas, but we've not been getting

the recognition we deserve," said renowned Nepali climber Kami Rita Sherpa, who has climbed Everest a record 24 times. "The spotlight has always been on foreign climbers. It is wonderful that today on K2 ten Nepalis have made history and shown our bravery and strength."

Nepali guides, usually ethnic Sherpas from the valleys around Everest, are considered the backbone of the climbing industry in the Himalayas for bearing huge risks to carry equipment and food, fix ropes and repair ladders. "Sherpas are top climbers of the world, and it is a proud moment for us. But reaching the summit is only the first half. We hope now that they can all make it back down safely," warned Ang Tshering Sherpa, the former president of the Nepal Mountaineering Association.

One of the final technical difficulties to be overcome by the group was the dreaded "bottleneck", a narrow and steep passage where 11 people were killed in Aug 2008 in K2's worst known tragedy. Many climbers have died trying to reach the summit, while others were killed on the dangerous descent. Lockdowns and travel bans sparked by the coronavirus pandemic meant the summer climbing season last year was a bust in most of the popular climbing destinations in the region, such as Nepal.

With Pakistan's borders open and few other places to go, this winter an unprecedented four teams totalling around 60 climbers converged on the mountain. — AFP

India starts vaccine drive as global...

Continued from Page 1

US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer said shipments of its vaccines would slow for a period in late January. In hard-hit Europe, there are concerns that the Pfizer delays could further slow a vaccine rollout that has already faced heavy criticism. Pfizer, which jointly developed its vaccine with German company BioNTech, said EU countries could expect delayed deliveries in the coming weeks due to work being done at its plant in Belgium.

It promised that there would be "a significant increase" in shipments in March, and the European

would no longer be handled by its European Command.

"We structure boundaries to best mitigate risk and protect US interests and partners," the Pentagon said in a statement. "The easing of tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbors subsequent to the Abraham Accords has provided a strategic opportunity for the United States to align key partners against shared threats in the Middle East."

That was mainly a reference to Iran, which the United States, Israel and Arab countries including leading power Saudi Arabia view as the leading security threat to the region. For decades at odds with its Arab neighbors over its treatment of Palestinians, Israel has over the past year broken barriers on open cooperation and communications with Gulf countries under the Trump-fostered Abraham Accords.

Moving it under the Central Command potentially makes security cooperation with the United States on regional matters easier, and could bring Israeli military officials in closer proximity to those of Gulf neighbors. But it could also complicate CentCom cooperation with Iran allies like Iraq, where the US retains 2,500 troops. "Israel is a leading strategic partner for the United States, and this will open up additional opportunities for cooperation with our US Central Command partners, while maintaining strong cooperation between Israel and our European allies," the Pentagon said. — AFP

Trump to leave town before...

Continued from Page 1

A mob then stormed Congress, halting proceedings underway to certify Biden's win.

For longer than anyone can remember, outgoing presidents have stood by their replacement on the Capitol steps, watching them take the oath - and in so doing showing visible support for the peaceful

Local

Kuwait welcomes newly-recruited helpers today, but fewer numbers taking up jobs

Pending issues delays recruitment of domestic helpers from Philippines

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti government has allowed entry of newly-recruited domestic helpers from labor-exporting countries such as the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka and elsewhere starting today. But here's the reality on the ground. India is not discouraging its nationals to work as domestic helpers in Kuwait, but fewer are taking up such jobs, although if they apply to work as housemaids, they can easily get hired.

Sri Lanka continues to send domestic helpers to Kuwait, but they only represent around 11 percent of the total domestic helper population. Talks are ongoing for the return of Ethiopian, Nepali and Indonesian housemaids, but there is no clear date as to when the agreement will be signed. Bangladesh only sends male domestic helpers to Kuwait and only a few hundreds come from Ivory Coast, Benin and Madagascar.

As for the Philippines, the second country after India to send the largest number of household workers to Kuwait, there are still pending issues to be settled, particularly the issue of the unified contract. According to a Kuwait Times source, if the unified contract is signed, deployment of new domestic helpers will resume immediately.

According to the source, until such a document is signed, there will be no deployment of new Filipino domestic helpers. Only returning Filipino domestic helpers can re-enter Kuwait, although they need to follow the 14-day quarantine procedure set by the government, plus the two required PCR tests upon arrival and at the end of the quarantine period.

Before the lockdown in March 2020, there were some ongoing talks between Kuwait and the Philippines (joint committee meetings) on the rights of domestic helpers and employers, but the talks stalled due to the pandemic. "A series of joint committee meetings between Kuwait and the Philippines were held, and the only remaining part is the signing of what has been agreed upon. But due to the lockdowns, these efforts are pending. Technically speaking, all the concerns of both sides were tackled and almost resolved, but due to the coronavirus, talks were suspended and documents have not been reviewed and signed yet," the source added.

Recruitment ban

On Jan 3, 2020, the Philippines implemented a ban on sending domestic workers to Kuwait following the death of Jeanelyn Padernal Villavende on Dec 28, 2019. The ban was lifted a month later after consultations with the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the filing of appropriate charges against the perpetrators and after Manila and Kuwait City agreed the full implementation of a harmonized employment contract for Filipino domestic workers. On Dec 30, 2020, a death verdict by hanging was handed by the criminal court to a Kuwaiti woman who killed Villavende. The woman's husband was sentenced to four years in jail for covering up and not reporting the crime.

Nationality	النسبة (%) Percentage (%)			العدد Number			الجنسية	الترتيب serial
	جملة Total	انث Females	ذكور Males	جملة Total	انث Females	ذكور Males		
India	47.6	28.0	68.6	324,081	98,526	225,555	الهند	1
Philippines	21.7	41.9	0.2	147,909	147,090	819	الفلبين	2
Bangladesh	11.5	0.3	23.5	78,258	903	77,355	بنجلاديش	3
Sri Lanka	11.2	17.3	4.8	76,253	60,618	15,635	سيريلانكا	4
Ethiopia	2.6	4.8	0.3	17,850	16,773	1,077	اثيوبيا	5
Nepal	2.2	4.0	0.3	15,048	14,053	995	نيپال	6
Indonesia	0.4	0.7	0.0	2,383	2,371	12	اندونيسيا	7
Ivory Coast / cote D'Ivoire	0.3	0.6	0.1	2,354	2,175	179	ساحل العاج	8
Benin	0.3	0.6	0.0	2,281	2,181	100	بنين	9
Madagascar	0.3	0.5	0.0	1,714	1,711	3	مدغشقر	10
Other Nationality	1.8	1.4	2.2	12,131	4,869	7,262	باقي الجنسيات	11
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	680,262	351,270	328,992	الاجمالي	

* Source: Integrated Database - LMIS .

* المصدر: البيانات المتكاملة - نظام معلومات سوق العمل

KUWAIT: A table showing the number of domestic workers in Kuwait per nationality, as of the latest available government statistics.

The recruitment of domestic helpers from labor-sending countries was suspended due to the coronavirus, and people working in this sector have been praying hard for a favorable decision to resume their business the soonest. "The death sentence handed to the perpetrator recently was really good news to the family of Villavende and to the Philippines in general, because it means justice is

being served here in Kuwait," the secretary of a recruitment agency told Kuwait Times.

680,000 workers as of June 2020

"We want to hear from the Philippine government on their commitment to deploy housemaid as soon as possible. I think it's just a matter of time - the January 17 permission to welcome new housemaids to Kuwait came right on time. We are ready

to deploy Filipino helpers. We have several hundred housemaids whom we had already prepared for the job more than a year earlier. I hope they will permit us to deploy workers who have been waiting so long for the job," she added.

In the new unified contract, provisions will be added such as prohibiting employers from confiscating the passports of their housemaids. Domestic helpers also have the right to own a phone, work not more than 12 hours a day and get enough rest and a weekly day off. They are also prevented from being transferred to other employers without written consent from the worker. As of June 2020, there were nearly 680,000 domestic workers in Kuwait - 325,000 from India and nearly 150,000 from the Philippines. Local and their international partner agencies are allowed to charge employers up to KD 990 for hiring new domestic helpers.

Online platform

Kuwait had allowed the return of domestic helpers with valid visas but stuck abroad starting Dec 7, 2020. On Thursday, aviation authorities announced launching an online platform named 'Be'Salamah' to facilitate the return of domestic workers from so-called 'high-risk' countries, in line

with specific procedures and mechanisms that take into account the required health measures. The platform 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's 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.

Domestic workers must hold a document from a laboratory accredited by their countries showing they tested negative before boarding their flights to Kuwait. When arriving in Kuwait, the passengers will be subjected to another PCR test, and 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 to their sponsors' homes if the results are negative. As for those who have positive results, the Ministry of Health (MoH) will be responsible for transferring them to other quarantine facilities.

News in brief

Smart licenses starting today

KUWAIT: The interior ministry will start issuing smart licenses for all drivers - citizens and expats - from today, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported. The ministry began issuing smart licenses for Kuwaitis from August, and to first-timers from Sept 27. Informed sources said traffic departments in all governorates will receive expats and bedoons to exchange their current licenses with the smart ones, which allows them to drive in any country in the world. The sources said the new licenses have high security specifications and are "impossible to forge," according to them. The license has a chip that stores the holder's data.

Marijuana farm found

KUWAIT: The Drugs Control General Department said a house in Surra was raided earlier last week, where officers found an area that was transformed into a marijuana farm, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported. Two Kuwaitis were arrested and officers confiscated the marijuana, 70 Captagon pills, 50 gm of hashish and seven marijuana seedlings, in addition to seeds the suspects said they obtained by courier. The department acted after receiving tips that the Surra house was used to cultivate marijuana, so investigations were carried out, confirming the tips. A warrant was obtained and the raid was carried out. The suspects claimed the illicit substances were for personal use, but evidence point to them trading in drugs.

Oil price down

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by 31 cents to \$55.61 per barrel Friday, after being at \$55.92 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. The price of Brent crude went down by \$1.32 to \$55.10 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which went down by \$1.21 cents to \$52.36 pb.

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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A view of the Jaber Causeway taken near the Free Trade Zone. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Hair cysts common among men in Kuwait

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Bariatric surgeon at Sabah Hospital Dr Mohammad Al-Slaimi said hair cyst cases are widespread in Kuwait and doctors frequently carry out operations for such cases. Hair cyst is usually found at the lower part of the back, he said, adding that its symptoms include pain and is often accompanied with pus and blood secretions. Dr Slaimi said in a press statement that it is possible to remove the hair cyst without leaving scars, pointing out that men get hair cysts more frequently than women, noting such cases are common between the ages of 14 to 30.

Dr Slaimi explained that hair cyst operations include two procedures, the first is opening and emptying the cyst which is more common and is done at the doctor's clinic with local anesthesia. The second procedure is to remove the cyst after making sure the first procedure is not enough, and or if the cyst appears again after it is first removed. This procedure is done under full anesthesia. He said this procedure takes 45 minutes and the patient may go home a few hours later, but will need four weeks to return to his normal daily activities.



Dr Mohammad Al-Slaimi

Kuwait strongly deplores Houthi drone attack

KUWAIT: Kuwait strongly condemns Yemeni Houthi militia's launching of several explosives-laden drones towards Saudi territories on Friday, the Foreign Ministry said. "The persistence of such cowardly terrorist acts signal a clear defiance to the international community and a blatant violation of the international law," the ministry said in a press statement. It argued that such acts threaten the security and stability of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the entire region and undermine international efforts to end the conflict in Yemen. "This requires an immediate action from the international community to put an end to these assaults," it emphasized. The ministry expressed Kuwait's solidarity with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and full support to whatever measures it might take to protect its security and stability. —KUNA

Kuwait participates in Western Sahara autonomy conference

RABAT: Morocco organized on Friday an international conference via videoconference on autonomy of the Western Sahara, with the participation of 40 countries including Kuwait. Kuwait's Ambassador to Morocco Abdullatif Al-Yahya said his participation in this conference demonstrates Kuwait's support to Morocco. He reiterated the deep-rooted brotherly relations between Kuwait

and Morocco. He re-affirmed Kuwait's stance regarding the Western Sahara issue. Kuwait supports the unity of the Moroccan territories and its sovereignty on the southern provinces, he said. In addition, he stressed the importance of the Moroccan initiative on the autonomy in the Sahara, describing it as a fair and permanent framework for resolving this regional dispute.

Yahya extolled the Moroccan's efforts to develop the Western Sahara by implementing development projects to rehabilitate these regions and turn them into an economic center in the African continent. The participants expressed their support to the Moroccan initiative, considering it the only fair and permanent solution to the regional dispute over the Western Sahara. —KUNA

Interior Minister tours border security department



KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah carried out a tour at the border security department recently, during which he gave orders to establish a police station at Kuwait International Airport where cases can be sent to instead of the Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh police station.

The minister also gave instructions to provide department personnel with the latest security systems to better serve the public at border checkpoints, the Interior Ministry's Relations and Security Media Department said in a press statement.

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Flowers, hope and consent forms for India's huge vaccine rollout

Coffin stored in break room as LA funeral home overwhelmed

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RAMALLAH: A handout picture provided by the Palestinian Authority's press office (PPO) on Friday, shows Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas (right) handing the elections decree to the chairman of the central election committee Hanna Nasser, in the West Bank city of Ramallah. —AFP

Abbas announces Palestinian elections

Long-delayed polls slated for May 22; Hamas welcomes decision

RAMALLAH, Palestinian Territories: Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas on Friday announced dates for the first Palestinian elections in more than 15 years, setting legislative polls for May 22 and a July 31 presidential vote. Abbas's Fatah party, which controls the Palestinian Authority based in the occupied West Bank, and the Hamas Islamists, who hold power in Gaza, have for years expressed interest in taking Palestinians back to the polls.

A long-standing rivalry between the two main Palestinian factions was seen as a leading factor in stalling progress towards a new vote. But Fatah and Hamas have lately been engaged in unity talks, reaching an agreement in principle in September to hold elections in 2021.

Hamas on Friday welcomed Abbas's announcement. "In recent months, we have worked to overcome obstacles in order to reach this day," it said in a statement. It added that it looked to "free elections in which voters can express themselves without pressure and without restrictions, in all fairness and transparency".

A statement on the official Palestinian Wafa news agency said Abbas has signed "a presidential decree concerning elections", specifying the May and July dates. "This announcement was eagerly awaited," Palestinian analyst Arif Jaffal, head of the Arab World Democracy and Electoral Monitor, said. "It is a very important step," he said.

The 2005 Palestinian presidential vote saw Abbas elect-

ed with 62 percent support to replace the late Yasser Arafat. There has been no indication from Fatah as to whether the 85-year-old Abbas intends to seek re-election. A rare poll by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Research carried out last year said Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh would beat Abbas in a presidential election.

East Jerusalem

The statement from Abbas said he expects polls will be held "in all governorates of Palestine, including east Jerusalem", which was annexed by Israel following the 1967 Six-Day War but is considered occupied territory. Israel bans all Palestinian Authority activity in east Jerusalem, and there was no indication the Jewish state would allow a Palestinian vote within the city.

Israel's right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who faces his own re-election contest in March, describes Jerusalem as Israel's "undivided capital". Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said his government "was ready to get things going to facilitate the electoral process, in total transparency, while waiting for pluralism".

Some 2.8 million Palestinians live in the West Bank, while the densely populated Gaza Strip is home to two million. The last Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006 saw Hamas win an unexpected landslide. The polls resulted in a brief unity government but it soon collapsed and in 2007, bloody

The election took place after one of the most violent campaigns in years, with harassment and arrests of the opposition, attacks on the media and the deaths of at least 54 people. While the government said the vote went off peacefully, Wine alleged widespread fraud such as ballot box stuffing and said his party agents had in some places been beaten and chased away from polling stations. "Whatever is being declared is a complete sham, we reject it and we dissociate ourselves with it," he said on Friday.

