



**5** Explosion outside Israeli embassy in New Delhi



**8** Taxes and food certificates: UK counting Brexit costs



**12** Canadian Luc Langevin makes virtual magic



**14** In Albania, first female boxer punches past the patriarchy



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

# Kuwait allows emergency use of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine

## EU also authorizes jab amid row with pharmaceutical giant

### Departure/arrival fees of KD 3/KD 2 from June 1

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** State Minister for Housing Affairs and State Minister for Services Affairs Abdullah Marafi issued a ministerial decision to charge an airport service fee of KD 3 on departure and KD 2 on arrival, which will be added to the airline ticket price of each passenger. The decision will be effective June 1, 2021.

According to Directorate General for Civil Aviation (DGCA) Spokesman Saad Al-Otaibi, the charges are based on an earlier decision. "These fees were approved a long time ago and are basically a reduction of the old KD 8 charges (KD 4 on departure and KD 4 on arrival). In fact, KD 5 is one of the lowest airport fees in the world. The decision will be effective from June 1 and applies on all passengers," Otaibi told Kuwait Times yesterday.

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti health ministry has authorized the emergency use of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine to protect people from the novel coronavirus. The authorization was issued after a detailed review of all relevant scientific data and reports and after conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the vaccine's safety, efficacy and quality, assistant undersecretary for drug and food control Dr Abdullah Al-Bader said in a press statement on Friday.

He added that a ministry technical committee also reviewed the results of the vaccine's clinical trials, particularly those related to the effectiveness and safety aspects of the vaccine. Bader emphasized that the ministry will closely monitor the vaccine's safety after using it and will take all necessary measures to ensure safety of people. The official also revealed that Kuwait will receive the first batch of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine within days to help accelerate its vaccination campaign.

The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, manufactured by the Serum Institute of India under a license from AstraZeneca, was approved for emergency use by the European Medicines Agency and Britain's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, Bader noted. He added the Serum Institute

of India is a vaccine manufacturer accredited by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen announced Friday that the AstraZeneca-Oxford University coronavirus vaccine has been authorized for the EU market, hours after the bloc's drug regulator recommended its approval. It is the third vaccine approved for use in the 27-nation EU, after rival shots produced by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna.

"I expect the company to deliver the 400 million doses as agreed," von der Leyen tweeted, as a row intensified between Brussels and AstraZeneca. "We will keep on doing all we can to secure vaccines for Europeans, our neighbors & partners worldwide." The British-Swedish company has admitted it will only be able to deliver a fraction of the doses promised to the EU in the short-term due to production problems.

That has come as a huge blow to Europe's already struggling rollout effort, while setting the EU on a collision course with former member Britain as they jostle for AstraZeneca's limited supplies. The approval of AstraZeneca's vaccine also comes in the middle of a controversy over the jab



This illustration photo shows COVID-19 vaccine vials and syringes with the logo of the University of Oxford and its partner, pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca. — AFP

within the EU itself.

Germany's vaccine commission said Thursday that the vaccine should not be used on over-65s due to insufficient evidence that it works. Even after the European Medicines Agency (EMA) recommended the AstraZeneca's shot be approved for all ages on Friday, the German panel maintained its stance. — Agencies

### News in brief

#### Iran hangs ethnic Baluch

**TEHRAN:** Iran hanged a man for murder, abduction and "terrorist" links yesterday, the judiciary's website said, despite international calls for the execution of the ethnic Baluch to be halted. Javid Dehghan Khalad was put to death early in the morning in the restive southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, Mizan Online reported. It comes a day after the United Nations had appealed to Iran not to go ahead with the execution of the 31-year-old. — AFP

#### Corpse hidden for 10 years

**TOKYO:** A Japanese woman who said she hid her mother's corpse in a freezer in her apartment for a decade told police she feared eviction if the death was discovered. Police said Yumi Yoshino, 48, was held "on suspicion of abandoning and hiding a female body" found Wednesday in a freezer in a Tokyo apartment. Yoshino said after finding her mother dead 10 years ago, she hid the body because she "didn't want to move out" of the home they shared. — AFP



#### Fake Stallone passport used as ad

**SOFIA:** A Bulgarian criminal gang used a fake passport in the name of the Hollywood actor Sylvester Stallone to advertise its counterfeiting services to potential clients, prosecutors said Friday. Four gang members were charged for counterfeiting-related crimes with two other men charged on other offences, prosecutors said in a statement. The passport in Stallone's name was found during a search of one of the gang-members' homes in the central city of Plovdiv. — AFP

## UAE to offer citizenship to select expats

**DUBAI:** The UAE announced yesterday it is opening a path to citizenship for select foreigners, in a rare move for the Gulf where the status and its welfare benefits are jealously guarded. Dubai ruler and United Arab Emirates (UAE) Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed Al-Maktoum said "investors, specialized talents and professionals including scientists, doctors, engineers, artists, authors and their families" would be eligible for naturalization under the new amendment.

"The UAE cabinet, local amiri courts and executive councils will nominate those eligible for the citizenship under clear criteria set for each category," Sheikh Mohammed said. "The law allows receivers of the UAE passport to keep their existing citizenship."

Continued on Page 2

## COVID infection may reduce fertility in men

**PARIS:** COVID-19 may damage sperm quality and reduce fertility in men, according to a new study based on experimental evidence. The viral disease - which has swept the globe, claiming nearly 2.2 million lives - can cause increased sperm cell death, inflammation and so-called oxidative stress, researchers reported Friday in the journal Reproduction. "These findings provide the first direct experimental evidence that the male reproductive system could be targeted and damaged by COVID-19," the authors concluded.

Experts commenting on the research, however, said the capacity of the virus to compromise fertility in men remains unproven. COVID-19 causes respiratory illness, especially in older people and those with underlying medical problems. The world has seen more than 100 million confirmed cases since the disease emerged in central China at the end of 2019. Transmitted through respiratory droplets, the disease attacks the lungs, kidneys, intestines and heart. It can also infect male reproductive organs,



DUBAI: People gather in front of the Jumeirah Beach Residence on Jan 20, 2021. — AFP



MADRID: Healthcare workers attend to a patient at the COVID-19 Intermediate Care Unit (IMCU) of the Enfermera Isabel Zendal new emergency hospital on Jan 27, 2021. — AFP

impairing sperm cell development and disrupting reproductive hormones, earlier studies have shown. The same receptors the virus uses to access lung tissue are also found in the testicles. But the effects of the virus on the ability of men to reproduce remained unclear.

Behzad Hajizadeh Maleki and Bakhtyar Tartibian from Justus-Liebig-University in Germany searched

Continued on Page 2

## Morocco ex-con YouTubers in the spotlight

**RABAT:** Moroccan former prisoners have moved out of their jail cells into the social media spotlight by sharing their thug life experiences on YouTube, making them minor celebrities. "You had to be a real ace to sell drugs in prison like I did," boasts Mohamed Moustadraf, 48, one of a host of ex-cons turned online storytellers. A former drug trafficker with tattooed arms, a ponytail, a tracksuit and a big gold watch, he has served a total of 23 years behind bars.

He is one of around 20 ex-con YouTubers now active in the North African country, many of them notching up millions of views. They regale their audiences with tales of vicious rivalries between inmates and vendettas against wardens or let off steam about mistreatment and overcrowding, in chastening warnings against the perils of a life of crime.

"In prison and outside, I was earning a lot of money," said Moustadraf, a father of three who also goes by the name of Slaoui. "But I lacked one thing: My freedom. Today, I try to take advantage of it and

Continued on Page 2

## Local

# Kuwait submits letter to UNSC on identifying bodies of 13 POWs

## OHCHR's cooperation reflects our int'l obligations: Kuwaiti diplomat

**NEW YORK:** Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi on Friday presented a letter to UN Security Council president on identifying bodies of 13 Kuwaiti and third country nationals who were detained during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990. The 13 bodies had been found in two burial sites in Iraq and were transferred to Kuwait for examination, according to the letter, registered as an official UNSC document.

Kuwait is still conducting examinations on several other bodies-which were received from Iraq-and will compare the results with the DNA database of its prisoners of war (POWs) and missing people, Ambassador Otaibi noted in the letter. He reaffirmed Kuwait's commitment to returning to Iraq all bodies whose DNA results do not match with any of the POWs. Otaibi also underlined that keenness on following up transparent and constructive steps in this regard.



Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi

He renewed Kuwait's invitation to Iraq to get first-hand experience about its efforts and measures to examine the bodies received from Iraq in August

2019.

The Kuwaiti envoy thanked the Iraqi, US, British and French governments, members of all relevant committees, the

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) for their efforts that contributed to identifying the fate of those missing persons and prisoners amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It also thanked UN Security Council members for support to this humanitarian file and keenness on following up the full implementation of the UNSC resolution 2107 to help identify the fate of the remaining 346 POWs and missing people.

### Training workshop

Separately, Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for Human Rights Affairs and Minister Plenipotentiary Talal Al-Mutairi said cooperation between Kuwait and the UN Human Rights Council (OHCHR) reflects keenness to keep pace with international recommendations. Mutairi made this statement after the conclusion of the virtual training workshop entitled "Interaction with International Human

Rights or members of the Permanent Committee for the Preparation of International Reports and Recommendations Related to Human Rights," which was held recently. This program is intended for members of the permanent national committee to prepare reports and follow up on international recommendations related to human rights headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he added.

The training program comes as a result of an agreement with the OHCHR in Geneva to hold annual capacity building activities for the benefit of government agencies in Kuwait, he noted. He pointed out that the Permanent National Committee to prepare reports and follow up on international recommendations related to human rights and with full support of Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Khaled Al-Jarallah. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Interior and Chairman of the Board of the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah visited PACI headquarters recently to oversee the process of works and services presented there. — KUNA photos

## UAE to offer citizenship to...

Continued from Page 1

The UAE government said the amendment to the citizenship law "aims at appreciating the talents and competencies present in the UAE and attracting more bright minds to the Emirati community".

Citizens make up a small minority of the population of the UAE, which has a huge migrant labor force, largely from south Asia, some of whom are second or third generation residents. The UAE also has a growing community of wealthy expats attracted by the low tax regime and the luxury megapro-

jects and tourist attractions of the larger emirates.

The wealthy oil states of the Gulf have long guaranteed their citizens a high standard of living through reserved jobs and a cradle to grave welfare system. To protect it, they have seldom allowed naturalizations. It was unclear if new passport holders would benefit from the public welfare system. The UAE spends billions of dollars each year on free education, healthcare, housing loans and grants for its estimated 1.4 million citizens.

Foreigners in the UAE usually have renewable visas valid for only a few years tied to employment. The government in recent has made its visa policy more flexible, offering longer residencies for certain types of investors, students and professionals. Last year, the government extended its "golden" visa system - which grants 10-year residency in the Gulf state - to certain professionals, specialized degree-holders and others. — Agencies

## COVID infection may reduce...

Continued from Page 1

for biological markers that might indicate a negative impact on fertility. Analysis done at 10-day intervals for 60 days in 84 men with COVID-19 was compared to data for 105 healthy men. In the COVID-19 patients, sperm cells showed a significant increase in markers of inflammation and oxidative stress, a chemical imbalance that can damage DNA and proteins in the body.

"These effects on sperm cells are associated with lower sperm quality and reduced fertility potential," said Maleki in a statement. "Although these effects tended to improve over time, they remained significantly and abnormally higher in the COVID-19 patients." The more severe the disease, the bigger the changes, he added. The male reproductive system "should be considered a vulnerable route of

COVID-19 infection and declared a high-risk organ by the World Health Organization," Maleki said.

Experts not involved in the study welcomed the research, but cautioned that more was needed before drawing hard and fast conclusions. "Men should not be unduly alarmed," noted Alison Campbell, director of embryology of the CARE Fertility Group in Britain. "There is currently no definitive evidence of long-lasting damage caused by COVID-19, to sperm or male reproductive potential," she told the London-based Science Media Centre.

The results could have been skewed, she added, by the fact that men recovering from COVID were treated with corticosteroids and antiviral therapies, while the control group was not. Allan Pacey, a specialist in male reproductive medicine at the University of Sheffield, raised a "strong note of caution" on how the data was interpreted.

Some of the indicators of decreased sperm quality could be due to factors besides COVID-19, he said, noting that more men in the COVID-19 group were overweight. The simple fact that only one group was very sick - no matter the cause - also needed to be taken into account, he added. — AFP

## Morocco ex-con YouTubers in...

Continued from Page 1

share my experience with others, especially young people." Like the other jailbird influencers, he insists his aim is not to glorify his criminal record. Slaoui says he was encouraged to go on YouTube by a group of rapper friends, including the musician Gnawi who was sentenced to a year in jail for insulting a policeman live on Instagram.

Another former prisoner, Ilyas Korrari, who is also a hit on YouTube, said opening up to his thousands of subscribers is "like therapy", and a form of catharsis for his past. "Before people would avoid me, look at me funny, or worse, they were afraid of me," he said. "I had so much hatred and vengeance in me because society is ruthless with people who make mistakes, but the camera has cured me," said Korrari, also a former drug dealer, sporting a tight T-shirt, slicked-back hair and a neatly trimmed beard.

Korrari, who has spent 17 of his 38 years in jail, said he decided to "radically change" his life on his last release in 2018. He has since posted videos of his time behind bars, and his YouTube channel today has more than 240,000 subscribers and has attracted over 21 million views. Last year, he set up a small audiovisual production company in Kenitra, north of the capital Rabat, although he insists the earnings from his success have been "modest".

The jail-themed channels have built a minor cult following. "I was first interested in these ex-convicts because they have created a buzz, their videos get millions of views, it's very compelling!" said one fan, a Casablanca man in his 30s. "They tell their stories and denounce injustices in the prison environment. The one thing that disturbs me is this heroic posture, or even the trivialisation of crime, that some of them adopt."

Moustadraf said he started up his channel in 2019 to "change the way people look" at ex-cons. "Just because we've been in prison doesn't mean we have



Moroccan YouTuber and former prisoner Mohamed Moustadraf is a former drug trafficker who accumulated a total of 23 years behind bars. — AFP

no faith or law." He said he "turned the page on illegality" in 2016, and that his appearances since have scored 13 million views.

Moustadraf often speaks of overcrowding in prisons and corrupt guards and raises the alarm on rights violations and "suspicious" deaths in custody. To survive, he said, waving his heavily inked arms, "you have to climb up the ranks, be patient, endure torture and injustice". A prison authority spokeswoman contacted by AFP warned against "those YouTube channels... (and) the lies they tell". She stressed that all complaints from prisoners' families are examined "with great attention".

But former inmates' accounts tally with official reports of overcrowding and frequent ill-treatment in Moroccan jails. With a nationwide prison population of more than 86,000 in 2019, occupancy exceeds 250 percent of official capacity in some detention centers, says the non-governmental watchdog Observatory of Prisons.

Mohamed Bentazout, a murder convict released in 2020 after 20 years in jail, said "the accounts of former detainees fill the void left by official media". The 57-year-old former boxer still insists he is innocent and working to have his case reviewed, using YouTube clips to reach a "large audience in Morocco and around the world". To denounce the "glaring injustice" he says he suffered, he now lives in a tiny cell he has built on the terrace of his family home. — AFP

Local

# Kuwait lists 514 new COVID cases, one death

## 658 cases, no deaths on Friday; total recoveries 157,404

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait yesterday reported 514 COVID-19 positive cases from 8,336 swab tests, compared to 658 from 11,338 tests on Friday, whereas one coronavirus-related death was reported in the past two days, Ministry of Health figures have shown. As such, total cases have climbed to 164,622 while deaths reached 959 as of yesterday. Meanwhile, the total number of recoveries reached 157,404 as the ministry reported 501 new recoveries yesterday and 516 on Friday. The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood yesterday at 6,259, down from 6,247 a day before, with 52 of them in intensive care units compared to 49 on Friday, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad. The total number of swab tests conducted in Kuwait reached 1,520,587. Dr Sanad urged the public to abide by health precautions, mainly social distancing to help limit the spread of the virus.

Committee to study health resolutions of the 41st summit of the GCC Supreme Council. The minister lauded the GCC Secretariat's efforts led by Secretary General Nayef Al-Hajraf to prove the meeting successful, the Ministry of Health said in a press statement. Sheikh Basel expressed his full

efforts by health workers, military, security and civil defense personnel and volunteers to combat the novel coronavirus.

The conferees mulled resolutions of the Supreme Council, the Al-Ula statement and the final communique of the recently-held Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad and Sultan Qaboos's GCC Summit, it noted. They also discussed the framework of the GCC public health emergency, preparedness and response plan. They considered boosting mutual coordination and emergency early warning systems, according to the statement.

Following the meeting, the ministers stressed the importance of unifying and coordinating stances regarding international and regional health cooperation. The meeting touched upon mechanism of implementing the Supreme Council's resolutions, a news conference said after the meeting. The resolutions issued on health field included approving the GCC public health plan to respond to emergencies, the emergency early warning system and the establishment of the Gulf center for disease prevention and control, it pointed out. — KUNA

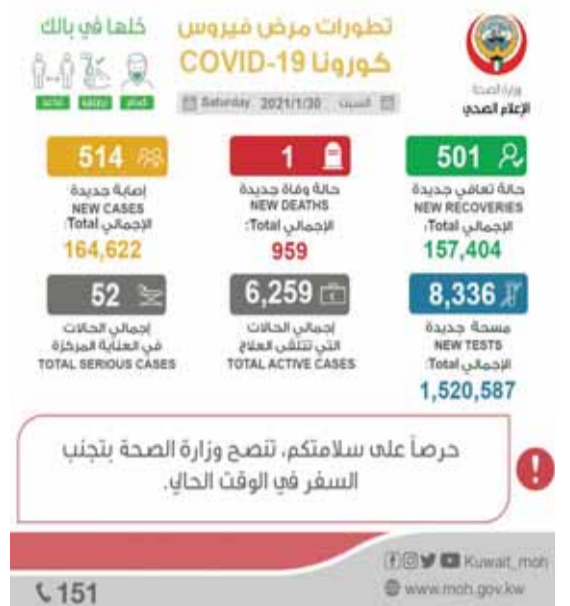


### Minister participates in GCC meeting

contentment about coordination and cooperation among health sectors of the GCC states, particularly in sharing the best-practiced policies and programs. He also extolled sincere and distinguished

#### GCC cooperation

In other news, Kuwait's Minister of Health Dr Sheikh Basel Al-Sabah took part in an extraordinary virtual meeting of the GCC Health Ministers'



**KUWAIT:** Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah visited a number of military units in a recent tour, in which he was accompanied by Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Lt Gen Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah, Deputy Chief of Staff Lt Gen Fahad Al-Nasser and top military brass. — KUNA

**News in brief**

**Man stabbed in fight**  
**KUWAIT:** A Kuwaiti young man sustained a stab wound during a fight with two others in a Sharq cafe yesterday. The other two also sustained wounds on various parts of their bodies. Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported. The three were taken to hospital for treatment, and a case was filed at the area's police station for investigations.


**Environmental violations**  
**KUWAIT:** The Environment Public Authority detected a number of environmental violations during a crackdown at the Sabah Al-Ahmad Sea City on Friday. The violations include dumping sewage water into the gulf, setting up piers without licenses and throwing garbage in non-designated areas, EPA said.





**Oil exports to Japan down**  
**TOKYO:** Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan in December fell 16.5 percent from a year earlier to 5.92 million barrels, or 191,000 barrels per day (bpd), for the ninth consecutive monthly drop, government data showed Friday. As Japan's fourth-biggest oil provider, Kuwait supplied 7.3 percent of the Asian nation's total crude imports, the Japanese Natural Resources and Energy Agency said in a preliminary report. For the whole of 2020, Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan stood at 227,000 bpd, down 10.0 percent from the previous year, and took up 9.2 percent of total Japanese crude imports.

**Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.**

**Kuwait Times**  
 Established 1961  
 The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf



KuwaitTimes     94488888

## Local

**Kuwait Times**  
Established 1961  
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT  
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF  
ESTABLISHED 1961

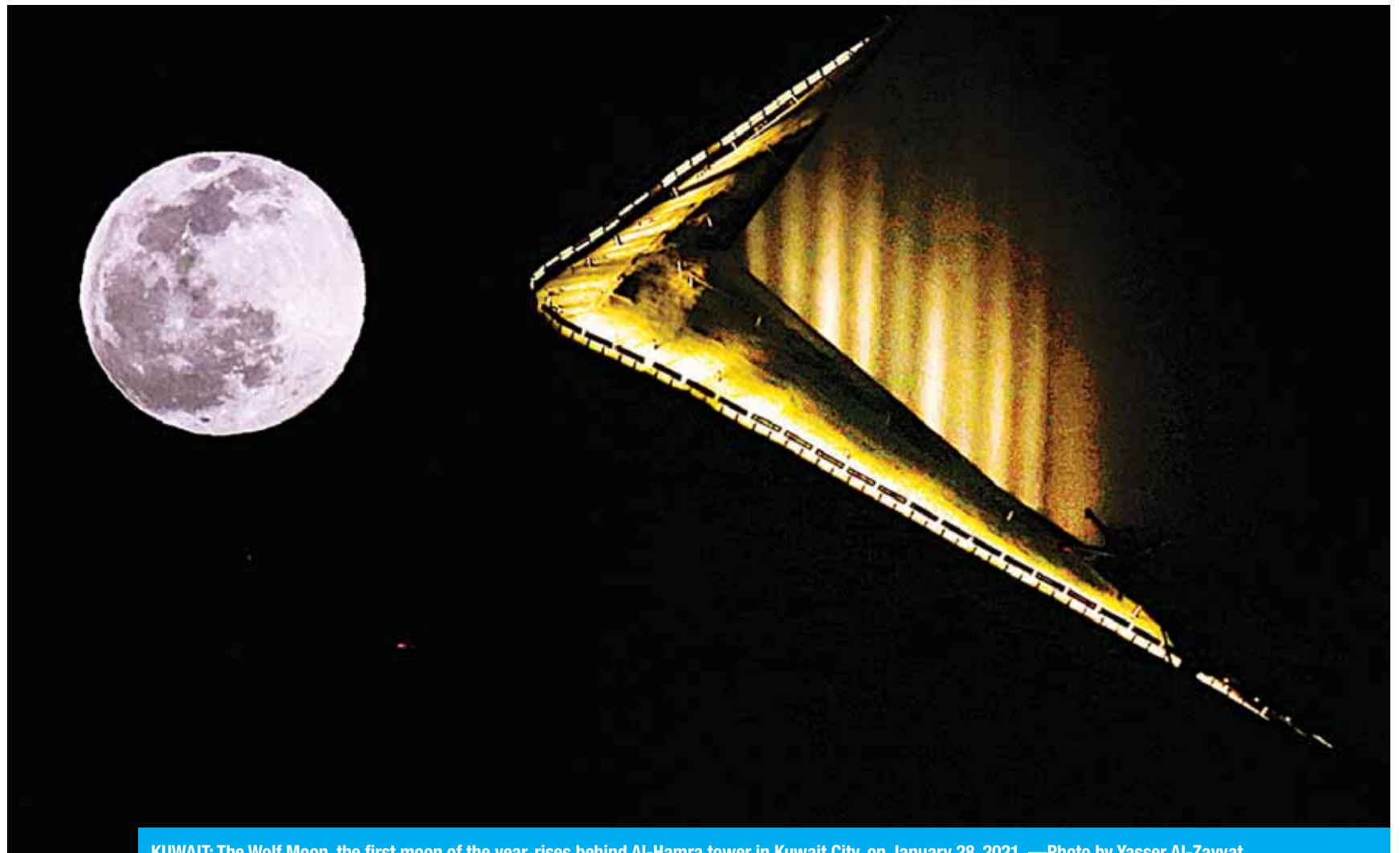
Founder and Publisher  
**YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN**

Editor-in-Chief  
**ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN**

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432  
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7  
FAX : 24835620/1  
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163  
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125  
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.  
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com  
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The Wolf Moon, the first moon of the year, rises behind Al-Hamra tower in Kuwait City, on January 28, 2021. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## News in brief

## PM receives US Commander

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received on Thursday Commander of the US Central Command Gen Kenneth McKenzie on the occasion of the latter's visit to Kuwait. The encounter was held in the presence of Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr. Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah. The meeting was also attended by Kuwait Chief of the General Staff Lt Gen Sheikh Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah, Deputy Chief of the General Staff Lt Gen Fahad Al-Nasser and Foreign Ministry Assistant Secretary of State for Americas Affairs Hamad Al-Mashaan.

## Oil price up

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by four cents to \$54.89 per barrel Friday after it was at \$54.85 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. In global markets, Brent crude rose up 25 cents to stand at \$55.35 and US West Texas Intermediate also went up seven cents to settle at \$52.36 pb.

## Couple arrested

**KUWAIT:** Salmiya police arrested a Kuwaiti man and an Arab woman who were in an abnormal condition, and officers found suspicious substances on them. The arrest came after receiving a call about a man sleeping in his car and causing a traffic jam near the passports' roundabout. The couple were taken to Mubarak Hospital to get medical reports on their condition. But the woman refused to enter the hospital, kicked the patrol's door and damaged it. Both were sent to drugs control general department.

## Pakistan, Kuwait express resolve for enhancing cooperation

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan and Kuwait on Thursday have expressed resolve to move forward for enhancing cooperation in economic, trade, oil and gas, energy, investment, agriculture, Information Technology and health sectors. The resolve is expressed during the visit of a high level Kuwaiti delegation led by Assistant Foreign Minister on Asian Affairs, Ali Sulciman Al-Saeed to Islamabad. According to the Pakistan Foreign Office, during the visit, the Kuwaiti delegate called on Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Shah Mehmood Qureshi in Islamabad.

Qureshi reaffirmed Pakistan's desire to forge stronger bilateral relations with Kuwait. He stressed the importance of deepening and diversifying bilateral cooperation; in particular, in the areas of trade, investment, manpower export, and food security. He also underscored the importance of facilitating travel between the two countries, which could be instrumental in significantly enhancing bilateral interactions in myriad fields. The Foreign Minister lauded the positive and constructive role played by the Kuwaiti leader-

ship towards the resolution of differences among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The Assistant Foreign Minister reciprocated the Foreign Minister's views on further fortifying the bilateral relationship. He said his visit reflected the keenness of the leadership of Kuwait to enhance cooperation and collaboration with Pakistan in diverse arenas.

During the meeting, the two sides expressed satisfaction at mutual collaboration in multilateral organizations, in particular the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Views were also exchanged on regional developments, including stability in the Gulf, Middle East and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), said Foreign Office. The Kuwaiti delegation also visited the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Interior Ministry and Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development. The Secretary of Economic Affairs during the meeting with the delegation emphasized upon enhancing bilateral economic relation for

mutual benefit of both the countries. He appreciated the generous support of Kuwait in development projects in Pakistan and the debt suspension facility provided by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development to overcome COVID-19 situation. Both sides took a review of bilateral economic relations and resolved to move forward for enhancing cooperation in economic, trade, oil and gas, energy, investment, agriculture, IT and health sector.

The secretary underscored the need to sign a Framework Agreement with Kuwait Fund for financing the various projects in infrastructure, energy and social sector. Both sides agreed to hold the next Session of Joint Ministerial Commission in near future. The Assistant Foreign Minister of Kuwait hoped that the forthcoming meeting of the Joint Commission will be instrumental in paving the way for future cooperation between the two countries. The Assistant Foreign Minister arrived in Pakistan to hold the Third Round of Bilateral Political Consultations (BPC). The last round was held in Kuwait in May 2016. —KUNA

## US envoy honors Kuwaiti PCELT achievers

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** AMIDEAST, in collaboration with the ministry of education, organized recently a virtual distribution (via Zoom) of certificates for the Professional Certificate in English Language Teaching (PCELT). The attendees included Minister of Education Ali Al-Mudhaf, Assistant Undersecretary Osama Al-Sultan and General English Language Supervisor Suzan Al-Bashiti, who collaborate with the US Embassy on PCELT and many other English training and exchange programs. The training program was made possible with the support of Hamad Al-Matar (Zain) and Bernie Dunn (Boeing).

US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina L. Romanowski thanked Samar Khleif, Janice Quinn and the team at AMIDEAST for delivering the PCELT course despite the most unusual and challenging circumstances. "We appreciate your work and we look

forward to our next collaboration. Because of everyone's cooperation, we trained 24 outstanding Kuwaiti educators in the 2020 PCELT program," the envoy said.

"To all the 2020 graduates of PCELT, congratulations! Some of you have been waiting since last February for this ceremony, and I'm glad that we are finally able to recognize your hard work and dedication," Romanowski added. She said the COVID outbreak forced many to delay the PCELT training and this ceremony, but added the job of educating students must continue even during a global pandemic.

"That is why I am so grateful that the ministry of education, for the past four years, has allowed some of its best English educators to participate in PCELT," Romanowski said. "Although I'm sure it was unusual for some of you to work with a trainer who was mounted on top of a robot, I hope that you found the experience rewarding. Thank you for your commitment to continuing to learn and improve your craft of teaching."

Romanowski said being selected for and completing the PCELT course is a great achievement and students should be proud of themselves. "The US Embassy provides many training and exchange programs for Kuwaiti educators. Please feel free to reach out to our Cultural Attache Nelson Wen for more information about these opportunities," she said.

**Kuwait Times**  
ESTABLISHED 1961  
THE FIRST DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

STAY CONNECTED

• Read Kuwait Times now on your phone for **FREE**

• Send Subscribe to **+965 944 88888**

• Enjoy the first daily paper in Kuwait on your phone

P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait  
Tel: 24833199 - 24833358 - 24835616/7 | Fax: 24835620 - 24835621  
E: info@kuwaittimes.net



KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways honors companies that partnered with the national airline in the evacuation plan to bring back Kuwaiti citizens from abroad during the COVID-19 crisis in 2020.



Trump flexes political muscle, meets top House Republican

## Eight Afghan security personnel killed in pre-dawn Taliban attack

Page 7

Page 6



DUBLIN: Medical staff work at the laboratory and testing center for COVID-19 antigen testing of hauliers bound for France via Dublin Port, at Dublin Airport, Ireland on Friday. —AFP

# EU backtracks on jab threat in UK row

## WHO warns against 'vaccine nationalism'. Macron questions vaccine efficacy

**BRUSSELS:** The European Union backtracked on a threat to restrict exports of coronavirus shots to Northern Ireland in its growing row with Britain, as the WHO warned against "vaccine nationalism". Outbreaks are raging around the globe with COVID-19 deaths nearing 2.2 million, and while wealthy countries fight over limited vaccine supplies, there are fears the less privileged will not get access for a long time. British-Swedish firm AstraZeneca has said it can only deliver a fraction of its vaccine doses promised to the EU and Britain because of production problems, but both sides are demanding their pledges are met.

The EU threatened to restrict vaccine exports to Northern Ireland by overriding part of the Brexit deal with Britain that allowed the free flow of goods over the Irish border, but backed down after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson voiced "grave concerns". The European Commission will "ensure that the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol is unaffected", the EU commissioner said in a statement late Friday.

That came after the EU released a redacted version of its contract with AstraZeneca, while announcing a mechanism that could allow it to deny the export of vaccines made on European soil.

The AstraZeneca vaccine on Friday became the third to get EU approval

after Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna, but it came under the shadow of the bitter diplomatic row. "I expect the company (AstraZeneca) to deliver the 400 million doses as agreed," tweeted European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen, as she announced the authorization. The supply issue is a huge blow to Europe's already stumbling vaccine rollout.

### 'Vaccine nationalism'

The EU-Britain tussle has highlighted the impact of shortages on ambitious mass vaccination programs, even on wealthy nations, and fears are growing that the developed world is hogging doses, leaving poorer nations behind. World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned Friday against "vaccine nationalism", saying there was a "real danger that the very tools that could help to end the pandemic-vaccines-may exacerbate" global inequality. Parts of Africa and Asia have only just started securing and rolling out vaccinations.

The global scramble for shots comes as more troubling data emerges on new variants of the coronavirus, which is known to have infected more than 101 million people worldwide. Variants first detected in Britain, Brazil and South Africa are believed to be more contagious.

Scientists are concerned that the South African variant may elude some vaccines, a potential stumbling block in the global effort to defeat Covid-19 through mass inoculation. New data on Thursday and Friday showed average effectiveness of 89 and 66 percent for shots from Novavax and Johnson & Johnson. But while Novavax's jab was highly effective against the British variant, both were less effective against the South African strain.

### Pfizer and Moderna have said their vaccines are effective against the variants

With vaccine rollouts still in their early stages, movement restrictions remain among the few options for governments to try to stop the spread of COVID-19. Surges have overwhelmed healthcare systems even in rich countries such as Britain and the United States, while Mozambique President Filipe Nyusi warned that hospitals across southern Africa were "rapidly reaching the limit of their capacities".

Citing concerns over the new strains, Germany on Friday said it would ban travel from countries where the variants are prevalent, starting this weekend, while Canada announced hotel quarantine for all new arrivals. France has announced the closure of its borders to all non-EU travellers except for essential travel.

### Macron

French President Emmanuel Macron said on Friday that AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine appeared not to be effective for people over 65 years of age. Speaking to reporters only hours before the European Medicines Agency (EMA) recommended the vaccine for adults of all ages, Macron also questioned Britain's decision to delay the second dose of COVID vaccines to inoculate more people.

Macron said there was "very little information" available for the vaccine developed by the British-Swedish company and Oxford University. "Today we think that it is quasi-ineffective for people over 65," he told the reporters, his office confirmed to AFP.

"What I can tell you officially today is that the early results we have are not encouraging for 60 to 65-year-old people concerning AstraZeneca," he said. Macron said he was awaiting the EMA's verdict—which came later Friday—and also that of France's own health authority "because they have the numbers".

The French expert decision on the vaccine is expected at the start of next week, according to sources close to the health authority. "I don't have any data, and I don't have a scientific team of my own to look at the numbers," Macron acknowledged. —AFP

## Biden taps veteran envoy to talk to Iran, defying hawks

**WAASHINGTON:** The new US administration has named Rob Malley, an architect of the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, as its special envoy to resume talks with Tehran, defying pressure from hawks who accuse him of being too conciliatory toward the Islamic republic. Secretary of State Antony Blinken "is building a dedicated team, drawing from clear-eyed experts with a diversity of views," State Department spokesman Ned Price said. "Leading that team as our special envoy for Iran will be Rob Malley, who brings to the position a track record of success negotiating constraints on Iran's nuclear program," he said. Malley, a childhood friend of Blinken, has been serving as head of the International Crisis Group, an independent non-governmental organization focused on conflict resolution. Before that, he was one of the chief negotiators on the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, under which Tehran was promised economic relief for major curbs in its contested nuclear program. The deal was reached under Barack Obama, when President Joe Biden was his number two.

But in 2018, Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from the accord, saying it should have also covered Iran's "destabilizing" activities in the Middle East, and slapped tough sanctions on Tehran. This week, Blinken confirmed the new US administration's intention to rejoin the accord—but only once Tehran returns to compliance. —AFP

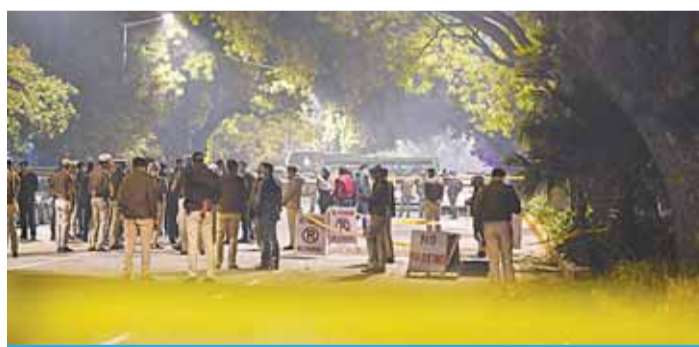
## Explosion outside Israeli embassy in New Delhi

**NEW DELHI:** A small bomb exploded outside the Israeli embassy in New Delhi on Friday as it marked the anniversary of setting up diplomatic relations with India. No injuries were reported but an Israeli official told AFP the incident was being treated as terrorism. The windows on three nearby cars were blown out by what police called "a very low intensity improvised device". "Initial impressions suggest a mischievous attempt to create a sensation," a police statement added. However an Israeli official in Jerusalem, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP: "We consider this as a terror attack."

With the Indian capital already on heightened alert because of farmers' protests, the district around the embassy was sealed off and flooded with police, paramilitaries, bomb disposal experts and anti-terrorism specialists. The embassy is on a tree-lined avenue opposite a French cultural institute with other embassies and international schools nearby. All stepped up security.

### 'Flower pot' bomb

According to media reports, the device, which went off at about 5.05pm (1135 GMT), could have been left in a flower pot or a bottle on the pavement close to the embassy. India's foreign minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar said he had spoken to his



NEW DELHI: Police cordon off an area at a street after an explosion near the Israeli embassy in New Delhi on Friday. —AFP

Israeli counterpart Gabi Ashkenazi about the bomb. "We take this very seriously," Jaishankar said on Twitter, adding that he had promised "the fullest protection for the embassy and Israeli diplomats." The "matter is under investigation and no effort will be spared to find the culprits," Ashkenazi said Jaishankar had promised that India "will continue to act resolutely to locate all those involved in the explosion." Top security officials from the two countries also discussed the bomb. The Israeli foreign ministry confirmed there were no casualties and no damage to the embassy. Ashkenazi had asked for "all necessary security measures" to be taken, said a statement. —AFP

## Syrian constitution talks stumble at UN

**GENEVA:** Talks on a new constitution for Syria hit a brick wall this week, with the United Nations mediator concluding Friday: "We can't continue like this".

The fifth round of discussions between 15 representatives each from President Bashar Al-Assad's government, the oppo-

sition and civil society, staged all week at the UN in Geneva, concluded with little to no progress. "I told the 45 members of the drafting body that we can't continue like this. That the week has been a disappointment," said UN envoy Geir Pedersen, voicing his frustration.

"I set out a few things I thought we should be able to achieve before we started this meeting—and I'm afraid we did not." The Syrian Constitutional Committee (SCC) was created in

September 2019 and first convened a month later.

The tentative discussions are aimed at rewriting the war-torn country's constitution. It is hoped the talks could pave the way towards a broader political process. Pedersen said opposition proposals for moving the process forward this week were rejected by Assad's delegation. He then made his own proposals, which were accepted by the opposition—but also rejected by the government. —AFP

WE ARE HIRING

- 5 Helpers / Pool Attendants / Cleaners
- 2 Drivers
- Swimming Pool Technicians

Conditions: - Have Transferable Visa No. 18  
 - Speaks English & Hindi

Send your CV to:  
[knt@atlaspool.com](mailto:knt@atlaspool.com)  
 or Contact: 67097467

## International

# Trump flexes political muscle, meets top House Republican

## US Capitol police officer who died in riot to lie in honor

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump met with US House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy in Florida Thursday amid a tug of war over the Republican Party's future, with congressional leadership appearing eager to present a united front with the former president.

Winning back the House of Representatives from Democrats in 2022 was the primary topic of the meeting at Trump's Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, according to a readout provided by Save America, a political action committee linked to Trump. "President Trump's popularity has never been stronger than it is today, and his endorsement means more than perhaps any endorsement at any time," it said.

McCarthy, an ally who encouraged Trump's baseless election fraud claims, distanced himself from the outgoing president after Trump was accused of inspiring his supporters to storm the US Capitol earlier this month. He declared that Joe Biden was the winner of the November election and that Trump "bears responsibility for (the January 6) attack on Congress by mob rioters."

But on Thursday McCarthy appeared back in Trump's graces, as the men grinned broadly in a handout photograph taken in an ornate room reminiscent of a European palace.

"Today, President Trump committed to helping elect Republicans in the House and Senate in 2022," McCarthy said in a statement that also attacked Democrats for "impeaching a president who is now a private citizen." "A united conservative movement will strengthen the bonds of our citizens and uphold

the freedoms our country was founded on," McCarthy added.

House Democrat Katherine Clark expressed shock that McCarthy was re-aligning with Trump after the "seditious" Capitol assault. Despite "active threats of violence," she said, "Kevin McCarthy's response is a photo op with the treasonous instigator."

