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# Education advocacy group calls for reopening schools

Teachers, parents cautiously hopeful on students returning to class

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: A group called Education First has been tirelessly campaigning for the safe reopening of schools in Kuwait, arguing that an entire generation has been out of school for over a year. All public and private educational institutions in Kuwait (with a few exemptions for special needs schools) have been closed for on-campus learning since March 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Educational consultant and Education First advocate Dr Duna Al-Mashaan told Kuwait Times the public has responded positively to the campaign. "Through our Education First campaign, we've garnered support from

many sectors of society. Our pledge, advocating for the safe return to schools, was posted on all social media channels, making it the number one trending hashtag on Twitter, thanks to corporations, banks, restaurants, parents and newspaper channels," she said.

"With the right health precautions and a reduction in the number of students in classrooms, social distancing, mask wearing and proper ventilations of schools, we can safely bring back students back into the classrooms," Mashaan said. "There are a few capable schools ready to welcome their students today with the hybrid model, which combines in-classroom face-to-face and online learning into one cohesive educational experience. This



Dr Duna Al-Mashaan

allows for the reduction of the (in-person) student population by 50 percent," she added.

"Given the opportunity, these schools will serve as pilot programs for others. Getting schools to open with the required safety protocols set by the health ministry requires strategizing, planning, teacher and staff training, identifying the capital needed, and of course, flexibility," Mashaan noted. Education First is calling on the government to allow parents to select the best learning model for their children (online or in-person), coordinate between the ministry of health and education and initiate a vaccination campaign for all school personnel.

Many government schools require maintenance of the entire facility, installation of digital infrastructures and the application of strict health guidelines.

Education First is urging the education ministry to begin working today as it requires months of preparation for these schools to open their doors for the safe return of students and teachers.

An English teacher from a private school in Salwa also emphasized the importance of face-to-face classes and allowing children to return to classrooms. "Online classes are not only cruel and difficult for both students and teachers, but are also teaching our children to be lazy. If there are strict safety protocols that can be followed by students and teachers, we need to return to campus as soon as possible. We need them in a real school environment," she told Kuwait Times.

Continued on Page 2

## News in brief

### Suicide 'instigator' arrested

KUWAIT: The interior ministry said a person who appeared in a video on social media throwing his mobile phone from a height to urge children to commit suicide was identified and arrested. The ministry urged parents to report any suspicious activities to security personnel and monitor what their children are viewing on various social media platforms. — MoI

### Bitcoin passes \$60,000

PARIS: Bitcoin passed the \$60,000 mark for the first time yesterday, with analysts saying the giant US stimulus package helped boost the world's most popular virtual currency on its record-breaking run. Bitcoin has tripled in value over the last three months bolstered by increasing backing from corporate heavyweights. — AFP

### UK police officer in court

LONDON: The police officer charged with murdering a young Londoner who disappeared while walking home from a friend's house appeared in court yesterday as organizers cancelled a march in her honor due to coronavirus restrictions. Metropolitan Police officer Wayne Couzens, 48, appeared in person at London's Westminster Magistrates' Court charged with the kidnap and murder of Sarah Everard. — AFP

### US administers 100m shots

WASHINGTON: Health workers in the US have administered 101,128,005 COVID-19 vaccine doses, around 30 percent of the world's total of shots in arms so far, according to the latest tally posted Friday afternoon by the CDC. Some 50 million doses of the Pfizer shot have been administered, 49 million of Moderna's, 900,000 of Johnson & Johnson's one-shot vaccine, and a further 100,000 that haven't been identified. — AFP

### Netflix targets password sharing

SAN FRANCISCO: Streaming television colossus Netflix on Friday was dabbling with more strictly enforcing its rule against sharing passwords with people living elsewhere. Some Netflix users who were apparently tapping into other people's accounts turned to Twitter to share news of an apparent crackdown along with posts of a notice telling them they need to be subscribers to keep watching the service. — AFP

## Outrage in Jordan as oxygen shortage leads to 7 deaths

SALT, Jordan: At least seven COVID-19 patients died yesterday when a Jordanian hospital ran out of oxygen, triggering an outcry in the kingdom and forcing the health minister to resign. Jordan's King Abdullah II ordered the head of the state hospital in the town of Salt northwest of Amman to resign, state media reported, as hundreds of angry people gathered outside the hospital.

"Between 6:00 and 7:00 this morning, oxygen ran out for nearly an hour at the hospital and this probably led to the deaths of six patients," health minister Nazir Obeidat said. The official Al-Mamlaka television channel later reported that a seventh patient had also died. Obeidat, who travelled to the Al-Hussein

Continued on Page 2



SALT, Jordan: Security forces control the crowd as King Abdullah II arrives in his vehicle at a hospital in this town northwest of Amman yesterday. — AFP

## Minneapolis to pay \$27m to Floyd family

MINNEAPOLIS: The Minnesota city of Minneapolis reached a \$27 million "wrongful death" settlement on Friday with the family of George Floyd, the black man who died while being arrested by a white police officer, sparking mass protests for racial justice across the United States. Lawyers for the Floyd family said it is the "largest pre-trial settlement in a civil rights wrongful death case in US

history".

Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, 44, is currently on trial facing murder and manslaughter charges for Floyd's death, which was captured on video by bystanders and laid bare racial wounds in the United States. Chauvin, 44, was seen on the video kneeling on the neck of the 46-year-old handcuffed Floyd for nearly nine minutes. Three other police officers - Tou Thao, Thomas Lane, and J Alexander Kueng - also face charges in connection with Floyd's May 25, 2020 death.

"George Floyd's horrific death, witnessed by millions of people around the world, unleashed a deep longing

Continued on Page 2



MINNEAPOLIS: George Floyd's family and their lawyer visit a memorial at the site where Floyd died while being arrested, after attending a press conference on Friday. — AFP

## New Zealand has duty to support Muslims: Ardern

WELLINGTON: New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told an emotional memorial service marking two years since the Christchurch mosque attacks that the country had "a duty" to support its Muslim community. Hundreds of people turned out for the service, held amid tight security, to remember the 51 people killed and dozens wounded when a heavily armed gunman

opened fire in two mosques on March 15, 2019.

Temel Atacocugu, who was shot nine times in the face, arms and legs, wept as he recalled waiting to be treated with the father of three-year-old Mucaad Ibrahim when they learned the toddler had died. "Suddenly, my pain seemed insignificant," he said. Ardern, who was widely praised for the compassion shown to survivors and the families of the victims of the shooting and her swift move to tighten firearms control in New Zealand, said words "despite their healing power" would never change what happened.

"Men, women and children ... were taken in an act of terror. Words will not

remove the fear that descended over the Muslim community," she said, adding the legacy should be "a more inclusive nation, one that stands proud of our diversity and embraces it and, if called to, defends it staunchly."

Atacocugu said it was a miracle he was still alive. "I have since had seven major surgeries and there are more to come. I will carry lots of shrapnel in my body for the rest of my life. Every time I have an X-ray it lights up like a Christmas tree." Kiran Munir, whose husband Shaheed Haroon Mahmood was killed in the attack, told the service that the best revenge was to "not be like the enemy."

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New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern



## Local

# Man sets Souq Mubarakiya mill on fire after stealing KD 9,000

## Suspect identified, arrested after arson case confirmed

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Fire Force said investigations in a fire at a Souq Mubarakiya mill on Wednesday evening showed it was set deliberately, and the interior ministry was informed accordingly. The force said the fire investigations unit works round the clock with experienced personnel who are equipped with all the necessary equipment to determine the causes of the fire.

Meanwhile, the interior ministry said following a review of the security tapes, a person was seen in the basement for more than three hours, and after he left, the fire started. Capital governorate detectives were able to determine the suspect's identity - an Asian who works at the mill, and found KD 9,000 at his residence. He said he noticed the safe was open before the other employees left, so he hid in the basement, took the money and started the fire. The suspect was sent to concerned authorities.



**KUWAIT:** Firemen put out a fire reported at a Souq Mubarakiya mill.



**A fireman battles the blaze.**

## People continue to flock to Kuwait vaccination centers



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Vaccination Center's hall number 6. — KUNA photos



**A person gets a COVID-19 vaccine jab.**



**People awaiting in lines to get their COVID-19 vaccines.**



**Kuwait Red Crescent Society medics are seen at Kuwait Vaccination Center.**

**KUWAIT:** People continue to show up in droves to vaccination sites across Kuwait, all of them with online appointments, with

the common belief that getting their COVID-19 shots is the only way to overcome a raging pandemic. Health workers

and interior ministry personnel are on hand to maintain order at these designated centers, as Kuwaitis and expatriates alike,

undeterred by a 12-hour lockdown to rein in spiraling infections rates, rush to get vaccinated. — KUNA

## New Zealand has duty to support...

Continued from Page 1

We are learning to rise up again with dignity and move forward as best we can."

The gunman, self-proclaimed white supremacist Brenton Tarrant, was arrested minutes after the

attacks on the Al Noor mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre. He pleaded guilty to 51 charges of murder, 40 of attempted murder and one of terrorism, and was sentenced last year to life imprisonment without parole, the first time a whole life term has been handed down in New Zealand.

Last week, police arrested a 27-year-old man in Christchurch and charged him with threatening to kill following online threats to the same two mosques. During the memorial service, armed police were stationed outside the venue and a sniffer dog checked the bags of people entering the building. — AFP

"But at the same time, we have a situation that needs to be remedied before it is too late for us to act, because it's been more than a year now. I don't want children studying alone at home most of the time in front of the computer. I don't want to continue learning the way we are doing it online, as there are alternative ways and means for kids to learn amidst the pandemic. But when it comes to choosing between safety and the need to give children normalcy and freedom to learn on-campus, I am adamant," she said.

A mother-of-three also told Kuwait Times she would rather wait for the situation in the entire world to stabilize before allowing her children to go back to school. "I better wait until everything is ready, even if it takes years. So long as they are safe at home, I am okay with it. I won't allow them to go to school if we are still counting deaths because of corona. Never...I don't want to lose any of my children. I will never forgive myself if this happens," said the Filipina expat, whose three children are all enrolled at private schools in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. "How I wish everything goes back to normal. I want them to play freely without fearing for their lives," she added.

## Education advocacy group calls for...

Continued from Page 1

"If you realize how devastating the current online setup is for children's future and wellbeing, you wouldn't waste time arguing how important face-to-face classes are for children. One year of not going to school is long enough; we cannot afford to be defeated completely by this pandemic. We want our kids socializing and talking to their peers. These are our responsibilities towards the next generation," the teacher said.

Jannah, a preparatory teacher in Jahra, said she is halfhearted when it comes to the issue of children going back to school. "I am torn with regards to their return to school because I have kids of my own. I'm afraid they'll contract COVID-19 if I allow them to go to school. I am sure these concerns are shared by many parents because kids don't care much about safety," she said.

## Minneapolis to pay \$27m...

Continued from Page 1

and undeniable demand for justice and change," said Ben Crump, a Floyd family lawyer. "That the largest pre-trial settlement in a wrongful death case ever would be for the life of a Black man sends a powerful message that Black lives do matter and police brutality against people of color must end," Crump said.

The settlement, which was unanimously approved by the city council, results from a federal lawsuit the

Floyd family filed in US District Court in July against the city of Minneapolis. "Our black community has endured deep and profound trauma," Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said at a press conference. "Today's settlement reflects our shared commitment to advancing racial justice."

Another Floyd family attorney, L. Chris Stewart, said the settlement "ensures that George Floyd's death will result in substantive, positive change" and prompt police forces around the country to enact reforms. "They have 27 million reasons now why they should," Stewart said. "Even as the trial against former officer Derek Chauvin moves forward and the family waits for justice in the criminal courts, this settlement imparts a measure of justice that is meaningful, important and necessary," he said. — AFP

## Outrage in Jordan as oxygen...

Continued from Page 1

New Salt Hospital after news of the tragedy broke, told reporters he was assuming "full moral responsibility" for what happened. "I have submitted my resignation to the prime minister," he added.

