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# Amir accepts govt resignation; Assembly sessions canceled

Cabinet to continue in caretaker role • MP urges 'fundamental reforms'



By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday accepted the resignation of the prime minister and the Cabinet which was submitted last week, an Amiri decree said. HH the Amir also asked HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and ministers to continue in a caretaker role until a new government is formed.

The Amir is expected to soon start customary consultations with former speakers of the Assembly and former prime ministers before reappointing Sheikh Sabah to form the new Cabinet or naming a new prime minister. There

is no time limit for the appointment of the next premier and the formation of the new Cabinet.

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said the two regular parliamentary sessions scheduled for today and tomorrow have been canceled because there is no government and no minister is expected to attend, a precondition for Assembly meetings to be legal. The Cabinet resigned after three opposition MPs filed to grill the prime minister over a number of reasons including the government's alleged support for Ghanem to be re-elected as speaker for a third consecutive term. Opposition MPs have vowed to oust Ghanem, whom they accuse of siding

with the government.

MP Abdullah Al-Turaiji expressed hope that the next Cabinet members will be selected from highly-qualified people. MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf called on opposition MPs to unite to achieve what he called "fundamental reforms", topped by issuing a general pardon law for ex-MPs and activists who received long jail terms for storming the Assembly building in 2011. Around a dozen opposition former MPs and activists have been living in exile since the summer of 2018 to avoid serving the jail terms.

Hajraf also said the opposition must push to amend the electoral law which has fragmented the Kuwaiti people and

also to protect the "pockets" of Kuwaiti people against the government's austerity measures. He said savings of over KD 60 billion made when oil prices were high have been used to finance suspicious arms and other deals. The lawmaker accused the prime minister of being weak in confronting forces of corruption and failing to protect public funds.

MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari meanwhile asked the finance minister in a question if the ministry has received some \$4 billion it had deposited at the Egyptian central bank to support the Egyptian economy. The lawmaker said the deposit had matured more than two years ago.

## Solution to issue of 16 stranded Indian sailors likely soon

**KUWAIT:** A solution to the issue of 16 Indian sailors who have been stranded on a ship at Kuwait's Shuaiba Port for the last nine months is likely soon, according to sources close to the matter. The ship named ULA was detained following a legal dispute between the ship's owner and the owner of its cargo. According to reports, the sailors had gone on a hunger strike.

Undersecretary of the Ministry of Communications Kholoud Al-Shehab met last week with Indian Ambassador Sibi George to discuss the implications of the detention of the ship. The ministry confirmed that high-level coordination between several parties has taken place and the matter is going to be settled in the next few days, according to Al-Qabas Arabic daily.

"We are following with great concern the complaint of the crew of the ULA, which has been detained at Shuaiba Port for the last nine months, which led them to go on a hunger strike," the daily said, quoting the Kuwaiti Association of the Basic Evaluators of Human Rights. "The society has contacted officials at government agencies and the National Diwan for Human Rights and asked them to resolve the issue quickly, in view of the unfortunate humanitarian situation and to preserve the image of the country of humanity," it added.

## Egypt, UAE resume direct Qatar flights

**DOHA:** The first direct flights since 2017 between Qatar and its former rivals Egypt and the UAE took to the skies yesterday, following the end of a regional crisis. Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) joined Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in cutting ties with Qatar in June 2017, accusing it of being too close to Iran and of backing Islamic extremists, charges Doha denies.

The quartet agreed to heal the rift at a

Gulf summit on Jan 5 in Saudi Arabia, after a flurry of diplomatic activity by outgoing US President Donald Trump's administration. The first commercial flight from Qatar to Egypt in three and a half years, an EgyptAir service to Cairo, took off from windswept Doha airport. It was followed shortly after by the arrival of an Air Arabia flight from Sharjah in the UAE. The resumption of flights from Doha to Cairo will simplify travel for the large contingent of Egyptians living in Qatar.

As many as 300,000 Egyptians call Qatar home, according to official statistics, but many were unable to travel home during the crisis. In May 2020, frustrated Egyptians protested outside the compound housing Egypt's

Continued on Page 2



DOHA: Mask-clad travellers walk with their carry-on luggage to board the first Qatar Airways flight bound for Cairo after the resumption of flights between Qatar and Egypt at Hamad International Airport yesterday. — AFP

## Tunisia makes arrests, deploys troops after riots

**TUNIS:** More than 600 people have been arrested and troops have been deployed after a third consecutive night of riots in several Tunisian cities, officials said yesterday. The unrest came after Tunisia imposed a nationwide lockdown to stem a rise in coronavirus infections on Thursday - the same day as it marked the 10th anniversary of dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's fall from power.

Interior ministry spokesman Khaled Hayouni said a total of 632 people were arrested, notably "groups of people between the ages of 15, 20 and 25 who burned tires and bins in order to block movements"

Continued on Page 2



TUNIS: Protesters block a street during clashes with security forces in the Ettadhamen suburb on the north-western outskirts of the capital on Sunday. — AFP

## In Iraq, bird flu decimates chicken coops

**SAMARRA, Iraq:** An outbreak of bird flu has killed tens of thousands of hens in a rural province north of Iraq's capital, decimating livelihoods overnight as authorities scramble to contain its spread. Near the town of Samarra, about 100 km north of Baghdad, Haytham Al-Hamash's coops have become graveyards.

Masked workers step around a few live hens to pick out the dead birds lying on their sides, tossing them into the back of a truck with a loud thud. "Right now, chickens are dying and we can't do anything for them," Hamash told AFP.

Continued on Page 2

## Tourists flock to Dubai amid lockdowns

**DUBAI:** As much of the world tightens lockdowns to stem coronavirus, Dubai has flung its doors open, branding itself as a sunny, quarantine-free escape - despite a sharp rise in cases. While mask-wearing and social distancing are strictly enforced, life in the tourism-reliant emirate looks much like normal, with its restaurants, hotels and megamalls open for business.

Images of sports stars and television personalities enjoying life at beach clubs and cocktail bars have flooded

social media - sometimes to disapproval back home. Emirates, which restored its network to about three quarters of pre-pandemic levels, is again operating A380 super-jumbos - the world's largest commercial airliner - ferrying in visitors from Britain and Russia.

But the downside to becoming one of the world's most open destinations has been a sharp rise in coronavirus cases. Daily detected cases hover in the mid-3,000s across the UAE, which has a population of under 10 million, with 745 deaths from COVID-19 since the pandemic began. With a negative PCR test in their home countries - and possibly another upon arrival, depending on the place of departure - tourists can freely enter Dubai, where winter temperatures average a pleasant 25 degrees Celsius. — AFP (See Page 13)



DUBAI: A mask-clad Israeli tourist photographs a falconer holding a falcon during a visit to the historic Al-Fahidi neighborhood on Jan 11, 2021. — AFP

## Local



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah separately received His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah at Seif Palace yesterday. — KUNA photos



# Ministry seeks vaccination drive to resume in-class teaching in Kuwait

## Education, health ministries coordinate on safe back to school plan

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education hopes to launch a comprehensive vaccination campaign as it remains optimistic of chances to return students back to school by the beginning of the second semester in March. The ministry is coordinating in this regard with the health ministry, who ultimately has the final say on when students can go back to school, and ending the online teaching experience one year after its implementation following the novel coronavirus outbreak.

In this regard, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf yesterday chaired a meeting of the joint committee between the education and health ministries to discuss a proposal for a gradual return plan to schools for the second semester of the 2020-21 academic year in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the meeting, Mudhaf stressed that should in-class teaching return, the education ministry will cooperate with the health ministry and observe all health standards and requirements at schools in a way that guarantees the safety of students, the educational and administrative staff, the Ministry of Education said in a press statement.

He explained that the meeting discussed a proposal for a gradual return to schools and the process of taking appropriate measures in this regard, including seeking to launch a comprehensive vaccination campaign at the beginning of the second semester. Decisions to regulate and launch this campaign will be discussed and agreed upon during a Cabinet meeting, the minister explained.

Meanwhile, Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, Assistant Undersecretary for Educational Development and Activities Faisal Al-Maqseed said that yesterday's meeting is "the first of its kind between the education and health ministries to coordinate on the topic of a gradual return to schools for the second semester."

Maqseed added that during the meeting, the education ministry's plan for returning to schools was reviewed and many health requirements were set in the event of a return to in-class teaching, or even in case the online education process continues until the end of the academic year.

"A recommendation was made to form teams at educational zones to coordinate with health officials and carry out field studies to come up



### Observing all health standards in schools



with the best environment to allow for students' return to classes," he said, adding that this topic

will be discussed in more detail during a meeting next week.

## Saudi reports sharp drop in executions

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia yesterday reported a sharp drop in executions in 2020. The Saudi government's Human Rights Commission (HRC) said it documented 27 executions in 2020, a decrease of 85 percent over the previous year due in part to a moratorium on the death penalty for drug-related offences.

"The Commission welcomes this news as a sign that the kingdom and its justice system are focusing more on rehabilitation and prevention than solely on punishment," HRC president Awwad Alawwad said in a statement. "The moratorium on drug-related offences means the kingdom is giving more non-violent criminals a second chance."

Saudi Arabia put 184 people to death in 2019, according to Amnesty International, which said it was the highest number ever recorded in a single year in the kingdom. Britain-based campaign group Reprieve

reported 25 executions in Saudi Arabia in 2020, saying it was the lowest figure since it began monitoring executions in 2013 but cautioned that the number could increase this year.

"The decline can partly be attributed to the COVID-19 lockdown from February to April, when the government carried out no executions due to restrictions to control the virus," Reprieve said in a statement. "However, there is reason to believe that the number of executions will rise in 2021. The government recommenced executions at an increased rate in the final quarter of 2020: approximately one-third of all executions last year were carried out in December alone."

Yesterday's announcement by the HRC follows a string of judicial reforms in 2020. Last April, the HRC said the kingdom was ending the death penalty for those convicted of crimes committed while aged under 18. Citing a royal decree, the HRC said individuals convicted as minors would receive a prison sentence of no more than 10 years in a juvenile detention facility.

Last April, the HRC also announced Saudi Arabia was abolishing court-ordered floggings, in a move welcomed by campaigners. The changes underscore a push by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to modernize the ultraconservative kingdom. — AFP

## In Iraq, bird flu decimates...

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His coops have been surrounded by makeshift trenches to keep infected chickens from escaping, as veterinarians in white suits examine the remaining flock.

The outbreak of avian influenza in the northern province of Salahaddin began on Thursday. By Friday, at least 60,000 chickens had contracted it, the governor announced. But Samarra's chicken farmers say their losses have been much higher. "We lost nearly 190,000 chickens," Hamash said. Another farmer, Fuad Barhan, claimed authorities had not been able to support all the coops. "We went to the health ministry and they didn't give us anything. The vaccine, H5, is not available. So the chickens are just left to die," he said.

Iraq's agriculture ministry yesterday said the chickens had been contaminated by wild foreign

fowl. "Chickens were isolated, shops were sterilized and we cordoned off the area. Of course we took measures to limit the entry of any Samarra chicken into other provinces," ministry spokesman Hameed Navef said. Not much more could be done, he told AFP. "There is no vaccine for avian flu in Iraq because the disease does not spread every year. Last year, we did not see an outbreak, while two years ago, it was much bigger than this year," Navef added.

Agriculture represents one in five jobs in Iraq and five percent of GDP, otherwise dominated by the oil sector. Historically low crude prices last year and the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic caused an unprecedented fiscal crisis for the country, where poverty rates are set to double. There had been one silver lining: With imports down, local egg production skyrocketed from 11 million eggs at the start of 2020 to 17 million by the summer, according to the agriculture ministry.

Those numbers will likely be slashed. Fearing the spread of avian flu, authorities in the autonomous Kurdish region in the north of the country have banned chicken imports from the south and closed down their own chicken farms. — AFP



DOHA: An Air Arabia Airbus A320 aircraft is seen taxiing at Hamad International Airport yesterday. — AFP

## Egypt, UAE resume direct...

Continued from Page 1

then-empty embassy. Following the demonstration, 18 repatriation flights operated via neutral Oman to comply with Cairo's ban on direct air traffic. A Qatar Airways plane was due to also make the trip to Cairo later yesterday.

Flights between Doha and Saudi Arabia, which

has also opened its land border to Qatar, resumed on Jan 11. The row complicated regional travel, divided families and raised costs faced by Qatari businesses. Mustafa Ahmed, 38, an Egyptian technical engineer, said he was "very happy". "With direct flights, life will be easier, especially for families and children, avoiding the torment of changing airports and planes and waiting for hours for transit flights," he told AFP.

Egyptians in Qatar work in a number of sectors including education, healthcare and engineering. Thousands of Qatar's majority-expatriate workforce, however, have lost their jobs as a result of a downturn caused by the coronavirus epidemic. — AFP

## Tunisia makes arrests, deploys...

Continued from Page 1

by the security forces". Defense ministry spokesman Mohamed Zikri meanwhile said the army has deployed reinforcements in several areas of the country.

Hayouni said that some of those arrested lobbed stones at police and clashed with security forces. "This has nothing to do with protest movements that are guaranteed by the law and the constitution," said Hayouni. "Protests take place in broad daylight normally... without any criminal acts involved," he added.

Hayouni said two policemen were wounded in the unrest. It was not immediately clear if there were injuries among the youths and Hayouni did not say what charges those arrested faced. The clashes took place in several cities across Tunisia, mostly in working-class neighborhoods, with the exact reasons for the disturbances not immediately known.

But it came as many Tunisians are increasingly angered by poor public services and a political class that has repeatedly proved unable to govern coherently a decade on from the 2011 revolution. GDP shrank by nine percent last year, consumer

prices have spiraled and one third of young people are unemployed. The key tourism sector, already on its knees after a string of deadly jihadist attacks in 2015, has been dealt a devastating blow by the pandemic. Tunisia has registered more than 177,000 coronavirus infections, including over 5,600 deaths since the pandemic erupted last year. The four-day lockdown ended on Sunday night, but it was not immediately known if other restrictions would be imposed.

The army has deployed troops in Bizerte in the north, Sousse in the east and Kasserine and Siliana in central Tunisia, the defense ministry spokesman said. Sousse, a coastal resort overlooking the Mediterranean, is a magnet for foreign holidaymaking that has been hit hard by the pandemic. The health crisis and ensuing economic misery have pushed growing numbers of Tunisians to seek to leave the country.

On Sunday evening in Ettadhamen, a restive working-class neighborhood on the edge of the Tunisian capital, the mood was somber. "I don't see any future here," said Abdelmoneim, a waiter, as the unrest unfolded around him. He blamed the violence on the country's post-revolution political class and said the rioting youths were "bored adolescents" who reflected the "failure" of politicians. Abdelmoneim said he was determined to take a boat across the Mediterranean to Europe "as soon as possible, and never come back to this miserable place". — AFP

Local

# Over 83,000 expats left Kuwait in three months

## Kuwait could cut quarantine to one week: Report

**KUWAIT:** A recent report about manpower in the third quarter of 2020 shows around 83,574 expats left the country for good during the period from September until December 2020, a local newspaper reported yesterday. The number of expats in the workforce has now dropped to 1.5 million workers, Al-Qabas Arabic daily wrote, adding that these figures serve as proof that Kuwait's efforts to replace and reduce the number of expat workers have seen some success "with deep-rooted changes in the population structure."

The report said work is ongoing to achieve more changes in the population structure and increase the numbers of workers terminated from government entities. The report showed that in three months, 2,144 contracts of expats in the government sector were terminated, while health and education ministries retain the highest number of expats, followed by Kuwait Airways, Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company and Kuwait Public Transport Company.

Following these latest developments, expat workers do not make up more than 29 percent of the total workforce registered in the government sector with 95,173 employees, 65 percent of whom are in the education and health ministries as teachers and medics, respectively. As for total expat workers in the country, their number has dropped. Meanwhile, the report pointed to an increase in the number of

Kuwaitis in all work sectors by 4,248 employees, taking the total until the end of September to 400,909 Kuwaiti workers. The domestic help sector saw a drop in female domestic workers in the past three months by 7,385 persons, while 382 male domestic helpers entered this sector.

### Quarantine period

In other news, health authorities are contemplating reducing the duration of home quarantine for arrivals to Kuwait to one week if it is proven the passenger is not infected with COVID-19, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday quoting an informed source. The reduction is subject to having airlines bear the cost of the PCR test, the anonymous source added.

The source said a Cabinet decision stipulated the passenger should undergo two PCR tests - the first before traveling to Kuwait, and the second during home quarantine, without deciding which day the test will be carried out.

The source said the preliminary view of the health authorities is to reduce home quarantine to one week because the passenger will undergo three PCR tests in case airlines bear the cost. The preliminary view is in case the PCR test is carried out on the seventh day after arrival with a negative result, the seven days of quarantine will be sufficient.



**KUWAIT:** This May 5, 2020 file photo shows long lines of Egyptian nationals traveling back to their home country after Kuwait opened the door for expatriates wishing to leave to their home countries for good during the aviation closure period. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



**KUWAIT:** Truffles are available at the main market in Rai, although in very few numbers due to border closures that affected the supply of imported truffles this year. The shortage has caused the delicacy's price to jump as high as KD 25 per kilogram. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

## Cold wave hits Kuwait tomorrow

**KUWAIT:** A cold wave hits Kuwait tomorrow night, a Kuwaiti meteorologist said, noting that temperature is likely to drop to 4 C degrees in residential areas and as low as 0 C in desert and open areas. The cold wave is caused by the Siberian high pressure combined with northwesterly winds, meteorologist Mohammad Karam said in a report published by Al-Qabas Arabic daily yesterday. Cold temperature is expected to last until Saturday, he said, adding that the average high within this period is expected to be around 14 C degrees.