'We don't control them'

Wine's home remained sealed off by soldiers and police on Saturday, after he told AFP Friday evening that security forces had breached the fence around it and he felt under "siege". "They jumped over my fence. They came inside my compound. I feel threatened," said the 38-year-old. The army's deputy spokesman Deo Akiiki said the soldiers were there for "his own security and the security of people around him".

However the spokesman for Wine's National Unity Platform (NUP), Joel Ssenyonyi, NUP spokesman says Bobi Wine "is under effective house arrest", and did not rule out protests following the announcement of the vote. "People are angry because their vote has been stolen. They don't need me or Bobi Wine to tell them to get angry... Even we can't control them." Police have advised people not to go out to celebrate or protest when results are announced, citing draconian COVID-19 regulations, which have regularly been used to crack down on the opposition. —AFP

inspired by a militant vision of Sunni Islam and dominated by Arabs.

Tehran has long dismissed claims of links to Al-Qaeda, and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif accused Pompeo of "ending his disastrous career with more warmongering lies." Zarif noted that all the militants who carried out Al-Qaeda's 9/11 attacks on the United States came from Pompeo's "favorite ME destinations," a pointed reference to Iran's regional rival Saudi Arabia.

Daniel L. Byman, a professor at Georgetown University, described the relationship between Iran and Al-Qaeda as "troubled and mutually suspicious." "In general, there is cooperation, and Iran does provide some sanctuary," he said, adding that "Iran has put limits on Al-Qaeda even as it has provided a haven".

The New York Times reported that Pompeo succeeded in "bewildering counterterrorism officials" with his comments, with some saying his assertions "appeared to represent his own analytic conclusions" rather than those of US intelligence. "The relationship between Al-Qaeda and Iran since 9/11 has vacillated between periods of hostility and cautious accommodation," said Bryce Loidolt, a research fellow at the Washington-based Institute for National Strategic Studies. —AFP

clashes erupted in the Gaza Strip between the two principal Palestinian factions, with Hamas ultimately seizing control of Gaza. Numerous attempts at reconciliation, including a prisoner exchange agreement in 2012 and a short-lived coalition government two years later, have failed to close the rift.

But experts have said intra-Palestinian reconciliation talks have taken on greater urgency following a series of US-brokered normalization agreements signed between Israel and four Arab states. The deals to normalize ties with Israel signed by the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco

and Sudan were condemned across the Palestinian political spectrum. They also broke with decades of Arab League consensus against recognition of Israel until it reached an agreement to end the Palestinian conflict that included the creation of Palestinian state, with a capital in east Jerusalem.

Palestinian leaders have also voiced hope that the incoming administration of US President-elect Joe Biden will lead to renewed diplomacy on the Palestinian cause. The PA cut ties with President Donald Trump's administration, accusing it of egregious bias towards Israel. —AFP

Museveni extends 35-year rule with disputed election win

KAMPALA: Uganda's Yoweri Museveni has won a sixth term in office with almost 60 percent of votes, in an election his main rival Bobi Wine has said was marred by fraud and violence, the electoral commission announced yesterday. The veteran leader, who took power in 1986, is one of Africa's longest serving presidents, and faced a stiff battle from the 38-year-old former ragga singer whose turn to politics fired up the youthful population.

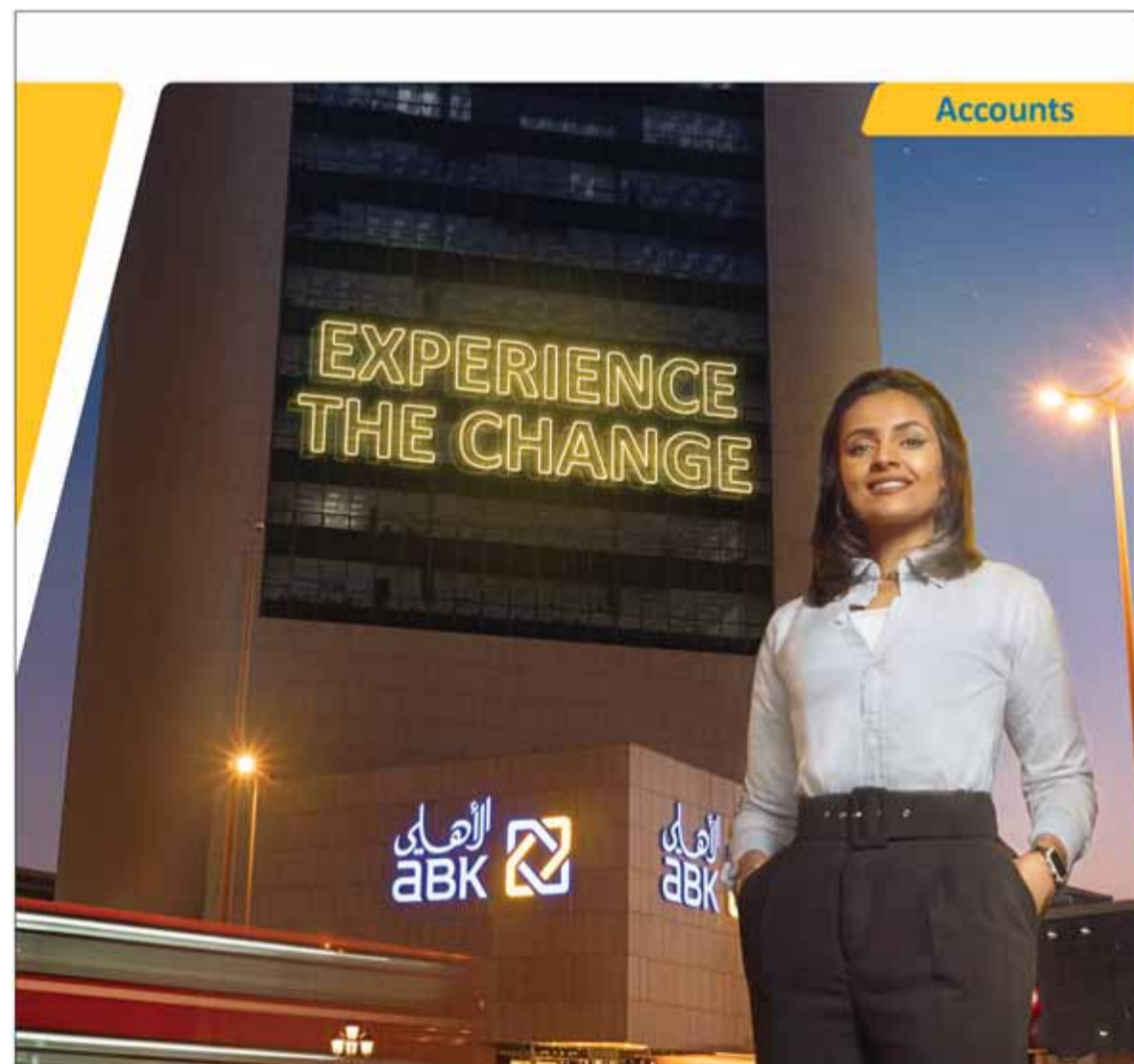
Wine was under heavy guard at his home on the outskirts of Kampala as results were announced, with his party saying he was under "effective house arrest", while the government said it was merely providing him with security. The singer-turned-MP was among 10 opposition candidates and came second with 34.8 percent of the votes, behind Museveni with 58.6 percent.

"The electoral commission declares Yoweri Museveni... elected President of the republic of Uganda," said election commission chairman Justice Simon Mugenyi Byabakama. He said turnout was 57.22 of almost 18 million registered voters. Byabakama urged the population to "remain calm and accept the outcome of these elections" while reminding those celebrating to be mindful of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Friend or foe? Controversy over Iran-Qaeda claim

PARIS: Iran has for years faced accusations of cooperation with Al-Qaeda despite stark ideological differences, but while mutual interests may have sometimes converged any relationship has been marked by distrust, analysts say. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's claim-made just a week before President Donald Trump leaves office-that Iran was the "new Afghanistan" for Qaeda militants surprised observers, who said there was no evidence of the country being used as a base.

He also stated publicly for the first time that Al-Qaeda's number two, Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah, known as Abu Muhammad Al-Masri, was assassinated in Tehran in August, buttressing allegations that Iran has at times offered sanctuary to the extremists. On paper, Iran and Al-Qaeda are ideological foes-the former the Persian regional heavyweight guided by Shia Islam, the latter



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International

Coffin stored in break room as LA funeral home overwhelmed

Shortage of coffins in Los Angeles due to lack of wood

LOS ANGELES: A corpse in the break room. Embalmed bodies in the garage. Boyd Funeral Home, a small family business in Los Angeles, is so overflowing with COVID-19 victims it has begun turning away customers for the first time in its history. "The weekend before I turned down 16 families that I couldn't do services for," said owner Candy Boyd.

"It's sad. But that's pretty much how it is now." In the past two weeks, as coronavirus has slammed Los Angeles, some 80 percent of the deceased passing through her doors died from COVID. One-in-10 residents of the nation's second largest city has been infected since the pandemic began, with nearly 300 people dying daily last week as the virus surges.

At Boyd's reception desk, the phones keep ringing, mostly going unanswered as her overwhelmed staff have abandoned setting appointments and now tell customers to just show up and get in line. She is even receiving calls from desperate families in other countries more than an hour's drive away.

Many hospital morgues are also full, with local coroners using refrigerated trucks to accommodate the victim load and some cemeteries warning of two week waiting lists. "Things are getting more and more out of control," said Boyd. During AFP's visit this week, a casket topped with a small wreath of flowers occupied the employee break room beyond the front desk. It had been there for a week. "This room is our lunch area, however, we are having to

use this room for space for caskets," said the owner. "We've done the services but the cemetery is so backed up... we have to hold them here until they have time to do the burial."

Bodies in the garage

Like much of surrounding South Los Angeles, the Westmont neighborhood is mainly inhabited by Black and Latino working class communities living in densely populated homes. These demographics have been hit particularly hard by COVID, with mortality rates two or three times higher than nearby affluent communities. Boyd's funeral home cold storage room has been consistently full.

Two weeks ago, Boyd brought in craftsmen to erect two large wooden structures in the company's garage to store embalmed bodies. "He hasn't even gotten a chance to really finish because we needed (to store) these," she said, pointing to corpses wrapped in body bags lying on the rough shelves.

"I would never imagined having to build that in my wildest dreams." Some funeral homes have reported a shortage of coffins due to lack of wood, though Boyd's supplier has kept up with orders so long as they are placed early enough.

'Nightmares'

Worried about her five staff catching the virus at the start of the pandemic, Boyd initially refused to accept COVID victims. "I was having nightmares. I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep," she recalled.



LOS ANGELES: Candy Boyd, owner of the Boyd Funeral home, speaks during an interview next to an empty casket and cabinets built for expanded storage capacity of embalmed bodies awaiting burial due to the surge of COVID-19 deaths in Los Angeles. — AFP

Boyd has since created safety protocols and now feels comfortable dealing with the influx, although she insists it is "not about the money." "It's about helping families and helping them get through this crisis," she said. "It takes a toll on me every day, I'm dealing with this," Boyd added. "And I have to keep a stoic face because I have to be there for the family."

Sometimes, customers are people she has long known personally. Other times, Boyd encounters

families who still refuse to wear masks or respect physical distance, even as they make arrangements to bury their loved ones. "The numbers don't lie. It's true. It's real," said Boyd of the disease.

Cases in California have more than doubled since early December to 2.8 million.

"If you don't take it serious," she warned an AFP journalist, "you could be one of the people that are in my back row back there, you know!" —AFP

An indiscriminate airport attack means many families are in mourning: ICRC

By Dominik Stillhart

SANAA, Yemen: My visit to Yemen was one filled with heartbreak, following the deaths of three of our colleagues. It's heartbreaking that the people of Yemen have suffered so much violence in the last five years, that ongoing fighting causes daily losses and despair at a time when people are dealing with a global pandemic on top of the consequences of protracted conflict.

The attack at Aden airport on December 30 was indiscriminate and a stark reminder of what civilians caught up in conflict and violence in Yemen endure. Latest official figures say that 28 people died and 113 were wounded, among them travelers, airport employees, families seeing people off or welcoming them home, who saw their world change in an instant.

Three of our colleagues were also killed in the attack—Saidi Kayiranga, Hamid Al-Qadami and Ahmed Wazir—three dedicated International Committee of the Red Cross staff helping people in need. As difficult as the visits were, I am glad that I got to meet with grieving family members, to extend my support and share heartfelt condolences on behalf of the entire ICRC. Our injured colleagues are also in our thoughts, as well as all those who witnessed and survived the attack and are dealing with the psychological and physical after-effects.

This is not the first such attack in Yemen where civilians have borne the brunt and the losses. We have said it many times before and we will keep repeating it: all those involved in the violence in Yemen must spare and safeguard civilians and ensure that humanitarian workers can perform their duties.

ICRC response to US designation in Yemen

We are increasingly alarmed about the situation across Yemen and committed to doing all we can to help alleviate suffering and deliver assistance. On top of the ongoing and deadly violence in different parts of the country, COVID-19 has affected many communities, seasonal infectious diseases claim thousands of lives each year; and high inflation has seen the price of food, medicine, and other basic goods soar.

With that in mind, the ICRC is concerned by the potential negative impact of the U.S designation of Ansarullah as a foreign terrorist organization on the humanitarian situation in Yemen, as well as on the provision of impartial humanitarian assistance to those in need. In particular, the ICRC is concerned about the possible "chilling effect" the designation may have on humanitarian action, leading to it being impeded or delayed. Increased operational risks and possible de-risking from the banking and private sectors in response to the designation ultimately may constrain the humanitarian response in Yemen. States that decide to impose such measures must consider the humanitarian consequences and take steps, such as humanitarian carve-outs, to mitigate any negative impact on affected populations and on impartial humanitarian action.

We are two weeks into 2021. For Yemen, this new year started as the old one ended - with violence, fear and loss. People there need support more than ever and the ICRC, as an independent, impartial, and neutral humanitarian actor, will do all we can to assist.

Note: This is a statement from Dominik Stillhart, director of ICRC operations, after a visit to Yemen following the deaths late last month of three ICRC staff in an explosion at Aden's airport

Brazil's Amazonas state transfers COVID patients

MANAUS, Brazil: Facing the imminent collapse of its health system, Amazonas state in northern Brazil started transferring coronavirus patients to other regions Friday as hospitals run out of beds and oxygen. Nine patients out of 235 identified for transfer were flown in the early morning hours to the state of Piaui on an air force plane, state authorities reported, with further flights planned to other states later Friday.

Amazonas state, with Manaus as its capital, has been hard hit by a resurgence of the virus.

It has a death rate of 143 per 100,000 inhabitants, one of the highest in Brazil, with a national average of 98.5 deaths per 100,000. During the first wave of the Covid-19 epidemic last April, the Amazon rainforest city saw haunting scenes of mass graves and corpses piled into refrigerator trucks.

With hospitalizations in Manaus reaching even higher levels this time round, the city has again had to deploy refrigerator trucks. It is also the origin of a new virus variant recently detected in Japan, and which scientists warn is likely more contagious than the original, though it is not clear if this is the reason for the resurgence.

Images of people bringing oxygen tanks to hospitals and of patients complaining about a lack of

Outgoing Trump fetes Morocco king, rallies behind claim

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump, in a last-minute push to solidify Morocco's normalization with Israel, bestowed a rare award Friday on its king as his administration rallied international support in a regional dispute.

Trump, who sees Arab recognition of Israel as a key overseas achievement of his presidency, last month broke decades of precedent by recognizing Morocco's full sovereignty over contested Western Sahara, with Morocco in turn saying it would normalize relations with the Jewish state. The White House said it presented King Mohammed VI with the Legion of Merit, degree of Chief Commander, five days before Trump's departure in a private ceremony in Washington in which Morocco's ambassador accepted.