Prime Minister Bisher Al-Khasawneh later told reporters he had accepted Obeidat's resignation and that the hospital's director had been sacked. The head of health services for the Balqa province, where Salt is located, was suspended pending the completion of an investigation, he said. "What happened is a huge and flagrant mistake, unjustified and unacceptable. We cannot accept the death of a single Jordanian," Khasawneh added. "The government alone assumes full responsibility for what happened."

The king also headed to Salt in the wake of the reports of the deaths and demanded the head of the

hospital step down, Al-Mamlaka reported. In video footage that circulated online, a visibly angry Abdullah, shaking his head and gesticulating, can be heard telling the hospital director: "How could such a thing happen. This is unacceptable."

Hundreds of people rallied outside the hospital to vent their anger over the deaths, with a crowd surrounding the king's car as it neared the hospital, AFP reporters said. Security forces tried to keep the crowds at bay, as many shouted slogans demanding accountability. The protesters included relatives of patients who died and others who had family members being treated at the hospital.

Suleiman Khreisat, a retired nurse who lost two of his relatives, told AFP the hospital was facing several shortcomings. "The hospital suffers from a shortage of medical and nursing staff and now there is a shortage of oxygen," Khreisat said, adding that this has exacerbated subpar conditions at the hospital. Patients were not receiving "their full medical right to treatment", he added. Another man, who called himself Abu Abdullah, said he also lost a relative and that "everyone who erred must be held responsible". "We hope that God will have mercy on all the victims," he added. — AFP



## Kuwait curfew: What you need to know

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait imposed a one-month partial curfew from 5:00 pm to 5:00 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 are allowed to continue operation only through delivery services. The government later allowed co-ops and supermarkets to serve shoppers from 5:00 pm to 10:00 pm every day. 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.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry launched a booking service, allowing people to shop from 5:00 pm to 10:00 pm during the curfew hours. The service is valid for all co-ops and supermarkets around Kuwait. To book an appointment, a shopper should visit [www.moci.shop](http://www.moci.shop), enter the required information (civil ID number and serial number, contact number and email address), the reason for appointment (food supply center) and the time and date of the appointment. The shopper would then receive a barcode to show once they reach the shopping center.

### 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

# Dust storm hits Kuwait



KUWAIT: These pictures taken on Friday show a view of the Kuwait City skyline during the day, and a highway at night during a dust storm. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

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## Kuwait distressed over UN report on Syrian children

GENEVA: The State of Kuwait expressed distress over a UN independent fact-finding commission on Syria's reports which mentioned the deteriorating conditions of Children, whose rights have been violated. Violations are committed by all parties of the conflict in Syria and Kuwait underlines importance of paying further attention to children, millions of them "don't know nothing about life but war." Kuwait Permanent Representative to UN and International Organizations in Geneva Jamal Al-Ghunaim said. He was addressing a meeting of UN Human Rights Council about findings of the fact-finding commission. It is painful to see more than 2.8 million children not attending schools in Syria, 40 percent of them are girls, said Ghunaim, and this number could be higher due to the coronavirus spread. He said one in every three schools in Syria was either destroyed or used for military purposes. There are UN reports, he added, confirming attacks on educational facilities in Syria while the conflict was affecting physical and mental health of children. Many children suffered from disabilities and devastating psychological traumas which make them vulnerable to attacks. Ghunaim said Kuwait cooperated with neighboring countries to support education for Syrian children, offering financial assistance through UNESCO and establishing schools in neighboring countries. He cited Kuwait's late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah's call to support the Syrian children and youth in the midst of conflict in their country. Ghunaim said the report called for urgent steps to unveil fate of missing, citing a Kuwait-proposed draft resolution to UN Security Council in 2019 over importance of finding missing persons in conflict zones. Kuwait, which had an agonizing experience, called anew on the international community to exercise pressure on the warring parties in Syria to stop violations, count the missing and support their families. Kuwait, said Ghunaim, firmly believed the Syrian conflict could only be solved politically on basis of the 2012 Geneva communique and UNSC resolution 2254. — KUNA

### Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Owls perched on a man's arm during a meet-up of the Kuwait Owl Team, a local group dedicated to the protection and proliferation of owls, in Kuwait City on March 6, 2021. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Kuwaiti influential women collaborate to fuel local talents

KUWAIT: VO, the first Kuwait-based integrated youth platform for incubating young talents, was launched as part of an official collaboration between Sheikha Ohoud Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Chairman of VO, and Riham Al-Ayyar, CEO of VO, to provide Kuwaiti youth with innovative avenues for developing and exhibiting their talents to the global market.

"We all witnessed the outstanding and engaging content demonstrated by Kuwaiti youth throughout the lockdowns on different digital platforms. It was evident that Kuwaiti youth enjoy multiple interests and talents. The stellar rates of public engagement and acknowledgement received from followers all over the region made us realize the importance of unleashing and highlighting Kuwait's hidden gifts to help position the country globally," stated Sheikha Ohoud.

Explaining the importance of providing a

dynamic physical and virtual space for youth to develop and exhibit their talents, Sheikha Ohoud added: "Acknowledging that those young talents are Kuwait's most valuable resources, we are launching VO. It will be the main platform for Kuwaiti youth to access the international market and showcase their creative talents."

In another statement, Ayyar underlined the importance of diversifying Kuwait's economy by capitalizing on Kuwait's young talents and equipping youth with the tools required to enter the global market. Praising the current efforts being made in the realm of youth and talent development, she stated that VO was established to support Kuwait's national efforts in globally positioning the country.

"VO was founded to innovatively complement the various initiatives and programs conducted to support Kuwaiti youth. This platform will not only provide an academic space for young and emerging creators to develop their talents but it will also include fully equipped studios for them to fertilize and express their ideas in a nurturing environment, and a digital app to unleash and export Kuwait's hidden resources to the world," stated Ayyar.

Labeling this collaboration as a 'privileged partnership,' Ayyar praised Sheikha Ohoud's



Sheikha Ohoud Al-Sabah



Riham Al-Ayyar

commitment and dedication to support Kuwaiti talents. While Sheikha Ohoud confirmed that this collaboration will result in opening so many doors for Kuwait's future generations. VO, an integrated youth platform and Kuwait's first talent incubator, will be officially launched in summer 2021 and will provide an academic program for Kuwaiti youth to identify and nurture their talents, an all-inclusive studios to empower and express their ideas, and a 'smart' app to promote their creative productions on a seamless, high-tech and efficient digital platform.

## 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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Canadian Ambassador Louis-Pierre Emond and Young Ambassador Reem Elassy visit the UN House.

## Embassy selects 'Young Ambassador of Canada'

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Canada organized an initiative under the name of "Young Ambassador of Canada" recently. The Embassy partnered with the British School of Kuwait to select a student to become the Young Ambassador for a day. She would accompany Louis-Pierre Emond, Ambassador of Canada to the State of Kuwait throughout his official duties for the day. The purpose of this initiative is to encourage young women to consider diplomacy as a career path, to empower young women to learn about leadership roles, underline Canada's efforts in supporting gender equality and to stand up for women's rights around the world.

The Young Ambassador selected Reem Elassy, a year 12 student at the British School of Kuwait. Reem has been at the school for the past four years and is currently studying Economics, Mathematics, Further Mathematics and History at AS Level. Reem is also participating in the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) and is undertaking research to assess 'The extent to which unemployment was the main cause of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution'. Whilst she has a keen interest in International Relations, History and Diplomacy, Reem is hoping to study Economics at University with career aspirations in becoming an economist.

During this special day, the Young Ambassador led a number of meetings accompanied by Ambassador Emond. She started her day at the Embassy where she met with the staff to learn about their roles and responsibilities, then she had a meeting with Ambassador Emond who gave her an extensive overview of the diplomatic career path as well as the Canadian values in key areas of mutual interest for Canada and Kuwait. She also had a fruitful meeting with Hamad Al-Mashaan, Assistant Foreign Minister for Americas Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to underline the key components of the bilateral relations between Canada and Kuwait. The Young Ambassador visited the UN House where she met with Dr Tarek El-Sheikh, UN Resident Coordinator to learn about the international organizations and their crucial role in the region. Finally, she had an interesting discussion with Aliya



KUWAIT: Canadian Ambassador Louis-Pierre Emond with Young Ambassador Reem Elassy.



Canadian Ambassador Louis-Pierre Emond and Young Ambassador Reem Elassy meet Assistant Foreign Minister for Americas Affairs Hamad Al-Mashaan.

Al-Khaled, a local leader, to have a better understanding of the role of women in both the political and business spheres.

Ambassador Emond said on this occasion: "It was a great pleasure to spend the day with our Young Ambassador. Our objective was to allow a young woman to get to experience what a day in diplomacy is like and to hopefully inspire her and others to consider diplomacy as a career path. Diversity is key to ensuring the success of all life experiences, whether they be professional or personal. We wanted to highlight the importance of having people from every background, every walk of life in any organization. It has been proven that having various perspectives taken into consideration allow for better policy making, decisions and the success of any organization. We encourage young women to continue to follow their dreams and find the path that fits their professional and personal needs. This will ensure we live in a better, more peaceful, more diverse, and fairer world."





Asian-Americans  
organize against hate:  
'Protect the community'

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## Facing COVID and China, US leads billion-plus vaccine push in India

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HERAT: Children wounded in a car bomb blast receive treatment at a hospital in Herat. —AFP

# Car bomb kills 8, wounds 47 in Afghanistan

## Russia backs US plan for Taleban role in interim government

**HERAT:** A powerful car bomb in western Afghanistan killed at least eight people and wounded dozens more, authorities said yesterday, as the United Nations condemned attacks on civilians in the country. The blast targeted a police headquarters in the city of Herat around 10 pm on Friday, damaging dozens of houses and shops, Jailani Farhad, the spokesman for the Herat provincial governor, told AFP.

"The death toll from a car bomb in the city of Herat increased to eight, and 47 others are wounded," he said, adding that women, children and security personnel were among the dead. The interior ministry spokesman, Tariq Arian, confirmed the death toll, adding that 54 had been wounded.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the blast in Herat had no links to their group. However, the group's insurgents are active in the western province and have carried out recent attacks against Afghan government forces. President Ashraf Ghani blamed the Taliban, adding in a statement the group "continued their illegitimate war and violence against our people" and "showed once

again they have no intention for peaceful settlement of the current crises".

Violence has surged in Afghanistan in recent months—including a wave of assassinations against journalists, activists and civil servants, despite the launch of peace talks between the warring Afghan government and Taleban. On Friday, the UN Security Council "condemned in the strongest terms the alarming number of attacks deliberately targeting civilians in Afghanistan". It comes as speculation is rife about the United States' future in Afghanistan after a two-decade military involvement in the country.

US President Joe Biden is wrapping up a review on whether to stick to an agreement with the Taleban negotiated by his predecessor Donald Trump who wanted to pull out the final US troops by May. The Biden administration has signalled that it wants to take a hard look at Trump's deal and its repercussions for Afghanistan and regional stability. Washington recently submitted a draft peace agreement to the authorities in Kabul and to the Taleban, including the creation of a "new inclusive government," according to a letter from US

Secretary of State Antony Blinken that was revealed by Afghan media.

Meanwhile, Russia on Friday backed a US initiative to include the Taleban in a future interim Afghanistan government, as global powers ramp up efforts to secure a peace deal and end decades of war. The Taleban and Afghan government will meet next week in Moscow at Russia's invitation ahead of a May deadline for US President Joe Biden to decide whether to end the two-decade military involvement in the ravaged country.

Washington has encouraged the Afghan leadership to work towards establishing an "inclusive" government and peace accord amid fears of rapid Taleban gains once US troops leave. "The formation of an interim inclusive administration would be a logical solution to the problem of integrating the Taleban into the peaceful political life of Afghanistan," Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters ahead of Moscow's diplomatic effort, its latest in the country since ending its occupation in 1989. Zakharova said that decisions should be made "by the Afghans themselves".

