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# Joe Biden sworn in as 46th US President, urges unity

Kamala Harris sworn in as Vice President, makes history • Amir sends congratulations



WASHINGTON: (Left) Joe Biden is sworn in as the 46th US President by Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts yesterday at the US Capitol. (Right) Kamala Harris is sworn in as the 49th US Vice President by Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor yesterday. — AFP photos

WASHINGTON: Joe Biden yesterday became the 46th president of the United States with a call to unity, vowing to bridge deep divides and defeat domestic extremism two weeks after a mob attack tried to undo his election victory. On a frigid but sunny day at the very Capitol building that was assaulted on Jan 6, Biden swore the oath of office moments after Kamala Harris, who became America's first woman vice president, turning the page on Donald Trump's tumultuous four years.

HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and on behalf of the Kuwaiti people, yesterday sent a cable of congratulations to Biden on his inauguration. In the cable, HH the Amir lauded the deep-rooted relations between Kuwait and the United States. He added that he looks forward to strengthening friendship bonds and taking cooperation level in all domains to a new high to serve the common interests within the framework of the joint strategic partnership. HH the Amir wished Biden all success and everlasting

good health and the US further progress and prosperity. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to Biden.

"Democracy is precious, democracy is fragile and at this hour, my friends, democracy has prevailed," Biden said before a National Mall that was virtually empty due to the ultra-tight security and a raging COVID-19 pandemic that he vowed to confront

immediately. "We must end this uncivil war that pits red against blue, rural versus urban, conservative versus liberal. We can do this if we open our souls instead of hardening our hearts, if we show a little tolerance and humility and we're willing to stand in the other person's shoes. Together we shall write an American story of hope, not fear, of unity, not division, of light, not darkness. A story of decency and dignity, love and healings and goodness," he said.

Continued on Page 2

## MP demands civil rights for bedoons

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition MP Thamer Al-Suwait yesterday submitted a draft law stipulating wide-ranging civil and humanitarian rights including a permanent residency for tens of thousands of stateless people or bedoons who have been living for decades in the country. The lawmaker called for ending what he called a "state of legislative paralysis" regarding the humanitarian cause of bedoons, whose plight has been repeatedly debated by parliaments over the past few decades but without reaching a conclusive solution.

Some 120,000 bedoons live in the country and claim the right to Kuwaiti citizenship, saying their forefathers lived in Kuwait decades ago. The government however insists that only less than a third of them qualify for consideration for Kuwaiti citizenship, while the rest are nationals of neighboring countries. In recent years, MPs sympathetic to the rights of bedoons have called for granting them basic rights in education, jobs and health while authorities continue to investigate if they have a right to citizenship.

The draft law stipulates that bedoons be granted special identification cards through which they can have access to civil and social rights, mainly permanent residency in the country. Based on the cards, bedoons will be entitled to free medication and healthcare, including for bedoons with special needs.

Continued on Page 2

## Trump snubs Biden, vows to be back

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump left the White House for the last time yesterday with a vow to stay in the spotlight and an extraordinary snub of Joe Biden, skipping his inauguration as the 46th president of the United States. Drawing a curtain on the most tumultuous administration of modern times, Trump is being ousted by a polar opposite with the Democrat Biden intent on charting a new course to tackle COVID-19 and unite a splin-

tered nation.

Trump, 74, and first lady Melania Trump walked a short red carpet and boarded the Marine One helicopter, which flew near the Capitol that was ready for Biden's inauguration before heading to Andrews Air Force Base on Washington's outskirts. "This has been an incredible four years," Trump told several hundred cheering supporters in a campaign-style event before flying off for the last time in Air Force One en route to his Florida resort.

"We will be back in some form," vowed Trump, who retains a hold on much of the Republican Party despite being the first president to be impeached twice.

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WASHINGTON: Outgoing US President Donald Trump waves as he boards Marine One at the White House yesterday. — AFP

## Bannon among 73 pardoned on Trump's last day

WASHINGTON: Outgoing US President Donald Trump yesterday pardoned 73 people, including his former aide Steve Bannon and the rapper Lil Wayne, just hours before he was due to leave office. The list of those pardoned - as well as 70 people whose sentences were commuted - was likely to draw allegations of cronyism. Trump also at the last minute ended a ban on his administration's officials serving as lobbyists - an order he had issued with fanfare at the start of his presidency as he vowed to

"drain the swamp" of Washington.

However, neither Trump nor his relatives were listed, amid speculation he could use the legally dubious tactic of a preemptive pardon to fend off future charges. Bannon - who was Trump's campaign manager during the 2016 election, before becoming a senior adviser to the president - left the White House acrimoniously in 2017, Trump later giving him the derogatory moniker "Sloppy Steve."

Last year he was charged with one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, over funds raised to build the Mexico border wall, a flagship Trump policy. But yesterday's statement, announcing his pardon, read: "Mr Bannon has been an important leader in the conservative movement and is known for his political acumen." US media earlier reported that the president made his last-minute decision after speaking to Bannon by phone.

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Steve Bannon

## Local

# Amir meets Crown Prince, senior officials at Bayan Palace

## Sheikh Nawaf congratulates Central Africa President on re-election



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



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



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



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



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness the Amir also received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-

Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received Speaker Ghanem and His Highness Sheikh

Sabah Al-Khaled at Bayan Palace.

In the meantime, His Highness the Amir sent yesterday a cable of congratulations to the President of Central Africa Faustin-Archange Touadera on his re-election for a new term in the top office. In the cable,

His Highness the Amir wished president Touadera good health and further promotion for the good ties between the two friendly countries. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables. — KUNA

## MP demands civil rights...

Continued from Page 1

Bedoons will also get free school and university education, birth and death certificates, driving licenses and passports based on the law, and the right to work in the public and private sectors with

equal treatment to citizens of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. The bill also calls for allowing bedoons to own real estate for private housing only, get all personal status rights like marriage and divorce certificates and also obtain end of service indemnity and other financial rights in accordance with the law.

Similar laws have been submitted to the National Assembly in the past and some had been debated, but without any conclusive result that obliges the government to implement the proposals.

## Joe Biden sworn in as 46th US...

Continued from Page 1

But Trump, who falsely said that he was cheated out of a second term and egged on his supporters before their rampage at the Capitol, broke 152 years of tradition by refusing to attend his successor's inauguration. Biden appealed to Trump's supporters, pledging to listen to all sides after four years of deep polarization in which Trump belittled minority groups and tried to cast doubts on basic facts. "I will be a president for all Americans."

But Biden confronted head-on the rise of domestic extremism, as witnessed during Trump's presidency in the Capitol mob, deadly attacks on synagogues and immigrants and a violent march by neo-Nazis in Charlottesville, Virginia. The United States faces "a rise of political extremism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism that we must confront, and we will defeat," Biden said. "Our history has been a constant struggle between the American ideal that we are all created equal and the harsh ugly reality that racism, nativism, fear and demonization have long torn us apart."

At 78, Biden is the oldest president in US history and only the second Roman Catholic president. Harris, the daughter of Indian and Jamaican immigrants, became the highest-ranking woman in US history and the first person of color as the nation's number two. She and her husband Doug Emhoff - America's first-ever "second gentleman" - were escorted to the inauguration by Eugene Goodman, a black police officer at the Capitol who lured the mostly white mob away from the Senate chambers in a video that went viral.

Central Washington took on the dystopian look of an armed camp, protected by some 25,000 National Guard troops tasked with preventing any repeat. The Supreme Court reported a bomb threat yesterday morning. With the general public essentially barred from attending due to the pandemic, Biden's audience at the National Mall instead was 200,000 flags planted to represent the absent crowds.

Biden nonetheless brought in star power - absent four years ago with Trump. Lady Gaga, in a poofy dress that was Valentine red, sang the national

anthem and Tom Hanks prepared for a televised evening appearance with the new president. Jennifer Lopez sang a pop rendition of "This Land is Your Land", often considered the unofficial US national anthem, ending it by exclaiming the words of the pledge of allegiance - a nation that promises "liberty and justice for all" - in Spanish.

Biden, who was vice president under Barack Obama and first ran for president in 1987, plans to kick off his tenure with a flurry of 17 orders. Officials said Biden will immediately rejoin the Paris climate accord and stop the US exit from the World Health Organization and set new paths on immigration, the environment, COVID-19 and the economy.

Biden, who has vowed a major escalation of vaccination against COVID, warned of a "dark winter" still ahead from the pandemic that has claimed more than 400,000 lives in the United States, more than in any other country. "We're entering what may be the toughest and deadliest period of the virus," Biden said. "We must set aside politics and finally face this pandemic as one nation," he said, striking a new tone after Trump's mockery of mask-wearing and business closings meant to halt the virus.

Biden will also end Trump's much-assailed ban on visitors from several majority-Muslim countries and halt construction of the wall that Trump ordered on the US-Mexico border to stem illegal immigration, the aides said. Many overseas leaders breathed a sigh of relief at the end of Trump's hawkish, go-it-alone presidency, with Biden's team pledging greater cooperation with the rest of the world.

With so many domestic challenges, Biden delved little in his inaugural address into foreign policy, a longtime passion for the former senator, but said: "We will repair our alliances and engage with the world once again."

Trump left Washington before the inauguration, walking on a red carpet on the White House lawn with his wife Melania to the Marine One presidential helicopter, which flew near the inauguration-ready Capitol before heading to Andrews Air Force Base on Washington's outskirts.

Mike Pence, the outgoing vice president who clashed with Trump in his final days by acknowledging he could not overturn the election, attended the inauguration and was spotted laughing with Harris. Also taking part were former presidents Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton and their wives - including Hillary Clinton, for whom Biden's victory was especially sweet four years after her narrow, surprise defeat to Trump. — AFP



US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania are greeted by Trump's family members on the tarmac at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland yesterday. — AFP

## Trump snubs Biden, vows...

Continued from Page 1

Trump - who for two months has falsely alleged election fraud - did not address Biden by name but, in a rare hint of graciousness, wished the next administration "great luck and great success". While a spokesman said the president had left a letter for Biden, Trump is the first sitting president since 1869 to skip the inauguration of his successor.

In one of his last acts before departing the White House, Trump issued scores of pardons to people convicted of crimes or facing charges, including several key allies. However, neither Trump nor his relatives were listed, amid speculation he could use the legally dubious tactic of a preemptive pardon to

fend off future charges.

Tensions have soared on Capitol Hill, where the Senate is expected to put Trump on trial soon following his record second impeachment by the House of Representatives over the Capitol riot. The spectacle will clash with the opening days of Biden's tenure, as the new president seeks to swiftly confirm his Cabinet picks and push through ambitious legislation - including a \$1.9 trillion rescue package.

Many overseas leaders breathed a sigh of relief at the end of Trump's hawkish, go-it-alone presidency, with Biden's team pledging greater cooperation with the rest of the world. Iran's President Hassan Rouhani hailed the departure of "tyrant" Trump, saying "the ball is in America's court" to return to a landmark nuclear deal and lift sanctions on Tehran. Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, said Biden's inauguration would "be a demonstration of the resilience of American democracy," as well as "the resounding proof that, once again, after four long years, Europe has a friend in the White House". — AFP

## Bannon among 73 pardoned on...

Continued from Page 1

Former Trump fundraiser Elliott Brody was similarly pardoned, after pleading guilty last year to conspiring to violate foreign lobbying laws. And the rapper Lil Wayne, who faced 10 years in jail after pleading guilty to possession of a firearm and ammunition by a convicted felon last month, also made the list. The star, listed as Dwayne Michael Carter Jr, had shown "generosity through commitment to a variety of charities, including donations to research hospitals and a host of foodbanks," the release added.

Another rapper, Kodak Black, was granted clemency after being jailed for making a false statement on a federal document, while disgraced Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick - sentenced in 2013 to 28 years in a federal prison on corruption and extortion charges - was also pardoned.

Some lesser-known individuals were also pardoned, among them Steve Bowker. "Nearly 30 years ago, Mr. Bowker pled guilty to a violation of the Lacey Act, which prohibits trafficking in wildlife, when he

arranged for 22 snakes owned by Rudy "Cobra King" Komarek to be transported to the Miami Serpentarium," the statement read. "Although he did not ask for any animals in return, he was offered 22 American alligators. After pleading guilty, Mr Bowker was sentenced to probation."

Other pardons included people facing long sentences over low-level offenses, whose cases have been championed by criminal justice advocates. Yesterday's announcement came after another raft of pardons late last year, including of Trump allies Michael Flynn, Paul Manafort, Roger Stone, George Papadopoulos and Alex Van Der Zwaan. All five had pleaded guilty or were convicted at trial as a result of special counsel Robert Mueller's probe into whether the Trump campaign conspired with Russia during the 2016 election.

Such sweeping acts of mass clemency are a presidential tradition dating all the way back to George Washington. While in office, Bill Clinton pardoned his half-brother, Roger Clinton, who had been convicted of cocaine possession, and Marc Rich, a billionaire and major donor to the Democratic Party who had been convicted of tax evasion. Barack Obama commuted the 35-year sentence of Chelsea Manning, a US Army private who had been convicted of providing classified material to WikiLeaks. — AFP

Local

# Ministry says COVID-19 situation stable as Kuwait lists 442 new cases

## 2,775,000 people in Kuwait eligible to receive vaccines

KUWAIT: The coronavirus situation in Kuwait is "stable", the Ministry of Health (MoH) Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said, but called for adhering to the preventive measures to avoid a rise in cases. Meanwhile, Kuwait listed 442 new coronavirus infections and one virus-related death yesterday, taking total infections and deaths to 159,264 and 951 respectively, the health ministry said. This is slightly up from the 440 infections announced the previous day, when two COVID-related deaths were also registered. In the meantime, the total number of COVID-19 patients who have recovered from the disease in Kuwait reached 152,420 after the ministry announced 484 new recoveries yesterday.

The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood yesterday at 5,893, with 54 of them in intensive care units, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad. He further revealed that 10,283 swab tests were conducted over the same period,

bringing the total up to 1,425,480. Dr Sanad went on to urge the public to abide by health precautions, mainly social distancing, to help limit the spread of the virus.

### Vaccine demand

Speaking at a news conference on Tuesday, Dr Sanad noted that the number of people who are eligible for coronavirus vaccines at present hit 2,775,000 after excluding those who are below 16 years. He hoped all people could receive COVID-19 vaccines throughout the year, pointing to the global competition of demand for the vaccines. "We are receiving vaccines periodically through phases," he said, hoping for getting more doses in the next months to help those who want vaccination.

The MoH has created an appropriate environment to store vaccines, in line with the standards set by the manufacturers, he pointed out. No doses



## Ministry eulogizes Dr Awadhi



## Kuwait, Palestine discuss boosting sports cooperation

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi and head of Palestinian Higher Council for Youth and Sports Jibreel Rjoub discussed on Tuesday means of boosting mutual cooperation in sports and youth domains. Speaking in a press statement after the meeting, Mutairi said that the two sides affirmed their keenness on continuing to exchange visits of sports delegations between the two countries. This is based on the effective role of these delegations in developing the bilateral relations, he added. He pointed to the visit of Palestinian national football team to Kuwait where they played a friendly match against the Kuwaiti team. He expressed his pride for strengthening sports ties between the two countries. — KUNA



AMMAN: Jordanian Prime Minister Dr Bisher Al-Khasawneh meets with Kuwaiti Ambassador to Jordan Aziz Al-Daihani. —KUNA

## Jordan aspires to increase Kuwait's \$18bn businesses

AMMAN: Jordanian Prime Minister Dr Bisher Al-Khasawneh affirmed on Tuesday the necessity of economic cooperation with the State of Kuwait expressing Amman's aspiration to lure more Kuwaiti businesses, currently in the range of \$18 billion. The premier made the remarks during his reception of the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Jordan Aziz Al-Daihani, against backdrop of the recent par-

liament's granting of confidence to the cabinet, where the two sides discussed means of enhancing the cooperation in the economic and business sectors.

Daihani in a statement to the press after the meeting quoted premier Khasawneh as lauding the volume of the Kuwaiti investments in Jordan: considered the largest among the Arab and foreign businesses, estimating the Kuwaiti investments' value at \$18 billion. Moreover, Khasawneh noted during the meeting the lucrative economic and legislative legislations for entrepreneurs in general. Daihani said, adding that necessity of activating bilateral agreements was underlined during the session. The Kuwaiti businesses cover the sectors of tourism, industries, banks, communications, realty and transports. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi meets with head of Palestinian Higher Council for Youth and Sports Jibreel Rjoub. — KUNA

## Security forces prevent hashish smuggling bid

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior announced Tuesday that their criminal security teams from the General Administration for Drug Control had thwarted an attempt to smuggle 25 kilograms of hashish into the country through one of the country's land ports. The ministry's Relations and Security Media Department stated in a press statement that ministry teams received information indicating an attempt to bring narcotic substances through land borders. Security forces immediately formed an investigation team, which collected data and later confirmed the validity of the information received, the statement said.

The ministry added that legal permission was obtained and coordinated with the General Administration of Customs, and "upon the arrival of the suspect at the port, he was seized and the vehicle searched, including the finding of 25 kilograms of narcotic hashish substance was found hidden in the spare tire and the interior of the vehicle," the statement noted. The ministry stated, "after confronting the suspect with the information he acknowledged and confessed that he used to bring narcotic substances for the purpose of trafficking. The statement said the "suspect and the findings were referred to the General Administration for Drug Control to take legal measures against him and refer him to the competent authorities." — KUNA



### News in brief

#### Jobs linked to academic qualifications

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower has started checking the academic qualifications of expats who wish to renew or transfer their work permits through the activation of new designations based on Gulf job descriptions, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday. The new designations are within nine main items that include legislators, senior employees and managers, specialists, clerks, sales and services personnel in markets and shops, skilled workers in agriculture, forestry, fish wealth and fishing, crafts and related professions, machinery operators and assembly laborers and workers in primary professions. The new designations decide the job titles of workers according to their academic qualifications, be they university graduates or laborers. The jobs of teachers, doctors and journalists will be linked to their qualifications.

#### Midterm break

KUWAIT: The midterm Arabic school holiday starts on Sunday, January 24 and ends on Wednesday, February 24, 2020, the Ministry of Education announced. This period goes for public and Arabic private schools, institutes, literacy schools, and special needs schools.

#### Whale in museum

KUWAIT: The education ministry has asked the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources to hand over the dead whale that was recovered near Jaber Causeway recently, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday. Educational sources said the ministry wants to display the whale at the educational museum, adding that its carcass is seven meters long and will be cut up for display for students and museum visitors.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.



