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Panel rejects any withdrawal from sovereign wealth fund

MP calls for reducing salaries of ministers, senior officials

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly financial and economic affairs committee yesterday strongly rejected a government-sponsored draft law to withdraw KD 5 billion annually from the future generations fund, the country's sovereign wealth fund, a lawmaker said. MP Saadoun Hammad, a member of the panel, said the committee informed the finance minister and his team that the panel has rejected the bill and will not discuss it.

Kuwait has two funds, the future generations fund and the general reserve

fund. The first is for future generations only, while the other provides for government expenditures. The general reserve fund has run out of money because of a sharp drop in oil prices and as public spending continues to rise, especially on non-investment items like salaries and subsidies.

As the Assembly has refused to allow the government to borrow from international and domestic markets, it was forced to propose withdrawals from the future generations fund. Withdrawal from the fund is banned by law and a legislative amendment is needed to

allow any withdrawal.

Kuwait posted an accumulative budget deficit of KD 26 billion between the 2014/2015 fiscal year, when oil prices began to slide, and 2018/2019 fiscal year. The finance ministry has projected deficits worth KD 55.4 billion over five years from 2019/2020 until 2023/2024. Notably, the budget for the upcoming fiscal year is calculated based on an average oil price of \$45 per barrel, while the budget for the current fiscal year is based on oil prices of \$30 per barrel.

MP Muhalhal Al-Mudhaf yesterday submitted a proposal calling to reduce

the salaries of ministers and senior government bureaucrats, saying reforms should start from the top. The lawmaker also called for suspending all forms of additional benefits and perks given to them.

MP Bader Al-Dahoum, rapporteur of the budgets committee, said yesterday the committee decided to cancel a contract with a private lawyer who was hired to help defend the Assembly's channel. Dahoum said the committee found that the lawyer, who was getting KD 30,000 annually, was not involved in any case since he was hired in 2014 and that his job

was only to criticize opposition MPs. As a result, the committee decided to cancel the contract.

Meanwhile, MP Hamad Rouh El-Din yesterday sent a series of questions to the health minister over the coronavirus pandemic. He asked the minister about legal measures taken against holders of fake PCR tests. He also asked the minister about a reported plan to close the airport, which has already led to an increase in airfares. The lawmaker also asked the minister about studies on which the ministry based its decision to close restaurants, cafes, salons and health clubs.

News in brief

Kuwait reports 1,179 COVID cases

KUWAIT: Kuwait announced yesterday that 1,179 people tested positive for COVID-19 over the previous 24 hours, while two patients died during the same period, taking total cases to 192,031 and deaths to 1,085. The percentage of daily cases compared to tests was estimated at 15.6 percent. — KUNA (See Page 3)

40% rise in deaths in 2020

KUWAIT: Deaths in Kuwait in 2020 rose around 40 percent (3,230) to 11,302 by Dec 31, 2020, compared to 8,079 by Dec 31, 2019. Excluding deaths due to the coronavirus - 934 by Dec 31, 2020 - the difference in deaths between the two years is 2,296, an increase of around 28 percent. Deaths among non-Kuwaitis rose 60.5 percent during 2020 (2,028) to reach 5,380, compared to 3,352 in 2019. Deaths among Kuwaitis increased 25.46 percent (1,202), reaching 5,922 in 2020 compared to 4,720 in 2019. — Al-Rai

Consumer protection society formed

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry and Economic Affairs Faisal Al-Medlej issued yesterday a ministerial decision to establish the Kuwaiti Consumer Protection Association, the third association to be announced by the ministry. The first article of the resolution stipulates "the establishment of the Kuwaiti Consumer Protection Society is attached to its statute where its board of directors practices work without pay or reward." — KUNA

Iran denies attacking ship

TEHRAN: Iran's foreign ministry yesterday "strongly" rejected accusations by Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that Tehran was behind a recent attack on an Israeli-owned ship in the Gulf of Oman. "It is indeed an Iranian act, that's clear," Netanyahu told Israel's public broadcaster Kan. "We strongly deny this accusation," spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said, adding that "the source of this accusation itself shows how invalid (the claim) is." — AFP (See Page 5)

Warships dock in Sudan

PORT SUDAN: A US warship docked in Sudan yesterday, a day after a Russian frigate arrived in the same key Red Sea port where Moscow is planning to establish a naval logistics base. The arrival of the guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S Churchill to Port Sudan follows Washington's delisting of Khartoum as state sponsors of terrorism. The USS Churchill docked shortly after Russia's Admiral Grigorovich frigate arrived in Port Sudan. — AFP

400 EU MPs slam Israeli annexation; UAE envoy arrives

JERUSALEM: More than 400 European parliamentarians have urged leaders to use Joe Biden's new presidency as an opportunity to stop what they term Israel's "de-facto annexation" of the occupied West Bank. A letter seen by AFP was signed by 400 European politicians from across a range of backgrounds who serve in national legislatures and senates or in the European parliament.

Addressed to European foreign ministers and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, the letter argues that "the Biden administration presents a chance to correct course" in Middle East diplomacy. "The previous US administration left the conflict farther away from peace than ever," it added. Former president Donald Trump broke with much of the international consensus concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's "undivided capital" and moved Washington's embassy

Continued on Page 2



JERUSALEM: Palestinian Hatem Hussein Abu Rayala points at his house which was demolished again by Israeli forces in the neighborhood of Issawiya yesterday. — AFP

First Covax jab injected; Modi gets vaccinated

ACCRA: Ghana's President Nana Akufo-Addo yesterday became the first recipient of a coronavirus vaccine under the global Covax scheme, as US health workers prepared to distribute nearly four million doses of the single-shot Johnson & Johnson jab. Covax, a scheme designed to ensure that poorer countries do not miss out on COVID-19 vaccines that have so far been largely hoovered up by rich nations, is aiming to deliver at least two billion doses by

the end of the year.

Akufo-Addo received his AstraZeneca shot live on television along with his wife, a day before the rest of the first batch of 600,000 Covax doses are deployed across Ghana. "It is important that I set the example that this vaccine is safe by being the first to have it, so that everybody in Ghana can feel comfortable about taking this vaccine," the president said.

In Ivory Coast a short while later, Patrick Achi, President Alassane Ouattara's spokesman, was vaccinated in a tent vaccination center set up in a sports complex in Abidjan, the country's economic hub. Getting the jab, said Achi, was a "patriotic duty". Vaccination "offers the hope of a return to normal in the coming months," he

Continued on Page 2



NEW DELHI: A health worker inoculates India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a COVID-19 vaccine at AIIMS hospital yesterday. — AFP

Trump teases 2024 run, airs grievances

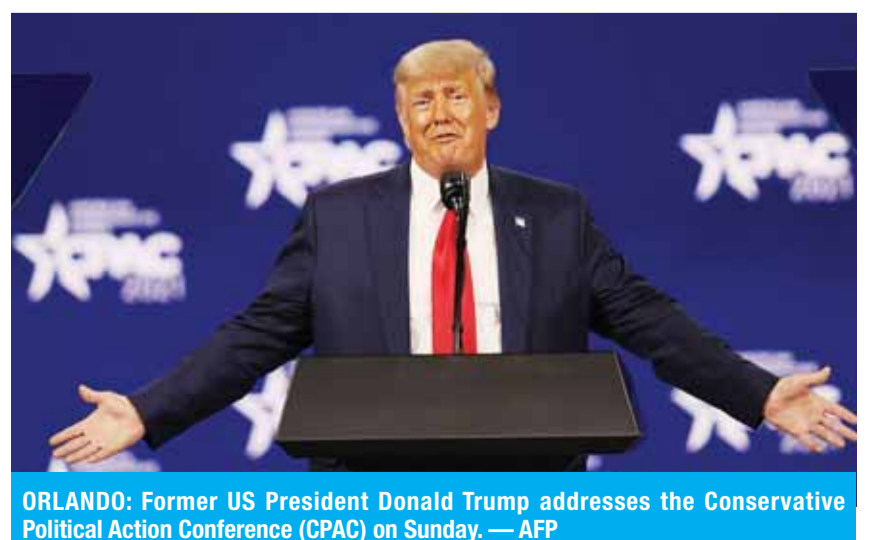
ORLANDO: Donald Trump told conservatives Sunday he was considering running for president again in 2024, as he reasserted dominance over the Republican Party and warned of a "struggle" for America's very survival. Echoing the grievance politics of his 2016 campaign and the harsh rhetoric of his one-term presidency, the 74-year-old fired up an enthusiastic crowd at the Conservative Political

Action Conference in Orlando.

In a keynote speech - his first since leaving the White House on Jan 20 - he repeated his false claims that he won the election instead of President Joe Biden, and hammered establishment Republicans who voted against him in the latest impeachment drama. But while he teased his future plans, he left the crowd guessing about whether he will challenge Biden in a rematch.

"With your help we will take back the House, we will win the Senate, and then a Republican president will make a triumphant return to the White House - and I wonder who that will be?" Trump said to a raucous cheer.

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ORLANDO: Former US President Donald Trump addresses the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) on Sunday. — AFP

Local

Amir receives Crown Prince, Speaker, Premier, Deputies



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



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



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah.



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



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

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

also received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Furthermore, His Highness the Amir received Deputy Prime Minister and

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

Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali, Saleh, Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. — KUNA



Palestinians go through a barbed wire fence into Israel as they attempt to cross to reach their workplaces close to the Israeli checkpoint of Mitar near Hebron in the occupied West Bank yesterday. — AFP

400 EU MPs slam Israeli annexation...

Continued from Page 1

there, infuriating the Palestinians who claim the eastern part of the city as the capital of their future state. The State Department under Trump also said it no longer viewed Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank as illegal. Trump's widely criticized Middle East peace plan earmarked parts of the West Bank for Israeli annexation.

While the Trump plan is dead, settlement expansion continues, with Israel regularly approving the construction of new homes for Jews on occupied Palestinian territory. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a close Trump ally, agreed to pause West Bank annexation plans in exchange for the diplomatic normalization with the United Arab Emirates.

"However, developments on the ground clearly point to a reality of rapidly progressing de facto annexation, especially through accelerated settlement expansion and demolitions of Palestinian structures," said the letter. "Europe must work with the Biden administration, countries in the region and the parties on the ground to prevent unilateral action undermining the possibility of peace, advance the rights and security of all people under Israel's effective control."

Israel's occupation of the West Bank began following the 1967 Six Day War, the conflict that also saw it seize control of east Jerusalem, an area it later annexed. The European Union insists any viable Israeli-Palestinian peace deal must be based on Israel's pre-1967 borders - a condition rejected across much of the Israeli political spectrum.

Biden has indicated his administration will restore US opposition to West Bank settlements expansion, but he does not intend to move the US embassy back to Tel Aviv. The letter also said that Gaza, the Israeli-blockaded Mediterranean enclave, "remains at risk of violent escalation at any moment", blaming both the blockade and "intra-Palestinian divisions".

Hamas Islamists who have controlled Gaza since 2007 are long-standing rivals of Fatah secularists who dominate the Palestinian Authority, but the two

sides are engaged in a unity push ahead of Palestinian elections called for later this year. "Palestinian reconciliation and elections across all the Palestinian territory is vital, including as a basis for ending the isolation of Gaza," the letter said.

Meanwhile, Israel's president yesterday formally received the first-ever ambassador from the United Arab Emirates, following last year's historic agreement between the countries to normalize ties. UAE envoy Mohamed Al-Khaja, who arrived in Israel earlier yesterday, delivered his credentials to Israeli President Reuven Rivlin at a ceremony in Jerusalem.

After greeting Khaja in Arabic, Rivlin said: "The entire Israeli people welcome you with joy. This will be your most important mission - to welcome the hands reaching out to you... treaties are signed by leaders, but real, sustained peace is made between peoples, face to face." Khaja said he would "work tirelessly to strengthen the political ties between our two countries, in the service of our peoples and regional stability."

The UAE was the first country to agree to establish full diplomatic relations with the Jewish state under the Abraham Accords, a pact brokered by former US president Donald Trump. The agreement made the UAE only the third majority Arab country to form official ties with Israel, following Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan have subsequently joined the Abraham Accords.

The agreements broke with longstanding Arab consensus that there should be no normalization with Israel until it reaches a comprehensive peace deal with the Palestinians. Earlier yesterday, Khaja met Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi in Jerusalem, who wished him "success" in his "historic mission". Noting the historic nature of his appointment, Khaja said he was "very proud and honored to be the first Emirati ambassador to the State of Israel". "My mission here is to foster and develop this relationship," he added. "We hope this will bring peace and prosperity to the people of the Middle East."

Israel opened its UAE embassy in January, with veteran diplomat Eitan Naeh heading the Abu Dhabi mission. Israel and the UAE have already signed treaties on direct flights and visa-free travel, along with accords on investment protection, science and technology. Today, Khaja is scheduled to visit Yad Vashem, Israel's national Holocaust memorial and education center. — AFP

Trump teases 2024 run, airs...

Continued from Page 1

"Who knows?" he boomed about his potential plans. "I may even decide to beat them for a third time, OK?"

Banned from Twitter and other social media, Trump has maintained a low post-presidential profile at his Mar-a-Lago resort. At CPAC, he walked on stage to revel in a lengthy standing ovation by cheering loyalists, the vast majority maskless despite the coronavirus pandemic. Like he did so often during his two campaigns, he painted a pitched battle against as Democrats' "socialist" agenda to remake the nation. "We're in a struggle for the survival of America as we know it," Trump said. "This is a terrible, terrible, painful struggle."

But he said the "incredible" populist movement that propelled him to victory four plus years ago is just beginning, "and in the end, we will win". Trump also put to rest the rumors that he might take his base of support to create a new political party. "I am not starting a new party," Trump said. "We have the Republican Party. It's going to unite and be stronger than ever before."

Trump as expected took swipes at Biden, saying the Democrat just concluded a "disastrous" first month in office. In his rambling 90-minute speech he attacked immigrants, slammed "cancel culture", criticized Biden policies on climate change and energy, and repeated

his false claims that "illegal" actions by Democrats had cost him the election.

But he also took aim at Republicans he feels betrayed him - a strong signal that he will seek to help out them in upcoming elections. He called out by name the 10 Republicans who voted to impeach him in the House of Representatives, and the seven Republicans who voted unsuccessfully to convict him in the Senate. "Get rid of them all," he seethed, while the crowd jeered.

Trump remains the most potent force in the Republican Party, something he made clear he was acutely aware of Sunday when he described his own endorsement as "the most powerful asset in politics". US political parties usually face a reckoning after a string of setbacks such as those the Republicans saw under four years of Trump: Losing the White House, the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The party is also marked with Trump's repeated lies about his election loss, his impeachment over inciting the US Capitol riot on Jan 6, and the faultline his actions have caused between establishment Republicans and pro-Trump populists. But, instead of jettisoning its troubled leader and charting a new path, much of the party still sees Trump as retaining a vice-like grip on its future.

At least at CPAC, enthusiasm for Trump remained sky high. Attendees posed next to a shiny gold-colored statue of the former president, and cheers rose up whenever panelists praised him. In a straw poll conducted at the conference, nearly seven in 10 respondents said they want him to run again. On future direction for the party, support for Trumpism was rock solid, with 95 percent of respondents wanting to continue Trump's policies and agenda. — AFP

First Covax jab injected; Modi...

Continued from Page 1

said. Ivorian Health Minister Eugene Aka Ouele said the first batch of 504,000 Covax vaccines would be distributed in the Abidjan area, "the epicenter of the country's epidemic".

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi also got his coronavirus jab yesterday - although a glitch in the online booking system meant thousands of others were turned away from hospitals nationwide. And in the United States, 3.9 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine are due to be delivered after it became the latest jab to get the green light from US regulators. The J&J rollout comes as a boost to President Joe Biden's plan to beat back a virus that has killed more than half a million Americans, making the US the world's worst-hit nation.

Vaccines are seen as crucial to returning the world to normality and healing the economy after a pandemic that has claimed more than 2.5 million lives across the globe. More than 224 million vaccine doses have been administered worldwide, according to national data compiled by AFP, with the Philippines among the latest countries to launch a rollout yesterday.

But rich countries have bought up the vast majority of those available, prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to warn that the crisis cannot end unless poor countries can vaccinate their populations too. A new row is brewing over a call, led by India and South Africa, for intellectual property rights to the vaccines to be waived.

Backed by dozens of governments from Argentina to Bangladesh, they argue that this would boost production and ultimately bring the pandemic to a swifter end. But the United States, the European Union and Switzerland - home to major pharmaceutical firms - oppose the idea, which is being thrashed out at a World Trade Organization meeting.

While inoculation campaigns are now well under way, the spread of highly infectious COVID variants has fuelled worries that they could prove more resistant to the vaccines. Britain has appealed for a person infected with the potent Brazilian strain to come forward after the person failed to leave contact details while being tested - meaning they could still be infecting others without knowing it.

Modi received a domestic developed vaccine, Covaxin, in a carefully choreographed operation at the AIIMS national medical institute. The vaccine, developed by Bharat Biotech, is one of two approved for use in India even though the late stage data from trials on 25,800 volunteers have not yet been released. Despite criticism from some doctors and health workers, India's drug regulator and the company insist it is safe for use.