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

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## Kuwait reports 467 new COVID cases, one death

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti Ministry of Health announced yesterday recording 467 new infection cases with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) during the past 24 hours, raising the caseload to 158,244. The ministry's official spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said that there was a single death registered during the same period, putting the death toll at 948. The ministry had earlier reported that 354 patients had recovered during the same period, raising total recoveries to 151,496. There were 56 patients in ICU's as of yesterday, Dr Sanad said, adding that the total number of patients remaining under treatment stood at 5,800. Health workers conducted 8,807 swab tests during the same period, as the overall count of such examinations reached 1,406,352. —KUNA



## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** A boat docked near Qaruh Island's shore. —Photo by Md Jahidul Islam (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)

## Ministry prepares for youth excellence, creativity award

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi affirmed the importance of "the patronage by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the Excellence and Creativity Youth Award, which is annually supervised by the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs. In a statement to the press Sunday, the minister said such patronage reflects on His Highness's interest in supporting and caring for distinguished Kuwaiti youths. The minister made his remarks, after chairing a meeting of the supreme committee for the award, which was held at the Ministry of Youth headquarters, noting that the award includes 10 important areas for the development of the nation. The minister added this year's version of the competition witnessed high-level of youth participations. Mutairi said the meeting reviewed the plan of the committee and the mechanism followed in announcing the winners of the current version, which will be full of distinguished youth cadres who have made distinguished contributions. —KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Information Minister and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi chairs the meeting. —KUNA

## Dasman Institute, WHO sign cooperation deal to raise healthcare standards

**KUWAIT:** Dasman Diabetes Institute, of the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, announced yesterday signing a cooperation agreement with the World Health Organization (WHO), which aims to provide advanced training to raise diabetes healthcare standards in primary care centers in Kuwait. Director General of the center, Dr Qais Al-Duwairi, said in a statement to the press that WHO's desire to cooperate with the institute comes from its efforts in researching, treating diabetes and its complications and spreading awareness about ways to prevent it over the past years. The agreement aims to establish an effective electronic platform about diabetes research and awareness, to enhance public awareness about diabetes and its complications, and to make efforts to reduce the prevalence and incidence of diabetes, he said. It also aims to conduct researches, administrative and medical activities on diabetes to achieve the Institute's mission, in addition to provide advanced and specialized training methodologies, he added. Dasman



The Dasman Diabetes Institute.

Diabetes Institute is making remarkable progress, especially in the field of research and publishing a large number of studies in prestigious and refereed international journals, and it pays great attention to scientific research in the first place. —KUNA

## Patients Helping Fund, GSK announce patient support program

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwait Patients Helping Fund Society (KPHFS) and global science-led healthcare company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) announced yesterday the launch of a new program - Nesma - to support severe asthma patients by providing them with GSK-subsidized medicines as covered under the agreement.

For patients whose asthma medication is not covered by their public or private health insurance plan, accessing treatment can be a struggle. Through Nesma, underprivileged patients in Kuwait will now have access to these treatments.

Severe asthma is the most serious and life-threatening form of asthma. Most people with asthma can manage their symptoms well with standard medicines, such as preventer inhalers and reliever inhalers. However, those with severe asthma often struggle to manage their symptoms even with high doses of asthma medicines, requiring increased medical attention and care.

"Imagine your chest tightening up and you beginning to wheeze, not being able to breathe. Having severe asthma can be a very scary experience. On top of that, imagine if you also need to worry about having access to the right medication. Support programs can truly change the life of patients, enabling them to take control of their condition and ultimately their life," explained Dr

Mona Al-Ahmad, President of Kuwait society of allergy and clinical immunology and head of allergy department at Al-Rashed allergy center.

"We encourage such initiatives that aim to alleviate the challenges that the patients face through anchoring our vision which revolves around actuating partnerships between associations, institutions, and various stakeholders to facilitate the patients access and play a key role is spreading the awareness about the diseases in Kuwait. Nesma program is an embodiment to what I mentioned and will contribute to supporting the eligible patients," said Mohammad Al-Sharhan, Chairman of the KPHFS. "Severe asthma represents a serious public health burden, and we are very happy to offer a solution that eases patients' suffering from this condition."

"Finding ways to transform the life of asthma patients through ground-breaking treatments has always been a top research priority at GSK. For as long as patients are suffering from the disorder, we are committed to helping them do more, feel better, live longer today, tomorrow and the day after. We are very excited to launch this patient support program, alongside the KPHFS, so that underprivileged patients in Kuwait can live a full and normal life," said Belal Ghattas, GSK Country Manager - Kuwait.

Leading healthcare access company Axios International, has been retained to administer the program and determine participant eligibility. Severe asthma patients interested in the program are advised to discuss their eligibility with their physicians who have been briefed on details of the program.

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Handwritten note seeds hope for trapped China gold miners

## French Muslim council agrees accord on 'principles' sought by Macron



WASHINGTON, DC: Members of the US National Guard stand watch at the US Capitol in Washington, DC on Sunday during a nationwide protest called by anti-government and far-right groups supporting US President Donald Trump and his claim of electoral fraud in the November 3 presidential election. —AFP

# Biden team braces for historic inauguration

## Washington under watch of thousands of troops; pro-Trump protests fizzle out

WASHINGTON: President-elect Joe Biden's top advisors on Sunday outlined his plans to tackle the nation's multiple crises while balancing the impeachment trial of Donald Trump, as an historic inauguration week opens in the United States. Washington was under the watch of thousands of National Guard troops and ringed with security barriers ahead of Biden's swearing in tomorrow, in a nation still rattled by the January 6 attack on the Capitol.

Pro-Trump protests planned at state capitols nationwide got off to a quiet start with only small groups of armed demonstrators gathering in states including Ohio, Texas, Oregon and Michigan. "The events of the past few weeks have proven just how damaged the soul of America has been and how important it is to restore it. That work starts on Wednesday," Biden's incoming chief of staff Ron Klain told CNN. "We're inheriting a huge mess here, but we have a plan to fix it."

As the president-elect prepares to take power in a city where only two weeks earlier Trump supporters launched a violent attempt to overturn the election, Biden faces overlapping crises: not only the pandemic but a struggling economy, climate change and racial tensions. Biden wants the Congress to act quickly on a massive, \$1.9-trillion stimulus package to revive the

economy, and he plans a blitz to accelerate America's stumbling COVID vaccine rollout.

His target of seeing 100 million doses of coronavirus vaccine injected within his first 100 days in office is "absolutely" achievable, top US scientist Anthony Fauci told NBC on Sunday. "The feasibility of his goal is absolutely clear, there's no doubt about it," said Fauci, who will be Biden's chief advisor on the virus, as he was Trump's.

### Shadow of uncertainty

But the coming Senate impeachment trial—an unprecedented second for Trump—casts a shadow over Biden's path forward. Democratic congressional leaders Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer have yet to say when the trial will begin.

"I don't think there's any promised date when Speaker Pelosi is going to present the articles of impeachment," Dick Durbin, a Democratic leader in the Senate, told CNN. "We understand, under the Constitution, we have a responsibility to act as quickly as possible."

Biden has said he hopes the Congress can deal with that stark distraction even while advancing his aggressive agenda. Adding to the uncertainty is a badly riven

Republican Party-divided over Trump's false assertions that he won November's election, his fanning of emotions ahead of the deadly Capitol invasion, and on the future direction of the party.

### 'Socialized policy'

One frequent Trump confidant, Senator Lindsey Graham, warned Sunday on Fox News' Sunday Morning Futures that Republicans may not offer Biden much of a grace period, if any—saying the president-elect might be trying to move too far too fast. "I think we are going to have in the first hundred days by the Biden administration the most aggressive socialized policy effort in the history of the country," he said.

He added, "No good comes from impeaching President Trump (when he is) out of office." But Klain repeated Biden's affirmation that the Senate-controlled only narrowly by Democrats—could handle both an impeachment trial and the new Biden agenda. He added Biden would be able to take a flurry of executive actions—requiring no congressional approval—as early as Wednesday afternoon. They will include returning the country to the Paris climate accord and ending the travel ban on some mainly Muslim countries.

### A muted celebration

Plans for the inauguration—in normal times a bracing, even joyous, tribute to peaceful transition—had already been scaled down out of pandemic concerns. Fears of new violence by unyielding Trump supporters after the January 6 riot have cast a further pall. Thousands of National Guard troops were filling downtown Washington, the normal crowd has been banned, and streets have been blocked with heavy trucks and concrete barriers. A 22-year-old Virginia man was arrested near the Capitol complex Sunday carrying a pistol, three high-capacity magazines and dozens of rounds of unregistered ammunition, the Washington Post reported.

US media reported small numbers of armed protesters outside state capitol buildings including in Texas, Michigan and Kentucky, overseen by large security deployments.

"This will be an inaugural like no other, in large part because of Covid," Vice President-elect Kamala Harris said in an interview aired Sunday on CBS. "But we are going to get sworn in. And we're going to do the job we were hired to do." Klain warned that the nation could reach a total of 500,000 Covid-19 deaths sometime next month. The toll on Sunday surpassed 397,000, according to a tally from Johns Hopkins University. —AFP

## Meet the Bidens: America's new 'first family'

WASHINGTON: President-elect Joe Biden and his wife Jill will become the new White House residents when he takes office tomorrow. Biden has made his family a major focus throughout his career, and his 2020 presidential campaign thrust them fully into the spotlight—with some members causing controversy but others breaking barriers. Here is a look at the members of America's new "first family."

### The First Lady

Jill Biden, an educator, is set to transform her new role before she even moves into the White House. While first ladies traditionally only fulfill ceremonial duties, "Dr B," as her students call her, intends to keep her full-time job as an English professor. As first lady, Jill is expected to work on education issues and relaunch Joining Forces, a mission to rally around military families that she and predecessor Michelle Obama started in 2011.

The Bidens met in 1975, a few years after the Delaware senator had faced the unthinkable—his young wife and daughter were killed in a car crash. Biden often says his second wife "put us

back together."

The couple wed in 1977, and she became "Mom" to his sons Hunter and Beau, who survived the car accident. They also have a daughter, Ashley, together.

While raising her family, Jill, 69, also earned two Master's degrees, and would eventually earn a doctorate in education. She supported her husband through his three previous presidential bids and was one of his most vocal advocates and tireless campaigners during his most recent run.

### The First Children

Biden has often spoken about how his relationship with his sons helped him cope with grieving as he built his political career, as well as when he married Jill. For years, while working as a senator, he commuted by train two hours each way between the family home in Delaware and Washington in order to be there for Hunter and Beau.

Beau was seen as inheriting his father's public service ethos and political skills. He served in the military in Iraq and became Delaware's attorney general. But Beau died of brain cancer in 2015 at age 46, less than two years after he was diagnosed. Biden refers to his late son often in political speeches, and he regularly visits Beau's grave, as well as those of his first wife and daughter.

Biden's other son, Hunter, has stayed farther from the spotlight. He struggled with alcohol and drug addiction, and was discharged from the Navy Reserve

America's first female president.

"While I may be the first woman in this office, I won't be the last," Harris said in a speech on November 7, her first after US networks projected Biden and Harris as the winners over Trump and Vice President Mike Pence. Trump bitterly contested the results, peddling the lie that the Democrats only won due to massive election fraud. During the campaign he routinely attacked Harris, branding her a "monster" after her October vice presidential debate with Pence. When asked about it by reporters, Harris curtly dismissed the president: "I don't comment on his childish remarks."

While Harris pushed back fiercely during the campaign, in the past two months she rose above the fray, pivoting to plans she and Biden are unveiling to help struggling families and fix a reeling economy.

"The first 100 days of the Biden-Harris administration will focus on getting control of this pandemic—ensuring vaccines are distributed equitably and free for all," she tweeted Tuesday.

### The decider

While the vice president's job is often seen as ceremonial, Harris will also be thrust into the powerful role of ultimate decider in the US Senate. Thanks to two shock Democratic run-off victories this month in Georgia, the Senate will be evenly split, 50 Democrats



WILMINGTON, Delaware: US President-elect Joe Biden (center) with his wife Jill Biden and members of their family salute the crowd on stage after delivering remarks in Wilmington, Delaware in this November 7, 2020 file photo.

in 2014 after a positive test for cocaine.

He became a regular focus of Donald Trump's attacks ahead of the November 3 vote for his business dealings in Ukraine and China. Hunter, 50, now an artist based in Los Angeles, has admitted to displaying "poor judgment" in some of his business dealings, but denied any wrongdoing.

Biden, however, has been unwavering in his support for his son. During the final presidential debate, when Trump mocked Hunter's cocaine use, the former vice president simply said: "I'm proud of him. I'm proud of my son." —AFP



Two handout photo obtained on January 12, 2021 courtesy of Vogue, of US Vice President-elect Kamala Harris in a Michael Kors Collection suit (left) and against colors inspired by those of her Howard university sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Kamala Harris (right) as she wears a Donald Deal jacket and Converse sneakers on the February 2021 cover of Vogue magazine. —AFP

and 50 Republicans.

That means Harris may spend considerable time on Capitol Hill acting as the tie-breaking vote on legislation on anything from judicial nominees to Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus plan. —AFP

## Biden plans swift action but Trump trial threatens unity

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden has promised quick action to address the coronavirus pandemic and boost the ailing US economy once he takes office tomorrow, but his goal of uniting the divided country could be undermined by the Senate impeachment trial of Donald Trump. The president-elect has promised to immediately reverse some of Trump's more controversial moves, and he can do so by executive action. He has vowed to return "on Day One" to the Paris climate agreement. Trump in 2017 announced plans to withdraw from the international accord, prompting global recriminations.

And Biden has said he will also immediately end Trump's controversial ban on travel from several Muslim-majority countries, an early action widely decried as Islamophobic. The start of the Biden era promises to be busy: An official statement Saturday promised a burst of action in his first 10 days, with "dozens" of executive actions and directives to follow.

But while Biden can make the consequential changes on the Paris accord and the travel ban with the stroke of a pen, the Senate impeachment trial seems sure to slow his efforts to galvanize the response to COVID-19 and to revive the nation's stumbling economy. The lower House of Representatives impeached Trump on a charge of inciting insurrection after he encouraged the January 6 protest that led to the violent storming of the US Capitol. Trump's first impeachment trial, in January 2020 over his efforts to pressure Ukraine to help him discredit Biden, lasted 21 days. A trial of similar length now would crimp Biden's ambitious plans for his first 100 days, but he has expressed confidence, based on his 36 years in the Senate, that the chamber can do two things at once.

"I hope that the Senate leadership will find a way to deal with their constitutional responsibilities on impeachment while also working on the other urgent business of this nation," he said after the House voted for impeachment. Biden suggested that the Senate, under Democratic control beginning tomorrow, might spend half-days on the trial and devote the rest of its time to hearings to confirm Biden's cabinet, a pressing priority. Those hearings begin Tuesday, in a Capitol that has taken on an almost wartime aspect after the chaos of January 6, as thousands of police and National Guardsmen block streets and provide protection. —AFP

## International

# French Muslim council agrees on 'principles' sought by Macron

## 'Charter of principles' to eradicate sectarianism and extremism

PARIS: France's Muslim federations agreed Sunday on a "charter of principles" requested by President Emmanuel Macron in his bid to eradicate sectarianism and extremism. Macron urged the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) to devise the charter in November, after the jihadist killing of a schoolteacher. The charter rejects "instrumentalizing" Islam for political ends and affirms equality between men and women, while denouncing practices such as female circumcisions, forced marriages or "virginity certificates" for brides. It also explicitly rejects racism and anti-Semitism, and warns that mosques "are not created for the spreading of nationalist speech defending foreign regimes".

"This charter reaffirms the compatibility of the Muslim faith with the principles of the Republic, including secularism, and the commitment of French Muslims to their complete citizenship," CFCM President Mohammed Moussaoui said. In a statement posted on Twitter, he added the charter would be shared with imams and local leaders, "with a view to the widest possible consultation and membership". Its formal adoption by the nine federations of the CFCM opens the way to a vast restructuring of Islam in France, particularly the creation of a National Council of Imams (CNI) which will be responsible for "labeling" imams practicing in the country.

Earlier, several member federations of the CFCM had criticized the idea of a charter declaring Islam compatible with French law and values—the first step toward creating the proposed CNI. But Moussaoui and his two vice presidents hammered out an accord in a meeting with Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin. "There was an awareness that these disagreements were preventing the Muslim community from asserting itself," Moussaoui said. "This awareness allowed us to



PARIS: Mohammed Moussaoui (second left), president of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) makes a statement next to Chems-Eddine Hafiz, rector of Paris' great Mosque (second right) and other CFCM representatives, including Assani Fassassi (left) after signing a "charter of principles" requested by President Macron. — AFP

overcome our differences." "I commend the work undertaken by the French Muslim community which clearly condemns political Islam," Darmanin said on Twitter.

The charter is part of Macron's hopes to "liberate" Islam from radicalized influences that encroach on France's strict secularism and which are blamed for a wave of jihadist killings in recent years. His government has embarked on a crackdown against extremist mosques and associations, and plans to remove the roughly 300 imams in France sent to teach from

Turkey, Morocco and Algeria. Macron's government is also pushing through legislation to combat "pernicious" Islamist radicalism, which would tighten rules on issues ranging from religious-based education to polygamy. The move, along with the president's defense of controversial cartoons has stoked anger among many in the Muslim world who believe Macron is unfairly targeting an entire religion.

Macron has rejected the claims, saying the law aims to protect the country's estimated four to five million Muslims, the largest number in Europe. — AFP

## 150 killed in Yemen clashes near Hodeida

YEMEN: Some 150 Yemeni pro-government soldiers and Houthi rebels have been killed in a week of fighting south of the strategic port city of Hodeida, military sources said yesterday. Impoverished Yemen is mired in a devastating conflict between Iran-backed Houthi rebels and government forces backed by Saudi Arabia that has left tens of thousands dead and sparked a dire humanitarian crisis. The latest clashes in the Red Sea port city of Hodeida are the most violent since a truce negotiated in the area by the UN came into force in 2018. The rebels, who hold Hodeida, have attacked to the south of the city where pro-government forces maintain positions, pro-government military sources said.

"The toll for losses on the two sides has reached around 150 dead and 260 wounded," an official of the pro-government forces told AFP. The toll was confirmed by a local official on the rebel side. The clashes had so far not resulted in any territorial gains for the rebels, residents said. After fierce fighting on Saturday and Sunday,

the intensity of clashes cooled early yesterday. Pro-government forces have suffered 27 fatalities and killed 44 rebels in countering "several assaults" by the rebels, two other pro-government sources said. Medics and rescue workers said that military fatalities on the two sides had reached a total of 70 between Saturday and Sunday. Aid group Doctors Without Borders said on Twitter that its team in the Mocha Trauma Hospital was engaging a "mass casualty plan" to respond to an influx of wounded. "We are intensely worried for civilians living near the frontline areas," it added, noting "intense fighting" along the southern Hodeida frontlines.