**'Russia has an important stake'**

The United States, despite tensions with Russia, has welcomed Moscow's role and also consulted fellow rival China as diplomacy steps up. "We welcome, as we have said, efforts by international partners to accelerate the peace process and to bring about a political settlement and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire," State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

"We do believe Russia as well as other countries in the region has an important stake in a secure and stable Afghanistan," he said, without commenting on whether the United States would participate in the talks. Biden is wrapping up a review on whether to stick to an agreement with the Taleban negotiated by his predecessor Donald Trump who wanted to pull out the final US troops from Afghanistan by May.

The Biden administration has signalled that it wants to take a hard look at Trump's deal and its repercussions for Afghanistan and regional stability. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrote a letter to Afghan leaders encouraging them to consider a "new, inclusive government". —AFP

## Nigeria gunmen abduct dozens of students

**KANO, Nigeria:** Gunmen raided a college in northwestern Nigeria and kidnapped 39 students, government officials and parents said on Friday, in the latest mass abduction targeting a school. The kidnap gang stormed the Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation in Mando, Kaduna state, around 9.30pm on Thursday, shooting indiscriminately before taking students.

The Kaduna college was said to have some 300 male and female students—mostly aged 17 and older—at the time of the attack. Kaduna state commissioner for internal security Samuel Aruwan said 39 of the students were missing while the army was able to rescue 180 people after a battle with the gunmen.

"Further checks in the wake of the attack by armed bandits... indicate that 39 students are currently unaccounted for," including 23 females and 16 males, Aruwan said in a statement late Friday.

He had initially said 30 students were unaccounted for. Aruwan said the state government "is maintaining close communication with the management of the college as efforts are sustained by security agencies towards the tracking of the missing students." The commissioner said some of the rescued students were injured during the operation and were being treated at a military hospital.

**'Appeal to the government'**

Police and military personnel stood guard around the college at the outskirts



Nigerian soldiers and police officers stand at the entrance of the Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation in Mando, Kaduna state on Friday after a kidnap gang stormed the school, shooting indiscriminately before taking at least 30 students. — AFP

of Kaduna city on Friday afternoon as anxious parents and families waited for news. A fighter jet flew overhead. Government officials said the students were found to be missing after a headcount at the college, and parents said they had been taken by the gunmen. "We have confirmed from her colleagues our daughter Sera is with the abductors," Helen Sunday told reporters, tears rolling down her face. "I appeal to the government to help rescue our children." "It is unacceptable for parents to send their children to school only to be kidnapped by criminal elements," said Denis John, who said his brother was among those taken.

Heavily-armed gangs in northwest and central Nigeria have stepped up attacks in recent years, kidnapping for ransom, raping and pillaging. The bandits have recently turned their focus to schools where they kidnap students or schoolchildren for ransom—Thursday's was at least the fourth such attack since December. Mass kidnappings in the northwest are complicating

security challenges facing President Muhammadu Buhari's security forces who are also battling a more than decade-long Islamist insurgency in the northeast.

**Late night gunfire**

Residents near the Kaduna college also heard repeated gunshots in the area late on Thursday. "We kept hearing gunshots which we ignored as shooting drills from the Nigeria Defense Academy which is a stone-throw from the forestry college," said Mustapha Aliyu, who lives in the area. "It was only when we came out for the morning prayers in the mosque that we learnt it was gunmen who took away students from the college," he said.

The area is notorious for banditry and armed robbery, especially along the highway linking the city with the airport. The gangs are largely driven by financial motives and have no known ideological leanings. Victims are often released shortly after negotiations though officials always deny any ransom payments. — AFP

## S Africa's Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini dies

**JOHANNESBURG:** Goodwill Zwelithini, the controversial but revered king of the Zulus, South Africa's largest ethnic group, died Friday aged 72 after weeks in hospital for a diabetes-related illness, the royal palace announced.

The king wielded great influence among millions of Zulus and beyond through his largely ceremonial and spiritual role, despite having no official power in modern South Africa.

In a short statement, the palace said the king "took a turn for the worse and he subsequently passed away in the early hours of this morning". Born in Nongoma, a small town in the southeastern Kwa-Zulu Natal province, Zwelithini ascended the throne in 1971 during the apartheid era. No succession plans have been divulged yet.

His body will be taken from a Durban hospital to the palace in Nongoma, around 300 kilometres away, to lie in state for "a couple of days", said Mangosuthu Buthelezi, a powerful veteran politician who is also a Zulu prince. President Cyril Ramaphosa has granted the king a special official funeral of the type usually reserved for presidents and ex-presidents. The date is yet to be announced, but in the meantime national flags will fly at half-mast.

During a half-century-long reign, Zwelithini revived festivals celebrating virgin women, was blamed for fuelling



In this file photo taken on October 07, 2018 Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini gestures to his supporters at The Moses Mabhida Football Stadium in Durban. — AFP

deadly xenophobic violence, slammed gays as "rotten" and enjoyed a lavish and hedonistic lifestyle in a country where millions live in poverty. Nevertheless, Ramaphosa said the king "will be remembered as a much-loved, visionary monarch who made an important contribution to cultural identity, national unity and economic development".

Returning from hiding over assassination fears, Zwelithini was crowned the eighth Zulu monarch at the age of 23. Under the white-minority regime which ended in 1994, kings ruled homelands where most blacks were confined to defuse broader national struggles.

He was to become the longest-reigning of all known Zulu kings - dying during his 50th year on the throne. The Zulus are South Africa's largest ethnic group with over 11 million people. — AFP



## International

# Asian-Americans organize against hate: ‘Protect the community’

## Biden condemns vicious hate crimes against Asian-Americans

**WASHINGTON:** As the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged America, Esther Lim grew more worried by the day for her parents’ welfare and her own-not just for their health, but their safety in the face of rising attacks against Asian-Americans. When her friend was hurt in a hit-and-run accident-in what she firmly believes was a hate attack-she decided to take action.

“I wanted to do something more proactive rather than wallow in fear,” Lim, who is Korean-American, told AFP. So Lim, 32, bought her mother pepper spray, started learning judo from her father-and wrote “How to Report a Hate Crime,” an information booklet with advice on dealing with the police and phrases written in English to show to bystanders, to ask for help.

As of this year, Lim has begun printing the booklet in six languages-Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Thai and Vietnamese-and has more on the way, including Tagalog and Khmer. She distributes them to friends and Asian community centers in Los Angeles.

She feels her work is more important than ever. Reports of attacks, primarily against Asian-American elders, have spiked in recent months-fuelled, activists believe, by talk of the “Chinese virus” by former president Donald Trump and others.

In an address to the nation on Thursday, President Joe Biden forcefully condemned what he called “vicious hate crimes against Asian-Americans who have been attacked, harassed, blamed and

scapegoated.”

“It’s wrong. It’s un-American. And it must stop,” he said. Documented incidents range from looting Asian-owned businesses, to vandalizing homes and cars with slurs, to violent and sometimes fatal attacks in the street. People of Filipino, Thai, Japanese, Laotian, Korean and Chinese descent have been targeted.

While racial motivation can be hard to establish, a study by the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at CSU San Bernardino found that reported anti-Asian hate crimes nearly tripled from 49 to 122 cases last year across 16 major US cities including New York and Los Angeles-even as overall hate crime fell seven percent. The report looked at events categorized as criminal in nature and showing evidence of ethnic or racial bias, using preliminary local police data.

### ‘Protect the community’

Just days into his presidency, Biden signed an executive order on January 26 condemning racism towards the Asian-American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community during the pandemic. States are following suit, with California and New York allocating more resources to combating anti-Asian racism and draft legislation in the works in New York.

But “I don’t think it’s going to come quickly,” said Lim. So like her, members of the community are taking matters into their own hands-campaigning online, fundraising for groups like Stop AAPI Hate, and raising awareness through hashtags such as



**SAN FRANCISCO:** Pedestrians walk along Grant Avenue in the Chinatown neighborhood of San Francisco, California. Police departments and community activist groups are trying to figure out how to curb a surge in burglaries, vandalism, hate crimes and attacks against Asian Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area. — AFP

### #NotYourModelMinority.

Throughout California, groups of volunteers have begun escorting elderly Asian citizens around town.

Jimmy Bounphensy founded one such group called Asians With Attitudes to patrol the Chinatown neighborhood of Oakland, California after a string of violent attacks and robberies.

At first on his own, he was soon joined by other volunteers. “If I can save one person, then I’m happy,” he told AFP while out on patrol. “My presence and our presence is to let other people know that we really are here trying to protect the community at all costs, make sure everybody goes home safe. “I believe we made an impact.” — AFP

## Sputnik V in eastern Europe: Propaganda tool or godsend?

**PRAGUE:** Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine has sown division among former Eastern Bloc countries, analysts say, with some seeing it as a godsend and others as a Kremlin propaganda tool. Countries in the region have been particularly hard hit by the virus and find themselves torn between a readily available jab from their old ally and European Union resistance to Russian influence.

Analysts say such discord benefits Russia and its efforts to sow disorder in the region since the Soviet Union crumbled three decades ago. “It is very clear that Sputnik V has become a tool of soft power for Russia,” Michal Baranowski from the German Marshall Fund of the United States told AFP.

“The political goal of (Russia’s) strategy is to divide the West,” said Baranowski, who heads the Fund’s Warsaw office. Slovakia found itself facing a government crisis only days after receiving its first batch of Sputnik V on March 1.

Prime Minister Igor Matovic hailed the jab, saying “COVID-19 does not know anything about geopolitics”, while foreign minister Ivan Korcok called the vaccine “a hybrid war tool”.

### ‘Help my country’

The vaccine has 91.6 percent efficacy against COVID-19, according to a recent study published by The Lancet, and it is already being used in several countries around the world. It is yet to be approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) for use in the EU but some ex-communist member states are planning to roll out the jab regardless.

EU members like Slovakia started to look east after Europe got off to a slower-than-expected start procuring Pfizer/BioNTech, AstraZeneca/ Oxford and Moderna vaccines. Experts agree rapid vaccination is the only way out of the coronavirus crisis, which is hitting Central and Eastern Europe particularly hard. Slovakia and its neighbor the Czech Republic have had the worst per capita death rates in the world for weeks, according to AFP statistics based on official data, and hospitals across the former Soviet satellites are reaching capacity.

Czech President Milos Zeman asked his ally President Vladimir Putin for a Sputnik V supply in a letter last month. “I think I will help my country this way,” Zeman said. When the Czech



**TUNIS:** A Tunisian nurse shows a vial of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine against the COVID-19 at a hospital in the capital Tunis, yesterday at the start of a vaccination program. — AFP

health minister refused to accept a vaccine lacking approval from the EMA, Zeman asked for his dismissal, a request that has not been carried out.

### Kremlin ‘rubbing its hands’

“The potential use of Sputnik V in the Czech Republic has become a purely political weapon,” said Prague-based political analyst Jiri Pehe. He dubbed the vaccine “a tool of political struggle and propaganda”. He said Russia has had problems producing enough Sputnik vaccines for its own needs and there were questions about

the conditions in which the vaccine was produced. “If Vladimir Putin really trusted the vaccine, he would be the first to get a jab with a great pomp, but he’s giving it a wide berth,” Pehe said.

Sputnik V’s spread has led EU chief Charles Michel to say vaccines should not be used for propaganda purposes. “We should not let ourselves be misled by China and Russia, both regimes with less desirable values than ours, as they organize highly limited but widely publicized operations to supply vaccines to others,” Michel said earlier this week. —AFP



**This file handout shows former Bolivian interim president Jeanine Anez delivering a message during the celebration of the 195th anniversary of the Bolivian Independence at the government palace in La Paz. — AFP**

## Bolivia ex-president Anez arrested in ‘coup’ probe

**LA PAZ, Bolivia:** Bolivia’s former interim president Jeanine Anez was arrested early yesterday in relation to the 2019 political crisis in which she replaced predecessor Evo Morales, according to a government minister. “I inform the Bolivian people that Mrs. Jeanine Anez has already been apprehended and is currently in the hands of the police,” minister of government Carlos Eduardo del Castillo wrote on Twitter and Facebook.

