

13 Parkour brings youngsters a taste of freedom in Gaza



15 Chelsea sack Lampard with Tuchel set to take charge



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

Kuwait curbs flights as global borders tighten

Moderna vaccine 'protective' against variants • COVID riots in Netherlands



EINDHOVEN, Netherlands: A car is set on fire in front of a train station on Sunday after a rally by several hundreds of people against the government's coronavirus policy. — AFP

KUWAIT/WASHINGTON: The Cabinet yesterday decided to indefinitely postpone the transition to the second phase of a plan to resume operations of commercial flights at Kuwait International Airport. During its weekly meeting yesterday, the Cabinet also asked the Directorate General of Civil Aviation to reduce the number of commercial flights arriving to the country in coordination with the ministry of health.

The civil aviation authority has reduced arrivals to just 1,000 passengers daily as part of measures to combat a new strain of the coronavirus. Commercial flights were due to be increased in the first week of February, but the Cabinet decided to delay the move based on a recommendation by health authorities.

Border restrictions were being tightened around the world yesterday in the face of an unrelenting coronavirus threat, after a weekend in which anger at social distancing rules bubbled over into fiery clashes in the Netherlands. In the face of deepening fears over new virus strains, US biotech firm Moderna offered some good news from lab studies of coronavirus variants that originated in Britain and South Africa.

"We are encouraged by these new data, which reinforce our confidence that the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine should be protective against these newly detected variants," said CEO Stephane Bancel. However, out of caution, Moderna will carry out

more tests adding a second booster of its vaccine - to make three shots in total.

Meanwhile, Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador became the latest public figure to test positive for the disease, and New Zealand reported its first community case for more than two months. In Washington, President Joe Biden was to reimpose a ban yesterday on most non-US citizens who have been in Britain, Brazil, Ireland and much of Europe, as well as adding South Africa to the list, a senior White House official said.

On Sunday, France started demanding a negative PCR test for arrivals by sea and air from European Union neighbors. Sweden said it would prohibit entry from neighboring Norway for three weeks, after cases of the more infectious British strain were detected in Oslo.

But government action to curtail the virus' spread still faces stiff opposition from some citizens. Protests against a coronavirus curfew in the Netherlands degenerated into clashes with police and looting in cities across the country Sunday, a day after a COVID-19 testing center was set on fire in the northern village of Urk. Police used water cannon and dogs in Amsterdam, public television NOS reported, after hundreds gathered to protest the 9 pm-4:30 am curfew, set to last until Feb 10. At least 30 people were arrested in Eindhoven. — Agencies

News in brief

Israel, UAE open embassies

JERUSALEM: Israel opened an embassy in the United Arab Emirates Sunday, its foreign ministry said "Today the Israeli embassy in Abu Dhabi has officially been opened, with the arrival of the mission head Eitan Naeh," the ministry said in a statement. The embassy will be operating from "temporary offices" until locating a permanent facility. The announcement came shortly after the UAE said its cabinet had approved the establishment of an embassy in Israel, also a first. The embassy will be opened in Tel Aviv. — AFP

Indonesia seizes tankers

JAKARTA: Indonesia has seized an Iranian tanker and Panamanian vessel suspected of illegally transferring oil in the Southeast Asian nation's waters, authorities said yesterday. The crude oil tankers - Iranian-flagged MT Horse and Panamanian-flagged MT Freya - were spotted Sunday off Kalimantan, Indonesia's section of Borneo island, and were later seized after the crew failed to respond to radio calls, authorities said. — AFP

Dubai restaurants offer discounts

DUBAI: Dubai restaurants have begun offering discounts to customers who have been inoculated against coronavirus. "Spread love, not Rona," say social media fliers for three restaurants run by Gates Hospitality, offerings a 10 percent discount to residents who have taken the first dose of a vaccine and 20 percent for those who have taken two. Diners must show proof of inoculation, such as a medical certificate, to get the discount. — AFP

India, China clash again

NEW DELHI: Indian and Chinese troops fought a new brawl on their contested Himalayan border that left injuries on both sides, officials said yesterday. India's military played down the latest skirmish as a "minor face-off" at Naku La pass, which connects Sikkim state with Tibet on the Chinese side. China's foreign ministry, however, said it had "no information" on the incident. — AFP (See Page 7)

Caretaker Cabinet passes budget with deficit of KD 12bn

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Council of Ministers, acting as a caretaker Cabinet dealing with necessary matters, yesterday approved the 2021/2022 budget, projecting a deficit of KD 12.1 billion. Spending in the budget, which starts on April 1, is estimated at KD 23 billion, while revenues are projected at KD 10.9 billion.

World lost 255m jobs in 2020: UN

GENEVA: The coronavirus pandemic took a huge toll on global jobs last year, the United Nations said yesterday, with the equivalent of more than a quarter of a billion lost. In a fresh study, the UN's International Labor Organization (ILO) found that a full 8.8 percent of global working hours were lost in 2020, compared to the fourth quarter of 2019.

That is equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs, or "approximately four times greater than the number lost during the 2009 global financial crisis," the ILO said in a statement. "This has been the most severe crisis for the world of work since the Great Depression of the 1930s," ILO chief Guy Ryder told reporters in a virtual briefing.

Since surfacing in China just over a year ago, the virus has killed more than 2.1 million people, infected tens of millions of others and hammered the global economy. The UN labor agency explained that around half of the lost working hours were calculated from reduced working hours for those remaining in employment. But the world also saw "unprecedented levels of employment loss" last year, it said.

Official global unemployment shot up by 1.1 percent, or 33 million more people, to a total of 220 million and a worldwide jobless rate of 6.5 percent last year. Ryder stressed that another 81 million people did not register as unemployed but "simply dropped out of the labor market". "Either they are unable to work perhaps because of pandemic restrictions or social obligations or they have given up looking for work," he said. "And so their talents, their skills, their energy have been lost, lost to their families, lost to our society, lost to us all."

The lost working hours last year shrank global labor

Both spending and revenues are higher than projections for the current fiscal year. Expenditures in the current year are estimated at KD 21.6 billion, while revenues are projected at KD 7.6 billion, leaving a deficit of KD 14 billion. The increase in revenues is due to a rise in oil prices, which provide the majority of Kuwait's public income.

Adding up the deficits of the current and next fiscal years takes the total deficit to KD 26.1 billion. Budget deficits are covered by the state reserve fund, which is separate from the fund for future generations, whose assets are estimated at around \$600 billion. Former finance minister Barrak Al-Sheetan had repeatedly warned that the state reserve fund will soon run out of cash because of huge spending and low income.



BELGRADE: People queue to receive the Chinese-made Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine outside the Belgrade Fairground turned into a vaccination center yesterday. — AFP

income by a full 8.3 percent, the ILO said. That amounts to a drop of some \$3.7 trillion, or 4.4 percent of overall global gross domestic product (GDP), it added. The emergence of several safe and effective vaccines against COVID-19 has raised hopes that the world will soon be able to rein in the pandemic.

But the ILO cautioned that the prospects for a global labor market recovery this year are "slow, uneven and uncertain." The organization pointed to the uneven impact the crisis had had on the world's workers, affecting women and younger workers far more than others. Globally, employment losses for women last year stood at five percent, compared with 3.9 percent for men. Women are more likely to work in the harder-hit sectors of the economy, and also have taken on more of the burden of, for instance, caring for children forced to stay home from school. — AFP



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaleed Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's weekly meeting yesterday. — KUNA

North Korean envoy to Kuwait defects to South

SEOUL: A senior North Korean diplomat who was acting ambassador to Kuwait has defected to the South with his family, reports said yesterday. Ryu Hyun-woo reached South Korea in Sept 2019 and sought asylum, according to the Maeil Business daily, but his arrival was kept secret until now. About 30,000 North Koreans have fled repression and poverty under the communist regime and settled in the capitalist South, mostly by first secretly crossing over the porous border with China.

Defections by senior officials are rare, although Ryu's arrival came just two months after the North's former acting ambassador to Italy Jo Song Gil sought asylum from Seoul. "I decided to defect because I wanted to offer my child a better future," the Maeil Business newspaper cited Ryu as saying. He became temporary acting ambassador in Sept 2017 after Kuwait expelled envoy So Chang Sik following the state's adoption of a UN resolution over Pyongyang's weapons programs.

According to reports, Ryu is the son-in-law of Jon Il Chun, the former head of Office 39, which manages the secret funds of the North Korean leadership. Tae Yong-ho, another high-profile defector who fled his post as North Korea's deputy ambassador to Britain in 2016 and was elected a South Korean opposition MP last year, described Ryu as part of Pyongyang's "core elite". — AFP

Local

Interview with Chairman of the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK)

KUWAIT: Established initially to grant Diploma Degrees based on two-year programs, ACK evolved over the years into an institution with strategic international ties, fulfilling regulatory and academic accrediting requirements and offering Diploma and Bachelor programs in Engineering, Business, and Aviation.

ACK's mission has always been to fulfill its strategic direction of graduating capable lifelong learners and engaged professionals who can contribute to Kuwait's socioeconomic and national development plan associated with the New Kuwait 2035 Vision.

We enable human potential within a culture of care that provides students with academic and career advice, learning support, employment and internship opportunities and access to continuous learning and professional development options.

ACK adheres to UNESCO's six pillars of education which are as follows: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, learning to live together, learning to get employed and learning to transform. We believe that an individual's acquisition of new knowledge and skills is heavily influenced and supported by the social environment in which the learning occurs. We view learning as an active and social process. The following are excerpts from an interview with Dr Sa'ad Al-Omari, Chairman of the Australian College of Kuwait:

Lessons learned

1. The higher education landscape, like many other sectors, has felt firsthand the impact of COVID-19. What are some of the lessons learned from this pandemic?

Dr Omari: Without a doubt, this pandemic has created great challenges for us all. However, no matter how difficult, one must look at them as opportunities for adaptation, learning, and discovery. From a higher education perspective, we have learned the importance of resilience, agility and adaptability.

One of the significant steps we took at the Australian College of Kuwait during the pandemic was to review our study programs to ensure that our post COVID graduates have the necessary transferrable skills that will allow them to succeed in unprecedented times. The pandemic also led to increased sharing of knowledge via joint research projects among colleges and universities.

New tools and mechanisms to disseminate knowledge effectively, are called for. We do not know the long term impact of the pandemic. To ensure that our programs of study meet the needs of the industry and workforce, we need to diversify our offerings and implement an approach based on 'research-informed teaching'. We should embrace the digital transformations that resulted from this pandemic. The higher education sector must invest in optimizing its digital infrastructure. Distance Learning/E-learning and blended learning are the future.

2. The pandemic has validated the need for international collaboration and cooperation. Could you expand on this notion and explain what are the measures adopted by ACK in this regard?

Dr Omari: The importance of being connected has never been clearer. The activities of universities in research, innovation, and education are designed to increase the capacity to exchange knowledge. During the crisis, many universities worked closely together to learn from and help one another navigate new realities.

When international research projects came to a sudden halt during lockdown periods, universities found creative ways to continue their collaborations. As a higher education institution, we must always ask ourselves, are we effectively exchanging knowledge with the right partners? Industry? Society? We are proud that we have built a diverse network of international partners that provide our faculty with opportunities to conduct joint research on a global scale.

We collaborate with local institutions such as the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) and the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR), and internationally we work closely with Central Queensland University (CQUniversity) in Australia. In addition, we are also engaged in research projects in Canada, and Europe. Through our partnerships, we generate a global mindset for our students and graduates to prepare them to continue their studies with our international partner in Australia and other universities.

Upcoming strategy

3. Could you walk us through the major highlights and pillars of your upcoming strategy? With the pandemic's effect taken into consideration, how was the design and development of the strategy impacted?

Dr Omari: The 2020-2025 Strategic Plan provides a clear roadmap to



Dr Sa'ad Al-Omari

achieve our vision. It aims to position ACK as a national and regional leading higher education institution in teaching, learning, research, and innovation while remaining true to our core value of 'Enabling Human Potential within a Cultural of Care'.

We have fine-tuned ACK's strategic direction to accommodate the rapidly evolving needs and challenges of industry. 'Excellence in Making a Difference' will be ACK's motto for the next five years. Our strategy includes the following:

- Adding programs of study that meet the demands and skills of the workplace;
- Evolving teaching and learning to meet the needs of our students through innovative pedagogy;
- Fostering competencies of leadership and entrepreneurship;
- Investing further in the College's infrastructure and technical teaching tools;
- Strengthening the College's relationship with industry and exchanging knowledge; and
- Contributing to sustainable development through research and innovation that will address national priorities.

4. At times, the industry's demands and their needs progress faster than the ability of higher education's to adapt. Higher education, businesses, and the industry need to work together to deliver more value to the students and to the workforce. As a higher education provider, what education model and supportive ecosystem have you developed to ensure collaboration with the different sectors of industry?

Dr Omari: By aligning our learning outcomes to needs of the job market, our role is critical in closing the skills gap facing the industry. We work closely with industry on several levels and we conduct joint research that addresses their need to optimize productivity.

Our students also work in teams and/or individually to research an industry or a business issue and then proceed to develop strategies, processes, and products as solutions. All students are required to research and present a major graduation project to demonstrate the synthesis of individual aspects of learning during their studies and apply this to an approved workplace project or challenge. Upon completion, these projects are exhibited as innovative solutions to everyday issues facing industry. Industry in turn, has successfully adopted the outcomes of several of our graduation projects.

To develop their projects, students are encouraged to connect with local businesses and research organizations. In many instances, this has led to further research and employment. Our students are also engaged in internships and work placements in industry as part of their studies.

ACK has established an Industrial Advisory Board at different levels (College and School). The Board comprises industry professionals from the private and government sectors who provide strategic advice on areas of research, development, and curricula. Such alliances ensure that ACK delivers industry-required skills and produces research that is beneficial to the development of the economy and society. At ACK we are also strong advocates of lifelong learning and provide ongoing education for industry professionals through our Corporate Training Center.

Skilled graduates

5. As Kuwait is seeking to diversify its sources of income, the role of higher education has never been more important in developing skilled graduates that can contribute to the nation's economy. How does ACK endeavor to support its graduates and alumni?

Dr Omari: In general, Arab countries have been seeking to transition from resource-based to knowledge-based economies and have been diversifying and expanding their base of human capital skills.

An example that demonstrates the adoption of important steps toward this



end is the national strategy adopted by the State of Kuwait, namely, the 'New Kuwait Vision 2035.' The plan aims to transform the country into a regional, financial, commercial, and cultural hub. The Vision is organized around seven pillars: global positioning, developed infrastructure, creative human capital, effective public administration, high quality healthcare, diversified economy, and sustainable environment.

One of the seven pillars identifies investment in human capital; another identifies economic diversification as a crucial element to reducing the country's dependence on oil export revenue. The Vision seeks to reform the education system to prepare Kuwaitis to become competitive and productive members of the workforce.

We have established an Alumni and Career Placement Center to support our graduates and as part of our commitment to lifelong learning by establishing connections with alumni in the workplace, the Center was able to build partnerships with leading companies from the private and public sectors.

Through an integrated leadership that joins the schools of Business and Engineering, we established the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center, to encourage and support novice entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are essential to economic growth, diversification and job creation. Our pedagogy serves to transfer practical knowledge and develop skills that facilitate the work of entrepreneurs. We organize an annual exhibition where entrepreneurs are given the opportunity to showcase their businesses and start-ups.

6. Many are of the opinion that distance learning/e-learning will fade away once the pandemic is over. What is ACK's take on that? What is the future of distance learning/e-learning in the Arab higher education sector post COVID?

Dr Omari: Distance Learning/E-learning is here to stay. This is a new transition that we must embrace and accept. It is also a cultural transition within the Arab region as E-learning has not been widely implemented in this part of the world. The pandemic managed to expedite what was already a long time coming.

ACK has always been a strong supporter of this mode of learning. In fact, in September 2019, before the pandemic, the College organized an international seminar with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences on the importance of introducing E-learning in the Arab region. Prominent local, regional, and international academics were invited to contribute. We support the continuation of E-learning even after the pandemic has passed.

The College's experience in the last few months of implementing E-learning has been very successful. Open communication channels and transparency were key in the successful implementation of E-learning. Through tutorials, students were supported in their transition to online learning. They were assigned academic advisors and the Department of Student Affairs provided counseling.

Through E-learning, education and assessments have become closer to real life. Students studying from home acquire a range of skills that will allow them to be productive, disciplined, motivated and organized. These skills are very important as they navigate their way through a dynamic and thoroughly transformed workforce.

7. How is innovation cultivated at ACK? Could you also walk us through some of the approaches adopted by ACK toward Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0) which includes cyber-physical systems, the internet, cloud and cognitive computing?

Dr Omari: Industry 4.0 requires us to

have transferrable skills. This sums up ACK's education objectives, namely, ensuring its graduates possess a range of 'transferrable skills'. Twenty first century skills require students to be thoughtful leaders, learn how to collaborate, solve problems, think analytically and critically, be creative, have high levels of digital literacy, be adaptable, resilient and agile, work in team-settings, think like entrepreneurs, be culturally aware and act as global citizens.

Through our student-centered pedagogy and project-based learning, all these skills are taught and sharpened. Our pedagogical approach also implements the Conceive-Design-Implement-Operate (CDIO) criteria, which emphasize the students' ability to analyze, synthesize and test. All of these are important skills in Industry 4.0.

8. There is no doubt that information communication and technology has the ability to transform the way higher education institutions conduct their activities. What is the role of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) at ACK? And how is it used in the processes of knowledge creation, management and dissemination?

Dr Omari: As I stated earlier, one of the most important lessons we have learnt in this pandemic is that the higher education sector needs to invest heavily in ICT infrastructure. Technology is the present and the future and we must channel our resources in that direction. When the pandemic began, ACK was able to easily switch to emergency remote teaching through its robust ICT infrastructure.

ICT is integrated into all of ACK's activities, and we continuously update our digital resources to ensure we are using state-of-the-art technology. For instance, we have virtual labs that allow students to virtually simulate lab work.