## Local

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## Palestinian govt approves Kuwait grant for Gaza projects

**GAZA:** The Palestinian government announced yesterday that it has approved new payments for spending within the Kuwaiti grant provided for the reconstruction of Gaza. New disbursement payments have been approved within the Kuwaiti grant worth \$800,000, distributed to the water, education and health sectors in the Gaza Strip, Minister of Public Works and Housing Mohammad Ziara said in a press release, carried by Palestinian Wafa news agency. Payments of \$663,000 have been approved for the second phase of the Southern Conveyor Project and the development of networks that will receive additional water from outside the Gaza Strip, he added. The ministry approved payments of \$140,000 for the project of re-establishing and finishing the maternity department in Al-Shifa Hospital, indicating that work is underway to follow up and complete the disbursement of all payments due for contractors, he explained. The value of the Kuwaiti grant amounts to \$200 million allocated for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip after the 2014 Gaza war in the summer, which will be used in a number of projects. —KUNA

## Kuwaiti oil price up 94 cents

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by 94 cents to \$55.36 per barrel on Tuesday after it was at \$54.42 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. At the global level, the price of the Brent crude went up by \$1.15 to \$55.90 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which went up by 62 cents to \$52.98 pb. Meanwhile, the OPEC daily basket price stood at \$54.85 per barrel (pb) Tuesday, compared with \$53.92 the previous day, the petroleum organization said in a statement yesterday. OPEC said average annual price in 2020 was \$41.47 pb. Commitment of OPEC+ in production cuts agreement encouraged market analysts to show optimism coupled with the inauguration of Joe Biden as US President. OPEC+ agreed, during a virtual meeting on January 5, to release two million barrels per day by summer. —KUNA

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** Vehicles parked in a jam-packed public parking space in Kuwait City. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

## Embassy of Guyana honors Kuwaiti businessman Sanad

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** The Embassy of Guyana and the Central Islamic Organization (CIOG) honored yesterday Kuwaiti businessman Asad Al-Sanad of Al-Sanad Holding Company for their contribution and continued support to the community and people of Guyana. Sanad was honored and presented a plaque of appreciation at the embassy in Mishref by Charge d'Affaires Shafraaz Shadood.

"This is a display of gratitude to the work done by the group of Asad Al-Sanad in Guyana, the most recent being the donation of a full container of facemasks to the people of Guyana. This is very laudable and we would like to express our gratitude for this," Shadood said.

"The close relationship between Guyana and Kuwait began in the 1980s and has strengthened. There have been high-ranking visits between the two countries, and as a

result our embassy opened in Kuwait in 2011. There is more room to improve our bilateral ties in the coming years and with the discovery of oil in Guyana, we expect to further strengthen and continue our people-to-people contacts and work together," he said. Speaking at a press conference, Sanad said the Al-Sanad Trust will continue its work to help countries around the world. "Our family trust is a non-governmental and family affairs charity aimed at helping poor communities around the world. It's been in existence for the past 50 years. There are lots of countries that need our support," he said.

"We have several countries as beneficiaries including Guyana. We recently sent a container of facemasks containing around 800,000 pieces, because it's the most needed thing amid the pandemic all over the world. Over the last six years, we've been helping and working hand-in-hand with the community and people of Guyana. We have

schools and computer centers in Guyana and we have scholars whom we support," Sanad said. "We will continue our program to support our brothers and sisters. We also support other countries like the Philippines, where we have built mosques and schools in various places in Mindanao. We have also installed water wells and toilets. We have an Al-Sanad Village in the Philippines too. We have 249 schools with around 300,000 students all over the world, and we are supporting them in their academic studies, along with 1,200 mosques worldwide," he added.

"This charity work is for the general public and not only for the Muslim community. It's for anyone regardless of religion - we help Hindus, Christians and atheists too. We want everyone to benefit and we will continue this family affair - this is what we are for as people, to share and help because we have extra," Sanad affirmed.



**KUWAIT:** Guyana's Charge d'Affaires Shafraaz Shadood honors Kuwaiti businessman Asad Al-Sanad. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Ambassador opens Indian School of Excellence Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** The Indian Community School Kuwait has marked a milestone in the 62nd year of its educational tenure, when the latest addition to ICSK group of schools was inaugurated with a striking panache in the evening of January 14, 2021. The grand opening of the Indian School of Excellence Kuwait has witnessed a galaxy of dignitaries who exuberantly joined the ICSK family in celebrating the evening. The venture was a coordinated dream effort of the ICSK management with an aim to provide a full-bodied curriculum which promotes intellectual, spiritual and emotional growth of every student.

Sibi George, the Ambassador of India to Kuwait graced the inaugural event as the chief guest. In his commencement address, he lauded the leadership of the State of Kuwait for their exemplary efforts in containing the spread of the pandemic within the country. He also congratulated the ISEK team for adapting the new technology to foster a creative and curious student community. He expressed his confidence that ISEK will soon turn as one of the most sort after centers of excellence in Kuwait.

The festivities began with the recitation of the Holy Quran by Hisham Abdul a student enrolled for sixth grade. Sheryl Dennis, the Head of ISEK, in her welcome address stated that the Indian School of Excellence is the dream of one person and the reality of many today. Shaikh Abdul Rahiman, the Honorary Chairman of Board of Trustees, highlighted on how the idea to start a smart school in Salmiya was the need of the hour. Underlining the salient features of the smart school, he encouraged parents to make optimum usage of the opportunity to reduce the travel time for the kids while enabling them to avail surplus time to participate in activities. He thanked the stakeholders who have already enrolled their kids at ISEK.

Ambassador George inaugurated the temple of



education with the lighting of the lamp of knowledge together with Dr V Binumon the Principal and Senior Administrator of ICSK. Sandhya Arun headmistress of ISEK cordially introduced the chief guest who was also honored with a memento by Amer Mohammed Honorary Secretary of the school board.

The event saw an active participation of 1,500 youngsters in Qurious 2021 the online quiz contest, conducted by ISEK for school students which was also a virtual quest for the best brains in Kuwait. The results were announced by the Vinukumar Nair Honorary Vice Chairman to the Board of Trustees. Jerome Mathew Jason from Indian Learners academy bagged the prize in the first category, Alfred Bernard of Fahaheel Al-Watanieh School DPS claimed the top prize in the second category while Jerrin John of ICSK Senior took over the third category.

The colorful evening showcased musical talents of the talented choir from ICSK Khaitan and the scintillating dance performances by the primary students and the talented kids of ICSK Amman. Rajesh Nair, Principal of ICSK Amman, rendered the vote of thanks by expressing his gratitude to all the dignitaries present and to the staff, parents and students who graced the evening. The countries of Kuwait and India were honored with the rendition of their national anthem. The ISEK team thanks Sibi George, Ambassador of India to Kuwait for lighting a bright guiding path towards the success of this institution.



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'Hoaxes, fake news' blamed for slow start to India vaccine drive

## Social media faces reckoning as Trump ban forces reset

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LUANDA: Health workers wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) prepare to conduct post-landing tests that Angola started to require for travellers from Brazil and Portugal, to stop the new COVID-19 strain, at the Luanda International Airport, in Luanda, yesterday. —AFP

# China latest of 60 nations with UK strain

## US 'committed' to rejoin WHO; COVID cases edging towards 100 million globally

**GENEVA:** China confirmed yesterday that it had detected the UK variant of the coronavirus, joining at least 60 other countries, as US President-elect Joe Biden's incoming administration committed to rejoining the World Health Organization.

COVID-19 has claimed more than two million lives globally since it was first detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan more than a year ago, while the total number of reported cases is edging towards 100 million, according to an AFP tally. The arrival of mass inoculation drives in the United States, Europe and Asia had brought hope that the end of the epidemic was in sight. The latest good news on that front came from India, which yesterday exported its first batch of locally produced coronavirus shots. The "Pharmacy of the World will deliver to overcome the COVID challenge", Foreign Minister S Jaishankar tweeted, as

India promised supplies to several other countries in the region.

More than 51 million vaccines have now been given out around the world, according to an AFP count, but the WHO has warned that rich countries are hogging most of the doses. Israel has vaccinated the highest percentage of its population by far, while the United States has administered the most shots, followed by China and the UK.

But the WHO warned yesterday that more than 60 countries were now grappling with the UK strain—and that 23 countries and territories had reported the South African variant, both of which are believed to be more infectious. The number of new deaths worldwide climbed to a record high of 93,000 over the previous week, it added, with 4.7 million new cases reported over the same period. Concern over the new variants has triggered governments around the world to tighten

constraints on restriction-weary populations as officials grapple with how to slow infections until vaccines become widely available.

### Biden to change tack

In the US, by far the worst-hit nation with more than 400,000 deaths, Biden focused on healing at a memorial for victims on the eve of his inauguration. "Let us shine the lights in the darkness along the sacred pool of reflection and remember all who we lost," Biden said at Washington's National Mall reflecting pool, where lights were turned on as a memorial to those who have died. Yesterday Biden's aides said his administration would immediately reverse Trump's decision to leave the WHO. Jeff Zients, the new president's point-man for fighting the pandemic, said Biden would also establish an office of COVID-19 response inside the White House.

"America's withdrawal from the international arena has impeded progress on the global response and left us more vulnerable to future pandemics," Zients said. He added that leading US coronavirus expert Anthony Fauci will lead a delegation to take part in the WHO Executive Board meeting today.

### Beijing lockdown

In China, 1.6 million residents were banned from leaving Beijing yesterday as two COVID-19 cases linked to the UK virus variant were found in the capital. The country is battling its largest resurgence in nearly a year, although the official figures are startlingly low compared to the rest of the world: just seven cases were reported in Beijing yesterday. Authorities ordered residents of the southern Beijing district of Daxing—which covers one of the city's two international airports—to remain indoors. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Cutting air pollution prevent deaths

**PARIS:** Limiting air pollution to levels recommended by the World Health Organization could prevent more than 50,000 deaths in Europe annually, according to research published yesterday that called for urgent action. The WHO estimates that air pollution kills more than seven million people each year and is one of the leading causes of sickness and absenteeism globally. Cities, with their crowded streets and high energy use, are hotspots for illness and disease linked to air pollution. The WHO recommends that fine particulate matter (PM2.5) not exceed 10 milligrams per cubic meter of air, averaged annually. For nitrous oxide (NO2), the threshold not to be exceeded is 40 mg/m3. —AFP

#### EU chiefs express relief

**BRUSSELS:** The European Union's top officials expressed relief yesterday that they would again have a friend in the White House as Joe Biden replaces Donald Trump. Charles Michel, president of the European Council, said the moment should be seized to form a new "founding pact" between democratic powers. He was joined in the European Parliament by Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Council, to address MEPs hours ahead of Biden's inauguration. "This time-honored ceremony on the steps of the US Capitol will be a demonstration of the resilience of American democracy," she said. —AFP

#### Iran hails end of 'tyrant' Trump

**TEHRAN:** Iran's President Hassan Rouhani yesterday hailed the White House departure of "tyrant" Donald Trump, saying that "the ball is in America's court" to return to a landmark nuclear deal and lift sanctions on Tehran. Trump is due to leave office later in the day making way for President-elect Joe Biden, whose team has signaled a willingness to return to dialogue with Tehran. A "tyrant's era came to an end and today is the final day of his ominous reign," Rouhani said in televised remarks to his cabinet. He labeled Trump "someone for whom all of his four years bore no fruit other than injustice and corruption and causing problems for his own people and the world". —AFP

## Netanyahu makes surprise campaign pitch to Arab voters

**JERUSALEM:** Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, under pressure in his fourth re-election battle in two years, is trying to court voters he has previously demonized: Arab Israelis. "A new era begins today," the veteran right-wing premier said during a rare visit this month to Nazareth, Israel's largest Arab city.

Netanyahu, threatened by a damaging split in his Likud party, has made several steps in a game-changing charm offensive toward Arab voters that some observers have found jarring. He highlighted Israel's rapid novel coronavirus inoculation pace at a vaccination center in Umm al-Fahm on January 1, while in Nazareth he promised investment and anti-crime initiatives and apologized for potentially offensive past remarks.

Arab Israelis-Palestinians who stayed on their land following the Jewish state's creation in 1948, and their descendants-make up about 20 percent of the country's roughly nine million people. The community's growing political importance was evident in the last vote, in March 2020, when the mainly Arab Joint List alliance won an unprecedented 15 seats in the 120-member Knesset, forming a key part of the anti-Netanyahu bloc. Netanyahu, a hardliner on the Israel-Palestinian conflict,

has on several occasions in recent years condemned Arab Israelis and their political leaders as terrorism supporters and enemies of the Jewish state. Experts described his new pitch to Arabs as a nuanced political manoeuvre aimed at boosting his own support while also sowing enough political chaos to discourage some Arabs from voting, thereby trimming the influence of his Arab rivals. Netanyahu is seeking to "win Arab votes but especially wants to weaken the Joint List", Tel Aviv University political science professor Jamal Amal said.

### Discrimination

Among Netanyahu's long record of anti-Arab rhetoric, a statement from Israel's 2015 election stands out. In a polling-day bid to energize right-wing voters, he warned that Arab Israelis were voting "in droves" and suggested left-wing groups had bussed Arab citizens to polling stations.

Then-US president Barack Obama accused Netanyahu of portraying Arab Israelis as "an invading force". Arabs have long complained of discrimination by Israeli police, and insist their plight has worsened since Netanyahu returned to power in 2009. The so-called Nation-State law passed in 2018 at Netanyahu's urging, which declared Israel as the "national home of the Jewish people", was widely perceived as legally downgrading Arabs as lesser citizens.

Despite that record, Netanyahu has often argued that his governments have invested heavily in minority communities and "done more for Arabs than any other government". While some protesters in Nazareth attempted to shout Netanyahu down, the premier secured an endorsement from the city's mayor, Ali Salam.



NAZARETH, Israel: Arab Israelis lift Palestinian flags and placards depicting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu which read "Get lost" in Arabic, during a demonstration as he visits Nazareth, Israel's largest Arab city. —AFP

Netanyahu, known as the great survivor of Israeli politics, faces the daunting challenge of securing a 61-seat Knesset majority in Israel's March 23 election. Multiple recent polls suggest that right-wing Likud defector Gideon Saar, who has formed his own New Hope party, could peel a substantial number of seats away from Netanyahu. Saar has categorically ruled out joining a Netanyahu-led government. The pledge, if true, could deliver a hammer blow to the premier, who failed to secure a majority in three elections since April 2019 when Likud was united behind him. The fraught coalition he formed with his centrist rival Benny Gantz in May following the third inconclusive election collapsed last month. —AFP

## India villagers fete Harris ahead of US inauguration

**THULASENDRAPURAM, India:** Villagers from Kamala Harris's ancestral home in southern India made offerings of fruit, lit firecrackers and prepared hundreds of snacks in celebration of her swearing-in Wednesday as US vice president. Thulasendrapuram, where Harris's grandfather was born, has been in party mode since November when Joe Biden and Harris won the American presidential election.

Her inauguration thousands of miles away in Washington has sparked a day of "Harrismania" in the Tamil Nadu village of 400 people, as children waved pictures of their hero in streets filled with firework smoke. Jubilant locals laid out hundreds of Chakkali—a popular south Indian spiral snack—shaping some to spell out "Kamala Harris", while bowls of sweets were passed around.

At the temple, villagers brought bananas

and coconuts, while a bare-chested priest wore a lungi sarong as he offered prayers. Harris, 56, was born in California, but was taken often to India by her mother—breast cancer specialist Shyamala Gopalan—and has spoken about the influence of her grandfather P.V. Gopalan, a senior Indian civil servant.

"People are very happy. Celebrations went on as soon as she was elected as the vice president," teacher Anukampa Madhavasimhan said. The village's main temple has drawn a steady stream of visitors praying for the vice president-elect, while posters depicting her and Biden now decorate roads.

"She belongs to this village and we are very proud of her," said retired bank manager Krishna Murthy. "And of course she has come on her own merit. It is not because we have done something for her."

The village plans to hold a live screening of the inauguration, which will take place late Wednesday in India. In New Delhi, academic Balachandran Gopalan-Harris' uncle—said he was proud of her achievements, but disappointed that he would not witness her inauguration in person. "My only regret is



Villagers pose holding photos of US Vice President-elect Kamala Harris at her ancestral village of Thulasendrapuram in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu yesterday. —AFP

not being there when she's sworn in as vice president. I was there when she was sworn in as senator," Gopalan told AFP. "What she has achieved is commendable," he added. Harris is already a trailblazer as California's first Black attorney general and the first woman of South Asian heritage elected to the US Senate. —AFP

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## International

# Social media faces reckoning as Trump ban forces reset

## Questions over neutrality remain while promoting democracy, free speech

WASHINGTON: Social media giants crossed a threshold in banning US President Donald Trump and an array of his supporters—and now face a quandary on defining their efforts to remain politically neutral while promoting democracy and free speech. After the unprecedented violence in the seat of Congress, Trump was banned for inciting the rioters on platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Google-owned YouTube and Snapchat. The alternative network Parler, which drew many Trump backers, was forced offline by Amazon's web services unit. The bans broke new ground for internet firms but also shattered the longstanding notion that they are simply neutral platforms open for all to express any views. "Banning Donald Trump was a crossing of a Rubicon for social media firms, and they can't go back," said Samuel Woolley, a professor and researcher with the University of Texas Center for Media Engagement.

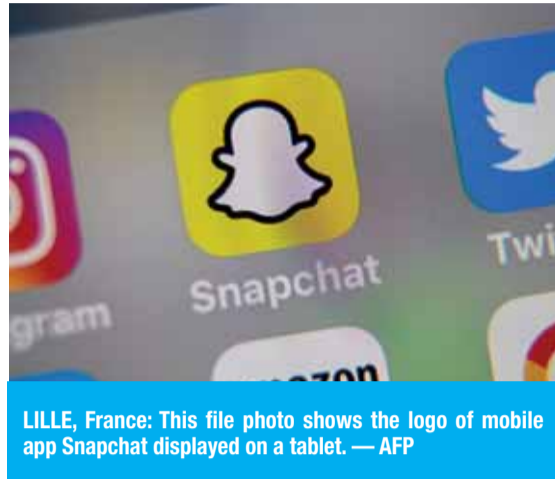
"Up to now their biggest goal was to promote free speech, but recent events have shown they can no longer do this," Twitter chief Jack Dorsey last week defended the Trump ban while acknowledging it stemmed from "a failure of ours ultimately to promote healthy conversation" and that it "sets a precedent I feel is dangerous: the power an individual or corporation has over a part of the global public conversation."

Javier Pallero, policy director for the digital rights nonprofit group Access Now, said the banning of Trump could be just the beginning for social media firms grappling with dangerous content, including from political leaders. "The companies have reacted to calls for violence by the president in the United States, and that's a good call. But they have failed in other areas like Myanmar," where social media has been used to carry out persecution, Pallero said.

### Human rights first?

Social platforms are being forced in some part of the world to choose to follow national laws or to prioritize human rights principles, Pallero noted. "We ask platforms to put human rights first. Sometimes they do, but all decisions on content governance are always a game of frustration," he said.

In authoritarian regimes with restrictive social media



LILLE, France: This file photo shows the logo of mobile app Snapchat displayed on a tablet. — AFP

laws, Pallero said the platforms "should stay and give a voice to democracy activists... however if they have to identify dissidents or censor them, they probably should leave, but not without a fight." Woolley said social networks that banned Trump are likely to face pressure to take action against similarly styled leaders who abuse the platforms.

"They can't simply ban a politician in the US without taking similar action around the world," he said. "It would be seen as prioritizing the United States in way that would be seen as unfair."

### Platform power

Trump's ban was a major step for Twitter, which the president used for policy announcements and to connect with his more than 80 million followers. Until recently, platforms have given world leaders leeway when enforcing rules, noting that their comments are in the public interest even if they are inflammatory. The de-platforming of Trump underscored the immense power of a handful of social networks over information flows, noted Bret Schafer, a researcher with the nonprofit Alliance for Securing Democracy. "One of the things that compelled them to act was that we saw the president's rhetoric manifest itself into real-world violence," Schafer said.

