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for the **COVID-19 vaccine**

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# Committee approves law banning raising charges

## Nod to draft electoral law amendments • Dahoum blasts govt, speaker

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** The National Assembly's legal and legislative committee yesterday cleared a draft law banning the government from raising charges on public services without the prior approval of the Assembly. The bill now goes to the financial and economic affairs committee to review it and send a report to the Assembly for debate and approval.

The bill stipulates to amend a 1995 law that bans the government from raising charges on public services

without the Assembly's approval, but allows the government to raise the prices of petroleum products. The amendment says any increase in charges or prices must be approved by the Assembly first. A large number of lawmakers have vowed to prevent the government from imposing new taxes on citizens amid fears the government is planning to impose taxes and new charges in the wake of a sharp drop in oil revenues.

The committee also approved a number of draft laws calling to amend the electoral law, with some of the amendments calling to return to the 2012 law in

which voters were allowed to elect up to four candidates. Committee rapporteur MP Mohammad Al-Sayer said one of the proposals calls to adopt a new system where voters vote for a list of candidates rather than one individual candidate.

Meanwhile, leading opposition lawmaker Bader Al-Dahoum yesterday sharply criticized Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, calling him "an employee of the government". He also blasted the government and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah for failing to face a grilling filed by three opposi-

tion MPs and for allegedly "paralyzing the country".

Dahoum said the government has submitted its resignation to HH the Amir and "we are awaiting its acceptance". But he warned the prime minister, if selected to form the next Cabinet, from bringing back Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh in the new line-up, strongly criticizing the minister. The lawmaker said MPs will insist that the government cooperates to pass a number of essential laws, especially a general pardon law, Kuwaitization of jobs, amending the election law and others.

### News in brief

#### Biden to sign executive orders

**WASHINGTON:** Joe Biden's chief of staff said Saturday the incoming president would sign about a dozen executive orders on his first day in office. Ron Klain said the executive orders would address the pandemic, the ailing US economy, climate change and racial injustice in America. On Inauguration Day Biden will sign orders including ones for the US to rejoin the Paris climate accord and reverse Trump's ban on entry of people from certain Muslim majority countries, Klain said. — AFP (See Page 2)

#### Sudan protesters burn Israeli flag

**KHARTOUM:** Dozens of Sudanese protesters burned the Israeli flag yesterday during a rally against Khartoum's recent signing of a deal on normalizing relations with Israel. Demonstrators gathered outside the cabinet offices, chanting anti-Israel slogans and carrying banners reading, "normalization is betrayal" and "normalization is a crime". — AFP

#### Aussie father, son released

**SYDNEY:** An Australian father and son have been released after almost six months in detention on unknown charges in Qatar. Professor Lukman Thalib, 58, and his son Ismail, 24, have been released, said a Doha-based source, who added that they flew to Turkey on Jan 5. In October, the US Department of the Treasury designated another son of Professor Thalib, Ahmed, as a "facilitator" of Al-Qaeda, along with that son's gemstone company. — AFP

#### Israel to vaccinate inmates

**JERUSALEM:** The Israel Prison Service said yesterday it will begin vaccinating all incarcerated people against COVID-19, including Palestinians, following calls from right groups, Palestinian officials and Israel's attorney general. According to the Palestinian Prisoners' Club, about 250 Palestinians in Israeli prisons have tested positive for the novel coronavirus. — AFP

#### Ozil moves to Fenerbahce

**ISTANBUL:** Mesut Ozil confirmed yesterday that he was leaving Arsenal for Turkish team Fenerbahce after being frozen out for months at the Gunners. "I'm very happy, very excited. God has given me the chance to wear the Fenerbahce shirt. I will wear it with pride and give everything for the team," Ozil said in an interview with Turkish television channel NTV. — AFP



## Egypt unveils treasures found at ancient site

**SAQQARA, Egypt:** Egypt yesterday unveiled ancient treasures found at the Saqqara archaeological site near Cairo, including sarcophagi over 3,000 years old, a discovery that "rewrites history", according to famed Egyptologist Zahi Hawass. Saqqara is a vast necropolis of the ancient Egyptian capital of Memphis, a UNESCO World Heritage Site home to more than a dozen pyramids, ancient monasteries, and animal burial sites.

A team headed by Hawass made the finds near the pyramid of King Teti, the first pharaoh of the Sixth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom. More than 50 wooden sarcophagi dating to the New Kingdom (16th century BC to 11th century BC) were found in a burial shaft, Hawass told AFP yesterday. "This discovery rewrites the history of Saqqara and more specifically the history of the New Kingdom, which began 3,000 years ago," he said.

Hawass said his team had discovered a total of 22 shafts, including one containing a "soldier, with his battle axe resting beside him".

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SAQQARA, Egypt: A visitor takes pictures next to an unearthed wooden coffin during the official announcement of the discovery of a new trove of treasures at Saqqara necropolis yesterday. — AFP (See Page 13)

## Swiss sleuths unpick QAnon origin mystery

**GENEVA:** The mysterious "Q" behind the QAnon conspiracy movement, which was instrumental in the storming of the US Capitol, is in fact two people, according to Swiss experts. Swiss startup OrphAnalytics said it had used its algorithm-based machine-learning text analysis software, developed to detect plagiarism, to help crack the mystery behind QAnon. "There are clearly two styles characterizing the QAnon messages,"

company chief Claude Alain Roten told AFP in an interview at his home in western Switzerland.

The conspiracy movement is based on messages by "Q Clearance Patriot", who claims to be a US intelligence official leaking classified information. The so-called Q-drops began appearing on fringe messaging board 4chan in Oct 2017 and later moved to 8kun, promoting a vast conspiracy theory claiming President Donald Trump is waging a secret war against a global liberal cult of Satan-worshipping pedophiles.

There has been speculation about Q's identity and whether one person is really behind thousands of these Q-drops but Roten said it was now clear

Continued on Page 2



OrphAnalytics CEO Claude-Alain Roten poses with a laptop using text analysis software on Jan 6, 2021. — AFP

## What's bitcoin really worth?

**LONDON:** After the latest wild ride took the poster child of cryptocurrencies above \$40,000 before a stomach-churning plunge, the million dollar question won't go away: How much is bitcoin actually worth? The virtual currency barreled to new highs to rise more than 400 percent over the past year, before promptly sliding some 20 percent and then settling around \$36,000.

When it started life in 2009 as open-source software, bitcoin was essentially worth zero - though within

a year it had reached the heady heights of eight cents. At today's market rates, bloated by a surge in institutional demand, the digital unit's market capitalization is worth some \$670 billion with myriad other crypto coins such as ethereum lifting the sector nominally close to the trillion mark.

Although that's small potatoes compared to the \$68 trillion or so swilling around world stock markets, it is nonetheless the sort of financial territory staked out by Wall Street tech royalty such as Google, Apple or Tesla. One tech site, AssetDash.com, notes that bitcoin is currently worth around as much as Facebook and a little more than Chinese e-retail giant Alibaba. — AFP (See Page 8)



MARSEILLE, France: In this photo taken on Jan 8, 2021, the logo of bitcoin is pictured on the front door of an ATM. — AFP



## Local

# Interior Minister orders probe into Kuwait waters infiltration incident

## Ministry applauds citizens who helped in suspects' arrest

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah ordered the formation of an investigation committee to look into the infiltration incident that took place from the sea side in the Abdullah port chalets area recently, and to determine the merits of the case and how they entered the regional waters.

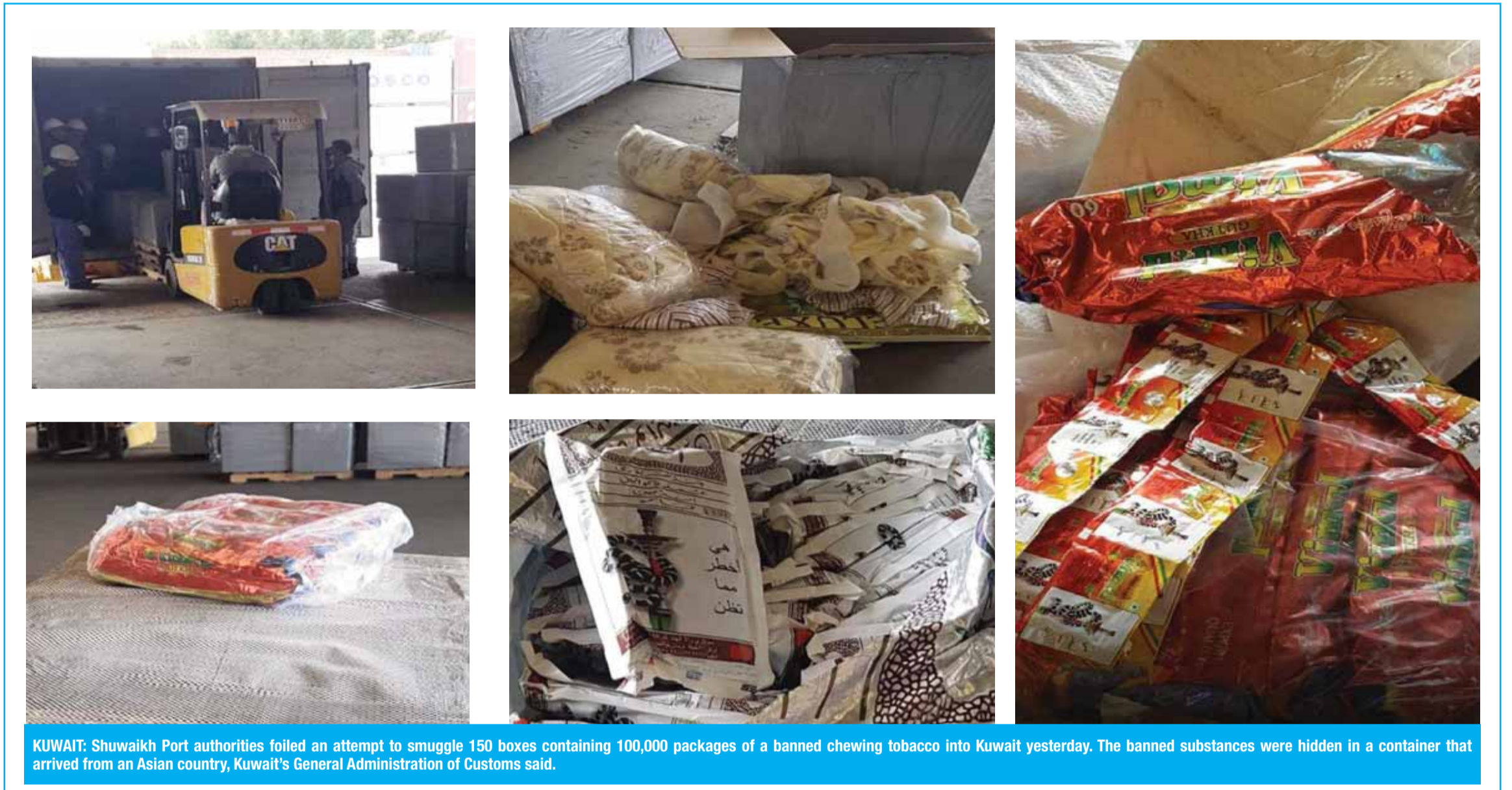
The Ministry of Interior (MoI)

stated in a press statement released by the General Directorate of Security Relations and Media yesterday that a number of citizens, in cooperation with the relevant security services, managed to arrest 10 people who tried to sneak in from the sea side in the chalets area of Mina Abdullah. MoI commended citizens who cooperated with the security men in arresting the infiltrators.

"They have established the principle that every citizen is a guard on the security of the homeland and that the integrated security system can only be achieved with the cooperation of citizens with the security establishment," it said.

Kuwait Coastguards had arrested 10 people on Saturday after they entered Kuwait illegally through Abdullah Port. Police had headed to

the scene after receiving a call about a number of people jumping out of a boat and into territorial waters. Cops 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.



**KUWAIT:** Shuwaikh Port authorities foiled an attempt to smuggle 150 boxes containing 100,000 packages of a banned chewing tobacco into Kuwait yesterday. The banned substances were hidden in a container that arrived from an Asian country, Kuwait's General Administration of Customs said.

## Swiss sleuths unpick QAnon...

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"two people are behind them". The 60-year-old asked AFP not to divulge the location of the house, which serves as a meeting place for the dozen or so employees currently all working from home, over concern about the reaction to the firm's analysis.

The company does so-called sequential stylometric analysis, which statistically analyses character sequences, comparing the frequency of single letters, letter pairs or triplets to determine the author or authors of a text. They use the technique to uncover academic plagiarism, ghostwriters or, for instance, to determine whether portions of a will or a contract may have been tampered with.

But Roten, who spent three years in the United States, said he had grown increasingly concerned over QAnon's "population manipulation" there, and had decided to apply his software on the movement without being paid. A biologist by training, Roten switched fields after realizing the same principles used to identify genetic codes could help spot the singular characteristics of a person's writing style. "I feel like I am still in the same profession," he said.

His colleague, a lanky 63-year-old with grey hair and a fabric facemask who asked to be identified only as Rene, showed off the software on a laptop perched on Roten's dining room table. After "cleaning" 4,950 Q-drops of irrelevant content like web links and greetings, he feeds them into the software. On the screen, a colorful scatter plot chart appears showing two clearly distinct collections of dots.

He said the chart showed a clear difference in style between the first Q messages that appeared on 4chan, from Oct 28 to Dec 1, 2017, and the subsequent messages. "The signal difference is strong enough to leave very little doubt on this author's swap," OrphAnalytics said in a white paper published last month.

## Egypt unveils treasures found...

Continued from Page 1

A stone sarcophagus was also found, he added, as well as "a papyrus around five meters long containing the 17th chapter of the book of the dead... masks, wooden boats, games the ancient Egyptians used to play". "It is a rare and new discovery because most of the artifacts we found are dated back to the New Kingdom, whereas in Saqqara, it's usually more around 5000 BC," he added.

A number of objects were displayed to the press

Florian Cafiero, a renowned stylometry researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research, said OrphAnalytics' work on QAnon "looks convincing". Stylometry has been around for more than a century, but the advent of computers has dramatically boosted the capacity to analyze large quantities of data. OrphAnalytics has made a number of headlines since its founding in 2014, having put its software to sometimes surprising use.

It helped sniff out the likely author behind the beloved Elena Ferrante pseudonym, comparing her writing to samples from two Italian authors suspected of being behind her books, discovering, Roten said, that "Domenico Starnone writes in a style that is indistinguishable from Elena Ferrante". And it has reportedly been engaged as an expert witness in criminal cases, including the unsolved 1986 murder of four-year-old Gregory Villemin in France.

Roten refused to say whether his company was working on that case, or comment on any of the handful of judicial cases it has been asked to weigh in on, saying such comments could taint a case. He said the company's approach of focusing purely on statistical analysis, and stripping away all the context and hypotheses generally used to enrich text analysis, helped avoid allowing preconceptions color the outcome. "It is difficult to imagine anything more neutral than this," he said.

Cafiero agreed the novel adaptation of the technique to the judicial process could help "avoid making mistakes". But he voiced concerns about "risks" linked to broadening the application of an increasingly powerful technology, such as potentially helping to identify whistleblowers. "With any technology, there is light and there is a dark side," Roten acknowledged, stressing that his company had strict ethical guidelines to "avoid our stylometric sequencing approach being used to serve the dark side". As for the QAnon probe, he said he felt an obligation to help illuminate who was behind the curtain. "We are responsible people. If we can act, we act." — AFP

yesterday, while excavations of the site are ongoing. "Seventy percent (of the new area) is still to be explored," he added. Egypt's tourism and antiquities ministry had announced Saturday "major discoveries" at Saqqara, where there has been a flurry of excavations in recent years. The ministry said the team had also discovered the "funerary temple of Queen Nefertiti, the wife of King Teti".

The Saqqara site is also home to the step pyramid of Djoser, one of the earliest built in ancient Egypt. Later this year, and after several delays, authorities hope to inaugurate a new museum - the Grand Egyptian Museum - at the Giza plateau, home to the famed Giza pyramids. Egypt hopes archaeological discoveries will spur tourism, a sector which has suffered multiple shocks, from a 2011 uprising to today's coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

## Biden to sign dozen executive orders on Day 1

**WASHINGTON:** Joe Biden's top aide said Saturday the incoming president would sign about a dozen executive orders on his first day in office, as police fearing violence from Trump supporters staged a nationwide security operation ahead of the inauguration. Authorities in Washington, where Wednesday's inauguration will take place, said they arrested a man with a loaded handgun and more than 500 rounds of ammunition at a security checkpoint, underscoring the tension in the US capital which is resembling a war zone.

However, the man said it was "an honest mistake," and that he was a private security guard who got lost on his way to work near the Capitol. Incoming Biden chief of staff Ron Klain said in a memo to new White House senior staff that the executive orders would address the pandemic, the ailing US economy, climate change and racial injustice in America. "All of these crises demand urgent action," Klain said in the memo.

"In his first ten days in office, President-elect Biden will take decisive action to address these four crises, prevent other urgent and irreversible harms, and restore America's place in the world," Klain added. As he inherits the White House from Donald Trump, Biden's plate is overflowing with acute challenges. The US is fast approaching 400,000 dead from the COVID-19 crisis and logging well over a million new cases a week as the coronavirus spreads out of control.

The economy is ailing, with 10 million fewer jobs available compared to the start of the pandemic. And millions of Americans who back Trump refuse to recognize Biden as the legitimate president. Biden this week unveiled plans to seek \$1.9 trillion to revive the economy through new stimulus payments and other aid, and plans a blitz to accelerate America's stumbling COVID vaccine rollout effort.

On Inauguration Day Biden, as previously promised, will sign orders including ones for the US to rejoin the Paris climate accord and reverse Trump's ban on entry of people from certain Muslim majority countries, Klain said. "President-elect Biden will take action - not just to reverse the gravest damages of the Trump administration - but also to start moving our country forward," Klain said.

### 500 rounds of ammunition

Meanwhile, Washington was under a state of high alert after a mob of President Donald Trump's supporters stormed the Capitol on Jan 6. The assault left five people dead, including a police officer. Security officials have warned that armed pro-Trump extremists, possibly carrying explosives, pose a threat to Washington as well as state capitols over the coming week.



**WILMINGTON, Delaware:** US President-elect Joe Biden waves as he leaves St Joseph on the Brandywine Roman Catholic Church on Saturday. — AFP

Thousands of National Guard troops have been deployed in Washington and streets have been blocked off downtown with concrete barriers. On Friday night, police arrested a Virginia man at a security checkpoint where he tried to use an "unauthorized" credential to access the restricted area where Biden will be inaugurated.

As officers checked the credential, one noticed decals on the back of Wesley Beeler's pick-up truck that said "Assault Life," with an image of a rifle, and another with the message: "If they come for your guns, give 'em your bullets first," according to a document filed in Washington, DC Superior Court.

Under questioning, Beeler told officers he had a Glock handgun in the vehicle. A search uncovered a loaded handgun, more than 500 rounds of ammunition, shotgun shells and a magazine for the gun, the court document said. Beeler was arrested on charges including possession of an unregistered firearm and unlawful possession of ammunition.

