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# Wuhan marks one year since lockdown as pandemic rages

Biden warns of 600,000 dead • WHO: Fabric masks work against virus variants



WUHAN, China: A woman wearing a facemask dances in Wuhan, one year after the city went into lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19. — AFP

**WUHAN, China:** The Chinese city of Wuhan marked one year since the start of its traumatic 76-day coronavirus lockdown yesterday, while the pandemic raged elsewhere and governments scrambled to put in place new measures. Europe faced a worsening struggle with production woes hitting supply of the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine as well as the Pfizer/BioNTech shot.

Around the world, more than 2.1 million people have died of COVID-19 since it emerged in China in December 2019, with over 98 million infected. In the world's worst-hit country, US President Joe Biden warned America's death toll could pass 600,000, the highest estimate yet that would mark a devastating rise on the 400,000 fatalities so far.

But the picture was vastly different in Wuhan, where humming traffic, bustling sidewalks, and citizens packing parks and public transport underscored the scale of the recovery in the metropolis of 11 million where the pathogen first emerged before going global. Elsewhere in China, new outbreaks have prompted harsh responses. Thousands of Hong Kongers in Jordan, one of the city's poorest and most densely-packed districts, were ordered to stay home yesterday unless they can show a negative

test, in the city's first lockdown.

AstraZeneca told AFP late Friday that "lower yield" at one of its vaccine-making sites would affect deliveries across Europe. Lithuania estimated it would receive 80 percent fewer AstraZeneca doses than hoped in the first quarter, although German and French ministers tried to reassure the public of a steady supply. Deliveries of Pfizer-made shots to the continent's countries are already behind schedule as the US firm upgrades capacity at a Belgian plant.

On Friday, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said there was "some evidence" the new strain first detected in the country "may be associated with a higher degree of mortality" as well as being more infectious. At 95,981 as of Friday, the UK death toll is the highest in Europe.

Norwegian capital Oslo toughened health restrictions after the British variant was found in a retirement home, closing all but essential shops and asking people to restrict movements. A French government source told AFP a new lockdown in the country looked increasingly likely with the more transmissible strain.

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## Saudi intercepts 'hostile target' over capital

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia intercepted a "hostile target" over Riyadh yesterday, said state media in the kingdom which has come under repeated attack from Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels since 2015. It was unclear who was behind the incident, with the kingdom's brief statement stopping short of accusing anyone and the Houthis saying they were not involved.

An explosion was heard in the Saudi capital at around 11:00 am (0800 GMT), AFP correspondents reported. "I heard a loud sound and thought that something had fallen from the sky," said one resident, who lives in the Al-Sulaimaniyah district of Riyadh. "The whole house was shaking."

The Saudi-led coalition, which backs Yemen's internationally recognized government against the Houthis, said it had "intercepted and destroyed a hostile air target going towards Riyadh", without elaborating, according to state-run Al Ekhbariya television station. Riyadh's King Khaled International Airport said there were a number of flight delays, but it was not immediately clear if they were linked to yesterday's incident.

Rebel spokesman Yahya Sarie said the Houthis were not behind the incident and "have not conducted any offensive operations against the aggressor countries in the past 24 hours". In a statement carried by rebel media, Sarie added that "any operation is announced with full pride and honor".

Saudi Arabia has been repeatedly targeted by the Houthis since its 2015 intervention in Yemen, where it leads a military coalition that includes the United Arab Emirates that backs the government. It is rare, however, for drones and missiles launched by the Houthis to reach the kingdom's capital - about 700 km from the Yemeni border.

The incident comes only days after Joe Biden was sworn-in as US president, replacing Donald Trump. According to Biden's pick for secretary of state, Antony Blinken, the new US administration will quickly revisit the designation of Yemen's Houthi rebels as terrorists. At his confirmation hearing on Tuesday, Blinken said he would "immediately" review the Trump administration's labeling of the insurgents, fearing the move was worsening a humanitarian crisis. — AFP

## Iconic US talk show host Larry King dies at 87

**LOS ANGELES:** The iconic talk show host Larry King, one of the most recognizable figures on US television as he interviewed everyone who was anyone over a career spanning 60 years, died yesterday at the age of 87. The company he co-founded, Ora Media, did not state a cause of death but media reports said King had been battling COVID-19 for weeks and had suffered several health problems in recent years.

King, with his trademark suspenders, black rim glasses and deep voice, was best known for a 25-year run as a talk show host on CNN's "Larry King Live". "For 63 years and across the platforms of radio, television and digital media, Larry's many thousands of interviews, awards, and global acclaim stand as a testament to his unique and lasting talent

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Larry King

## Imams mobilize to counter UK vaccine disinfo

**LONDON:** Imams across Britain are helping a drive to dispel coronavirus disinformation, using Friday sermons and their influential standing within Muslim communities to argue that COVID-19 vaccines are safe. Qari Asim, chairman of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) which is leading a campaign to reassure its faithful, is among those publically advocating that the inoculations are compatible with Islamic practices.

"We are confident that the two vaccines that have been used in the UK, Oxford AstraZeneca and Pfizer, are permissible from an Islamic perspective," he told AFP. "The hesitancy, the anxiety (and) concern is driven by misinformation, conspiracy theories, fake news and rumors."

Britain, the hardest-hit country in Europe by the virus after registering nearly 95,000 deaths, is relying on its biggest-ever vaccination effort to end repeated cycles of lockdowns and restrictions. However, a report from the scientific committee advising the government showed stronger mistrust of vaccines among ethnic minorities than the rest of the UK population.

It highlighted that 72 percent of black survey respondents were

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BIRMINGHAM: A man grimaces as he receives the Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine at the Al-Abbas Islamic Centre on Jan 21, 2021. — AFP

## COVID forces Jordan kids to start working

**AMMAN:** Omar's heart sinks when he trudges past his closed school gates in the Jordanian capital Amman - now part of his trip to work, to repair and clean kerosene heaters. The 14-year-old, who dreams of becoming a pilot, is one of many minors experts say have been forced prematurely into the labor market. Schools throughout Jordan have been closed for nearly a year now, and the economic fallout from the novel coronavirus pandemic

has eaten into breadwinners' ability to feed their families.

"As school is shut, I help my family financially," said Omar, sporting a sweater and dirty jeans as he cleaned a heater with his blackened hands. He works exhausting 12-hour days at the workshop, and collapses into bed after a shower and a quick evening meal. Overall, the work "doesn't bother me", he said. "What is unbearable is the smell of kerosene... (it) doesn't go away."

He earns three dinars (around \$4.25) a day, which helps pay the family's monthly rent of 130 dinars. His contribution is vital because his father, a day laborer, has struggled to find work due to the coronavirus downturn. But Omar has not given up hope, and said he was

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AMMAN: Jordanian youths using handcarts work in the capital's Wahdat district on Jan 10, 2021. — AFP

## Local

# Kuwait Amir sends condolence cables to Iraqi top officials

## Sheikh Nawaf condoles with Indian, Ukrainian presidents on deadly fires

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent condolence cables to Iraq's President Barham Salih and Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadmi expressing his sincere condolences on the victims of two deadly blasts in central Baghdad. The attacks on a busy market in the Iraqi capital led to the death and injury of dozens of civilians. The cable highlighted Kuwait's "denunciation and strong condemnation of these two acts that targeted the lives of innocent people and undermined security and stability in the brotherly country."

Kuwait's Amir went on to underline Kuwait's stance in rejection of terrorism, under all forms and manifestations, and in support of all measures taken by Iraq to confront such "criminal acts." He also extended his sincere condolences to the families of the victims of the blast and wished a speedy recovery for those injured. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables, while National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem sent a cable of condolences to Iraq's parliament speaker Mohammad Al-Halbousi.

Moreover, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah reiterated Kuwait's

strong condemnation of the terrorist blasts that shook central Baghdad on Thursday and resulted in the death of dozens of innocent people and targeted the security and stability of Iraq. This came in a telephone call held yesterday between the Kuwaiti foreign minister and his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein. Kuwait's foreign minister also underlined his country's solidarity with Iraq in all measures Baghdad takes to maintain its security and stability. He also expressed his sincere condolences to the families of the victims and wished the injured a speedy recovery.



### Kuwait supports Iraq's fight against terrorism

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir sent a cable to Indian President Ram Nath Kovind to extend his condolences for the deadly fire at a serum producing institute western India. In the cable, His Highness the Amir also offered his sincere sympathy to relatives of the victims of the fire at an under-construction site of the Pune's Serum Institute of India. The blaze left several people dead and wounded. His Highness the Amir wished those injured a speedy recovery. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables, while Speaker Ghanem sent cables of condolences to Speaker of India's parliament Om Birla and

#### Deadly fires

Chairman of the Council of States Venkaiah Naidu. In the meantime, His Highness the Amir sent a cable to President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky to express his condolences on the tragic loss of life in a fire at an elderly home in southeastern city of Kharkiv. In the cable, His Highness the Amir also extended sin-



**BAGHDAD:** People console Louai Al-Nuaimi father of two Iraqi youngsters, Omar and Ali, killed in Baghdad's twin suicide attacks, during a condolences ceremony in the capital's Cairo neighborhood, on Friday. — AFP

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cere condolences to families of the victims and wished those injured a speedy recovery. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables to the Ukrainian president, while Speaker Ghanem sent a cable to his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Razumkov. — KUNA

## Kuwait seeks tougher maritime laws to counter infiltration



**KUWAIT:** Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah during visits to Sabah Al-Ahmad Naval Base and a number of southern borders posts. — KUNA photos

**KUWAIT:** It is imperative to strengthen legislation dealing with maritime navigation to beef up anti-infiltration efforts, Kuwait's interior minister said on Friday, a week after authorities reported suspected

trespassers into the country's waters. "We will not accept any security shortcomings or a repeat of last week's incident," Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah was cited as saying in an interior ministry statement, amid



a visit to a southern naval base, adding that national security will "never be jeopardized." Seeking to bolster Kuwait's vigilance against all foreign infiltration efforts, the statement said the minister held

talks with Housing and State Services Minister Dr Abdullah Marafi over plans to employ cutting-edge telecom technology in efforts to keep trespassers at bay. — KUNA

## Imams mobilize to counter UK...

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unlikely or very unlikely to get the vaccine. Among those from Pakistani or Bangladeshi backgrounds, the figure was 42 percent. Imams are pushing back in particular at fears among Britain's estimated 2.8 million Muslims that the vaccines contain pork gelatin or alcohol, which are banned by Islam.

Asim said it was "legitimate" to question whether things were permissible under Islam but without paying attention to unfounded claims. Among the falsehoods spread about the vaccine are that it can modify DNA, make recipients sterile, or even involve inserting a microchip in the body.

Misinformation around the coronavirus is all the more dangerous given several studies have shown that it can impact minorities disproportionately. "These are precisely the communities we should be trying to target," said Nighat Arif, a general practitioner based in Chesham, near London. When she received her vaccination, she posted a video in Urdu on social media

aimed at the language's speakers living in Britain.

"I'm hoping that because they see someone who looks like them, who is a practicing Muslim, wears a hijab, someone who is Asian who speaks their language, that's more relatable than something that's coming through from the government," she added. Arif is still surprised by the refusal of certain patients to be inoculated, noting they will often get vaccinated to undertake the hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, or to visit Pakistan or India. She blames conspiracy theories spread online, which contribute to the science behind the process "being lost".

Samara Afzal, 34, a general practitioner at Netherton Health Centre in Dudley in the West Midlands, also shared a video in Urdu with her 35,000 Twitter followers to "debunk some myths". She said some people had asked her to send the video directly to them so they could forward it to skeptical loved ones via social tools like WhatsApp.

At her medical center, Afzal estimates that around 40 to 50 people out of 1,000 have refused to be vaccinated when she had expected only one or two. "It's still a fair amount of people that are saying no and obviously we haven't even addressed the younger ones, so this is just the elderly," she added. "So I'm sure when it comes down to the younger ones, there'll be a lot more that say no." — AFP

In Mexico, where hospitals have been overwhelmed and over 146,000 have died, people are queuing for hours to buy oxygen to care for the growing numbers fighting coronavirus at home. Brazilian scientists have meanwhile warned that the country faces running out of vaccine doses and basic equipment like syringes, just as its vaccination campaign gets underway - with some blaming government for the shortages.

The World Health Organization said Friday it had no plans to change its guidance recommending fabric facemasks as new coronavirus variants spread, because the mutated strains are transmitted in the same way. Germany and Austria have made medical masks mandatory on public transport and in shops - allowing only surgical or FFP2 masks, rather than fabric - amid concerns over the threat posed by the rapidly-spreading new virus mutations. — AFP

## Iconic US talk show host Larry...

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as a broadcaster," Ora Media said in a statement posted on Twitter.

King's long list of interviewees ranged from every US president since 1974, world leaders Yasser Arafat and Vladimir Putin, and celebrities such as Frank Sinatra, Marlon Brando and Barbra Streisand. In an emotional last "Larry King Live" show in 2010, tributes included one from President Barack Obama, who in a video message called King "one of the giants of broadcasting".

Tributes from the media, politicians and Hollywood stars poured in, led by Putin, who hailed the interviewer's "great professionalism and unquestioned journalistic authority", according to the Kremlin. Veteran CNN foreign correspondent Christiane Amanpour remembered King as "a giant of broadcasting and a master of the TV celebrity/statesman-woman interview".

Star Trek icon and social media personality George Takei noted how King understood

"human triumph and frailty equally well," while Kirstie Alley, of "Cheers" fame, described him as "one of the only talk show hosts who let you talk".

British TV hosts Piers Morgan and Craig Ferguson, both of whom have had shows in the US, paid tribute to King's interviewing skills.

"Larry King was a hero of mine until we fell out after I replaced him at CNN & he said my show was 'like watching your mother-in-law go over a cliff in your new Bentley.' (He married 8 times so a mother-in-law expert)," said Morgan. "But he was a brilliant broadcaster & masterful TV interviewer."

Born Lawrence Harvey Zeiger on Nov 19, 1933, to poor Russian Jewish immigrants in working-class Brooklyn, New York, King says he never wanted to be anything but a radio broadcaster. At the age of 23 he went to Florida to try and find a job. He became a disc-jockey for a Miami radio station in 1957, changing his name to King when the radio's manager told him it was "too ethnic".

For another Miami Beach radio station he recorded programs in a restaurant, doing live audience interviews. In 1978 he went to Washington where he anchored a national late-night radio call-in show, before being spotted by CNN, a channel founded in 1980, which hired him for its nighttime programs in 1985. — AFP

## Wuhan marks one year since...

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Meanwhile the Netherlands introduced its first curfew since World War II, from 9 pm until 4:30 am. Across the Atlantic, newly-installed President Biden stepped up federal aid even as he gave his highest estimate yet of the eventual toll. "The virus is surging," he said. "We're at 400,000 dead, expected to reach well over 600,000." And in the Colombian capital of Bogota, residents were under their third weekend quarantine in a row, meaning the closure of all non-essential shops in the city of eight million from Friday at 8 pm until Monday at 4 am.

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## COVID forces Jordan kids to...

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determined to return to school as soon as possible. "I would love to continue my studies" and eventually become a pilot, he said. "I don't want the coronavirus to destroy my dream."

The education ministry has announced a return to classes next month for kindergarten and some elementary school levels, as well for students in their final year of high school. Everyone else will have to wait until March. UN children's agency UNICEF said that while it had no hard statistics, it believed many Jordanian children had been forced into precarious

work since the pandemic began - despite it being forbidden to employ those under 16.

Some 76,000 children were already working in Jordan according to the last official count, published in 2016. "When we see children and when we speak to people, we are concerned that the numbers are increasing," said Tanya Chapuisat, UNICEF's country representative in Jordan. "It would seem logical... because we know the levels of poverty are increasing" during the coronavirus crisis, she added.

The official poverty rate in Jordan was 15.7 percent last autumn, but the World Bank has warned this will increase by 11 percentage points over "the short term". Experts fear child labor rates will surge even higher. "I expect child labor to increase dramatically," said Ahmad Awad, director of Jordan Labor Watch. He pointed to both the rise in poverty and the pandemic's negative impact on Jordan's education system as drivers of this trend. — AFP

Local

# Kuwait vaccination drive should be completed within a year: Spokesman

## No evidence yet vaccinated people won't infect others, says Dr Sanad

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** It's been nearly a month since the coronavirus vaccination campaign kicked off in Kuwait, and the latest announced number of people who have been vaccinated is 20,000. People are wondering how long the vaccination process will take, considering it could last for years, which means that life won't get back to normal soon.

According to Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, Spokesman of the Ministry of Health, the vaccination drive should be completed within a year. "Kuwait's population is 4,464,521, and after excluding those under 15 years old, pregnant women, those with severe allergies and those who are not interested in getting vaccinated, the number of people who could be vaccinated is 2,775,000," he told Kuwait Times.

There is intense competition from all countries to import the vaccine. "Kuwait signed a contract to receive a certain number of vaccines, but haven't received it all yet. We are receiving them on a weekly basis. Soon, the Oxford-AstraZeneca vac-

cine will be approved worldwide, so we will receive many more vaccines. We hope to finish the vaccination process within one year," added Sanad.

In order to complete the vaccination of 2,775,000 people within a year, over 231,000 peo-

ple should be vaccinated every month, which is far from the number reached in the first month. Kuwait Times hasn't received the number of people inoculated daily or the number of vaccines that have been

received. Dr Sanad noted the numbers will be announced soon, adding the situation will change after receiving other vaccine doses. The Ministry of Health had announced on Thursday the rescheduling of future coronavirus vaccination appointments, as shipments from Pfizer-BioNTech will be delayed for Kuwait and the entire world because of a halt in factory production. The company will not export the amount of vaccines agreed upon to many countries for a period of time, so the ministry will reschedule future dates (those who haven't received text messages yet) to ensure a continuous vaccination campaign, the ministry said.

The statement also highlighted that all those who previously booked appointments have received text messages for the first shot of the coronavirus vaccination and the second shot too. All those who have already been vaccinated and are waiting for their second shot will also receive their inoculation on time according to their appointment without any change. The rescheduling



is for future appointments only. Dr Sanad also noted that those who were vaccinated may be protected from getting infected, but there is no evidence yet that these vaccinated people will not infect others with the virus if they are not showing symptoms. "So those who have been vaccinated should still follow health precautions until we reach herd immunity," he cautioned.