It was not clear whether the latest bout of fighting had so far caused civilian casualties. In early January, five women were killed by a shell when it hit a wedding hall near Hodeida airport, located on the frontline. Yemen's war has killed tens of thousands, displaced millions and, according to the UN, left 16 million on the brink of famine. UN and EU officials and aid groups have warned of a worsening humanitarian crisis after outgoing US President Donald Trump's administration classified the Houthi rebels "terrorists". The designation is expected to halt many transactions with Houthi authorities, including bank transfers and payments to medical personnel and for food and fuel, due to fears of US prosecution. — AFP



SANAA: Supporters of Yemen's Houthi movement raise firearms as they chant slogans during a demonstration in front of the closed US Embassy, in the capital Sanaa yesterday. — AFP

## Poland's youngest return to school as depression rates grow

WARSAW: Poland's youngest children returned to school yesterday for the first time in over two months but most pupils will remain in virtual classrooms as experts warned of a growing psychological toll. Poland has seen some of the longest school closures in Europe due to Covid-19 but many parents are concerned that children may be returning too soon.

"I don't like the idea of children going back to school. I'm worried about my son," said Rafal Kazmierczak, 46, a sports journalist.

"He's only nine years old and too young to be demanded to adhere to a strict sanitary regime. It's impossible to maintain social distance." Grades 1-3 are returning to school for the first time since November 9. Older primary schools, Grades 4-8, have been out of physical schools since October 26. Secondary schools and universities shut on October 19. Psychologist Beata Trzesniewska said long periods away from the classroom were having a negative effect.

"Cases of depression among pupils and students are going up," she said. Children and students "are saying they do not see the purpose of studying, have no interest in their current life, feel sad or bored or that nothing

has meaning. "Above all, they feel that they have no way of influencing what is happening right now," she told AFP. The government has said it wants to bring more children back but is starting with the youngest as it says they are least likely to be infected and remote learning for them is least effective.

"We are of course striving to get children back to school as soon as possible, as safely and securely as possible for children, teachers and all school staff," President Andrzej Duda said on Friday.

Poland yesterday reported 3,271 new coronavirus cases and 52 additional deaths.

### 'Stop-start-pause' schooling

A ranking by the Insights for Education Foundation, a Switzerland-based non-governmental group, shows Polish schools have been closed for 128 days, putting it second in the EU after Romania with 140 days. The list is topped by Panama, Bolivia and El Salvador with 295, 270 and 267 days of closed schools.

Randa Grob-Zakhary, head of Insights for Education, said access to remote learning and the quality of that learning have been "very variable" around the world. "The common assumption that school is dangerous has not held up. There are ways that countries have shown to safely and gradually return schools," she said. "Poland is showing this by re-introducing Grades 1-3." Grob-Zakhary said she believes there would be no "post-Covid period soon" and countries had to "help children flourish alongside Covid and stop this stop-start-pause" with school closures and re-openings. — AFP

## Kremlin critic Navalny decries 'mockery of justice' at hearing

MOSCOW: Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said yesterday he was facing a "mockery of justice" as police in Moscow organized a makeshift court hearing a day after his dramatic airport arrest. With calls growing in the West for Navalny's release, he was brought into a courtroom set up at the police station in Khimki on the outskirts of Moscow where he was taken following his detention on Sunday night. Aides said Navalny, who returned to Russia for the first time since being poisoned with a nerve agent in August, was denied access to his lawyers and notified at the last minute of the hearing. His team released a video of an incredulous Navalny at the hearing. "I've seen a lot of mockery of justice... but they have ripped up and thrown away" Russia's criminal code, Navalny said. "This is impossible. It's ultimate lawlessness."

Police seized the 44-year-old, the most prominent opponent of President Vladimir Putin, at a border control post at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport less than an hour after he returned to Russia, in defiance of warnings he would be arrested. Russia's FSIN prison service said it had detained Navalny for violating the terms of a suspended sentence he was given in 2014, on fraud charges he says were politically motivated. Navalny is also facing potential new criminal charges under a probe launched late last year by Russian investigators who say he misappropriated over \$4 million worth of donations. Navalny emerged a decade ago as the leading critic of the Kremlin, with his Anti-Corruption Foundation publishing anti-graft investigations that often reveal the lavish lifestyles of the Russian elite.



SANAA: Supporters of Yemen's Houthi movement raise firearms during a demonstration in front of the closed US Embassy, in the capital Sanaa yesterday. — AFP

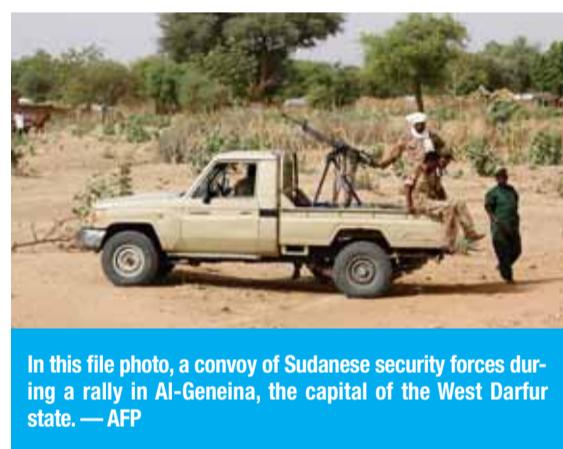
He has repeatedly led large-scale street protests against Putin, most recently in the summer of 2019, and was gearing up for another challenge to authorities during elections to the lower house State Duma in September. He was evacuated to Germany after falling violently ill on a flight over Siberia in August from what Western experts eventually concluded was a poisoning with Soviet-designed nerve agent Novichok. Navalny accused Putin of ordering the attack, a claim the Kremlin vehemently denies. Russian police have not opened an investigation citing a lack of evidence. His arrest on Sunday drew widespread Western condemnation, with the United States, European Union, France and Canada all calling for his release. Others joined that call yesterday, with EU chief Ursula von der Leyen saying Russian authorities should "immediately release him and ensure his safety". — AFP

## Beijing likens Pompeo to a 'mantis' after latest US sanctions

HONG KONG: China yesterday likened outgoing Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to a "praying mantis" in a colorful condemnation of the latest US sanctions sparked by the mass arrest of Hong Kong pro-democracy activists. Pompeo, one of the Trump administration's most vociferous China hawks, has spent his final days in office unveiling a host of measures targeting Beijing ahead of Wednesday's inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden. Among them was fresh sanctions on six officials—including Hong Kong's sole representative to China's top lawmaking body—in response to the recent arrest of 55 democracy activists under a new security law.

"Hong Kong's development from chaos to stability is unstoppable," Beijing's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office said in its first response to the sanctions yesterday. "People like Pompeo are nothing but laughable praying mantises who are trying in vain to stop the rolling wheels of history." The metaphor stems from an old Chinese idiom that describes futility in which a mantis tries to stop a chariot with its legs. Dismissing US sanctions as "a political trick when all other tricks are exhausted", the office urged Pompeo to "wind up the show"—a reference to his impending departure from office.

On Saturday the Hong Kong government slammed the sanctions as "insane, shameless and despicable"—one of a host of recent statements from the business hub's authorities that channel the rhetoric used by the authoritarian mainland. Hong Kong was convulsed by seven months of huge and often violent democracy protests in 2019. China dismissed the protests and has since overseen a widespread crackdown in the financial hub, including imposing a draconian security law last year that criminalizes much dissent. — AFP



In this file photo, a convoy of Sudanese security forces during a rally in Al-Geneina, the capital of the West Darfur state. — AFP

## Fears about Darfur after 130 killed in days of fighting

KHARTOUM: The latest inter-ethnic violence to rock Sudan's restive Darfur left 47 dead yesterday, after 83 died in separate weekend clashes - and following shortly after a peacekeeping mission ended operations. With at least 130 people killed in total, the recent violence is some of the worst reported since the signing of a peace agreement in October, which observers hoped would end years of war.

The bloodshed comes just over two weeks since the hybrid United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) ended operations in their long-running peacekeeping mission. While former rebel forces have committed to lay down their weapons in the recent political peace deal, decades of conflict have left the vast western region awash with weapons and divided by bitter rivalries.

Key issues include land ownership and access to water. In South Darfur, fighting broke out early yesterday between the powerful Arab Rizeigat tribe and the Fallata, a cattle and camel herding people who trace their roots to the Fulani of western Africa. "The clashes between the Rizeigat tribe and the Fallata tribe have stopped, and we have now counted 47 deaths," local Fallata leader Mohamed Saleh told AFP. Saleh said that several homes were torched in the attack.

### 'Ugly face of war'

The fighting in South Darfur comes after at least 83 people were killed in clashes between rival ethnic groups on Saturday and Sunday in El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur state. Sudanese authorities in Khartoum said they had sent a "high-profile" delegation to help contain the situation. The United Nations - a long-running presence in the nation - expressed deep concerns on Sunday over the violence.

Sudan has been undergoing a fragile transition since the April 2019 ouster of president Omar Al-Bashir following mass protests against his rule. The Sudanese Professionals Association, an umbrella group which spearheaded protests against Bashir, said Sunday that the violence showed the "deficiencies" of the peace agreement, which they said did not address the roots of the crisis in the region.

Darfur endured a bitter conflict that erupted in 2003, leaving roughly 300,000 people dead and 2.5 million displaced, according to the UN. The 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. The main conflict has subsided over the years but ethnic and tribal clashes still flare periodically, largely pitting semi-nomadic Arab pastoralists against settled farmers.

On Dec 31, the UNAMID force formally ended its 13 years of operations in the region. It plans a phased withdrawal of its approximately 8,000 armed and civilian personnel within six months. Fearing deadly violence, Darfur residents held protests in late December against UNAMID's departure. — AFP

## International

## Handwritten note seeds hope for trapped China gold miners

## 'Help us, we're still alive': A week after gold mine mishap

BEIJING: At least 12 gold miners trapped hundreds of meters underground in China for more than a week have sent up a note warning some are injured, water surrounds them and they urgently need medicine. Twenty-two workers became trapped more than 600 meters from the mine's entrance after a blast eight days ago at the mine near Qixia city in eastern Shandong province.

After days without any signs of life, rescuers heard knocking sounds on Sunday afternoon as they drilled through the mine's shaft. A note was sent up on a line from the depths below saying that at least a dozen of the miners were still alive, but pleading for help as their health and conditions deteriorate. "We are in urgent need of medicine, painkillers, medical tape, external anti-inflammatory drugs, and three people have high blood pressure," the note read. The condition of the other ten workers is unknown. Four people were injured, according to the note which was crumpled, water-stained and scrawled in pencil on pages ripped out of a notebook. "We wish the rescuers won't stop so that we can still have hope. Thank you," the note read.

The writer of the note asked rescuers to send down some medication from his car, and warned that there was a large amount of underground water where the miners are trapped. Footage from state broadcaster CCTV showed rescue workers cheering as the knocking sound was detected and later hurrying to read the note which was taped to a line sunk below via a pneumatic drill.

## Hopes and tears

Footage showed rescuers sending a wire taped with food and drinks down a small opening to the miners. Hopes of a miracle rescue after a days-long ordeal triggered an outpouring of sympathy and encouragement on Chinese social media.



QIXIA, China: This photo shows rescuers working at the site of gold mine explosion where 22 miners were trapped underground in Qixia.—AFP

The hashtag "Qixia gold mine incident" was viewed 130 million times on popular social media site Weibo. "I saw the note while I was watching the morning news and burst into tears," one Weibo user wrote.

"I hope they will rescue the trapped workers as soon as possible." Some rescue workers wore fur hats to keep off the cold while others appeared covered in dust and grime from the rescue operation.

Rescuers intend to drill multiple tunnels into the mine, to vent air as well as deliver supplies while work continues on bringing the miners back up to safety,

CCTV said. The explosion badly damaged the communications system and exit ladder from the mine, which is owned by the Shandong Wucaolong Investment Co. Ltd.

Two officials have already been sacked over the accident. Mining accidents are common in China, where the industry has a poor safety record and regulations are often weakly enforced. In December, 23 miners died after being trapped in a mine in the southwestern city of Chongqing—just months after 16 others died from carbon monoxide poisoning after being trapped underground at another coal mine in the city.—AFP

## 'Still trapped'

It was unclear how many people—dead or alive—could be buried under mountains of debris, as rescuers rushed to find survivors more than three days after the disaster. Most of the 84 dead were found in Mamuju, but some bodies were also recovered south of the city of 110,000 people in West Sulawesi province. At least 18 people had been pulled out of the rubble alive, including a pair of young sisters, according to official data. Police began using sniffer dogs to help in the search at a badly damaged hospital, as body bags were filled with recovered corpses. "There are probably some people still trapped under the rubble," search and rescue agency spokesman Yusuf Latif said yesterday.

Meanwhile, about 30,000 people have taken refuge at dozens of makeshift shelters—many little more than makeshift tarpaulin tents filled with whole families. They said they were running low on food, blankets and other aid, as emergency supplies were rushed to the hard-hit region. Friday's tremor triggered panic among residents of the island, which was hit by a 2018 quake—tsunami that killed thousands.

Many survivors of the latest disaster were unable to return to their destroyed homes, or were too scared to go back, fearing a tsunami sparked by aftershocks, common after strong earthquakes. Hundreds have already fled camps in hard-hit Majene as rumors of a quake—tsunami rippled through a shelter there. "We were confused and couldn't check if that was true because there wasn't any Internet at the shelter," said Ernawati, 38, who fled to a town more than 100 kilometers away with a dozen relatives.

Fear of another disaster was certain to heap more stress on survivors, said Jan Gelfand, head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Indonesia. "The physical impact of this earthquake is terrifying, but we must not underestimate the debilitating psychological effect this disaster is having on tens of thousands of people who fled their homes," he said. "They are living with the constant threat of another big quake." —AFP

## Indonesian medics overwhelmed by quake casualties

MAMUJU, Indonesia: Medics battled exhaustion and the risk of COVID-19 as they raced yesterday to treat scores of people injured by a devastating earthquake on Indonesia's Sulawesi Island. At least 84 were killed and thousands left homeless by the 6.2-magnitude quake that struck early Friday, reducing buildings to a tangled mass of twisted metal and chunks of concrete in the seaside city of Mamuju. Doctors in hazard suits treated patients with broken limbs and other injuries at a makeshift medical center set up outside the only one of the city's hospitals that survived relatively intact—one was flattened by the violent tremor.

A handful of doctors and nurses worked "non-stop" in the first couple of days after the quake until reinforcements arrived, but it was still barely enough amid shortages of medicine and other supplies. "We were completely overwhelmed at one point," said Indahwati Nursyamsi, director of West Sulawesi General Hospital. "My nurses were also quake victims and had to help their families." Medics scrambled to quarantine COVID-19 positive patients in a bid to prevent an outbreak at the crowded open-air triage center.

Some with coronavirus have been put in a prayer room—common in the Muslim majority nation—at the back of the hospital. The hospital was trying to open up more rooms for surgery and erect additional tents outside to treat the injured. But fears that another quake could bring down the building added to the challenges as patients, and some staff, refused to stay inside. "There are patients who were scared and pleaded to be taken out of the building," Nursyamsi said. Nurse Agriani, 29, who came from a nearby district to help, said she had been working day and night. "It's tiring... but it's part of my job as a nurse," said the woman, who like many Indonesians goes by one name.



MAMUJU, Indonesia: A nurse treats a patient injured in the 6.2 magnitude earthquake at a makeshift ward outside West Sulawesi General Hospital due to concerns of aftershocks in Mamuju yesterday.—AFP

## Japan PM vows to tackle virus

TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga pledged yesterday to tackle surging coronavirus cases and restore normal life "as soon as possible" as polls showed plunging support for his government. Suga, who was speaking at the opening of a new parliament session, has only been in office since September, but has seen approval ratings nosedive over his government's handling of a third wave of infections. The latest wave in Japan and abroad has also cast doubt on whether the pandemic—postponed Tokyo 2020 Olympics can go ahead this year, but Suga repeated he was still committed to holding the Games as "proof of mankind's victory over the virus".

"To protect the lives and health of the Japanese people... I will get the situation back to normal as soon as possible," Suga said in a policy address to the Diet as it opened for a 150-day session. The greater Tokyo region and several other parts of Japan are under a virus state of emergency set to last until February 7, but the government has been accused of waiting too long to impose the measure and sending mixed messaging on the situation. A weekend survey by the Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper showed approval for Suga's cabinet sank six percentage points from December to 39 percent, against a disapproval rate of 49 percent.

The latest readings compare with a 74 percent approval rating for his government in the same survey when he took office in September. A poll from private broadcaster ANN over the weekend showed similar results, with approval dropping to 34.8 percent from December. Suga's government has

## News in brief

## Latvia plans Russian-language ads

RIGA, Latvia: Latvia's health minister yesterday said the government would boost a Russian-language information campaign on the safety of vaccines in order to improve low vaccination rates. After visiting a hospital in the capital Riga, Daniels Pavluts said the situation was "very problematic" in Daugavpils, Latvia's second city which has a majority Russian-speaking population. Pavluts said there was "disinformation" about vaccines in Russian-language media, as well as more global "anti-vaxx propaganda". "To address the disinformation in Russian, we are doubling our efforts on the information campaign, everything will also be translated and available in Russian," Pavluts told AFP.—AFP

## Italy PM struggles to save govt

ROME: Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte was due to address parliament's lower house yesterday at the start of a make-or-break week in a crisis that could bring down his government. Against the backdrop of a coronavirus pandemic that sparked fresh restrictions at the weekend, Conte will seek a show of support with lawmakers ahead of a crucial vote in the upper Senate the following day. His coalition government, in power since September 2019, was plunged into turmoil by the withdrawal last week of former premier Matteo Renzi's Italia Viva party. Conte was to speak at midday to the Chamber of Deputies, where his coalition partners including the Democratic Party (PD) and Five Star Movement (M5S) have a majority of support.—AFP

## Malawi imposes first lockdown

BLANTYRE, Malawi: Malawi is set to roll out a first set of anti-coronavirus restrictions this week, the president said, after overruling a court ban on lockdown measures to tackle a surge in cases. Unlike the rest of the continent, daily life had been unfolding normally in the southern African country since its High Court barred the government from confining citizens to limit the spread of COVID-19. Judges ruled in April that insufficient measures were in place to cushion loss of livelihood in one of the world's poorest countries, where most people work informally. But Malawi, like many African states, is now grappling with an infection rise after months of relatively low infection figures.—AFP

## Slovakia begins virus testing

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia: Slovakia yesterday began a new round of nationwide COVID-19 screening—a process aimed at easing curfew restrictions for people who test negative. Tests will also serve as a basis for new localized restrictions in the country's 73 districts. "We have decided to combine lockdown with massive testing," Prime Minister Igor Matovic told a press conference yesterday. "Subsequently, we will intervene in districts where it is necessary to get the situation under control," he said. The latest tests will end on January 26.