"It was an honest mistake," Beeler told The Washington Post after being released from jail. "I pulled up to a checkpoint after getting lost in DC because I'm a country boy," he said. "I showed them the inauguration badge that was given to me." Beeler told the newspaper he works as a private security guard near the Capitol, and presented a credential provided by his employer.

He said he was licensed to carry his gun in Virginia, but forgot to take it out of his car before leaving home for his overnight shift in Washington. Prosecutors did not object to Beeler's release from jail, the Washington Post said, though he was ordered to stay out of Washington except for court-related matters.

In addition to the heavy security presence in the US capital, law enforcement was out in force at statehouses around the country to ward off potential political violence. Mass protests that had been planned for the weekend did not materialize on Saturday, with security far outnumbering Trump supporters at several fortified capitols, US media reported. In St Paul, Minnesota, for example, hundreds of law enforcement officers, some armed with long guns, ringed the Capitol with National Guard troops providing backup. The number of protesters totaled about 50. — AFP



# Kuwait's Amir receives senior state officials



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Seif Palace yesterday. His Highness also received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. Moreover, His Highness the Amir separately received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received Speaker Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali, and Saleh at Seif Palace. In addition, His Highness Sheikh Mishal received Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets a number of Cabinet ministers at Seif Palace.

## Amir congratulates Kyrgyzstan President on winning elections

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable of congratulations to newly-elected President of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Japarov for winning the elections. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent similar cables to President Japarov. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Chief of Kuwait National Guard Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received in his office yesterday Tunisia's Ambassador to Kuwait Al-Hashemi Ajeeli. The two sides discussed issues of mutual interest, Kuwait National Guard said in a statement.

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## Dar Suad Al-Sabah publishes book on 3rd, 4th Kuwait rulers

**KUWAIT:** Dar Suad Al-Sabah for Publishing and Distribution published a new book on Kuwait during the reign of the third and fourth rulers 'Kuwait in the reigns of Jaber bin Abdullah Al-Sabah and Sabah bin Jaber Al-Sabah'. In a statement yesterday, Dar Suad Al-Sabah said Dr Suad Al-Sabah, the author, published the book as a continuation of her historic project that has so far resulted in releasing several books namely 'Mubarak Al-Sabah, Founder of the Modern State of Kuwait', 'Saqr Al-Khaleej - the Gulf's Falcon - Abdullah Mubarak Al-Sabah', 'Kuwait in the era of Abdullah bin Sabah Al-Sabah' and 'Kuwait in the era of Mohammad bin Sabah Al-Sabah'.

The author, in her newly released book, presents economic, social and political conditions of Kuwait and the Kuwaitis during the era of Sheikh Jaber bin Abdullah Al-Sabah, the third ruler of Kuwait, whose reign spanned from 1814 to 1859 and was known by 'Jaber Al-Aish' and the reign of his son Sheikh Sabah bin Jaber, whose ruling extended from 1859 until 1866 when he passed away, it said. The book included an introduction and six sections: the first topic 'life biography', the second 'economic conditions', the third 'social conditions', the fourth 'the evolution of Kuwait's relations with Najd and Bahrain', the fifth 'the development of relations with other regional powers' and the last 'Kuwait and seeking a balance between the major powers'. Dar Suad Al-Sabah has indicated that it is necessary to refer to this book for anyone interested in studying Kuwaitis' life in its various aspects during the two reigns of Sheikh Jaber bin Abdullah and Sabah bin Jaber. —KUNA

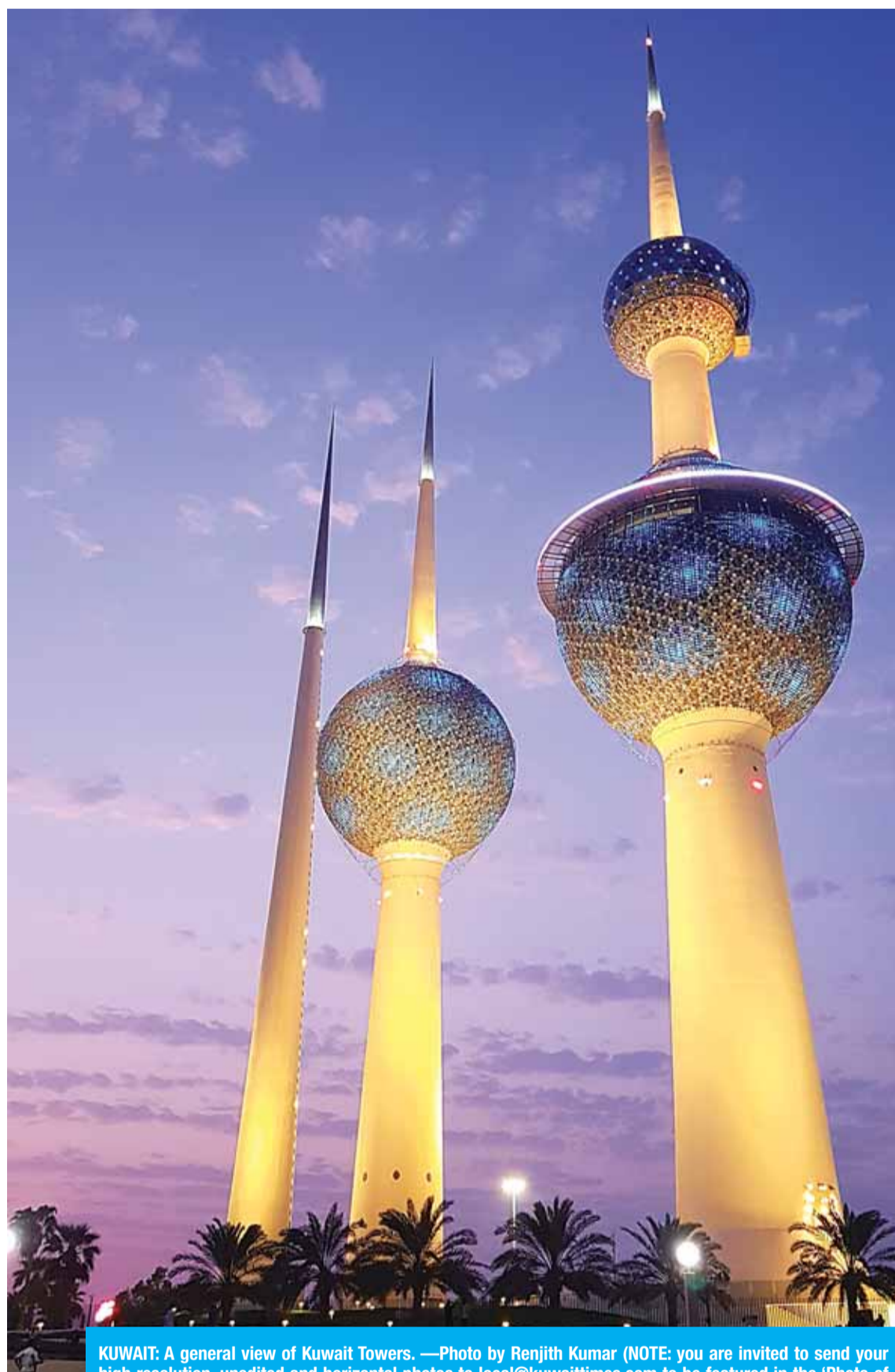


## KAFO project launches event on COVID-19

**KUWAIT:** Amiri Diwan's KAFO project launched an event to exchange ways through which the cultural sector dealt with COVID-19. Fatma Al-Mousawi, Executive Director of KAFO, said the fourth annual event of the Culture and Arts Society, held last Saturday, is one of many annual youth projects. Mousawi explained that the participants presented their experiences and achievements during COVID-19, as the session was opened by Kuwaiti novelist and short story writer Taleb Al-Refai on his publication called 'The Color of Tomorrow,' which touched on a question that was posed to Arab writers: What do you expect will happen in the year? Kuwaiti children's writer Basema Al-Wazzan mentioned some of her books in the Kuwait Virtual Book Fair, namely 'Ideas that Triumph' and 'I Want Surprise' and many other stories for children.

Mousawi pointed out that Kuwaiti novelist Istabraq Ahmad, who won cultural awards, has partnered with a group of writers to publish two books during COVID-19 period. She indicated that all individuals can register on the KAFO platform, which is the first national platform to display youth competencies to facilitate the process of research, communication and cooperation among them. —KUNA

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** A general view of Kuwait Towers. —Photo by Renjith Kumar (NOTE: you are invited to send your high resolution, unedited and horizontal photos to local@kuwaittimes.com to be featured in the 'Photo of the Day' section. Make sure to include your name and Instagram account if available)

## Kuwait records 378 coronavirus cases, no deaths

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait recorded 378 new coronavirus cases without deaths yesterday, raising the total number of cases to 157,777, while total deaths remained at 947, the Ministry of Health said. The ministry's official spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said there were 54 patients in ICUs as of yesterday, while the total number of patients still receiving medical care stood at 5,688. He added that 8,251 swabs were done in the previous 24 hours, increasing the total number of swabs to 1,397,545. The ministry had announced earlier that 464 people recovered from the virus, raising the total number of recoveries to 151,142. —KUNA



## Early cancer detection improves recovery chances: CAN

**KUWAIT:** Cancer Awareness Nation (CAN) Board Chairman Dr Khaled Al-Saleh yesterday highlighted the importance of raising awareness regarding early detection of cancer in the head, neck and thyroid via tests to reduce these serious ailments. Saleh said in a press statement that CAN launched a cancer awareness campaign for head, neck and thyroid, which continues throughout this month, and aims to highlight importance of early detection and achieve high recovery rates.

He added that in order to spread awareness, CAN is carrying out the campaign, entitled 'Early Detection and COVID-19 Challenge Campaign', to relay correct information in simple and scientific ways, with focus on knowing risk factors for developing such cancers and

identifying initial symptoms. The campaign began with two sessions for dentists to train on discovering initial signs of head and neck cancer, which leads to rapid tumor detection and early diagnosis, thus the patient would seek speedy treatment with higher rates of recovery, Saleh noted. He pointed out courses were held in cooperation with the Department of Dental Affairs at the Ministry of Health in coordination with the Planning and Training Department at the Ministry.

Moreover, CAN has set up four exhibitions, one at Biraq Mall and three in cooperative societies, where managers welcomed the activity to enlighten shareholders and visitors. Furthermore, CAN has distributed brochures and gifts as part of the awareness activity, he said. —KUNA

## Ibn Sina doctors successfully remove brain tumor

**KUWAIT:** A brain tumor resection was successfully carried out in Kuwait without any complications, marking the first successful surgery of its kind to be carried out in the country without the presence of visiting doctors, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday. The procedure was carried out in Ibn Sina Hospital by surgeon Dr

Mohammad Al-Manabri, along with Dr Abdallah Al-Shawees and Dr Dragan Savic. The procedure was carried out on a 15-year-old girl who suffered from a schwannoma that put pressure on sensitive areas of the brain.

Due to the lack of visiting doctors because of COVID-19, a decision was made to immediately remove the tumor with the approval of the head of nerves surgery department Dr Tareq Al-Sheikh, head of the unit Dr Yousuf Al-Awadhi and Hospital Director Dr Abbass Ramadhan. The operation lasted nearly 10 hours to extract the 3.5cm tumor, without any complications. The girl was discharged after her condition stabilized and her situation is being monitored continuously.

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Gunmen assassinate two Afghan women judges in ambush

## Humbled Trump seeks warmer welcome in Florida

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CAMOTAN, Guatemala: Honduran migrants, part of a caravan heading to the United States, hitchhike on a truck on Saturday. —AFP

# US-bound caravan swells to 9,000 people

## Honduran migrants push their way past police at Guatemalan border town

**CAMOTAN, Guatemala:** At least 9,000 Honduran migrants have entered Guatemala after a first group pushed past border police late Friday and others soon followed on the first step of a journey north they hope will take them to the United States, officials said Saturday. Seeking to escape poverty, unemployment, gang and drug violence and the aftermath of two devastating hurricanes, the migrants, most of them traveling on foot, planned to head first to Mexico and then on to the US, a journey of thousands of kilometers.

A first group of men, women and children - many wearing masks due to the COVID-19 pandemic - pushed their way Friday past police at the Guatemalan border town of El Florido, 220 km east of Guatemala City, an AFP correspondent said. Guatemalan officials said the initial group numbered roughly 6,000; an additional 3,000 crossed into the country on Saturday, they said.

A Guatemalan government statement denounced what it said was a violation of its national sovereignty and called on Honduras to "contain the massive departure of

its inhabitants, through permanent preventive actions". A police official said the migrants were allowed to cross into Guatemala because there were many families with children. They said officers, who were unarmed, feared tear gas could cause casualties. Border agents asked the migrants for their papers - and demanded proof of negative coronavirus tests - but appeared to let many through who did not meet those requirements.

### Sandals and backpacks

As the migrants moved northward in small groups, workers with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees provided some with assistance. Most of the migrants, many in sandals, carried backpacks with their few belongings. Olga Ramirez, 28, trudged along with her husband, four children ages 3 to 8, and her brother. She carried the smallest child in her arms and the middle kids rode in a decrepit stroller that looked like it was about to collapse. Ramirez said they left Honduras because staying

meant running the risk of only eating every other day. She lost her job selling food in a bus station after the facility was privatized. "They threw us out like we were dogs, like garbage, as if we were worthless to the country," Ramirez said, drying her tears as she walked along the side of the road. "And I have no profession to support my family," she said.

The migrants are seeking a better life in America under Joe Biden after years of tough anti-immigrant policies under Donald Trump, but US authorities have already warned off the group. Guatemala, Mexico and Honduras have an agreement with the US to stop north-bound migratory flows. Biden has promised "a fair and humane immigration system" and pledged aid to tackle the root causes of poverty and violence that drive Central Americans to the United States.

But Mark Morgan, acting commissioner of US Customs and Border Protection, warned the group last week not to "waste your time and money". The US commitment to the "rule of law and public health" is

not affected by the change in administration, he said in a statement.

### 'National emergency'

More than a dozen caravans, some with thousands of migrants, have set off from Honduras since Oct 2018. But all have run up against thousands of US border guards and soldiers under Trump, who characterized immigrants from Mexico as "rapists" and criminals. The Mexican government said it would not allow the "illegal entry" of any migrant caravans and deployed 500 immigration officers to the border states of Chiapas and Tabasco.

Guatemalan migration officials said the Honduran group appeared to be heading for the border post at Tecun Uman in southern Mexico. Trump said Friday he was extending a national emergency on the border with Mexico, a measure he first imposed in Feb 2019. "Further action is needed to address the humanitarian crisis and to control unlawful migration and the flow of narcotics and criminals," a White House statement said. —AFP

## Morocco Jews 'already packing' for Israel flights

**CASABLANCA:** Fanny Mergui has no doubt: Moroccan Jews "are already packing their suitcases" to board direct flights to Israel after the kingdom normalized ties with the Jewish state. Morocco, home to North Africa's biggest Jewish community and the ancestral homeland of some 700,000 Israelis, is also hoping for an influx of Israeli tourists when the COVID-19 pandemic eases.

"I'm very happy" that the five-hour route will be served by direct flights, said Mergui, a Moroccan Jew who lives in Casablanca. "It's a true revolution." The first direct commercial flight headed from Tel Aviv to Rabat in December to mark the three-way, US-brokered accord, under which Washington also recognized Moroccan sovereignty over disputed Western Sahara.

But tickets for regular commercial flights have yet to go on sale. Bureaucratic delays have been compounded by the pandemic, which forced Morocco to mostly close its borders since March and impose a nationwide curfew in December. Singer Suzanne Harroch, who had to wait 14 hours in transit at a Paris airport last time she visited Israel, called the Israeli-Moroccan rapprochement a "miracle". "A lot of my family live there," said the 67-year-old. "I can't wait to see them more, and more often."

### Historical ties

Israel had established liaison offices in Morocco in the 1990s during a short-lived diplomatic opening. But they were closed again in the early 2000s as the second Palestinian intifada sparked a crushing Israeli response. Yet relations quietly continued, with some \$149 million in bilateral trade between 2014-2017, according to Moroccan news reports.

The re-opening of the liaison offices could make it much easier for Moroccans to obtain visas to visit Israel.

Morocco is also hoping to host more Israeli visitors. Official statistics show that prior to the coronavirus pandemic, up to 70,000 Israeli tourists used to visit the country annually. Most were of Moroccan ancestry and had kept close ties with their country of origin.

"The majority of Israelis of Moroccan origin are delighted," said Avraham Avizemer, who left Casablanca as a toddler and has lived for decades in Israel. The fact their children and grandchildren can return "is huge", he said. One Israeli already in Morocco is Elan. The 34-year-old sat in the library of a Casablanca synagogue, where along with other Israeli Jews, mostly of Moroccan origin, he is receiving religious classes from a Moroccan rabbi. "Direct flights would make travel easier," he said.

Morocco's Jewish community dates back to antiquity. It was boosted in the 15th century by Jews expelled from Spain, and by the late 1940s reached about 250,000 people - around a tenth of the population. But that figure tumbled as many Moroccan Jews headed to the newly founded state of Israel. Today, about 3,000 Jews remain in Morocco. —AFP



CASABLANCA: Members of the Moroccan Jewish community pray at the synagogue of Em Habanim on Jan 5, 2021. —AFP

## Sudan textbook picture sparks angry debate

**KHARTOUM:** As Sudan's transitional government shifts the nation from the Islamist rule of ousted strongman Omar Al-Bashir, a new schoolbook has sparked controversy for reproducing Michelangelo's iconic "Creation of Adam". Khartoum's government has embarked on deeply controversial reforms in bid to boost its international standing and rescue its ailing economy - but bringing it into confrontation with those who see changes as anti-Islamic.

The offending picture, in a history textbook for teenagers, has become a flashpoint in the argument. "It is an ugly offence," said Sudan's Academy of Islamic Fiqh, the body ruling on Islamic law, which issued an edict banning teaching from the book. Michelangelo's fresco, depicting the Biblical story of God reaching out with his hand to give life to Adam, is a flagship piece of 16th century Renaissance art that forms part of the Sistine Chapel's ceiling in Rome.

But Adam (PBUH) is also revered as a prophet in the Quran, and Islamists say the painting goes against teachings prohibiting depictions of the human form in art. "The book glorifies Western culture in a way that makes it the culture of science and civilization - in contrast to its presentation of Islamic civilization," the Fiqh academy added.

Furious Muslim clerics have railed against the book, and other changes to the school curriculum. In one video widely shared on social media, a preacher broke down as he waved the book during Friday prayers, accusing it of promoting "apostasy" and "heresy". Another urged followers to "burn the book".

But others defended the changes, saying they were part of necessary education reforms. "The picture is not in a religious book,"



KHARTOUM: People walk past book stalls on the roadside in the Sudanese capital on Jan 14, 2021. —AFP

teacher Qamarya Omar told AFP. "It is in a history book for the sixth-grade under a section called European Renaissance, which makes it placed in context." Omar is also a member of the Sudanese Professionals Association - an umbrella group which spearheaded months-long anti-Bashir protests. "A picture will not make people shun their religion or shake their belief," said Omar. "School curricula should be determined by educational experts on a scientific basis," she added.