With Trump impeached for an unprecedented second time, and the Senate girding for his trial, it was unclear how much political clout Trump would retain beyond his presidency. But recently several Republicans, following polling showing strong party support for Trump, have signaled they will remain in the brash billionaire's orbit-or at least not publicly break with him.

Pro-Trump Republicans will hold huge sway in the coming years. They are a large enough contingent to influence the Republican primaries. But should Trump be cast out and they abandon ship, the party would be severely weakened in its attempts to challenge Democrats for congressional control.

"You have the Trump wing of the party, wanting to purge those who have stood up to the president's lies, (and) you have the establishment wing of the party wanting to purge the party of Trump," Republican former congressman Carlos Curbelo told MSNBC.

The US Capitol police officer who died after being injured in the January 6 attack by pro-Trump rioters will lie in honor at the building's Rotunda, lawmakers said Friday, a mark of respect rarely bestowed. Brian Sicknick was reportedly struck in



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo taken on May 08, 2020, then US President Donald Trump speaks with US representative Kevin McCarthy as he meets with Republican members of the US Congress in the State Dining Room of the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

the head with a fire extinguisher while struggling with the rioters who swarmed through the halls of Congress.

The 42-year-old member of the force that protects the ground of the Congress returned to his division office where he collapsed and was taken to the hospital, according to the Capitol Police.

He died the next day, they said, bringing the death toll from the violent attack to five. "The US Congress

is united in grief, gratitude and solemn appreciation for the service and sacrifice of Officer Brian Sicknick," said Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer in a statement Friday. Sicknick's actions "during the violent insurrection against our Capitol helped save lives, defend the temple of our democracy and ensure that the Congress was not diverted from our duty to the Constitution." — AFP

### News in brief

#### Nurse takes first vaccine jab in Bolivia

SANTA CRUZ: A nurse on Friday became the first person in Bolivia to be vaccinated against the coronavirus, receiving a shot of Russia's Sputnik V, which is still being tested. Sandra Rios Villarte, 40, sat for her first dose at a public hospital in Santa Cruz, followed by dozens of other health workers. "I feel good, excited... a bit nervous, but positive," said Rios, adding she "did not feel" the jab. Bolivia on Thursday received the first 20,000 of 5.2 million doses of Sputnik V it has ordered from Russia. —AFP

#### Rally in Poland over abortion ban

WARSAW: Thousands protested for a third consecutive night in Warsaw and other parts of Poland on Friday after the country's right-wing government implemented a court ruling imposing a near-total ban on abortion. Protesters have defied coronavirus restrictions and sub-zero temperatures to rally after the controversial judgment was given legal force on Wednesday. In Warsaw, they waved Polish and gay rainbow flags and brandished the red lightning symbol used by Women's Strike—the main organization behind the protests. — AFP

#### Chinese exec's bail terms not relaxed

VANCOUR: A Canadian judge on Friday rejected Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou's request to relax her bail conditions as she fights against extradition to the US on fraud and conspiracy charges. British Columbia Supreme Court Justice William Ehrcke ruled that the Chinese businesswoman must remain under constant supervision by court-ordered security guards-imposed after her arrest two years ago. "The conditions imposed in my original bail order are the minimum necessary to ensure Meng will attend court as and when required and will not flee the jurisdiction," Ehrcke said. — AFP

#### Lithuania blocks Chinese screening gear

VILNIUS: NATO member Lithuania has banned the use of airport security-screening equipment made by a Chinese company over national security concerns, officials said Friday. The move came amid increased concern in the West over Chinese investments in critical infrastructure, including 5G telecommunications networks. A government-appointed commission concluded that the equipment from China's Nuctech "does not meet national security interests," Rasa Jakilaitiene, a spokeswoman for Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte, said. — AFP

#### Portugal votes to legalize euthanasia

LISBON: Portugal's parliament on Friday passed a law allowing medically assisted dying, putting the Catholic-majority country on course to become the fourth in Europe to legalize euthanasia. Before coming into force the bill must first be signed into law by President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, a staunch Catholic and conservative who was re-elected only last weekend. The president—who has yet to make public his position on the issue—could also either use his veto against the legislation, or refer it to the country's constitutional court for further study. —AFP

## AstraZeneca hit by jab delays, disagreements

LONDON: Only a few weeks ago, Anglo-Swedish pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca was being applauded for the speed with which it developed its COVID-19 vaccine. Experts heralded the launch of the jab as a turning point in the pandemic, not least because it can be transported and stored more easily than its Pfizer/BioNTech counterpart. The Anglo-Swedish firm also won plaudits for promising to provide the vaccine on a non-profit basis to lower- and middle-income countries.

Now the vaccine has become a headache, with questions about its effectiveness, and potential litigation because of delays in delivery to the European Union. On Friday, the European Commission published the contract it signed with the drugs group, showing AstraZeneca's commitment to produce 300 million doses of the vaccine. A day earlier, an inspection of a Belgian plant producing the vaccine was carried out at the request of the European Commission to examine production problems at the site. Italy raised the prospect of legal action—which would also target Pfizer—to "get back the promised doses".

## Navalny brother, aides under house arrest

MOSCOW: The brother and aides of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny were placed under house arrest on Friday ahead of new rallies, as Russian authorities warned that protesters could face charges of taking part in "mass unrest". Moscow police also announced that on Sunday, when the fresh protests are planned, movement in the center of the Russian capital would be limited and seven central metro stations closed. Kremlin critics say authorities are dramatically ramping up pressure on the opposition in an effort to intimidate protesters and smother dissent.

Navalny's plight and the related crackdown has sparked an outcry in the West, and could be raised during a UN Security Council meeting next week. Diplomats said an informal meeting had been tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, officially framed as a discussion on the opposition leader's poisoning last year. Navalny's team has urged residents of

## Better behavior, immunity behind US case decline

WASHINGTON: The trend line is now unmistakable: the US COVID outbreak is easing, with new cases and hospitalizations down two weeks in a row, even though the overall numbers still remain far higher than prior to the fall-winter surge. What's behind the slide? Experts say there are many reasons, from a better adherence to masking and distancing measures, to the fact that the holiday period is now well behind us.

Another factor, at least in some areas of the country, is that the virus has already burned through much of the population and is running out of targets—but easing restrictions too fast could still upset the current equilibrium and trigger a new spike, scientists warn.

Here's what you need to know.

Germany's Robert Koch Institute also questioned the effectiveness of the jab among the over-65s, citing gaps in test data. All of these tensions came as the EU mulled approval of the AstraZeneca jab which was granted on Friday. It was the third COVID vaccine authorized by the European Medicines Agency. The Financial Times said on Friday the "souring" relationship with the EU "could hurt the pharma group".

"Neither side comes out of this particularly well," CMC Markets analyst Michael Hewson told AFP, adding that the disputes showed why "the prospect of vaccine nationalism is so worrying". He cautioned that "if the EU follows through on its threat to impose an export restriction," there could be a knock-on effect of "countermeasures" from other nations like the UK if supplies slow. The contract with the EU stipulates that AstraZeneca committed to its "best reasonable efforts" to manufacture and distribute the doses.

David Greene, a partner in the law firm Edwin Coe and president of The Law Society in the UK, said the contract remained "straightforward", even if the group was not providing the shot for profit. He added that the contract with the EU was governed by Belgian law, and, as such, "the only place it can be litigated is in Belgium". If AstraZeneca does not demonstrate that it is using its "best reasonable efforts" to respect its commitments, said Greene, it could have breached its



Moscow to gather Sunday in Lubyanka Square outside the headquarters of the FSB security agency and Staraya Square, where the presidential administration has its offices.

On Friday, Navalny's brother Oleg, prominent aide Lyubov Sobol and Pussy Riot activist Maria Alyokhina were placed under house arrest until March 23 for allegedly violating restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic by calling for people to join protests.

The coordinator of Navalny's Moscow office, Oleg Stepanov, and Anastasia Vasilyeva, head of the medical workers' union critical of the government, were also placed under house arrest for two months. Oleg Navalny has already served three-and-a-half years in prison for an embezzlement conviction that Kremlin critics say was politically motivated. He was released in 2018.

The pressure on Navalny's family and associates grew after tens of thousands of Russians rallied last weekend in support of President Vladimir Putin's most vocal domestic critic. More than 4,000 protesters were detained last weekend and authorities launched a number of criminal probes. Several Navalny associates, including Sobol, were detained following police raids on their apartments and offices. — AFP

#### Holiday super-surge over

After a summer lull, the US infection rate began to pick up again last fall, when gatherings began to move indoors and people started letting their guards down. Then came the holiday season: Thanksgiving, Christmas, then New Year's—a coronavirus triple-threat that sent cases soaring as millions of Americans ignored official guidance and visited their families and friends.

The US was clocking a daily case average of more than 250,000 by the second week of January, and more than 130,000 hospitalizations, according to data from the COVID Tracking Project.

There are still more than 3,000 deaths on average per day, because of the lag time, but overall the metrics are heading in the right direction. "That holiday travel which the virus was exploiting has kind of dissipated," Amesh Adalja of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security told AFP.

#### Caution rises with cases

The spread of infectious diseases is innately linked to human behavior. Natalie Dean, a biostatistics and infectious disease expert at University of



MOSCOW: Russian opposition activist Lyubov Sobol reads a book inside a defendant dock at the Tverskoi district court. —AFP

Florida, told AFP she saw a "population-level feedback mechanism, such that people respond to rising numbers in their areas."

She cited how Florida, Texas and Arizona quickly turned things around after their summer surges. "Whether through policies or many small behavior changes, the numbers slow," she added.

Brandon Brown, a public health specialist at the University of California, added "there is also less misinformation compared to before, and it's hard to deny the over 400,000 deaths." But if people respond to rising cases by becoming more cautious, the opposite can also be true when infections decline, warned the experts.

The current number of confirmed cases in the US is around 25 million—but we know by now the true figure is likely to be much higher, and could be as high as 100 to 125 million people, Stanford professor Jay Bhattacharya told AFP. We know that natural infection confers a high degree of immunity, at least for a period of time, then you can add the people who have received at least one vaccine dose (which confers partial immunity) — currently 21 million. —AFP

## International

# Eight Afghan security personnel killed in pre-dawn Taliban attack

## Ghani urges Biden to mount pressure on Taliban

**JALALABAD:** A suicide bomber drove a vehicle loaded with explosives into a base for Afghan defense forces in the country's east yesterday, killing at least eight security personnel in an attack claimed by the Taliban. The pre-dawn assault took place in the restive province of Nangarhar where the Taliban have claimed several deadly assaults targeting government forces. It came two days after the Pentagon said the Taliban were not living up to promises made in a deal signed with Washington last year, including reducing violence and cutting ties with Al-Qaeda.

The eight were killed when the bomber hit the base with a Humvee, the office of Nangarhar's governor said in a statement. The deputy head of Nangarhar provincial council, Ajmal Omar, confirmed the attack but put the number of dead soldiers at 15 with five wounded.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said his group had carried out the attack. The governor's office said security forces had seized another vehicle loaded with explosives near the city of Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar. Nangarhar province has seen several recent deadly attacks carried out by the Islamic State. Separately, two roadside bombs exploded in Kabul on Saturday but there were no casualties, police said. Violence has surged across Afghanistan even as the Taliban and government engage in peace talks that began in September. The discussions have so far failed to make any major breakthrough.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani urged the new US administration to step up pressure on the Taliban and not rush to withdraw more troops. Ghani said the Taliban have failed to live up to conditions agreed in their February 2020 deal with the United States to reduce attacks in Afghanistan and sever longstanding ties to Al-Qaeda. "The United States and NATO must take a very strong stand on the conditions-based

approach," Ghani said in an online address to the Aspen Security Forum.

"They signed an agreement; that agreement now needs to be implemented."

Even though Taliban and Afghan government negotiators opened peace talks in Doha last year, violence in Afghanistan has soared. Ghani said the Taliban must admit to attacking government forces and conducting a string of assassinations of public figures. The Taliban exploited former president Donald Trump's rush to pull US forces from Afghanistan to continue attacking government forces, Ghani suggested.

After the US-Taliban deal last year, US officials assured Kabul "there will be a ceasefire or a very substantial reduction of violence," Ghani said.

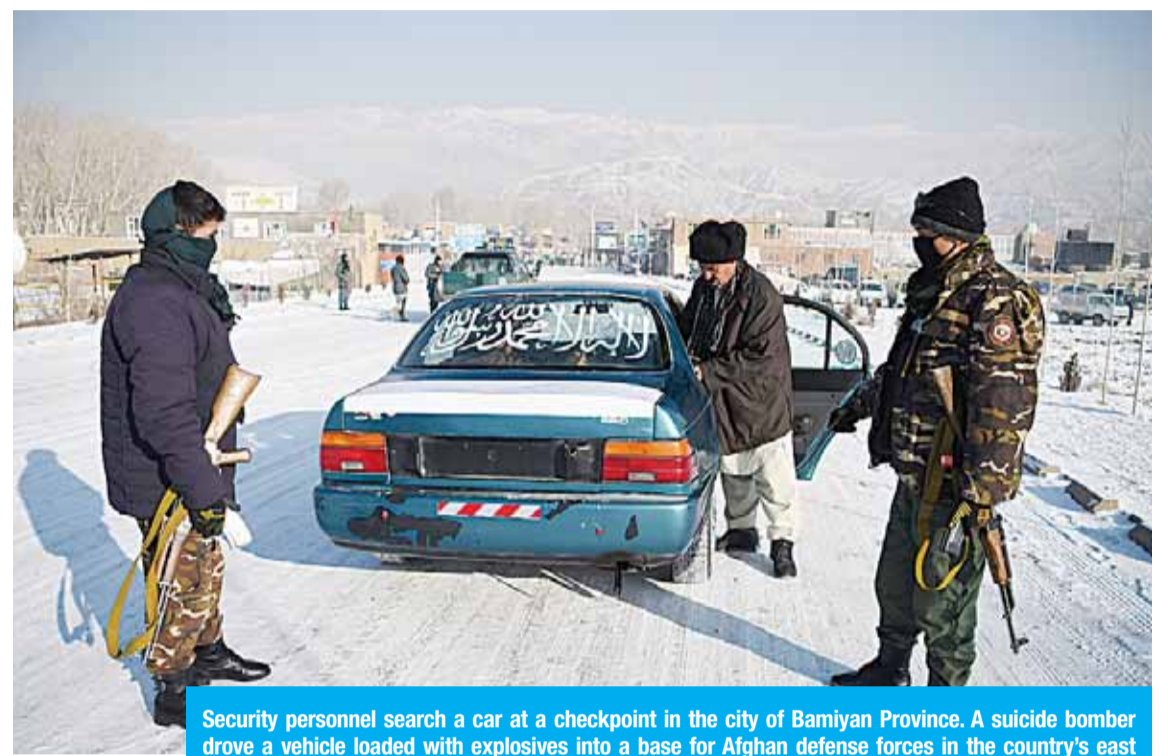
"Instead, violence has peaked," he said. And rather than pursuing peace talks in good faith, "the Taliban are finding one excuse after another not to meet."

### 'They will not let go'

Ghani said he spoke with new US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday and was assured that President Joe Biden's administration would review matters by sending a new team to Afghanistan, and would consult more closely with Kabul. "We couldn't be more pleased with the early focused, systematic attention and a dialog between two partners that have mutually sacrificed and have a mutual interest," he said.

The Taliban believe they defeated the US and that NATO forces in Afghanistan are "on the run", Ghani said. "Now, robust diplomacy and a stand on conditions-based approaches will enable us all hopefully to resume meaningful discussion," he added.

The United States has about 2,500 troops in Afghanistan, down from close to 13,000 a year ago. In the Trump administration's withdrawal deal with



Security personnel search a car at a checkpoint in the city of Bamiyan Province. A suicide bomber drove a vehicle loaded with explosives into a base for Afghan defense forces in the country's east yesterday, killing at least eight security personnel in an attack claimed by the Taliban. —AFP

the Taliban, the US was supposed to pull all troops out by May 2021 in return for security pledges from the insurgents. Ghani said US forces need to remain, without specifying how many. He said he expected Biden to make "the right decision." "NATO without US enablers cannot continue its mission," he said. If the "Taliban release that they can prevail through violence, they will not let go," he added. "A combination of presence, plus diplomacy, bringing US tools of power in a concentrated manner... would be

extremely crucial to our success."

In separate comments, White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said the Biden administration supports the framework for an Afghanistan peace deal established in the US-Taliban agreement. He said the administration is "taking a hard look" at how much the Taliban is meeting the conditions it agreed to on reducing violence, cutting ties with Al-Qaeda, and genuinely negotiating with the Kabul government. —AFP

## WHO virus probe team visits Wuhan propaganda exhibit

**WUHAN:** A team of WHO experts investigating the origins of the coronavirus toured a propaganda exhibition celebrating China's recovery from the pandemic in Wuhan yesterday, after a meeting at the hospital that treated the first confirmed Covid-19 cases over a year ago. Details of the trip have been scant so far, with the media kept at arm's length and information on the itinerary dribbling out via tweets from the World Health Organization experts instead of China's tight-lipped Communist authorities. The group was driven to the Jinyintan Hospital, the first to receive officially diagnosed Covid-19 patients in late 2019, as the horrors of the virus emerged in the central Chinese city. In a tweet, team member Peter Daszak welcomed the hospital visit as an "important opportunity to talk directly w/ medics who were on the ground at that critical time fighting COVID!"

Yesterday afternoon, the team visited a cavernous exhibition that applauds the emergency response of Wuhan health authorities in the chaotic, terrifying early stages of the outbreak — as well

as the agility of the Communist leadership in controlling a crisis without precedent. The WHO mission comes with heavy political baggage — China refused the team access until mid-January and there are question marks over what the experts can hope to find a year after the virus first emerged.

On Friday, the WHO's emergencies director Michael Ryan sought to manage expectations.

Success "is not measured necessarily in absolutely finding a source on the first mission", he told a press conference in Geneva. "This is a complicated business, but what we need to do is gather all of the data... and come to an assessment as to how much more we know about the origins of the disease and what further studies may be needed to elucidate that." Last week, China warned the United States against "political interference" during the trip, after the White House demanded a "robust and clear" investigation.

The WHO insists the probe will stick tightly to the science behind how the virus jumped from animals — believed to be bats — to humans. The team is also expected to visit the market believed to have seen the first major cluster of infections, as well as the Wuhan Institute of Virology and other labs, in what the WHO's Ryan described as a "very busy, busy schedule".

Beijing is desperate to defang criticism of its handling of the chaotic early stages of the outbreak. It has refocused attention at home — and

abroad — on its handling of and recovery from the outbreak. Since seeping beyond China's borders, the pandemic has ripped across the world, killing more than two million people and wrecking economies. China, with a relatively low reported death toll of 4,636, has bounced back, and has swiftly locked down areas where cases have been found, tested millions and restricted travel to snuff out the crisis. —AFP



WUHAN: Members of the World Health Organization (WHO) team investigating the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic leave after visiting a museum exhibition about China's fight against COVID-19 in Wuhan, China's central Hubei province yesterday. —AFP

## Myanmar army seeks to quell coup fears

**YANGON:** Myanmar's military yesterday vowed to abide by the country's constitution, in an apparent backtracking after its commander-in-chief spurred fears of a coup when he suggested the charter could be repealed. The army has for weeks alleged widespread irregularities in November's election, won in a landslide by Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD).

Tensions were ramped up Tuesday when a military spokesman refused to rule out the possibility of a coup. A day later, army chief General Min Aung Hlaing—arguably the most powerful person in Myanmar—said revoking the 2008 junta-scripted constitution could be "necessary" under certain circumstances. His comments—translated into English and published in the army-run Myawady newspaper—sent shockwaves through the nascent democracy, which is only a decade out of the grips of a 49-year military junta.

clashes between farmers and security forces left one dead and hundreds injured.

At least 10,000 new protesters have arrived since Thursday to bolster the campaign, according to observers. In the camps, many farmers held a one-day fast on Saturday—the 73rd anniversary of the assassination of independence leader Mahatma Gandhi—in a bid to show their tactics are peaceful.

But outside, on top of the internet cut, police blocked a main road into the Ghazipur camp on the outskirts of Delhi. Additional security forces were deployed after clashes erupted Friday between farmers and opponents of their campaign.