## Australia not to open border

SYDNEY: Australia's international borders are unlikely to open to travellers this year despite the rollout of coronavirus vaccines, a top health official said yesterday. Health department secretary Brendan Murphy, a key adviser in Australia's virus response, said free-flowing travel to and from the country was not expected to resume in 2021. "I think that we'll go most of this year with still substantial border restrictions," he told public broadcaster ABC. "Even if we have a lot of the population vaccinated, we don't know whether that will prevent transmission of the virus. "And it's likely that quarantine will continue for some time." Australia's border has been largely closed to overseas visitors since March 2020 to stem the spread of COVID-19, with a limited number of citizens and their families allowed to return each week.—AFP

stressed the need to balance infection measures against economic impact, but was slammed for continuing to back a domestic travel campaign even as infection rates spiked. He said yesterday his government would soon submit legislation intended to toughen the rules during a state of emergency—including allowing fines for businesses that flout closure requests.

Reports suggest the government may also seek legal changes that would allow fines or even prison sentences for those who refuse hospitalization or contact tracing after testing positive with the virus. Despite the recent spike, Japan has so far seen a comparatively small COVID-19 outbreak, with around 4,500 deaths overall. The government has secured sufficient vaccine doses for all its 126 million residents, but so far just Pfizer has applied for approval, and the jabs are not expected to start until late February.—AFP



PARIS: This file photo shows French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur (right) talking with Defense Minister Francois Leotard during a meeting on national consultation of youth.—AFP

## Balladur on trial over 'Karachi affair' kickbacks

PARIS: Former French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur goes on trial today on charges that he used kickbacks from arms deals in the 1990s to fund a presidential bid, a case known as the "Karachi affair". Balladur, 91, joins a long list of senior French politicians pursued for alleged financial wrongdoing, including former president Nicolas Sarkozy and his predecessor, Jacques Chirac. The conservative expremier will be tried by the Court of Justice of the Republic in Paris, a tribunal dedicated to hearing cases of ministerial misconduct.

Also in the dock will be his former defense minister Francois Leotard, 78, though his presence at the trial's opening is uncertain because of illness. Balladur will appear in court today "to face his judges and answer their questions," his lawyer Felix de Belloy said. The two men were charged in 2017 with "complicity in the misuse of corporate assets" over the sale of submarines to Pakistan and frigates to Saudi Arabia between 1993 and 1995, when Balladur was prime minister in the final years of Francois Mitterrand's presidency.

The kickbacks are estimated at 13 million francs, now worth some 2.8-million-euros (\$3.3 million), after accounting for inflation. The sum is believed to have included a cash injection of about 10 million francs to Balladur's 1995 unsuccessful presidential campaign against Chirac. Balladur, who also has to answer to a charge that he concealed the crimes, has denied any wrongdoing, saying the 10 million francs came from the sale of T-shirts and other items at campaign rallies. The claims came to light during an investigation into a 2002 bombing in Karachi, Pakistan, which targeted a bus transporting French engineers.

Fifteen people were killed, including 11 engineers working on the submarine contract. The Al-Qaeda terror network was initially suspected of the attack. But the focus later shifted to the arms deal as investigators considered whether the bombing may have been revenge for Chirac's decision to halt the commission payments for the arms deals shortly after he beat Balladur in the presidential vote.

Leotard is accused of having created an "opaque network" of intermediaries for the contracts signed with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The ex-premier also stands charged with instructing the budget ministry—led at the time by Sarkozy—to approve state guarantees for "deficient or underfunded" contracts, because of the alleged kickbacks. Investigators say that cash deposits in Balladur's campaign fund coincided with trips to Switzerland by Ziad Takieddine, a Lebanese-French intermediary who has long been active in French rightwing circles. Takieddine fled to Lebanon last June after a Paris court sentenced him and another middleman, Abdul Rahman El-Assir, to five years in prison over their role in the "Karachi" kickbacks.—AFP

# Business

TUESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2021

## Samsung chief jailed for 2.5 years over corruption scandal

### Conviction after Lee Jae-yong was found guilty of bribery and embezzlement

SEOUL: The de facto chief of South Korea's Samsung business empire was convicted yesterday over a huge corruption scandal and jailed for two-and-a-half years, in a ruling that deprives the tech giant of its top decision-maker. Lee Jae-yong, vice-chairman of Samsung Electronics, the world's biggest smartphone and memory chip maker, was found guilty of bribery and embezzlement in connection with the scandal that brought down president Park Geun-hye. Lee "actively provided bribes and implicitly asked the president to use her power to help his smooth succession" at the head of the sprawling conglomerate, the Seoul Central District Court said in its verdict.

"It is very unfortunate that Samsung, the country's top company and proud global innovator, is repeatedly involved in crimes whenever there is a change in political power." It jailed him for two and a half years, concluding a retrial that was the latest step in a long-running legal process that has hung over Samsung for years. The multi-billionaire Lee—who had earlier walked into court grim-faced and wearing a facemask, without responding to reporters' shouted questions—was immediately taken into custody. He has effectively been at the head of the entire Samsung group for several years after his father was left bedridden by a heart attack, finally dying in October.



SEOUL: Lee Jae-yong (center), vice chairman of Samsung Electronics, arrives at a court for a trial in his bribery scandal involving former South Korean president Park Geun-hye in Seoul yesterday. — AFP

"This is essentially a case where the freedom and property rights of a company were violated by the former president's abuse of power," Lee's lawyer, Lee In-jae, told reporters. "Given the nature of the matter, I find the court's ruling regrettable." Samsung is by far the biggest of the family-controlled conglomerates, or chaebols, that dominate business in the world's 12th-largest economy. Its overall turnover is equivalent to a fifth of the national gross domestic product and it is crucial to

South Korea's economic health. Its rise has been driven by a willingness to invest billions in strategic bets on key technologies. But experts say the sentence will create a leadership vacuum that could hamper its decision-making on future large-scale investments. "It's really a huge blow and a big crisis for Samsung," said Kim Dae-jong, a business professor at Sejong University. Samsung Electronics, the group's flagship subsidiary, declined to comment yesterday ruling. Like many tech firms, its shares have risen significantly during the coronavirus pandemic, more than doubling from their lows in March, but closed down 3.4 percent yesterday.

#### Public apology

The case centers on millions of dollars the Samsung group paid Park's secret confidante Choi Soon-sil, allegedly for government favors including ensuring a smooth transition for Lee to succeed his then-ailing father. The scandal highlighted shady connections between big business and politics in South Korea, with the ousted president and her friend accused of taking bribes from corporate bigwigs in exchange for preferential treatment. Lee was first jailed for five years in 2017, after Park's ouster.

He walked free the following year when an appeals court dismissed most of his bribery convictions and gave

him a suspended sentence, but the Supreme Court later ordered the 52-year-old to face a retrial. In May, Lee made a rare public apology, bowing before flashing cameras for company misconduct including the firm's controversial plan for him to ascend to the leadership.

His own children, he promised, would not succeed him in top management roles at the company. Both Lee's father Lee Kun-hee and grandfather-Samsung founder Lee Byung-chull had brushes with the law themselves but never served time behind bars. In the past, leaders of South Korean conglomerates convicted of crimes such as tax evasion or bribery have been given presidential pardons in recognition of their economic role. The Federation of Korean Industries said in a statement: "Considering Samsung's share of the Korean economy and its status as a global company, the ruling is feared to have a negative impact on the overall Korean economy." Lee, it added, "has been helping to sustain the Korean economy by spearheading bold investment and job creation amid the economic crisis over the coronavirus". Earlier this month, Samsung Electronics flagged a jump of more than 25 percent in fourth quarter operating profits, citing benefits from pandemic-induced working from home that boosted demand for devices powered by its chips. Analysts forecast a stable outlook for the company in 2021, driven by continued demand for memory chips.—AFP

## Sri Lanka to welcome back tourists, but with strict COVID rules

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka will reopen its borders to foreign tourists this week after a 10-month hiatus, officials said yesterday, with travellers subject to tough COVID-19 protocols. The announcement came despite a surge in COVID-19 cases and deaths, as authorities sought to revive a once-lucrative tourism sector devastated by the deadly 2019 Easter bombings and the pandemic.

"Every precautionary measure has been set in place to make the island getaway as safe, secure and serene as possible for visitors," the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau said in a statement, with borders due to open on Thursday. The sun-soaked island nation, famous for its picturesque beaches, last month welcomed some 1,700 Ukrainian tourists on charter flights in a "pilot project to test our systems", the government said.

Sri Lanka is also currently hosting the England cricket team for a two-Test series, with the matches played behind closed doors. Under the protocols,

tourists will be allowed to stay in 55 designated hotels-off limits to locals except for staff-across the country.

Visitors will be required to produce a negative result from a PCR test taken up to four days before their arrival. They must undergo two more tests for a visit of up to seven days, and three tests if they stay for more than a week.

Tourists are also required to fork out \$12 for insurance that will cover up to \$50,000 in Covid-19 related medical costs. For the first two weeks of their visit, they will have to be accompanied by officials when travelling to designated tourism spots. Those who test positive during their stay will be isolated in their hotel rooms if they are asymptomatic, and taken to a hospital if they show symptoms.

Passengers who have spent up to two weeks in Britain before arriving will not be allowed to enter the country, and flights from the UK remain banned in an effort to keep out a more contagious coronavirus variant. Officials did not say if more airlines would resume services to Sri Lanka.

Qatar Airways, Emirates and several other airlines currently operate repatriation and transit flights. National carrier SriLankan Airlines has also been flying on a limited schedule. Sri Lanka has seen a surge in virus cases since October, with the total number of infections passing 53,000 and deaths rising to over 260 from just 13 in October. — AFP

## Parler could return to App Store with reforms: Cook

WASHINGTON: Parler, the social network popular among conservatives, could return to Apple's App Store if it changes how it moderates posts on the platform, the tech giant's CEO Tim Cook said Sunday. Apple suspended all downloads of the Parler app following the attack on the US Capitol on January 6, citing postings on the platform that could incite further violence. Google and Amazon also cut ties with the company. Speaking to Fox News Sunday, Cook justified suspending Parler, favored by supporters of President Donald Trump. "We looked at the incitement to violence that was on there, and we don't consider that free speech and incitement to violence has an intersection," Cook said.

Parler sued Amazon yesterday after Amazon Web Services cut off the platform's access to internet servers. Parler alleged Amazon was violating antitrust laws and acting to help social rival Twitter, which also has banned Trump for language that could incite violence. In Apple's case, "we've only suspended them," Cook said. "So, if they get their moderation together, they would be back on" the App Store. Parler's popularity skyrocketed after Twitter permanently banned Trump following the Capitol attack, which Cook called "one of the saddest moments of my life" and "an attack on our democracy."



AUSTIN, Texas: In this file photo Apple CEO Tim Cook speak to the press during a tour of the Flextronics computer manufacturing facility, with US President Donald Trump, where Apple's Mac Pros are assembled in Austin, Texas.— AFP

"I felt like I was in some sort of alternate reality," he said. "This could not be happening." The day Apple suspended downloads for Parler, it was the top-downloaded app from the App Store in the US. Google has also banned downloads of the app. Parler, which launched in 2018, operates much like Twitter, with profiles to follow and "parleys" instead of tweets.

In its early days, the platform attracted a crowd of ultraconservative and even extreme-right users. But more recently, it has signed up many more traditional Republican voices. "We have an app store that has about two million apps in it," said Cook. "We obviously don't control what's on the internet. But we've never viewed that our platform should be a simple replication of the internet. We have rules and regulations and we just ask that people abide by those." — AFP

## Algeria's crude oil revenues tumbled in 2020

ALGIERS, Algeria: Algeria's oil revenues collapsed in 2020, according to energy ministry figures released Sunday, exacerbating an economic crisis in the North African country which is heavily dependent on crude income. "The overall volume of hydrocarbon exports reached 82.2 million tons of oil equivalent in 2020, for a value of \$20 billion, a decrease of 11 percent and 40 percent respectively compared to 2019," the ministry said in a statement cited by state news agency APS.

The coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing economic downturn hit oil prices hard, battering the economies of producer nations.

Oil income to Algeria's treasury were down 31 percent year-on-year, the energy ministry said. The International Monetary Fund forecasts that Algeria, Africa's fourth-largest economy, will see a 5.2 percent recession in 2020, along with one of the highest budget deficits in the region. Algeria's finance law for 2021 allows for foreign exchange reserves to dip to less than \$47 billion, before a gradual recovery in the following two years. Algeria has long been opposed to borrowing from foreign lenders, but some experts say it may be forced to do so. Widespread unemployment and accusations of official corruption were key drivers of the country's long-running Hirak protest movement which swept autocrat Abdelaziz Bouteflika from power in 2019. — AFP



People watch an elephant standing behind an electric fence marking the boundary of a wildlife sanctuary in Udawalawe. — AFP

## Uganda eases Internet shutdown imposed over election

KAMPALA: Internet was partially restored in Uganda yesterday almost five days after a near-total blackout was imposed across the East African country ahead of elections the opposition says were rigged. The gradual easing of Internet curbs came as police announced dozens of arrests for alleged election-related violence, and surrounded the headquarters of the main opposition party whose leader is effectively under house arrest.

President Yoweri Museveni extended his 35 years in power in January 14's election, securing a sixth term with 58.6 percent of the vote. His main rival, musician-turned-lawmaker Bobi Wine, came a distant second with 34.8 percent. Wine has rejected the results, and decided the election as a sham.

A government spokesman said an unprecedented Internet shutdown imposed on January 13 for alleged

national security reasons had been lifted.

"The Internet has been restored. Other platforms are still under review," spokesman Ouwono Opondo told AFP. "We shall go full throttle depending on what happens in the initial phase of opening connectivity... We advise Internet users, especially those from the opposition, not to use it to promote hate messages, threats" and intimidation.

#### 'Planned in advance'

Social media access remained patchy in the capital Kampala, where millions of Internet users have been unable to send emails, search the web, or use Facebook, WhatsApp and other communication platforms for the better part of a week. NetBlocks, a non-governmental organisation that tracks Internet shutdowns, said network data showed a rise in connectivity in Uganda to 37 percent after all but core infrastructure, regulatory and government networks were switched off.

"This suggests that Uganda's election shutdown, or at least the procedure under which it was implemented, was planned some time in advance. This has been one of the more orderly nation-scale network blackouts we've tracked," NetBlocks told AFP. The headquarters of Wine's National Unity Platform (NUP) in

Kampala was under police guard Monday in what the opposition leader called a "raid" by security forces. "Museveni, after committing the most vile election fraud in history, has resorted to the most despicable forms of intimidation," Wine tweeted.

His lawyer, Benjamin Katana, said he tried to visit his client yesterday but was denied permission. Wine last left his home to vote on Thursday, and his resi-

dence is surrounded by police and soldiers. Uganda police spokesman Fred Enanga said yesterday that 55 people had been arrested over the election period for "violent acts" including blocking highways and damaging property. "Though the polls were peaceful and a success, there were criminal elements that wanted to cause violence," he said, adding the accused would face court.—AFP



KAMPALA: People using Internet on phones at a taxi waiting area minutes after the Uganda Communication Commission, a body responsible for communications in Uganda, restored the Internet in Kampala, Uganda, yesterday. — AFP



## Business

# ECB to hold course as virus clouds economic outlook

## Governing council may leave ultra-loose monetary policy unchanged

FRANKFURT: A resurgence in the coronavirus pandemic and a bumpy start to vaccination drives are likely to weigh on the minds of European Central Bank governors when they meet on Thursday, but they are expected to stop short of taking fresh action. The ECB's 25-member governing council is likely to leave its ultra-loose monetary policy unchanged after injecting more stimulus into the battered eurozone economy at last month's meeting. The Frankfurt institution bulked up its pandemic emergency bond-buying program (PEPP) by 500-billion-euros (\$600 billion) to 1.85-trillion-euros (\$2.23 billion) and prolonged the scheme until March 2022. It also announced more ultra-cheap loans for banks.

"Policymakers will be happy to sit out the meeting... and repeat the mantra that they will do whatever is required to support the eurozone through the pandemic," said Andrew Kenningham at Capital Economics. Their main concern, he said, would be the impact of the pandemic on hopes for an economic rebound in the first quarter of 2021. Many European governments are reimposing tough restrictions to contain a second wave of Covid-19 cases, compounded by the emergence of new, more contagious strains in Britain and South Africa. Smaller-than-expected deliveries of the first batches of



PARIS: File photo shows President of the European Central Bank (ECB) Christine Lagarde holds her smartphone as she attends the One Planet Summit, part of World Nature Day, at the Reception Room of the Elysee Palace, in Paris. — AFP

Covid-19 vaccines, especially in the European Union, have further fuelled fears that the pandemic could wreak havoc for longer.

The ECB in December forecast economic growth in the 19-nation euro area at 3.9 percent in 2021, after a fall estimated at 7.3 percent in 2020. ECB chief Christine Lagarde recently said she had "no reasons to believe our forecast is wrong at this point". But it would become "a

concern", she said, if member states had to extend their shutdowns beyond March.

### 'Inflation surprise'

Under Lagarde, the central bank has unleashed unprecedented support to steer the eurozone through the health crisis, while also urging governments to do their bit through fiscal stimulus. Alongside the emergency bond purchases, the ECB has kept interest rates at record-low levels, and it is still buying 20-billion-euros (\$24 billion) a month in corporate and government debt under a pre-pandemic asset purchasing scheme. The bond purchases are aimed at keeping borrowing costs low to encourage spending and investment, in a bid to bolster growth and drive up inflation.