However, the protests have shaken the authorities. Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok's transitional civilian-majority government has been pushing for reforms aimed at dismantling decades of repression and hardline Islam. Then on Jan 6, Hamdok froze changes to the school curricula and ordered the formation of committee representing all sectors of the society to investigate. Adel Hamza, of the Academy of Islamic Fiqh, said Hamdok's "decision resolved the issue". —AFP

**CONSUMER PROTECTION DEPARTMENT**

**RECALL INFORMATION**

**Mercedes-Benz Cars**  
MODEL: GLC Class (253)  
Model year: 2020

**RECALL REASON**

Mercedes-Benz AG has determined that on certain GLC vehicles, the wiring harness of the steering control unit might not have been manufactured according to specification. It cannot be excluded that moisture might also enter into the control unit. This might result in a loss of the electric power steering support and a corresponding warning message would be indicated in the instrument cluster. In case of a damaged wiring harness, a short circuit and, as a consequence, a potential fire cannot be fully ruled out.

**REMEDY**

As a precautionary measure, Mercedes-Benz AG, via its Mercedes-Benz service partners, will check the wiring harness of the steering control unit on the affected vehicles and replace it, if necessary. The required work will certainly be carried out free of charge.

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## International

# Man with loaded gun arrested at security checkpoint in Washington

## US Justice: No evidence of murder plot in Capitol attack

WASHINGTON: A man with a loaded handgun and more than 500 rounds of ammunition has been arrested in Washington at a security checkpoint near the US Capitol, authorities said. Wesley Allen Beeler, of Virginia, had driven to a checkpoint on Friday evening and tried to use a phony credential to access the restricted area where President-elect Joe Biden will be inaugurated next week, according to a document filed in Washington, DC Superior Court.

As officers checked against an authorized access list, one of them noticed decals on the back of Beeler's pickup truck that said "Assault Life," with an image of a rifle, and another with the message: "If they come for your guns, give 'em your bullets first."

Under questioning, Beeler told officers he had a Glock handgun in the vehicle. A search uncovered a loaded handgun, more than 500 rounds of ammunition, shotgun shells and a magazine for the gun, the court document said. Beeler was arrested on charges including possession of an unregistered firearm and unlawful possession of ammunition, a police report said.

Following his arrest, Beeler said it was "an honest mistake" and that he was a private security guard who got lost on his way to work near the Capitol. Washington is under a high state of alert ahead of Biden's Wednesday inauguration, after a mob of President Donald Trump's supporters stormed the Capitol on January 6. Five people died in the assault, including a police officer. Security officials have warned that armed pro-Trump extremists, possibly carrying explosives, pose a threat to Washington as well as state capitals over the coming week.

Thousands of National Guard troops have been deployed in Washington and streets have been blocked off downtown with concrete barriers. The National Mall, which is normally packed with people every four years for presidential inaugurations, has been declared off-limits at the request of the Secret Service, which ensures the security of the president.

### No evidence

US Justice Department investigators say they have not found any evidence yet that the rioters who ransacked the US Capitol last week intended to capture



WASHINGTON, DC: Police detain a person as supporters of US President Donald Trump protest outside the US Capitol in Washington, DC. A man with a loaded handgun and more than 500 rounds of ammunition has been arrested in Washington at a security checkpoint near the US Capitol, authorities said. — AFP

and kill any lawmakers. In an Arizona court filing on Friday in the case of Jacob Chansley, federal prosecutors took back an earlier assertion that supporters of President Donald Trump planned to "capture and assassinate elected officials" in the January 6 siege of the US legislature.

The claim was made in arguments to prevent the court from granting bail to Chansley, aka Jake Angeli, seen worldwide in photographs bare-chested wearing a horned headdress and carrying a spear inside the Capitol. But on Friday the Arizona prosecutors withdrew that claim as the Justice Department said that,

despite calls during the attack to capture certain lawmakers and to kill Vice President Mike Pence, no evidence had been found yet to support any serious effort to do so. "There is no direct evidence at this point of kill-capture teams and assassination," Michael Sherwin, the federal district attorney for Washington DC who is overseeing the investigation of the Capitol attack, told reporters Friday. Nevertheless, the US Capitol remained on heavy lockdown Saturday ahead of the January 20 inauguration of Joe Biden as president, with security officials worried of potentially violent attacks on the event. — AFP

## Death toll in Sudan Darfur clashes rises to 48

KHARTOUM: Ongoing clashes in Sudan's restive Darfur have killed at least 48 people in two days, state media said yesterday, just over two weeks after a long-running peacekeeping mission ended operations. The violence has reportedly pitted the Massalit tribe against Arab nomads in El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur state, and quickly morphed into broader fighting involving armed militias in the area.

"The death toll from militia attacks in El Geneina yesterday (Saturday) reached 48," the SUNA news agency said, quoting the local branch of the country's doctors' union. "The bloody events which are still ongoing since Saturday morning (have) also left ... 97 wounded." It was not immediately clear why the fighting started. Sudanese authorities have since Saturday imposed a state-wide curfew in West Darfur, while the Khartoum government dispatched a "high-profile" delegation to help contain the situation. Citing the doctors' union, SUNA reported that casualties are expect-

ed to increase as the fighting continues. The union's local branch also "called for the securing of health facilities" and urged transport be made available for medics to assist the wounded.

### Peacekeeping mission over

On December 31, the hybrid United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) formally ended its operations in the region, 13 years after it came into being. It plans a phased withdrawal of its approximately 8,000 armed and civilian personnel inside six months. The Sudanese government "will take over responsibility for the protection of civilians" in Darfur, UNAMID said, as its mandate ended. Fearing deadly violence, Darfur residents held protests in late December against UNAMID's departure. Also in late December, clashes in South Darfur state left at least 15 people dead and dozens wounded, prompting the government to send troops to the area.

The vast Darfur region was the scene of a bitter conflict that erupted in 2003, leaving around 300,000 people dead and 2.5 million displaced, according to the UN. Back then, fighting erupted when ethnic minority rebels rose up against the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum, which responded by recruiting and arming a notorious Arab-dominated militia known as the Janjaweed. — AFP



In this file photo, a convoy of Sudanese security forces deploy during a rally in Al-Geneina, the capital of the West Darfur state. Ongoing clashes in Sudan's restive Darfur have killed at least 48 people in two days, state media said yesterday. — AFP

## Facing Biden, Erdogan extends olive branch to EU

ANKARA: Facing a potentially hostile US administration, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is trying to break his isolation by mending EU relations, torn by what the bloc views as his belligerent foreign policy. Ties between Ankara and Brussels have plunged to a nadir not seen since Turkey formally opened talks to join the bloc in 2005, a process which is now frozen.

And while Erdogan speaks of turning "a new page", the list of European grievances is long.

Most recently, Brussels began drawing up a list of sanctions over Turkey's hunt for natural gas in the eastern Mediterranean, which triggered a naval standoff with Greece last year.

But older suspicions simmer. Erdogan's direct military interventions in the Syrian and Libyan conflicts raised hackles in Europe, while his vocal backing of Azerbaijan in the six-week Nagorno-Karabakh war upset Armenia's allies across the West. Erdogan's threats to send millions of Syrian and other refugees Turkey is hosting to Europe if the bloc fails to provide

more funding are a constant menace. And he has made the animosity personal by attacking French President Emmanuel Macron's treatment of Muslims, which Europe counters by pointing to Turkey's grim record on human rights. Some believe this standoff is unsustainable for Erdogan. "Ankara cannot afford an escalation with both the US and Europe, especially with an economy this fragile," a European diplomat told AFP.

### 'Looking for friends'

Turkey's heavy dependence on Europe is borne out by the numbers. EU member states accounted for 67.2 percent of foreign direct investments in Turkey between 2002-2018, according to official data. With foreign sentiment dented, the Turkish lira lost a fifth of its value against the dollar last year, forcing the central bank to burn through most of its reserves trying to prop up the currency. Then Erdogan parted ways with his powerful son-in-law, who served as finance minister and bore the blame for Turkey's economic woes. A few days later, Erdogan first mentioned reforms and "turning a new page" in relations with Europe.

"Erdogan is looking for friends anywhere and everywhere," said Ilke Toygur, an analyst at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, and Elcano Royal Institute. To this end, Erdogan held a meeting on Tuesday with EU ambassadors-described as "positive" by some of those who took part-while

## Humbled Trump seeks warmer welcome in Florida

MIAMI: President Donald Trump will leave Washington in disgrace next week, destined for a warmer welcome in Florida, where some supporters are so gung-ho they recently wrote his name on the back of a fat, lumbering manatee. Days after suffering the ignominy of a second impeachment, Trump will skip his successor Joe Biden's inauguration and depart early Wednesday for his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida. Apparently, he plans to live there. There are also signs his adult children will decamp south to be near their father, who was cut off from Twitter and other social networks that were his megaphone after being widely accused of instigating the January 6 assault by his supporters on the US Capitol.

Locals can already be heard whispering, angrily, "There goes the neighborhood." They are not happy with the prospect of Trump settling among them. Last month people in Palm Beach sent the city council a letter recalling that under a 1993 agreement, Mar-a-Lago was not zoned as a full-time residence.



PALM BEACH: In this file photo taken on December 31, 2019 US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump arrive for a New Year's celebration at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida. President Donald Trump will leave Washington in disgrace next week, destined for a warmer welcome in Florida, where some supporters are so gung-ho they recently wrote his name on the back of a fat, lumbering manatee. — AFP

That letter, published by The Washington Post, states that use of the living quarters at the golf resort "shall be limited to a maximum of three (3) non-consecutive seven (7) day periods by any one member during the year." The resort denies that the 1993 accord contains this restriction. The Post noted that the president already spends large amounts of time at the resort in violation of this rule, and he is expected to put up a fight against those who do not want him around. But that's only the beginning of Trump's Mar-a-Lago woes. This week Palm Beach County officials issued the resort a warning over a New Year's Eve party at which guests did not wear masks or observe social distancing rules. Trump's son Don Jr had posted a video of the festivities showing people dancing to 1989 hit "Ice Ice Baby" by the rapper Vanilla Ice, who performed live. The county warned that any future violation of pandemic restrictions would mean a fine of \$15,000.

### Solid base

"The Trumps may be surprised to learn that the voter rolls in the three main South Florida counties—Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade—are dominated by Democrats," said Craig Pittman, a Florida native and the author of five books on the state. "In fact, the congressional representative for the district that covers Mar-a-Lago, Lois Frankel, has voted not once but twice to impeach her most famous constituent," Pittman said. Still, over the past four years Trump has built up a solid base of support in Florida, mainly among non-urban white people and conservative Latinos. One of his most loyal followers is Miami Cuban-American Enrique Tarrio, a leader of the right-wing Proud Boys group. Trump's support is so strong in Florida that last Sunday a live manatee was found with "Trump" etched onto its back. But after the assault on Congress, Trump is on thin ice. — AFP

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu will visit Brussels on Thursday. Macron and Erdogan have also exchanged letters that Cavusoglu said could help reboot their relations, leading to a possible video conference call.

### Preparing for Biden

US President-elect Joe Biden's victory over Donald Trump, who once called the Turkish leader a "good friend", appears to be at least partially responsible for Erdogan's shift in tone. "Biden's victory has reshuffled the cards. Turkey expects the next US administration will be less inclined to let it off the hook," the European diplomat said. Certain appointments by Biden are likely to have an important role in shaping Washington's relations with Erdogan. "This seeming call for a rapprochement with the EU can be interpreted as preparation" for Biden, said Sinem Adar, an associate at the Centre for Applied Turkey Studies in Berlin. Erdogan was once part of a select group of leaders who could dial up Trump directly on the phone, but Adar said the loss of this privilege with Biden is not the only factor behind the attempted rapprochement. — AFP



BERLIN: A screen shows German Chancellor Angela Merkel (right) delivering a speech as outgoing leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer listens during the party's 33rd congress held online because of the coronavirus pandemic, in Berlin on Friday. — AFP

## Race to succeed Merkel in top job thrown wide open

BERLIN: Moderate Armin Laschet may have won a key vote this weekend to become the new leader of Germany's conservative CDU party, but his victory has thrown wide open the question of who will succeed Chancellor Angela Merkel in the top job.

Merkel ally Laschet was elected as head of the Christian Democratic Union on Saturday in a run-off against right-winger Friedrich Merz, nine months ahead of a general election that will mark the end of the chancellor's 16-year reign. The head of the CDU would normally lead the party and its Bavarian sister party, the CSU, to the polls as their chancellor candidate in a general election. But Laschet's poor standing in national polls has prompted speculation that someone other than the CDU leader could be a better choice to lead the conservatives into the election race.

In the run-up to the September 26 vote, with the coronavirus pandemic still wreaking havoc in Europe's top economy and around the world, it will not only be Laschet whose every move is under close scrutiny. Two other men, CSU leader Markus Soeder and Health Minister Jens Spahn, could also be in the running to be the conservative "chancellor candidate".

### 'Savior'

Bavarian state premier Soeder, who has impressed with his tough line on the coronavirus pandemic, is currently streets ahead in polls of who Germans would like to see as their next chancellor. Once known as a staunch conservative and a vocal opponent of Merkel's liberal migration policies, Soeder has reinvented himself in recent years as a man of the people with an environmentalist streak. After 1.75 million people in Bavaria signed a "save the bees" petition in 2019, Soeder announced that drastic changes in farming practices would simply be written into law rather than taking the additional step of a referendum—a move seen at that time as a bid to woo environmentally conscious voters.

Amid the raging coronavirus pandemic, the 54-year-old former journalist has repeatedly struck out alone to introduce tough anti-virus measures in the southern German state, an approach that has "given him the aura of a savior", according to Der Spiegel weekly. Long a defender of traditional Christian values, Soeder is also known for being PR-savvy and chose the day before the CDU leadership vote to tweet a cute photo of his new puppy Molly. Germany has never before had a CSU chancellor, though the conservative alliance has not ruled out fielding a CSU candidate this time and has done so twice before—albeit unsuccessfully. — AFP



## International

# Gunmen assassinate two Afghan women judges in Kabul ambush

## Top US envoy in Kabul blames Taliban for attack

**KABUL:** Gunmen shot dead two Afghan women judges working for the Supreme Court in an ambush in the country's capital yesterday, officials said, an attack the top US envoy in Kabul blamed on the Taliban.

Violence has surged across Afghanistan in recent months despite ongoing peace talks between the Taliban and government—especially in Kabul, where a new trend of targeted killings aimed at high-profile figures has sown fear in the restive city. The latest attack, which US Charge D'Affaires Ross Wilson blamed on the Taliban, comes just two days after the Pentagon announced it had cut troop levels in Afghanistan to 2,500, the fewest in nearly two decades.

The attack on the judges happened as they were driving to their office in a court vehicle, said Ahmad Fahim Qawem, a spokesman for the Supreme Court. "Unfortunately, we have lost two women judges in today's attack. Their driver is wounded," Qawem said. There are more than 200 female judges working for the country's top court, the spokesman added.

Kabul police confirmed the attack, which no group has claimed so far. Afghanistan's Supreme Court was a target in February 2017 when a suicide bomb ripped through a crowd of court employees, killing at least 20 and wounding 41. The latest attack drew widespread condemnation, with Wilson blaming the Taliban directly as he called for an investigation. "The Taliban should understand that such actions for which it bears responsibility outrage the world and must cease if peace is to come to Afghanistan," wrote Wilson on Twitter.

Following the attacks the American embassy in Kabul updated its travel advisory, saying "US citizens

already in Afghanistan should consider departing". President Ashraf Ghani also accused the Taliban of launching an "illegitimate war and hostility".

"The government once again reiterates its call on the Taliban that violence, terror, brutality and crimes... will only prolong the war in the country," he said in a statement issued by the presidential palace.

### 'Appalling attack'

The top British envoy to Kabul, Alison Blake, condemned the "appalling targeted attack" on the judges as she called for an investigation. The head of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission also condemned the murders, calling the ongoing killings a "systematic massacre".

"Afghanistan is losing one of its most important gains, its educated & professional cadre, in what seems to be a systematic massacre & the world seems to be just watching. This must stop," tweeted Shaharazad Akbar. In recent months, several prominent Afghans—including politicians, journalists, activists, doctors and prosecutors—have been assassinated in often brazen daytime attacks in Kabul and other cities.

Many journalists and activists have left the country, worried they might be the next targets.

Afghan officials have steadfastly blamed the Taliban for the assassinations, a charge the insurgent group has denied. Some of these killings have been claimed by the rival jihadist Islamic State group.

Earlier this month the US military for the first time directly accused the Taliban of orchestrating these attacks. "The Taliban's campaign of unclaimed attacks and targeted killings of government officials, civil society leaders & journalists must... cease for



**KABUL:** Relatives of the victims arrive at the site after gunmen shot dead two Afghan women judges working for the Supreme Court during an early morning ambush in the country's capital in Kabul yesterday. — AFP

peace to succeed," Colonel Sonny Leggett, spokesman for US forces in Afghanistan, said on Twitter. The targeted killings have surged despite the Taliban and Afghan government engaging in peace talks in the Qatari capital of Doha.

Afghan government negotiators engaged in peace talks with their Taliban counterparts are pushing for a permanent ceasefire as part of the agenda for the talks, but the insurgents so far have dismissed the calls for any type of truce. The Taliban

carried out more than 18,000 attacks in 2020, Afghanistan's spy chief Ahmad Zia Siraj told lawmakers earlier this month.

On Friday, the Pentagon announced it had cut troop levels in Afghanistan to 2,500 as part of its deal with the Taliban to withdraw all troops from the country by May 2021. That deal was struck in return for security guarantees from the insurgents and a commitment to peace talks with the Afghan government. — AFP

## India hails COVID vaccine rollout

**NEW DELHI:** India's COVID-19 vaccination drive had a successful start with more than 190,000 people receiving their first jabs and no one hospitalized for major side effects, the health ministry said, but reports emerged about concerns over the homegrown vaccine. Authorities have given emergency-use approval for two vaccines—Oxford-AstraZeneca and the homegrown "Covaxin", which has yet to complete its Phase 3 trials and plans to immunize some 300 million people in the country of 1.3 billion by July.

Frontline workers such as hospital staff, people over 50 and those deemed to be at high risk due to pre-existing medical conditions are on the shortlist to receive the vaccines. "We have got encouraging and satisfactory feedback results on the first day,"

Health Minister Harsh Vardhan told his state counterparts on Saturday. "This vaccine will indeed be a 'Sanjeevani' (life saver) in the fight against the virus, he added. The health ministry said "no case of post-vaccination hospitalization" had been reported, although local media said a security guard at the country's top-ranked public hospital, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Delhi, had developed an allergic reaction shortly after getting his shot.