Some local groups say they want the protesters to go home but the farmers' leaders are adamant they will stay. There have been accusations that right-wing activists have manipulated the counter-protests. —AFP

## India police boost security as more farmers join protests

**NEW DELHI:** Indian police tightened security yesterday around camps where farmers have been protesting against new agricultural reform laws, as thousands more arrived to join the campaign.

Authorities cut internet links to most of the camps where tens of thousands of farmers have been based since November as they demand the repeal of the laws. Tensions have been rising since a mass tractor rally on Tuesday turned into a rampage across Delhi where

clashes between farmers and security forces left one dead and hundreds injured.

At least 10,000 new protesters have arrived since Thursday to bolster the campaign, according to observers. In the camps, many farmers held a one-day fast on Saturday—the 73rd anniversary of the assassination of independence leader Mahatma Gandhi—in a bid to show their tactics are peaceful.

But outside, on top of the internet cut, police blocked a main road into the Ghazipur camp on the outskirts of Delhi. Additional security forces were deployed after clashes erupted Friday between farmers and opponents of their campaign.

Some local groups say they want the protesters to go home but the farmers' leaders are adamant they will stay. There have been accusations that right-wing activists have manipulated the counter-protests. —AFP

election commission release the electoral roll for cross-checking. Their call has been taken up by military supporters, hundreds of whom turned up yesterday outside Yangon's famed Shwedagon pagoda to protest against the election commission. They were joined by hardline nationalist monks who carried banners rejecting "interference from foreign countries". —AFP



YANGON: Commuters make their way in front of the banners ahead of the reopening of the parliament tomorrow following the November 2020 elections which Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) won in a landslide, in Yangon yesterday. —AFP

## China executes ex-banker in bribes, bigamy case

**BEIJING:** China on Friday executed a former top banker accused of taking \$260 million worth of bribes, other forms of corruption and bigamy, state broadcaster CCTV reported. Lai Xiaomin, the former chairman of Huarong—one of China's largest state-controlled asset management firms—was put to death by a court in the northern city of Tianjin, CCTV said.

"The amount of bribes received by Lai Xiaomin was extremely large, the crime's circumstances were partic-

ularly serious and the social impact was particularly severe," CCTV quoted the Chinese Supreme People's Court as saying, which reviewed and approved the execution order. The report did not specify how Lai was executed, but said he was allowed to meet with close relatives before his death.

Chinese courts have a conviction rate of over 99 percent, and it is extremely rare for a death sentence to be overturned. The number of executions carried out annually is considered a state secret.

Rights group Amnesty International estimates the country is the top executioner globally, with thousands executed and sentenced to death each year. Lai was convicted and sentenced earlier this month. The Tianjin court ruled that he had shown "extreme malicious intent" and abused his position to obtain the vast sum. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Great Lakes leaders call for truce

**LUANDA:** African leaders from the Great Lakes region called on rebels in the conflict-riven Central African Republic to agree to a ceasefire on Friday. Election-based violence in the country has displaced more than 200,000 in the past two months, the United Nations said. Rebels controlling about two-thirds of the nation launched an offensive a week before contested presidential elections that returned Faustin Archange Touadera to power. "The Heads of State and Government urge all rebel forces to observe a unilateral and immediate cease-fire," Angolan Foreign Minister Tete Antonio said at the end of a meeting of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) in Luanda. —AFP

#### Jill to help migrant kids

**WASHINGTON:** US first lady Jill Biden will participate in efforts by her husband's administration to reunite families split apart by former president Donald Trump's headline immigration policies, the White House said Friday. In line with his campaign promises, President Joe Biden plans to announce on Tuesday "his launch of a task force on reunifying families and children. Something that he is personally committed to, his wife Dr Biden is personally committed to and invested in," said White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki. —AFP

#### Five dead in Cuba copter crash

**HAVANA:** Five people died in Cuba on Friday when their helicopter crashed on its way from the province of Holguin to Guantanamo in the east of the island, the armed forces ministry announced. The helicopter "crashed against a hill" and "the five people on board died," the ministry said in a statement released by state media. The ministry has set up a commission to investigate what caused the accident, according to the statement. It gave no other details, including the identities of the victims. —AFP

#### Vanuatu detains China fishing boats

**PORT VILA, Vanuatu:** The Pacific island nation of Vanuatu has detained two Chinese fishing boats and a Russian yacht due to concerns the vessels were operating illegally in its waters, police said. It is believed to be the first time authorities in Vanuatu have detained Chinese fishing vessels. The Chinese boats, Dong Gang Xing 13 and 16, were apprehended by a police patrol boat on January 19 near Hiu island in Vanuatu's northern waters, according to police. The boats are currently moored in Port Vila, as 14 Chinese nationals undergo COVID-19 quarantine before being questioned on suspicion of illegal fishing. —AFP

# Business

SUNDAY, JANUARY 31, 2021

## GameStop surges in frenzied trading but equities tumble

### Drama after Robinhood, other platforms lifted curbs on trading the equities

**NEW DELHI:** Global stocks finished an ugly week with another volatile session Friday as the buying frenzy over GameStop and some other equities resumed amid stepped-up scrutiny from regulators. Major US indices fell about two percent following similar drops in Europe and Asia, while investors shrugged off some positive developments on coronavirus vaccines.

Analysts said there were factors besides the drama around GameStop influencing the pullback on Friday and earlier in the week. These include concerns over lofty equity valuations given the economic weakness caused by COVID-19. Investors are also worried US fiscal stimulus may lag market expectations after President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion package garnered a skeptical reception in Congress.

But much of the focus landed on questions over GameStop, which soared nearly 70 percent after Robinhood and other trading platforms lifted restrictions on trading the equities.

Shares of GameStop, AMC Entertainment and others have been

on a tear much of the week as investors organized over Reddit targeted the equities on Robinhood and other platforms to combat hedge fund short-sellers who were betting on lower prices.

"This is all a de-risking event by hedge funds, because of the loss that they have taken from the stocks like GameStop," said Karl Haeling of LBBW. "These hedge funds are facing billions of dollars of losses and they had to go and sell stocks where they had profits and long positions. They have to sell them off to cover their losses." "Fear is running through the equity markets again as some trading apps have relaxed restrictions on certain stocks that have experienced colossal volatility recently, like GameStop," said David Madden at CMC Markets UK.

#### COVID continues

Regulators have taken notice of the activity, with Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton announcing a probe into Robinhood and 12 other online broker-

age services. Earlier, the US Securities and Exchange Commission said it was "closely monitoring and evaluating the extreme price volatility of certain stocks," while British market watchdog the Financial Conduct Authority issued a warning to investors about market volatility. Friday's bumpy session came as Johnson & Johnson said its Covid-19 vaccine has an overall efficacy of 66 percent, with 85 percent effectiveness in preventing severe Covid-19 across all geographical regions, but only 57 percent success rate in combatting a variant discovered in South Africa.

The J&J vaccine has been eagerly anticipated because it requires only one shot, in contrast to other options now on the market. The J&J vaccine also does not need to be maintained at exceptionally cold temperatures. "The fact we have a single-dose vaccine that's 66 percent effective, and highly effective against severe disease is still a success," said Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, adding it would increase US vaccination capacity. — AFP



The GameStop logo sign is seen above the store in Culver City, California. Texas's attorney general announced on Friday a probe into Robinhood and 12 other online stock exchanges after they suspended trading on GameStop and other volatile equities. — AFP

## Regulators take notice as Reddit onslaught continues

**NEW YORK:** The US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) on Friday said its regulators were keeping an eye on the whipsawing share prices of some Wall Street stocks that had been targeted by a social media-driven campaign to make wealthy hedge funds suffer. "The commission is closely monitoring and evaluating the extreme price volatility of certain stocks' trading prices over the past several days," the SEC said in a statement, a day after some platforms restricted trading in GameStop, AMC Entertainment and other stocks caught up in the surge.

"We will act to protect retail investors when the facts demonstrate abusive or manipulative trading activity that is prohibited by the federal securities laws." The regulator also said it "will closely review actions taken by regulated entities that may disadvantage investors or otherwise unduly inhibit their ability to trade certain securities."

Investors who organized over Reddit and other forums have in recent days targeted shares of companies that had been short-sold by hedge funds, which have bet that the price of the company would fall. Their tactics have caused massive spikes in share prices, and on Thursday Robinhood, an app popular among retail investors whose stated goal is to "democratize finance

for all," decided to limit trades on the most volatile stocks.

#### Political outcry

British market watchdog the Financial Conduct Authority also took notice on Friday, issuing a statement saying they were "warning UK investors in certain US listed shares which are being discussed online to use extreme caution. "Volatile markets are unpredictable and mean you can quickly lose money." The move to restrict trades was decried by lawmakers from across the United States.

Texas's attorney general Ken Paxton joined the ranks of those scrutinizing the issue, saying he had launched a probe into Robinhood and 12 other online brokerage services. The state's top prosecutor sent a civil investigative demand—a type of administrative subpoena—to the companies, the latest sign of escalating scrutiny from regulators and lawmakers over the trade suspensions.

Trading of GameStop resumed Friday on Robinhood. US media reported the company had also raised \$1 billion from its investors to help it stay afloat and allow its customers to continue trading, though on Thursday Robinhood chief Vlad Tenev told CNBC the company was not facing a liquidity crunch.

Robinhood needs to maintain a cer-



ARLINGTON: This photo illustration shows the logo of WallStreetBet on a computer and the Reddit logo on a mobile phone in Arlington, Virginia on Friday. The US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) on Friday said its regulators were keeping an eye on the whipsawing share prices of some Wall Street stocks that had been targeted by a social media-driven campaign intended to make wealthy hedge funds suffer. — AFP

tain amount of funds in the financial institutions that facilitate orders made on its platforms, and when it sees increased demand, that liquidity needs to increase as well.

#### Wild ride

Major investors like hedge funds have bet against GameStop, citing the video game chain store's ill financial health as consumers shift towards buying over the internet. As the company's stock surged under the Reddit-fueled onslaught, the big Wall Street firms were forced to buy back shares at higher prices to cover their losses—further driving up the price.

Hedge fund Melvin Capital liquidated its position in the company and con-

firmed to US media that it had received a bailout of \$2.75 billion from other investment funds. GameStop's shares were worth \$65.01 at the end of Wall Street trading last week, but ended on Wednesday up 435 percent at \$347.51. On Thursday, it reached \$483, before falling after Robinhood and other platforms cut off trade of its stock under the ticker symbol GME. It resumed its upward momentum on Friday, rising 75 percent from the beginning of the session. The enthusiasm for companies many analysts expect to collapse has spread elsewhere, with movie theater chain AMC, furnishings store Bed Bath and Beyond and business software manufacturer Blackberry all seeing their shares rise. — AFP

## NBK announces winner of KD 125,000 in Al-Jawhara draw

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to reward its customers with an outstanding array of draws, prizes and offers all year round. In this context, the bank announced Abeer Abdulrahman Saadat as the winner of Al-Jawhara Monthly prize worth KD 125,000 for January 2021.

On the other hand, NBK announced the names of the winners of Al-Jawhara Weekly Draws worth KD 5,000 each including: Saad Shayhan Najm Aldhafeeri, Salah Abdulla Ahmad Al-Ali and Khaled Abdullah Hamad Al-Sultan.

The draw was held live on NBK Instagram page in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as representatives from NBK, noting that Al-Jawhara monthly and quarterly draws are conducted in the presence of a representative from Deloitte. Al-Jawhara Account gives customers the opportunity to enter draws and win prizes of KD 5,000 weekly, KD 125,000 monthly as well as the grand

prize of KD 250,000 quarterly. Every KD 50 deposited into Al-Jawhara Account gives the customer a chance to be one of the next lucky winners, and if no withdrawal or transfers occur on the account during the holding period, customers will receive an additional chance to enter the draw for every KD 50 held in the account, doubling their chance to win.

Commenting on Al-Jawhara Monthly Draw, Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "We are keen to award our customers all year round, and Al-Jawhara Account gives them the opportunity to enter periodic draws, as well as provides them with an outstanding means of saving, with big chances to win." "We are continuously communicating with our customers to identify their needs, and also work on measuring their satisfaction with provided products, as part of our commitment to enrich their banking experience," Al-Nusif added.

Al-Nusif affirmed that NBK is keen

on making the process of Al-Jawhara Account opening quick and easy by visiting the nearest NBK Branch, or simply through NBK Mobile Banking or NBK Online Banking, as part of our Digital Transformation Strategy that provides our customers with integrated banking experience by enabling them to make all their banking transactions without visiting branches.

Since 2012, National Bank of Kuwait has rewarded loyal customers with a total worth of prizes amounting KD 2,200,000 in Al-Jawhara weekly, monthly and quarterly draws. In addition to providing top-notch, cutting-edge and highly secure banking services, NBK is keen to



Hisham Al-Nusif

give customers a variety of offers, rewards and prizes that suit their expectations all year round.



## Taxes and food certificates: UK counts Brexit costs

**LONDON:** A tangle of post-Brexit paperwork, duties and taxes is disrupting commercial ties between Britain and the European Union that have often taken years to build, piling extra costs on small firms that can make cross-Channel trade unprofitable.

Changes since the UK's departure from the bloc's single market and customs union on January 1 have made it "commercially and practically impossible for us to continue actually shipping to the EU", laments cheesemaker Simon Spurrell. Owner of the Hartington Creamery, which produces crumbly, flavourful Stilton cheese, Spurrell must now include a food health certificate signed by a veterinarian with each order sent to the bloc. Regardless of the package size, one slab of the geographically-protected treat or a whole crate, the cost of the certificate is the same — £180 (204 euros, \$247).

A big price to pay for the creamery, which previously relied on EU customers for around one-fifth of online sales. "We may just have to abandon the EU market completely until both sides come to their senses," said Spurrell, who is now eyeing sales into North America to help fill the gap.

The food certificate, which applies also to meat and fish products, is not the only bitter-tasting financial consequence served up by Brexit—even though Britain struck a tariff-free trade deal with the EU.

British customers purchasing goods from the EU with a sale price of more than £135 (152 euros, \$185) are in some cases having to pay so-called import value-added tax (VAT) of around 20 percent.

They may have to also pay customs duties and higher courier charges. The result is that some EU-based companies, mainly small ones, have decided to stop selling products to buyers in Britain.

#### 'Reality of Brexit'

"It certainly isn't a tariff but nevertheless it's going to have an implication for UK customers and make goods from the EU more expensive," said Gary Rycroft, a partner at law firm Joseph A Jones & Co in Lancaster, northern England. "In that sense, it's a protectionist policy because it's creating a barrier to trade. "That's the reality of Brexit," the consumer affairs legal expert told AFP.

For businesses, there is also the headache of "rules of origin", bringing new charges levied on goods exported from the UK that have been made with imported materials. "We're hearing from increasing numbers of small exporters who are struggling with rising courier costs, customs declarations, rules of origin requirements, duties and VAT charges," according to Mike Cherry, national chair at British lobby group The Federation of Small Businesses. Around 20 percent of small and medium-sized enterprises have suspended exports to the EU owing to the new rules, revealed a recent study by UK accountants UHY Hacker Young. — AFP



Business

# Gulf Bank HR dept wraps up a year of employee achievements in 2020



Aijal 7 Group with the executive management



Aijal 7 graduation ceremony

**KUWAIT:** As Gulf Bank is wrapping up a year of accomplishments, the bank is also recognizing the magnificent achievements of its employees in 2020.

In the face of a challenging year, Gulf Bank's Human Resources (HR) department spearheaded a variety of initiatives including a robust pandemic response and business continuity plan, community outreach opportunities, human capital and talent development measures, and more. These initiatives reflect a long-standing culture at Gulf Bank that has always supported and empowered its employees as part of the Bank's vision to enhance economic and social sustainability in Kuwait.

Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources, Salma Al-Hajjaj, commented: "In celebrating the accomplishments of Gulf Bank as a whole, it is now more important than ever to recognize the magnificent achievements of our employees who have demonstrated a spirit of resilience in the face of adversity. We would like to recognize all our Gulf Bank employees for their dedication and commitment, and thank them for the impact that their collective efforts have made at the Bank and the imprint they have left on the country."

### Pandemic safety & response

Gulf Bank is committed to applying the best preventive health measure to ensure the safety of both its clients and staff. During the first stages of returning to normal life, Gulf Bank was keen to ensure business continuity while implementing a set of initiatives that prioritized both employees' physical and mental wellbeing, and included the periodic sterilization of the Bank's branches, implementation of social distancing measures, and several employee wellness programs.

### Safety first

During the first stages of returning to normal life, Gulf Bank was keen on applying all the necessary precautionary measures to ensure the regular sterilization of its locations. These measures include taking customers' temperatures at the entrance, maintaining physical distance, and ensuring both customers and staff are wearing gloves and masks at all times. To raise awareness and encourage a culture of social distancing, Gulf Bank placed several markers and signs across its branches and internal spaces with the recommended amount of individuals allowed in any given space.

Gulf Bank's HR department also distributed Personal Safety Pouches for all employees that included a hand sanitizer, masks, hand soap, and elevator safety keys. To ensure employees stayed informed on the latest health and safety measures, Gulf Bank launched a staff Instagram account and exclusive WhatsApp service for employees.

Gulf Bank also distributed a detailed safety guide for employees that included recommendations to ensure a safe working environment in addition to a detailed remote work guideline with tips on creating a proper work-from-home atmosphere.

### Employee wellness program

In light of the exceptional circumstances the world had been undergoing, Gulf Bank also launched a nationwide mental and physical wellness campaign to

raise awareness about adjusting to the gradual and safe return to the workplace. Gulf Bank's Employee Wellbeing Program, which offered employees access to professional counseling through a series of focused workshop sessions, was designed to target specific challenges facing the Bank's workforce, particularly employees working directly with customers. The program was held in partnership with Dr. Amar Behbehani, who holds a PhD in Creative Psychology and Design Educations, and offered attendees up to 40 hours of one-on-one or group counseling, plus other group sessions.

This year, Gulf Bank was the first bank in Kuwait to offer psychological services for its employees in recognition of the importance of mental and social health during the pandemic. Gulf Bank hosted two wellbeing webinars during the national lockdown which were open to attendees from various local banks, and launched a remote mental and physical wellness training program for over 200 of its employees.

### GB heroes

Towards the end of 2020, Gulf Bank held a series of appreciation ceremonies to recognize employees' extraordinary contribution, hard work, and dedication throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Gulf Bank employees who displayed an immense sense of dedication and commitment to the organization throughout the pandemic were presented with plaques and pins by their direct General Managers during a series of ceremonies covering all departments and units

Al-Khaleej team also assisted at the Coronavirus Rapid Screening Center in Sabhan. Volunteer employees distributed preventive materials to all visitors as part of the Bank's unwavering commitment to social responsibility, and as part of its community sustainability efforts in raising awareness about the virus and its prevention.

### INJAZ & community outreach

As part of its commitment to empowering long-standing partnerships, Gulf Bank extended its support to INJAZ Kuwait, a non-profit, non-governmental organization for education and training in workforce readiness, financial literacy and entrepreneurship. As part of their ongoing strategic partnership with INJAZ, Gulf Bank sponsored INJAZ Kuwait's annual "Company Program" competition in which students pitched their business ideas to a panel of judges. In light of this year's circumstances, this year's competition was held virtually, with each of the winners taking home valuable prizes sponsored by Gulf Bank. During the pandemic, Gulf Bank participated in three INJAZ Al-Arab programs: Job Shadow, Steer Your Career and Head Start.

### World cleanup day

As part of its multiple efforts throughout the year to take action on preserving environmental sustainability, Gulf Bank also participated in the largest daily gathering of waste in Kuwait's history, in honor of World Cleanup Day. In collaboration with non-profit initiative Alnowair,

combined both classroom and virtual training, conducting over 50 courses to more than 700 employees across varying career levels. As a result of Gulf Bank's ongoing investment in innovation and technology, Gulf Bank successfully launched its first remote training program for employees. The four-week virtual training program was held for a group of 25 employees, and included a detailed overview of Gulf Bank's products, customer service, sales department, and more. Throughout the program, employees were regularly evaluated to confirm their readiness to work at the Bank's various branches and Customer Contact Center.