But inflation has stayed stubbornly low for years and even turned negative in 2020. By the ECB's own estimates, eurozone inflation will gradually inch up to 1.4 percent by 2023, still far off the bank's target of just under two percent. In December, inflation held steady at minus 0.3 percent. Analysts say inflation could bound higher later this year, fuelled by pent-up consumer demand once the lockdowns start easing, particularly in travel and restaurant sectors. The start of 2021 also

marked the end of a six-month sales tax cut in Germany, the EU's largest economy, that had dragged on inflation.

"The return of inflation could be one of the biggest surprises in 2021," said ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski. ECB executive board member Isabel Schnabel however has said any such boost would be temporary and that a sustained increase in inflation "is likely to only emerge very slowly".

"That is why it would not significantly influence our monetary policy decisions, which are oriented towards a medium-term horizon," she said. At Thursday's press conference, former French finance minister Lagarde is likely to also be quizzed about the recent strength of the euro against the dollar. "The currency remains a concern for the ECB as it could add to deflationary pressures and hurt the recovery," said HSBC economist Fabio Balboni.

A stronger euro makes imports cheaper, keeping the lid on consumer prices, while exports become less competitive, hurting growth prospects. "There is arguably little the ECB can do about it," said Pictet Wealth Management strategist Frederik Ducrozet. "Although there is more they could say, for instance putting growing emphasis on their tolerance for inflation overshoot in the future." — AFP



DUSSELDORF, Germany: This file photo shows a general view of passengers lining up for check-in at Frankfurt International Airport in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, amid the ongoing novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. — AFP

## Frankfurt airport traffic drops to lowest since 1984

FRANKFURT: The operator of Frankfurt airport said yesterday that passenger numbers in 2020 plunged to their lowest since the 1980s as the coronavirus pandemic devastated the travel sector. Germany's largest airport recorded 18.8 million passengers in 2020, a decline of 73 percent compared with the year before, Fraport said, hitting lows not seen since 1984. Air traffic came to a complete stand-

still between April and June during the first coronavirus lockdown, "with weekly passenger figures plummeting by up to 98 percent year-on-year", Fraport said.

Traffic at the hub recovered in the third quarter of 2020, but then fell again as restrictions intensified on a resurgence of the virus late in the year, the company said. In December alone, passenger traffic was down 82 percent year-on-year to just over 890,000 people. "The year 2020 brought extreme challenges to the entire aviation industry," Fraport chief executive Stefan Schulte said. In the summer, the company said it would cut 3,000 to 4,000 jobs, or around 15 percent of its workforce. The Fraport boss stressed that recent vaccination rollouts will lift the company's fortunes, and he believes "Frankfurt's passenger traffic will rebound noticeably in the second half of 2021".

At the same time, he said he expects 2021 traffic to reach only 35 to 45 percent of 2019's passenger numbers, in a "difficult year". Cargo traffic was a rare bright spot in 2020, Schulte said. Freight dropped by just 8.3 percent. Germany's largest travel companies have been hardest hit by the health crisis.

Flag carrier Lufthansa and Europe's largest tour operator TUI have been forced to tap multi-billion euro aid programs from the German government to sustain them through the collapse in demand. Shares in Lufthansa and TUI fell in morning trade yesterday on the back of tightening restrictions introduced on travel to Britain. All arrivals to the UK will have to quarantine and show negative tests for COVID-19 from yesterday, after the government scrapped "travel corridors" from countries with lower caseloads following the emergence of new virus strains. — AFP

## Tunisian assets in Swiss banks to stay blocked

GENEVA: The bulk of the assets of Tunisia's former president and his family held in Swiss accounts will stay blocked even after a 10-year freeze ends next week, the government said Sunday. Swiss officials froze the accounts of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and his entourage on January 19, 2011, five days after he fled the country following a popular uprising. Most of those assets were frozen both by a Swiss government order, which can last up to 10 years, and in response to a request from Tunisia for under a system known as mutual legal assistance. "That means that, on January 19, 2021, the blocking based on the first (Swiss) level will no longer exist," the foreign ministry told AFP.

"But the great majority of the assets will still be blocked as part of the process of mutual assistance" orders, the ministry added. Ben Ali fled Tunisia to Saudi Arabia, where he later died in 2019, aged 83, having been convicted in Tunisia in his absence of homicide, torture and corruption. The Swiss campaign group Public Eye estimates that he and his family transferred \$320 million (265 million euros) to Swiss banks during the 2000s. The ministry's statement comes a day after a Tunisian official told AFP the country could lose millions in the Swiss accounts belonging to the former president and his family. The Swiss have reportedly demanded documents to prove the funds are indeed illegal, before they could return it to Tunisia's government. Swiss authorities also want to know the legal status of members of the Ben Ali clan, many of whom faced warrants and trials in Tunisia for corruption, the source said. The authorities have failed to compile the information due to political instability in Tunisia, which has seen nine governments since 2011, the source added. — AFP

## Major firms urge Japan to bolster 2030 renewables goal

TOKYO: Major firms including Sony, Panasonic and Nissan yesterday urged the Japanese government to make its 2030 renewable energy target twice as ambitious. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga last year set a 2050 deadline for Japan to become carbon-neutral, but the country's shorter term renewables goal has long been criticized as lagging. Japan currently aims to source between 22 and 24 percent of its power from solar, wind and other renewables by 2030, a target set three years ago and soon to be reassessed as the government revises its energy strategy. A group of 92 corporations known as the Japan Climate Initiative yesterday urged ministers to double this goal to 40-50 percent.

Many of Japan's biggest firms, from Fujifilm to Toshiba, as well as household names in insurance, electricity and food and drink, signed the petition. "In order for Japan to meet its responsibilities to be one of the leaders in global efforts (against climate change), the target needs to be much more ambitious," they said in a statement. "An ambitious target will stimulate renewable energy deployment, and Japanese companies will be able to play a greater role in the global business environment, where decarbonization is accelerating."

Japan's renewable energy use was around 17 percent in 2017. And by some estimates it may have already hit its 2030 target last year, due to a combination of growth in the green energy sector and a pandemic-related fall in demand. The country ploughed \$16.5 billion into renewable energy in 2019, according to a UN report-making it the world's fourth biggest investor in the sector, but still far behind China, the United States and Europe. However, Japan is still heavily reliant on fossil fuels, especially after public anger over the 2011 Fukushima meltdown pushed all its nuclear reactors temporarily offline. It has struggled to cut carbon emissions since the disaster, with a third of total electricity generation provided by coal, and nearly 40 percent by LNG-fired plants. — AFP



TOKYO: Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga drinks from a glass of water during his policy speech at the opening session of the lower house of parliament in Tokyo. — AFP

## Spain court drops tycoon probe over supermarket buy

MADRID: A Spanish court yesterday said it had dropped an investigation into Russian tycoon Mikhail Fridman's 2019 purchase of Spain's Dia supermarket chain. The court did not say why it dismissed the investigation into the Kremlin-friendly oligarch, one of Russia's richest men who acquired a controlling stake in the struggling supermarket chain in May 2019. The hostile takeover by Fridman's Luxembourg-based investment company LetterOne followed a bitter dispute with Dia's former management during which its share price slumped.

Five months later, Spain's National Court opened an investigation into claims LetterOne acted in a "coordinated and concerted way" to lower Dia's share price so he could buy it, raising suspicions of market manipulation. When LetterOne first bought into Dia in 2017, the chain's shares were worth 4.50 euros but when it launched its takeover bid, it offered 0.67 euros per share. Known as a ruthless operator who is notoriously litigious, Fridman has always strenuously defended his own interests, insisting he was one of the main "victims" of Dia's financial troubles. The same court also dropped a similar investigation into Fridman's affairs last month, following allegations he acted to bring down the value of Zed Worldwide, a Spanish digital entertainment firm. — AFP



TOULOUSE, France: A Deliveroo food delivery scooter drives through a deserted Place Saint Pierre in the city of Toulouse. — AFP

## Deliveroo targets \$7bn valuation for upcoming IPO

LONDON: British meals delivery company Deliveroo, boosted by demand during the coronavirus pandemic, said Sunday it was targeting a stock market listing after a fundraising round valued the company at more than \$7.0 billion. Deliveroo said in a statement that it had raised more than \$180 million from its existing investors,

"valuing the business at over \$7 billion". "This investment comes ahead of a potential initial public offering and reflects strong demand... given the significant growth potential in the online food delivery sector in which consumer adoption is accelerating," it said.

No date was set for the IPO, but Bloomberg News said it was expected in or around April. London-based Deliveroo works with 140,000 restaurants in 800 cities to deliver meals to customers' homes, and has seen demand soar in line with other home-delivery companies as much of the world has been subject to lockdowns to tackle the pandemic. But its business has come under scrutiny, including in France and Spain, as its freelance delivery riders complain of exploitative practices. — AFP

## Business

# China GDP grows at slowest pace in more than four decades in 2020

## First country to bounce back from virus-induced economic downturn

**BEIJING:** China's GDP grew at the slowest pace in more than four decades in 2020, official data showed yesterday, but it was still expected to be the only major economy to grow at all after a strong rebound from the coronavirus crisis.

COVID-19, which has ravaged the world economy, first emerged in central China in late 2019. But the world's second-largest economy also became the first to bounce back after imposing strict lockdowns and virus control measures. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said last year was a "grave and complex environment both at home and abroad" with the pandemic having a "huge impact".

The 2.3 percent expansion in 2020 was a marked slowdown from 2019's revised growth of 6.0 percent—its lowest in decades—with the country hit by weak domestic demand and trade tensions. But it is better than that forecast by an AFP poll of analysts from 13 financial institutions, who had predicted a 2.0 percent expansion.

In the last three months of 2020, China's economic rebound continued with a better-than-expected 6.5 percent growth on-year, a sustained improvement since the second quarter. This brings it back to a pre-pandemic trajectory, although full-year 2020 growth is still its worst performance since a 1.6 contraction in 1976, the year Chairman Mao Zedong died.

That was two years before former leader Deng Xiaoping set in motion a shift away from communist-style central planning, turning China into an industrial, trade and tech powerhouse.

### Recovery 'not yet firm'

NBS commissioner Ning Jizhe told reporters the foundation for China's economic recovery "is still not yet firm". "There are many uncertainties in the changing dynamics of the pandemic, as well as the external environment," he said. According to the latest data, industrial production grew 2.8 percent on-year for 2020, slowing further from previous years.

Retail sales, whose recovery has lagged behind that of industrial activity, shrank 3.9 percent for the full year with consumers wary of spending as the pandemic lingered.

This marks the first contraction in retail sales since 1968, underscoring difficulties amid China's push to rebalance its economy with domestic consumption as the main driver. But the urban unemployment rate remained at 5.2 percent, and Ning said the number of newly-employed in urban areas was more than 11 million—exceeding the target of nine million. However, experts have cautioned unemployment could be higher than official figures suggest due to the large numbers of people in China's informal workforce.

"The strengthening momentum of China's economic rebound during the fourth quarter of 2020 reflected improving private consumption expenditure as well as buoyant net exports," Rajiv Biswas, IHS Markit's Asia-Pacific chief economist, said. He added exports were helped by rebounding orders from the United States and Europe, including shipments of medical equipment during the pandemic.

But Iris Pang, ING chief economist for Greater



A woman crosses a street in the central business district (CBD) of Beijing yesterday. —AFP

China, said "when China can achieve a complete recovery is still an open question", given that without fiscal and monetary stimulus, the economy would not have recovered at such a pace. She added: "The risk of a technology war between

China and some economies remains if the US does not remove some measures." New government restrictions due to local COVID-19 outbreaks could also hamper first quarter growth this year, said Louis Kuijs of Oxford Economics. —AFP

## CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

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

## European stocks steady amid Biden stimulus doubts

**LONDON:** European stock markets steadied yesterday amid doubts over the passage of US President-elect Joe Biden's flagship stimulus policy. Nearing the half-way mark, London's benchmark FTSE 100 index was down 0.3 percent, Paris flat-lined and Frankfurt added 0.2 percent.

Asia mostly closed lower following a recent rally, though Hong Kong and Shanghai rose on data showing China's economy expanded a forecast-beating 2.3 percent last year.

While the reading was the weakest in four decades, it showed growth was picking up again after a devastating start to 2020 as swathes of the country were shut down to contain the deadly coronavirus.

The dollar traded mixed, Bitcoin held steady and oil prices declined, while most US markets were shut for Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Focus is turning to Biden's inauguration tomorrow and hopes that his massive spending plan can get through Congress.

### Stimulus concerns

"European markets have stumbled into a new week, with Biden's stimulus promises doing little to help sentiment given doubts over just how much of that package will be approved in Congress," said Joshua Mahony, senior market analyst at online traders IG. "With the US markets closed for Martin Luther King day, today provides a gentle entry into a week that will be dominated by the US."

"While US trading activity will be minimized today, speculation over whether Biden will be able to garner enough support to pass his full stimulus package remain a key concern for markets," Mahony added.

While broadly welcomed on trading floors, Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus proposal was unable to fuel fresh gains with the spending spree largely priced in. Concern about a frightening spike in new virus cases was also keeping a lid on buying sentiment as governments are forced to impose fresh lockdowns while battling to roll out vaccines. —AFP

## France's Total takes stake in Indian solar energy group Adani

**PARIS:** French oil giant Total yesterday that it would pay \$2.5 billion for a 20 percent stake in India's Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL), a major solar energy producer, as it diversifies away from fossil fuels into renewables. Along with the 20 percent direct stake comes a 50 percent holding in a portfolio of solar energy assets operated by AGEL, part of the Adani group, Total said in a statement.

## KIB appoints Manal Al-Rubaian as Dy GM of internal audit dept

**KUWAIT:** As part of its efforts to tap into the national talent pool and leverage local expertise, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced the appointment of Manal Adnan Al-Rubaian as Deputy General Manager of the Internal Audit Department. Al-Rubaian brings a wealth of experience to her new role of managing the internal audit team, and will be tasked with identifying, measuring and monitoring internal audit programs. Besides providing recommendations and guidance aimed at upgrading KIB's operations, Al-Rubaian will play a key role in establishing and strengthening risk management, internal control and governance.

Al-Rubaian joins KIB with over 12 years of experience in Islamic finance. Most recently, she held the position of Head of Internal Audit at Al-Rajhi Bank in Kuwait, after having served as Senior Auditor at Kuwait Finance House (KFH) and Internal Auditor at Boubyan Bank, Kuwait. Al-Rubaian received Commemorative Coins from Governor of Central Bank of Kuwait marking her outstanding efforts and achievements and academic research in the field of internal auditing in Kuwait. She is also the first

## Eurostar urges state support as virus wipes out train traffic

**LONDON:** Eurostar, whose train services through the Channel Tunnel have been decimated by the coronavirus pandemic, has called on the UK government to provide it with the same financial support handed to ground airlines over concerns about a possible collapse.

Christophe Fanchet, a senior executive from SNCF, the French state railway and part-owner of Eurostar, said on Friday that the London-based company was in "a very critical" state after a collapse in travel between Britain and the European continent. And following a call by British businesses for a UK government rescue of London-based Eurostar, the company on Monday reiterated the need for support.

"We are encouraged by the (British) government backed loans that have been awarded to airlines and would once again ask that this kind of support be extended to international high-speed rail which has been severely impacted by the pandemic," Eurostar said in a statement. "Without additional funding from government there is a real risk to the survival of Eurostar, the green gateway to Europe, as the current situation is very serious," it added in reference to trains' lower emissions compared with planes.

Separately, the Department for Transport said it recognized "the significant financial challenges facing Eurostar as a result of COVID-19 and the unprecedented circumstances currently faced by the international travel industry". While it did not refer to the loans request, the department said it would continue to work

The two companies have had a partnership accord since 2018, when Total acquired a stake in Adani Gas Limited. India relies heavily on coal but has been moving into renewables and natural gas in an effort to reduce damaging pollution levels and costs.

Total described AGEL as the world's biggest solar energy developer. It operates 3.0 gigawatts of renewable energy assets, with another 3.0 GW under construction and 8.6 GW in development. AGEL is aiming for 25 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2025. "Taking a stake in AGEL is a major step in the strategy put in place with Adani in renewable energy in India," Total's chief executive Patrick Pouyanné said in the statement. "Given the size of its market, India is the right country to put in motion our strategy for energy transition based on the two pillars of solar and natural gas," he said. —AFP

Kuwait to be selected as one of the influential women leaders in the business and Islamic finance sector in 2020 by Cambridge Islamic Finance Advisory, where Al-Rubaian ranked 45th among 300 leading women in the same field worldwide.

In a statement, KIB pointed out that having talented and experienced executives like Al-Rubaian is essential for consolidating the Bank's position among other local banks, stressing that the Bank is on track to achieve its long-term and short-term objectives of managing internal audit and running control and governance operations, as well as improving the overall control environment.

The Bank stated that Al-Rubaian's competence is the result of many years of experience in managing internal audit work in line with the highest quality standards. It also serves to note that Al-Rubaian had chosen KIB's transformation into an Islamic bank as a topic for her Master's thesis in 2013 at Gulf University in Bahrain, which was published in the International Journal of Management and Information Technology (IJMIT), entitled: Evaluating the Performance of Kuwait International Bank "An analytical study of the effects of the convert from the conventional system to a full-fledged Islamic system". In her research paper, Al-Rubaian demonstrates a deep understanding of KIB's business policy - an asset that will help her contribute towards reflecting the Bank's ambitions to achieve success in the near future.

In its statement, KIB also highlighted its dynamic

role in supporting the aspiring Kuwaiti youth as it strives to continuously develop its human capital by scouting local talents with outstanding experience in the banking sector, with the aim of fulfilling its new policy of Kuwaitizing senior management positions as per the Central Bank's instructions. The Bank is also keen to capitalize on the strengths and talents of existing employees by offering intensive programs and training courses that boost their performance.