**Vaccinated people should still follow precautions**

ple should be vaccinated every month, which is far from the number reached in the first month. Kuwait Times hasn't received the number of people inoculated daily or the number of vaccines that have been

## National Guard's Deputy Chief visits personnel at Info Ministry



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait National Guard's Deputy Chief Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited the critical infrastructure protection unit responsible for protecting the Ministry of Information's building yesterday. Sheikh Ahmad praised the personnel's role in providing protection to the critical site, urging them to stay vigilant at all times. Sheikh Ahmad also conveyed greetings of Kuwait National Guard's Chief His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah to the officers, Kuwait National Guard said in a press statement.



## Kuwait lists 1,067 new COVID-19 cases in two days

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait listed 534 new coronavirus infections and no virus-related deaths yesterday, compared to 533 new cases and one death on Friday, taking the total cases up to 160,901 and deaths to 952, the health ministry said. Meanwhile, total recoveries reached 153,746 after the ministry reported 439 and 481 recoveries yesterday and Friday, respectively. The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood yesterday at 6,203, with 50 of them in intensive care units, up from 48 on Friday, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad. He added that 8,978 swab tests were conducted over the last day out of a total number of swab tests conducted in Kuwait reached 1,455,481 after the ministry announced that health workers carried out 8,978 and 10,311 tests over the previous two days respectively. Dr Sanad renewed his call for the public to abide by social distancing rules and other preventive measures. He advised people to follow up the official websites and accounts of the ministry to get updated about necessary measures to stop the spread of the virus. —KUNA

تطورات مرض فيروس كورونا COVID-19

كلها في مكان واحد

<p>534</p> <p>حالة جديدة</p> <p>NEW CASES</p> <p>الإجمالي: 160,901</p>	<p>0</p> <p>حالة وفاة جديدة</p> <p>NEW DEATHS</p> <p>الإجمالي: 952</p>	<p>439</p> <p>شفاء جديد</p> <p>NEW RECOVERIES</p> <p>الإجمالي: 153,746</p>
<p>50</p> <p>حالات خطيرة</p> <p>TOTAL SERIOUS CASES</p>	<p>6,203</p> <p>إجمالي الحالات</p> <p>TOTAL ACTIVE CASES</p>	<p>8,978</p> <p>حالات جديدة</p> <p>NEW TESTS</p> <p>الإجمالي: 1,455,481</p>

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## Local

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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com  
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## News in brief

## New IDs for expats?

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait could soon introduce a new form of identification cards for expatriates to replace civil IDs that would be issued exclusively to citizens, a local daily reported. According to security sources quoted in an Al-Rai Arabic daily report, the Interior Ministry's Directorate General of Residency Affairs made a proposal to issue magnetic ID cards for expats that contain all information about the holder. The proposed system, which the sources say is "followed by many countries around the world," would limit expats' transactions to the residency affairs directorate, while the card would expire with the expiration of the holder's residency.

## Residencies allowed to expire

**KUWAIT:** Official statistics revealed that 935 residencies of expats stranded abroad had expired in the past 10 days, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported. This happened because the workers' sponsors failed to renew their employees' residencies despite the availability of online renewal, the paper wrote. Meanwhile, statistics released by the Manpower Public Authority revealed that 2,716 residencies were canceled through the Ash'al online system since January 12, 2021, while around 30,000 residencies were renewed using the service during the same period.

## Oil price down

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil went down 36 cents to \$55.40 per barrel on Friday after being at \$55.76 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. At the international level, the price of the Brent crude went down by 69 cents to \$55.41 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which went down by 86 cents to \$52.27 pb.

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** A woman selects books at a bookstore in Kuwait City yesterday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## One injured in Jahra house fire

**KUWAIT:** Firemen ponded to a call about a Jahra house fire and dealt with the blaze on the first floor. A person was taken to hospital with various burns, Kuwait Fire Force said in a statement. Meanwhile, Salmiya firemen responded to a fire in a nine-storey building. The fire was on the third floor. Residents were evacuated while the fire was contained and put out. Investigations were opened to reveal the cause in both incidents.

Separately, police arrested two persons for illegally dealing in pharmaceuticals, the interior ministry's relations and security information department said. Salmiya police received a call about a person handing people something and receiving money, so policemen responded and arrested a suspect who was dealing in Lyrica and Nervax. He led police to an accomplice, who was also arrested.



**KUWAIT:** Pictures from the scene of the fire in Jahra.

## Al-Safat Investment holds seminar on new COVID strain

**KUWAIT:** Al-Safat Investment Company held a medical seminar about the new coronavirus strain and hosted General Surgery Consultant in Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital Dr Fatima Khajah, a frontline hero in fighting the virus. The seminar was held in Al-Safat Tower in the presence of Al-Safat Investment Company CEO Ahmed Abouzeid and all company employees as well as Safat Tower investors and a number of clients.

Saheb Khajah, Manager of Supporting Services Department at Al-Safat Investment Company said that the significance of the seminar lies in its discussion of the critical global issue of the deadly pandemic which has swept the world causing hundreds of thousands of families to lose loved ones. He beseeched Allah to protect Kuwait and its people from all harm. Khajah added that Al-Safat Investment Company has been keen on keeping up with events and through this awareness seminar, supporting the awareness efforts of various public and private entities. This emphasizes on the grave responsibility of private institutions and businesses in Kuwait in confronting this pandemic which has impacted all business sectors in Kuwait.

He explained that the local effect of the pandemic called for precautionary measures and awareness on the part of major institutions which have large numbers of employees, administrators and technicians. This was recognized by Al-Safat company through implementing a number of precautionary measures whose aspects today's seminar aims to highlight. Khajah applauded the seminar's attendance as being indicative of the high level of awareness of public sector workers who realize the importance of working in a safe environment. He also praised Dr Fatima Khajah's presentation, pointing out that it brought



Saheb Khajah



Dr Fatima Khajah

optimism and reassurance about the concerned authorities having the spread of the pandemic in Kuwait under control.

Dr Fatima Khajah began her presentation by noting the global cost of the pandemic in terms of health, economy and psychology. She addressed the essential question of why this virus is different, explaining that it is due to its ability to spread fast through aerosols and exhalation as well as its ability to mutate as evidenced lately. She added that this mutation is the result of the nature of the COVID-19 which is described as a fast dividing virus, noting that this "does not necessarily make it more dangerous, but it increases its ability to spread."

Dr Khajah pointed out that the preliminary methods of fighting the virus are simple, easy and rely on social distancing, regular hygiene and sanitization as well as complying with health instructions and guidelines. Since the advanced and most effective solution against the virus is the vaccine, she stressed that beating the virus is possible with the medical efforts through the vaccines approved by the American Food and Drug Organization. Dr Fatima Khajah concluded her presentation by answering questions and queries of the attendees who interacted actively with the topic of discussion.



**KUWAIT:** A view of people in attendance.

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Trump impeachment trial to begin only in second week of February

## Sri Lankan minister tests positive for COVID after endorsing sorcery



WASHINGTON, DC: President Joe Biden speaks during an event on economic crisis in the State Dining Room of the White House on Friday in Washington, DC. —AFP

# Biden undoes Trump migration orders

## Presidential signatures lift 'Muslim ban' which was enforced in 2017

**NEW YORK:** Within hours of taking office, President Joe Biden undid some of Donald Trump's most controversial immigration policies and sparked cautious hope that millions living in the shadows could one day get legal status in the US.

Scribbled signatures from his pen on Wednesday lifted an entry ban for people from many majority Muslim nations and halted construction of Trump's border wall with Mexico, heartening immigration defenders left reeling by four years of "America First" nationalism. Yet advocates see new battles ahead, including whether lawmakers can finally overhaul the nation's immigration system which has been branded as "broken" with some 11 million undocumented people living in limbo. These discussions, however, have only begun as the Trump administration has just left the White House. His so-called "Muslim ban," which in 2017 targeted citizens of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, ignited international outrage and led to domestic court rulings against it.

Iraq and Sudan were dropped from the list, but in 2018 the Supreme Court upheld a later version of the ban for

the other nations—as well as North Korea and Venezuela. As part of his first acts, Biden signed new protections for so-called "Dreamers"—immigrants who arrived illegally as children and had been temporarily shielded from deportation by a program Trump tried to dismantle. In addition, the new president overturned one of his predecessor's orders pushing aggressive efforts to find and deport unauthorized immigrants, and imposed a 100-day suspension on most deportations.

Immigration advocates erupted in support for Biden's first orders. "There is that dark cloud that used to hang over our heads, which is gone," said Camille Mackler, the executive director of a pro-migrant lawyers group founded against the ban targeting Muslim nations.

### Republican pushback

"After four years of what was a war on immigration and immigrants, this feels like the dawn of a new day," said Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, president of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. "I think (this) is pretty significant action for, you know, a president unilaterally on

day one," she added. Aura Hernandez, a 39-year-old immigrant from Guatemala who doesn't have papers, heaved a sigh of relief.

"These past four years have been the worst of my life," said the mother of five, who took refuge for several months in a Manhattan church in 2018 to avoid deportation. But like millions of others in her position, Hernandez has to keep her hope in check because Biden's executive orders do not change the fundamentals of the nation's immigration system. The president's nominee to lead the nation's Homeland Security department, Alejandro Mayorkas, said this week that Biden has "committed to presenting Congress, on day one, with an immigration reform bill that, once and for all, fixes I think what we all can agree is a broken immigration system."

Previous efforts to pass a major reform of the system have come tantalizingly close but failed in the end, leaving powerful Democratic Senator Bob Menendez to describe what he expects will be a "Herculean" effort in Congress this time around. A proposed bill would allow immigrants without documents, but who pay taxes and have no criminal record or

national security issues, to work legally for six years and then get on a possible track to permanent legal status.

Menendez noted that 60 of 100 votes would be needed for passage in the Senate, which means Democrats would have to have bipartisan support. Immigration reform is a particularly delicate issue for Republicans, who have been skeptical of regularization measures and some of whom will be up for re-election in 2022. Menendez called on the business community, especially in the migrant-heavy agricultural and tech sectors, to push Republicans for action. Apple boss Tim Cook said on Wednesday he was ready to work with the Biden administration and Congress for "comprehensive solutions to fix our broken immigration system." Yet any reform proposal will likely require negotiation and thus compromise, Menendez noted. The legal status of millions of undocumented people "is a major immigration issue that hasn't been resolved for decades," said Sahar Aziz, a law professor at Rutgers University. "Each time a Democratic president tries to find a path to citizenship, Republicans push back." —AFP

## Inside the world's biggest vaccine factory, India's Serum Institute

**PUNE:** The tiny clinking vials supervised by silent PPE-wearing technicians belie the excitement inside the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, the Serum Institute of India, a major player in the fight against coronavirus. The firm, founded in 1966 in the western city of Pune, is producing millions of doses of the Covishield vaccine, developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University, for India and much of the developing world.

Unlike the rival Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, Covishield can be stored and transported using standard refrigeration. It is also significantly cheaper than the vaccines developed by Pfizer or the US firm Moderna, making it better suited for countries with poorer populations and rusty infrastructure.

Even before the pandemic, the Indian firm was a world leader in vaccines, producing 1.5 billion doses a year and inoculating two out of three children in 170 countries against diseases such as polio, mumps, meningitis and measles. Its journey kicked off on a stud farm, where the firm's owners, the Poonawalla family, began breeding horses in 1946, before a conversation with a vet sparked the realization that antitoxin serum extracted from the animals could be used to make vaccines.

The Serum Institute soon became a market leader thanks

to its cheap and effective drugs, which were eagerly sought after by price-conscious governments and consumers, prompting the company to expand at a dizzying rate. Adar Poonawalla, its 40-year-old CEO, has spent nearly a billion dollars in recent years enlarging and improving the sprawling Pune campus.

As a result, when the coronavirus pandemic began to sweep across the world, the company, which recorded annual revenues of over \$800 million in 2019-20 and is debt-free, was in pole position to reap the rewards.

### 'Used to pressure'

The palm-fringed Pune campus, whose grounds boast horse-shaped topiaries in a playful nod to the firm's origins, is home to several buildings where vaccines are manufactured and scrutinized for quality before being deposited into sterilized vials and stored for delivery. From Brazil to South Africa, there is no shortage of customers, with governments clamoring to buy Covishield.

With Poonawalla vowing to reserve 50 percent of Covishield stocks for the Indian market, New Delhi, which intends to immunize 300 million people by July, is engaging in a bout of vaccine diplomacy, planning to supply 20 million doses to its South Asian neighbors. The Serum Institute also plans to supply 200 million doses to Covax, a World Health Organization-backed effort to procure and distribute inoculations to poor countries. If all this sounds overwhelming, the firm's bosses are not worried. "We are used to these kinds of pressures because even in the past there were situations when we were required to step up the production to meet individual countries' requirements," Suresh Jadhav, Serum Institute's executive director, told AFP.

Even a deadly fire at an under-construction building this week failed to dent confidence, with Poonawalla promptly



PUNE: Uddhav Thackeray (left), the chief minister of India's Maharashtra state, speaks as the Serum Institute of India's CEO Adar Poonawalla watches during a press conference in Pune on Friday. —AFP

tweeting that "there would be no loss of #COVISHIELD production due to multiple production buildings that I had kept in reserve to deal with such contingencies".

The pandemic has transformed Poonawalla's public profile, from a jet-setting billionaire known for his expensive taste in cars and fine art to a pharma-tycoon applauded for his willingness to take risks and his commitment to affordable vaccines. Unsurprisingly, the father-of-two has not held back from taking so-called anti-vaxxers to task, including berating US rapper Kanye West for spreading conspiracy theories. "Though we enjoy your music very much @KanyeWest, your views on #vaccines come across as irresponsible and borderline dangerous, considering the influence you have today and may have in the future: vaccines save lives," Poonawalla tweeted in July. —AFP

"All the current evidence continues to show that both the vaccines we are currently using remain effective both against the old variant and this new variant," he added. The government appears on track to meet its pledge to vaccinate 15 million of the most vulnerable by mid-February. It is also aiming to inoculate the entire adult population by September at the latest. England has been in a third nationwide lockdown since early this month, with similar restrictions in place in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, where devolved administrations are responsible for health policy. New Office for National Statistics (ONS) data released Friday showed the stay-at-home order had helped prompt a slight drop in infection rates across England last week.

On average, one in 55 people have got the virus there, rising to one in 35 in London, it found. However, chief medical officer Chris Whitty warned that despite the "signs of improvement" cases remained "at a very high level" and hospitals were still in danger of becoming overwhelmed. The government said Friday it was launching a new national campaign featuring hospital staff and COVID-19 patients, in a bid to remind the public of the extreme pressures still facing the state-run health service. The "emotive" TV advert "challenges the public to think about the impact their actions might have by asking: 'Can you look them in the eyes and tell them you're helping by staying at home?'" —AFP

## Baghdad blasts bare gaps in Iraq's strained military

**BAGHDAD:** Twin suicide blasts in Baghdad claimed by the Islamic State group have exposed gaps within Iraq's security forces, weakened by the COVID-19 pandemic, rival armed groups and political tensions. At least 32 people were killed and more than 100 wounded in the double-tap suicide attack that targeted a commercial district in Baghdad on Thursday.

It was the deadliest attack in three years in the capital, which has been relatively calm since IS's territorial defeat in late 2017. But it has also illustrated accumulating shortfalls in Iraq's patchwork of security forces, experts said. "IS isn't coming back. The fact that this is news shows how good the situation has become compared to the past," said Jack Watling, a research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in London.

"But there are some very clear problems in the Iraqi security sector, and this is reflective of that." Following the US-led invasion in 2003, Iraq's security forces had to be effectively rebuilt from the ground up, relying heavily on training by foreign armies.

The COVID-19 pandemic put an abrupt halt to that. Living together at bases with little social distancing, Iraqi troops were some of the country's first coronavirus victims.

In March 2020, the US-led coalition announced it was pulling out foreign trainers to stem the pandemic's spread. "The decreased training over the past year because of COVID-19 (created) a gap there," a top US official in Baghdad told AFP last month. It also meant Iraq's security services had decreased access to the coalition's communications surveillance—"an early warning system" that was crucial to nipping IS attacks in the bud, said Watling.

### 'Gap to exploit'

Many of those withdrawals became permanent. The US-led coalition announced last year that Iraq's army was capable of fighting IS remnants on its own and pulled out of eight bases across the country. At the same time, citing the improving security situation, Baghdad's authorities lifted the concrete blast walls and checkpoints that had congested the city for years. Battle-hardened units were moved out of cities to chase down IS sleeper cells in rural areas, with less-experienced units taking over urban security. Security analyst Alex Mello said those rotations combined with less-reliable intelligence may have eventually granted IS "a gap to exploit". —AFP

## Evidence UK virus strain more deadly, says Johnson

**LONDON:** The coronavirus strain that has swept Britain and beyond in recent months could be more deadly as well as more transmissible, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Friday. The sobering news came as the UK sees record deaths from COVID-19, following a surge in cases and hospitalizations since the variant was first identified in southeast England in September.

The strain has also spread to more than 60 nations—including China, where the pandemic began more than a year ago—according to the World Health Organization (WHO). "In addition to spreading more quickly, it also now appears that there is some evidence that the new variant... may be associated with a higher degree of mortality," Johnson said at a news conference. He blamed the variant for the grim situation engulfing Britain, where another 1,401 fatalities were announced Friday, taking the overall toll to 95,981 — the highest in Europe. Virus deaths have risen 16 percent over the past week, while the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 is

approaching double the number seen during the worst days of the first wave of the pandemic in April.

Chief government scientist Patrick Vallance said the new variant could be 30-40 percent more deadly for some age groups, although he stressed the assessment relied on sparse data. "There's a lot of uncertainty around these numbers and we need more work to get a precise handle on it, but it obviously is of concern," he said, flanking Johnson in Downing Street. "You will see that across the different age groups as well, a similar sort of relative increase in the risk."

However Mike Ryan, executive director of the WHO's health emergencies program, said it had not yet seen evidence that the variant is more lethal. "What we are seeing is that if you infect more people, more people will get very sick, and if more people get very sick more people will die," he added. "Increasing incidence leads to higher mortality."

### 'Signs of improvement'

Britain is in the grip of its third and worst wave of the virus. The country is pinning its hopes of a return to normality later this year on the biggest vaccination program in its history, which began last month.

Johnson revealed 5.4 million people had now received their first dose of two vaccines currently being administered, with a daily record of 400,000 people inoculated in the last 24 hours.