"That may be where they draw the line."

But he noted inconsistencies in enforcing these policies in other parts of the world, including in authoritarian regimes. "There is a legitimate argument on whether leaders in some of these countries should be allowed to have an account when their citizens do not, and can't take part in the discussion," Schafer said.

### Regulatory conundrum

Internet firms are likely to face heightened calls for regulation following the recent turmoil. Karen Kornbluh, who heads the digital innovation and democracy initiative at the German Marshall Fund, said any regulatory tweaks should be modest to avoid government regulating online speech. Kornbluh said platforms should have a transparent "code of conduct" that limits disinformation and incitements to violence and should be held accountable if they fail to live up to those terms.

"I don't think we want to regulate the internet," she said. "We want to apply offline protection for individual rights." Platforms could also use "circuit breakers" to prevent inflammatory content from going viral, modeled as those used on Wall Street for extreme swings.

"The code should focus not on content but practices," she said. "You don't want the government deciding on content." Schafer cited a need for "some algorithmic oversight" of platforms to ensure against bias and amplification of inflammatory content. He said the controversial Section 230 law remains important in enabling platforms to remove inappropriate content, but that it remains challenging "to moderate in a way that protects free speech and civil liberties." Daniel Kreiss, a professor and researcher with the University of North Carolina's Center for Information, Technology, and Public Life, said the major platforms "are going to have to rebuild their policies from the ground up" as a result of the crisis.

"This situation absolutely reveals the power of platform companies to make decisions on who gets hurt in the public sphere," Kreiss said. "The power they have is not simply free speech, it's free amplification. But because they are private companies, under the law we give them a fair amount of latitude to set their own policies." — AFP

## Frustrated Amazon villagers tackle virus with faith potions

BELA VISTA DO JARAQUI, Brazil: Remote Amazon village communities, feeling abandoned by the state, are turning to religion and traditional remedies for protection in the coronavirus pandemic.

Raimundo Leite de Sousa, 34, claims he recovered from Covid-19 with a potion made from the stinktoe and crabwood plants, flavored with lemon and garlic. "It (the virus) bent me over double but it didn't take me," said Leite de Sousa, who avoided the fate of some 210,000 other Brazilians who have died—a national toll surpassed only by that of the United States.



MANAUS, Brazil: A health worker collects a swab sample from a resident to perform a COVID-19 test in the riverside community of Bela Vista do Jaraqui, Manaus, Amazonas state, Brazil. — AFP

Leite de Sousa lives in Bela Vista do Jaraqui, an hour from Manaus, the regional capital of Amazonas state which has been hit hard by a second pandemic wave. The riverside village offers a stunning panoramic view of the Rio Negro and is home to 112 families whose wooden huts are accessed by dirt tracks leading up from the jetty.

From the river, the village is masked by a wall of trees. The nearest health center is in another village — 25 minutes on foot or 10 minutes by boat. "Although many people lost relatives, I am happy because I have faith that God is the greatest," said Silvio de Melo, who took part in a Covid testing program of the Manaus municipality.

Locals say it was only made possible by donations. Forty-five people were tested on Tuesday and will have to wait five to seven days for their results. Erasmo Morales, 55, says "Covid-19 is the most serious problem in Amazonas," but he is not worried because "God looks after everyone and if (death) comes, there's no remedy that will save you." For his neighbor Francisco Morales it is a matter of prevention: he has augmented his personalized health potion with a daily morning shot of cachaca, a distilled spirit.

### 'God doesn't abandon you'

In the village, everyone wears a mask, even children. More than half of the community has never had a coronavirus test, even though they live in one of the worst-affected states in Brazil.

There is also a new strain of the virus from Amazonas state which is believed to be more contagious than the original. "I'm disappointed, the governor could have done more," said Jardeir Santos, 35, who believes she has caught the disease as she is suffering from nausea and a headache.

Sitting on a wooden bench waiting for her turn to be tested, she says she is afraid for herself and her family. "I'm more worried than I was last year because I see more people infected. But we have to pray, God doesn't abandon you." — AFP

## Experts: Pandemic lays bare WHO's powerlessness

GENEVA: The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed how underfunded and powerless the World Health Organization is to carry out the tasks the world expects of it, an independent expert panel said Tuesday.

The heads of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response presented a report to the WHO's executive board which said that the UN health body could have acted faster and more decisively at the start of the pandemic to avert catastrophe. But they stressed that the delays and failures could largely be attributed to the weak position of the UN agency, and said more funding and reforms were desperately needed.

"The world is more reliant on an effective WHO than ever before," said former Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who co-chairs the panel with former New Zealand prime minister Helen Clark. But, she told reporters, the same countries that have turned to the WHO for leadership during the crisis "have kept it underpowered and under-resourced to do the job expected of it."

COVID-19 was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019 before seeping beyond China's borders to wreak global havoc, costing more than two million lives and eviscerating economies. The WHO has faced claims it moved too slowly to declare an international crisis, to acknowledge the virus was spreading through the air, and to recommend face masks.—AFP



MILAN: A woman smokes a cigarette on Piazza del Duomo in Milan as it became the first Italian city to introduce an outdoor smoking ban. — AFP

## Choked-up Milan takes smoking ban outside

MILAN: "It's about time they passed this law. We're fed up with this smoke!" declared Massimo Gabbadini, a shopkeeper in Piazza del Duomo, after Milan banned smoking in many outdoor places.

"But I will wait and see if the rules are enforced. In the north of Europe people respect the law, but in Italy?" the 54-year-old told AFP. Italy's financial and fashion capital on Tuesday became the first city in the country to ban smoking in many open-air public places such as parks, stadiums, bus stops and even cemeteries. There are exemptions for lighting up in isolated spots, at a distance of 10 meters (30 feet) or more from other smokers—as well as for electronic cigarettes. The usual throngs of tourists outside Milan's cathedral were absent on Tuesday because of coronavirus restrictions, which saw the city placed back in partial lockdown at the weekend.

Among those walking past the police officers standing guard, many with cigarettes between their lips seemed unaware of the change in the law. "There's no sign saying you can't smoke in certain places," complained Floris Dethmers, an 18-year-old model in Milan for the men's fashion week shows. "I understand that it's banned inside. But outside, I want the freedom to smoke."

## Catholic priest missing in Burkina Faso

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso: A priest has gone missing in southeastern Burkina Faso, triggering fears of a kidnapping in the Sahel state, which is struggling

### Harmful to lungs

But the measure has been largely welcomed in Milan, including by smokers such as Maria Luigia di Toma, an unemployed receptionist. "I think it's fair, because smoking is really annoying for people around you," the 63-year-old said.

Italy was a pioneer in Europe in banning smoking in closed public spaces, notably bars and restaurants, in 2005 — and such prohibitions are now widespread. But Milan has taken it one step further as part of a wider battle against pollution. The new ban aims to "reduce PM10 fine particles, which are harmful to the lungs, and protect the health of citizens against active and passive smoking in public places," according to the local council. Situated in the middle of the industrial Po Valley and choked with road traffic, Milan regularly breaks air quality records—and eight percent of the PM10 particles in the city are due to smoking.

Fines for breaking the new law range from 40 to 240 euros (\$48 to \$290), although they will be only gradually introduced. By January 1, 2025, however, Milan will have a total ban on smoking in the open air. Authorities here are heartened by the relative ease with which the national ban on indoor smoking was imposed—and its impact.

Since 2005, the number of smokers aged 15 and over in Italy has fallen by one million to 11.6 million, according to a study by the ISS health agency. Leaning against a statue in Piazza del Duomo, Laura Beraldo says she is not ready to give up her 20-a-day habit.

"I don't blame cigarettes for the smog, but the traffic and global warming," said the 21-year-old, who works for an NGO. And for now, "there are no restrictions on the freedom to smoke, as long as I respect the 10-metre rule", she said, smiling.—AFP

with a five-year-old jihadist offensive, the Catholic Church said yesterday. The bishop of Banfora, Lucas Kalfa Sanou, said Father Rodrigue Sanon had not been seen since Tuesday.

"He left Soubaganyedougou for a meeting in Banfora but never arrived," Sanou said in a statement, adding that the authorities had been asked to do all they can to find him.

Residents in Banfora said the priest's vehicle had been found on the road leading into the town of Soubaganyedougou, sparking fears of an abduction by armed groups, some of which are close to shadowy

## Rivals sidelined, Benin's Talon looks set to win

COTONOU, Benin: Benin's elections are still nearly three months away, but President Patrice Talon went out on the road in November, stealing a march on a campaign that formally kicked off only last week in the poor West African country. "I will continue to take action to strengthen good governance. I am running for that reason, just for good governance, that's why I'm a candidate," Talon pledged last Friday.

He was speaking in Adjohoun, a rural community less than an hour's drive from the capital Cotonou—his last stop on a tour that covered all of Benin's 77 districts. When he was first elected in 2016 on a modernizing platform and a vow to stamp out corruption and mismanagement, the cotton baron said he intended to serve only one term.

But opposition parties were in no doubt that Talon, 62, would seek re-election. They are already despairing of being able to unseat a ruler they accuse of leading a country once famed for multi-party democracy down an authoritarian road. Notably, detractors accuse Talon of being behind a crackdown that drove key rivals into exile. Businessman Sebastien Ajavon, who came third in the 2016 presidential poll, was convicted of drug trafficking in 2018 and sentenced to 20 years in prison. From exile in Paris, Ajavon turned to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the judicial arm of the African Union, which ruled that the judgement against him was illegal. But Benin has refused to overturn the conviction. Lionel Zinsou, runner-up in 2016 who is also now in Paris, was handed a six-month suspended jail term in 2019 over campaign breaches and banned from standing in elections for five years. Another potential rival, ex-finance minister Komi Koutche, was sentenced to 20 years in prison for embezzlement and lives in exile in Washington.

### 'Not to bend the knee'

The opposition says the election is already sewn up for Talon, pointing to a new provision of the electoral law that requires each candidate to be formally sponsored by 16 mayors or members of parliament. Early this month, Benin's Constitutional Court declared itself incompetent to hear an appeal against the new rule.

The opposition has faced other hurdles in the recent past in the former French colony with an economy dependent on subsistence agriculture and cotton. During parliamentary elections in April 2019, no opposition parties were allowed to present lists of candidates for the vote. A year later, only six opposition challengers to sitting mayors won in municipal elections that were boycotted by some opponents. Part of the opposition last week founded a broad coalition, the Front for the Restoration of Democracy, to join forces against Talon, uniting behind a single candidate, the little-known academic Joel Aivo.—AFP

jihadist organizations. One of the poorest countries in the world, Burkina Faso is struggling with a ruthless insurgency by armed Islamists who swept in from neighboring Mali in 2015.

Almost 1,100 people have died and more than a million people have fled their homes. Last August, the grand imam of the northern town of Djibo, was found dead three days after gunmen stopped the car he was travelling in and kidnapped him. In March 2019, a priest in Djibo was kidnapped, and in February 2018, a Catholic missionary, Cesar Fernandez, was murdered in the centre of the country.—AFP

## International

# 'Hoaxes, fake news' blamed for slow start to India vaccine drive

## Authorities fight misinformation campaigns amid massive vaccine rollout

**NEW DELHI:** Hoaxes, doctored videos and far-fetched rumors are emerging as some of the biggest threats to India's massive coronavirus vaccine drive, with misinformation blamed for sluggish initial take-ups. There has long been deep distrust of government health programs throughout the vast nation of 1.3 billion people, particularly among minority communities, making a strong foundation for the proliferation of vaccine "fake news".

Indian authorities are aiming to inoculate 300 million people by July. But medics in New Delhi and elsewhere say signs following the weekend launch of the campaign have not been good. "People are very scared. We can't force anyone to take the vaccine, it is voluntary," a doctor at a community health center in neighboring Haryana state, who asked to remain anonymous, told AFP.

On the first day of the rollout in the capital, only 53 percent of people registered for the vaccine came forward, according to the city's Health Minister Satyendar Jain. National Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, a doctor, has repeatedly called for state and local authorities to refute "rumors and disinformation campaigns".

To coincide with Saturday's launch of the vaccination campaign, Vardhan changed his Twitter banner to "vaccines work: stay informed, stay safe". Prominent Bollywood celebrities, including megastars Amitabh Bachchan and Priyanka Chopra Jonas, have also spoken out in support of the vaccine rollout on social media. Like elsewhere around the world, India has endured a torrent of misinformation for the duration of the pandemic.

AFP's fact check team has debunked a vast number of hoaxes circulating on social media over the

past year. Compounding the situation is the scientific backlash against one of the two vaccines being used in the campaign, indigenously developed "Covaxin", which was approved before Phase III trials were completed. "I read that someone died after being given the vaccine. Although it may be unrelated, it does instill fear still," 54-year-old banker Sushma Ali said. The other vaccine is Covishield, a version of AstraZeneca and Oxford University's shot made by India's Serum Institute, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer.

### Missteps and mistrust

Further highlighting the importance, Indian officials are placing on fighting misinformation, the drugs controller general was forced to dismiss as "absolute rubbish" claims that inoculations could cause infertility—just hours after announcing that two vaccines were approved for use. False claims about infertility have long haunted India's immunization efforts, including for polio and measles-rubella, according to leading virologist Gagandeep Kang from the Wellcome Trust Research Laboratory at the Christian Medical College in Tamil Nadu.

Some hoaxes sparked fears in some communities in Uttar Pradesh state that the program was a form of population control. Similar fears spread in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in 2016-17 over the measles-rubella vaccine. India's last wild polio virus infection was in 2011 and the country was declared polio-free in 2014.

Experts said the long path to polio vaccination success took the involvement of local religious and community leaders to build trust. AFP's fact check



**MUMBAI:** A medical worker inoculates a colleague with a Covid-19 coronavirus vaccine at the Rajawadi Hospital in Mumbai. — AFP

team also debunked hundreds of social media posts that falsely targeted one community in regards to the pandemic in India. The spread of misinformation in turn saw health workers attacked when they visited a neighborhood in the central city of Indore, amid "social media claims that they were going to

be injected with the coronavirus", Observer Research Foundation think-tank's governance and public policy expert, Niranjan Sahoo, said. "We have a history of polarization through misinformation and this is going to play out during this vaccination process," Sahoo said. — AFP

## New foreign minister for S Korea ahead of Biden inauguration

**SEOUL:** The man who told US President Donald Trump that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un wanted to denuclearize was named as South Korea's foreign minister yesterday, hours before the inauguration of Joe Biden. Former national security adviser Chung Eui-yong will be responsible for Seoul's relations with treaty ally Washington after replacing UN veteran Kang Kyung-wha, who was Seoul's first female foreign minister when she was appointed in mid-2017. Chung was instrumental in brokering the talks between Trump and Kim, which saw three headline-grabbing meetings between the two but little substantive progress.

In March 2018, after a year in which tensions soared as the two leaders exchanged mutual insults and threats of war, Chung visited Washington to brief Trump that Kim—who he had met earlier in Pyongyang—wanted to talk and was "committed to denuclearization". An ecstatic Trump immediately accepted the request for a summit and Chung was deputized to make the announcement in an unorthodox night-time briefing on the White House lawn.

The two leaders met in a blaze of publicity in Singapore and signed a vaguely-worded statement on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, but



**Chung Eui-yong**

a second summit in Hanoi collapsed over sanctions relief and what the North would be willing to give up in return. The process has been stalled ever since, while the North has showed off several new missiles at military parades in October and earlier this month, when Kim pledged to strengthen its nuclear arsenal.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in has long championed engagement with the North and his office said in a statement that Chung, 74, had been "involved in every issue in the US-South Korea relationship" and was the "best expert in the field of diplomacy and national security". Biden's nominee as secretary of state Antony Blinken told his Senate confirmation hearing on Tuesday that the new administration will "review the entire approach and policy toward North Korea because this is a hard problem that has plagued administration after administration, and it's a problem that has not gotten better. In fact, it's gotten worse". — AFP

## China triumphant one year after Wuhan lockdown

**WUHAN:** "People Supremacy, Life Supremacy" reads the sign at a Wuhan exhibition, where visitors are greeted by a paean to China's triumph over the pandemic and the agility of its communist leadership in a crisis. Saturday marks one year since the start of a 76-day lockdown of Wuhan, the central Chinese city where the coronavirus was first detected before sweeping across the world and killing more than two million people. With China's official death toll from the virus under 5,000, Beijing is on a prolonged victory lap to promote its narrative of how it contained COVID-19, engineered vaccines and rebooted its economy. China this week reported 2.3 percent GDP growth in 2020 – the slowest in decades but still the only major economy to post positive figures during the pandemic.

As the official data was released, state media trumpeted the "resilience

and vitality" of China's economy. In Wuhan, a city of 11 million people, scenes of relaxation, travel freedoms and safety this week contrast with the rolling lockdowns, surging death rates and overwhelmed health services in many other parts of the world. Wuhan's wet markets throng with shoppers, elderly dancers rehearse in the parks, and bars sell "Wuhan Stay Strong" craft beer. At the Wuhan exhibition hall, China's virus story gets an extravagant retelling.

Visitors are transported back to early last year, when tributes flowed to the medics, army and authorities who were battling the virus at its ground zero. Rooms are bedecked in communist flags and party messages as videos celebrate health workers and the makeshift hospitals erected in record time. President Xi Jinping presides benevolently over the hall from life-sized photos, unmistakably the marshal of the virus response.



**WUHAN:** In this picture people visit an exhibition about China's fight against the COVID-19 coronavirus at a convention center that was previously used as a makeshift hospital for patients in Wuhan. — AFP

Many in Wuhan stick closely to the official story, especially with a team of experts from the World Health Organization poised to begin fieldwork to establish the virus' origins. "Wuhan had a tough year in 2020," Wang Chen, a 20-year-old resident, told AFP outside the exhibition, adding that China "handled the crisis very well." Stung by international criticism of cover-ups and bungling in the

early weeks of the outbreak, China for months blocked the WHO team from visiting. Beijing is embracing their much-delayed trip as a chance to embellish its storyline. "It's time to prove Wuhan's innocence," Wang said, in echoes of official narratives that have sought to lay the blame for the virus in other countries. — AFP

## Rescue shaft offers hope for trapped Chinese miners

**BEIJING:** Rescuers are widening a communications shaft in the hope of extracting a group of Chinese gold miners who have been trapped deep underground for 10 days in rising floodwaters, state media said yesterday, with one critically ill and far from medical help. Twenty-two workers were stuck hundreds of meters underground at the Hushan mine near Qixia city in eastern China's Shandong province when an explosion on January 10 sealed the entrance and cut off communications. Contact has been made with 11 miners at one location around 580 meters (1,900 feet) below the surface. Another—apparently alone—is trapped about a further 100 meters down.

After days without any sign of life, a handwritten note was sent up on a metal wire that rescuers had dropped into the mine on Sunday. In it, the workers pleaded for food and medicine and warned water levels were

high in the damaged mine. The whereabouts and condition of 10 of their colleagues are still unknown. At least four of the workers are injured, according to their note. One miner injured by the blast was "in a deep coma," Song Xicheng, deputy head of the rescue team, told reporters yesterday afternoon. Rescuers sent down medicine and instructed the other miners on how to treat him, but he could not be fed. "There are no professional rescue personnel (down there) and he cannot be treated intravenously," said Song, adding that his situation was "not very optimistic".