Pompeo hits Iran, China and Cuba in last-minute push

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday imposed sanctions on three of his primary targets—China, Iran and Cuba—in a last-minute push aimed in part at boxing in President-elect Joe Biden. Five days before he turns in his keys at the State Department, Pompeo vowed to punish China over its clampdown in Hong Kong—a stance backed by Biden—but moved further away from Biden's goal of easing tensions with Iran and Cuba.

Pompeo condemned as "appalling" the massive operation on January 6 in Hong Kong in which China rounded up 55 people including an American lawyer, John Clancey. "We condemn PRC actions that erode Hong Kong's freedoms and democratic processes and will continue to use all tools at our disposal to hold those responsible to account," Pompeo said, referring to the People's Republic of China.



A COVID-19 patient, one of 12 to be transferred in a military airplane, is assisted by medical staff at the Ponta Pelada airport in Manaus, Amazonas State, Brazil, Friday amid the novel coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

medical assistance have angered Brazilians and augmented criticism of President Jair Bolsonaro's handling of the pandemic. The country has recorded more than 207,000 deaths from Covid-19, second only to the United States.

'We have done our part'

Bolsonaro, who has downplayed the virus and railed against lockdowns, face masks and other "hysteria," on Friday told supporters in Brasilia it was "terrible the problem there" in Amazonas. "Now we

have done our part with resources, means," he said. A ten-day curfew of 7:00 pm to 6:00 am enters into force in the state Friday in a bid to stop the rapid viral spread. A court on Saturday forced Amazonas state government to shut non-essential businesses for 15 days. In the early morning of Friday, an air force plane brought nine oxygen cylinders for Amazonas hospitals, adding to more than 400 delivered in the last five days. Oxygen is needed to treat people who suffer breathing problems as the coronavirus attacks their lungs. —AFP

dor accepted.

The military award was created to honor allied leaders in World War II and had gone into obscurity until it was revived by Trump, who last month also presented it to the prime ministers of Australia, India and Japan. "His vision and personal courage—including his decision to resume ties with the State of Israel—have positively reshaped the landscape of the Middle East and North Africa and ushered in a new era of security and prosperity for both our countries and the world," a White House statement said. The State Department's top official on the Middle East, David Schenker, on Friday joined Morocco in a virtual conference on Western Sahara that highlighted Trump's position. Forty nations participated with 27 at the ministerial level, a joint statement said.

"Participants committed to continue their advocacy for a solution, using Morocco's autonomy plan as the sole framework for resolving the Western Sahara dispute," it said. The countries taking part included Arab allies of Morocco and smaller developing nations but also France, Morocco's foreign ministry said.

President Donald Trump's outgoing administration slapped sanctions on six people over the detentions including Tam Yiu-Chung, Hong Kong's sole delegate to China's top lawmaking body, the National People's Congress Standing Committee. It earlier took action against Hong Kong's top leader, Chief Executive Carrie Lam, who acknowledged that as a result she was no longer able to use a credit card or hold a bank account.

China last year pushed through a draconian security law in Hong Kong after widespread and sometimes violent protests that sought to preserve freedoms guaranteed to the financial hub before Britain handed back the territory in 1997.

Pressure on Cuba, Iran

Antony Blinken, who will appear for a Senate confirmation hearing Tuesday to be Pompeo's successor, has vowed that the next administration "will stand with the people of Hong Kong and against Beijing's crackdown on democracy." But the Biden administration is expected to shift course on Cuba and Iran, on which headline stances have become points of pride in Trump's Republican Party, which saw a boost in support in the crucial state of Florida from Cuban-Americans.

On Friday, the Treasury Department said it was



Moroccan King Mohammed VI

President-elect Joe Biden has not committed to maintaining Trump's recognition of Moroccan sovereignty in Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony where tensions have simmered since the 1970s as the Algerian-backed Polisario Front fights for independence. Morocco controls most of Western Sahara but its sovereignty is not recognized by the United Nations. —AFP



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo listens as US President Donald Trump speaks during the daily briefing on the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, in the Brady Briefing Room at the White House on April 8, 2020, in Washington, DC. —AFP

imposing sanctions on Cuba's interior minister, Lazaro Alberto Alvarez Casas, days after Pompeo said he was putting the island back on the US list of state sponsors of terrorism. Pompeo pointed to the arrest in 2019 of Cuban dissident Jose Daniel Ferrer, who was held in a prison run by the interior ministry "where he reported being beaten, tortured and held in isolation." —AFP

International

Flowers, hope and consent forms for India's huge vaccine rollout

India aims to vaccinate around 300m of its 1.3bn people by July

NEW DELHI: Hospitals were decked out with flowers and one politician planted a tree as India began yesterday its colossal coronavirus vaccine drive, desperately hoping to end a pandemic that has killed 150,000 of its people. India aims to vaccinate around 300 million of its 1.3 billion people by July—a number equal to almost the entire US population—with frontline workers, people over 50 and those deemed high risk first in line.

On day one around 300,000 people were due to be vaccinated with Covishield, developed by AstraZeneca and made by India's Serum Institute, or the homegrown Covaxin.

Covaxin is still in clinical trials and recipients yesterday had to sign a consent form that stated that the "clinical efficacy... is yet to be established". But Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he launched the vaccination program urged people to reject "propaganda and rumors" about the indigenous vaccine.

"The world has immense faith in India's scientists and capacity of vaccine production," Modi, 70, said in a video message.

'Ray of hope'

Inside a 15,000-bed field hospital in Mumbai, authorities set up 15 vaccination booths and expected to inoculate up to 1,000 people yesterday. "Back in May, it felt like a losing battle. We were getting 200 cases a day," said Rajesh C. Dere, 46, the dean. "Today I feel a great sense of satisfaction that we have succeeded."

The facility's first recipient was a young female health worker in lab coat and mask. There was applause as she got the jab in her right arm and

gave a thumbs-up with her left. Mohan Ganpat Nikam, 53, a security guard at another Mumbai hospital, said he was scared last year as the pandemic raged through the country.

"I felt so happy when I heard that my name was on the list for vaccinations," he said.

Physiotherapist Smita Ringanekar, 42, said she spent months living in a hotel so she could help patients and not infect her aged parents at home. "I haven't visited any of my friends or relatives for months," she said. "I have seen people dying," said health worker Santa Roy, 35 in the eastern city of Kolkata, saying he now saw a "ray of hope".

Ram Babu, the first recipient in Patna, said he went to the temple on the way to the hospital, and was "so excited that I couldn't sleep."

'Deeply challenging'

New infection rates in India have fallen sharply in recent months. On Friday 175 people died compared to almost 4,000 a day earlier in the United States. But experts are concerned a new wave might hit, fuelled by a string of recent mass religious festivals. Authorities are drawing on their experience with India's massive elections and child immunization programs for polio and tuberculosis. But in an enormous, impoverished nation with often shoddy transport networks and one of the world's worst-funded healthcare systems, it is still a daunting undertaking. Child inoculations are a "much smaller game" and vaccinating against Covid-19 is "deeply challenging", said Satyajit Rath from the National Institute of Immunology.

Both approved vaccines need to be kept refrigerated, and others being developed will need to be



MUMBAI: Nurses from the Rajawadi Hospital make the victory sign gesture as they pose in front of a television broadcasting live address by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi before the start of the COVID-19 vaccination drive in Mumbai yesterday. — AFP

stored at ultra-low temperatures—and in a country with scorching summers. There are also concerns about plans to manage the entire process digitally via India's own app, CoWIN—of which there are already several fake versions.

Fake news

And as in other countries, there is skepticism about the vaccine, fuelled by a torrent of hoaxes and baseless rumors online about the virus. For example, multiple Facebook and Twitter posts

shared hundreds of times—debunked by AFP Fact Check—claimed no vegetarian had died from COVID. A recent survey of 18,000 people across India found that 69 percent were in no rush to get a COVID-19 jab. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the approval of Covaxin without data from phase 3 human trials has further eroded trust among doctors and patients alike. But with "Thank you Modi" posters on the wall, Chand Wattal, 60, a senior Delhi doctor who was among the first to be vaccinated—with Covishield—wasn't worried. — AFP

Hunt for buried survivors after Indonesia quake

MAMUJU, Indonesia: Rescuers scrambled to find buried survivors yesterday after a powerful earthquake on Indonesia's Sulawesi Island killed dozens, injured hundreds and left more feared trapped in the rubble of collapsed buildings, as monsoon rains lashed the disaster-struck region. At least 46 people died after the 6.2-magnitude quake struck in the early hours of Friday, triggering panic among residents of the island, which was hit by a 2018 quake-tsunami disaster that killed thousands. Search-and-rescue worked through the night as they pulled dozens of bodies from beneath crumpled buildings in Mamuju, a city of about 110,000 people in West Sulawesi province, where a hospital was flattened and a shopping mall lay in ruins.

Others were killed south of the city

after the quake struck, as a strong aftershock jolted the area yesterday morning. Grieving relatives began burying the dead at a local cemetery. Planes and boats packed with food and other emergency supplies were arriving, with the navy reportedly sending a ship equipped with mobile medical services as Mamuju's still-standing hospitals were flooded with hundreds of injured. Rescuers said a shortage of heavy equipment was slowing the search effort, while thousands left homeless by the quake set up makeshift shelters on higher ground—many little more than tarpaulin-covered tents that were lashed by heavy downpours.

"We're running out of food. There hasn't been any aid from the government yet," 24-year-old survivor Desti told AFP from hard-hit Majene, adding that some survivors at the camp needed medical attention. "Some people are using coconut leaves as mats," she added. Many survivors are unable to return to their destroyed homes, or too scared to go back fearing more quakes or a tsunami, said Desti, who like many



MAMUJU: Rescuers move the body of a victim that was trapped in a collapsed building in Mamuju yesterday. — AFP

Indonesians goes by one name. Authorities have not given a figure for the number of residents who could still be trapped under buildings reduced to twisted metal and concrete chunks, including the hospital that collapsed with more than a dozen patients and staff inside.

Yesterday, authorities said they

had pulled eight corpses from under the building, while five members of a family of eight were found dead in the crumpled remains of their home. Among the Mamuju survivors was a pair of young sisters plucked from under the mass of concrete and other debris. The pair are now being treated in hospital. — AFP

Iceland leads the way in COVID sequencing

REYKJAVIK, Iceland: Iceland has genetically sequenced all its positive COVID-19 cases since the start of the pandemic, an increasingly vital practice as worrying new strains emerge from Britain and South Africa. The World Health Organization on Friday urged all countries to ramp up genome sequencing to help combat the emerging variants. Scientists at the Icelandic biopharma group deCODE Genetics' laboratory in Reykjavik have worked relentlessly for the past 10 months, analyzing each positive coronavirus test in Iceland at the request of the country's health authorities. The aim is to trace every case in order to prevent problematic ones from slipping through the net. "It takes us relatively short time to do the actual sequencing," explains the head of the lab, Olafur Thor

Magnusson, adding that "about three hours" is all that is needed to determine the virus strain.

The entire process, from isolating the DNA to sequencing it, can take up to a day and a half, and has enabled Iceland to identify 463 separate variants—which scientists call haplotypes. Prior to sequencing, the DNA of each sample is first isolated, then purified using magnetic beads. The samples are then taken to a massive, bright room full of equipment, where a deafening sound emanates from small machines resembling scanners. The machines are gene sequencers which map the novel coronavirus genome.

World leader

Inside each machine is a black box called a "flow cell", a glass slide that contains the DNA molecules. This technology has played a large role in Iceland since the start of the pandemic. "The sequencing of samples is key to helping us follow the state and development of the epidemic," Health Minister Svandis Svavarsdottir told AFP. Authorities have used the sequencing information to decide on precise, targeted measures to curb the spread of the virus, she



REYKJAVIK: In this file photo Scientists at deCODE genetics are seen working in the laboratory in Reykjavik, Iceland. — AFP

said. While the South African variant has not been detected in Iceland, 41 people have been identified as carriers of the British variant. All of them were stopped at the border—where PCR tests are conducted on travellers—effectively preventing the variant's transmission on the subarctic island. — AFP

Taliban kill 12 militiamen in Afghanistan

HERAT, Afghanistan: Two Taliban fighters who had infiltrated a base of pro-government Afghan militiamen killed 12 of them, officials and the insurgent group said yesterday. The night-time attack at a post manned by the militiamen occurred in the district of Ghorian in the western Herat province late on Friday, the governor for the district Farhad Khademi told AFP.

"Twelve pro-government militiamen were killed in the Taliban attack in Ghorian district last night," he said. Herat provincial council member Mohammad Sardar Bahaduri confirmed the attack and said it was carried out by two Taliban fighters who had infiltrated the base. "The militiamen were dining when the attack happened," he

said. The Taliban also said two of its fighters had carried out the attack and then returned. In a separate incident, a vehicle carrying policemen was struck by a roadside bomb in the center of the Afghan capital Kabul, police spokesman Ferdaws Faramarz told reporters. Two policemen were killed and one wounded in the attack, he said.

Violence has surged across Afghanistan in recent months, especially in Kabul, which has been rocked by a new trend of targeted killings. The bloodshed comes even as the Taliban and government negotiators engage in peace talks to end the nearly two-decades-long war in the country. Representatives from two warring sides are currently in the Qatari capital Doha discussing the agenda for the talks.

US troop withdrawal

The Taliban welcomed the latest withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan with the insurgents' spokesman yesterday calling the continued reduction of American forces a

"good advancement" even as fighting raged across the war-weary country. The Taliban's statement came just hours after the Pentagon announced it had cut troop levels in Afghanistan to 2,500, their lowest numbers during the nearly two decades of fighting. Washington struck a deal with the Taliban in Qatar last year to begin withdrawing its troops in return for security guarantees from the militants and a commitment to peace talks with Kabul.

Those talks are ongoing, but have stalled amid violence and allegations of slow progress. Meanwhile the Taliban has continued its lethal assaults on Afghan security forces and civilians alike. "The withdrawal of other US forces from Afghanistan, which was announced by the US yesterday, is a good advancement and practical measure," tweeted Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naeem. "Undoubtedly, the practice of the agreement signed between the IEA and the US is in the benefit of both countries and nations," he added, referring to the Taliban's official acronym. — AFP

Australian bushfire threatens Perth homes

SYDNEY: Australian firefighters said they expect to battle an out-of-control bushfire well into the night yesterday, as the blaze threatens lives and homes in the west coast city of Perth. Residents were told "to act immediately to survive" as the flames approached homes near Oakford, about 35 kilometers (22 miles) south of Perth's city center, in an emergency warning issued by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES). Locals were told to evacuate if the way was clear or to take shelter, as the fire spewed thick smoke over the area. Around 150 firefighters were expected to work overnight into Sunday to bring the 80-100 hectare (200-250 acre) blaze under control, DFES District Officer Russell Wells told media. "There are certainly some challenging conditions ahead," Wells said.

Although temperatures were expected to dip overnight from their high of 33 degrees Celsius (91 Fahrenheit), strong gusty winds were forecast. And crews were expecting even hotter temperatures on Sunday amid concerns the windy conditions could cause the fire to double in size. "What we're really trying to do at the moment is bring this fire under control today and have a really strong presence tomorrow so it doesn't flare up," said Wells. Aerial footage showed at least one structure ablaze in the area as water bombing aircraft repeatedly tried to douse the fire. Several roads have been closed and evacuation centers set up.