In research, ICT is core in sharing and exchanging knowledge. Our scholars are able to conduct joint research projects with faculty around the world. ICT also serves as a tool for collaborative learning as it is integrated into every aspect of ACK's academic pillars, from teaching/learning to assessments and evaluation.

Lasting impact

9. The pandemic will have a long lasting impact on many sectors. Many industries will suffer and some will emerge better off post COVID. The higher education sector has also been left struggling. What long term impacts can be expected on the higher education sector in Kuwait following the pandemic? Post COVID shock, what is ACK doing to build resilience?

Dr Omari: We are beginning to understand the real impact of the pandemic. Like other sectors, the higher education sector took a big hit. When the world went into lockdown, campuses stood empty, halls of residence were evacuated and student enrollment dropped. Suddenly, many universities and colleges were left struggling financially and had to restructure and explore new sources of income.

Kuwait has a robust higher education sector. It responded quickly to COVID-19 and was able to shift to E-learning within a relatively short time. As Kuwait is already expanding its higher education sector with more universities and colleges entering the landscape, the goal is to ensure that these institutions offer skills that are relevant in the post COVID era.

As higher education institutions, we must take into account national strategies: increase our appetite for interdisciplinary research; design a systematic approach to knowledge development; network efficiently and effectively, and develop our ICT infrastructure. All of these are essential. At ACK, we believe resilience is the key to growth in the



next few years. We are navigating uncertain times, and we have adapted our strategy to become more agile and resilient.

We have developed our study programs to ensure that our graduates have all the necessary skills to navigate this new environment. We are expanding our networking and collaboration platforms, locally and internationally. We plan to expand our offerings to include a range of new programs that will meet the market's needs.

We have integrated research into all of our programs of study. Through our Scientific Research Center, our faculty are engaged in research projects that meet the nation's needs and make an impact within our society. Kuwait has many technologically savvy young people, and with the right national and institutional strategies, the higher education sector can emerge from this pandemic stronger than before.

10. On a final note, how are leadership and its competencies integrated into ACK's programs of studies? How is this notion conceptualized at ACK, and why is it so important for students and graduates?

Dr Omari: Now, more than ever, we must focus on the notion of 'leadership development' to ensure our students are prepared to deal with the challenges of these difficult times. Through ACK's programs of study, we aim to develop behavioral competencies. We instill a leadership mindset and skills through our Project Based Learning courses, Research Based Learning, internships, and graduation projects. Our mentoring environment paves the way for integrating programs to ensure students gain a wide range of skills and competencies.

Our innovative pedagogy and activities are geared toward ensuring our students develop leadership competencies. We have ensured that our programs are co-created with industry and accredited by the relevant bodies so that they are aligned with the labor market and produce graduates that have the competencies and skills required by the workforce. For instance, our engineering programs are accredited by Engineers Australia, the School of Business is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Business Schools (ACBSP) and the School of Aviation programs are accredited by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and are approved by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), and the General Civil Aviation Authority of United Arab Emirates (GCAA). Effective leaders are thoughtful, humble, inspired, committed, and articulate. We want our graduates to make a difference in the world but at the same time remain true to themselves.

Local

Kuwait's Amir meets visiting Iraqi parliament speaker

Kuwait, Iraq discuss enhancing cooperation



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Iraqi parliament speaker Mohammad Al-Halbousi. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Iraqi parliament speaker Mohammad Al-Halbousi.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Seif Palace National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, accompanied by Iraqi parliament speaker Mohammad Al-Halbousi and his accompanying delegation. 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 received the visiting Iraqi parliament speaker separately at Seif Palace. Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah attended the meeting between His Highness the Prime Minister and the Iraqi speaker.

Meanwhile, Ghanem had a meeting with his Iraqi counterpart, during which they discussed means of boosting cooperation at various levels in addition to diverse regional and international topics, Al-Dastour news network reported. Parliament Deputy Speaker Ahmad Al-Shuhomi and a number of MPs attended the meeting. After the talks, Ghanem held a banquet for the visiting guest and his accompanying delega-

tion, attended by a number of MPs. Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah also met with the visiting Iraqi parliament speaker, and discussed with him means of boosting cooperation at various levels in addition to diverse regional and international topics. The meeting was attended by Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Khaled Al-Jarallah, Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocol Affairs Ambassador Dhari Al-Ejran and Assistant Foreign Minister for the Arab Homeland Affairs Ambassador Fahad Al-Awadhi. Also present were Assistant Foreign Minister for Affairs of the Bureau of the Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar, Assistant Foreign Minister for the Bureau Affairs of the Foreign Minister Ambassador Saleh Al-Loughani, Deputy Assistant of the Foreign Minister for the Bureau Affairs of the Foreign Minister Counsellor Ahmad Al-Shraim, Deputy Assistant of the Foreign Minister for Protocol Affairs Counsellor Abdulmohsen Al-Zaid and a number of senior ministry officials. — KUNA



Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets Iraqi parliament speaker Mohammad Al-Halbousi.

Gulf Bank distributes recyclable bottles

KUWAIT: As part of its commitment to environmental sustainability and preservation, Gulf Bank distributed high quality reusable water bottles to all employees across the bank's various branches and departments. The initiative aims to reduce the use of single-use plastic and paper cups, encouraging employees to opt for reusable water bottles instead.

As part of the initiative, which was planned, coordinated and implemented by the Bank's Facilities Management team, each employee received an exclusive, high quality, insulated, BPA-free, and leak-proof water bottle from Klean Kanteen. In keeping with Gulf Bank's colors, the bottles are a vibrant red and are decorated



Saoud Al-Musallam

with distinctive drawings inspired by the Bank's iconic main branch in Kuwait City, which is considered a unique historical and architectural landmark in the country. Each employee received a bottle engraved with their name as part of the initiative that aims to reduce plastic waste and champion a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Each bottle can be used for both hot and cold drinks, and is 100 percent recyclable and biodegradable.

Commenting on the initiative, Saoud Abdulaziz Al-Musallam, Deputy General Manager of Facilities Management at Gulf Bank, said: "At Gulf Bank, we are fully committed to sustainability at the societal, economic and environmental levels. In keeping



with this promise, we launched this initiative to encourage our employees to reduce the use of single-use plastic and paper cups, and minimize waste. We are proud to be teaming up with Klean Kanteen to provide our employees with high quality drinking bottles customized for every Gulf Bank employee. As with all steps toward positive change, we are starting from within, and hope to encourage everyone to take positive steps towards environmental preservation for the benefit of our communities and country.

Kuwait lists 492 new COVID cases, two deaths

KUWAIT: Kuwait registered 492 coronavirus (COVID-19) cases in addition to two deaths in the past 24 hours, raising the caseload of contaminations with the virus to 161,777 and the fatalities' toll to 954, the Health Ministry said yesterday. The ministry added that the number of people receiving treatment at intensive care units amounted to 51 as of yesterday, whereas the whole count of confirmed infection cases and remained under medical care stood at 6,057. It pointed out that 7,928 swab tests were conducted during the same period, bringing the total of such examinations to 1,471,104. The ministry had announced earlier 513



recoveries from the virus during the same period, bringing the total of the recuperated to 154,766. — KUNA

News in brief

Human remains found

KUWAIT: Forensics personnel went to Abdaly to recover human remains and will work on identifying them - whether they belong to a male or female, as well as determine the time of death and compare it with absconding reports at the time. Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday quoting a source who said all possibilities are open for consideration, as the remains may date back to the time of the invasion or a few years ago, adding that forensics officers have the techniques that will enable them to uncover the details behind this discovery, which was recorded as a suspected felony at Qashaniya police station. Police had received a call from an expat who works for a contracting company, who told them he saw a skull while on his way to work, and gave them the location.

No seats available

KUWAIT: Sources at airline companies and travel agencies said no seats are available on flights from the UAE and Turkey until Feb 20. The sources told Al-Anbaa Arabic daily that rescheduling of flights and cancellation of others based on a decision by the civil aviation authority to reduce the number of arriving passengers to Kuwait to 1,000 daily. This caused a massive demand for return flights to Kuwait, especially from Dubai and Istanbul, as they are transit destinations for passengers from 35 countries from which direct flights are banned due to a high risk of coronavirus transmission. Local and regional airlines have merged their flights to meet the operation quota for each country.

Five-day quarantine

KUWAIT: Head of the union of domestic help offices Khalid Al-Dakhnan said the union proposed to reduce the quarantine time for arriving domestic helpers to five days instead of two weeks, especially since they undergo three PCR tests before arriving proving they are free of COVID-19. Al-Jarida Arabic daily reported. He said this measure will reduce costs and save large amounts of money for citizens and expats. Dakhnan said that the recruitment rate set according to a commerce ministry decision is KD 990 for each helper, with KD 490 to be added as expenses for quarantine in case the helpers are arriving from the Philippines, and KD 390 if they are coming from India.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.



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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Close up of the female (left) and male flower cluster of the date palm. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Chinese envoy affirms partnership with Kuwait

KUWAIT: The Chinese Ambassador to the State of Kuwait Li Minggang has lauded the distinctive and strategic relationship between the two countries expressing desire to boost cooperation in various sectors. Speaking at a virtual news conference, Li Minggang expressed congratulations to Kuwait on forthcoming 60th independence and 30th liberation anniversaries, saying the Kuwaiti people, led by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, would pursue the efforts to attain Kuwait Vision 2035.

Kuwait and China have been dealing with each other on equal basis for half a century; efforts that have culminated with establishing the strategic partnership, he said. Underscoring reciprocating visits and contacts by leaders of the two countries, the envoy affirmed that Kuwait had donated \$3 million to China at the peak of the coronavirus crisis.

Beijing for its turn has sent in medical experts to back the country in the fight against the contagion. Noting that China is the top commercial partner for Kuwait at the non-oil level, he said trade exchanges in 2020 reached \$14.29 billion. Currently, Chinese companies are partaking in 77 Kuwaiti enterprises, he has said, also noting that Kuwait has signed cooperation documents with Beijing within framework of the silk road strategy. —KUNA

Kuwait-India relations a vibrant and dynamic partnership: Envoy

Indian Embassy has created a database of Indian engineers in Kuwait

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: On the occasion of the 72nd Republic Day of India, Indian Ambassador Sibi George spoke with Kuwait Times on a range of topics, such as deep-rooted India-

Kuwait relations, consular services at the embassy, certification issue of Indian engineers in Kuwait and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the embassy's community outreach programs, among other issues. Excerpts from the interview:

KT: Ambassador, could you share with us your vision of India-Kuwait bilateral relations in the medium to longer term and how do you see the relationship shaping up in the future?

George: India-Kuwait bilateral relations have been built on a very sound, solid and deep-rooted foundation of exceptionally close and strong friendship ties between the peoples of our two countries. Over a period, this relationship has transformed into a vibrant and dynamic partnership. My vision for the future of this relationship is a new age, New India-New Kuwait partnership which connects the visions of our two friendly countries and transforms them into reality for mutual development and progress. As ambassador, I will strive to work on these opportunities to benefit from our comparative strengths and forge mutually beneficial partnerships across all domains of our multifaceted cooperation.

KT: What changes have you made since taking over as India's Ambassador to Kuwait in August 2020?

George: An embassy of India anywhere in the world is expected to be a 'home away from home' for the Indian diaspora. In order to realize this objective, every embassy is expected to take a few basic steps - first and foremost is to ensure that it has the most effective and user-friendly consular services. Everything else flows from that. As an ambassador, it is my responsibility to ensure that the visit of every Indian to the embassy here in Kuwait for any form of service is a pleasant experience and not a nightmare.

My objective has been to make the service of the embassy user-friendly. In order to make it a pleasant experience, it is important to get regular feedback from the community on consular services and welfare services. Officers of the embassy regularly visit the consular service areas and also our outsourcing centers. We have introduced multilingual feedback forms. These regular feedbacks from the community at multiple levels helped the embassy to understand specific issues. Addressing many of these issues is a work in progress. Let me reiterate that the doors of the embassy are always open for the community.

Impact of the pandemic

KT: The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the embassy's several community-oriented programs, particularly the open house program, although the embassy continued open house meetings virtually. How do you evaluate this experience?

George: The community faced multiple challenges during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic. I would like to place on record my heartfelt thanks to the many volunteers, associations and members of the Indian Community Support Group (ICSG) who worked closely with the embassy in a humanitarian mission with full commitment and dedication to ensure that no Indian will go hungry here.

COVID-19 brought in so many challenges to the embassy, as it has done to most public offices in Kuwait and across the world. We needed to follow all precautions, guidelines and protocols related to COVID-19. In adherence to these guidelines, we converted the physical open house into a digital open house. Today, we have a very active community welfare section at the embassy. I am happy to note that we are getting full support from all concerned authorities both in Kuwait and India.

KT: Indian engineers in Kuwait have faced issues related to their certification. How are you addressing this problem?

George: The engineers' certification issue is one of the main issues that I have faced during my last few months here. As part of the process to address this issue, we undertook a large-scale registration and verification exercise and have created a complete database through a multipronged approach.

We have been engaging the concerned authorities in Kuwait at multiple levels. At the same time, we are trying to address the root cause of the issue in close coordination with



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George.

the concerned authorities in India. We have established a regular weekly dialogue mechanism with the Kuwaiti Society of Engineers (KSE).

An embassy team meets the leadership of KSE and discusses individual cases that are brought to the attention of the embassy. We are finding solutions to several individual cases. This again is a work in progress. I am optimistic that we will be able to find a lasting solution to the certification issue soon.

Partial amnesty

KT: The Kuwait government has announced a partial amnesty allowing undocumented expats to leave the country or regularize their status. How has been the general response from Indians in Kuwait?

George: The embassy welcomes every step that the Kuwaiti authorities take for undocumented expats to leave the country or regularize their status. I am happy that each of the Kuwaiti leaders and citizens that I met during the last few months spoke very highly of the hardworking, peace-loving and law-abiding qualities of our community. The ongoing regularization drive was a welcome step. I thank the leadership of the government of Kuwait for this gesture. The embassy worked very closely with the community and the Kuwaiti authorities to help undocumented laborers avail the facilities offered. We issued travel documents to every Indian who approached us.

We erected a special tent and opened special counters at the embassy to facilitate the speedy issuance of travel documents. We would like to have every Indian in Kuwait to be working legally here. Our endeavor is for everyone to correct their legal status. This again is a work in progress. We have also extended assistance from the ICWF (Indian Community Welfare Fund) for the benefit of the community. We have provided over seven hundred air tickets in the last few months.

KT: The Indian embassy in Kuwait plans to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Kuwait and India. Can you briefly outline these plans?

George: The years 2021-2022 mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait. Over the last 60 years, our relationship with Kuwait has grown into a vibrant, mutually beneficial partnership.

Our relationship with Kuwait is a partnership not only between governments and officials; it is a partnership involving multiple stakeholders—universities, schools, students, business establishments, small and medium enterprises, industry and commercial chambers, industry groups, science and technology establishments, academicians, scholars, artists, movie lovers, drama lovers, innovation and research organizations, hospitality firms, museums, libraries and above all our vibrant people-to-people contacts.

We will involve each of these stakeholders in our 60th anniversary celebrations. We will coordinate these celebrations also through our four outreach platforms of ICN (Indian Cultural Network), IPN (Indian Professionals Network), IBN (Indian Business Network) and ISN (Indian Sports Network).

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NAJAF: Supporters and members of Iraq's Hashed al-Shaabi force react by coffins of members of the powerful pro-Iran paramilitary network during a funeral ceremony in the holy city of Najaf on Sunday, a day after they were killed in an ambush north of the capital. —AFP

Fears of Iraq execution spree after IS attack

Baghdad blasts a jolting reminder of persistent threat posed by jihadists

BAGHDAD: Rights defenders fear Iraq may give the green light to a spree of executions of convicted jihadists in a show of strength, days after a deadly suicide attack in Baghdad. On Sunday, an official from Iraq's presidency told AFP more than 340 execution orders "for terrorism or criminal acts" were ready to be carried out.

"We are continuing to sign off on more," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Another official from Iraq's presidency added yesterday that all the orders were signed after 2014, most of them under ex-president Fuad Massum and at a time when jihadists were occupying a third of the country. The orders were disclosed to AFP after twin suicide attacks claimed by the Islamic State group on Thursday killed at least 32 people in a crowded open-air Baghdad market.

The blasts were a jolting reminder of the persistent threat posed by the jihadists, despite the government declaring victory over them in late 2017. The two officials, along with judicial sources contacted by AFP, could not provide additional details on when the executions may take place or if they included foreigners convicted of

belonging to IS. A 2005 law carries the death penalty for anyone convicted of "terrorism," which can include membership of an extremist group even if they are not convicted of any specific acts. Rights groups have warned that executions were being used for political reasons. "Leaders resort to announcements of mass executions simply to signal to the public that they're taking... (these issues) seriously," said Belkis Wille, senior crisis and conflict researcher at Human Rights Watch.

"The death penalty is used as a political tool more than anything else," she told AFP on Sunday.

In mid-2018, outgoing Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced 13 executions under the Counter-Terror Law, and for the first time authorities published pictures of the hangings. That came after IS killed eight civilians.

'Deeply troubling'

Since the official declaration of victory over IS, Iraq's courts have sentenced hundreds to death for crimes perpetrated during the jihadists' 2014 seizure of around a third of the country and their brutal three-year hold over

cities including Mosul. But only a small proportion of the sentences have been carried out, as they must be approved by the president. Barham Saleh, who has held the post since 2018, is known to be personally against capital punishment, and has resisted signing execution orders in the past. Some Iraqis took to social media to demand tougher action from Saleh after Thursday's attack, accusing him of "not carrying out the sentences" and risking a prison break.

Despite Saleh's moderating influence, Iraq in 2019 carried out the fourth highest number of executions among nations worldwide, after China, Iran and Saudi Arabia, according to Amnesty International.

Iraq carried out 100 executions that year—one out of every seven worldwide. Judicial sources told AFP at least 30 executions took place in 2020. They include 21 men convicted of "terrorism" and executed at the notorious Nasiriyah prison in November.