### Training center at Crystal Tower

This year, Gulf Bank also developed a state-of-the-art training center in Crystal Tower to accommodate meetings and training sessions on demand. The ability to transform the venue from four separate rooms to one big hall allows the location to accommodate up to 150 employees. The training center employs a modern and unique design, and is fully equipped with the latest audio and visual technologies. The new training center is located in Crystal Tower, offering customers and employees beautiful views of the Arabian Gulf and several Kuwaiti landmarks.

### AJYAL program

Gulf Bank has a divested interest in cultivating young Kuwaiti talent for the local banking industry and for the future of Kuwait. Since 2014, Gulf Bank's

ment of the private sector and the national economy overall.

### IBS ceremony

Gulf Bank celebrated the success of its employees at the annual Institute of Banking Studies (IBS) graduation ceremony. The graduation ceremony, which was held at the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, celebrated 28 Gulf Bank employees who completed specialist banking courses at IBS during 2018-2019. During the ceremony, Gulf Bank awarded various certificates to its employees, marking the completion of a wide range of programs, including the Certified Credit Management (CCM), Certified Bank Branch Manager (CBBM), Certified Assistant Bank Branch Manager programs (CABBMM), Certified Bank Branch Operations Manager (CBBOM), Strategic Management Performance System (SMPS) Certificate, and SHRM Essentials Certificate.

### Executive education

In 2020, Gulf Bank partnered with several prominent universities, colleges, and institutions to drive its commitment toward strengthening the skillsets of its executive leadership team. Through a series of innovative courses and specialized sessions uniquely tailored to Gulf Bank, attendees received multiple training sessions on leadership proficiency and the skills needed to manage a corporation during times of uncertainty. As a result of these efforts, nine virtual international programs were held in partnership with business institutions and elite universities around the world.

### Female empowerment GB WOV

Launched as an internal employee initiative in 2017, Gulf Bank's "Women of Wisdom" (GB WOV) program was created as a result of the Gulf Bank management's vision to empower and support women in the corporate world. GB WOV offers networking opportunities for female employees via monthly gatherings held in groups of 10 to 12 women. The discussions are led by Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources, Salma Al-Hajjaj, and promote a transparent exchange on various topics related to work-life balance. The Bank's ultimate goal is to lend its support to more women in their career paths as they strive for, and reach, leadership positions. This goal goes hand in hand with the national development vision of New Kuwait 2035, which aims to increase female contribution and presence in leadership roles to 30 percent. In spite of the pandemic and national lockdown, Gulf Bank held several virtual webinars addressing the importance of gender parity.

### Breast cancer awareness

Every year, Gulf Bank aims to increase awareness for the early detection and treatment of breast cancer. Throughout October, Gulf Bank spearheaded several initiatives to raise awareness for breast cancer in an effort to encourage the local community to get themselves checked, including by lighting up its head office branch in Kuwait City in pink. The initiative educated the community on the importance of early detection and regular screening, with exclusive training for female employees in partnership with Cancer Aware Nation.

Human capital and talent development thrive in the face of a challenging year with a robust pandemic safety response and various community outreach initiatives

across the bank with particular emphasis on consumer banking and especially customer facing frontlines who attended during lockdowns periods.

### Community outreach 'Sawa'ed Al-Khaleej' volunteer program

This year, Gulf Bank expanded the role of "Sawa'ed Al-Khaleej," an internal volunteer program that brings together Gulf Bank employees from various departments for a variety of good causes. The program aims to provide Gulf Bank employees with opportunities to engage in a variety of corporate social responsibility initiatives, including internal and external events within the local community, environmental sustainability initiatives, charity and sports events, and more.

The internal volunteer team played a key role in Gulf Bank's post-COVID response efforts. As part of their efforts to support Kuwait's Civil Defense frontliners, Sawa'ed Al-Khaleej volunteers were assigned various responsibilities including food & mail distribution in lockdown areas, aiding in quarantine facilities, and completing organizational tasks at the Civil Defense's headquarters.

In appreciation and recognition of the Ministry of Health's continuous efforts throughout the year, Gulf Bank's Sawa'ed

Gulf Bank employees took part in a cleanup day aimed at raising awareness on the importance of sustainability throughout the year.

### Talent development & talent acquisition

Despite the pandemic, Gulf Bank's training and development opportunities remained at the forefront of the Bank's priorities throughout the year. This year, Gulf Bank conducted over 8 induction programs and recruited 174 newly hired staff.

The Bank's human capital initiatives consist of training and educating future generations to develop their skills and lend themselves to a knowledge-led economy. As such, Gulf Bank is committed to creating sustainable job opportunities for all segments of the Kuwaiti society, including through Kuwaitization efforts that contribute to the private sector's economic prosperity. This year, Gulf Bank spearheaded several Kuwaitization efforts, employing 152 Kuwaitis through a virtual hiring process that was held in full compliance with public health guidelines.

### Virtual training

During the pandemic, Gulf Bank's Talent Development Department introduced new training opportunities that

'AJYAL' initiative has targeted Kuwaiti professionals as part of an intensive training program designed to develop future Kuwaiti leaders. The program aims to help candidates develop key banking skills, cultivating holistic bankers that have shown growth potential on both a personal and professional level. In keeping with health requirements, the Talent Development Department changed the training format to online classes, graduating their sixth cohort with a small graduation ceremony with limited attendance, and initiating Aijal 7.

### MGRP career fair

In February, Gulf Bank wrapped up the 2020 edition of the Manpower and Government Restructuring Program (MGRP) Career Fair at the Public Authority of Manpower, marking the third consecutive year that Gulf Bank sponsored the fair as part of its commitment to offering employment opportunities to local youth. During the course of the event, Gulf Bank's Human Resources team met with multiple ambitious young men and women who wished to join the banking sector and held on-the-spot interviews at the career fair. Gulf Bank's participation reflected its ongoing commitment to the national development plan, Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait," which prioritizes the develop-



Return-to work webinar



New recruits taking the required exams before joining the bank



Awarding GB heroes

## Business

# BPG signs on Motiongate Dubai, Singapore Tourism as new clients

## BPG keeps the momentum going, leveraging three decades of destination marketing expertise

**DUBAI:** Award-winning omnichannel communications agency BPG, a part of the WPP network, has secured two more marquee brands from the leisure and tourism sector. Motiongate(tm) Dubai and Singapore Tourism Board are BPG's newest clients, capping off a year that has seen the 40-year-old agency enhance its omnichannel client roster. In 2020, BPG bagged a vibrant cross-sector mix of new clients and projects spanning fintech, retail, technology, media, telecom, life sciences and FMCG.

Following a competitive tender, BPG Dubai has been appointed the social media agency in the MENA region for Singapore Tourism Board, the lead development agency for one of Singapore's key economic sectors. BPG will use its creative and digital media expertise to bring alive Singapore's 'Passion Made Possible' brand promise. The holistic digital remit also includes managing Instagram and Facebook for Visit Singapore ME.

BPG Dubai has also won the contract to manage the public relations for Motiongate(tm) Dubai, the largest Hollywood-inspired theme park in the Middle East and the flagship theme park in Dubai Parks and Resorts. Avi Bhojani, CEO, BPG, said: "BPG Group has a 40-year legacy and deep under-

standing of the region. We have had the good fortune of supporting iconic regional destination marketing brands like DSF, DSS, Jumeirah, and more. We have partnered in communicating milestone initiatives, which shaped regional and global perceptions. Armed with our clients' trust, we look forward to leveraging our extensive experience in destination marketing to support Motiongate(tm) Dubai and Singapore Tourism Board with our insights, refreshed digital skill sets and innovation."

Sharing the agency's winning strategy, Avi explained: "By breaking down siloes and challenging traditional organizational structures, we are building omnichannel teams around clients, with one client lead as the brand custodian. We offer a refreshed agency model under a single P&L, combining digital and offline media services, public relations and public affairs, social media, branding, activation and creative content, with digital at its heart. This streamlines efficiencies, and delivers impact and consistency across all marketing."

"We were quick to innovate, pivot and action our plans into fruition, which was key to responding to the pandemic. Our clients value our ability to be real, impactful and nimble - without any bureaucracy or the needless overheads of siloes,

or dictates from Global Head Offices."

"This has enabled the agency to weather the challenges of 2020, deliver tangible value for clients and some excellent award-winning work," said Ketaki Banga, Executive Vice President, BPG Dubai. "A finalist for 19 awards at MEPA this year, BPG Group won 10 awards for clients such as KPMG, Deezer, Mazoon, Sony and Avenues Mall, across diverse categories such as Best Consumer Goods Campaign, Best Art & Culture Campaign, Best Retail Campaign and Best Professional Services Campaign. The agency also picked up best campaign awards for clients in Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia."

Motiongate(tm) and Singapore Tourism join BPG's impressive roster of clients such as Alshaya Group, Al-Tayer Motors, Behbehani Motors (dealers for Porsche, VW and Skoda), Booz Allen Hamilton, Boubyan Bank, DHL, HMD Global (the home of Nokia phones), Innoventures Education, KPMG, NBK, Philip Morris International, Rivoli Group, Sony, Spinneys, and Warner Media.

Souheil Arabi, President, BPG Kuwait, concluded: "Our data-driven creative expressions that cut through digital clutter to deliver results,



are exactly what brands need in the post-pandemic business environment. In 2021 and beyond, we look forward to helping our clients thrive in the new normal, delivering ROI on marketing budgets, bringing brands to life and reinvigorating the region's economy in turn."

## IMF-CEF Kuwait, IMF-ATI Mauritius hold webinar

**KUWAIT:** The IMF-Middle East Center for Economics and Finance (IMF-CEF) in Kuwait, and the Africa Training Institute (IMF-ATI) in Mauritius, held a high-level bi-regional webinar on "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Commodity Price Shock: The Way Forward for Africa and the Middle East".

The webinar was moderated by Yousef Al-Ebraheem, Kuwait's HH the Amir Court's Economic Advisor, Rabah Arezki, Vice President and Chief Economist, African Development Bank, kicked off the panel with a presentation on the challenges faced by both regions and the way forward, followed by discussions with eminent panelists including (by alphabetical order) Athanasios Arvanitis, Deputy Director, IMF's Middle East and Central Asia Department; Ibrahim Elbadawi, Managing Director, Economic Research Forum; Nikolay Gueorguiev, Division Chief, IMF's Fiscal Affairs Department; Jose de Lima Massano, Governor, Banco Nacional de Angola; Khaled Mehdi, Secretary General, Kuwait Supreme Council for Planning and Development; Catriona Purfield, Deputy Director, IMF's African Department; and Professor James Robinson, University of Chicago.

Al-Ebraheem highlighted the novel bi-regional approach to bring to the fore common traits and differences of the two regions regarding the policy responses to the adverse twin shocks—the global COVID-19 pandemic and the fall in oil and commodity prices. Arezki discussed success stories, including the Republic of Korea, of containing the virus and providing targeted assistance to those in need. He indicated that the COVID-19 crisis brought to light the underlying vulnerabilities of the two regions, which warrant decisive reforms. Recognizing the importance of moving to more inclusive societies, Rabah made the case that countries must simplify social safety nets by promoting a universal social protection system to replace the current fragmented systems that benefit few and exclude many. He argued that countries would need to provide Universal Basic Income (UBI) schemes and universal health systems.

Arezki underscored the importance of reforms to bolster transparency, productivity, fair competition, and digitalization, which are especially important to the informal sector to gain access to services and markets. He concluded that having a more efficient and accountable public administration would put an end to the rent-seeking behavior and help spur growth in the Middle East and Africa.

Arvanitis then examined the key policy priorities for the MENA region to pave the way for more sustainable and inclusive growth. Purfield discussed the way forward for Sub-Saharan African countries, bringing to the fore ways to "build back better" once the pandemic is overcome.

Turning to concrete country cases from both regions, Mehdi and Massano shared lessons from Kuwait and Angola in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and strategies going forward, highlighting lessons for other resource-rich countries. Gueorguiev discussed fiscal policy responses by oil exporters to the decline in oil revenue. He highlighted the consequences of the fact that although oil prices have recovered somewhat recently, the medium-term trend seems down, demand for oil remains subdued, and overall revenue still lower relative to 2019.

Elbadawi explained that countries in the Middle East and Africa are faced with a heavy fiscal burden, which will require a prudent expenditure policy going forward. He discussed the challenges and opportunities for the two regions to graduate from subsidizing commodities to directly empowering citizens through schemes like UBI or direct cash transfers.

Professor Robinson discussed the political economy consequences of the pandemic, explaining how political considerations can constrain economic policies in the two regions. The floor then opened for a discussion with a diverse audience from both regions, including participants from the public sector, academia, the business community, and representatives from civil society and international organizations. In closing, Al-Ebraheem thanked the CEF and ATI for the novel bi-regional approach. "This webinar was indeed very revealing in the richness of this approach, and I look forward to more such events," Al-Ebraheem told the audience.

## AUB supports CBK 'Diraya' financial awareness campaign

**KUWAIT:** Jehad Al-Humaidhi, Acting CEO of Ahli United Bank participated in the press conference on launching "Diraya" Financial Awareness Campaign initiated by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK). Diraya Campaign is an initiative overseen by CBK and managed by the Kuwait Banking

Association (KBA), with the aim to educate customers about their rights and to increase their awareness in financial institutions role and how to benefit from the services provided by the banks.

In a press statement, Al-Humaidhi emphasized AUB's support to Diraya Campaign as it is an excellent initiative of CBK geared to increase the level of financial and banking awareness and enhance social financial culture, which will be reflected in increasing customer protection against any potential risks on one front and enhancing their trust in banking institutions on the other front.

Al-Humaidhi pointed out that Ahli United Bank will endeavor to support the campaign through the Bank's all means of communication, in order to

achieve a wider spread of the campaign's mission and objectives and ensure that the public interacts with its content. Al-Humaidhi praised the campaign's role in enhancing the savings culture across a wider segment of society and encouraging them to deal with the banking sector in a way that contributes to achieving the financial inclusion.



## AVEVA joins United Nations Global Compact Network

**DUBAI:** AVEVA, a global leader in engineering and industrial software, has joined the United Nations Global Compact and the UN Global Compact Network UK - a voluntary leadership platform for the development, implementation, and disclosure of responsible business practices. With this announcement, AVEVA joins thousands of other companies around the globe committed to taking responsible business action to create a more sustainable world.

Launched in 2000, the UN Global Compact is the largest corporate sustainability initiative in the world, with more than 12,000 companies and 3,500 non-business signatories based in over 160 countries, and 69 local networks. Its aim is to mobilize a global movement of sustainable companies and stakeholders to create the world that conducts business responsibly by aligning its strategies and operations with Ten Principles on human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption; and takes strategic actions to advance broader societal goals, such as the UN Sustainable

Development Goals, with an emphasis on collaboration and innovation.

AVEVA is already making strides towards a sustainable future, and today's announcement marks another step in this journey. Alongside embedding changes across its own functions, AVEVA is enabling its customers to advance their own sustainability efforts with software solutions that can be applied across more than nine industry verticals to address challenges such as providing real-time energy data and supporting improved operational efficiency to help customers cut their energy consumption and emissions. Craig Hayman, CEO of AVEVA, commented, "Joining the UN Global Compact cements our existing commitment to align our business with the Ten Principles, and provides an exciting platform for learning and collaboration with other members. AVEVA's key focus will initially be on areas where our social and environmental contribution can be greatest, including addressing the climate crisis



and expediting the transition to a more circular global economy. We will accelerate this journey by delivering products and solutions which will drive more sustainable outcomes for our customers while also providing additional benefits for our employee and partner ecosystem focused on ultimately creating a better environment for all."

Steve Kenzie, Executive Director, UN Global Compact Network UK,

added, "The core of the United Nations Global Compact's mission is to support companies doing business responsibly by aligning their strategies and operations with ten universal principles on human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption. We also support business taking actions to advance the Sustainable Development Goals. We are delighted and encouraged by AVEVA's endorsement of our initiative."

## Sunday last date to enter Gulf Bank's Al-Danah draw for KD 100,000

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank has announced that Sunday is the last day for customers to deposit into their Al-Danah accounts, and therefore be eligible to win the KD 100,000 quarterly draw prize.

Mohammad Al-Qattan, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, encouraged Gulf Bank customers residing in Kuwait to take advantage of this opportunity, saying: "We recently updated Gulf Bank's Al-Danah draw prizes to give two people the opportunity to become millionaires, with a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1 million, and an annual grand draw prize of KD 1.5 million. Today, we are quickly approaching the deadline to participate in the first quarterly draw for a chance to win KD 100,000. We would like to remind all Gulf Bank customers that opening and depositing into an Al-Danah account is easier than ever and can be done online through the Gulf Bank app."

The Al-Danah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and its many advantages for account holders. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand

draw prize of KD 1,500,000.

### Numerous benefits

The Al-Danah account is the only account that rewards customers for their loyalty by providing loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the Bank. Accordingly, all chances gained by existing Al-Danah customers in 2020 have been transferred to the 2021 draws, and this will be repeated in 2022 onwards. Terms and conditions apply. It is also worth noting that all account draws are attended by a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, with the quarterly and annual draws also reviewed by Ernst & Young.

### Annual grand prize

To increase their chances of winning, account holders must either keep their account with a minimum deposit amount of KD 200, or increase their Al-Danah savings - the more deposits into an account, the more chances accumulated over time. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account holders also have the opportunity to enter and win cash prizes all year long through monthly, quarterly and annual draws.

### Opening an Al-Danah Account

To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open an Al-Danah account today with only KD 200. To open an Al-Danah account, existing Gulf Bank customers can apply through Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services, or book an appointment at their nearest branch by using the new "Visit Gulf Bank" app for a faster and more convenient branch visit. New customers can also open

an Al-Danah account by visiting their nearest Gulf Bank branch or by scheduling an appointment through the app.

### Deposit more for more chances to win!

With Gulf Bank, depositing into an Al-Danah account is easier and more secure than ever, as clients can deposit into their accounts through the following channels: Online/Mobile Banking App which includes the ePay service, ATMs and ITMs, the Customer Contact Center at 1805805 which is available 24/7, in addition to the free standing order service from other Gulf Bank accounts.

### Additional features:

- All Al-Danah account holders will receive a special Al-Danah ATM card for deposits, ideal for depositing money anytime.
- Gulf Bank's Customer Contact Center is available on WhatsApp around the clock for any inquiries at 65805805.
- Al-Danah account holders are eligible for free SMS alerts for all transactions.
- Customers can now calculate their chances using the Al-Danah Calculator, available at Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking App.

### Important notes

If a customer's account balance drops below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to their account on a monthly basis until the minimum account balance is increased again to a minimum of KD 200. If no transactions are made on an Al-Danah account for a 48-month period, the account will become dormant. However, this will not affect your chances, and you will still be eligible to enter all draws.

# Classifieds

Sunday, January 31, 2021

**Kuwait Times**  
 Now you can browse  
[www.kuwaittimes.net](http://www.kuwaittimes.net)  
 e-mail: info@kuwaittimes.net



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 66819 - 66817  
 Fax: (+965) 24348714  
[www.met.gov.kw](http://www.met.gov.kw)

## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

**BY DAY:** Fair and Dust will subside gradually with light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 08 - 35 km/h .

**BY NIGHT:** Rather cold to cold and Partly cloudy with light to moderate north westerly wind to wind with speed of 08 - 32 km/h .