### Race against time

Rescuers have already finished drilling two "lifeline" channels to send food, medicine, paper, pencils and phones down to the stricken group. Eight more shafts are at various stages of drilling, two of which are intended



**QIXIA, China:** This photo shows rescuers working at the site of a gold mine explosion where 22 miners are trapped underground in Qixia, in eastern China's Shandong province. — AFP

to drain the rising floodwaters in the mine, state broadcaster CCTV reported yesterday. One completed communications shaft has now been abandoned since it worsened water leakage into the section of the mine where 11 workers are currently stuck, according to CCTV. The deepest sec-

tion of the mine, where one person is believed to be trapped, is also experiencing "serious flooding". There are plans for the widest of the shafts, about the size of a manhole cover, to be broadened enough to extract the miners once drilling is finished, CCTV said yesterday. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Gorbachev calls to mend ties

**MOSCOW:** Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev yesterday called for Russia and the United States to repair their strained relations, hours before President-elect Joe Biden was to enter the White House. Tensions have soared between Moscow and Washington under US President Donald Trump, fuelled by fresh allegations of sweeping cyber-attacks among a litany of other disagreements on the world stage. "The current condition of relations between Russia and the United States is of great concern," Gorbachev said in an interview with state-run news agency TASS. — AFP

#### China spurns Uighur claim

**BEIJING:** China yesterday dismissed Washington's declaration that Beijing was committing genocide against Uighurs and other minorities as "outrageous lies" and "poison". Foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying blamed the declaration of genocide on outgoing Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, accusing him of fabricating "sensational false propositions" throughout his term in office. Pompeo said Tuesday Beijing's sweeping incarceration of mostly Muslim minorities in the far western Xinjiang region amounted to genocide and crimes against humanity. — AFP

#### Moscow court delays Navalny trial

**MOSCOW:** A Moscow court yesterday postponed the start of the trial of detained Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny on charges of defaming a World War II veteran, his lawyers said. Olga Mikhailova, a lawyer for Navalny, told AFP the court pushed back the trial until February 5 because the opposition figure is currently in coronavirus quarantine after returning from Germany at the weekend and being immediately put behind bars. The court ruled that the "hearing has to take place with his participation," Mikhailova said, adding that Navalny's allies supported the decision. — AFP

#### N Korea defector numbers fall

**SEOUL:** The number of North Koreans defecting to the South plummeted last year after Pyongyang closed its border in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, Seoul's unification ministry said yesterday. The figure has been on a steady decline for some time but slumped to just 229 last year, the ministry said, far below the 1,047 of 2019. The vast majority of Northern defectors first travel to neighboring China, sometimes staying there for years before making their way on to the South via third countries, and only a handful directly cross the Demilitarized Zone that divides the peninsula. — AFP

#### Trump halts deportation of Venezuelans

**WASHINGTON:** On his last night in the White House, outgoing President Donald Trump signed an executive order Tuesday suspending the deportation of Venezuelans from US territory for a period of 18 months, citing the ongoing crisis in their own country. "I have determined that it is in the foreign policy interest of the United States to defer the removal of any national of Venezuela, or alien without nationality who last habitually resided in Venezuela," for 18 months, the executive order signed by Trump said. — AFP

# Business

THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 2021

## Jack Ma appears for first time since regulatory crackdown

### Appearance sends Alibaba's shares soaring 8%

BEIJING: Shares in internet giant Alibaba soared more than eight percent yesterday after billionaire founder Jack Ma made his first public appearance since November, ending weeks of speculation about his whereabouts after the company took a kicking from Chinese regulators. Ma—one of Asia's richest people with a fortune estimated at around \$58 billion—disappeared from the public eye after he was hauled in front of regulators for an October speech critical of China's financial system.

Shortly afterwards, the record-breaking \$37 billion IPO of his financial group Ant was spiked at the last minute by mainland officials in a shock move that some saw as retaliation for Ma's outspokenness. China's finance authorities have since ordered Ant to change its business model and hack back its lending, insurance and wealth management services, while Alibaba is also the subject of an anti-monopoly probe. The disappearance of

Ma from the public eye set tongues wagging on his whereabouts.

But a video clip released by Chinese financial news outlets yesterday showed him in a recording giving a speech to rural teachers as part of an awards ceremony organized by his charity.

Shares in Alibaba soared 8.5 percent to HK\$265.00 in Hong Kong. In the speech, Ma praised China's poverty alleviation efforts, a central target of the Communist leadership, and vowed to dedicate more efforts towards helping rural teachers.

"My colleagues and I... are even more determined to devote ourselves to education and public welfare," he said, according to a transcript of his speech published by news site Tianmu News. "China has... entered a new stage of development, and is moving towards common prosperity."

A spokesperson for the Jack Ma Foundation, his

charitable arm, confirmed he "participated in the online ceremony of the annual Rural Teacher Initiative event". Both Alibaba and Ant said they will cooperate with regulatory requests. Ma, a charismatic former teacher turned internet entrepreneur, retired as chairman of Alibaba in 2019 but has long attracted attention for his outspokenness and flamboyant antics, performing as a rockstar at company conferences.

The continued squeeze on one of China's most influential companies is the latest sign that the leadership is ready to deflate the ambitions of big tech firms in a runaway internet sector. Beijing has a history of disappearing, investigating and imprisoning financial tycoons who do not toe the party line.

Last year, outspoken real estate tycoon Ren Zhiqiang was jailed for 18 years on alleged corruption charges, months after penning an essay critical of the Communist Party. — AFP



PARIS: This file photo taken on May 16, 2019 shows Jack Ma, CEO of Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba, speaking during his visit at the Vivattech startups and innovation fair, in Paris. — AFP

## 'Pharmacy of the world' India exports first COVID vaccines

NEW DELHI: India exported its first batch of locally produced coronavirus shots yesterday, officials said, as the world's biggest vaccine manufacturer scrambled to meet requests from other countries desperate to protect their populations. The Maldives and Bhutan will be the first recipients of India's coronavirus vaccine, while Brazil and South Africa are also among those on the waiting list.

Foreign Minister S Jaishankar said on Twitter that the "Pharmacy of the World will deliver to overcome the COVID challenge". The policy is seen in part as a push by India to boost its soft power and take on rival China, which is also supplying vaccines to other countries.

In January, Indian regulators approved two vaccines—one, Covishield, developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University and produced by India's Serum Institute, and the other Covaxin, made by local firm Bharat Biotech. The Indian government said the Maldives will receive a free supply of 100,000 doses of Covishield on Wednesday, while Bhutan will receive 150,000 as a "gift". Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Seychelles will follow shortly, New Delhi said.

India plans to offer 20 million doses to its South Asian neighbors, Bloomberg News reported last



NEW DELHI: A medical worker shows a vial of Covishield vaccine as she prepares to inoculate a medical staff at Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital, in New Delhi on Tuesday. — AFP

week, with others in Latin America, Africa and Central Asia next in line. The Serum Institute, the world's biggest vaccine maker by volume, also plans to supply 200 million doses to Covax, a World Health Organization-backed effort to procure and distribute inoculations to poor countries.

Meanwhile, Covaxin's maker Bharat Biotech last week signed a deal with a Brazilian firm and is ramping up annual production to 700 million doses, a spokesperson told financial outlet the Mint Daily yesterday. India on Saturday began rolling out

Covishield and Covaxin jabs to its 1.3 billion people, although the shot for the latter is yet to complete human trials.

As of Wednesday, India had vaccinated almost 675,000 people, according to the government, as it pushes to inoculate 300 million people by July. In the first two days of the rollout in the capital New Delhi, for instance, only 53 percent of people invited came forward for jabs, the city's Health Minister Satyendar Jain said. — AFP

## Stellantis sets its sights on electric vehicles in future

VELIZY-VILLACOUBLAY, France: Stellantis, the world's newest major automobile group, laid out Tuesday a roadmap for its development, notably in electric vehicles.

Chief executive Carlos Tavares, who was already head of the French automaker PSA, said the 14 brands that make up Stellantis, now the world's fourth biggest carmaker, would all offer electric vehicles by 2025. He also pledged to draw up a strategy for development in China by the end of the year, without providing details. Stellantis was created from the merger of PSA and its Peugeot and Citroen brands in particular—with the Italian carmaker Fiat, which also owns Chrysler, Jeep, Alfa Romeo and Maserati, among others.

Tavares told a press conference that every brand, including those which currently post weak sales, would have a chance to prove itself. "We want to support those brands, even those facing difficulties," he said. "We are car addicts. We like the brands, we like their history".

The group also plans to "make electric vehicles affordable for the middle class" in the near future, he said. Stellantis already has 29 electric models for sale and plans to launch 10 more by the end of the year.

With respect to the Chinese market, Tavares said that neither PSA nor Fiat had been satisfied with their results, and pledged "a complete overhaul of the group's strategy". Tavares said the group was pleased that Britain and the European Union had hammered out a deal on trade relations now that Britain is no longer an EU member. He added that decisions regarding future investments in Britain, home to the group's Vauxhall brand, "will be made within the next two weeks".

Meanwhile, Electric vehicle maker Rivian on Tuesday said it raised \$2.65 billion in a new funding round valuing the Amazon-backed US company at \$26.7 billion. Investors included Amazon's Climate Pledge Fund and Fidelity Management and



The flags blow in the wind outside of the FCA US LLC Headquarters and Technology Center as it is changed to Stellantis on Tuesday in Auburn Hills, Michigan. — AFP

Research, according to Rivian.

"This is a critical year for us as we are launching the R1T, the R1S and the Amazon commercial delivery vehicles," Rivian founder and chief executive RJ Scaringe said in a release. "The support and confidence of our investors enables us to remain focused on these launches while simultaneously scaling our business for our next stage of growth." Amazon is set to launch its own electric delivery vans ordered from the startup. The new round brings to \$8 billion the total amount of funding raised by Rivian in the past two years.

"We have been eagerly anticipating the arrival of 2021, and with it, the exhilaration of Rivian starting to deliver its revolutionary products to customers," said T. Rowe Price portfolio manager Joe Fath. The Rivian financing round was led by funds and accounts advised by T. Rowe Price Associates.

Rivian has been targeting Europe for its electric vehicles, according to Wedbush analyst Dan

Ives. "They have the brand, the backers, and the prototypes to aggressively go after this market," Ives said.

Electric vehicle sales increased by 20 percent last year and are expected to surge by 71 percent this year, as the number of charging stations also grows significantly, according to AI-powered predictive platform BlastPoint. "The Covid-19 pandemic was responsible for slower EV commercial expansion, but 2020 still saw explosive sales across Europe and China, and an uptick in US sales," said BlastPoint chief executive Alison Alvarez. The news comes with General Motors announcing it is joining forces with Microsoft on its Cruise autonomous driving venture.

The companies have established "a long-term strategic relationship," and Microsoft will join GM, Honda and institutional investors in a new \$2 billion equity investment round, GM and Cruise said in a press release. — AFP

## EU wants euro to challenge dollar supremacy

BRUSSELS: Europe is too vulnerable to the global power of the dollar and must ensure the international standing of its euro currency to challenge US dominance, the EU executive urged Tuesday. The European Commission made its pitch in a plan that sets out ways to help build the power of the euro and chip away at Washington's supremacy, though the 19-page proposal rarely refers to the United States by name.

After their traumatic experience with the Trump administration, Europeans would like to mitigate that dominance and the paper released on Tuesday sets out several ways to achieve that, though most will be difficult to attain. "The EU will always champion alliances with like-minded partners. This is our absolute preference. We are committed to multilateralism, openness and beneficial partnerships," said EU executive vice president Valdis Dombrovskis.

"But given the more confrontational geopolitical landscape, we have to be ready to protect ourselves against unfair and abusive practices imposed from elsewhere—and to bolster our defenses against them." The effort comes a day before the inauguration of president-elect Joe Biden, who many in Europe assume will turn the page from the anti-EU President Donald Trump and re-establish transatlantic goodwill.

### New opportunities

The ambition to boost the euro was strengthened in 2018 when European companies were forced out of doing business in Iran, at risk of facing sanctions by Washington that had pulled out of the nuclear deal with Tehran. The EU scrambled to come up with a legal work-around to help companies avoid US sanctions, but this was mostly a failure given the immense risk of challenging Washington.

"The extra-territorial application of unilateral sanctions by third countries has seriously affected the EU's and its Member States' ability to advance foreign policy objectives," the paper said. To help fight that, the commission wants to expand the scrutiny of takeovers of European companies specifically to establish "whether this makes the EU target company more vulnerable to compliance with such extraterritorial sanctions."

Far beyond sanctions, the use of the dollar as the world's reserve currency gives Washington immense economic and diplomatic leverage. To rival the dollar, the paper suggests that the EU use its 750 billion euro (\$900 billion) recovery plan as inspiration to promote euro-denominated financing on the markets. Experts have long said that the EU needs to create a financial asset to compete with the 10-year US treasury bond, which is a bedrock of global investment. — AFP





## Business

# GM teams up with Microsoft as electric car market revs

## New partnership to challenge Tesla and others in electric car market



In this file photo Mark Reuss, President of General Motors, announces that GM's Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly plant will build the all-electric Cruise Origin self-driving shuttle. Microsoft will join GM, Honda and institutional investors in a new \$2 billion equity investment round, GM and Cruise said in a press release.



This handout image obtained on January 12, 2021, courtesy of Cadillac/General Motors shows Cadillac in its recent product blitz derived from GM's future EV platform, as GM announced that Cadillac will be at the vanguard of the company's move towards an all-electric future. —AFP photos

**SAN FRANCISCO:** General Motors announced an alliance with Microsoft on its Cruise autonomous driving venture, combining forces to challenge Tesla and others in an electric car market expected to rev with Joe Biden's environment-friendly administration in the White House.

The companies have established "a long-term strategic relationship," and Microsoft will join GM, Honda and institutional investors in a new \$2 billion equity investment round, GM and its Cruise subsidiary said in a press release. "This is a major shot across the bow from Microsoft to Tesla and Waymo and other EV (electric vehicle) autonomous players that Redmond is on its way," said Wedbush analyst Dan Ives.

"There is an arms race in the EV world and this is the latest collaborative deal with many more on their way, speaking to this trillion dollar market over the next decade," Ives and others think Apple is poised to begin putting its technology to work in self-driving, electric cars although the iPhone maker has remained mum on the subject. Microsoft Azure is a powerhouse in the cloud computing market, so

synching GM electric vehicles with Azure computing and artificial intelligence capabilities promises a boon for the car maker, Ives reasoned.

Microsoft also will provide hardware and software engineering support to GM as part of the alliance, which values Cruise at some \$30 billion. "Our mission to bring safer, better, and more affordable transportation to everyone isn't just a tech race—it's also a trust race," Cruise chief executive Dan Ammann said.

"Microsoft, as the gold standard in the trustworthy democratization of technology, will be a force multiplier for us as we commercialize our fleet of self-driving, all-electric, shared vehicles."

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella said the venture will help GM and Cruise to "scale and make autonomous transportation mainstream." Last week, GM announced plans to build a fleet of new electric vans.

### Windscreen-free future?

The partnership comes on the heels of a series of GM announcements to reposition the Detroit

giant to compete with Tesla and other newer players. "It makes a lot of sense," said Edmunds executive director of insights Jessica Caldwell. "Microsoft and General Motors, both massive, historical American companies, tackling a problem that companies around the world are working on."

Companies such as GM are still trying to figure out what the self-driving car of the future looks like, Caldwell added. Perhaps seats will face each other as in train cars, or there will be no need for front windows or driver seats.

Electric vehicle maker Rivian separately said it raised \$2.65 billion in a new funding round valuing the Amazon-backed US company at \$26.7 billion.

Investors included Amazon's Climate Pledge Fund and Fidelity Management and Research, according to Rivian. Amazon is set to launch its own electric delivery vans ordered from the startup.

Waymo, the autonomous car unit of Google-parent Alphabet, late last year opened its robo-taxi project to the general public in the US city of Phoenix, becoming the first widely available

driverless ride service. Early last year, Waymo raised \$2.25 billion in its first external funding round to accelerate its deployment of autonomous cars and trucks.

### Retrofitting future?

Global Equities analyst Trip Chowdhry was skeptical of traditional car makers such as GM being able to recreate the mix of technology, manufacturing, logistics, and culture that has been a winning formula for electric car star Tesla. "You cannot retrofit into the new world," Chowdhry said while discussing the GM alliance with Microsoft.

Accelerating adoption of electric vehicles is expected to be "top of mind" in the Biden administration, being front-and-center in a framework of green initiatives, according to Ives. "One of the core underpinnings of the Biden platform will be around pushing clean energy and zero-emissions vehicles with hopes of accelerating the deployment of electric vehicles and public charging outlets by 2030," Ives said. —AFP

## Germany to be 'first country' to end shredding of male chicks

**BERLIN:** Germany is set to be the first country to ban mass shredding of male chicks in the poultry industry, the government said yesterday after approving a draft law on the controversial practice. The measure passed by the cabinet envisages a ban on chick shredding from 2022 in "a significant step forward for animal welfare," Agriculture Minister Julia Klöckner said in a statement.

In many poultry businesses, male chicks are separated from females soon after hatching and killed as they do not produce eggs and generate less

meat. Tens of millions of males are shredded in Germany every year. Animal welfare activists have long campaigned to end the practice but farmers have complained there is no practical, affordable and cruelty-free alternative.

But technologies to determine the sex of chicks before they hatch are expected to be widely available by the time the ban comes into force, according to Klöckner. "We have invested millions of euros in alternatives, bringing animal welfare and economic efficiency together on German soil," Klöckner said.

Saying Germany would be "the first country in the world" to stop the practice, Klöckner stated it wants to "set the pace and be a role model for other countries". From 2024, the law would also require poultry farmers to use methods that work at before hatching. The legislation must next be approved by the Bundestag, the lower house of parliament. Germany and France committed in January 2020 to work together to end the practice of chick shredding by the end of 2021. —AFP



LEIPZIG: In this file photo, activists of the Albert Schweitzer Foundation (ASF), a German animal protection and rights organization, throw toy chicks into a fake shredding machine in a symbolic action to protest against the killing of male chicks in front of the Federal Administrative Court in Leipzig, eastern Germany. —AFP

## WWW inventor opposes Australia's news payment plan

**SYDNEY:** World Wide Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee says Australia's plan to force digital giants to pay media outlets for news content is "unworkable" and undermines a "fundamental principle" of the internet. Canberra is pursuing world-first laws that would require Google and Facebook to compensate Australian news organizations, or pay millions of dollars in fines.

The aggressive move to check the tech giants' power has prompted blowback from the US firms, with Facebook warning Australians could be blocked from sharing articles on its "News Feed", while Google has been experimenting with hiding local news in searches. Berners-Lee, a computer scientist who created the web in 1989, said in a submission to an Australian Senate inquiry he is "concerned that the code risks breaching a fundamental principle of the web by requiring payment for linking between certain content online".

