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# Two MPs file to grill PM over 'selective' application of law

Health minister under fire • 322K people vaccinated • Co-op appointments from 5-10 pm

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** Leading opposition MPs Bader Al-Dahoum and Mohammad Al-Mutair yesterday filed to grill HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah over what they charged is the "selective" implementation of laws. The move came after the government decided to refer some 15 MPs, including the two grillers, and dozens of activists to court for breaching health measures by holding a gathering attended by some 300 people.

Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said he received the grilling and informed the government, adding that the grilling will be placed on the agenda of the next session to determine a date for its debate. The Assembly can meet only after March 18, because HH the Amir suspended regular sessions for a month from Feb 18.

A large number of lawmakers



Bader Al-Dahoum

expressed total support for the grilling and it is highly expected to get enough votes to declare non-cooperation with the prime minister, triggering yet a new political crisis. Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah is also facing a tough time after MPs declared that they will file at



Mohammad Al-Mutair

least two grillings against him for his "confusing" decisions that failed to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

MP Hasan Jowhar said a meeting with government ministers failed to defuse tensions over the health minister's grilling, adding that the minister should "resign or



HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled

face the grilling". MP Ahmad Al-Azemi said yesterday he will file to grill the health minister over the damage caused by the coronavirus and his recommendations that harmed the country. A large number of lawmakers also declared their support for the minister's grilling, which

means that the grillers have enough votes to dismiss the minister out of office.

In their grilling, MPs Dahoum and Mutair said they had agreed to turn a big public rally into a press conference after a meeting with Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah due to health restrictions. They said they were surprised that the ministry still sent them to court for violating health measures, which shows that the government did not keep its word and was selective in applying the law, as it closed its eyes to many similar events.

The grilling said the government had taken no action toward a group of supporters of the Assembly speaker who disrupted the Assembly's opening session in December. The prime minister and the entire Cabinet resigned in January after three lawmakers filed to grill the premier. The resignation was accepted by HH the Amir, and Sheikh Sabah was later renamed to form the new Cabinet.

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## News in brief

### Assad, wife contract COVID

**DAMASCUS:** Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and his wife Asma have tested positive for COVID-19 after experiencing mild symptoms, the presidency said yesterday. "After experiencing mild symptoms that resemble... COVID-19, President Al-Assad and first lady Asma Al-Assad took a PCR test, and the result showed that they are infected with the virus," the presidency said in a statement, adding the couple will quarantine for up to three weeks. — AFP

### Vaccinated can gather sans masks

**WASHINGTON:** People who have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 can gather indoors unmasked with others who have been vaccinated, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in new guidance yesterday. Those who are fully vaccinated can also visit with unvaccinated people from one other household indoors without masks or distancing so long as the unvaccinated people are not at high risk for severe COVID-19. — AFP

### Houthi target Saudi oil facilities

**RIYADH:** A missile and drone attack targeted the heart of Saudi Arabia's oil industry on Sunday in an assault claimed by Yemen's Houthi rebels, a new escalation in the six-year conflict. The Saudi defense ministry said it had intercepted a drone targeting a petroleum storage yard at Ras Tanura and a ballistic missile aimed at Aramco facilities in Dhahran. Shrapnel from the missile fell close to an Aramco residential compound in the city. — AFP

### Tourist destinations shut

**MADRID:** Almost one-third of destinations worldwide are currently completely closed to international tourists because of the pandemic, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) said yesterday. At the start of February, 69 destinations out of 217 worldwide, or 32 percent, were completely closed to international tourism - including 30 in Asia and the Pacific, 15 in Europe and 11 in Africa, the UN body said. International tourist arrivals fell by one billion, or 74 percent, in 2020. — AFP

## Bus riders walk home on first day of curfew

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** Thousands of people were left stranded on the streets Sunday afternoon as the partial curfew came into effect. Buses stopped picking up passengers long before the expected 3 pm deadline and left riders stranded on roadsides, many of whom were forced to walk home in the afternoon heat. Similar scenes of people waiting for the bus were also witnessed yesterday.

Meanwhile, main arteries in Kuwait

City, Salmiya, Farwaniya, Industrial Shuwaikh, Mahboula, Fintas and elsewhere were choked with vehicles as drivers stuck in traffic jams could not move to reach home in time for the 5 pm curfew. There were no reported cases of people being rounded up for violating the curfew even though many failed to reach home before the curfew came into effect.

"I was at the bus stop at 3 pm but buses just drove past without stopping. They wouldn't stop because they were already filled to capacity. Everyone was rushing to be home by 5 pm," said Saby, who normally rides the bus home to Salmiya from his job in Shuwaikh. Saby said he wasn't aware that buses would stop taking passengers after 3 pm.

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**KUWAIT:** People wait for a bus at a bus stop on Ghazali Street as cars are stuck in a traffic jam yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Qatar Amir meets Saudi FM in Doha

**DOHA:** Saudi Arabia's top diplomat met Qatar's ruler Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani in Doha yesterday, official media reported, as the countries heal following a bruising rift. Prince Faisal bin Farhan's visit came as a Qatari delegation arrived in Cairo to continue restoring diplomatic relations between Egypt and the Gulf monarchy fractured by years of discord, Egyptian media reported.

Saudi Arabia led a coalition of countries including Egypt to break off ties with Qatar in June 2017 over claims it was too close to Iran and backed radical Islamist groups, which Qatar has always denied. But following Kuwaiti mediation, Qatar was invited to a regional meeting in Saudi Arabia in January at which Qatar was brought back into the regional fold.

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**DOHA:** Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani meets Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud yesterday. — AFP

## Harry, Meghan unload on royal family

**LONDON:** Suicidal thoughts, a racist relative and an heir-to-the-throne trapped by tradition - Prince Harry and his wife Meghan have lifted the lid on life inside Britain's royal family with an explosive interview that reverberated around the world. The two-hour sit-down with Oprah Winfrey by the Duke and Duchess of Sussex was the most startling since Harry's late mother Princess Diana made her own

bombshell revelations in 1995, and triggered similar questions about the ability of Queen Elizabeth II's family to weather the storm.

Harry described feeling "really let down" by his father Prince Charles, who had stopped taking his phone calls for a time. Both Charles - the queen's heir - and Harry's elder brother William were "trapped" by the conventions of the monarchy. "They don't get to leave. And I have huge compassion for that," Harry said in the interview broadcast on CBS Sunday night, explaining the couple's dramatic exit from royal life last year, which has now seen them stripped by the queen of their honorary titles and patronages.

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**WASHINGTON:** This undated image released on Sunday shows Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan in a conversation with US television host Oprah Winfrey. — AFP (See Pages 12 & 13)

## Local

# National Guard Deputy Chief calls for respecting the law

## KNG officials follow up procedures to implement partial curfew

KUWAIT: Deputy Chief of Kuwait's National Guard (KNG) Lieutenant General Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Sunday called for respecting the law, good dealing with the public, provide assistance to citizens and residents, and maintaining the good image of the National Guard. This came in a statement by the KNG after the meeting between the Deputy Chief of the National Guard with National Guard Undersecretary Lieutenant General engineer Hashim Al-Rifai and senior commanders and officers to follow up the procedures for the implementation of the partial curfew imposed by the government, and to help the state institutions concerned to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf conveyed the directives of His Highness Chief of the National Guard Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah to harness all resources to provide maximum support to state institutions in implementing Cabinet decisions aimed at reducing the spread of the coronavirus. He stressed caution and vigilance in all locations where the National Guard is responsible for security, whether the main tasks in protecting state installations and sensitive sites or emergency tasks to assign state agencies, especially the ministries of interior and health, to implement the partial curfew. According to the statement, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nawaf listened to a summary from Training Assistant Major General Faleh Shujaa, in which he reviewed the plans of national guard operations developed in such circumstances to deal with any government measures regarding the coronavirus crisis. He also reviewed a summary from the Commander of Protection and Reinforcement, Brigadier General Hamad Salem, on the measures taken in implementing the hotel security plan that the National Guard was mandated to secure.—KUNA



KUWAIT: A photo shows a deserted street in Kuwait city, on Sunday, as a nationwide curfew from 5 pm until 5 am is imposed for one month to curb a sharp rise in coronavirus cases.— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Prime Minister receives outgoing UK Ambassador



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received yesterday Britain's Ambassador to Kuwait Michael Davenport on the occasion of ending his tenure.— KUNA

## Al-Shaheed park open for walking



KUWAIT: This photo shows people walking at Al-Shaheed Park on March 6, 2021, one day before the partial curfew went into effect.— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: Al-Shaheed Park in Kuwait City announced on their official Instagram account that they will be open every day from 7:00 am to 3:00 pm starting yesterday. The park had originally announced that it would be closed during the entire month of the curfew period until April 8 but has now reversed this decision.

### News in brief

#### Kuwait first in Gulf in freedoms

KUWAIT: Kuwait ranked first among Gulf states in the Freedom House 2021 report in civil and political freedoms. The report said that Kuwait achieved progress in civil freedoms last year. The report ranks Kuwait 143 worldwide out of 201 countries, finishing with a score of 37 out of 100.

#### Teachers' payment suspended

KUWAIT: The education ministry has suspended payment of salaries to nearly 600 "newly-stranded" teachers in various education zones. Educational sources said these teachers are those who were at work until the end of the first school semester but did not report to work for the second semester, adding they were given until Sunday to show up before rules related to absence were applied.

#### Quarantine sites 'returned'

KUWAIT: The management of quarantine sites that were established to support health measures to confront the coronavirus pandemic is now the responsibility of ministries and state departments that leased them, such as the ministries of finance, public works, defense and Kuwait Oil Company. Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday quoting informed sources. They said the quarantine sites went to the relevant authorities after carrying out their responsibilities during the process of repatriating citizens from abroad. The finance ministry completed contractual procedures with resorts or hotels that were rented for this purpose. It said that the role of the health ministry was to prepare the fairground quarantine and field hospitals that are still carrying out their roles in facing the pandemic. Meanwhile, construction or financial procedures at other quarantine sites is the responsibility of the relevant authorities, while the role of the health ministry is limited to presenting health services. The sources said the ministry of public works quarantine site near Jaber Stadium was prepared and paid for by MPW, Al-Zour quarantine site by KOC and the same for the ministry of defense near the military hospital.

## Qatar Amir meets Saudi FM...

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and a process of reconciliation began. Since then, Qatari officials have met in Kuwait with their opposite numbers from Egypt and the United Arab Emirates to discuss how to move on from the spat. "(The Amir) received an oral message from Saudi

Arabia's King Salman... during the reception of Prince Farhan," the state-run Qatar News Agency reported. The Saudi foreign minister later met his Qatari counterpart and discussed bilateral relations, the agency added.

Egypt's Al-Ahram daily reported Doha's delegation was led by senior foreign ministry official Mohamed bin Saud Al-Thani to "discuss cooperation between Egypt and Qatar". The visit is the latest sign of warming ties between the two countries after their respective foreign ministers met last week on the sidelines of an Arab League session in Cairo.— AFP

## Bus riders walk home on first...

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"I realized that I will never get a bus from Shuwaikh to Salmiya, so I took any bus that came and ended up in Kuwait City. There I waited for more than an hour for another bus. All the buses were filled to capacity, but people were rushing to the bus wanting to get in. I was stuck there until 5:15 pm as the scenes in Kuwait City were even worse than Shuwaikh. At 5:20 pm, I decided to go home by foot," Saby told Kuwait Times.

"I was ready to walk from Kuwait City to Salmiya because that's what people were doing as there were no more buses and no taxis. I saw crowds of people of various nationalities walking in different directions, bracing to be caught by the police. But thank God, the police only yelled at us, telling us to go home," he said. Luckily, a Good Samaritan offered Saby a ride home from Mirqab

when he saw him walking.

Maricel, a regular bus passenger from Salmiya to Farwaniya, said she left her workplace in Salmiya at 2 pm and reached home after an hour. "At that time, the traffic was just starting to build up. I reached home relatively quickly, but on regular days, I could have been home in 15-20 minutes," she said. "Buses at the time were already filled to capacity and we already saw the rush at 2 pm," she added.

Mike, who was in a taxi with his friend from Kuwait City headed to Hawally, said they were stuck on the road from 3 pm to 5:30 pm. "My home is near Al-Bahar Mall on Tunis Street in Hawally. I came from Kuwait City in a taxi with my friend. The taxi driver chose to take road 30, assuming that traffic there would be less, but he was wrong, and we were stuck for two hours. I kept checking the time, worried we would not make it home before 5 pm. Finally, when we entered Hawally, the taxi driver suggested we would move faster if we walked, so we got out and walked the rest of the way home, which took us another 20 minutes. We were not so worried because we saw many people walking at that time," Mike said.

## Two MPs file to grill PM over...

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Meanwhile, the Cabinet yesterday ordered the ministry of commerce and industry to start accepting online bookings by the public to visit cooperative societies between 5 pm and 10 pm during the partial curfew. The Cabinet was briefed by Sheikh Basal on the health situation in the country. The minister revealed 322,000 people in Kuwait have so

far been vaccinated against COVID-19. Kuwait yesterday reported 1,326 new coronavirus cases and six deaths, taking total cases to 201,898 and deaths to 1,133.

The Assembly's legal and legislative committee meanwhile approved a draft law barring the appointment of expats to public sector jobs unless there are no jobseekers among Kuwaitis, children of Kuwaiti women married to foreigners and Gulf citizens. The bill forces the government to announce such jobs for Kuwaitis first and then for children of Kuwaiti women, and later to Gulf citizens. If the positions are not filled, then government agencies can invite foreigners.

## Harry, Meghan unload on...

Continued from Page 1

Meghan, a mixed-race former television actress, described herself as "naively" unprepared for life in the pressure cooker of the royal family. But she said she was denied help for a mental health crisis, targeted by lies in an incident involving her sister-in-law, and there was even official concern about the skin colour of her unborn son.

"I... just didn't want to be alive anymore. And that was a very clear and real and frightening constant thought," she told Winfrey, describing the impact of vitriol from hostile tabloids in Britain and social media. Asked if she had had suicidal thoughts while pregnant with son Archie, Meghan replied: "Yes. This was very, very clear."

Meghan, 39, also told of "concerns" about "how dark" Archie's skin would be, saying Harry revealed to her conversations over their baby's appearance, as well as the security he would be entitled to, ahead of his birth on May 6, 2019. The couple both declined to name the royal involved but Winfrey said Monday that Harry had told her the queen, 94, and her 99-year-old husband, Prince Philip, were not part of the conversations.

The revelations have triggered a storm of reaction on both sides of the Atlantic, particularly the explosive claims about racism, opening up a wider debate about prejudice in British society. Harry himself has faced accusations of using a racist slur against a former military colleague, and of wearing a Nazi soldier's uniform at a fancy dress party. He has said Meghan had made him confront the issue and since vowed to tackle institutional racism. The couple have been outspoken supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Anti-monarchy group Republic said the revelations showed the institution was "rotten to the core" and facing "its worst crisis since the abdication in 1936", referring to Edward VIII's decision to step down to marry an American divorcee. Meghan won wide-ranging support, including from tennis ace Serena Williams and Bernice King, daughter of the civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Amid political calls for a full investigation, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson - whose own views during his time as a newspaper columnist have been seen as racist - refused to comment. But he told reporters: "I've always had the highest admiration for the queen and the unifying role she plays in our country and across the Commonwealth." — AFP

Local

# Expats stranded in Dubai lose hope for chance to come back to Kuwait

## Some still waiting for a miracle

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** Some expat families and workers stranded in Dubai en-route to Kuwait have finally decided to go back to their home countries. Some however are still waiting for a miracle, like a Filipina mother who has decided to stay a bit longer in Dubai in hope of reuniting with her family in Kuwait. Kuwait Times has no official numbers of workers stranded en route to Kuwait, but a source said there are hundreds, possibly thousands, of expats from countries like Egypt, India and the Philippines.

Flight restrictions started in March last year in order to stop the spread of the coronavirus in Kuwait. In Aug 2020, Kuwait resumed most flights but banned anyone traveling directly from a number of 'high-risk countries' from entering Kuwait. Passengers from these countries have to spend 14 days in a third country before arriving in Kuwait. Since the restrictions in March 2020, the airport has never returned to full operations.

When the new strain of COVID-19 was discovered in the UK in December last year, Kuwait reimposed a new airport shutdown, besides restrictions on 68 countries with high numbers of coronavirus cases. The closure does not apply to air cargo operations. Kuwait continues to report record

daily new coronavirus cases after it saw daily infections fall below 300 late last year from a peak of more than 1,000 in May 2020.

### In a dilemma

Tessy, not her real name, has been in Dubai since Jan 23, hoping to enter Kuwait. "Last year I was waiting for a direct flight to Kuwait, but it did not happen. So on Jan 22, I finally decided to fly back to Kuwait via Dubai to be with my child and husband. My daughter, who is 13 years old, is alone daily in our flat in Salmiya when my husband goes to work. She has been attending online classes. I always call and support her studies online, but being away from her for a year now is driving me crazy," Tessy said.

Tessy, who has a dependent visa, left Kuwait in Feb 2020. "I went home alone to the Philippines because my mother had died. Even though the situation was unclear at that time, I had to be with my

mother because I loved her so much. I went home thinking I can come back in a month or so. My child was studying, so I told my husband to look after her. I am very afraid for her safety and have been in this state of mind over the last one year," she agonized via call on Facebook Messenger.

"I was ready to stay in Dubai for 14 days. My flight to Kuwait was scheduled on Feb 8, but on Feb 7, they extended the ban on the entry of foreigners again. On Feb 21, Kuwait said it will allow foreigners to fly back, but then extended the ban indefinitely. Now, I don't know what to do. I am in a dilemma whether to return back to the Philippines or remain in Dubai. We don't have enough money. My only wish for now is to be able to reach Kuwait and be with my family," she said.

"I am too stressed to handle my situation. I am even willing to walk from Dubai to Kuwait so long as I know I can be with my family. My visa will

expire in May and my passport validity is less than a year. This is killing me slowly, mentally and physically," Tessy lamented.