It is worth mentioning that Manal Al-Rubaian graduated from Kuwait University where she majored in Mathematics and minored in Accounting. She holds a postgraduate diploma in Islamic Finance from the same university with a senior project entitled: "Internal Audit and Shari'a Control in Islamic Banks (Integration and Coherence)". Al-Rubaian's professional profile boasts a number of prestigious training courses and professional certificates, including the Internal Audit Practitioner from the Institute of Internal Auditors, as well as Islamic Specialist in Sharia Audit (CISSA) from the Authority General Council for Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions (CIBAFI).



Manal Al-Rubaian



LONDON: Workers clean the platform area as a Eurostar train bound for Paris prepares to leave St Pancras International train station in London yesterday. British business leaders yesterday urged the government to rescue Eurostar, after the firm said it was close to collapse following border closures to contain new COVID-19 strains. —AFP

closely with Eurostar over "the safe recovery of international travel".

Eurostar is 55 percent owned by the SNCF, 30 percent by Canadian fund manager CDPQ, 10 percent by Britain-based fund Hermes Infrastructure, and five percent by the Belgian railway SNCB.

British business leaders have joined the call for the UK government to financially rescue Eurostar. In a letter dated Friday and sent to British finance minister Rishi

Sunak, London First lobby group said Eurostar needed "swift action to safeguard its future", or further harm Britain's economy and environmental targets.

Signed by 25 executives and academics, the letter urged Britain's Treasury and Department for Transport not to allow Eurostar to collapse. "If this viable business is allowed to fall between the cracks of support — neither an airline, nor a domestic railway — our (economic) recovery could be damaged." —AFP

## Suez receives Ardian-GIP proposal

**PARIS:** French water management company Suez received an acquisition offer Sunday from investment firms Ardian and GIP as it fights off a bid from arch-rival Veolia. Months of acrimonious wrangling between the two massive French companies have seen Veolia manoeuvre to become Suez's main shareholder after purchasing a 29.9 percent stake. But Ardian is now offering 18 euros per share (\$21) — matching another earlier Veolia offer that valued the whole company at 11.3 billion euros (\$13.65 billion). Suez's board of directors said it had received a "letter of intent from

Ardian and GIP (Global Infrastructure Partners), aiming to allow a friendly and rapid solution to the situation created by the Veolia offer". The fresh proposal aims to guarantee the sustainability of the two French giants of water and waste by offering a way out. Suez CEO Bertrand Camus said the Ardian offer would preserve jobs and maintain "essential competition" within France.

The proposal "has the advantage of ticking a lot of boxes", he said in a statement. Last year, commodities giant Veolia secured a deal to buy almost 30 percent of Suez from Engie, an energy player in which the French state owns a 22 percent stake—despite the government voting against the sale. Veolia's takeover had the potential to create a global giant supplying power generation, waste management and water services to municipalities worldwide. —AFP

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## Lifestyle | Features

## Expatriate youth delves into historical fantasy to write debut novel



Sushyanth Sridhar

By Sajeev K Peter

Locked down and isolated for nearly six months, expat youth Sushyanth Sridhar delves into the depths of historical fantasy to write his maiden novel 'Jon Oliver'. The 19-year-old engineering student at National Institute of Technology (NIT), Warangal, India, has created an intriguing world of mystery and myth in this book that seeks to stress the importance of mental health. "I was isolated from my family and friends due to the COVID pandemic and had to spend the lockdown in the city of Chennai with my grandmother," says Sushyanth.

The boredom of being locked between four walls motivated the Indian youth to dive deeper into history, understand the effects of psychosis disorder and finish writing 'Jon Oliver'. Immersing himself in the historical era of the 1930s helped him deal with the confinement of the lockdown, he says. According to Sushyanth,

"Don't spend your time trying to bring others down that will keep you youthful and beautiful too!!! Sending you love. #beautyfromtheinsideout #beautyhasno-expirationdate. (sic)" The 'Waiting For Tonight' hitmaker - who unveiled her eponymous beauty brand earlier this month - recently insisted her glowing complexion is not the result of Botox and she will hold off turning to "the needles" for as long as she can by using the best products.

Jennifer was involved in the creation of every piece in the range, including the That JLo Glow Serum, which took 20 attempts to get right. And the 'In The Morning' singer insisted she would never put out skincare that she didn't believe in under her own name. She said: "I'm not that person. I don't have anything against people doing that; it's just not my thing. I'm more about a natural approach to skincare. Whatever topical I use has to be somewhat natural, but I want them to work. I want the hyaluronic acid in there. I want the things that are going to help, because I don't want to have to go to the needles at some point. I'm not saying one day I won't, but I haven't yet."

The line is comprised of eight products in total - which come in rose gold packaging inspired by Jennifer's favorite brand Cartier - with prices ranging between \$18 (facemask) and \$79 for the That JLo Glow serum. The 'Made in Manhattan' star - who is constantly asked what the secret to her ageless appearance is - also revealed that she has olive oil to thank for her radiant glow. She said: "This has been something I've been thinking about for maybe the past 20 years. I was just, like, I have to do skincare because the number one question, no matter where I went - if I was filming a movie, music, or whatever - was, What are you doing for your skin? And as I got more mature, the question came even more frequently." — Bang Showbiz

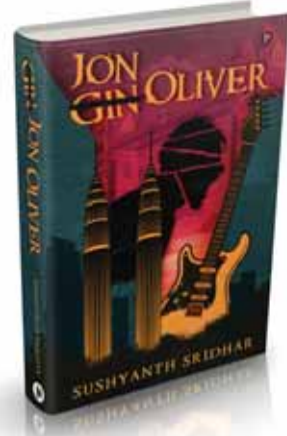
## Jennifer Lopez: I have never done Botox

Jennifer Lopez shut down a troll who accused her of getting Botox. The JLo Beauty founder has made it clear she has never injected her skin several times and hilariously told an Instagram user to try being "more positive and kind to others" if they want to say "youthful". The troll commented on a video of the 51-year-old singer-and-



Jennifer Lopez

actress showing the results of her JLo Glow Multitasking Serum mask. They wrote: "You definitely have Botox. And tons of it." Jennifer replied: "LOL that's just my face!! for the 500 millionth time...I have never done Botox or any injectable or surgery!! Just saying. "Get you some JLo Beauty and feel beautiful in your own skin!! And here is another JLo Beauty secret: try spending your time being more positive, kind and uplifting of others."



he used to enjoy writing historical fantasy ever since he was a child studying at FAIPS - DPS, Kuwait.

Jon, the protagonist of the book, embarks on a holiday with his family to Malaysia during the summer of 2018. Jon happens to be an easy prey to the vile

effects of a psychosis disorder that ruins his holiday. He is haunted by a man called Finn Larsen, who he assumes to be his arch-nemesis. He fails to realize that Larsen is a figment of his imagination.

"As I have been an avid Model United Nations (MUN) delegate and director through my schooling in Kuwait, I developed an interest in authoring background guides, papers and resolutions," says Sushyanth. This is what subsequently inspired him to write 'Jon Oliver' in the psychological/history genre, he says.

'Jon Oliver' highlights the importance of tranquility and public order in the era of 2018 and 1931 respectively. The imaginary world created by Jon is set in the year 1931 and Larsen is characterized as a mobster in London. Jon builds his alter ego, Gin Oliver, to chase Larsen down the River Thames and bring down his criminal empire. Larsen joins hands with a burgeoning fascist syndicate based in London to immortalize his power.

## Historical fiction

"Writing historical fiction gives me an opportunity to translate to a different era and relive the past. I enjoy the thrill of retracing the routes of popular cultures. It also gives me an opportunity to speculate alternative ending to game-changing historical events and scrutinize its possible aftermath," Sushyanth says, explaining the rationale behind foraging into the genre.

The book was released on online portals such as - iBook, Googleplay, Amazon, Kobo, and Flipkart - on January 14, 2021. The paperback version is now also available in Kuwait. A formal virtual book launch will be held in Kuwait on January 22, 2021 in the presence of well-known Kuwaiti personalities. "I wish to build history as my stronghold for my upcoming books as well," Sushyanth quips.

## 'Paddington' bears tour crowd-free Machu Picchu



This file photo shows the archaeological site of Machu Picchu, in Cusco, Peru amid the new coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

Two members of South America's only bear species-a mother and her cub-have been spotted exploring the ruins of the Inca citadel of Machu Picchu, where tourist numbers have been restricted due to the pandemic. The pair of Spectacled bears, also known as Andean bears, were captured on film clambering around the mountainous site's dry-stone walls before slinking off into the jungle, Peru's culture ministry said. With the absence of tourists due to the coronavirus pandemic, the bears-said to be the inspiration for the children's book character Paddington Bear, who came from the jungles of Peru-have been able to explore where they would other-

wise avoid.

Biologist Ernesto Escalante, who is in charge of the Machu Picchu sanctuary surrounding the archaeological site, said the mammals are naturally fearful of humans. The Spectacled bear is classified as "vulnerable" on the red list of threatened species of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It is the only surviving bear species in South America and the last of the short-faced bear subgroup. It is a small omnivorous mammal, standing between 1.3 meters (4.2 feet) and 1.9 meters tall and weighing between 80 and 125 kilograms (176-275 pounds).

The dark-colored bear, usually black,

gets its name from light patches on its face that form spectacle-like rings around its eyes. Humans are its main threat, encroaching on their natural habitat and killing bears that damage crops or capture livestock. Andean bear products are used for medicinal or ritual purposes, according to the IUCN, and in some areas the creatures' meat is highly prized. Live bears are sometimes captured and sold. Machu Picchu was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1983. Visitor numbers are restricted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. — AFP



Venice



Louvre Museum



Machu Picchu



Phuket, Thailand

## WORLD'S TOURIST HUBS, 'GHOST TOWNS' FOR HOW LONG?

The coronavirus pandemic has brought the world's top tourist draws, from the ruins of Machu Picchu to Thailand's sandy beaches, to a standstill. Now tourism professionals and local authorities are hoping against hope for an economic recovery that will bring the punters back. Here are some key examples.

## Not so serenissima Venice

The Renaissance city of Venice on Italy's northern Adriatic coast is almost entirely dependent on tourism. The first nine months of 2020 saw a drop of 73.1 percent in foreign tourist arrivals, according to a study published by an employment consultancy in December. The overall decrease was 59.5 percent. "Without the tourists, Venice has become a ghost town, a dead city like Pompeii," said Anna Bigal, president of the lagoon city's tourist guide cooperative, who has led only around a dozen tours in the past year. "There's a feeling of sadness when you walk down the street."

## Dim prospects in City of Lights

In Paris, 2020 was a disaster, with tourist numbers nose-diving by two-thirds, translating into a loss of revenue estimated at 12.1 billion euros (\$14.5 billion) compared with 2019. The Louvre Museum, the world's largest, welcomed 72 percent fewer visitors last year. "We are starting the year with activity halted for at least three months, maybe a lot longer," said Didier Arino, director of independent advisory group

Protourisme, noting that the Paris region depends heavily not only on tourists but also on business travellers.

## Downbeat in Machu Picchu

Some 80 percent of businesses bunched around the mountainous Inca citadel remain closed, with the local economy-heavily dependent on foreign tourists-at a standstill. Local mayor Darwin Baca expects 2021 to be another bust, fearing that business will not return

to normal until at least 2022, depending on the success of vaccination programs.

## Barcelona blues

The mood is also morose in Barcelona, one of Spain's top tourist destinations, where hotel occupancy plunged from 8.5 million in 2019 to 1.8 million last year. The few hotels still operating have repurposed into venues for teleworkers or have slashed their long-stay rates to compete with traditional

rental accommodations.

## Thai transformation

Authorities in Thailand have turned to domestic tourism to keep the industry afloat, adding bank holidays and creating incentives for locals to travel. The policy has borne fruit in areas that are off the beaten track for international tourists such as in the northeast. The Krungsri bank forecasts that the country will take two to three years to return to its pre-pandemic tourism levels, with tourism-linked employment and commercial activity expected to remain depressed.

## Dubrovnik dreams

Croatia's medieval walled city of Dubrovnik, which saw an 85 percent plunge in visitors last year, is dreaming of a return to pre-pandemic levels. "The outlook is good for now," said Ana Hrnica, head of the tourist office. "There's a great desire to go back to 'normal' and we think that's going to happen." — AFP



Dubrovnik, Croatia



Sagrada Familia, Spain

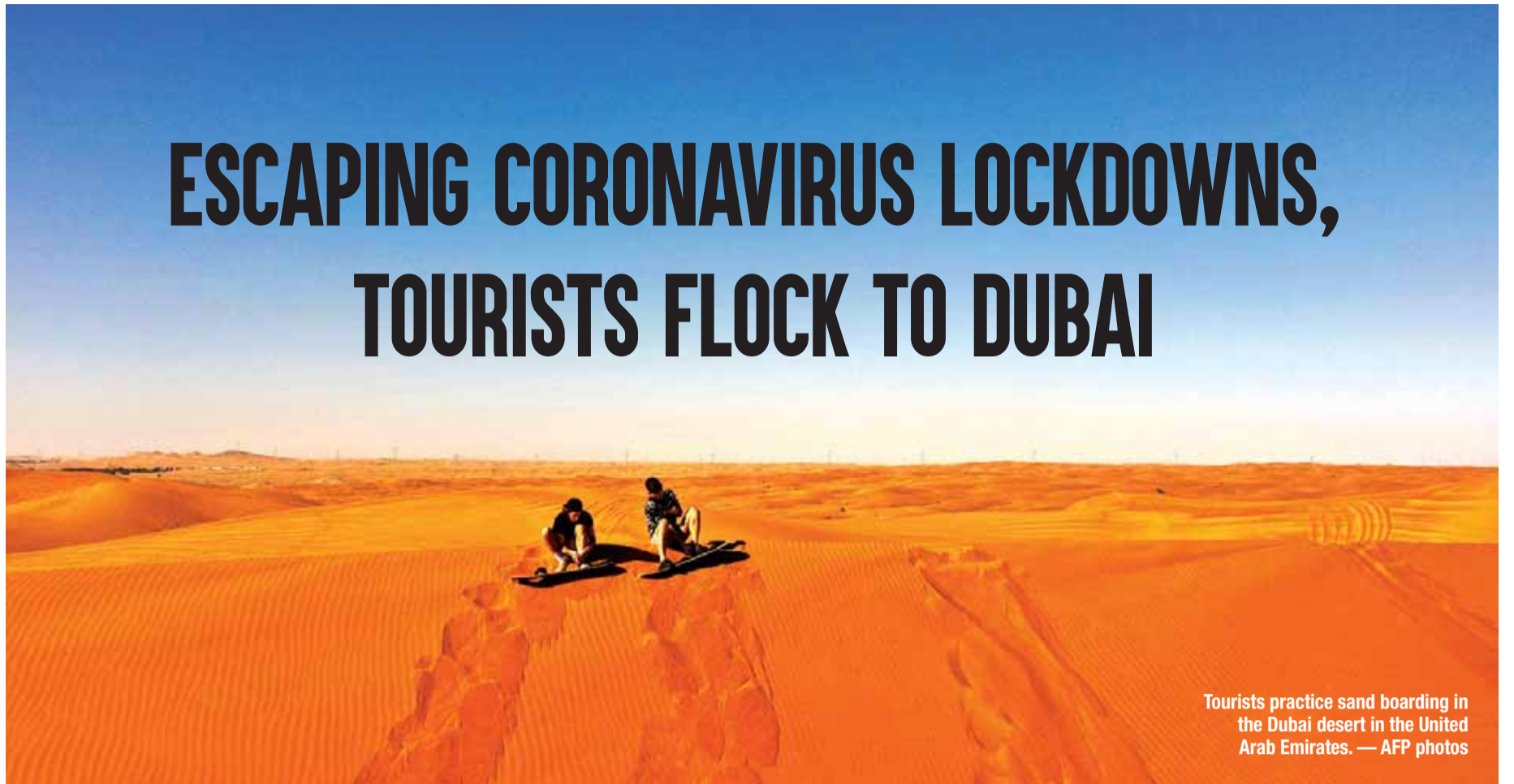
Lifestyle | Features

As much of the world tightens lockdowns to stem coronavirus, Dubai has flung its doors open, branding itself as a sunny, quarantine-free escape—despite a sharp rise in cases. While mask-wearing and social distancing are strictly enforced, life in the tourism-reliant emirate looks much like normal, with its restaurants, hotels and mega-malls open for business. Images of sports stars and television personalities enjoying life at beach clubs and cocktail bars have flooded social media—sometimes to disapproval back home.

Emirates, which restored its network to about three quarters of pre-pandemic levels, is again operating A380 super-jumbos - the world's largest commercial airliner—ferrying in visitors from Britain and Russia. Russian tourist, Dmitriy Melnikov, said he came to Dubai because his choices were otherwise limited, with many destinations in partial or full lockdown. "I am not scared," the 30-year-old told AFP. "If you look at people here, everyone has a mask, and I think it's cool."



A mask-clad tourist visits the historic Al-Fahidi neighborhood of Dubai.



Tourists practice sand boarding in the Dubai desert in the United Arab Emirates. — AFP photos

But the downside to becoming one of the world's most open destinations has been a sharp rise in coronavirus cases. Daily detected cases hover in the mid-3,000s across the United Arab Emirates, which has a population of under 10 million, with 745 deaths from Covid-19 since the pandemic began. "There are significant risks in Dubai remaining so open," said Scott Livermore, chief economist at Oxford Economics Middle East. "A renewed outbreak of Covid-19 would set the recovery back quite some way."

'Willing to take the risk'

With a negative PCR test in their home countries—and possibly another upon arrival, depending on the place of departure—tourists can freely enter Dubai, where winter temperatures average a pleasant 25 degrees Celsius (77 degrees Fahrenheit). The neighboring emirate of Abu Dhabi, which with large oil reserves is less dependent on tourism, has taken a

much more conservative approach, generally requiring quarantine on arrival. In the Al-Fahidi historical neighborhood in Dubai, mask-clad tourists walk through alleyways, taking pictures of the recreation of life a century ago. Hand sanitizers and floor stickers warning people to maintain their distance are everywhere, while most restaurants have replaced their menus with digital QR barcodes, that can be displayed on a smartphone.