## International

# Trump impeachment trial to begin only in second week of February

## Trial delayed to conduct critical business including confirmation of cabinet nominees

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump's US Senate trial will begin in the second week of February, days after a fresh impeachment case against the former president is transmitted by the House, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Friday.

The newly announced schedule reflects a deal struck by Senate leaders to delay the substantive portion of the trial for two weeks so that the chamber may conduct other critical business including confirmation of President Joe Biden's cabinet nominees. The House of Representatives impeached Trump for a historic second time on January 13, just one week before he left office.

Schumer said the article of impeachment will be delivered and read out to the Senate on Monday at 7:00 pm (0000 GMT Tuesday). The chamber's 100 members will be sworn in as trial jurors the next day. The House members assigned by Speaker Nancy Pelosi as impeachment managers, and members of Trump's yet-to-be-named defense team, will then be given time to draft their legal briefs.

"Once the briefs are drafted, presentation by the parties will commence the week of February 8," Schumer told colleagues on the Senate floor. During the two-week interim, the Senate will act on Biden's cabinet nominations "and the COVID relief bill which would provide relief for millions of American who are suffering during this pandemic," Schumer added.

"Healing and unity will only come if there is truth and accountability, and that is what this trial will provide." Members will deliberate whether to convict

Trump on what the US Constitution describes as "high crimes and misdemeanors."

Trump was impeached on a single charge of "incitement of insurrection" for his role in whipping up his supporters during a speech in Washington on January 6, the day a pro-Trump mob stormed Congress and threatened the lives of lawmakers and then-vice president Mike Pence. Five people died in the violence, including a police officer.

### 'Unprecedentedly fast'

The delay is the result of a deal Schumer struck with Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell. McConnell was a close congressional ally to Trump during his term, but he severely reprimanded the outgoing president for repeatedly seeking to overturn results of the election and for his incitement of protesters, and he left the door open for voting to convict Trump.

But he had sought a delay in the trial until February, arguing Trump needs time to hire lawyers and mount a defense. On Friday, McConnell appeared to express regret for the Democrats' speedy timetable. "As I understand, it must be headed our way Monday. By Senate rules, if the article arrives, we have to start a trial right then," he said on the floor. But the Senate can agree to its own parameters of the trial timeline.

McConnell spoke of the "unprecedentedly fast" process in the House, where Trump was impeached in a single day. "The sequel cannot be an insufficient Senate process that denies former president Trump



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo taken on February 06, 2020, US President Donald Trump holds up a newspaper that displays a headline "Acquitted," as he arrives to speak at the 68th annual National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC. — AFP

his due process or damages the Senate or the presidency itself," he said. Trump survived a first impeachment almost a year ago when the then Republican-controlled Senate acquitted him of abusing his office to try to get dirt on Biden's family before the presidential election.

With the Senate now comprised of 50 Democrats and 50 Republicans, and a two-thirds majority need-

ed to convict Trump, at least 17 Republicans would have to vote against the former president to secure a conviction. If that occurs, a subsequent vote would be held on whether to ban Trump from holding public office in the future. A handful of Republicans have spoken out harshly against the president but it remains unclear if there would be enough GOP senators to vote for conviction. — AFP

## Iran calls on Biden to 'unconditionally' lift US sanctions

TEHRAN: Iran on Friday called on the new US administration to "unconditionally" lift sanctions imposed by Donald Trump on the Islamic republic to salvage the 2015 nuclear deal, warning against any concessions. Just two days after US President Joe Biden took office, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif published an op-ed in the US foreign policy magazine Foreign Affairs on Tehran's view towards saving the deal.

The agreement has been largely in tatters since former president Donald Trump withdrew from it unilaterally in 2018 and reimposed harsh sanctions as part of a policy of "maximum pressure" on Iran.

Known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the deal was agreed between Iran, the United States, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany. It offered sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on Tehran's nuclear ambitions and guarantees it would not seek an atomic bomb. Iran has maintained it has only pursued a civilian nuclear energy program. "The new administration in Washington has a fundamental choice to make," Zarif, who is considered one of the architects of the 2015 nuclear deal, wrote in the op-ed.

"It can embrace the failed policies of the Trump administration," or Biden "can choose a better path by ending Trump's failed policy of 'maximum pressure' and returning to the deal his predecessor abandoned," he added. "But if Washington instead insists on extracting concessions, then this opportunity will be lost."

### 'Collective efforts'

The sanctions targeted Iran's vital oil sales and international banking ties, plunging its economy into a deep recession. Since 2019, Iran has suspended its compliance with most of the limits set by the deal in response to Washington's abandonment of sanctions relief and what Tehran deemed as Europe's inaction to provide it with the JCPOA's economic benefits.

The Iranian government has signalled a readiness to engage with Biden, who took office on January 20 and who has expressed willingness to return to diplomacy with Tehran. Biden's pick for secretary of state, Anthony Blinken, said at a Senate confirmation hearing Tuesday that Trump's policies had made Iran "more dangerous".

Blinken confirmed Biden's desire for Washington to return to the nuclear agreement, but said that was conditional on Tehran's return to strict compliance with its commitments. But Tehran has insisted that Washington must first lift all sanctions and return to its own JCPOA obligations.

"The incoming Biden administration can still salvage the nuclear agreement, but only if it can muster the genuine political will in Washington to demonstrate that the United States is ready to be a real partner in collective efforts," Zarif wrote. "The administration should begin by unconditionally removing, with full effect, all sanctions imposed, reimposed, or relabeled since Trump took office," he added.

"In turn, Iran would reverse all the remedial measures it has taken in the wake of Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear deal." Iran has maintained it would return to full compliance with the deal if sanctions were lifted and it could benefit from the economic relief it expected under the JCPOA. — AFP

## Icelandic man recovers from double arm transplant

LYON: An Icelandic man who got the world's first double shoulder and arm transplant is recovering well after the operation, two decades after the accident that cost him both limbs, doctors said Friday. They said it was still uncertain how much mobility Felix Gretarsson, 48, will eventually recover following the operation earlier this month in the French southeastern city of Lyon.

But "giving a little to somebody who was missing so much, that's already a lot" Aram Gazarian, the lead surgeon in the operation, told a news conference.

"If he can recover the possibility to actively bend his elbow, that would be a life-changer," he said. On January 12, 1998, Gretarsson, an electrician, was working on a high-voltage power line when an 11,000-

volt surge burned his hands and flung him to the icy ground. He sustained multiple fractures and internal injuries, and went into a three-month coma during which surgeons amputated both arms.

He underwent several more operations, including a liver transplant. When hand transplant pioneer Jean-Michel Dubernard, based in Lyon, visited Reykjavik for a conference, Gretarsson asked him whether it would be possible to replace the lost limbs. The operations was "his biggest dream", Gretarsson's wife Sylvia told Friday's news conference, adding that she herself never felt that the operation was truly necessary as he "wasn't missing anything".

It took years to find suitable donors, during which some 50 med-



Felix Gretarsson was a long way from being able to move his arms, but seemed visibly pleased with the outcome.

ical staff in total became involved in the preparations for the operation. Four surgical teams were involved to minimize the transition time between donor and recipient.

Doctors said Friday the outlook for the right arm to become functional is better than for the left, which had also required a complete rebuild of the shoulder. — AFP

## Biden White House atmosphere is transformed

WASHINGTON: Camped out in bare offices, President Joe Biden's new White House team has spent its first three days scrambling for things like binder clips and IT support-oh, and trying to save the country from multiple crises. They took over leadership of the world's most powerful, wealthy and innovative nation on Wednesday. But after a nasty transition period from the Donald Trump administration, incoming staff face some of the problems an ordinary renter might face in a new apartment.

The entire premises got a deep cleaning job that CNN reported cost \$500,000 and the Oval Office has been revamped. But rows of empty shelves and walls stripped of decoration make a less than homely atmosphere in the warren of offices occupied by Press Secretary Jen Psaki and her media operation.

On her first full day, Meghan Hays, director of message planning, had to write on her cellphone because the computer didn't work. Another staffer



WASHINGTON, DC: US President Joe Biden (third right) and First Lady Jill Biden (second right), with Vice President Kamala Harris (second left) and her husband, Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff, watch the virtual Presidential Inaugural Prayer Service hosted by the Washington National Cathedral, in the State Dining Room of the White House in Washington, DC, on Friday. — AFP

asked if anyone had seen binder clips, before rummaging unsuccessfully through an assortment of office supplies in a big cardboard box. Yet even if Biden's crew haven't had time to hang pictures, they've already transformed the White House.

### Masked up

Visually, the most obvious difference is that

everyone now wears masks against COVID-19. A picture of Biden at the Resolute Desk on his first day, sporting a black mask, defined the new era. Trump almost never wore a mask in public, fearing it would send a message of weakness. He certainly never wore one publicly in the Oval Office, wondering aloud what "presidents, prime ministers, dictators, kings, queens" would think of such a thing. — AFP

## Russia detains thousands of Navalny supporters

MOSCOW: Police yesterday aggressively detained protesters in Moscow and other cities as thousands of supporters of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny took to the streets following his call to protest against President Vladimir Putin's rule.

In the Russian capital, which usually mobilizes the largest rallies, protesters planned to meet on the central Pushkin Square at 2:00 pm (1100 GMT) and march towards the Kremlin. But more than an hour before the planned rally police began detaining people, AFP journalists reported. Putin's most charismatic critic put out the mass rally call after surviving a near-fatal poisoning with a Novichok nerve agent and returning to Moscow last week-end following months of treatment in Germany. He was arrested at

Sheremetievo Airport and jailed.

Protests were held early Saturday in the Far East, Siberia and the Urals including Khabarovsk, Novosibirsk and Chita where several thousand turned out, Navalny supporters said. OVD Info, which monitors detentions at opposition rallies, said police had detained more than 200 people across the country.

Protesters told AFP they wanted to see new faces in politics and that authorities were persecuting Navalny for speaking the truth. "The country is in a state of complete lawlessness because of Putin's rule," a young protester, Maria Kirichenko, said in the Pacific port of Vladivostok.

Yesterday's rallies are expected to be a major test of the opposition's ability to mobilize despite increasing Kremlin pressure on critics and the



VILNIUS: People gather to demonstrate in support of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who is currently jailed, in front of the Russian embassy in Vilnius, yesterday. — AFP

coronavirus pandemic.

### 'Freedom to Navalny'

Ahead of the demonstrations, Navalny's team released a video investigation into an opulent Black Sea property allegedly owned by Putin who has been in power for 20 years. The two-hour report has been viewed more than 66 million times. In

Vladivostok, demonstrators gathered in the city center, chanting "Putin is a thief" and "Freedom to Navalny!" AFP footage showed riot police running after protesters and beating them with batons. In Yakutsk south of the Arctic Circle, protesters wrapped up against the cold, rallied in temperatures of minus 50 degrees Celsius (-58 Fahrenheit). — AFP

## International

# Biden administration to review US-Taliban withdrawal deal

## Violence rages across Afghanistan despite ceasefire agreement

**WASHINGTON:** The Biden administration said it will review a landmark US deal with the Taliban, focusing on whether the insurgent group has reduced attacks in Afghanistan, in keeping with its side of the agreement. Washington struck a deal with the Taliban in Qatar last year, to begin withdrawing its troops in return for security guarantees from the militants and a commitment to kickstart peace talks with the Afghan government.

But violence across Afghanistan has surged despite the two sides engaging in those talks since September. President Joe Biden's newly appointed national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, spoke with his Afghan counterpart Hamdullah Mohib and "made clear the National Security Council's intention to review" the deal, said National Security Council spokeswoman Emily Horne late Friday.

Specifically, Washington wants to check that the Taliban is "living up to its commitments to cut ties with terrorist groups, to reduce violence in Afghanistan, and to engage in meaningful negotiations with the Afghan government and other stakeholders," her statement continued. It added that Sullivan "underscored that the US will support the peace process with a robust and regional diplomatic effort, which will aim to help the two sides achieve a durable and just political settlement and permanent ceasefire."

Sullivan also discussed the United States' support

for protecting recent progress made on women and minority groups' rights as part of the peace process. When contacted, the Taliban said they remained "committed to the agreement and honor our commitments".

"We expect the other side to remain committed to the agreement too," Mohammad Naeem, the group's spokesman in Qatar, told AFP. Washington's move was met with a sigh of relief from officials in Kabul after months of speculation over how the new administration would potentially recalibrate the Afghan policy. Mohib, the Afghan national security advisor, tweeted that during the call the two sides "agreed to work toward a permanent ceasefire and a just and durable peace" in the country.

Another top Afghan government official lambasted the Taliban's failure to live up to the February 2020 deal, saying the agreement had failed to achieve its stated goals. "The agreement so far, did not deliver a desired goal of ending Taliban's violence and bringing a ceasefire desired by the Afghans," Sediq Sediqqi, Deputy Interior Minister and former spokesman to President Ashraf Ghani said on Twitter.

"The Taliban did not live up to its commitments." Deadly attacks and high-profile assassinations have increased in recent months, particularly in Kabul where several journalists, activists, judges and politicians have been murdered in brazen daylight



HERAT: Afghan President Ashraf Ghani (center) arrives with the government delegation during a visit in Herat province on Friday. — AFP

attacks. The Taliban have denied responsibility for these killings, but Afghan and US officials have blamed the group for the murders. On Tuesday,

Biden's nominee for secretary of state, Antony Blinken, told his Senate confirmation hearing that "we want to end this so-called forever war." —AFP

## Sri Lankan minister tests positive after endorsing sorcery

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka's health minister, who publicly endorsed sorcery and magic potions to stop surging coronavirus infections in the island, has tested positive and will self-isolate, officials said yesterday.

Pavithra Wanniarachchi had publicly consumed and endorsed a magic potion, later revealed to contain honey and nutmeg, manufactured by a sorcerer who claimed it worked as a life-long inoculation against the virus. She also poured a pot of "blessed" water into a river in November after a self-styled god-man told her that it would end the pandemic.

The island nation of 21 million on Friday approved the emergency use of the vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University only

hours after Wanniarachchi tested positive, officials said. "Her antigen test returned positive on Friday and she has been asked to isolate herself," a health ministry official said.

"All her immediate contacts have been quarantined." A junior minister who had also taken the potion made popular by Wanniarachchi tested positive for the virus earlier this week.

Doctors in the island nation have said there is no scientific basis for the syrup, and there is no known cure for COVID-19. But thousands defied public gathering restrictions to swamp a village in central Sri Lanka last month to obtain the elixir, made by carpenter Dhammika Bandara.

Family members of another politician, who hailed from Bandara's village, have also been infected after taking the syrup. Pro-government media gave widespread publicity to the holy man, who claimed the formula was revealed to him by Kali, a Hindu goddess of death and destruction.

But the government has since scrambled to distance itself from Bandara, whose preparation was approved as a food supplement by the official indige-



Pavithra Wanniarachchi

nous medicine unit. Sri Lanka is in the grip of a coronavirus surge, with the number of cases and deaths soaring from 3,300 and 13 in early October to nearly 57,000 infections and 278 dead this week. —AFP

## HK orders people to stay home in two-day lockdown

**HONG KONG:** Thousands of Hong Kongers were ordered to stay in their homes yesterday for the city's first coronavirus lockdown as authorities battle an outbreak in one of its poorest and most densely packed districts. The order bans about 10,000 people living inside multiple housing blocks within the neighborhood of Jordan from leaving their apartments until all those in the area had been tested.

Officials said they planned to screen everyone inside the designated zone within 48 hours "in order to achieve the goal of zero cases in the district". "Residents will have to stay at their premises to avoid cross-infection until they get their test results," health minister Sophia Chan told reporters yesterday. The government had deployed over 3,000 staff to enforce the lockdown, which covers about 150 housing blocks. Residents were seen lining up for testing at more than 50 mobile specimen collec-

tion vehicles parked in the area and for basic daily supplies provided by the government.

Around 3,000 people in the area had been tested. Hong Kong was one of the first places to be struck by the coronavirus after it spilled out of central China. It has recorded just over 10,000 infections with some 170 deaths by imposing effective but economically punishing social distancing measures for much of the last year.

Over the last two months the city has been hit by a fourth wave of infections, with authorities struggling to bring the daily numbers down. Stubborn clusters have emerged in low-income neighborhoods notorious for some of the world's most cramped housing. The district of Jordan recorded 162 confirmed cases from the beginning of this year to January 20.

Yesterday the city recorded 81 infections, of which 21 were from Yau Tsim Mong area where the restricted



HONG KONG: Health workers prepare to conduct testing in the Jordan area of Hong Kong yesterday, after thousands were ordered to stay in their homes for the city's first COVID-19 coronavirus lockdown as authorities battle an outbreak in one of its poorest and most densely packed districts. —AFP

district is located.

### Inequality and housing shortages

On paper Hong Kong is one of the richest cities in the world. But it suffers from pervasive inequality, an acute housing shortage and eye-watering rents that successive governments have failed to solve.

The average flat in Hong Kong is

about 500 square feet (46 square meters). But many squeeze themselves into even smaller subdivided flats-cubicles that can be as tiny as 50 square feet or even less, with shared bathrooms and showers inside ageing walk-up buildings. It is in these kinds of buildings where clusters have been located in recent weeks, prompting the first lockdown order. —AFP

## Patients battle COVID 'enemy' in Nigeria second wave

**LAGOS:** "Attention, isolation zone," warns a bright orange notice at the entrance to the main coronavirus treatment center in Lagos, Africa's most populous city. Huge black gates separate the center at the Yaba Mainland Hospital, which takes 20 seriously ill patients every day, from the hustle and bustle of the city, Nigeria's economic capital.

The gates are not just an entrance, they symbolize the gulf between the sick and those still untouched by the second wave of this devastating pandemic. On one side, hundreds of people crowd into the markets, many apparently oblivious to the virus' dangers, without masks and failing to observe social distancing. Inside, the atmosphere could not be more different. Around 100 gravely ill patients struggle to breathe, bedridden and reliant on oxygen tanks.

"I would never believe that COVID-19 (could) happen to me," says Idoja Isaac, 57, a former Nigerian Navy officer who was admitted a day earlier

with a fever and breathing difficulties. "Covid 19 is real, it's an enemy you cannot fight with (a) bullet," he adds.

### Malaria or COVID?

When he first experienced symptoms a few days previously, Isaac thought he was suffering from another bout of malaria, never imagining that he too could be struck down by the virus that has afflicted millions worldwide. Nigeria, with nearly 200 million people, has registered more than 116,000 cases including 1,485 deaths. Around half of these cases have been in Lagos, which registered the first infection in sub-Saharan Africa in March.