The conservative politician had faced an arrest warrant on charges of terrorism, sedition and conspiracy over an alleged coup after she replaced Morales in November 2019 when he fled the country during widespread protests against his re-election. Former ministers who backed her one-year caretaker government were also being detained by authorities, media reports said. Castillo congratulated the police for their “great work” in the “historic task of giving justice” to the Bolivian people. Anez had tweeted an arrest order she said was issued by the public prosecutor’s office, with the response: “The political persecution has begun.” She later tweeted to again condemn the arrest warrant. The prosecutor’s office had not publicly announced the warrant.

But Bolivian television broadcast images of a heavy police presence around her home in the northern city of Trinidad, as well as of former energy minister Rodrigo Guzman and his justice counterpart Alvaro Coimbra, both listed on the warrant, being detained. Anez, a former senator, took over as caretaker president after Morales left Bolivia. He had lost the support of the armed forces amid violent protests against his re-election to an unconstitutional fourth term.

Several Morales allies who held senior posts also fled, leaving Anez the most senior Senate official still standing. Morales returned from exile in November last year, and took over the leadership of the ruling Movement for Socialism (MAS) party he founded. Last month, Bolivia’s socialist-dominated congress voted to give amnesty to those prosecuted during conservative president Anez’s year-long government for acts of violence during the chaos that followed Morales’ resignation.

Bolivia’s congress is dominated by the MAS, which romped to victory in an October 2020 general election that saw the party’s Luis Arce win the presidency. MAS party member Lidia Patty filed a complaint against Anez last December, claiming she, several of her former ministers, ex-military and police members, and others had promoted the overthrow of Morales, who had been in power for 14 years. —AFP



**SERiate, Italy:** Members of the medical staff wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) tend to a patient in the COVID-19 unit of the Bolognini hospital in Seriate, Bergamo, Friday amid a rise in virus cases. —AFP

## With new COVID wave, Italy heads back into lockdown

**ROME:** Schools, restaurants, shops and museums were ordered Friday to close across most of Italy from next week, after Prime Minister Mario Draghi warned of a “new wave” of coronavirus infections. One year after it became the first European country to face a major outbreak, Italy is once again struggling with the rapid spread of COVID-19, this time fuelled by new, more contagious variants.

A majority of regions-including those containing Rome and Milan-were classified by Health Minister Roberto Speranza as high-risk red zones from Monday, with all residents told to stay home except for work, health or other essential reasons. The extra restrictions will last until Easter, according to Draghi’s office. During the Easter weekend of April 3-5, the whole of Italy will become a red zone.

“More than a year after the start of the health emergency, we are unfortunately facing a new wave of infections,” Draghi said during a visit to a new vaccination center at Rome’s Fiumicino airport.

He added: “The memory of what happened last spring is vivid, and we will do everything to prevent

it from happening again.” Infinite patience -

More than 100,000 people with coronavirus have died in Italy since the pandemic swept over the eurozone’s third largest economy one year ago, sparking a months-long lockdown and triggering its worst recession since World War II. Draghi said more than 150,000 new COVID-19 cases were reported in the last week, up from just under 131,000 recorded the week before. The GIMBE health tank on Thursday said the increase in the number of new cases for three consecutive weeks “confirms the start of the third wave”. It warned that in more than half of Italy’s regions, “hospitals and above all intensive care units are already overloaded”.

A health ministry source said that eight regions, mostly in Italy’s north and central areas, would become red zones, along with the autonomous region of Trento. That brings to 11 the number of regions considered red as of Monday. All other regions will be in medium-risk orange, meaning museums, restaurants and bars are closed but schools remain open. Only Sardinia escapes restrictions, designated a low-risk “white” area.

Earlier Friday, Draghi thanked Italians for their “infinite patience” and said the new measures would be accompanied by fresh support for families and businesses. But he acknowledged there would be “consequences for the education of children, for the economy and also for the psychological state of us all”. —AFP

## NY school in culture war crosshairs over ‘inclusive language guide’

**NEW YORK:** A principal at a private Manhattan school is defending his institution’s “inclusive language guide” after it gained media attention this week as part of a larger debate on political correctness and so-called cancel culture in the United States.

The guide steered those involved with the school toward rephrasing language on gender, families, sexual orientation and race, among other topics. It suggested replacing such terms as “Mom and Dad” with “grown-ups, folks, or family” and “nanny/babysitter” with “caregiver.”

Grace Church School in Manhattan’s Noho neighborhood posted the 12-page guidance in September, according to US news outlets. The guide became a hot topic thanks to media coverage fueled by pro-Trump Fox commentator Sean Hannity on Thursday.

“As you have likely seen from yesterday’s press, we have found ourselves in the eye of the culture war storm this week, and it is important to remember why we are proud to be there,” school head George Davison said in a letter. The debate comes as the United States grapples with issues surrounding race and as the coronavirus pandemic and attendant recession has laid bare economic inequality, all against the backdrop of the wider #MeToo movement. “If the boorish ‘cancel culture’ press wants to condemn us a newly dubbed ‘Woke Noho’ school of politeness, dignity and respect, then I embrace it, and I hope you will too,” Davison said.

The cancel culture movement seeks to call out and punish offensive behavior but is denounced by critics as excessive and contributing to increased political polarization. Stating that gender-inclusive language could “provide critical affirmation to students across the gender spectrum,” the school guide advised that “one way to achieve this is to take gender out of text where it’s unnecessary.” —AFP



## International

## Facing COVID and China, US leads billion-plus vaccine push in India

## US, Japan, India and Australia hold their first-ever joint summit

WASHINGTON: India will produce more than one billion more COVID vaccine doses by the end of next year in an initiative launched Friday with the United States, Japan and Australia, challenging China as the four leaders held their first-ever joint summit. US President Joe Biden, who has vowed to reinvigorate alliances in the face of growing worries about China, met virtually with the three nations' prime ministers as they pledged together to defend a "free and open" Indo-Pacific region.

"We're renewing our commitment to ensure that our region is governed by international law, committed to upholding universal values and free from coercion," said Biden, who like the others made no explicit, but plenty of implicit, mentions of China. Vowing to show concrete results, the so-called Quad announced that Indian company Biological Ltd. would manufacture at least one billion additional vaccine doses by the end of 2022, focusing on the single-shot, US-developed Johnson & Johnson jab that was approved Friday by the World Health Organization.

Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, called the plan a "massive joint commitment" and said that Southeast Asia would be the priority to receive the shots, which should come well after the United States is largely vaccinated. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the vaccine initiative showed that the Quad is "a positive force for global good and for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific." India, a global pharmaceutical hub, is already sending vaccines to 70 nations and called the Quad initiative a vindication.

"We believe that this will speed up the process of post-pandemic recovery and enable families and businesses to put the COVID-19 crisis behind them," Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla told reporters in New Delhi. The White House said that Japan and the United States would provide favorable loans to allow the Indian production, with Australia stepping up to nearly \$500 million funding to administer vaccines Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

The plan comes as China, where the deadly virus was first detected in late 2019, works to transform its image into that of a global healer. China has shipped vaccines as far afield as the Dominican Republic and provided doses to international partners such as Pakistan and Zimbabwe.



COLOMBO: In this photo illustration a woman looks through a webpage of the online retail giant Amazon displaying Chinese-made doormats with the Sri Lankan flag design for sale, in Colombo on Friday. — AFP

## Sri Lanka bristles over Chinese doormats featuring flag

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka has complained to Beijing over Chinese-made doormats featuring the island's national lion flag being sold through online retail giant Amazon, officials said Friday.

Sri Lanka is highly sensitive to what it sees as any misuse of its national flag as well as Buddhist symbols. The Sri Lankan foreign ministry said it had taken up the issue with the Chinese embassy in Colombo, and also asked Colombo's mission in Beijing to track down the manufacturer.

The ministry has also instructed the Sri Lankan embassy in Washington to "follow up on the matter" with Amazon. Several Chinese vendors on Amazon were offering the non-slip doormat with Sri Lanka's flag on it at prices ranging from \$10 to \$24. "This is how the Chinese see Sri Lanka," said one Facebook user. Another suggested the doormat was a forewarning of how future relations might play out in light of Sri Lanka's huge debt to China: "May be it's the sign (of how) they gonna treat us when we fail to pay their loans."

"If we are unable to pay our debts, they will print our flag on toilet paper for sure," wrote another on Facebook. In 2010, Sri Lanka prevented US rap star Akon from visiting the country over one of his music videos, which featured scantily clad women dancing in front of a Buddha statue. In 2002, Sri Lanka's Supreme Court ordered police and customs to seize CDs of Buddha Bar lounge music. Two years ago, a Muslim woman was arrested for wearing a dress with prints of a ship's steering wheel, which police mistook for Dharma Chakra, a Buddhist symbol. —AFP

## G7 powers urge China to end HK 'oppression'

WASHINGTON: Group of Seven powers on Friday demanded that China honor commitments in Hong Kong and end "oppression" against democratic activists after Beijing forced sweeping changes of the city's election system. Beijing's rubber-stamp parlia-



WASHINGTON, DC: US President Joe Biden (left), with Secretary of State Antony Blinken (second left), meets virtually with members of the "Quad" alliance of Australia, India, Japan and the US, in the State Dining Room of the White House in Washington, DC, on Friday. — AFP

## 'New dawn'

The Quad format has been growing for more than a decade, but Friday's talks are the first at the leaders' level and come as all four nations see relations with China deteriorate. China over the past year has engaged in a deadly clash with Indian forces in the Himalayas, stepped up activity near islands administered by Japan and imposed sanctions on Australian products following a series of disputes.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said that the summit marked "a new dawn in the Indo-Pacific." "As four leaders of great liberal democracies in the Indo-Pacific, may our partnership be the enabler of peace, stability and prosperity, and to do so inclusively with the many nations of our region," Morrison said.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, speaking to reporters afterward in Tokyo, said he raised "strong opposition to China's unilateral attempts to change the status quo" and voiced concern over Myanmar's coup.

"They supported each of my remarks," Suga said of the other leaders. China has denounced the Quad as a US plot against it and put particular pressure on India, which under Modi has increasingly aligned with the United States and shed its historic non-alignment. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian called

on all nations to "refrain from forming closed and exclusive cliques and act in a way that is conducive to regional peace, stability and prosperity."

## Flurry of diplomacy

The Quad summit kicks off a flurry of diplomacy by Biden, who promised an in-person meeting with the other three leaders this year. The Biden administration says it largely agrees with previous president Donald Trump's hawkish line of China but that it is taking a more tactful approach that includes a renewed focus on alliances—many of which, especially in Europe, were badly rattled by the vitriolic Trump. Japan announced that Suga will become the first foreign leader to have White House talks with Biden, who has tried to set an example by limiting travel and meetings during the pandemic.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin are also paying a joint visit next week to both Japan and South Korea on their first foreign travel, with Austin continuing on to India. After showcasing the alliance, Blinken and Sullivan will meet top Chinese officials in Alaska late next week in what the Biden administration has promised to be a blunt airing of US concerns. — AFP

to the neck," he said, adding that they had to wait until the police stopped shooting to retrieve the bodies.

## Stun grenades

Verified footage and video showed the bodies of the two men—both supporters of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party—lying in their homes with flower petals scattered across them as their relatives mourned. Local media Democratic Voice of Burma and Khit Thit Media confirmed the deaths as well. "Everyone said don't go out, just stay at home... but he said he had to go out again because three kids were arrested in the police station," said the wife of 37-year-old Si Thu, one of the deceased.

"We kept waiting for him to come back home," she said, in tears. Across town in Hlaing township, residents alarmed at the presence of police and soldiers in their neighborhood left their homes to protest. "Residents did not want them to come into the area at night to arrest people... We wanted to drive them out," one told AFP on condition of anonymity for fear of repercussions, adding that residents deployed Molotov cocktails against security forces.

## 'Honor the fallen heroes'

Before the violence, hundreds defied a nightly 8:00 pm curfew to hold candlelight vigils across the country, from the northern jade-producing city of Hpakant to the southern coastal hub of Myeik.