The move sparked condemnations from the United Nations, which described the news as "deeply troubling" and called on Iraq to halt any further planned executions.

'Limited options'

Rights groups accuse Iraq's justice system of corruption, carrying out rushed trials on circumstantial evidence and failing to allow the accused a proper defense. They also condemn cramped conditions in detention centers, saying those arrested for petty crimes are often held with hardened jihadists, facilitating radicalization. Iraq's government has declined to provide figures on detention centers or prisoners, including how many are facing terrorism-related charges, although some studies estimate 20,000 are being held for purported IS links. UN Human Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet said late last year that given such gaps in Iraq's legal system, implementing capital punishment "may amount to an arbitrary deprivation of life by the State." Ali Bayati, a leading member of Iraq's Human Rights Commission, told AFP the country had "limited options." "Capital punishment is part of the Iraqi legal system—and we do not have real rehabilitation centers," he said. "We lack clear guarantees and real transparency in the interrogation and ruling sessions, and in allowing human rights organizations to play their role." —AFP

Israel deports child sex abuse suspect to Australia

JERUSALEM: Israel yesterday extradited Malka Leifer, a former Jewish ultra-Orthodox school principal accused of dozens of sexual abuse cases of pupils in Australia, ending a six-year legal wrangle, the justice ministry said.

"We confirm the deportation," it said in a WhatsApp message, giving no further details. Israeli media said she left on an early-morning flight to Australia, hours before Israel's Ben Gurion airport was to close down as part of COVID-19 precautions.

The Jerusalem Post said she was "travelling to Australia via Frankfurt, and will arrive in Australia later today". Leifer,

an Israeli, is accused of child sex abuse while she worked as a teacher and principal at an ultra-Orthodox school in Melbourne.

According to Australian media, she faces 74 counts of child sex abuse against girls. After allegations against her surfaced in Australia in 2008, Leifer and her family left for Israel and moved to the Emmanuel settlement in the occupied West Bank. In December, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected her lawyers' final appeal against extradition in a strongly-worded judgment.

"More than six years have passed since a request was filed in the Jerusalem district court to declare the appellant extradited to Australia," it wrote. Since then, it said, "there is no proceeding that the appellant has not taken" to prevent her extradition, including on grounds of mental illness.

Israeli daily Haaretz on Monday quoted the Zionist Federation of Australia's Jeremy Leibler as criticizing the delay. "That Leifer was allowed to escape justice for so long was a travesty," he said.

"While it's a relief that Israel's justice system has finally prevailed, the time and process that resulted in these delays are completely unacceptable." A previous extradition attempt between 2014 and 2016 failed after Leifer was admitted to mental institutions and expert opinions found she was not fit to stand trial.

But undercover private investigators later filmed Leifer shopping and depositing a cheque at a bank, apparently living a normal life. This prompted Israeli authorities to launch a probe into whether she was faking mental illness to avoid extradition, leading to her re-arrest in February 2018.

Last May, Jerusalem district court justice Chana Lomp ruled that while Leifer had "mental problems", they were "not psychotic problems of mental illness as in its legal definition" and she was fit to stand trial. The legal wrangling caused some tensions between allies Israel and Australia, with Leifer's extradition being a central issue raised with Israeli President Reuven Rivlin during a visit to Australia last February. —AFP

Nine trapped Chinese miners confirmed dead, one still missing

BEIJING: Chinese rescue workers have found the bodies of nine more miners after an explosion a fortnight ago, local officials said yesterday, raising the death toll to 10. It comes a day after 11 miners were pulled out alive from the mine in eastern Shandong province where the blast struck. One miner remains unaccounted for. A group of 22 were trapped hundreds of meters underground by the explosion on January 10, with some relying on food and medicine delivered through long shafts drilled by rescue teams. "From Sunday afternoon to this afternoon, rescue workers have not stopped searching, and found a further nine trapped miners who unfortunately all died," the mayor of Yantai city, Chen Fei, said at a briefing yesterday.

"Along with one miner who died on Thursday, the

bodies of the nine deceased miners were all lifted out of the mine." The initial explosion at the Hushan mine occurred in its ventilator shaft, causing a blockage that damaged the cable car. The head of the rescue team Chen Yumin said it appeared all nine miners had been killed by the impact of a secondary explosion in the mine on January 10 as they tried to climb up to the mine entrance to escape. A minute's silence was held at the press conference, and the four officials bowed afterwards to pay respects to the dead.

Officials said that the identities of the deceased would be confirmed through DNA testing. The 11 survivors are in "stable" and "non life-threatening" conditions and are currently receiving medical treatment, according to Qin Chengyong, deputy head of the Shandong provincial health commission. Two are in serious but non life-threatening conditions—including one who had not eaten for 14 days before being rescued.

Missing miner

Rescue operations sped up dramatically on Sunday as a blockage in the ventilator shaft was cleared. Onsite workers had previously estimated that it would



QIXIA, China: One of twenty-two Chinese miners wearing a black patch is saved from hundreds of meters underground, in Qixia, in eastern China's Shandong province. —AFP

take at least two weeks to reach the trapped miners, also hampered by high levels of underground water. But the mayor said yesterday rescue teams will not stop searching until the last remaining miner was found. All sections of the mine have been searched except for one that has been filled with water, rescue team leader Chen said. —AFP

Taiwan expels Chinese dredgers from its waters

TAIPEI: Taiwan expelled nearly 4,000 Chinese vessels illegally dredging sand from its waters in 2020, authorities said yesterday, a more than six-fold increase on the year before as Beijing seeks to heap pressure on the democratic island.

China has taken an increasingly belligerent tone towards Taiwan under President Xi Jinping—especially over the last twelve months with Beijing's jets and bombers buzzing the island at a record rate.

But the waters surrounding Taiwan have become another hot zone. Taiwan's coastguard yesterday told AFP it recorded a huge spike in Chinese sand dredgers illegally entering its waters. Up to November last year, it expelled 3,969 vessels, compared to 600 in 2019 and 71 in 2018. China's leaders view Taiwan as their territory and have vowed one day to seize it, by force if necessary. It has increased economic and diplomatic pressure since Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen

took office in 2016, as she rejects the idea that the island is part of "one China". Chinese jets made a record 380 incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) last year as analysts warned tensions were at their highest since the mid-1990s. Beijing was infuriated by Taipei's dramatically warming relations with Washington under former president Donald Trump who used the island as leverage as he feuded with China on a host of issues. After the inauguration of US President Joe Biden last week—to which Taipei's de facto ambassador was invited—Beijing sent a fleet of jets and bombers into the ADIZ on both Saturday and Sunday. —AFP

News in brief

US exercises in South China Sea

WASHINGTON: A US aircraft carrier group sailed into the South China Sea on a so-called "freedom of navigation" exercise, the first routine operation in the region under new President Joe Biden. Led by the USS Theodore Roosevelt, the carrier strike group entered the area Saturday, the US Indo-Pacific Command said, the same day Taiwan reported multiple Chinese jets and bombers had flown into its air defense zone. "It's great to be in the South China Sea again, conducting routine operations, promoting freedom of the seas, and reassuring allies and partners," said Rear Admiral Doug Verissimo, commander of Carrier Strike Group Nine. —AFP

French hotel heiress kidnapping case

NICE: French prosecutors demanded long prison sentences yesterday for an Italian restaurant manager and a hard-up British ex-soldier who are accused of kidnapping an ageing hotel heiress in the city of Nice. The men have been on trial along with 11 other alleged accomplices since January 4 over the plot against Jacqueline Veyrac, the owner of the five-star Grand Hotel in Cannes and the ritzy seafront La Reserve restaurant in Nice. Chief prosecutor Annie Brunet-Fuster suggested a 30-year sentence for Italian restaurant owner Giuseppe Serena, who had long denied responsibility but appeared to make a confession in court. —AFP

Nine dead on Somalia-Kenya border

MOGADISHU: Fighting broke out early yesterday along Somalia's border with Kenya, leaving at least nine dead and several injured on both sides of the frontier, according to officials and witnesses. Somalia accused Kenyan troops—and Somali fighters it says were trained by its neighbor—of entering the border town of Bulohawo and attacking federal army bases there. Kenya has denied any role in the clashes. The incident is the latest linked to a political crisis in the semi-autonomous Jubaland region of Somalia which has strained diplomatic relations between the East African countries. —AFP

International

Biden seeking to reinforce 'Made in America' approach favored by Trump

President to reinstate COVID travel bans

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden signed an executive order yesterday giving priority to US companies and products in contracts with the federal government, pushing a "Made in America" approach favored by predecessor Donald Trump. The order, senior White House officials said, aims to boost national production and save industrial jobs by increasing investments in manufacturing industries and workers in order to "Build Back Better."

Less than a week after his inauguration, Biden is pushing his priorities through with executive orders, even though his Cabinet is not fully in place, with the roles such as Secretary of State still to be approved. The new executive order should reduce the possibility of skirting rules requiring federal authorities to prioritize buying US-made products. Biden wants to limit the way federal agencies stamp the products they buy as "Made in America" in order to eliminate legal loopholes used by companies that often manufacture in the US only a small portion of the products offered to the government.

Avoiding a trade war

Biden's decision echoes those of his predecessors, particularly Trump. Trump had issued an executive order urging the federal government to purchase more

US-made products and turning tariffs into a weapon against imports—with mixed results. But instead of a trade war, Biden favors tightening the "Buy American" rules and wants to utilize the federal government's buying power. "The dollars the federal government spends... are a powerful tool to support American workers and manufacturers. Contracting alone accounts for nearly \$600 billion in federal spending," an administration official said.

The Buy American Act of 1933, still in force, requires federal agencies to prioritize buying goods produced on US soil, but "these preferences have not always been implemented consistently or effectively," according to the Biden administration. Biden's approach seeks to change the structure of the process by changing the definition of what is considered a US-made product and reducing the possibilities for exemptions. The administration also wants new companies, including small ones, to have access to tenders.

Strengthening the supply chain

During his presidential campaign, Biden promised to strengthen the "Buy American" process with a \$400 billion plan for projects using US-made products—including steel, or protective equipment for healthcare



WASHINGTON: In this file photo US President Joe Biden speaks about the COVID-19 response before signing executive orders for economic relief to COVID-hit families and businesses in the State Dining Room of the White House in Washington. — AFP

workers battling COVID-19. After his electoral victory, Biden said the federal government would buy American cars and inventory. However, companies have already warned that overly restrictive rules could

cause costs to soar, making it harder to buy parts made outside the US.

President Joe Biden will re-impose a COVID-19 travel ban on most non-US citizens who have been in Britain, Brazil, Ireland and much of Europe, a White House official said Sunday, as the new administration ramps up its pandemic response. Biden will also extend the ban to travelers who have recently been to South Africa amid warnings that new, more transmissible coronavirus variants are already establishing themselves in the United States, the official said, confirming US media reports.

The new president last week tightened mask wearing rules and ordered quarantine for people flying into the United States, as he seeks to tackle the country's worsening coronavirus crisis. Biden has said that the COVID-19 death toll would likely rise from 420,000 to half a million next month—and that drastic action was needed. "We're in a national emergency. It's time we treated it like one," he said on Thursday. In his last days in office, Donald Trump announced that a COVID-19 ban on travelers arriving from much of Europe and Brazil would be lifted—but the Biden administration immediately said it would reverse the order due to come into effect on January 26. — AFP



VIENNA: A commuter wears an FFP2 protective facemask on a public transport underground train in Vienna yesterday, during the ongoing novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. — AFP

FFP2 masks become mandatory in Austrian shops, transport

VIENNA: Austrians yesterday swapped their cloth face coverings for medical-grade FFP2 masks, now mandatory for those over 14 on public transport, shops and businesses, pharmacies as well as hospitals or medical practices. Austria is among the first European countries to make FFP2 masks mandatory. The measure has largely been accepted without complaint, despite controversy over other measures such as the closing of schools while ski lifts remain open. "Because of the (more contagious) variants of the coronavirus, it is necessary to protect yourself better," said 24-year-old Vienna resident and graphic designer Hannah Zuegner.

"If everyone participates, I think it will change the situation, especially when the vaccines arrive," she said. Though often sold for more than 5 euros each just a few weeks ago, the masks, which block 94 percent of aerosols, can now be found at all grocery stores for 59 cents each. Elderly residents and low-income households received packs of free FFP2 masks last week.

The measure also applies to supermarkets and to service providers such as garage owners and health professionals, while teachers, warehouse workers and people in the public service must also comply at their workplace, unless a minimum distance of two meters can be ensured.

Pregnant women and people with medical conditions that make it harder for them to breathe are exempt. Following a second lockdown that ended in early December and allowed stores to open for Christmas shopping, daily infection rates quickly increased, leading the government to impose a third lockdown just a few weeks later, on December 26. Though it was meant to be lifted on January 25, this third lockdown failed to significantly contain new infections in the nation of 8.9 million, leading to an extension until February 8 and stricter regulations, including the mandatory FFP2 masks. Currently, around 130 new infections are registered per 100,000 residents each day—well above the maximum of 50 infections the government aims for.

Schools, museums, sports halls, cinemas and non-essential shops are currently closed and the government is urging Austrians to limit social contacts and to work from home wherever possible. Outdoor sports, however, are permitted, and photos of crowds queuing at lifts or huddling with drinks at ice skating rinks have sparked outrage. — AFP

Trump impeachment article to be sent to Senate

WASHINGTON: US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was set to send the Senate a single article of impeachment yesterday accusing Donald Trump of inciting the Capitol riot, formally triggering the first-ever impeachment trial of a former president. Pelosi, the top Democrat in Congress, vowed last week that the trial—already scheduled to open in the second week of February—should proceed, saying, "I don't think it will be long, but we must do it."

But Republican lawmakers signaled over the weekend that Democrats may struggle to secure Trump's conviction over the storming of US legislative buildings earlier this month, which left five people dead. Senior figures in Trump's party have pushed back with both political and constitutional arguments, raising doubts that Democrats—who control 50 seats in the 100-seat chamber—can secure the 17 Republican votes to reach the two-thirds majority needed to convict.

"I think the trial is stupid. I think it's counterproductive. We already have a flaming fire in this country and it's like taking a bunch of gasoline and pouring it on top," Marco Rubio, the top Republican on the Senate Intelligence Committee, told Fox News Sunday. He acknowledged that Trump—who had urged thousands of his supporters to flock to Washington and protest the congressional certification of Joe Biden's victory—"bears some responsibility for what happened." But to "stir it up again" could only hurt the country, said Rubio, a presidential candidate beaten by Trump in the 2016 primary. — AFP

Cyclone Eloise leaves hundreds homeless in Mozambique

MAPUTO, Mozambique: A tropical cyclone that hit central Mozambique this weekend has displaced thousands of people and caused severe flooding in an area battered by two deadly cyclones in 2019, response teams and aid agencies said. Cyclone Eloise made landfall in the early hours of Saturday, bringing high-speed winds followed by torrential rain over the port city of Beira, capital of Mozambique's Sofala province, and the adjacent Buzi district. Almost 7,000 people have been displaced and over 5,000 houses destroyed or damaged in the area, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said yesterday, citing preliminary government figures.

National emergency response teams on Sunday confirmed six fatalities and 12 serious injuries—numbers expected to rise as the scale of the damage is fully assessed in coming days. "So many places are flooded already and it's getting worse," said Unicef Mozambique spokesman Daniel Timme, speaking to AFP from Beira. "Rivers are collecting water and bringing it back to the Buzi River basin" south of Beira, he said. Timme said the cyclone had disproportionately affected the city's poorer neighborhoods, where homes made of tarpaulin and corrugated iron were swept up by winds. — AFP

UK govt under pressure over schools' closure

LONDON: The UK government faced growing pressure yesterday to detail a strategy to reopen schools in England, following a backlash from lawmakers about reports they could remain closed for months. A dozen MPs from Prime Minister Boris Johnson's ruling Conservatives have warned publicly that pupils risk becoming the pandemic's "forgotten victims" and demand schools fully reopen sooner. The group—which includes former Cabinet minister Esther McVey and Graham Brady, head of an influential committee of Conservative lawmakers—backed a parents' pressure group campaign on the issue.

"We need to get our children learning again - with clarity from @educationgovuk and an education route map out of the coronavirus," Conservative MP Rob Halfon, chairman of parliament's watchdog education committee, said on Twitter. "The engine of government should be directed towards opening our schools. We face an epidemic of educational poverty and mental health otherwise." However, Halfon's bid to force a government statement on the issue in parliament yesterday failed after House of Commons Speaker Lindsay Hoyle opted against selecting his urgent question on the issue.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson is widely expected to address the matter later this week, and confirm that students will not return to classrooms after the mid-February half-term break as ministers

had once hoped. Johnson closed schools to all but the children of key workers this month as COVID-19 infections surged across the country, largely due to the emergence of a more contagious virus variant in recent months.

Quarantine hotels

The dramatic spike in cases through December has led to unprecedented levels of hospitalizations and fatalities from coronavirus, with Britain now approaching 100,000 deaths during the pandemic. Although the number of new cases has begun to fall this month, Health Secretary Matt Hancock declined Sunday to guarantee schools would be back by Easter in early April, noting that infection rates would need to come down further. The UK government sets education policy in England. The sector is handled by the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, where schools have also been shut.

Meanwhile, the government is also being urged to beef up its borders policy amid fears other new virus strains could be imported. Ministers have for weeks been mulling whether to require all incoming travellers to isolate in hotels, and a decision is expected within days. Earlier this month, the UK scrapped its "travel corridors" from countries with lower caseloads following the emergence of new variants, and now asks arrivals to show negative Covid-19 tests and then self-isolate. But following calls for even stricter curbs, senior ministers are on Tuesday due to discuss requiring arriving travellers to pay to quarantine at a designated hotel to ensure they are following the self-isolation rules.