The figures, however, are believed to be underestimates while the number of tests carried out remains far lower than in Europe. Despite the pandemic, many Nigerians continue to attribute COVID symptoms to malaria and therefore don't seek testing. The potential for COVID to be missed due to it being mistaken for malaria prompted the governor of Lagos state,



LAGOS: Health workers study with laptops results of tests to dictate levels of infections at Surveillance and Epidemiology section at the Infectious Disease Hospital (IDH) in Yaba, Lagos, yesterday. —AFP

Babajide Sanwo-Olu, to issue a warning this week. "In this second wave of coronavirus, any malaria symptom needs to be considered as Covid-19," he said on Tuesday.

Nigeria's second wave, which began in November, reached its peak of infections two weeks ago, and has since appeared to stabilize, according to health authorities. In the COVID-19 center, around half the beds are empty. And in the small intensive care unit, two out of the five available beds are filled by intubated patients, compared

with four a few weeks ago.

Likewise, the number of oxygen tanks needed to treat patients has gone from 70 a day a few weeks ago to 500 a day at the peak before coming back down to 350 a day today, said Lagos Health Commissioner Akin Abayomi. "We have never not had enough oxygen. We've been close to not having enough and we've been stretched, but we've never been in a situation when we had patients who needed oxygen, and there's no oxygen," he said. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Trump mull replacing AG

**WASHINGTON:** Donald Trump considered replacing then-acting US attorney general Jeffrey A. Rosen with a Justice Department lawyer who would help him force Georgia officials to overturn the state's election result, US media reported late Friday. The New York Times said Trump only decided against the move when told that all remaining top officials at the Justice Department would resign en masse if the plan went ahead. The news, also reported in the Washington Post, comes as Trump is set to face a Senate trial for "incitement of insurrection" over his role in whipping up supporters with unfounded claims of election fraud before they stormed the US Capitol in early January. —AFP

#### Pakistani killed during TikTok stunt

**ISLAMABAD:** A young man was hit and killed by a train in Pakistan while being filmed walking along the tracks for a TikTok stunt, police and rescue officials said yesterday. The accident happened on Friday in the Shah Khalid neighborhood of Rawalpindi city, near the capital Islamabad. Hamza Naveed, 18, was walking next to the tracks while a friend filmed him, Raja Rafaqat Zaman, a spokesperson for the local rescue agency, told AFP. "The moving train hit him while he was posing for a video and walking on the railway track," Zaman said. Rescue workers rushed to the site, he said, but the young man was already dead. —AFP

#### US, Mexico, Guatemala bar caravans

**GUATEMALA CITY:** The United States, Mexico and Guatemala agreed Friday to bar migrant caravans from passing through their territories due to the Covid pandemic, days after one from Honduras was violently broken up in Guatemala. US Ambassador to Guatemala William Popp stressed that any migrants who cross the US border in an irregular manner will be returned home immediately, citing national health security. His comments came after a meeting with Guatemalan Foreign Minister Pedro Brolo and Mexican Ambassador to Guatemala Romeo Ruiz. —AFP

#### No severe reaction to Moderna vaccine

**WASHINGTON:** Severe allergic reaction to Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine is "rare," US health authorities said Friday, with only 10 cases arising from more than four million first doses. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also emphasized that widespread vaccination was critical to fighting the coronavirus pandemic. "Based on this early monitoring, anaphylaxis after receipt of Moderna Covid-19 vaccine appears to be a rare event," the CDC said in a report, indicating that none of the reactions resulted in death. The CDC data documented the 10 cases of anaphylactic shock among a reported 4,041,396 first doses administered between December 21 and January 10. —AFP

#### Florida condition for inoculation

**MIAMI:** Florida will require proof of residence for those getting a COVID shot in a push to thwart so-called "vaccine tourism," a move experts say could also leave thousands of undocumented immigrants, homeless and low-income people in the lurch. The decision came after residents of other states and even people from abroad were reportedly arriving in Florida—which currently vaccinates anyone over age 65 — with an aim of gaining easier access to immunization. —AFP

# Business

SUNDAY, JANUARY 24, 2021

## Double-dip Europe recession is increasingly inevitable: Survey

### UK economy faces another recession on virus curbs

**BRUSSELS:** A slowdown in eurozone business activity accelerated in January, making a new recession almost certain as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to batter the economy, a key survey showed Friday. The closely watched PMI index compiled by IHS Markit is considered the earliest indicator of the state of the economy and the latest reading confirmed fears that the year-old virus crisis is still going strong.

"A double-dip recession for the eurozone economy is looking increasingly inevitable as tighter COVID-19 restrictions took a further toll on businesses in January," Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit, said. This meant that the economies of the 19 countries that use the single currency, dominated by Germany and France, would sink back into recession after only a very short recovery over the European summer.

The firm's closely watched PMI index fell from 49.1 points in December to 47.5 points this month, further away from the 50-point level which indicates growth. Williamson noted however that the bad start to 2021 would be less damaging than the economic collapse seen in the first wave of the pandemic last year. This was due to the "ongoing relative resilience of manufacturing, rising demand for exported goods and the lockdown measures having been less stringent on average than last year," he said. The difference between France and Germany was notable.

German exports managed to keep the country narrowly on a growth trajectory, while French business activity sank. The situation for the rest of the eurozone, accounting for a little more than half of

the bloc's economy, was even worse. Worryingly, employment across the eurozone fell for an eleventh consecutive month, albeit with modest increases in France and Germany, IHS Markit said. The bleak picture confirmed a warning by European Central Bank chief Christine Lagarde who saw "serious risks" still looming over the eurozone economy.

Much hope has been put in the distribution of vaccinations to reopen the economy but the campaign in the EU is going at a slower pace than hoped. The rollout of vaccines had instilled "a strong degree of confidence" but "the recent rise in virus case numbers has caused some pull-back in optimism," Williamson said. IHS Markit on Friday also posted an alarming survey result for Britain, where activity collapsed from a modest expansion in December to a low 40.6 points in January.

The country, which left the EU's single market on January 1, has seen a series of damaging lockdowns due to the spread of a more contagious strain of the virus. Meanwhile, Britain's private sector activity shrank in January due to another coronavirus lockdown and the Brexit fallout, survey data showed Friday, placing the economy on course for a double-dip recession. The composite purchasing managers' index (PMI) sank to an eight-month low at 40.6 points, compilers IHS Markit and the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) said in a statement.

The shift below 50 — indicating contraction — compared with 50.4 in December. "A steep slump in business activity in January puts the locked-down UK economy on course to contract sharply



**LONDON:** Sondheim Theatre in London's West End. Britain's private sector activity shrank in January due to another coronavirus lockdown and the Brexit fallout, survey data showed Friday, placing the economy on course for a double-dip recession. —AFP

in the first quarter of 2021, meaning a double-dip recession is on the cards," said Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit.

"Services have once again been especially hard hit but manufacturing has seen growth almost stall, blamed on a cocktail of COVID-19 and Brexit, which has led to increasingly widespread supply delays, rising costs and falling exports." Those

delays were sparked after Britain finally departed the European Union's single market and customs union at the start of this year. The economy had already suffered a historic recession in the first half of last year owing to an initial virus lockdown. Britain earlier this month imposed fresh curbs as the government sought to halt the spread of a more transmissible variant of the virus. —AFP

### Asia to dominate Davos virtual forum as virus-hit West struggles

**PARIS:** Emerging stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic, Asia is set to dominate this year's virtual World Economic Forum as a virus-battered West struggles and a new US president faces particularly daunting challenges. The 2020 WEF, which took place in its usual Swiss Alpine resort of Davos, saw the global elite just starting to worry about a pandemic that surfaced in China a month earlier.

While the coronavirus leaves a mounting death toll and upends economies, depriving millions of people of work, China and Asian countries in 2021 are making a strong comeback from the virus that hit them first. In virtual format because of the pandemic, next week's event is headlined: "A Crucial Year to Rebuild Trust." The spotlight will be on Chinese President Xi Jinping, who will give a speech tomorrow, the opening day of the event that will last through next Friday.

The big names from Europe will be German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who heads the European Union executive. US President Joe Biden will not appear at the virtual Davos, which has never been a fixture on the White House calendar—even if the new administration has pledged to revive a US multilateral foreign policy after four years of Donald



A file picture shows a panel discussion during the 50th World Economic Forum in Davos

Trump's America First approach.

Trump had been an exception as he stopped in Davos twice, with the real estate billionaire enjoying mixing with the global business elite.

Before him, Bill Clinton was the only American president who had travelled to Davos, and that was just once. Showing up from Asia are China's and South Korea's presidents as well as the prime ministers of India and Japan. Following the first virtual session, Davos will move in May to Singapore, far from the luxury Swiss ski resort where it has taken place since it was launched in 1971, the brainchild of German professor Klaus Schwab. The stated reason

for the changes is health safety.

But a virtual forum is not particularly attractive for the world's well-heeled movers and shakers, who value huddles behind closed doors in fancy hotels over meetings in formal settings.

French insurance-credit group Euler Hermes said in a study this month that the "world's economic center of gravity" (WECG) has been moving towards Asia since 2002. "The COVID-19 crisis could accelerate the shifting global balance towards Asia," it added. "By 2030, we forecast the WECG, could be located around the confluence of China, India and Pakistan," the study projected. —AFP

### US housing boomed in 2020 even as virus slammed economy

**WASHINGTON:** The US housing market boomed in 2020 even as the coronavirus pandemic caused one of the worst economic contractions of modern times, as Americans took advantage of low borrowing rates to buy homes. The surge in new and existing home sales, and home construction, underscores the unequal experience of the pandemic across the United States. Even as tens of millions of people lost their jobs due to the pandemic disruptions, others were able to afford major property purchases.

And it serves as a stark contrast to the 2008 global financial crisis, when mortgages were at the center of the downturn and the American housing market collapsed.

Existing home sales last year hit the highest level since 2006, the National Association of Realtors (NAR) reported Friday, with sales rising to 5.64 million. That was 5.6 percent higher than in 2019, before the virus harrowed the world's largest economy. And while the Commerce Department will not release its year-end data for new home sales until next week, through November the 841,000 seasonally adjusted annual rate was 20.8 percent above the same month in 2019.

"What's even better is that this momentum is likely to carry into the new year, with more buyers expected to enter the market," NAR Chief Economist Lawrence Yun said.

#### Low rates, cheap loans

The housing market was fairly solid before the pandemic hit, but the Federal Reserve's decision to slash its benchmark lending rate to zero as the coronavirus crisis began fueled the surge in purchases that began after a short pause. The drastic Fed move was a sign of the severity of the damage and intended to keep the economy afloat.

The last time the central bank cut rates to zero was during the global financial crisis, when the housing market was in the eye of the storm and a wave of subprime mortgage defaults caused millions of foreclosures. With mortgage rates hitting historically low levels last year, according to government-sponsored lender Freddie Mac, buyers seized the opportunity.

The Pew Research Center in July reported that about one in five Americans moved due to the pandemic or know someone who had, and 18 percent of those who moved said the reason was financial. But there was also evidence that people took advantage of the changing situation to try out new digs. Pew reported that 13 percent of people moved to a second home or vacation residence, while nine percent headed to a new place that they either bought or rented. —AFP

### Iconic glassmaker Duralex hopes for a lifeline

**ORLEANS, France:** A French court on Friday studied a rescue bid for Duralex, the maker of ultra-tough glassware prized by home cooks as well as professionals, but whose fortunes have taken a hit from production problems and the COVID crisis.

Staggering under a debt of some 32 million euros (\$39 million), Duralex could well be bought by its French rival Pyrex, also a household name worldwide. Pyrex's owner International Cookware was the only bid still standing as the hearing opened on Orleans, central France, where Duralex's historic factory stands just outside the city. The company's Picardie tumblers are considered icons of modern design, sold at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and used by James Bond during a drinking contest in 2012's "Skyfall."

Film buffs have also noted that Indiana Jones downs whisky in a Universal glass in "Raiders of the Lost Ark"—a movie set in the 1930s, though

Duralex itself was created in 1945.

Generations of French children also grew up with Duralex glasses that were ubiquitous in school cafeterias in the 1960s and 70s. But since 2017 Duralex has struggled to recover from a problem that emerged while replacing the furnace at its factory in La Chapelle-Saint-Mesmin—a nine million euro investment that was to improve quality as well as production capacity.

The company needed to replace a key part of its production machinery at the same time, but delays and technical mishaps prompted a drop in output that persisted for years.

And since last year Duralex has lost key restaurant and hotel orders as coronavirus restrictions have shut down restaurants and tourism. Export orders overall make up 80 percent of the group's revenue.

It was placed in receivership last September in hopes of finding new investors, and the Orleans court was to evaluate three takeover offers. They



A product of Glassware Duralex is shown in La Chapelle-Saint-Mesmin.

included one from Andre Ioannides, brother of Duralex's chief executive Antoine Ioannides, but the bid was withdrawn late Thursday.

"We didn't have enough time to line up the financing," the family's lawyer Antoine Poulaine said.

Another bid was lodged but

nobody showed up Friday to defend it. That cleared the way for a takeover by International Cookware. Its chief Jose Luis Llacuna said on the sidelines of the closed-door hearing that his group was ready to invest 21 million euros in Duralex and maintain nearly all its 248 employees. —AFP



Business

# KFH's customers conduct 140 million transactions through KFHonline in 2020

## Al-Shamlan: Successful launch of 'opening bank account online' for citizens and residents

**KUWAIT:** The total transactions completed by Kuwait Finance House's (KFH) customers through KFHonline on the website or the mobile app were nearly 140 million for the year 2020, with a growth rate of 18 percent compared to same period last year.

The e-banking transactions included: logins, local and telex financial transfers, opening deposits, adding beneficiaries, balance inquiry, cheque book request, opening KFH gold account, conducting gold transactions (purchase, sell and trade), requesting financing, opening an account, and checking the PINs for credit and debit cards, activating new bank cards, reporting a lost credit/debit cards, checking the financing obligations and the number of installments, among wide range of digital services.

Group General Manager Retail Banking at KFH, Khaled Yousif Al-Shamlan, said that these figures of online usage and growth rate reflect the efficiency of KFH digital solutions and the KFHonline services.

"This also reiterates the bank's leadership position in providing high-end mobile banking services that enable customers to complete their banking transactions anywhere 24/7," he added. Al-Shamlan pointed out that KFH succeeded in making significant strides with its digital transformation journey, drawing attention to its advanced and innovative financial services and products, indicating the bank successfully launched the digital service "opening bank account online" for new customers, citizens and residents within minutes without having to visit the branch. He said that the XTMs and the smart branches: KFH Go contributed in adding value to customers' banking experience, confirming the ongoing efforts in utilizing AI and teaming up with Fintech for the best interest of customers, and to keep abreast of latest financial technology.

Al-Shamlan listed some of the innovative financial solutions provided by KFH which are: The free of charge "SWIFT GPI" service to track local and international banking transfers electronically for individuals and corporate via KFHonline, Kuwait Clearing Company KCC dividend subscription, transfer to KFH Trade, Baiti online, deposit of cheques via mobile, Cardless cash withdrawal by (QR Code, Civil ID & Mobile Number), and a complete update of KYC request "Know your customer".

He also mentioned the digital services of opening a gold account with options of selling, buying and trading online, Skiplino to book appointments electronically in the banking branches, KFHPay electronic payment service through which the customer can pay through the KFHonline mobile application or via the K-Net page, in addition to many other highly efficient digital services.

KFH also offers Push Notification service that is important in the case of traveling and the text messaging service is not available. To speed up electronic payment processes and enhance security, 3D Secure service has been developed so that the verification process is done through the verification code (OTP) technology that reaches the customer even if he is outside Kuwait via SMS or through the Push Notification service in the KFH mobile application. Al-Shamlan emphasized KFH's keenness on constantly improving its innovation strategy to roll out unique digital banking solutions, while moving forward in its digital transformation journey.



Khaled Al-Shamlan

## Russia wages online battle against TikTok, YouTube

**MOSCOW:** "I'm an American!" a young Russian under the username Neulera exclaims in English on the popular video-sharing app TikTok as she explains how to impersonate a tourist to avoid arrest at a street demonstration. Her video-published ahead of rallies planned in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny has been viewed more than 500,000 times while videos demanding Navalny's release garnered hundreds of millions of views on the platform.

In Russia, where state-controlled media outlets co-exist in stark contrast with online platforms popular among the opposition, authorities have ramped up efforts to contain and even replace sites that are seen as a threat. YouTube has become the primary source of news for many young Russians. The videos of web star Yuri Dud, known for his interviews with celebrities, or anti-graft campaigner Navalny are enjoying more and more success.

Soon after Navalny's arrest, his team published a two-hour investigation into a lavish palace on the Black Sea allegedly belonging to Russian President Vladimir Putin. The video has been viewed more than 65 million times on YouTube since its publication on Tuesday. Russian authorities have in recent years started tightening the "Runet"-the Russian segment of the Internet-in the name of fighting extremism, terrorism and protecting minors. In 2019, Russia passed a law for the development of "sovereign internet" aimed at isolating the Runet from the worldwide web, a move activists fear will tighten government control of cyberspace and stifle free speech.

### Fines and failures

Russia's media watchdog Roskomnadzor this week reacted to a wave of calls for protests in support of Navalny by threatening social media networks with fines if they do not delete content inciting minors to participate in the demonstrations. On the eve of the rallies, Roskomnadzor said TikTok "deleted 38 percent of information inciting minors to dangerous illegal actions", adding that other social networks including Instagram and YouTube also removed content on its request. Facebook said however it had not removed any of the information in question.

"We've received requests from the local regulator to restrict access to certain content that calls for protest," a Facebook spokesperson told AFP. "Since this content doesn't violate our Community Standards, it remains on our platform." Platforms that do not comply can face fines of up to 4 million rubles (around \$53,000 or 43,000 euros), Roskomnadzor said. Russia has already banned a number of websites that have refused to cooperate with authorities, such as the video platform Dailymotion and professional networking website LinkedIn. But banning YouTube, which is owned by tech giant Google, would prove a more difficult task.

"Roskomnadzor doesn't have a lot of funds," said Artyom Kozlyuk, head of the Roskomsvoboda digital rights NGO. "They have practically no leverage." He added that it was difficult to put pressure on Western social networks which would be "dealt a blow to their reputation" if they made concessions for a political regime.