"Before the coronavirus, tour groups were up to 100 or 250 visitors with each tour guide, but now things are different, only 20 visitors maximum for each tour guide," said the district's director Nasser Juma bin Sulaiman. Andi Pitman, from the US state of Alabama, said it was her first trip abroad since the start of the pandemic. "We are very excited to be here and a little nervous, but happy to be out again," she told AFP, strolling through Al-Fahidi with her husband and two children. "None of us have had the vaccine yet,

but we have small kids that need to be out and need to see the world, so we're willing to take the risk." Sophia Amouch, from France, said she was not too concerned about the rise in cases in the UAE. "Everything is run better here," the 25-year-old told AFP, adding that she felt "safer in Dubai, where everyone abides by all the measures."

'Growth strategy'

Tourism has long been an economic mainstay of Dubai, which welcomed more than 16 million visitors in 2019. Before the pandemic, the aim was to reach 20 million by 2020. The economy—the most diversified in the Gulf—was decimated by the crisis. The government was counting on the six-month Dubai Expo 2020 global trade fair—delayed by a year and now set to open in October—to attract millions of visitors and boost the economy. Now it is seeking to find what benefits it can from the crisis.

"Dubai seems to be positioning itself as the destination of choice for those wanting to escape lockdown conditions and have a winter break, especially given ski resorts in Europe are largely closed," said Livermore. "This is a growth strategy in its own right, but the more successful Dubai can be in achieving this aim, the more benefits will spill over for when Expo opens." Ahead of the Expo, authorities are mounting a huge vaccination campaign, which has seen 14 percent of the population inoculated. "Travel and tourism is very important to Dubai," Livermore said. "The sector is crucial for generating a sustainable recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. "It is essential the city remains open and connected, but critically keeps Covid-19 in check." — AFP



A tourist practices sand boarding.



A mask-clad Israeli tourist photographs a falconer holding a falcon during a visit to the historic Al-Fahidi neighborhood of Dubai.



A mask-clad falconer holds a falcon near tourists at the historic Al-Fahidi neighborhood of Dubai.



Mask-clad Israeli tourists walk towards their bus after a visit to the historic Al-Fahidi neighborhood of Dubai.

Michelin unveils COVID-era France picks despite criticism

The Michelin Guide revealed yesterday its annual pick of France's top restaurants despite criticism over its decision to hold the awards while establishments remain closed in the Covid-19 pandemic. Three-star chefs can rest easy, however, after Michelin said none will be demoted as the health crisis rages. The industry bible's boss Gwendal Poullennec defended inspections that led to 57 new stars overall, even though restaurants remain shuttered after lockdowns imposed last spring and again since October. "It's an important decision to support the industry, despite the current situation and perhaps even because of the situation," Poullennec told AFP.



"All the establishments that have kept their star this year or won one are restaurants that fully deserve it," he said. Michelin has drawn fire for bestowing its verdicts as chefs rack up losses while adapting their menus for takeaway or deliveries—and food fans have little chance of booking tables anytime soon,

with or without face masks. The rival Best 50 list, based in Britain, cancelled its 2020 ranking last year, while France's La Liste said this month that instead of rankings it would honor innovative chefs who have persevered amid the pandemic. Michelin called off the lavish gala ceremony that was to be held in Cognac, southwest France—the first time outside Paris—and instead will announce the 2021 winners in a YouTube broadcast from the Eiffel Tower.

'Consistent quality'

But Poullennec said all three-star restaurants will keep their stars—France including Monaco counts 29—while the handful of demotions will affect only restaurants that have closed or changed their dining concept. He insisted that inspectors worked double duty and even cancelled their sacrosanct summer holidays to eat and drink as much as possible when restaurants were allowed to open under strict virus restrictions between France's lockdowns.

Michelin also brought in inspectors from elsewhere in Europe and even Asia to back up the French team. "This selection has been made with the same serious attention, and inspectors were able to judge as many meals as the previous year," he said. "Despite the difficulties, chefs have risen to the occasion and maintained consistent quality, at times even succeeding in making further progress," he added. Poullennec, who took over the guide in 2018, has overseen several choices that have raised eyebrows among chefs and foodies alike. Last year Michelin shocked industry insiders by downgrading the Auberge du Pont de Collonges—the oldest three-starred restaurant in the world—after the death of its legendary chef Paul Bocuse.

And in January 2019, Marc Veyrat became the first chef to sue the famous red guidebook after it withdrew the third star for his French Alps restaurant La Maison des Bois just a year after it was awarded. Veyrat, who lost his case, has said he never wants to see a Michelin inspector in any of his restaurants ever again. — AFP

Phil Spector, pop producer convicted of murder, dead at 81

Phil Spector, who revolutionized 1960s pop music with his "Wall of Sound" production technique but who was imprisoned in 2009 for murder, has died at age 81, authorities said Sunday. In his heyday, Spector was the undisputed king of rock 'n' roll producers, the "Tycoon of Teen" whose music helped define the soaring optimism of a generation. But the sharp suits and dark sunglasses favored by the diminutive genius gave way to prison clothes after he was convicted of the 2003 shooting death of actress Lana Clarkson.

Spector was pronounced dead Saturday and his "official cause of death will be determined by the medical examiner," according to a statement from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Born in New York to Russian-Jewish parents in 1939, Spector was only eight years old when his father committed suicide, a family tragedy that was to leave lasting scars on the young Spector's psyche. In the aftermath of his father's death, Spector, his mother and his sister moved to Los Angeles for a fresh start. It was not long before Spector's musical talents emerged, with the slight teenager showing a flair for song-writing and playing guitar.

Forming his first group, The Teddy Bears, with three high-school friends, Spector soon struck gold with the 1958 single "To Know Him Is to Love Him"—the inscription on his father's gravestone. The record went to number one on the Billboard Hot 100 and sold five million copies. The Teddy Bears were unable to repeat the success and they split up the following year. Badly affected by stage fright, Spector began channeling his energies into producing and song-writing, helping to write Ben E. King's 1961 hit "Spanish Harlem."

The creation of his own "Philles" record label signaled the beginning of Spector's prime, when he almost single-handedly



changed the recording industry with the "Wall of Sound." Using large numbers of musicians playing individual parts layered upon each other, the technique gave Spector's productions a distinctive, orchestral quality that he famously described as "a Wagnerian approach to rock & roll: little symphonies for the kids." "I knew Beethoven was more important than whoever was playing his music," he once said. "That's what I wanted to be."

'I'm probably relatively insane'

Working with The Crystals, The Ronettes and The Righteous Brothers, Spector became a hit machine, with tracks including "Da Doo Ron Ron," "Then He Kissed Me," "Be My Baby," "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'" and "Unchained Melody." The final act signed to the Phillies label was Ike and Tina Turner in 1966, but Spector was dismayed when the extraordinary "River Deep-Mountain High" reached only 88th in the US singles charts.

Marrying Ronettes lead singer "Ronnie" Bennett in 1968, Spector retreated from the public eye a multi-millionaire. He returned in the early 1970s for a triumphant collaboration with The Beatles on their hit album "Let It Be," and produced solo albums for John Lennon ("Imagine") and George Harrison. As the 1970s pro-

gressed, Spector became increasingly reclusive and rumors of his eccentric behavior became legend.

The graphic testimony at his murder trial of repeated gun-toting rages only served to confirm what had been common knowledge within the music world for years. Ronnie, who divorced him in 1974, chronicled years of abusive behavior in her autobiography, which included the producer threatening to kill her and put her body on display in a golden glass-topped coffin he kept in her basement. "I can only say that when I left in the early '70s, I knew that if I didn't leave at that time, I was going to die there," Ronnie wrote later.

Spector's threatening behavior also extended to the artists he worked with. He was alleged to have fired a gun into a studio while working with Lennon during the recording of "Rock 'n' Roll" and once held a gun to Leonard Cohen's head during sessions for "Death of a Ladies' Man."

In another incident, he held punk band The Ramones hostage at gunpoint during recording of their album "End of the Century." Spector was jailed for the second-degree murder after Lana Clarkson was shot dead at his home though he claimed it was an accidental suicide. His first trial, in 2007, was declared a mistrial due to a hung jury before he was convicted two years later. Clues to Spector's troubled state of mind were evident in a rare and wide-ranging interview he gave to British newspaper The Daily Telegraph, just weeks before Clarkson died. "I would say I'm probably relatively insane, to an extent," he said. "I'm my own worst enemy. I have devils inside that fight me. "People idolize me, want to be like me, but I tell them, 'Trust me, you don't want my life.' Because it hasn't been a very pleasant life. "I've been a very tortured soul. I have not been at peace with myself. I have not been happy." — AFP

## Sports

# 'Perfect' Inter shock Juventus to move level with leaders Milan

## Napoli advance with 6-0 route of Fiorentina

**MILAN:** Inter Milan shocked champions Juventus 2-0 to move level on points with Serie A leaders AC Milan on Sunday, boosting their hopes of a first league title since 2010. Arturo Vidal got his head to a Nicolo Barella cross in the 12th minute for his first league goal for Inter Milan against his former club.

Barella added the second seven minutes after the break as Inter claimed a first victory over Juventus since September 2016, ending a series of seven matches without a win. "It was a bad defeat, we didn't expect it, we couldn't have put in a worse performance than this," said Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo after his second league defeat this season. "Our attitude was wrong, right from the start. We were too passive, fearful, we only thought about the defensive phase."

Inter are equal on 40 points with local rivals Milan, with Juventus seven points behind the top two in fifth. "To win against a team like Juve you have to touch perfection," said Inter coach Antonio Conte after his first win in four meetings against the club he led to the first three of their current run of nine consecutive league titles. "I'm happy for the lads because these are games that give you self-esteem and make you understand that we're on the right path. I've seen a credible Inter, and it is the greatest satisfaction after a year and a half of work".

### Vidal sets the tone

Cristiano Ronaldo looked to have broken through for the away side after 11 minutes but Federico Chiesa was ruled offside in the build-up. And Chilean Vidal made no mistake for last season's Serie A runners-up two minutes later off Barella's perfect cross.

"We've shown that we're up to fighting for the

Scudetto," warned Vidal, who won four league titles in as many years with Juventus. Romelu Lukaku then forced a save from Juventus goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny on 24 minutes, with Lautaro Martinez spurning the chance to score on the rebound.

Omnipresent midfielder Barella created another chance for Lukaku which Szczesny cleared, and the Polish keeper also denied Barella before punching the ball off Lukaku's head at full stretch. A superb Alessandro Bastoni through ball to Barella paid off in the 52nd minute, with the pacy Italy midfielder shaking off Gianluca Frabotta and Giorgio Chiellini to blast home the second.

Pirlo made a triple change just before the hour with Weston McKennie, Federico Bernardeschi and Dejan Kulusevski coming off the bench. But Inter keeper Samir Handanovic was rarely threatened, clearing a McKennie header on 61 minutes, and a Chiesa effort three minutes from time. "It's a slip-up, but our ambition remains the same, there is still a long way to go," warned Pirlo, whose side next meet Napoli in Wednesday's Italian SuperCup.

### Six-goal Napoli go third

In Naples, Lorenzo Insigne scored twice and set up another as Napoli thumped Fiorentina 6-0 to move third ahead of Roma who lost 3-0 to local rivals Lazio on Friday. Insigne got the first goal in the fifth minute at the Diego Armando Maradona Stadium as Gennaro Gattuso's side went four goals up in the first half.

Fiorentina missed chances to equalise with Napoli keeper David Ospina denying Franck Ribery before Diego Demme, Hirving Lozano and Piotr Zielinski notched three goals for the hosts in the last nine minutes before the break.

Napoli were awarded a penalty after Gaetano



**MILAN:** Inter Milan's Chilean midfielder Arturo Vidal opens the scoring past Juventus' Polish goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny during the Italian Serie A football match Inter vs Juventus on Sunday at the San Siro stadium in Milan. —AFP

Castrovilli fouled Tiemoue Bakayoko. Insigne converted from the spot for his ninth goal this season. Substitute Matteo Politano completed the rout with a minute to go. "It looked easy but it wasn't," said Gattuso as Napoli moved level on points with Roma.

Atalanta missed the chance to move third, dropping points before next week's trip to AC

Milan with a goalless draw against lowly Genoa. Gian Piero Gasperini's side had won their first three matches of the year with a total of 12 goals scored. Hans Hateboer rattled the post for Atalanta after 65 minutes in the best chance for the hosts who are sixth, eight points behind Milan. Genoa are 16th position, two points above the relegation zone. —AFP

## Bairstow, Lawrence seal seven-wicket win for England

**GALLE:** After a seven-wicket win, a double-century innings, and two five-wicket hauls for the bowlers, England captain Joe Root still feels his side "got away" with too many mistakes against Sri Lanka. England won the first Test in Galle yesterday with Jonny Bairstow and Dan Lawrence negotiating what Bairstow called a "tricky" finish after losing three quick wickets before the overnight close Sunday.

Bairstow, who cracked a four to pass the winning target, and Lawrence steadied the innings and scored the required 36 runs in less than 10 overs. The crumbling pitch gave Sri Lanka's spinners hopes of claiming more wickets, but Bairstow (35) and Lawrence (21) took England to 76-3 after resuming at 38-3. Sri Lanka called a review on one Dilruwan Perera ball to Lawrence — who missed a reverse sweep — but the TV replay found the faintest edge before it hit his pads.

The win should have been a stroll after Sri Lanka collapsed to 135 in the first innings and England made 421 with a Joe Root double century. But the home side hit back with a determined 359 in their second innings before having England in trouble at 14-3 at one stage late Sunday. "These run chases are always a little bit nervy," said the captain, who hit 228 in the first innings when he also saw six England batsmen fall in a single session, tarnishing the big total.

### 'Little mistakes' rankle

He said the team's lack of preparation before the match — stuck in a bio-secure coronavirus bubble — had been a handicap, but the five-wicket hauls by spinners Dom Bess and Jack Leach were a "brilliant achievement". Bairstow's role overcoming the general batting jitters in his first Test since 2019 was also a plus.

Root already has his thoughts on the second Test starting in Galle on Friday, and four tough Tests in India after that. "There are things and mistakes in this game that we have probably got away with," said Root. "But I am really proud of these guys."

England have now won four away Tests in a row, their best performance since 1955-56. Root has 24 Test wins as a captain, two behind Michael Vaughan's all-time record of 26 for England. "We are not the finished article, we have a long way to go," he added. "If we can keep improving all the time, keep learning from the things and the little mistakes we made then we can keep getting better."

Root said that Sri Lanka are a "very proud" side and England must expect a backlash in the second Test. Sri Lanka skipper Dinesh Chandimal is also looking for more of the attitude from the second innings, when Lahiru Thirimanne scored a stubborn 111.

Chandimal admitted his side gave away the game on the opening day. "We were outplayed in the first innings with the bat and ball," he said. "As a batting unit, we have to get a big total in the first innings. It cost us the game."

If they could have added 70-80 more runs on Sunday, then Sri Lanka could have caused an upset. "It could have been a different story," he declared, adding the first-innings total would be crucial in the second Test. —AFP

## Stones enjoying rebirth at Man City

**MANCHESTER:** John Stones admitted he had to go back to basics to regain Pep Guardiola's faith after scoring twice as Manchester City thrashed Crystal Palace 4-0 on Sunday. City's charge up the table has taken them into second in the Premier League, just two points behind leaders Manchester United with a game in hand to come.

Stones's partnership with Ruben Dias has been pivotal to 12 clean sheets in a 15-game unbeaten run and the England defender also delivered his first two Premier League goals for the club after five seasons in Manchester.

"Keeping these clean sheets is massive. It's a platform for the lads to go and express themselves up front," said Stones. "We are taking great pride in keeping clean sheets and hopefully we can keep the run going."

The signings of Dias and Nathan Ake during the summer transfer window could have signaled the end of Stones's time at the Etihad after he struggled for game time even when Guardiola was short on center-back options last season following the departure of Vincent Kompany and a long-term injury to Aymeric Laporte.

"It's always tough when you are not playing and you don't perform as you can because you put too much pressure on yourself," added Stones. "I went back to the basics, looked at myself first and looked at what I can improve on in every aspect."

Guardiola hailed the impact Dias has had on his center-back partner and is relieved that the defensive deficiencies that ruined his side's title defense last season appear to have been ironed out. "We don't make mistakes," he said. "In the past, especially last season we made a lot of mistakes. This season if the opponent scores a goal, ok, but we make them do it. They give us this confidence that we can score a goal and we don't concede. Today we didn't concede one shot on target and that is fundamental to our game. Ruben helped us a lot and John, alongside Ruben, grew up."

### 100 assists for De Bruyne

City took full advantage of dropped points for both their biggest title challengers after United and Liverpool played out a disappointing 0-0 draw earlier on Sunday. Despite not hitting the heights of back-to-back league titles under Guardiola between 2017 and 2019, City have now won their last eight games in all competitions.

Kevin De Bruyne registered his 100th City assist with the outside of his right foot for Stones to nod home from close range to open the scoring on 26 minutes. Palace had taken four



**MANCHESTER:** Manchester City's English defender John Stones (center) jumps to head the ball to score the opening goal during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Crystal Palace at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, on Sunday. —AFP

points from their last two trips to the Etihad, but without the injured Wilfried Zaha offered barely any attacking threat as the Eagles remain 13th in the table.

With Gabriel Jesus and Raheem Sterling short on goals and Sergio Aguero absent after coming into close contact with a positive coronavirus case, Ilkay Gundogan's goalscoring form of late has been a major factor in City's revival.

The German midfielder curled home his fourth goal in seven games into the top corner 11 minutes into the second-half to end any doubt over the outcome. Stones then swept home his

second of the night on the rebound after Vicente Guaita saved from Dias's initial powerful header.

Guardiola could then afford the luxury of handing De Bruyne and Gundogan a rare rest for the final 20 minutes ahead of Aston Villa's visit in midweek. Sterling blazed a penalty over the bar late on in Wednesday's 1-0 win over Brighton when handed the responsibility by De Bruyne.