It comes as border rules were being tightened around the world. The United States yesterday set to reimpose a ban on most non-US citizens who have been in Britain, Brazil, Ireland and much of Europe from visiting, as well as adding South Africa to the list. — AFP



LONDON: Prime Minister Boris Johnson carries Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines for distribution during a visit to Barnet FC's ground at The Hive, north London, which is being used as a coronavirus vaccination center yesterday. — AFP

Mexican president says he has COVID

MEXICO CITY: Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador announced Sunday that he was infected with the coronavirus, but said his symptoms were mild. "I regret to inform you that I am infected with COVID-19. The symptoms are mild but I am already undergoing medical treatment," the 67-year-old said in a message on social media. "As always, I am optimistic. We will come through this together," he said. The leftwing populist is rarely seen wearing a mask in public, including at his daily news conferences, and has kept up most of his activities during the pandemic.

Lopez Obrador has continued his travels to different parts of the country and on Friday visited the northern state of San Luis Potosi. He was criticized for being slow to impose a lockdown at the start of the pandemic and for continuing to hold rallies and greet supporters with handshakes and hugs.

Lopez Obrador suffered a heart attack in 2013 and underwent angioplasty. He also suffers from hypertension—a risk factor for COVID-19. He joins other world leaders, including former US president Donald Trump, Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro and British prime minister Boris Johnson, who have caught the virus. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau tweeted that he wished his Mexican counterpart a "full and speedy recovery."

"We wish him a speedy recovery. I know that his people need him and that Latin America accompanies him in this difficult time we are going through,"

Argentine President Alberto Fernandez said on Twitter. Former Mexican presidents Felipe Calderon (2006-2012) and Enrique Pena Nieto (2012-2018) also took to Twitter to wish Lopez Obrador a successful recovery. Lopez Obrador said he would work from the presidential palace this week and delegated Interior Minister Olga Sanchez to represent him at his daily news conference. He also said he would take part in a telephone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday about the possibility of Mexico acquiring the Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine.

Maximum alert

Mexico has officially registered more than 1.75 million coronavirus cases and nearly 150,000 deaths—the world's fourth-highest toll after the United States, Brazil and India. Mexico City has been in a state of maximum alert since mid-December, with more than 90 percent of hospital beds full due to soaring infections. Non-essential activities have been suspended in the capital. Lopez Obrador came to power on December 1, 2018, promising to "transform" the country after sweeping aside the two political parties that had ruled for decades.

The former Mexico City mayor and self-styled anti-corruption crusader has faced calls to resign over his handling of the pandemic but still enjoys solid approval ratings. The Latin American nation began a mass immunization program on December 24 using the coronavirus vaccine developed by US drugs giant Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech. It has also authorized the shot developed by AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford. The first vaccinations were given to frontline health workers, and Lopez Obrador said that he would wait until March, when people over the age of 65 are scheduled to be immunized, to get the shot himself. — AFP

International

Greece, Turkey bow to EU pressure, open first direct talks since 2016

Istanbul talks unlikely to make major headway

ISTANBUL: Greece and Turkey bowed to EU and NATO pressure yesterday and opened the first direct talks in nearly five years over their explosive eastern Mediterranean standoff. The Istanbul meeting is not expected to make major headway after the two NATO neighbors' gunboats collided in August as their dispute over energy and borders threatened to spiral out of control. But it adds to the positive tone Turkish President Recep Erdogan has been setting as he tries to repair damaged relations with Europe in the face of a potentially more hostile US administration under President Joe Biden.

And it could lay the groundwork for the eventual delineation of one of the world's most recently discovered regions of proven natural gas reserves. Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias said over the weekend that Athens was entering the so-called exploratory talks "in good faith"—a comment echoed by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

Disputed agenda

Athens and Ankara held 60 rounds of talks between 2002 and 2016 but they broke off the negotiations without resolving a dispute that has lingered for much of the past century. Hostilities flared anew last year when Ankara sent a research ship accompanied by a navy flotilla into waters near the Turkish shore, which Greece claims with EU support. Turkey is furious that Greece is using its

vast web of islands to lay claim to huge swathes of the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. The two sides cite a range of decades-old treaties and international agreements to support their conflicting claims. NATO has set up a hotline to stave off a military conflict, while Germany has spearheaded efforts to solve the dispute through negotiations that do not further isolate the mercurial Erdogan.

These will not be easy as Athens and Ankara clashed over their agenda last week. Athens wants to limit the discussions-led by retired Greek diplomat Pavlos Apostolidis and Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Sedat Onal—to continental shelf borders and the size of exclusive economic zones. But Ankara also accuses Athens of illegally stationing troops on some of its islands and wants to discuss aerial zones—a separate dispute that saw a Greek pilot killed when his jet collided with a Turkish one in 2006. "It's not right to choose one (subject) and say, 'we're holding exploratory talks on this'," Cavusoglu said last week.

'Credible gestures'

The process could be helped along if it involved a third party such as the US or Germany, according to security and energy expert Michael Tanchum. "The likely outcome of such adjudication would invalidate the use of some small Greek islands near Turkey's mainland... while upholding the use of



ISTANBUL: Greek diplomat Pavlos Apostolidis, Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Sedat Onal, Turkish President's spokesman Ibrahim Kalin and their delegation meeting at Dolmabahce Palace as talks resumed over their Eastern Mediterranean dispute. — AFP

larger islands and more distant islands," Tanchum said. Dendias said on Saturday that the dispute could be submitted for arbitration in The Hague if the exploratory talks collapse. The Istanbul meeting comes during a sudden spurt in diplomatic contacts aimed at thawing an ever deeper chill in relations that have frozen EU accession talks Turkey

began in 2005. Cavusoglu was in Brussels for meetings with top EU officials last week and Ankara hopes for a return visit at the end of February or early March. But EU chief Ursula von der Leyen remarked in a pointed tweet after the meeting that as well as talks she expected "credible gestures on the ground". —AFP

India, China clash on Himalayan border again

NEW DELHI: Indian and Chinese troops fought a new brawl on their contested Himalayan border that left injuries on both sides, officials said yesterday, highlighting the fraught state of relations between the giant neighbors. The fighting on January 20 came six months after a pitched battle which left at least 20 Indian troops dead as well as an unknown number of Chinese casualties.

The world's two most populous nations have since become embroiled in a diplomatic showdown over their geographical and political differences. India's military played down the latest skirmish as a "minor face-off" at Naku La pass, which connects Sikkim state with Tibet on the Chinese side.

China's foreign ministry, however, said it had "no information" on the incident. In a statement, the

Indian army said last week's clash was "resolved by local commanders as per established protocols". Government sources said four Indian troops were injured when a Chinese patrol was forced back. They added that China's People's Liberation Army suffered an unknown number of casualties.

In Beijing, foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said Chinese troops "dedicated themselves to safeguarding the peace and tranquility" of the border region. "China urges India to work in the same direction," he said.

Firearms banned

Details of the latest clash emerged on the eve of India's Republic Day, when the country shows off its latest military hardware at a parade in the capital. Hand-to-hand fighting between 150 soldiers at Naku La in May also set off tensions. About 10 troops from each side were injured. The use of firearms by border patrols is banned under a bilateral agreement. In June, troops fought with fists and wooden clubs in the Galwan valley of Ladakh region, leaving dozens dead. China has never confirmed it suffered fatalities. —AFP



In this file photo a Chinese soldier gestures as he stands near an Indian soldier on the Chinese side of the ancient Nathu La border crossing between India and China. — AFP

Kim Jong-Cheol sacked for sexual harassment

SEOUL: The head of a left-wing South Korean political party that has championed gender equality was sacked yesterday for sexually harassing one of his own MPs, a prominent rights campaigner. Kim Jong-Cheol was chairman of the Justice Party, which with six representatives is the third-largest in the South Korean parliament, and was stripped of his position after admitting harassing Jang Hye-yeong, the party said in a statement. He is the latest male politician to be brought down by an abuse case in the socially conservative and traditionally patriarchal country, where victims have long faced pressure to remain silent.

Jang, 33, was elected last year and is among South Korea's youngest MPs. She is known for her human rights activism and drew up an anti-discrimination bill last year that would ban favoritism based on sex, race, age, sexual orientation, disability or religion, but has yet to be put to a vote. The inci-

dent happened following a dinner last month, and the party mounted an investigation after Jang reported it three days later. "This is blatant sexual harassment without a doubt," deputy leader Bae Bok-ju told reporters. "Kim, the perpetrator, has also acknowledged all allegations."

South Korea remains male-dominated despite its economic and technological advances, and sexual abuse victims often face stigma, discouraging them from coming forward. But the country has seen a widespread #MeToo movement in the last few years, sparked by a prosecutor who publicly accused a superior of groping her at a funeral. In a statement Jang said the incident gave her "an enormous sense of shock and suffering", involving "someone I deeply trusted as a political ally and with whom I campaigned together against sex crimes".

"I decided to make this public and hold him accountable because I believed doing so would restore my dignity and pave a path for me to return to normal life," she said, in comments lauded on social media. Kim admitted he "made physical contacts that the victim neither wanted nor consented to and committed clear sexual harassment". "This was an act that could not be excused and caused great harm to her," he said in a statement, offering



SEOUL: This picture shows Kim Jong-Cheol, chairman of South Korea's left-wing Justice Party, speaking during a press conference at the National Assembly in Seoul. — AFP

her his "deepest apology". The case comes after Seoul mayor Park Won-soon took his own life last year after he was accused of sexual harassment, the highest-profile politician disgraced by sexual misconduct in recent years. — AFP

New Zealand says new COVID case is South African variant

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's first case of coronavirus in the community for more than two months has been identified as the more contagious South African variant, prompting Australia to suspend quarantine-free travel from the neighboring country for at least 72 hours. A 56-year-old New Zealander, who recently returned from Europe, tested positive on Saturday to the infectious strain, 10 days after she completed her compulsory two weeks in isolation. New Zealand has been widely praised for its handling of the pandemic, with just 25 deaths from 1,927 confirmed virus cases in a population of five million.

The latest case is New Zealand's first in the community since mid-November and has been classified as a strain said to be more transmissible. "The strain of infection is the South African variant and the source of infection is highly likely to be a fellow returnee," said Health Minister Chris Hipkins. Australian Health Minister Greg Hunt said it was a case of "significant concern" and the increased possibility of transmission had prompted his government

to suspend its "travel bubble" with New Zealand for a minimum of 72 hours. "This will be done out of an abundance of caution whilst more is learnt about the event and the case," he told reporters in Canberra. "The changes come into effect immediately."

Hunt urged New Zealanders with a flight to Australia scheduled within the next three days to "reconsider their need to travel" as they will have to go into hotel quarantine-like other international arrivals—for up to 14 days on arrival. The woman is thought to have been infected during quarantine by a person on the same floor of the hotel who tested positive two days before the woman left. The 56-year-old travelled around the Northland region near Auckland after her release from quarantine and showed symptoms for several days before being tested.

Two people close to her, including her husband, have since returned negative tests and New Zealand's director-general of health Ashley Bloomfield said they likely avoided contracting the illness due to the type of infection. "She didn't talk about respiratory symptoms, it was more muscle aches, so she may not have been sharing or spreading the virus much," he said. "I don't think that's peculiar to this variant, it's just how it was expressed in this woman." The World Health Organization has said there is no clear evidence the South African variant leads to more severe disease or a higher death rate. —AFP

Singapore activists appeal gay sex ban court ruling

SINGAPORE: Three Singapore campaigners launched an appeal yesterday against a court's decision to uphold a law banning sex between men, the latest effort to overturn the colonial-era legislation. A holdover from British rule of the city-state, the law is rarely enforced but activists say it still jars with the affluent country's increasingly modern and vibrant culture. Others, however, argue that Singapore remains conservative at heart, and is not ready for change, while officials also believe most would not be in favor of repealing the legislation.

Last year, the High Court dismissed three challenges to the law, which it heard together, by a retired doctor, a DJ and an LGBT rights advocate. The trio challenged that decision yesterday at the Court of Appeal. M. Ravi, a lawyer representing retired doctor Roy Tan, said in a Facebook post he had argued the gay sex ban should be deemed "absurd". Tan said the appeal was based on the grounds that the judge hearing last year's case was wrong to reject arguments the legislation breached several articles of the constitution. These include the right to equality before the law, the right to life and personal liberty and the right to freedom of expression, he said in a statement. Challenges to the law have been rejected twice, first in 2014 and again last year. The failure to overturn it contrasts sharply with progress made elsewhere in the region on LGBT rights. —AFP

News in brief

Swedes go on trial for filming

STOCKHOLM: Two filmmakers went on trial in Sweden yesterday for violating the sanctity of the wreck of the Estonia ferry, which sank in the Baltic Sea in 1994 killing 852 people in one of the 20th century's worst maritime disasters. The team sent a remote-operated submersible to the ship while filming a documentary that revealed a massive hole in the ship's hull, helping to cast doubt on the findings of an official investigation into the sinking. After deciding not to salvage the wreck, Sweden, Estonia and Finland agreed in 1995 to designate it a final resting place and make it illegal to disturb the site. —AFP

EU mulls response to Navalny crackdown

BRUSSELS: EU foreign ministers met yesterday to debate their response to Russia's arrest of Alexei Navalny and crackdown on demonstrators, as pressure grows to impose sanctions on the Kremlin. The diplomats from the 27 nations are meeting in Brussels for a busy day of talks ranging from Europe's relations with new US President Joe Biden to efforts to salvage the Iran nuclear deal. But the arrest of Russian President Vladimir Putin's most prominent critic Navalny and detention of thousands of protesters will be one of the thorniest issues. —AFP

HK lifts first virus lockdown

HONG KONG: Hong Kong lifted its first neighborhood coronavirus lockdown yesterday morning after testing some 7,000 people and finding just a handful of cases as debate swirled over the efficacy of the move. Over the weekend police moved in to seal off a poor and densely populated neighborhood of about 150 apartment blocks where coronavirus clusters had sprung up in recent weeks. Officials went door to door conducting mandatory tests and found 0.17 percent of those tested had the virus. Some community and business leaders were critical of how the lockdown was carried out. —AFP

Greek former minister dies

ATHENS: A Greek former minister and freedom fighter who took part in several bomb attacks against the country's military dictatorship before escaping prison by swimming from Corfu to Albania has been found dead at sea. Former socialist minister Sifis Valirakis was discovered on Sunday off the Coast of Evia Island, according to Athens News Agency. The 77-year-old went missing on Sunday afternoon and the coastguard, alerted by his wife, found his inflatable boat near an islet with the engine on. His body was located later in the evening about a mile from the boat. Valirakis was a member of the Panhellenic Liberation Army, a militant group fighting Greece's US-backed military dictatorship that ruled the country from 1967-74. —AFP

Outrage over brutal beating

PARIS: A teenage boy whose vicious beating was filmed in a video that went viral over the weekend has awoken from his coma, his mother said yesterday, as officials vowed to find and punish the assailants. The attack against Yuriy, 15, in a busy and well-heeled neighborhood of the capital shocked residents, though police have noted violent disputes between rival bands of youths in the area. His mother Nataliya Kruchenyk said her son had left school with friends when he was accosted by around a dozen people, a scene captured by a surveillance camera. —AFP

Business

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2021

Xi warns Davos World Economic Forum against 'new Cold War'

Beijing urges global unity in the face of pandemic

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping warned global leaders at an all-virtual Davos forum yesterday against starting a "new Cold War", and urged global unity in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.

Having largely curbed the spread of the pandemic within its borders, Xi wants to position China as a key player in a new multilateral world order as the US remains crippled by the pandemic. "To build small cliques or start a new Cold War, to reject, threaten or intimidate others... will only push the world into division," said Xi in a likely veiled attack on US President Joe Biden's plans to revitalize global alliances to counter China's growing influence. In a swipe at moves targeting China launched by the previous US administration under President Donald Trump, Xi said confrontation "will always end up harming every nation's interests and sacrificing people's welfare".

The Chinese leader also reaffirmed Beijing's ambitious climate pledges to slash carbon emissions by 65 per cent by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060 — both significant commitments as

China emits a quarter of the world's greenhouse gases. "Meeting these targets will require tremendous hard work from China. But we believe that when the interests of the entire humanity are at stake, China must step forward, take action and get the job done," he said.

Xi also called for stronger global governance via multilateral organizations, the removal of barriers to international trade, investment and tech exchanges, as well as stronger representation on the world stage for developing countries. He stressed the importance of strengthening macroeconomic policies to combat the pandemic-induced global economic downturn.

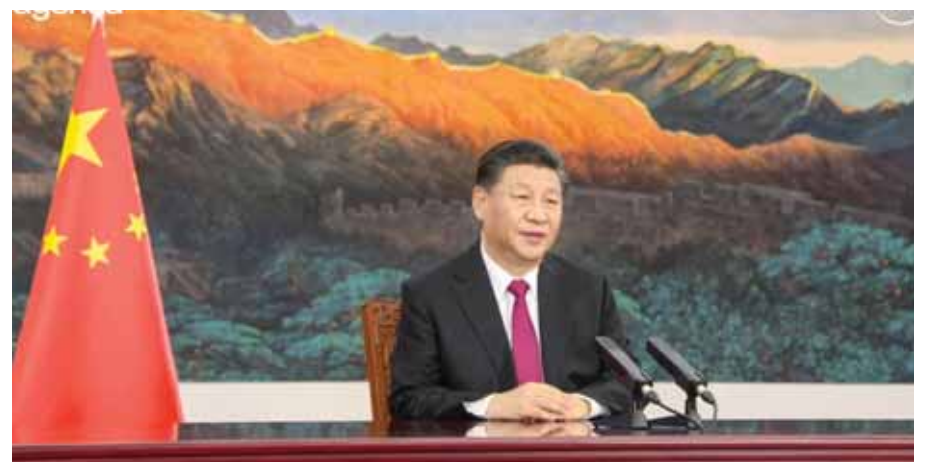
"We must build an open world economy, firmly safeguard the multilateral trade system, and refrain from making discriminatory and exclusive standards, rules and systems, as well as high walls that separate trade, investment, and technology," he said.