### Rooms booked

Kuwaiti authorities had earlier agreed for the return of foreigners, provided they quarantine for seven days at a local hotel and seven days at quarantine. Many expats were elated by the decision, but only a few days after this decision, Kuwait suspended the entry of foreigners indefinitely. Some expats had already booked hotel rooms.

A family from India who had booked a three-star hotel in Mangaf finally decided to go back to India tomorrow. "There is no hope for returning to Kuwait soon. I think the government is not ready yet for foreigners to come back. So my family and I decided to return to India for financial reasons. Our funds will not be able to sustain us anymore in Dubai, so we are going back to India," the head of the family told Kuwait Times.

"Even if we feel we are unfairly treated by the uncertainty, we cannot do anything. At the end of the day, it is because of the coronavirus that we are all struggling, and we don't blame Kuwait for this mishap. We hope we can still come back when everything is settled," he said.

## Kuwait curfew: What you need to know

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait imposed a one-month partial curfew from 5 pm to 5 am starting from March 7, 2021 to help curb the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases registered in recent weeks. During the curfew hours, pharmacies, medical stores, Co-operative societies and supermarkets to continue operation only through delivery services. Also during the curfew, people are allowed to go to Fajr, Maghreb and Isha prayers at mosques only by walking, while taxis are allowed to carry only two passengers. The government meanwhile allowed salons and health clubs to reopen during the day after a one-month closure but kept restaurants and cafes closed except for drive-through and delivery services.

### Where to obtain a curfew pass?

Citizens and residents that need a pass during the curfew hours to leave their homes can apply for a pass at <https://www.paci.gov.kw/>. The pass is available for those in need of emergency medical treatment, doctor's visits, blood donation, COVID-19 swaps and COVID-19 vaccinations.

### Co-op delivery during curfew hours

During curfew hours, co-ops, grocery stores and other markets will be allowed to offer delivery services. Most co-ops will accept orders via delivery. Here is an incomplete list of co-op WhatsApp numbers. Each co-op will be responsible for deciding if and when they provide delivery services and not all may be providing.

- Omariya Co-op**  
WhatsApp 6041-0067
- Farwaniya Co-op**  
WhatsApp 6767-8211
- Qairawan Co-op**  
WhatsApp 9000-3749
- Jahra Co-op**  
WhatsApp 5160-2458
- Abdulla Al-Mubarak Co-op**  
WhatsApp 6066-6338
- Nuzha Co-op**  
WhatsApp 9784-5531
- Khaitan Co-op**  
WhatsApp 6777-9745
- Ardhiya Co-op**  
WhatsApp 6902-0779
- Rabiya Co-op**  
WhatsApp 2438-8316
- Wafra Farm Co-op**  
Tel: 9883-5245 / 5170-0085
- Salmiya Co-op**  
Tel: 22253225
- Jabriya Co-op**  
Tel: 1805-353
- WhatsApp 6566-6084
- Rawdha & Hawally**  
WhatsApp 9662-2883
- Shaab Co-op**  
WhatsApp 9090-4455
- Wafra Co-op**  
WhatsApp 5055-0539
- Keifan Co-op**  
WhatsApp 5178-1719
- Rehab Co-op**  
WhatsApp 9222-2358
- Mishref Co-op**  
WhatsApp 5055-9900
- Faiha Co-op**  
Tel: 1861-000
- WhatsApp 9098-6000
- Rumaithiya Co-op**  
WhatsApp 6066-0045
- Bayan Co-op**  
WhatsApp 9004-2500
- Fahaheel Co-op**  
WhatsApp 5178-9951
- Adan & Qusour Co-op**  
Tel: 5034-3111 / 6593-3975
- Salam Co-op**  
WhatsApp 9788-7832

## US stands with Kuwait to counter cyber threats

By US Ambassador to Kuwait  
Alina L Romanowski

This year, Kuwait and the United States will celebrate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our nations. As we commemorate this important milestone, it is important to take stock of what we have achieved in this relationship, as well as what we still must accomplish together. Thirty years ago, a coalition of 38 countries led by the United States helped liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation - an experience that has bonded Kuwait and the United States forever. Today, there are new threats facing our countries, and the United States is again prepared to stand with the people of Kuwait to ensure peace and prosperity throughout the region.

Recent incidents demonstrate that the battlefield today has moved into cyberspace. In 2019



Iranian cyber espionage campaign targeted critical networks in Kuwait. During the first half of 2020 there were 1,305 cyber-attacks in Kuwait tied to COVID-19. Recently, Russia attacked the United States in the largest spying operation in history. These incidents validate how malicious state and non-state actors can exploit vulnerabilities in mobile networks, data, internet connectivity, social media, and artificial intelligence. Since these digital tools are integrated in critical and non-critical infrastructure such as the energy grid, water distribution system, transportation, and military and law enforcement networks, things we rely on everyday can now be disabled or destroyed with keystrokes rather than missiles and bombs.

While tanks and missiles still defend our physical borders and important installations, it is crucial to complement them with strong cyber defenses against those intent on causing widespread damage to our financial systems, national security, privacy, and our democratic way of life. Given how interconnected we are and how much we depend upon each other, if our networks are vulnerable, those vulnerabilities pose a security threat to our allies and partners.

This is why the United States is urging our partners to develop open, interoperable, reliable, and secure networks. We strongly encourage our allies and partners, including Kuwait - whose national security the United States is committed to protect - to craft legislation, regulations, and other measures that ensure our common security in 5G and other networks. These measures include supporting vendor diversity and transparent standards via national regulatory frameworks. Participating in organizations that develop and help implement telecom standards and developing

a skilled workforce that supports these goals are also important.

As the United States and Kuwait continue to strengthen our partnership, we want to foster a more robust and diverse information and communication technology supply chain that would allow Kuwait to exclude untrusted vendors and build a network that enables secure transmission of data on 5G networks.

In addition to ensuring data privacy and protecting against hackers, a secure and safe telecom infrastructure is key to attracting multinational tech companies and businesses. Kuwait aspires to be a data hub between the Middle East and Europe. But, to attract reliable, world-renowned, and cutting-edge technology firms, Kuwait must assure data safety and security, and build strong cyber defenses by investing in trusted vendors and clean networks.

In a networked world, economic prosperity and the strength and security of our relationship can only be assured if we are unified in our approach to cybersecurity. Today once again our nations must unite as we did thirty years ago. This time, we must build our collective cyber-defense, against an enemy that may already be lurking within our critical systems ready to inflict damage not only on us but also on our allies and partners.

Just as the pandemic has shown us that wearing a mask protects ourselves as well as others, we must protect our mutual interests by wearing a mask of strong cybersecurity defenses. The United States is ready to support the people of Kuwait to prepare for and defend against cyber threats. By doing this, we will expand and deepen the historic partnership between our nations that has created decades of peace and prosperity.

## Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed



## Japan embassy announces winner of logo contest

**KUWAIT:** The Japanese embassy in Kuwait released the following statement, announcing the winner for the logo contest to mark the 60th anniversary for establishing diplomatic relations between Japan and Kuwait:

"Surprisingly, we have received a large number of logo designs not only from Kuwait but also from Japan and other neighboring countries. The Embassy of Japan in the State of Kuwait is deeply grateful and impressed by the enormous and creative designs that were submitted, as they showed great interest in strengthening the friendship and bilateral relations between Japan and Kuwait. We would like to thank all participants for their enthusiastic participation and wonderful designs.

"We have to say that all submitted designs were excellent and unique, which made it very difficult for us to select a winning logo. After much consideration, we are excited to announce that the winning design is created by Yuka Satori, a Japanese art student. The Evaluation was based on the simplicity and originality.

"The selected logo shows the Kuwaiti flag represented by the number six, while Japan's flag is represented by number zero, and the Sakura flower that symbolizes Japan. Together, the two numbers are a symbol of the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations. The wave refers to the sea, which is a common natural environment between the two countries, represents the strong and deep relations between Japan and Kuwait. The winning logo design will be used for activities related to the 60th anniversary."



## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** People walk towards a mosque in Kuwait City to perform the Maghrib prayer during the curfew hours on Sunday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## NBK participates in event promoting women empowerment

**KUWAIT:** Celebrating International Women's Day, NBK participated in the 'Ring the Bell Event,' organized by UN Women and in cooperation with the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (SCPD) and Boursa Kuwait to promote the empowerment of women in various fields. UN Women themed this year's event "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world, in celebration of

the great efforts made by women for recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

NBK participated in the event, which was held virtually represented by Shaikha Al-Bahar, Deputy Group CEO, and Emad Al-Ablani, GM - Group Human Resources, who shed light on the bank's achievements in promoting gender diversity and inclusion as a cornerstone of the bank's system.

The event discussed ways to consolidate efforts and visions to promote the seven principles of the empowerment of women launched by UN Women and UN Global Compact. In 2021, the focus was on the third and fifth of these principles regarding guaranteeing the health, safety, and well-being of all women and men workers, and implementing enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.

On this occasion, Bahar said: "Commemorating International Women's Day gives us an opportunity to reflect on women's achievements and the progress made in achieving gender equality globally. Moreover, it encourages business leaders to act proactively to accelerate realization of this goal in the coming years."

Bahar pointed out that all organizations and institutions are required to proactively support the principle of equal opportunities in all job roles, and that career progression should be based on key criteria basically skill, experience and competence.

Bahar emphasized that women leaders showed great examples in addressing the coronavirus pandemic and contributed to putting countries on the track of recovery, noting that achieving gender equality in women's leadership and representation is a global prerequisite to create an environment that promotes sustainable development and creates a positive impact on society in the long term.

Bahar added that supporting women to reach their full potential has always been one of

NBK's priorities, stemming from the bank's belief in the importance of gender diversity and inclusion as critical factors to sustain its success in the future.

"At NBK, we are proud to be one of the first private sector institutions in the region to endorse UN Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPPs), as we were early to adopt a more systematic approach towards gender equality, which contributed to comprehensive adoption of these principles, and also provided us with a framework to work on the overall UN Sustainable Development Goals including gender equality as one of its key pillars," she pointed out.

Bahar noted: "NBK follows a unique approach with regards to guaranteeing equal opportunities, as it ensures equal opportunities for all its employees, with no exception, with the aim to motivate them to innovate. This approach is also clearly manifested in having no salary gap between women and men employees in the bank."

Bahar indicated that gender-diverse workforce gives added value to the bank's business, operating across 4 continents and 15 countries worldwide. We are proud that women employees represent 46% of the workforce, which is a remarkable achievement across the banking sector and the regional labor market. Moreover, the bank is keen to empower more women through mentoring and offering them career development opportunities. Over the past years, the bank adopted many initiatives that help attract and retain female talents, in addition to helping working parents create a better work-life balance.



Shaikha Al-Bahar

## 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](mailto: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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## Kuwait deplores Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait on Sunday condemned "in the strongest possible terms" a string of drone attacks launched by Yemen's Houthi group towards "civilian sites" in Saudi Arabia. These "terrorist crimes" represent a major escalation of violence and put the kingdom's security at great risk, said a Kuwaiti foreign ministry statement, adding such transgressions "run counter to international law and humanitarian principles." It slammed the international community's "silence" in the face of these "despicable actions," saying Kuwait "stands in solidarity with Saudi Arabia" and supports all the measures taken by Riyadh to keep its security and stability intact.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) condemned the drone and missile attacks. "These terrorist attacks not only target Saudi Arabia, but strike at the pulse of the global economy and energy supplies to the world," GCC chief Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf said in a statement. He underlined the six-nation bloc's "unwavering support" for all the measures Riyadh has taken to protect its national interests, which support global energy security and maritime trade operations. Colonel Turki Al-Malki, the spokesman for the Saudi defense ministry and the military coalition led by the kingdom, said the site of the world's biggest offshore oil loading facility was attacked with a drone coming from the sea, before it was intercepted and destroyed prior to reaching its target.

In the meantime, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has condemned in the strongest terms the Houthi militias' foiled terrorist attacks. In a press statement on Sunday, the OIC Secretary General Dr Youssef bin Ahmed Al-Othaimen stressed that these terrorist,

sabotage and criminal acts against vital installations not only target the Kingdom, but also target the security and stability of global energy supplies. He also warned that such acts pose a threat to the lives of thousands of Saudi Aramco employees and their families of various nationalities. He called on the international community to stand with the Kingdom in taking practical deterrent measures against all terrorist entities that carry out and support these subversive acts.

Saudi Arabia had derailed a drone assault on oil reservoirs at Ras Tanura Port and a ballistic missile attack on a residential compound of workers of the country's energy giant Aramco, announced the Saudi Energy Ministry. "One of the petroleum tank areas at the Ras Tanura Port in the Eastern Region, one of the largest oil shipping ports in the world, was attacked this morning by a drone, coming from the sea," the Saudi Press Agency quoted an official spokesman of the Energy Ministry as saying Sunday. The spokesman added that another deliberate attempt was also made this evening to attack Saudi Aramco's facilities. "Shrapnel from a ballistic missile fell near Saudi Aramco's residential area in the city of Dhahran, where thousands of the company's employees and their families from different nationalities live," he stated. He said that both attacks did not result in any injury or loss of life or property.

In his statement, the spokesman stressed that the Kingdom condemns and criminalizes such repeated acts of sabotage and hostility. "The Kingdom calls on nations and organizations of the world to stand together against these attacks, which are aimed at civilian objects and vital installations," he said. "Such acts of sabotage do not only target the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but also the security and stability of energy supplies to the world, and therefore, the global economy. They affect the security of petroleum exports, freedom of world trade, and maritime traffic." He added that they also expose coasts and territorial waters to grave environmental catastrophes due to potential leakage of petroleum or petroleum products. —KUNA



Myanmar protesters gather after general strike call

## Brutal murders in rural Venezuela highlight violence against women

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ALEPPO, Syria: In this file photo taken on June 3, 2014, a man carries a young girl who was injured in a reported barrel-bomb attack by government forces in Kallaseh district in the northern city of Aleppo. —AFP

# 10 years on, no peace after war in Syria

## The fighting has tapered off, but the suffering hasn't

**BEIRUT:** After a decade of unfathomable violence and human tragedy that has made Syria the defining war of the early 21st century, the fighting has tapered off but the suffering hasn't. In 2011, Bashar al-Assad and his government briefly looked like another domino about to fall in the whirlwind of pro-democracy revolts sweeping the Middle East.

Ten years later, Assad is still there, a pyrrhic victor offering no credible prospects of reconciliation for the Syrian people and exercising limited sovereignty over a land left prey to foreign powers. In late January 2011, the uprisings that toppled dictators in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya became known as the "Arab Spring" and the contagious nature of the region's revolts became obvious.

It took time for the wave of protests to take hold in Syria, where demonstrations had been banned for half a century and the government seemed more entrenched than anywhere else in the region. Some of the first gatherings, such as vigils outside the Libyan embassy, were ostensibly in support of the other uprisings and not a direct challenge to the four-decade-old rule of the Assad clan.

"We would call for freedom and democracy in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, but we were actually chanting for Syria," prominent Syrian activist Mazen Darwish recalled.

"We became obsessed with finding the spark that would put us next in line," he says, retracing the beginnings of Syria's

revolt in a phone interview with AFP. "Who was going to be Syria's Bouazizi?" The closest equivalent to Mohamed Bouazizi, the young street vendor whose self-immolation was the trigger for Tunisia's revolt, turned out to be youngsters who spray-painted the words "Your turn, doctor" on a wall in the southern town of Daraa.

The slogan was a clear reference to Assad, wishing the London-trained ophthalmologist the same fate as Tunisia's Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, who had to flee into exile—or perhaps even Libya's Muammar Gaddafi who was later that year lynched by a frenzied mob. The graffiti led to arrests and torture, which in turn caused an uproar that rallied a critical number of Syrians behind the protests.

March 15, the date which AFP and many others use for the start of the Syrian uprising, was not the first day of protests but the day that demonstrations happened nationwide and simultaneously. Journalist and author Rania Abouzeid describes the moment that gives its title to her book on the Syrian war: "No Turning Back". "The great wall of fear had cracked, the silence was shattered. The confrontation was existential—for all sides—from its inception," she wrote.

### Exodus

What came next led to the planet's worst conflict in a generation. The displacement, which saw half of Syria's pre-war

population of 22 million forced to flee their homes, was the largest induced by conflict since World War II. Half of those displaced fled the country, some of them swelling a wave of refugees reaching the shores of Europe, a phenomenon whose scope affected public opinion, politics and the outcome of elections on the continent.

In the chaos that followed the eruption of civil conflict in Syria, the most violent group in modern jihad—the so-called Islamic State—proclaimed a "caliphate" straddling Syria and Iraq that reshaped global terrorism. Arch foes Iran and the United States both sent troops to Syria to protect their interests, as did Turkey. Russia for its part launched in 2015 its largest military intervention since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a move that turned the tide in Assad's favor.

Almost 400,000 people were killed in 10 years, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based war monitor that has continued to keep count after international organizations gave up. Most of the 117,000 civilians in that grim tally were killed by the government, whose willingness to turn against the population surprised even its fiercest opponents. "I didn't think it would reach this level of violence," said Darwish. "But I was mistaken."

The government has used chemical weapons on civilian areas to subdue pockets of resistance, it has raided densely inhabited areas with crude barrel bombs that sow indiscrimi-

nate death, and systematically resorted to siege and starvation tactics.

### War spiral

Countless strikes were carried out against medical facilities in defiance of global outrage. Huge swathes of Aleppo, once the country's economic hub and a heritage jewel considered one of the world's longest continuously inhabited cities, were leveled. The rapid militarization of the government's response to the initial protests and the emergence of jihadist groups—helped by the government's mass release of Al-Qaeda militants—turned the Syrian uprising into the Syrian war. The ultra-violence that the Islamic State group projected and its ability to attract fighters from Europe and beyond instilled a fear in the West that wiped out the early pro-democracy enthusiasm.

The world's focus shifted to the fight against jihadists and away from the Syrian people's struggle against Assad, who quickly recast himself as the best rampart against terrorism.

"We were very naive when we started the revolution," said Darwish, who was among those who created the first coordination committees organizing the anti-government movement. "Our outlook was sentimental, poetic, romantic. We thought our moral high ground alone would be enough. We had no tools when the others—the regime and the Islamists—had real partners and huge resources," he explained. —AFP

## With heavy hearts, Syrians in Turkey pursue new lives

**GAZIANTEP, Turkey:** Some are coping, others struggling, but Syrian refugees in Turkey say they dare not follow their dreams and return home while President Bashar al-Assad remains in power.