Near Yangon's Hledan junction—which has for weeks been a hotspot for unrest—protesters carrying posters of Suu Kyi sat and prayed, holding their candles in the air to mourn those killed in anti-coup demonstrations. "To break the curfew and to honor the fallen heroes," activist Thinzar Shunlei Yi told AFP. "People were so fearful to go out after 8:00 pm... so when that call comes out, it's powerful." —AFP



YANGON: Protesters, who were shot with live rounds during a demonstration against the military coup, receive medical attention at a makeshift medical center in Mandalay yesterday. — AFP

ment on Thursday passed reforms said that only "patriots" can run the city, which was guaranteed a separate system before Britain handed over control in 1997.

"Such a decision strongly indicates that the authorities in mainland China are determined to eliminate dissenting voices and opinions in Hong Kong," Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States as well as the European Union said in a joint statement.

The G7's top diplomats said they "call on China and the Hong Kong authorities to restore confidence in Hong Kong's political institutions and end the unwar-

ranted oppression of those who promote democratic values." "The people of Hong Kong should be trusted to cast their votes in the best interests of Hong Kong. Discussion of differing views, not silencing of them, is the way to secure the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong," they said.

Beijing has brushed aside earlier international warnings on Hong Kong and last year pushed through a draconian security bill used to detain activists. The actions came after Hong Kong was rocked by massive and sometimes violent protests in 2019 against Beijing's encroachment on the financial hub's unique freedoms. —AFP

## News in brief

## Amazon Canada warehouse shut

OTTAWA: Canadian authorities on Friday ordered an Amazon warehouse to close and for its 5,000 employees to self-isolate after a COVID-19 outbreak. Public health officials said workers at the tech giant's Brampton facility north of Toronto were required to "to self-isolate for two weeks effective 12:01 am March 13, 2021." "Over the past few weeks, the rate of Covid-19 infection across (the region) has been decreasing while the rate inside this facility has been increasing significantly," said a statement from health officials for the regional municipality of Peel. — AFP

## Daughter of kingpin pleads guilty

WASHINGTON: The daughter of a powerful Mexican drug kingpin pleaded guilty in a US court Friday to financial dealings with companies on a drug traffickers blacklist, authorities said. Jessica Johanna Oseguera Gonzalez, 34, is the daughter of Nemesio "El Mencho" Oseguera, head of the Jalisco New Generation cartel, one of the most violent gangs in Mexico. The United States considers Oseguera one its most wanted fugitives, with the Drug Enforcement Administration offering \$10 million for his arrest. — AFP

## UN urges Somalia elections

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council on Friday adopted a resolution extending the mandate of the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia until December, and called on Somali authorities to hold elections "without further delay." The 13-page text drafted by Britain was unanimously approved by the 15 members of the Council, diplomatic sources said. It had proven difficult to finalize due to differences in the past month between Western countries and the African members of the council, including Kenya, Niger and Tunisia, who had even forced London to postpone the vote for 15 days. — AFP

## Senegal demos called off

DAKAR: A Senegalese opposition movement has called off a demonstration planned for yesterday after earlier protests over the arrest of one of the president's rivals sparked the country's worst unrest in years. The collective known as the Movement for Defence of Democracy, or M2D, said in a statement on Friday that it was indefinitely postponing the rally after discussions with religious leaders. "Following the discussions, M2D agreed to the request to postpone the demonstration," it said without providing a new date. — AFP

## UN calls for pullout from Libya

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations Security Council called on Friday for the withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya "without further delay" in a unanimously approved declaration. It also welcomed the Libyan parliament's approval of a new unified government on Wednesday, which is set to lead the oil-rich country to December elections after a decade of conflict following the removal of dictator Muammar Gaddafi. "The Security Council calls on all parties to implement the ceasefire agreement in full and urges Member States to respect and support the full implementation of the agreement," the statement approved by all 15 council members said. — AFP

## Burmese in US offered refuge from crackdown

WASHINGTON: The US government said Friday that Myanmar citizens stranded by the violence following the country's military coup would be able to remain inside the United States under "temporary protected status." "Due to the military coup and security forces' brutal violence against civilians, the people of Burma are suffering a complex and deteriorating humanitarian crisis in many parts of the country," said Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, using Myanmar's former name.

"After a thorough review of this dire situation, I have designated Burma for temporary protected status so that Burmese nationals and habitual residents may remain temporarily in the United States."

The United States has granted TPS protection to nationals of a number of countries struck by political upheavals or natural disasters that make their return difficult. The protection is usually set for a limited period, like 12 months, but can be extended if the hardships or threats remain. DHS said the February 1 takeover by Myanmar's military has led to an economic crisis and shortages of humanitarian and medical aid. In addition, it said the people protesting the coup face arbitrary detention, intimidation and lethal violence from the military. —AFP



# Business

SUNDAY, MARCH 14, 2021

## Barrier to sell: Post-Brexit deal slashes British exports to EU

### Johnson buffeted by Brexit discontent in N Ireland

**LONDON:** The financial toll of Brexit is clear for exporters like cookware maker Neil Currie: He is buried in new paperwork, has lost orders and the cost of exporting frying pans to France has doubled.

Those are some of the new challenges that companies shipping goods ranging from lobster to pasta and perfume are now facing since Britain left the European Union. "Britain now looks a little bit toxic," said Neil Currie, managing director of Netherton Foundry, which makes traditional iron and copper cookware in Shropshire, England. The post-Brexit trade deal struck between the EU and Britain is "a barrier to sell, an additional wall", Currie told AFP. Official data on Friday confirmed the worst.

British exports to the EU collapsed by a record 41 percent in January, the first full month following Britain's official exit. The government, however, described the news as "inevitable" due to stockpiling last year, coronavirus lockdowns and "businesses adjusting to our new trading relationship". Data also revealed that the post-Brexit economy hit reverse overall in January, shrinking 2.9 percent from December also on COVID restrictions.

#### 'A lot of extra money'

Brexit was finalized on January 1 after Prime Minister Boris Johnson clinched the trade deal over Christmas, but many UK exporters complain of chronic delays and hurdles to previously seamless continental trade. Currie has lost orders from customers abroad and at one point faced uncertainty with German firms over contracts worth a combined £100,000 (\$140,000, 117,000 euros).

UK companies have in particular been hit by extra paperwork, adding substantially to their costs and delaying the movement of goods. "It's a lot of extra money," Currie said.

## US tech stocks lose tug-of-war amid inflation fears

**NEW YORK:** Wall Street closed out a volatile week mostly higher on Friday, but tech shares once again lost the battle between optimism over a stronger economy and concerns about inflation. US Treasury yields jumped again, returning to the pre-pandemic levels of February 2020, as the 10-year note rose above 1.6 percent. That is a sign of growing investor fears that the Federal Reserve will have to raise borrowing rates sooner than expected to contain inflation despite the central bank's assurances to the contrary.

The tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index recovered from the lowest point of the day, closing down 0.6 percent at 13,319.87. The benchmark Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 0.9 percent to 32,778.64, setting another record, while broad-based S&P 500 edged up 0.1 percent to 3,943.34, adding four points to the all-time high set Thursday. "There is a tug of war in the market regarding where inflation will settle," Quincy Krosby of Prudential Financial said, with traders watching how President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus package will impact the economy, as well as the infrastructure package he's pushing.

"No one is suggesting at this point that we will be due for hyperinflation," she said. But since the Fed has made it clear they will run the economy hotter, markets are now wondering, "how hot?" Tech shares are seen as most vulnerable to rising borrowing rates, and Apple and Amazon each lost 0.8 percent.

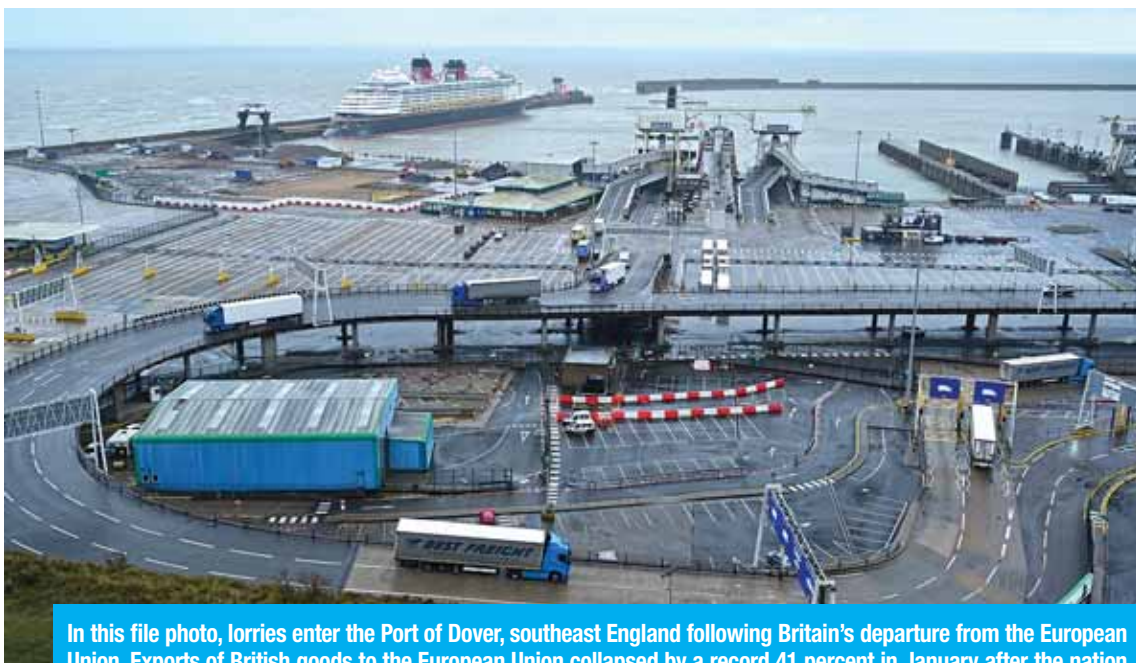
Meanwhile, US and European stocks had a mixed finish on Friday, capping a week that saw equities set new records on both sides of the Atlantic but also struggle with inflation fears.

In Europe, London's FTSE 100 gained as a weaker pound helped take the sting out of data showing Britain's economy tanked amid the latest Covid-19 lockdown, and post-Brexit exports to the EU plunged. In the eurozone, Frankfurt's DAX 30, which has streaked to fresh highs repeatedly this week, gave up gains made the previous day after the European Central Bank boosted sentiment by promising more support for the economy if needed.

The Dow and S&P 500 managed to edge to new records for the second day straight day in New York trading, but rising bond yields amid fears of oncoming inflation kept investors away from tech stocks, sending the Nasdaq down 0.6 percent at the close. "There is a tug of war in the market regarding where inflation will settle," Quincy Krosby of Prudential Financial said.

Traders are watching how US President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus package will impact the economy, as well as mulling added push from the infrastructure package he is expected to soon propose. "No one is suggesting at this point that we will be due for hyperinflation," Krosby said. But since the Federal Reserve has made it clear they will run the economy hotter, markets are now wondering, "how hot?" Asian stock markets earlier closed mostly higher.

Less than two months after taking office, Biden on Thursday put his signature on the huge rescue plan, which paves the way for a spending splurge widely seen as ramping up both domestic and global growth. The package—which includes up to \$1,400 in cash handouts, extended unemployment benefits and other aid programs—comes as the US government accelerates its vaccine drive against the coronavirus.—AFP



In this file photo, lorries enter the Port of Dover, southeast England following Britain's departure from the European Union. Exports of British goods to the European Union collapsed by a record 41 percent in January after the nation finalized its divorce from the bloc, official data showed on Friday.— AFP

"If you're a big multinational you are going to find a way, but we've got 12 people, we don't have somebody who sits there all day working out export administration." Exporting a £50 frying pan to France just a few months ago would have seen Netherton Foundry add around £8 in distribution costs. "Now, it's quite a lot more—it's £16 and possibly £20," noted Currie.

And while pre-Brexit he could send an item to

Brussels from his central England base faster than to Scotland or Northern Ireland, that is no longer the case.

#### Moving abroad?

A similar situation is found at fresh pasta-maker La Tua Pasta. Faced with extra costs, managing director Nicolas Hanson said his London-based operation is looking into opening a site in Europe.

## Australia's Cormann voted OECD head to dismay of green groups

**PARIS:** Former Australian finance minister Mathias Cormann was elected Friday as the new head of the influential Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, sources told AFP, in a choice that dismayed environmental campaigners.