WEATHER WARNING			Drop in Visibility	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 30/01/2021 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	21 °C	14 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	20 °C	14 °C		
ABDALY	21 °C	11 °C		
BUBYAN	20 °C	09 °C		
JAHRA	21 °C	13 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C		
SALMIYAH	18 °C	15 °C		
AHMADI	19 °C	16 °C		
NUWAISIB	22 °C	14 °C		
WAFRA	21 °C	14 °C		
SALMY	21 °C	09 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	01/31	Rather cold	19 °C	08 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 26 km/h
Monday	02/01	Fair	21 °C	08 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 30 km/h
Tuesday	02/02	Fair and some high clouds will appear	22 °C	08 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 28 km/h
Wednesday	02/03	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	23 °C	08 °C	VRB-SE	08 - 30 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:17
Sunrise	06:39
Zuhr	12:01
Asr	15:03
Sunset	17:24
Isha	18:44

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	25 °C
MIN. Temp.	17 °C
MAX. RH	80 %
MIN. RH	24 %
MAX. Wind	S 60 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	.31 mm

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

## Hospitals

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

## Clinics

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

## CHANGE OF NAME

Old name: Haussain Sabun, New name: Hussain Sabun, Passport: J5546259. (C 5764) 31-1-2021

## Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Oman Air	22958787
Turkish Airlines	22453820/1

**EMERGENCY 112**

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

## Word Search

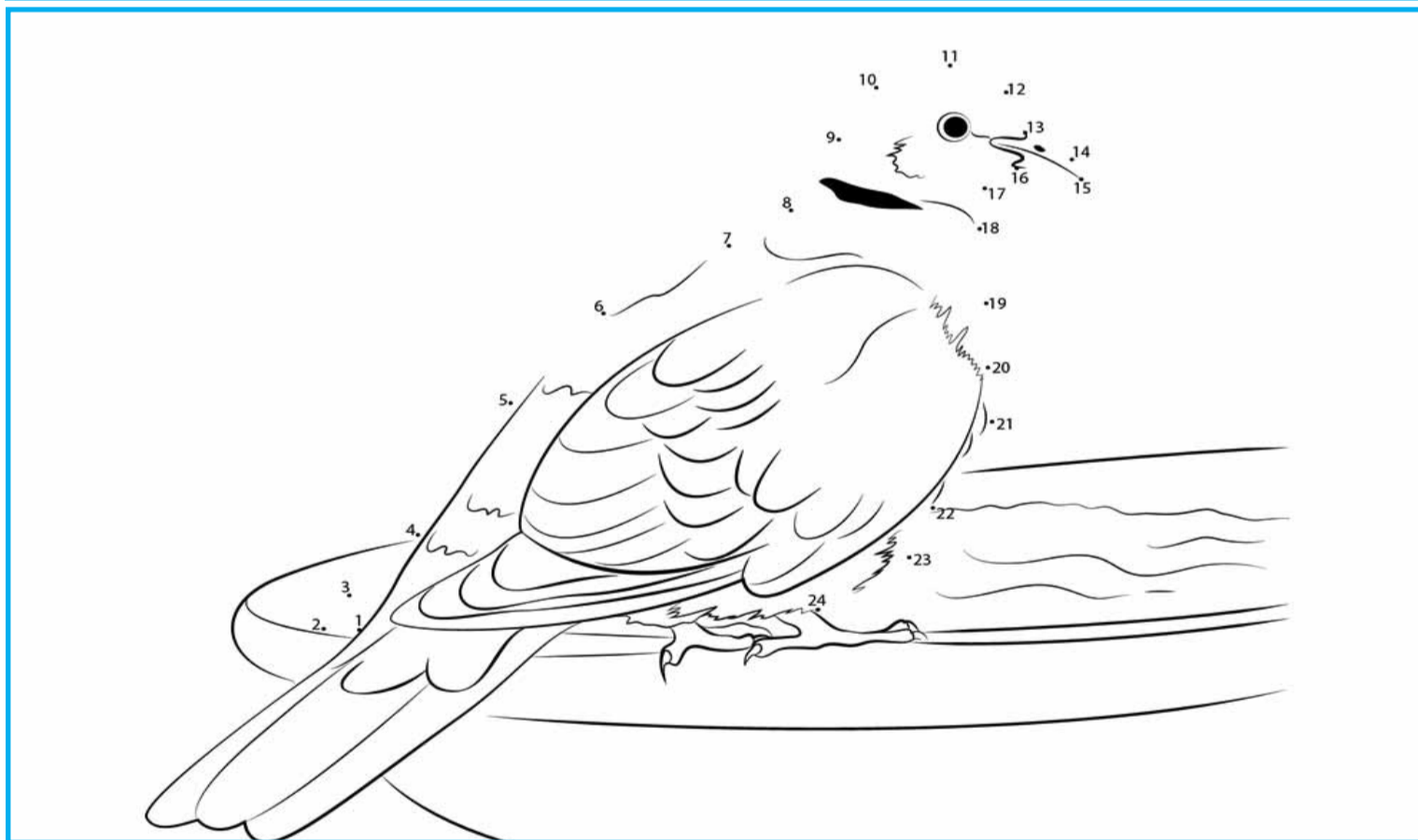
### Light as a Feather

Find all of the hidden words and the letters that remain spell out a funny saying about our feathered friends.

T H E N E K A R T L Q Y B E I  
 R D E I B I S E L M A U M I N  
 N R E T L N R V Y A G U A W O  
 W O E W U G E O T T Z H E I O  
 W B I O E F E D O R M T N K L  
 O I P R J I C A N A R Y E B U  
 R N G C A S T I G T S L V U T  
 I H A S Y H E P E L I C A N Q  
 O S M W E E E N C O E N R R D  
 L H M A S R A R P O F U S Y K  
 E A E L C C T U O C A L D E S  
 L W O L U A F H R N L U S K T  
 A K T O G F W A E U C O T R O  
 S T T W I H N E G K O C H U R  
 E E S N E E N I U G N E P T K

- |          |            |         |
|----------|------------|---------|
| BLUE JAY | HERON      | QUAIL   |
| CANARY   | IBIS       | QUETZAL |
| CRANE    | KINGFISHER | RAVEN   |
| CROW     | KIWI       | ROBIN   |
| DOVE     | LARK       | STORK   |
| DUCK     | LOON       | SWALLOW |
| EAGLE    | MACAW      | SWAN    |
| EGRET    | MAGPIE     | TERN    |
| EMU      | ORIOLE     | TOUCAN  |
| FALCON   | OWL        | TURKEY  |
| GOOSE    | PELICAN    | WREN    |
| GULL     | PENGUIN    |         |
| HAWK     | PUFFIN     |         |

## Join the Dots



## STAR TRACK

<p><b>Aries (March 21-April 19)</b>                  Changes you're making at home might necessitate your planning extra time, Aries. Perhaps you're waiting for a guest whose plane got delayed, or your shopping trip takes much longer because you can't find what you're looking for. Whatever it is, don't panic. Just try to stay rational and think about other options or alternatives.</p>	<p><b>Cancer (June 21-July 22)</b>                  A business or romantic partner might be in a foul mood and not very likely to tell you why, Cancer. It won't be all that easy to deal with, but it probably doesn't relate to any trouble between you. Therefore, it's best to let your partner work it out alone. Take care to stay cool and keep a safe distance between you, at least for today. The mood should pass by tomorrow.</p>	<p><b>Libra (September 23-October 22)</b>                  You could be introduced to a new person today Libra. He or she may be someone who will play a very important role in your life at one point. You will feel an instant connection and find out you share a passion for the same kinds of things. This person could turn out to be a very good friend, and romance is also very likely. Take it slowly and see what happens.</p>	<p><b>Capricorn (December 22-January 19)</b>                  A temporary separation from a love partner might have you in a very gloomy mood, Capricorn. Attempts to reach your friend by phone might prove fruitless. You might grow more and more frustrated and angry. There isn't much you can do other than leave messages. Don't let your insecurity get the best of you. Find something else to do until your friend has a chance to call.</p>
<p><b>Taurus (April 20-May 20)</b>                  Are you involved in a search through every store for a particular item, Taurus? You might be looking for a long time. The object you need won't be found at the local mall. Secondhand shops, obscure boutiques, antique stores outside town - all of these are more likely to have what you want than any shop you'd normally frequent. Be brave and take a chance. You might really enjoy it.</p>	<p><b>Leo (July 23-August 22)</b>                  Have you been exercising beyond your fitness level, Leo? If you have, you're probably feeling very tired, sore, and out of sorts. Take it easy today, even if you don't want to. You can still exercise, but concentrate on yoga and tai chi rather than more strenuous programs like aerobics. Push yourself a little, but not too much. The idea of "no pain, no gain" is a fallacy.</p>	<p><b>Scorpio (October 23-November 21)</b>                  Is there a secret you're obsessed with unveiling, Scorpio? Something strange could be going on in your neighborhood, or it might be an intellectual puzzle. Whatever it is, you're determined to discover the truth. You may do things you wouldn't normally do. Don't be too pushy with questions. Confine your research to books, newspapers, and the web. You can find a few clues without alienating anyone.</p>	<p><b>Aquarius (January 20- February 18)</b>                  Expect to be frantic if you have to take care of something that's time critical today, Aquarius. People and situations aren't in your favor. Everything will seem like a challenge. Prioritize tasks and do them slowly and cautiously one at a time. If you push too hard, you will make mistakes and wear yourself out. The world won't end if you don't finish all your tasks.</p>
<p><b>Gemini (May 21-June 20)</b>                  If you've given up on something you've lost, Gemini, you might get a real surprise tonight when a dream sheds light on where you might find it. It's important that you either get up and search for the object immediately or write the dream down in as much detail as you can remember. Otherwise, this could be one of those dreams that disappears as soon as you wake up, and you won't want that.</p>	<p><b>Virgo (August 23-September 22)</b>                  A goal you've recently been on the verge of attaining may suddenly hit unexpected setbacks, Virgo. However major or minor they are, it's going to be disheartening. The only thing you can do is pick up the pieces and move on. The goal isn't dead in the water. There are only some extra tasks that need to be done before you achieve it. Do what you have to, and hang in there.</p>	<p><b>Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)</b>                  Various intellectual or humanitarian subjects you've been reading about have changed your value system, perhaps subtly, Sagittarius. You may not notice it until you hear someone mention beliefs like those you used to hold. It might be uncomfortable to realize that such profound changes have occurred in you, but it's only a natural part of personal growth. Everything changes, so why not you?</p>	<p><b>Pisces (February 19-March 20)</b>                  Generally you avoid politics in any group you belong to, Pisces, but today you might get caught up in the fray in order to support a friend. This goes against your grain. Be sure and assess the situation carefully before getting too involved. Friend or not, you aren't going to want to alienate anyone in the group. Think about it. Is it worth it?</p>

## Lifestyle | Features

## First ever Arab fashion week for men kicks off virtually

From animal print ensembles to lacy hoodies and flared silky slacks, Arab men on Thursday got their first ever fashion week, with the three-day event showcased virtually online. Designer Furne One of Amato Couture, loved in Dubai for his ethereal designs, opened the unprecedented event with a fall/winter 2021-2022 collection entitled "The First Temptation". Set in the desert, the models all wore white, including lacy hoodies and pants. The traditional dishdasha robe worn by men across the Arab Gulf was featured, but revisited with a slit down the front.

"The world around us is changing, so too are attitudes towards fashion, and nowhere more so than in the

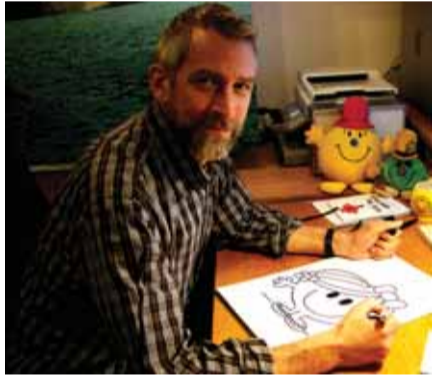
Middle East," said Mohammed Aqra, chief strategist at the Arab Fashion Council. "Arab Fashion Week-Men's presents the breadth of menswear beyond formal attire and street wear and paves the way for men in the Middle East to embrace a more adventurous wardrobe," he added. The council organized the event, which will be broadcast on YouTube for the three day duration, to showcase some 15 regional and international designers, including from France, Britain, Iran and Lebanon.

Also on show Thursday were "Puro Teatro" (pure theatre) creations by Spanish designer Arturo Obegero, including high-rise pants, tops with crinkly waists and others with huge

bow ties hanging from the back. The first day of the Arab men's fashion week also featured designs by Zardouz, including animal print shirts and pants, as well as others by Anomalous and Boyfriend The Brand. Based in Dubai, the Arab Fashion Council represents all 22 members of the Arab League and is already behind the twice-yearly Arab Fashion Week, now in its 14th edition. The council aims at promoting regional designers and the industry across the globe. According to the Dubai Chamber of Commerce, menswear dominated the UAE apparel sector in 2018, amounting to \$12.3 billion in sales. — AFP

Happy birthday!  
Mr. Men books  
turn 50

It's an occasion that might make even Mr. Grumpy crack a smile. The colorful Mr. Men children's books are celebrating their 50th birthday. The popular series has now entered its sixth decade in 2021, surviving its British creator Roger Hargreaves thanks to the dedication of his son. "It is an amazing fact that we've reached half a century, it's a very long time for a series to be so successful," Adam Hargreaves told AFP.



An undated handout picture shows Adam Hargreaves, son of Mr. Men creator Roger Hargreaves working on a character.

The books' enduring popularity after the first story's publication in 1971 is an indication of "how strong my father's idea really is", he added. The younger Hargreaves played no small role in the genesis of the Mr. Men and the Little Miss series that followed, whose characters are named after the emotion or behaviour they embody. It was his own childish question—"one of those impossible questions that children like to pose to their parents," he said—that prompted his father to draw the first Mr. Men character. "My question was: 'what does a tickle look like?'" Hargreaves explained.

In response, his father drew a little orange man with a blue hat and arms of incredible length. Mr. Tickle was born. The character became a book, and that book, in turn, became a runaway success, even leading to a television series narrated by "Dad's Army" actor Arthur Lowe. Over the following years, Mr. Tickle was joined by a cohort of friends, including the perpetually smiling Mr. Happy and the accident-prone, heavily bandaged Mr. Bump. The Little Miss series followed 10 years later.

## Global success

Since their inception, some 250 million copies of the small square books have been sold in 30 countries around the world, from Britain to China, and translated into 17 languages. Hargreaves said that his father had always been ambitious

about the books and saw the potential of the series. "But in terms of whether he thought it would have lasted for 50 years I don't think he could have imagined that, half a century on," he said.

The success of the Mr. Men and Little Miss series was not always assured, however, and could have come to an abrupt end when Roger Hargreaves died suddenly at the age of 53. Following his father's death, Adam, who had always loved to draw, decided to take on the books himself. "One of the most difficult things was actually taking on board the idea of creating something," the 57-year-old said. "There was a kind of reluctance on my part to actually create anything new. And I just saw it as my dad's idea," Hargreaves added.

But he did go on to create new characters and finds inspiration for them often in the world around him. Fans are currently being asked to vote on mrmen.com for two new characters to join the gang in Happyland. Hargreaves still finds himself returning to his father's books when he feels stuck for ideas. "I think a lot of people might have thought it was kind of quite difficult to do emotionally," he said of following in his father's footsteps.

"But actually, I found it quite comforting, because it sort of brought me closer to him." There are some things Adam refuses to change: the "unique style" of his father's drawing, the interior decoration—"definitely stuck in the 70s" and the "old-fashioned" rotary telephones. He believes the strength of the Mr. Men and Little Miss books lies in their timelessness. The characters are "based on a little bit of us, our emotions and our characteristics. And obviously, those don't date", he said. "Children are looking at the Mr. Men, Little Miss series in exactly the same way as they were 50 years ago," he said. "So, conceptually, the idea doesn't need to be updated or modernized."

## Next generation

The core ideas of the books may have remained the same but the series has also moved with the times. In recent years, Hargreaves has put characters from the BBC's popular science fiction series "Doctor Who" into the books and members of pop group the Spice Girls. During the Covid-19 crisis, the books have also played an important role.

"Through this pandemic, Mr. Men and Little Miss have helped children understand how they feel," he said. "Mr. Grumpy will show them what anger is and show them how to deal with it, in a very kind of funny and amusing way," Hargreaves added. A father now himself, Hargreaves said he had no plans at present to put down his brush. But he hopes that when retirement does beckon the series might stay in the family. "You never know, there might be another generation of Hargreaves drawing and writing Mr. Men in 50 years time," he said. — AFP

February 2, Mexican Catholics mark Candlemas, the day when according to their tradition Christ was presented in the temple in Jerusalem. It is usually an occasion for families to celebrate and to dig deep into the imagination to create new outfits for baby Jesus dolls. This year's trend is "COVID Child"—a sign of the times in the Latin American country, which has reported more than 150,000 coronavirus deaths, one of the world's highest tolls.

At a store in Mexico City's historic district, dolls roughly the size of a newborn baby peer out at shoppers from behind their small masks and face shields. Some are dressed in medical gowns while others wear white laboratory coats and even stethoscopes. The

CANADIAN LUC LANGEVIN  
MAKES VIRTUAL MAGIC

Faced with the shutdown of his touring shows due to pandemic restrictions, Canadian illusionist Luc Langevin reached far up his sleeve and developed a new trick-interactive virtual performances. "The pandemic forced me to find a new way to do magic," said the 37-year-old Canadian. Langevin, who gives performances in French, used to regularly travel to Europe with a team and piles of equipment for shows, including in France where television appearances helped make him famous. The pandemic and resulting cancellations of live shows forced him to rethink things, he told AFP.

Like the martial arts he learned as a child, Langevin "used his adversary's strengths against him." "The pandemic forces us all to be in front of screens, so I thought to myself: how can I amaze people in this context?" he said. From a small studio in Montreal, he has found success with virtual shows. His large travel trunks are now stacked against a back wall of the studio in a former factory. On a magician's table sit various items for his tricks—a deck of cards, a lemon, a nut and a knife. A camera follows Langevin around the room for just over an hour for his show "Interconnected." "All of the acts are very interactive," he said.

About 20 spectators with "premium" tickets appeared on the edges of the screen. Langevin called out to them, asked them to name an object or a card that he then revealed. He used a magic scarf to turn Donald Trump into a cucumber. During the show, audience members received an email which he implored them "not to open right away." It contained information to be offered by audience members that he had already "guessed." Some may be disappointed: There were no amazing levitations, poetic storylines or soaring music like in Cirque du Soleil (with which he has collaborated), and sometimes a few glitches—"Eric, your microphone is not



Canadian illusionist Luc Langevin hides a lemon under a coffee cup before making it disappear during rehearsals for a new livestreamed magic show from his Montreal studio. — AFP photos

plugged in," he told an audience member. "Great show, too bad some tricks fell flat," commented Mikael Turpin in one of the few bad reviews of the show on social networks.

## Virtual audience participation

The idea for the new show was to be "close to the people" with a virtual audience that participates and influences the show, giving it an air of originality, according to Langevin. "I was wondering, would people be prepared to pay \$25 or \$55 for a one-hour online magic show, with all of the cheap entertainment available on Netflix, YouTube and social networks," said the artist. The answer is yes, he added. The show launched at the end of 2020 and was initially to run for two months. But it has been a hit, selling out the first 40 shows, and demand for upcoming performances continues to be strong. "The show will go on as long as there's a demand," Langevin said.

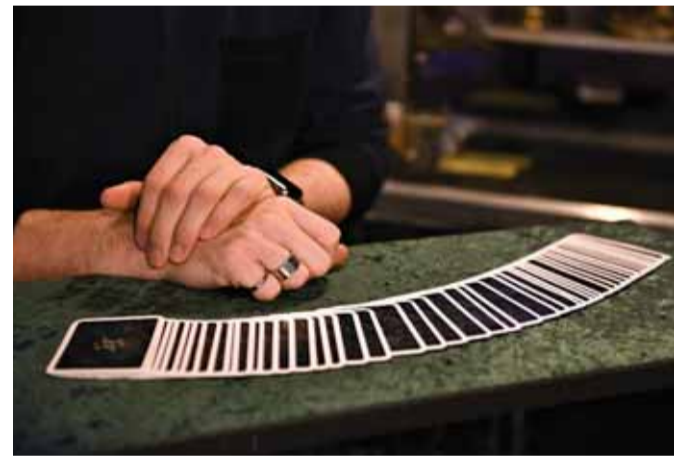
With only two paid technicians and an average of 850 spectators per show,



Canadian illusionist Luc Langevin sets up a card trick at his Montreal studio with a deck featuring images of French celebrities.

"we became profitable much faster than we thought," he said. "All the shows are done here, there's no big tour buses, no hotel rooms, no per diems to pay my entourage..." And it's helped to expand the illusionist's reach. "I can do a presentation for Europe at 2:30 pm-but over there it's 8:30 pm.

After that I can go back to my house to eat a meal with my family and come back in the evening for a Canadian show," commented the married father of a young boy. So has the pandemic been a boon for him? "One can see it that way," he said. Next up: an English-language version of the show for the United States and Canada. And when pandemic restrictions are eventually lifted, Langevin said he may continue performing virtually, interspersed with live in-person shows. "It's magic that is very different. The two products can coexist," he said with a smile. — AFP



Canadian illusionist Luc Langevin rehearses a new trick with playing cards, for a new livestreamed magic show from his Montreal studio.