### Local competitors

In the case of TikTok the procedure could be facilitated by the Kremlin's proximity to China, an expert in internet censorship, but Moscow still comes up against a lack of knowledge of this popular social network. The Kremlin-funded broadcaster RT (former Russia Today) on Wednesday



Videos demanding Navalny's release garnered hundreds of millions of views on TikTok platform

said courses would be offered to officials to help understand youth slang on sites like TikTok.

Last year Russia conceded its failure to ban the encrypted messenger Telegram after months of unsuccessful attempts to block it. Authorities are instead aiming to build local competitors such as "RuTube"-which belongs to Russia's leading media holding Gazprom Media controlled by energy giant Gazprom-a video platform that currently has only government-approved content. —AFP

## Alphabet closes Internet network project 'Loon'

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Google parent company Alphabet announced Friday it was shutting down "Loon", a high-profile project aiming to deliver wireless Internet via flying balloons in the stratosphere, because it is not commercially viable. The idea behind Loon was to build a network of balloons to expand Internet connectivity to underserved areas and disaster zones and was initially part of an Alphabet "moonshot factory" known as X, which aims to create projects to disrupt new sectors.

In a blog, X's Astro Teller announced the decision, adding: "Sadly, despite the team's groundbreaking technical achievements over the last 9 years... the road to commercial viability has proven much longer and riskier than hoped." Loon was deployed to provide Internet in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria in 2017, as well as after a major earthquake in Peru.

Last year it announced a partnership with American telecom giant AT&T's infrastructure to keep third-party mobile telecommunications services running in the aftermath of similar disasters.

In July it launched a pilot commercial service in Kenya, prompting the company to proclaim "a new era of stratospheric communications has begun." But Loon CEO Alastair Westgarth said Friday the company had failed "to get the costs low enough to build a long-term, sustainable business."

Operations will be wound down in "the coming months", with the hope that Loon employees will be redeployed at Alphabet, the firm said. Local



SAN FRANCISCO: Google parent company Alphabet announced Friday it was shutting down "Loon", a high-profile project aiming to deliver wireless internet via flying balloons in the stratosphere, because it is not commercially viable.

media in Kenya reported that the plans of Telkom, Loon's telecoms partner in the country, were now "in limbo" after the announcement.

On Friday Loon also announced a fund of \$10 million "to support nonprofits and businesses focused on connectivity, Internet, entrepreneurship and education in Kenya." Loon's giant, transparent plastic balloons are powered by solar panels and navigated using artificial intelligence systems that allow them to ride high-altitude winds to ideal locations, or loop in patterns that create consistent webs of Internet coverage in the sky.

Made an independent company within Alphabet in 2018, the venture was a prominent so-called "other bet" for the tech giant, a category which also includes the Waymo self-driving car project and Wing drone delivery. But Loon is not the first of similar projects to be axed-in February 2020 Alphabet shut down Makani, which used high-tech kites to tap into wind energy for electricity. —AFP

## Fear, frustration in Nigeria as millions at risk of phone suspension

**ABUJA:** "If I don't have my phone, I don't make money," said Raphael Ajih, resting on a rusty metal chair, his hands clenched on his lap. The government of Africa's most populous country has ordered telecom operators to block the SIM cards of anyone who fails to register for a National Identity Number (NIN) by February 9.

Across the country, many like Ajih are trying to comply with the directive, only to be frustrated by days-long waits to do the paperwork, often in large crowds despite the COVID pandemic. The idea behind the NIN is to create a single ID database for Nigeria's 200 million people, replacing the hotchpotch of documents, from drivers licenses to voter cards, that citizens use to identify themselves.

A unique number for each person, which in turn will unlock their national ID card, will help to smooth out problems in policy-making and budget planning, the government says. The change will also fight Nigeria's rampant crime, goes its argument. By linking the ID number to a SIM, this will



LAGOS: People walk past a signpost to warn visitors of the infectious environment at the Infectious Disease Hospital (IDH) in Yaba, Lagos, on Friday. The Nigeria government has ordered telecom operators to block the SIM cards of anyone who fails to register for a National Identity Number (NIN) by February 9. —AFP

weed out unregistered cards used by crooks and jihadists.

Ajih, 38, sells goods via WhatsApp and Amazon and works as an Uber driver in the capital Abuja-jobs that enable him to financially support his two younger brothers and sister as well as extended family members. He sends money to relatives by mobile transfer, something he may no longer be able to do if he fails to get a NIN and submits the number to his mobile operator. —AFP



## Redemption Notice Burgan Bank K.P.S.C. KD 100,000,000 Subordinated Tier 2 Bonds due 2026

In accordance with the Prospectus dated 9 March 2016 (the "Prospectus"), Burgan Bank K.P.S.C. ("Burgan" or the "Issuer") issued KWD100,000,000 Subordinated Tier 2 bonds due 9 March 2026 (the "Issuance"), which comprised KWD30,100,000 fixed rate bonds and KWD69,900,000 floating rate bonds (the "Bonds").

Unless otherwise defined herein, capitalized terms when used herein shall have the meaning assigned to them in the Terms and Conditions.

In accordance with Condition 4(d) (Call Option) (the "Call Option") of the terms and conditions attaching to the Bonds (the "Terms and Conditions") as outlined in the Prospectus, Burgan has the right, subject to the Redemption Conditions and the requirements set out in Condition 4(d), to exercise the Call Option in terms of which Burgan may, on any Interest Payment Date falling on or after the fifth anniversary of the Issue Date of the Bonds, redeem all (but not some only) of the Bonds in accordance with the Terms and Conditions at their principal amount together with interest accrued to but excluding the date of redemption.

This redemption notice satisfies the requirement of serving a prior written notice to the Bondholders within the prescribed period under Condition 4(d) and in accordance with Condition 14 of the Terms and Conditions (the "Relevant Conditions") allowing the Issuer to exercise the Call Option right.

The Issuer - by serving this redemption notice- confirms the satisfaction of the Relevant Conditions and hereby formally exercises its rights under the Call Option.

As such, the Issuer is electing to redeem, by way of exercising its Call Option, all of the remaining Bonds (the "Outstanding Bonds"), in whole at their principal amount together with interest accrued to but excluding the date of redemption, and Kamco Investment Company K.S.C.(Public) ("Kamco Invest") in its capacity as the Fiscal and Principal Paying Agent shall separately notify each relevant Bondholder in writing of the accrued interest and total redemption amount payable for the Outstanding Bonds. The redemption will be performed on the Interest Payment Date falling on 5 years from the Issue Date of the Bonds being 9 March 2021 (the "Redemption Date").

The prior written approval of the Central Bank of Kuwait for Burgan to exercise its Call Option was issued on 28 October 2020.

Should a bondholder have any questions regarding the redemption of the Outstanding Bonds by way of exercise of Burgan's Call Option, please contact the Fiscal and Paying Agent Kamco Invest on:

(965) 2233 6982 | burganredemption@kamcoinvest.com

Fiscal & Paying Agent



## Business

# KIB named 'Best Shariah-Compliant Bank, Fastest Growing Islamic Bank'

## Bank nabs two CFI.co awards from Capital Finance

**KUWAIT:** As a testament to its efforts to provide state-of-the-art Islamic banking solutions together with the best customer experience, KIB recently garnered two awards from Capital Finance International (CFI.co), Fastest Growing Islamic Bank and Best Sharia-Compliant Bank (MENA 2020). This marks the fifth consecutive year of KIB being named Fastest Growing Islamic Bank and sixth consecutive year of being named Best Sharia-Compliant by CFI.co, an organization specializing in the finance and banking sectors.

The bank was evaluated by a judging panel according to several key criteria, including its outstanding financial performance despite the COVID-19 pandemic that gravely wounded the world economy, in addition to its ability to manage risks and serve customers without any delay amidst the coronavirus crisis. Moreover, KIB earned double recognition as a result of its continued innovation and creativity in providing the best advanced e-banking solutions and its keenness to serve the community in at all times, in addition to playing a leading role in designing e-banking solutions uniquely tailored to suit the needs of their contemporary lifestyle.

On this occasion, Vice Chairman and CEO of

KIB, Raed Jawad Bukhamseen, expressed his pride at KIB's continuing to garner this prestigious acclaim, highlighting the success of the Bank's new digital transformation strategy and its quest to become the first e-bank in Kuwait. "KIB is always keen to provide a comprehensive range of sharia-compliant services and products, as well as to enhance its technological base and introduce new e-banking solutions with the aim to satisfy the largest possible segment of customers and provide products and services uniquely designed to suit the needs of their contemporary lifestyle, which demonstrates the Bank's steadfast growth and leading role in the local financial sector, particularly amidst the pandemic where the Bank continued to serve its customers remotely and meet their day-to-day banking needs."

Bukhamseen also pointed out that KIB always strives to deliver an easy and convenient banking experience to its customers, while also keeping them safe against the potential risks of in-person banking, stressing that these shifts helped the Bank satisfy its existing customers and expand its customer base. In addition, these recently implemented business models have strengthened the Bank's position in the local and regional banking arena

and qualified it to win these awards with merit.

Over the past few months, KIB launched seven new e-banking services that enable customers to complete multiple transactions through the 24-hour call center, in addition to a mobile app feature that allows digital registration with the Kuwait Clearing Company to receive direct-deposit dividends in customers' accounts instead of having to pick up a check in person. Moreover, KIB has revamped its website and introduced an innovative visual IVR service in addition to 'Live Chat' service, which provides customers with access to services via a visual interface, in addition the instant card issuance service across main branches.

With the aim of ensuring customers' safety and comfort in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, the Bank developed an app that allows customers to pre-book appointments via Q-Matic on their smartphones. Moreover, self-service devices known as "PACI KIOSK" were provided at a number of branches of the bank to help customers update their data and create an approved digital signature for individuals, in addition to an instant card issuance service available across the Bank's branches.

Key milestones achieved by KIB for the year

2020, aligned with their digital transformation, was the restructuring and launch of two branches at eMall and 89 Mall; featuring a contemporary design, state-of-the-art ATMs and devices with interactive touchscreens that allow customers to navigate through menu options as if they were using their smartphones. Additionally, KIB staff roam the open-plan branches with iPads to answer client various queries.

It serves to note that CFI.co is an international, independent assessment body specializing in finance and banking. A prominent, London-based organization, CFI.co combines views from leading multilateral and national organizations with thought leadership from some of the world's top minds to bring news, analysis and commentary on markets worldwide. CFI.co also seeks out individuals and organizations that contribute significantly to the convergence of economies.



Raed Jawad Bukhamseen

## Small farmers 'need more climate aid to ward off famines': UN

**PARIS:** Climate aid to millions of small farmers around the world must "substantially increase" to ward off hunger and instability, a United Nations body warned yesterday. Small farmers "do little to cause climate change, but suffer the most from its impacts," Gilbert F. Houngbo, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) said in a statement.

"If investments... do not substantially increase, we risk widespread hunger and global instability," IFAD added. Houngbo said small farmers' "increasingly common crop failures and livestock deaths put our entire food system at risk", warning that "hunger, poverty and migration will become even more widespread" without increased aid.

The UN body's warning comes ahead of a climate adaptation summit on January 25 and 26 in the Netherlands. At the gathering, IFAD plans to launch a new \$500-million fund dubbed ASAP+ "to reduce climate change threats to food security, lower greenhouse gases and help more than 10 million people adapt to weather changes".

Austria, Germany, Ireland and Qatar have already said they will contribute. British actor Idris Elba and his wife Sandrine, both IFAD "Goodwill Ambassadors", will take part in a debate at the summit with Belgian Prime Minister Alexander de Croot. IFAD-funded research forecasts a potential fall in production of staples like beans, maize, and cassava of between 50 and 90 percent by 2050 across much of sub-Saharan Africa due to climate change, "which would result in substantial increases in hunger and poverty".

"Climate change could push more than 140 million people to migrate" over the same period, the studies found. IFAD's earlier ASAP program has already distributed \$300 million to more than five million farmers in 41 countries. But the body notes that only 1.7 percent of global climate finance goes to small-scale farmers in developing countries. —AFP

## Nissan commits to UK after Brexit trade deal

**LONDON:** Japanese carmaker Nissan on Friday committed to its future in Britain, home to the group's largest European factory, citing the country's Brexit trade deal with the European Union.

Chief operating officer Ashwani Gupta said the recent agreement gave its Sunderland plant in northeast England a competitive advantage, dispelling long-running uncertainty over the facility. "Brexit has brought the business continuity in the short term (and) protects... all of our models which we manufacture in Sunderland," Gupta was quoted as saying by UK media.

Nissan had previously warned that a no-deal Brexit would threaten its Sunderland factory, which manufactures models including the Juke, Leaf and Qashqai. However, Britain's largely foreign-owned automotive sector was a big winner from the free trade Brexit agreement, which allows for smooth tariff-free trade with the continent. Nissan's Sunderland hub employs 6,000 workers, and produces 400,000 cars annually, mostly for export.

Gupta added that Nissan would switch battery production for its electric Leaf vehicles from Japan to Britain, to benefit from the zero tariffs. UK electric car exports will however face tariffs from 2027 if they do not have a majority of components sourced from either Britain or the European Union. "Sunderland is one of the top three plants in the world for competitiveness for Nissan," noted Gupta. —AFP

## Trash islands bring Balkan waste crisis to the surface

**PRIBOJ, Serbia:** Framed by rolling hills and farmhouses, the emerald waters of Potpecko lake were once a picturesque fishing spot in western Serbia. But recently, the smell itself was enough to turn away visitors from a reservoir filled with a sprawling mass of trash—one of several enormous build-ups in the region that have brought the Balkans' garbage crisis into plain view.

"It's very ugly," sighed Milimir Mijovic, a 34-year-old who lives nearby, as he stood near the shore of the lake whose waters were hidden beneath an 8,000 cubic meter spread of plastic bottles, styrofoam and other detritus, frozen together with sticks and mud. "I have seven children and I am sad not to be able to take them fishing, or come here in summer to the beach," he said.

The Western Balkans are home to some of Europe's wildest rivers and most pristine tracts of nature. But failing waste management systems across the region are threatening the environment and public health. Heavy rains in January highlighted the long-running problem after floods swept garbage from roadsides and other illegal dumps into rivers.

The trash accumulated at hydro-power dams, such as in Potpecko which is part of the Lim river that flows down from Montenegro, as well as at a dam in the scenic Drina river in eastern Bosnia.

## Diamond magnate gets 5 years in prison in Swiss graft trial

**GENEVA:** French-Israeli diamond magnate Beny Steinmetz was sentenced by a Geneva court on Friday to five years behind bars for corruption linked to mining rights in Guinea. After a seven-year international investigation, the 64-year-old businessman was accused of setting up a complex financial web to pay bribes so that Beny Steinmetz Group Resources (BSGR) could obtain permits in an area estimated to contain the world's biggest untapped deposits of iron ore.

"It is clear from what has been presented... that the rights were obtained through corruption and that Steinmetz cooperated with others" to obtain them, said chief justice Alexandra Banna.

The court, she said, had therefore sentenced him "to a deprivation of liberty for five years", in line with the prosecutors' request. The court also granted the prosecution's call for Steinmetz to pay 50 million Swiss francs (\$56 million, 46 million euros) in compensation to the Geneva canton.

### 'Big injustice'

Steinmetz, who throughout the trial has maintained his innocence, told reporters at the Geneva courthouse

## UN: World's ageing big dams pose 'emerging risk'

**PARIS:** By 2050, more than half the global population will live downstream from tens of thousands of large dams near or past their intended lifespan, according to a UN report released Friday.

Most of the world's nearly 59,000 big dams—constructed between 1930 and 1970—were designed to last 50 to 100 years, according to research from the UN University's Institute for Water, Environment and Health. "This is an emerging global risk that we are not yet paying attention to," co-author and Institute director Vladimir Smakhtin told AFP.

"In terms of dams at risk, the number is growing year by year, decade by decade." A well-designed, constructed and maintained dam can easily remain functional for a century.

Clearing such garbage clumps has become a regular activity for dam operators, though the recent masses were larger than normal.

"We can't solve this problem, we can only repair it—we pick up the garbage that the municipalities leave on the banks," said Tomislav Popovic, who works at the power plant on the Drina, where objects ranging from television sets to an old football were conjoined together in the island of trash.

"We have even seen images of bulldozers pushing garbage right into the river," he told AFP, adding that the dam collects some 8,000 cubic meters of waste annually.

### Hazardous waste

Across the region, effective waste management is held back by low budgets, outdated infrastructure and a lack of urgency among officials and parts of the public. Recycling is minimal in most states, while illegal dumpsites are a common eyesore along rural roads and on the outskirts of towns and cities.

In North Macedonia, scenic mountain views are often marred by plastic bags caught on tree limbs or heaps of roadside trash, ranging from building materials to discarded sofas and washing machines.

Illegal dumps also encircle the capital Skopje. Just five kilometers (three miles) northwest of the city center is a wasteland full of bathtubs, textiles, plastic packaging and car parts.

In the Vardarishite area to the east, a once-official landfill that was closed 26 years ago is now an illegal dump that stretches some 170,000 square meters (42 acres). It sits less than one kilometer away from urban neighborhoods. Fires from the site pump add to Skopje's smog, sending up toxic fumes as locals burn objects like cables to extract and sell

the verdict was a "big injustice." "I will be appealing immediately," he said in a statement, complaining that he had faced "10 years of manipulation and lies".

His lawyer Marc Bonnant told reporters the appeal would be filed soon, citing "contradictions and errors" in the ruling. The trial, which began on January 11, was the culmination of a drawn-out international investigation that kicked off in Switzerland in 2013.

Swiss prosecutors accused Steinmetz and two partners of bribing a wife of the then Guinea president Lansana Conte and others in order to win mining rights in the southeastern Simandou region.

The prosecutors said Steinmetz obtained the rights shortly before Conte died in 2008 after about \$10 million (8.2 million euros) was paid in bribes over a number of years, some through Swiss bank accounts. Conte's military dictatorship ordered global mining giant Rio Tinto to relinquish two concessions to BSGR for around \$170 million in 2008.

Just 18 months later, BSGR sold 51 percent of its stake in the concession to Brazilian mining giant Vale for \$2.5 billion. But in 2013, Guinea's first democratically-elected president Alpha Conde launched a review of permits allotted under Conte and later stripped the VBG consortium formed by BSGR and Vale, of its permit.