With the Belgian off the field, Sterling got another chance from a set-piece outside the box and this time curled a brilliant free-kick into the top corner two minutes from time to round off a perfect day for City. —AFP

## Arabi, Fatat win big in Women's Indoor Football

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The semifinals of the URC Women's Indoor Football Championship is all set as Arabi Club beat Salva Al-Sabah team 10-3. The top-sided win has placed Arabi in second place with 13 points. Meanwhile, the Fatat Club emerged victorious in its

match held at Kuwait Club hall against Qadisiya with the score of 7-1. With this win, the Fatat Club tops the standings with 19 points, while Kuwait remains in third place with 10 points and Qadisiya in the fourth place with 7 points. The top four teams will face each other in the semifinals following a draw to be held at a later date.



**KUWAIT:** The Fatat Club vs Qadisiya match in action.



**KUWAIT:** The national cycling team returned from UAE after participating in the 'Nakhlat Deerat Dubai' race. Kuwait's Khalid Al-Khalifa won first place in the 80km race.

Live		Matches on TV (Local Timings)	
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE			
West Ham United v West Bromwich Albion	beIN Sports HD 1	21:00	
Leicester City v Chelsea	beIN Sports HD 1	23:15	
SPANISH LEAGUE			
Cadiz CF v Levante	beIN Sports HD 3	21:00	
Real Valladolid v Elche CF	beIN Sports HD 4	21:00	
Deportivo Alaves v Sevilla FC	beIN Sports HD 3	23:30	
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA			
Borussia Monchengladbach v SV Werder Bremen	beIN Sports	20:30	
Bayer 04 Leverkusen v Borussia Dortmund	beIN Sports	22:30	
Hertha Berlin v TSG 1899 Hoffenheim	beIN Sports	22:30	
FSV Mainz 05 v VfL Wolfsburg	beIN Sports	22:30	

Sports

# Brady-led Bucs advance while Mahomes hurt in Chiefs win

## Tampa Bay set for showdown with Rodgers-led Packers

WASHINGTON: Tom Brady threw for two touchdowns and ran for another Sunday to lead the Tampa Bay Buccaneers over New Orleans in the NFL playoffs while defending Super Bowl champion Kansas City withstood Patrick Mahomes suffering a concussion to oust Cleveland.

Six-time Super Bowl champion Brady and a defensive unit that forced four turnovers sparked the visiting Bucs over the Drew Brees-led Saints while Mahomes threw for one touchdown and ran for another before exiting in the third quarter of the Chiefs' 22-17 triumph. "The defense was the key to the game. It was huge," Brady said. "Our defense really balled out, got the turnovers we needed."

Both winners advanced to within one game of next month's Super Bowl in Tampa, the Buccaneers booking a date next Sunday at chilly Green Bay in the NFC Championship game while the Chiefs will host the Buffalo Bills in next Sunday's AFC Championship game.

### Quarterbacks' showdown

In his first Bucs season after 20 years in New England, 43-year-old Brady beat 42-year-old Brees in a duel of the all-time NFL passing yardage leaders. That earned a showdown with star quarterback Aaron Rodgers and the Packers, who lost 38-10 to Tampa Bay in October. "It's great for our team. We worked hard to get to this point," Brady said. "We're going to be playing a great football team. Aaron Rodgers is playing incredible."

Mahomes, last year's Super Bowl Most Valuable Player, completed 21-of-30 passes for 255 yards but suffered a concussion when slammed to the turf by Browns linebacker Mack Wilson. "When any of our teammates go down, we all step up for one another," Chiefs receiver Tyrann Mathieu said.

Mahomes must complete NFL concussion protocols before he can return to face the Bills, who lost to the Chiefs 26-17 in October. "He's actually doing very well. He's feeling pretty good," Chiefs coach

Andy Reid said. "He got hit in the back of the head and kind of knocked the wind out of him and everything else with it. He's doing great right now... we'll see where it goes from here."

At New Orleans, Brady drove the Bucs 61 yards in 11 plays over 5:52 to set up Ryan Succop's 36-yard field goal and put Tampa Bay ahead 23-20 early in the fourth quarter. Devin White, who already had a fumble recovery, intercepted Brees on the Saints' next series to set up Brady's 1-yard touchdown run with 4:57 remaining to produce the final margin.

Mike Edwards intercepted Brees for a fourth Bucs takeaway with 4:17 left and Tampa Bay ran out the clock. Brady completed 18-of-33 passes for 199 yards while Brees, who led New Orleans to a 2010 Super Bowl victory, completed 19-of-34 for 134 yards in what could be his NFL farewell. "He's an incredible player," Brady said.

Wil Lutz kicked field goals of 23 and 42 yards to put the Saints ahead, but the Bucs took a 10-6 lead on Succop's 26-yard field goal and a 3-yard touchdown pass by Brady to Mike Evans. New Orleans answered with a trick play 56-yard touchdown pass from Jameis Winston to Tre'Quan Smith but Succop's 37-yard field goal ending the second quarter pulled Tampa Bay level at 13-13.

Smith caught a 16-yard touchdown pass from Brees 5:17 into the third quarter for a 20-13 Saints lead. White recovered a fumble by Jared Cook to set up Brady's 6-yard touchdown pass to Leonard Fournette — his 77th career playoff TD toss — to equalize at 20-20, setting up the final drama.

### 'HenneThingsIsPossible'

At Kansas City, Baker Mayfield flipped a 4-yard touchdown pass to Jarvis Landry to lift Cleveland within 19-10 early in the third quarter. On Kansas City's next possession, Mahomes was slammed down by Wilson and knocked out of the game. "I pray you back next week," Wilson tweeted after the



KANSAS CITY: Quarterback Patrick Mahomes #15 of the Kansas City Chiefs is assisted by offensive tackle Mike Remmers #75 after an injury from a sack that would remove Mahomes in the third quarter of the AFC Divisional Playoff game against the Cleveland Browns at Arrowhead Stadium on Sunday in Kansas City, Missouri. —AFP

game. "Go be great like you have been." In reply, Mahomes tweeted: "All good brother!"

The Chiefs added a 33-yard Harrison Butker field goal but Cleveland marched 75 yards on 18 plays in 8:17 and pulled within the final margin on Kareem Hunt's 3-yard touchdown run. After a Karl Joseph interception ended a Chiefs drive, Kansas City forced a Cleveland punt and the Chiefs ran out the clock, thanks to a 13-yard run by reserve quarterback Chad Henne and his 5-yard pass to Tyreek Hill for a fourth-down conversion.

"HenneThingsIsPossible," Mahomes tweeted after the victory.

"I'm proud of Chad and the way he handled everything," Reid said. Mahomes opened the scoring on a 1-yard touchdown run and threw a 20-yard touchdown pass to Travis Kelce for a 13-3 Chiefs' lead. Butker field goals of 28 and 50 yards brought a 19-3 halftime lead. "We hurt ourselves in the first half and they capitalized," Mayfield said. "We gave it our all. It's just unfortunate to come up short. It sucks." —AFP

## Bulls overcome Doncic's historic triple-double

LOS ANGELES: Lauri Markkanen scored a team-high 29 points and grabbed 10 rebounds as the Chicago Bulls overcame a historic triple-double from Luka Doncic to beat the Dallas Mavericks 117-101 on Sunday. Garrett Temple scored 17 of his 21 points in the first half as the Bulls snapped a four-game losing streak.

The Bulls shot 50 percent in the first half and led by 19 points at one stage, en route to a 67-52 lead heading into the third quarter. Slovenian sensation Doncic finished with 36 points, 16 rebounds and 15 assists to record his 29th career triple-double to pass Michael Jordan and move into 15th spot on the all-time list.

A frustrated Doncic said the blame for the loss rested squarely on his shoulders because he played selfishly. "The second half, I played terrible," Doncic said. "That's on me, that game. I was being selfish a little bit because I had 30 points in the first half. That wasn't me in the second half. I've got to do way better in the second half. That's just on me."

Doncic shot 11-of-18 from the floor in the first half. He finished with six three-pointers. Doncic became only

the fourth player in NBA history to record at least 35 points, 15 rebounds and 15 assists in a game and the youngest to do so. Oscar Robertson did it five times.

The Bulls had six players in double-figure scoring as their bench outscored the Mavericks reserves 61-22. Chicago's ball movement was outstanding and their defense compiled a season-high 14 steals. This was Markkanen's second game back after missing seven because of COVID-19 protocols.

"I was a little short on my shot and trying to get my legs back," he said. "Conditioning-wise, I feel pretty good." Kristaps Porzingis added 20 points and eight rebounds for Dallas in his third game back since recovering from offseason surgery on his right knee.

Elsewhere, the New York Knicks snapped their five-game NBA losing streak in emphatic style, holding the host Celtics to a season-low total in a 105-75 blowout win. Julius Randle scored 20 points and pulled down 12 rebounds and RJ Barrett added 19 points and 11 boards for the Knicks, who spoiled the season debut of Celtics All-Star guard Kemba Walker, absent from the first 11 games with a left-knee injury. Walker departed in the third quarter with an apparent rib injury, but said he was happy to be back. "It felt really good to be out there," Walker said. "I kind of forgot how



DALLAS: Luka Doncic #77 of the Dallas Mavericks shoots the ball during the game against the Chicago Bulls on Sunday at the American Airlines Center in Dallas, Texas. —AFP

good it feels to be out there."

Jaylen Brown led the Celtics with 25 points as Eastern Conference leader Boston remained without Jayson Tatum, who remained in COVID-19 quarantine. The Knicks never trailed, pushing the lead to as many as 11 in the first quarter and 15 in the second. They opened the second half with a 10-0 scoring burst and led by as many as 37 before it was over.

Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said that, even as his team remained mired in a losing streak, he liked what he

was seeing in practice. "I love the approach and I love the attitude of the guys we had today," Thibodeau said. "A lot of guys stepped up and played really well today."

Celtics coach Brad Stevens, meanwhile, said the game was not representative of Boston. "We had a clunker," Stevens said. "You try to have as few of those as you can." Also, Zion Williamson had 31 points and six rebounds as the New Orleans Pelicans overcame a 43-point performance by Sacramento's De'Aaron Fox to beat the Kings 128-123. —AFP

## Mattress, McDonald's, moaning: Tennis tactics for Aussie isolation

MELBOURNE: From bitter social media posts to workouts using mattresses as hitting partners, dozens of the world's best tennis players confined to Australian hotels for two weeks are dealing with their confinement in contrasting ways. The Australian Open in Melbourne has been delayed three weeks until February 8 because of the coronavirus pandemic, and has run into new problems this week. Positive COVID-19 cases on three of 17 charter flights into the country mean 72 players have been confined to their rooms for the entire 14-day quarantine period.

Others are allowed out, but only for five hours a day, to train in bio-secure 'bubbles'. It means players are having to cope with some unusual problems and find some creative solutions as they try to stay occupied and in shape over two weeks of isolation.

### New surfaces

World number 12 Belinda Bencic revealed her new training method for quarantine, posting a video of her practicing two-handed backhands against her hotel window. Her hotel neighbors may have had something to say about the racket, but she seemed to have no problem with her new glass training partner, which returned every shot.

"Wrong surface, but that doesn't matter for us," she tweeted. Uruguayan star Pablo Cuevas, ranked 68th in the world, used another clever hack for his backhand practice: a mattress turned vertically against the wall. "Yes, I'm going crazy," he wrote on Instagram. Instead of working on shot technique, one player was pictured in his hotel window lifting dumbbells over his head.

### Fast food fuel

Several players took to social media to complain about the hotel food on offer. Europeans Fabio Fognini, Pablo Correno Busta, Corentin Moutet and Marco Cecchinato all posted their disapproval of the Aussie fare served to their rooms.

"Really?" asked Busta, alongside photographic evidence of his culinary horror. Others chose to avoid the quarantine menu altogether, throw their diet out of the window, and order fast food to their room. World number 28 Benoit Paire and world number 118 Damir Dzumhur — who have racked up more than \$10 million in career prize money between them — posted pictures of their chosen quarantine fuel: McDonald's.

### Vermis on video

Unlike other players, Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva discovered that she was not alone in quarantine. The world number 187 posted a video of a mouse running around her hotel room and tweeted that she tried to move to another room without success because of the strict quarantine rules. She said the unwanted roommate was the fault of the authorities who selected her quarantine location. "They put me not in the nicest hotel like other players!" she wrote.

### 'Crazy' complaints

While some of the quarantined players posted about their revamped diets and training regimes, others showed no love for their new surroundings. Austrian Philipp Oswald called the two-week quarantine "crazy" and said the new rules were "never communicated to us" before the charters flights.

World number 71 Sorana Cirstea of Romania said she would not have travelled to Australia if there was a chance of hard quarantine. "I have no issues to stay 14 days in the room watching Netflix. What we can't do is COMPETE after we have stayed 14 days on a couch," she tweeted.



ADELAIDE: Men's world number one tennis player Novak Djokovic of Serbia gestures from his hotel balcony in Adelaide yesterday, one of the locations where players have quarantined for two weeks upon their arrival ahead of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne. —AFP

### Wise counsel

Many social media users have derided the players, accusing them of being entitled for moaning about their free stay while thousands of Australians remain stranded abroad. Former tennis player and coach Roger Rasheed offered them some words of wisdom instead.

"You can create a program in your hotel room, which will be quite physical and demanding," he wrote in a commentary Sunday for Melbourne's daily newspaper 'The Age'. Rasheed said the players' conditioning should have been sorted beforehand, and called on those complaining online to be more positive about their confinement. "The players are lucky to come to a country with strict health measures... and should be grateful they can play a grand slam during the pandemic," he concluded. —AFP

## Gamma Game Hall hosts first FIFA 21 Championship

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Board of Kuwait Esport Club Abdullah Al-Ali and Secretary Faisal Abul opened the first FIFA 21 Championship on Sunday at the Gamma Game Hall in Salmiya with the participation of 64 players and 12 volunteer organizers. The games are broadcast live on Kuwait Esport channels on YouTube: <https://youtube.com/channel/UCuPtD0EGADdiD7Wv7HRBIHFQ> and Twitch: <https://twitch.tv/kuwaitesports>.

The tournament is being broadcast live for free, while some fans are allowed to attend in person in accordance with health precautionary measures. The club offers this unique service, providing commentary in Arabic and English so that fans can be familiar with the tournaments and teams competing. The Gamma Game Hall is one of the largest in Kuwait, and is ready to host the local FIFA 21 Championship matches. The hall was well-prepared to receive the players in upcoming matches.



KUWAIT: Chairman of the Board of Kuwait Esport Club Abdullah Al-Ali and Secretary Faisal Abul with club members.



Chairman of the Board of Kuwait Esport Club Abdullah Al-Ali and Secretary Faisal Abul with Gamma Game representative Hussein Al-Shehri.

## Bilbao stun Barca to win Spanish Super Cup

### Messi sees red • Koeman misses chance of first trophy with Catalans

**MADRID:** Lionel Messi was sent off for the first time playing for Barcelona as Athletic Bilbao stunned the Catalans to win the Spanish Super Cup on Sunday, a dramatic final finishing 3-2 after extra-time. Moments before Bilbao's momentous triumph was confirmed, Messi threw an arm at Asier Villalibre, who had earlier scored a 90th-minute equalizer in normal time to deny Barca victory. Antoine Griezmann's double looked to have sealed the trophy but Villalibre intervened before Inaki Williams' fabulous strike three minutes into extra time proved decisive.

Messi shook off a thigh problem to start in Seville and was required to play all 120 minutes as Barcelona attempted to take the game to penalties. Instead, the 33-year-old lost his temper at the end of a combative contest, reacting to a late challenge from Villalibre by swiping his hands across the back of his opponent.

It meant a first ever red card for Messi in 753 appearances for Barcelona, to go with his two reds for Argentina in 2005 and 2019. "After so many years in football, Leo knows perfectly well when he is fit to play," said Barca coach Ronald Koeman. "We talked and he said he was in a good place to start. He has survived the game, given the maximum, nothing more."

Messi's anger will take some of the limelight away from Bilbao, who had already denied the competition a Clasico final by beating Real Madrid in the semi on Thursday and now have completed the set. It means a title and the perfect start for Marcelino Garcia

Toral, who only took over as coach less than two weeks ago.

But there was praise too for his predecessor Gaizka Garitano, who oversaw this team reaching the Copa del Rey final last season, which earned qualification in the first place. "This is for Gaizka Garitano and his coaching staff as well who brought us here," said Williams.

Organizers at the Spanish Football Federation might have hoped for the global attraction of a Clasico, especially as the coronavirus pandemic had already kept the tournament in Spain rather than the lucrative Saudi Arabia, where it was played last year.

Yet this was a frantic final, with a hugely surprising result. Barca arrived on the back of a nine-game unbeaten run and a trophy, even a minor one, would have turned encouraging signs in recent weeks into more tangible evidence of a revival under Koeman.

"It is not a step back," he said. "Always winning titles is helpful to show that we are on the right track, but it is only one game, it is a Super Cup, and we will show in the next few games that we are on the right track."

Bilbao were the better side in the first half, more decisive in possession and more aggressive out of it. But both teams created little for 40 minutes and then in two minutes both had scored. A brilliant pass created each of them, Messi the instigator for Barca.

He collected from the right and threaded through for Jordi Alba on the left, whose cut-back was intended for the Argentinian but spilled out to Griezmann, who could not miss.



SEVILLE: In this handout picture released by RFEF (Spanish Royal Football Federation) Athletic Bilbao players celebrate after winning the Spanish Super Cup final football match between FC Barcelona and Athletic Club Bilbao at La Cartuja stadium in Seville on Sunday. — AFP

Marcelino hurled his water bottle to the ground in disgust but his team were soon level.

Williams played the pass, his clipped ball over the top catching Alba off-guard, with Oscar De Marcos sneaking in and half-volleying home. Raul Garcia thought he had his third goal in four days when he headed in just before the hour but Barca survived.

With 10 minutes left, Griezmann

struck again, Alba's cross evading the Bilbao defense and finding the Frenchman, who steered in at the front post for what looked like the winner. Instead, Bilbao scored in the 90th minute to send the game to extra-time and then the 93rd to lead for the first time.

Villalibre was allowed to volley in from close range but there was little Barca could do about Williams' effort,

the striker cutting inside from the left and whipping a tremendous shot into the top right-hand corner.

Unai Nunez might have sealed it but failed to connect. Griezmann almost rescued it but fired high on the volley with his right foot. Then Villalibre left a shoulder in on Messi, who reacted, scuttling after his opponent and swinging an arm around the back of his head. Messi and Barca were beaten. — AFP



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