Baby Jesus dolls  
help raise COVID  
awareness  
in Mexico

Wearing miniature face masks and clutching tiny bottles of hand sanitizer, dolls representing the baby Jesus are being given a COVID-19 theme in a pandemic-era twist to a Mexican tradition. Every



View of dolls displayed for sale at the @Nino Uribe® traditional Mexican store in Mexico City. — AFP photos

idea is to "pay tribute to the doctors and nurses who are on the front line of this pandemic," said manager Felipe Garrido. "It's also to raise awareness so people understand that this is not a game and that we're going through a very difficult situation," he added. "As we're very religious people, when we leave home and do the sign of the cross and turn to see the baby Jesus it reminds us that we must leave with a face shield, mask and hand sanitizer."

## Protecting loved ones

Despite a partial lockdown in the capital, customers still trickle into the store and others like it to buy the pandemic-themed clothes for their dolls. Aline Villegas, a 26-year-old physiother-

apist, was buying "COVID Child" for her father, a doctor, who always puts a baby Jesus on an altar in his office. "He's helping many patients with COVID-19, and I'm protecting him," she said. Previous themes for the baby Jesus dolls include football players, at the consternation of the Catholic Church.

Inside the store, social distancing is strictly observed and the entry of customers is controlled. But outside is a different matter. A crowd, including many people without masks, throngs the streets. Shops have been allowed to reopen in the historic center despite the suspension of non-essential activities in the capital, where coronavirus cases continue to soar. Those infected include

67-year-old President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who after months of refusing to wear a mask announced on Sunday that he had COVID-19, though he said his symptoms were mild. Mexico City authorities say the spike in cases is largely due to people gathering during Christmas and the New Year, despite a plea from the Church for people to mark the occasion at home. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

# Star-studded Sparks documentary seeks audience at Sundance

What do Mike Myers, Neil Gaiman, Duran Duran and the Red Hot Chili Peppers have in common? They are all mega-fans of the cult, odd-ball, if-you-know-you-know band Sparks, according to a new documentary from Edgar Wright which premiered at the Sundance festival yesterday. To Wright and his fellow initiated, the eccentric California brothers that form Sparks have forged one of the most unique and lasting influences on popular music today, with a distinctive blend of poetic lyrics, falsetto vocals and constant re-invention.

Fresh off the success of his Oscar-nominated "Baby Driver," Wright called on his famous friends to contribute to passion project "The Sparks Brothers," which charts the many rises and falls of Ron and Russell Mael over five decades. "It was pretty easy. People who are Sparks fans are like evangelists—they want to tell other people how much they love Sparks," the "Shaun of the Dead" director told AFP. "Sparks are one of those bands that make people want to make art and make music," added Wright. The feature-length movie charts how a "glam rock anomaly" briefly



In this file photo Canadian actor Mike Myers arrives for the 91st Annual Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos

soared in mid-70s Britain, topped France's charts later that decade, and stormed Los Angeles radio waves with early synth pop in the 80s.

Sparks also left a sizable mark on Germany's club scene in the '90s, got impersonated by Paul McCartney, wrote an upcoming film starring Adam Driver and Marion Cotillard... to name just a few

of their varied adventures. "I felt that the only thing stopping Sparks from being as big as they could be was like an overview, like a documentary, about them, so everybody can understand the context of it," said Wright.

### 'Uncompromising'

As the film displays, the Mael brothers have never truly courted mainstream success, constantly reinventing Sparks' sound while remaining "insular... as people and as musicians." "Neil Gaiman—we would never (have guessed) in a million years!" said Russell, for whom the movie's eclectic gamut of famous fans came as a shock. "And Flea, we'd have had no idea that someone as strong of a character as he is—and stylistically, the Red Hot Chili Peppers—would be into the band..." he told AFP.

The movie recounts how the siblings flirted with Hollywood once before—in a 1990s manga film set to be directed by Tim Burton, before he eventually pulled the plug. They have spent the intervening decades on diverse projects including a collaboration with Franz Ferdinand, a 21-night London residency playing all



In this file photo Flea, bassist of the US rock band Red Hot Chili Peppers performs at the main stage of Rock in Rio festival, Olympic Park, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

their albums back-to-back, and a radio musical about Ingmar Bergman. But the pair, who struck up a friendship with Wright on Twitter, are ready to give the silver screen another stab. Along with "The Sparks Brothers," they also penned a musical film "Annette"—"a pretty special and uncompromising film," according to Russell—for French director Leos Carax, and starring Driver and Cotillard.

**'Icing on the cake'**  
For "The Sparks Brothers," Wright mixed interview footage with archive concert clips, quirky animations and recreations of key moments in the brothers' lives. The humorous tone will be familiar to fans of Sparks' music, as well as Wright's "Cornetto" film trilogy. The director's mission to broaden the band's fanbase will depend on the film finding a distributor at the influential Sundance-America's biggest indie movie fest, which is taking place online due to Covid and runs until Wednesday. Meanwhile Wright's next fiction movie, "Last Night in Soho" starring Anya Taylor-Joy ("The Queen's Gambit"), was recently delayed again until October, in the hope audiences will be able to return to theaters. For Sparks, simply creating a standalone film was an end in its own right. "Obviously, as a bonus, if a lot of people end up seeing it and having a positive reaction, that's just icing on the cake, too," said Russell.— AFP



In this file photo US-Irish actress and director Olivia Wilde arrives for the 35th Film Independent Spirit Awards in Santa Monica, California.



In this file photo Director Ben Wheatley attends the premiere of A24's 'Free Fire' at ArcLight Hollywood in Hollywood, California.

## Apocalyptic movies shot during pandemic hit Sundance

A virus horror and a last-day-on-Earth comedy—both entirely devised, shot and edited during the pandemic—brought an apocalyptic flavor Friday to the Sundance film festival, which has moved online due to COVID. Speaking after "virtual" world premieres at the influential US indie event, the films' creators described how they funneled their boredom and anxiety into creativity by quickly finding ways to safely film during long lockdowns.

"I had a slightly hysterical episode about one week into the lockdown... I needed to calm down and part of the calming down was to try and write," recalled "In The Earth" director Ben Wheatley. The first new production to film in the UK after its initial March lockdown, the horror is set in a remote English forest where scientists are conducting mysterious experiments while a virus sweeps through the cities. "It was a weird amount of pressure on us... all the protocols were brand new at that point," said Wheatley.

While COVID-19 does not provide the main plot of the movie, it serves as an essential backdrop to the film's events. Wheatley told an online Q&A that the introduction of social distancing and lockdown had made even newly finished films look like they were "from another age." "You'd sit there and watch a movie and it has these massive crowd scenes in, or all their concerns were concerns of two years ago," he said. "I think that horror films especially, but movies in general, should reflect the moment that you're in."

Meanwhile, comedy "How It Ends" imagines Los Angeles on the day an asteroid is due to wipe out the planet.

Liza (played by co-director Zoe Lister-Jones) sets out on foot to confront those who have wronged her—and make a few last-minute apologies of her own—all en route to a wild, end-of-days party. Conceived in the early weeks of California's lockdown and shot in summer, the movie also takes place almost entirely outdoors—on the city's permanently sunny streets, gardens and pool decks.

### 'Home movie'

The filmmakers raced to finish and release the film "while we are all still struggling with some of this emotional minefield," said Lister-Jones, describing the process as therapeutic during "a very bleak time." Helen Hunt, Bradley Whitford and Olivia Wilde are among the famous faces who pop up for socially-distanced conversations with Zoe during her "existential scavenger hunt"—many shot outside the A-listers' real-life homes.

"Normally when someone comes over with two cameras and a sound guy and an actor, I'm like 'I'm excited to be in your home movie,'" joked Charlie Day, who appears with his wife Mary Elizabeth Ellis. "It was super quick—I got a call one day saying 'hey, we're going to show up at your house tomorrow'... I didn't really know what I was getting myself into," added Lamorne Morris.

Friday also saw the Sundance premiere of "The Pink Cloud," in which two strangers are forced to cohabit indefinitely when a toxic cloud spreads across the planet midway through their one-night-stand, making the outside air deadly. However, the eerily prescient Brazilian sci-fi was written and shot a year before COVID-19. Top US indie film festival Sundance, co-founded by Robert Redford, typically takes place each winter in the Utah mountains, where multi-million-dollar deals are struck for many of the year's most coveted arthouse hits. Due to the pandemic, all of this year's 72 feature films are making their premieres via online streaming, with the shortened festival running through to February 3. — AFP

## Coachella festival scrapped again amid virus fears

Organizers of the world-famous Coachella music festival, due to be held in April, have been forced to cancel the event because of coronavirus concerns, the second year in a row it has been shut down. Cameron Kaiser, a public health officer for California's Riverside County, where the massive gathering is held, said Friday the order to cancel was based on concerns of "resurgence of COVID-19 both within the county of Riverside and worldwide." He said the Coachella and Stagecoach music and arts festivals, both scheduled to take place in April, attract "hundreds of thousands of attendees from many countries, including

several disproportionately afflicted by the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic."

"If COVID-19 were detected at these festivals, the scope and number of attendees and the nature of the venue would make it infeasible, if not impossible, to track those who may be placed at risk," Kaiser said. Festival organizers had not said if they would attempt to find a later date for the 2021 festival. Coachella and Stagecoach are usually held every year on two weekends in April in the California desert. Last year, the festival had been postponed until October because of the pandemic when authorities opted to scrap it altogether. The lineup was meant to include headliners Rage Against the Machine, Travis Scott and Frank Ocean. According to media reports, the economy of the Coachella Valley suffered a drop in revenue of up to \$700 million due to the cancellation of last year's festival. — AFP



## APPLE TV+ PLANS MINISERIES ON WEWORK RISE AND FALL WITH JARED LETO

Video-on-demand service Apple TV+ has commissioned a miniseries based on the saga of WeWork, the shared office giant that almost went bankrupt after becoming a darling of Wall Street, with Jared Leto playing the role of its colorful former boss Adam Neumann. "WeCrashed: The Rise and Fall of WeWork," will follow "the greed-filled rise and inevitable fall of WeWork, one of the world's most valuable startups, and the narcissists whose chaotic love made it all possible," Apple TV+ said in a statement. Founded in 2010, WeWork was built on the model of shared office space, combining both flexibility and user-friendliness. A startup with a dynamic and innovative image, WeWork quickly won over investors, reaching a theoretical valuation of \$47 billion in January 2019.

The group was preparing its entry on the New York Stock Exchange with great fanfare, but within weeks it suffered a catastrophic downturn and had to cancel. On the front lines was Neumann, managing director and co-founder of the company, a marketing and sales genius but also a man also prone to excess and wild unpredictability. To save WeWork from bankruptcy, its main shareholder, Japan's Softbank,

had to inject several billion dollars and shunted Adam Neumann aside. Oscar winner Jared Leto, long accustomed to colorful roles, will play Neumann alongside Anne Hathaway, also an Oscar winner, who plays Neumann's wife and WeWork co-founder Rebekah, who has a personality as volatile as her husband's. She, too, had to leave the group in 2019. — AFP



In this file photo US actor/musician Jared Leto arrives for the 2019 LACMA Art+Film Gala at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in Los Angeles. — AFP

## AFRICA'S LARGEST FILM FESTIVAL POSTPONED BY PANDEMIC

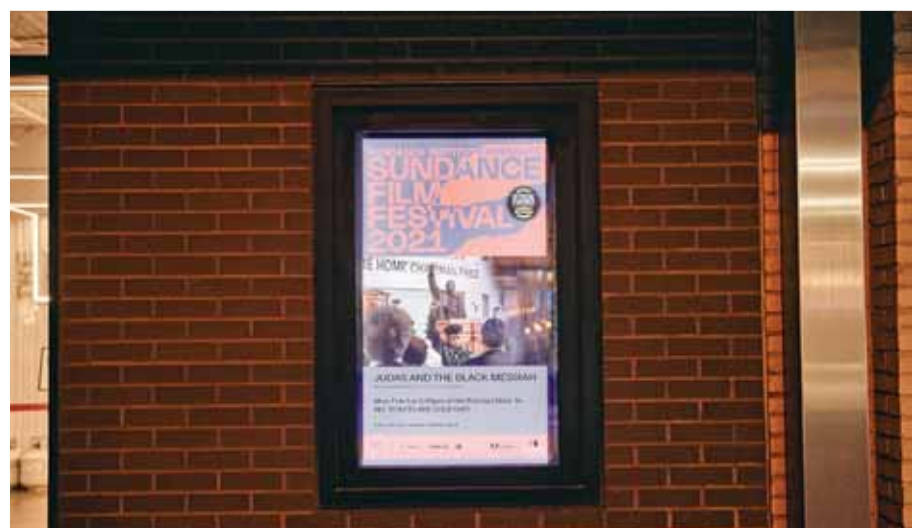
Africa's biggest film festival, which had been scheduled to run in Burkina Faso's capital Ouagadougou from February 27 to March 6, has been postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Pan-African Festival of Cinema and Television of Ouagadougou, known by its acronym in French of FESPACO, is an eagerly-awaited showcase held every two years. Burkina's cabinet on Friday "took the decision to postpone the holding of FESPACO to a later date," government spokesman Ousseni Tamboura told a press conference.

Founded in 1969, FESPACO stipulates that films chosen for competition have to be made by Africans and predominantly produced in Africa. Its top prize is the coveted Golden Stallion of Yennenga, a beast in Burkinabe mythology. The internationally-respected festival is closely followed by the US and European movie industries, which scout the event for new films, talent and ideas. Burkina Faso, a landlocked country in the Sahel, has so far recorded 10,423 Covid-19 cases, of which 120 have been fatal, but like other countries in Africa is struggling with a worrying second wave of the virus.



In this file photo a woman poses in front of a poster for the Pan-African Film and Television Festival (FESPACO) in Ouagadougou, on the eve of the opening of the festival. — AFP

"Given the health situation, both nationally and internationally, in relation to the coronavirus pandemic, it will be hard to hold FESPACO at the scheduled time," Tamboura said. "It won't be easy for us to decide (a new date) because this is linked to developments in the health situation," he added. The Cannes Film Festival in southern France, viewed by many as the most prestigious in the world, has been postponed from May 11-22 to July 6-17, its organizers said on Wednesday. Cannes was cancelled entirely last year for the first time since World War II, with just a small online presentation from its official selection in October.— AFP



The exterior of the Belcourt Theatre is seen during the 2021 Sundance Film Festival's satellite screening series in Nashville, Tennessee. — AFP photos

## Photo of the Day



Seth Quintero races during Rally Dakar from Wadi Ad-Dawasir to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Tanaka wants Olympic gold with Japan fans

TOKYO: Japanese baseball star Masahiro Tanaka said yesterday he hopes to win a gold medal at the upcoming Tokyo Olympics and celebrate with Japan fans, as the pitcher returns home after a seven-year stint with the New York Yankees. Speaking at a press conference in Tokyo, the 32-year-old — now set to play for the Rakuten Eagles — was asked about the possibility of him playing in the postponed Summer Games.

"If I ever have a chance to participate, there is no reason for me to reject," he said. "I had a bitter feeling when I played in the Beijing Olympics... This time I want to win a gold medal" as part of the host country's team, he added. "I'm very excited at the fact I will be able to pitch in front of fans in Japan."

The timing of this year's games is particularly meaningful, he said, as it comes 10 years after a 2011 tsunami that left thousands dead in Japan. Star pitcher Tanaka played for the Eagles from 2007 until 2013, when the team won their first-ever "Japan Series" title to the joy of fans in its home city of Sendai, which was devastated by the disaster. He began a seven-year \$155 million contract with the Yankees the following year.

Rakuten's chairman Hiroshi Mikitani said he hoped Tanaka's pitching would "invigorate" Japan this year. The Tokyo Olympics — initially set to take place last year but postponed due to the coronavirus — are set to begin on July 23. Despite growing concern over the event's feasibility, organizers and the International Olympic Committee insist it can go ahead safely. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga vowed Friday that the Olympics would be held this summer "as a symbol of global unity" to "bring hope and courage to the world". — AFP

## In Albania, first female boxer punches past the patriarchy

SHKODER: At age 15, Elsidita Selaj decided she wanted to box. Through sheer stubbornness she has succeeded, breaking down her family's resistance and sexist attitudes to become Albania's first — and only — competitive female boxer. "In the beginning, boxing was for me an impossible, unimaginable love," the now 20-year-old said after a recent training session in her hometown of Shkoder in Albania's north. "But thanks to my determination, it has become a possible love that belongs entirely to me," she added.

It was five years ago that she began hitting the boxing gym every day after school, begging to be trained in a sport considered the domain of men in a country with strict gender roles. Jetmir Kuci, a nine-time Albanian boxing champion and coach, initially refused to work with her. "I was a bit traditional," he recalled. "It was very difficult to accept to train Elsidita, thinking about the judgments of the people of the city where we live." But eventually, he agreed. "With her firmness, she was able to break a taboo for all of us."

Selaj, a licensed amateur boxer, has since proved her prowess, taking home a bronze medal at a regional Balkans tournament in 2017, followed by a second and third place finish in the 2018 and 2019 European Amateur Boxing Championships respectively. She now has her sights set on the Olympic Games in Tokyo, but will have to overcome a tough qualifying round in the spring, not to mention the financial hurdle of other expenses involved. "The goal of every athlete, not only mine, is the Olympics," she said. Her coach believes that a postponement of the Games due to the pandemic "may work in her favor because it gave her more time". And if it is not Japan, there will still be Paris in 2024, he added.



SHKODER: Albanian boxer Elsidita Selaj, 20-year old, poses for a photo during a training session at a gym in the city of Shkoder, on January 21, 2021. — AFP

## Mexican fans roar in Qatar ahead of Club World Cup

## Stadiums at 30 percent of capacity; no fans from abroad

DOHA: Despite only having a handful of fans, Mexico's Tigres will be able to count on the support of the diaspora in Qatar as rivalries are set aside for the Club World Cup underdogs. No supporters will be able to travel to the Gulf for the football showcase because of Qatar's ultra-strict coronavirus rules, meaning Tigres will be relying on the Monterrey club's backers already in the country.

"We are forgetting about national teams; we are all here today to celebrate the Tigres and we are very happy," said Enrique Flores, 58, a pilot from Monterrey who joined two dozen Mexican soccer fans at Doha's Education City Stadium for a Tigres fan event yesterday.

Around him, noisy compatriots sporting Tigres' signature canary jersey chanted a Mexican anthem, "Canta y no llores" (Sing and don't cry), while some played drums and tambourines and others modelled decorative sombreros.

"In Qatar there are around 600 Mexicans, but each has their own team," said Mexico's ambassador to Qatar Graciela Gomez as the group flicked double "L" with their fingers for "Libres y locos" (Free and crazy). "What unites us is that we all believe in Mexico, we all love our country and we are showing our solidarity for the success of any Mexican."

Footballing great Bora Milutinovic, one-time coach of the Mexican national side, even put in an appearance, firing up the gathering. "When they told me that the Tigres were coming, I was very happy because I have many memories of Monterrey," he said before adoring fans snapped selfies.

Spectator numbers will be capped at 30 percent of capacity at each of the two 40,000-seat grounds for the tournament, which also features favorites Bayern Munich and Egypt's Al-Ahly. Tigres will kick off the competition at Qatar's newly opened Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium on Thursday when they take on Ulsan Hyundai. "We all know fans can't travel and, for the Tigres and for the club, it's the first time they've qualified for an international tournament so we are very happy with this turnout," said Gustavo Velasco, 27, a chef.

## Virus fears

The Mexican embassy in Doha tweeted: "More and more Mexican residents in #Doha, #Qatar are joining



AR-RAYYAN: Supporters of Mexico's Tigres UANL football club, clad in masks due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, gather to support their team at an event for fans outside Education City Stadium in the Qatari city of Ar-Rayyan yesterday, ahead of their match against Ulsan Hyundai FC the following week. — AFP

the 'tiger wave' and engaging in various activities to support the @TigresOficial in the Club World Cup".

The embassy has paired Tigres fans in Mexico unable to travel with their countrymen in Qatar who will cheer on the 2020 CONCACAF Champions. Social distancing, mask wearing and use of Qatar's contract tracing app and sanitizer will be mandatory, authorities have said.