Of the 5.6 million people who have fled Syria's conflict, more than 3.6 million have settled in neighboring Turkey. Their arrival since Syria's descent into bloody war that began a decade ago has profoundly changed the makeup of southern Turkish border provinces such as Gaziantep and Hatay.

According to official figures, Gaziantep is now home to 450,000 Syrians, making up a fifth of its population. Most have come from Aleppo, the obliterated Syrian city just an hour's drive south.

"I want to return to Syria and am trying to get Turkish citizenship at the same time, because as long as Assad is in power, our return is out of the question," Ismail Abtini, 42, says. He runs a grill restaurant with his family on one of the main thoroughfares in the city of Gaziantep, after fleeing Aleppo in 2013 with his parents, siblings, wife and children to "avoid the barrel bombs dropping on our neighborhood". One of his brothers was killed in the government assault.

### Lives left behind

Abtini acknowledges that his business is booming, as two roasters rotate whole chickens and a spit is laden with

meat for takeaway shawarma. But, he adds, back home, "we left behind businesses, houses and large farms"—something to return to should Assad ever be ousted.

On this stretch of Gaziantep's Inonu Avenue, better known as the Iranian Bazaar, most of the shops are run by Syrians—although storefront signs are spelled out in Turkish, as required by law.

"We fled the Assad regime, and if someone suddenly told us that Assad has fallen, you wouldn't find a single Syrian in Turkey," says Zakaria al-Sabbagh, a 23-year-old dried fruit vendor.

"But if the regime stays put, there is no hope" of going back, adds fellow trader Khader al-Houssein, 41. "I love my children too much to put them through what I went through."

In a small barbershop, Mohammad Abu Al-Nar, 28, and his customers debate Syria's fate and their possible futures. "If I return now, I will be jailed and no one will hear from me again," the barber says, as he takes his scissors to a Syrian customer's mop of hair.

"Especially since I am an army deserter. And there are many others like me in Turkey."

### 'A beautiful country'

While the traders on Inonu Avenue are cobbling together new lives, others are only just hanging on. Zeina Alawi, who lost her husband in a bombing in 2014, lives with her four daughters and two sons in a squalid flat not far from the city center.

Deprived of odd jobs by the pandemic, she depends on good Samaritans to help feed her family and pay the equivalent of 50 euros (about \$60) a month for an apartment furnished with two mattresses, a striped sofa and a charcoal furnace. With no prospects of return in sight, she remembers Syria with fondness. "I tell the children that

accusations. A month later, during a visit to Iran, Johnson presses Tehran for her release.

On March 7, 2019, London accords diplomatic protection to Zaghari-Ratcliffe, saying her detention conditions do not comply with international law. In April, the Iranian authorities offer to free Zaghari-Ratcliffe if the United States drops accusations against an Iranian prisoner, also a woman, in Australia. London rejects the offer.

### Hunger strike, psychiatric ward

In June 2019, Zaghari-Ratcliffe launches a hunger strike that lasts two weeks. In July she is transferred to a hospital's psychiatric ward where she stays for several days. In October, little Gabriella returns to London so she can go to school under her father's care. Richard Ratcliffe, who has fought for years



GAZIANTEP, Turkey: A Syrian buys food in a grill shop in Gaziantep. Some are coping, others struggling, but the millions of Syrian refugees in Turkey say they dare not follow their dreams and return home while President Bashar Al-Assad remains in power. —AFP

Syria is a beautiful country where we lived in a house and were happy, where we didn't have to suffer the kind of work that we have to do here," Alawi says. "But God has decided otherwise."

### 'Maybe one day'

Ahd Al-Wali, a grocer and confidante of many of the neighborhood's Syrian families, grabbed her son and fled Aleppo in 2014, a year after her husband, an opposition fighter, was killed by regime forces.

"How could I go back there?" the 39-year-old asks in her small storefront, where she runs a tab for most of her poor Syrian customers. "Can you imagine walking down the street, seeing his (Assad's) portrait hanging amid all the destruction that he himself caused, not to mention the women and children he has killed?" she says. —AFP

### House arrest

In March 2020, because of the coronavirus pandemic, Zaghari-Ratcliffe is accorded temporary release and placed under house arrest at her parents' home. On September 8, a new charge is levied against her, for spreading propaganda against Tehran. She appears before a judge on November 2 and the trial is adjourned without a date set for resumption. Upon completion of her five-year sentence for sedition on Sunday, Zaghari-Ratcliffe's electronic bracelet is removed, but she is summoned to appear in court on March 14 over the propaganda charge. —AFP

## Jailed in Tehran: British-Iranian's judicial saga

**LONDON:** British-Iranian dual citizen Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who completed a five-year sentence for sedition in Iran on Sunday, has been on a judicial roller coaster since 2016.

Here are the key dates in her ordeal.

### Airport arrest

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, an employee of the Thomson Reuters Foundation, is arrested on April 3, 2016, with her daughter Gabriella, then 22-months-old, at the Tehran airport after she visited her family for the Iranian new

year. The toddler's British passport is confiscated and she is handed over to her maternal grandparents.

Incarcerated at the Evin prison in the Iranian capital, Zaghari-Ratcliffe, then 37, is accused in June 2016 of plotting a "soft overthrow" of the Iranian government with the support of foreign intelligence services.

### Jailed for five years

On September 9, 2016, Zaghari-Ratcliffe is sentenced to five years in jail for taking part in a "sedition movement" in Iran in 2009, according to an Iranian judicial official. The sentence is upheld on appeal in April 2017. In November that year, Boris Johnson, who was then Britain's foreign minister, commits a faux pas by telling a parliament committee that Zaghari-Ratcliffe trained journalists in Iran, a remark that fuels Tehran's

## Syria's Idlib: What future for the rebel holdout?

**BEIRUT:** Ten years into Syria's war, a large patch of territory in the country's northwest controlled by jihadists and allied rebels is still holding out against the Damascus regime.

Can the Idlib bastion, protected against a military onslaught since a March 2020 ceasefire, continue to survive as its own self-run territory, perhaps a bit like the Palestinian Gaza Strip?

### Who lives in Idlib?

On the border with Turkey, a former Al-Qaeda affiliate as well as a flurry of rebel groups and other jihadists resist government rule in a chunk of territory referred to as Idlib.

The jihadist-dominated bastion is made up of half of Idlib province as well as slivers of adjacent governorates. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) controls the agricultural area and its towns through its influence over the so-called Salvation Government.

Despite HTS claiming it has renounced all ties with Al-Qaeda, the United Nations and European Union consider the group to be "terrorist". Syria's last major opposition bastion is home to 2.9 million people, of whom two thirds have been displaced from their homes by conflict, the UN says.

Many of those displaced, including those forced to flee other parts of the country, live in camps.

For about a year, fighting has largely halted in and around the area after a ceasefire deal, brokered by Damascus ally Russia and rebel backer Turkey, took hold in March 2020. But years of successive Russia-backed government bombardment campaigns have chipped away at the opposition stronghold.

From September 2017 to today, jihadists and allied rebels saw their bastion shrink from 9,000 to just 3,000 square kilometers (3,470 to 1,150 square miles), geographer Fabrice Balanche says.

### How many are jihadists?

Of the 2.9 million residents, several thousand are said to be jihadist fighters, according to UN estimates. The region is run by HTS and its 10,000 mostly Syrian fighters, a UN report released last month said.

They control the importation and distribution of gasoline and diesel, pocketing about \$1 million a month in trading fuel and energy, it said. The group is also reported to control distribution of humanitarian aid, "and confiscates portions of these goods to reinforce HTS patronage networks," the report added. But several other jihadist groups also exist, and there is sometimes infighting. —AFP

## International

# Brutal murders in rural Venezuela highlight violence against women

## Fear, pain and anger felt in Latin American country

**LA MISION, Venezuela:** Denis Reanez was looking through her daughter's things when she found a handwritten song she had been penning on a sheet slipped inside her bible. But Eliannys Martinez would never sing it. She was murdered on February 21 in La Mision in Venezuela's western Portuguesa state, aged just 17 when she became one of the two victims of a sexual predator who sowed terror in the village of 5,000. Murders of women have surged in Venezuela in the past year, and the killings in La Mision have embodied the fear, pain and anger that many in the Latin American country have felt as a result. "They found her dead, in panties, no clothes, face down, her mouth open, it was horrible. It fell like my chest was being torn open," said a tearful Reanez about her daughter.

The last time Reanez saw Martinez, the oldest of her eight children, was the morning of her murder, as they sat side by side in church. Afterwards, Martinez—who played the keyboard-stayed behind with friends to rehearse. She never returned home. Her grandfather Pedro Reanez went out into fields of beans and tomatoes to call out her name over and over again. Acting on advice from police, the family searched the abandoned sheds of a former tobacco factory now covered with vegetation.

Martinez was known to use a shortcut along a sandy path that passed by the dilapidated buildings and where many people would stop under the shade of mango trees to catch a telephone signal.

That was where she was killed. When her grandfather found the body, he covered it with his shirt to protect the crime scene before police arrived. "The shoes were placed" next to her, and she had broken "purple nails," he remembers. The very next day, a few blocks away, 20-year-old Eduarlis Falcon was found dead. She disappeared the day before, after heading to the gym



**LA MISION, Venezuela:** Mileidys Torrealba (left), 39, and Eduard Jose Falcon, 45, pose with portraits of their 20-year-old daughter Eduarlis Falcon, who was murdered alongside another girl, at their house in La Mision, Portuguesa state, Venezuela. — AFP

some three kilometers (two miles) from her home. "She didn't deserve this," said her mother Mileidys Torrealba, 39, whose voice was weak from crying. In her phone, she has some photos of her daughter's last birthday celebration. Paper flowers arranged in the shape of the number 20 adorn a piece of furniture next to Falcon's bed, from the celebrations last September. The killer was arrested on February 27, after he was turned in by his wife, and faces the maximum 30-year sentence.

### 50% increase in femicides

The brutality of the two killings on successive days in such a small village gained national attention and sparked protests against violence against women in Portuguesa and the capital Caracas. In the first two months of this year, 51 women were murdered in Venezuela, according to the national assembly, which on March 2 agreed to discuss reforming a women's rights law. In the last week of February alone there were five

killings, including a 33-year-old in Portuguesa killed by her ex-partner. A teenager in the capital Caracas was also murdered by her boyfriend. In both cases, the man had killed after the woman tried to end the relationship. Last year, during the coronavirus pandemic, 256 women were murdered—an increase of more than 50 percent on the previous year. Some NGOs believe the rise in murders is linked to the pandemic confinement that has forced vulnerable women to spend more time at home with their abusers. Most victims were between 16 and 40 years of age, according to an association monitoring femicide. It amounts to 8.5 women killed per million inhabitants in 2020. In Mexico, one of the country's worst affected by violence against women, that figure is 7.4, according to official figures.

### 'We have to break the fear'

Sexually-motivated femicide remains "unusual within the expression of violence that Venezuelan women" experience, anthropologist Aimee Zambrano, said. Most are "intimate femicides that happen at the hands of partners, ex-partners or family members," said Zambrano, who works with the femicide monitor group and fears that many such murders go unreported. Attorney General Tarek William Saab says his department has processed 600 murders of women since 2017, half of which were solved. Back in La Mision, the streets have been deserted at night.

Francisco Saavedra, a karate instructor, and friends have organized self-defense classes for women on a sports court. Around 30 women and children have been put through their paces learning to punch, kick and elbow strike. "We have to break the fear because fear paralyzes us," said Yasberly Almeida, 35, after taking part in a class. "It's very worrying going out into the streets and not knowing if we'll return home." — AFP



**JERUSALEM:** Leader of the Israeli Labor Party Merav Michaeli, speaks during an interview at the 'Influencers Conference' of the Israeli leading News Channel 12 in Jerusalem ahead of the March 23 general elections. — AFP

## Israeli Labor's new leader: Feminist and battle ready

**TEL AVIV:** Tasked with reviving an Israeli Labor party seen as near death just weeks ago, new leader Merav Michaeli is campaigning for social democracy, feminism and environmental issues. "Labor has lost its credibility and its backbone," Michaeli, 54, said. "It should be the center-left's party of government, to renew the country and get it back on track," she told AFP at her Tel Aviv campaign headquarters ahead of elections set for March 23. But the road ahead will be a rocky one. The party has been in severe decline for a generation and Israeli politics has undergone a significant shift to the right, especially under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in power since 2009.

Israeli Labor won just three seats in the 120-seat Knesset in last year's national elections, down from 44 in 1992 and a far cry from its decades in power. Rather than a return to the party's past glory, Michaeli's immediate goal is to influence the tone and policies of an emerging anti-Netanyahu camp that could cobble together the 61 seats to wrest power from the incumbent. "The most important thing is that the Labor party will have as many seats as possible within that bloc for change, so that no alternative coalition can be built" without it, she said.

The party has already enjoyed something of a bounce since Michaeli trounced opponents in a party primary on January 24, replacing Amir Peretz and becoming only its third woman leader. After the latest election—the country's fourth in just two years—was called in December, polling initially showed Israeli Labor failing to win enough votes to keep a single seat. But since she took the helm, polls indicate the party will double its tally to six.

### 'Need to rebuild'

Michaeli did not rule out any potential political partner, but said there would be ground rules. Her predecessor was widely criticized for joining Netanyahu's most recent ill-fated coalition government. "Rehabilitation of Israeli democracy, return to the rules of the game, return to the voice of reason, that is the only basis" for forming a coalition, she said. "To replace Netanyahu is not enough—we need to also replace 'Netanyahuism.'" The incumbent, Israel's longest serving premier who was also in power between 1996 and 1999, is seen by many as a highly divisive figure.

He has notched up a list of diplomatic and economic successes, lately including normalized ties with four Arab nations, but his coalition governments have quickly foundered in recent years and a corruption trial against him opened in May. Some of Netanyahu's former lieutenants are now seeking to oust him, including defectors from his own Likud party, among them former ministers. Any viable coalition joined by Labor would need to accommodate parties that have similar right-wing agendas to Likud. — AFP

## Floyd's uncle wants justice, but frets about 'the system'

**MINNEAPOLIS:** Deeply wounded and forever changed by the death of his nephew George Floyd, Selwyn Jones is apprehensive about the trial started yesterday of the police officer charged with his murder, his doubts fueled by a legal system that historically has been friendly to law enforcement. "I want justice to prevail," said Jones, a maternal uncle to the Black man whose death under the knee of white Minneapolis officer Derek Chauvin sparked outraged protests around the world. "I obviously want conviction," Jones told AFP. But he said he worries about "the system."

Chauvin, who kept his knee on the neck of the prostrate Floyd for nearly nine minutes on May 25, 2020, faces murder and manslaughter charges in the trial in a Hennepin County district court, where jury selection began yesterday. The 55-year-old Jones, who lives in the small town of Gettysburg, South Dakota, hundreds of miles to the west, said he hopes to attend part of the trial, though social distancing rules imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic mean only one family member can attend at a time. To him, the video of the fateful episode—filmed by a passerby and now seen by millions around the world—left no doubt: Chauvin is "guilty as hell." When Jones first saw the video on television, he didn't know who the Black man was lying facedown under a police officer's knee.

"Damn," he said he thought at the time, "that gonna kill this dude!" When his distraught sister called him with the news, Jones said, it was as if someone had "put their hands through my chest and ripped my heart out." He said he could never forget the images of his nephew begging for his life—and gasping for air as he predicted his own death. As for Chauvin, he said, "he acted like

there was nobody around him," even as a gathering crowd implored him to let Floyd breathe. Jones said it was as if Chauvin told himself, "I can do whatever I want to, because I am a police officer, and I am a white man and we rule the world."

### 'Manipulate the system'

Despite the powerful nature of the video, Jones is not optimistic about the outcome of the trial, which is expected to last several weeks. He said "technicalities"—including laws that give police officers considerable legal immunity—can be used "to manipulate the system to their way." "You've seen things like this happen over time, and they never worked out the way that they were supposed to." The most glaring example, he said, was the 1992 beating by Los Angeles police of a Black man, Rodney King following a high-speed chase. Despite a clear video record of the prolonged beating, a jury acquitted three of the officers involved and reached no verdict on the fourth.

That outcome led to six days of bloody rioting in African-American and Latino neighborhoods that left 63 people dead—a scenario Jones fears could be repeated if Chauvin escapes prison. "If there's an acquittal the whole world is gonna be tore up," he said. "I hate rioting, but sometimes that's the only way that people understand." The circumstances surrounding his nephew's death, and the huge protests it spawned, do give Jones some hope. "Just by chance, my nephew's death had to be in the middle of a pandemic, with everybody in the world (having) that opportunity to see what racism looks like," he said.

"Because that's what it was all about—racism, power and control. The same thing that has been inflicted upon Black people for hundreds of years." "The only reason" Chauvin was arrested, Jones said, "is because people were sick and tired of being sick and tired." New protests are planned around the Government Center where the trial is being held—opening arguments are set for March 29 — and huge media attention is guaranteed. With "so much pressure on this case to do something," Jones said, he does hold at least a bit of hope. — AFP



**MINNEAPOLIS:** Demonstrators hold placards during the "I Can't Breathe - Silent March for Justice" in front of the Hennepin County Government Center. — AFP

## Turkey arrests man for beating ex-wife on street

**ISTANBUL:** A man was arrested in Turkey on Sunday after a video on social media purportedly showing him beating his ex-wife on a street sparked outrage, state media reported.

The suspect was ordered to be detained by a court in the Black Sea province of Samsun on charges of "intentional attempted murder", the official news agency Anadolu said. The video, which went viral on social media, shows the man violently punching and

kicking his 24-year-old ex-wife in front of their five-year-old child as residents called on him to stop.

The assault—which came shortly before International Women's Day—sparked condemnation on social media, with users calling on the authorities not to let him go unpunished. The woman, known only by her initials E.M., was taken to hospital with bruises on her face and head but doctors said she was in good health, the news agency said. In a statement to prosecutors, the suspect named as Ibrahim Zarap said he felt "remorse", according to Anadolu. He claimed his ex-wife had threatened not to allow him further contact with their child. "I was shocked and I didn't know what I was doing," he said.