A doctors' representative body at the Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital in New Delhi wrote a letter asking for the Oxford-AstraZeneca "Covishield" vaccine to be supplied instead of Covaxin to allay any fears. "The residents are a bit apprehensive about the lack of complete trial in case of Covaxin and might not participate in huge numbers thus defeating the purpose of vaccination," said the letter addressing the hospital's medical superintendent, seen by AFP. "We request you to vaccinate us with Covishield, which has completed all stages of trial before its rollout." Pathologist Arvind Ahuja told



**AHMEDABAD:** A medical worker inoculates a doctor with a COVID-19 coronavirus vaccine at the Institute of Kidney Diseases and Research Centre (IKDRC) in Ahmedabad. — AFP

AFP at the hospital on Saturday that he shared some of the concerns. "I hope when the data comes out, it is good. Ideally, they should have waited for one month at least as then we would have known better about its efficacy," the 45-year-old said. Vaccine hesitancy has emerged

as a major concern, with a recent survey of 18,000 people across India finding that 69 percent were in no rush to get a shot. Leading scientists and doctors have called on authorities to release efficacy data about Covaxin to boost confidence about the vaccine. —AFP

## Indonesia rains hamper hunt for quake survivors

**MAMUJU, Indonesia:** Torrential monsoon rains hampered the hunt yesterday for anyone still buried alive under buildings flattened by a powerful earthquake on Indonesia's Sulawesi Island, after the huge tremor killed at least 77 and left thousands homeless. Excavators and cranes were deployed across the devastated seaside city of Mamuju, where buildings were reduced to a tangled mass of twisted metal and chunks of concrete, including a hospital and the regional governor's office. It was unclear how many people—dead or alive—could still be under mountains of debris in the aftermath of Friday's 6.2-magnitude quake. "The rain poses risks because damaged buildings could collapse if it gets too heavy...and aftershocks could move them too," said rescuer Octavianto.

Excavating debris too fast with heavy equipment could crush and kill any buried survivors, he added. "All the victims we've found so far were dead," said Octavianto, 37, who like many Indonesians goes by one name. "It is most likely any more victims are already dead if 24 hours has passed," he added. Scores of rescuers combed through the destruction, filling body bags with corpses, while police yesterday deployed a K-9 unit of sniffer dogs to help in the search at a badly damaged hospital. "We also use our own sense of smell to find possible victims," said rescuer Kustang Firman at the hospital scene. "If there's a strong scent (of decay), we'll focus on that spot."

### 'Roaring sound'

Most victims were found in Mamuju, but some were also recovered south of the city of 110,000 people in West Sulawesi province. Friday's tremor triggered panic among residents of the island, which was hit by a 2018 quake-tsunami disaster that killed thousands. "We heard



**MAMUJU:** Women carry supplies distributed to people affected by a 6.2 magnitude earthquake in Mamuju yesterday. — AFP

a roaring sound and the house started shaking," said survivor Jumardi, 50, from a shelter where he and six family members took refuge. "All I had in my mind was that I would die... Everyone was panicking."

Authorities have not given a figure for how many survivors have been res-

cued. A pair of young sisters plucked from under the mass of concrete and other debris were treated in hospital. Meanwhile, corpses were recovered from under a collapsed hospital, while five members of a family of eight were found dead in the crumpled remains of their home. —AFP

### Over 60,000 refugees

On January 4, Touadera was declared the victor, although the political opposition cried foul. The results accounted for only about half of registered voters, as hundreds of thousands were unable to cast their vote in areas held by rebels. On Wednesday, the rebel forces mounted their closest attack yet to Bangui before being pushed back with the loss of a peacekeeper, the UN said. The UN refugee agency UNHCR said on Friday that the number of people fleeing violence following the presidential election had doubled in a week to 60,000. More than 50,000 of those had fled across the Ubangui River to the Democratic Republic of Congo—with 10,000 people arriving in the DRC on Wednesday alone as rebels attacked near the Bangui. Landlocked CAR is one of the world's poorest nations and has seen a string of coups and wars since it gained independence from France in 1960. In 2013, it spiraled once more into bloodshed when then-president Francois Bozize, who had himself seized power in a coup a decade earlier, was ousted by a mainly Muslim coalition called the Seleka. —AFP

## UN troops retake C African city from rebels

**BANGUI, Central African Republic:** UN peacekeeping troops said they have retaken control of a city in the Central African Republic captured two weeks ago by armed groups waging an offensive against the government of President Faustin Archange Touadera. Rebels abandoned their positions in Bangassou, 750 kilometers east of the capital Bangui, and fled the city following an ultimatum on Friday from the UN peacekeeping force MINUSCA, the mission's spokesman Vladimir Monteiro said late Saturday.

"The city of Bangassou is under the complete control of MINUSCA," Monteiro said, though he added that the UN force "remains on alert" to pre-

vent any rebel return or other actions against civilians, the state authority and UN troops. Armed groups waging a nationwide offensive captured the city on January 3, forcing many residents to flee across the border to the Democratic Republic of Congo. "It's a great joy," Juan Jose Aguirre, the bishop of Bangassou, told AFP following the UN operation to regain control of the city. "After thirteen days sleeping outdoors, people will be able to return to their homes," he added.

Lieutenant Colonel Abdoulaziz Fall, spokesman for MINUSCA's military component, said the UN force intervened to stop attempts at looting overnight Friday to Saturday. "The situation is calm and under control and positions that had been occupied by armed groups are no longer," Fall said. Six of the most powerful armed groups, who have occupied roughly two-thirds of the country for eight years, united a month ago to wage an offensive. The coalition announced their offensive ahead of the December 27 presidential and legislative vote, aimed at preventing Touadera's re-election.

### News in brief

#### 5 shot dead in Mexico

**MEXICO CITY:** Five people were shot dead in central Mexico City, the local security secretariat said Saturday, a rare attack in the capital and likely linked to organized crime, according to local media. The attack occurred late Friday at the town hall in Miguel Hidalgo, one of the most prosperous districts of Mexico City. Police responding to an alert found "five people on the ground with gunshot wounds," according to a statement. Medical services certified three men dead at the scene while the other two were transferred to a nearby hospital where they later died due to the seriousness of their injuries, the security secretariat said. —AFP

#### Ecuador seizes 1.3 tons of cocaine

**QUITO, Ecuador:** Ecuadoran police have seized 1.3 tons of cocaine hidden in a container destined for Estonia, interior minister Patricio Pazmino said Saturday. The narcotics were found in the port of Guayaquil thanks to a drug-sniffing dog, he said. "With the support of the anti-narcotics canine, Garo, the drugs were detected in a container that was to be transported to Estonia, in Europe," he tweeted along with pictures of the seized container. —AFP

#### Cyclone forms off Australia

**BRISBANE, Australia:** A tropical cyclone formed off the northeastern coast of Australia yesterday, threatening the tourist hotspot of Cairns with destructive 130 kilometers per hour winds. Tropical Cyclone Kimi is a Category One storm with sustained winds of 65 kph but meteorologists said it may strengthen to a Category Two when it crosses the coast late Monday. The Bureau of Meteorology forecast it was likely to hit between the towns of Cooktown and Port Douglas, with gale-force winds extending south of Cairns. Heavy rainfall is also expected in the area, with residents warned of possible flooding. —AFP

#### US troubled by Uganda clashes

**WASHINGTON:** The US State Department said Saturday it is "deeply troubled" by reports of violence and irregularities surrounding Uganda's presidential election, which saw Yoweri Museveni win a sixth term in office. "The Ugandan people turned out to vote in multiparty national elections on January 14 despite an environment of intimidation and fear," department spokeswoman Morgan Ortugas said in a statement. "We are deeply troubled by the many credible reports of security force violence during the pre-election period and election irregularities during the polls," she said. —AFP

#### Britain to host G7 summit

**LONDON:** Britain will host a G7 summit in June, the government said Friday, announcing what will be the first face-to-face meeting of the group since the start of Joe Biden's US presidency. Outgoing US President Donald Trump was forced to cancel last year's meeting of the G7 — the world's most advanced economies—due to the coronavirus pandemic. Individual leaders have yet to confirm their attendance, but the summit is scheduled to take place on June 11-13 in Carbis Bay, a coastal town in Cornwall, southwest England. —AFP



# Business

MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2021

## Superfast 5G in the US still a work in progress

### Promoters promise fast-thinking self-driving cars, rapid-fire video downloads

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Marketing pitches in the US are bullish on superfast 5G telecom networks, but they remain more of a promise than reality. Promoters of the technology say it will bring such innovations as fast-thinking self-driving cars and rapid-fire video downloads.

And nationwide coverage with 5G could add \$1.5 trillion to GDP in the next five years. But actually deploying it here is "very fragmented" given the maze of local regulations and agencies that telecom companies have to navigate across 50 states, said Jefferson Wang, head of 5G strategy at Accenture.

Approvals need to be sought and, typically, hearings held when it comes to where on streets, buildings, or other structures antennae can be mounted to relay telecom signals.

The first smartphones adapted for 5G were released by Samsung and Huawei in mid-2019. Apple introduced its first 5G iPhone late last year, spurring telecom operators here to talk it up despite such speedy service not being widely available. Gadgets and services synched to 5G networks were a major theme at the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES) that wrapped up Friday after its first online-only event.

People using Verizon can get 5G connections, provided they are in the right city and in line of sight of antennae. Verizon invested in a part of radio bandwidth where high-frequency signals move fastest but sacrifice travel distance and can be blocked by things such as walls or rain.

Rivals AT&T and T-Mobile have been investing in medium and low frequencies, which travel further but at relatively slower speeds.

#### 'Not sexy enough'

AT&T has taken to calling its enhanced 4G network "5G E" in a widely criticized marketing strategy. While smartphone screens might show connections stamped "5G," speeds do not deliver. "With 4G, that is like driving a Ferrari at rush hour," Qualcomm senior vice president of engineering Alejandro Holcman said of using 5G smartphones on slower networks.

"You probably can do it but you need 5G to take full advantage of the capabilities of the devices," he added, while speaking on a CES panel. Innovators have been heralding wonders with 5G networks, with connections so rich and fast that remote surgery, for instance, will be a practical option.

Verizon boss Hans Vestberg boasted at CES that it had installed 5G in more than two dozen US football stadiums this year, enabling fans to watch live play from a variety of camera angles and overlay information using augmented reality. He also provided a glimpse at a project to allow people to examine 3D digital versions of Smithsonian Museum exhibits in their homes.

"The reality is you don't need 5G for that. You just need an internet connection," quipped Creative Strategies analyst Carolina Milanesi.

"I wish people would spend more time talking about the real benefit, which is the quality of service is going to be better. But that's not sexy."

#### Omniscient glasses

At the outset, 5G networks taking root first in metro areas risk reinforcing the disparity between ample telecommunication service in city centers and rural communities where even slow wireless



**PARIS:** In this file photo, the 5G wireless technology logo is displayed on a tablet in Paris. Marketing pitches in the US are bullish on superfast 5G telecom networks, but they remain more of a promise than reality. — AFP

connections are not reliable. Some 18 percent of the US population does not even have access to broadband internet, according to Elemental Content consultant John Penney.

Making 5G wireless service ubiquitous and affordable in the US would be transformative when it comes to remote learning, telemedicine and more, Penney maintained. Applications of 5G are expected to shine early in manufacturing, with private networks used to run "smart" factories.

It will be tougher to impress consumers accustomed to video games, 4K films streamed on demand, and virtual assistants at their beck and call. But 5G could free people from reliance on smartphones, infusing software smarts and internet capabilities into more objects in a step toward "ambient computing." For example, security cameras will be able to scan thousands of faces in real time to identify wanted criminals and alert authorities, suggested Holcman. — AFP

## After dizzying gyrations, what's bitcoin really worth?

**LONDON:** After the latest wild ride took the poster child of cryptocurrencies above \$40,000 before a stomach-churning plunge, the million dollar question won't go away: how much is bitcoin actually worth? The virtual currency barreled to new highs to rise more than 400 percent over the past year, before promptly sliding some 20 percent and then settling around \$36,000.

When it started life in 2009 as open-source software, bitcoin was essentially worth zero—though within a year it had reached the heady heights of eight cents.

At today's market rates, bloated by a surge in institutional demand, the digital unit's market capitalization is worth some \$670 billion with myriad other crypto coins such as ethereum lifting the sector nominally close to the trillion mark. Although that's small potatoes compared to the \$68 trillion or so swilling around world stock markets, it is nonetheless the sort of

financial territory staked out by Wall Street tech royalty such as Google, Apple or Tesla. One tech site, AssetDash.com, notes that bitcoin is currently worth around as much as Facebook and a little more than Chinese e-retail giant Alibaba.

#### Curse of the forgotten password

Although deep-pocketed investors have recently become enthusiasts, crypto was in its early days the preserve of geeky amateur investors. It is the latter who have mainly suffered as an estimated four million of the roughly 19 million bitcoin units currently in circulation have been lost.

"Lost" does not mean the coins have fallen down the back of the sofa or through a hole in a trouser pocket: they have been electronically zapped from the record, often because their owner has forgotten a password to coins hoarded on a USB stick. One US developer mislaid his password after storing 7,002 bitcoins on one such



**TEL AVIV:** This file photo shows a visual representation of the digital crypto-currency Bitcoin, at the "Bitcoin Change" shop in the Israeli city of Tel Aviv. — AFP

flash drive, forcing him to wave goodbye, on paper (or rather, the trading screen), to around \$280 million.

This week, Welshman James Howells desperately offered his local authority a quarter of his fortune to dig up a landfill site where he believes a hard drive he accidentally tossed away—and which has since soared in

value to around \$270 million—is buried. The council refused, citing the cost and logistical restrictions. According to analysts at JP Morgan, bitcoin may be highly volatile but could go as high as \$146,000 per unit, putting it in competition with gold as an asset class in terms of private sector investment. — AFP

## Bruised presidency, Capitol attack taint Trump brand

**NEW YORK:** Donald Trump shot to prominence with a business empire that bears his name, but after four years of political tumult capped by his supporters' violent attack on the Capitol, the US president's brand stands tarnished, threatening his businesses, experts say.

Companies that stuck with Trump throughout his term are cutting ties in an 11th-hour stampede, including Signature Bank which closed Trump's personal accounts and the PGA of America which scotched a plan to hold its 2022 championship at Trump's New Jersey golf course.

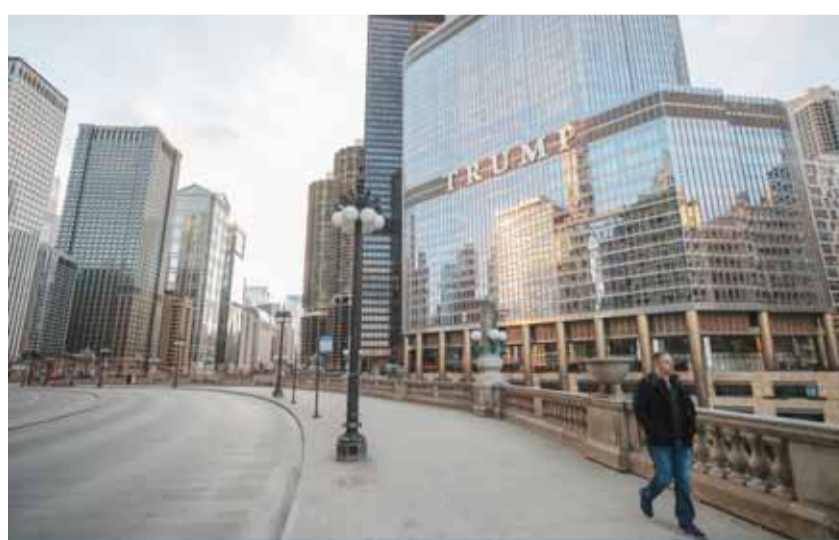
Such announcements not only reflect the business community's skittishness to proximity with a widely-condemned figure, but further hem in his company, already hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic and the looming loss of US taxpayer revenue tied to Trump's visits. The president's role in the Capitol calamity that killed five people and drew international shock has generated withering criticism from diverse groups ranging from the Business Roundtable to the AFL-CIO labor federation.

Trump's "name is really an albatross," said Michael D'Antonio, who authored a 2015 biography of Trump, adding that January 6 was a game-changer for the president's brand. "He is the most disgraced president in history. This is a person who's synonymous with a mob attacking the US Capitol," he said. "I just think this went a step too far."

Tim Calkins, a marketing professor at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, said Trump's brand will suffer long-term damage due to the chaos. "Before his term, Trump stood for wealth, success and over-the-top luxury," he said. "Now the brand has associations with anti-government views, racism and extremism. This makes the brand fairly toxic."

#### Mixed bag

Recent reports in US media, including The Washington Post, have chronicled low occupancy at Trump properties in Washington and Chicago as the US contends with the COVID-19 crisis. In addition, Trump owes some \$400 million to Deutsche



**CHICAGO:** In this file photo taken on March 21, 2020 a man walks by Trump International Hotel and Tower in Chicago, Illinois. Donald Trump shot to prominence with a business empire that bears his name, but after four years of political tumult capped by his supporters' violent attack on the Capitol, the US president's brand stands tarnished, threatening his businesses, experts say. — AFP

Bank, which reportedly also plans to halt business with Trump after the Capitol siege.

Trump's company did not respond to written questions from AFP. The president has dismissed business challenges, stating in an October 15 televised event that the \$400 million is "a tiny percentage of my net worth." Assessing the state of Trump's

finances is difficult because of the opaque nature of government disclosure information and the private status of the Trump Organization. However, winning the presidency has most certainly cost the company some business, as when the Trump Organization bowed out of a luxury hotel in Soho, New York, where the president is unpopular. — AFP

## Large US banks eye improving economy after rocky 2020

**NEW YORK:** Large US banks reported a mixed fourth quarter to conclude a turbulent year, but expressed optimism about 2021 thanks to the coronavirus vaccine and additional fiscal stimulus.

JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup and Wells Fargo all modestly lowered their reserves set aside earlier in the pandemic when coronavirus shutdowns prompted the banks to establish huge provisions in case of a wave of defaults due to a much sharper economic downturn. The banks are still keeping billions of dollars in provisions for bad loans in case the economy takes another turn for the worse.

But executives are generally hopeful about the new year as coronavirus vaccines become more widely deployed and as President-elect Joe Biden advances a fiscal package expected to keep households flush with enough funds to pay their bills. "You have a cloudy next two quarters of mixed economic information and you have almost 4,000 people dying today," said JPMorgan Chase Chief Executive Jamie Dimon. But "we've got the vaccine coming, we've got fiscal stimulus and people have saved a lot of money," Dimon said on a conference call with reporters. "You've got a lot of pent-up demand and hopefully optimism by the fact that we're getting through this mess."

Citigroup Chief Financial Officer Mark Mason said conditions have improved even since the end of the fourth quarter, with more vaccines advancing and clarity over the next US presidential administration.

"There are a lot of favorable indicators that ... make for a positive outlook," he said. "And hopefully a continued stable recovery." Shares of all three banks fell sharply Friday. However, the S&P financials index had risen nearly 32 percent over the last two and a half months.

JPMorgan reported record quarterly profits of \$12.1 billion, up 42.4 percent from the year-ago levels, while revenues rose 3.3 percent to 29.2 billion. The profits included \$1.9 billion in credit benefits, reflecting that the bank now expects fewer loan defaults compared with last year.

But the bank still has \$30 billion in reserves, which "continue to reflect significant near-term economic uncertainty and will allow us to withstand an economic environment far worse than the current base forecasts by most economists," the bank said. Although US unemployment levels remain elevated and some business sectors like commercial real estate and hospitality are in dire straits due to the pandemic, aggressive fiscal support measures from Washington have mitigated the effect on many households. — AFP



## Business

# KIB awarded 'Best Islamic Bank' and 'Most Secure Bank in Kuwait' for 2020

## Bank recognized for its sharia-compliant products and services by World Finance

KUWAIT: For a seventh consecutive year, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) nabbed the "Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait" award for the year 2020, in addition to being named the "Safest Bank in Kuwait" award for 2020 by the editorial panel of World Finance; a leading, global financial magazine specializing in finance and banking, whose GCC Awards have continued to recognize leading financial and investment institutions in Kuwait and the GCC.