Fears over vaccines have contributed to the slow pace of inoculation and Modi said on Twitter: "I appeal to all those who are eligible to take the vaccine. Together, let us make India COVID-19 free!" Problems with online registration did not help on the first day of the new drive. "It's utter chaos here," said Nilanjana Gupta, who took her lawyer father Sunil Gupta to the Max Smart Super Speciality hospital in Delhi.

Gupta said the administrators were "clueless". She said it took more than 30 attempts to get a registration number on the government app. "I expected this but it's still very frustrating," she added. An uncle of US Vice-President Kamala Harris was also among those affected. Balachandran Gopalan, an academic, told AFP he got onto the government portal and received a registration number and an appointment at a hospital in New Delhi's Malviya Nagar area.

"Once I got there, they checked my registration details and said they have no record of it," the 79-year-old said. Gopalan said hospital officials could not tell him when his turn would come. "I understand the doctors are stressed," he said. "But why put the patients under stress?" Some, like 69-year-old Vijaya Shankar, were happy after they got the inoculation, which cost just \$3.40. "I have waited for so long and the day is now finally here. I think the government has done a great job," she said. "The vaccine is cheap, I don't mind paying." — AFP

Local

Kuwait's COVID-19 cases jump by 1,179, two deaths registered

Kuwait, Belgium discuss measures to curb coronavirus

KUWAIT: Kuwait announced yesterday that 1,179 people tested positive for COVID-19 over the previous 24 hours, while two patients passed away during the same period, taking the total cases to 192,031 and deaths to 1,085. The percentage of daily cases compared to tests was estimated at 15.6 percent. The number of coronavirus recoveries in Kuwait rose by 946 to 180,155 over the past 24 hours, the health ministry said yesterday. The percentage of recoveries compared to infections was estimated at 93.8 percent.

Meanwhile, the number of people hospitalized with the virus stood yesterday at 10,791, with 157 of them in intensive care units, ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said, adding that some 7,542 swab tests were conducted over the same period, while the total number of swabs reached 1,792,041. Dr Sanad

went on to urge the public to abide by health precautions, mainly social distancing, in order to help limit the spread of the virus.



Recoveries up by 946

Kuwait had listed 962 new cases from 6,423 swab tests, five deaths and 1,012 recoveries on Sunday. The number of patients in hospital had

stood at 10,560 as of Sunday, including 156 in intensive care units. On Saturday, Kuwait listed 844 new cases from 5,704 swab tests, six deaths and 1,064 recoveries. The number of patients in hospital had stood then at 10,615, including 158 in intensive care units.

In other news, Minister of Health Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah yesterday held talks with Belgium's Ambassador to the State of Kuwait Leo Peeters on policies and precautions against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The MoH said in a statement that Minister Dr Basel and the envoy, who held the meeting at the ministry's headquarters, exchanged views on cooperation between the two countries in the health sector and other arenas. Dr Rehab Al-Watyan, Director of International Health Relations Department at the MoH, attended the meeting. —KUNA



KUWAIT: People arrive to receive a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at the make-shift vaccination center erected at the Kuwait International Fairground in Mishref yesterday. Kuwait received on February 28 a shipment of 53,820 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Woman hospitalized after harassment

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti woman accused a motorist of harassing her and deliberately hitting her car after she rejected his advances. The woman told Farwaniya Hospital that a man in an SUV harassed her, and when she ignored him, he hit her vehicle and sped off. The woman gave police the suspect's car's license plate number. Investigations are underway.

Swerving

A restaurant deliveryman was cut off by an unidentified motorist, who accused him of swerving towards him. The suspect beat the deliveryman and escaped. The victim failed to write down his car's license plate number.

Drug possession

Jahra police arrested a Kuwaiti man loitering in the governorate's industrial area late at night. He was found in an abnormal condition and had drugs on him. The suspects and drugs were sent to the Drugs Control General Department.

Jahra fight

Two Kuwaitis traded blows in a Jahra area, then both went to the police station and exchanged charges. The incident took place when the two met at a mall, where arguments over previous disputes got heated and led to exchanging blows. The two were sent for questioning as a prelude to taking legal action against them.

Money gone

A Kuwaiti man told police that he planned to buy electric appliances from a friend and paid him half the price, but the friend did not deliver the appliances and disappeared. He is also not answering his calls. Police are looking for the accused to question him over the matter.

—Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Rai

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A night view of Kuwait City. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

News in brief

Indian Embassy notice

KUWAIT: The Embassy of India in Kuwait announced that it will remain closed for consular services from today to Thursday as part of a precautionary health measure related to COVID-19. However, emergency consular services will continue to be rendered by the mission on prior appointment basis, a press release said. The request for emergency consular services may be sent to cons1.kuwait@mea.gov.in. Passport Services offered at all the three passport centers will continue. All embassy organized events scheduled for March 2021 stand rescheduled till further notice, the release added.

Falcons smuggler arrested

KUWAIT: Coastguards foiled an attempt to smuggle a number of falcons and curlews into the country, as man was arrested with eight cages containing the birds, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday. The suspect, a Kuwaiti man in his 40s, said he collected the birds from an Iranian boat, which left after receiving the payment. A security source said cameras spotted an Iranian boat that entered territorial waters, and a sea patrol was dispatched towards it. But the boat left the area quickly. Meanwhile, another boat was spotted receiving things from it, thought to be drugs, only to discover they were birds. Another source said trade in these types of birds is very profitable, as a bird bought for KD 200 from Iran is sold in Kuwait for up to KD 4,000.

330 Filipinos to be repatriated from Kuwait

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Philippine Embassy in Kuwait will repatriate as many as 330 nationals tomorrow. More than 200 of the Filipinos to be sent home are currently at the Philippine Embassy shelter, including domestic helpers who fled their employment and those who lost their jobs as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, those who have medical issues or are currently living in Kuwait without legal papers may be returned home.

"This is a necessary endeavor because we have several runaway housemaids at the shelter and we need to send them back to their loved ones. That is part of our mandate to protect the

wellbeing of every Filipino abroad," explained Philippine Embassy Spokesperson Adrian Baccay.

The embassy organized a chartered flight in collaboration with the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila and the Office of Migrant Workers Affairs (OMWA) at the request of the embassy in Kuwait. Many of those stranded at the embassy have been living in the shelter for months, have not received salaries or back pay from employers in Kuwait and have faced various forms of maltreatment at the hands of employers.

Kuwait and the Philippines have a contentious relationship over the treatment of domestic workers and the protection of their rights - which include not more than a 12-hour workday, one day off every week, a full month's annual holiday and the domestic worker's right to keep his or her passport. Many of those scheduled to go home have already been cleared by the Kuwait Ministry of Interior's immigration bureau for travel.

"We want them to go back to their families - we managed to fix their issues prior to their flight, which is the reason why we only set until 8 am today (March 1) to apply for the chartered flight. Included in the list are Filipinos whose records are clean with no travel bans or absconding cases, or else they need to wait for the next chartered flight if they want to be repatriated for free," Baccay said.

The Philippine Embassy has also been faced with challenges due to a backlog of applications for passport renewals and long queues for con-

sular services at its temporary location in Hawally. There are an estimated 230,000 Filipinos in Kuwait, the majority of whom are domestic helpers. The Philippine Embassy has facilitated the acquisition of papers and travel requirements such as exit visas for Filipinos, especially those categorized as undocumented workers, to guarantee their safe return to their families.

"This flight is for free - the Philippine Airlines plane came to Kuwait just for this, so we want the aircraft to be filled to capacity," Baccay said. He assured those who fail to catch the flight tomorrow will not be abandoned by their government, as the DFA has enough funds to transport more Filipinos back to Manila if necessary.

"All they need to do is register at the embassy. We will try to assess their circumstances and if they want to go back home, they can wait until the next flight. We are expecting chartered flights on a quarterly basis, so every three months probably we can send a request to our airlines. The last chartered flight was in December last year," he concluded.



Adrian Baccay

FRONTLINE HEROES OF KUWAIT

Student Art Competition 2021



It is our pleasure to welcome each and every youngster to our Student Art Competition. We hope that everyone is ready to create beautiful artworks and show support for our heroes of Kuwait! We're searching for great art - so get your paintbrushes, color pencils, crayons and markers ready. Let your talent flow and start painting. Good luck to our young artists!

- The competition is open to students aged 6 - 18 years with categories (6 - 8 years) (9 - 11 years) (12 - 14 years) (15 - 18 years) and special abilities students.
- The competition is open to all schools in Kuwait (government and private).
- Submissions are open from February 14, 2021 till March 31, 2021.
- 5 winners from each category will receive valuable prizes.
- All participants will receive a certificate of appreciation.
- All schools and individuals interested in participating in this competition are welcome.
- Participants in the ages 6 - 8 years may use marker colors only.
- You can use any drawing sheet, but of A3 size.
- All artwork must be hand drawn and not computer generated.
- All paintings should be submitted by email at painting@kuwaittimes.net in PDF format ONLY.
- Participant must include on the bottom of the artwork the following: name, age, email address, phone number and school in legible font.

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Prime Minister patronizes 8th E-Gov forum

KUWAIT: NoufEXPO announced in a press release yesterday that it will organize the "8th eGovernment Forum" on March 23-24, 2021. EGOV8 convenes virtually through cyberspace under auspices of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Khaled Al-Saleh will represent His Highness at the opening ceremony.

The Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) is the strategic partner of NoufEXPO in supporting EGOV8. Salem Muthib Al-Othainah, Chairman and CEO of CITRA, said, "The forum's slogan - Comprehensive e-government is an urgent need beyond CORONA - reflects one of the fundamental challenges imposed by COVID-19 on today's world. It became a vital necessity to achieve integrated electronic services in Kuwait, ie, those services that more than one government entity shares in its delivery to citizens and residents. Automating all government transactions has become a necessity because of the COVID-19 social distancing policy. Besides, electronic transactions have significant economic and community rewards. CITRA's support of EGOV8 stems from its regulatory role of the information technology industry in the State of Kuwait."

The Executive Manager of NoufEXPO, Magdy Sabry, commented, "Re-engineering government procedures will be the main focus during EGOV8. This task is one of the basic requirements for developing integrated and comprehensive eGovernment services. The output of business re-engineering of government procedures constitutes the input for developing comprehensive, integrated electronic services during the eGovernment program's advances and the prerequisite for its success."

The Press release noticed that EGOV8 convenes virtually due to COVID-19 restrictions. NoufEXPO considers this as an opportunity rather than a challenge. Specialists will be able to join from around the world without having to travel to Kuwait. The virtual EGOV8 removes the geographical barriers that face participants; hence, attendees can benefit from a broader spectrum of specialized global experiences.

NoufEXPO, in its statement, announced that it



Anas Al-Saleh



Salem Al-Othainah

has collaborated with Vmeets to run EGOV8 virtually through cyberspace. Vmeets platform provides a one-stop-shop for Virtual events, including a 3D interactive auditorium for presentation, panel discussions, workshops, an exhibition hall to host exhibition pavilions for participants, and advanced technologies to manage the course of the forum electronically, including registrations and confirmations.

The electronic platform also provides sponsoring companies with advanced capabilities to display their products, services, and technical capabilities through their display pavilions. They can speak directly with the audience and collect their contact details. They can also show videos, reports, and brochures of their companies. Sponsoring companies and attendees will have the right to watch a complete recording of EGOV8 after it is over.

NoufEXPO concluded its press release by extending gratitude to the so many global and local technology vendors that persistently participated in the previous EGOV events. International vendors include Microsoft, IBM, EMC, CISCO, Symantec, Fortinet, FireEye, EY, Aruba, Red Canari, and Techno-Management. Local vendors include major Kuwaiti enterprises such as VIVA, Al-Ghanem Industries, Kuwait United Co for Copies and Computer Services, KFH, KNET, Sultan Center, and Advanced Technology Company (ATC). NoufEXPO looks forward to welcoming organizations specialized in business re-engineering of government procedures, especially those with similar successful experiences in the GCC countries. NoufEXPO invites all interested organizations to contact the Scientific Committee or NoufEXPO on +965 22469921 or send their messages info@noufexpo.com.kw to arrange for their participation in this annual and unique technology event that is held virtually for the first time.



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This combination of pictures created and taken yesterday shows (left to right) the Russian Navy frigate RFS Admiral Grigorovich (494) and the US Navy guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S Churchill (DDG 81), both anchoring in Port Sudan. — AFP

US, Russia warships dock in Sudan port

US military seen 'renewing partnership' with Sudan armed forces

PORT SUDAN: A US warship docked in Sudan yesterday a day after a Russian frigate arrived in the same key Red Sea port where Moscow is planning to establish a naval logistics base, an AFP correspondent said. The arrival of the guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S Churchill to Port Sudan follows Washington's delisting of Khartoum as state sponsors of terrorism, following the April 2019 ouster of strongman Omar Al-Bashir.

An expeditionary fast transport ship, the USNS Carson City, had already docked in the port on February 24, the "first US navy ship to visit Sudan in decades", the US embassy in Khartoum said in a statement at the time. It "highlights the willingness" of the US military to "strengthen their renewed partnership" with Sudan's armed forces, it added.

The arrival of the USS Churchill was "the second (US) ship to stop in Sudan this week," said US Charge d'Affaires Brian Shukan. Its arrival, "sheds light on US support for a democratic transition in Sudan," Shukan added, in a message on Twitter.

The USS Churchill docked shortly after Russia's Admiral Grigorovich frigate arrived in Port Sudan, where the Russian navy said "a logistical support base" would be created. The Admiral Grigorovich frigate would refuel and its crew rest after exercises in the Indian Ocean off Pakistan, the navy added.

'Peace and stability'

Sudan's military said the Admiral Grigorovich's visit was "part of advancing diplomatic relations" between the two countries, according to a state-

ment late Sunday. In December, Russia announced signing a 25-year agreement to build a naval base in Port Sudan, part of Moscow's latest push into Africa as it seeks to renew its geopolitical clout. The purpose of the base will be to "uphold peace and stability in the region", according to the deal.

Russia's navy will be allowed to keep up to four ships at a time at the base including nuclear-powered vessels. The base will be manned by up to 300 military and civilian personnel.

Russia will have the right to transport via Sudan's airports and ports "weapons, ammunition and equipment" needed for the naval base to function. The Red Sea naval base will be Russia's first in Africa and only its second on foreign soil, after Tartous in Syria.

The US has its only permanent base in Africa in the port of Djibouti, 1,000 kilometers (625 miles) to the south, which overlooks the narrow strait between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden a chokepoint for world shipping. After Bashir was toppled, Sudan is led by an civilian-majority administration which has been seeking reintegration in the international community and to ending decades of pariah status.

In December, Washington removed Khartoum from its blacklist as part of a deal for Sudan to agree to normalize ties with Israel. The move is hoped to help fix Sudan's beleaguered economy suffering from decades of US sanctions, mismanagement and civil war, as well as by the secession of oil-rich South Sudan in 2011. —AFP

Netanyahu blames Iran for ship attack, Tehran denies charge

JERUSALEM: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday accused Iran of a recent attack on an Israeli-owned ship, noting his country was regularly "striking" its arch-foe in comments that followed an overnight raid on Syria. Iran has denied any role in the explosion last Thursday that hit the MV Helios Ray in the Gulf of Oman, leaving two holes in its side but causing no casualties.

The latest escalation between the sides came as the international community has been trying to salvage the troubled 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. "It is indeed an Iranian act, that's clear," Netanyahu told public broadcaster Kan. "As for a reaction—you know my policy," he continued. "Iran is Israel's greatest enemy, I'm determined to block it, we're striking at it throughout the region."

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh responded swiftly to dismiss Netanyahu's claims. "We strongly deny this accusation," Khatibzadeh told reporters, adding that "the source of this accusation itself shows how invalid (the claim) is."

Syria strikes

Netanyahu's remarks came hours after Syrian air defenses intercepted what they said were Israeli missiles over Damascus. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, said the strike hit the area of Sayyida Zeinab south of Damascus, where Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Lebanese Hezbollah forces are reported to be present.

There was no immediate report of casualties. The Israeli army refused to confirm its involvement in the attack.



DUBAI: This picture taken on Sunday shows a view of the Israeli-owned Bahamian-flagged MV Helios Ray cargo ship docked in Dubai's Mina Rashid (Port Rashid) cruise terminal. The MV Helios Ray, a vehicle carrier, was travelling from the Saudi port of Dammam to Singapore when a blast occurred on February 25, according to the London-based Dryad Global maritime security group. — AFP

It was not clear what caused the blast on the Helios Ray, a vehicle carrier travelling from the Saudi port of Dammam to Singapore, which punctured the boat's hull but did not cause

any casualties among the crew or damage to the engine. Israel has long accused Iran of trying to acquire nuclear weapons, a charge always denied by Tehran. —AFP

El Salvador's Bukele looks set to increase power with allies

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador: El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele looked set to increase his power as his allies took a clear lead in legislative elections, according to preliminary results early yesterday.