Domestic violence and femicide remain a serious problem in Turkey. Last year, 300 women were murdered according to the rights group We Will Stop Femicide Platform. Angry over the rising number of women killed by men, women often take to streets in



**BAGHDAD:** A handout picture shows Iraq's President Barham Saleh (center) and his wife Sarbagh (left) bidding farewell to Pope Francis (right) during the farewell ceremony at the conclusion of the pontiff's visit to Iraq, at the capital's Baghdad International Airport. — AFP

## Pope Francis departs Iraq after historic trip

**BAGHDAD, Iraq:** Pope Francis concluded yesterday the first-ever papal trip to Iraq, which went off without a hitch despite security worries and a second wave of coronavirus cases in the country. The 84-year-old pontiff covered more than 1,400 kilometers inside the country, bringing encouragement to its diminished Christian community and extending a hand to Shiite Muslims by meeting top cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. "In my time among you, I have heard voices of sorrow and loss, but also voices of hope and consolation," Francis said on Sunday, concluding his last public event. "Now the time draws near for my return to Rome. Yet Iraq will always remain with me, in my heart."

In his packed three full days in Iraq, the Pope made more than a half-dozen speeches in nearly as many cities, repeatedly evoking hope and fraternity. In Baghdad on Friday, he called for an end to violence and extremism and urged officials to do more to fight corruption. Francis called the minority Yazidis "innocent victims of senseless and brutal atrocities," following the Islamic State group's rampage against their esoteric community in 2014. He also met members of Iraq's other minorities in a moving interfaith ceremony at Ur, where the Prophet Abraham is thought to have been born.

On Saturday, he held an extraordinary meeting with the reclusive but highly respected Sistani, who afterwards said Iraq's Christians should have the right to live in "peace." Francis' full day in Iraq's war-battered north on Sunday embodied a cause close to his heart—supporting traumatized Christians. There, he said the "tragic" exodus of Christians "does incalculable harm not just to the individuals and communities concerned, but also to the society they leave behind". — AFP

Istanbul and other cities to demand that the government adheres to a landmark treaty on preventing domestic violence. The so-called Istanbul convention is the world's first binding instrument to prevent and combat violence against women, from marital rape to female genital mutilation. A ruling party official said last year that the convention was "wrong" and speculated over a possible withdrawal. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday he considered violence against women a "crime against humanity". "I condemn once more in the strongest terms any kind of physical or mental violence against women and discrimination," he said in a message for Women's Day yesterday. The opposition CHP party leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu said: "We grieve because of what we see instead of celebrating March 8," in a video message on Twitter where he appeared alongside his wife. "You have my word. We will end the violence," he promised. — AFP

## International

# Myanmar protesters gather after general strike call

## 1,800 arrested as troops continue brutal crackdown, Death toll 50

**YANGON:** Anti-coup protesters gathered across Myanmar yesterday, answering a trade union call for a general strike following a weekend of night raids and arrests. The country has been in turmoil since a February 1 coup ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi from power and triggered mass protests against the new military junta. The police and military have responded with an increasingly brutal crackdown on demonstrators, with more than 50 people killed and nearly 1,800 arrested.

Despite the risk, protesters rallied in parts of the commercial capital Yangon, the second-largest city Mandalay and other towns around the country.

Yesterday's demonstrations followed an appeal by trade unions for mass walkouts to bring the economy to a standstill. "To continue economic and business activities as usual... will only benefit the military as they repress the energy of the Myanmar people," 18 unions said in a statement. "The time to take action in defense of our democracy is now."

Unions are seeking to extend the impact of an ongoing "Civil Disobedience Movement"—a campaign urging civil servants to boycott working under military rule—which has already hit state machinery hard. The impact has been felt at every level of the national infrastructure, with shuttered hospitals, empty ministry offices, and banks unable to operate. The junta has warned that civil servants "will be fired" with immediate effect Monday if they continued to strike.

### Hospital takeovers

After a restless night with security forces deployed to multiple neighborhoods and shots heard in some areas, parts of Yangon woke to a heavy police presence. "Police and soldiers started clearing off Kyuntaw Road in Sanchaung township. They used sound bombs to stop protesters gathering," a resident told AFP.

"They are now using a bulldozer to remove the barriers protesters have made." Reports emerged overnight that security forces had taken over several public hospitals in Yangon.

Physicians for Human Rights said it was appalled by these moves, calling them a violation of international law. "One eyewitness account detailed armed



**YANGON:** Protesters wearing protective gears take part in a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon yesterday. — AFP

security forces entering and seeking to occupy West Yangon General Hospital by force," the group said, adding it had reliable information that five other Yangon hospitals were being occupied with similar situations elsewhere in Myanmar.

"Even though medical personnel vacated their government posts to initiate the civil disobedience movement, many returned to government hospitals in response to escalating violence against peaceful protesters."

### International pleas

The coup and subsequent crackdown have drawn widespread international condemnation as well as sanctions against key military personnel. Australia's Foreign Minister Marise Payne announced late on Sunday the country was suspending its defense cooperation program with Myanmar, which included

English language training. Canberra is reviewing its aid program so money is channeled away from government agencies towards not-for-profit organizations. The United Nations Special Envoy on Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener on Friday demanded an end to the "repression" of protesters and urged the Security Council to act.

But diplomats say the Security Council was unlikely to approve any international measures against the junta, with veto-wielding China—historically allied to Myanmar's generals—seen as a major obstacle.

The military, which denies responsibility for loss of life in the protests, has defended seizing power by alleging widespread electoral fraud in November's elections, which Suu Kyi's party had won in a landslide. The Nobel laureate has not been publicly seen since she was detained as the lightning coup was launched in the early hours of February 1. — AFP

## HK leader praises China's plan to install 'patriots'

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kong's leader yesterday praised China's plan to ensure only "patriots" remain in politics, denying the move was a purge of the opposition. Chief Executive Carrie Lam ruled out any need to consult the public on the changes, as they were decreed by Beijing.

Legislation to vet all election candidates in Hong Kong is currently being discussed by China's rubber-stamp parliament and is expected to be adopted on Thursday. China has said only those deemed "patriotic" will be allowed to stand. Critics say the radical overhaul of the city's already limited democratic system will demolish what remains of the pro-democracy opposition and ensure only loyalists remain, an argument that Lam rejected yesterday. "The improvements to the electoral system are not designed to favor someone, it is designed to ensure that whoever is administering Hong Kong is patriotic," Lam, a pro-Beijing appointee, told reporters after returning from the gathering in Beijing. "The decision is timely, necessary, lawful and constitutional, and the central authorities' leadership and decision-making power are out of question."

Authoritarian China promised Hong Kong would keep a degree of autonomy and certain freedoms when it reverted from British colonial rule in 1997. The city has a partially elected legislature and China also promised to one day grant residents universal suffrage. Critics had for years complained freedoms were being steadily eroded. Beijing then ramped up the dismantling of the financial hub's democratic pillars in response to huge and sometimes violent democracy rallies that paralyzed the city throughout 2019. Hong Kong was poised to hold direct elections for half the city legislature's seats last summer but delayed the polls for a year, citing the coronavirus.

## Exiled Belarus leader piles pressure on Lukashenko

**GENEVA:** Exiled Belarus opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya has no intention of stopping her fight against the government of Alexander Lukashenko, and is appealing to the United Nations to help intensify pressure on the regime, she told AFP Sunday. Belarus was gripped by months of unprecedented anti-government demonstrations that erupted after a disputed presidential election last August which saw



**GENEVA:** Belarus exiled opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya poses in front of the Palais des Nations on the sideline of her visit to the International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights (FIFDH) in Geneva. — AFP



**Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam speaks during a press conference at the government headquarters in Hong Kong yesterday. — AFP**

Yesterday, Lam hinted a further delay was likely given the sweeping changes Beijing is planning. "We are not able to tell you now whether the September election can proceed as scheduled," she said, adding the priority was to implement whatever changes Beijing decides on first. She said her government would launch an "intensive" drive to explain the changes. But she said there was no need for a "so-called extensive public consultation", arguing the transformation of Hong Kong's political system was "urgent" and was being spearheaded by the central government.

Hong Kong has never been a democracy—something that has fuelled protests and resentment in the territory towards Beijing. But it maintained a measure of choice, allowing a vocal opposition to contest certain local elections and maintain a minority presence.

When Hong Kongers were allowed to vote, they tended to return high counts for candidates advocating greater democracy. In recent years authorities have ramped up the disqualification of politicians either sitting in the city's semi-elected legislature or standing as candidates, based on their political views. Beijing also imposed a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong last year, snuffing out protest and clobbering the pro-democracy opposition. — AFP

Lukashenko claim a sixth term in office. His opponents say the polls were rigged and that political novice Tikhanovskaya, who ran in place of her jailed husband, was the true winner. But Belarusian security forces unleashed a harsh crackdown, detaining demonstrators and pushing opposition leaders into exile.

"We're convinced that at some point this regime is going to fall, because the pressure it's under is coming from inside just as much as from outside," said Tikhanovskaya, who has been living in Lithuania. "At some point, it won't be able to avoid starting negotiations to get out of this enormous crisis."

"The pressure has to be ramped up," she insisted. On Friday, Belarus requested Tikhanovskaya's extradition "to face prosecution for crimes against the governing order, public safety and the state", an appeal immediately rejected by Lithuania.

Asked about whether she felt safe in Europe in light of the extradition attempt, Tikhanovskaya was stoic. "There's a minimum risk but that's not going to stop me in my fight," she told AFP calmly.

Tikhanovskaya is in Geneva to take part in a debate on Belarus organised by the International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights (FIFDH), but is using the opportunity to argue the Belarus opposition's case to UN officials too. Accompanied by an impressive security detail, the 38-year-old mother-of-two was surrounded by dozens of supporters outside the UN headquarters. The UN Human Rights Council is currently in session, and Tikhanovskaya hopes it will adopt a resolution on Belarus. At its previous session in September, it held an urgent debate on Belarus and adopted a resolution calling on the authorities to enter into a dialogue with the opposition. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Burkina Faso ambush kills many

**OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso:** Six people including civilians were killed when a military detachment was ambushed in northern Burkina Faso, security sources said Sunday. The nation, among the world's poorest, is struggling with a jihadist insurgency that has killed more than 1,000 people and displaced hundreds of thousands. "A unit from Gaskinde (Soum province) was ambushed on Saturday. One (soldier) sadly lost his life, and another was injured. On our side, there were five other casualties, all volunteers," a security source said. The five civilians were part of Volunteers for the Defence of the Nation (VDP), a network of civilian volunteers who help the army in their uphill battle against the various jihadist groups operating in the country. — AFP

#### 107 migrants rescued off Canary Isles

**MADRID:** Spain's coast guard rescued 107 migrants from boats off the Canary Islands over the weekend as the migrant surge showed no letup on the Atlantic archipelago, a spokesman said Sunday. A total of 56 migrants were plucked from two vessels on Saturday. One boat was found off the island of Tenerife carrying 15 men, while a second was intercepted off Gran Canaria carrying another 41 men, all of them from sub-Saharan Africa. On Sunday, the coast guard rescued another 51 people on a boat found off Gran Canaria, he said. On board were 49 men and two women. — AFP

#### Iran asked to release dual national

**LONDON:** The UK government on Sunday called for the immediate release of a British-Iranian woman after her five-year sentence for sedition ended in Iran, as a new court summons caused further uncertainty about her fate. Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who has been under house arrest for months, had her ankle tag removed, giving her more freedom of movement and allowing her to visit relatives in Tehran. But the 42-year-old dual national now faces another court appearance in Iran next Sunday, dashing hopes among her family, friends and supporters of an immediate return home. — AFP

## S Korea, US agree on troop deal

**SEOUL:** South Korea and the United States have reached agreement on Seoul's contribution to the costs of the US troop presence on the peninsula, Seoul said yesterday, as the two allies kicked off annual joint military exercises. The issue had bedevilled the two allies' security alliance under former president Donald Trump, who had a transactional approach to foreign policy and repeatedly accused the South of free-loading. Washington stations 28,500 troops in the country to defend it from the nuclear-armed North, which invaded in 1950. They are a key part of US forces' deployment in Asia, but negotiations over funding had been gridlocked by the former US administration's demands that the South pay billions of dollars more towards their costs. The Trump administration initially insisted on \$5 billion a year—a more than fivefold increase. Under the previous deal, which expired at the end of 2019, Seoul paid Washington about \$920 million annually.

Seoul's foreign ministry said the two sides had reached an agreement "in principle" without specifying the agreed amount. "The government will resolve a gap that has lasted for more than a year through a swift signing of an agreement," it said in a statement.

The new deal must still be approved by the South Korean legislature. US President Joe Biden has vowed to revive frayed US alliances under his predecessor to counter the challenges posed by Russia, China, Iran and North Korea. "America's alliances are a tremendous source of our strength," the US State Department said in a tweet. It also did not state how much the South would pay.

The two sides "will now pursue the final steps needed to conclude the Special Measures Agreement for signature and entry into force that will strengthen our Alliance and our shared defense," it added.

The agreement came as Seoul and Washington kicked off their annual military training yesterday, which has been scaled down from the usual level over COVID-19, with no large-scale physical troop involvement. The nine-day exercise is still likely to infuriate the North, which has long considered such drills rehearsals for invasion. "The upcoming annual training is a computer-simulated command post exercise that is strictly defensive in nature," the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said, adding they went ahead with plans after considering the pandemic. After his first summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore in June 2018, Trump said Washington would suspend the "very provocative" joint military exercises with South Korea. But a second meeting held in Hanoi in February 2019 broke up early with no progress towards Washington's goal of Pyongyang abandoning its nuclear weapons program. North Korea has put itself under strict self-imposed isolation to try to protect itself against the coronavirus pandemic, adding to the pressure on its moribund economy. — AFP



**KOLKATA:** India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during a mass rally ahead of the state legislative assembly elections at the Brigade Parade ground in Kolkata on Sunday. — AFP

## Huge crowd fetes Modi at rally for key W Bengal poll

**KOLKATA:** A crowd of up to 800,000 turned out for a state election rally by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday, as he sought to unseat one of his fiercest critics in a campaign hit by violence. Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been seeking to expand its power at the state level, and is eyeing the eastern state of West Bengal where the larger-than-life Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has ruled for a decade. The state, home to more than 90 million people with some 73 million eligible to vote in the staggered polling that kicks off on March 27, has so far eluded the BJP. "The next 25 years of development are very important for West Bengal. We want it to lead India when it celebrates 100 years of its independence," Modi told the rally at the Brigade Parade Ground in the capital Kolkata, which can hold up to a million people. Supporters held up life-size cardboard cutouts of Modi's image under the blazing sun. Hundreds also watched the rally from the rooftops of high-rise buildings overlooking the site.

"Our (state) government will work to re-establish the public's belief in government systems, police and administration... We are here for change, a change that brings economic prosperity, jobs and development for all sections of the society," Modi added. The BJP and local media estimated that between 500,000 to 800,000 people attended the rally. Banerjee, 66, remains popular but there are growing signs of anti-incumbency among voters, while some allies have switched sides to join the BJP.

West Bengal, like in its previous polls, has been beset by political violence with workers and activists attacked and several killed. Modi's campaign was boosted by veteran Bollywood actor Mithun Chakraborty, who announced at the rally that he had joined the BJP. Teacher Tapas Burman, who travelled from his village 40 kilometers (24.8 miles) from Kolkata to attend the rally, told AFP voters were "ready for change". "We will fight. We will win," he added. The BJP's push to highlight allegations of corruption, nepotism and minority politics against Banerjee and her Trinamool Congress party has seen them become only marginal favorites to hold on to power, political strategist Amitabh Tiwari told AFP. Tiwari said the poll would also be a referendum on a disputed citizenship law introduced by the national government in late December that sparked violent protests including in Kolkata. — AFP

# Business

TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2021

## Zain Group publishes insightful report on women in technology

### Annual thought leadership report focuses on 'Bridging the Gender Gap in STEM Fields'

KUWAIT: Zain Group, the leading mobile telecom innovator in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, announced the publication of its annual thought leadership report, this year entitled, Women in Technology - Bridging the Gender Gap in STEM Fields. It provides insights on the gender gap in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), highlighting the impact on socio-economic development across the board.

The release of the report, which coincides with International Women's Day, explores several important issues regarding the cause, nature, and effects of the challenges faced by women as related to STEM, and the prejudices they face even upon entering professions related to the subject area. The publication delves into aspects of gender disparity; the gender digital divide; literacy and STEM education; as well as employment equality.

- **Bader Al-Kharafi: The role of women in tech needs to be increased. It is that simple**
- **Released on International Women's Day, report explores important issues regarding the cause, nature, and effects of the challenges faced by women as related to STEM**
- **Report finds that if 600 million more women were connected to the internet over the next three years, global GDP would rise between \$13 billion - \$18 billion**
- **Continually driving equality programs, Zain pushing an agenda that is cohesive, inclusive, and fair to all**
- **Zain tapping into over 100 of its female workforce who were certified in the fundamentals of Data Analytics and Science**

Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO commented, "The role of women in tech needs to be increased. It is that simple. Zain is continually driving equality programs, recognizing the need to push an agenda that is cohesive, inclusive, and fair to all. This thought leadership report is another tool to highlight the extent of the exclusion of women from STEM-related fields, and what is needed to close the gender gap across the region and beyond."

Al-Kharafi added, "Since the launch of our Gender Diversity initiative, we have invested in certifying over 100 females within Zain on the fundamentals of Data Analytics and Science. These colleagues then went on

to take part in our groupwide 12-hour datathon in April 2020 at the height of pandemic, and are now part of a talent pool of resources we tap into for tech related projects across our footprint. We will continue to inspire learning through practice, and the engagement in this datathon has proven the resilience of our talented pool of women in STEM."