### 'Pact of corruption'

To secure the initial deal, prosecutors claimed Steinmetz and representatives in Guinea entered a "pact of corruption" with Conte and his fourth wife Mamadie Toure. Toure, who has admitted to having received payments, has protected status in the United

States as a state witness. She and a number of other key witnesses in the case failed to appear. Steinmetz, who lived in Geneva during the years when the bribes were allegedly paid, insisted during his trial that he "never" asked anyone to pay Toure, insisting she "told a lot of lies". But on Friday, judge Banna found that "the money paid to Mamadie Toure did indeed originate from BSGR."

She also said that there had been no reason for Conte to withdraw Rio Tinto's mining concessions "unless it benefited him personally or someone else, namely his fourth wife." —AFP

In 2019, record flooding sparked concern that Mosul Dam, Iraq's largest, could fail. Ageing dams not only pose a greater risk to downstream populations, but also become less efficient at generating electricity, and far more expensive to maintain. Because the number of large dams under construction or planned has dropped sharply since the 1960s and 1970s, these problems will multiply in coming years, the report showed. "There won't be another dam-building revolution, so the average age of dams is getting older," said Perera.

"Due to new energy sources coming online—solar, wind—a lot of planned hydroelectric dams will probably not ever be built." A global fleet of nearly 60,000 ageing dams also highlights the challenge of dismantling—or "decommissioning"—those that are no longer safe or functional.

Several dozen have been torn down in the United States, but all of them small, Smakhtin said. More than 90 percent of large dams—at least 15 metres from foundation to crest, or holding back no less than three million cubic meters of water—are located in only two dozen countries. —AFP



This picture taken on January 14, 2021, shows an illegal dumpsite near the city of Struga. The Western Balkans are home to some of Europe's wildest rivers and most pristine tracts of nature. But failing waste management systems across the region are threatening the environment and public health. —AFP

the copper inside. "The negative influence of these illegal landfills is huge," said Dejan Dimitrovski, a 45-year-old council member in Skopje's Gazi Baba municipality.

An environmental activist, Dimitrovski helped expose a scandal in 2019 after he filmed a company failing to properly treat medical waste—including syringes and vials of blood—before dumping it into Skopje's official landfill. It is the only landfill in the country to meet the EU's minimum standards.

In another recent video shown to AFP, he confronted a man who tried to toss large bags of trash outside his car. It is as if North Macedonia "built ourselves an apartment, but did not build a toilet for that apartment", he said of the country's inadequate waste management. —AFP



GENEVA: French-Israeli diamond magnate Beny Steinmetz (center) reacts next to his lawyers Camille Haab (left) and Marc Bonnant after the verdict of a trial over alleged corruption linked to mining deals in Guinea, in Geneva on Friday. —AFP

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## Lifestyle | Features

## Africa with a twist: Paris chef Sacko wins Michelin star

It took Mory Sacko just weeks to break into the illustrious circle of Michelin laureates with his audacious menu of African cuisine, refined with a smattering of French and Japanese twists. The tall 28-year old was already a star on French culinary TV show Top Chef when the Guide Michelin awarded his restaurant "Mosuke" a star this week, the first in France for a cuisine centered on west and central African culinary traditions.

While many other chefs' businesses languished during the many months of COVID-19 restrictions in 2020, Sacko says his year turned out to be "a bit crazy, but very beautiful". During the short period of freedom between last year's first and second French Covid lockdowns, Sacko left his post as sous-chef for Thierry Marx at the Mandarin Oriental, which holds two Michelin stars,



French chef Mory Sacko poses during a session photo in Paris on Jan 20, 2021. — AFP

to venture out on his own.

His restaurant, situated in the Montparnasse neighborhood in the south of the capital, quickly became the talk of the town after it opened in September, and just two months of operations were enough for Michelin's inspectors to give him the nod.

#### 'Fried chicken'

Days before winning the Michelin star, he was handed the Young Chef Award by La Liste. "I can already say

that my year 2021 is even greater than 2020 which was already exceptional," Sacko wrote on social media. When reconfinement forced the closure of restaurants - except for takeaway meals - Sacko quickly looked for ways to turn challenges into opportunities by "revisiting the totems of street food". His restaurant quickly sold an average of 150 takeaway meals per day.

"The central theme for me is fried chicken, which I serve up every two weeks," Sacko told AFP at his bright

and minimalist-styled restaurant with a capacity of 30. The chicken is cooked "with a Japanese frying method with little grease", and served with cajun or aioli mayonnaise. "That's a reflection of the cosmopolitan identity of the restaurant," said the chef.

"When the lockdown was announced I said to myself: We're going to make street food, in a homage to black food, to the soul food of New Orleans," he said. Sacko was born and raised in France, but knew French food only from the school canteen as a boy. Instead, his mother's cooking accustomed him to the range of west African tastes. "She's Malian, but was born in Ivory Coast and grew up in Senegal," Sacko said.

#### West African food at home

"I ate the cosmopolitan food of west Africa at home, and often went to eat central African food in friends' homes. I also know the Congolese cuisine really well," he said. During his formal chef training, he discovered traditional French fare such as veal blanquette and boeuf bourguignon, perfecting his skills under Thierry Marx whom he calls "the most Japanese of French chefs".

But now that he has injected Africa "into the DNA" of his own restaurant, Sacko feels he is "a spokesman for this African new cuisine". French restaurant goers are much more familiar with north

African dishes such as couscous and tajine, but sub-Saharan offerings are slowly making inroads. The Food Temple festival in Paris in September made Africa its main theme.

#### Not just rice

"My ambition is for clients to come away with the realization that African cooking is not just a big plate of rice with sauces that are neither pretty nor delicate," he said. Among fusion dishes at Mosuke, Sacko prepares a Breton sole with attieke, a cassava semolina, fermented with natural acidity "that people eat on the pavement or in bars in Ivory Coast".

Sacko's approach is perhaps best summed up in his take on Senegal's traditional Chicken Yassa, "a quintessential African dish", that in his version gets a Japanese and a French twist. He uses young fattened chickens from northwestern France, Cevennes onions - "which are mild and sweet and add a lot of roundness" - and onions from Roscoff in Brittany "with their slightly maritime, crispy side". He then adds Japanese yuzu and sudachi citrus fruit for extra potency, and creamed Camargue rice. — AFP

## Brazilian singer's YouTube hit joins virus fight

Singer MC Fiati, the first Brazilian to garner 1.5 billion views on YouTube, has re-cast the tune from that video - to try to go viral against COVID. Brazil has lost approximately 213,000 lives to the coronavirus, a toll second only to the United States, and the music-maker is hoping the song - will help push his nation's people to get vaccinated. MC Fiati has updated "Bum Bum Tam Tam," which exploded on YouTube in 2017, for the grim new reality of a world battling to control a virus that has sickened some 8.6 million people in Brazil. The artist has changed the song lyrics, which mention the Portuguese word for backside, to include "Butantan" - the name of the research institute charged with producing the Chinese CoronaVac shot in Brazil.

"The vaccine is going to save a lot of people. Come to Bu-bu-tan-tan," the artist, whose real name is Leandro Aparecido Ferreira, sings in the re-make. "My song 'Bum Bum Tam Tam' was launched four years ago but it became viral again with the arrival of the vaccine, because Internet users linked it to the Butantan institute. It happened on its own," he told AFP.

After seeing what was happening on social media, MC Fiati decided to shoot a new clip inside the research institute. "Butantan supported me 100 percent. I was very well received," said the 26-year-old artist. The extras in his new clip are none other than institute employees, who swing their hips at the prestigious establishment to the rhythm of the tune.

#### 'People will continue to die'

The song in Brazilian-style "funk" is imbued with themes like everyday life in



Brazilian musician Leandro Aparecido Ferreira, known as MC Fiati, poses at a recording studio in Sao Paulo on Jan 20, 2021. — AFP

the nation's favela shantytowns or sexuality, but this is the genre's first foray into science. "I find it totally normal that science and medicine are evoked in funk music, because funk adapts easily to any theme, unlike other musical styles which would not dare to do so," the singer added.

Without directly mentioning the nation's far-right President Jair Bolsonaro and his supporters, MC Fiati regrets that "some people" have pushed Brazilians to doubt the usefulness of the vaccine. Bolsonaro has minimized the risks of what he initially called "a little flu," - subsequently catching and recovering from the virus.

"I feel very happy to encourage people to believe in (the vaccine). Through funk, I can speak a lot to the favelas," said MC Fiati, who grew up in one of the poor neighborhoods in an area south of Sao Paulo. He now lives next to his recording studio with his wife and one-year-old daughter, and says he plans to get the shot, which Brazil began rolling out this week. "Of course I will get vaccinated," he said. "My fear is that the pandemic will continue and that people will continue to die. If we have a vaccine that can save lives, we must save them." — AFP



This undated handout camera trap photo released yesterday shows a freshwater Siamese crocodile at Kaeng Krachan National Park in central Thailand. — AFP

## Endangered Siamese crocodile in rare sighting at Thai national park

The critically endangered Siamese crocodile has been spotted for only the second time in a decade at Thailand's largest national park, according to photos released yesterday. The freshwater reptile - snapped by camera traps sunning itself at Kaeng Krachan National Park near the Thai border with Myanmar - was once ubiquitous across Southeast Asia, but its numbers have plummeted in the region. It is currently listed as critically endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list.

National park officials estimate only about 20 remain in the wild because of hunting and habitat loss, but yesterday the nature reserve shared a rare spot of good news. The crocodile - never seen before by officials - was captured by cameras slithering out of the water, before it parked itself on the river bank open-jawed under the sun.

The footage was captured in December and is "proof that Kaeng Krachan National Park is an important area for wildlife conservation," said Manoon Prewsoongnern, a park manager who works with the NGO World Conservation Society. The crocodile is estimated to be about 3m long, he said, adding that this is only the second sighting of the species in the past decade.

"The Siamese crocodile is a predator, but it is one of the first victims of environmental corrosion, so the sighting... is also evidence that the national park's environment is still pristine," Manoon said. The endangered crocodile is highly sought after by poachers, who supply eggs and adult reptiles to farms around the region, where their skins are turned into luxury belts, shoes and handbags. — AFP

## 'JAMES BOND' STUNTMAN REMY JULIENNE DIES FROM CORONAVIRUS

One of the world's leading stuntmen, Remy Julienne, who worked on six James Bond films as well as the 1969 classic "The Italian Job", has died from COVID-19 aged 90, friends and family said on Friday. A veteran of more than 1,400 films and TV commercials as an actor or stunt coordinator, Julienne had been in intensive care in a hospital in his home town of Montargis in central France since early January.

"What was bound to happen has happened. He left us early in the evening (Thursday). It was predictable, he was on a respirator," a relative told AFP. Julienne was born in Cepoy near Montargis in 1930. A French motocross champion, he began his film career in 1964 when he doubled for French actor Jean Marais in the film "Fantomas", in which he was required to ride a motorbike. "They needed someone who was very controlled," he said of this experience. "It ended up being me. It was the start of a huge adventure."

His career saw him fly over Venice dangling from a rope-ladder suspended from a helicopter, being hit in the face with a pumpkin while riding a motorbike and countless car crashes. He doubled



In this file photo taken on Sept 28, 2017, former French stuntman Remy Julienne gestures next to rolls of films at the Centre for Conservation and Research of Toulouse's film library in Balma near Toulouse in southern France. — AFP

for some of the world's most famous actors, including Sean Connery and Roger Moore, as well top French names including Yves Montand, Alain Delon and Jean-Paul Belmondo.

He worked on six James Bond movies in total, including "GoldenEye" and "For Your Eyes Only", in which he drove a heavily modified yellow Citroen 2CV during a memorable car chase. Both as an actor and a director of stunt sequences, which became the focus of his later career, Julienne won praise from some of the biggest names in cinema for his precision and creativity. "He has an absolutely incredible scientific understanding. He's a real scientist, the Einstein of stuntmen," French director Claude Lelouch told a documentary for

## America captivated by young black poet after inaugural reading

Amanda Gorman, the young black poet who performed at President Joe Biden's inaugural, has become an overnight star with her works shooting to the top of Amazon bestseller lists ahead of their publication. Gorman, 22, recited "The Hill We Climb" at the inaugural, a poem inspired by the US Capitol attack touching on how democracy "can never be permanently defeated". She is the youngest poet ever to recite at a presidential inauguration, a role first given to Robert Frost by John F Kennedy in 1961.

The Harvard University graduate was invited to participate after First Lady Jill Biden saw one of her readings. A collection of Gorman's poems to be published in September was number one on the Amazon bestseller list on Friday followed by a children's book, "Change Sings: A Children's Anthem," also to be released in September. A hardcover copy of her inaugural poem to be released next month is number three on the list.

Gorman's works knocked former president Barack Obama's autobiography, "A Promised Land", down to the number five position. America's first black president was one of the many Americans left impressed by Gorman. "On a day for the history books, @TheAmandaGorman

delivered a poem that more than met the moment," Obama tweeted, before quoting the closing line of Gorman's inaugural poem. "Young people like her are proof that 'there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it; if only we're brave enough to be it,'" Obama said.

Talk show host Oprah Winfrey, former Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai were among those praising the young poet. She gained two million followers on Instagram in a day and a million on Twitter. Her poem was set to music by Rostam Batmanglij. Originally from Los Angeles, raised by a single mother, Gorman had a speech impediment as a child - like the 46th president - and turned to writing.

She won her first poetry prize at 16 years old and went on to study sociology at Harvard. She has previously written about the struggle for racial equality and the #MeToo movement against sexual assault. Gorman was forced to extensively revise her poem at the last minute after supporters of president Donald Trump stormed the US Capitol on Jan 6 in a bid to undo Biden's election victory. — AFP



American poet Amanda Gorman reads a poem during the 59th inaugural ceremony on the West Front of the US Capitol on Jan 20, 2021 in Washington. — AFP

France Televisions marking Julienne's 50 years in the business.

#### Fatal accident

A believer in real action rather than special effects, Julienne worked constantly to minimize the risks he took during his shoots, but he badly injured himself early in his career while filming on a Colombian production in Germany. Missing his timing to exit from a car before it crashed into a ravine, he ended up with a crushed ankle that left him in bed for six weeks.

Once recovered, he would go on to earn fame from his work for the car chase scenes in the "The Italian Job" with Michael Caine. "Fear is necessary before and after, but never during," he once said of his time on film sets. His career low point came during filming for the French film "Taxi 2" in 1999, which he was overseeing, when a cameraman was killed by a car that missed its landing spot after a jump.

He was found guilty of involuntary manslaughter in 2007 and handed an 18-month suspended jail sentence, which was later reduced on appeal to six months and an order to pay damages of 60,000 euros (\$73,000) to the victim's family. Julienne also helped police with crime reconstructions. In 2000, he mounted a reconstruction of the death of a British student, Isabel Peake, to try to establish how the young woman was pushed from a Paris-bound train. Julienne said the work "was very much like cinema work, only here we are fortunate enough to be using dummies, which takes a certain amount of pressure off us". — AFP

## Le Monde's celebrated cartoonist Plantu to bow out after 50 years

The celebrated cartoonist of France's Le Monde daily Plantu said Friday that he would soon leave the paper after half a century of work that has seen him mock the elite in his country and elsewhere with biting acerbic drawings. The departure on March 31 of Plantu - who has championed cartoons as a bastion of free expression - comes as a freedom of speech debate is raging both at the venerable paper and in France.



But Plantu, whose real name is Jean Plantureux, said his departure was not linked to the move this week by fellow Le Monde cartoonist Xavier Gorce to sever ties with the paper in a censorship row. Plantu told AFP he would be taking his retirement when he turns 70 in March and his exit had nothing to do with Gorce's departure.

He said his cartoons would be replaced by drawings by Cartooning for Peace, an organization he founded with former UN secretary general Kofi Annan 15 years ago to promote cartoons from around the world. Plantu has created some 14,000 cartoons in his career, mainly for Le Monde, and has already handed most of his collection to the National Library of France (BNF). — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

# Sudan cinema takes inspiration from revolution

Sudanese filmmakers who celebrated the end of stifling restrictions following the ouster of autocrat Omar Al-Bashir have won multiple international awards but are yet to enjoy the same recognition at home. Cinema languished in the North African country through three decades of authoritarian rule by Bashir. But Sudanese took to the streets to demand freedom, peace and social justice, and Bashir's ironfisted rule came to an end in a palace coup by the army in April 2019.



In this file photo taken on Nov 11, 2019, Talal Afifi, founder and director of the "Sudan Film Factory", speaks to AFP in Khartoum.

"We started realizing how much our society needs our dreams," said director Amjad Abou Alala. His 2019 film "You Will Die at Twenty" was both Sudan's first Oscar entry and the first Sudanese film broadcast on Netflix, winning prizes at international film festivals including Italy's Venice and Egypt's El Gouna. The film tells the story of a young man a mystic predicts will die at age 20.

As Sudan undergoes a precarious political transition, the country's filmmakers have found more space to operate, Alala said. Young filmmakers act "without the complexes, the lack of self-confidence or the frustration that we suffered in previous generations", he added.

### Art 'aborted' under Bashir

Talal Afifi, director of the Khartoum-based Sudan Film Factory program, has trained hundreds of young people in filmmaking. Bashir's government "aborted all cultural and artistic initiatives and fought... diversity and freedom of opinion, through policies of alleged Islamization and Arabization", he said.

Afifi began work long before the 2019 revolution, with advances in digital camera technology making filmmaking far more accessible. The filmmaker attended a 2008 short film festival in Munich, where the winning film - an Iraqi documentary shot on a handy-cam - inspired him to return home and set up a training center and production house.

In the past decades, the Film Factory has organized some 30 screenwriting, directing and editing workshops - and produced more than 60 short films, honored in international festivals from Brazil to Japan. Afifi says the roots of Sudan's innovative cinema was born from the "hard work dating from before"

Bashir's overthrow, when many cinemas were closed.

Today, cinemas are allowed - big budget Hollywood films, as well as Indian and Egyptian movies are popular - but moves to reopen them have been frustrated by restrictions to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus. The Sudanese National Museum organized screenings of films, including "You Will Die at Twenty", but they were not screened in large theatres.

Filmmakers still face challenges. Hajooj Kuka, director of the acclaimed 2014 "Beats of the Antonov" was jailed for two months last year for causing a "public nuisance" - for what he said was an acting workshop. Other Sudanese films have also garnered international attention, including the 2019 documentary "Talking About Trees" by Suhaib Gasmelbari, which tells the story of four elderly Sudanese filmmakers with a passion for movies.

The quartet and their "Sudanese Film Club" work to reopen an open-air cinema in Omdurman, the city across the Nile from the capital Khartoum. It won prizes ranging from the Berlin International Film Festival to awards from Istanbul, Athens and Mumbai.