"The ability to link freely-meaning without limitations regarding the content of the linked site and without monetary fees-is fundamental to how the web operates, how it has flourished till present, and how it will continue to grow in decades to come," he wrote. In the submission dated January 18, Berners-Lee said he supports the need for publishers to be "properly rewarded" for their work but "constraints on the use of hypertext links are not the correct way to achieve this goal".

"If this precedent were followed elsewhere it could make the web unworkable around the world," he wrote. "I therefore respectfully urge the committee to remove this mechanism from the code."

The Office of the US Trade Representative has also urged Australia to abandon its "burdensome" plan, saying there could be "long-lasting negative consequences" for consumers and companies.

Canberra's initiative has been closely watched around the globe, as news media worldwide suffer in an increasingly digital economy where big tech firms overwhelmingly capture advertising revenue. The planned legislation has received widespread support from Australian media organizations, many of which have been hit hard by a drop in revenue during the coronavirus pandemic.

The digital giants have also made submissions to



Tim Berners-Lee

the inquiry, with Facebook urging a return to the voluntary code of conduct first mooted by Canberra. "Facebook remains willing to pay Australian news publishers for news content made available on Facebook, as long as it is subject to genuine commercial considerations," it said. Google has said some revisions to the draft proposal have improved the law but called for several further amendments to the rules. Australia plans to introduce the new rules this year, with the Senate committee set to hold public hearings from Friday. —AFP

Some US\$1 million in cash was seized at the public housing apartment of one of those arrested, police added. Hong Kong is a major international business hub and a key conduit for China to access international markets and finance.

It bills itself as one of the world's most free economies, but transparency campaigners have long complained that lax regulations make it an easy place to launder money and set up shell companies. —AFP

## HK bank staff arrested in \$810m probe

**HONG KONG:** Seven former and current bank employees have been arrested in Hong Kong as part of a major operation against a \$810 million international money-laundering syn-

dicate, police said yesterday. "It's the largest case we have busted in recent years," said Yip Wing-lam, a superintendent at the commercial crime bureau, adding it was the first time local bank staff had been arrested for involvement in money laundering.

Police declined to name the banks those arrested worked for. Investigators said those detained are alleged to have helped a key Hong Kong-based member of the syndicate apply for business accounts,

including falsifying company documents and coaching applicants for interviews.

At least 14 business accounts were opened between 2017 and 2018 using names of 16 people from mainland China and Belgium, police said. The accounts handled a total of HK\$6.3 billion (US\$810 million) in illicit funds. Police said much of the money could be traced to a number of foreign countries, including Italy, Germany and Vietnam.

## Wall Street climbs ahead of Biden's inauguration

**NEW YORK:** Wall Street saw solid gains ahead of US President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration as investors considered his plans to revive the economy, though European indices were weaker as the COVID-19 pandemic wore on.

Dominating the news cycle for New York traders was the confirmation hearing of Janet Yellen, Biden's nominee to lead the Treasury, who fielded questions from senators on the incoming administration's \$1.9 trillion stimulus proposal. Investors apparently liked what they heard, with the Dow gaining 0.4 percent and the tech-rich Nasdaq climbing 1.5 percent. Stephen Innes, chief global market strategist at Axi, said the uptick reflects "the market giving the Biden policy agenda an early stamp of approval" a day before his administration takes office. Oil prices gained on optimism of a global economic recovery and vaccine roll-outs that are offsetting concerns about the emergence of new coronavirus strains, while the dollar was mixed.

### Yellen's remarks

Biden has vowed swift action to get the world's largest economy back on its feet, though he will have to get the stimulus package — one of two bills he has promised American voters — through a Congress only narrowly controlled by his Democrats. At her hearing, Yellen warned that without more stimulus, the United States could be in for renewed economic pain.

She also emphasized that the dollar's value should be determined by foreign exchange markets, and expressed support for digital tax negotiations taking place under the auspices of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. A global agreement would allow the US to collect taxes from corporations that have moved their headquarters overseas, Yellen said.

"It would enable us to collect a fair share from corporations, while maintaining the competitiveness of our businesses and diminish the incentives that American companies now have to offshore activities," she said. In New York, traders also scoured US corporate results, which Oanda market analyst Craig Erlam suggested might "spark markets back into life." In Germany meanwhile, investor confidence jumped in December, the ZEW institute's monthly barometer showed.

"The announcement of imminent vaccine approvals makes financial market experts more confident about the future," ZEW President Achim Wambach said, but the news nonetheless failed to push the DAX index of leading German shares into the black. That was because German authorities were set to announce the extension and tightening of a partial lockdown beyond January owing to growing fears over the new coronavirus variants. —AFP

## Business



A group picture of Gulf Bank employees.



Najla Al-Essa (right) with Lujain Al-Qena'i during a press conference.

# Gulf Bank launches new Mastercard 'Rose Gold' credit card for women

## New card is packed with exclusive discounts and benefits for today's modern woman

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank has launched its new Mastercard Rose Gold credit card, with tailored benefits and exclusive unmatched discounts designed to reward the modern woman for every purchase. The Bank announced the Rose Gold card in a press conference held at its newest branch in Crystal Tower, in which Gulf Bank's Head of Marketing, Najla Al-Essa, highlighted the card's exciting new features.

What makes the Mastercard Rose Gold credit card especially unique is that it is the highest rewarding credit card for women in Kuwait, covering popular spends categories of interest such as fashion, fitness and dining. In addition, Rose Gold credit cardholders will be automatically enrolled to Gulf Points, the fastest rewarding program in Kuwait that provides free flights and hotel stays.

For every KD 1 spent worldwide at the spa, salon, or gym, Rose Gold credit cardholders can earn 20 Gulf Points. They also can earn 7 Gulf Points for dining, 5 points for online shopping on international websites, and 2 points on other local or international purchases. Customers can use their Gulf Points to make bookings across any airline anytime, anywhere, and at over 300,000 hotels worldwide, with no blackout dates.

Rose Gold Cardholders enjoy a variety of exclusive benefits and offers, including the opportunity to receive the card free for life upon spending KD 2,500 annually. As a welcome offer, Gulf Bank is excited to offer Rose Gold cardholders an additional 15,000 bonus points

upon spending KD 500 by April 30th, 2021.

Moreover, as Rose Gold cardholders, customers also get access to exclusive discounts & offers at more than 1,000 outlets such as:

- Free Coffee every Sunday at all Costa Coffee branches
- Exclusive discounts at more than 21 salons with Book app
- 20% discount at GIA restaurant
- Up to 15% at Regency Hotel
- Up to 20% at Home Center

Commenting on Gulf Bank's newest launch, Najla Al-Essa, Head of Marketing at Gulf Bank, said: "We are proud to be launching a product designed to empower and reward women when spending at their favorite locations. In addition to the benefits that all Gulf Bank credit cardholders enjoy, Rose Gold cardholders have access to exclusive benefits, services and additional rewards as part of the Bank's Gulf Points program, the fastest rewarding program in Kuwait, which can be redeemed for airline travel, hotel accommodation, and exclusive seasonal travel packages."

Nadia Ghissassi, Country Manager for Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq and Oman at Mastercard, said: "We're delighted to be collaborating with Gulf Bank on the launch of the Rose Gold credit card. Including women by design and enabling them to pursue their passions is at the core of what we do at Mastercard. With this new credit card, women in Kuwait can shop and make



Najla Al-Essa

lifestyle purchases, all with the comfort of quick, fast and secure contactless payments."

Gulf Bank's Rose Gold cardholders can also take advantage of a more convenient shopping experience with Gulf Bank's exclusive Easy Pay service. With Easy Pay, cardholders can pay for their purchases in installments over the course of 12 months, with 0 percent interest and no processing fees which allows cardholders to shop from over 100 shopping partners across a variety of categories, including electronics, home furnishing, automobile services, fashion, travel, and more.



Rose Gold Mastercard

Gulf Bank's Rose Gold credit card also provides cardholders with a variety of exclusive travel offers and benefits which include discounts on hotel bookings, flights, and car rentals. With Gulf Bank's Rose Gold credit card, women can also enjoy complimentary airport lounge access across five countries in the Middle East. To further ease the travel planning process, Gulf Bank Rose Gold credit cardholders can receive free travel insurance which can be used for the Schengen Visa application for both the cardholder and their family members upon booking with their card.

## Lotus looks to an electric future with Alpine deal

**LONDON:** A co-operation deal between British sports car maker Lotus and Alpine, owned by French giant Renault, is driven by a need to share supply chains and production facilities. The joint venture was announced last week and is aimed at accelerating the two firms' electrification strategy. Chinese-owned Lotus makes all its cars in Britain, which is being hit by supply-chain delays following the country's recent exit from the European Union's single market and customs union. But Lotus has enjoyed a solid 2020 despite fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. AFP spoke to Uday Senapati, executive director corporate strategy and product management at Lotus.

### What's the aim of the deal?

"We are partnering on several aspects, the main one being an all-electric sports car backbone (chassis) which will be done by Lotus engineering. "It will give us our line of sports car in the middle of this decade. We will be looking at launching a new electric sports car on this platform. "Alpine will be developing their own sports car with us, which we will lead the development for. "We have a great expertise in motor sports, they have great expertise in aerodynamic powertrains with lots of electrification on race tracks. "Formula One is another area that we are exploring but this is not the main focus."

### How are the firms' electric ambitions going?

"We will go all electric, I can't put a timeline to it yet. "We are also talking about tackling the environmental footprint of all our operations. "We have done a partnership with (British Gas-parent) Centrica on a deal for our energy supply to make sure our carbon footprint is zero or better in the next decade.

"That's what we're working on. "In 2028 we will be 80 years old as a company and we are aiming at that point in time to be there in terms of our carbon footprint. "There have been challenges with the launch of (our first electric model) Evija and testing the car with the (Covid) travel restrictions. "The car has to be developed with testing it across the globe... it'll go into production and commercialization this year. "There will be only 130 of them... at a base price of £2.0 million (\$2.7 million, 2.2 million euros)."

### How are you coping with the Brexit transition?

"We have very strong shareholders especially (our Chinese parent) Geely who has not just committed but has been spending a great deal on developing products. "The Chinese market is going well, Geely is doing extremely well so this commitment is solid.

"If you want to battle a crisis yourself you are going to be in trouble. Partnerships are going to be key and Lotus has a history of partnerships. We are open to more. "2021 is going to be extremely challenging for the industry. We have to work together to brace for those challenges. Lotus engineering is firmly posi-



LONDON: A co-operation deal between British sports car maker Lotus and Alpine, owned by French giant Renault, is driven by a need to share supply chains and production facilities.

tioned to work with many others but we stand in a good position. "Our results from 2020 show we've done extremely well. We grew 4.4 percent in our sales in our most difficult year in recent times. I cannot say 2021 will be much better. "We did not see a massive effect from Brexit. We don't see a massive disruption (to supplies). "The partnership with Renault will work well there since Renault has got a big supply-chain footprint and this partnership will help us. "With Renault we have access to their industrial footprint as well as in Europe if needed." —AFP

## Malaysia files WTO complaint over EU palm oil restrictions

**GENEVA:** Malaysia has filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization over European Union rules affecting the consumption of palm oil-based biofuels, according to a document published Tuesday. In the complaint, dated January 15, Malaysia charges that the EU, and in particular its member states France and Lithuania, had imposed restrictive measures on the use of palm oil that violate international trade agreements.

Malaysia, the world's second largest producer of palm oil, balked at EU efforts to phase out the use of palm oil as a biofuel, and has requested consultations to help resolve the dispute. The EU has embarked on a major plan committing member states to build a carbon neutral economy by 2050, including by promoting the use of biofuels.

But it has deemed that palm oil production is not sustainable, and palm oil-based biofuels cannot be counted towards EU renewable targets. By doing so, the bloc and its member states "confer unfair benefits to EU domestic producers of certain biofuel feedstocks, such as rapeseed oil and soy, and the biofuels produced therefrom, at the expense of palm oil and oil palm crop-based biofuels from Malaysia," according to the complaint. Palm oil is a key ingredient in a wide range of products from food to cosmetics but it has long been controversial. Environmentalists say it drives deforestation, with huge swathes of rainforest logged in recent decades to make way for plantations.—AFP

## Yellen says US to stand against China trade abuses

**WASHINGTON:** President-elect Joe Biden's picks to lead economic and foreign policy signaled on Tuesday that there would be no letup in Washington's efforts to combat China's trade abuses. The comments from the incoming administration reflect an unusual area of common ground with outgoing President Donald Trump, who over the past four years unleashed an aggressive and costly trade war that imposed billions of dollars in punitive tariffs on Chinese goods.

Janet Yellen, Biden's pick for Treasury secretary, and Antony Blinken, who was tapped to lead the State Department, nonetheless emphasized areas of difference, particularly the incoming administration's commitments to working with US allies and promoting investments to make American firms and workers more competitive against Beijing. Responding to questions from the Senate Finance Committee at her confirmation hearing on Tuesday, Yellen called China "our most important strategic competitor."

She accused Beijing of "undercutting American companies" by offering illegal subsidies, dumping products at below-market prices, stealing intellectual property and erecting barriers to US exports. "We need to take on China's abusive unfair and illegal practices," she said, adding "we're prepared to use the full array of tools" to address those issues. Speaking the day before Biden is due to take office, she also vowed to be watchful of the national security implications of China's theft of "trade secrets" and "illegal efforts to acquire critical technology."

Biden's transition team pushed for her "swift confir-

mation" in a statement after her testimony, saying Yellen "demonstrated that she is the bold, experienced leader needed at the helm of the Treasury to begin building our economy back better." Blinken told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "President Trump was right in taking a tougher approach to China," but added, "I disagree very much with the way he went about it in a number of areas."

### Investing in America

Unlike Trump, who pulled back from multilateral organizations and attacked the trade policies of US partners and adversaries alike, Yellen stressed that it will be important "to work with our allies" to combat the challenge posed by China. Democrats have for years complained bitterly about the exodus of jobs and manufacturing to the Asian country. Trump, a Republican, doubled down on those complaints and won the support of many workers.

In a farewell address Tuesday, the outgoing president defended his record, saying he had brought unprecedented international pressure on Washington's communist rival.

"We revitalized our alliances and rallied the nations of the world to stand up to China like never before," Trump said, according to excerpts released by the White House. But he in fact consistently acted unilaterally, while both retreating from and crippling the World Trade Organization, which enforces global commerce rules.

Biden, a Democrat, also has pledged to defend American workers and manufacturing, and under his slogan "Build Back Better" is expected to soon propose a stimulus plan that includes massive infrastructure investments. Yellen said that policy would help fend off Beijing's economic challenge. Washington needs to "make investments that allow us to compete with China... by investing in our infrastructure, investing in our people and creating a more competitive economy," she said.—AFP



WASHINGTON, DC: Ranking member Ron Wyden and Chairman Chuck Grassley speak to one another before the start of a Senate Finance Committee hearing for Joe Biden's nominee for Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen on Tuesday in Washington, DC. —AFP

# Classifieds

Thursday, January 21, 2021

**Kuwait Times**  
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 Fax: (+965) 24348714  
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## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY DAY:** Fair with light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind with speed of 15 - 45 km/h causing rising dust.

**BY NIGHT:** Cold and Partly cloudy with moderate to fresh north westerly wind with speed of 25 - 60 km/h causing rising dust.

WEATHER WATCH			Fresh wind + dust	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 20/01/2021 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	22 °C	13 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	23 °C	09 °C		
ABDALY	25 °C	06 °C		
BUBYAN	21 °C	11 °C		
JAHRA	23 °C	11 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C		
SALMIYAH	19 °C	15 °C		
AHMADI	- °C	16 °C		
NUWAISIB	22 °C	10 °C		
WAFRA	23 °C	09 °C		
SALMY	22 °C	09 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Thursday	01/21	A significant decrease in temperature with a chance for frost forming in agriculture and desert areas	16 °C	06 °C	NW	20 - 45 km/h
Friday	01/22	Rather cold with a chance for frost forming in agriculture and desert areas	15 °C	02 °C	NW	15 - 45 km/h
Saturday	01/23	Rather cold and Partly cloudy with a chance for frost forming in agriculture and desert areas	16 °C	02 °C	NW	10 - 32 km/h
Sunday	01/24	Rather cold and some scattered clouds will appear	18 °C	04 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 28 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:20
Sunrise	06:43
Zuhr	11:59
Asr	14:56
Sunset	17:16
Isha	18:36

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	23 °C
MIN. Temp.	07 °C
MAX. RH	87 %
MIN. RH	23 %
MAX. Wind	W 32 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

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

## Hospitals

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

## Clinics

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

## CHANGE OF NAME

I, **Deepu S/O Ramesh** holder Of Indian Passport No. M9884743 issued at Kuwait on 29/11/2015 & Civil Id No. 285050302439 has changed my name from Deepu to Deepu Verma hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Deepu (Given Name) and Verma (Surname). (C 5830) 21-1-2021