The 50-year-old Belgian-born politician was chosen "by a slim majority" during a meeting of ambassadors to the OECD, which acts as a think-tank and club of democratic countries, the sources close to the organization said. Cormann served as Australia's finance minister for seven years until late 2020, a record for the country, having been first named to the job by right-wing premier and climate change skeptic Tony Abbott in 2013. He has criss-crossed Europe by plane in the last two months, where most of the OECD's members are located, promoting his candidacy and promising an agenda of "inclusive and sustainable economic growth". In a statement on Friday, Cormann said leading the organization would be a "privilege and an honor."

"It provides a great platform for international cooperation and best practice policy development, from the foundation of a shared commitment to democracy, human rights, the rule of law, market-based economic principles and a rules-based international order," he said.

This month, more than two dozen global civil society leaders took the unusual step of writing to the OECD's selection chair to criticize Cormann's record on climate change while in government.

Greenpeace on Friday expressed "deep dismay and anger" at the choice for one of the world's major multinational institutions, while the head of E3G campaign group Nick Mabey said the appointment sent a "dangerous signal". Cormann has defended his political career and promised to work to cut emissions at the OECD, telling AFP earlier this month that "action on climate change, to be effective, requires an ambitious, globally coordinated approach". The conservative church-goer, who moved from the German-speaking part of Belgium to Australia in his mid-20s, emerged as a surprise frontrunner to beat fellow contender Cecilia Malmstrom, a Swedish former EU trade commissioner. Australian Prime Minister Scott



CANBERRA: In this file photo taken on May 29, 2019 Australian Finance Minister senator Mathias Cormann signs a document during an oath-taking ceremony at Government House in Canberra. — AFP

Morrison called it "the most senior appointment of an Australian candidate to an international body for decades."

He said in a statement that Cormann's experience in Europe and Australia "will ensure he makes an outstanding contribution as leader of the OECD."

#### Past statements

Green groups have sought to highlight Cormann's skeptical statements on climate policy in the past, such as when he called Australia's emission-trading scheme "economic self-harm which does nothing to help global emissions". When students in Australia took part in a global strike for climate action, Cormann suggested they "stick to school".

During his first stint as finance minister under Abbott, the government made killing off a carbon tax a political priority, while the last election in 2019 saw the ruling Liberal party repeatedly attack its Labor rival over its pro-climate policies. "He helped lead the charge on dismantling an effective legislative and regulatory framework for bringing down emissions and reshaped Australia into a global laggard and anchor on climate action," Julie-Anne Richards from Climate Action Network Australia said in a statement.—AFP

## Senator asks Jeff Bezos to testify on union drive

**WASHINGTON:** Senator Bernie Sanders said Friday he wants Amazon founder Jeff Bezos to testify at a hearing on what the progressive lawmaker called a "union-busting" campaign at one of the e-commerce giant's facilities. Sanders said he asked the tech baron to appear at a Wednesday committee hearing to discuss the union election being held at Amazon's warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama.

The former presidential candidate said Amazon "is currently engaged in an aggressive union-busting campaign against Amazon workers in Bessemer, Alabama to stop them from collectively bargaining for better wages, benefits, and working conditions."

"But at the moment it is difficult with COVID," he said. He estimates the cost of Brexit to his company this year will be between £50,000 and £70,000. Faced with the administrative shake-up, other small British companies have simply suspended exports to the EU. For some, like lobster exporter Baron Shellfish, trading has ceased.

While the British government assures businesses that normality is resuming, manufacturing lobby group Make UK has claimed that more than one-third of its members have lost sales since the start of the year owing to Brexit. "I am going to increase my prices in France but I am not going to be able to recoup all the costs and will have to absorb half of them," said Hanson.

As for Netherton Foundry, Currie is looking into warehousing products in an EU country—and is eyeing possible sites in Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands. Prime Minister Boris Johnson faced a snub from one regional leader and criticism from another as he visited Northern Ireland, with tensions growing over its post-Brexit status.

The province's first minister Arlene Foster confronted Johnson with a call to undo "intolerable" new special trading arrangements in place since January, when the UK left the EU single market and customs union. Then her deputy Michelle O'Neill, from Irish republican party Sinn Féin, refused to join the welcoming delegation, citing Johnson's "reckless and partisan" Brexit strategy.

The UK officially left the European Union last year, and as part of the divorce in December agreed to a so-called Northern Ireland protocol imposing unique trading terms on the region. The arrangements aim to preserve the fragile peace in the territory of around two million people by preventing a hard border with EU member Ireland, a flashpoint in three decades of sectarian conflict which ended in 1998.—AFP

## Huawei listed anew as threat to US national security

**SAN FRANCISCO:** US regulators on Friday listed Huawei among Chinese telecom gear firms deemed a threat to national security, signalling that a hoped for softening of relations is not in the cards. A roster of communications companies thought to pose "an unacceptable risk" to national security included Huawei Technologies; ZTE; Hytera Communications; Hangzhou Hikvision Digital Technology, and Dahua Technology. "This list is a big step toward restoring trust in our communications networks," said Federal Communications Commission acting chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel.

"This list provides meaningful guidance that will ensure that as next-generation networks are built across the country, they do not repeat the mistakes of the past or use equipment or services that will pose a threat to US national security or the security and safety of Americans."

The five Chinese companies that provide communications equipment or services were on a roster compiled by the FCC and the Homeland Security Bureau as per US law. Huawei chief and founder Ren Zhengfei last month called for a reset with the United States under President Joe Biden, after the firm was battered by sanctions imposed by Donald Trump's administration.

In his first appearance before journalists in a year, Ren Zhengfei said his "confidence in Huawei's ability to survive has grown" despite its travails across much of the western world where it is maligned as a potential security threat. The comments came as the firm struggled under rules that have effectively banned US firms from selling it technology such as semiconductors and other critical components, citing national security concerns.—AFP

Among the witnesses called will be Jennifer Bates, an Amazon worker at the fulfillment center. Sanders said in a tweet that he "invited" Bezos "to explain to the American people why he thinks it's appropriate for him to spend a whole lot of money denying economic dignity to workers at Amazon, while he has become \$78 billion richer during the pandemic."

Amazon did not immediately respond to an inquiry on whether Bezos, who is the world's richest person, would appear at the hearing. The hearing comes amid a contentious union drive which would, if successful, result in the first US collective bargaining unit at Amazon, which employs some 800,000 people in the United States.

Celebrities and political leaders have expressed support for the union effort and President Joe Biden said last month the election should go on with "no intimidation, no coercion, no threats, no anti-union propaganda." Sanders said he was calling the hearing on the growing crisis of wealth inequality and stated that "during the pandemic, 664 billionaires in America have increased their wealth by \$1.3 trillion." —AFP



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos (left) sits with his former wife MacKenzie Bezos in Washington, DC. — AFP



## Business

# Africa set for growth with rising poverty, debt in 2021: Forecast

## 2.1% recession of pan-African economy was first in half a century

**ABIDJAN:** Africa's economy should return to growth in aggregate across the continent in 2021 after a coronavirus recession, the African Development Bank said Friday, while warning that poverty and public debt would continue to rise. The 2.1-percent contraction of the pan-African economy in 2020 was the first recession in half a century, but should give way to expansion of 3.4 percent this year, the AfDB said in the 2021 edition of its African Economic Outlook report. At 3.1 percent, the International Monetary Fund's forecast was less optimistic than the AfDB, whose mission is to fund investment in African countries and offer advice and technical assistance to development.

The development bank predicted the strongest rebound for economies like Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritius that depend on tourism, at 6.2 percent—although their GDP fell the furthest last year.

Meanwhile oil and raw materials exporters like Algeria, Nigeria, Angola and South Africa should enjoy growth around three percent, and the continent's most diversified economies like Ethiopia and Ivory Coast rise by 4.1 percent, having already suffered a softer 2020 blow. The AfDB report also highlighted that 39 million more people could slip below the extreme poverty threshold of \$1.90 per day this year, up from

an estimated 30 million last year. A total of 465 million people in Africa could be affected by extreme poverty, one-third of the continent's population, in a setback after two decades of steady reductions. Meanwhile "the pandemic shock and ensuing economic crisis have had direct implications for budgetary balances and debt burdens," the AfDB warned. Deficits roughly doubled last year, to around 8.4 percent of GDP, while the average debt-to-GDP ratio on the continent is expected to surge by between 10 and 15 percentage points, to around 70 percent.

By December, 14 of 38 countries analyzed for debt sustainability were judged "in high risk of debt distress", with 16 seen as moderate risk and just two at low risk. "Serious debt challenges might be looming, and disorderly defaults and lengthy resolutions could become a major obstacle to Africa's progress toward prosperity," AfDB president Akinwumi Adesina wrote in the report.

"We need to address Africa's debt and development finance challenges, in partnership with the international community" and with private creditors, he added. But Adesina also urged leaders to enact "bold governance reforms to eliminate all forms of leakages in public resources, improve domestic resource mobilization, and enhance transparency." — AFP



**LAGOS:** A taxicab passes a giant advertising screen showing US dollar, British pound and euro foreign currency exchange rates on a road in Lagos, Nigeria. — AFP

## US judge removes China's Xiaomi from Trump-era blacklist

**WASHINGTON:** A US judge on Friday ordered Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi temporarily removed from a government blacklist barring American investment in the company.

Six days before Donald Trump left office last year, his administration cemented its trade war legacy against Beijing with a series of announcements targeting Chinese firms including Xiaomi, state oil giant CNOOC, and social media darling TikTok. Xiaomi was one of nine firms classified by the Pentagon as "Communist Chinese military companies." But US District Judge Rudolph Contreras in Washington ruled Friday the Departments of Defense and Treasury "have not made the case that the national security interests at stake here are compelling."

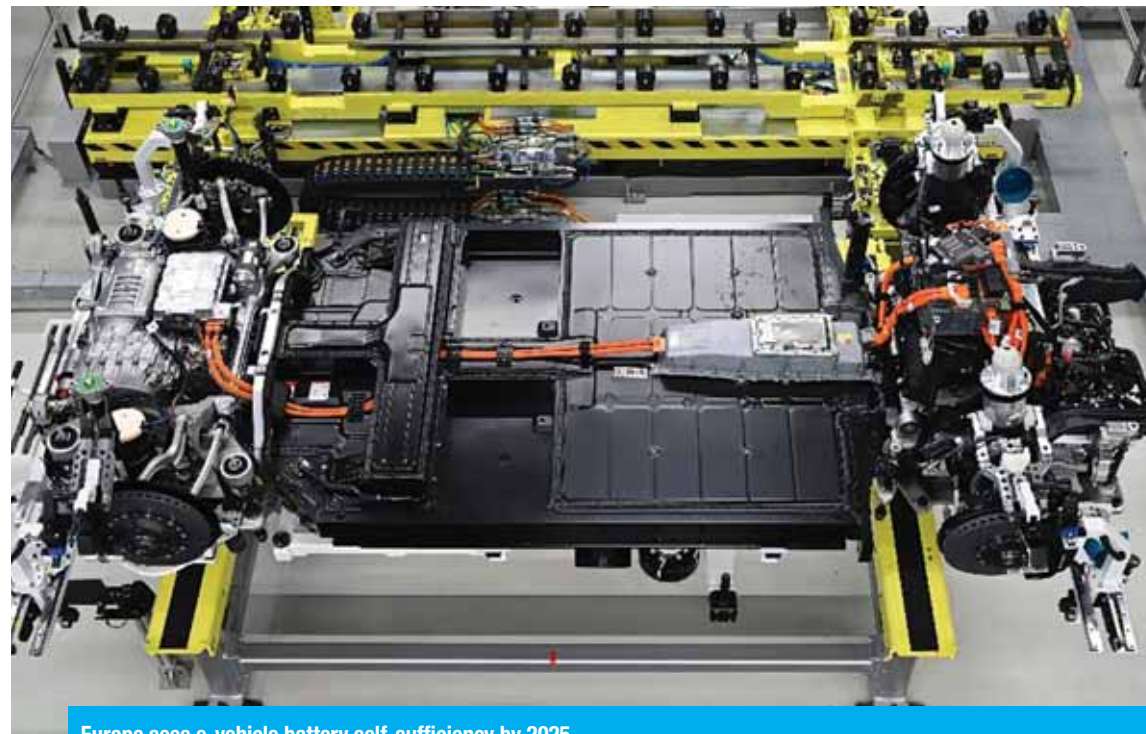
He issued a preliminary injunction removing Xiaomi from the blacklist and suspending the ban on US investors buying the company's securities. In an appeal filed in January against its blacklisting, Xiaomi—which overtook Apple last year to become the world's third-largest smartphone manufacturer—said Washington's moves were "incorrect" and had "deprived the company of legal due process."