Jennifer Suleiman, Zain Group's Chief Sustainability Officer said, "Zain has a long list of activities aimed at reducing the gender gap. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted glaring inequalities across so many aspects of modern life, and the plight of females in STEM-related fields is one of them. The timing and topic of our latest report that coincides with International Women's Day couldn't be more appropriate, and we hope it forces people to recognize the state of play when it comes to gender exclusion and the steps required to rectify it." This latest and insightful thought leadership encompasses issues related to gender biases in STEM; innovation in STEM; developing STEM skills to achieve financial inclusion; and COVID-19 and women in technology. Core areas of discussion and highlights in the report include:

#### Aspects of gender disparity

Women account for half of the world's population and are fundamental to ensuring a sustainable future and peaceful societies. There has been some progress made towards achieving a more equal society, however, there is still a long way to go and according to the UN, the gender gap is considered "the unfinished business of our time."

#### The gender digital divide

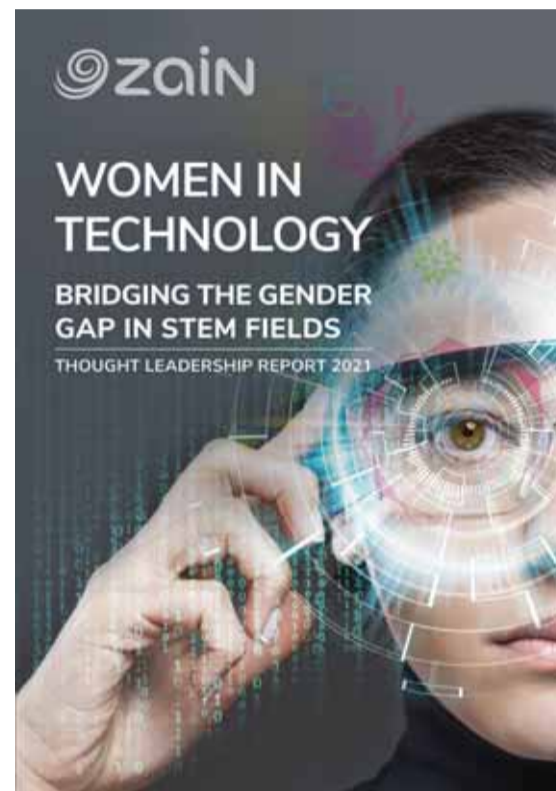
Studies have shown that the gender digital divide is due to the lack of access females have in attaining digital skillsets that can help them advance and develop in the area. Additionally, women are more likely to represent lower income segments, leaving them unable to afford and purchase digital software and hardware.

Glaring discrepancies exist with regards females gaining access to digital tools, including:

- 165 million fewer women own a mobile phone in comparison to men
- Globally, 433 million women are unconnected
- The global internet user gap is 17 percent
- If 600 million more women were connected to the internet over the next three years, global GDP would rise between \$13 billion and \$18 billion

#### Literacy and STEM education

As the number of girls gaining an education increases, disparities associated with access to opportunities, quality and topics they choose to study becomes more evident. It is imperative for girls to further develop themselves in STEM education, as careers in these areas are seen as the jobs of the future, driving innovation, social well-being, inclusive growth, and sustainable development.



Zain Bahrain's Girls for Tech Camp, for example, was launched in partnership with the Kingdom's Supreme Council for Women and Clever Play, an organization that aims to inspire children's curiosity and passion for STEM. Established in October 2019, the program equips girls between ages 8 and 13 years with 10 hours of training in coding, and targets training 1,000 girls. In 2019-2020, 725 girls completed the program.

#### Employment equality

Women are underrepresented in the technology sector and even though large strides have been made in STEM education, it has not translated into employment. Studies have shown that even though countries have largely invested in improving girls' education including STEM education, cultural and societal constraints have hindered this needed transition, impacting societies in a dramatic manner. This gap in STEM employment prevents economies from reaching their full potential as it omits half of the population's potential and talent to contribute to the economy.

#### Gender biases in STEM

Gender stereotypes in the context of STEM start at an early age and continue to impact children at later stages in their lives. It has been studied that children's choices to enter STEM start as early as 3-5 years of age. By the ages of 6-10 years, girls start developing the notion that boys are better in math, which is not the case, as analyses show girls and boys in fact perform

the same. Another stereotype that starts to emerge during this time is that males innately succeed in the field of STEM. These stereotypes continue to manifest throughout the course of women's education and career.

#### Innovation in STEM

STEM plays a key role in creating innovative tools to address global challenges that our world faces. It has been proven that diversity in teams drives transformation as it brings about new ideas and perspectives. As men and women have different life experiences that lead to varied perspectives, such diversity in viewpoints triggers creativity and improves results. Merging STEM and diversity creates phenomenal growth opportunities.

#### Developing STEM skills to achieve financial inclusion

Technology and digital services are seen as tools that can be used to enable development. When used to progress development, technology can be extremely transformational and improve social and economic outcomes. Such tools could also be used to improve distribution in addition to promoting inclusivity, increasing accessibility and allocating resources. With that being said, it is important for marginalized and disadvantaged segments to leverage tools that help elevate their standards of living and increase their access to services.

#### COVID-19 and women in technology

A needs assessment conducted by UN agencies highlighted that households led by males had less access to the internet than those led by males during these times of COVID-19. In addition, only 41% of women-led households claimed that their children had access to online websites created by ministries of education that supported the continuation of learning in comparison to 56 percent of male-led households.

In addition to learning inequalities, the increase of violence during lockdowns is extremely alarming as females are left vulnerable to dire situations. Digital advancements such as instant messaging with geolocation functions, domestic abuse hotlines, and disguised apps that provide discreet information for survivors in case their abusers continue to track them, can play a pivotal role in saving the lives of women.

#### 'Choose To Challenge' is this year's theme for International Women's Day

Marked annually on March 8th, International Women's Day (IWD) is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity. The campaign theme for International Women's Day 2021 is 'Choose To Challenge'. A challenged world is an alert world. And from challenge comes change. So let's all #ChooseToChallenge.



Controversy surrounding the importation of Indonesian palm oil and its sustainability fuelled enough concern in Switzerland to trigger a public vote on the agreement.

## Swiss approve Indonesia free trade deal

GENEVA: Swiss voters narrowly backed a free trade deal signed with Indonesia, opening up a vast potential market with the world's fourth most populous country.

Controversy surrounding the importation of Indonesian palm oil and its sustainability fuelled enough concern in Switzerland to trigger a public vote on the agreement. But the deal scraped through the public approval test with 51.7 percent of the vote, on a 51 percent turnout. Supporters voiced relief at the result but said they would have to be more sensitive to environmental issues in any future votes on trade agreements. Under the deal, tariffs will be gradually removed from almost all of Switzerland's biggest exports to Indonesia, while the Swiss will abolish duties on Indonesian industrial products.

Anyone importing Indonesian palm oil must prove that it meets certain environmental and social standards. The agreement was signed in 2018 and

approved by the Swiss parliament in 2019, but opponents were especially critical of Bern's move to reduce palm oil import duties and secured a public vote on the deal. Palm oil is a key ingredient in a wide range of products from food to cosmetics, but it has long been controversial. Environmentalists say it drives deforestation, with huge swathes of rainforest logged in recent decades to make way for plantations.

#### Bears, tigers and orangutans

The deal contains exceptions for agricultural products, notably to protect Switzerland's sunflower and rapeseed oil production. For palm oil, customs duties will not be removed but instead reduced by between 20 and 40 percent, on a volume limited to 12,500 tons per year. Campaign posters backing the deal showed a Swiss bear hugging an Indonesian tiger to symbolize the partnership, while those against showed an orangutan and baby clinging to a tree trunk, surrounded by flames. The agreement aims to boost ties with Indonesia, which despite its population is only Switzerland's 44th biggest economic partner and 16th biggest export market in Asia.

In 2020, Swiss exports to Indonesia amounted to just 498 million Swiss francs (\$540 million, 450 million euros). Switzerland is an export-led economy, drawing almost half its national income from abroad.—AFP

## Markets look to ECB for reassurance on cheap money

FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank is on Thursday expected to stress its commitment to keeping borrowing costs low, as inflation concerns and a slow vaccination drive weigh on the eurozone economy. This week's meeting of the ECB's 25-member governing council is likely to be dominated by a recent rise in global bond yields, triggered by signs of higher inflation on the horizon.

Investors fear faster price growth could force a hike in interest rates that would make borrowing more expensive and slow the recovery from the pandemic.

"ECB President Christine Lagarde will have to convince markets that the central bank remains strongly committed to securing favorable financing conditions," Unicredit bank said in an analyst note.

The Frankfurt institution is also expected to nudge down its 2021 forecast for economic growth in Thursday's latest quarterly projections. Many curbs on public life remain in place as the euro area struggles to bring down coronavirus infections, while the pace of vaccinations lags behind countries like the United States or Britain. To boost growth and drive up anemic inflation, the ECB has long held interest rates at historically low and even negative levels, alongside offering ultra-cheap loans to banks. It responded to the coronavirus shock by launching a 1.85 trillion euro (\$2.2 trillion) pandemic emergency bond-buying program (PEPP), on top of an existing asset purchasing scheme running at 20 billion euros a month.

The massive debt purchases are aimed at keeping credit flowing in the 19-nation currency club to encourage spending and investment.

#### Talk over action

"With no prospect of any change to its policy settings, the focus will be on the bank's efforts to explain how and when it would step up bond purchases in response to rising bond yields," said Andrew Kenningham, an economist at Capital Economics. Some observers expect the ECB to step up the pace of PEPP purchases or extend the scheme beyond March



FRANKFURT: The European Central Bank is on Thursday expected to stress its commitment to keeping borrowing costs low, as inflation concerns and a slow vaccination drive weigh on the eurozone economy.

2022, while others think the bank might settle for saying it is "monitoring" the yield situation. European bond yields haven't seen quite the same surge as US Treasury notes, which reflects optimism about the US economy as well as jitters over higher inflation from Washington's \$1.9 trillion stimulus plan. Nevertheless, Germany's benchmark 10-year bond yield has risen by 0.31 percent since the start of the year. French 10-year bond yields have climbed 0.32 percent and Italy's by 0.24 percent, said Eric Dor of France's IESEG business school. Yields are closely watched because they serve as a guide for bank lending rates, and the ECB is eager to avoid a premature end to easy money before the Covid recovery has taken hold.

#### 'Blind eye'

The ECB has repeatedly stressed it plans to stick to its ultra-loose monetary policy for "as long as necessary" and use "all of its instruments" to reach its inflation goal of just under 2.0 percent. Eurozone inflation stood at 0.9 percent in January and February, a big jump after several months of negative inflation last year as COVID shutdowns sapped consumer demand. A series of one-off effects is expected to see consumer prices climb further this year and perhaps even overshoot the target, complicating the ECB's job. Price growth driven by Germany's reversal of a sales tax cut or temporary mark-ups when businesses like hairdressers first reopen do not represent the inflation the ECB wants, said ING bank economists.—AFP



Business

# Lebanese demonstrators block roads to protest currency crisis

## Pound hits record lows on black market amid political impasse

BEIRUT: Demonstrators blocked key roads across Lebanon yesterday in protest at the country's political paralysis after the Lebanese pound hit record lows on the black market. Black smoke billowed up from overturned rubbish dumpsters and tires set ablaze by protesters at various entrances to Beirut from the early morning. Lebanon is in the grips of its worst economic crisis in decades, compounded by the coronavirus pandemic. The value of the Lebanese pound has plunged by more than 80 percent, sending pricing soaring, and more than half the population are living below the poverty line. "We've closed off all the roads today to tell everyone: It's over, we have nothing left to lose. We've even lost our dignity," said Pascale Nohra, a protester blocking the northern road into Beirut.



BEIRUT: A man stands next to flaming tires at a make-shift roadblock set-up by anti-government demonstrators next to the Mohammed Al-Amin Mosque in the Martyrs' Square in the center of Lebanon's capital Beirut yesterday during a protest against the deteriorating value of the local currency and dire economic and social conditions. — AFP

She said it was time to revive the mass cross-sectarian protests of late 2019 against the political class. "We want everybody to show solidarity and come out on the street to demand their rights. The economic crisis touches all Lebanese and religious sects," said the former worker in real estate. "We need to return to the streets and revive our revolution," she said. The value of the local currency has hovered at an all-time high of nearly 11,000 pounds to the greenback on the black market in recent days, even though the official exchange rate remains 1,507.

Lebanese fear the government will soon lift food subsidies, and footage has circulated of fighting over cheaper, subsidized baby milk in a supermarket. Mohammad Faour, a research fellow in banking and finance at University College Dublin, said the pound's ongoing free fall was "a mere continuation of a clear downward trend in the exchange rate since the very

beginning of the crisis, and the concurrent policy inaction". The protests came on the same day as Lebanon entered a new phase in easing up a lockdown to keep COVID-19 infection rates in check. Lebanon has been without a fully functioning government since a massive blast in Beirut last summer that killed more than 200 people and ravaged swathes of the capital. The government stepped down after the disaster, but a deeply

divided political class has since failed to agree on a new cabinet to replace it.

### Money running out

In a country that imports 80 percent of its food, much of the six million population depends on subsidies to get by. Even without them being lifted, many are already struggling, said Beit El Baraka founder Maya

Ibrahimchah. "There have been many more demands for help over the past four months," she said.

"Those we are helping today are all from the middle class." The state has poured up to \$437 million into subsidies a month, the World Bank estimates, to keep prices in check for bread, medicine, fuel and electricity, as well as around 300 other items since mid-2020.

To counter the pound's drastic devaluation, importers get access to dollars at a preferential rate to ensure they can afford to continue bringing in supplies. For flour, fuel and medicine, for example, they offer dollars at the official exchange rate of 1,507 pounds to cover most of their cost. But traders must resort to the black market to cover the difference, where Tuesday the rate hit a record low of 10,000 pounds to the dollar. As a result, in less than a year the price of a large bag of subsidized bread has risen from 1,500 to 2,500 pounds. Authorities have remained vague about how the subsidies will be reduced, though meetings are ongoing. In early December, central bank governor Riad Salameh said it could only fund subsidies for another two months. Later that month, he said two billion dollars were available for them. At the end of February, the central bank's website showed it had \$17.9 billion in foreign currency reserves, yet \$17.5 billion of that is the bank's required reserves. The bank did not respond to AFP's repeated requests for comment. The UN food agency has warned any subsidy reduction would have "major inflationary repercussions" and "put an unbearable strain on households". The price of bread could increase by up to three times and fuel by 4.5 times, the World Food Programme said, adding it was critical to immediately scale up assistance to the poorest. — AFP



Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain



## Ooredoo offers 3 months free who have had COVID vaccine

KUWAIT: To promote vaccination against COVID-19, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, is offering three months free of charge to all its customers -with post-paid subscriptions- who have had the COVID-19 vaccine. Announced yesterday (8 March 2021) the offer is already active, provoking a range of positive reactions from customers. Hence, all customers must show the original COVID-19 medical certificate in order for them to enjoy the offer.

In light of the above, Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain, Chief Executive Officer of Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "Our Company determination is to stand by the Government and its entities in their efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, and inspire the people of Kuwait to take the two shots. This is mainly driven by our national corporate social responsibility program, in which we pursue all that we deem appropriate procedures and practices that contribute to achieving sustainable development and improving the lives of members of society as a whole."

Al-Babtain added: "We value the efforts of the Minister of Health (MoH), first-line medical staff and all workers of the Kuwait Vaccination Center. We also urge everyone to act in a responsible way and get vaccinated in order to protect themselves and society. At Ooredoo Kuwait, we aim to conduct business in a responsible manner, thus, we are working hand in hand with the government and health entities to protect society. Indeed, that is the ultimate goal, to protect our people."

Al-Babtain concluded: "We take pride being the leading telecom company in Kuwait to launch this humanitarian initiative that offers our valued customers free of charge service, promising them with more unique activities to further enrich their communication experiences." Ooredoo Kuwait reaffirms its keenness to adhere to all instructions issued by the official authorities in the State of Kuwait related to the current situation, confirming its cooperation and its complete readiness to implement the procedures followed in this regard during the coming period.

## Why staff in Saudi could be looking forward to a 5% pay rise this year

RIYADH: Over half of skilled employees in Saudi Arabia expect a salary increase this year, according to the latest report from recruitment giant Hays. And the Hays 2021 Saudi Arabia Salary & Employment Report revealed that, while nine percent of those working in the kingdom experienced a pay cut last year as a result of the economic turmoil caused by the global coronavirus pandemic, 39 percent of respondents said they had actually received a pay rise in the last 12 months.

"Saudi Arabia has not been exempt from the negative impacts of COVID-19. Indeed, lockdown measures and consequential reductions in energy prices forced a number of organizations in the country to make redundancies and reduce salaries in a bid to remain operational," said Chris Greaves, managing director of Hays in the Middle East.

"However, this was largely only during the height of the pandemic and when looking on a global scale, Saudi Arabia's job market has fared very well." According to the survey, double the number (18 percent) of professionals in the UAE faced salary decreases compared to those in Saudi, and nearly half (45 percent) of employees in the UAE were forced to lay off staff, while more than two thirds (68 percent) of organizations in Saudi made no redundancies.

"This really does highlight the resilience of the Saudi economy. The UAE alone has been relatively robust throughout the pandemic and yet results from

our survey show that Saudi Arabia has been affected even less so by the epidemic," said Greaves.

Of the Saudi employers who took part in the survey, a significant 81 percent said they were already in recovery, business as usual, or growth phases following the pandemic, with 62 percent expecting business activity to increase in 2021 and 76 percent planning to recruit additional headcount in the next year. Greaves said: "From our own experiences of working in Saudi Arabia, we have certainly witnessed growing confidence in the market since the last quarter of 2020. When it comes to salaries, while organizations will want to keep a lid on pay increases in an attempt to recoup some of the financial losses made in the past year, we expect this optimism to translate in a higher number of pay rises in 2021 than were awarded in 2020."

Some 53 percent of employers said they will award pay rises to their employees in 2021, most commonly increasing rates by up to five percent.

The survey also found salary to be the number one factor why 44 percent of professionals working in Saudi Arabia are looking to move jobs in the next 12 months. "Given employees -

particularly expats working in private sector organizations - will no longer need employers' consent to leave an organization once their contract is up, we expect mobility of labor to be higher than previous years with professionals being more willing to leave an organization based on pay offered by another. Employers will need to be competitive with salaries, paying more than others to secure the top talent," added Greaves.