## Airlines

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

## EMERGENCY 112

Automated enquiry  
 about the Civil ID card is  
**1889988**

## Word Search

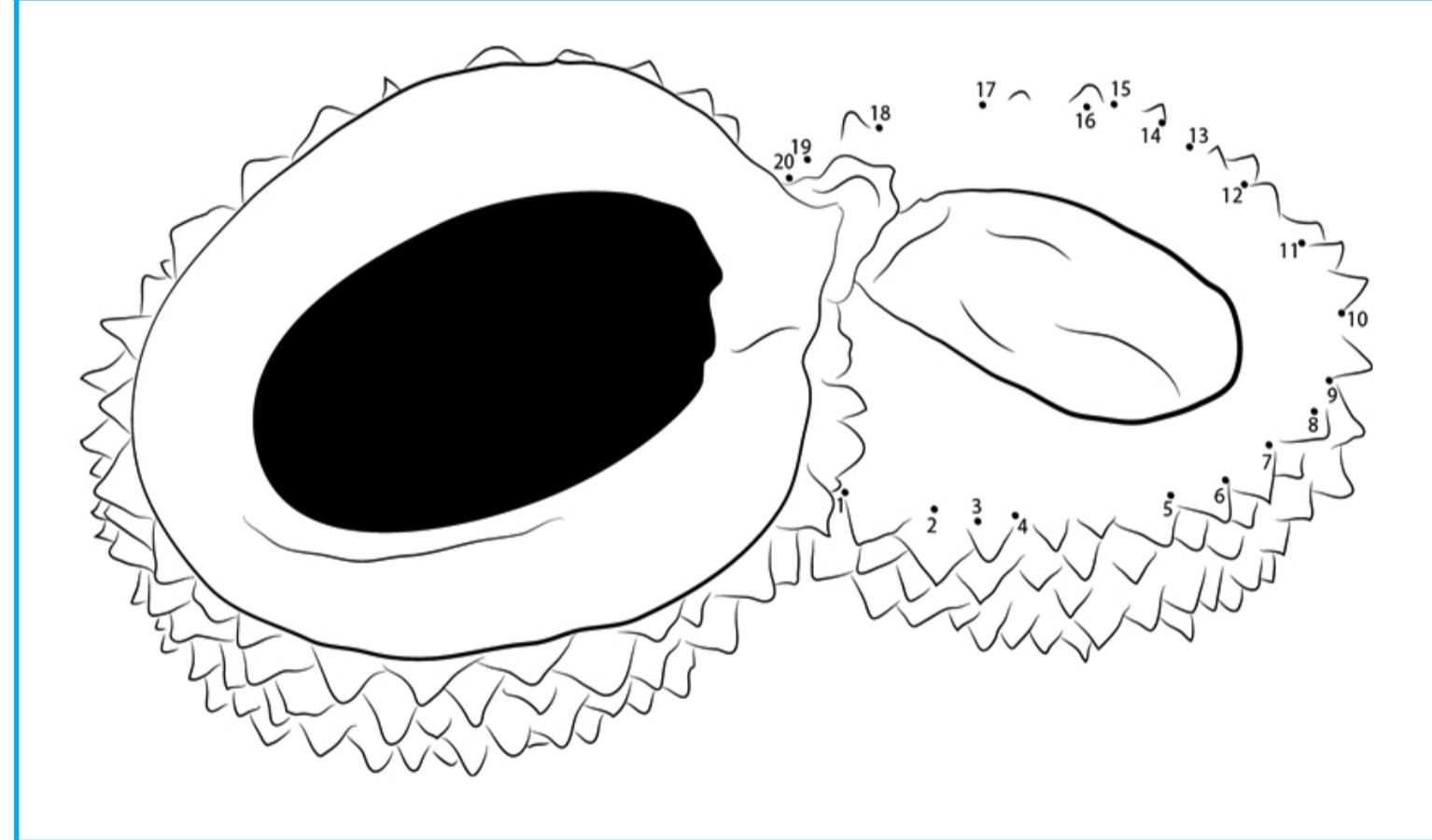
### Tokyo Word Search

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

Akihara	X	J	T	R	E	W	O	T	O	Y	K	O	T	P	R	T	D	X	H
Disneyland	A	K	A	K	I	H	A	B	A	R	A	C	K	A	I	V	G	O	A
DisneySea	T	R	X	S	H	I	B	U	Y	A	C	R	O	S	S	I	N	G	F
Fish Market	F	A	E	F	I	S	H	M	A	R	K	E	T	Y	H	Z	B	D	E
Ginza	N	P	M	Z	V	C	G	J	K	N	Y	A	B	P	L	R	R	C	M
Godzilla	Q	O	O	C	H	E	R	K	I	A	E	S	Y	E	N	S	I	D	U
Harajuku	C	M	D	X	I	Y	X	A	T	O	Z	S	E	A	N	O	M	N	S
Imperial Palace	D	M	O	U	P	X	R	S	O	D	E	U	O	Z	E	Q	L	T	E
Museums	A	P	Y	I	Q	T	S	O	R	A	Q	S	T	A	M	I	W	H	U
Odaiba	L	Z	K	J	T	G	J	M	I	I	C	H	H	O	A	G	N	A	M
Park	L	T	O	O	M	U	S	P	F	B	T	I	H	Z	R	N	A	R	S
Ramen	I	H	T	J	S	G	M	L	E	A	B	E	Z	U	Z	O	M	A	A
Roppongi	Z	D	Y	V	C	W	S	D	R	R	N	P	M	J	B	P	Y	J	A
Salaryman	D	I	S	N	E	Y	L	A	N	D	Y	Z	G	P	I	P	R	U	S
Shibuya Crossing	O	M	V	U	B	W	T	O	Q	M	Q	U	O	G	U	O	A	K	A
Shrine	G	E	C	A	L	A	P	L	A	I	R	E	P	M	I	R	L	U	Z
Sky Tree	A	E	V	P	F	F	L	C	B	S	R	O	E	W	P	H	A	A	N
Sumo	E	B	H	B	T	C	Z	Y	Z	X	E	E	R	T	Y	K	S	L	I
Sushi	G	V	X	O	K	A	D	G	T	G	M	A	E	L	P	M	E	T	G

Akiba  
 Disneyland  
 DisneySea  
 Fish Market  
 Ginza  
 Godzilla  
 Harajuku  
 Imperial Palace  
 Museums  
 Odaiba  
 Park  
 Ramen  
 Roppongi  
 Salaryman  
 Shibuya Crossing  
 Shrine  
 Sky Tree  
 Sumo  
 Sushi  
 Temple  
 Tempura  
 Tokyo Dome  
 Tokyo Tower  
 Train  
 Udon  
 Yakitori

## Join the Dots



## STAR TRACK

### Aries (March 21-April 19)

You might try to learn a new computer program today, Aries. You could find it a little confusing at first, but as you continue to learn, you will find that it makes things easier for you. You should master it more quickly than you thought. This may sound minor, but it will improve your productivity from now on, leaving you time to explore other possibilities or attend to important matters.

### Cancer (June 21-July 22)

A phone call from a close friend or love partner could bring a thrilling surprise your way today, Cancer. An event has occurred that you either gave up on long ago or never dreamed of. This news could necessitate your spending a lot of time on the phone or computer making contacts, but that's OK. You will be so happy that this happened that you won't mind the time you spend on it.

### Libra (September 23-October 22)

Today you may discover that you have a previously untapped talent for the occult sciences, Libra. This might involve astrology, numerology, alchemy, or using oracles. A class or workshop could be involved. You tend to be intuitive by nature, and studying these fields may offer an opportunity to train that ability to a higher level of accuracy. Find an expert in one of those areas.

### Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

If you've been thinking about studying astrology, numerology, or other occult sciences, Capricorn, this is the day to start. There may be a school or teacher that you've been considering. By doing this, you could open doors to new knowledge, meet new friends who share your interests, and steer your life in a fascinating new direction. Pick up the phone and take the first step.

### Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Today you may stumble into an unexpected new friendship, Taurus. This could come as the result of a social event or an introduction by a close friend. You will discover new rapport the likes of which you haven't experienced in a long time. You could spend hours trading ideas. Make sure you exchange contact information. You will definitely want to stay in touch with this person.

### Leo (July 23-August 22)

If you own property, you might discover that its value has increased far beyond anything you dreamed of, Leo. This might involve real estate, but it could also involve other resources like stocks, bonds, or family heirlooms. What you choose to do with this information is up to you, but you will probably decide to hang on to what you have. It's just nice to know it's valuable.

### Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

There's someone you've wanted to meet for a long time, Scorpio, and today you might have the opportunity to introduce yourself. This could be a potential romantic interest, a teacher you've wanted to study with, or someone interesting you might like for a friend. Sparks are apt to fly between you. Don't hesitate, for this encounter could affect the rest of your life in some profound way.

### Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

A woman you meet at work might point you in a new direction, Aquarius. You should investigate all possible options. This could be a new intellectual interest, a technological skill, or possibly a new and more lucrative source of income. It may involve an unusual field, but don't worry about that. The world is changing, so what seems unorthodox now could be commonplace tomorrow.

### Gemini (May 21-June 20)

A group meeting of some sort, perhaps job related, could take place in your home today, Gemini. Whatever business the group has planned should be taken care of quickly and then you will be able to hang out and socialize. You might discover new aspects of your guests you didn't know existed. This could prove very enlightening for all concerned. Your bond with them will definitely improve.

### Virgo (August 23-September 22)

A surprising phone call or email could come your way today from a friend you haven't heard from in a long time, Virgo. This should make you happy, as you've probably been wondering what this person was doing. Some business changes may have occurred for your friend, but possible new opportunities might also be in the cards for you. Hear what your friend has to say, think about it, and decide later.

### Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Do you feel helpless in the face of problems with technology? If so, you might surprise yourself today, Sagittarius. Some software that you use a lot could go haywire, and you won't want to take the time to wait for a professional. Some study could enable you to come up with the solution on your own. Consulting a professional could demonstrate that you're on the right track.

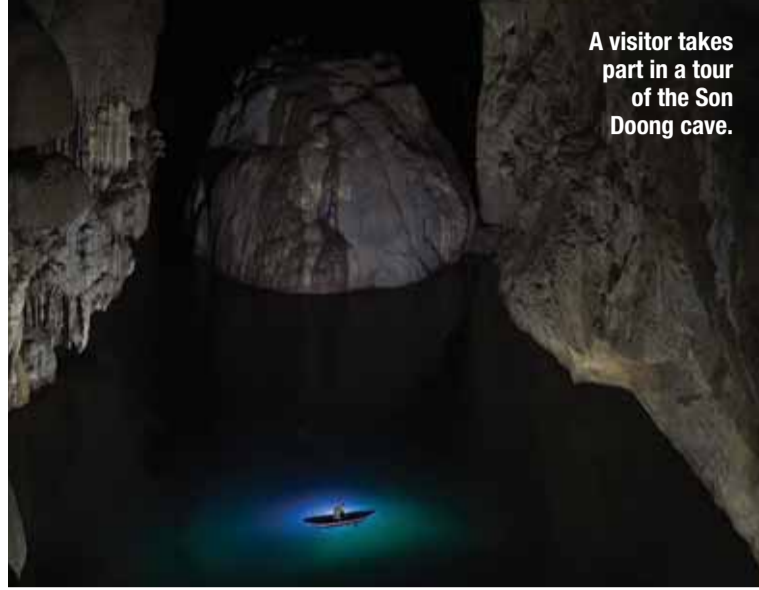
### Pisces (February 19-March 20)

A friend from far away could contact you by phone, email, or even in person, Pisces. This person might bring great news that suddenly turns your life in a new direction. This could involve a new intellectual study or possibly a new circle of friends. At any rate, you will certainly enjoy catching up and hearing what your friend has to say.

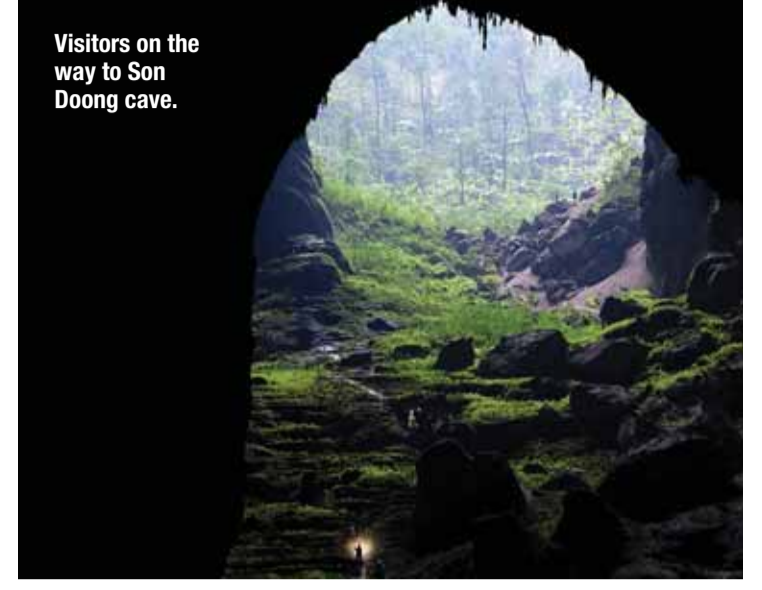
## Lifestyle | Features



This photograph shows a visitor in Son Doong cave, one of the world's largest natural caves, during a tour in central Vietnam's Quang Binh province. — AFP photos



A visitor takes part in a tour of the Son Doong cave.



Visitors on the way to Son Doong cave.



Visitors in Son Doong cave.



# TOURISM ON TRACK IN THE WORLD'S LARGEST CAVE

Vast rock formations the size of multi-storey buildings loom above Ho Minh Phuc, as he picks a path through the gloom inside the world's largest cave. Phuc, who once earned a living through illegal logging, is a porter for the small tour groups that explore Vietnam's Son Doong—a cave so large it has its own ecosystem and weather patterns. Home to flying foxes and a 70-metre rock formation resembling a dog's paw, the cave is an otherworldly wonder that has reshaped the lives of the surrounding community since it opened for boutique tourism in 2013.



Visitors take part in a tour of the Son Doong cave, one of the world's largest natural caves, in central Vietnam's Quang Binh province.

Trapped in poverty, young men like Phuc once had little choice but to forage in the depths of Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park—the World Heritage site where Son Doong lies. There they searched for precious agarwood, a hugely sought-after material known as "the wood of the gods" and widely used for incense. Others eked out a living from hunting endangered civets and porcupines in the forest. "We had to do all we could to avoid the forest rangers," 35-year-old Phuc told AFP. "We did nothing good for nature."

#### Lost for nearly two decades

Son Doong in central Quang Binh province was first discovered by local forager Ho Khanh in 1991, when he stumbled upon an opening in a lime-



A visitor in Son Doong cave.

stone cliff and heard the sounds of a river deep inside. But after returning home through the thick surrounding jungle, Khanh forgot where the hidden entrance lay, and it stayed lost for another two decades. When he eventually led a team of British experts back there in 2009, the team found it had the largest cross-section of any cave anywhere on the planet.

It is large enough to house the 40-floor skyscrapers of an entire New York City block, according to adventure tour company Oxalis, which guides visitors into the caves. When Son Doong was opened to tourists four years later, the lives of Khanh and hundreds of locals changed forever. They soon became porters and guides and opened their

homes to guests wanting a bed for the night. "Some became rich with logging, but most lived a very hard life," Khanh, now 52, said of the time before the cave was opened to the outside world. "When tour companies came in, I told the youngsters their first duty was to protect the environment so as to benefit not just ourselves but also our children... so life can improve."

Before the coronavirus pandemic, Vietnam's tourism industry was booming, but the communist country has

#### Protecting Son Doong

As Covid-19 swept the globe, locals catering to international travellers have struggled. Khanh says his guests are 90 percent down since the pandemic began. But Son Doong has weathered the crisis fairly well overall, thanks to a boost in visitors among Vietnam's fast-growing middle class. The high-end tourism model of the caves—which provides around 500 jobs for the local community—has begun to attract interest in other areas, Oxalis said.



Visitors take part in a tour of the Son Doong cave, one of the world's largest natural caves, in central Vietnam's Quang Binh province.

come under fire for failing to preserve landscapes as it rapidly expands the sector. The area has so far largely stayed clear of the mass tourism model used in other Vietnamese holiday hotspots such as Halong Bay, where cruise ships have spewed sewage into once-pristine waters.

With only one company given permission to operate in each of the key caves, there is an incentive to protect them, with numbers of visitors limited and prices kept high. But challenges lie ahead, UNESCO warned recently. Poaching remains among the national park's "most serious threats", it said in a report that also raised concerns over a proposal to build a cable car to nearby Hang En cave. Logging has also not disappeared — 18 people were sentenced last year for cutting down trees in the national park.

Industry professionals are skeptical, however, that the pandemic could spark a change in direction across the country. Vietnam's tourism industry has done "some very good policy making but they've generally ignored their own policies", says Peter Burns, a tourism planning consultant and professor who worked on a five-year EU-funded sustainable tourism project in Vietnam.

Despite strong environmental protections in place, "they tend to build stuff anyway", he said, pointing to the spread of high-rise hotels in Halong Bay. For porter Phuc, it is crucial that the pandemic does not lead to a similar outcome in Son Doong. "If we expanded into mass tourism, it would of course harm the natural scenery," he said. "That would be terrible." — AFP

## Amazon Prime show agrees to changes after India Hindu outcry

The cast and crew of a popular streaming series starring Bollywood megastar Saif Ali Khan have agreed to "implement changes" to the show after ruling party politicians accused it of insulting Hindu gods. The Amazon Prime drama "Tandav"—loosely compared to the US series "House of Cards"—drew criticism from members of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party after its Friday release. Several BJP politicians called for the show to be

banned, saying it was "deliberately mocking Hindu gods" and disrespecting religious sentiments.

One of the criticized scenes depicts a university play in which Hindu deity Shiva talks about "azaadi" (freedom), a rallying cry from 2019's anti-government protests across the country. "The cast and crew of Tandav have made the decision to implement changes to the web series to address the concerns raised," director Ali Abbas Zafar wrote in a post on Twitter late Tuesday.

The cast and crew also apologized on Monday, with Zafar saying that the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting had told the team it had received "a large number of grievances and petitions... with serious concerns and apprehensions" over the series. "'Tandav' is a work of fiction and any resemblance to acts and persons and events is purely coincidental," he said Monday. The petitioners include Ram Kadam, a BJP lawmaker in Mumbai, who

said he was "fighting for Hindu pride and trying to ensure that nobody dare to mock our Hindu Gods". Leading streaming platforms, including Netflix, Amazon and Disney's Hotstar, have expanded their presence in the country of 1.3 billion, including by commissioning local content. The streaming TV services are not subject to the country's notoriously fussy censor boards, which regularly cut scenes.

But there have been growing calls, particularly from BJP politicians, for the shows to be subject to the same scrutiny. The most recent controversy involved the BBC's TV version of Vikram Seth's epic bestselling novel, "A Suitable Boy", which is streaming on Netflix, over a scene where a Hindu girl kisses a Muslim boy in front of a temple. A BJP politician in November filed a police complaint saying the show had hurt Hindus' religious sentiments. — AFP



Supporters of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) take part in a protest against a new web series 'Tandav', in Mumbai. — AFP

## Lifestyle | Features

## Lebanon returns two stolen 18th-century icons to Greece

Lebanon handed back two 18th-century religious icons of Jesus and Mary to Greece on Tuesday after they were seized during an auction, a judicial source said. The paintings were stolen from an exhibition in Athens in 2016, and Greece put out an international notice calling for their return. Icons are Christian religious paintings, often of saints, and are viewed as sacred.

Lebanon has launched an investigation, but it is not clear who stole them, or how they were brought to the country. "The person who bought the paintings at the auction in Lebanon was questioned," the source said, adding that the buyer was about to ship them to Germany "to sell them on at an international auction there." The paintings were handed to the Greek ambassador in Beirut. Greece has

retrieved several other religious icons worth thousands of dollars in recent years.

In 2011, Greek officials blocked the sale of a dozen religious icons by two art galleries in Britain and the Netherlands after finding the items had been stolen years before. The icons, which dated from before the 18th century and could have each fetched from \$7,000 to

\$21,000, were stolen from unguarded monasteries and churches in the sparsely-populated Epirus region of northwestern Greece. In 2008, Britain returned to Greece a 14th-century icon stolen from a Greek Orthodox monastery 30 years earlier, and found in the hands of a London-based collector. — AFP



A picture shows two 18th-century religious icons depicting Jesus and Mary that were stolen in Greece and were seized by Lebanese authorities during an auction in the capital Beirut. — AFP



In this file photograph, visitors take photographs with mobile phone of the oil painting by Leonardo da Vinci "Salvator Mundi", during the opening of the exhibition "Leonardo da Vinci" at The Louvre Museum in Paris. — AFP

## STOLEN 500-YEAR-OLD LEONARDO DA VINCI COPY FOUND IN NAPLES FLAT

Italian police have found a 500-year-old copy of Leonardo da Vinci's Salvator Mundi in a Naples flat and returned it to a church that had no idea it had been stolen. Officers said late Monday they had arrested the 36-year-old owner of the apartment on suspicion of receiving stolen goods, after the painting was found in his bedroom cupboard. Depicting Jesus Christ with his hand raised in a blessing and holding a crystal orb, the painting is part of the Doma Museum collection within the San Domenico Maggiore church complex in Naples.

It is a copy of Leonardo's famous work that in 2017 became the most expensive painting ever sold, fetching \$450 million at a Christie's auction. But

the collection has been without visitors for months due to coronavirus restrictions and nobody had reported it missing. It was not immediately clear how the police came to discover the theft of the painting, but they said it was a "particularly complex operation". "The painting was found on Saturday thanks to a brilliant and diligent police operation," said Naples prosecutor Giovanni Melillo.