KIB received these two awards based on nominations by World Finance readers, as well as the final result of the Editorial Board, which includes a select group of renowned editors. Based on the Board's criteria, the Bank was recognized for its Sharia-compliant financial products and services, adherence to Islamic finance guidelines, forward-looking approach to Islamic finance, sustainable growth and pursuit of innovation, its presence in the market, transparency and corporate governance, and robust social responsibility program. Moreover, KIB was recognized for its newly adopted digital transformation strategy, particularly in successfully introducing digital services, products and technologies that offer customers maximum banking safety and convenience, in addition to following the highest safety and security standards to financial transactions through online banking services.

Commenting on the awards, Raed Jawad Bukhamseen, Vice Chairman and CEO at KIB, said: "We are pleased to have received two awards from World



Finance - these achievements demonstrate KIB's efforts in implementing its new digital transformation strategy aimed at establishing itself as a digital-first bank in Kuwait. In that vein, the Bank has been focusing on improving its operating structure and restructuring its branch network, as well as providing state-of-the-art Sharia-compliant banking services and solutions that meet the dynamic needs and ever-higher expectations of its customers."

"KIB was awarded "Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait" in recognition of its key position in the banking sector amidst the coronavirus crisis. Despite the disruption caused to global commerce, KIB continued to serve its customers without compromising the health and safety of its employees and customers, in addition to launching a number of innovative banking services, investment deals

and instruments that consolidated the Bank's position among the world's Islamic banks, both at the local and regional level," he added.

Bukhamseen praised the Bank's Information Security efforts and lauded its commitment to protecting the security of customers' personal information and banking data, whether online or through other banking channels. He further noted that KIB put forward the best professional practices and the latest technological methods to protect data and banking assets, stressing that the security of the Bank's IT infrastructure is always a top priority, thus, the Bank was recognized as the MostSecure Bank in Kuwait this year.

For his part, Basil Al-Suwaidan, Assistant General Manager - Head of Information Security at KIB, said: "KIB's 2020 award for The Most Secure Bank in Kuwait is well deserved, as the Bank considers information security an integral part of the Bank's digital transformation strategy and overall structure. Accordingly, the bank has invested heavily to adopt state-of-the-art detection and preventive technologies." Al-Suwaidan further noted that amid the evolving global pandemic and as part of KIB's vision to be a long-term leader in digital banking, the Bank made quick decisions to launch more online banking products and services that provide customers with a seamless banking experience. "KIB embraced early, bold and effective actions to mitigate the risks and concerns, which complies with ISO 22301 standard: security and resilience - business conti-

nity management systems. Three immediate information security priorities were presented to the Bank's management: the first is ensuring a continuous safeguarding of the bank's employees and customers health and safety, the second is enabling and securing work-from-home facility that allows staff to login into the Bank's system safely from the comfort of their homes and the third is protecting the bank's online system from drastically increasing cyber-attacks," he said.

Concluding his statement, Al-Suwaidan highlighted KIB's unyielding efforts in adhering to cybersecurity regulations set forth by the Central Bank of Kuwait, which included the recently released cybersecurity framework, ISO 27001 Information Security Management System standard, payment card industry data security standard, and SWIFT Customer Security Programme. "These measures have helped the Bank expand its business operations in a safe and efficient manner, as well as increase its customer portfolio in local and international markets by providing competitive market pricing and offering secure state-of-the-art banking solutions," he concluded.

It serves to note that World Finance is a premier quarterly global financial magazine based in London, published by World News Media. Since 2007, World Finance has identified and honored leaders in the financial industry, as well as teams and institutions that represent the benchmark for success and best practices in the business world.

## Opinion

## Outlook for energy investment crisis in post-COVID year ahead

By Hatem Al-Mosa

The COVID-19 pandemic has set in motion the largest drop in global energy investment in history, with spending expected to plunge in every major sector this year - from fossil fuels to renewables and efficiency. As a result of plummeting prices and collapsing demand, many energy companies significantly reduced capital expenditure (Capex) investments in international upstream projects, deferring investments into other areas of the industry.

Eventually these investment cutbacks will trigger a shortage of oil and gas supply. When demand does return to normal after COVID-19, you are not going to be able to produce enough energy for the demand required. The only savior at that time will be shale oil because you can drill and produce from shale rock within months, instead of the two-to-four-year timeline for conventional oil development projects.

At the moment, there is about 5mn b/d to 7mn b/d of available oil capacity that is not being produced. However, there is still about 10mn b/d of demand destruction. When economies recover to full strength, OPEC will probably fully open the taps, but it will still not be sufficient to meet the demand. The short-term impact will be a spike in oil prices for a while until the oil sector recovers, and supply catches up with demand. The unparalleled decline in capex in 2020 is staggering in both its scale and swiftness, with serious potential implications for energy security and clean energy transitions.

At the start of 2020, global energy investment was on track for growth of around 2 percent, which would have been the largest annual rise in spending in six

years. But after the COVID-19 crisis brought large swathes of the world economy to a standstill within weeks, it triggered global investment in energy to plummet by almost \$400 billion to \$1.5 trillion in 2020, compared with 2019, according to the International Energy Agency. This is a tough time for the oil and gas industry. Revenues are down significantly for National Oil Companies (NOCs) and International Oil Companies (IOCs), yet they still need to cover their operating and capital costs. While NOCs, with lower production costs, can still make money at these levels, much of their profit is siphoned away to fund government budgets.

Alternate funds for investment will have to come from curtailing capital costs or borrowing money. The problem is that the banks are more reluctant to invest in oil and gas today and under shareholder pressure to fund cleaner energy projects. Despite the dramatic consequences COVID-19 is having on the global economy, most analysts predict the energy transition will be accelerated by several years as a result. Trillions of dollars are expected to flow through economic relief packages into the deployment of low- and zero-carbon infrastructure, as well as research and development into technologies that enable it.

In early December, the leaders of the 27 European Union member states reached an agreement on the bloc's long-term budget and COVID recovery fund -

a landmark package worth over 1.8 trillion euros (\$2.19 trillion) to tackle the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic, including a European Green Deal roadmap to a lower carbon economy. Natural Gas has an important role to play in this transition as the world's fastest growing low-carbon fuel source. It is a critical bridging resource between the era of decoupling economies from coal-fired power generation and the rise of renewables to carry the full load of electrification.

While we have seen a dramatic reduction in the cost of solar and wind power generation, we will still need both conventional energy sources and renewables to meet demand over the coming decades. Significant new technological developments are still required to allow us to wholly depend on renewable resources, as well as many trillions of dollars to transform this new technology into an infrastructure that will enable us to produce and use the required energy. Such a transformation will take several decades to complete.

Prior to the COVID pandemic, gas demand growth in 2019 was second only to growth in demand for renewables, pushing the share of gas in the global energy mix to an historic high of 23 percent. Fuel switching from coal to natural gas was the largest contributor to consumption growth in 2019.

By 2050, gas is forecast to reach 30 percent of global energy supply, providing the constant and predictable stream of power that is required. Still, for these predictions to materialize, we must ensure that gas remains compatible with the great energy transition by continuously investing in the development of new technologies to decarbonize gas, such as Carbon Capture and Sequestration (CCS).

While most NOCs and IOCs have slashed capex this year due to the pandemic, the industry must be swift to recover lost ground in 2021 and make the investments necessary to continuously decarbonize oil and gas production. Otherwise, the transition acceleration triggered in 2020 could move faster in the coming years and deter the much-needed talent and finance required to sustain the industry.

Note: Hatem Al-Mosa is CEO, Sharjah National Oil Corporation



Hatem Al-Mosa



WILMINGTON, Delaware: US President-elect Joe Biden takes off his mask as he arrives at the Queen theater to present his plan for combating the coronavirus and jump-starting the nation's economy in Wilmington, Delaware. — AFP

## US consumers await Biden stimulus injection

WASHINGTON: President-elect Joe Biden's stimulus plan could spur hesitant US consumers to start spending again, analysts said, amid reports of falling sales in December. But they warned the vast package may not be enough to overcome surging coronavirus cases.

Biden on Thursday unveiled a \$1.9 trillion package aimed at getting the world's largest economy back on its feet after business shutdowns to stop COVID-19 caused a massive downturn in 2020.

The package, dubbed the American Rescue Plan, would raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, fund struggling state and local governments, send larger stimulus checks to consumers and pay for a renewed testing and vaccination assault on the coronavirus. Those provisions could help return shoppers to the struggling retail sector, where the Commerce Department said Friday sales fell 0.7 percent during the December holiday season as even booming e-commerce outlets did less business.

"President-elect Biden's ambitious fiscal agenda could further juice up household spending during the delicate vaccine rollout phase. Thereafter, consumers' mood should revive as herd immunity comes within reach and further fiscal aid is delivered," Lydia Boussoir of Oxford Economics said.

But with COVID-19 cases still at worrying levels across the economy, Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics feared that even Biden's massive proposal won't be enough to lure people back to stores. "We expect consumers' spending to struggle until falling COVID cases allow restrictions to be eased, starting in March. We think most of the next round of stimulus payments, proposed yesterday by President-elect Biden, will be saved," Shepherdson said.

### Worrying signs

The retail sales data follows recent Labor Department statistics showing weekly claims for new unemployment benefits increasing, and the economy shedding jobs in December. The president-elect's proposal would cushion the blow for the unemployed by increasing the amount of weekly payments and lengthening their duration, while also raising stimulus payments included in a December measure to \$2,000 from \$600.

Congress is controlled only narrowly by Biden's Democrats, but at least one key senator has expressed reservations about the plan's increased stimulus checks, even as party leaders vowed to act swiftly on the proposal. "His plan makes big, bold, urgent action, building on some of our Democratic initiatives in the last Congress," Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi said on Friday.

The National Retail Federation industry group sounded a positive note, saying: "We support providing critical government assistance in the form of direct payments to families and individuals whose lives have been disrupted, further aid for small businesses across the country, and tools to keep businesses open and the economy growing." —AFP

## UN agency warns of another bad year for airlines

MONTREAL: The UN aviation agency on Friday predicted "prolonged depressed demand" for air travel and more financial woes for airlines, following a year of fewer flights and big losses blamed on the pandemic. Air travel plunged 60 percent in 2020 as nations closed borders and restricted travel to slow the spread of Covid-19, the International Civil Aviation Organization said in a report.

The near-term outlook, it said, "is for prolonged depressed demand, with downside risks to global air travel recovery predominating in the first quarter of 2021, and likely to be subject to further deterioration." With just 1.8 billion passengers taking to the air during the first year of the pandemic, compared to 4.5 billion in 2019, airline losses reached US\$370 billion, according to ICAO figures. Airports and air navigation services providers lost a further \$115 billion and \$13 billion, respectively. And severe liquidity strains, the ICAO said, are now "placing the industry's financial viability in question and threatening millions of jobs around the world." The situation has also been devastating for tourism, given that half of international holidaymakers used air travel in the past.

A recovery, the ICAO said, will hinge on the successful rollout of vaccines, which have now started to be distributed. Several governments have also provided or are in talks with carriers about bailouts.

The plunge in air travel began in January 2020, but was limited to a few countries. As the novel coronavirus spread, air transport "came to a virtual standstill" by the end of March, the ICAO said. A month later, with the introduction of wide-scale lockdowns, border closures and travel restrictions around the world, passenger numbers dropped 92 percent from



The UN aviation agency on Friday predicted "prolonged depressed demand" for air travel and more financial woes for airlines, following a year of fewer flights and big losses blamed on the pandemic.

2019 levels. Passenger traffic then saw a moderate rebound during the usually busy summer travel period, but again dropped off in the last four months of 2020, coinciding with a second wave of COVID-19 infections triggering fresh restrictions.

The ICAO noted that domestic travel has demonstrated stronger resilience, particularly in China and Russia, where passenger numbers have already returned to the pre-pandemic levels.

### Brexit adds to woes

Already grounded by the coronavirus pandemic, airlines operating in the UK are facing post-Brexit obstacles to flying across the European Union, and their shareholders are paying the price. The trade

agreement reached ahead of Britain's recent formal divorce from the EU allows flights between the two to continue as before.

But for airlines with fewer than 50 percent EU-based shareholders, flights within the European Union require a new agreement by the end of 2021. "To continue being able to access these intra-European traffic rights, airlines need to demonstrate they are majority-owned and controlled by European persons," noted Bernstein analyst Daniel Roeska.

No-frills airlines, such as Ryanair and EasyJet, are notably affected, with their business model based heavily on flying customers across the European Union, such as French and German tourists to holiday destinations in Spain and Greece. —AFP



## Business

# Markaz to organize webinar on investment opportunities in 2021

**'Markaz House Views' will include expert sessions on current and future market trends**

**KUWAIT:** As businesses worldwide hope to recover from the setback of the pandemic year and operate in a robust market in 2021, Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" is organizing a webinar to help investors capitalize on new and emerging opportunities. The webinar, titled 'Markaz House Views 2021: Opportunities and Outlook', will be held on 18th of January at 6pm through Zoom, and the registration form can be found on Markaz website. It will feature expert sessions led by Markaz's investment professionals sharing their views on current market conditions and the prospects for 2021.

The webinar will include five different engaging panel discussions and presentations covering MENA equities, fixed income, MENA real estate, international real estate and international investments. The sessions will assess the performance of various markets following the positive news sur-

rounding coronavirus vaccines and new support measures by governments, based on Markaz's market study and evaluations. Panel discussions will explore the attractive asset classes in 2021, including fixed income, bonds and sukuk, and take an in-depth look at the performance of equities against the backdrop of lower oil prices and the COVID-19 pandemic. Attendees will also gain insights on opportunities in the regional and international real estate markets across multi-family, office, retail, and industrial asset classes.

The outstanding line-up of Markaz speakers includes Ali H Khalil, Chief Executive Officer; Bassam N. Al-Othman, Managing Director, MENA Real Estate; Rasha A Othman, Executive Vice President, Fixed Income; Abdullah Al-Mailam, Senior Analyst, International Real Estate; Fahad Al-Rushaid, Manager, MENA Equities; and Abdulmohsen Al-

Mudhaf, Assistant Analyst, International Investments. The sessions will be moderated by M R Raghu, Executive Vice President, Published Research.

Commenting on the webinar, Abdullatif W Al-Nusif, Managing Director, Wealth Management and Business Development, said: "As a black swan event, the Covid-19 pandemic presented profound uncertainty and challenges that impacted nearly all economic and business sectors in 2020. Driven by the optimism around the rollout of vaccines and fresh stimulus measures, investor sentiment has been growing and businesses have emerged more confident about recovery in the near future."

He added: "At Markaz, we have been closely watching the market trends and developments to derive insights that would inform our investment decisions to mitigate risks and generate solid returns for our clients. Through our upcoming

webinar, we aim to share the valuable insights from our experts on the prospects for the new year to help investors make the right investment choices."

In line with its commitment to support the overall development of the Kuwaiti economy, Markaz has been continuously organizing and participating in webinars and initiatives, as well as undertaking various research studies. Most recently in December, Markaz took part in the 'Kuwait Investment Outreach' webinar, themed 'Investing in Kuwait - Capitalizing on Transformation', as a supporting partner to Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA). Markaz also published a market report on the impact of mobility restrictions during the COVID-19 outbreak, with recommendations for different sectors to overcome disruptions and ensure safe operations.

## Italy to increase borrowing to help virus-hit firms

**ROME:** The Italian government said Friday it would seek to borrow an extra 32 billion euros (\$39 billion) to help businesses hurt by coronavirus restrictions. In a statement issued overnight after a cabinet meeting, it said the money would be used to offer "further help" to businesses and citizens "worst hit by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic".

Parliament would have to approve the new request but this is seen as a formality despite the political crisis threatening the government's survival. Former premier Matteo Renzi, who this week pulled out of the ruling coalition, said his Italia Viva party would back any proposal to help virus-hit businesses.

Italy was the first country in Europe to have been overwhelmed by the pandemic, which has left almost 81,000 people dead and plunged the economy into recession.

In a quarterly bulletin on Friday, the Bank of Italy said the economy was not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels before 2023. After a 9.2-per-cent drop in 2020, gross domestic product (GDP) was projected to grow by 3.5 per cent in 2021, 3.8 per cent in 2022, and 2.3 per cent in 2023, the bank said. Italy's public finances, already stretched before the pandemic, have worsened dramatically.

Official data earlier this month showed the public deficit in the third quarter of 2020 stood at 9.4 per cent of GDP, compared to 2.2 per cent in the same period of 2019. However, Italy is one of the major beneficiaries of a huge European Union recovery fund, expecting loans and grants worth around 220 billion euros.

### Red zone restrictions

Meanwhile, Health Minister Roberto Speranza announced Friday tighter regional coronavirus rules in response to worsening virus statistics. The northern region of Lombardy, comprising Milan, the island of Sicily and the autonomous province of South Tyrol will become "red zones" with only supermarkets, pharmacies and other stores selling basic necessities left open.

Another nine of Italy's 20 regions including Lazio, which includes Rome, were due to move up from "yellow" to "orange" zones, to make a total of 12 in that category. In orange areas, restaurants and bars are closed except for take-away and delivery, as in red zones, but shops are open. A nighttime curfew remains in effect throughout the country from 10:00 pm to 5:00 am and gyms, pools and theatres remain closed.

But museums were due to reopen, only on weekdays, in the few lower risk "yellow" regions, including Tuscany, Sardinia and Campania. —AFP

## Tunisia set to lose stolen millions in Swiss banks

**TUNIS:** Tunisia could lose millions of dollars stashed in Switzerland by the family of ousted dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, a senior official said Saturday. The funds are currently frozen by Swiss authorities but a deadline to claw back funds ends midnight on Tuesday and restrictions then cease, a presidential official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Swiss authorities imposed a 10-year freeze on assets of Ben Ali and his clan amid a corruption probe on January 19, 2011, five days after the toppled leader fled to Saudi Arabia, where he later died. Swiss-based campaign group Public Eye, which investigates human rights violations by Swiss companies, estimates Ben Ali's family and allies shifted some \$320 million into Swiss banks in the years before his ouster. Leila Trabelsi, Ben Ali's widow, and her wealthy businessman brother Belhassen Trabelsi, are among 30 to 50 of his relatives and associates who "could get hold of the money", the source said.

"We are in touch daily with the Swiss authorities, but despite their understanding, it will be difficult to achieve anything" by the deadline, the source added. —AFP

## Fitch keeps UK outlook negative, debt at AA-

**WASHINGTON:** Fitch ratings maintained Britain's AA- debt rating and outlook at negative, but warned rising deficits, the coronavirus surge and its fraught trading relationship with Europe pose risks.

The affirmed negative outlook "reflects the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the UK economy and the resulting material deterioration in the public finances," with the agency saying in a statement the deficit widened to 16.2 percent last year. London's recent trade deal with the European Union following its departure from the bloc "should limit disruption at borders in the short term," Fitch said, but warned "uncertainty remains around how the new trade arrangement will work in practice and how it will affect the UK's trade with the EU over time."