There were also several other wildfires burning around the edges of the city. Western Australia was spared the brunt of last summer's devastating climate change-fueled wildfires, which mostly ravaged the country's two most populous states, New South Wales and Victoria. The fires razed more than 24 million hectares (49 million acres) of drought-stricken bushland and forest across Australia in late 2019 and early 2020, killing more than 30 people and destroying thousands of homes. — AFP

News in brief

Serbia gets Sinopharm jabs

BELGRADE: Serbia became one of the first European countries to receive a Chinese-made COVID-19 vaccine yesterday when one million doses of a jab produced by Sinopharm arrived at Belgrade airport. President Aleksandar Vucic posted a picture of himself on Instagram, standing next to the plane carrying the vaccine. "We are proud of our friendship with China," he was quoted as saying by Beta news agency, telling reporters that he hoped to be inoculated with the Sinopharm vaccine in six or seven days. — AFP

World migration down 30%

UNITED NATIONS: The coronavirus pandemic has slowed global migration by nearly 30 percent, with around two million fewer people than predicted migrating between 2019 and 2020, according to a UN report released on Friday. Some 281 million people were living outside their country of origin in 2020. The report, entitled "International Migration 2020," showed that two-thirds of registered migrants lived in just 20 countries, with the United States at the top of the list, with 51 million international migrants in 2020. Next came Germany with 16 million, Saudi Arabia with 13 million, Russia with 12 million and Britain with nine million. — AFP

UN peacekeeper killed

BANGUI: A Burundian peacekeeper was killed Friday during an ambush by rebels in the Central African Republic, the United Nations said, the fifth soldier killed since a rebel offensive began. The soldier died in an ambush by a coalition of rebels near Grimari, roughly 300 kilometers northeast of the capital Bangui, the UN said, during a security mission to the town with Burundian and Bangladeshi peacekeepers. MINUSCA—the UN peacekeeping force in the region—also said that two Bangladeshi soldiers were lightly wounded. In a statement from New York, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres strongly condemned the attack and reiterated his "deep concern over the continued destabilization efforts by armed groups throughout the country." — AFP

Classifieds

Sunday, January 17, 2021

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair and clouds will increase gradually with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind with speed of 08 - 28 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain later on.

BY NIGHT: Rather cold and Partly cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind with speed of 08 - 32 km/h with chances for scattered light rain that might be thundery at times and a chance

WEATHER WATCH			Fog		
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 16/01/2021 0000 UTC		
KUWAIT CITY	21 °C	14 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	22 °C	13 °C			
ABDALY	25 °C	09 °C			
BUBYAN	19 °C	12 °C			
JAHRA	23 °C	12 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C			
SALMIYAH	19 °C	14 °C			
AHMADI	- °C	- °C			
NUWAISIB	24 °C	12 °C			
WAFRA	24 °C	12 °C			
SALMY	21 °C	07 °C			

4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	01/17	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	21 °C	14 °C	VRB	06 - 22 km/h
Monday	01/18	Fair and partly cloudy and visibility will improve gradually	23 °C	09 °C	VRB-NW	08 - 28 km/h
Tuesday	01/19	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	22 °C	07 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 26 km/h
Wednesday	01/20	Fair and Partly cloudy	22 °C	07 °C	SE	15 - 38 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:20
Sunrise	06:43
Zuhr	11:58
Asr	14:53
Sunset	17:12
Isha	18:33

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	24 °C
MIN. Temp.	13 °C
MAX. RH	71 %
MIN. RH	21 %
MAX. Wind	S 36 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

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

Hospitals

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

Clinics

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

WANTED

Marine Engineer
 (Superintendent) with 10 years' experience
 Should be able to maintain a fleet of Marine vessels. Salary based on Experience.
 ALSO
 • Seaman
 • Small Boats Operators & Engine Driver
 • Marine Engine Mechanic's (Cummins/Volvo)
 Transferable Residence
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Airlines

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

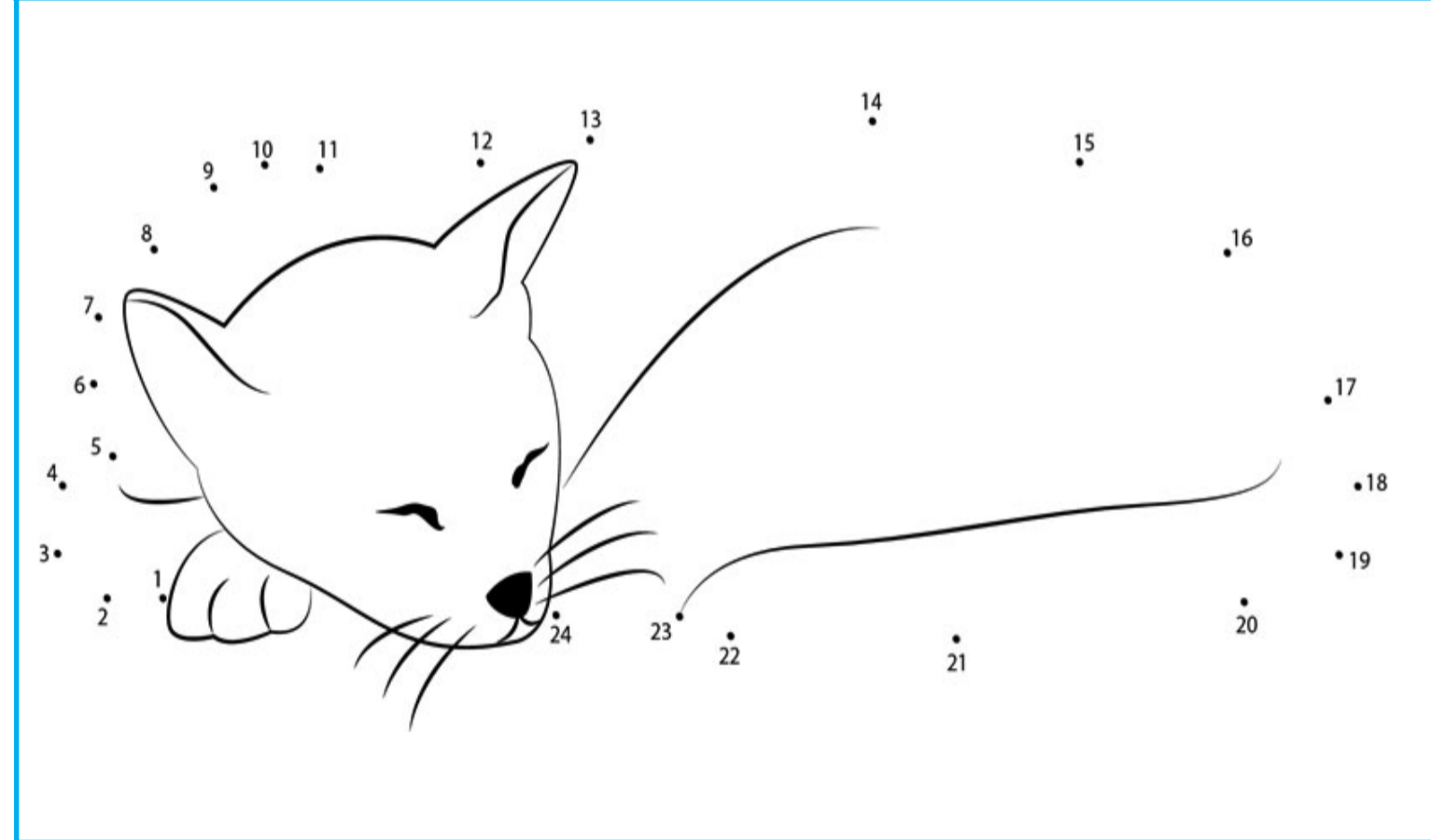
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Word Search

ICE CREAM PARLOR

BANANA	FREEZER	SORBET
BIRTHDAY	HOT FUDGE	SPLIT
BOOTH	MALT	SPOON
CAKE	NAPKIN	STRAW
CHERRY	NUTS	SUNDAE
CHOCOLATE	PARFAIT	SYRUP
CONE	SCOOP	TOPPING
CUP	SHAKE	VANILLA
FLOAT	SMOOTHIE	WHIPPED

Join the Dots



STAR TRACK

<p>Aries (March 21-April 19) Your practical skills should be operating efficiently, Aries. A creative or intellectual discipline that fascinates you might require some intense concentration today. You could spend much of the day in the library. You will want to take meticulous notes, but don't worry about it if you don't quite catch everything. Your memory should be sharp right now.</p>	<p>Cancer (June 21-July 22) Financial matters might need attention today. Bills may need to be paid, checks deposited, and budgeting worked out. Your powers of concentration are high, Cancer, so this is a great day to do this, even though you'd rather be doing something more interesting. Don't despair. Your practical skills are good, so you're apt to finish quickly. Then you can go play.</p>	<p>Libra (September 23-October 22) Today you might spend a lot of time on the phone with friends, some of them seniors. Your conversations will be loving, informative, and revealing. Libra. As a result, you might decide to attend some group events in your community. A letter, check, or delivery that had been delayed might finally arrive. This is going to release a lot of tension, as you may have feared it had been lost.</p>	<p>Capricorn (December 22-January 19) Memories of past events that caused traumas that you're still dealing with could come to light today. This is a positive development, as the release of these old emotions could make it possible for you to progress more quickly on material and spiritual planes. You may feel lighter, and you could experience a rush of joy. In the evening, go dancing and work off some of this energy.</p>
<p>Taurus (April 20-May 20) Practical matters involving home and family might need some attention today. This isn't anything alarming, Taurus, just a few tasks that you may have put off, such as house cleaning or yard work. Get other members of your household to help. You have other responsibilities to see to. It isn't fair to have to do it all by yourself.</p>	<p>Leo (July 23-August 22) Some projects might require practical attention today, getting irritating little details cleared up and out of the way. Your natural efficiency is at a peak, Leo, so you will probably be able to get these matters done before you get too bored. The important thing is that you will be able to achieve the results you want. Go to it.</p>	<p>Scorpio (October 23-November 21) Today you could resolve to work harder than ever on whatever it is that brings the results you hope for, Scorpio. This is likely to involve nothing more glamorous than practical tasks, such as getting paperwork out of the way. Nonetheless, by the end of the day you should feel satisfied with your accomplishments. If nothing else, it should free you for more interesting chores.</p>	<p>Aquarius (January 20- February 18) Today you might see old and new friendships and romantic involvements reach a new understanding, Aquarius. This creates a stronger commitment between you and those who care for you. This is a great day to execute paperwork, particularly legal contracts. Your business sense is operating at a very high level. You're more apt to spot clauses that need work, so go for it today.</p>
<p>Gemini (May 21-June 20) Matters involving your community might require your attention. This is likely to involve communication in some way. Perhaps you want to make some phone calls, write letters, or place an ad or article in a local newspaper. Communication of all sorts should go well, Gemini, and you might find that it opens new doors to understanding between you and those closest to you.</p>	<p>Virgo (August 23-September 22) Relatives or old friends, particularly seniors, who visit you today are likely to awaken childhood memories that you'd long since forgotten. Some of them might come as a shock, but they will all release hang-ups that you've been trying to expunge for a while. You might feel like you've just dropped a ton of weight - and you have. Psychological weight can be as heavy as anything physical.</p>	<p>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21) Pursuing intellectual interests may be on hold today because of career matters. Your ambitions, whatever they are, could get a shot in the arm through some new information, possibly from far away. This could be uncovered in a newspaper, book, conversation with a friend, or online. Whichever it is, Sagittarius, it's likely to work for you, so make use of it.</p>	<p>Pisces (February 19-March 20) An important project could require intense concentration today, Pisces, and you're in the right frame of mind. You could be pleased with the results and so could others whose opinions matter. Expect public acknowledgment of some kind. A boost to your self-confidence is in the works, perhaps even a raise in income. Work hard, enjoy the spotlight, and treat yourself to an evening out.</p>

Business

SUNDAY, JANUARY 17, 2021

Zapping COVID: Tech sector takes aim at COVID with new gadgetry

Virus-zapping drones, smart masks and disease-predicting wearables

WASHINGTON: From virus-zapping drones to smart masks to disease-predicting wearables, the tech sector is showcasing ways to detect and mitigate the coronavirus outbreak. The health crisis which forced this week's 2021 Consumer Electronics Show online has also spawned innovations for fighting the pandemic.

Drone maker Draganfly showcased its camera technology which can be used to offer alerts on social distancing, and also detect changes in people's vital signs which may be early indicators of Covid-19 infections. Draganfly chief Cameron Chell said the "vital intelligence assessment" system can be "deployed from any camera, not just a drone camera," to measure vital signs such as heart or respiratory rate and blood pressure.

The company has been deploying its drones, which can spray disinfectant in large public spaces like stadiums, similar to other robotic disinfection systems being deployed during the pandemic. "This allows public places to have the opportunity to be opened up again," Chell told a CES online briefing. "We're completely overwhelmed with demand."

In a similar vein to the Draganfly system, Taiwan-based FaceHeart demonstrated its software which can be installed in cameras for contactless measurement of vital signs. FaceHeart said its algorithms scan for signs of severe shortness of breath, high fever, dehydration, elevated heart rate and other symptoms which are early indicators of COVID-19.

One new wearable tech device being shown at CES from Colorado-based BioIntelliSense is a coin-sized wearable sticker called BioButton

which can detect changes in vital signs that could be linked to Covid-19. The patch, meant to be worn on a person's chest, can detect skin temperature, heart rate, coughing frequency and more, according to the company.

The BioButton device, which is paired with mobile applications, "represents a significant advancement in making continuous medical-grade monitoring reliable, effortless and cost-effective," said company CEO James Mault. "The convenience of the BioButton will support a range of clinical use cases... and mass market use to enable safe return to work or school."

Smart masks, doorbells

Startup AirPop Health unveiled its Active+ Smart Mask which captures breathing-related data and incorporates a sensor which can tell wearers when to replace their mask's filter. "This product embodies the AirPop mission-to help people better understand and take control of their respiratory health through a human-centered approach to design, science and technology," said Chris Hosmer, AirPop's founder. The gaming tech firm Razer meanwhile showed its Project Hazel mask which features rechargeable ventilators and a transparent design "so those around you can view facial cues such as a smile or laugh and allow the hard of hearing to lip read what the wearer is saying," according to the company. Another gadget unveiled at the all-digital show was the Ettie video doorbell from the smart home startup Plott, which takes the temperature of a visitor at the front door with an infrared sensor, allowing consumers to see if a



The health crisis which forced this year's Consumer Electronics Show online has spawned innovations for fighting the COVID pandemic

fever is present.

Meanwhile Taiwan-based electronics firm iWavenology introduced its iDistance wearable device which can be used to prevent infections by sounding an alarm when people fail to respect social distancing guidelines. The tags can be worn around a person's arm and can function in a workplace or outdoor environment. "The pandemic requires everyone to think about innova-

tive solutions to ensure safety for all employees at the workplace," founder Shau-Gang Mao said. "That is why iWavenology created a simple device that generates an alarm whenever a person comes too close to another."

The all-digital trade event, which was forced to move to an online format because of the pandemic, included some 1,800 exhibitors and concluded Thursday. —AFP

Emirates stops flights to three Australian cities

SYDNEY: Emirates has suspended flights to Australia's three largest cities as the country further restricts international arrivals over fears of new virus strains. The Dubai-based carrier was one of the last to maintain routes into and out of the country's east coast throughout most of the pandemic but on Friday evening told travellers a handful of planned flights next week would be the last. "Due to operational reasons, Emirates flights to/from Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne will be suspended until further notice," Emirates said on its website.

The airline will still run two flights a week to Perth, but the cuts are another barrier for tens of thousands of stranded Australians still attempting to return home. The Australian government responded by announcing more repatriation flights and said other carriers still flying services to the cities could fill the gap. "The capacity that Emirates was able to use within the cap will be allocated to other airlines,

ensuring that there are still as many tickets, as many seats available into Australia," Finance Minister Simon Birmingham said.