Chris Greaves, managing director of Hays in the Middle East

## Most markets fall as inflation fears trump recovery signs

HONG KONG: Asian markets mostly fell yesterday as persistent inflation fears overshadowed a forecast-busting US jobs report and Senate approval of Joe Biden's huge stimulus package, while Brent crude broke past \$70 for the first time in almost two years after an attack on energy facilities in Saudi Arabia. Traders were given a stellar lead from Wall Street, where the three main indexes surged following news that the world's top economy created 379,000 jobs in February, reaffirming the view that it is on track for a strong recovery.

The report came just ahead of senators passing Biden's \$1.9 trillion rescue plan, setting it up for the president's signature by the end of the week. In another sign that the world economy is getting back on track, China at the weekend released data showing a better-than-expected jump in exports in January and February, suggesting global trade is revving up again after being hammered by the coronavirus pandemic.

However, the news added to fears about soaring inflation that could force the Federal Reserve and other central banks to wind back the ultra-loose monetary policies that have been a key driver of a year-long equity market rally. "The US federal government and the Federal Reserve seemed to have learnt something from their attempts to reheat the economy after the great financial crisis," said David Kelly at JP Morgan Asset Management.

"The economy is already surprisingly warm and, with the help of very aggressive policy, is likely to heat up quickly from here. However, the critical question remains whether they have the skill and discipline to turn the policy temperature down to a simmer before inflation, and not just the economy, comes to a boil." Hong Kong ended 1.9 percent lower while Shanghai closed down 2.3 percent. Tokyo, Seoul, Wellington, Taipei and Jakarta also suffered selling pressure.

However, Sydney, Singapore, Mumbai and Bangkok all rose.

London, Frankfurt and Paris were all up in early European trade.

The losses come as investors also worried that valuations may have run a little too far and were in line for a correction. "Profit taking is not over yet, given that the yield continues rising and investors have become cautious," Jackson Wong, at Amber Hill Capital, said.

### Oil prices extend rally

While the outlook for the global economy is for a strong rebound from last year's recession, there is a growing worry about soaring prices, with benchmark US 10-year Treasury bond yields continuing to rise. Yields rise as bond prices fall, and investors have been rushing out of them as inflation would eat into their returns over time, sparking the selloff in world markets.

And observers say markets are worried that the Fed is reacting too slowly, with strategist Louis Navellier saying at the weekend that traders are worried the central bank may not have enough firepower to control the surge in yields.

Fed boss Jerome Powell "keeps talking about how inflation is transitory and may not persist", he said. "This is the real problem. Wall Street sees higher crude oil prices and Treasury yields, while Powell is essentially in denial about inflation, which does not inspire investor confidence."

Investors will be keeping tabs on the European Central Bank's latest policy meeting this week, hoping officials will stress their commitment to keeping borrowing costs low, while the Fed is due to gather next week. Crude prices, already rallying on expectations that the global recovery will fan a surge in demand, jumped more than two percent Monday - having climbed around four percent Friday - after a missile and drone attack on Saudi Arabia's oil industry.

Brent at one point peaked at \$71.38 before easing slightly but is still sitting at levels not seen since May 2019. The strike on the Aramco facilities - including one of the world's biggest oil ports - by Yemen's Houthi rebels Sunday followed the bombing of the country's capital Sanaa by a Saudi-led military coalition. The rising hostilities underscore a dangerous intensification of Yemen's conflict between the coalition-backed Yemeni government and the Iran-backed Houthis, despite a renewed US push to end the war in the crude-rich region. — AFP



## JYSK launches flagship store at the Avenues

KUWAIT: JYSK, the Scandinavian furniture brand for sleeping and living franchised by Ali Abdulwahab Al-Mutawa Commercial Co (AAW), has officially opened its new flagship store in Kuwait at The Avenues, the country's largest shopping destination. Building on the success of its other branches, this is JYSK's third store opening in Kuwait and comes as the Scandinavian furniture brand celebrates its three-year anniversary since opening in the country. It is part of the brand's strategic expansion plan into the furniture sector in Kuwait and comes in response to high customer demand on simple, modern, and affordable Scandinavian furniture.

The new 1,700 sqm store is located at The Avenues, and offers a wide collection of simple, modern and affordable Scandinavian furniture including bedrooms, living rooms, dining rooms, outdoor furniture, textiles, and home accessories. With its new concept, the store features a new modern layout including room set displays, stronger decor, much better lighting and wood-

en flooring, offering customers more inspiration for interior design.

Like other JYSK stores in Kuwait, JYSK at The Avenues follows the guidelines set by the local public health authorities and ensures that all safety precautions are adhered to. These precautions include daily sanitization of the showroom, daily temperature checks for employees and customers, and providing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as masks, gloves and hand sanitizers at the store.

As part of its social responsibility, the brand recently introduced the "Shop Safe" initiative to encourage customers to shop online on the JYSK website (JYSK.com.kw). All products will be delivered to them safely by the companies' drivers who follow protective measures and guidelines outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO). JYSK is a global retail chain of stores and e-commerce websites that delivers a great Scandinavian offer for everyone within sleeping and living. In total, they have more than 3,000 stores in 51 countries. In 2017, the brand launched the first JYSK furniture store in Kuwait and the Middle East in the Al-Dajeej area.

The new flagship store is located in The Avenues Phase 1 on the ground floor and is open seven days a week from 8 am to 8 pm. JYSK Shuwaikh is open Saturday to Thursday from 10 am to 8:00 pm, and Friday from 2 pm to 8 pm, and JYSK Al Dajeej is open daily from 9 am to 8 pm.

## Business

# Solutions by stc partners with Huawei to launch IdeaHub office master

## Productivity tool designed to boost efficiency of corporate customers

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that its specialized business arm solutions by stc has partnered with Huawei to offer corporate customers with the latest cutting edge productivity tool and office master, IdeaHub. The innovative solution aims to create an all-scenario smart office ecosystem that builds on the vast capability of the current cloud era to boost operational efficiency for corporate customers.

In its statement, solutions by stc noted that the increased demand for digital transformation global economies are witnessing is partially due to restrictions and protocols implemented to mitigate the risks of the Coronavirus pandemic. The accelerated adoption rate of new technologies that can power seamless remote collaboration programs and meetings is at an all-time high. With an aim to provide its customers with innovative business solutions, solutions by stc partnered with Huawei to offer an all-in-one ultra-modern and simplified product design that can

provide extensive collaboration capabilities, as well as other advanced features that enable smart technology.

IdeaHub is an innovative tool for the smart office that integrates a wide range of solutions designed to effectively enhance the working environment in any office setting. Bundled with AI features and advanced capabilities such as smart auto text recognition, advanced 4k wireless sharing with reverse back feature, and advanced video conferencing features like speaker voice tracking, IdeaHub aims to elevate the online collaboration experience. With an open ecosystem compatible with multiple applications, the all-in-one concept includes advanced whiteboards, professional conferencing, bulletin boards, office applications and dual operating systems. Through its advanced features and cloud-enabled solutions, the IdeaHub can transform traditional office environments into integrated smart ecosystems that are intelligent, user-friendly, and productive.

The partnership formed with Huawei to offer the productivity tool through solutions by stc builds on a series of innovative offerings intro-

duced by the Company to support the B2B market by enhancing efficiency and the path towards digitization. The IdeaHub is a concept that represents a key component under stc's strategic plan to provide safe and secure world-class connectivity through advanced IT solutions, paving the way for digital transformation in businesses. As a business solutions provider, solutions by stc offers a range of connectivity solutions, fixed or wireless services, 5G technology, ICT, IoT and the IT products and services.

Given the ongoing pandemic, working environments today are shifting towards digitization at a rapid pace to offer a range of solutions to customers and clients online and with ease. Through this transformation, businesses are now depending on technology and collaboration tools to deliver such services while battling the ongoing pandemic effectively and efficiently. Through solutions by stc's partnership with Huawei, a renowned and recognized brand in the digital world, solutions by stc aims to assist corporate customers in integrating their operational aspects to strengthen the collaboration needs amongst



internal and external work teams.

Solutions by stc will continue to expand its offering line and form strategic partnerships to onboard and introduce new technologies that can integrate systems to enable digitization across multiple work functions and sectors, with a goal to provide a breadth of solutions that can greatly enhance the operational efficiency of day-to-day activities to achieve favorable outcomes for its customers.



In this file photo, the logo of German multinational engineering and electronics company Bosch is pictured at the plant in Onet-le-Chateau, near Rodez. —AFP

## German industrial output unexpectedly drops in January

**FRANKFURT:** German industrial production unexpectedly dropped in January compared to December as semi-conductor shortages and a cold snap impacted output in the automobile and construction sectors. Analysts said the data raised the possibility that the German economy, Europe's biggest, could be shrinking again after recovering strongly from the coronavirus pandemic downturn of early last year.

Federal statistics agency Destatis said industrial output declined 2.5 percent in January, well short of short of analyst forecasts for a 0.5 percent increase. The economy ministry noted that a semiconductor shortage had hit Germany's vital automobile sector, forcing Volkswagen to halt production for a few days in January. Meanwhile the construction sector "showed a sharp decline because of unfavorable conditions".

Temperatures fell to sharply in parts of Germany, bringing heavy snow in a cold snap that gripped Europe's biggest economy for about a week. Compared to a year ago-before pandemic restrictions across the world kicked in-industrial output was down 3.9 percent in January.

Destatis meanwhile revised upwards its December output figure to show month-on-month growth of 1.9 percent, compared with its initial estimate of no change. ING analyst Carsten Brzeski warned that January's difficulties show "that it will be hard for industry to prevent the entire economy from falling into contraction once again."

After several months of shutdowns, Germany has begun gradually easing restrictions, with pupils back in school since the end of February. Hairdressers opened last week, and some non-essential shops such as flower stores were due to be allowed to re-open later. —AFP

## Top Japanese banker sounds alarm over Hong Kong freedoms

**HONG KONG:** China's crackdown in Hong Kong has left Japanese finance firms "very much afraid" and reconsidering whether to remain in the city, a senior banker said yesterday in a rare public declaration of concern from within the industry. Yoshitaka Kitao, chief executive of financial conglomerate SBI Holdings, which runs Japan's largest online brokerage, told the Financial Times he was planning to pull his company's operations out of the southern Chinese city, arguing that "without freedom, there is no financial business".

Other Japanese companies, he told the newspaper, were thinking about doing the same but were less willing to say so openly. "They are unlike me. I'm a very straightforward guy. But all the others, in their bellies, they think they should move out or won't invest more in Hong Kong," Kitao said in an interview

## 'Diraya' campaign releases video on personal loans and financing facilities

**KUWAIT:** Keen to enhance financial awareness across all segments of society, and in line with its directives towards expanding and strengthening the Kuwaiti banking sector's social responsibility, the CBK-supervised banking awareness campaign "Be Aware" ("Diraya" in Arabic) continues in cooperation with the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) and with participation of all Kuwaiti banks, with the aim to leverage public awareness of the banking sector's role, and how customers can use banks' diverse services most advantageously.

In a statement marking the launch of the new campaign video, the CBK affirmed its resolve to regulate the extension of personal loans and financing facilities to enable customers to benefit from

## Limited-time offer from 'Farfetch' for Burgan Bank clients

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank announces its latest partnership with Farfetch, the leading global online platform for luxury fashion industry, whereby Burgan Bank MasterCard Credit Card holders will be offered up to 20 percent discount on purchases made through Farfetch's online platforms. Ensuring a convenient and rewarding experience, Burgan Bank MasterCard Credit cardholders can enjoy a maximum discount of up to \$400 while shopping at Farfetch from 1st March until 31st March 2021.

This exclusive offer ensures that Burgan Bank MasterCard Credit Card holders can now enjoy shopping from world's top brands and boutiques through Farfetch while enjoying seamless experience through

## EU looks to secure vaccine materials from US

**BRUSSELS:** The EU will open talks with Washington to ensure its supply of US-made materials for coronavirus vaccines, a European source said, items currently under tough export restrictions. Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton-Brussels' pointman on vaccine production-will confer with White House Covid-

published yesterday. Beijing is struggling to quash dissent in semi-autonomous Hong Kong after huge and sometimes violent pro-democracy demonstrations in 2019.

It has imposed a broad national security law on the city that has criminalized much opposition, and is planning to enact new rules vetting all political candidates for their "patriotism".

Senior Chinese leaders have also called for "reform" of the city's independent judiciary, a key component of Hong Kong's status as a regional business hub. Many international business figures privately fret their companies could be caught in the crossfire as Beijing and multiple Western nations feud over China's plans for Hong Kong.

But few have vocalized them so publicly as Kitao, whose company last year had a market capitalization of \$5.9 billion. In his interview with the newspaper, Kitao said businesses were now questioning whether it made sense to remain in Hong Kong—a city with notoriously high rents—if the business landscape becomes little different from mainland China.

"If I want to do business in China, I would

such facilities without exposure to the risk of default, nor overburdening them with financial obligations. As part of the efforts to enhance the protection of the banking sector's customers, "Diraya" Campaign launched a video that clarifies the most important aspects that individuals should know about loans and financing operations to customers, the requirements to be fulfilled to benefit from the facilities, and the customer's rights and obligations in this regard.

The video highlights the CBK's instructions to banks and financing companies, stating that the lenders should advise customers before and during the financing term. The said instructions underline the necessity to explain the risks of increasing financial obligations on the customer requesting credit or finance, especially in the event of any change to the financial condition resulting from change of employment or retirement status, or in applied interest rate.

The content provided by the campaign is published through several channels, most notably on the CBK and Kuwaiti banks social media accounts. More information on the "Diraya" banking awareness campaign and its objectives, as well as cam-

paign content, is available through its official website: [www.dirayakw.com](http://www.dirayakw.com)

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advance. When the time comes that vaccine production in Europe steps up sharply, we want to be sure that all the materials will be there," the source added.

The EU's own export control system only applies to ready-to-use vaccines, and was recently used to block a shipment of 250,000 AstraZeneca doses to Australia.

The Swedish-British firm has notified the EU's 27 member countries that it will only be able to deliver one-third of the initially promised number of doses to the bloc in the first quarter.

Yesterday's talks "do not aim to negotiate on doses" of finished vaccines with the US, the European source said, saying that was "up to businesses". —AFP



**HONG KONG:** Many international business figures privately fret their companies could be caught in the crossfire as Beijing and multiple Western nations feud over China's plans for Hong Kong. —AFP

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This undated image shows Britain's Prince Harry and his wife Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, in a conversation with US television host Oprah Winfrey.



In this file photo taken on August 19, 1995 Prince Charles (right), Princess Diana (left) and their children William (second right) and Harry watch the march past on a dais on the mall as part of the commemorations of VJ Day on August 19, 1995.

# NO HOLDS BARRED: MEGHAN AND HARRY'S HISTORIC INTERVIEW

**M**eghan Markle opened up about battling suicidal thoughts, Prince Harry disclosed a painful rift with his father-and both settled a fair few scores in their history-making interview with Oprah Winfrey. The gloves came off as the pair lifted the veil on their dramatic exit from royal life, holding little back as they alleged racism in

would do it. And I... just didn't want to be alive anymore. And that was a very clear and real and frightening constant thought," she told Winfrey in the two-hour CBS spot. Asked by Winfrey if she was having suicidal thoughts while pregnant with her first child, Meghan replied "Yes. This was very, very clear." Meghan said she approached the

revealed to her official concerns among the royals about the skin color of her unborn son, Archie. "In those months when I was pregnant... we have in tandem the conversation of 'he won't be given security, he's not going to be given a title' and also concerns and conversations about how dark his skin might be when he's born," Meghan said. "Those were conversations the family had with him." Asked by Winfrey if the concern was that he might be "too brown," Meghan replied: "If that's the assumption you're making, I think that feels like a pretty safe one."

#### 'Character assassination'

It was sensational tabloid fodder: the story of how of Meghan made Kate Middleton cry after a bridesmaid dress fitting for Princess Charlotte. And by Meghan's account-it was entirely fabricated. "Everyone in the institution knew it wasn't true," Meghan told Winfrey of the alleged incident, claiming that in reality: "The reverse happened." Kate, she said, "was upset about something, but she owned it, and she apologized." "A few days before the wedding, she was upset about something pertaining-yes, the issue was correct-about flower girl dresses, and it made me cry, and it really hurt my feelings." Meghan called the incident "a turning point" in her relations with the royal family.

"The narrative about, you know, making Kate cry I think was the beginning of a real character assassination," she said. "And they knew it wasn't true. And I thought, well, if they're not going to kill things like that, then what are we going to do?" "I came to understand that not only was I not being protected but that they were willing to lie to protect other members of the family," Meghan said.

#### 'Let down'

Speaking candidly about his relationship with Prince Charles, Harry said had he felt "really let down" by his father throughout the painful episode-but that they were now talking to one another. "There's a lot to work through



This photo illustration shows people wearing face masks, watch a televised conversation between Britain's Prince Harry with his wife Meghan Markle and US host Oprah Winfrey, in Arlington, Virginia.

there, you know? I feel really let down, because he's been through something similar. He knows what pain feels like," an emotional Harry said. He described Charles-the heir to the throne-and Harry's older brother William as "trapped" by the conventions of the monarchy, but vowed that he would "always love" his father.

"My father and my brother, they are

trapped. They don't get to leave. And I have huge compassion for that." Harry went on to say that he and Meghan "did everything we could" to stay in the royal family. "I'm sad that what's happened has happened, but I know, and I'm comfortable in knowing that we did everything that we could to make it work." — AFP



In this file photo Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, and his wife Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, pose for a photo with their newborn baby son, Archie Harrison Mountbatten-Windsor, in St George's Hall at Windsor Castle in Windsor.

royal ranks, and a campaign of lies targeting Meghan. But there was tenderness too as the pair spoke of their present-day happiness-and revealed the gender of their second child. Here are key takeaways from the interview:

#### 'Didn't want to be alive'

Opening up on a barrage of negative media coverage she faced as part of the royal family, Meghan, 39, said the British press drove her to the point where life no longer seemed worth living. "I knew that if I didn't say it, that I

palace to tell them she was having a mental health crisis. "I went to one of the most senior people just to get help," she said. "I was told that I couldn't, that it wouldn't be good for the institution." Meghan said she ultimately reached out to one of the late Princess Diana's best friends for support. "Who else could understand what's-what it's actually like on the inside?"