"Victory," Bukele tweeted in anticipation of a win, along with a video of fireworks in the capital San Salvador. The New Ideas party, founded by Bukele and contesting an election for the first time, together with the Grand Alliance for National Unity (GAN), through which he came to power, had more than half the votes according to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), with 64 percent of ballots counted after Sunday's elections.

The official count will only begin today, where it will be determined how many of the 84 seats in Congress each party will take, a TSE source said. Bukele also shared results of an exit poll by Costa Rican firm Cid Gallup which gave New Ideas a large

majority in parliament, with more than 67 percent of the vote, although technical details of the survey were not released.

"New Ideas + GANA will have more than 60 deputies (...) Thank you to the Salvadoran people. Thank God," he tweeted. If the results are confirmed, Bukele could fulfill his objective of winning an absolute majority in parliament, which would give the president more power over crucial decisions and lawmaking. Bukele, accused of authoritarianism by his detractors, hopes to have his hands untied after a frustrating two years of blockages by an opposition-controlled parliament.

Opinion polls have projected victory for his two allied parties. Long queues of voters wearing face masks amid the coronavirus pandemic formed well before voting started, though many stations opened hours late. The delay prompted Bukele to level accusations of wrongdoing against the TSE on Twitter. "We told them 1,000 times that, whether through corruption or incompetence, they would do everything wrong," he said.

But an election observer told AFP he had seen no evidence of voter fraud. About 40,000 police, soldiers and international observers were deployed to oversee the balloting, which came after the worst



Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele

political violence in years claimed two lives last month. After polls closed, the Organization of American States described election day as peaceful.

TSE president Dora Martinez said 51 percent of the country's 5.4 million voters had taken part in the polls to elect 84 members of the Legislative Assembly from among 10 political parties.

Elected in 2019 for a five-year term, Bukele, who is 39 and is of Palestinian and Greek descent, has had trouble getting some programs approved in a parliament dominated by two opposition parties—the right-wing Arena and leftist FMLN. —AFP

Riots break out in Algeria after activist jailed

ALGIERS: Unrest broke out late Sunday in a southern Algerian town after a blogger and activist was handed a seven-year jail sentence for condoning acts of terrorism, a news website reported.

El Watan said protesters burnt tyres and blocked several roads in Ouargla, after a court in the town convicted Amour Guerrache. In a video posted on social media, protesters were seen hurling stones at police as tear gas filled the air. Guerrache's mother appealed to President Abdelmadjid Tebboune to release her 31-year-old son, in another video.

According to Algeria's prisoners' support group CLND, the activist was found guilty of condoning terrorism, incitement to acts of terrorism and illegal gatherings, and offending the president.

Guerrache, arrested last July, had for years been a key activist behind the "Mekhadma" protest movement, named after a neglected district of the town, according to CLND. Ouargla, some 570 kilometers (355 miles) south of Algiers, is the capital of an oil-rich region where youth unemployment runs high.

The official APS news agency said judicial police had found a more than hour-long video message of "hateful sermons" and protest calls on Guerrache's Facebook account, as well as a photograph of an unnamed "terrorist" on his mobile. The justice ministry said Saturday that 59 pro-democracy activists have been released from jail under presidential pardons announced on February 18.

Tebboune, who was elected in December 2019 on a very low turnout in a poll boycotted by the protest movement, has made several bids to head off renewed anti-government rallies. But another 700 people were briefly detained on Friday during marches around the country of the "Hirak" protest movement, according to rights groups. —AFP

International

Venezuelan migrants flood into Chile as culture clash looms

Five million Venezuelans have fled their country since 2015

COLCHANE, Chile: Anyier sits at the side of the road gasping for breath as the beating sun and 3,700-meter (12,000-foot) altitude take their toll. It has been seven hours since she entered Chile from Bolivia on foot—her fifth border crossing since leaving Venezuela nearly a month and 5,000 kilometers (more than 3,000 miles) ago. “This has been the toughest,” she pants, sunburned and with chapped lips. “Awful.”

The 40-year-old, a former employee of Venezuela's national iron and steel company, set off for Chile on January 25 with her 14-year-old daughter Dany and her partner, 26-year-old barber Reinaldo.

They left a Caracas suburb with just \$350 and a backpack of bare essentials for the long walk across the Andean high plane and the Atacama desert, crossing Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. They were not alone. In small groups, exhausted migrants advance slowly, mainly on foot, completing portions of the journey by bus or taxi, some catching rides on the roofs of delivery trucks. Nearing the Chilean town of Colchane after illegally crossing the border in freezing desert conditions at dawn, Anyier and other migrants—some traveling for weeks or even months—are desperate for drinking water. “They don't even want to give us water,” complains Ramses, who is heading to Rancagua, a town close to Chile's capital Santiago, where a friend has offered him a farming job.

None of the migrants, many without valid travel documents, wanted to give their family names. AFP met Anyier and her family as they took a break on the side of the road after a 25-kilometer walk from their last rest point. The only vehicles to pass were trucks and “lately taxis and people that blackmail us” when offering rides, she says, tearfully. “A taxi driver stopped to ask us if we had papers and when we said we were Venezuelan he made fun of us and drove off.” After crossing the border, “we climbed into a truck so that they would take us to Iquique or to Huara, but they said no, they weren't going to help Venezuelans,” adds Reinaldo.

'Unparalleled crisis'

By daytime, the migrants are pummeled by a beating sun and gusts of wind capable of moving a truck. At night, the thermometer drops to below freezing, Colchane mayor Javier Garcia tells AFP. The village of



COLCHANE, Chile: Venezuelan migrants Reinaldo (left), 26, Anyier (center), 40, and her daughter Danyierly, 14, walk along the highway on their way to Iquique, after crossing from Bolivia, in Colchane, Chile. — AFP

1,700 people—one of the 10 poorest in Chile—has since January experienced “a migration phenomenon and humanitarian crisis that is unparalleled in the region,” he says. Officially, three people—a Colombian woman, a baby and a 69-year-old Venezuelan—have died, “of cold, hypothermia,” according to a soldier in Colchane. “For months we saw raw, inhuman images at dawn with temperatures below zero—minus eight or minus 10 — of (people) crying from hunger, sometimes without money,” says Garcia. Some 40 kilometers from Colchane, 26-year-old Alexander lies paralyzed with cold by the side of the road. Covered by old blankets, he wears light clothes and beach sandals over his socks.

He cries, saying he cannot feel his hands. “He can't handle the cold,” says a friend, before lying down on top of Alexander and embracing him for warmth. “Come on buddy, let's go!” he says, trying to encourage him. Two others in their 20s throw their blankets and rucksacks into a roadside ditch in an effort to form a rough shelter

to sleep in. The Venezuelans' reception has mostly been cool in this region of isolated homesteads and indigenous Aymara shepherds raising alpacas. Garcia speaks of a culture clash between the migrants and the Aymara people of the area, whose reserved character contrasts sharply with what they perceive as the arrogant and noisy demeanor of some of the newcomers.

'They threatened to kill me'

The villagers “have been afraid because some of them (migrants) enter homes without asking permission,” says Ana Moscoso, a store owner in the village of Chusmiza. In the village of Quebe, a signpost reads: “Beware—Keep out—three pitbulls on the loose.” “They came here, they threatened to kill me, to eat me because I threw them out of my grandson's house,” recounts Maximiliana Amaro, 82, who lives off her animals and the quinoa, potatoes and corn she grows. Amaro is furious, saying Venezuelan migrants enter homes while the

owners are out tending to their alpacas. “And in Colchane they give them (the migrants) everything, food, but not to us,” she moans.

A new life

According to the UN, some five million Venezuelans have fled their country since 2015 due to the political and economic crisis. Most have traveled elsewhere in South America, including about a half million to Chile, where many expect to find a chance at a new life in a more stable economy. Since late 2020, with Peruvian troops patrolling the border after it was closed due to the global health crisis, more and more Venezuelans are attempting the perilous walk along the Andean mountain range to Chile. To make it to the capital Santiago from Colchane, migrants must first find a way some 170 kilometers to Huara, along a little-used road with few villages, and from there to the coastal city of Iquique.

In Huara, migrants are seen sleeping on the streets, with a few finding shelter in the shed of a sympathetic local. A lucky few catch rides on mining trucks. Others pay passing drivers up to \$100 each for a ride to Iquique, but many get abandoned along the way.

'Nowhere to go'

Iquique, a city of 200,000, has been badly hit by the coronavirus pandemic. Thousands of migrants have arrived since December, and migrant centers are crammed full of people fulfilling obligatory quarantines. In February, the Chilean military removed dozens of migrants from facilities in Iquique and deported them in a move meant as a deterrent. “We have nowhere to go and no money,” said Anabella, one of hundreds of people camping out on the Plaza Brasil main square in Iquique. “There are people who give us tents, we cook, some go out to do little jobs, sell sweets or ask for money,” said the 26-year-old mother of two. Anyier and her family finally make it to the Iquique bus terminal.

Many, like her, rely on money sent from friends or family already in Chile to buy a bus ticket and pay for a coronavirus test to allow them to continue on. On February 23, Anyier's family reached Santiago; her sister emigrated there three years ago. “Thank God!” she exclaims as she falls into her sister's arms at the end of an excruciating ordeal. — AFP



LONDON: In this file photo Britain's Prince Harry (right) and Meghan Markle attend a Commonwealth Day Service at Westminster Abbey in central London. — AFP

Harry 'worried about history repeating itself'

LOS ANGELES: Britain's Prince Harry, who has blamed press intrusion for contributing to his mother Princess Diana's death in 1997, has told US chat show host Oprah Winfrey he was worried about history repeating itself.

Harry and his wife Meghan Markle rocked Britain's monarchy with their shock announcement in January 2020 that they were stepping back from royal duties.

CBS on Sunday released brief clips of an “intimate” interview with Winfrey about their lives which will air March 7. “My biggest concern was history repeating itself,” Harry, 36, said, apparently referring to the death of his mother who was killed in a high-speed car crash in Paris in 1997 as she tried to escape paparazzi.

Harry has long had a difficult relationship with Britain's tabloids and blames press intrusion for contributing to Diana's death. “I'm just really relieved and happy to be sitting here talking to you with my wife by my side,” Harry, holding Markle's hand, told Winfrey.

“Because I can't begin to imagine what it must have been like for her (Diana), going through this process by herself all those years ago. “It's been unbelievably tough for the two of us, but at least we have each other.”

The couple, who announced on Valentine's Day that they were expecting a second child, have launched several legal cases against British news outlets alleging invasion of privacy—including one that ended last month with a victory against Associated Newspapers.

In a rare interview, Harry last week revealed that he left royal life because the British press was “destroying” his mental health. “We all know what the British press can be like, and it was destroying my mental health,” he told “The Late Late Show” host James Corden.

“I was, like, this is toxic. So I did what any husband and what any father would do. I need to get my family out of here,” said Harry, who relocated to the United States with Markle last year.

Harry also said he was more comfortable with the portrayal of the royal family in the hit Netflix series “The Crown” than he was with newspaper stories written about him and his family. In February, Buckingham Palace announced that the couple had permanently quit royal duties following a one-year review of the new arrangement. Queen Elizabeth II ordered the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, as they are formally known, to relinquish their honorary titles and patronages. — AFP

Sarkozy convicted for corruption

PARIS: Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy was found guilty of corruption yesterday and handed a three-year prison sentence, in a ruling that deals a major blow to any lingering political ambitions. The sentence includes two years suspended and the remaining one year would be converted into a non-custodial sentence, meaning it is unlikely Sarkozy will end up behind bars over this case. He is almost certain to appeal and remains free, with no arrest warrant issued, but he faces several other corruption investigations over campaign financing and alleged influence peddling. The sentence for seeking to illegally influence a judge is the latest twist in the tumultuous political career of the 66-year-old who remains a favorite for many on the right for his combative style and tough talk on crime and immigration.

The conviction is likely to undermine any attempted comeback to frontline politics, an ambition he has denied, but which has been promoted by many supporters ahead of 2022 presidential elections. Wearing a dark suit and tie, Sarkozy showed no emotion as the sentence was read out and he left court without commenting to waiting journalists before heading to his private office in central Paris.

“What a senseless witchhunt, my love Nicolas Sarkozy,” his wife, former supermodel and singer Carla Bruni, posted on Instagram, next to a picture of the couple embracing. “The fight goes on, the truth will come out. #injustice.” Only one other modern French president, Sarkozy's political mentor Jacques Chirac, has been convicted of corruption. Chirac, who did not attend proceedings in 2011 due to ill health, received a two-year suspended sentence over the creation of ghost jobs at the Paris city hall to fund his party when he was mayor.

The verdict yesterday related to a case of influence peddling and corruption, one of at least four separate investigations into Sarkozy. It centered on allegations that the former head of state offered to help a judge obtain a desirable job in Monaco in 2014 in exchange for information about an inquiry into his campaign finances.

The former president told the court during the trial he had “never committed the slightest act of corruption”. Prosecutors called for him to be jailed for four years and serve a minimum of two, and asked for the same punishment for his co-defendants - lawyer Thierry Herzog and the judge Gilbert Azibert, who were also convicted.

While reading out her sentence, judge Christine Mee said Sarkozy, who was “guarantor of the independence of the judiciary, used his status as a former president to favor a magistrate who had served his personal interests”. The charges carried a maximum sentence of 10 years and a fine of one million euro (\$1.2 million). — AFP



PARIS: Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy leaves after the hearing of the final verdict in a corruption trial at the Paris courthouse yesterday. — AFP



BAGHDAD: A nun and caretakers finalize preparations inside the Syrian Catholic Church of Our Lady of Deliverance in the Karrada district of Iraq's capital Baghdad yesterday amidst preparations ahead of the pontiff's visit. — AFP

In historic first, Pope Francis to visit Iraq

BAGHDAD: Pope Francis is to arrive Friday for the first-ever papal visit to conflict-torn Iraq, aiming to encourage the dwindling Christian community to remain in their ancient homeland, and broaden his outreach to Islam.

Among the most extraordinary moments of the trip will be his one-on-one meeting with Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the highly reclusive cleric, who is a top religious authority for many of the world's Shiite Muslims. Despite a second deadly wave of coronavirus infections, renewed violence and notoriously poor public services, Francis is fulfilling the dream of a predecessor, late pope John Paul II, by visiting Iraq. Amid war and persecution, the country's Christian community—one of the world's oldest—has fallen from 1.5 million in 2003 to just 400,000 today. The 84-year-old pontiff, who will be on his first foreign trip since the start of the pandemic, plans to voice solidarity with them and the rest of Iraq's 40 million people during a packed three-day visit.

From central Baghdad to the Shiite shrine city of Najaf, welcome banners featuring his image and Arabic title “Baba al-Vatican” already dot the streets. From Ur, the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham in the southern desert, to ravaged Christian towns in the north, roads are being paved and churches rehabilitated in remote areas that have never seen such a high-profile visitor. “The pope's message is that the Church stands beside those who suffer,” said Najeeb Michael, Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of the northern city of Mosul. “He will have powerful words for Iraq, where crimes against humanity have been committed.”

Ancient roots

Iraq's Christian community is one of the oldest and most diverse in the world, with Chaldeans and other Catholics making up around half, along with Armenian Orthodox, Protestants and others. By 2003, when the US-led invasion toppled then-dictator Saddam Hussein, Christians made up around six percent of Iraq's 25 million people. But even as sectarian violence pushed members of the minority to flee, the national population surged, further diluting Christians to just one percent, according to William Warda, co-founder of the Hammurabi Human Rights Organization. Most were concentrated in the northern province of Nineveh, where many still speak a dialect of Aramaic, the language of Jesus Christ. In 2014, jihadists from the so-called Islamic State group seized control of Nineveh, rampaging

through Christian towns and telling residents: convert or die. At the time, Pope Francis endorsed military action against IS and considered visiting northern Iraq in solidarity with Christians there. That trip never materialized, but Francis has kept a close eye on Iraq, condemning the killing of unarmed protesters during mass anti-government rallies from 2019. — AFP

NY governor denies sexual harassment

WASHINGTON: New York governor Andrew Cuomo said Sunday he was “truly sorry” if his conduct had ever been “misinterpreted as an unwanted flirtation” as he faced mounting pressure over sexual harassment allegations. Cuomo has been harshly criticized, including by fellow Democrats, after former aide Charlotte Bennett told The New York Times that he sexually harassed her last year.

The allegations came just four days after ex-aide Lindsey Boylan described unwanted physical contact from Cuomo. He issued a statement saying that “sometimes I think I am being playful and make jokes that I think are funny... I mean no offense and only attempt to add some levity and banter to what is a very serious business.”

“I now understand that my interactions may have been insensitive or too personal.” He admitted some of his comments may have been “misinterpreted as an unwanted flirtation. To the extent anyone felt that way, I am truly sorry.” But he denied ever inappropriately touching or propositioning anyone. Cuomo said he had called for an independent review into the allegations.