Contreras's decision came the same day US reg-



ulators listed Huawei and ZTE among Chinese telecom gear firms deemed a threat to national security, signalling that a hoped-for softening of relations is not on the cards. Huawei chief and founder Ren Zhengfei last month called for a reset with the United States under President Joe Biden, after the firm was battered by sanctions imposed by Trump's administration. The telecoms giant has been at the center of the Sino-American rivalry in recent years, against a backdrop of a trade and technology war between the superpowers.

Washington claims Huawei has close ties to China's military and that Beijing could use its equipment for espionage—accusations the company denies. —AFP



**Europe sees e-vehicle battery self-sufficiency by 2025**

## E-vehicle battery self-sufficiency by 2025 in Europe

**PARIS:** European firms will have the capacity to supply all the lithium-ion batteries needed for the continent's automakers by 2025 as they ramp up electric vehicle output to meet strict pollution limits, EU officials said Friday. The bloc is banking on its European Battery Alliance, launched in 2017, to reduce its reliance on batteries and other technologies imported from the US or Asia while pursuing its Green Deal goal of carbon neutrality by 2050.

"We expect that we will be able to cover all the industrial needs of our car manufacturers when it comes to batteries already by 2025," EU Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic said at a press conference broadcast from Brussels. "By that time we expect giga-factories in Europe will produce between seven to eight million batteries... so even more than what are the current plans for manufacturers of EVs by that time," he said.

Sefcovic spoke alongside Thierry Breton, the EU's internal markets commissioner, after talks on the battery alliance with German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier and French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire.

Le Maire acknowledged that meeting the goal

would require massive training programs to produce enough skilled workers for Europe to catch up with rival battery makers. "Our goal is to train and recon-vert 800,000 workers between now and 2025 across the entire value chain for electric vehicles," he said by video link from Paris.

"Already we are investing 12 billion euros (\$24 billion) in total in 70 projects in 12 member states," he added, to ensure battery autonomy—including by developing independent supplies of key raw materials such as lithium, nickel and graphite. "Europe must invest, invest, invest—this is how it will remain at the level of China the United States," he said.

By next year, the Commission also hopes to adopt strict new environmental standards for batteries, including on material recycling, to fend off imports of cheaper and less sustainable imports that would undermine the EU's efforts. "I'm sure batteries in Europe will be the greenest and most sustainable, and their performance will be the best in the world," Sefcovic said.

The alliance, sometimes dubbed the "Airbus for batteries," involves dozens of companies including automakers and energy groups that are building production capacity while also vying to create next-generation power sources. Sefcovic said he would work with the European Investment Bank to leverage additional private money to come up with an additional 50 billion euros to meet the ambitious 2025 goals. In April, he said, the Commission and private firms will sign an accord to finance "cutting edge" research to the tune of some 900 million euros. — AFP

## Canada jobs market bounces back, jobless rate falls

**OTTAWA:** Canada added a net 259,000 jobs in February, blowing past forecasts as the unemployment rate fell 1.2 percentage points to 8.2 percent—its lowest rate since March 2020, the national statistical agency said Friday. The rebound, after two months of falling job numbers, coincided with a gradual lifting of pandemic restrictions as COVID-19 infections trended lower.

But employment was still down about 600,000 jobs from pre-pandemic levels, said Statistics Canada. "The quick turnaround is reminiscent of the first wave (of COVID-19 illnesses) when employment rebounded far faster than expected as the economy began reopening," said CIBC analyst Royce Mendes. Mendes suggested it could lead Canada's central bank to soon start tapering off its quantitative easing program—bond purchases to boost money supplies, end-

ing and investment. Several Canadian provinces have gradually lifted lockdowns ordered by public health authorities in December, allowing many businesses, cultural and recreational facilities, as well as restaurants to reopen. But several parts of the economy continue to struggle.

There were gains in both part-time (+171,000) and full-time (+88,000) jobs; the number of self-employed workers was unchanged for a second consecutive month; and the private sector added 226,000 new employees. In February, total hours worked increased by 1.4 percent, driven mostly by gains in wholesale and retail trade. More people also returned to their traditional workplaces, leaving their home offices set up during the pandemic, as schools and offices reopened.

Earlier this week, the Bank of Canada revised its economic forecast, saying it expected growth in the first quarter to be positive rather than negative as it had predicted in January. That followed a strong push in the fourth quarter of 2020 when the economy grew 9.6 percent. That surge, however, wasn't enough to lift Canada's pandemic-hit economy out of recession. For the year 2020, the economy contracted 5.4 percent—its worst plunge on record. —AFP

### Kuwait Telecommunications Company (stc)

Kuwait Shareholding Company (Public)

#### Invitation to Attend the Ordinary General Assembly Meeting

The Board of Directors of Kuwait Telecommunications Company is pleased to invite you to attend the ordinary general assembly meeting to be held on Monday 29 March 2021 at 10:30 AM at **stc** headquarters located in Salmiya – Olympia Mall, West Tower. All our valued shareholders shall attend and cast their vote online only due to the current health precautionary measures and procedures. The details of the agenda for the meeting are given below:

<b>First</b>	Discuss the Board of Directors' report on the company's activity, financial position and financial results for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
<b>Second</b>	Discuss the external auditor's report on the company's results of the financial statements, in addition to approving the distributable net profit for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
<b>Third</b>	Present and approve the Sharia Supervisory Authority report for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
<b>Fourth</b>	Read out the Corporate Governance Report, Audit Committee Report as well as the Board members' and the Executive Management's Remuneration, Bonuses, Salaries and Benefits Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
<b>Fifth</b>	Review any breaches discovered by the regulatory bodies and any sanctions issued as a result of such breaches that has led to impose (financial and non-financial) penalties against the company (if any) for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
<b>Sixth</b>	Review and approve the financial statements as well as profit and loss calculations for the financial year ended on 31 December 2020.
<b>Seventh</b>	Deduct 10% which equals to KD 3,399,839 (Three Million, Three Hundred Ninety Nine Thousand, and Eight Hundred Thirty Nine Kuwaiti Dinars) from the net profits of the financial year ended 31 December 2020 for the statutory reserve. Such allocation for the statutory reserve shall be stopped as of 2021.
<b>Eighth</b>	Discuss the Board's proposal of deducting 10% which equals to KD 3,399,839 (Three Million, Three Hundred Ninety Nine Thousand, and Eight Hundred Thirty Nine Kuwaiti Dinars) from the net profits of the financial year ended 31 December 2020, for the voluntary reserve.
<b>Ninth</b>	Discuss the Board's recommendation of distributing cash dividends of 60% of the company's total capital for the financial year ended 31 December 2020, representing 60 fils per share, for the respective shareholders listed in the company's registries at the end of the record date scheduled on Wednesday 14 April 2021. The cash dividends shall be distributed for the eligible shareholders as of Wednesday dated 21 April 2021 and the Board shall be authorized to change the pre-determined dates specified in the eligibility table if it should be changed, if necessary.
<b>Tenth</b>	Discuss the Board of Directors' remunerations which amounted to KD 152,061 (One Hundred Fifty Two Thousand, and Sixty One Kuwaiti Dinars) for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
<b>Eleventh</b>	Authorize the Board of Directors to buy or sell company's shares by no more than 10% of its total number of shares outstanding, as per the law 7 of the year 2010 and its implementing regulation and their amendments.
<b>Twelfth</b>	Review the transactions in respect of stakeholders that have been made within the financial year ended 31 December 2020, and allow the company to deal with the respective stakeholders during the financial year ending 31 December 2021.
<b>Thirteenth</b>	Discuss the disclaim of the members of the Board of Directors and discharge them from all legal and financial obligations for the financial year ended 31 December 2020.
<b>Fourteenth</b>	Appoint or re-appoint the company's external auditor from the list of auditors certified by Capital Markets Authority (CMA), taking into consideration their obligatory execution period for the financial year ended 31 December 2020, and authorize the Board of Directors to decide their fees.
<b>Fifteenth</b>	Appoint or re-appoint the Members of the Sharia authority for the financial year ended 31 December 2020 and authorize the Board of Directors to decide their fees.
<b>Sixteenth</b>	Elect the members of the Board of Directors for three years.

Shareholders wishing to attend the meeting are required to register their names using the electronic voting service eAGM by filling up the intended form available on the website of the Kuwait Clearing Company ([www.maqasa.com](http://www.maqasa.com)) in addition to providing the required documents in order to obtain the username and password which shall authorize them to attend and vote electronically on the Agenda items of the general assembly. Participation and voting will be available from Sunday 21 March 2021 until 08:00 AM of the day of the ordinary general assembly meeting scheduled on Monday 29 March 2021, as per the Policies and Procedures Guidelines published on Kuwait Clearing Company's website with regards to convening the general assemblies through the electronic systems.

**stc**

Board of Directors



## Business

# China denies plan for \$1bn fine on Alibaba, but tech firms take a blow

## CEO of China's Ant Group steps down

**BEIJING:** China denied it was planning to hit e-commerce giant Alibaba with a record fine of almost \$1 billion for allegedly flouting monopoly rules, as authorities turned up the pressure on the country's vast technology sector. Alibaba, China's largest online shopping portal, has been in the crosshairs of authorities in recent months over concerns of its reach into the daily finances of ordinary Chinese people. The market's regulator denied it was planning to fine the company almost \$1 billion for anti-competitive behavior, as reported by the Wall Street Journal, who cited unnamed sources "familiar" with the matter.

However, on Friday it hit 12 other tech firms-including giants Tencent, Baidu and ByteDance-with symbolic fines for allegedly flouting monopoly rules. Tencent was fined \$77,000 for its 2018 investment in online education app Yuanfudao without seeking prior government approval for the deal, the State Administration for Market Regulation said in a statement Friday.

Search giant Baidu has to pay the same amount for acquiring consumer electronics maker Ainemo under the radar in 2014. Beijing has warned it will take an increasingly ruthless approach to antitrust questions. Premier Li Keqiang last week said the government would "strengthen anti-monopoly laws" and "prevent the disorderly expansion of capital".

Analysts said Friday's blizzard of fines send a strong signal of the Communist Party's dominion over the country's tech landscape. "These penalties send a message: the economy and everything within it must comply with the state's directive," Alex Capri, a senior fellow at the National University of Singapore's business school, said. Capri said heavy-handed regulations will rein in the ability of tech firms to gobble up market share and influence with unchecked acquisitions.

### Alibaba's woes

The ongoing squeeze on Alibaba - one of China's most influential companies - is the latest sign that the leadership is ready to deflate the ambitions of big tech firms in a runaway internet sector. The Wall Street Journal reported Thursday that officials are considering levying a hefty penalty against the company that could top the \$975 million paid by US chipmaker Qualcomm in 2015 - the biggest known fine for anticompetitive practices in China.

But the regulator in charge of the case told AFP there was no truth to the story. "If it's not there (on our website), it's not (true)," a spokeswoman for the State Administration for Market Regulation said.

Still, the company's legal troubles linger. Problems began after comments in October by billionaire founder



The ongoing squeeze on Alibaba - one of China's most influential companies - is the latest sign that the leadership is ready to deflate the ambitions of big tech firms in a runaway internet sector. — AFP

Jack Ma in which he laid into China's convoluted regulatory system. In November, financial regulators pulled the plug on the record \$35 billion Hong Kong-Shanghai initial public offering of Alibaba's online payment subsidiary Ant Group.