"There was no complaint on the matter and in fact we contacted the (church) prior, who was not aware of its disappearance, as the room where the painting is kept has not been open for three months." The oil painting is believed to be by artist Giacomo Alibrandi and dates to the early 1500s.

Having returned the painting to the church, police are now investigating how it was stolen in the first place, as there was no sign of a break-in, Melillo said. "Whoever took the painting wanted it, and it is plausible that it was a commissioned theft by an organization working in the international art trade," he added. Video images released by police showed an empty wall inside a large niche where the artwork had been housed, in an alcove behind heavy wooden doors locked with a key. — AFP

## Top British musicians hit out at Brexit impact on tours

More than 100 leading musicians yesterday criticized the government's Brexit deal with the European Union writing in an open letter that performers had been "shamefully failed". Leading musical lights including Elton John, The Who's Roger Daltry and classical conductor Simon Rattle wrote in The Times newspaper that the government's failure to secure visa-free travel for musicians would "tip many performers over the edge".

Pink Floyd's Roger Waters, Ed Sheeran, Oasis's Liam Gallagher and Queen's Brian May also signed the letter, which spoke of a "gaping hole where the promised free movement for musicians should be". They outlined how red tape around touring and additional work permits for British performances in Europe will make "many tours unviable, especially for young emerging musicians who are already struggling to keep their heads above water owing to the Covid ban on live music".

Musicians and others in creative industries have railed against new travel rules with the European Union after Britain definitively left the 27-member bloc at the end of the Brexit transition period in December 2020. A petition calling for a visa-free travel and cultural work permit with the EU has so far attracted more than 263,000 signatures online. The government in London has blamed



Elton John is one of the musicians criticizing the British government's Brexit deal. — AFP

Brussels saying the EU had not offered 90-day visa-free travel for musicians.

The EU's chief Brexit negotiator has denied opposing free movement of musicians saying "ambitious proposals" for mobility had been offered. On Tuesday, Culture minister Caroline Dinenage said "the door is open" if Brussels was willing to "consider the UK's very sensible proposals" on visa arrangements for musicians. However, she explained that the deal offered by the EU "would not have been compatible with the government's manifesto commitment to take back control of our borders". The 100 musicians said the government needed to "do what it said it would do" and negotiate a reciprocal deal for paperwork-free travel.

Britain-one of the countries worst affected by the global health crisis, with over 90,000 deaths-has seen its £5.8-billion (\$7.9-billion, 6.4-billion-euro) music industry hit hard by the pandemic. British music festival organizers say the virus has devastated the sector and warned the annual summer events could disappear without more government support and an indication of when music venues can reopen. — AFP

## Netflix keeps growing in pandemic, tops 200 m subscribers

Netflix on Tuesday topped subscriber growth expectations in the past quarter, keeping ahead of new streaming rivals competing for viewers stuck in their homes during the coronavirus pandemic. The streaming television leader added some 8.5 million paid subscribers in the quarter to reach 203 million, topping 200 million despite recent price hikes, its quarterly earnings update showed. "Covid-19 has accelerated that big shift from linear to streaming entertainment," Netflix chief financial officer Spencer Neumann said on an earnings call. "So, the underlying long-term looks good."

The company's cash flow was so strong that it will no longer borrow money to pay for operations, and is considering starting to buy back shares, according to a letter to investors. Netflix shares jumped more than 12 percent in after-market trades following the release. Profits dipped to \$542 million in the fourth quarter, compared with \$587 million in the same period in 2019. But overall revenue in the quarter surged 21.5 percent to \$6.6 billion.



For the full year, Netflix added a record 37 million paid memberships, according to the earnings report. "We're enormously grateful that in these uniquely challenging times we've been able to provide our members around the world with a source of escape, connection and joy while continuing to build our business," Netflix said in a letter to investors. Paid membership increased 23 percent in the final quarter of 2020 when compared with the same period a year earlier, but average revenue per membership was flat, according to the Silicon Valley-based company. While Netflix raised rates slightly in the US late last year, the majority-some 83 percent-of its new subscribers were from outside North America, the earnings report indicated.

## Films to launch

Netflix has invested heavily in original shows and films to make itself a must-have service in the increasingly competitive streaming market. "It's super impressive what Disney has done," Netflix chief executive Reed Hastings said on the call. "It is going to be great for the world that Disney and Netflix are competing show by show, movie by movie."

While Apple, Comcast, Disney and others have fielded streaming services, Netflix thus far "has been a clear winner," according to eMarketer analyst Eric Haggstrom. Netflix executives said their productions are back up and running in most regions after being derailed by the pandemic. Netflix boasted having more than 500 titles in post-production or being readied for release on the service, with the plan being to launch at least one new original film weekly. Already the master of the pandemic-era movie landscape, Netflix last week offered a preview of upcoming 2021 releases, a list with no fewer than 70 star-studded feature films. From drama, comedy and science fiction to horror and even Westerns, the slate will take in every major film genre before the year is out, with some releases poised as potential competition for major awards.

Among the most-anticipated titles is "Don't Look Up," from filmmaker Adam McKay of "The Big Short" and "Vice" fame and starring Leonardo DiCaprio. "The Harder They Fall," a Western co-produced by Jay-Z and with a primarily Black cast including Regina King and Idris Elba, also promises to be one to look out for. The announcement-via a brochure on the streamer's website-was accompanied by a short video presented by "Wonder Woman" star Gal Gadot, "Jumanji" lead Dwayne Johnson and "Deadpool" actor Ryan Reynolds. — AFP

## French series 'Lupin' tops 'Queen's Gambit' views on Netflix

The Netflix-produced series "Lupin", a sly modern take on France's beloved gentleman thief, is on track for 70 million views worldwide in its first month, setting a record for a French TV show, the streaming platform said Tuesday. On the basis of current trends the series — starring Omar Sy of "Untouchable" fame — will have breezed past Netflix's biggest recent blockbuster "The Queen's Gambit" which has 62 million views and other English-language hits including "Bridgerton". The Netflix projection covers the 28 days to February 5, the company told AFP.

"70 million, that's crazy," Omar Sy tweeted. "So proud that Lupin is the first French series to have such an international success." Only half of the first season's 10 episodes have so far been available on Netflix. They are top of the viewing charts in around 10 countries, including Brazil, Vietnam, Argentina and Spain. The 1905 book on which the series is loosely based, "Arsene Lupin — Gentleman Burglar" by French novelist Maurice Leblanc — has shot to the top of book



In this file photograph French actor Omar Sy attends a press conference for the film "Police" (Night Shift) screened in the Berlinale Special Gala section at the 70th Berlinale film festival in Berlin. — AFP

sales on Amazon.fr since the release of the TV show.

In the series, based in modern-day Paris, Sy plays Assane Diop who uses the gentleman thief and master of disguise as his inspiration in his quest to avenge his father for an injustice inflicted by a wealthy family. "For an actor, Lupin is the perfect plaything," Sy told the 20 Minutes daily. "His role is dramatic, but also light,

funny, seductive and action-packed," he said. Asked why so few black actors played leading roles in French productions, Sy said: "I don't know. But let's hope that we've set something in motion with Lupin".

The series, produced by Gaumont, was mostly written by Briton George Kay, whose past work includes "Killing Eve", "Criminal" and "The Hour", in collaboration with Frenchman Francois Uzan, author of French series "Family Business", another Netflix production. Kay told AFP earlier this month that "what is great about Omar is that when he plays Assane with his charisma and his smile you want him to succeed, even when he's breaking the rules". "Lupin" has a 7.4 out of 10 rating, according to a review compilation by the Internet Movie Database. The Globe and Mail called it "a magnificent concoction", while the Chicago Tribune said it was "Sy's Bond-ian elegance and understated charisma that keeps you keyed in". — AFP

## Hollywood actor union threatens to expel Trump

Hollywood's actors union launched disciplinary action against outgoing US President Donald Trump on Monday, which could lead to the former "Apprentice" star's expulsion. SAG-AFTRA "voted overwhelmingly to find probable cause of a violation" of its constitution by long-time member Trump, whose screen credits include "Home Alone 2." The guild's disciplinary committee will now examine Trump's role in the January 6 mob attack on the US Capitol.



In this file photo US President Donald Trump holds an umbrella as he speaks to the media under the rain prior to departing from the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, DC, September 17, 2020. — AFP

Thousands of Trump supporters stormed the Washington building following a speech by the president in which he repeated his false claims to have won the election. At least five people died in the mayhem. "Donald Trump attacked the values that this union holds most sacred—democracy, truth, respect for our fellow Americans of all races and faiths, and the sanctity of the free press," said SAG-AFTRA president Gabrielle Carteris. The committee will also examine Trump's "reckless campaign of misinformation aimed at discrediting and ultimately threatening the safety of journalists," according to a statement. SAG-AFTRA also represents thousands of broadcast journalists among its 160,000 members.

"There's a straight line from his wanton disregard for the truth to the attacks on journalists perpetrated by his followers," said Carteris. "Our most important role as a union is the protection of our members," added national executive director David White. — AFP

## Foreigners without face masks punished with push-ups in Bali

Foreigners caught not wearing face masks on the Indonesian resort island of Bali are being subject to an unusual punishment: push-ups. Video footage circulating on social media this week shows tourists in T-shirts and shorts being made to do the exercise in sweltering tropical heat as masked security officials stood over them. Bali authorities made wearing a face mask in public mandatory last year as Indonesia battled a raging Covid-19 outbreak.

In recent days, however, scores of foreigners have been caught without face coverings, said security official Gusti Agung Ketut Suryanegara. More than 70



people paid a fine of 100,000 rupiah (\$7), but about 30 others said they did not have the cash. Instead, they were ordered to do push-ups. Those not carrying a mask had to do up to 50, while those who were wearing one improperly were punished with 15. "At first, they would claim that they didn't know the regulation," Suryanegara told AFP. "Then they said they forgot, or that the mask was wet or damaged." Some Indonesians on the island, which is a pocket of Hinduism in

the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, have also been hit with the unusual punishment. Bali's authorities have also warned that foreigners who break virus regulations could be thrown out of the country, although so far there have no reports of anyone being deported for failing to wear a mask. The island, which has been hammered by the epidemic, remains officially closed to overseas tourists but is home to many long-term residents from abroad. — AFP

## Sports

## Photo of the Day



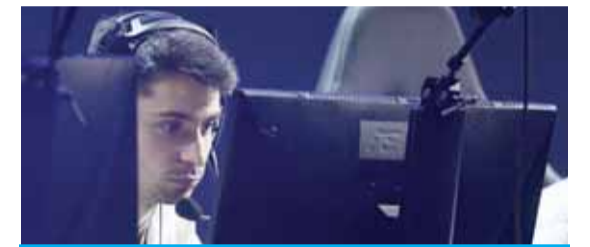
Sam Sunderland of Red Bull KTM Factory Team races during Rally Dakar in Saudi Arabia. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Pro gamer retires at 25 after thumb injury

**NEW YORK:** Professional gamer Thomas Papatatto has thanked fans for "an amazing run" after a thumb injury forced him to throw in the towel at the age of 25. Papatatto—who goes by the online moniker ZooMaa—has played "Call of Duty" professionally for eight years.

But he said in a statement on Twitter on Tuesday that an injury to his hand meant he was taking a step back from gaming. "It breaks my heart to step away from a game I put my heart and soul into every single day for eight years," he said, thanking fans for their "confidence and support." An earlier hand injury that had required him to undergo surgery has returned, Papatatto said, making it "really hard" for him to continue to compete "against some of the best players in the world."

"I don't regret anything and I am grateful to have had a long playing career doing what I love to do at such a high level," he added. Fellow members of the New York Subliners—one of the world's top Call of Duty League (CDL) eSports teams—and other top players tweeted their sadness at Papatatto's early retirement. "I'll miss you brotha. Seriously, one of my best friends in the whole scene," three-time world champion James "Clayster" Eubanks said. —AFP



MINNEAPOLIS: In this file photo Thomas "ZooMaa" Papatatto of the New York Subliners competes against the London Royal Ravens during day two of the Call of Duty League launch weekend at The Armory on January 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. — AFP

# England look to sweep Sri Lanka as India await

## Shakib stars in Bangladesh win over Windies

**COLOMBO:** Joe Root's England will look to sweep Sri Lanka in the second and final Test, starting Friday, as they prepare to face an India side buoyed by their sensational victory in Australia. England, who resumed a tour that was halted in March by the coronavirus pandemic, won the first Test in Galle by seven wickets and start a four-Test series in India on February 5.

India are riding high after Tuesday's stunning win in Brisbane, which snapped Australia's 32-year unbeaten streak at the Gabba and clinched the series 2-1. "If we can go into that series with a 2-0 win it would do us a world of good for our confidence," said England coach Chris Silverwood. "All being well by the time we get to India we'll have hit our straps fully and be ready to hit the first game hard."

After skittling Sri Lanka for 135, England should have strolled to victory with Root scoring 228 of England's first innings of 421. But Sri Lanka's batsmen put up fierce resistance in the second innings. Stuart Broad, Sam Curran and Mark Wood led the pace component of an attack that twice bowled out Sri Lanka.

But Silverwood said the team would rotate their options for the second Test, also in Galle, with James Anderson, Chris Woakes and Olly Stone also in the squad. "Looking at what we've got in front of us with a lot of Tests in India as well, it's highly likely that there will be rotation and rest within the seamers' line-up," Silverwood said. "There's plenty of things on the table at the moment, so we have to do what's best for the players and equally, making sure that we've got the strongest balanced attack out there to make sure we win the Test match as well."

### Moeen out

Silverwood confirmed that Moeen Ali, who is out of isolation after testing positive for coronavirus, is unlikely to play. England's performance in the next five Tests will decide the finalists of the inaugural

world Test championship.

They are currently ranked behind New Zealand, India and Australia with the top two teams reaching the final. England need a convincing series win to stand a chance of going to Lord's. Sri Lanka meanwhile are hoping to bounce back under stand-in captain Dinesh Chandimal, with regular skipper Dimuth Karunaratne out with a broken finger.

Kusal Mendis was one of five players moved out of the team's biosecure 'bubble' for the second match after being dismissed in Galle for his fourth Test duck in five innings. Sri Lanka, who recently suffered a 2-0 Test loss in South Africa, are hoping to have pacesman Suranga Lakmal fit for the final game. Spinners including Lasith Embuldeniya, Dilruwan Perera and Wanindu Hasaranga remain key on a Galle track expected to favour the turning ball.

### Bangladesh wins

Shakib Al Hasan claimed four wickets for eight runs in his international comeback to set up an easy six-wicket victory for Bangladesh over West Indies in the first one-day international in Dhaka yesterday. Debutant pacer Hasan Mahmud also impressed with the ball, picking up 3-28 as the hosts bowled out the weakened tourists for 122 before racing to 125-4 in 33.5 overs.

Skipper Tamim Iqbal top-scored with 44 off 69 while all-rounder Shakib played his part with the bat, hitting 19. Left-arm spinner Akeel Hossain took 3-26 to give the home batsmen some trouble but his effort was not enough to defend the visitors' meagre total.

Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad were unbeaten on 19 and nine runs respectively to complete the win, helping Bangladesh take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. Opting to bowl first, Bangladesh earlier wrapped up the West Indies innings in 32.2 overs. "No complaints, we bowled extremely well. Not just the spinners, but the pacers as well," said Tamim at the prize-giving ceremony.



DHAKA: West Indies' Joshua Da Silva (R) tries to catch a ball during the first one-day international (ODI) cricket match between Bangladesh and West Indies at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. — AFP

West Indies captain Jason Mohammed said he was disappointed with his side's performance. "It wasn't easy to start on, but we didn't have enough guys getting partnerships and those who got starts didn't carry on," he said.

Mustafizur Rahman, who claimed 2-20, seized the early momentum for Bangladesh, trapping Sunil Ambris in front for seven in the second over. He removed Joshua Da Silva for nine after a rain break that halted play for nearly an hour.

Playing his first international after a one-year suspension, Shakib's left-arm spin immediately put pressure on the West Indies. He bowled Andre McCarthy for 12 before West Indies' stand-in

captain Jason Mohammed was stumped off his bowling for 17. Nkrumah Bonner went for a duck leg before wicket in Shakib's next over to leave the West Indies struggling at 56-5. Kyle Mayers hit 40 off 56 balls and added 59 runs with Rovman Powell (28) for the seventh wicket to bring some respectability to the visitors' score.

Hasan's pace removed Powell and Raymon Reifer with successive deliveries to end the resistance. Off-spinner Mehidy Hasan dismissed Mayers as the West Indies lost their last five wickets for seven runs. Shakib claimed the final wicket of Alzarri Joseph (four). The second match of the series will be held at the same venue on Friday. — AFP

## Indian cricket's unlikely heroes

**NEW DELHI:** After India ended Australia's 32-year unbeaten streak at Brisbane's Gabba ground to win the Border-Gavaskar Trophy Test series, AFP Sport looks at the injury-hit team's unlikely heroes:

### Mohammed Siraj: Tragedy to triumph

Despite grieving his father, who died just before the series, the 26-year-old emerged as one of India's new stars. Thrust into the limelight after a succession of injuries to front-line bowlers, Siraj rose to the challenge with a maiden five-wicket haul in Brisbane, only his third Test.

Siraj's father, an auto-rickshaw driver from the southern city of Hyderabad, always dreamed of seeing his son play for India, but he passed away on November 20. Siraj stayed in Australia and missed his father's last rites despite an offer to fly back home. The image of Siraj welling up when India's national anthem was played in Sydney went viral. "The boy has become a man on this tour. Siraj, leader of the attack in his first Test series and he

has led from the front," said former India opener Virender Swagat.

### Washington Sundar: Defiant on debut

Australia were in the driver's seat after they ran through India's top-order on day three. But in walked Sundar, a 21-year-old Test debutant who hit a defiant half-century. Sundar also took three wickets, including the key scalp of Steve Smith.

Sundar became the toast of Indian media and when his father was asked about his son's unusual name, he revealed he had christened him after a friend who helped the struggling family buy uniforms and pay school fees.

He even bought books for Sundar and took him on his bicycle for training. "My mentor was called Washington. He helped me a lot and I kept my son's name after him as a way to show my gratitude," Sundar's father told local media.

### Shardul Thakur: Ticket to ride

Playing his first Test of the tour, Thakur steadied India with a valuable 123-run first-innings stand with Sundar and also top-scored with 67. It was also the third-highest score by an Indian number eight in Australia. Growing up in a village in Maharashtra, Thakur, 29, had to commute in crowded local trains for two-and-a-half hours every day to chase his

cricketing dreams. He would set out early and return home late. For one year, he stayed at his coach's small apartment in Mumbai because he could not afford any other accommodation. "We didn't take any money from him. I got him admitted in my school, and Shardul stayed with us for a year," said the coach, Dinesh Lad.

### Shubman Gill: Farming the strike

The opener from India's agricultural state of Punjab came in as a replacement for Prithvi Shaw and struck 91 on the final day to pave the way for India's stunning win. Gill, 21, spent a good amount of his childhood in his home village and was fascinated to see his grandfather, father and uncles working in the fields. It was in the sprawling fields that Gill started playing cricket with farm hands bowling to him. "I can tell you if he had not been a cricketer, he would have become a farmer. He still has an interest in farming," said his father, Lakhwinder.