#### 'How dark his skin might be'

Meghan, whose father is white and mother is Black, said Harry had



This combination of file pictures shows US TV personality Oprah Winfrey speaking at the Warner Theater in Washington, DC, and Britain's Prince Harry (right) and his fiancée US actress Meghan Markle attending a Commonwealth Day Service at Westminster Abbey in central London.



In this file photo taken on September 06, 1997 (from left) The Duke of Edinburgh, Prince William, Earl Spencer, Prince Harry and the Prince of Wales follow the coffin of Diana, Princess of Wales, to Westminster Abbey 06 September for her funeral service.



This undated image shows Britain's Prince Harry (left) and his wife Meghan (center), Duchess of Sussex, in a conversation with US television host Oprah Winfrey. — AFP photos

Lifestyle | Features



In this file photo Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex and his wife Meghan, Duchess of Sussex walk down the west steps of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, in Windsor, after their wedding ceremony. — AFP

## Harry and Meghan offer glimpse of 'fairytale' new life

Prince Harry and his wife Meghan had scores to settle in their tell-all interview with Oprah Winfrey Sunday but they also offered a generous glimpse of their "fairytale" new family life far from the monarchy. In a bucolic segment of the interview, the couple invited Winfrey to their home in California's oceanside celebrity enclave of Montecito, where they showed off their chicken coop and its hens rescued from a factory farm. Filmed in rubber boots and a T-shirt, Harry opened up on life during the pandemic lockdown, and shared his joy at taking baby Archie—who will turn two in May—for long trips to the beach.

"I guess the highlight for me is sticking him on the back of a bicycle in his little baby seat and taking him on these bike rides, something which I was never able to do when I was young," Harry said. "And I can see him on the back and he's got his arms out and he's like



In this file photo Britain's Prince Harry and his then fiancée US actress Meghan Markle pose for a photograph in the Sunken Garden at Kensington Palace in west London.

'woahhh, chatty, chatty, chatty, palm tree, house' and all this sort of stuff, and I do, I think to myself 'wow.'" Asked to name Archie's favorite word, Meghan said he is "on a roll." "In the past couple of weeks it has been 'hydrate' which is

just hysterical," she said. Offering royal fans a treat, the couple revealed the gender of their second child, chiming in tandem "It's a girl!" and confirming the baby was due in "summertime." Asked if they were "done" with two children, Harry replied: "done." "To have a boy and then a girl, I mean what more can you ask for?" he said. "Two is it!" quipped Meghan.

Meghan wrapped up with a hopeful look to the future, saying that in deciding to exit from royal life, Harry made a decision that "saved my life." "And now because we're actually on the other side, we've actually not just survived but are thriving." To the question of whether her story "does have a happy ending," Meghan replied: "It does. Greater than any fairytale you've ever read." — AFP



Tennis superstar Serena Williams



In this file photo Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman speaks during the inauguration of US President Joe Biden on the West Front of the US Capitol in Washington, DC.

## Williams, Gorman lead support for Markle over royal racism

Tennis superstar Serena Williams and poet Amanda Gorman led an outpouring of support for Meghan Markle following her explosive allegations of racism in the British royal family. In a two-hour interview with Oprah Winfrey, Markle, whose mother is Black, said her husband Prince Harry revealed his family's concerns over "how dark" her son Archie's skin would be. She also said no members of the royal family had spoken out to defend her against a torrent of what she said was racist coverage from British tabloids. "Her words illustrate the pain and cruelty she's experienced," Williams tweeted after the interview aired on Sunday.

"I know first hand the sexism and

racism institutions and the media use to vilify women and people of color to minimize us, to break us down and demonize us," said Williams, hailing her "selfless friend." "We must recognize our obligation to decry malicious, unfounded gossip and tabloid journalism. The mental health consequences of systemic oppression and victimization are devastating, isolating and all too often lethal." Markle told Winfrey she had contemplated taking her own life after joining the royal family and that she was denied help during her mental health crisis. "Royalty is not a shield from the devastation and despair of racism," Bernice King, daughter of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., tweeted in support. "We can know racism exists in an institution and still hurt for someone who was hurt by it," she wrote. "I'm grateful that Meghan Markle is still here."

### 'Missed opportunity'

African American poet Gorman, who became a star after her reading at President Joe Biden's inauguration, said the British royal family had missed an opportunity to change. "Meghan was the Crown's greatest opportunity for change, regeneration, and reconciliation in a new

era. They didn't just maltreat her light—they missed out on it," the 22-year-old Gorman tweeted, referencing Prince Harry's mother Diana, who was killed in a high-speed car crash in Paris in 1997 as she tried to escape paparazzi. "Meghan is living the life Diana should have, if only those around her had been as brave as she was. Meghan isn't living a life without pain, but a life without a prison.

"This isn't Meghan's princess 'happy' ending. But sometimes change, the decisions that bring us the most hurt, aren't about happiness, but healing," Gorman said it was unclear if it would change the royal family, but Markle would inspire women. "Think of the women who will be inspired to stand up for their lives, the partners who will be kinder & more courageous than the kin they were born into," she tweeted. Meena Harris, niece of Vice President Kamala Harris, also voiced support for Markle. "She was suicidal and begged for help," she said, adding a tweet with a quote from Markle after discussing her mental health struggles with Winfrey. "Meghan Markle: 'I'm still standing.'" — AFP

## Oprah Winfrey: Cultural powerhouse and trailblazing billionaire

He may be the Queen's grandson, but she is American cultural royalty: Oprah Winfrey, whose bombshell interview with Prince Harry and Meghan Markle dominated headlines, is a billionaire TV phenomenon renowned for coaxing secrets and tears from countless celebrities. From Michael Jackson and Tom Cruise to Lance Armstrong and the Duchess of York, Winfrey is responsible for some of America's most memorable sit-down interviews over the last three decades.

Harry and Meghan were the latest to open up when a tell-all interview with the talk show queen aired by CBS on Sunday. Winfrey, 67, is also one of the world's biggest influencers, inspiring millions of Americans to read more, buy her favorite products and even change how they talk, eat and vote. She has appeared in movies, co-authored several books and presides over a vast and varied media empire, with Forbes magazine estimating her personal wealth at \$2.7 billion.

The multiple-award-winning interviewer has long promoted mindfulness and self-improvement too, becoming a self-help guru for many. Her colossal influence extends to politics: in 2008, she endorsed Barack Obama's presidential bid, the first time she had ever publicly backed a candidate for office. Fans have long encouraged Winfrey to run for president herself. In 2018, she was forced to dampen speculation that she would seek the Democratic nomination to take on then-president Donald Trump.

Winfrey, born in 1954, rose from a childhood of poverty and abuse in small-town Mississippi to become the world's first female African-American billionaire in 2003. She began her broadcasting career while she was still in high school and landed a job as a news anchor in Nashville at age 19. Her emotional ad-libs won her a Chicago morning talk show in 1984, which was syndicated nationally as "The Oprah Winfrey Show" in 1986. The show, which ran for 25 seasons until 2011, became the most-watched talk show of all time and was estimated to reach 40 million US viewers a week.

### Book club

Audiences tuned in for the emotional connection she made with guests and viewers, with celebrities from all walks of life choosing her couch as a comfortable place to open up. The part of the interview where they suddenly discover something about themselves became known as the "Oprah moment." Actor Cruise famously jumped up on the sofa to proclaim his love for Katie Holmes.

Winfrey also took her show to the

Neverland Ranch for a 1993 interview with "King of Pop" Jackson which drew an audience of 100 million people. In other interviews, Sarah Ferguson told Winfrey in 2010 that mounting debts had led her to try to sell access to her ex-husband, Britain's Prince Andrew. During a 2013 chat, disgraced cyclist Armstrong admitted for the first time that he had used banned performance-enhancing drugs.

Winfrey's use of public confession as therapy is not reserved for guests: she has regularly spoken of her battles with fluctuating weight and of sexual abuse she suffered as a child. "I really understood that there was no difference between me and the audience," she said in 2014. Through her book club she popularized numerous works. A stamp of approval from Winfrey could turn a novel into an instant best-seller, a phenomenon known as the "Oprah Effect." Her endorsement of Obama was estimated by University of Maryland researchers to have brought in a million additional votes and helped him win both the Democratic nomination and the presidency. He awarded her the Presidential Media of Freedom in 2013.

### Oscar nomination

"The Oprah Winfrey Show" also served as the foundation for an empire that spans books, radio, magazines and online publishing. Winfrey founded her own production company in 1986, naming it Harpo—her name backwards. She launched "O, The Oprah Magazine" in 2000. It enjoyed a circulation of more than 2.5 million in the mid-noughties before its print run ended last December. She struggled with the Oprah Winfrey Network though. The TV channel launched in 2011 but took years to build an audience and is now majority owned by Discovery.

In 2018, Winfrey signed a multi-year partnership with Apple to create programs for its streaming service. She also owns a seven percent stake in Weight Watchers. Winfrey is a noted philanthropist; last year her charity donated \$10 million to Covid-19 relief efforts. In 1993, former president Bill Clinton signed the "Oprah Bill" into law after she helped establish a national database of convicted child abusers. Winfrey was nominated for an Academy Award for her supporting actress role in Steven Spielberg's 1985 film "The Color Purple." She has never married and has kept her more than 30-year relationship with businessman Stedman Graham largely out of public view. — AFP



In this file photo Oprah Winfrey speaks on stage during Oprah's 2020 Vision: Your Life in Focus Tour presented by WW (Weight Watchers Reimagined) at American Airlines Center in Dallas, Texas. — AFP

## 'Nomadland' picks up Critics' Choice wins on Hollywood awards trip

US road movie "Nomadland" swerved controversy in China and accelerated towards award season glory Sunday as it topped the prizes at the Critics Choice Awards, picking up best picture and best director for Chloe Zhao. The film about van dwellers living on America's spectacular open road also won cinematography and adapted screenplay, confirming its Oscars frontrunner status two days after the Academy voting window began. The movie—which also won big at last weekend's Golden Globes—has drawn a nationalist backlash in China, where its release was recently thrown in doubt after social media users and state media questioned Beijing-born Zhao's loyalty to her birth country.

Filmmakers did not directly address the controversy directly Sunday, with producer Mollye Asher thanking Zhao for "leading us with such heart." "In a year that has illuminated the crucial need for connection and empathy, we are so proud to have created a film that celebrates the compassion gained by simply listening to one another," Asher said. Zhao also paid tribute to the movie's sound mixer Michael Wolf Snyder, who died by suicide last week. "We'll see you down the road my friend," said Zhao, echoing a line from the film. The Critics Choice Awards—chosen by 400 members of North America's largest critics organization—took place remotely from a Los Angeles stage.

US actor Taye Diggs hosted a mix-

ture of in-person guests, live video calls and pre-recorded messages from presenters, nominees and the widow of late "Black Panther" star Chadwick Boseman. "It is so hard to find a celebratory feeling in these moments," said Taylor Simone Ledward, accepting his latest best actor award for 1920s blues drama "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," following his death from cancer last August. "Societies grow great when old men plant trees in whose shade they know they may never sit," she said. "And our society may be a far cry from great, but I know that the seeds you planted will grow into forests."

### The Crown' tops TV

"Ma Rainey" also won two technical

awards to finish the night in second with three awards, ahead of three other films on two. Carey Mulligan bolstered her Oscars hopes in a crowded field for best actress with her turn as a revenge-seeker who preys on misogynist men in "Promising Young Woman," which also won for original screenplay. "The Trial of the Chicago 7," a courtroom drama about anti-Vietnam War protesters in the 1960s, took the best acting ensemble award as well as co-winning best editing.

Co-star Sacha Baron Cohen warned that history will repeat itself "unless we learn from it by telling its most salient stories." And Alan Kim—the pint-sized, eight-year-old star of Korean-American immigrant drama

"Minari"—melted hearts by bursting into uncontrollable tears in his tiny tuxedo as he accepted best young actor. The film also won for best foreign-language film.

On a night overshadowed by CBS's explosive interview of Meghan Markle and Prince Harry by Oprah Winfrey, British royals drama "The Crown" topped the television categories, with four wins including best drama series. Oscars nominations will be announced March 15, with the season-crowning ceremony pushed back this year to April 25. — AFP

## Sports

# Atletico denied derby victory by late Benzema equalizer

## Simeone's side failed to go eight points clear on top

**MADRID:** Atletico Madrid squandered the chance to inflict a heavy blow on Real Madrid's La Liga title hopes on Sunday as Karim Benzema's late equalizer earned the champions a 1-1 draw and kept them in the race at the top. Luis Suarez's flicked finish early in the first half looked to be enough to give Atletico a crucial win that would have put them eight points clear of their opponents, with a game in hand.

But they failed to make their authority count and Benzema punished them in the 88th minute, his goal earning Real Madrid a draw that ensures the gap between the two city rivals stays at five points. "They took the first half and we took the second, the draw was more or less a fair result," said Zinedine Zidane. "There remains a lot of the season left and we'll fight to the end."

Atletico's lead is still considerable and they can extend it to eight points with 12 matches left if they win their game in hand at home to Athletic Bilbao tomorrow night. Yet at full-time, it was Real Madrid's players who had smiles on their faces, while Suarez left the pitch shaking his head, with Atletico only too aware this was a huge opportunity missed.

"It depends which way you look at it," said Diego Simeone. "In the negative, they equalized in the last minute, or the positive, that we played very well in general, that we absolutely controlled the first half, and dominated the second."

The title race remains very much in Atletico's favor but still up for grabs, especially for Barcelona, who were perhaps the biggest beneficiaries of this result. Barca now sit three points behind Atletico, having played a game more. They also face Simeone's side at Camp Nou in May. "It's a long and difficult competition," added Simeone.

"I don't know what people expected, that we were going to win it by 20 points? We know it is going to be difficult."

Kieran Trippier played his first game since January after serving his 10-week ban for breaking betting rules while Benzema proved his worth again, after being deemed fit enough to start following time out with a groin strain.

Atletico were far superior in the first half, stronger, more aggressive, better on the ball and with a clearer plan that restricted Real Madrid to one long-shot from Casemiro and a glancing Benzema header.

By then, Real were behind, the opening goal coming from a familiar combination down the right. Trippier played out from deep into the path of the excellent Marcos Llorente, who nipped the ball away from the diving Nacho Fernandez. A poked pass behind Raphael Varane found Suarez and he flicked a superb finish with the outside of his foot around goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and into the far corner.

Atletico won every challenge and loose ball but missed a second goal. Madrid wanted a penalty at the end of the half after the ball struck Felipe on the hand but the referee was unconvinced, even after consulting the monitor.

Real Madrid rallied and for a while the game opened up. Nacho went close at the back post before Yannick Carrasco twice got the better of Lucas Vazquez, the second time pulling back for Suarez, whose finish was blocked. Angel Correa scuffed when free from six yards out.

Atletico appeared to have regained their authority but they failed to give themselves a cushion and tension grew. Benzema fired over and



**MADRID:** Real Madrid's Spanish defender Nacho Fernandez (left) challenges Atletico Madrid's Uruguayan forward Luis Suarez during the Spanish league football match Club Atletico de Madrid against Real Madrid CF at the Wanda Metropolitano stadium in Madrid on Sunday. —AFP

then Jan Oblak pulled off an incredible double save, denying the Frenchman from point blank before getting up to block the rebound. Two minutes remained when Benzema finally struck. He

bundled through, the ball cannoning through kindly for Casemiro, who capitalized with an ice-cold pull-back for his team-mate, who had an open net. —AFP

## Rangers win Scottish Premiership for first time in 10 years

**GLASGOW:** Rangers' first Scottish Premiership title for 10 years was confirmed Sunday after Celtic's 0-0 draw at Dundee United left them 20 points behind their Glasgow rivals with six games left to play. Steven Gerrard's men have stormed to the title without losing a game to end Celtic's stranglehold of a record-equaling nine consecutive Scottish league titles.

Rangers were not even in the top-flight for four of those seasons after the club was demoted to the fourth tier after being liquidated in 2012 due to financial troubles. "This club has been to hell and back over the past 10 years," said Gerrard after Saturday's 3-0 win over St Mirren put Rangers on the brink of a first major trophy since 2011. "I've only been part of it for three, but I can certainly relate and I've got that feeling and that affection with the fans and I know what they have been through."

The former England and Liverpool captain never won a league title during his legendary 17-year career at Anfield. However, Gerrard has transformed Rangers' fortunes both domestically and in Europe since taking his first senior managerial role in 2018. The newly crowned Scottish champions have reached the last 16 of the Europa League for the second consecutive season, where they face Slavia Prague on Thursday.

Rangers were denied rubbing salt into Celtic wounds by winning the title at Celtic Park in two weeks' time in their next league fixture after they dropped points for the 12th time in the league this season. Caretaker manager John Kennedy was taking charge for just the second time since Neil Lennon resigned last month. The same issues that have dogged Celtic all season cost them at Tannadice as the visitors dominated but failed to find the net with 27 attempts on goal. —AFP

## Red Bull athletes aim for the sky over the world's largest fountain

**DUBAI:** What happens when two of the world's top paragliding pilots are introduced to the world's largest fountain? A whole lot of fun (not to mention some spectacular content). In the spirit of demonstrating that anything is possible - by even pushing their own adventurous boundaries - Red Bull athletes Horacio Llorens and Rafael Goberna teamed up to take part in an exclusive one-off stunt to showcase the beautiful Palm Fountain at the Pointe, Palm Jumeirah in Dubai.

And this performance - now showing in a new Red Bull TV short film, "The Breaking Pointe" - didn't just involve your typical paraglide... With the world-renowned Atlantis, The Palm Jumeirah resort as a backdrop, Llorens and Goberna donned special paramotors to take to the sky; gliding between the Palm Fountain's jets of water that were so close they could feel them.

In the film, the athletes - along with a large team of specialists - demonstrate just what it takes to plan a stunt of this kind. It's definitely not just a case of turning up and flying - there's pre-event training, there's engineering, there are multiple safety precautions, as well as intensive training sessions and practicing choreography.