A small number of airlines—including Qatar Airways and Singapore Airlines—are still running services to Australia but local media were already reporting delays and cancellations among returning travellers. Australia's borders have effectively been closed since March to curb the spread of the virus, with the government even limiting the number of citizens allowed to return. Last week travel restrictions were further tightened, with arrival numbers slashed and all travellers into the country requiring a negative COVID-19 test before flying.

In making the changes, Prime Minister Scott Morrison cited a growing number of people in quarantine testing positive for new strains of COVID-19. Fears that a variant of the virus from Britain, believed to be more contagious, had leaked into Brisbane from hotel quarantine triggered a snap lockdown in the city last week. "There are many unknowns and uncertainties in relation to the new strain, and so that's why this precautionary approach, we believe, is very sensible," Morrison said. Australia continues to deal relatively well with the virus, having recorded about 28,600 cases and 909 deaths linked to COVID-19 in a population of 25 million. —AFP

Stellantis is born as Peugeot, Fiat complete merger

PARIS: The merger of France's PSA and US-Italian rival Fiat Chrysler becomes official yesterday, creating Stellantis, the world's fourth-biggest automaker by volume. The long-awaited 50/50 tie-up, which was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, is seen as crucial for the two groups to undertake the investment necessary to transition to clean car technology. The new company will bring together producers such as Peugeot, Citroen, Fiat, Chrysler, Jeep, Alfa Romeo and Maserati, each of which will continue under their own brand names.

The 14 Stellantis brands will account for about nine percent of the global auto market. Together they produced eight million vehicles in 2019.

Ranking behind global rivals such as Volkswagen, Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi and Toyota, Stellantis will be the fourth-largest automaker by volume and the third-largest by revenue, with a workforce of over 400,000.

John Elkann, Fiat chairman and scion of Italy's storied Agnelli family, will retain his role at Stellantis in what he has called "a challenging era". "The coming decade will redefine mobility: we are intent on playing a leading role in building this new future," Elkann said earlier this month after the shareholders gave their blessing to what he called the "historic merger".

On Monday the new group Stellantis, the name derived from the Latin verb "stellare" meaning to brighten with stars, will launch on the Milan and Paris stock exchanges followed by its debut in the New York stock market the following day. In



PARIS: The merger of France's PSA and US-Italian rival Fiat Chrysler becomes official yesterday, creating Stellantis, the world's fourth-biggest automaker by volume.

November PS chief Carlos Tavares warned that "only the most agile, with a Darwinian spirit, will survive".

On Tuesday Tavares, as Stellantis chief executive officer, will hold the new group's first news conference, laying out the vision for the newly merged automaker. The challenges are many, to turn the range of vehicles to electric-power, to coax back into the new car market drivers who have switched to used cars or rentals, plus the ongoing coronavirus pandemic which is putting major dents into many industries.

PSA's global sales — Peugeot, Citroen, DS, Opel, Vauxhall — fell by 27.8 percent last year. Matthias Heck of Moody's sees the merger as a good thing for both the French and Italian makers because it will "improve their global coverage, they can collaborate at the technological level and in various segments and will save money through the synergies and experience of PSA, which has been able to set the right price and manage its costs". —AFP



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Business

Gulf Bank announces Talal Fahad Al-Ajmi as this year's Al-Danah account grand prize winner of KD 1,500,000

- Al-Danah is one of Gulf Bank's long-standing savings accounts, rewarding clients for saving
- Gulf Bank to announce two new millionaires this year
- March 31 is the last chance to participate in Al-Danah account's upcoming semiannual draw and win KD 1,000,000 prize

KUWAIT: On Thursday evening, Gulf Bank held its annual draw to announce its newest millionaire and the lucky winner of the Al-Danah account's grand draw prize of KD 1.5 million for the year 2020. This year, the grand prize went to Talal Fahad Salem Al-Ajmi.

The winner was announced as part of a virtual draw event that aired on Al-Rai TV, in addition to the radio station Kuwait Pulse FM 88.8 and the Bank's various social media channels. The draw was held live in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and from Ernst & Young.



Mohammed Al-Qattan

Two millionaires in 2021!

The draw event started with a short speech from Gulf Bank's General Manager of Consumer Banking, Mohammed Al-Qattan, who touched on the Bank's most recent achievements, saying: "We have grown accustomed to celebrating Gulf Bank's grand annual Al-Danah account draw with our esteemed customers, but this year marks a celebration that is bigger than ever! For the very first time, we will be announcing a millionaire who will be taking home a KD 1.5 million prize, the largest prize associated with a bank worldwide. We are also very excited to celebrate Gulf Bank's 60th anniversary by announcing Al-Danah is bigger than ever, with increased draw prizes. Moving forward, we are

excited to be announcing two new millionaires per year with the Al-Danah account, and will be giving away a grand prize of KD 1.5 million to one winner, and a semiannual prize of KD 1 million to the other, in addition to the monthly and quarterly Al-Danah prizes. We're wishing everyone the best of luck!"

The Bank has updated its draw prizes with a remarkable increase in the semiannual draw prize, now KD 1 million, making it the second largest prize following the annual grand draw prize of KD 1.5 million. The new draw prize scheme makes Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account one of the most rewarding savings accounts of the year, granting two people the opportunities of a lifetime: to become millionaires in 2021!



The Gulf Bank executive team with MOCI and EY representatives

NEW!

ALDANAH

JUST GOT BIGGER

ALDanah Millionaire Grand Draw

KD 1,500,000

New for 2021! An Additional ALDanah Millionaire Draw

KD 1,000,000

10 Monthly Winners

KD 1,000

Two Quarterly Draws

KD 100,000

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Business



Salma Al-Hajaj

A culture of human capital

While recalling the various stages that Gulf Bank and its customers have undergone throughout the past six decades, no role is more apparent than that of Gulf Bank's employees, who have demonstrated their loyalty and dedication to customer service on a daily basis. Their commitment and dedication were especially evident as the Bank navigated the challenges of the past few months in light of health restrictions and the national quarantine and curfews.

During the draw event, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources, Salma Al-Hajaj, said: "The human element is one of the most important resources that forms the basis for progress, development and growth at any institution. At Gulf Bank, we would not be where we are today had it not been for the continuous efforts of the wonderful people we work with. Over the past 60 years, Gulf

Bank has invested in human resources. To give an example, Gulf Bank's AJYAL program has successfully graduated six cohorts, cultivating generations of young men and women who are proudly shaping the future of Gulf Bank's leadership. We are also proud to shine a light on the many women that have contributed to the development and growth of the Bank. Gulf Bank's female employees have not only proven their competence, but have also made great strides in contributing to, and building, a promising future. In so much as they form the basis of our society, women are also an integral part of the workplace. Since today also happens to be Rewards Day, we have decided to reward women all over with an exciting new product, which will be available across all of Gulf Bank's branches this week - stay tuned for more details which we will be announcing soon!"



Tareq Al-Saleh

Recommendations for draw winners

Gulf Bank also provided financial advice from the Deputy General Manager of the Economic Research Unit at Gulf Bank, Tareq Al-Saleh, who said: "The Al-Danah account offers everyone the chance to make their dreams come true. My advice to tonight's winner is to take advantage of this opportunity to secure a better future, and to be mindful of making smart decisions to avoid financial loss. At Gulf Bank, we provide investment advice that suits every client's needs, with the opportunity to invest in both the local and global markets. Whether

you are today's lucky winner or not, we encourage everyone to make sure they are saving regularly. A great place to start is by setting up an allocated amount to be automatically transferred monthly to your Al-Danah savings account - in that way, you are not only saving, but you are also increasing your chances of winning the Al-Danah account's KD 1.5 million or KD 1 million prizes and more!" As one of Gulf Bank's most long-standing and established savings accounts, the Al-Danah account is designed to encourage a culture of saving in Kuwait, and to reward savers for committing to saving on a regular basis.



Ahmad Al-Amir

A one-of-a-kind virtual live draw event
Following the announcement of the

Al-Danah millionaire, Gulf Bank's Assistant General Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Ahmad

Al-Amir, said: "Today we enjoyed a beautiful evening brimming with multiple segments that reflect Gulf Bank's foundational priorities. These segments highlighted the Bank's enduring relationships with its clients over the past sixty years, including the ways in which we support our youth, our emphasis on female empowerment and women working in the banking sector, and Gulf Bank's ongoing efforts to provide the best investment advice and state-of-the-art financial services to our clients. Although this year's annual Al-Danah draw event was held virtually in the interest of everyone's safety and in compliance with national health requirements, it is nevertheless the largest celebration in Gulf Bank's history, with the winner claiming a prize of KD 1.5 million! We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Talal Al-Ajmi for being the first lucky winner to receive the largest draw prize offered by Gulf Bank to date. We wish our other customers the best of the luck in the upcoming semiannual draw, in which the winner will take home a prize of KD 1 million. With that in mind, we would like to remind everyone that the last date to participate in the semi-annual draw for the chance to become a millionaire is March 31 and we are hopeful that we will be able to celebrate our next millionaire with a live celebration!"

Al-Danah enriches lives

During the event, Gulf Bank debuted a song by popular singers, Khaled Al-Mulla and Marwa Ben Sghaier, who touched on the many life-altering possibilities that come with winning the Al-Danah account's grand prize. The artists painted an exciting picture of all the possibilities that can come with winning an Al-Danah prize, and the ways in which winning can change someone's life. The song alludes to the sheer size and magnitude of the Al-Danah prizes and the many ways in which winners can spend the draw prizes and enhance their lives forever.

Interviews with the audience

During the segment, the Gulf Bank team was also shown taking a quick tour of the local Souq Al-Mubarakiya, conducting short interviews with passersby to ask them an interesting question: "What would you do if you won the Gulf Bank Al-Danah account's grand prize of 1,500,000 Kuwaiti Dinars?" The visitors' answers varied - some were shocked and amazed at the prize amount, while others desired to build a house and a seaside chalet. Still others brought up the possibility of investing the cash prizes, while another market visitor expressed that he would donate the money to a charitable cause.

Social media followers win 60 prizes

In addition to an exclusive virtual draw event and as part of a roster of activities planned by Gulf Bank, the Bank continued to engage with its social media followers throughout the week. In celebration of Gulf Bank's 60th anniversary, the Bank posed questions on the topic of the Al-Danah savings account all week, awarding

60 winners with Prepaid Cards containing KD 60 each, to be spent on whatever the winners desire.

Al-Danah's exclusive loyalty program increases your chances of winning

As part of Gulf Bank's commitment to reward customers for their loyalty, the Al-Danah account provides account holders with loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the Bank. Accordingly, all chances gained by existing Al-Danah customers in 2020 have been transferred to the 2021 onwards. Terms and conditions apply.

Gulf Bank encourages Al-Danah account holders to increase their chances of winning by increasing the amounts deposited into their accounts. With Gulf Bank, depositing into an Al-Danah account is now easier than ever, as clients can deposit into their accounts using the ePay service, available through the Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services.

The Al-Danah account provides a multitude of valuable services to its customers, including access to an exclusive Al-Danah ATM card, ideal for depositing money into their accounts at any time. Account holders can now also calculate their chances of winning the monthly, quarterly and annual draws using the Al-Danah Calculator, available on Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking App.

Will you be the next millionaire? Deposit before March 31!
Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open

to both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. A minimum of KD 200 is required to open an account and the same amount must be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to the account monthly until the minimum balance is met. To participate in this year's upcoming monthly, quarterly and annual Al-Danah draws, customers must maintain the required balance.

To deposit into an Al-Danah account, customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's branches, or transfer directly through Gulf Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services. Customers can also direct their queries via WhatsApp on 1805805 for round-the-clock assistance from Gulf Bank representatives, or call the Customer Contact Center on the same number. In addition, customers can visit the dedicated Al-Danah account website to learn more about the account and its winners.



Scan the QR code and watch the event online!



As of January, Gulf Bank's Al Danah draws will take place according to the following schedule:

Draw	Winners	Draw Prize	Last Day to Deposit
Monthly	10 Winners	KD One Thousand per winner (KD 1,000 per winner)	7 days prior to the draw
First Quarterly Draw	One Winner	KD One Hundred Thousand (KD 100,000)	January 31, 2021
Second Quarterly Draw	One Winner	KD One Million (KD 1,000,000)	March 31, 2021
Third Quarterly Draw	One Winner	KD One Hundred Thousand (KD 100,000)	June 30, 2021
Annual Grand Prize	One Winner	KD One Million and Five Hundred Thousand (KD 1,500,000)	September 30, 2021



Najla Al-Essa

Gulf Bank celebrates 60 years of being by your side

In celebration of Gulf Bank's 60th anniversary, the Bank aired a short video depicting its journey over the past six decades, in appreciation of the dedicated customers who have placed their trust in the Bank, and who the Bank has served in return. Gulf Bank's

Assistant General Manager of Marketing, Najla Al-Essa, said: "Over the past sixty years, we have been honored to have been a part of your lives and experiences, and to have you share in our journey and our successes. Throughout the years, we have proudly rewarded you in multiple ways for your loyalty and dedication. Among these

many opportunities for rewards are the Al-Danah draws, which we have held over the past few years, and which we will continue to hold during the years to come. In the meantime, we promise to continue providing the highest levels of customer service, and look forward to serving our clients for the next sixty years and more."

Lifestyle | Features

Tyler Perry to receive honorary statuette at Oscars



In this file photo Director/actor Tyler Perry poses in the press room during the 76th annual Golden Globe Awards at the Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP

US filmmaker Tyler Perry will receive an honorary statuette at this year's Oscars for his humanitarian work, including efforts to get the entertainment industry safely back to work during the coronavirus pandemic, the Academy announced Thursday. The Black entertainment mogul has set up a self-contained, 330-acre (133-hectare) production "campus" at a Civil War-era Confederate military base in Atlanta, Georgia, where hundreds have been employed while Covid-19 shuts down productions in Los Angeles and elsewhere. Perry has championed greater diversity in Hollywood, produced dozens of films and TV shows starring mainly African American actors, and last year paid funeral costs for victims of police violence including George Floyd.

"Tyler's cultural influence extends far beyond his work as a filmmaker," said David Rubin, the president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. "He has quietly and steadily focused on humanitarian and social justice causes from the beginning of his career, caring for people who are most often ignored." The 51-year-old Perry—a producer, actor, writer and director—first achieved mainstream US success with his outspoken grandmother character Madea in the 2005 movie "Diary of a Mad Black Woman." A string of Madea films followed, all with Perry in drag in the role of the title character. He has also appeared in movies including "Star Trek" (2009), "Gone Girl" (2014) and "Vice" (2018).

His films, TV shows and plays have

since made him a household name in the US, especially among African Americans, and he became a billionaire last year, according to Forbes—but he remains relatively little-known abroad. Perry was separately honored at television's Emmys, which were held virtually in September. The Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award has been handed out by the Academy most years since 1957, and last went to "Thelma & Louise" star Geena Davis for her work promoting gender equality in media. Other previous winners include Angelina Jolie, Oprah Winfrey and Elizabeth Taylor. In recent years, the prize has been awarded at the Academy's separate Governors Awards ceremony, held in Los Angeles before the Oscars, but that event has been canceled this year due to the pandemic.