He had earlier chosen former federal judge Barbara Jones to lead a probe, but high-profile figures in his own Democratic Party said that was insufficiently transparent.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a prominent young liberal lawmaker, tweeted that the “detailed accounts” of Cuomo's accusers “are extremely serious and painful to read.” According to the 25-year-old Bennett, Cuomo, who is 63, said in June that he was open to dating women in their 20s, and asked her if she thought age made a difference in romantic relationships, the Times reported. — AFP

International

Myanmar's Suu Kyi hit with two new criminal charges

Police shooting toll rises to 18 amid rising uproar, demos

YANGON: Ousted Myanmar civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi was hit with two new criminal charges when she appeared in court via video link yesterday, a month after a military coup triggered relentless and massive protests. Suu Kyi has not been seen since being detained on February 1, and her appearance came as demonstrators took to the streets again across the country in defiance of an escalation of deadly force from the junta. At least 18 people died on Sunday as troops and police fired live bullets at demonstrators in cities across Myanmar, according to the United Nations, which cited its own credible information.

Suu Kyi, 75, was already facing obscure criminal charges for possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies, as well as violating coronavirus restrictions by staging a campaign event during last year's election. She is now also accused of a violation of communications laws as well as intent to incite public unrest, her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw said. "We cannot say for sure how many more cases Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will face in this period," he told reporters in Naypyidaw. "Anything can happen in this country at this time."

Myanmar's ousted president Win Myint is also facing the same intent to incite public unrest charge in addition to coronavirus restriction breaches. Suu Kyi has reportedly been kept under house arrest in Naypyidaw, an isolated city that the military built during a previous dictatorship. The military has justified its takeover, ending a decade-long democratic experiment, by making unfounded allegations of widespread fraud in last November's national elections. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy

won the election in a landslide.

The generals have hit Suu Kyi with two charges the international community widely regards as frivolous-relating to importing walkie-talkies and staging a campaign rally during the pandemic. Yesterday's court proceedings were preliminary matters in the case, including with Khin Maung Zaw seeking to formally represent her.

Uprising

Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to streets regularly over the past month to oppose the coup. While the military has steadily increased the type of force used to try to contain the uprising, beginning with tear gas and water cannons, this weekend's violence saw the biggest escalation. One person was shot while crouching behind rubbish bins and other makeshift shields, and had to be dragged away by others, with the incident filmed by media.

AFP independently confirmed 10 deaths in Sunday's violence, although there were fears the toll could be much higher. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a reliable monitoring group, estimated that about 30 people had been killed by security forces since the coup on February 1. Yesterday, protests erupted again in multiple cities across the country, with demonstrators in Yangon using bamboo poles, sofas and tree branches to erect barricades across streets.

In one clash broadcast live on Facebook and verified by AFP, unarmed protesters fled after a volley of shots were fired. It was not immediately clear if the security forces had fired live rounds or rubber bullets. Hundreds of people were also arrested over



YANGON: Protesters run during a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon yesterday. — AFP

the weekend with many in Yangon taken to Insein Prison, where Myanmar's leading democracy campaigners have served long jail terms under previous dictatorships. More than 1,100 people have been arrested, charged, or sentenced since the coup, according to The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

One reporter was also shot with rubber bullets on the weekend while covering a protest in the cen-

tral city of Pyay, their employer said. Several journalists documenting Saturday's assaults by security forces were detained, including an Associated Press photographer in Yangon. "We strongly condemn the escalating violence against protests in Myanmar and call on the military to immediately halt the use of force against peaceful protesters," Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman for the UN human rights office, said. —AFP

'Grandma Wong' leads brief reminder of HK protest past

HONG KONG: Alexandra Wong disappeared for more than a year into mainland China's opaque judicial system because she joined Hong Kong's democracy rallies. But that did not deter her from joining protesters outside Hong Kong's West Kowloon court yesterday as many of the democracy movement's key leaders appeared in the dock to face charges of subversion. "Today is not just about supporting the 47 people who were arrested," the 64-year-old told AFP, referring to the dozens of activists charged with conspiracy to commit subversion, one of Beijing's new national security crimes.

"We need to come out again, tell the world that we will continue to fight for freedom, democracy and justice." Protests have been all but outlawed in Hong Kong over the last year. Using both anti-coronavirus bans on public gatherings and a new security law imposed by Beijing, authorities have successfully stamped out the huge and often violent democracy rallies that convulsed the finance hub for months in 2019. Yesterday's gathering was a rare exception. Hundreds queued to attend the hearing

for those charged with subversion, chanting slogans and flashing popular protest gestures—once-familiar scenes not witnessed in Hong Kong for months.

Handshakes and selfies

Many asked to shake Wong's hand and pose for pictures because she is something of a local celebrity. Dubbed "Grandma Wong", she was one of the most visible faces in the early stages of 2019's democracy protests. She attended virtually every rally, usually waving a British flag. But she disappeared in August 2019 during a trip to the mainland city of Shenzhen. Wong emerged 14 months later in Hong Kong saying she had been detained for months for "picking quarrels"—a catch-all term used by the government to target dissenters.

She remains committed to democracy and yesterday's court hearing offered an opportunity to signal her continued defiance. As she queued for a spot inside the court, she unfurled a large British flag and held banners that read "Fight for freedom" and "Stand with HK". "I'm a person who loves freedom, but I know more clearly what I should do to secure our freedom, so I must come out," she said. "Even if I die or I'm being imprisoned for a lifetime, I hope people will not give up."

Slogans, songs and books

Behind her were hundreds of people also queuing to get into court, the line snaking around one side of



HONG KONG: Alexandra Wong, an activist known as 'Grandma Wong' sits outside West Kowloon court in Hong Kong yesterday. —AFP

the building at least four rows deep. Some held yellow umbrellas, a symbol of the democracy movement. Chanting broke out intermittently, including the phrase "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times"—a slogan authorities have now deemed illegal. Many flashed pro-democracy hand signals, including the three-finger "Hunger Games" salute embraced by protesters in Thailand and Myanmar. Others played protest songs on portable speakers and left images of jailed activists at a makeshift shrine. In another corner of the crowd, people read political books. —AFP

Bali opens drive-thru vaccination for hospitality workers

JAKARTA: Indonesian resort island Bali has launched a drive-thru vaccination campaign targeting thousands of hospitality workers, as the popular tourist destination eyes reopening to foreign visitors. Billed as the first such campaign in Southeast Asia, Bali's drive-thru vaccinations kicked-off at the weekend. The program aims to inoculate around 5,000 workers in hospitality and ride-sharing services by the end of this month. The campaign was rolled out at Nusa Dua Bali Convention Center in Bali's capital Denpasar, set up in partnership with Southeast Asian ride-hailing giant Grab. "This drive-thru program is good, because for us drivers who work on the street every day, we are very vulnerable to being exposed to the virus," a ride-hailing driver Zul Widodo said.

In August, Bali closed the door to

foreign tourists over coronavirus concerns, battering its key tourism sector. "The COVID-19 vaccine is paramount for Indonesia's tourism industry recovery," Tourism Minister Sandiaga Uno said in a weekend statement. "The availability of vaccines continues to be a source of hope for people to return to normalcy and boost confidence that they can travel safely."

The island has recorded some 923 deaths and just over 34,000 virus cases. The drive-thru vaccination has been rolled out alongside Indonesia's nationwide vaccination bid, which kicked off in January with the Chinese CoronaVac jabs. Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous nation, plans to inoculate more than 180 million of its nearly 270 million people. But it was not clear if the drive-thru program would be rolled out in other cities



BALI, Indonesia: Medical workers prepare to administer the COVID-19 coronavirus vaccine during a drive-through vaccination service in Nusa Dua, Indonesia's resort island of Bali yesterday. — AFP

across the archipelago. Indonesia's economy-Southeast Asia's largest-has lurched into recession during a pandemic that has infected more than 1.3

million people and killed over 36,000 nationwide, according to official data, though low testing rates mean the figures could be much higher. —AFP

Crowds gather outside court after Hong Kong dissidents charged

HONG KONG: Hundreds of democracy supporters gathered outside a Hong Kong courthouse yesterday chanting slogans and flashing protest symbols as some of the city's best-known dissidents appeared in the dock charged with subversion. Beijing is battling to stamp out dissent in semi-autonomous Hong Kong after swaths of the population hit the streets in 2019 in huge and sometimes violent democracy demonstrations. It has blanketed the once free-wheeling finance hub in a national security law, while anti-coronavirus measures ban public gatherings of more than four people.

Police on Sunday charged 47 leading dissidents with conspiracy to commit subversion in the largest use yet of the security legislation. Yesterday's hearing sparked a resurgence of defiance from members of the public in a city where protest has been all but

outlawed. Hundreds queued up outside the law courts in one of the biggest gatherings in months as police maintained a heavy presence. Some chanted slogans including "Release all political prisoners" and "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times"—the latter a slogan authorities say is now illegal under the security law.

Others flashed the three-finger "Hunger Games" salute that has been embraced by fellow democracy campaigners in Thailand and Myanmar. Tensions rose and fell throughout the afternoon as police raised banners warning that an illegal gathering was taking place and that protesters were breaking the national security law with their chanting. Officers could be seen stopping and searching several young men outside the court but the crowds did not disperse.

'Jailed, exiled and charged'

Local district councillor Kwan Chun-sang was one of dozens who camped overnight to bag a spot at the front of the queue for the court's public gallery. "Soon after the charges were laid yesterday I decided to come and spend the night here," Kwan told AFP. "I would like to show my support for the pro-democracy activists." A small group of nationalist

protesters held banners welcoming the subversion charges. "Punish the traitors severely, enact the national security law and throw them all behind bars," one sign read. The defendants represent a broad cross-section of Hong Kong's opposition, from veteran former pro-democracy lawmakers to academics, lawyers, social workers and a host of youth activists. So many have been charged that officials had to open up three other courtrooms to accommodate the overspill.

After a brief appearance by the charged, proceedings were adjourned to later in the afternoon. The alleged offence of those arrested for subversion was to organize an unofficial primary last summer to choose candidates for the city's partially elected legislature, in hopes that the pro-democracy bloc might take a majority for the first time and block government legislation. Chinese and Hong Kong officials viewed the primary as an attempt to "overthrow" the city's government and therefore a threat to national security. They were arrested in a series of dawn raids in January and charged on Sunday with "conspiracy to commit subversion"—one of the new broadly defined national security crimes. They face up to life in prison if convicted. —AFP

News in brief

EU to defuse Georgia crisis

TBILISI, Georgia: The European Union yesterday called on Georgia to defuse a spiraling political crisis that deepened with the arrest of a top opposition leader last week. The pro-Western South Caucasus nation has been in the grip of a crisis since parliamentary elections in October which the opposition has denounced as rigged. Last week's arrest of Nika Melia—the leader of Georgia's main opposition party, the United National Movement (UNM)—further exacerbated the tensions. On a visit to the Georgian capital Tbilisi, European Council President Charles Michel said the bloc was concerned about the "worsening crisis". —AFP

UK charities warn of famine

LONDON: A coalition of UK aid agencies warned yesterday that the COVID-19 pandemic is worsening the "dire humanitarian" crisis in fragile states and raising the risk of famine, including in Yemen. Parts of Yemen and South Sudan are already on the brink of famine, while Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo are at risk, driven by the pandemic's economic impact, the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) said in a new report. —AFP

Death of Guinea ex-PM fuels riots

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea: Papua New Guinea security services called for calm yesterday, as incidents of rioting and looting followed the death of a beloved former prime minister. Police Minister William Onglo warned officers would "step in to fully restore order" after disturbances in Port Moresby and the second city of Lae. Several stores were reportedly ransacked during a national day of mourning for the country's first prime minister and "father of the nation" Sir Michael Somare, who died of pancreatic cancer on Friday. —AFP

Malaysian site editor questioned

KUALA LUMPUR: The chief editor of an independent Malaysian news outlet was questioned by police yesterday on suspicion of sedition after he criticized the conviction of his website for contempt. Malaysiakini, which made a name for itself by reporting on the misdeeds of the country's ruling elite, was found guilty last month over readers' comments critical of the judiciary and fined \$120,000. The conviction added to concerns about worsening press freedoms in the Southeast Asian nation since a scandal-plagued coalition came to power last year without an election. —AFP

Philippines vaccinations begin

MANILA: The Philippines launched its COVID-19 vaccination drive yesterday, with health workers, soldiers, police and government officials first in line to get donated Chinese jabs despite concerns over their effectiveness. Key aides of President Rodrigo Duterte, who were among hundreds to get jabs, described getting inoculated as a moral duty. The rollout started at six Manila hospitals a day after the government, under fire over delays in vaccine procurement, received 600,000 donated doses from Beijing. —AFP

Business

TUESDAY, MARCH 2, 2021

Boursa Kuwait achieves over 190% increase in its profits for 2020

Board of Directors recommends distribution of a cash dividend of 40 fils

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait announced profits of KD 28 million for the 2020 fiscal year, an increase of over 190 percent compared to 2019, when the company recorded a profit of KD 9.6 million.

The company's total assets amounted to about KD 104.2 million, an increase of 187.9 percent compared to the 2019 total of KD 36.2 million, while shareholder equity (attributable to the parent company) increased from KD 32.1 million in 2019 to KD 52.8 million for the year ended December 31, 2020, an increase of more than 64 percent.

Operating income increased by 56.3 percent, from KD 14.2 million to reach about KD 22.2 million, while earnings per share amounted to 128.5 fils, an increase of about 169 percent compared to 2019 when it was 47.8 fils.

In line with the successful performance and commitment to deliver superior returns to shareholders, Boursa Kuwait's Board of Directors has recommended the distribution of a cash dividend of 40 fils per share for the full year ended December 31, 2020 (subject to approval of the General Assembly and other regulatory entities).

Boursa Kuwait Chairman Hamad Meshari Al-Humaidhi commented on the results, saying "We are pleased to have recorded profits of KD 28 million, an increase of over 190 percent compared to our 2019 total, which are a result of the company's continuous development and enhancements to the market. Boursa Kuwait has made great progress in our journey to be a prominent stock exchange in the Middle East, and a capital market classified by the most prominent international classification indicators."

Al-Humaidhi added: "Despite the circumstances

surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, Boursa Kuwait, one of the government entities to successfully undergo a privatization process, continued its series of achievements and milestones, continuing its strategy to develop the Kuwaiti capital market into one of the best financial markets in the region. I would like to thank the Executive Team and all Boursa Kuwait employees for their valuable contributions towards the advancement of this company."

In its most prominent achievement this year, Boursa Kuwait self-listed on the Premier Market, an outcome of its unrelenting pursuit of far-reaching reforms and world-class offerings in line with the company's vision to develop a liquid, reliable and sound capital market providing issuers with efficient access to capital and investors with diverse return opportunities.

Mohammed Saud Al-Osaimi, Boursa Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer commented on the company's financials, saying: "Boursa Kuwait continues to work on enhancements to its infrastructure and operational model, reaffirming our commitment to improve the market's efficiency, access and performance in order to attract more local and international investors."

"The company continued to work on its key pipeline projects for the year, which included the listing of Shamal Azzour Al-Oula Water and Power Company, as well as the listing of the first local real estate investment trust (REIT), BAITAKREIT. Boursa Kuwait also successfully managed the inclusion of seven listed companies into the MSCI Emerging Market Indices, following the reclassification of Kuwait into Emerging Market status at the



Hamad Meshari Al-Humaidhi



Mohammed Saud Al-Osaimi

end of 2019," he added.

The inclusion accounted for over KD 961.6 million in traded value and representing one of the highest one-day traded values in the history of Kuwait's capital markets. As a result, foreign ownership within the Premier Market increased by 13 percent, while foreign trading flows accounted for approximately 24 percent of traded value in 2020. The total number of securities traded during 2020 was just over 52 billion shares, a 33 percent jump from around 39 billion shares traded in 2019, as a result of Boursa Kuwait's effective strategy to develop an attractive investment environment.

Boursa Kuwait is working to develop a strong and efficient financial market with liquidity and transparency, that can effectively put issuers and investors in touch with one another for investment opportunities and high returns on investment to create a developed capital market that is a pioneer in the region.

2020 FINANCIAL RESULTS			
	31 DEC 2020	31 DEC 2019	%
Total Operating Revenue "KD million"	22.2	14.2	56.3
Total Operating Expenses "KD million"	10.4	7.1	46.5
Net Profit "KD million"	28	9.6	191.7
Total Assets "KD million"	104.2	36.2	187.8
Shareholder Equity "KD million"	52.8	32.1	64.5
Earnings Per Share "Fils"	128.5	47.8	169

To Shareholders		
	2020	2019
Cash Dividends "Fils"	40	25

Hopes abound as Ngozi takes WTO reins

GENEVA: Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said she was eager to get straight to work as she took up her role yesterday as the first woman and first African to lead the beleaguered World Trade Organization. "I am coming into one of the most important institutions in the world and we have a lot of work to do," the former Nigerian finance and foreign minister said as she arrived for her first day on the job in Geneva.

"I feel ready to go."

Hopes abound that the 66-year-old will be able to help the WTO address a range of towering challenges, including navigating through the global economic crisis triggered by the pandemic.

"The WTO is too important to allow it to be slowed down, paralyzed and moribund," she told AFP a day after her nomination last month. Known as Dr Ngozi, she is taking the helm after the WTO was left adrift for six months following the sudden departure of Brazilian career diplomat Roberto Azevedo last August, a year ahead of schedule.