Economic growth
China saw its GDP increase 2.3 per cent last year, according to official data-

the lowest growth rate since 1976 — but it is nonetheless expected to be the only major economy to have expanded in the pandemic-ravaged year. Its economy is also forecast to grow by 7.9 per cent in 2021, according to the International Monetary Fund-trimmed down from initial predictions by a harsh geopolitical climate, global economic downturn and risks from a messy technological decoupling from the US.

It also overtook the US as the world's biggest recipient of foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2020, according to a UN report released Sunday. Bolstered by confidence in his country's management of the pandemic, Xi has made ambitious climate pledges and vowed to uphold multilateralism as US-China relations entered their worst phase in decades under the Trump administration.

But the Chinese government has been accused of mishandling the initial Covid-19 outbreak and covering up information, while a World Health Organization expert team is currently conducting a long-delayed probe into the origins of the virus. How Biden decides to handle the



DAVOS: This video grab taken yesterday from the website of the World Economic Forum shows China's President Xi Jinping speaking from Peking as he opens an all-virtual World Economic Forum, which usually takes place in Davos, Switzerland. — AFP

mounting tensions posed by China's rise will be one of the biggest strategic challenges he faces.

Under Trump, China and the US traded blows on a wide range of issues ranging from the virus to trade, media freedoms, human rights and technology competition.

Biden, busy handling several urgent domestic crises, did not participate at Davos and tasked US climate envoy John Kerry with representing Washington. Xi last addressed Davos in 2017, presenting himself as the champion of free trade on the eve of Trump's inauguration. — AFP

Debenhams shuts stores, costing 12,000 jobs

LONDON: UK department store chain Debenhams is to shut all its outlets, administrators for the collapsed group said yesterday, with the loss of around 12,000 jobs. Debenhams, which has long struggled with fierce online competition, will see its brand live on however after British online fashion group Boohoo bought the group's intellectual property assets.

Boohoo-rival ASOS meanwhile announced it was in exclusive discussions with the administrators of Arcadia about purchasing some of its brands, including Topshop. Arcadia and Debenhams collapsed last month-together risking the loss of 25,000 jobs-having struggled to transition from a bricks-and-mortar business long before the coronavirus pandemic forced shoppers online.

Arcadia owner Philip Green-once dubbed "the king of the high street"—saw his reputation severely hit by the high-profile collapse of UK retailer BHS in 2016. "The importance of the bricks-and-mortar traditionally associated with retail brands has now fully waned," noted Gordon Fletcher at the University of Salford Business School.

"This is not a new realization that has only been discovered during the pandemic.

"However, the current lockdown situation has forced us to cut the final ties between our favorite brands and the physical high street," Fletcher added. Debenhams' stores will reopen following the lifting of the UK lockdown solely to liquidate stock,



MANCHESTER: In this file photo, a pedestrian walks past "Store Closing" signs in the window display of a Debenhams store in Manchester, northern England. UK department store chain Debenhams is to shut all its outlets with the loss of around 12,000 jobs. — AFP

administrators FRP Advisory, brought in to salvage parts of the business, said in a statement yesterday. "Regrettably, all the UK stores will then be permanently closed," it added.

A source close to the company told AFP this meant that around 12,000 jobs would disappear. Debenhams, whose history dates back to the late eighteenth century, had hoped to sell some of its 124 stores, whose staff have been paid by the British government's furlough scheme during the pandemic. It is unclear whether British retail group Frasers, which has been in talks with the administrators, will

still snap up some Debenhams stores. Frasers is headed by Mike Ashley, owner of English Premier League football club Newcastle United and renowned for purchasing major retailers that have fallen from great heights.

Boohoo said its acquisition of Debenhams' assets, including customer data, will cost it £55 million (\$75 million, 62 million euros). It plans to relaunch Debenhams' online platform, as Boohoo looks to lead the fashion e-commerce market by entering new areas including beauty, sports and homeware. —AFP

US leading race in AI, China rising: Survey

WASHINGTON: The United States is leading rivals in development and use of artificial intelligence while China is rising quickly and European Union is lagging, a research report showed yesterday.

The study by the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation assessed AI using 30 separate metrics including human talent, research activity, commercial development and investment in hardware and software. The United States leads, with an overall score of 44.6 points on a 100-point scale, followed by China with 32 and the European Union with 23.3, the report based on 2020 data found. The researchers found the US leading in key areas such as investment in startups and research and development funding.

But China has made strides in several areas and last year had more of the world's 500 most powerful supercomputers than any other nation — 214, compared with 113 for the US and 91 for the EU. "The Chinese government has made AI a top priority and the results are showing," said Daniel Castro, direc-

tor of the think tank's Center for Data Innovation and lead author of the report. "The United States and European Union need to pay attention to what China is doing and respond, because nations that lead in the development and use of AI will shape its future and significantly improve their economic competitiveness, while those that fall behind risk losing competitiveness in key industries."

The EU lagged notably in venture capital and private equity funding, while faring better in terms of research papers published. The report found China published some 24,929 AI research papers in 2018, the latest year for which data was available, to 20,418 for the European Union and 16,233 for the United States. But it said that "average US research quality is still higher than that of China and the European Union."

The survey also concluded that the United States "is still the world leader in designing chips for AI systems." To remain competitive, the report said, Europe needs to boost research tax incentives, and expand public research institutes working on AI. For the United States to maintain its lead, it must boost support for AI research and deployment, and step up efforts to develop AI talent domestically while attracting top talent from around the world. —AFP

Saudi PIF boosts investments as joblessness soars

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund will invest \$40 billion annually in the domestic economy over the next five years, the crown prince said Sunday, as the kingdom battles high unemployment and a coronavirus-triggered slump. The Public Investment Fund "will invest at least 150 billion riyals (\$40 billion) annually in the domestic economy until 2025," Prince Mohammed bin Salman said in a speech carried by state media. The PIF, the main engine of the kingdom's efforts to diversify its oil-dependent economy, has previously been focused on investing in major global giants—from ride-hailing app Uber to US carmaker Lucid Motors.

The PIF intends to boost its assets to 4 trillion riyals (\$1.07 trillion) and directly or indirectly create 1.8 million jobs by 2025, the crown prince added. Prince Mohammed's speech coincided with a royal decree on Sunday which declared the sacking of central bank governor Ahmed Al-Kholifeh. Fahad al-Mubarak was named as his successor, in what will

be his second stint as the governor of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority (SAMA).

The announcements come as the petro-state battles high unemployment and a sharp economic downturn. Joblessness in Saudi Arabia touched 14.9 percent in the third quarter of 2020, dipping slightly from an all-time high of 15.4 percent in the second quarter, official data showed last week. "The impact of COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the Saudi labor market and the economy," Saudi Arabia's General Authority for Statistics said in a statement last week.

Last year, the twin shocks of the novel coronavirus pandemic and a drop in oil prices prompted the top crude exporter to triple its value-added tax and suspend a monthly allowance to civil servants to rein in a ballooning budget deficit. The highly unpopular austerity measures were implemented even as the kingdom continues to boost spending on a slew of megaprojects, including the planned \$500 billion NEOM megacity on the kingdom's Red Sea coast. —AFP

Foreign investment faces U-shaped recovery: UN

GENEVA: Global foreign direct investment flows are set to go through a U-shaped recovery, staying weak in 2021, the United Nations warned on Sunday.

FDI is likely to bottom out this year before picking up again in 2022, said the UN Conference on Trade and Development. "Global FDI flows will remain weak in 2021," UNCTAD said in its latest Investment Trends Monitor report, with the world still in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has eviscerated economies. The UN agency said FDI collapsed last year, falling by 42 percent to from \$1.5 trillion in 2019 to an estimated \$859 billion in 2020. UNCTAD predicts a further drop of five to 10 percent this year.

FDI finished 2020 more than 30 percent below the trough after the global financial crisis in 2009, and at a level last seen in the 1990s, the report said. "The decline of global FDI will bottom out in 2021, and a real recovery will start in 2022," James Zhan, UNCTAD's investment and enterprise director, told reporters in Geneva. "Overall, the global FDI is likely to follow a U-shaped recovery, unlike global trade and GDP (gross domestic product), which have been predicted to be a V-shaped recovery starting already 2021." The ongoing risks surrounding the coronavirus pandemic, the speed at which vaccination campaigns can be rolled out, and sluggishness in releasing economic aid will put the brakes on an FDI comeback this year, he explained. "Investors are likely to remain cautious in committing capital to new overseas productive assets," said the report.

Green-field outlook

Green-field project announcements—considered an indicator of future FDI trends—were 35 percent down in 2020, figures that "do not bode well for new investment in industrial sectors in 2021," said the report. Green-field investment typically refers to projects that create new physical facilities which are considered productive, in part because they normally create jobs.

The indicator is flashing red for developing countries. "For developing countries, the prospects for 2021 are a major concern," said Zhan. Although FDI flows in developing economies seemed relatively resilient in 2020, greenfield announcements in such countries plunged by 46 percent, while international project finance—typically financial arrangements from several partners for large infrastructure projects—dropped by seven percent.

International investment projects tend to have a long gestation period and react to crises with a delay, both on the downward slope and in the recovery. The biggest shocks on these indicators were felt in Africa in 2020, with a 63 percent drop in greenfield announcements, while international project finance in the continent fell by 40 percent. Greenfield announcements dropped by 51 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and by 38 percent in Asia. —AFP

Business

CBK governor launches 'Diraya' financial awareness campaign

Year-long campaign under the slogan 'Be aware'



Dr Mohammad Y Al-Hashel

KUWAIT: To enhance public financial awareness, and in line with its encouragement of the Kuwaiti banking sector to increase and expand its social responsibility, Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) Dr Mohammad Y Al-Hashel announced the launch of a year-long campaign under the slogan "Be aware", "Diraya" in Arabic yesterday.

In a statement, Dr. Al-Hashel noted that the awareness campaign is overseen by the CBK and managed by the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) with the participation of all Kuwaiti banks. He added, the campaign's activities are geared to increase financial awareness across a wider segment of society, and, more specifically, to increase public awareness of the banking sector's role and how customers can use banks' diverse services advantageously. Such campaigns, he stressed, are a great means to educate customers of their rights and protection dictated by the CBK through its instructions to the banking sector. As an example, Dr Al-Hashel mentioned customers' rights when

signing financing contracts at both conventional and Islamic banks, as well as the rights of people with disabilities to have each bank designate at least one branch in each governorate to accommodate their needs.

Other issues the campaign addresses include banks' role as financial intermediaries, the importance of saving, means to benefit from banks' products, and customers' rights when accessing either consumer or housing financing. The campaign also addresses specific services provided to people with disability, grievance redress mechanisms, types of bank cards, and means to avoid scams and fraud. Serious issues such as loan encashment and high-risk investments are also covered.

The Governor pointed out that campaign videos, press statements, and various other media will be published and disseminated across all communication channels, and most especially across digital platforms and through CBK, KBA, and banks' social networks' accounts, in addition to banks' branches and all other points of interaction with customers.

This comprehensive approach, the Governor underlined, aims to ensure that the message gets across and engages the public.

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 200 million for three months with rate of return at 1.125 percent.

PEOPLE holds first global industry panel discussion webinar

KUWAIT: PEOPLE organized its 1st Global Industry Panel discussion of 2021 featuring industry leaders from Kuwait and Pakistan. The theme of this webinar was 2021 Outlook and Socio-Economic Impact Post-COVID-19. The three industry experts, namely Financial Services, Oil & Gas, and Fashion/Media, shared their respective personal and business experiences during COVID-19 thus far, the key learnings, what will be the financial impact on commerce in 2021, how do we maintain and continue to foster innovation and what will be the fundamental shifts post-COVID-19.

PEOPLE (Pakistani Executives Organization for Promotion of Leadership and Entrepreneurship) is a global networking platform that focuses on bringing professional communities together, assist in developing young leaders in their respective fields, and encourage entrepreneurship. PEOPLE was founded in 2011 by Kashif Khan, a seasoned Investment banker and an entrepreneur, who is the Chairman of PEOPLE and has since focused on growing PEOPLE in order for the organization to achieve the goals for which it was founded.

The webinar was conducted on 23rd January 2021 with business and industry leaders, PEOPLE's extensive team of mentors and prospective mentees, and various other professionals from diversified sectors. Attendance of the participants spanned the globe from the Middle East, Asia, Europe and North America. The audience included active participations from the professional Kuwaiti community, where PEOPLE was successful in bringing various communities together on one platform.

The panel session was moderated by Salman Sayeed (Head of Buying & Merchandising at Alshaya Group HQ in Kuwait). Salman opened up the session by stating that after a challenging 2020, we must grow by reflecting on the hardships we went through and at the same time, we have messages of hope for 2021. He shared PEOPLE's vision and asked thought-provoking questions from the panel members thus making this a very interactive, informative and an engaging session.

The three esteemed panelists sharing their views during this webinar were: Mohammad Alqathany, Managing Director at Arcapita based in Kuwait, is a top financial services professional. He is currently on the board of several top companies in the Middle East with financial services and e-commerce sectors. He expressed his awareness and participation in PEOPLE's organization starting in UAE many years ago.

Professional community

He recognized the group's tremendous growth under its leadership of Kashif Khan. He appreciated the value of the organization's role and contribution of Pakistani professional community in Kuwait and all over GCC in supporting the local economy and being an integral part of the growth of the region. He shared his invaluable insights of the past year: small businesses being hit hard



especially the hospitality sector and at the same time the tremendous growth in e-commerce.

He highlighted the fact that Kuwait government has adapted very quickly to come up with portals to conduct many ministry processes online; we will see a different world after 2020, he said. Another very important learning Alqathany shared was the realization of the power of family and friends. Without the social interaction and support, even though through the use of technology, we wouldn't have survived this as well. He enhanced the importance of digitalization with the current paradigm shift.

Nadia Hussain is a top celebrity, a fashion designer, a dentist and also runs a health & beauty business in Pakistan. She is a successful entrepreneur with her own makeup line launched in 2019 and a genuine trailblazer in different industries and a great inspiration. Hussain shared her numerous challenges due to COVID-19 and the struggles she had to overcome during the difficult times. She mentioned the importance to adapt and accept the situations, learn from the experiences and from each other.

She emphasized that the experiences and the decisions were difficult and brought out empathy towards the people who were suffering during these hard times, to live within our means and to adapt.

Mohammed Meghani, a 40-year veteran in Oil & Gas Industry currently working in Kuwait for the 2nd time, brought forth the outlook in the Oil Industry highlighting that Oil Industry is here to stay, in spite of other energy sources contributing to the world's energy needs e.g., electric cars, wind and solar energy. He mentioned the year 2020 being the time of finding ourselves, while 2021 being the year of transition into the new norms and how we conduct ourselves as individuals and businesses. Individuals as well as companies who were agile, flexible and adapted were successful.

e-commerce presence

A huge number of people established their e-com-

merce presence. Whereas tens of thousands of small and large businesses went under and closed their doors, this pandemic sparked a wave of innovation and has launched a new generation of entrepreneurs. He shared a number of tips for companies to continue to foster innovation and a call to action for all of us to look at ourselves and make the changes to be a better version of ourselves.

The panel discussion went very well with audience engaged and asking questions to the three panelists. Loulwa Al-Tarkait, heading the external relations unit with the UN refugee agency, UNSCR in Kuwait asked about the CSR Contribution expected from the private sector this year. She shared that surprisingly in 2020, the private sector contribution was record high since the agency's opening in Kuwait in 1991. They were expecting the opposite.

Afrah Al-Arbash, another guest, AGM HR at Al-Ahli Bank in Kuwait asked about the lack of Research & Development in the region and if we see this pattern changing. Alqathany shared that there are positive changes by giving the example of Chinese vaccine being tested in UAE with talks of manufacturing in UAE now. Salman shared his hope that the COVID-19 pandemic catapults this region into the future and accelerate in research and development more aggressively.

Kashif Khan concluded the session by thanking the speakers. He mentioned that even though this forum is organized by the Pakistani diaspora, however the platform is for all the professional communities to come together and contribute to Kuwait's economy. He concluded that the takeaway from the experiences shared reveal the new world order; meaning how business was done in past and will be done in future by combining the social aspects and technology.

He committed that PEOPLE would continue to bring value added activities and webinars on a monthly basis on various topics of interests addressed by prominent leaders to the platform to help and benefit all of us, especially the youth.

Samsung chief will not appeal 2.5-year jail term

SEOUL: The de facto chief of South Korea's Samsung business empire will not appeal against his 2.5-year prison sentence for corruption, his lawyer said yesterday, in a move experts noted could pave the way for his early release on parole. Lee Jae-yong, vice-chairman of Samsung Electronics, the world's biggest smartphone and memory chip maker, was found guilty of bribery and embezzlement in connection with the scandal that brought down former president Park Geun-hye.

The Seoul Central District Court jailed him after a retrial last week, the latest step in a long-running legal process that has hung over Samsung for years. "Vice-chairman Lee will humbly accept the ruling and has decided not to appeal," his lawyer Lee In-jae said in a statement. Prosecutors—who had demanded nine years in jail—also said Monday they would not appeal. Yonhap news agency reported, essentially finalizing the verdict.



In this file photo taken on May 06, 2020 Vice-Chairman of Samsung Electronics Lee Jae-yong speaks during a news conference in Seoul on May 6, 2020. Lee will not appeal against his 2.5-year prison sentence for corruption, his lawyer said yesterday. — AFP

As such, with time already served Lee will be eligible for parole as soon as September. If Samsung had appealed, said Kim Dae-jong, a business professor at Sejong University, it ran the risk of Lee being given a longer sentence, and any parole application would have had to wait until after a Supreme Court ruling. "Samsung is aiming for a presidential pardon in time for Chuseok," he said, referring to Korea's autumn harvest festival. Samsung is by far the biggest of the family-controlled conglomerates, or chaebols, that dominate business in the world's 12th-largest economy. Its overall turnover is equivalent to a fifth of the national gross domestic product and it is crucial to South Korea's economic health.

Experts have warned a prolonged leadership vacuum could hamper its decision-making on future large-scale investments of the kind that have been key to its rise. Lee, 52, was first jailed for five years in 2017, after Park's ouster.