Perry will receive his at the 93rd Oscars, due to take place April 25, which will also see a second Jean Hersholt award handed to the Motion Picture and Television Fund. The MPTF, co-founded by silent era megastar Mary Pickford a century ago, offers financial relief and other services to struggling entertainment industry workers. The Academy changed its rules for one year only to allow an institution to receive the honor, for the first time. "The organization's contribution during the pandemic has made a significant impact on the entertainment community, providing social services support to nearly 9,000 industry members in 2020," the Academy said. — AFP

Spike Lee vows to 'delay Father Time' as Hollywood bestows honor

Spike Lee voiced hope for the "next wave" of Black filmmakers—but warned his own trail-blazing career was far from done—as he was honored by Hollywood at a virtual ceremony Thursday. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, Lee accepted the prestigious American Cinematheque Award online rather than at the usual star-studded Beverly Hills gala. The prolific 63-year-

come up and keep this thing going, it makes me happy," said Lee. "The happiest people for the success of 'Black Panther' (were) you, Disney, and I was... third," he told Coogler.

Both men reflected on "Black Panther" star Chadwick Boseman, who appeared in "Da 5 Bloods" before succumbing to cancer in August. Very few actors could play the "revered" and "almost mythical" role of soldier Stormin' Norman, said Lee. "I love him and I miss him... even though he was only with us for a limited amount of time, he gave us so, so much," added Coogler. The American Cinematheque Award is a "mid-career achievement award," with previous honorees including Al Pacino, Tom Cruise and Steven Spielberg. Before accepting, Lee noted that many of his films "did not connect with the audience right away" but had been re-evaluated in recent years. Lee received an honorary Oscar in late 2015, and won his first competitive Oscar four years later with best adapted screenplay for "BlackKkKlansman." Last year, he was named the first person of black African descent to preside at the Cannes film festival. "Let's keep it going!" Lee concluded as he accepted his honor. — AFP



In this file photo Best Director nominee for "BlackKkKlansman" Spike Lee arrives for the 91st Annual Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

old director, who has entertained and provoked audiences with frank depictions of Black America for decades, promised he has "got some more joints to make," referring to his films. "If you love what you're doing, you can delay Father Time," he told ceremony host Jodie Foster.

The livestreamed event saw Lee heaped with praise by the likes of Foster, Angela Bassett, Rosie Perez and "Black Panther" director Ryan Coogler, who dubbed him a "trailblazer." The award was remotely presented by the cast of Lee's recent movie "Da 5 Bloods," in which elderly Black soldiers return to Vietnam decades after the war. Lee, who continues to teach film at his alma mater New York University, deflected praise onto younger Black filmmakers including Coogler. "When I see the next wave

60s icon Marianne Faithfull reveals 'long Covid' battle

British singer Marianne Faithfull has been left with fatigue and breathing problems months after being treated for Covid-19 in hospital, the Guardian newspaper reported on Friday. Faithfull, 74, said she had suffered with lingering symptoms after contracting the virus during the first wave of the pandemic in Britain in April last year. "Three things: the memory, fatigue and my lungs are still not OK—I have to have oxygen and all that stuff," she told the paper, adding that the side-effects were "strange" and "awful". A high number of Covid-19 patients have experienced lasting effects from the virus after an initial recovery with a lingering disease known as "long Covid".

Symptoms range from memory problems, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell, post-traumatic stress disorder, and in some cases patients can be left bed-ridden for months. Faithfull, a 1960s icon who was catapulted to fame at the age of just 17 singing "As Tears Go By" written by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones, was discharged from hospital in London on April 22. The singer said given her age, well-documented battles with drug addiction and health issues, such as an earlier hepatitis C diagnosis and emphysema, she was particularly vulnerable to Covid and came close to death. "All I know is that I was in a very dark place—presumably, it was death," she said. Faithfull said she has subsequently learned from medical notes that at one stage in hospital, doctors were only advising palliative care. Her musical collaborator, the Australian musician Warren Ellis, said her chances of survival had seemed slim. "She wasn't actually meant to make it through," Ellis said. — AFP



In this file photo English singer Marianne Faithfull performs on stage during the 23rd edition of the Cognac Blues Passion festival in Cognac. — AFP

'Parasite' director to head Venice film festival jury

South Korean director Bong Joon-ho, whose "Parasite" movie won the Academy Award for Best Picture last year, was named Friday as jury president of the 2021 Venice Film Festival. "I'm ready to admire and applaud all the great films selected by the festival. I'm filled with genuine hope and excitement," Bong said in a statement issued by festival organizers. Festival director Alberto Barbera said Bong would be the first South Korean jury president, and saluted him as "one of the most authentic and original voices in worldwide cinema."

"Parasite," a dark comedy about the gap between rich and poor, made history as the first non-English-language movie to win an Oscar for Best Picture. It also



In this file photo South Korean film director Bong Joon Ho poses with his engraved awards as he attends the 92nd Oscars Governors Ball at the Hollywood & Highland Center in Hollywood, California. — AFP

picked up three other statuettes at the Academy Awards for Best Director, Best International Feature and Best Original Screenplay. The Venice Film Festival is one of the most prestigious in the world, rivaling with Cannes and Berlin, and the oldest. Its 78th edition is scheduled for September 1-11, 2021. — AFP



Mountain gazelles are pictured on a hill next to a forest in the suburb of Jerusalem.

Israel studies new forest home for endangered mountain gazelle

Israel is one of the last places where the endangered mountain gazelle roams in the wild but, as development shrinks their natural savannah habitat, ecologists are studying if they can also thrive in forests. Wildlife experts hope their population can recover in woodlands like the Forest of the Martyrs west of Jerusalem, where six million trees were planted after World War II, reflecting the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust. To study how the animals are adapting to their new environment and food sources, a team at the Volcani Center, Israel's agricultural research organization, has been collecting their droppings to study the quality of their diets.

Armed with small shovels, they walked its foliage-covered paths recently which led team leader Guy Dovrat and his staff to what they call "a station", delighted to find the small dark pellets deposited by the animals. Analysis already suggests the slender herbivores can indeed adapt to the forest ecosystem, Dovrat said. Gazelles are still found in northern and southern Israel, near the coastline and in the Jerusalem area, Dovrat said, with forests now constituting "the last large open spaces where gazelles can live". The International Union for Conservation of Nature placed the mountain gazelle on its "Red List" in 2017, saying its population was declining due to poaching, road kills and habitat degradation. Endemic to the Levant, their population in Israel is now estimated at about 5,000, but falling due to urbanisation and other pressures, according to Yoram Yom-Tov of Tel Aviv University and Uri Roll of Ben Gurion University in Beersheva.

'Last stronghold'

New roads, towns and homes in Israel have reduced the animals' habitat, fragmented their territories and isolated gazelle populations, the two scientists note in an article published in Oryx, The International Journal of Conservation. The animals also face threats from cars,

predators like wolves or jackals, and even hunting, although it is prohibited in Israel. The article noted that despite Israel being the mountain gazelle's "last stronghold", populations there too are declining and not meeting their full reproductive potential.



A mountain gazelle is pictured on a hill next to a forest in the suburb of Jerusalem.

Dovrat, for his study, joined forces with the Jewish National Fund which manages the Forest of the Martyrs, planted in 1951. "We have set up this partnership to see how in the future we can use data (on gazelles) to better manage the forest," said Yahel Porat, 45, an ecologist and landscape gardener at the JNF. One way of aiding the gazelles is planting vegetation they favour, Porat said.

Dovrat's team was also installing cameras on trees to capture the movement of gazelles and to estimate their number. "It's important for us to know where there are gazelles to adapt our activity in the forest, to avoid disturbing them and to keep from pushing them towards the roads," Porat said. The JNF has recently put in place ecological bridges over roads to allow gazelles to move from forest to forest, he said. "It's one of the most important things we can do today to preserve them." — AFP

'WE NEED YOU' GERMAN TENOR KAUFMANN TELLS PANDEMIC PUBLIC

German tenor Jonas Kaufmann says not being able to perform in front of a live audience for months has been hugely detrimental for musicians who thrive on connecting with real people. "What we miss is this connection and it doesn't matter if they wear masks or whatever," the 51-year-old told AFP on Thursday after performing at Madrid's Teatro Real opera house. "I would probably feel them, sense them even if they were behind a curtain. But they are there. This is what really matters," added the tenor, whose last performance before an audience was in November in Denmark.

While many of the world's major venues are shut, Spain's main opera house has remained open—although with smaller audiences and safety measures such as the mandatory use of face masks—since July. "For me, being on tour all year round, it feels like it has been forever since I had the experience of an audience in front of me," said Kaufmann, adding he was "extremely excited and thrilled" to perform in Madrid. Some opera houses have staged full operas to empty theatres for television or online broadcast but Kaufmann said it was no substitute for a live audience. "Usually there is the applause and then you relax and start smiling at you take a bow, but if there is just this eternal silence what can you do? It's embarrassing really," he said earlier during a press conference.

"So my apologies. Audience we need you and we need you now more than ever," he added. "People needed distraction, people needed something to at least forget for a couple of hours all their sorrows. If you take that away and at the same time, when you take away pretty much everything else, I think it's a huge, huge mistake."

'High rate of suicides'

Kaufmann warned that the devastating economic impact on musicians, many of whom are struggling to make ends meet as shows are cancelled, is taking a psychological toll. "I know about a quite high rate of suicides in our family of musicians because they don't see any future and it is really, really terrible," he said. Some are "vulnerable souls" who unfortunately "don't see any other exit, which is very sad," Kaufmann said. Kaufmann, who the New York Times once called the "most important, versatile tenor of his generation", said he feels "very privileged" to still be able to perform. "There are maybe two dozen singers worldwide who are in this privileged position," he said.

Kaufmann urged the authorities to reopen concert halls and other cultural institutions and be inventive to revive the arts. "We are not the politicians... we are only voices and we need others to help" so that after the pandemic "we find a cultural landscape that is similar to what we have left when this whole crisis started," he said. "This is the first time that music is being silenced in a time of crisis," he added. — AFP



German operatic tenor Jonas Kaufmann poses after his performance at the Teatro Real in Madrid. — AFP



Dustin Diamond

'Saved by the Bell' star Dustin Diamond diagnosed with cancer

The actor Dustin Diamond, best known for playing Samuel 'Screech' Powers in hit US children's TV show "Saved by the Bell", has been diagnosed with cancer, according to his representatives. His official Facebook page confirmed the news in a statement Thursday, asking fans to "respect Dustin's privacy during this difficult time." The 44-year-old's representative Roger Paul also confirmed the diagnosis to USA Today and said Diamond was undergoing treatment at a Florida hospital for stage 4 cancer. "We are still doing more tests," Paul said on Thursday. "Once we know, we will have an idea of how to approach it. Right now it is a very serious situation. I'm asking everyone for thoughts and prayers."

He did not disclose what type of cancer Diamond had. Diamond starred in "Saved by the Bell" from the late 1980s to 2000, but was not involved in a remake that premiered in November. In recent years, Diamond has worked as a stand-up comedian and appeared on several reality TV shows. In 2015, he was sentenced to four months in prison after being charged with carrying a concealed weapon and disorderly conduct during a stabbing at a bar. He was released from jail a month early in 2016 for good behavior. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

Desert off-roading final frontier for women in Qatar



4x4 vehicles prepare for dune bashing, also known as desert safari, in Qatar's Sealine desert, around 63 kilometres south of the capital Doha. — AFP photos

A female 4x4 enthusiast is blazing a trail in Qatar's traditionally male sport of off-roading and in a rare move has also become a dune driving safety marshal. "As soon as my tyres touched the sand, I fell in love with the desert," said Marcelle Visser, a South African woman living in Qatar, as

"When you start off with this, you think it's a men's sport. This was keeping me away in the beginning," said Visser. But Khaled Shash, the chief safety marshal of Qatar's Dune Rider Club, a group bringing together those with a passion for the desert and 4x4 vehicles, sought to nurture Visser's

popular off-roading area in the past five years, according to interior ministry figures. Over the winter desert season, authorities have carried out a media blitz with television coverage of safety and recovery initiatives, driver education roadshows, and warning billboards dotted around desert areas. Dune Riders, like most other clubs, hosts regular workshops for newcomers to promote safety.

At one workshop, Shash, Visser and the other marshals demonstrated desert recovery techniques. Visser showed a group of young men how to be sure their cars were properly dug out before driving off to avoid spinning their tyres and digging in. "When we come out to the desert, it's four to six hours per time so it's really intensive training," she said of her marshal training, surrounded by the sides of the deep sand bowl used to demonstrate recovery techniques. "It's the same for women getting stuck as for the men, because you don't need the physical strength, you just need to follow the right steps."

a woman thing," said Shash, the chief marshal.

But Visser was not deterred, rising from an ordinary group member to a marshal in little over a year. "That raised a lot of eyebrows," she said. "When it's a big group and each one has their own way of doing it, being heard over a big group of people is very difficult." The group, which counts



South African Marcelle Visser, driving safety marshal of Qatar's Dune Rider club, train participants in off-road driving techniques in Qatar's Sealine desert.

only a handful of women as members—something Visser has sought to change by encouraging members' wives to give it a try—has come to embrace the lone female marshal. "I've been in many clubs, even back in India I used to be in all the two-wheel clubs, but I've never seen a woman who's handling this stuff alone," said group member Ram Arun. "This is the first time that I've seen a woman, who's very bold, very patient. She's really good." — AFP



4x4 vehicles prepare for dune bashing, also known as desert safari, in Qatar's Sealine desert.

her Land Cruiser bounded across the rolling sandscape. In Qatar, gender separation in social settings remains common in many areas of life, so the appointment of a woman as one of a handful of experts at a prestigious desert club has caused a stir. Men and women gather separately for prayers and most celebrations and, historically, it was the men who would gather and make camps in the desert as well as off-road together—hugely popular pastimes in Qatar.

enthusiasm. "The minute I saw how Marcelle is passionate about off-roading in general I decided to focus with her. It was a plan to make her a marshal," he said.

'Don't need physical strength'

Marshals take responsibility for the safety of group members on desert drives, training participants in off-road driving techniques and assisting those in distress. More than 4,300 accidents have been reported in Qatar's most

'Not a woman thing?'

Desert camps and off-roading will be at the forefront of Qatar's offer to fans visiting the Gulf emirate for the 2022 World Cup. Desert camps are also expected to help pick up the slack for hotels and other more conventional accommodation. Visser's expertise is clear, but she sometimes has to work to be heard over her more vocal male club members. "Off-roading always had something of an adrenaline rush, so it's always existed with men—it's not



Marcelle Visser train participants in off-road driving techniques.



Teenagers sit together ahead of dune bashing.



A girl walks with her dog ahead of dune bashing, also known as desert safari.

COVID KILLS MEN'S FASHION BUZZ IN MILAN

A year after the last Covid-free catwalk shows in Milan, men's fashion week began on Friday, but without the buzz of its traditional audience of buyers, bloggers, celebrities and media. As the pandemic continues to upend Italy's crucial luxury sector nearly 12 months after it first swept

through the country, fashion houses have turned to technology to showcase their fall/winter 2021-22 collections. Shows will be broadcast live on the fashion houses' own websites or be replaced with pre-recorded presentations, short films and other artistic projects. Others such as Dolce & Gabbana have withdrawn entirely.

The four-day men's fashion event takes place with infections rising in Italy's Lombardy region with a return a full lockdown possible as early as the weekend. Lombardy, whose capital is Milan, is one of five in Italy classified "orange" by the government, which means that stores and most schools are closed, while a curfew remains in force at night. Among those opting for live shows to be broadcast by the fashion houses are Fendi, Etrò and Kway.

Most other brands, however, including Ermenegildo Zegna, Tod's, Prada and Church's, have opted for pre-recorded choices that allow for creative freedom but lack the immediacy and drama of live shows. Dolce & Gabbana, which was originally scheduled to offer a traditional runway show on January 16, announced on Monday its decision to pull out entirely. In view of Covid-19, it said, "the conditions essential to the realisation of our fashion show are not met". For the moment, no digital presentation is planned.