The rollout of vaccines against COVID-19 could spark a "sustained recovery" beginning in the second half of 2021, and Fitch raised the year's GDP growth forecast to 5.0 percent from its previous 4.1 percent,

## Restaurants suffer as virus hits 2020 US retail sales

**WASHINGTON:** The coronavirus pandemic upended shopping habits in the United States in 2020, government data showed Friday, pushing customers towards online outlets but keeping them away from restaurants and electronics stores.

The Commerce Department said US retail sales in the final month of 2020 were up only 2.9 percent from last year, weaker than the 5.8 percent growth seen from December 2018 as stores across the world's largest economy struggled with its massive COVID-19 outbreak.

Month-on-month sales also fell by a worse-than-expected 0.7 percent in December and November's data was revised downwards as states again tightened restrictions on businesses as infections surged.

"Sales were much weaker than expected in December and declined

citing the free trade agreement. But the agency warned of a "weak" short-term economic outlook, as Britain grapples with surging virus cases.

Earlier this month, London imposed a lockdown and ordered the public to stay at home and work remotely, if possible, and only to go out for essential shopping, medical reasons or to exercise.

That will cause the economy to contract three percent in the first quarter of this year, but Fitch said its recovery in the second quarter could be stronger than before thanks to the new trade deal.

### Brexit red tape

German logistics company DB Schenker is temporarily suspending deliveries from the European Union to Britain because of bureaucratic hurdles brought on by Brexit. The transport giant is experiencing "considerable problems" in customs formalities in the movement of goods between the UK and EU, it said in a statement sent to AFP on Friday.

Only "around 10 percent" of deliveries are accompanied by the complete and correct paperwork, it added. DB Schenker, owned by Germany's state-owned rail giant Deutsche Bahn, said it has staff specially trained to deal with Brexit

for a third straight month. Overall, spending is coming under pressure from restrictions that are resulting in job and income loss," Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics said in an analysis. Excluding the volatile auto sector, retail sales declined 1.4 percent from November, and even for non-store retailers like e-commerce sites, which saw huge growth in 2020, sales dipped 5.8 percent.

The report caps a year that saw massive upheavals for businesses, with some prospering but others slumping under the weight of the coronavirus. Non-store retailers saw sales rise 19.2 percent in December from the end of 2019 and building materials and gardening equipment were up 17.0 percent.

Grocery stores gained 8.9 percent last year as more people cooked at home and occasionally stockpiled, while sporting goods, hobby, book and musical instrument stores saw sales jump 15.2 percent. Many other types of retailer suffered as the arrival of COVID-19 made shopping trips potentially perilous.

## Global stocks rise with Biden stimulus in focus

**NEW YORK:** Global equity markets mostly advanced as anticipation for Joe Biden's plan for substantial new stimulus offset worries about tightening coronavirus restrictions in some markets.

Shortly after US markets closed, details became known of the Biden plan, which proposes \$1.9 trillion to revitalize the US economy as it faces an onslaught of coronavirus cases.

The plan comes as government data showed that new applications for unemployment benefits rose sharply in the first week of 2021, surging by 181,000 in the biggest increase since the coronavirus pandemic began in March and a clear demonstration that the economy is faltering.

"The key takeaway from the report for the market is that it simply paints the need for additional stimulus; hence, this bad news gets

interpreted as good news," said market analyst Patrick J. O'Hare at Briefing.com. US indices finished lower following a choppy session. Still, equity markets remain near all-time highs as investors look ahead to a better 2021 economy thanks to coronavirus vaccines.

Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell predicted the United States could see a boost of "exuberant spending" after the pandemic, without predicting a spike in inflation.

In Europe, the London stock market closed with a gain of 0.8 percent while Frankfurt rose by 0.4 percent and Paris added 0.3 percent. "A more positive tone in markets has developed ahead of the expected stimulus announcement from Joe Biden," noted Chris Beauchamp, chief market analyst at trading firm IG. "Investors (are) hoping that the president-elect will move quickly and in substantial form to secure a new package that will bolster the US economy as the vaccine program moves into a higher gear," he added.

News that outgoing US president Donald Trump had been impeached for a historic second time appeared



issues but "every shipment that is not properly documented delays the delivery of entire loads". Shipments that are not fully declared cannot be delivered, it said.

The company expects a further increase in the volume of shipments in January, but said it "will only be able to process these quickly if the proportion of deliveries with complete paperwork increases significantly." "Both the sender and the recipient have a duty to provide compliant documents for this purpose."

It said deliveries already posted will continue to be transported as

quickly as possible.

The post-Brexit trade agreement concluded on Christmas Eve ended the free movement of goods between the EU and Britain. The French parcel delivery service DPD said earlier in January that it was suspending deliveries from Britain to EU countries for a few days.

It said it needed time to adjust to the "new, more complex procedures" for passing through customs because of Brexit. DB Schenker handles around half a million shipments from continental Europe to the UK every year. —AFP

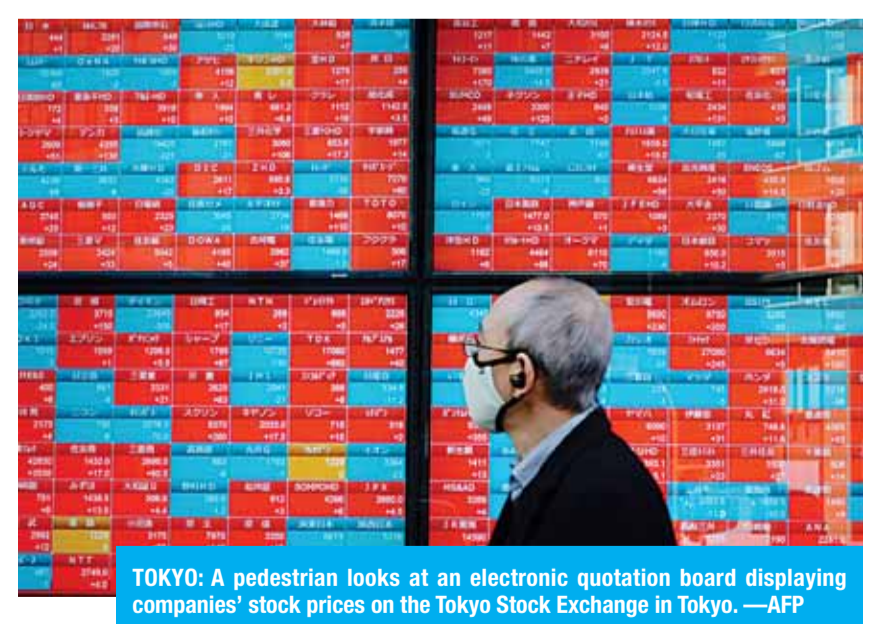


Clothing and accessories stores were down 16 percent from December 2019, electronics stores lost 16.6 percent and food and drink outlets, like the eateries which were among the first businesses shuttered when the virus arrived, plunged 21.2 percent.

The virus also sunk oil prices, pushing gasoline station sales down 12.2 percent in 2020. Even with vac-

cines being rolled out and consumers receiving another round of stimulus checks from the government, Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics predicted retail sales weren't set for a rebound until the virus is controlled.

"We expect consumers' spending to struggle until falling COVID cases allow restrictions to be eased," he said. —AFP



**TOKYO:** A pedestrian looks at an electronic quotation board displaying companies' stock prices on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in Tokyo. —AFP

to have little immediate impact on sentiment, despite worries about more unrest ahead of Biden's inauguration on January 20.

Mounting COVID-19 cases however remained a worry, with German Chancellor Angela Merkel calling for tougher restrictions to contain the country's worsening outbreak

and pushing for crisis talks with regional leaders, party sources said. Analysts said a vaccine being developed by pharma giant Johnson & Johnson could make a huge difference as it would only need one jab and can be transported more easily. Shares of the pharma giant jumped 1.8 percent. —AFP



# Classifieds

Monday, January 18, 2021

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## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

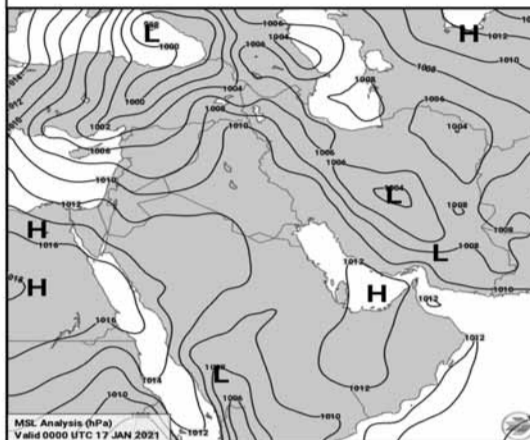
**BY DAY:** Fair and with light to moderate south easterly wind to light variable wind with speed of 06 - 28 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

**BY NIGHT:** Cold and Partly cloudy with light variable wind changing to light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 08 - 28 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

WEATHER WARNING: No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	22 °C	15 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	22 °C	11 °C
ABDALY	23 °C	09 °C
BUBYAN	19 °C	14 °C
JAHRA	23 °C	13 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	19 °C	16 °C
AHMADI	- °C	- °C
NUWAISIB	21 °C	12 °C
WAFRA	22 °C	11 °C
SALMY	19 °C	11 °C

## SFC. CHART 17/01/2021 0000 UTC



DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Monday	01/18	Fair and Partly cloudy	21 °C	10 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 28 km/h
Tuesday	01/19	Fair and Partly cloudy	20 °C	09 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 26 km/h
Wednesday	01/20	Warm and some scattered clouds will appear with a chance for rising dust over open areas	24 °C	10 °C	SE-NW	15 - 40 km/h
Thursday	01/21	A significant decrease in temperature	15 °C	05 °C	NW	15 - 42 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:20
Sunrise	06:43
Zuhr	11:58
Asr	14:54
Sunset	17:13
Isha	18:34

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	23 °C
MIN. Temp.	12 °C
MAX. RH	84 %
MIN. RH	31 %
MAX. Wind	NW 28 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

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## Word Search

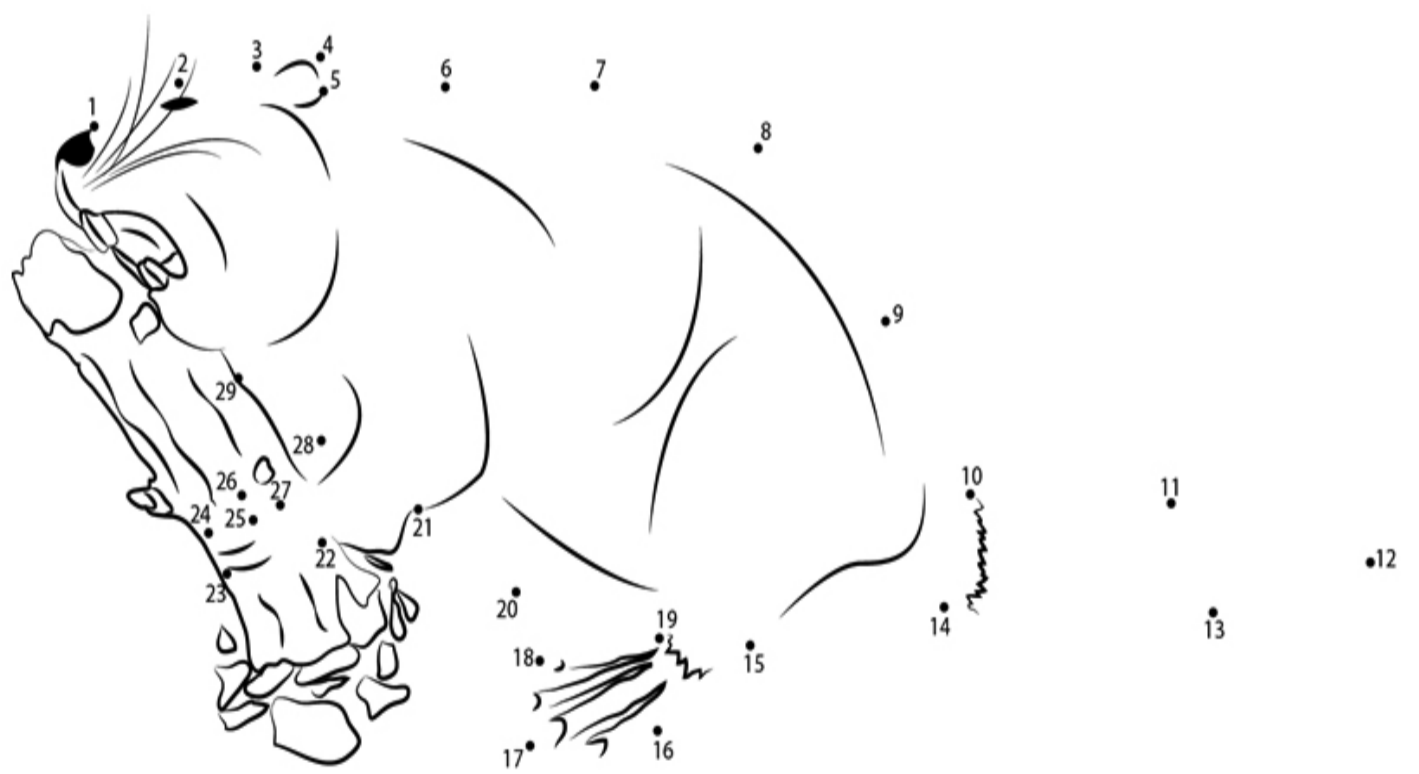
### AIRPORTS

Find the three letter codes for 30 international airports in the word search grid.



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| AMS (Amsterdam Schiphol)                      | ICN (Incheon International)            |
| ATL (Hartfield Jackson Atlanta International) | IST (Ataturk International)            |
| BKK (Suvarnabhumi Bangkok)                    | JKK (John F Kennedy International)     |
| CAN (Guangzhou Baiyun International)          | KUL (Kuala Lumpur International)       |
| CDG (Charles de Gaulle International)         | LAS (McCarran International Las Vegas) |
| CGK (Soekarno-Hatta International)            | LAX (Los Angeles International)        |
| CLT (Charlotte Douglas International)         | LHR (London Heathrow)                  |
| DEL (Indira Gandhi International New Delhi)   | MAD (Madrid Barajas International)     |
| DEN (Denver International)                    | MIA (Miami International)              |
| DFW (Dallas Fort Worth International)         | ORD (Chicago O'Hare International)     |
| DXB (Dubai International)                     | PEK (Beijing Capital International)    |
| FRA (Frankfurt am Main International)         | PHX (Phoenix Sky Harbor International) |
| HKG (Hong Kong International Kai Tak)         | PVG (Shanghai Pudong International)    |
| HND (Tokyo International)                     | SFO (San Francisco International)      |
| IAH (George Bush Intercontinental Houston)    | SIN (Singapore Changi International)   |

## Join the Dots



## STAR TRACK

 <p><b>Aries (March 21-April 19)</b> Some deeply buried feelings about your mother and family could come up from the past today and need release. Don't be afraid to show your pain and anger. If you're embarrassed to do it around others, Aries, stay home and deal with it. This is a positive development. By the end of the day you might feel as if a large weight has been lifted from your shoulders.</p>	 <p><b>Cancer (June 21-July 22)</b> Expanding your horizons is the key for today, Cancer. Communications received from distant states or foreign lands could have you entertaining the idea of traveling to those places. Learning is very much on your mind. You're probably curious about different cultures, ideas, and perspectives. Even though you might not make definite plans for travel now, you're apt to at least consider it.</p>	 <p><b>Libra (September 23-October 22)</b> You're a service-oriented person by nature, Libra, and today the opportunity to spend time serving those in need could well present itself. This could be in a professional capacity or helping someone close who's having troubles of some kind. This particular situation won't last long, but it's likely to change your life in a positive way. Don't resist. Go with the flow.</p>	 <p><b>Capricorn (December 22-January 19)</b> Some great news could change your life forever. It might involve a new partnership of some kind or opportunities in your community. At the least, Capricorn, it could involve changes in your outlook and attitudes about life. You could spend a lot of time on the phone with friends and acquaintances. You will probably want to schedule a romantic evening with your partner.</p>
 <p><b>Taurus (April 20-May 20)</b> Group activities in your neighborhood could lead to positive changes in your community. You will enjoy exchanging ideas and information with others, Taurus, and could come away from these activities feeling exhilarated. It might be a good idea to walk home, or perhaps go for coffee or a movie afterward. If you let the ideas buzz until bedtime, you might not be able to sleep.</p>	 <p><b>Leo (July 23-August 22)</b> Some very intense dreams could take you back to the past, perhaps your childhood or past lives. Write down any dreams you remember, Leo. They might not make sense to you now, but if you go back and analyze them later, you're likely to find that they reveal a lot about you that you weren't previously aware of. They might even inspire new projects of some kind. Think about them carefully.</p>	 <p><b>Scorpio (October 23-November 21)</b> If you've been hoping for a lucky break, Scorpio, this is the day it might come, especially if it involves love and romance. Or you might have been hoping for acknowledgment on the job, in the field of education, or by someone who means a lot to you. Whatever breaks come your way are likely to move you emotionally. You won't be the same. Have a great day.</p>	 <p><b>Aquarius (January 20-February 18)</b> Some changes regarding your career could make a difference in your resources. This could involve a pending raise or promotion or opportunities for freelance work outside the job. It might imply a new job, perhaps in a creative field. Whatever work you do is likely to seem more emotionally rewarding than it has been, Aquarius. This should boost your spirits considerably.</p>
 <p><b>Gemini (May 21-June 20)</b> Today you might find yourself in the public eye. Acknowledgment for work well done could come your way. It might also involve an increase in income. This could be job related or simply a community project that you've been working on and accomplished successfully. Enjoy your 15 minutes of fame, Gemini, even though you might find it a bit disconcerting.</p>	 <p><b>Virgo (August 23-September 22)</b> An old friend you haven't seen for a while could suddenly reappear, and you might view this person in a different light as a potential business partner, source of inspiration, or even a romantic possibility. If this is your inclination, Virgo, don't write it off without giving it some careful consideration. Partnerships formed today are likely to lead to success.</p>	 <p><b>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)</b> Changes in your home could take place now. These are positive, Sagittarius, though they might seem a bit overwhelming. Some could even be described as upheavals. Perhaps someone moves in or out. It could even involve moving to a new place, redecorating, refurbishing, or perhaps adopting a pet. At the very least, expect some emotional changes within yourself.</p>	 <p><b>Pisces (February 19-March 20)</b> Today you're likely to feel especially romantic and sexy, and anxious to get together with a love partner. This doesn't mean you aren't in the mood for socializing in general. In fact, you may look forward to meeting with friends. You should be feeling especially creative, and you could spend a lot of your day either planning or working on projects.</p>





## CYPRUS CATS OUT IN THE COLD AS PANDEMIC BITES

**A**t a cat sanctuary set in picturesque hills near Paphos, on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, volunteers are grappling with a surge in abandonments they blame on the coronavirus pandemic. "There has been an increase of about 30 percent of previously owned, loved (and) looked-after cats that have been left behind" as people depart the island, lamented Dawn Foote, 48, who runs the Tala Cats rescue center. Some among Cyprus's large expatriate and dual resident communities have retreated home as the economic squeeze has tightened, she noted.