### 'Leap into the void'

Another film, director Marwa Zein's award-winning 2019 documentary "Khartoum Offside", tackles sexism in the conservative country through the story of young female footballers determined to play professionally. Sudan films from 2020 include "The Art of Sin", a



In this file photo taken on Dec 22, 2014, Sudanese watch a film at The Palace of Youth and Children in the Omdurman district, one of just three functioning cinemas left in the capital Khartoum. — AFP photos

documentary about openly gay Sudanese artist Ahmed Umar.

A refugee in Norway, he returns to Sudan to see his mother again despite the risks that remain even after Bashir's ouster. Many leading Sudanese directors have lived abroad for years, some shuttling between the Egyptian capital Cairo and Khartoum, like Zein and Gasmelbari. "We are children of the diaspora, which is why our analysis of the affairs of the Sudanese is critical," said Dubai-based Alala.

But if international recognition is seen as a sign of success, Alala fears the new boom in Sudanese cinema will amount to a "leap into the void" because it has not

benefited from "any official support or suitable infrastructure". He understands that this is in part due to the many challenges facing Sudan, as it struggles with a dire economic crisis and seeks to implement a recent peace deal with rebels to end decades of civil war. While Alala says government support is necessary for the film industry to flourish, he admits that it "would be unfair to ask the new government to shoulder this burden when the economy is devastated". — AFP

# Theatre, cinema, concerts thrive in Madrid despite virus

With entertainment venues shuttered across much of Europe, Spain stands out as a cultural oasis where people still go to the theatre and cinema or watch concerts despite soaring infection rates. "Having the chance to be here with you is a huge blessing and with all my heart I applaud the great efforts being made in this country to defend culture," Mexican tenor Javier Camarena told Madrid's Theatre Royal last week after going months without performing on stage.

rooms and even the costumes. And the performers themselves are not exempt from these new rituals: As well as respecting the safety distance and protective partitions, the musicians must undergo regular tests and wear masks, except for the players of wind instruments.

### 'Safe space'

"We can and we must" put on these performances, Spain's Culture Minister Jose Manuel Rodriguez Uribes told

Madrid's regional government, readily acknowledges it is "concert halls and live music venues that are facing the most difficult challenge", saying they will need the vaccine to be widely adopted "to get back on their feet".

Until then, the authorities are looking at rapid virus tests. In Barcelona, 500 people attended a standing-only concert, grouped very close together but wearing masks who had been previously tested in the context of a clinical study carried out in December. Eight days later, there was no sign of any infection. It's an idea that could prove to be "the safest way to reactivate the entertainment sector", says infectious diseases specialist Boris Revollo, who led the study.

### 'No sweat!'

At the Renoir cinema in the center of Madrid, the cashier's voice crackles over the intercom: "Screen 3, at the back after the escalators". A risky outing? Not for Paloma Arroyo, 38, who has come to see a retrospective of work by Hong Kong director Wong Kar Wai. "When you go wearing a mask, you don't talk. People eating popcorn is a bit dangerous, I've thought about that," she jokes, saying such outings were important for protecting her "mental health".

If public transport is considered safe, the cinemas are even more so, says Pablo Blasco, another movie-goer. "I don't understand why other countries aren't doing this. It seems strange to me." A few hundred metres (yards) away, old promotional posters outside the Cafe Berlin, a popular live music venue, give nostalgic echoes of the world before the pandemic. Inside, under bluish lights, the music is powerful and intoxicating, but with dancing banned, the audience can only wiggle in their small velvet chairs facing the stage where the DJ works his magic. For Maria Llorens, a 20-year-old student, it's not ideal but better than nothing, admitting she misses "that party feeling, with people pressed up against you, and the sweat!" The club has since closed until further notice due to the economic pressures brought on by the increasing restrictions aimed at slowing infections. — AFP

AFP, who wants to show that culture "is a safe space". But the pandemic has forced some venues to temporarily shut, such as Barcelona's famed Liceu opera house which closed its doors in November.

Under the combined pressure of nationwide curfews, public anxiety and economic pressures, many cultural venues are fighting for their survival. According to Javier Olmedo, director of "Noche en vivo" association which represents 54 concert halls in the Madrid region, "80 percent have not opened since March". "It's a time of distress."

Many initiatives to bring people back to theatres and concert halls have popped up on social networks, tagged #SafeTheatre or #CultureisSafe, insisting they have not been linked to any outbreaks. Marta Rivera de la Cruz, deputy head of cultural affairs in



Spectators wait for the start of a performance at the Teatro Real in Madrid on Jan 14, 2021.

In the audience were 1,200 people in suits, fur coats and masks, often the FFP2 type, after having their temperature taken as part of a meticulous safety protocol. Following a months-long national lockdown at the start of the pandemic, Spain's cultural venues reopened in the summer operating with strict capacity limitations, well-spaced seating policies and bars and cloakrooms closed.

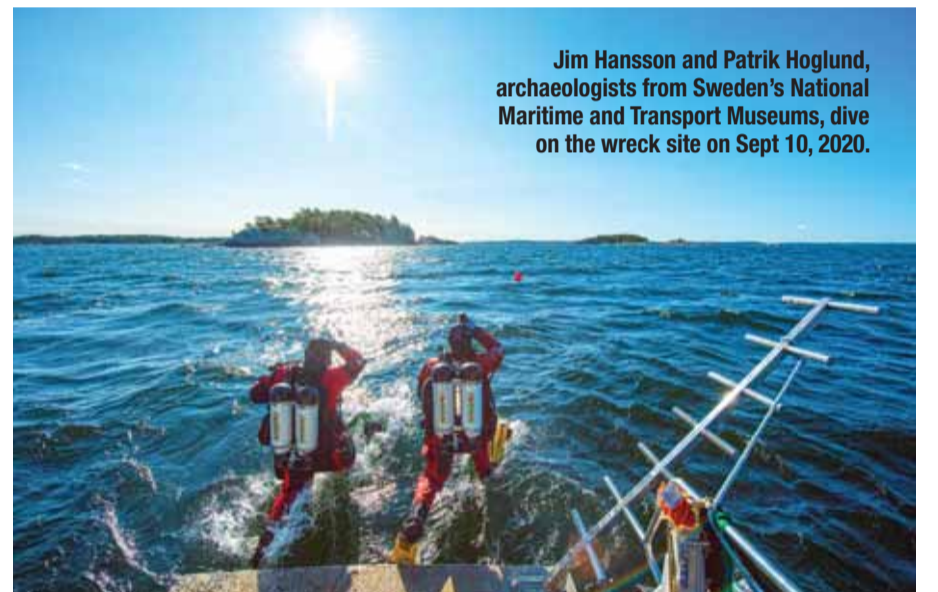
And since then they have never closed their doors, unlike in other countries such as France or Germany. But it has meant a costly investment by the venues. The Theatre Royal, where Spain's King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia attended a performance in September, said it has spent one million euros (\$1.2 million), part of which went on an ultraviolet light system for disinfecting the auditorium, the dressing



Youths enjoy the evening at the Berlin Cafe in Madrid on Jan 17, 2021. - AFP photos



A DJ performs at the Berlin Cafe.



Jim Hansson and Patrik Hoglund, archaeologists from Sweden's National Maritime and Transport Museums, dive on the wreck site on Sept 10, 2020.

# SWEDISH ARCHAEOLOGISTS TAKE TO THE WAVES TO PROTECT BALTIC WRECKS

On a small boat on the choppy waters of Stockholm's archipelago, four maritime archaeologists pulled on wetsuits and prepared to dive into the Baltic to survey a merchant ship that sank nearly 500 years ago. The team from Stockholm's National Maritime and Transport Museums are racing to protect wrecks along Sweden's Baltic coast from looting, which they say has been on the rise since 2017.

They have called in the navy, coastguard and police since the spring to help document the wrecks, so they can monitor them more carefully for signs of interference. Plunging into the murky waters, two divers descended to the preserved timbers 28 m below, photographing items used by the sailors on the deck before resurfacing.

When the team discovered the wreck in 2017, they realized it could reveal long-lost historical details about the Baltic Sea trade that brought riches to the region. But returning months later, one of the archaeologists, Jim Hansson, noticed that a three-legged cooking pot left on the wreck where it had settled five hundred years before had vanished.

"I was cursing in my facemask down at 30 meters," the 47-year-old said as he sat drying out in his wetsuit on deck. Although the law forbids theft from wrecks like this near the waterside town of Dalarna, archaeologists believe the artifacts are being taken by collectors or put up for sale. "If everything is still there at the wreck, we can tell a story as close to reality as possible, because there are no books, sketches, blueprints on these things," Hansson said.

### Rich maritime heritage

Experts believe up to 20,000 shipwrecks lie on the floor of the Baltic Sea, many of them well preserved by its brackish waters, a mix of salt and freshwater. In 1961, divers found the wreck of the Vasa, a magnificent 69-m warship carrying 64 cannon, which had sunk on its maiden voyage in 1628. It was salvaged, put on display, and is now one of Sweden's most popular tourist attractions.

Then, last November, Hansson and his colleagues discovered a wreck they believe to be the Vasa's sister ship in the Stockholm archipelago. They came across it as they searched for sites to feature in a new museum - the Museum of Wrecks - dedicated to the sea's underwater archaeological sites. There

have long been cases of looting in the area, and the archaeologists also noticed signs of recent interference with the wrecks as they began research for the museum in 2017.

They discovered that items such as porcelain and tableware were missing from at least four 17th-century wrecks in the archipelago - all of which require diving permits. Exploring further, they found items such as dive masks and knives left behind by the intruders. From the beginning of the year, Hansson and his colleagues decided to step up their surveys of the wrecks, to chart more clearly if other divers had tampered with key sites.



In this handout photo released by National Maritime and Transport Museum, archaeologists from the National Maritime and Transport Museums carry out a dive on the wreck of a 16th century merchant ship off the coast of Dalarna in the Stockholm Archipelago on Dec 7, 2017. — AFP photos

After one dive on the merchant ship, Hansson and his colleagues gathered round a table below deck on their dive boat check the latest 3D map of the site that they had produced. Noting the untouched items - barrels of iron ore, the ship's beams - they satisfied themselves no one had interfered with the wreck. And now they have a record for future use. "We can come back and check ... if people have been here looting or if natural causes have made the wreck fall apart," said Patrik Hoglund, an archaeologist with the Maritime Museum.

But the team has 1,500 km of Sweden's Baltic Sea coast to watch, so Hansson organized a seminar in January 2020 to persuade the Swedish navy, coastguard and police to help them. Now the archaeologists are sharing the photos, videos and 3D maps of the wrecks they survey with the authorities so they too can track any changes to the sites.—AFP

## Sports

# Japan dismisses report of Olympics' cancellation, teams back Games

## Host nation battles third wave of coronavirus

**TOKYO:** Japan dismissed a report claiming officials see cancelling the Tokyo Olympics as inevitable on Friday, as heavyweights the United States, Canada and Australia said they were still preparing for the Games.

Deputy government spokesman Manabu Sakai said there was "no truth" to the report in The Times, which quoted an unnamed ruling coalition source as saying "the consensus is that it's too difficult" to hold the Olympics. It is the latest report to cast doubt on the troubled 2020 Games, which were postponed over the coronavirus last year but have been hit by a surge in cases and plunging public support. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga on Friday insisted he was "determined" to hold the event "as proof that mankind will have overcome the virus".

Tokyo 2020 organizers said they were "fully focused on hosting the Games this summer". And the national Olympic committees of the United States, Canada and Australia all said they were preparing to send teams to Japan. The statements from Canada and Australia contrast with last year, when they withdrew their athletes before officials took the unprecedented decision to postpone. However, despite denying the British report, Sakai said a decision was looming for Japan.

"At some point in time, we will naturally make a decision as to whether to actually hold it," he said. "Until then the Japanese government will do what it needs to do and make progress and prepare for it."

Concerns have risen as Japan battles a third wave of coronavirus infections, with polls showing around 80 percent of Japanese oppose hosting the event this year. The Olympics have never been cancelled in peacetime.

International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach said there was "no reason whatsoever" for them not to go ahead on July 23 as scheduled. "Everybody is really determined to make these Olympic Games," Bach said in a video message on Friday. "All the prospects are good and we are working hard." The World Health Organization's emergencies director Michael Ryan said on Friday the Tokyo Olympic Games were still viable, but remained cautious.

"We don't contribute to the decision-making regarding the holding or not holding of the Olympics," he said. "The best way we can get to an Olympics is get on top of this disease. I have every confidence in the Japanese people and in their public health and governmental authorities. We all hope in the Olympics but we all recognize that everyone right now is a little afraid, as we enter the New Year, with some uncertainties."



**TOKYO:** In this file photo taken on July 22, 2018 Mascots for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics Games Miraitowa and Someity appear at their debut event in Tokyo. — AFP

### "Tokyo Games are on"

Japan and the IOC took the historic step of postponing the Games last March as COVID-19 spread around the world. On Friday, Australian Olympic Committee CEO Matt Carroll ruled out another withdrawal, calling reports of the Games' cancellation "unfounded rumor".

"The Tokyo Games are on," he said. The United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee stopped short of a vote of confidence, but said it remained focused on preparing for the Games. "We have not received any information suggesting the Games will not happen as planned, and our focus remains on the health and preparedness of Team USA athletes ahead of the Games this summer," the USOPC tweeted.

The chairman of the British Olympic Association, Hugh Robertson, told AFP he believed the Games would take place, although with "many fewer spectators in venues". "Clearly there is uncertainty around but I am as confident as one can be the Games will go ahead in some shape or form," he said.

Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike said she had no idea where The Times had obtained its information, insisting cancellation had not been discussed. "We've been firmly

coordinating with the government, the organizing committee and the IOC... and the truth is that there has been no talk of cancellation or postponement," she told reporters.

Tokyo 2020 CEO Toshiro Muto said last week that the organizing committee is "unwavering" on holding the event this year, but couldn't rule out staging it without spectators. But domestically there is rising doubt, with opposition lawmakers in parliament on Thursday calling for the Games to be postponed or cancelled.

And on Friday, the Tokyo Medical Association called for the event to be held behind closed doors. "They must give up the idea of having the festivity of the century by inviting people from various countries," its chairman Haruo Ozaki told the Asahi Shimbun newspaper. "The feasibility of holding it with no spectators should be considered."

Sebastian Coe, the global president of the Games' showpiece sport, track and field, said such a solution would be acceptable. "I would love to have fans, noisy and passionate," Coe told the BBC. "But if the only way we're able to deliver it is behind closed doors, I think everybody is accepting of that." — AFP

## Strict virus measures for Club World Cup

**DOHA:** The Club World Cup will be staged with strict measures to combat the spread of COVID-19, the Qatari organizers said yesterday less than two weeks before the tournament which will be closed to overseas fans. It is due to get underway on February 4 with spectator numbers capped at 30 percent of capacity at each of the two 40,000-seat grounds which will host games.

"Fans will have to undergo rapid PCR or antigen tests up to 72 hours before each match. If it comes out negative they are allowed to receive their ticket," said Abdulwahab al-Musleh, sports affairs adviser to Qatar's health ministry. Social distancing, mask wearing and use of Qatar's contact tracing app and sanitizer will be mandatory, he added, during a media briefing in Doha. International fans will be unable to attend because of Qatar's virus mitigation measures, and there will be no public events including fan zones.

Qatar's coronavirus cases are steadily ticking up, with 59.5 new cases per 100,000 people in the past week, up 15 percent on the week before. The death rate is very low and cases remain fewer than many other countries in the region. "This slight increase means we won't raise the capacity beyond 30 percent," said Musleh who added the new variants of coronavirus are likely already in Qatar. Following a cluster of cases in the Saudi Al-Hilal team during the AFC Champions League at the end of last year, Musleh said that "several measures to prevent that recurring" had been taken.

On January 15 Auckland City withdrew from February's tournament, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and related quarantine measures required by the New Zealand authorities. FIFA said it would work with the Qatari authorities to provide "the safeguards required to protect the health and safety of everyone involved in the competition".

The February 4-11 Club World Cup 2020 will now be contested by Qatari club Al Duhail, Al Ahly of Egypt, Bayern Munich, Ulsan Hyundai, Tigres UANL and the winners of the CONMEBOL Libertadores final scheduled for January 30. The first round match will no longer take place and Al Duhail will begin the competition in the second round. The competition format remains otherwise unchanged. Matches will be held at Qatar's recently inaugurated Ahmad Bin Ali and Education City stadiums, important test fixtures ahead of the 2022 World Cup. — AFP



The winners of the first FIFA21 championship.



The winners with Kuwait Esports Club and GAMMA GAME officials.

## Kuwait Esports Club hosts first FIFA21 championship

**KUWAIT:** The finals of the first FIFA21 championship were held recently in the presence of Kuwait Esports Club Chairman of the Board Abdullah Al-Ali and Secretary Faisal Abul. The championship was held at the GAMMA GAME hall in Salmiya, with participation of 64 players and 12 volunteer organizers. Kuwait Esports Club broadcasted the championship

live on its Twitch channel. The club invited young commentator Yazan Taha to attend the finals and he was presented with a plaque. Ahmad Salem Hameed and Khalid Abdelbasat Alsameer had qualified for the final match, and Hameed came out victorious. Hameed received a financial prize and membership in the Kuwait Esports Club.

putting his impressive record in front of goal as he prepares to face his old club in the last 16 of the Champions League next month.

### Mbappe back in form

Mbappe was more prominent in this game, however, as he scored his first goals of the Pochettino era. Pochettino said: "I was already happy with Mbappe's performances before tonight. I am pleased that he scored because scoring goals is crucial for a striker's confidence. But we knew it was only a matter of time."

The France World Cup-winning star was scythed down just outside the box by Omlin in the 16th minute,

with the Swiss goalkeeper initially shown a yellow card before the punishment was upgraded to red following a VAR review. PSG made the extra man count as Di Maria played in Mbappe to open the scoring with a dinked finish over substitute goalkeeper Dimitry Bertaud in the 34th minute.

Pochettino lost goalkeeper Keylor Navas to injury at half-time, while captain Marquinhos was also forced off early in the second half. The coach later said he thought it was "nothing serious" for either player. Mbappe cut the ball back for Neymar to make it 2-0 on the hour mark, before Icardi tucked in his third goal in four games.—AFP



**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe (center) is tackled by Montpellier's Swiss goalkeeper Jonas Omlin (right) during the French L1 football match between Paris-Saint Germain (PSG) and Montpellier at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris on Friday. — AFP

## Neymar on target on 100th PSG appearance

**PARIS:** Neymar made his 100th appearance for Paris Saint-Germain on Friday and marked the occasion with a goal in a 4-0 rout of 10-man Montpellier that took Mauricio Pochettino's side clear at the top of Ligue 1. Kylian Mbappe scored twice and Mauro Icardi was also on target with PSG leading 1-0 before netting three times in the space of four minutes around the hour mark.