Following a lengthy selection process, Ngozi, a development econ-

omist who spent 25 years at the World Bank, was finally anointed by the WTO's 164 members on February 15. From an initial eight candidates, Ngozi was the clear favorite among the last two standing in November. However, her appointment was delayed by former US president Donald Trump blocking her nomination.

The arrival of his successor Joe Biden made it possible for her to receive the consensus backing required to end the impasse.

In at the deep end

Ngozi is hitting the ground running, with her first day on the job in Geneva coinciding with the annual meeting of the WTO's General Council. "I am hoping to be able to listen in and see what delegations have to say, what ambassadors have to say, about the key issues," she told journalists about her expectations for her first day. Delegates are expected to agree that the organization's next ministerial conference, which had been scheduled for last year but was postponed due to the pandemic, will be held in Geneva in December. Questions remain as to whether the new WTO chief, considered a strong-willed trailblazer, will be able to mold the organization in her image before then.

Vaccines IP wrangle

Among the issues to be discussed Monday is a controversial push for



GENEVA: World Trade Organization (WTO) Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (right) gestures with Chair of the fisheries subsidies negotiations at the WTO Colombian Ambassador Santiago Wills next to an ice sculpture depicting fish during an event by NGOs requesting urgent action to finalize the WTO agreement on ending subsidies that drive overfishing, yesterday in Geneva. — AFP

the WTO to waive intellectual property rights for COVID-19 vaccines. Dozens of nations say this would help boost production and access and would rein in the pandemic sooner, but the notion has been fiercely rejected by pharmaceutical giants and the countries that host them.

Ngozi chaired the Gavi vaccine alliance before running for the WTO and has made tackling the pandemic one of her priorities. In a likely bid to avoid a row on day one, Ngozi has called for flexibility, encouraging

voluntary licensing agreements, such as the one agreed between AstraZeneca and the Serum Institute of India, whereby the SH factory manufactures the pharmaceutical giant's Covid-19 vaccines. The Ottawa Group, which brings together the EU and 12 countries including Brazil, Canada and Switzerland, will meanwhile demand that countries commit not to hindering the flow of medical goods during the pandemic, and removing customs duties on those considered essential. — AFP

Yemen conference seeks \$3.85 billion to prevent famine

DUBAI: The United Nations said it hopes to raise \$3.85 billion yesterday to prevent large-scale famine in Yemen, warning that life in the war-ravaged nation was unbearable, with children enduring a "special kind of hell". More than 100 governments and donors will take part in a virtual donor conference-co-hosted by Sweden and Switzerland-as Yemen's Houthi rebels push to seize the government's last northern stronghold.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed and millions pushed to the brink of famine in the six-year-old conflict, which the UN describes as the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

But with aid funding dropping in 2020 amid the coronavirus downturn, resulting in the closure of many humanitarian programs, the situation in the country has become even more dire.

The UN and its partners last year received \$1.9 billion-about half of

what was required. It called Monday for "immediate funding" to support 16 million people in Yemen, where some two thirds of the population is in need of some form of aid to survive. "For most people, life in Yemen is now unbearable. Childhood in Yemen is a special kind of hell. This war is swallowing up a whole generation of Yemenis," said UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

"We must end it now and start dealing with its enormous consequences immediately. This is not the moment to step back from Yemen," he said in a statement.

'Life-threatening cuts'

The UN is seeking to raise \$3.85 billion from donors, including wealthy Gulf nations, after falling \$1.5 billion short of the required \$3.4 billion last year. The United Arab Emirates pledged on Friday to give \$230 million. According to the latest UN data,



In this file photo, the seats of the delegation of Yemen is seen prior to the opening of a high-level conference to raise funds for war-ravaged Yemen on April 25, 2017 at the United Nations Office in Geneva. — AFP

more than 16 million Yemenis-about half the 29-million population-will face hunger this year, and nearly 50,000 are already starving to death in famine-like conditions.

It warned that 400,000 Yemeni children under the age of five could die from acute malnutrition. The UN said in September that critical aid had been cut at 300 health centers

across Yemen due to lack of funding, with more than a third of its major humanitarian programs in the country either reduced or shut down entirely. Twelve aid groups, including Save the Children and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), warned in a joint statement Friday of a "catastrophe" for Yemen if funding cuts continue. — AFP

Joe Biden backs Amazon workers' right to unionize

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden on Sunday backed the right of Amazon workers to unionize, but stopped short of explicitly encouraging them to form a union.

Workers at an Amazon warehouse in Alabama began voting in February on whether to form the first American union at the e-commerce giant that could pave the way for further unionization in the US at one of the world's most powerful companies. "Workers in Alabama and all across America are voting on whether to organize a union in their workplace," Biden said in a video posted to Twitter. "This is vitally important—a vitally important choice."

"There should be no intimidation, no coercion, no threats, no anti-union propaganda," he said. "Every worker should have a free and fair choice to join a union."

Amazon does not officially oppose unions but it has campaigned against efforts by staff at the warehouse in Bessemer to unionize. In addition to flyers posted in bathrooms, it has held meetings to make the case against unions and even launched a website arguing that a union is unnecessary.

There have been a series of protests around the United States on safety and working conditions at Amazon, with the pandemic increasing pressure on its distribution network even as profits soar. The company—helmed by the world's richest person, Jeff Bezos—has maintained that it has invested billions in worker safety even as it has boosted the number of its employees.

It is unclear how many of the Bessemer employees support a union, with the count expected to begin on March 30. If a majority vote in favor, they will automatically be represented by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) but will only become full members after approval of a new company contract, negotiated between the union and Amazon.

"As President Biden points out, the best way for working people to protect themselves and their families is by organizing into unions," RWDSU head Stuart Appelbaum said in a statement.

Biden cultivated a pro-organized labor image and played up his working class background while campaigning for office, although he had previously avoided addressing the Bessemer efforts to unionize. — AFP

Business

Ooredoo Kuwait Group holds AGM

93.20% of shareholders attend the annual general assembly meeting



KUWAIT: (From left), Mijbil Al-Ayoub, Omar Al-Bassam, Taban Tripathi, Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, Dr Yousuf Al-Sellili, Fadi Kawar, Steven Colinz, Amado Nadai and Essa Al-Mousa.



KUWAIT: (From left) Nazem Al-Ghabra, Fatina Ahmad, Dr Yousuf Al-Sellili, Eman Abu Khadra and Fatima Dashti

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait Group -National Mobile Telecommunications Company KSCP "Ooredoo" - held its Annual General Assembly Meeting yesterday at its headquarters. The AGM was attended with a presence of 93.20 percent of the shareholders and (15 fils per share) cash dividend was declared to the shareholders already registered in the company's record date of March 31, 2021.

During the AGM, the agenda was reviewed; the financial statements and reports were stated, discussed and approved while all other articles on the agenda were also discussed. The Group's Annual Financial Report included the most prominent achievements of the group during the year 2020 was also reviewed.

Optimism

In a statement delivered on the occasion of the AGM, Chairman of the board Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Thani stated the fact that 2020 has been an exceptional year where economies and businesses have been deeply affected by the pandemic. He added "I remain highly optimistic, that we will overcome this situation in 2021 and for the years to come; where the world will have to adjust to the new normal".

Revenues growth

Speaking of the financial growth, Al-Thani said "our financial performance was impacted by the economic slowdown resulting from this global pandemic, which deteriorated market conditions in some of the countries we operate in. NMTC reported consolidated revenues of KD 593 million in 2020 down from KD 633 million in the previous year. Revenues improved sequentially from KD 148 million in Q3 2020 to KD 151 million in Q4 2020 indicating the start of a potential recovery. However, due to the uncertainty of the ongoing pandemic we remain cautiously optimistic and prudent in our approach.

Digital solutions ahead

Al-Thani concluded by saying "As we look ahead over the next year, and we promise we will invest in more efforts towards building smarter, safer, and stronger solutions as well as offering exclusive offers and plans for all our customers. NMTC group will unite efforts to dominate the telecom industry in the coming year and in the post-pandemic era".

Number of the board members: Dr Yousuf Al-Sellili attended the AGM in addition to Ooredoo Kuwait CEO Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain, Chief of Operations Fadi Kawar and a number of other representatives of the executive management. It witnessed the presence of Kuwait Clearing Company and the Ministry of Commerce.

Pandemic's positive impact

Commenting on the financial results of 2020, Ooredoo Kuwait CEO Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain said "COVID-19 has shown very clearly the critical role that telecommunications play in our society and economy. While the pandemic has been a profound societal and economic crisis, it has reinforced the importance of connectivity as a critical part of a functioning society and everyday life. The widespread and accelerated shift to virtual models - from the world of work to how we educate the next generations - has driven up demand for connectivity services on an unprecedented scale.

Digital evolution

Speaking about the digital growth journey of Ooredoo Kuwait Al-Babtain said "Today, millions of people depend on the online connection to study and work from home, attend virtual meetings, and shop online. Thus, Ooredoo Kuwait constantly improves its products, services, and offerings to serve the community. Ooredoo Kuwait's digital user base witnessed a significant growth supported by an increase in sales through "MyOoredoo App".

Ooredoo Kuwait continued to accelerate its digital strategy to create a seamless user experience and drive growth of its digital customer base. Ooredoo Kuwait witnessed a tremendous increase in digital user numbers and digital sales revenues by 90 percent.

Awards

Al-Babtain expressed his gratitude as Ooredoo Kuwait was honored by several entities and won many prestigious awards including the "Best Loyalty and Rewards Program" award for its "Nojoom" Rewards Program from the Telecom Review Leaders' Summit in November 2020. Another prestigious recognition as the "Best Application" was from the MENA Digital Awards for the innovative MyOoredoo App. Ooredoo Kuwait was also named the winner of Bronze Stevie Awards in the categories 'Most Valuable Corporate Response' and 'Business & Government'. Ooredoo also won the Best National Day TVC 2020 from the Arab Media Forum.

- 15 fils per share cash dividend declared
- Reported consolidated revenues of KD 593 million in 2020
- Ooredoo Kuwait reported revenues of KD 209.8 million in 2020
- Al-Thani: NMTC group will unite efforts to dominate the telecom industry this year and in the post-pandemic era
- Al-Babtain: Ooredoo Kuwait witnessed a remarkable jump in digital sales revenues by 90%



Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Thani

Exclusive products for B2B

Al-Babtain said that B2B and enterprises in Kuwait were offered a wide range of exclusive products during 2020. Ooredoo Kuwait launched the e-learning platform in partnership with Education. As Ooredoo Kuwait continues to support the digital transformation with the latest digital services, Ooredoo is bringing e-learning platform Education as a new-age, learning environment aiming to provide schools with the opportunity to go digital. Education is a provider of a new-age learning environment. It strives to help students to capitalize on teachable moments by giving them instant access to knowledge at all times. We have also expanded our digital solutions and launched exclusive product & services: E-store for government employees, the 1st B2B e-store across Kuwait, ICT Solutions, Virtual Desktop infrastructure, the Security Operation Center, Web Application Firewall. Ooredoo supported business continuity and offered resilience solutions since the early days of the pandemic: Thermal Camera, Social Distancing Solution through AI analytics, Occupancy measurement, smart helmet and remote working solutions. Ooredoo celebrated a 1000 day completion of data center services with zero down time and carried out the successful expansion of BIR operations in 56 branches to deliver a better customer experience and 24/7 support to customers. HP and ARUBA also certified Ooredoo Business as a gold partner.

Assurance & sustainability

Al-Babtain concluded his statement with a clear tone of optimism and said "Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has been again an extraordinary performer during the tough times the world went through, and achieved greatness.

Today, we mark this year by celebrating everything we have accomplished - from bringing new innovative digital solutions to our customers, to supporting the government and community during the crisis, collaborating with well-established companies, and more. Ooredoo Kuwait will continue the journey of success."

Financial Highlights:

- Consolidated customer base decreased by 5 percent to 24.8 million in 2020, compared to 26.1 million in 2019.
- Revenues in KWD were impacted by lower sales in Kuwait (substantial support for local customers with free of charge services and plans), a decrease in Algerian revenue mainly due to the weak economic environment, currency devaluation, price competition and the impact of the Coronavirus and related business limitations across all operations. Consequently, consolidated revenue decreased by 6 percent to KD 592.8 million for 2020, compared to KD 633.5 million in 2019.
- EBITDA decreased by 15 percent in 2020 to KD 196.9 million, compared to KD 232.6 million in 2019.
- Net profit attributable to NMTC was KD 3.4 million for 2020 compared with KD 30.1 million in 2019, due to the decline in EBITDA
- The consolidated earnings per share was 7 fils for 2020, compared to 60 fils per share earned in 2019. The Board of Directors recommends a dividend payment of 15 fils per share

The Group's operational performance and achievements can be summarized as follows:

Ooredoo Kuwait

Ooredoo Kuwait has reaffirmed its full support of the government and its entities in light of the Coronavirus outbreak in the country beginning of March 2020 and to ensure that customers are staying home as per Government directives. The company reaffirmed its support during a meeting held with the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA). During March 2020, which was the beginning of the outbreak, the company reaffirmed its support by collaborating with the Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) by providing customers with free 5GB internet and free calls for one month. Ooredoo Kuwait also launched its 'Be Safe. Be Home. Be Online' campaign which featured an array of digital offers and services designed to support customers and to ensure they are well connected and informed during the Coronavirus outbreak in the country. Ooredoo Kuwait celebrated 1000 days of launching its state of the art data center with zero downtime since its launch in 2017. This comes to further reiterate the company's commitment to being one of the leading companies in information technology solutions, and the company of choice for prospective clients searching for ICT solutions, catering especially for the needs of corporates and businesses. The data center provides a suite of managed hosting services tailor-made to fit corporate and business needs. These services are ideal for corporates and businesses looking to better manage their data, platforms and applications.

More and above, Ooredoo Kuwait launched its all-new "Shamel Pro" on Monday, 19 October 2020, which was a big step that added to the company's portfolio. The hard work of Ooredoo's team has paid off as they have proudly stated that they gained more than 1,000 new "Shamel Pro" customers in the first two days of its launching. Ooredoo Kuwait never ceases to amaze its customers with its constant captivating products and services, and "Shamel Pro" takes Ooredoo's digital customer experience to the next level through its three different plans that were designed and built around the needs and passions of the local consumer market be it travelling, gaming or entertainment. The company's headquarters opened its doors on Friday, 20 November, 2020 at mid-night amid with adherence to social distancing and safety measures to welcome customers who were keen on the two-day exclusive offer by Ooredoo, iPhone 12 launch offer on Shamel starting from KD 25 per month. The hard work of the team has paid off, and the successful event was the talk of the town.

An undeniable fact, the C-19 crisis has imposed unforeseen global challenges and left a lot of human damage. One of the priorities of Ooredoo Kuwait was to provide and preserve jobs for all. Hence, Ooredoo was one of the companies that did not dismiss its employees during the COVID-19, rather, they made distinct efforts to employ young talents, and in December 2020 specifically, the company opened its doors for Kuwaiti youth to join the Ooredoo family. Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, is reshaping the age of information and insight through innovative partnerships. The company is launching state-of-the-art IPv6 and be 5G/IPv6 ready for faster mobile data customer experience and evolution of smarter network.

The partnership between Ooredoo and Wipro Limited enables the services on Ooredoo's mobile network in Kuwait. Wipro leveraged a dual-stack solution through network devices that translate Internet Protocol (IPv4) and (IPv6) to provide futuristic, reliable, secure, and faster mobile data experience.

Ooredoo represented by Fast Telco has also been recognized as a Gold Partner in the Aruba Partner Ready for Networking Program with Hewlett Packard Enterprise. It has also signed up to be Aruba's first Managed Service Provider (MSP) in Kuwait. Gold Certified Partners are recognized for having some of

the industry's best-trained network engineers and demonstrating the highest level of expertise in planning, designing, implementing, and supporting complex networking, security, and wireless solutions. Ooredoo have fulfilled Gold level competencies and completed noteworthy projects in the country which has enabled them to reach this level. Ooredoo has also signed a partnership with Nutanix, Inc. a leader in enterprise cloud computing, to offer Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI)-as-a-Service to businesses in Kuwait. The telecom service provider has implemented Nutanix Enterprise Cloud Platform combined with Citrix Virtual Desktops software in its data center with a view to provide a fully supported solution for desktop virtualization to small and medium businesses (SMBs) and enterprise customers.

Moreover, Ooredoo and Batelco, the leading digital solutions provider in Bahrain, partnered to launch "Global Zone" in Kuwait which will offer an ecosystem platform to further support the enablement of digital transformation in the region. The company has also partnered with Warba Bank, Kuwait's leading Islamic Bank with the aim of providing innovative digital services, solutions, and products to their customers. This partnership is also the first of its kind in Kuwait which will provide mutual cooperation in providing innovative and smart digital solutions that will satisfy customer needs and provide them with the best and most innovative digital experience.