Fashion in free fall

The men's fashion industry has suffered a hard blow from the pandemic. In Italy, the sector ended 2020 with revenues down by 18.6 percent, representing some two billion euros (\$2.4

billion) in lost sales. The global nature of the crisis curtailed exports, which had been on the rise but fell by 16.7 percent last year, crushing revenues by 70.8 percent. One sign of hope, however, is the beginnings of recovery in the key Asian markets, but industry experts do not expect a full return to health in the luxury sector before 2023.

Italy was the epicenter of the first European outbreak in February last year after Covid-19 first emerged late in 2019 in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Since then the virus has claimed tens of thousands of lives in Italy, making it one of the two worst-hit countries in Europe alongside Britain.—AFP



A screen shows screenings schedule of the Fall/Winter 2021 Men's fashion collections by the Italian Chamber of Italian Fashion (Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana) on Friday in downtown Milan, on the opening day of a four-day so-called "phygital fashion week".



Young men take a lunch break on a public bench as a screen displays Ermenegildo Zegna's digital Fall/Winter 2021 Men's fashion collection. — AFP photos

Funny old world: The week's offbeat news

A final leak

There was only so long the US Secret Service agents guarding Ivanka Trump and her husband Jared Kushner could hold on... Now the truth has finally dribbled out. Trump's favorite child and her millionaire partner refused to let the agents protecting them around the clock use any of the "6.5 bathrooms" in their Washington mansion. Instead the agents were forced to go to the nearby home of Barack and Michelle Obama when nature called. And when the Obamas weren't home they had to make do with a porta-potty. Eventually the Secret Service rented a studio apartment nearby for \$3,000 a month to save everyone from embarrassment, the Washington Post revealed.

You've been Trumped

In other Trump news, the departing president is reportedly refusing to pay his personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani—despite the fact that he pretty much trashed his career and reputation for him. The pair have fallen out, with Trump "offended" by Giuliani's demand for \$20,000 a day. But Giuliani got no pity from his old friend and former spin doctor Ken Frydman. He said the ex-New York mayor had repeatedly "embarrassed himself" for the President—including in an unfortunate bedroom cameo in the latest Borat film, "Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan". "Lay down with dogs. Wake up with fleas and without \$20,000 a day," Frydman quipped.

Childbirth is no excuse

South Korean authorities have issued a reminder to pregnant women to have enough pressed shirts, socks and underpants ready for their helpless husbands when they are away in hospital giving birth. They should also have sufficient pre-cooked meals set aside so the poor man, so "unfamiliar with cooking" will not starve, Seoul's local government said on its website. In another helpful hint, mothers-to-be are advised to hang their favorite skimpy dress up on a wall to "motivate" them not to eat too much during their pregnancy. "And don't put off your domestic duties like cleaning and the dishes" girls, it adds. "The exercise will help you keep your weight down..." Like in neighboring Japan, authorities wonder why fewer and fewer South Korean women are having children. But the penny may be dropping. The advice was taken down after 20,000 women expressed their fury at it in an online petition.

Keep it short, Joe

When Joe Biden is sworn in as US president on Wednesday, we hope he remembers the lesson of his unfortunate predecessor William H. Harrison in 1841. An oldie like Biden, Harrison tried to show his vigour by giving the longest inauguration speech in US history, only to expire of pneumonia a month later having talked for two hours in the freezing cold. History does not record how many of the audience also perished. — AFP



In this picture rhino caretaker Farid Mia cuddles a rhino inside an enclosure at the zoo in Dhaka. — AFP

Bangladesh zoo seeks mate for lonely Kanchi the Rhino

A lonely rhinoceros at a Bangladesh zoo is looking for new love after losing her partner seven years ago, but pandemic travel restrictions are hampering her keeper's attempts to play matchmaker. Kanchi, a star attraction at the Bangladesh National Zoo, is at her most fertile age. But since the death of her male partner in 2014, she has been living on her own in her muddy pen in the northern suburb of the capital. The malaise of Kanchi the rhino has become increasingly apparent to the two million-plus visitors a year at the Dhaka landmark. Kanchi refuses food and often snubs her carer Farid Mia, who hugs the rhino and scratches its neck and shoulders.

The one-ton vegetarian beast is served six kilograms (13 pounds) of rice bran and one kilo of chickpeas each day. "Her mood swings frequently. Sometimes she does not respond to my calls. It is mainly because she has grown up alone all these years," Mia said. "I tell her that we will soon find her a male partner. But she is restless. She needs a partner desperately." Abdul Latif, curator of the zoo, said the coronavirus pandemic had blocked recent efforts to bring in a male rhino from Africa. "We know she feels lonely and we are trying our best to buy a suitable partner," Latif told AFP. There has been more attention given to Kanchi, however, since the plight of Kaavan, the world's loneliest elephant made international headlines in November. —AFP

Sports

Photo of the Day



Carlos Sainz races during Rally Dakar 2021 from Wadi Ad Dawasir to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Antetokounmpo propels Bucks over Mavs, James leads Lakers past Pelicans

T'Wolves star Towns confirms positive COVID-19 case

LOS ANGELES: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 31 points and had nine rebounds to power the Milwaukee Bucks to a 112-109 victory over Luka Doncic's Dallas Mavericks in a battle between the two early frontrunners for NBA Most Valuable Player honors. Two-time MVP winner Antetokounmpo hit 14-of-21 shots from the floor and Khris Middleton finished with 25 points for the host Bucks, who have won seven of their last eight games.

Doncic shot 12-of-24 from the floor for a team-high 28 points after coming off a 34-point performance in a win over Charlotte two nights earlier. "We showed him bodies. He wasn't able to step back. We made him pass the ball," Antetokounmpo said of Doncic.

After Milwaukee's Brook Lopez missed a free throw with one second left, Doncic launched a desperation two-handed three-point attempt at the buzzer but it hit the backboard and bounced harmlessly away to give Milwaukee the win. "We just stayed with it," said Middleton. "They did a good job rebounding off the glass and made some tough shots but we just stayed with it."

Middleton drained a pair of clutch three-pointers late in the fourth quarter. He also had eight rebounds and six assists. The former second-round draft pick was traded to the Bucks in 2013 from Detroit. "Each year is about getting better and finding ways to make my teammates better. That is what they do for me," said Middleton, who recently donated \$100,000 to the employees at Fiserv Forum who lost their jobs because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Jue Holiday had 16 points and Lopez added 11 points and 11 rebounds for the Bucks, who overcame Antetokounmpo's one-for-10 shooting from the free throw line. Doncic also had 13 assists and Tim Hardaway added 22 points for the Mavericks, who had their four-game winning streak snapped. "We played bad," said Doncic. "But we had a chance to go up and we hung in there."

Antetokounmpo against Doncic wasn't the only marquee matchup on a night when the league had to postpone three games because of a series of coronavirus outbreaks. Four-time NBA champion LeBron James took on former first overall draft pick Zion Williamson and after the slow start the host Lakers rolled to a 112-95 win over the Pelicans. James had 21 points, 11 assists and eight rebounds, Anthony Davis finished with 17 points and a half dozen Lakers finished in double figure scoring.



MILWAUKEE: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks handles the ball during the game against the Dallas Mavericks on Friday at the Fiserv Forum Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. — AFP

Montrezl Harrell and Kentavious Caldwell-Pope each with 16 points, Germany's Dennis Schroder with 12 and Kyle Kuzma with 11 as the first place Los Angeles won their fifth game in a row.

New players

"We are playing good basketball right now and we want to continue that," said James. "We are implementing five new guys into our rotation that weren't part of our team last year." Williamson, who returned after a one-game absence due to health protocols, had 21 points and 12 rebounds and Brandon Ingram scored 20 points for the Pelicans, who lost their fifth straight.

sports community.

The company also took this opportunity to highlight the extensive efforts witnessed by KFA president, Sheikh Ahmed Youssef Al-Sabah, and the members of the association, throughout the football season. Their hard work and dedication led to yet another successful outcome witnessed during the closing ceremony of this widely followed championship in Kuwait, added stc.

The Crown Prince Cup stems from the basic values stc abides by. These include promoting fair and positive competition, good sportsmanship, ethical principles, and integrity, values that apply to all aspects of life. The company said that it will continue to support sporting initiatives, especially those that foster the same values that the company stands by. Participating in competitive sports and fitness activities aids in building character, developing morals, and promoting a healthier lifestyle through frequent exercise, a belief that is also encouraged amongst work teams.

In its stride to support the local sports community, stc will continue to back such initiatives, firmly believing in the added value and benefits these could bring to the younger generation. Promoting a healthier and active lifestyle is a priority that should not only be considered towards the younger generation, but also work teams within the company.

stc concluded, "In line with our digital transformation strategy, we aim to continue developing innovative communication solutions and platforms that complement the strength of our 5G networks, serving the

Also, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 33 points and Mike Muscala hit a pair of three-pointers in overtime to lift the Oklahoma City Thunder to a 127-125 win over the Chicago Bulls. The Bulls led by as many as 22 points in the first half before the Thunder rallied to tie it up in the final seconds.

Muscala's three-pointers and Chicago's poor overtime shooting allowed Oklahoma City to win for the first time in six home games this season. Elsewhere, Kawhi Leonard delivered 27 points and six assists as the Los Angeles Clippers cruised to a 138-100 win over the Sacramento Kings.

Towns tests positive

Minnesota Timberwolves star Karl-Anthony Towns said Friday he had tested positive for COVID-19, vowing to overcome the disease that last year claimed the life of his mother and six other family members. The 25-year-old power forward confirmed news of his positive case in a statement on Twitter, shortly after the NBA confirmed Minnesota's game against Memphis on Friday had been postponed. "Prior to tonight's game, I received yet another awful call that I tested positive for COVID," said Towns. "I pray every day that this nightmare of a virus will subside and I beg everyone to continue to take it seriously by taking all of the necessary precautions. We cannot stop the spread of this virus alone, it must be a group effort by all of us."

In April last year, Towns' mother, Jacqueline Cruz-Towns, died at the age of 58 after contracting COVID-19. Towns father also contracted the disease but recovered. US media reports have said six other members of Towns' extended family had died from coronavirus complications. "I've seen a lot of coffins in the last seven months," Towns said in December before the start of the new NBA season.

"It breaks my heart that my family, particularly my father and sister, continue to suffer from the anxiety that comes along with this diagnosis as we know all too well what the end result could be," Towns said in his statement on Friday. "To my niece and nephew... I promise you I will not end up in a box next to grandma and I will beat this." Towns' positive case comes amid a slew of postponements in the NBA, which opened its 2020-2021 season last month amid a resurgent COVID-19 crisis in the United States. — AFP

entertainment needs of our individual and corporate customers. stc is keen to support and encourage pioneering projects and activities across various sectors, which definitely includes the sports industry."

It is worth mentioning that through its influential and role in the local sports community, stc aims to

Lazio cruise past city rivals Roma

MILAN: Lazio cruised to a 3-0 victory over city rivals Roma on Friday, equaling their best ever derby victory in Serie A. The win moved Lazio up to seventh place on 31 points, just two behind champions Juventus in fourth. Roma stay third with 34 points, but are six points off leaders AC Milan having also played a game more. Ciro Immobile opened the scoring in the 14th minute for his 12th goal of the season. Luis Alberto, in the 23rd and 67th minutes, scored the other two, both with precise strikes. Roma, who had drawn 2-2 with second-placed Inter Milan last weekend, were rescued from further punishment by goalkeeper Paul Lopez who pulled off a series of fine second-half saves. "This season, it was a bit more important than usual, because we weren't doing as well in Serie A as we wanted," Spanish star Alberto said. "The last three or four games have been much better, we improved a great deal, and we confirmed that in the derby. We showed a winning mentality and want to keep this momentum going."

Friday's game was the first derby for new Roma owner Dan Friedkin, but the performance was desperately familiar. Having lost heavily already this season to top six rivals Napoli (4-0) and Atalanta (4-1), Roma were undone by a far more aggressive Lazio side.—AFP



Matches on TV

(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Aston Villa v Everton 15:00
beIN Sports

Sheffield United v Tottenham Hotspur 17:00
beIN Sports HD 1

Liverpool v Manchester United 19:30
beIN Sports HD 1

Manchester City v Crystal Palace 22:15
beIN Sports

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE

SSC Napoli v ACF Fiorentina 14:30
beIN Sports HD 1

Crotone v Benevento 17:00
beIN Sports HD 5

US Sassuolo Calcio v Parma Calcio 1913 17:00
beIN Sports HD 4

Atalanta v Genoa CFC 20:00
beIN Sports HD 4

Internazionale Milano v Juventus FC 22:45
beIN Sports HD 1

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

FC Bayern Munich v SC Freiburg 17:30
beIN Sports

Eintracht Frankfurt v FC Schalke 04 20:00
beIN Sports

FRENCH LEAGUE

Stade brestois 29 v Stade Rennais 15:00
beIN Sports HD 6

Lorient v FCO Dijon 17:00
beIN Sports HD 10

FC Nantes v Racing Club de Lens 17:00
beIN Sports HD 6

OGC Nice v Bordeaux 17:00
beIN Sports HD 8

RC Strasbourg v Saint Etienne 17:00
beIN Sports HD 9

LOSC Lille v Stade Reims 19:00
beIN Sports HD 6

Olympique Lyonnais v FC Metz 23:00
beIN Sports HD 6

SPANISH SUPER CUP

FC Barcelona v Athletic de Bilbao 23:00
KSA Sports 1 HD

stc celebrates with Crown Prince Cup champions

KUWAIT: stc, the official sponsor of the initiatives organized by the Kuwait Football Association (KFA) including premier championships, celebrated the final match of the most exclusive championship in Kuwait. stc attended the closing ceremony of the Crown Prince Cup at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, held under the patronage of HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Crown Prince of Kuwait, where Kuwait Sporting Club were announced as the official champions of the cup.

The Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi (attending on behalf of HH the Crown Prince of Kuwait), CEO of stc, engineer Maziad Bin Nasser Alharbi, and president of KFA, Sheikh Ahmed Youssef Al-Sabah, crowned Kuwait Sporting Club as champions after winning against Qadsia Sporting Club with a score of 2-1 in favor of the winners.

stc released a statement expressing its sense of joy in the solid partnership it has built over the years with the KFA. In its role as an ongoing supporter, stc indicated that the Crown Prince Cup is a unique annual event that holds a special weight in the local



KUWAIT: Kuwait Club players celebrate with the championship trophy.

actively be engaged in activities that encourage individuals of all ages and nationalities to adopt better lifestyle choices. This dynamic runs parallel to one of the company's primary social responsibility pillars, promoting health awareness and exercising regularly to maintain a balanced active lifestyle.

Sports

Man Utd face acid test of Premier League title credentials at Liverpool

United looks to become first visitors to win at Anfield in league in four years

LONDON: Liverpool and Manchester United face off today as the Premier League's top two teams for the first time since 1997 — with the rivalry between England's most successful clubs rekindled by a fascinating title race. United top the table after the New Year for the first time since Alex Ferguson's retirement in 2013 thanks to an 11-match unbeaten run to take them past Jurgen Klopp's men. Liverpool have surrendered top spot after three league games without a win and could drop to fifth place today if results go against them.

The last time United and Liverpool locked horns in a title race was 12 years ago. Back then United were hardened winners under Ferguson, who saw off Rafael Benitez's challengers to win a third consecutive league title. Now it is United who Ole Gunnar Solskjaer admits are the "hunters" chasing the champions. Ferguson, who arrived at Old Trafford in 1986 with United firmly in Liverpool's shadow, once famously said his goal was to knock them "off their perch" and he went on to win 13 league titles. But United have been displaced as top dogs even in their own city by Manchester City.

And fans have been forced to watch Klopp spearhead another era of glory at Anfield, winning the Champions League in 2019 before ending the club's 30-year wait for a league title last season — putting them just one behind United's record tally of 20.