"As soon as we got the opportunity, we wanted to fly there!" explains pro paragliding pilot, Llorens. "The ultimate challenge is that we were flying in the night, which means low visibility. Therefore, we needed to know the area really well beforehand. "Also - we needed to know how to 'play' with The Palm Fountain... this was new for us. And with such strong streams of water shooting up, 100 metres, is a lot so we had to be really

## Milan close gap on Inter in Serie A

**MILAN:** Rade Krunic and Diogo Dalot scored in either half as AC Milan beat Hellas Verona 2-0 to close the gap on Serie A leaders Inter before this week's Europa League trip to Manchester United. Krunic curled in a free-kick after 27 minutes with Manchester United loanee Dalot doubling the visitors' account five minutes after the break to pull Milan three points behind Inter, who host in-form Atalanta last week. Champions Juventus are four points behind Milan in third, with a game in hand, after claiming their seventh straight win at home, 3-1 against Lazio on Saturday.

Despite the absence of key players including star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, winger Ante Rebic and defender Theo Hernandez, Milan kept the pressure on their city rivals two weeks after their 3-0 derby defeat. Ibrahimovic, who has scored 14 goals in as many league games for the club, joined the team at Verona despite a leg muscle problem.

"Today we've shown that we are there, that we are a team and still believe," said coach Stefano Pioli. "We are stronger when we're all together, but we're also strong with absences. Ibrahimovic arrived before the game, followed the technical meeting, and helped to stimulate us as

great champions do. He is a pack leader."

Rafael Leao started up front in Ibrahimovic's absence, and the Portuguese forward threatened after quarter of an hour with a header which went over the bar. The breakthrough came when Krunic was brought down just outside the box. The Bosnian midfielder dusted himself down and whipped a free-kick past a stunned Marco Silvestri from a tricky angle for his first league goal in Milan colours.

Defender Dalot also got off the mark in Serie A four minutes after the break, blasting in an Alexis Saelemaekers cross. Milan took a valuable three points before they travel to Manchester for the first leg of their Europa League last 16 tie with United before hosting Napoli in the league next weekend. Verona, in eighth, fell to their first home defeat since losing to Inter before Christmas.

### Insigne double lifts Napoli

Roma moved up to fourth, one point ahead of fifth-placed Atalanta thanks to a Gianluca Mancini goal, ahead of their Europa League tie against Shakhtar Donetsk in Rome. Mancini jumped highest to turn in a Lorenzo Pellegrini corner after 24 minutes at the Stadio Olimpico, beating second choice goalkeeper Federico Marchetti who replaced Mattia Perrin. Roma sit nine points behind Inter after the win. "One more step is missing to beat the big teams, we need to improve because something more is needed to reach



**VERONA:** AC Milan's Portuguese defender Diogo Dalot celebrates after scoring with his teammates during the Italian Serie A football match Hellas Verona vs AC Milan played behind closed doors at the Marcantonio Bentegodi Stadium in Verona on Sunday. —AFP

the Champions League," said Mancini.

In Naples, Lorenzo Insigne scored twice with Victor Osimhen adding a third as Napoli consolidated sixth place, three points off the Champions League berths, with a 3-1 win over Bologna. Nigerian Osimhen returned after taking a knock to his head two weeks ago, coming off the bench eight minutes after the break. A minute's silence was observed before kick-off after the death of Mirko Pavinato, captain of the Bologna side who won the league in 1964.

Insigne opened the scoring after eight minutes, latching onto a Piotr Zielinski's back-heel kick. Osimhen

scored eight minutes after coming on and was involved in Insigne's second 12 minutes later off a rebound just after Roberto Soriano had pulled a goal back for Bologna.

Bottom side Crotone ended their seven-match losing streak with a 4-2 win over coronavirus-hit relegation rivals Torino. The Turin club's last two games, against Sassuolo and Lazio, were unplayed because of a COVID-19 outbreak. Crotone are a point behind second-last Parma, who stretched their winless run to 17 games after defender Simone Iacopini turned into his own net just before the final whistle to hand 14th-placed Fiorentina a 3-3 draw. —AFP

prepared!"

Llorens, along with fellow athlete and friend Goberna had been discussing and practicing tricks and choreography for some time prior to arriving in Dubai. Once in the emirate, the duo - along with the entire project team - conducted trial runs in the Margham Desert in daylight for two days.

### Adjusting to the climate

Paragliding with a paramotor is a complicated process and requires skill, patience and very, very precise planning. What many extreme adventure and sporting fans might not know is that paramotors require to be adjusted according to the location they're in. "During training that's when we were testing the paramotors, adjusting the gliders and the brakes," continues Llorens. "Rafael [Goberna] did have a little problem with his motor."

Goberna elaborates: "The motor wasn't flying so good, because prior to arriving in Dubai, it was last used in Europe at high altitude. Therefore, I needed to adjust the carburettor in the air inside the motor. "In the first practice flight over the water, I broke one propeller. I really couldn't understand what was happening. And then another one broke. Eventually, a back-up motor was required."

Refusing to give up, the entire team worked tirelessly to be "fountain-ready" and show day - and the results, as showcased in the video, are spectacular. "It was super nice for us to have finished for us this way - the process was definitely challenging from the very beginning," concludes Goberna. "After a long journey, the result was beautiful! The team worked incredibly hard to make it. The highlight for me was playing between the super shooters with Rafael, because it's something we've never done before; it felt really new and really powerful - with the water coming to our sides extremely high."



Goberna adds: "You feel the air coming up with the water - and the water splashes against your face because it's so strong. It was such a nice experience."

### Safety and Precision

As "The Breaking Pointe" demonstrates, a lot of work went into the showcase - one of the most important aspects being learning how to navigate The Palm Fountain. With both sides having different choreography, Llorens and Goberna had to study the movement of the water with great precision in order not to get caught up in the jets of water.

"Obviously, safety is paramount, and there are a

multitude of safety devices we use on paramotors," explains Director of Safety, Alan Gates. "Each athlete used two parachute systems - the main which they fly normally. In the case of an emergency or when they have a technical issue, they would use a reserve parachute."

"When we're flying over water, it's also mandatory to wear a life jacket with automatic and manual inflation. We always have rescue boats, jet skis and divers... it's important we have multiple teams for rescue and safety." Watch the full video here or via Red Bull Kuwait's Instagram page @RedBullKuwait and YouTube page @RedBull.

Sports

# Giannis wins MVP as Team LeBron dominates 2021 NBA All-Star Game

## Stars put on show despite lack of fans

ATLANTA: Damian Lillard nailed a game-ending three pointer from just inside half court as LeBron James improved to 4-0 as an NBA All-Star Game captain with a 170-150 win over Team Durant on Sunday night.

Two-time NBA MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo captured the Kobe Bryant MVP Award going a perfect 16-of-16 from the field for a game high 35 points in Atlanta. "It's fun. I was happy," said Antetokounmpo. "I just love being around great players. It makes it easier to play with them."

Antetokounmpo's 16-for-16 game easily eclipsed the previous All-Star record of the Philadelphia 76ers' Hal Greer, who went eight-of-eight in 1968. Antetokounmpo also made all three of his three point attempts.

James improved to 4-0 in All-Star games he has served as a team captain. He finished with four points in just 13 minutes of playing time. "I always try to pick the right team, and I've been lucky enough for four years to pick the right team," James said. "Guys go out and compete and play to win. I've been on the winning side of all four."

James' participation in the annual showcase was at one time in doubt. Last month James slammed the NBA for holding the contest during the global pandemic calling it a "slap in the face." NBA commissioner Adam Silver responded to the criticism from James and others at a weekend news conference, saying the players he spoke to this week were in favor of holding the contest.

"It would have been a bigger deal not to have it," Silver said. "I know that some players have made public comments suggesting they'd rather not be at All-Star. Many have told me directly they're thrilled to be All-Stars. It should be judged, when people are looking back, as to what

this meant to them as opposed to what some of the initial reactions were from the players."

Antetokounmpo becomes just the second winner of the MVP award named in honor of Bryant who died in a helicopter crash just outside of Los Angeles in January 2020. Kawhi Leonard was the first recipient at last year's All-Star Game in Chicago.

"To have the trophy with the name of Kobe Bryant, it's amazing, and I know he would be happy. Yeah, I know he'd be happy," said Antetokounmpo. "I wanted to win the one last year really bad and I had a chance to win."

The 70th All-Star Game had a different feel to it because there were no fans in the arena due to the global pandemic. But that didn't stop the players from putting on a show at the State Farm Arena including a healthy dose of dunks, alley-oops, behind the back passes and long-range threes like the one by Lillard, who finished with 32 points.

### Plenty of dunks

Stephen Curry, who won the three-point shooting contest earlier in the day, hit six threes in the first half en route to a 28 point night for Team LeBron. Jaylen Brown tallied 22 points and Chris Paul dished out 16 assists. Both Curry and Lillard finished with eight baskets from beyond the arc.

Bradley Beal scored a team high 26 points and Kyrie Irving delivered 24 points and 12 assists for Team Durant. In a sign that defense took the night off no player from either team grabbed more than nine rebounds. "When you've got Steph, Dame, those guys shooting half-court threes, threes from the timeline, there's not much



ATLANTA: Giannis Antetokounmpo of Team LeBron dunks the ball against Team Durant during the 70th NBA All Star Game as part of 2021 NBA All Star Weekend on Sunday at State Farm Arena in Atlanta, Georgia. —AFP

you can do. So give credit to them," said Irving.

The NBA and the players union agreed to hold Sunday's modified All-Star Game weekend, salvaging a scaled-down showcase after the pandemic scuttled plans to hold the event earlier in Indianapolis. This is the second straight year using the new scoring format which calls for an

"Elam Ending," which provides a target score during an untimed fourth quarter.

Team LeBron dominated the first three quarters to take a 146-125 lead into the final quarter. That set a winning target score of 170 which Team LeBron easily achieved despite being outscored 25-24 in the fourth by Team Durant. —AFP

## Portland's Simons wins Slam-Dunk contest

LOS ANGELES: Portland guard Anfernee Simons won the NBA Slam-Dunk contest Sunday, the first Trail Blazer to win the high-flying competition that is part of the annual All-Star festivities. On his lone final-round dunk, Simons soared to snag a high-bounced ball and jam in a one-handed dunk, leaning his face toward the basket as if to kiss it on the way down. He got the nod from three of five judges over final-round foe Obi Toppin of the New York Knicks, who leapt from just inside the foul line and passed the ball between his legs for a right-handed jam.

"Pretty nervous coming in," admitted Simons, who has just two dunks this season and 15 in his career. "But a lot of people didn't know that I can jump pretty high. So I kind of calmed down and

just showed my talents."

The contest, usually the highlight on Saturday night of All-Star weekend, was compressed this year and held during halftime of the All-Star Game itself as festivities were limited to one day amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Toppin led the way in the two-dunk first round, opening with a dunk in which he bounced the ball between his legs on the way to a reverse slam. On his second effort Toppin got some help from his father, Obadiah Toppin Sr, and teammate Julius Randle, leapfrogging over them with a little push off of Randle's back.

Simons opened the first round by having the ball placed in a small plastic hoop attached to the backboard more than a foot above the rim. He leapt to grab it with both hands and dunked it in a smooth move. For his second dunk, Simons donned a Tracy McGrady jersey and delivering a spinning dunk McGrady made in the 2000 contest. Indiana's Cassius Stanley was eliminated in the first round, although he opened the event in scintillating style with a between-the-legs left-handed slam. —AFP



ATLANTA: Anfernee Simons of the Portland Trail Blazers dunks the ball during the AT&T Slam Dunk Contest as part of 2021 NBA All Star Weekend on Sunday at State Farm Arena in Atlanta, Georgia. —AFP

## Leonard says ready to play Tokyo Olympics

ATLANTA: Los Angeles Clippers star Kawhi Leonard says he's eager to make his Olympic debut at the rescheduled Tokyo Games in July even if it means flying halfway around the world on tight timeline. If the Clippers make a long run through the NBA post-season and reach the Finals, it might mean Leonard and some of his teammates would have little or no break between the end of the season and the start of the Olympic men's basketball tournament.

"Right now my plan is to go," Leonard told reporters in a virtual press conference on Sunday before the NBA All-Star Game in Atlanta. "It doesn't really matter on the success that we have. If I feel up to it and

feel ready to go around that time then I'm going to play."

The Clippers are one of the top contenders and the playoffs are scheduled to end July 22 if the Finals go a full seven games. The Tokyo Opening ceremony is on July 23, and the United States play their first basketball game on July 25 against France.

Leonard has never represented the United States in an Olympics. In Tokyo, he would also be reunited with his former San Antonio Spurs coach Gregg Popovich. Leonard was named a finalist for Team USA last year but the Games were postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

His Clippers teammate Paul George, who won a gold medal for the US at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, was also picked for the team. USA Basketball sent invitations out two months ago to around 60 players regarding their inclusion in the pool from which the team will be selected. —AFP



ATLANTA: Kawhi Leonard of Team Durant smiles and looks on during the 70th NBA All Star Game as part of 2021 NBA All Star Weekend on Sunday at State Farm Arena in Atlanta, Georgia. —AFP

## Warriors' Curry wins All-Star 3-point contest

LOS ANGELES: Golden State Warriors sharpshooter Stephen Curry won the 3-point contest Sunday, edging Utah's Mike Conley in the final round of the curtain-raiser to the NBA All-Star Game in Atlanta, Georgia.

Curry, one of the best shooters the NBA has ever seen and the league leader in made 3-pointers in the first half of this season, was the favorite heading into the competition, which sees players shoot from two stations around the three-point arc with multiple balls from a few feet further back worth extra points. Curry put up a red-hot 31 points in the first round, advancing along with Conley and Boston's Jayson Tatum.

But it was close in the final round with Curry, the final contestant, missing his first four shots before getting the victory only after he knocked down his final attempt from the right corner to total 28 points — one more than the 27 Conley had put up. "I knew I had to knock it down," Curry said. "It was a fun battle. I'm glad I got it done." —AFP



ATLANTA: Stephen Curry of the Golden State Warriors poses with the MTN Dew 3-Point Trophy after winning the MTN Dew 3-Point Contest during the NBA All-Star Game 2021 on Sunday at State Farm Arena in Atlanta, Georgia. —AFP

# Classifieds

### HOSPITALS

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

### Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
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Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908

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## Laporta elected new Barca president

### Returning boss has tough task of rebuilding club

MADRID: Joan Laporta returned as Barcelona president on Sunday after winning the club's elections by a landslide, with his central pledge to try to persuade Lionel Messi to stay. Laporta was last president at Barca between 2003 and 2010, which included overseeing the hugely successful appointment of Pep Guardiola as coach and the iconic treble-winning team of 2008/9.

In total, the club won four La Liga titles and two Champions Leagues during Laporta's seven-year spell in charge. The 58-year-old will return after holding off competition from Victor Font and Toni Freixa, the other two candidates to gain enough support to make the final stage.

Laporta won 30,184 votes, Font 16,679 and Freixa 4,769 from a total of 55,611 lodged by the club's members. Amid champagne celebrations shared with his team on Sunday night, Laporta shouted with a grin on his face: "Now let's go to Paris and see if we can make another 'remontada' happen!"

Barcelona face Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday in the Champions League last 16, with a 4-1 deficit to make up from the opening leg. Longer-term, Laporta's task will be to rebuild a club in crisis, with crippling debts exacerbated by the pandemic, its reputation damaged and Messi considering leaving for free when his contract expires this summer.

He has said he will do everything possible to keep Messi at Camp Nou and campaigned heavily on the idea he was the best-placed candidate to convince the Argentinian, owing to their relationship during his previous time in charge.

In his victory speech, Laporta picked

up on Messi showing up to vote earlier in the day. "Seeing Leo, the best player in the world, come to vote with his son is for me a sign of what we have said all along," Laporta said.

#### 'Leo loves Barca'

"Leo loves Barca and knows that we are a big family. Hopefully that can help us encourage him to stay." A change of regime also leaves coach Ronald Koeman's position uncertain, with Laporta insisting the Dutchman "deserves respect" for his work this season while maintaining his future will depend on results. Koeman's contract runs until 2022. "I am not worried because I have a contract and when we know who is going to be the president of course we will talk and I want him to show me his way," Koeman said on Friday.

Laporta's main rival for the presidency was Font, who was the early favorite after claiming he would bring former Barcelona midfielder Xavi Hernandez in as coach. But the team's progress under Koeman and Laporta's superior campaign cast doubt over the promise, with Laporta questioning last week why Xavi had not come out in support of Font publicly.

Xavi may have been keen to keep his options open and the Spaniard caused a stir on Sunday by liking, and then unliking, an Instagram post of Laporta casting his ballot. Laporta will also have to make decisions on Xavi's other former team-mates still at the club like Gerard Pique, Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba, who have contributed so much but whose peak years are now behind them.



BARCELONA: Spanish lawyer Joan Laporta delivers a speech at the auditorium of the Camp Nou complex after winning the election for the FC Barcelona presidency on Sunday in Barcelona. — AFP

#### 'Great family'

Perhaps most importantly, his job will be to heal the deep mistrust that has developed between the board of directors and the dressing room, led by Messi and Pique. "We are a great family," Laporta said. "We have a feeling of belonging to this club and that feeling will make us all go together to face the challenges that lie ahead."

The last president Josep Maria Bartomeu was forced to resign in October

after the club's members succeeded in achieving a vote of no confidence against him. But Bartomeu quit before facing the vote after overseeing a disastrous final year that included Messi attempting to leave, the team being humiliated by Bayern Munich in the Champions League and the club posting gross debts of 1.2 billion euros.

Bartomeu spent the night in prison last Monday after being arrested as part of a police investigation into alleged

corruption. Voters had been due to go to the polls on January 24 but were prevented due to restrictions in relating to the pandemic, meaning the election was postponed.

Ballots on Sunday were held at six different polling stations in Catalonia and Andorra between 9:00 am and 9:00 pm, while just over 22,000 voters were able to vote by post for the first time. Laporta's victory was confirmed officially by the club at just before midnight. — AFP



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