He walked free the following year when an appeals court dismissed most of his bribery convictions and gave him a suspended sentence, but the Supreme Court later ordered Lee to face a retrial. Given Lee has served around a year in prison he is due for release in July 2022, even without parole, a presidential pardon or a commutation. — AFP



European stocks slip after bright start to week

LONDON: European stock markets headed south yesterday after opening higher, as France was reportedly set for a fresh lockdown over the coronavirus pandemic. Asian markets had initially risen but later turned lower. The dollar traded mixed, while oil prices rose. "A somewhat drab start to European trade has highlighted the detrimental impact of the lockdown measures seen throughout the region, with traders casting aside the optimism seen throughout Asia overnight," noted Joshua Mahony, senior market ana-

lyst at IG trading group. "France looks set for a third lockdown, with the spread of the UK strain likely to bring further travel restrictions."

Border restrictions were meanwhile being tightened around the world Monday, after a weekend in which anger at social distancing rules bubbled over into fiery clashes in the Netherlands. The United States was set to join France, Israel and Sweden in pulling up the drawbridge to certain arrivals, with special concern about new strains of the pathogen that originated in Britain and South Africa.

Elsewhere, investors kept tabs on the progress of US President Joe Biden's economic rescue package. Lawmakers in Washington are getting to work on the \$1.9 trillion stimulus proposal from the new president, with some suggesting they could pass something before the Senate holds an impeachment trial of Donald Trump, which starts in the week beginning February 8.—AFP

US lab Merck halting work on COVID vaccines

NEW YORK: US pharmaceutical giant Merck announced yesterday it was halting work on two potential Covid-19 vaccines, but would continue to develop therapeutics to treat the deadly virus. The two vaccine candidates "were generally well tolerated, but the immune responses were inferior to those seen following natural infection" and compared with other Covid-19 vaccines, Merck said in a press release.

One of the candidates had been pursued in tandem with France's Pasteur Institute, which said it continues to research "two other vaccine candidates which use differ-

ent methodologies." The announcement is a setback for the global effort to contain Covid-19, which has accounted for nearly 100 million cases worldwide and more than 2.1 million fatalities.

There are currently seven vaccines circulating around the world. The vaccines developed by Pfizer-BioNTech (US-German) and Moderna (US) are dominant in North America, Europe, Israel and the Gulf. Britain's AstraZeneca-Oxford is used in much of the UK and India, with the latter also using a vaccine by Bharat Biotech. Russia's Sputnik V vaccine and two vaccines from China, Sinopharm and Sinovac, are being used across a dozen countries, but they have yet to be fully approved. Merck said it plans to continue work on two treatments for the virus. One of these therapeutics, MK-7110, "modulates the inflammatory response" to the virus; interim clinical results showed a more than 50 percent reduction in the risk of death or respiratory failure in patients with severe COVID-19, Merck said.—AFP

Business

KAICO - Al-Shaya & Al-Sagar and RE riders meet at Starbucks, Al-Bidaa

Adventure touring and city riding to get more exciting and engaging now



KUWAIT: Kuwait Automotive Imports Co (Al-Shaya & Al-Sagar) the official dealers of Royal Enfield in Kuwait organized a gathering for their Royal Enfield riders in the presence of the senior management in order to build transparent and comfortable customer relationship.

The event was organized at Starbucks, Al-Bidaa Branch which is a famous Pit Stop for the riders with the perfect ambience in Kuwait. The riders were offered refreshments on the house from the cafe as well while having intense conversations on their rides and the modes they had done to personalize them.

The motorcycles which were seen in the event include the Re TWINS (Continental GT 650 & the Interceptor 650), the Himalayan and the legendary Classic 500 & 350. KAICO had also brought in the Cafe Racer Continental GT 535cc to be available as a test drive during the event for the riders. These events are organized instead of having display bikes in locations which the brand promotes, with which Royal Enfield has redefined adventure touring in India and across the world.

Ashish Tandon, general manager, KAICO, who is a passionate biker himself added to the enthusiasm in the event by personally checking out the

modifications done by the riders and had also proposed the availability of the accessories to be available at the dealership to Muneer Mohammed (parts manager) who was present in the event as well. Mohammed Abou El-Aun, senior executive manager - After Sales, and Ahmed Zaki also engaged themselves in communicating with the riders, addressed their issues and challenges and welcomed them for a checkup of their motorcycles at the dealership.

Nader K Salmeh, senior executive manager - Vehicle Sales Group, also indicated the availability of the famous Royal Enfield Himalayan which retains the original versatility and vigor of the motorcycle, and makes the ride experience more engaging and lets the rider have fun when riding off-road as well as on road. The purpose-built motorcycle is an absolutely versatile and truly off-road capable motorcycle.

The Cafe Racer Continental GT 535cc which was the test drive star of the event is available at a special discounted price of just KD 1450. The fun motorcycle with exhilarating acceleration comes in three exciting colors comprising of British Green with Brown Leather Seats, GT Red & Mark Three Black.

The classic retro styled single-seater is a perfect ride to make your spare time fun time for a quick ride. Go get a test drive of the Cafe Racer which is available for a test drive as well at the dealership. This motorcycle exaggerates the feel of riding with the natural two stroke vibration and proves the tag line of 'Royal Enfield - Made like a Gun.'

The new Royal Enfield Himalayan will be available in three colors, including two dual tone colors, inspired from the varied terrains that our riders ride on during their journeys. The motorcycle comes with a three-year warranty and will be available across all Royal Enfield stores in India starting at KD 1,800. Inspired by the newly launched motorcycle, Royal Enfield will also bring in a new range of apparel. The collection also has a lifestyle apparel range, consisting of a light-weight jersey with armor pockets on shoulders and elbows and a curated range of T-shirts, sweatshirts and headgears. These will be available at Royal Enfield showroom.

The oldest motorcycle brand in continuous production, Royal Enfield made its first motorcycle in 1901. A division of Eicher Motors Limited, Royal Enfield has created the mid-sized motorcycle segment in India with its unique and



distinctive modern classic bikes. With its new manufacturing base in Chennai, India, Royal Enfield is able to grow its production rapidly against a surge in demand for its motorcycles. With more than 40 percent compounded annual growth rate over the last eight years, Royal Enfield is fast becoming a very important player in the global mid-size motorcycle market and is working towards re-inventing this space with motorcycles that are evocative and engaging and great fun to ride.

COVID condemns billions to poverty for a decade: Oxfam

PARIS: The COVID-19 crisis is aggravating inequality, with the richest quickly getting richer while it will likely take years for the world's poorest to recover, anti-poverty group Oxfam said yesterday. In a report entitled "The inequality virus", the group warned that the pandemic is the first time since records began that inequality is rising in virtually every country at the same time. "The 1,000 richest people on the planet recouped their COVID-19 losses within just nine months, but it could take more than a decade for the world's poorest to recover," said the Oxfam report.

Oxfam also highlighted the fact that the impact of the virus is also being felt unevenly, with ethnic minorities in certain countries dying at higher rates and women being overrepresented in the sectors of the economy that are hardest hit by the pandemic. —AFP

Huawei innovation competition ME



KUWAIT: Congratulations to Kuwait College of Science and Technology Team: Abdulrahman Serhan, Zainab Abolhassan and Yasmeen Burezq for

winning the Best User Experience Award in the Huawei ICT Competition Middle East 2020, supervised by Tareq Al-Zayyat. The Huawei ICT Innovation



competition is focused on Artificial intelligence and big data, and it was for Middle East countries. The objective of it is to create valuable and meaningful

products and solutions by using Huawei latest AI technology. The competition was held online between 9 countries, 12 teams from different regions."

Russia Nord Stream 2 pipe-laying ship begins work off Denmark

COPENHAGEN: The Russian ship tasked with completing the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline has begun work in waters off Denmark, the company said on Sunday.

The pipe-laying vessel "Fortuna", owned by the Russian company KVT-RUS, had earlier been located, by marine tracing apps, some 28 kilometers (18 miles) south of the Danish island of Bornholm.

Several Russian support vessels were also in the immediate vicinity, according to the Vesselfinder and MarineTraffic applications. "The laybarge Fortuna has started works in the construction corridor in the Danish EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone), ahead of the resumption of the Nord Stream 2 construction," the Nord Stream 2 company said in a statement.

"All works are performed in line with relevant permits," the company added. It is in this area, just outside Danish territorial waters but in the Scandinavian country's exclusive economic zone, that the "Danish" sector of the pipeline passes, according to plans released by Nord Stream, which is majority owned by Russian gas giant Gazprom. Nord Stream 2 is a 10-billion-euro (\$11-billion) pipeline that will run beneath the Baltic Sea and is set to double Russian natural-gas shipments to Germany, Europe's largest economy.

It has long been in the crosshairs of the United States, particularly by the former Trump administration which promoted US gas and openly criticized European countries for their reliance on energy from Russia. Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic states are also fiercely opposed to the pipeline, fearing it will increase Europe's reliance on Russian energy, which Moscow could then use to exert political pressure.

The European Parliament on Friday passed a non-binding resolution urging Brussels to block to completion of the 1,200 kilometer-long pipeline. Work on the massive project resumed



The Castoro 10 pipeline vessel lays concrete-coated pipe for the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline onto the seabed of the Baltic Sea on near Lubmin, Germany.

in German waters in December after being suspended for nearly a year because of the threat of US sanctions.

Danish authorities had authorized Nord Stream to carry out works in its waters from January 15.

But the company had spoken of a "preparatory" phase in the operation, amid uncertainties over US policy during the transition between Donald Trump and President Joe Biden, who took office this month. Last week, German officials said that the United States will place sanc-

tions on the "Fortuna".

Signed off by then president Trump in late 2019, the sanction measures threaten asset freezes and visa restrictions for companies involved in the construction. The pipeline is almost complete, with most of the remaining pipe-laying work to be done in the waters off Denmark.

Nord Stream 2 is in fact two parallel pipelines. According to Denmark's energy authority, 69.2 kilometers remains to be laid on one pipeline and 49.6 kilometers on the other. —AFP

Philips sees 'uncertainty' due to COVID

THE HAGUE: Dutch electronics giant Philips said yesterday it saw "uncertainty" this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, as net profit for 2020 rose 1.9 percent. The company, now focused on healthcare after decades as a key home appliances and lighting player, had sales of 19.5 billion euros (\$23.7 billion) in 2020, up 0.27 percent on 2019.

"Looking ahead, we continue to see uncertainty related to the impact of Covid-19 across the world," Philips chief executive Frans van Houten said in a statement. "For 2021, Philips plans to deliver low-single-digit comparable sales growth, driven by solid growth in diagnosis and treatment and personal health." Philips said net income in the fourth quarter of 2020 rose 9.17 percent year-on-year to 607 million euros. The firm signed deals with 25 hospitals in the United States, Europe and Asia in the final quarter and expanded remote "telehealth" services for consumers at home, it said.

Total 2020 net profit hit 1.19 billion euros compared to 1.17 billion euros in 2019.

Van Houten said Philips's performance was "resilient" because of a "stronger performance in the second half of the year, following a challenging first half due to the impact of Covid-19."

In December Philips said it was buying US remote cardiac monitoring firm BioTelemetry for \$2.8 billion (2.3 billion euros). Philips said in January 2020 that it would sell off its home appliance arm over the coming year-and-a-half to fully concentrate on health sector products. —AFP



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Lifestyle | Gossip



Beyoncé teases third Ivy Park x Adidas collection

Beyoncé has teased her third Ivy Park collection dubbed Ivy Park. The 39-year-old megastar has once again teamed up with sportswear brand Adidas on the latest Adidas x Ivy Park collection. This time, they've created pieces fit for the slopes, including footwear, accessories and apparel. As per Adidas, the collection was created with the aim of bringing out "creativity, individuality and imagination" in those who wear the pieces. The third drop boasts the updated Ivy Park Ultra Boost, Forum Lo, Forum Mid and Super Sleep

sneakers, plus the new Super Sleek Boot. The likes of rapper Gucci Mane, singer Kaash Paige, and models Hailey Bieber, Akesha Murray, Shi Gray and Kyla Coleman feature in the campaign alongside Beyoncé. Ivy Park follows October's Drip 2 collection and once again uses the "This is my Park" motto, but this time it's "Your Park Is Your Wonderland". The size-inclusive Adidas x Ivy Park line first launched in January 2020. Meanwhile, Beyoncé recently shared how she has used fashion as an "escape" during lockdown. The

'Formation' hitmaker - who has Blue Ivy, nine, and twins Rumi and Sir, three, with husband Jay-Z - enjoyed setting aside a day every week for herself and her kids to get dressed up and pose for pictures while quarantining at home amid the coronavirus pandemic, and the "tradition" they established was a big influence on the last Ivy Park collection. She said at the time: "During quarantine, fashion was a place of escape for me. My kids and I came up with Fashion Fridays. Every Friday, we would dress up in my clothes or make clothes

together and take each other's pictures. "It became a ritual for us and an opportunity to handle this crazy year together. "The newest Ivy Park collection was inspired by this new tradition. It consciously uses bright, bold colors to remind us to smile. I used a lot of neon yellow and coral mixed with baby blue and earth tones that felt soothing. "They brought me joy and made me smile in the midst of a tough time for all of us."

HARVEY CLAIMS
BEAU B. JORDAN
AS 'MINE'

Lori Harvey has declared Michael B. Jordan "mine". The 'Black Panther' star and the 24-year-old model made their romance Instagram official earlier this month, and the pair have since gushed over each other on the social media app. On Sunday, the 33-year-old actor posted some shirtless holiday snaps taken by his girlfriend, seemingly from their recent romantic getaway to St. Barts in the Caribbean. Michael captioned the post: "Spf 1000 pls Photo: @loriharvey (sic)" The blonde beauty then commented: "Mine", along with the tongue emoji. And Michael replied with the smiley face emoji with a tongue sticking out one side. The couple's flirtation comes after sources claimed the loved-up couple are both "committed and very happy" in their relationship. An insider said: "Michael B. Jordan's family loves Lori, and vice versa. Lori is everything Michael's family could have hoped for him to find. She's lovely, respectful and fits in perfectly. "Her friends also think

he's great for her. Everyone around them approves of their relationship. Things have gotten serious fast, but there have been no red flags. "They're both totally invested, committed and very happy." Michael and Lori first sparked romance rumors in November, before making their relationship public on January 10. And shortly before they started posting pictures of one another on social media, sources had explained they had been dating for four months, but had been friends for years before taking things a stage further. Another source had said at the time: "They have a lot of fun together and Michael has been ready for a serious relationship for a while." Meanwhile, Lori's father, Steve Harvey, recently joked he has "pure hatred" for Michael, as he insisted he's keeping his eye on the Hollywood hunk and won't be swayed by his People's Sexiest Man Alive title. He said: "I still got my eye on him. I mean I like him, but like I say to all of them, 'I might like you. I might approve of you, but I've got a thumb-sized section of my heart filled with nothing but pure hatred for you.' Just in case I need it. "[Michael is a] nice guy. But I got this little section where all I gotta do is a click a switch and I'd hate you're a". You're not the sexiest man in the world to me. Let's be clear about that."

Mendes takes time
away from social media
for her kids

Eva Mendes is taking time away from social media after one of her daughters accused her of being on her phone "too much". The 'Hitch' star has Esmeralda, six, and Amada, four, with her husband Ryan Gosling, and has said she has cut back on the time she spends glued to her phone because her children want her to be more "present" in their lives. Eva made the confession as she shared a post on her Instagram from a Twitter account called Latinx Parenting, which read: "Let your kids call you out. It's not disrespect. It's healthy. Kids can be so fiercely aligned with their value that they will take nothing less than the respect they deserve. They will take no BS. Not even from you. Congratulations, you are raising an empowered child. (sic)" And alongside the post, Eva wrote: "Thank you to @latinxparenting for this important reminder. "I haven't posted lately because my little one told me I was on the phone too much. I could tell she was taking it personally. And she's a

kid, of course she'd take it personally. They take things personally unless we go out of our way to make it clear to them it's not personal. So we had good talk, I apologized and I promised her I'd be mindful. I realized that just because I'm always home with them doesn't mean I'm always present. (sic)" Meanwhile, the 46-year-old actress recently hinted that she may return to acting soon, after taking a break to raise her daughters. She said in October: "I feel like, as far as my ambition, it didn't go away, it just shifted onto the children. I applaud and look up to those women who can do it all, but I'm not one of them. "And, thankfully, I have a choice not to work and I realize how fortunate I am that it's even a choice. I've been so happy to be able to incubate with my babies, but now they are four and six, I'm starting to feel like my ambition is coming back." — Bang Showbiz

Trey Songz has
been arrested

The 'Back Home' rapper - whose real name is Tremaine Aldon Neverson - was taken into custody after allegedly getting into an altercation with a police officer at the AFC Championship Game between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Buffalo Bills at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City, Missouri, on Sunday. Witnesses told TMZ that Trey was being heckled by other fans in the stands and asked them to be quiet. According to the onlookers, a cop then allegedly got physical with the 36-year-old star without provocation and insisted the supposed altercation saw Trey acting in self-defense. The website had video footage of the scuffle, in which a man said to be the rapper could be seen punching the police officer in the head and trying to get him in a headlock before being detained. In the clip, fans can be heard shouting and urging the cop to get off the 'Na Na' hitmaker until more officers arrived, and then urged for them to arrest their fellow cop instead. However, Trey was arrested and accused of trespassing, resisting arrest and assaulting a police officer. He is on a 24-hour hold in custody

Hathaway
'incredibly empowered'
by Twitter trolls

Anne Hathaway felt "incredibly empowered" by Twitter trolls. The 'Les Misérables' star has received hate from trolls on the social media platforms but whilst it would leave most feeling worse, Anne admits it has been a "good thing" for her. She said: "I really don't want to dredge up the past but I did have my monster out there, I did have the internet turn on me and hate me and it was like a whole big thing. And it was a really good thing for me personally. You can be incredibly empowered because of those things. So I guess what I'd say is when the bad thing happens, don't fear it - just go with it, flow with it." And the 38-year-old actress admits lockdown has been tough for her but she is grateful to have had her family - husband Adam and their kids, Jonathan, four, and Jack, 14 months - around. Speaking to The Sun on Sunday about her lockdown experience, she added: "Adam is great. If you're going to be quarantined with another adult, my husband is the one. In the early days of lockdown we were all so overwhelmed and there was a lot to process and I needed a release but I didn't want to scare my kids, so I



Geri Horner:

Clothes are like a Batman suit, they make you feel 'a little more brave'

Geri Horner says clothes are like Batman's Batsuit, they instantly make you feel "a little more brave". The Spice Girl took to the sewing machine to recreate the classic white Givenchy dress worn by Audrey Hepburn in 1964 for her latest episode of her YouTube series, 'Rainbow Woman'. During the 12th installment titled 'The Right Fit', Ginger Spice discussed the "power of clothes" and how she often made her own pieces in the girl group. On the late Hollywood icon being one of her "go-to" fashion muses, Geri said: "I've always loved the power of clothes. Real style never goes out of fashion. It's timeless I love Audrey Hepburn. She's my go-to. There's something about her that is effortless." The 48-year-old singer - whose most famous look as a Spice Girl is still to this day her Union Jack tea towel dress worn to the

1997 BRITs - also shared how when she first left the 'Viva Forever' group in 1998, she used clothes to boost her self-confidence. She said: "It's funny how clothes change the way people think you're going to be. "When I first left the Spice Girls, people were expecting to meet a six-foot tall drag queen. You know, like RuPaul. I actually deem clothes as almost your Batman suit. You put that on and suddenly you feel a little more brave." Geri explained that as someone who has been both "very thin and curvy", she wants to wear clothes that give you room to eat and also make you look "like a million dollars". She said: "Because I've been all shapes and sizes, I understand a woman's body. I've sometimes been very thin and curvy ... I like to make clothes that you can eat in but then also feel like a million dollars and a queen." Elsewhere, the 'Bag It

Up' hitmaker confessed that her sewing is "a bit wobbly", while she recalled the time her DIY tie-dye vest almost fell to pieces during their first TV appearance as a band. Geri added: "I've always made my own clothes. I've taken old outfits from the past and re-jigged it. I did that for the Spice Girls' 'Wannabe' video. That is a trapeze outfit on backwards. "The first time we were on television, I wore an outfit that I'd made myself. I wore this tie-dye kind of flared vest outfit. It was very stretchy and giving but my sewing is a bit wobbly, and I remember as I was performing it was coming apart."