Lastly, Ooredoo Kuwait announced its 5-year partnership agreement with Tamdeen Pearl, a subsidiary of Tamdeen Group, Kuwait's leading mixed-use property developer. As per this agreement, Ooredoo will provide innovative services and integrated digital communication solutions supported by the high-speed 5G technology for phase one of Al Khiran project, the "Hybrid Outlet Mall", located in the heart of Sabah Al Ahmad Sea City, and the region's first hybrid outlet, leisure and lifestyle destination. Ooredoo will also support the project with state-of-the-art cyber security technical services with its highest international standards and specifications. Ooredoo's social responsibility strategy is based on many values including communicating with all segments of the society, caring for them and enriching their digital lives, as well as manage all the challenges that might hinder the progress of the societies.

Thus, Ooredoo Kuwait collaborated with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a related organization of the United Nations (UN), that plays a leading role in the field of migration governance globally. The collaboration allows Nojoom members who are also Ooredoo customers to donate their points to IOM on MyOoredoo Application.

Ooredoo continued with the campaign which was a dedication to all frontliners encouraging them and highlighting the fact that they are the real soldiers who will protect us and help us get through the crisis.

Moreover, the "Free minutes and internet, on us" was activated as part of our efforts to support our customers while the country is going through COVID-19 circumstances. Ooredoo Kuwait offered special free offers to help all customers stay connected at all times with the tagline "Stay safe! Stay home! Stay online!" Ooredoo Kuwait offered free 5GB internet per day for all customers. From another side, Ooredoo offered our customers exceptional packages at exclusive prices to encourage them to stay at home safely, last but not least, our employees were working safely from their homes, and government officials were given all the support from our side through offering them free SIM cards, internet, and calls to stay connected with their families and friends. Proactive, data-driven crisis response has been shaped. We have identified and acknowledged the crisis and delineated COVID-19 response plan from normal business activities. Formed a committee to coordinate responses to all stakeholders on a daily basis. Took steps to provide continued delivery of critical national infrastructure and fulfill customer priorities around maintenance and confidence. Data usage scored up to 93 percent nationwide during full lockdown in May 2020. Telecommunications is a people-intensive industry, with a seasoned workforce that includes teams in offices, on trucks and in retail storefronts. During Covid-19, work-from-home strategy was applied. The PPE handbook was circulated amongst all employees at OK and all premises were disinfected when working in the office resumed. All offices were labelled with social distancing and health and safety tips signs and stickers. Determined which employees can work remotely without compromising productivity.

Prioritized cyber safe remote technology capabilities to transition workers to remote work while maintaining productivity. Assure the safety of employees who need to continue working on-site by continually updating and communicating risk-mitigation guidelines. Drafted and updated HR policies to ensure they are appropriate in the current environment. Free SIMS distribution and gifts to Quarantine centers in Kuwait. Ooredoo Kuwait gifted all C19 patients under quarantine and the staff treating them at Aqua Marine Resort, Sea Shell Resort, and Khalifa Resort.

Business

In Russian Arctic, mining giant Nornickel exhibits green goal

Nikel metallurgical plant a major source of pollution for decades

NIKEL, Russia: Freezing winds blow through a vast hangar in the Russian Arctic, where giant, once-gleaming machines are still, and a layer of snow has covered empty vats. Owned by the mining giant Norilsk Nickel, a leading operator in the northwestern resource-rich region of Murmansk, the Nickel metallurgical plant was a major source of pollution for decades.

In 74 years of operation, the plant near the Norwegian border produced more than 2.4 million tons of nickel, a non-ferrous metal that gave the town of Nikel its name. Each year, the smelter spewed out four times as much sulfur dioxide as all of Norway's industries, devastating vegetation and poisoning the region's air. But the former howl of turbines has now given way to silence. Closed in December, the Nickel factory with its near-dilapidated buildings and outdated technology is to be dismantled by 2029.

Strolling among the frost-covered machinery, production assistant Vladimir Bezushkov does not hide his bitterness over the death of a factory to which he gave 25 years.

"I would have liked to continue working as I did before. It's a shame, but what can be done?" Bezushkov says. Asked about the plant's sulfur emissions and resulting pollution, he responds: "Maybe, but we met all the standards."

Lessons learnt

The closure of the Nickel smelter is part of a global strategy aimed at transforming Norilsk Nickel, also known as Nornickel, into an environmentally friendly company—or at the very least, limiting its environmental impact. The shift in strategy comes in the wake of one of the Arctic's worst ecological disasters. In May, more than 20,000 tons of diesel leaked into lakes and rivers after a fuel reservoir collapsed at a power plant

owned by Nornickel. The company, which was slapped with a fine roughly equal to \$2 billion (1.7 billion euros) by the Russian government, claims to have "learnt an important lesson".

One of the world's biggest polluters and an essential cog in Russia's Arctic development, the company now plans to invest \$5.5 billion over the next 10 years to modernize equipment, clean up existing pollution and support national parks. One of those initiatives includes reducing emissions on the Kola peninsula-home to Murmansk and bordered by Norway and Finland-by 85 percent by the end of 2021.

"Nornickel has completely stopped dumping pollutants on the territory of Nikel and the surrounding region," the deputy director of the company's local subsidiary, Maxime Ivanov, told AFP.

Recognizing that sulfur dioxide emissions "have caused some environmental damage," Ivanov added: "The production of metals using modern green technologies is our strategy, our goal, and that is what we are striving to do."

'Not enough'

Nikel's metallurgical production has been partly transferred to the huge Monchegorsk factory farther south in the Murmansk region, where these new technologies are to be implemented.

Vadim Menchenin, a director of one of the plant's sectors, told AFP that with a new refining unit the company plans to double copper production to 150,000 tons per year.

"There will be no negative impact on the environment," Menchenin said. Today, Nornickel's Monchegorsk plant produces copper, cobalt and nickel. But its smelter, like the one in Nikel, is to be closed by March 1 in favor of the more environmentally friendly refinery.

Neighboring Norway welcomed the closure



A view of the Arctic town of Nikel in Russia's Murmansk region. —AFP

of the Nickel plant, with local environmental NGO Bellona Foundation describing it as a "gift to nature". In 2007, the plant's emissions were so severe that Oslo considered evacuating its border residents. Yet despite significant investments in new technologies and reduced emissions, Nornickel's plants remain among the main sources of Arctic pollution. "The closure of factories that have had their day is a step in

the right direction. But it is not enough compared to the production volumes of this company with revenues amounting to several billion," Yelena Sakirko of Greenpeace's Russian branch told AFP. "The Arctic has a very vulnerable ecosystem which takes a long time to regenerate," she added.

"In our eyes, there are regions that should be protected from human activities." —AFP

Al-Ablani: NBK is reserved for ambitious people



KUWAIT: The career readiness program "Tamakan" sponsored by National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) hosted Emad Al-Ablani, GM- Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait, who gave a lecture and answered a number of questions raised by participants, as well as provided tips on the best ways to develop personal skills and capabilities to be well-qualified to navigate their way into the labor market and ensure career advancement.

During the seminar, Al-Ablani urged the trainees to work hard, raise the ceiling of their ambitions, and have passion to achieve the desired career advancement, noting that the development of personal skills and persistence in knowledge acquisition and learning are crucial factors for a successful career and holding leading positions in the future.

Planning for the future

Al-Ablani advised the trainees that early planning for the future, and focusing on looking for opportunities in the private sector are essential, adding that the future and economic leadership in Kuwait will be for the private sector, which will push the Kuwaiti economy forward.

He stressed that there are plenty of job opportunities in the private sector, but there is a need for a specialized platform or

employment hub through which job seekers can explore suitable job opportunities in various sectors.

Al-Ablani stressed that the experience of moving from the government sector to the private sector is usually full of challenges, a thing he personally witnessed when he moved from his government job at Kuwait University to the private sector, attributing this to the fact that ambitions are usually greater than routine government jobs.

The founders' values

In response to a question about the reasons that made NBK maintain its leading position over the past decades, Al-Ablani pointed out that NBK was established on core values set by the founders back in 1952, indicating that these values remained unchanged and became an integral part of the identity of the bank and its employees. "NBK's culture is based on perseverance and perfection at work, as well as transparency in communicating with our customers. In addition, respect, solidarity and cooperation shown by our employees are all qualities stemming from the values of the Kuwaiti society," he noted.

Al-Ablani emphasized that NBK's executive management and employees are



mainly concerned with sustaining these core values upon which the bank was established, as reflected in "I am NBK" program launched by the bank.

Al-Ablani added: "I am NBK" seeks to reward and recognize the efforts of outstanding employees on the professional and behavioral levels, in addition to going the extra mile in performing their job duties, along with showing one of the eight principles derived from the core values of "I am NBK" including: Trust, Consistency, Excellence, Accessibility and Availability, Teamwork, Integrity, Respect, Empathy, and Communication.

"NBK is one family. Our motto is always excellence, which is the main driver for us to be a unique part of the Kuwaiti economy and the private sector, in particular. And despite having a job structure organizing work, all the bank's employees are equally keen on hard work and dedication, as leaders provide an example to follow in commitment, acting as a role model for newly hired employees.

NBK is for the ambitious

On a question about the prerequisite qualities and skills for joining NBK, Al-Ablani stressed that NBK is reserved for ambitious, innovative and creative people, as the bank basically strives to maintain

its leading position, locally and regionally. To this end, it must look for the human cadres and talents characterized by innovation, passion and having the drive for career advancement.

Al-Ablani highlighted that recruiting the wrong people is costly for both parties of the employment relationship, so the bank selects its employees very carefully, noting that to ensure continuation of the relationship between the two parties, they should have shared values and common grounds, and this is the secret of the bank's successful professional system.

Better potentials and capabilities

Advising the youth on searching for the right job, Al-Ablani said: "We have to understand ourselves first, in order to identify our strengths and weaknesses. Then, we can market our personal skills and capabilities in the best way. Failure to understand oneself leads to not knowing the desired job, distraction, and lacking true identity."

This generation has much better potentials and capabilities than previous generations, as we are now living in a more advanced and open era, and all what a successful person needs is to set a strategic plan to enhance his strengths and demonstrate his skills, he noted.

Facebook to pay \$650m settlement over US dispute

WASHINGTON: A US federal judge has given final approval to Facebook's \$650 million payment to settle a privacy dispute between the social media giant and 1.6 million users in the state of Illinois. "We are pleased to have reached a settlement so we can move past this matter, which is in the best interest of our community and our shareholders," a Facebook spokesperson said in a statement to AFP.

The decision was issued on Friday, according to documents seen by AFP on Sunday. Chicago attorney Jay Edelson sued Facebook in 2015, alleging it illegally collected biometric data to identify faces in violation of a 2008 Illinois privacy law. At the end of January 2020, Facebook agreed to pay \$550 million after it failed to get the lawsuit-filed as a class action in 2018 — dismissed. But in July 2020, the judge in the case, James Donato, ruled that the amount was insufficient.

During the trial, it emerged that Facebook was violating Illinois law by storing biometric data—digital scans of people's faces, in support of its face-tagging feature—without users' consent.

In 2019, Facebook proposed that the facial recognition feature be optional only. According to Donato, the regulation is "a landmark result" and represents a "major win for consumers in the hotly contested area of digital privacy." "It is one of the largest settlements ever for a privacy violation," he commented, noting that plaintiffs will receive at least \$345 each in compensation. —AFP

Huawei FreeLace Pro, best overall neckband earphones

KUWAIT: We took into consideration some of the key features you need to look at when picking up a neckband earphone. This includes features like battery life, overall noise cancellation and sound quality and finally the connectivity with smartphones and other devices. The price is an important factor as well. After going through all the available models in the market, we have come down to our 3 picks for neckband earphones: The new Huawei FreeLace Pro, Bose QC 30 and Sony WI-1000 XM2. However, thanks to its strong features and audio capabilities at its helm, the Huawei FreeLace Pro might just be your best choice. Here's how these three neckband earphones fare against each other and how the Huawei FreeLace Pro comes out on top.

1. Huawei FreeLace Pro

At the top of the list lies the Huawei FreeLace Pro, the latest addition to Huawei's growing audio portfolio. This neck-

band earphone, garnering multiple accolades globally, brings together all the key features that users need all at a more affordable price point. The Huawei FreeLace Pro packs a battery large enough to last 24h on a single charge. Charging it doesn't take too long either, because a single 5 minute charge can give you up to 5h of use! Even the charging method is quite unique, because the USB Type-C charger is built into the control box, which can be simply plugged into a USB Type-C port to start charging. This also takes away the need to carry around extra cables to charge on the go!

It uses a setup of microphones for dual active noise cancellation which cancels out both ambient noise around the user and residual noise in their ears. The Huawei FreeLace Pro also uses a Triple mic Noise cancellation setup to boost call voice quality for an undisturbed calling experience. The 14mm drivers contribute to great audio and is complemented further by a dedicated bass tube that allows for deep bass and high frequency range for a studio like experience.

You can also pair multiple devices and switch between them by simply double pressing the power button, taking away the hassle of disconnecting and reconnecting. The Huawei FreeLace Pro also come with a low-latency gaming mode which uses an optimized wireless audio codec that reduces audio latency in-game to as low as 150ms, making it a great choice for gamers as well. To top it off, it is also



more affordable while also packing more features that users would need.

2. Bose QC 30 - Quality audio at higher price

In second place sits the Bose QC 30. Based on the reputation of the powerful QC series that are known for its top-notch audio quality, the Bose QC 30 brings together all of what Bose knows best into a smaller form factor. If we are to compare battery life, a full charge of the Bose QC 30 gives you 10h of use, which is not as much as you get from the Huawei FreeLace Pro. It also uses a standard wired charging method, which while a little old school, gets the job done. However, because of this method, a full hour of charging can get you just 15 minutes of use, which



doesn't really work when it comes to on-the-go use.

Insert image of Bose QC 30

The Bose QC 30 offers variable noise cancellation and excellent sound quality, which is quite staple when it comes to the brand. However, if put up against competing neckband earphones like the Huawei FreeLace Pro, noise cancellation leaves room for improvement. Its 10mm drivers do however, result in good immersive audio. In terms of connectivity, the Bose QC 30 opts for the standard methods of using an app or finding it on a Bluetooth menu. However, the biggest caveat with the Bose QC 30 is actually the price point it comes in, which can make it an expensive purchase for minimal features.

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Lifestyle | Awards



This handout photo courtesy of NBCUniversal shows Chloe Zhao (on screen) accepting the Best Director - Motion Picture award for "Nomadland" via video from Bryce Dallas Howard onstage at the 78th Annual Golden Globe Awards held at the Rainbow Room.



In this file photo US-Chinese director Chloe Zhao poses during a photocall to present the movie "Songs My Brothers Taught Me" in the French northwestern sea resort of Deauville.



Photo shows Sacha Baron Cohen with Isla Fisher as he accepts the Best Picture - Musical/Comedy award for "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm" via video from Kristen Wiig (left, in character as Star) and Annie Mumolo (right, in character as Barb) at the 78th Annual Golden Globe Awards. — AFP photos

'NOMADLAND' MAKES GLOBES HISTORY, AS VIRTUAL GALA HONORS LATE BOSEMAN

"Nomadland" made Golden Globes history Sunday as Chloe Zhao became the first female director to win the awards' top prize for best drama, putting her film about marginalized Americans roaming the West in vans into Oscars pole position. Zhao also bagged the best director Globe, making her only the second woman to do so in the history of Hollywood's traditional awards season opener, which was a mainly virtual ceremony due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The late Chadwick Boseman won best actor for 1920s blues drama "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," six months after his death from cancer at age 43, in a night of emotional moments interspersed with technical glitches, awkward jokes and a row over the lack of diversity among event organizers. Semi-fictional film "Nomadland" stars Oscar winner Frances McDormand alongside a rag-tag bunch of non-actors who truly live on the open road, working mostly menial jobs to scrape by off the grid.

"For everyone who has gone through this difficult and beautiful journey at some point in their lives-this is for you. We don't say goodbye. We say see you down the road," said Beijing-born Zhao, 38. "Sometimes a first feels like a long time coming, — you feel like it's about time. I'm sure there's many others before me that deserve the same recognition," she told journalists in a virtual press room of her historic win. Usually a star-packed party that draws Tinseltown's biggest names to a California hotel ballroom, this pandemic edition of the Globes was broadcast from identical sets at the Beverly Hilton and New York's Rainbow Room, with essential workers and a few A-list presenters among the few in attendance.

The night's most poignant moment came with the win for "Black Panther" actor Boseman. "He would thank his ancestors for their guidance and their sacrifice," said his widow, Taylor Simone Ledward, accepting on his behalf. "He would say something beau-

tiful, something inspiring, something that would amplify that little voice that tells you you can, that tells you to keep going, that calls you back to what you are meant to be doing at this moment in history."

'One unzipping'

Unlike the Oscars, the Globes split most movie categories into drama and "musical or comedy." "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm," a sequel about the fictional Kazakh journalist, won the

and flirtatious young woman, played by nominee Maria Bakalova. "I mean, you can get more laughs out of one unzipping? It's just incredible," asked Cohen. Best comedy actress went to Rosamund Pike for Netflix's dark thriller "I Care A Lot." "I had to swim up from a sinking car. I think I still would rather do that than have to be in a room with Rudy Giuliani," said Pike. The biggest upset came as Andra Day won best drama actress for her portrayal of the legendary jazz singer Billie Holiday in "The

night, pledging "a more inclusive future," after several influential showbiz groups had piled on criticism including Hollywood's actors and directors unions.