"People, at the moment, have just got no money, and it's expensive to get a cat to

Cyprus-in the form of a feline jawbone.

### Prowling for food, owners

Abandoned cats just "don't know how to survive," Foote said. "A lot of them want to give up." The government imposed a nationwide lockdown from January 10, Cyprus's second since the pandemic began, after Covid-19 infections surged. The closure of restaurants-choice locations for feline scavengers-has further compounded the misery for many of the island's feline residents, whose numbers dwarf the human population, according to at least one animal welfare organization.

Meanwhile, the rehousing of animals, many of whom find their "forever homes" abroad, has become more difficult, a trend confirmed to AFP by a dog sanctuary near the capital Nicosia. Fewer cargo flights, higher transport costs and the repeated closure of sanctuaries to visitors are making it harder to win would-be owners' hearts. As a result, there are now some 800 cats prowling the grounds at Tala Cats, situated on land owned by the nearby Agios Neophytos Monastery. The location is apt, because there is no breeding-all the felines who come through the gates are spayed or neutered.

### 'Your outdoor cat'

Sterilization is key to keeping any stray cat population under control, and while some vets in Cyprus perform operations outside their main business, they face an uphill battle. State coordination and funding for sterilization programs — 75,000 euros (\$91,000) in total last year, according to the agriculture ministry-were insufficient, vets told AFP. The strategy "is not working at all... it's not focused", said Evis Andreou, 42, noting that key prerequisites, including censuses of stray populations in target areas, were absent.

Cyprus's agriculture ministry said its neutering program has been "effective", noting however that it was "working to further improve our procedures, so that there is more effective targeting and control" during the coming year. But some say the public as a whole also fails to take the issue seriously enough. "I hear people here say, 'this



is a stray I've been feeding for 10 years'," said another vet, Marie-Ellen Josephides, 38. "I'm like, 'it's not a stray, you've been feeding it... it's your outdoor cat'"-and it will have been breeding for much of the last decade, she pointed out. — AFP



another country-you've got passports to pay for, you've got transport carriers to pay," Foote said. "It's heartbreaking," she told AFP, saying abandonments were rising island-wide, in part also due to locals no longer being able to afford pet food or vet bills. Evidence of cats' domestication in Cyprus dates back further than anywhere else, including Pharaonic Egypt.

In 2004, archaeologists announced they had unearthed the remains of a cat and a human deliberately buried together 9,500 years ago at the Neolithic village of Shillourokambos. That's some 1,500 years earlier than the previous record find-also in



Abandoned cats gather at Tala Cats rescue center, on land owned by the Ayios Neofytos Monastery, in the Cypriot village of Tala near Paphos. — AFP photos



## Videogame sales hit US high in pandemic-plagued 2020



**S**ales of video games, consoles and accessories hit a record high in the US last year as people hunkered down at home due to the pandemic turned to play. Video game spending in the US totaled \$56.9 billion last year, 27 percent more than what was spent in 2019, according NPD market research group analyst Mat Piscatella. A total of \$7.7 billion of that was spent in December, which posted the highest

sales figures ever for that month, NPD figures showed. And that did not even count money spent on smartphone games. Nintendo Switch was the top selling console last year, with the PlayStation 5 coming in second, according to Piscatella.

Sony's PlayStation 5 and Microsoft's newest Xbox were released in November, vying for holiday season dominance as the pandemic boosts gaming demand.

Exact sales figures for the new consoles were not available from NPD, Sony, nor Microsoft. The top selling game of the year was Call of Duty: Black Ops: Cold War, with a Modern Warfare installment to the same franchise racking up the second-highest sales amount, according to NPD. "Call of Duty ranked as the best-selling gaming franchise in the US market for a record 12th consecutive year," Piscatella said in an NPD

release. The Last of Us: Part II finished 2020 as the year's best-selling PlayStation exclusive, according to NPD. The boom in video game play is poised to continue this year, with some hugely-awaited titles on the way for the new Xbox and PlayStation consoles. — AFP



Lifestyle | Features

# Egypt makes 'major discoveries' at Saqqara archaeological site



Egypt announced Saturday the discovery of a new trove of treasures at the Saqqara necropolis south of Cairo, including an ancient funerary temple. The tourism and antiquities ministry said the "major discoveries" made by a team of archaeologists headed by famed Egyptologist Zahi Hawass also included more than 50 sarcophagi. The wooden sarcophagi, which date back to the New Kingdom, were found in 52 burial shafts at depths of 10 to 12 meters (40 feet), the ministry said in a statement.

It quoted Hawass as saying that the "funerary temple of Queen Naert, the wife of King Teti" as well as three warehouses made of bricks were found on the site. Saqqara, home to more than a dozen pyramids, ancient monasteries, and animal burial sites, is a vast necropolis of the ancient Egyptian capital of Memphis, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In November, Egypt announced the discovery of more than 100 intact sarcophagi, in the largest such find of the year.

The sealed wooden coffins, unveiled alongside statues of ancient deities, dated back to more than 2,500 years and belonged to top officials of the Late Period

and the Ptolemaic period of ancient Egypt. At the time, Antiquities and Tourism Minister Khaled Al-Anani predicted that "Saqqara has yet to reveal all of its contents."

In the statement released Saturday, Hawass said the latest discovery could shed new light on the history of Saqqara during the New Kingdom, between the 16th century BC and the 11th century BC. The discovery was made near the pyramid where King Teti, the first pharaoh of the Sixth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom, is buried. Egypt hopes archaeological discoveries will spur tourism, a sector which has suffered multiple shocks, from a 2011 uprising to today's coronavirus pandemic.

Later this year, and after several delays, authorities hope to inaugurate a new museum—the Grand Egyptian Museum—at the Giza plateau, home to the famed Giza pyramids. There has been a flurry of excavations in recent years in Saqqara, home to the step pyramid of Djoser, one of the earliest built in ancient Egypt. — AFP

# Rocker David Crosby on songwriting, 'emotional voyages' and Donald Trump

Like all entertainers, David Crosby—the mustachioed co-founder of both the seminal folk rock band The Byrds and the supergroup Crosby, Stills and Nash (and Young) — had a disappointing 2020 that saw the pandemic ground tours and thwart live performance. But the two-time Rock and Roll Hall of Famer, songwriter and prominent Twitter personality has tried to make the most of it, working on a screenplay and new songs, catching up on music from jazz to bluegrass, and dreaming up a European museum tour for when it's safe to travel again.

The 79-year-old is an adept social media user, dropping quippy tweets on everything from the music business to blasts of the Donald Trump administration, also praising climate activist Greta Thunberg and regularly critiquing his followers' joint rolling skills. The following are excerpts from an interview, edited for length and clarity, with Crosby, who spoke to AFP via video chat from his California home. What have you been up to since Covid-19 began spreading? I'm writing a screenplay... but I got an email from the producer this morning telling me to stop talking about it. I've also been writing (songs).



In this file photo US musician David Crosby (left) and wife Jan Dance arrive for the 62nd Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles.

Normally, as you get older, you sort of peter out. You write less. You may write better, but you write less. You kind of fade out. I started writing with other people, my son James, notably. Who is, if anything, better than me. Which is saying something—I'm a good songwriter. I write with a number of friends of mine... the other person always thinks of something you didn't, which is a marvel. It's just wonderful. It's like if you're a painter, and you have a palette in your hand, you've got like seven colors—and the other guy's got seven other colors! So it's a better painting.

That has extended my life as a writer tremendously. I just finished a record that I haven't put out yet and I think I'm going to start another one, because we have more songs. I just love making music. Do you think touring will reboot any time

soon? Sure. It's a huge business and there are enormous amounts of money being lost, so you know there's a bunch of people trying to fix it. Live Nation, for instance, the big player.

I don't think they're going to have a lot of success; I'll tell you why. First of all, a lot of people won't take the vaccine. MAGA-hatted Trump supporters... not sensible people. They're not going to do the right thing... that's a problem. But if enough people are vaccinated, then they can sit in a regular audience and we don't have to have masks and we can see their faces and we can have them sitting next to each other. That, I can play to. Obviously income is a factor, but what is it you miss most about performing? What I do isn't just guitar playing and singing. I'm not the best at either one of those.

What I'm really good at is breaking the fourth wall. Taking you on a little trip. Making you laugh, so then I can make you cry. That's my job. I can't do that to a windshield. I can't do it to a face mask. I can't do it to people sitting in pods. I've got to have a real audience, and I can't do it any other way. Otherwise, we can't communicate the words outwards, the ideas that we're trying to tell you. We can't take you on the little emotional voyages that we're trying to take you on. Do you have any fears, health wise, about touring again?

It wouldn't stop me. I'd be cautious, but I want to sing so badly. I love what I do. You two have had differences in recent years, but do you think there's a chance we'll see a David Crosby-Neil Young reunion ever again? No. I think it's done. I think CSNY was a very good thing, and I'm very proud of it. And I think it's very finished. You're a long time activist—how did you feel watching the recent storming of the Capitol by Trump supporters? Disgusted.

I believe very much in democracy... (it's) the only thing that gives the little guy a shot. What you've seen in the United States is the result of people who don't value democracy—they value power. And our current president is a very low kind of person. He's not a fully developed human being. He's not very bright. He's a very, very greedy, very vindictive, very awful human being. And he's done a great deal of harm to our democracy. We're going through an agonizing thing. I think democracy will win in the long run. I think there are a whole lot of us Americans who believe in it and are willing to sacrifice for it and keep fighting for it. I have to believe that to keep going to keep my head up. — AFP



In this file photo Stephen Stills (left), Graham Nash (second left), David Crosby (second right) and Neil Young (right) perform live for the first time since 1974 at the Palace of Auburn Hill, Michigan. — AFP photos



Yelizaveta Mikhaylova, a daughter of a victim of Stalinist repressions, shows a photo of her parents - father Semyon and mother Antonina - at her house in the village of Zolotkovo.

# Life in exile: Children of the Gulag fight to return home

In a run-down wooden hut deep in the Russian countryside, Yelizaveta Mikhaylova has been waiting for justice for 30 years. The daughter of a Gulag prisoner, the 72-year-old is among the ageing children of those sent to the infamous Soviet camps who were promised compensation they have yet to receive. Under a law passed after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, they are entitled to accommodation in the city from which their parents were sent into exile—in Mikhaylova's case Moscow some 300 kilometers (185 miles) away. "My parents wanted for us to return... that is why I am still fighting," says the retired dentist.



Yelizaveta Mikhaylova, a daughter of a victim of Stalinist repressions, shows a photo of herself as a child at her house close to the village of Zolotkovo, Vladimir region.

She has waited a long time, living with her two daughters in a 40-square-metre (430-square-foot) room in the hut near Zolotkovo, a village five hours' drive from Moscow. It's a difficult life. They cut wood to fuel a stove that heats the room and their toilet is separated by a simple curtain. Mikhaylova's father Semyon—a manager in the chemicals industry—was arrested during the mass purges set into motion by Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and accused of participating in a counter-revolutionary organization. After serving eight years in a camp in the Far East, Semyon was sentenced to another 25 years in Siberia, though the sentence was cut short by Stalin's death in 1953.

## 'A tragedy for a family'

Restricted by a ban that did not allow former prisoners to reside within 100 kilometers (about 60 miles) of most cities, Semyon's family first settled in what is now Moldova before returning to Russia. "It is a tragedy, a tragedy for a family," says Mikhaylova. A few years ago, Mikhaylova arrived with a suitcase full of documents in the office of Grigory Vaypan, then a fresh graduate of Moscow State University and Harvard. "Immediately we understood that we could not abandon this woman," says the 30-year-old human rights lawyer.

He took up her case, along with those of two other children of Gulag survivors, Alissa Meissner and Yevgeniya Shashaeva, who still live near former camps in remote areas. They scored a first legal success in 2019, when Russia's Constitutional Court recognised that the

compensation law was not being applied due its changing and near impossible conditions. The court ordered legislators to seek a solution. A bill has since been passed in first reading in Russia's lower house State Duma, but Vaypan says it will not do enough to help Mikhaylova and others like her because it makes them register on waiting lists for social housing.

In Moscow the average wait for such a spot is almost 30 years. The bill heads to a second reading next week and supporters of the children of Gulag hope changes will be made to help them in time. "(They) have lived their entire lives in exile," Vaypan says, and while there is no way they can now recover the homes that belonged to their parents, they should at least be allowed to return to the cities.

## 'Their future was broken'

Supporters say it is the least the country can do for the remaining victims of Stalinist terror—a period of history that Russian authorities often ignore, highlighting instead moments like the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany. Most of these children of the Gulag are now in their 70s and 80s, with only about 1,500 left alive in Russia today, says Roman Romanov, the director of the Gulag Museum in Moscow. "Their future was broken then and this break has never been repaired. They are still suffering the consequences of the repression," says Romanov, 38.

Momentum is building to finally help them. The United Nations and International Federation for Human Rights recently urged the Russian government to take action and more than 100 prominent figures signed an open letter this week demanding justice. A petition launched by Vaypan has gathered more than more than 80,000 signatures in favor of a proper law to help Mikhaylova and others who share her fate return home. "We've managed to draw attention to these people and show they exist," Vaypan says. "They have the right to return, the law must work". — AFP



Yelizaveta Mikhaylova, a daughter of a victim of Stalinist repressions, shows a document of her father Semyon at her house close to the village of Zolotkovo.



Gulag children personal belongings are on display at the Gulag Museum. — AFP photos

# DYLAN, YOUNG, FLEETWOOD: MUSIC PUBLISHING SECTOR BOOMING WITH HIGH-PROFILE SALES

The pandemic has left the performance industry reeling but music publishing, a normally under-the-radar side of the business, is roaring thanks to a frenzy of high-profile music catalog sales. The royalty streams of songwriting copyright portfolios can prove lucrative for the long haul, and increasingly are enticing investors even as other industries tank under the pandemic's weight. In many cases, the transactions have come at staggering prices: Bob Dylan sold his full publishing catalog for a reported sum of \$300 million to Universal Music Publishing Group, while Stevie Nicks of Fleetwood Mac sold a majority stake in her catalog reportedly for \$100 million.



In this file photo taken on July 4, 1978 US poet and folk singer Bob Dylan performs at the Pavillon de Paris.



In this file photo musician Neil Young attends "Neil Young Journeys" Premiere at Slandance Main Screening Room in Park City, Utah. — AFP photos

Neil Young and the duo behind Blondie inked deals for undisclosed amounts, as did Shakira. Lindsey Buckingham and Mick Fleetwood, both also of Fleetwood Mac, each recently announced sales that include publishing copyrights to hits including the 1977 song "Dreams," which recently enjoyed a streaming renaissance after going viral on TikTok. The owners of a song's publishing rights receive a cut in a number of scenarios, including radio play and streaming, album sales, and use in advertising and movies. The "fantastically positive" sales trend began well before 2020 but rapidly escalated even as other sectors suffered due to Covid-19, said Nari Matsuura, a partner at the firm Massarsky Consulting, which values catalogs for lenders and music publishing groups along with private equity and music funds. Streaming's numbers have soared in recent years and appear sound long-term.

That anticipated stability combined with low interest rates and dependable earning projections for time-tested hits have fostered music publishing's bull market, she said. Meanwhile, many artists unable to tour have looked to monetize their other assets, namely songwriting catalogs, as the valuations of their work continue to rise. "We have seen names, these incredibly iconic artists... (who) we never imagined would sell," Matsuura said. For some musicians, it makes sense to cash out while they know prices are good. — AFP



## Sports

## Photo of the Day



Jaan Roose performs in Seli Raba, Estonia. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Milan lose Hernandez, Calhanoglu after positive COVID tests

ROME: Serie A leaders AC Milan will be without French defender Theo Hernandez and Turkish midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu for today's game in Cagliari after both returned positive tests for COVID-19, the club announced yesterday. The two players, both regulars in Stefano Pioli's team, "tested positive in a molecular test" carried out on Saturday on the entire squad and were "immediately placed in quarantine at home", the club said.

AC Milan are already missing Croatian striker Ante Rebic and Bosnian midfielder Rade Krunic, who have not featured since their positive tests were announced on January 6. It marks a new setback for Pioli who is also without Ismael Bennacer, Alexis Saelemaekers and Matteo Gabbia, who are all injured, while striker Rafael Leao is suspended.

His side have a three-point lead over city rivals Inter at the top of the table and will take the honorary title of "winter champion" on Monday if they win in Sardinia, the 18th round of the championship marking the halfway point in the title race. Hernandez and Calhanoglu are also likely to miss the Serie A match against Atalanta Bergamo next Saturday and the Italian Cup quarter-final against Inter on January 26. — AFP

# Harden posts triple double, sets NBA record in Brooklyn Nets debut

## First player to record 30-plus triple double in first game with new team

LOS ANGELES: Kevin Durant scored a season-high 42 points as the James Harden-era began for the Brooklyn Nets with a triple double and a 122-115 NBA victory over the struggling Orlando Magic on Saturday.

The 31-year-old Harden finished with 32 points, 14 assists and 12 rebounds in his debut with the Nets, who must wait to show off their Big Three of Harden, Durant and Kyrie Irving due to Irving's absence for personal reasons.

Harden scored his first points as a Net by nailing two free throws with six seconds left in the first quarter as the Nets took a 29-26 lead. "Early on, I felt like we all were overpassing, trying to make everybody comfortable," Durant said. "Then he just got into his mode of being aggressive to score and that opened up the whole game for others."

Harden, who became the seventh player in history to record a triple double in their debut for a new club and the first to do so with a 30-plus scoring effort, slammed the door on his way out of Houston after a four-team trade deal was completed.

But he was clearly pleased with his new club on Saturday, which sees him reunited with former Oklahoma City Thunder teammate Durant. "It felt really good. Guys got after it," Harden said. "I've got to stop turning the basketball over. That comes with chemistry. That comes with practice. Getting a win in my first game here, it feels pretty good. We just have to keep it going." As for his historic statistics — "I'm just happy we came away with a win," he said. "Those stats don't mean anything."

### Underachiever

Despite winning the NBA scoring crown three times, Harden earned a reputation as an underachiever in the playoffs with the Rockets. His tenure in Houston came to a head after a one-sided loss to the Los Angeles Lakers on Tuesday when Harden blasted the team's talent level. Even before that, Harden had demanded out of Houston after failing to deliver them a championship despite some impressive individual performances and being named the 2018 NBA Most Valuable Player.

Two days later after saying the Rockets were "just not good enough", Harden was on his way to Brooklyn after being acquired in a blockbuster four-team trade that saw Caris LeVert, Jarrett Allen and a number of draft picks go to Houston. Harden was averaging 24.8 points, 10.4 assists, and 5.1 rebounds in eight games with the Rockets this season. Harden, who waited until late in the first quarter Saturday to score his first Nets points, looks forward to Irving's return. "The sooner we can be on the court together, it's going to be scary hours," Harden said.

Irving missed his sixth straight game after being fined \$50,000 by the NBA for violating health and safety protocols. He was seen on social media during his absence without a mask at an indoor family party. He joined Harden as the second NBA player fined for violating the league's COVID-19 rules.