But, in a strange and at times soulless season in empty stadiums, the relentless consistency shown by Liverpool in recent years has dropped off. Hampered by a series of injuries, most notably by talismanic center-back Virgil van Dijk, Liverpool have already dropped more points in 17 games than they have in either of the past two seasons. That has allowed United to overtake them despite a slow start to their own campaign. Solskjaer's men won just two of their opening six games, suffering a humiliating 6-1 reverse at the hands of Tottenham at Old Trafford.

Historic divides fuel Liverpool, Man Utd rivalry

LONDON: When Liverpool and Manchester United clash at Anfield today, one of the Premier League's most explosive rivalries will carry an extra edge rarely seen in past meetings despite their trophy-laden histories. Over the past four decades, United and Liverpool have often been in the ascendant at different times, so a sustained title battle between the two old enemies is an enticing prospect. United are three points clear of second-placed Liverpool ahead of this weekend's showdown, making it the first time the Old Trafford outfit have been top at this stage of a season since Alex Ferguson's title-winning farewell campaign in 2013. While both teams play in red and come from cities separated by just 31 miles, beneath the superficial similarities lies a bitter feud.



MANCHESTER: In this file photo taken on January 13, 2013 Manchester United's Scottish manager Alex Ferguson (left) celebrates next to Liverpool's Northern Irish manager Brendan Rodgers during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Liverpool at Old Trafford in Manchester, northwest England. — AFP

Best of enemies

Formed as Newton Heath in 1878, Manchester United were born 14 years before Liverpool emerged in 1892, and for a brief period, the clubs had a surprisingly cordial relationship. In 1915, several players from both teams even joined forces to fix their match, which helped United avoid relegation, with four from Liverpool and three from Manchester subsequently hit with bans.

As late as 1958, Liverpool offered to lend players to United after a number of their stars were killed in the

Cavani's 'racism' ban: An attack on a culture?

MONTEVIDEO: "Touch one Uruguayan, touch us all," grumbles Silvina Rosas as she adorns wine bottles with labels bearing the controversial phrase "Gracias Negro." The term, which translates as: "Thank you little black person," got star footballer Edinson Cavani fined for racism in England, but most of his countrymen insist it is a term of endearment.

Following complaints, the Uruguay and Manchester United striker swiftly deleted the social media post he made in response to a message of congratulations after a match-winning display against Southampton in

'We're in it'

But, on the road, United's form has been remarkably consistent. Today, it will be almost a year to the day since they last lost an away game in domestic competition — on their last visit to Anfield. Since then Bruno Fernandes' arrival has helped transform United's fortunes. On Friday, the Portugal playmaker won his fourth Premier League player-of-the-month award in 2020 by picking up the prize for December.

"Unfortunately a good signing for United," said Klopp. "He is a very influential player for United obviously, involved in a lot of things. I know people talk mostly about the goal involvements, which is very important stuff, but he is a link-up in a lot of other situations as well."

Without the silverware on his CV to rival Klopp or City boss Pep Guardiola, Solskjaer's credentials for one of the biggest jobs in football are questioned every time he has a couple of bad results. But the Norwegian has guided United into a position his more storied predecessors, Jose Mourinho and Louis van Gaal, could not manage. "The last few years, there have been two teams running away with it already by the end of October," said Solskjaer. "Now, at least, we're in it at half-way. We're a much better side now than a year ago."

Questions remain over whether United's revival is for real or another false dawn, of which there have been several in the post-Ferguson era. Liverpool's three-decade drought without a league title stands as a warning of how far even giants can fall.

One of Klopp's first iconic phrases when taking charge in 2015 was his ambition to change the fatalism around the club's mentality from "doubter to believer". Should United become the first visiting side to win at Anfield in the league for nearly four years, it is they who will have the new-found confidence that a 21st league title in 2021 is possible. — AFP

Munich airplane crash. But the friendly rivalry had turned nasty by the late 1970s as hooligan gangs fought bloody battles, while United were sprayed with tear gas by a Liverpool fan when they stepped off the coach before a match at Anfield in 1986.

There has not been a transfer between the clubs since Phil Chisnall moved from United to Liverpool in 1964. The enmity plumbed new depths when Liverpool striker Luis Suarez was suspended for eight games after racially abusing United's Patrice Evra in 2011.

Arms race

Liverpool enjoyed one of English football's most dominant periods from the 1970s until 1990, a golden era in which they won 11 of their 19 league titles, lifted the FA Cup three times and won the League Cup in four successive years. Not content with hoovering up the domestic prizes, Liverpool reigned supreme abroad, winning the European Cup four times and the UEFA Cup twice. Liverpool's preeminence had ended by the dawn of the Premier League as United rose to power.

Between 1992 and 2013, United were crowned champions 13 times, surpassing Liverpool as they took the club's overall haul to 20 English titles. Liverpool closed the gap last season with their first title in 30 years and would equal United's record haul if they retain the trophy this term. It also remains a source of angst at Old Trafford that the club have only been European champions three times — half of Liverpool's tally.

Touchline tantrums

"It doesn't matter if we are playing tiddlywinks, when we get together you expect sparks to fly," former United manager Alex Ferguson once said of the Liverpool rivalry. Ferguson did more than most to light the fuse, complaining that visiting managers left Anfield "choking on their own vomit" after an acrimonious 1988 clash and crowing that he had made it his aim to "knock Liverpool from their perch" when he arrived in Manchester.

Liverpool managers were just as susceptible to the passion play, with Rafael Benitez infamously embarking on a heated press conference rant in 2009 about the "facts" that showed Ferguson and United were given favorable treatment by the referees and the governing bodies. Benitez's men ended up blowing their title bid, so current Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp and his United counterpart Ole Gunnar Solskjaer might be wise to keep their cool if tensions threaten to mount this season.

Culture clash

While the football feud has gradually come to the boil, there was rarely any love lost between the cities. One source of the rivalry was the decision of Manchester authorities to build a ship canal in the late 19th century, challenging the port city of Liverpool.

When the Beatles took the charts by storm in the 1960s, Liverpudlians trumpeted Merseybeat as the country's greatest pop export, a boast Mancunians used themselves 20 years later when their city produced touchstone bands such as the Smiths, the Stone Roses and the Happy Mondays. Liverpool supporters claim they beat Manchester to the craze of dressing in fashionable casual sportswear that swept the terraces in the 1980s. —AFP

November, and issued an apology insisting he was "completely opposed to racism." But the English Football Association (FA) deemed the comment "insulting, abusive, improper," banned the 33-year-old for three matches and fined him £100,000 (\$137,000).

The sanction gave rise to much incredulity in Cavani's home country. Rosas, who runs a wine distribution outlet, said the news "outraged" her. As an act of protest, she designed a label with the contested phrase sprawled over blue and white background reminiscent of the Uruguayan flag, and posted a photo montage of some newly-dressed wine bottles on social media.

An avalanche of orders led her to create a new line for real, and she has not stopped shipping deliveries since then. "The reaction was divine madness," Rosas told AFP. "People understood that this (the label design) was done with love. The price also represents that because there is not much profit." The bottles of Uruguay's flagship tannat red wine, sell for 340 pesos (about \$8) apiece. Rosas's



LIVERPOOL: This combination of file pictures created on January 15, 2021, shows Liverpool's Senegalese striker Sadio Mane (left) celebrating scoring his team's first goal during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Liverpool at Goodison Park in Liverpool, north west England on October 17, 2020 and Manchester United's English forward Marcus Rashford (right) celebrating after scoring a goal during the UEFA Champions League Group H first-leg football match between Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) and Manchester United at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris on October 20, 2020. — AFP

Rooney ends playing career to become full-time Derby boss

LONDON: Former Manchester United and England star Wayne Rooney ended his illustrious playing career on Friday to take up the job of managing Championship side Derby on a full-time basis. Derby confirmed Rooney, 35, has agreed a permanent deal until 2023, having succeeded Phillip Cocu on an interim basis in November.



MOSCOW: In this file photo taken on May 21, 2008 Manchester United's Wayne Rooney holds up the trophy after beating Chelsea in the final of the UEFA Champions League football match at the Luzhniki stadium in Moscow. — AFP

In accepting the manager's role, Derby said the iconic forward had "elected to call time on his illustrious playing career to fully focus on his job". Rooney was in charge for nine matches as interim boss at Derby, winning three and drawing four.

"We are delighted to confirm the appointment of Wayne Rooney as our new manager," said Derby County chief executive officer Stephen Pearce. "Our recent upturn in results under Wayne was married together with some positive performances."

rebellion is just one example of Uruguayan indignation the FA ignited.

Uruguay's Spanish language academy issued a statement in which it accused the FA of "ignorance", saying it was common for the phrase, and others that may appear offensive to an outsider, to be used affectionately among friends or family members. For its part, the Uruguayan Football Players' Association said that FA itself had been "racist", while the Uruguayan Football Association (AUF) said Cavani had suffered a "flagrant injustice".

"In our Spanish, which differs greatly from the Spanish spoken in other regions of the world, the nicknames negro/a or negrito/a are used... as an expression of friendship, affection, closeness and trust, and is in no way derogatory or discriminatory to the race or skin color" of the recipient. It noted that Cavani's message had been addressed to a close friend, a fellow Uruguayan, who "knows and shares his way of speaking".

As institutional ranks closed around Cavani, individu-

Rooney said he had been "blown away" by Derby's potential when he arrived at the club after a spell playing for DC United in the United States. "To be given the opportunity to follow the likes of Brian Clough, Jim Smith, Frank Lampard and Phillip Cocu is such an honor," he said. "And I can promise everyone involved in the club and all our fans, my staff and I will leave no stone unturned in achieving the potential I have witnessed over the last 12 months of this historic football club."

Record-breaker

Rooney, who captained Manchester United and England, hangs up his boots as the all-time leading goalscorer for United and his country. He is also the second-highest goalscorer in Premier League history — behind only Alan Shearer — with 208 goals.

His retirement was instantly recognised by the England official Twitter account, which posted: "A #ThreeLions legend. Congratulations on a fantastic playing career. @WayneRooney! Wishing you all the best in management."

Alex Ferguson, who signed Rooney for United, said: "He is England's top goalscorer, he is Manchester United's top goalscorer and he has had a fantastic career as a player. It will give him a starting point. But like anyone else it is a results industry. He will know that better than anyone. It is a big step for him. He is quite a wealthy young man now, so he probably doesn't need to go into management, but he wants to do it and that is important. Hopefully he does well."

Rooney made his debut for boyhood club Everton in 2002 and shot to prominence by scoring a sensational goal to beat then-champions Arsenal days before his 17th birthday. After an impressive showing for England at Euro 2004 he was signed by United in a £27 million (\$37 million) transfer.

Rooney soon started paying that fee back, scoring a hat-trick on his debut in the Champions League against Fenerbahce.

A potent combination of poise and power made Rooney a lethal goal threat before he finished his career showcasing his more cerebral side in a deeper role. Capable of predatory finishes and spectacular strikes in equal measure, Rooney was one of the world's best forwards during his prime years. He broke Bobby Charlton's long-standing record of 249 goals in January 2017, going on to reach 253 goals in total for the Old Trafford club.

Rooney won five Premier League titles and a Champions League medal with Ferguson at the helm and captained the club to FA Cup glory under Louis van Gaal in 2016. He played 120 matches and scored 53 goals for England, appearing for the final time against the United States in 2018.

The forward rejoined Everton from United in 2017 but was at Goodison Park for just a year before moving to MLS side DC United. Rooney moved to Derby in January 2020 as a player-coach and took caretaker charge when Cocu was sacked. Derby are currently in the Championship relegation zone but are level on 19 points with Sheffield Wednesday, in 21st place. — AFP

als, too, rushed to his defense. Twitter was flooded with the hashtag #GraciasNegrito, small businesses started selling T-shirts emblazoned with the phrase, and a plane flew a banner displaying it over a beach east of Uruguay's capital Montevideo in a show of support.

While most have flocked to Cavani's defense, even accusing the FA of suffering a colonial hangover, some in the Afro-Uruguayan community say it may be time for a language review. Black player Mathias Acuna, 28, believes the FA sanction was unjust, but this did not mean racism was not a problem.

"There are times that it (the word 'negro' or its diminutive 'negrito') is used affectionately, as a compliment. It depends who it is from," he told AFP. "It is a pity that it is him (Cavani), who used it affectionately" who is being made an example of, said Acuna. But "racism in Uruguay and in football exists." People should be more circumspect, he argued. "We are not blacks nor whites, we are people, nothing more." —AFP

West Brom seal Allardyce's first win

Brighton boost survival bid with win at Leeds • West Ham up to eighth

LONDON: West Bromwich Albion won for the first time under new boss Sam Allardyce as Matheus Pereira's penalty double clinched a 3-2 Premier League victory at local rivals Wolves yesterday. Allardyce had failed to win any of his first five matches since replacing the sacked Slaven Bilic. But the former England manager was finally able to celebrate after a pulsating Black Country derby at Molineux.

Pereira shot Albion ahead from the spot before goals from Fabio Silva and Willy Boly put Wolves in the driving seat at half-time. Semi Ajayi equalized after the interval and Pereira's second penalty sealed West Brom's first win in eight league games. Albion remain second bottom of the table after their second league victory, but are just three points from safety.

"I thought the way the lads carried out their tactics was excellent. It's the best I have seen us in possession since I have been here," Allardyce said. "The lads were excellent in the second half, their heads could have gone down with the results we have had recently but they came bouncing back." Wolves are winless in six league games and have not beaten the Baggies in 10 years.

It was the first time these two local rivals had met since 2012 when West Brom won 5-1 at Molineux and this was an equally memorable success for the visitors. West Brom were hit by Covid-19 this week, forcing keeper Sam Johnstone and winger Matt Phillips into self-isolation after positive tests. David Button replaced Johnstone in goal, while new signing Robert Snodgrass made his Albion debut in Phillips' absence.

Wounded Wolves

Wolves fell behind in the eighth minute when Albion failed to clear a Romain Saiss cross and Boly caught Callum Robinson with a rash challenge and, after a VAR review confirmed the foul was just inside the area, Pereira stepped up to convert the penalty. That made it nine consecutive league games in which Wolves had fallen behind.

Silva's leveller came in the 38th minute when Albion failed to clear a Romain Saiss cross and Boly's deft back-heel found the teenage forward, who slotted home from close-range. Sloppy defending was Albion's downfall again as Wolves went in front five minutes later. Joao Moutinho's corner wasn't cleared by Jake Livermore and Boly slammed his shot past Button from seven yards.

Boly was the first Wolves player to concede a penalty, assist a goal and score a goal in the same Premier League game since Adlene Guedioura in 2011 — also against West Brom at Molineux. Albion equalised in the 52nd minute when a long throw was flicked on by Kyle Bartley and Ajayi looped his header over Wolves keeper Rui Patrício into the far corner. A dramatic game took another turn when Conor Coady conceded a penalty with a trip on Robinson and Pereira stepped up to score from the spot again.

Brighton boosted their survival bid with a 1-0 win at Leeds. Neal Maupay netted after 17 minutes with a tap-in after Alexis Mac Allister and Leandro Trossard combined to open up the Leeds defense. Graham Potter's side are



LEEDS: Leeds United's English defender Luke Ayling (center) vies with Brighton's German midfielder Pascal Gross (left) and Brighton's Ivorian midfielder Yves Bissouma (right) during their English Premier League football match at Elland Road yesterday. — AFP

five points clear of the relegation zone after ending a nine-match winless run in the league.

West Ham are up to eighth after beat-

ing fourth bottom Burnley 1-0 at the London Stadium. The decisive moment came in the ninth minute when Michail Antonio grabbed his first league goal

since October from Pablo Fornals' cross. Later yesterday, Chelsea traveled to west London neighbors Fulham, while Leicester hosted Southampton. — AFP



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