Bieber reflects
on 2014 arrest
as 'Not my
finest hour'

Justin Bieber was "unhappy, angry, misled and misunderstood" during his 2014 arrest. The 'Yummy' hitmaker was arrested seven years ago for a DUI charge, and on Saturday he took to Instagram to reflect on his state of mind at the time, insisting he is "not proud" of the incident, but noting he was "hurting" and "confused" by things happening in his personal life. He wrote: "7 years ago today I was arrested, not my finest hour. Not proud of where I was at in my life. I was hurting, unhappy, confused, angry, misled, misunderstood and angry at god. I also wore too much leather for someone in Miami. (sic)" Justin, 26, went on to say his renewed sense of faith has helped him become a better person, as he also sent a sweet message to his fans. He added: "All this to say God has brought me a long way. From then til now I do realize something.. God was as close to me then as he is right now. My encouragement to you is to 'let your past be a reminder of how far god has brought you. Don't allow shame to ruin your "today" let the forgiveness of Jesus take over and watch your life blossom into all that God has designed you to be. LOVE YOU GUYS WITH MY WHOLE HEART (sic)" Justin has previously spoken about his wild years, as he said becoming a global star at the age of 13 negatively impacted his growth. He said in a lengthy 2019 social media post: "I went from a 13-year-old boy from a small town to being praised left and right by the world, with millions saying how much they loved me and how great I was. You hear these things enough as a young boy and you actually start believing it. "By 20, I made every bad decision you could have thought of and went from one of the most loved and adored people in the world to the most ridiculed, judged, and hated person in the world." The 'Love Yourself' singer also opened up on his struggles in an episode of his Facebook Watch series alongside his wife Hailey Bieber, in which he highlighted the importance of seeking professional help.

screamed into a pillow a lot." Meanwhile, Anne previously admitted motherhood is "more than just a challenge". Asked what her biggest challenge as a mother is, she said: "During the lockdown? Can I curse? The laundry! But, you know, I'm always hesitant to frame things in the realm of challenges because I think it sets a tone. As a mum, I've found tons of opportunities. There's obviously a learning curve - you just have to be kind to yourself with that because you do feel like you're doing everything wrong, especially in the early days. But it's more than a challenge."



Lifestyle | Features

BALI BOOTS RUSSIAN INFLUENCER FOR PARTY THAT BROKE VIRUS RULES

A Russian social media star with millions of followers has been kicked out of Bali for holding a party on the Indonesian holiday island that broke virus rules, authorities said yesterday. Sergey Kosenko's deportation comes days after Bali officials sent a gay American couple home after the women called the island "queer friendly" in tweets that went viral, and encouraged foreigners to come and stay there during

the pandemic. Kosenko, 33, was put on a plane bound for Moscow on Sunday and would be banned from returning for at least six months.

"We took administrative action against Sergey in the form of deportation," said Bali justice official Jamaruli Manihuruk. Kosenko, who has nearly five million followers on Instagram, made headlines in December after he posted a video of himself and a woman driving a motorbike

off a dock. Immigration officials moved against him after he posted another video of a party he held this month at a local hotel which breached health protocols banning large gatherings, authorities said. More than 50 people were in attendance despite the restrictions.

Kosenko also had misused his visitor visa by doing business while on the island, they added. Kosenko is from Smolensk, a city west of the Russian

capital, according to his social media, where he blasted his deportation as "outrageous". "If in Russia the law doesn't work as it should, here there is no law at all," Kosenko wrote. "There's no presumption of innocence — they just deport you." — AFP



In Gaza, **parkour** brings youngsters a taste of freedom

Palestinian youths practice parkour at sunset in Gaza City. — AFP photos



Mohamed Aliwa, a Palestinian youth whose leg was amputated near the knee in 2018 after he was hit by Israeli army fire during protests along the fortified border separating the Gaza Strip from Israel, shows off his parkour skills despite his disability and while on crutches.

Using crutches, Palestinian Mohamed Aliwa leaps from one concrete slab to another, determined that his missing leg won't stop him doing parkour, a sport that brings respite from grim reality in Gaza. The Palestinian teen's right leg was amputated near the knee in 2018 after he was hit by Israeli army fire during protests along the fortified border separating the Gaza Strip from Israel. Along with his lower leg, he lost his dream of being a professional parkour athlete, he told AFP. But watching his friends jumping from obstacle to obstacle, the 18-year-old, who now sometimes makes use of a prosthetic limb, decided that his disability shouldn't bring his moves to an end.

"I asked my friends to help me walk, and little by little I came to move and jump almost like them," he said, talking in a rehabilitation centre which he visits at least once a week. Parkour, an extreme sport also known as free-running, originated in France in the 1990s. It involves navigating urban obstacles using a fast-paced mix of jumping, vaulting, running and rolling. "Sometimes I feel frustrated," says Aliwa. "But I told myself that if I could do that (again), then everything else in my life would be easy." He says the sport gives him "incredible energy". In Gaza, young people have been practicing parkour for years; bounding from ruin to ruin in an enclave pockmarked by three wars between Israel and the armed Islamist movement Hamas, which has ruled Gaza since 2007.

'Resilience'

But even the easiest jump carries risks, and that is why Jihad Abu Sultan,

32, opened what he says is the "first parkour academy in the Palestinian territories", with the support of French sporting goods giant Decathlon. "I started doing parkour in 2005," he said at his club in Al-Shati refugee camp, near Gaza City. "At the time, we didn't have a dedicated space, we trained in ceme-



Palestinian youths train at the Wallrunners Parkour Academy's training facility.

teries and on the ruins of buildings destroyed by Israel". Abu Sultan says that the sport was practiced by individuals on an ad hoc basis until two months ago, when he came together with fellow enthusiasts to establish the club, which they call "Wallrunners".

It teaches the sport "in a safe way, far from the dangers of the street," he told AFP. It has a modest budget but already has some 70 members, includ-



A coach trains Palestinian children at the Wallrunners Parkour Academy's training facility.

ing seven girls, who can jump from one wooden block to another, perform somersaults and swing on parallel bars. On the ground are rubber mats, to soften falls. The Gaza Strip has been under Israeli blockade for more than a decade and unemployment is about 50 percent, rising to 65 percent among young people, according to the World Bank.

For some, Parkour shines a ray of light into what is a dreary existence. "For a generation of young Palestinians who have grown up in a flood of under-employment, it has become a method of self-expression, an escape, and a way of life," says the Wallrunners website in English. "Parkour is young, dynamic, and subversive. A sport that is perhaps custom fit for places like Gaza, and the energy, creativity and resilience of its youth."

The club is due to hold the first parkour competition in Gaza in February, if restrictions linked to the novel coronavirus pandemic allow it. Aliwa will not be able to compete, but will watch his fellow athletes. "I wish I had my leg back, to resume a normal life, to work out in the gym and do parkour" to the limits that he achieved previously, he said. — AFP



A Palestinian youth trains at the Wallrunners Parkour Academy's training facility.



Palestinian youths train at the Wallrunners Parkour Academy's training facility in Gaza City.



Palestinian youths practice parkour at sunset in Gaza City.

Sports

Leonard scores 34 as Clippers stretch NBA win streak to seven

Celtics' Brown scores 30 points in less than 20 minutes

LOS ANGELES: Kawhi Leonard scored a game-high 34 points as the Los Angeles Clippers extended their season-high NBA win streak to seven games with a 108-100 victory over the Oklahoma City Thunder on Sunday.

Leonard shot 14 of 24 from the floor and finished with nine rebounds and eight assists while Ivica Zubac came off the bench to score 10 points and grab 11 rebounds for the Clippers, who beat Oklahoma City for the second time in three days. Serge Ibaka tallied 17 points, Reggie Jackson finished with 14 and Paul George scored 11 for the Clippers, who matched the Los Angeles Lakers for the best record in the league at 13-4.

"On a night when we weren't making shots, it was a good, tough, grind-out win for us," Clippers coach Tyrone Lue said. "Kawhi had it going so we played through him a lot, especially in the second half. We had to ride him pretty hard so we could keep the lead."

George spent two seasons with the Thunder before being traded to the Clippers prior to the 2019-20 season. Nicolas Batum scored seven points in the win while Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 23 points, seven assists and six rebounds for the Thunder, who lost their third in a row after having last Sunday's game against Philadelphia postponed.

George Hill scored 22 points and Hamidou Diallo had 14 points for Oklahoma City. The Thunder cut the Clippers lead to six points, 102-96, with just under two minutes left on a basket by Gilgeous-Alexander. But Leonard helped clinch the victory by scoring on a dunk with 42 seconds remaining.

The Clippers grabbed a big lead early just like they did in Friday's win over the Thunder. Los Angeles compiled a 17 point lead in the opening

quarter before the Thunder reduced that to eight with just over four minutes left in the second. The Clippers regained control to take a 56-45 lead into the half.

Leonard, who scored 11 points in the third quarter, hit a jumper at the end of the third to give the Clippers a 85-73 lead. "He did a great job of just getting us the lead," Jackson said of Leonard. "They were loading up on Kawhi and Paul. They did a great job of attacking."

The Clippers won despite struggling from three-point range, hitting just 14 of 46. The Thunder were even worse, making just seven of 35 from beyond the arc. Los Angeles played without forward Marcus Morris, who sat out with an unspecified illness.

Elsewhere, Dejounte Murray had a triple double with 11 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists and Patty Mills scored a team high 21 as the San Antonio Spurs used a balanced and explosive offensive attack to breeze past the short-handed Washington Wizards 121-101. It was the first game in 13 days for the Covid-19 ravaged Wizards after a half dozen players tested positive and three had to miss time because of contact tracing.

Wizards return to court

Lonnie Walker scored 16 points, LaMarcus Aldridge tallied 15, Devin Vassell notched 14 points, and Rudy Gay and Keldon Johnson each had 13 as seven players reached double figure scoring for the Spurs, who halted a two game losing skid.

The Spurs led by as many as 11 points in the fourth quarter and then used a 15-1 run down the stretch to cruise to victory. Wizards top scorer Bradley Beal had 31 points and Jerome Robinson added 16, while Alex Len finished with 11 points.



LOS ANGELES: Kawhi Leonard #2 of the LA Clippers dunks the ball during the game against the Oklahoma City Thunder on Sunday at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Russell Westbrook, who missed the Wizards last two games with a quadriceps injury, was held to just nine points. Washington acquired Westbrook from Houston in an offseason deal that included John Wall being traded to the Rockets.

In Boston, Jaylen Brown delivered one of the fastest scoring bursts in NBA history, scoring 20 of his 33 points in the third quarter as the Boston

Celtics rolled over the Cleveland Cavaliers 141-103. Brown became the first player in NBA history to score more than 30 points in less than 20 minutes as the Celtics halted a three-game losing streak. Meanwhile, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 27 points to become the sixth player in franchise history to reach 11,000 points, leading the Milwaukee Bucks to a 129-115 win over the Atlanta Hawks. — AFP

Kuwait hosts Asian Shooting Championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: President of the Arab and Kuwait Shooting Federations, Secretary General of Asian Shooting Confederation (ASC) Engineer Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi said Kuwait Shooting Federation welcomes the ASC's request to organize the first Asian Shooting Championship online. He said the tournament will take place on Jan 29 and 30.

Otaibi said the Higher Organizing Committee is working hard to complete preparations for the tournament, which is going to be held online due to the coronavirus pandemic. He said that a large number of countries expressed interest in participating in the tournament, noting that there are 16 countries so far who confirmed their participation in the Olympic skeet, trap, air pistol and rifle for both genders.



Duaij Al-Otaibi



Obaid Al-Osaimi

Furthermore, Otaibi said that the ASC executive committee expressed its intention to hold such tournaments so that Asian shooters remain ready to participate in upcoming international tournaments most notably the Tokyo Olympics currently planned for August.

Otaibi said the Organizing Committee approved the international referees who will supervise competition in each country, along with a coordinator who will send the results as they take place, and to make sure participating shooters are registered and approved, and are participating from their own

country. Results will be sent to the organizing country as they will be calculated and winners will be announced, he explained.

Meanwhile, Secretary General of Arab and Kuwait Shooting Federations Obaid Al-Osaimi said that preparations are ongoing for the launch of the tournament which takes place under the patronage of President of the Asian Shooting Confederation Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah. Osaimi, who is the director of the tournament, lauded the major role of Sheikh Salman in helping Asian shooters to return to shooting after the halt of sports activities due to the coronavirus pandemic, through organizing championships in Asia using online technology.

Osaimi added that there are 400 shooters of both genders participating from 16 countries. "The Kuwait Shooting Federation is ready to organize the tournament's activities, and the higher organizing committee was formed for this purpose," he said. Osaimi said the tournament is an important platform for shooters to prepare for HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Grand Prix to be held at Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex on February 12-19, 2021.

stc partners with 'Extreme Sports' to support 'Friday Ride'

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its partnership with local bicycle supplier, 'Extreme Sports', to support a series of events organized for cyclist enthusiasts labeled 'Friday Ride' as part of its 2021 strategy to back various sporting initiatives.

stc's participation in the initiative, in collaboration with Extreme Sports, aims to ensure the safety of participating cyclists competing in a race across Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah Causeway. The objective of this collaboration is to maintain safety protocols and implement precautionary measures, all while raising awareness on the importance of physical health, increased endurance, and body awareness.

Through its role, stc provided a number of unique services to cyclists, as well as arranged activities at its dedicated wing at the event. Company representatives Ahmed Al-Nowaibet and Ahmed Al-Shayji from the Corporate Communications team at stc attended and managed the initiatives, while providing assistance and support to the cyclists at the venue.



Danah Al-Jasem

In this regard, stc indicated that upon its participation, it was keen to implement and ensure that the appropriate guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health regarding social distancing were met to the highest degree. A practice that stc enforces within its headquarters, across its branches, and at any external initiatives it participates in to avoid the spread of infection.

Commenting on the thrilling event, Danah Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "When it comes to physical health and body awareness, we find these attributes to be essential in sustaining a well-balanced lifestyle. By participating in these events, we aim to encourage the younger generation to develop a more active lifestyle, experience healthy competition, improve their teamwork skills, and challenge their mental and physical abilities to overcome obstacles. We believe such characteristics are important components of stc's corporate social responsibility strategy."

Jasem added, "On this occasion, I would like to express stc's gratitude and appreciation to the organizers and participants, especially Extreme



KUWAIT: Ahmed Al-Nowaibet in Friday Ride cycling event.

Sports, for the successful turnout. We promise to continue upholding our commitment to support and play a contributing role in similar engaging initiatives that encourage sustainable healthy living and physical activity. For stc strives to become a source of inspiration to the younger generation, encouraging them to adopt a healthier lifestyle that can pave the way for a brighter future ahead."

Jasem pointed out that this partnership is part of a series of initiatives stc has participated in since launching its new corporate brand early 2020, marking it a more distinctive moment for the company. She also emphasized that stc is looking forward to the upcoming events under the Friday Ride initiative as it aims to offer the cyclists unique services in each event as a source of motivation.

Women's football: Fatat plays Qadisiya in playoffs

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Fatat Football Club defeated Al-Arabi 7-2 in the conclusion of the second part of the Women's Indoor Football League (URC). With this win, the Fatat Club increased its point total to 23 on top of the standings, while Al-Arabi remained third with 13 points. Meanwhile, Kuwait defeated Salwa Al-Sabah Club 9-1, placing it in second place on goal difference. Salwa remains in fifth place with 3 points. Fatat, Arabi, Kuwait and Qadisiya qualified for the semifinals. The semifinals will start on Saturday in the playoffs format, and the winner of the best of three matches will qualify to the final. Fatat will play Qadisiya while Arabi will meet Kuwait in the playoffs.