Four-time scoring champ Durant shot 16 of 26 from the floor against the Magic and was a perfect 5-of-5 from the free throw line. Nikola Vucevic finished with a team-high 34 points and 10 rebounds to lead Orlando, who have lost five straight.



BROOKLYN: James Harden #13 of the Brooklyn Nets handles the ball during the game against the Orlando Magic on Saturday at Barclays Center in Brooklyn, New York. — AFP

### Spurs rip Rockets

DeMar DeRozan scored 24 points and the San Antonio Spurs rolled over the Rockets 103-91 in the second game between the teams over a three-day span. At Tampa, Norman Powell scored 24 points

and Chris Boucher, Kyle Lowry and Fred Van Fleet converted eight straight free throws in the final two minutes as the Toronto Raptors beat Charlotte 116-113. Boucher came off the bench to score 20 points and nine rebounds. — AFP

## Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem shooting tournament concludes

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Late Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah annual shooting tournament concluded on Saturday with a closing ceremony at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex in the presence of tournament patron Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Sheikh Abdullah Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Sheikhha Mariam Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah, President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi, Secretary General Obaid Manahi Al-Osaimi and Board Member Tariq Hamada.

Sheikh Thamer congratulated the winners and wished those who did not win the best of luck in future tournaments. "We are honored to support such a sport, and we notice new developments every year due to the efforts of the Kuwait Shooting Sport Club. Shooters continue to make significant achievements regionally and at the international level," he said.

Otaibi welcomed the guests, adding that Kuwait Shooting Sport Club is honored to organize this tournament due to the name it carries, in appreciation of the late Sheikh Ali Sabah Al-Salem's contributions to Kuwait in general and shooting in particular.

The results of the tournament are as follows:  
Skeet Men: Mansour Al-Rashidi, Saud Al-Kandari, Faisal Al-Mutairi  
Trap Men: Nasser Al-Moqled, Talal Al-Rashidi, Abdelrahman Al-Faihan  
Skeet Women: Afrah Adel, Sheikhha Al-Rashidi, Fatima Al-Zaabi  
Trap Women: Sarah Al-Hawal, Fatima Abdelmalek, Shahad Al-Hawal.



KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah and other officials with the winners in the men's competition.



Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah and other officials with the winners in the women's competition.

## S Africa team forced into last-minute flight to Pakistan

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's Test cricket squad had to fly to Pakistan on a hastily-arranged charter flight after their commercial flights were cancelled — and COVID-19 restrictions could further complicate the team's plans, it emerged yesterday. The 21-member team and support staff arrived in Karachi on Saturday for a two-Test series against Pakistan, starting on January 26.

A team spokesperson confirmed yesterday that Cricket South Africa had to make urgent late arrangements after being informed on Thursday that Emirates Airlines had temporarily suspended flights to and from South Africa for "operational reasons".

The South African players had been due to travel in groups to Dubai from the airline's hubs in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban before travelling on to Karachi. Cricket South Africa were able to organize a charter flight to enable the team to depart as planned on Friday night, flying directly to Karachi.

With COVID-19 restrictions severely limiting international travel options from South Africa, CSA now has a major logistical and cost problem if a planned Twenty20 international series, due to follow the Test matches, is to go ahead.

It had been expected that an almost completely different squad would play in the three T20 matches, with the Test squad returning to South Africa to prepare for a planned series against Australia. The Test series in Pakistan is due to end on February 8 with the T20 internationals scheduled on February 11-14.

The home Test series against Australia, which has not yet been confirmed, is likely to start in early March, two weeks later than originally planned. But a CSA source told AFP that COVID-19 protocols would make it necessary for the South African Test squad to return home immediately after the second Test in Pakistan. — AFP



Sports

# Rodgers-led Packers, gritty Bills advance in NFL playoffs

## Green Bay face Brady's Buccaneers or Brees' Saints for NFC Championship

LOS ANGELES: Aaron Rodgers threw for two touchdowns and rushed for another as the Green Bay Packers moved to within one win of the Super Bowl on Saturday with a 32-18 victory over the Los Angeles Rams. Rodgers set up an NFC Championship game against either Tom Brady's Tampa Bay Buccaneers or Drew Brees and the New Orleans Saints as Green Bay subdued the Rams defense at a frigid Lambeau Field.

Also advancing with a home triumph were the Buffalo Bills as Taron Johnson intercepted a Lamar Jackson pass and ran it back 101 yards for a touchdown in a 17-3 victory over the Baltimore Ravens.

The Bills advanced to their first AFC Conference championship game since 1993, where they will face the winner of last night's game between the Cleveland Browns and the defending Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs.

It was a deserved victory for the Packers, who dominated the divisional-round clash for long periods with a potent running and passing game before holding off a second-half Rams rally. "This feels really good right now," said Rodgers, who finished with 296 passing yards from 23-of-36 to stay on course for a second Super Bowl appearance, 10 years after leading the Packers to his first Vince Lombardi trophy.

The Packers were also buoyed by the presence of fans at Lambeau for the first time this season due to COVID-19, with a socially distanced crowd of 8,456 roaring them on. "We have really missed that part of the experience," Rodgers said. "So to run out of the tunnel tonight was unbelievable."

"It's hard to explain how much it means, having that energy from the crowd. But being able to play in front of them tonight was really special." A third-quarter touchdown from Rams running back Cam Akers followed by a successful two-point conversion had cut Green Bay's lead to seven points at 25-18 heading into the fourth quarter.

### Knockout blow

But Rodgers delivered the knockout blow, hitting receiver Allen Lazard for a 58-yard touchdown to make it 32-18 and put the game out of reach. Green Bay had dominated the first half, moving the chains methodically and coming away with points on every possession in the first two quarters.

Mason Crosby and Matt Gay exchanged early field goals for a 3-3 tie after one quarter. Rodgers tossed a one-yard pass to Davante Adams to put Green Bay up 10-3 and the Packers quarterback then skipped into the end zone for a one-yard touchdown to make it 16-3.

The Rams rallied as quarterback Jared Goff upped the tempo before arrowing a four-yard pass into Van Jefferson to make it 16-10. Rodgers, however, was not done. He made completions of 21 and 33 yards to set up another Crosby field goal for a 19-10 half-time lead.

Green Bay started the second half on the front foot, with running back Aaron Jones rushing 60 yards to set up his own touchdown run for a 25-10 lead. With the Rams defense finally managing to make a stop, Akers' touchdown and clever two-point conversion gave Los Angeles hope at 25-18.

But on their next possession, Green Bay's defense reasserted itself with a stop and Rodgers made a long touchdown pass to Lazard. The Packers will now host either Tampa Bay or New Orleans — who play Sunday — at Lambeau Field next weekend.

At Buffalo, Johnson's playoff record-long touchdown play was a turning point in the first-ever post-season matchup between the clubs. Bills star Josh Allen won the battle between quarterbacks taken in the 2018 NFL Draft. Both were coming off the first playoff wins of their careers but while Allen showed off his electric arm and powerful running skills, Jackson struggled mightily and had to leave the game at the end of the third quarter with a pos-



GREEN BAY: Aaron Rodgers #12 of the Green Bay Packers runs for a 1-yard touchdown in the second quarter against the Los Angeles Rams during the NFL Divisional Playoff game at Lambeau Field on Saturday in Green Bay, Wisconsin. —AFP

sible concussion.

On a cold and windy night, Allen threw for 206 yards and a touchdown. Stefon Diggs snagged a touchdown pass and Jerry Hughes had two sacks as the Bills' defense harassed Jackson and prevented the Baltimore offense from getting into the end zone.

Allen said he doesn't care how it looks as long as the Bills walk off the field as winners. "Our defensive game plan was unbelievable," said Allen. "The guys

stepped up when their numbers were called. We got the job done. You don't get style points for winning in the playoffs."

Jackson was hurt on the final play of the third quarter. Centre Patrick Makari snapped the ball over his head and Jackson picked it up but was hit as he attempted to get rid of it. He fell backward and slammed his head on the turf. He finished his night with 162 passing yards, 34 rushing yards and an interception. —AFP

## Mount winner buys Lampard time at Chelsea

LONDON: Frank Lampard was relieved to get Chelsea back to winning ways as Mason Mount's late strike broke the resistance of 10-man Fulham to earn a 1-0 victory in the West London derby on Saturday. The Blues were languishing down in 10th at kick-off after a run of one win in six league games left Lampard fighting for his job.

But the former England midfielder was handed a gift by Antonio Robinson's reckless challenge just before half-time that earned the American a straight red card. Chelsea still struggled to make the extra man advantage count, but Mount's precise low finish 13 minutes from time moved the visitors up to seventh and within three points of the top four.

"We can't think everything is solved because we want more," said Lampard. "I keep saying we're in a bit of a transition and progression. We know there are new players and we're still trying to find solutions but we need to get points because it's Chelsea. It's a good start from a difficult patch."

A first defeat in six games rounded off a disappointing day for Fulham after victories earlier on Saturday for relegation rivals Brighton and West

Brom. Scott Parker's men remain third from bottom and are now four points from safety. Lampard responded to Chelsea's poor run by leaving big-money summer signings Timo Werner and Kai Havertz on the bench. Mount has maintained Lampard's faith despite a club record fee being splashed out to bring in Havertz from Bayer Leverkusen and the English international was inches away from rewarding his manager with a thunderous shot that came back off the crossbar midway through the first-half. "He needs to score more goals, he knows that, but his quality is brilliant, his attitude is brilliant," added Lampard on Mount's contribution.

### Reckless Robinson

Fulham were posing a threat themselves on the break and should have gone in front after a brilliant team move. Robinson's low cross was turned back across goal by Kenny Tete, but Ivan Cavaleiro's mishit shot spooned wide. "We had a massive chance with Cavaleiro and those are the fine margins in this league," said Parker. "Against Chelsea you are relying on a couple of chances and they need to go in."

Moments later, Fulham had a mountain to climb when Robinson dived in on Cesar Azpilicueta and was shown a straight red card. The hosts were forced to sit deep and doggedly defend wave after wave of Chelsea attacks after the break.



LONDON: Chelsea's English head coach Frank Lampard (right) gestures to Fulham's French striker Aboubakar Kamara (left) on the pitch after the English Premier League football match between Fulham and Chelsea at Craven Cottage in London on Saturday. —AFP

In search of a goal, Lampard first turned to Tammy Abraham from the bench and he headed a huge chance straight at Areola with his first touch. A moment of madness from Chelsea goalkeeper Edouard Mendy nearly gifted the Cottagers a shock lead at the other end.

Mendy diverted Azpilicueta's back-pass as he raced from his goal into the path of Cavaleiro, who should have done better than fire straight into Silva's chest with an empty net to aim for. Werner was finally introduced 17 minutes from time, but it was

Lampard's trusted lieutenant Mount who made the breakthrough as he pounced after Areola flapped at Ben Chilwell's cross.

Deep into stoppage time, Werner then wasted a great chance to end his 10-game drought without a Premier League goal as he skewed well wide when one-on-one with Areola. "Those are goals I've seen him score many a time," said Lampard. "He has to just keep working, it's the only way to get out of it. It'll go in for him because he's got high quality, he's getting in position and he'll score." —AFP

## PSG beat Angers to go top of Ligue 1 without Pochettino

PARIS: A rare Layvin Kurzawa goal was enough for Paris Saint-Germain to beat Angers 1-0 on Saturday and go top of Ligue 1 despite coach Mauricio Pochettino testing positive for COVID-19 before the game. Kurzawa scored with 20 minutes left at the Stade Raymond Kopa to send PSG provisionally two points clear of Lyon, who will have the chance to reclaim first place when they host Metz on Sunday.

Assistants Jesus Perez and Miguel D'Agostino took charge of the PSG side with Pochettino having to self-isolate after the announcement on Friday that he had contracted the virus. The Argentine's positive test followed those of three Paris players — Brazilian Rafinha, Germany's Thilo Kehrer and French Under-21 international Colin Dagba — in the last week.

"It was a very difficult match. Angers are a very well organized team," said Perez, the Spaniard who also worked for Pochettino at Espanyol, Southampton and Tottenham Hotspur. "We were in contact with Mauricio. He spoke to the players before the match via video at the hotel. We spoke before the match, at half-time and just afterwards. We will of course be in contact

during the week. We already know what we will be doing in training. Of course it's not the same without him, but we have been working together for eight years so we know what we need to put the emphasis on."

Neymar made his return to the starting line-up in Angers for the first time since suffering an ankle injury in a defeat to Lyon a month ago. With Kylian Mbappe and Angel di Maria also starting behind Moise Kean in attack, it was a strong Parisian line-up but they appeared to play within themselves against an Angers side who sit seventh.

The home team even almost went ahead early in the second half when a Lois Diony diving header from close range was well saved by Keylor Navas. Stephane Bahoken also saw an attempt deflected over before PSG broke through.

### 'Miserable' Marseille beaten

Alessandro Florenzi's cross from the right was inadvertently helped on by Angers defender Romain Thomas for Kurzawa, arriving from left-back, to score his first goal in almost a year with a first-time cushioned volley at the back post. It was a third win in four games for PSG since former Spurs coach Pochettino was appointed two weeks ago. He won his maiden trophy in midweek when the reigning Ligue 1 champions beat Marseille 2-1 to claim the Champions Trophy, the French



ANGERS: Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian defender Marquinhos (left) runs with the ball during the French L1 football match between Angers (SCO) and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) at the Raymond Kopa Stadium in Angers, western France, on Saturday. —AFP

equivalent of a Super Cup.

Meanwhile, Marseille's hopes of staying in the title race were dealt another blow earlier on Saturday as Florian Thauvin missed a penalty in a shock 2-1 home defeat by struggling Nimes. France World Cup winner Thauvin sent a woeful spot-kick wide in the first half and Swedish winger Niclas Eliasson then converted twice from close range after the break to give the away side an unassailable lead behind closed doors at the Velodrome. Argentine forward Dario

Benedetto pulled one back late on for Andre Villas-Boas's side but this result left them with just one win in six Ligue 1 games. Marseille are sixth in the league, now 10 points behind leaders PSG, albeit still with two games in hand.

"We risk losing touch with the teams at the top, who are more consistent than us," said Villas-Boas. "We were very bad and we paid an expensive price for it. We can't go from playing well against Paris to a miserable match like today." —AFP

## No delay to Australian Open despite COVID

MELBOURNE: Australian Open chief Craig Tiley insisted yesterday the Grand Slam would begin as scheduled next month, while admitting it was "not a great situation" for the 47 players who have been confined to their hotel rooms. The tournament was thrown into disarray on Saturday when three people tested positive to COVID-19 on two of the 17 charter flights bringing players and their entourages to Melbourne and Adelaide.

A fourth person, a member of a broadcast team on one of the same flights, from Los Angeles, tested positive yesterday. None were players, although one was Sylvain Bruneau, coach of Canada's 2019 US Open winner Bianca Andreescu. Another was also a coach, although they were not identified.

Everyone on board was considered to be close contacts and ordered not to leave their hotel rooms for the 14-day mandatory quarantine period. It means 47 players will not be allowed out to train for five hours a day as previously agreed in the build-up to the opening Grand Slam of the year, which is due to start on February 8.

The likes of Victoria Azarenka, Sloane Stephens, Kei Nishikori and Angelique Kerber are believed to be among those affected, badly impacting their preparations. "We always knew there would be significant risk with this pandemic, you can never tell," Tiley told Channel Nine television. "But the Australian Open is going ahead and we will continue to do the best we possibly can to ensure those players that have what is not a great situation, one that is somewhat acceptable."

Organizers quashed rumors about a positive case on one of the two flights to Adelaide carrying some of the game's biggest names. While most players touched down in Melbourne, superstars including Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal, Serena Williams and Naomi Osaka instead flew into the South Australian city.

Several players, including Sorana Cirstea and Belinda Bencic, took to social media to complain about not being able to train, with some claiming they were not told about a hard lockdown if one person tested positive. "If they would have told us this rule before I would not play Australia," tweeted Romania's Cirstea, and Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva agreed: "I would think twice before coming here," she said. —AFP



### Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Arsenal v Newcastle United	23:00
beIN Sports HD 1	
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE	
Cagliari Calcio v AC Milan	22:45
beIN Sports HD 4	



## Man United hold on to top spot

Alisson salvages stalemate for Liverpool • Spurs back into title race

LONDON: Manchester United held onto top spot in the Premier League after grinding out a dour 0-0 draw at title rivals Liverpool, while Tanguy Ndombele's stunning strike sealed Tottenham's 3-1 win at Sheffield United yesterday. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side had the better chances in a strangely subdued clash between two of English football's bitterest rivals. Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson Becker saved well from Bruno Fernandes and Paul Pogba in the second half, but neither side deserved to win.

United are three points clear of third placed Liverpool and two ahead of second placed Leicester. United are top after the New Year for the first time since Alex Ferguson's retirement in 2013 thanks to nine wins in an 12-match unbeaten run. Leaving Anfield unscathed is a solid result for United as they chase a first title in eight years, but they might feel it was a missed opportunity to pile pressure on injury-hit Liverpool given their recent struggles.

It is the first time these two old foes have been involved in a title race together since 2009 when United, then at their peak, held off Liverpool's challenge. But there was little feel of a seismic encounter as both teams largely played with the handbrake on at an empty and silent Anfield. Liverpool are well short of the dynamic form that carried them to the title last season and the Champions League in 2019.

Jürgen Klopp's team have now gone four league games without a win and are without a goal in their last three top-flight matches. Liverpool defender Joel Matip wasn't fit enough to feature, so Jordan Henderson had to play as a makeshift center-back alongside fellow midfielder Fabinho. Despite that setback, Liverpool dominated a cautious first half with over 65 percent of the possession. They lacked a cutting edge in the final third and Roberto Firmino shot wide before Mohamed Salah volleyed over.

It took United 34 minutes to have a shot and they almost took the lead from it as Bruno Fernandes



LIVERPOOL: Manchester United's Spanish goalkeeper David de Gea controls the ball during an English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Manchester United at Anfield yesterday. — AFP

whipped his free-kick inches wide. In an equally scrappy second half, Fernandes forced a good save from Alisson when his effort from Luke Shaw's cross was turned away by the Brazilian's foot. Thiago Alcantara's strike was well saved by David De Gea, while Alisson made another fine stop to deny Paul Pogba's close-range shot.

### 'Incredible' Ndombele

At Bramall Lane, Tottenham took an early lead through a rare goal from Ivory Coast defender

Serge Aurier. Harry Kane's 19th goal of the season - the England captain's fourth in his last six games - increased Tottenham's advantage before half-time. David McGoldrick got one back for bottom of the table United in the second half, but Ndombele's sublime lob, flicked over his shoulder from an acute angle, wrapped up the points.

The wonder-goal was the latest sign of Ndombele turning his Tottenham career around. The 24-year-old's fine form is a stark contrast to his struggles in his first season after arriving from Lyon,

with Mourinho admitting the player had to change his mindset to get back on track. "He is incredible. For me sometimes you can score a great goal isolated from your performance. In this case the goal confirmed his performance. It was really, really good," Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho said. Fourth placed Tottenham are on a seven-match unbeaten run in all competitions after winning at Bramall Lane for the first time since 1975. Manchester City hosted Crystal Palace in yesterday's late match. — AFP



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