The game, played behind closed doors at the Parc des Princes, was conditioned by the early sending-off of Montpellier goalkeeper Jonas Omlin for a foul on Mbappe, as PSG made the most of their extra man. It was their fourth straight win since drawing at Saint-Etienne in Pochettino's first match in charge after the Argentine was appointed as coach on January 2.

The former Tottenham Hotspur boss was back on the Paris bench having spent a week self-isolating following a positive Covid-19 test that forced him to miss his new team's 1-0 win at Angers last weekend. "I feel good. I am happy to be back," he said.

PSG are now three points clear of second-placed Lille, who go to in-form Rennes on Sunday. Lyon in third are five points behind the leaders before visiting derby rivals Saint-Etienne, who will be without seven players because of a coronavirus outbreak. The capital club's rivals may have their work cut out trying to overtake the reigning champions on this evidence, with the attacking quartet of Neymar, Mbappe, Icardi and Angel Di Maria running riot. Neymar's goal took his tally to 81 in 100 appearances for PSG since his world-record \$22 million-euro (\$264m) move from Barcelona in August 2017. His time in Paris has been marred by injuries at important moments but there can be no dis-

Live		Matches on TV (Local Timings)	
<b>SPANISH LEAGUE</b>			
Osasuna v Granada CF	beIN Sports	16:00	
Elche CF v FC Barcelona	beIN Sports HD 3	18:15	
Celta de Vigo v SD Eibar	beIN Sports	20:30	
Atletico de Madrid v Valencia C.F	beIN Sports HD 1	23:00	
<b>ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE</b>			
Juventus FC v Bologna FC	beIN Sports HD 1	14:30	
Genoa CFC v Cagliari Calcio	beIN Sports HD 5	17:00	
Hellas Verona FC v SSC Napoli	beIN Sports HD 4	17:00	
SS Lazio v US Sassuolo Calcio	beIN Sports HD 4	20:00	
Parma Calcio 1913 v UC Sampdoria	beIN Sports HD 4	22:45	
<b>GERMAN BUNDESLIGA</b>			
FC Schalke 04 v FC Bayern Munich	beIN Sports	17:30	
TSG 1899 Hoffenheim v FC Koln	beIN Sports	20:00	
<b>FRENCH LEAGUE</b>			
Bordeaux v Angers SCO	beIN Sports HD 6	15:00	
Stade Reims v Stade brestois 29	beIN Sports HD 9	17:00	
Nimes Olympique v Lorient	beIN Sports	17:00	
FCO Dijon v RC Strasbourg	beIN Sports HD 7	17:00	
FC Metz v FC Nantes	beIN Sports HD 6	17:00	
Stade Rennais v LOSC Lille	beIN Sports	19:00	
Saint Etienne v Olympique Lyonnais	beIN Sports	23:00	

## Sports

# Rodgers, Brady duel as Bucs target Super Bowl curse

## Chiefs boost as Mahomes fit for Bills clash

LOS ANGELES: Aaron Rodgers takes on Tom Brady in a first-ever NFL playoff game between the two quarterback titans today when the Green Bay Packers host the Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Lambeau Field for a place in the Super Bowl. For the legion of admirers who argue that Rodgers' natural talents make him the best quarterback of all time, Sunday's NFC championship showdown is a chance to put one over Brady, regarded by many as the undisputed G.O.A.T.

In raw statistical terms, Rodgers' resume pales into comparison when contrasted with the achievements and honors amassed by the 43-year-old Brady over the course of his 21 trophy-laden seasons in the NFL. Rodgers is bidding to reach the Super Bowl for only the second time in his career since leading Green Bay to victory over Pittsburgh a full decade ago in 2011.

Brady, meanwhile, is looking to extend his record number of Super Bowl appearances to 10, with dreams of adding a seventh championship ring to those won with the New England Patriots in 2002, 2004, 2005, 2015, 2017 and 2019.

A win today would see Brady become the first quarterback to reach Super Bowls in three different decades, and only the fourth after Peyton Manning, Kurt Warner and Craig Morton, to lead two different franchises to the NFL's championship showpiece. Blocking Brady and the Bucs' path, however, are Rodgers and a multi-faceted Packers team who shrugged off a 38-10 drubbing by Tampa Bay in week six of the regular season to enter the playoffs as top seeds.

### The greatest?

At the center of the Packers revival has been Rodgers, who has delivered an Most Valuable Player-worthy season en route to this weekend's battle at Lambeau. "I say this all the time," revered former Packers quarterback Brett Favre said in a recent interview. "Tom Brady is the greatest player ever if we're measuring from a Super Bowl perspective. But, believe me, the Packers are good year in and year out because of Aaron Rodgers."

The 37-year-old Rodgers, who started the season against a backdrop of uncertainty after the Packers swooped for quarterback Jordan Love in the first round of the NFL Draft, says he is not thinking about his long-term future or personal milestones. "I'm always just trying to stay present, especially this year as much as any-



Aaron Rodgers

thing, and enjoy the moments," Rodgers said. "I'm going to enjoy these moments for sure, and just not worry about what happens down the line."

Brady heads to Lambeau hoping to extend Tampa Bay's dominant record on the road. The Buccaneers advanced to the NFC title game with a 30-20 defeat of the Saints in New Orleans last Sunday — their seventh straight win away from home this season.

"Let's keep that streak going," Brady said. "That would be pretty sweet. Let's get another one. We're going to be challenged to get it because we're going up against a great football team."

The Buccaneers are also going up against the weight of history. If they are victorious in Green Bay on Sunday, they would become the first team in NFL history to play a Super Bowl at their home venue, with Tampa's Raymond James Stadium the site for the February 7 title game.



Tom Brady

### Bills eye 'dogfight'

While Rodgers and Brady are duel for NFC honors today, in the AFC, the reigning Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs host the Buffalo Bills with uncertainty surrounding the fitness of quarterback Patrick Mahomes. But Mahomes confirmed Friday he is fit to start today's AFC Championship clash with the Bills following his concussion last weekend. "I just got out of the protocol," Mahomes said. "This week has just been a bunch of testing, and a bunch of different things to make sure that I'm good to go and there's no lingering effects or anything like that. But everything has been good, three or four different doctors have said everything looks well, so I'm out of it now."

Mahomes has spent this week in the NFL's concussion protocol after being knocked out of last Sunday's divisional round nail-biter over the Cleveland Browns

following a heavy blow to the head. The 25-year-old reigning Super Bowl MVP returned to practice on Wednesday, however, and is expected to start at Arrowhead Stadium against a Bills team targeting its first Super Bowl appearance since the franchise's ill-fated losing streak in the early 1990s.

The Bills appeared in four straight Super Bowls — and lost all four — between 1991 and 1994. Buffalo's miserable streak of playoff futility ended this season, however, with rapidly maturing quarterback Josh Allen and receiver Stefon Diggs leading the way in post-season wins over the Indianapolis Colts and Baltimore Ravens.

Allen says the Bills have improved since being outclassed 26-17 by the Chiefs in October. "I think we've gotten a lot better since that game," Allen said. "So it's good teams that are going to go out there and compete, and it's going to be a four-quarter dogfight." — AFP



CLEVELAND: Collin Sexton #2 of the Cleveland Cavaliers shoots the ball during the game against the Brooklyn Nets on Friday at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse in Cleveland, Ohio. — AFP

## Cavs beat Brooklyn again, Celtics lose to Sixers

LOS ANGELES: Collin Sexton carried the Cleveland Cavaliers to their second straight win over Brooklyn on Friday, scoring 25 points and dishing out nine assists in a 125-113 win just two nights after posting a career high of 42 points against the same Nets. Sexton once again outplayed Nets big guns James Harden and Kyrie Irving, just as he did in the Cavs' thrilling 147-135 double overtime victory on Wednesday.

Cleveland dominated the paint and seized control in the third quarter by exploiting the Nets porous defense to record their third straight victory. Sexton scored eight points in the third quarter, when Cleveland outscored the Nets 37-24 and forced eight turnovers. Andre Drummond posted his 13th double-double with 19 points and 16 rebounds, and Larry Nance added 15. Former Net Taurean Prince tallied 14 for the Cavaliers, who outrebounded the Nets 50-29 at the Rocket Mortgage Fieldhouse arena in Cleveland. "When we're a whole, healthy team, we're very tough to beat," Drummond said.

Kyrie Irving scored 38 points in his second game after a two-week absence, while James Harden scored 19 points and had 11 assists. Brooklyn could have used Kevin Durant, who did not play because the team wanted to give him a rest.

The Nets shot 48 percent from the field and made just 14 of 43 three-point attempts. "I don't want to overreact, but we need the guys to clean things up because we underperformed in two games," Nets coach Steve Nash said. "People are excited to play against our team and will bring it every night. I feel

like we need a little more and we have to take more pride in what we're doing."

"Our problem isn't offence. We're not worried at all about offence. It's our defense," said Harden. Cleveland will try to snap an eight-game losing streak to Boston when they face the Celtics in their next game today.

### Curry returns

Elsewhere, Joel Embiid scored 38 points and grabbed 11 rebounds as the Philadelphia 76ers beat the Celtics 122-110. The Sixers beat the Celtics for the second straight game thanks to Tobias Harris who scored 23 points on 10-of-12 shooting.

Seth Curry returned from missing seven games due to coronavirus protocols and scored 15 points for the 76ers, who improved to 9-1 at home. Ben Simmons also had 15 points and added 11 assists. Jaylen Brown led the Celtics, matching his career high of 42 points to go along with nine rebounds, while Marcus Smart added 20 points and seven assists.

The Celtics went on a 8-0 run halfway through the fourth quarter. Brown nailed his fifth three pointer with just under five minutes remaining to close the gap to 103-100. Simmons answered with a three-point play then a steal and dunk. Harris added a three pointer for a 111-100 lead. Simmons made another key late basket and the lead ballooned to 13 points with 3:15 left.

Also, Luka Doncic finished just shy of a triple double with 36 points, 11 assists and nine rebounds to power the Dallas Mavericks to a 122-117 victory over the San Antonio Spurs. In Tampa, Norman Powell scored 14 of his game-high 23 points in the first quarter and the Toronto Raptors beat the Miami Heat 101-81. Powell, who was starting in place of injured Kyle Lowry, shot 10-of-18 from the field. In Los Angeles, Kawhi Leonard scored 31 points and Paul George added 29 as the Los Angeles Clippers won their sixth straight game with a 120-106 victory over the Oklahoma City Thunder. — AFP

## Baseball mourns death of long-time homer king Aaron

NEW YORK: Long-time Major League Baseball home run king Hank Aaron was remembered for his character and dignity as well as his sporting achievements following his death Friday at age 86. Aaron shrugged off racism and death threats to pass the record 714 homers hit by Babe Ruth in 1974, finishing on 755 for his career and becoming a pioneer in front office opportunities for black players after their careers.

"Hank Aaron was one of the best baseball players we've ever seen and one of the strongest people I've ever met," former US President Barack Obama said. "Michelle and I send our thoughts and prayers to the Aaron family and everyone who was inspired by this unassuming man and his towering example." Inspired by a meeting with Jackie Robinson, MLB's first black player, Aaron turned his talents to baseball and became an iconic sportsman while greeting intolerance with class and grace. Newly-elected US President Joe Biden has fond memories of watching Aaron hit home runs. "I knew I was watching someone special," Biden said. "With courage and dignity, he eclipsed the most hallowed record in sports while absorbing vengeance that would have broken most people. But he was unbreakable. He stemmed the vicious force of white supremacy, in death threats, hate mail, and in hardened hearts. What I deeply admired and respected about him is that each time he rounded those bases — an astonishing 755 trips home — he melted away more and more of the ice of bigotry to show that we can be better as a people and as a nation."

Aaron played 23 MLB seasons from 1954 to 1976, starting with the Milwaukee Braves, moving with them to Atlanta in 1966, leaving for the Milwaukee Brewers in 1975 and retiring in 1976. Aaron joined the Braves as an executive, became vice president of player development and a senior vice president for the club in 1980. "We are absolutely devastated by the passing of our beloved Hank," Braves chairman Terry McGuirk said. "Henry Louis Aaron wasn't just our icon, but one across Major League Baseball and around the world." Aaron was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1982, where his steadfastness and courage in the face of death threats made him elite even among baseball immortals. "Hank Aaron is near the top of everyone's list of all-time great players," MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said. — AFP



ATLANTA: Fans pay tribute after the death of MLB Hall of Famer Hank Aaron at The Battery Atlanta on Friday in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Mbappe unsure on future

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe says he is still "thinking about" whether to agree to a new contract at Paris Saint-Germain, with the France superstar's existing deal set to expire at the end of next season. "We are in discussions with the club to try to find a suitable project. I said I was thinking about it because I think that...if I sign it would have to be a long-term commitment to Paris Saint-Germain," Mbappe told TV channel Telefoot after Friday's 4-0 win over Montpellier in Ligue 1. "I am very happy here. I have always been very happy. The supporters and the club have always helped me and for that alone I will always be grateful." — AFP

#### Messi ban appeal rejected

MADRID: Barcelona's appeal against Lionel Messi's two-match ban following his sending-off in the Spanish Super Cup final was rejected on Friday, sources from the Spanish Football Federation told AFP. It means the Argentine will not be able to play for Barcelona in today's game away at Elche in La Liga. Messi served the first match of his suspension as the Catalans won 2-0 in extra time away to near neighbors Cornella, of Spain's third-tier Segunda B division, on Thursday in the Copa del Rey. He was sent off late in extra time in Sunday's Super Cup final in Seville against Athletic Bilbao, which Barcelona lost 3-2. Messi saw the first red card of his Barcelona career, on his 753rd appearance, for lashing out at Athletic's Asier Villalibre. — AFP

#### Ferrari sign female driver

PARIS: Ferrari on Friday signed up 16-year-old Maya Weug, the first female to join their academy which has nurtured the talent of Formula one drivers like Charles Leclerc. Weug, born and raised in Spain, will compete in Formula 4 this year backed by the academy which also counts Formula One rookie Mick Schumacher among its success stories. The teenager of Dutch-Belgian origins began racing in a secondhand kart shared with her brother at the age of seven in 2011. While a number of women drivers have attempted to qualify for a Formula One Grand Prix the last to succeed was Italian Lella Lombardi in 1976. — AFP

#### Tomori loaned to Milan

LONDON: Chelsea defender Fikayo Tomori joined AC Milan on loan for the rest of the season on Friday. Serie A leaders Milan are believed to have retained an option to buy Tomori for £25 million (\$34 million) when the loan expires at the end of the current campaign. Thiago Silva's move to Chelsea in the close-season pushed Tomori down Frank Lampard's list of center-backs. Kurt Zouma, Toni Rudiger and Andreas Christensen were all competing with Tomori to partner Silva at the heart of Chelsea's defense. — AFP

## Pogba's renaissance comes at perfect time for Man Utd

### Premier League leaders host Liverpool in FA Cup showdown

LONDON: Paul Pogba is back in form for Manchester United at just the right time as the Premier League leaders prepare for today's FA Cup showdown with bitter rivals Liverpool. Pogba has been a constant source of friction during his second spell with United and recent suggestions that he was keen to engineer a close-season transfer came as little surprise.

Mino Raiola, the France midfielder's agent, infuriated United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer in December by giving an interview in which he suggested Pogba wanted to leave because he was "unhappy" with the lack of freedom granted to him at Old Trafford. At the time, Pogba's form was so erratic and his team's results so concerning, that some United fans would gladly have helped him to the exit door.

Perceived in some quarters to be a bad influence on some of his younger United team-mates, Pogba's stock could not have been any lower when Solskjaer's side crashed out of the Champions League in the same week Raiola made his inflammatory claims. At that point, a move to his former club Juventus or a possible switch to Paris Saint Germain or Real Madrid seemed inevitable.

But from the ashes of what looked like a season-defining calamity, both Pogba and United have unexpectedly returned to prominence. Finally showing signs of knuckling down and putting his focus on football rather than his image and commercial inter-

ests, Pogba has played a key role in United's surge to the top of the Premier League.

Solskjaer reportedly made his displeasure known to Pogba about Raiola's intervention, but did not lose his cool with the 27-year-old. Pogba has repaid that show of faith with match-winning goals in United's league victories at Burnley and then Fulham on Wednesday. The World Cup winner's superb curler against Fulham was only his fourth goal of the season but, with Pogba

“ He's very happy and in a very good shape ”

back in the groove, United are a far more formidable force.

#### 'In good shape'

Sitting two points clear at the top of the Premier League, United are in contention for a first English title since Alex Ferguson retired in 2013. After the dour goalless draw between the old foes in the league at Anfield on January 17, United have a chance to inflict a psychological blow on Liverpool when the champions visit Old Trafford in the FA Cup fourth round today.

The question on the lips of everyone at

United is whether Pogba can sustain his sudden hot streak. Some believe Pogba is motivated by a desire to keep his place in the France team ahead of this year's delayed European Championships.

Whatever the reason behind Pogba's renaissance, Solskjaer would clearly benefit from keeping his temperamental playmaker in a positive frame of mind. "He's enjoying his football, he's happy. Mentally he's very happy and physically he's in a very good shape and we know all about his talents," Solskjaer said. "We decided to play him in midfield (against Fulham) and it was worth it."

United are catching Liverpool at the perfect time after Burnley ended the champions' 68-game unbeaten home league record with a shock 1-0 win at Anfield on Thursday. Jurgen Klopp's side have gone five league games without a win and lie six points behind United. It is seven hours and 18 minutes since they last found the net in the league — Liverpool's worst goal drought for almost 21 years. A victory over United would be just the tonic the ailing Reds need.

"When things don't work out on the pitch as we want them to, then there is an issue," Klopp said. "The issue is that the things I tell the boys, I didn't tell them clear enough so I have to change the way I tell the boys and then we have to change the way we play. "We have to keep going with the things that were good enough and improve the others." — AFP



LONDON: Manchester United's French midfielder Paul Pogba reacts at the final whistle during the English Premier League football match between Fulham and Manchester United at Craven Cottage in London on January 20, 2021. — AFP



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