KUWAIT: The Fatat Football Club vs Al-Arabi match in action.

Sibley, Buttler help England to sweep Sri Lanka Tests 2-0

GALLE: Dom Sibley and Jos Buttler anchored a run chase after a jittery start as England beat Sri Lanka by six wickets yesterday in the second Test to sweep the series 2-0. Sibley and Buttler put on an unbeaten 75-run stand as England, who were struggling at 89-4, got to their target of 164 in an extended final session on the fourth day in Galle.

The result gave England a second successive Test whitewash in Sri Lanka after winning all three matches in the island nation in 2018. England were given a deadline to finish in the day after spinners Jack Leach and Dom Bess skittled out Sri Lanka for 126 in their second innings.

Left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya claimed three wickets that gave Sri Lanka hope and helped him to his Test-best match figures of 10-200. Debutant spinner Ramesh Mendis got the key wicket of skipper Joe Root, who scored 11 after his 186 in England's first innings total of 344, to add to the scare given to the tourists.

Embuldeniya took Zak Crawley for 13 and then ended Jonny Bairstow's stay after a quickfire 29, putting England's nerves on edge, but Sibley calmly moved to his third Test half-century. Leach and Sibley took four wickets each to set up England's win.

The hosts started their second innings early in the day with a lead of 37 but it all came to an end in the afternoon session. Number 10 Embuldeniya top-scored with 40, after taking seven wickets with his left-arm spin to end England's first innings on 344.

He was the only batsman to score more than 20 as Sri Lanka collapsed from 29 for one in their second innings. Embuldeniya put up some resistance with a ninth-wicket stand of 48 with Suranga Lakmal, who made 11 not out, before Root took the final two wickets with his off-spin.

Leach's left-arm spin got Kusal Perera trapped lbw for 14, and off-spinner Bess sent back Oshada Fernando for three in the first session. First-innings centurion Angelo Mathews was then bowled by Bess for five and Chandimal fell to Leach, with James Anderson taking a superb running catch.

Earlier Dilruwan Perera trapped overnight batsman Leach lbw for one on just the 11th ball of the day after England resumed on 339 for nine in Galle. Leach took a single and number 11 Anderson hit a boundary off Embuldeniya, who returned career-best figures of 7-137 in just his ninth Test, to add five runs to the overnight score.

Anderson played a key part after his best bowling figures of 6-40 in Asia. The 38-year-old quick has 606 Test wickets in 157 matches. Riding on Root's 228, England won the opening Test of the resumed series, which started last March but was postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. England now head to India for a four-Test series starting February 5 in Chennai. The first two Tests will be played to empty stadiums. — AFP

Sports

Chelsea sack Lampard and are linked to Tuchel

Team lost five of last eight Premier League matches

LONDON: Chelsea sacked manager Frank Lampard yesterday after 18 months in charge, with former Paris Saint-Germain boss Thomas Tuchel reportedly set to replace him at Stamford Bridge. Sunday's 3-1 FA Cup fourth-round win against Championship side Luton was not enough to save Lampard, whose team have slumped to ninth place in the Premier League.

Chelsea said it had been a "very difficult decision" to part ways with the 42-year-old, who replaced Maurizio Sarri in July 2019. "We are grateful to Frank for what he has achieved in his time as head coach of the club," Chelsea said in a statement. "However, recent results and performances have not met the club's expectations, leaving the club mid-table without any clear path to sustained improvement."

The club's Russian owner Roman Abramovich said: "This was a very difficult decision for the club, not least because I have an excellent personal relationship with Frank and I have the utmost respect for him. He is a man of great integrity and has the highest of work ethics. However, under current circumstances we believe it is best to change managers."

Former PSG boss Tuchel, who was abruptly sacked by the French champions in December, is in line to take over, reports said. Chelsea are struggling in ninth place in the Premier League table, 11 points behind leaders Manchester United.

They have lost five of their past eight Premier League matches after a good start to the season.

Lampard signed a three-year deal in 2019 and despite a transfer ban, led them to the FA Cup final and a fourth-place finish in his first managerial campaign at Stamford Bridge.

But a huge outlay of around £220 million (\$300 million) on new players including Ben Chilwell and German attackers Kai Havertz and Timo Werner has failed to translate into improved results. Lampard's points-per-game average of 1.67 is the fourth-lowest of any permanent Chelsea manager in the Premier League.

Tuchel only became available a month ago when he left PSG, less than five months after taking them to the Champions League final, which they lost to Bayern Munich. The 47-year-old German won back-to-back league titles with PSG, but that was not enough to satisfy the club's Qatari owners, who replaced him with former Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino.

Prior to PSG, Tuchel impressed at Borussia Dortmund, having started his managerial career with Augsburg and then Mainz. Lampard is Chelsea's record goalscorer and won three Premier League titles during his glittering playing career at Stamford Bridge, as well as the Champions and Europa Leagues and other domestic honors.

His first managerial posting was at Championship club Derby. In his one season in charge, they reached the Championship play-off final, where they lost to Aston Villa. Lampard then became the 10th full-time manager appointed by Abramovich since the billionaire bought the club in 2003. "He is



LONDON: In this file photo taken on January 03, 2021 Chelsea's English head coach Frank Lampard reacts to their defeat on the pitch after the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Manchester City at Stamford Bridge in London. —AFP

an important icon of this great club and his status here remains undiminished," said Abramovich. "He

will always be warmly welcomed back at Stamford Bridge." —AFP

Suarez strikes again as Atletico march on with Valencia win

MADRID: Luis Suarez scored a brilliant team goal as Atletico Madrid came from behind to beat Valencia 3-1 on Sunday and move seven points clear at the top of La Liga. After Real Madrid thrashed Alaves on Saturday, Barca had earlier followed suit with a scrappy victory over Elche.

But Atletico were undeterred in the capital, as their considerable advantage was restored again, with a game in hand. "We don't get carried away or think too far ahead, we think about getting better," said Atletico coach Diego Simeone.

Suarez finished off a flowing move that had started almost on Atletico's goal-line before substitute Angel Correa capped another slick string of passes to end Valencia's resistance. The visitors had taken an early lead in stunning fashion, Uros Racic curling into the top corner from 35 yards but Joao Felix equalised and Atletico came back, in a way that has begun to feel expected.

Felix was replaced by Correa after an hour by Simeone after assisting Suarez and scoring a goal for himself that should send a message to his coach, who has handed the 21-year-old a spell on the bench in recent weeks. "It's not written that footballers have to play 90 minutes," said Simeone. "Joao scored a goal, made an assist, he came off and on came Correa, who scored a goal and was close to another. The competition is healthy."

Simeone knows the pressure will mount as the La Liga trophy comes more into view, yet his team are showing an assuredness now that is offering little encouragement for Barcelona and Real Madrid.

They had hope when Valencia took the lead on 11 minutes. Racic running onto Jose Gaya's pass and wrapping his left foot around the ball to send it bending into the top right-hand corner.

He celebrated by seeking out his under-pressure coach Javi Gracia, but the advantage was short-lived as Felix stabbed in on the volley at the back post after holding off his marker Thierry Correia from a corner. With the more attacking Renan Lodi and Yannick Carrasco playing left and right wing-back in the second half, Atletico opened up Valencia twice with two superb, sweeping moves.

The first started in their own right corner with Stefan Savic, the ball played across the back and into midfield where Mario Hermoso drove a searching pass forward to Felix on the left. He slipped in Suarez, who opened his body and finished from the angle. It was no fluke because the third goal was almost as good, some slick passing through midfield freeing Marcos Llorente down the right and he pulled back for Correa to sidefoot in.

Barca win without Messi

Barcelona won again without the suspended Lionel Messi as goals from Frenkie de Jong and Riqui Puig were enough to secure a scruffy 2-0 win over Elche. De Jong poked the ball over the line just before half-time at the Martinez Valero, which would have proved a suitably scrappy winner before Puig came off the bench to head in a second late on.

Despite an uninspiring performance, Ronald Koeman will be relieved to see Barca make it two consecutive victories without Messi and since their loss in the Spanish Super Cup final last weekend to Athletic Bilbao, after an extra-time Copa del Rey victory over Cornellà in midweek.

Messi is still serving his punishment for being sent off in Seville but the Argentinian will be available again for Wednesday's cup tie at Rayo



MADRID: Atletico Madrid's Uruguayan forward Luis Suarez (left) vies with Valencia's Spanish midfielder Carlos Soler during the Spanish league football match between Club Atletico de Madrid and Valencia CF at the Wanda Metropolitano stadium in Madrid on Sunday. —AFP

Vallecano. In his absence, De Jong stepped up, continuing his own resurgence in recent weeks with one of the simplest goals he will ever score and then an assist, following a more impressive run and cross for Puig.

"We are better this year. We've had to play all our games away and in La Liga we have won all of them so I think we have done well," said De Jong. "For me, playing better is not just about goals and assists but I'm happy of course to score and assist today." —AFP

Bayern seven points clear after thrashing Schalke

BERLIN: Bayern Munich opened up a seven-point lead at the top of the Bundesliga on Sunday with a 4-0 victory at bottom side Schalke 04 as Robert Lewandowski scored for the eighth straight league game. Bayern extended their advantage over second-placed RB Leipzig, who suffered a shock 3-2 defeat at second-from-bottom Mainz on Saturday.

As the only top-three team to win this weekend, European champions Bayern are firmly on course for a ninth consecutive Bundesliga title. Thomas Mueller claimed the first of his two goals with a header before Lewandowski netted from a tight angle midway through the second half for his 23rd goal in 17 league matches this season.

Bayern then scored twice in the final two minutes, with a second Mueller header before David Alaba smashed in a long-range shot in the 90th minute. "We have had a few big points this week — even when we don't overrun the opposition," Mueller told Sky. Bayern have taken a maximum nine points in the last week after a scrappy 1-0 win on Wednesday at Augsburg, who missed a late penalty, and a 2-1 home victory over Freiburg last Sunday. Midfielder Joshua Kimmich weighed in with three assists in Gelsenkirchen.

Goalkeeper Manuel Neuer kept his 197th Bundesliga clean sheet to break Oliver Kahn's league record. "I hope Schalke stay in the league and manage to turn the tide," said former Schalke player Neuer. Schalke remain rooted to the bottom and 10 points from guaranteed safety.

Flick not 'completely satisfied'

However, Bayern coach Hansi Flick saw room for improvement. "I wasn't completely satisfied. Sure,



GELSENKIRCHEN: Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski celebrates scoring the 0-2 goal during the German first division Bundesliga football match Schalke 04 v FC Bayern Munich in Gelsenkirchen, western Germany, on Sunday. —AFP

we scored four goals, but I also saw that we can do one or two things better in possession," said Flick. "We sometimes play with too much risk, sometimes too slowly. Nevertheless, I'm satisfied with the nine points we got in one week." Bayern routed the Royal Blues 8-0 in Munich when the teams last met in September, but the hosts put up more of a fight having changed their head coach three times in four months. Even with captain Sead Kolasinac and veteran striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar missing with leg injuries, they had chances as Suat Serdar and Mark Uth forced saves from Neuer.

Bayern broke the deadlock on 33 minutes when Kimmich was left with plenty of time to curl his cross straight into the path of Mueller. Lewandowski once again proved why he was voted

FIFA's best male player of 2020.

Kimmich lofted a pass over the Schalke defence, which Lewandowski controlled superbly, before beating two defenders and firing home from a tight angle nine minutes after the break. Schalke goalkeeper Ralf Faehrmann had kept the score respectable with a string of saves until the dam burst with two goals in the final minutes.

A Kimmich free-kick presented Mueller with a second headed goal in the 88th minute, before Alaba's speculative shot from distance evaded Faehrmann's grasp. Later, Hoffenheim jumped three places to 11th after their second straight win as Andrej Kramaric netted two penalties in a 3-0 home victory over Cologne, who remain in the bottom three. —AFP

Lyon crush Saint-Etienne, stay near top

PARIS: Marcelo and Tino Kadewere kept Lyon in touch with Ligue 1's pace-setters on Sunday after they scored twice in a 5-0 derby thumping of a Saint-Etienne side missing a host of players to the coronavirus.

Rudi Garcia's team stay two points behind leaders Paris Saint-Germain and Lille, who earlier won 1-0 at Rennes, after a comfortable victory at the Stade Geoffroy-Guichard thanks to two carbon copy headers from Brazilian Marcelo, another brace from Kadewere and a Denis Bouanga own goal.

The win put Lyon back on track after falling at home to Metz last weekend but came against a Saint-Etienne team missing seven players following a Covid-19 outbreak at the club which also led to president Roland Romeyer testing positive.

Ten-time French champions Saint-Etienne sit 16th after the defeat, only four points above the relegation zone after their miserable run of form was extended to just one win in their last 18 matches. "This might have been our most complete performance. We could have scored more but winning a derby 5-0 is not something that comes every day," said Garcia.

Kadewere put the away side in the lead in the 16th minute when a Memphis Depay corner fell to the Zimbabwean, who only had to tap home to open the scoring. Mattia De Sciglio almost doubled Lyon's lead when he smacked a long-range shot against the bar seven minutes later, but it didn't take too for the deserved second goal to arrive.

Leo Dubois whipped in a superb free-kick into the Saint-Etienne area in the 36th minute which allowed Marcelo to attack the ball aggressively and head in his first goal of the season. Marcelo repeated the trick just before the hour mark when he met another perfect Dubois cross to crash in the third, before Kadewere claimed his ninth of the campaign in the 68th minute after collecting a pass from Memphis Depay.

Lille level with PSG

Bouanga completed the home side's misery by nodding Depay's free-kick into his own net with eight minutes remaining. "It is difficult to accept, we're angry with ourselves for making it so easy for them," said Saint-Etienne coach Claude Puel. "Even with the situation we were in we believed but we were very quickly disillusioned because we were so sloppy both defensively and going forward."

Earlier, Jonathan David made sure that Lille stayed level on 45 points with PSG by scoring the only goal in their 1-0 win at Rennes. David pounced in the 16th minute when Yusuf Yazici's corner was palmed out to him by Rennes goalkeeper Romain Salin, the Canada forward lashing home. —AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Newcastle United v Leeds United	beIN Sports HD 1	21:00
Crystal Palace v West Ham United	beIN Sports HD 5	21:00
West Bromwich Albion v Manchester City	beIN Sports HD 1	23:15
Southampton v Arsenal	beIN Sports HD 5	23:15

Brady, Mahomes set up dream Super Bowl

Bucs, Chiefs advance for Feb 7 showdown in Tampa

LOS ANGELES: Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers made NFL history on Sunday to set up a dream home Super Bowl against Patrick Mahomes and the defending champion Kansas City Chiefs. Brady, the 43-year-old widely regarded as the greatest quarterback in the history of the sport, led the Buccaneers to a 31-26 upset of the top-seeded Green Bay Packers at Lambeau Field. It means the Buccaneers will become the first team in NFL history to play in a Super Bowl at their own arena, with the February 7 showpiece taking place at the Raymond James Stadium in Tampa.

Brady threw for three touchdowns and 280 yards as he punched his ticket to an incredible 10th Super Bowl appearance, 19 years after his playing in his first championship game with the New England Patriots in 2002. "It's been a long process for the whole team, and today was just a great team effort," Brady said afterwards.

The victory represented a stunning vindication of Brady's decision to leave the Patriots in March last year after a glittering two-decade career in New England that yielded six Super Bowl wins. "It's been a great journey thus far," Brady said. "We put the work in. I just made a decision. I've loved coming to work every day with this group of guys. I'm just so proud of this whole team."

Brady had helped the Bucs race into a 28-10 lead early in the second half after touchdowns from Mike Evans, Leonard Fournette, Scotty Miller and Cameron Brate as the Packers offense failed to fire.

'This one stings'

Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers — bidding to reach a second Super Bowl — then led a stirring second half fight-back with touchdowns from Robert Tonyan and Davante Adams that got the score to 28-23. But the Packers' challenge fizzled after they controversially opted to kick a field goal late in the fourth quarter instead of going for a potentially game-tying touchdown.

"This one definitely stings and is going to for a long time, especially the way it played out and the chances we had," a downcast Rodgers said. "The finality of it all, kind of hits you like a ton of bricks. It's a gutting feeling in your stomach."

Packers head coach Matt LaFleur later defended the decision to kick a field goal, saying he felt the Green Bay defense could win the ball back. "The way our defense was playing it felt like it was the right decision," LaFleur said. "It just didn't work out."

Chiefs romp

While the Buccaneers-Packers game went to the wire, there was no such drama in Kansas City, where the Chiefs out-classed the Buffalo Bills 38-24 to reach the Super Bowl for a second straight year.

"It was just trusting each other," Chiefs quarterback Mahomes said. "The thing about this team is that we trust each other, and every time we go on the field we give it everything we have. But the job's not finished — we're going to Tampa and we're going to try and run it back. We've just got to go to Tampa and be ourselves. I trust my guys over anybody."



GREEN BAY: Tom Brady #12 of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers looks to pass in the second quarter against the Green Bay Packers during the NFC Championship game at Lambeau Field on Sunday in Green Bay, Wisconsin. — AFP

The Bills started brightly with a field goal and a touchdown from Dawson Knox to take a 9-0 lead. But once the Chiefs' offense cranked into life, there was only going to be one winner, with Mahomes showing no ill-effects from the concussion that knocked him out of last week's divisional round win over Cleveland.

The Chiefs rattled off 21 unanswered points with touchdowns from Mecole Hardman, Darrel Williams and Clyde Edwards-Helaire to take a 21-12 lead at half-time. Mahomes produced a cheeky underarm flipped pass to tight end Travis Kelce in the third quarter to help make it 31-15.

Kelce then added his second touch-

down of the game midway through the fourth quarter to make it 38-15. The Bills rallied with a touchdown from Isaiah McKenzie to cut the Chiefs lead to 38-21 and then recovered an onside kick to raise hopes of an improbable comeback. The Bills challenge wilted though in an undisciplined finale as the Chiefs closed out a deserved victory. — AFP



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