Lakhwinder however said he felt his son could have done better, underlining the often huge expectations Indian parents place on their children. "A century would have been good for his confidence. He was batting so well and I don't know why all of a sudden he played away from his body," he was quoted as saying in the Times of India yesterday. — AFP



KUWAIT: Sheikh Mubarak and his sons Abdullah and Ahmad present a memento to Hamad Al-Enezi.

## Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah honors retired footballer

**KUWAIT:** Sheikh Mubarak Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah received Qadisiya Sports Club and national football team player Hamad Al-Enezi yesterday. Sheikh Mubarak presented to Enezi a memento on the occasion of his retirement. Sheikh Mubarak's sons

Sheikh Abdullah and Sheikh Ahmad were present. Sheikh Mubarak lauded the player's contributions to the club and national team, and called upon him to continue his contributions to Kuwait's sports. Enezi thanked Sheikh Mubarak for his continued support of Kuwaiti youth.

## Sports

# Leicester dream after beating lackluster Chelsea to go top

## Lampard criticizes his players' desire

**LEICESTER:** Leicester moved top of the Premier League by inflicting another damaging 2-0 defeat on Chelsea on Tuesday, to leave manager Frank Lampard fighting to remain in charge at Stamford Bridge. The Blues have now won just two of their last eight league games to fall to eighth, nine points behind the leaders.

Chelsea were expected to challenge for the title after a £220 million (\$300 million) spending spree in the transfer market. But it is Leicester who are threatening to recreate their heroics of the 2015/16 season when they shocked the football world to win the Premier League as first-half goals from Wilfried Ndidi and James Maddison earned a thoroughly deserved win. "It sounds nice 'top of the Premier League'," said Maddison. "It's a good one psychologically because we've worked really hard. It's a great achievement halfway through the season."

But a second title in five years would be less of a surprise, despite the financial gulf between Leicester and the traditional top six in the English top-flight, as they have established themselves as a force to be reckoned with since Brendan Rodgers took charge nearly two years ago.

"There might be teams able to spend a lot more money than us and bring in quality from abroad and pay big wages, but our team spirit and togetherness will continue to try and keep us up there," added Maddison.

"We're not up there by a fluke, we're up there because we work hard. People might talk about United, Liverpool, Tottenham or whatever but let them talk. We'll do our business in the background and hopefully come the end of the season it will give

us a chance of being right up there." Rodgers is reportedly one of Chelsea's potential targets should Lampard be dismissed in the coming days.

### Lampard bemoans attitude

The former England international again criticized the desire of his players to match the work rate of their opponents, as he did after a 3-1 defeat to Arsenal last month. "The basics and bare minimums are to run, sprint and cover ground, and too many of our players didn't do it," said Lampard. "We were beaten by the better team."

Chelsea got off to a terrible start as they were caught napping from a well-worked corner after six minutes. Even after Harvey Barnes failed to connect with Marc Albrighton's cross, Ndidi smashed in off the inside of the post from just outside the box.

Maddison then fired off the bar as Leicester dominated the opening half hour. Chelsea showed signs of life when Callum Hudson-Odoi fired into the side-netting and the visitors thought they had won a penalty when Christian Pulisic was upended by Jonny Evans.

A VAR review, though, judged the foul had taken place outside the box and within two minutes it was 2-0 thanks to more dire Chelsea defending. Albrighton's simple long ball forward found Maddison completely unmarked inside the area and the in-form England midfielder slotted home his eighth goal of the season.

The margin of defeat could have been far more humiliating for Lampard had Leicester been more clinical in the second half. James Justin headed wide with a free header at the back post before Edouard



**LEICESTER:** Leicester City's English midfielder James Maddison (left) scores his team's second goal during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Chelsea at the King Power Stadium in Leicester, central England on Tuesday. —AFP

Mendy stood up well to deny Youri Tielemans.

Lampard responded by turning to his £85 million worth of talent on the bench as Timo Werner and Hakim Ziyech were introduced for the final 25 minutes.

Werner has now gone 11 Premier League games without a goal and even when the German international did find the net to flick home a late free-kick, the offside flag rescued Leicester. —AFP

## Diaby shines to down Dortmund, send Leverkusen second

**BERLIN:** Moussa Diaby starred with a goal and assist as Bayer Leverkusen went second in the Bundesliga on Tuesday with a 2-1 win over Borussia Dortmund. French winger Diaby's early opener was cancelled out by a 67th-minute equalizer from Julian Brandt against his former club.

Dortmund were left to regret a host of missed chances when Diaby then set up a superb goal by Leverkusen's 17-year-old midfielder Florian Wirtz for the winner 10 minutes from time. "The second half was an open exchange of blows but we did well in the end," said Leverkusen coach Peter Bosz.

The victory was Leverkusen's first in five league games and puts them second on goal difference, level on 32 points with RB Leipzig, who hosted Union Berlin yesterday. Leverkusen are four points behind leaders Bayern Munich, who are away to Augsburg on Wednesday in the Bavarian derby.

The away defeat was a fresh blow to Dortmund's title hopes, leaving them seven points adrift of Bayern. "We are not able to keep up the level needed for 90 minutes," complained Brandt. "A lot can happen in 17 games, but we are far away" from leaders Bayern in the table.

As Dortmund captain Marco Reus put it bluntly, the title race "did not play a relevant role neither before nor after the game" for his team. Leverkusen took the lead in the 14th minute when they returned a clearance kick by Dortmund goalkeeper Roman Buerki, which was snapped up by Leon Bailey on the halfway line.

The Jamaica winger put in a terrific diagonal pass to Diaby who sprinted away from the Dortmund defense and fired past Buerki on 14 minutes. Dortmund equalized midway through the second half when Brandt hit the far bottom corner from 25 yards out. He then squandered another chance moments later.



**LEVERKUSEN:** Leverkusen's French forward Moussa Diaby shoots during the German first division Bundesliga football match Bayer 04 Leverkusen v BVB Borussia Dortmund in Leverkusen, western Germany on Tuesday. —AFP

England winger Jadon Sancho also fired wide as both sides had a string of chances. Diaby then did brilliantly to put Wirtz in enough space to steer the winner past Buerki. Wolfsburg are fifth, level with Dortmund on 29 points, after a 2-0 win at Mainz thanks to goals by Polish midfielder Bartosz Bialek and Dutch striker Wout Weghorst.

### Gladbach drop Embolo

Hertha Berlin have not scored in their last three matches as Hoffenheim earned their first victory in four games this year with a 3-0 win in the capital. Hertha's Polish striker Krzysztof Piatek had his early penalty attempt saved superbly by visiting goalkeeper Oliver Baumann. Sebastian Rudy put Hoffenheim ahead with half an hour played, then Croatia striker Andrej Kramaric added two second-half goals.

Earlier, Borussia Moenchengladbach climbed

to seventh with a 1-0 home win over Werder Bremen thanks to Nico Elvedi's second-half header. Gladbach dropped Swiss striker Brel Embolo for what head coach Marco Rose described as a "senseless" breach of the Bundesliga's hygiene rules.

Embolo, 23, was dropped amid allegations he turned up at a private party, reportedly attended by 23 people, on Saturday. The event at a restaurant in Essen was broken up by police with Germany currently in lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Embolo insists he was instead at a friend's house watching basketball, but his behaviour still violates the league's hygiene rules as players are not allowed to meet people outside their team's bubble during the pandemic. Embolo must now submit two negative tests for Covid-19 before he can train again with the Gladbach squad. —AFP

On the other side of the draw, Mexican club Tigres UANL, the CONCACAF Champions League winners, will take on Asian champions Ulsan Hyundai of South Korea on February 4 for the right to take on the Copa Libertadores winners in the first semi-final on February 7. Brazilian clubs Santos and Palmeiras will clash in the delayed South American showpiece at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana on January 30.

Their fellow Brazilians Flamengo lost the 2019 final to Liverpool, with European clubs winning each of the last seven editions of the Club World Cup. That run started with Bayern lifting the trophy in Morocco in 2013. Hansi Flick's Bayern are now looking to add the FIFA title to the five trophies they won in 2020, namely the Bundesliga, German Cup, Champions League, UEFA Super Cup and German Super Cup.

The 2020 edition was initially scheduled for December last year but was delayed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and because the Copa Libertadores has not yet been completed. However, would-be Oceania representatives Auckland City withdrew because of the pandemic and related quarantine measures required by the New Zealand authorities. That allowed Al-Duhail to earn a bye through the first round. The final will be played at Education City on Thursday, February 11. —AFP

## Bayern to face Al-Ahly or Al-Duhail in Club World Cup

**ZURICH:** Bayern Munich will face either African champions Al-Ahly or Al-Duhail of Qatar in the semi-finals of the Club World Cup next month, following the draw at FIFA's headquarters in Zurich on Tuesday. The semi-final will be played on Monday, February 8 at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al-Rayyan, just outside the Qatari capital Doha.

Before that Al-Ahly and Al-Duhail will meet on February 4 at the nearby Education City Stadium, another of the venues for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. Cairo giants Al-Ahly, coached by South Africa's Pitso Mosimane, are Africa's most successful club having been continental champions nine times. Meanwhile Al-Duhail, whose manager is the former France international and ex-Rennes and Nottingham Forest coach Sabri Lamouchi, qualify as the reigning champions of the host nation.

## UEFA mulls one host nation for Euro 2020?

**BERLIN:** Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, a major figure in European football, says UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin is considering holding this year's European Championship in a single country, and not in 12 as originally planned. The delayed Euro 2020 finals, scheduled to be played in 12 host cities across Europe from June 11 until July 11, have already been pushed back a year due to problems caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

However high numbers of the virus across the continent are threatening to force another rethink. "One must not forget that the idea of this special tournament was born when the coronavirus did not yet exist," Rummenigge told Munich-based newspapers Muenchner Merkur/TZ. "At the time, it was an initiative of the EU Commission, which wanted football to be represented throughout Europe. But I know that UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin - who is incredibly careful with COVID-19 - is thinking about whether it wouldn't make more sense... to play the tournament in just one country." A UEFA spokesman did not deny the suggestion to AFP on Tuesday, but said there is "no information" and "no comment to make at this stage". —AFP

## Football fan Pope Francis hails Spezia for Roma win

**ROME:** Pope Francis, an avid football fan, congratulated Spezia on their dramatic Italian Cup win against Roma, in an audience at the Vatican yesterday. "Congratulations, because you did well yesterday," the Argentine pontiff told Vincenzo Italiano's outfit.

"In Argentina, we dance the tango, and the tango is music in two-four (time). Today you are four to two, OK," the 84-year-old pope told them, according to a Vatican statement. "Congratulations and keep it up!" He described sport as a "wonder" that brings out the best in people. Francis is a keen follower of Buenos Aires team San Lorenzo and has spoken of his joy of playing football on the city's streets as a child.

Spezia will face Napoli in the quarter-finals of the Italian Cup next week after their dramatic 4-2 win at Roma in which the hosts finished with nine men. Vincenzo Italiano's side, who are playing their first ever Serie A season, moved into the last eight thanks to two goals in extra-time after initially letting slip an early two-goal lead.

Roma came into the last 16 clash at the Stadio Olimpico reeling from a 3-0 hammering at the hands of local rivals Lazio at the weekend, and were two down by the 15th minute thanks to Andrey Galabinov's penalty and a sumptuous finish from Riccardo Saponara.

However Lorenzo Pellegrini pulled one back for the hosts with a penalty of his own shortly before the break and after wasting a series of chances Roma finally drew level in the 73rd minute through Henrikh Mkhitaryan.

Borja Mayoral, who had already ballooned over one great opportunity, should have put Roma in what would have been a deserved lead with four minutes left of normal time when he pounced on a stray backpass only to somehow shoot wide with the goal at his mercy.

Roma then found themselves down to nine less than two minutes into extra time when Gianluca Mancini picked up a second booking and then goalkeeper Pau Lopez was shown a straight red card for clattering Roberto Piccoli when fluffing a clearance.

Daniele Verde put Spezia ahead in the 107th minute with a fine header against the club he played for as a boy before Saponara completed a famous night for the away side with a fabulous chip one minute from the end. The final last eight match will be decided on Thursday when Lazio host Parma with the winner facing a clash with Atalanta. —AFP



### Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Liverpool v Burnley beIN Sports HD 1	23:00
SPANISH LEAGUE	
Valencia C.F v Osasuna beIN Sports HD 3	21:00
SD Eibar v Atletico de Madrid beIN Sports HD 3	23:30

## Mitchell shines as red-hot Jazz down Pelicans

### McCollum has broken foot; LeVert focuses on health; Irving back with Nets

**LOS ANGELES:** Donovan Mitchell scored 28 points to lead the Utah Jazz to a sixth straight NBA victory on Tuesday, a 118-102 triumph over Zion Williamson and the New Orleans Pelicans. Mitchell piled up 15 points in the first quarter on an efficient six-of-seven shooting from the field.

"I was just doing my job and trying to find ways to provide a spark," said Mitchell, who finished with seven rebounds and four assists. "Tonight it was getting to the rim early and trying to be aggressive and score."

French center Rudy Gobert added 13 points, 18 rebounds and three blocked shots. Jordan Clarkson added 18 points off the bench and reserve Joe Ingles, returning from a three-game absence due to an Achilles tendon injury, chipped in 15 for the Jazz who improved to 10-4 to match the Los Angeles Clippers for second place in the Western Conference behind the 11-4 Los Angeles Lakers.

The Pelicans had the edge in the paint, where they out-scored the Jazz 64-42. But Utah drained 21 three-pointers to New Orleans' six. Williamson, the 20-year-old taken first overall in the 2019 draft, led the Pelicans with 32 points and five rebounds.

He was five-for-five from the field in the first quarter and his layup capped a 7-0 scoring run that put New Orleans up 20-18 with 4:09 left in the first period. Brandon Ingram added 17 points for New Orleans. But Lonzo Ball — back after missing three games with a knee injury — had just seven and Steven Adams scored six and the Pelicans never led in the second half.

#### Nuggets win big

It was similarly lopsided in the night's only other contest, with Nuggets guard Nikola Jokic scoring 27 points and pulling down 12 rebounds in a 119-101 victory over the Oklahoma City Thunder in Denver. Jokic also

handed out six assists and with the game well in hand sat out the fourth quarter along with the rest of Denver's starters.

Monte Morris added 15 points off the bench and Paul Millsap and Will Barton scored 13 points apiece for the Nuggets. Denver, who reached the Western Conference finals last season but have been off to a slow start in this campaign, improved to 7-7.

Luguentz Dort led the Thunder with 20 points, 15 of them in the first half. But Denver took control in the second quarter and never trailed after halftime, pushing their lead to as many as 29 points in the fourth quarter.

The Thunder were coming off an unexpectedly long break since a victory over the Chicago Bulls on Friday. Their game against the Philadelphia 76ers scheduled for Sunday was postponed because the 76ers didn't have the required eight available players because of COVID-19 health protocols.

#### Broken foot

Portland guard CJ McCollum, averaging a career-best 26.7 points for the Trail Blazers this NBA season, has a broken left foot and will be sidelined at least four weeks, the team said. "It's just some bad timing, terrible timing," McCollum said Tuesday, a day after the team confirmed that tests had revealed the hairline fracture.

It had initially been thought he suffered only a left foot sprain in Portland's victory over the Atlanta Hawks on Saturday and would miss about a week. Instead he will wear a walking boot and be re-evaluated in four weeks.

"There's nothing I can really do about it," McCollum said. "I work hard and take care of myself. I put a lot of time in, I put a lot of effort into my body and this is one of those situations where there's not much I could have done."

The Blazers said the injury occurred in the first quarter of Saturday's game, when Hawks center Clint Capela stepped on McCollum's foot as he tried to contest an attempt at the rim. McCollum left the game briefly but returned, scoring 16 points in 19 minutes before departing for good at halftime. McCollum's injury is another blow for the Blazers. Center Jusuf Nurkic broke his wrist in a game last week and will require surgery. The team said he would be re-evaluated in six weeks.

#### Focus on health

NBA guard Caris LeVert says the trade that sent him from the Brooklyn Nets to the Indiana Pacers last week might just have saved his life. LeVert arrived in Indiana feeling fine and eager to join his new teammates.

He was shocked when the medical exam needed to confirm the deal found a small mass on his left kidney. "I'm definitely humbled to know that this trade could have possibly saved me in the long run," the 26-year-old said during a video conference with reporters on Tuesday.

"It's definitely been some trying times for sure, for myself and my family," said LeVert, who arrived at Indiana as part of the blockbuster deal that sent James Harden from Houston to the Nets and Indiana's Victor Oladipo to the Rockets. "I'm very grateful for such support I've received from not only the Pacers players, but the front office and the fans and everybody associated with this program," he said.

LeVert said on Tuesday that he does not yet know if the mass is cancerous. He is waiting for the results of additional tests before determining any potential next steps, including possible surgery. For now he is sidelined indefinitely. "Obviously I want to play as soon as possible. I'm a competitor, I love the game, but for me I think making sure I'm good

health-wise is most important right now."

LeVert said he hadn't experienced any pain or symptoms and felt "100 percent healthy" playing for the Nets this season. "A lot of things crept through my mind," LeVert said. "I didn't really know what was going on, I didn't know the next steps, I didn't know if the trade was going to go through. But obviously it did and I think that's a testament to this organization," he said.

#### Irving returns

Kyrie Irving returned to the Brooklyn Nets on Tuesday after missing the NBA club's past seven games, saying he "just needed a pause" due to personal issues. The 28-year-old American guard spoke generally about family matters and mental health issues in his first comments since the layoff that began after he played January 5.

"Happy to be back. Happy to be around these guys," Irving said. "We got some great pieces and we just move on and I let my actions and my game speak for itself like I planned on doing. Just needed a pause."

Since his departure, he was fined \$50,000 for violating NBA COVID-19 health and safety protocols after being seen in a video attending what appeared to be a family birthday party, also losing more than \$800,000 in salary for missing two games while serving an NBA quarantine.

Irving's absence, five games for personal reasons and two more for conditioning, began the day of an invasion of the US Capitol in Washington that led to five deaths and increased security for Wednesday's inauguration ceremony for President Joe Biden. Irving said he needed to separate being an NBA player from major social issues such as politics or the Black Lives Matter movement.

While Irving was gone, Brooklyn obtained three-time NBA scoring champion James



**SALT LAKE CITY:** Donovan Mitchell #45 of the Utah Jazz passes the ball during the game against the New Orleans Pelicans on Tuesday at vivint.SmartHome Arena in Salt Lake City, Utah. — AFP

Harden in a huge four-team trade deal. The Nets, 9-6, are 2-0 since Harden's arrival as he joined forces with fellow former NBA Most Valuable Player Kevin Durant to make a formidable inside-outside combination despite little practice time together.

Irving — averaging 27.1 points, 5.3 rebounds and 6.1 assists a game — could return to form a 'Big Three' on the same Cleveland court where he was part of another powerful trio on the Cavaliers alongside LeBron James and Kevin Love that produced an NBA title in 2016. — AFP



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