But the punches kept coming, with presenter Sterling K Brown quipping: "It is great to be black, um back, at the Golden Globes." Despite that controversy, the Globes remain a coveted prize and a high-profile source of momentum in the run-up to the season-crowning Oscars, which were pushed back this year to April 25. Asked by AFP about heightened

Daniel Kaluuya, initially lost sound for his acceptance speech, forcing in-studio presenter Laura Dern to apologize before audio was restored. Jodie Foster won best supporting actress for Guantanamo legal drama "The Mauritanian," while Korean-American immigrant family drama "Minari" won the Globe for best foreign language film.

Pixar's "Soul"-mispronounced by presenter Tracy Morgan as "Sawl," to widespread amusement among the various stars appearing on videolink-won best



Photo shows Renee Zellweger announcing the late Chadwick Boseman as winner of the Best Actor - Motion Picture Drama award for "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom".

comedy section's best film and best actor prizes for creator Sacha Baron Cohen.

"Hold on, Donald Trump is contesting the result. He claimed a lot of dead people voted, which is a very rude thing to say about the HFPA," joked Cohen, referring to the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which organizes the Globes. Cohen also had a couple of zingers for Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani, who was tricked into a fake hotel room "interview" with an attractive

United States vs. Billie Holiday."

'Black, um back'

Comedians Tina Fey and Amy Poehler-hosting from opposite coasts-opened the ceremony making fun of the HFPA, which has been under mounting pressure for its lack of diversity. "The Hollywood Foreign Press Association is made up of around 90 — no Black-journalists that attend movie junkets each year, in search for a better life," said Fey. Three senior HFPA officials took the Globes stage early in the



This handout screen grab shows Simone Ledward Boseman accepting the award for Best Actor in a Motion Picture - Drama for "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" on behalf of her late husband Chadwick Boseman.

Oscar hopes for "Nomadland," Zhao said: "The awareness that I think it's going to bring to the nomadic community, I think is a great thing." Aaron Sorkin's "The Trial of the Chicago 7" had been tipped for multiple Globes but had to settle for best screenplay, while "Mank"-an ode to "Citizen Kane"-left empty-handed despite topping the nominations.

'The Crown' reigns

The remote ceremony battled through technical glitches and a few awkward moments. The night's first winner, "Judah and the Black Messiah" supporting actor

animated feature, as well as best musical score. In the television categories, the latest season of "The Crown" continued the show's multi-year dominance at the Globes, with three acting awards and best drama series honors. Netflix scored further wins for "The Queen's Gambit," for best limited series and best actress with Anya Taylor-Joy, while "Schitt's Creek" followed up its Emmys sweep with best TV comedy. — AFP



Rosamund Pike (on screen) accepting the Best Actress - Motion Picture - Musical/Comedy award for "I Care a Lot" via video as Ben Stiller speaks onstage.



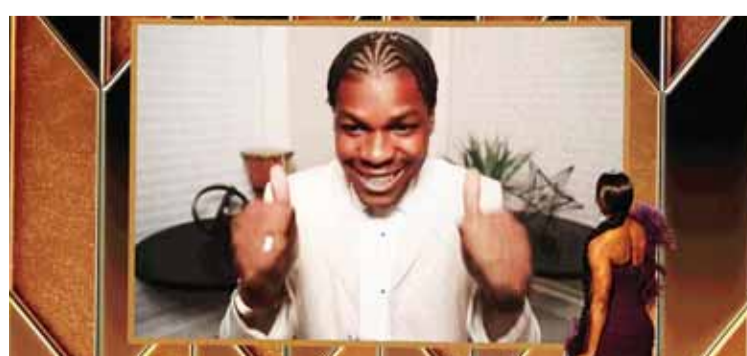
Gillian Anderson (on screen) accepts the Best Supporting Actress - Television award for "The Crown" via video by Christopher Meloni onstage.



This handout photo shows Andra Day (center top) reacting after being named winner of the Best Actress - Motion Picture Drama award for "The United States vs. Billie Holiday" via video by Joaquin Phoenix.



Actress Catherine O'Hara with her husband Bo Welch accepts Best Television Actress - Musical/Comedy Series award for "Schitt's Creek" via video from Christian Slater onstage.



John Boyega accepts the Best Supporting Actor - Television award for "Small Axe" via video from Angela Bassett.



Anthony Anderson presenting via video the Best Television Actor - Drama Series award for "The Crown" to Josh O'Connor (on screen).

Lifestyle | Awards



This handout photo shows Honoree Jane Fonda accepting the Cecil B. DeMille Award onstage.



Anya Taylor-Joy (on screen), winner of the Best Actress - Television Motion Picture award for "The Queen's Gambit" reacts as Rosie Perez presents onstage.



Mark Ruffalo, with Sunrise Coigney, accepting the Best Actor - Television Motion Picture award for "I Know This Much Is True" via video as Justin Theroux stands onstage.



Gal Gadot presenting the Best Picture - Foreign Language award for "Minari" via video to Lee Isaac Chung (on screen).



Jodie Foster, winner of Best Actress in a Supporting Role in Any Motion Picture for "The Mauritanian", and Alexandra Hedison speak on screen.

List of key Golden Globe winners

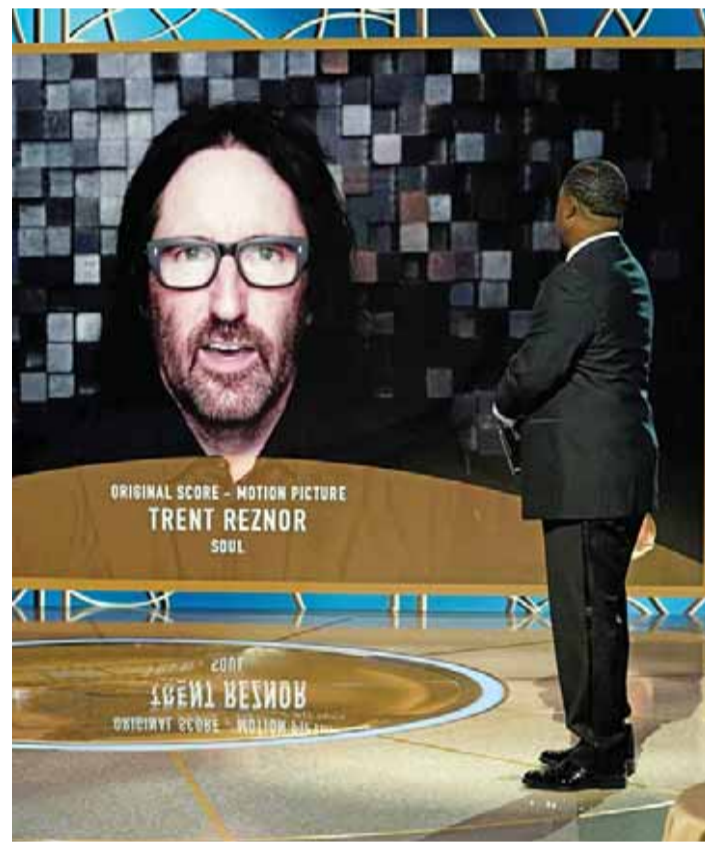
Here are the winners in key categories for the 78th Golden Globe Awards, which were handed out on Sunday.

FILM

Best film, drama: "Nomadland"
Best film, musical or comedy: "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm"
Best director: Chloe Zhao, "Nomadland"
Best actor, drama: Chadwick Boseman, "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom"
Best actress, drama: Andra Day, "The United States vs Billie Holiday"
Best actor, musical or comedy: Sacha Baron Cohen, "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm"
Best actress, musical or comedy: Rosamund Pike, "I Care A Lot"
Best supporting actor: Daniel Kaluuya, "Judas and the Black Messiah"
Best supporting actress: Jodie Foster, "The Mauritanian"
Best foreign language film: "Minari"
Best animated feature: "Soul"

TELEVISION

Best drama series: "The Crown"
Best drama actor: Josh O'Connor, "The Crown"
Best drama actress: Emma Corrin, "The Crown"
Best musical or comedy series: "Schitt's Creek"
Best musical or comedy actor: Jason Sudeikis, "Ted Lasso"
Best musical or comedy actress: Catherine O'Hara, "Schitt's Creek"
Best supporting actor: John Boyega, "Small Axe"
Best supporting actress: Gillian Anderson, "The Crown"
Best limited series or TV movie: "The Queen's Gambit"
Best limited series or TV movie actor: Mark Ruffalo, "I Know This Much Is True"
Best limited series or TV movie actress: Anya Taylor-Joy, "The Queen's Gambit". — AFP



Trent Reznor as he accepts the Best Score - Motion Picture award for "Soul" via video by Tracy Morgan onstage.

FIVE TAKEAWAYS FROM THE GOLDEN GLOBES

The Golden Globes on Sunday experimented with a virtual format and cemented "Nomadland" as the film to beat this Hollywood awards season. Here are five key takeaways from the night:

Netflix arrives (sort of...)

When it lost the first few awards, Netflix must have dreaded a repeat of last year's fiasco, when it converted just two of its 34 nods. But the streaming giant's increased clout in Hollywood proved impossible to ignore, as it ultimately topped both the film and TV awards Sunday. British royals series "The Crown" proved especially popular, sweeping four prizes including various acting gongs and best drama, and Netflix earned two other TV statuettes for "The Queen's Gambit." On the film side, the late Chadwick Boseman won for "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," Rosamund Pike for "I Care A Lot" and Sophia Loren's "The Life Ahead" won best original song.

But there was ultimately disappointment for Netflix best picture hope "The Trial of the Chicago 7," which claimed only best screenplay honors for Aaron Sorkin, and nominations-leading "Mank," which missed out altogether.

No party, no Globes

More than any other Hollywood award show, the Globes depend on their reputation for hosting a star-packed, champagne-drenched party of a night. On Sunday, with all those elements absent due to Covid-19, it showed. An initial review from Variety called it a "lazy, clueless ceremony," while Deadline dubbed the show "bloated and glitchy." The night's nadir came as the first winner Daniel Kaluuya briefly lost sound for his acceptance speech, forcing in-studio presenter Laura Dern to apologize. Unsurprisingly, the winners themselves were more generous in their analysis of the event, if still rather lukewarm. Sorkin called the night "more intimate," while Sacha Baron Cohen declared it "interesting" and expressed thanks that he didn't have to set foot on a red carpet.



This handout screen grab courtesy of NBCUniversal shows hosts, Tina Fey (left) and Amy Poehler (right) during the 78th Annual Golden Globe Awards ceremony simultaneously in Beverly Hills, California and in New York. — AFP

Diversity takes center stage

The Globes-awarding Hollywood Foreign Press Association has been under fire this week after a Los Angeles Times expose reported that it lacks a single Black member. Everybody from winners and presenters to co-hosts Tina Fey and Amy Poehler poked fun at the group, which put three senior members on stage to promise change. Yet the group-known for conservative choices-ultimately chose a diverse array of winners. Black awardees included Boseman, Kaluuya, Andra Day and "Soul" composer Jon Batiste, while Chloe Zhao became the first Asian female to win best director.

Politics

With the end of Donald Trump's presidency still fresh in liberal Hollywood's mind, the Globes offered a chance to ridicule the former president after his removal from the White House. Sorkin sounded one of the night's political notes in his acceptance speech, quoting the late activist Abbie Hoffman: "If you stop doing it, democracy crumbles."

"I don't need any more evidence than what happened on January 6 to agree with this," said Sorkin, referring to the storming of the US Capitol by a Trump-supporting mob. Mark Ruffalo, winning for TV limited series "I Know This Much Is True," urged viewers to "turn the page on the cruel past of this nation." Baron Cohen also singled out Trump's personal lawyer for attention. "This movie could not have been possible without my co-star, a fresh new talent, who came from nowhere, and turned out to be a comedy genius," he said. "I'm talking about Rudy Giuliani-I mean, who can get more laughs out of one unzipping? It's just incredible."

Records tumble

Chloe Zhao stole the "record-breaking" headlines with her "Nomadland" the first best drama directed by a woman, and as the first Asian woman to win best director. But other records also tumbled Sunday. Sorkin-already the most-nominated Globes screenwriter-became the joint biggest winner in the screenplay category, alongside Robert Bolt and Quentin Tarantino. The trio now each have three wins. And Boseman became just the second posthumous winner-and first in four decades-for best drama actor. The previous, Peter Finch, went on to win an Oscar for his star turn in 1976's "Network." — AFP



Emma Corrin (on screen) accepting the Best Television Actress - Drama Series award for "The Crown" via video from Kyra Sedgwick and Kevin Bacon.



Jason Sudeikis (center) accepting the Best Television Actor - Musical/Comedy Series award for "Ted Lasso" via video from Sterling K. Brown (left) and Susan Kelechi Watson.



Laura Dern presents the Best Supporting Actor - Motion Picture award for "Judas and the Black Messiah" to winner Daniel Kaluuya (on screen).



This handout photo shows Norman Lear (on screen) winner of the Carol Burnett Television Achievement Award with Tina Fey onstage.

Sports

Photo of the Day



Beat Feuz of Switzerland competes during the Hahnenkamm Rennen in Kitzbühel, Austria. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Djokovic ties Federer record

PARIS: Novak Djokovic matched Roger Federer's all-time record for the most weeks as ATP world number one yesterday, holding the top spot for the 310th week. Djokovic's ninth Australian Open title last month ensured the 18-time Grand Slam champion will surpass Federer's record next week. The Serb reclaimed the top ranking from Rafael Nadal in February 2020 and finished as year-end number one for the sixth time, tying the mark set by Pete Sampras. This is Djokovic's fifth different stint atop the rankings. He spent 122 consecutive weeks as number one between July 2014 and November 2016. That record is currently held by Federer (237). The only change in the top 20 yesterday saw David Goffin, who won his first title in over three years at Montpellier on Sunday, rise one spot to 14th at the expense of Milos Raonic. — AFP

USA basketball start bid vs France

TOKYO: Olympic men's basketball champions the United States will play France in their Tokyo Games opener on July 25 — three days after the end of the NBA Finals — organizers said yesterday. The mighty US, aiming to win their fourth straight gold and 16th in total, will face the French at Saitama Stadium, north of the Japanese capital, on the first day of the basketball competition. They will then play Iran on July 28 and a yet-to-be-determined qualifier at the same venue on July 31. The NBA Finals are scheduled to conclude on July 22. Greece, China, Canada, Uruguay, the Czech Republic and Turkey will play a qualifying event in Canada in late June to determine the final team in the group. Australia and Nigeria will also face off on the opening day, before host nation Japan begin their campaign against Spain, bronze medalists at Rio 2016, a day later. — AFP

Lakers blow out Warriors, Giannis propels Bucks over Clippers

Chicago, Toronto game called off after COVID alert

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James scored 19 points and had plenty of time to sit back and enjoy the Los Angeles Lakers' 117-91 NBA victory over the Golden State Warriors on Sunday. James, playing in his 1,300th regular-season game, added six rebounds, four assists, two steals and two blocked shots in just 24 minutes on court.

He sat out all of the fourth quarter along with the rest of the starters from both teams as the Lakers closed out what had become a tough February with a dominant victory despite the continuing absence of star forward Anthony Davis.

The NBA champions, who lost five of their first six with Anthony sidelined, have now won two straight. "When you lose a mega-piece like AD, it's going to take some time both offensively and defensively," James said of the adjustments required. James said the Lakers were becoming more comfortable in the roles they've had to adopt with Davis sidelined, an absence that Lakers coach Frank Vogel said called on them to develop a "little bit of a new identity."

Six Lakers scored in double figures as they avenged a narrow loss to the Warriors in January. James capped an overwhelming first half with a pull-up three-pointer that put the Lakers up 73-44. Eric Paschall led the Warriors with 18 points off the bench as star Stephen Curry was limited to 16. The end of the Warriors' three-game winning streak was made more painful with departure of Draymond Green with a sprained left ankle in the second quarter. The Lakers' win wasn't even the most lopsided of the night. That belonged to the Memphis Grizzlies, who trounced the slumping Houston Rockets 133-84.

However, there was plenty of drama in Boston, where forward Jayson Tatum drove for two baskets in the final 15 seconds to lead the Celtics to a 111-110 come-from-behind victory over the Washington

Wizards. Tatum scored 31 points and the Celtics withstood a 46-point performance from Washington's Bradley Beal to complete their first back-to-back wins since January.

The Celtics trailed by five with 46.9 seconds remaining. Tatum cut the deficit with a driving finger-roll layup and with 4.7 seconds left spun and drove through traffic for the go-ahead basket. "Jayson's will really shine through," Celtics coach Brad Stevens said. "It's been a tough stretch for (Tatum), but this matters to him, he wants to win, and he made big plays."

It came down to the wire in Sacramento, where the Charlotte Hornets trailed by nine with 2:19 remaining but battled back to beat the Kings 127-126. PJ Washington scored 42 points for the Hornets but it was Malik Monk who drove for the game-tying layup with 1.4 seconds to play, drawing a foul and making the free throw to snatch the victory.