International fans will be unable to attend because of Qatar's virus mitigation measures, and there will be no public events including fan zones. The tournament will be a crunch test of FIFA virus containment rules.

Qatari health authorities say that, based on a recent domestic cup game, attendees have only one-tenth of the risk of contracting COVID-19 compared with the general population. Auckland City pulled out of the tournament, citing New Zealand's strict quarantine and virus prevention measures.

FIFA has said it will work with the Qatari authorities to "implement a comprehensive medical and security protocol providing the safeguards required to protect the health and safety of everyone involved in the competition".

Qatar's coronavirus cases are steadily ticking up, with 76.4 new cases per 100,000 people in the past week, up 28 percent on the week before. The official death rate is very low and cases remain fewer than many other countries in the region.

Mexico, with 126 million people, closed all but essential businesses last March because of the pandemic, dealing a devastating blow to its economy. It began to reopen some sectors in July, but reimposed restrictions as COVID-19 cases soared later in the year. Mexico has one of the world's highest death tolls from the pandemic at more than 155,000, along with more than 1.8 million known cases of infection. — AFP

## Up to 30,000 a day allowed into Australian Open

MELBOURNE: Daily crowds of between 25,000 and 30,000 will be allowed to watch the Australian Open, organizers said yesterday in a big boost to the season's opening Grand Slam. Aggressive restrictions on incoming travel have helped keep the coronavirus largely at bay in Australia, making it one of the few places in the world where fans can still attend sports events in significant numbers.

Victoria state's Sports Minister Martin Pakula said it equated to some 390,000 spectators across the two-week spectacle — around half the attendance of last year. The event's COVID-safe plan allows a daily crowd of 30,000 for the first eight days of the Slam, then 25,000 from the start of the quarter-finals.

"That means on Rod Laver Arena, as we get to the end of the tournament, we'll have an incredible atmosphere, not that different to the atmosphere we've seen in all the Opens in years past," he said. "It will not be the same as the last few years, but it will be the most significant international event with crowds that the

world has seen for many, many months." Victoria has now gone 24 days without any new locally acquired cases of the virus and all players who arrived in Australia had to undergo a mandatory 14 days of quarantine. Eight positive cases were detected from the more than 1,000 players, coaches and officials who flew in on 17 charter flights.

Players are gradually emerging from their lockdown with the first of six ATP and WTA tournaments due to begin at Melbourne Park on Sunday ahead of the Australian Open starting on February 8. Tournament chief Craig Tiley said it had been a huge logistical exercise. "We hope to have set the stage and the example for the rest of the world about the possibility of being able to do this," he said. US Open finalist Alexander Zverev insisted Saturday he is on track to contend for a maiden Grand Slam title despite a mounting personal toll off the court. The world number seven will spearhead Germany in the ATP Cup starting in Melbourne Tuesday as he eyes a first Slam trophy at the subsequent Australian Open. But Zverev, who fell agonizingly short in New York to Dominic Thiem, has endured a tumultuous period including allegations of domestic abuse by a former girlfriend and a recent split with coach David Ferrer. The 23-year-old, however, said he remained buoyed by his strong showing in the majors last year, which included a semi-final finish at the Australian Open. "I worked extremely hard in the off-season," he said. — AFP



MELBOURNE: Germany's Alexander Zverev hits a return during a practice session in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

## Sports

# Bogdanovic fires up Jazz, George, Leonard return to spark Clippers

## Utah cruise to 11 straight win without Mitchell, Favors



SALT LAKE CITY: Bojan Bogdanovic #44 of the Utah Jazz shoots the ball against the Dallas Mavericks on Friday at vivint.SmartHome Arena in Salt Lake City, Utah. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Bojan Bogdanovic put his stamp on a season-high 32-point performance with seven three pointers as the under-manned Utah Jazz claimed their 11th straight win by cruising to a 120-101 victory over the Dallas Mavericks on Friday.

Starting guard Mike Conley finished with 22 points and nine assists, France's Rudy Gobert had 17 points and 12 rebounds and Jordan Clarkson came off the bench to score 18 points for the Jazz, who drained 20 baskets from beyond the arc for their ninth straight game with 15 or more three pointers.

"We want to be unselfish, help each other on both ends of the floor," Jazz coach Quin Snyder said. "I think we're covering for each other, our communication defensively. The game can be simple if you let it be."

Utah was playing without two of its best players Donovan Mitchell and Derrick Favors. It was their second straight contest without all-star Mitchell, who remains in the NBA's concussion protocol after being hurt Tuesday against New York. Luka Doncic tallied 25 points, seven assists and six rebounds, but Dallas lost for the fourth time in a row. The Mavs return home for a Saturday game against Phoenix having lost seven of nine games.

### 50 points

Elsewhere, all-stars Paul George and Kawhi Leonard combined for 50 points in their return from the COVID-19 unavailable list as the Los Angeles Clippers routed the Orlando Magic 116-90. George finished with a team-high 26 points and nine rebounds while Leonard tallied 24 points for the Clippers, who continued their dominance over the Magic by winning their 14th straight contest in a stretch dating back seven years.

"Just having their presence was huge for us," said Clippers coach Tyrone Lue. "We needed those guys tonight. I thought our team was a little tired, but we fought through it." Leonard and George had been out of the lineup since Monday and did not join the team at the start of their current six-game road trip. They were both cleared to play earlier Friday at Amway Center arena in Orlando.

"It was good," George said of the added rest. "I took care of my body and rested. I just chilled and relaxed in

the house with my family." In their absence, the Clippers were 1-1, losing 108-99 to the Atlanta Hawks on Tuesday and defeating the Heat in Miami on Thursday 109-105.

The Clippers, who were still missing Patrick Beverley with a sore knee, lead the Pacific Division with a 15-5 record. Nikola Vucevic was the only Magic player to reach double figures but the Clippers held him to just 10 points, well below his 23-point season average.

"Coming in we made it a focal point to stop him," George said of Vucevic. "We didn't want him to get started early. We did a great job on him."

### Young casts spell over Wizards

Elsewhere, Atlanta's Trae Young scored 41 points to lead the Hawks to a 116-100 victory over the Wizards in Washington, where three players were ejected from a chippy contest. Washington, who never led after the first minute, were down by 18 when point guard Russell Westbrook was tossed after receiving his second technical foul for shoving Hawks guard Rajon Rondo.

Westbrook and Rondo had both received technicals after jarring late in the first half. Rondo, who waved goodbye to Westbrook as he departed the court, was ejected with 5:08 to play. Washington center Robin Lopez was also ejected, receiving two quick technicals while on the bench for comments to officials after a delay of game call on teammate Bradley Beal — the NBA scoring leader who was held to a season-low 26 points by the Hawks. "I have to figure out how to better lead these guys," said Westbrook.

In New Orleans, Lonzo Ball scored a season-best 27-points and the New Orleans Pelicans went wire-to-wire to beat the Milwaukee Bucks 131-126. Brandon Ingram scored 28 points, and Zion Williamson had 21 points, nine rebounds and a career-best seven assists for the Pelicans, who made 21 of 48 three pointers.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 38 points and 11 rebounds, and former Pelican Jrue Holiday scored 22 for Milwaukee, which trailed nearly the entire game after trying but failing to erase a 28 point deficit in the final 17 minutes. Elsewhere, James Harden had 25 points, 10 rebounds and 11 assists to lead the Brooklyn Nets to a 147-125 win over the Oklahoma City Thunder. — AFP

## Solskjaer hails 'brilliant' Fernandes' impact on Man Utd

LONDON: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has saluted "brilliant" Bruno Fernandes' impact in his first year at Manchester United. Yesterday marked the first anniversary of the Portugal midfielder's arrival from Sporting Lisbon. Nobody has scored more for a Premier League club than Fernandes since his debut in January 2020. He has bagged 28 goals in all competitions and provided 17 assists to transform United from underachievers into Premier League title contenders.

The 26-year-old saw off Liverpool with a superb free-kick in last weekend's FA Cup fourth round clash. "Brilliant," Solskjaer said of Fernandes' impact. "From day one he's come in and wanted to affect the environment, the playing environment, the staff. He's been a great addition. He's such a humble human being, working hard and I think everyone has seen what he's done on the pitch. Very pleased with his first year and long may it continue. The higher up in the league, the more pressure there will be on us and on him. Now the limelight is on him but I'm sure he'll handle that pressure fine."

"He's got his opinion, he's a winner," Solskjaer added. "He's not just going to let a game pass away and talk about it after. He wants to affect it there and then. He's so passionate about winning and he knows his football, he knows his stuff. He watches every single game there is on telly, especially the big games. And if you ask him 'did you watch that last night?' he's always seen the game, so he's going to make the most of his career, that's for sure."

Solskjaer has been impressed by the single-minded focus of Fernandes, whose transformative impact on United has been likened to that of French forward Eric Cantona in the 1990s. "Bruno has come in and helped the team, no doubt about that," the United boss said. "He's come in at a time when we needed his type of player and Bruno came into a team that makes his attributes and skills come to fruition. — AFP

## Cameroon host championship against backdrop of war and fear

LIMBE: A stone's throw from the Mungo River which partly marks the dividing line between Cameroon's anglophone and francophone regions stand armored vehicles and trucks filled with soldiers. They have been there on careful watch since the African Nations Championship (CHAN) got underway on January 16 with the home side's 1-0 win over Zimbabwe in Yaounde.

CHAN is a long way from being the most important football tournament in the world — it is not even the biggest tournament in Africa. But the current competition has taken on a more significant role as the Cameroonian hosts run the dress rehearsal for next year's far more important African Cup of Nations (CAN) while handling COVID-19 and a deadly domestic war. This is, indeed, the first major international football tournament organized in the world since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of 2019.

According to Johns Hopkins University, Cameroon had recorded just over 29,000 cases on Friday with at least 462 deaths, relatively low figures which have prompted organizers to allow some fans into the stadiums — 25 percent capacity for the group games and 50 percent for the semi-finals. The greater fear, however, resides in the ongoing conflict in the west of the country.

Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest regions have for over three years been the theatre of a bloody conflict between government forces and armed separatists. The militants are demanding independence for the two regions, where English-speaking people predominate in the otherwise francophone-majority nation. Civilians are often caught up in the fighting, suffering at the hands of both sides, international aid groups and the UN say. So far more than 3,000 people have died and more than 700,000 have fled their homes during the conflict. Some armed groups have promised to disrupt CHAN.

Along the banks of the Mungo — symbol of the amalgamation in 1961 of Cameroon following the French and British rule after World War I — police and military personnel have been boosted strengthened.

### 'Ghost town'

With the group stage over and the quarter-finals starting on Saturday, fears are rising in Limbe, a town in the Southwest Region that will host one of the semi-finals, and in Buea, the region's capital, which is

the training centre for some of the teams. Ahead of last Wednesday's game between Zambia and Namibia in Limbe, the villages located along the road connecting this seaside town to Douala were almost deserted. The armed separatists, nicknamed "Amba Boys" because they want to call the territory Ambazonia once they secure independence, stage "ghost town" operations every Monday, prohibiting any activity where they can.

But since the opening of CHAN, "ghost town" has been decreed every day, including the eve of the match in Limbe. Usually very lively, the small towns of Tiko and Mutengene, between Buea and Limbe, were sealed off on Wednesday. "It is normal that we are on alert," said a police officer in Buea. "The enemies of peace are there, still active despite everything."

On the road, as in Buea, light armored patrols criss-cross the city, sometimes at high speed and other times at walking pace but always with machine guns at the ready. In Molyko, the boulevard which cuts Buea in two, lies the burnt-out shell of a car. Four other charred wrecks are still scattered along the way to Limbe. Convoys of soldiers are sometimes targeted by IEDs, improvised explosives placed by the roadside.

### Bomb

In November, suspected separatists attacked a school in Limbe, setting fire to two classrooms and forcing teachers and students to strip naked. Going down the mountain towards Limbe, however, as in some ultra-secure areas of Buea, life seems more normal. Clusters of children and high school students return home after a day in the classroom. Shops and bars are full. But in Limbe, each match brings a new and very palpable sense of fear. On Tuesday "everyone took shelter after a bomb explosion" near the stadium, says Harris, 19, who is still in shock. On this occasion, there were no casualties.

As a result, Harris opted "out of caution" not to go and see the Wednesday's Zambia-Namibia match as he had planned. At halftime in the match came a word of relief from the authorities.

"On the security front, everything is going well," Southwest governor Bernard Okalia Bilai told AFP. "We have not recorded any incident that would have disrupted our program," he said. But as the competition rolls on towards the final on February 7, so Cameroon holds its breath. — AFP



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's English striker Harry Kane (right) and Liverpool's English midfielder James Milner take knee against racism during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Liverpool at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, on January 28, 2021. — AFP

## Premier League urges clamp down on racist abuse

LONDON: England's Premier League has urged social media organizations to do more to combat racism following online abuse directed at the Manchester United duo of Axel Tuanzebe and Anthony Martial and West Brom's Romaine Sawyers this week. West Brom contacted police after Sawyers was sent a racist message during Tuesday's 5-0 loss to Manchester City, while the United pair came under attack following a shock defeat by Premier League basement club Sheffield United on Wednesday.

"I am appalled to see the racial abuse received by players this week," Premier League chief executive Richard Masters said Friday. "Racist behavior of any form is unacceptable and nobody should have to deal with it. Tackling online hate is a priority for football, and I believe social media companies need to do more."

Masters said while the Premier League had been talking to social media companies, more action was needed to ensure the "swifter removal" of abusive messages. "We are in regular dialogue with social media companies, challenging them to do more against discriminatory abuse on their platforms," he said. "We want to see swifter removal of offensive messages and improved identification and banning of offenders."

The abuse aimed at Sawyers appeared to be in response to the error he made that led to City's third goal, with the "appalled" Baggies insisting Friday they would be seeking the "toughest available legal punishment", as well as issuing a lifetime ban from The Hawthorns, should those responsible for the offensive posts be identified. Meanwhile, Albion manager Sam Allardyce questioned how those responsible could best be held accountable. "Romaine — or any black person — should not have to put up with this," he said. "It does become a greater thing to put right but who does it lie with? Should a player take legal action? That is an avenue for the PFA (Professional Footballers' Association) and all the players to get together about and choose the right way to go. How do we hold people accountable? Social media sites need to act in a more responsible way." His comments came after Manchester United condemned the "mindless idiots" who had racially abused Tuanzebe and Martial. A 2-1 loss to the Blades, where Tuanzebe inadvertently turned in Oliver Burke's winner for the Blades, appeared to be the catalyst for online abuse that saw racist terms and money emojis put on Instagram comments of the Manchester United pair's most recent posts. — AFP

## 'Shot from pool table' lifts Lyon to top of Ligue 1

LYON: Leo Dubois struck deep into added time on Friday to give Lyon a 2-1 home victory over Bordeaux and first place in Ligue 1. Lyon jumped from third to first, one point ahead of Paris Saint-Germain and Lille who both play today.

"The objective was to retake this first place and that puts pressure on our opponents, Lille and PSG," said Lyon coach Rudi Garcia. "When you score the winning goal in added time, it's always huge in terms of positive emotions."

Bordeaux coach Jean-Louis Gasset called the strangely swerving late winner "a shot from the pool table." Lyon had the best of the first half and took the lead after 32 minutes. Memphis Depay burst down the left. When he was fouled near the corner flag, he leaped up and chipped a quick free kick into the goalmouth.

Bordeaux had the chance to clear but the ball bounced off center back Laurent Koscielny and fell to Karl Toko Ekambi who rammed it home from the edge of the six-yard box. Bordeaux showed more aggression from the start of the second half and were rewarded after 55 minutes when they scored with their first shot on target.

Yacine Adli won the ball on the edge of the Lyon penalty area and rolled a pass to Remi Oudin whose low deflected cross fell to Samuel Kalou. The Nigerian smashed a shot over Sinaly Diomande's challenge and into the net. That sparked the game into life. Both teams had chances in an increasingly frantic finish before right back Dubois won the game.

Collecting an over-hit cross in space near the right edge of the Bordeaux penalty area, Dubois slashed the ball back into the goalmouth. The ball swerved, struck the far post and flew into the net. "I'm very disappointed because the players didn't deserve this," said Gasset. "We lost on a goal from somewhere else...a shot from the pool table." — AFP



PARIS: Lyon's French midfielder Mattia De Sciglio (left) fights for the ball with Bordeaux's South Korean forward Hwang Ui-Jo during the French L1 football match between Lyon and Girondins de Bordeaux at the Groupama stadium in Decine-Charpieu, near Lyon, on Friday. — AFP



LIMBE: Cameroonian security forces patrol at the football stadium in Limbe on January 23, 2021 in the Anglophone zone of Cameroon, during a football match of the African Nations Championship (CHAN). — AFP

## Man City move four points clear

Newcastle lift pressure on Bruce • West Brom, Fulham play out draw

**LIVERPOOL:** Manchester City opened up a four-point lead at the top of the Premier League with a 1-0 win over bottom-of-the-table Sheffield United, while Everton's bid for a top-four finish was dented by a shock home defeat by Newcastle. Gabriel Jesus scored the only goal inside the first 10 minutes at the Etihad as City extended their winning run to 12 games in all competitions.

Pep Guardiola's men thrashed West Brom 5-0 in midweek, but after beating Manchester United away on Wednesday, the Blades again belied their lowly position to put up a fight against the leaders. Ferran Torres and Jesus were two of five changes made by Guardiola and they combined to make the breakthrough as the Brazilian tapped home for his first Premier League goal since November.

City failed to build on the lead, but comfortably held out for a 15th clean sheet in their last 19 games to pull clear of second-placed Manchester United, who visited Arsenal later yesterday. Regardless of United's result, City have no reason to fear anyone at present. Their winning run is now up to 12 matches in all competitions and they are unbeaten in 19 games since losing to Tottenham in November.

At that stage, it was easy to believe City would struggle to feature in the title race. But, revitalized by Guardiola's tactical tweaks, they are in the hunt for a third English title in four seasons despite the continued absence of star striker Sergio Aguero. City's winning streak is the ideal preparation for next Sunday's trip to champions Liverpool, which

comes after a visit to Burnley on Wednesday.

At the other end of the table, Newcastle were the big winners of the day as they pulled clear of the drop zone with a first win in 12 games, while two of the bottom three West Brom and Fulham played out a 2-2 draw. Magpies manager Steve Bruce's future was under the spotlight after a wretched run that plunged his side into the relegation dogfight. But Callum Wilson scored twice in the final 17 minutes to earn a deserved 2-0 victory at Goodison Park on a bad day for Carlo Ancelotti's men.

Everton could have moved to within a point of local rivals Liverpool in fourth with a win, but rarely looked like scoring and were finally punished for a poor performance when Wilson lost his marker at a Jonjo Shelvey corner and looped a header across Jordan Pickford and inside the far upright. Wilson was then denied by the post after rounding Pickford, but the former Bournemouth striker made no mistake when Newcastle countered quickly in stoppage time.

Bruce's men are now eight points clear of the relegation zone after a point each did little for West Brom or Fulham's battle to beat the drop. The visitors were dominant in the first half at the Hawthorns and were made to regret not building on Bobby Decordova-Reid's opener. Kyle Bartley levelled for the Baggies two minutes into the second half before new signing Mbaye Diagne teed up Matheus Pereira to turn the game around. Ivan Cavaleiro's equaliser ensured Fulham remain above West



MANCHESTER: Sheffield United's English-born Irish striker David McGoldrick (right) challenges Manchester City's English defender Kyle Walker at the Etihad Stadium yesterday. — AFP

Brom in 18th and edged to within four points of safety. Crystal Palace eased fears they could be dragged into a scrap for survival as Eberechi Eze's winner earned the Eagles a 1-0 win over Wolves to move up to 13th. — AFP




# Kuwait Times

Established 1961  
The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf

## REGISTER TODAY

### for the COVID-19 vaccine

Free for all residents of Kuwait. To register visit:

## www.moh.gov.kw

STEP 1: Click on COVID-19 VACCINE REGISTRATION    STEP 2: FILL OUT BASIC INFORMATION    STEP 3: SUBMIT FORM

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe, effective and approved by Kuwait's Ministry of Health