Bucks rally late

In Milwaukee, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 17 of the Bucks' last 22 points in a 105-100 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers. Down by seven early in the fourth quarter, the Bucks took a 101-100 lead on two Antetokounmpo free throws with 1:57 remaining.

With 10.3 seconds remaining, Khris Middleton found Antetokounmpo for a one-handed slam that made it 103-100 and after Kawhi Leonard's potential game-tying three-pointer bounced off the front of the rim Middleton grabbed the rebound and made two free throws to seal the win. The Clippers went scoreless over the last four minutes, with Leonard and Paul George both coming up empty on multiple possessions.

Two-time reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Antetokounmpo finished with 36 points — his fourth straight game of 36 or more. "I was just trying to be



LOS ANGELES: LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers drives to the basket during the game against the Golden State Warriors on Sunday at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

aggressive and I knew it was going to work out," Antetokounmpo said. "(I) tried to find my teammates, just go downhill and create opportunities so my teammates can have an open shot or I can go all the way to the rim or make something for myself."

He added 14 rebounds and five assists and Middleton scored 19 points with eight assists for a Bucks team that welcomed back point guard Jrue Holiday after a 10-game absence because of NBA coronavirus protocols.

Game called off

The NBA has postponed Sunday's clash between the Chicago Bulls and Toronto Raptors in Florida after the Raptors were unable to raise a team due to

COVID-19, the league said. A statement said the game at the Amalie Arena in Tampa had been shelved "because of positive test results and ongoing contact tracing within the Raptors."

"The team will not have the league-required eight available players to proceed with the scheduled game against the Bulls," the league said. Toronto are playing their home games in Florida this season because of restrictions affecting travel between the United States and Canada. On Friday, six members of the Raptors coaching staff including head coach Nick Nurse were absent from Toronto's win over the Houston Rockets in Tampa because COVID-19 health and safety protocols. Toronto forward Pascal Siakam also sat out the game due to the same protocols. — AFP



CHICAGO: Patrick Kane #88 of the Chicago Blackhawks readies to shoot against Filip Hronek #17 of the Detroit Red Wings to score the 400th goal of his career in the third period at the United Center on Sunday in Chicago, Illinois. — AFP

Blackhawks' Kane scores 400th NHL goal

LOS ANGELES: Chicago forward Patrick Kane scored his 400th NHL goal Sunday in the Blackhawks' 7-2 rout of the Detroit Red Wings, becoming the 100th player to reach the milestone. Kane has scored 11 goals in 23 games this season and is the eighth active NHL player to reach 400.

He's just the ninth US player to do it and the fourth

Blackhawks player after Bobby Hull, Stan Mikita and Steve Larmer — all Canadians. "I think it leaves you wanting more," Kane said of the milestone, which came in the Blackhawks' five-goal third period.

On a 2-on-1 rush with Alex DeBrincat, Kane kept the puck himself, toe-dragging around a sprawling defender and putting a shot past Thomas Greiss's blocker for his milestone tally. "I picked it up at the red line and decided I was going to shoot," Kane told NBC Sports Network.

Kane, 32, said he's feeling "pretty good" about his game. "I'm just trying to keep getting better," he said. "When I look back on it, my childhood was pretty much playing hockey all the time. It's just what I love to do, it's still what I love to do." — AFP

Woods 'touched' by show of support from fellow golfers

LOS ANGELES: Tiger Woods, recovering in hospital after surgery for serious leg injuries received in a solo car smash, tweeted thanks Sunday for a show of support from fellow pro golfers. "It is hard to explain how touching today was when I turned on the tv and saw all the red shirts," the 15-time major champion said in a tweet. "To every golfer and every fan, you are truly helping me get through this tough time."

A host of golfers at the World Golf Championships Workday Championship in Bradenton, Florida — and quite a few at the LPGA Tour event in Orlando, as well — took the course for their final rounds wearing Woods's signature Sunday colors of red and black. The PGA Tour tweeted a picture of the maintenance staff at its Puerto Rico Open on Sunday all turned out in red and black.

Former world number one Rory McIlroy, Tommy Fleetwood and Tony Finau at the WGC and Phil Mickelson at a PGA Tour Champions event were some of the players who turned out wearing Woods's iconic color combo. "I guess for us it's just a gesture to let him know that we're thinking about him and we're rooting for him," McIlroy said. "Obviously things are looking a little better today than they were on Tuesday, but he's still got a ways to go. He's got a huge recovery

ahead of him. But I think (it's) just for everyone to show their appreciation for what he means to us out here. If there was no Tiger Woods, I just think the tour and the game of golf in general would be in a worse place. He's meant a lot to us, he still does mean a lot to us and I think that was just a little way to show that."

Collin Morikawa lifted the trophy at Concession Golf Club in Bradenton, becoming joining Woods as the only players to win both a major title and a WGC crown before turning 25. "Tiger means everything to me," Morikawa said. "Yes, he had the crash and thankfully he's okay and will make a quick recovery. But I don't think we say thank you enough, so I want to say thank you to Tiger."

Woods, 45, underwent hours of emergency surgery to repair what doctors called "significant orthopedic injuries" to his lower right leg and ankle on Tuesday after his early morning crash on a steep, winding road in suburban Los Angeles. He was transferred to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles for further treatment and recovery on Wednesday night and on Friday was reported in a statement posted on Twitter to be in good spirits after follow-up treatment for his injuries.

Woods faces a lengthy recovery from his injuries, which include open fractures affecting both the upper and lower portions of his lower right leg, along with injuries to the bones of the foot and ankle. Woods was already recovering from his fifth back surgery — and hoping he would be able to prepare for a run at the Masters in April — when the crash occurred. — AFP

Sports

Lukaku keeps Inter's title push on track as Milan bounce back

Atalanta keep Champions League push alive, Napoli win

MILAN: Romelu Lukaku scored after 33 seconds and set up another in Inter Milan's 3-0 win over Genoa on Sunday to keep their title push on track ahead of city rivals AC Milan, who beat Roma 2-1. Inter remain four points ahead of second-placed Milan, who got back to winning ways in Rome after consecutive league losses including last weekend's derby defeat.

Champions Juventus are a further six points adrift after being held 1-1 at Hellas Verona on Saturday, but have played a game fewer. Atalanta, equal on points with Juventus, take fourth spot two points ahead of Roma who drop to fifth following the loss to Milan.

Lukaku scored with the first chance at the San Siro, then laid on Matteo Darmian for Inter's second in the 69th minute. Alexis Sanchez came off the bench to add a third with 13 minutes to go. "We're first in the standings and it's a good feeling," said Lukaku as Inter try to deny Juventus a 10th consecutive league title after finishing runners-up last season.

Antonio Conte's side followed on from last weekend's 3-0 derby win over Milan, notching up a fifth win in a row as they push for a first league title since 2010. "We're happy because our hard work is paying off," said Conte. "We know that there are 14 games left. Let's keep our antennas up until the end if we want to do something good."

Lukaku led the way, completing a give-and-go with Lautaro Martinez after good work from Nicolò Barella to fire in from an angle for his 18th Serie A goal of the season, one shy of leading scorer Cristiano Ronaldo. The 27-year-old has scored six goals in the last five games.

"I'm in a good moment of my career but the

important thing is that Inter win," added the former Manchester United player. "These matches are opportunities for us to give signals to others, but the championship is long."

Milan edge Roma

Milan won an intense battle with rivals Roma at the Stadio Olimpico in the Italian capital, as Stefano Pioli's side push for a first league title since 2011. A Franck Kessie penalty gave Milan the lead five minutes before the interval after Federico Fazio fouled Davide Calabria.

Jordan Veretout pulled Roma level five minutes after the break with an arrowed shot, but the away side were soon back in front. Ante Rebic drilled home the winner eight minutes later after collecting a pass from Alexis Saelemaekers following a poor clearance from Roma goalkeeper Pau Lopez.

Off-form Milan star Zlatan Ibrahimovic had been substituted shortly before Croatia international Rebic scored the decisive goal. "I told the lads that two games (losses) cannot take away the confidence build up over a year," said Pioli. "It's an important win at a decisive moment in the season which takes us out of two very strange weeks."

Ibrahimovic watched the end of game with an ice pack on his left thigh before a week in which he will juggle football and show business as one of the star presenters of the San Remo music festival. Atalanta kept their Champions League push alive with a 2-0 win over Sampdoria with goals in either half from Ruslan Malinovskyi and Robin Gosens.

Napoli's record goalscorer Dries Mertens returned from injury to help the southerners boost their own top four hopes with a 2-0 win over local rivals Benevento that puts them a point behind



MILAN: Inter Milan's Belgian forward Romelu Lukaku and Genoa's Serbian midfielder Ivan Radovanovic go for the ball during the Italian Serie A football match Inter Milan v Genoa on Sunday at the San Siro stadium in Milan. —AFP

Roma in sixth. Mertens started for the first time in over two months and the 33-year-old got his boot to a Faouzi Ghoulam cross after half an hour for his 131st Napoli goal.

Matteo Politano turned in the second in the 66th minute and Gennaro Gattuso's side held on

for the points despite Kalidou Koulibaly's sending off 10 minutes from time. In the relegation battle, Cagliari snapped their 16-match winless run in coach Leonardo Semplici's first match in charge with a 2-0 success over rock-bottom Crotone. —AFP

'Written off' Liverpool still ready to fight

SHEFFIELD: Jurgen Klopp believes Liverpool can prove the doubters that have written their season off wrong after snapping a four-game Premier League losing streak to win 2-0 at Sheffield United on Sunday. The English champions' title defense has been decimated by injuries and they face a battle just to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top-four finish.

Klopp's men remain in sixth, but are now just two points behind fourth-placed West Ham and can leapfrog Chelsea in fifth when the Blues visit Anfield on Thursday. "Plenty of people have written us off. That's fine," said Klopp. "With all the problems we have had we're still around the exciting places." Captain Jordan Henderson has been added to Liverpool's long-term injury list, while goalkeeper Alisson Becker was absent after he lost his father to

a swimming accident in Brazil this week.

But the Championship-bound Blades proved the perfect opponents for Klopp's men to restore some confidence as Curtis Jones's second-half strike and Kean Bryan's own goal got the Reds back to winning ways. "This was about us showing we're still there," added Klopp. "We play Chelsea on Thursday, we have to show it again. We have to win football games, we know that. There's no way into the Champions League without results."

With Alisson's understudy Caoimhin Kelleher also absent due to injury, Liverpool's third-choice goalkeeper Adrian started in the Premier League for the first time since conceding nine goals in two games in October to Aston Villa and Everton.

However, the much-maligned Spaniard made an important early save to prevent David McGoldrick giving Sheffield United a shock lead. Most of the action was taking place down the other end as Aaron Ramsdale brilliantly denied Roberto Firmino, who should have teed up Jones for a tap-in.

The former Bournemouth stopper also did well to block from Mohamed Salah, Trent Alexander-Arnold and Georginio Wijnaldum, while Firmino's lack of confidence showed as he tried to tee up Sadio Mane

rather than go for an open goal from a narrow angle. Liverpool's breakthrough finally came three minutes into the second period when Alexander-Arnold was deemed not to have run the ball out of play before his cross was turned by Firmino into the path of Jones to slot home the opening goal.

The same two players were involved again for the second as this time the Brazilian's shot took a huge deflection off Bryan. Firmino was denied his first goal in seven games with the goal credited to the defender. "He had a goal," said Klopp. "For him it counts, if it's not in the stats, I don't care."

Andy Robertson and Salah were guilty of passing up more clear-cut chances that could have given the scoreline the reflection Liverpool's dominance deserved. Sheffield United are still 15 points adrift of safety at the bottom of the table and manager Chris Wilder admitted his side lacked the quality to challenge even a depleted Liverpool.

"You have to have your best players available and be at the top of your form and unfortunately we are not," said Wilder. "We had a right go but lacked quality and strength in depth. You need a bit more in this division because it's brutal and it exposes you." —AFP



SHEFFIELD: Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp brings on Liverpool's English midfielder James Milner during the English Premier League football match between Sheffield United and Liverpool at Bramall Lane in Sheffield, northern England on Sunday. —AFP

Atletico hold La Liga rivals at bay with tight win

MADRID: Atletico Madrid bounced back from recent poor form with a hard-fought 2-0 win at Villarreal on Sunday that allowed the La Liga pace-setters to extend their lead to five points. An own goal from Alfonso Pedraza and Joao Felix's powerful strike gave Atletico a precious win after a wobble which had allowed Barcelona and Real Madrid to gain ground in the title race. Diego Simeone's side had come into the match off the back of a Champions League last 16 defeat to Chelsea and a league run in which they picked up just five points from their previous four matches.

However despite Villarreal coming close on a number of occasions Atletico held on for a win that ensures they keep second-placed Barca at bay and crucially increase the gap between them and rivals Real Madrid to six points ahead of next weekend's local derby. "We suffered, and even after the second goal they had good chances. But we come home with a very important victory at this point in the season," said Simeone.

Atletico opened the scoring thanks to Pedraza's odd own goal mid-way through the first half, which came after long VAR check to see if Stefan Savic, who was initially credited with the goal, had strayed offside for Thomas Lemar's cross. Savic's header was saved by Sergio Asenjo only for the ball to ricochet off Pedraza and into the net as the 24-year-old defender fell over. Gerard Moreno should have pulled the hosts level when he met a Daniel Parejo cross but couldn't muster a decisive finish and Savic recovered easily to clear the ball off the line.

Suarez could have doubled Atleti's lead eight minutes after the break when he pounced on a defensive lapse to let off a powerful shot, only for Asenjo to pull off a superb reaction save to deny the Uruguayan. However Joao Felix gave the away side the two-goal cushion they needed in the 69th minute, quickly latching onto a poor clearance by Pau Torres to lash home the second from just outside the penalty area.

Felix appeared to direct an angry look at Simeone after scoring, reportedly prompted by a lack of game time. "I love rebel players, those that have pride. The goal brought something out in him," Simeone said. "He needed it, and the team needed that goal." The hosts responded, with Carlos Bacca somehow shooting wide when Moreno laid on a simple finish for the Colombian with 12 minutes remaining. And teenage substitute Alex Baena was unlucky to finish the match without his first La Liga goal, first clipping the post in the 82nd minute and then forcing a brilliant save from Jan Oblak with a stinging volley. —AFP

Live		Matches on TV (Local Timings)	
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE			
Manchester City v Wolverhampton Wanderers	23:00		
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE			
SS Lazio v Torino FC	20:30		
Juventus FC v Spezia Calcio	22:45		

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Several arrested at FC Barcelona

BARCELONA: Police raided the offices of FC Barcelona yesterday, carrying out several arrests just six days ahead of the club's presidential elections, a Catalan regional police spokesman told AFP. Spain's Cadena Ser radio said one of those arrested was former club president Josep Maria Bartomeu, who resigned in October, along with CEO Oscar Grau and the club's head of legal services.

But the police refused to confirm names, saying only "arrests are taking place" and adding that the operation was being run by officers from the financial crimes unit. "We are in the process of carrying out an operation right now with agents of the financial crimes unit," the police spokesman told AFP.

According to reports in the Spanish media, the operation is linked to last year's investigation into the 'BarcaGate' scandal, in which the club denied hiring a company to criticize current and former players on social media to improve the image of the then-president Bartomeu.

Lionel Messi, Pep Guardiola and Xavi Hernandez were among those allegedly targeted by the campaign. Messi described the controversy as "strange" in an interview with Catalan newspaper Mundo Deportivo. Cadena Ser also claimed Barca had paid the company, I3 Ventures, an inflated fee and put payments through in smaller, separate amounts to avoid the club's financial controls.

Emili Rousaud, who resigned as Barcelona vice president in March last year, said in an interview with RAC1: "If the auditors tell us the cost of these services is 100,000 euros and we have paid one million, it means someone has had their hand in the till." The club took legal action against him. Rousaud was among six Barca executives to leave their posts, with a joint letter citing the controversy as a key issue needing to be resolved.

'Plugging gaps'

Bartomeu said the company had been hired only to monitor posts on social media and announced an internal audit by PricewaterhouseCoopers, which cleared the club of financial corruption in July. "Let



BARCELONA: A security guard enters the offices of Barcelona Football Club with a dog yesterday in Barcelona during a police operation inside the building. — AFP

one thing be clear," Bartomeu said. "To the question: Have we commissioned the monitoring of social networks? The answer is yes. To the question: Have we commissioned to discredit people or institutions through social networks? The answer is no and we will take action against all those who accuse us of that."

Bartomeu resigned in October, avoiding a vote

of no confidence triggered after more than 20,000 club members signed a petition against him. His departure came the same month Barcelona announced losses of 97 million euros (\$114m) for last season and debts that had more than doubled to 488 million euros.

As well as a series of political blunders, Bartomeu had also overseen a dramatic decline in performanc-

es on the pitch and a personal falling-out with Messi, who tried to leave for free last summer.

Messi accused the club of "always juggling everything and plugging gaps" under Bartomeu's leadership. Bartomeu's successor is due to be elected on Sunday, when club members will choose between the final three candidates, Joan Laporta, Toni Freixa and Victor Font. — AFP



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