Regulators have already told Ant Group to change its business model and hack back its lending, insurance and wealth management services. Alibaba saw profits jump 52 percent to \$12.2 billion over the last three months of 2020, despite the official crackdown.

Meanwhile, the chief executive of Chinese fintech giant Ant Group has stepped down for "personal reasons", a spokesperson from the Alibaba-affiliated online payment provider said Friday, amid growing regulatory scrutiny. Simon Hu has been replaced as CEO by Ant Group executive Eric Jing, according to the company's updated website, just months after Chinese authorities pulled the plug on the company's colossal Hong Kong IPO. "The Ant Group Board of Directors has accepted Mr. Simon Hu's resignation request, due to personal reasons," Ant's spokesperson said in a statement.

Tech tycoon Jack Ma's Alibaba, China's largest online shopping portal, has been in the crosshairs of authorities in recent months over concerns of its reach into the daily finances of ordinary Chinese people. Its online payment subsidiary Ant Group made its name via its main product Alipay, the online payments platform and super-app that is now deeply embedded in China's economy. — AFP

## Eid and Al-Saidi join NBK Board of Directors

**KUWAIT:** Dr Robert Maroun Eid and Dr Nasser Al-Saidi were elected by National Bank of Kuwait's Annual General Assembly (AGM) as independent members for the remainder of the membership term of the current session of the Board. The appointment of the new independent board members is part of the bank's compliance with corporate governance regulations issued by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and its amendments introduced to the formation of boards of directors and sub-committees.

Dr Eid and Dr Al-Saidi have outstanding academic and professional expertise based on years of experience in leading regional and international financial institutions.

### Dr Robert Eid

Dr Eid has over 40 years' experience in the financial industry. He held numerous positions at the National Bank of Kuwait and the Arab National Bank (ANB) KSA, as well as other financial institutions. He held many executive positions in a number of leading financial institutions including Saudi Home Loans Company, Arab National Investment Company, MetLife AIG & ANB Cooperative Insurance Company.

He served as Managing Director and CEO of Arab National Bank - KSA from 2005 to 2021, and as Managing Director and CEO of National Bank of Kuwait (International) plc - London from 1995 to 2005.

Dr Eid holds a PhD degree in Money and Banking from the Sorbonne University in Paris, having read Economics at the American University of Beirut. Dr Eid won the "World Finance" award of "Best Banker in the Middle East" for the year 2016.

### Dr Nasser Al-Saidi

Dr Al-Saidi has vast experience in macroeconomics, banking, and investments. He held many executive positions at various financial institutions in several Arab countries and in Europe. He worked as a professor of economics at the University of Chicago and the Graduate Institute in Geneva, Switzerland. He was also a



Robert Maroun Eid



Nasser Al-Saidi

lecturer at the American University of Beirut and Saint Joseph University in Lebanon. Throughout his tenure, Dr Saidi held several key positions. He served as the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry in Lebanon from 1998 to 2000 and the First Vice Governor of Banque du Liban (Central Bank of Lebanon) from 1993 to 2003.

He also was a Member of UN Committee for Development Policy (UNCDP) from 2005 to 2006, and the Chief Advisor to the Minister of Finance - UAE from 2005 to 2006 and the Chief Economists & Strategist and Head of External Relations for Dubai International Financial Center (DIFC) from 2006 to 2012. He also served as the Executive Director of the Hawkamah Institute for Corporate Governance and Mudara Institute of Directors from 2006 to 2012.

Since 2013, Dr Al-Saidi has served as a member of the advisory board of the Official Financial and Monetary Institutions Forum (OFMIF). He has also been a member of the Regional Advisory Group of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) since 2009.

Al-Saidi holds a PhD and a master's degree from the University of Rochester in USA. He also obtained a master's degree in economics from the University of London in the UK. NBK is committed to supporting the best governance practices through setting forth a clear and sound Corporate Governance framework aimed at enhancing accountability and the evaluation processes, including the oversight over the responsibilities of members of the Board of Directors and its sub-committees in line with the best international practices to ensure consistency with the highest possible standard for ethical behavior across the bank and its subsidiaries. NBK also continuously strives to adhere to the highest levels of transparency and disclosure, in addition to its diligent efforts to achieve sustainability.

## Ooredoo Group MD recognized by Forbes Middle East

**DOHA:** Ooredoo Group has announced its Managing Director Aziz Aluthman Fakhroo, has been recognized as one of the top CEOs in the Middle East region. Respected business journal Forbes Middle East published its list of the Top CEOs in the Middle East on Monday 8 March 2021, with Mr. Aluthman featuring in the top 50.



Aziz Aluthman Fakhroo

The rankings recognize the region's most pioneering, successful leaders across a range of industries including telecommunications. Aluthman has been Managing Director of Ooredoo Group since November 2020, and a Board member of the Group since 2011. He is currently also a Senior Adviser to the Qatar Minister of Finance, having served as Deputy Undersecretary for Budget, Treasury and Financial

affairs at the Ministry of Finance from 2014 until 2020, and was the Co-head of Mergers and Acquisitions at Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) from 2007 until 2014.

He holds a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from ESLSA University and has extensive experience in senior roles across various fields. Aluthman said: "I am delighted and proud to be recognized amongst my peers in the region by such a respected publication. We have some exceptional talent here in the Middle East, and some formidable business leaders, and to have my achievements and abilities considered worthy of such an accolade is praise indeed. It gives me great pleasure to lead Ooredoo Group under our Chairman, Sheikh Faisal Bin Thani Al-Thani, and I look forward to continuing this leadership as we take our business to the next level in 2021 and beyond."

## KIB nabs 'Kuwait Deal of Year 2020' award from IFN

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently added another milestone to its already impressive track record of prestigious awards and honors, by nabbing the 'IFN Kuwait Deal of the Year 2020' award at national level by Islamic Finance News (IFN). The award came in recognition of the Bank's issuance of \$300 million Tier 2 10-Year non-call 5-year Sukuk.

KIB was selected as an award recipient by the IFN judging panel, which comprises a group of experts from non-competing organizations who evaluated financing deals that took place in 2020. The judging panel assessed the financing deal based on several key criteria, including deal impact, significance and complexity as well as time to market, challenges overcome, deal uniqueness and issuer profile among others.

After evaluating the best financing deals that took place in 2020, the panel unanimously agreed that KIB is committed to developing

investment banking in the regional market through its first-of-its-kind participation in such a deal, which consolidated the Bank's position in the regional debt markets and led to a positive impact on the future of the Islamic capital markets in Kuwait. The panel also noted the attractive pricing achieved by the deal

and the high demand by investors as the instrument was priced at a profit rate of 2.375 percent per annum, with a total participation reaching approximately 9 times at \$2.7 billion.

Commenting on this achievement, Jamal Al-Barrak, General Manager of the Investment Department at the Bank, said: "Despite the difficulties brought about by the pandemic, KIB concluded the deal successfully which was attributed to the focused approach taken by the Banks' senior management to accelerate financial diversification of its funding sources."

Al-Barrak further added: "We are delighted that KIB's Sukuk issuance won the 'Deal of the Year 2020' award, given that this issuance is the first-ever Tier 2 Sukuk publicly issued to international investors out of Kuwait. Moreover, the Bank marked another significant milestone by receiving the highest rated T2 Sukuk at "A-" in Kuwait and the GCC by Fitch Ratings. Fitch has also assigned A+/'F1' long- and short-term ratings, which strengthened the Bank's standing among international investors and reflected the robustness of Kuwait's banking sector."

Concluding his statement, Al-Barrak noted that despite the difficult economic conditions faced during 2020 due to global pandemic, KIB has distinguished itself among other Kuwaiti banks by actively participating in high-quality syndications both locally and region wide."

It serves to note that Islamic Finance News (IFN) is a subsidiary of REDmoney Group, which was established in 2004 to provide media services in global markets including emerging Islamic economies, the Middle East and developed regions of Europe and the Americas. IFN honors the best in the Islamic financial industry and publishes the most important news of Islamic banking in the world. With a world-wide readership, IFN provides exclusive and comprehensive coverage of the global Islamic financial markets and leverages an unrivalled network of connections to provide unmatched insight into global sharia-compliant markets.



## Burgan Bank opens new branch in Burj Jasim

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank announced the opening of its new branch in Burj Jasim as part of its plan to reach and provide its wide range of products and services to its customers and expand and increase its network of branches to serve both residential and commercial areas in all parts of Kuwait.

The new branch is equipped with state-of-the-art technology to accommodate the needs of all segments including customers with special needs. The branch operates daily from 9:00am until 1:00pm. Nasser Al-Qaisi - Chief Retail Banking Officer of Burgan Bank said: "Burgan Bank strives to be a leading financial services provider that ensures convenient branch sites with closer proximity to its customers everywhere. The establishment of the new branch falls in line with our customer-focused growth and expansion strategy to cater to the demands of our valued customers across all locations of Kuwait."

## Gulf Bank to announce 20 winners of Al-Danah monthly draws tomorrow

**KUWAIT:** Tomorrow, Gulf Bank will be holding two draws, as to thereby announce the Al-Danah monthly draw winners for both January and February of this year. The bank is set to announce a total of 20 lucky Al-Danah account winners, who will each receive cash prizes of KD 1,000. Gulf Bank has also announced that the last chance to participate in this year's semi-annual Al-Danah account draw is Wednesday, March 31 for the chance to win a millionaire prize of KD 1,000,000.

Gulf Bank's General Manager of Consumer Banking, Mohammed Al-Qattan, commented: "Gulf Bank recently announced its new draw scheme for the Al-Danah account, adding yet another KD 1 million as a semi-annual prize, in addition to the grand annual prize of KD 1.5 million. In addition to the chance to become one of our two millionaires of the year, Al-Danah account holders are also eligible to enter the monthly draws, which we are excited to be starting tomorrow. We are wishing all our Al-Danah clients the best of luck tomorrow! I would also like to remind all Gulf Bank customers of this opportunity, and to encourage everyone to participate by opening and depositing into an Al-Danah account online through the Gulf Bank app, or by visiting one of our many branches throughout the country."

The Al-Danah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and with many advantages for account holders. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 1,500,000.



Mohammed Al-Qattan



# CLINIC PAGE



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## Lifestyle | Features

## French Oscars turn political over virus shutdown

There was a fiercely political air at France's annual celebration of cinema, Les Césars, on Friday as frustrations were unleashed over the months-long shutdown of theatres. The country has seen mounting protests in recent days over the closure of cultural sites, with several theatres occupied by activists and students. That frustration was center stage at Friday's awards, with actress Corinne Masiero stripping naked with the words "No culture, no future" written across her front as she presented the costume award.

Others used the stage to confront the government over its decision to keep cinemas shut since October, even as most other businesses have reopened. "My children can go to Zara but not the cinema... it's incomprehensible," said Stephane Demoustier as he picked up the Cesar for best screenplay for "The Girl With a Bracelet".

The mood was set from the opening monologue, as mistress of ceremonies Marina Fois launched a scathing attack on Culture Minister Roselyne Bachelot. "The minister hasn't done nothing... Madame Bachelot, you released a book with your recipe for pasta and gorgonzola," the actress joked, before striking a sad note to conclude: "What we miss is what unites us, the emotions that we experience together."

Also hanging heavy over the ceremony was the memory of last year's disastrous event, in which the decision to award veteran Polish director Roman



French Tunisian actor Sami Bouajila poses with the Best Actor award for "Un fils" (A Son).

Polanski-accused of multiple sexual assaults and the statutory rape of a 13-year-old girl - led to stars walking out and police teargassing protesters outside. The entire Cesar academy board resigned in the build-up to the 2020 ceremony due to the uproar over Polanski's nominations for his film "An Officer and a Spy", which many saw as proof of the French industry's failure to respond to the #MeToo movement.

**'Played fairly'**  
This year's first awards signaled that



French actress Laure Calamy poses with the trophy after winning the Best Actress award for "Antoinette dans les Cévennes" (My Donkey, My Lover and I).

the academy was keen to embrace calls for greater ethnic diversity, with the most promising actor and actress awards going to Jean-Pascal Zadi and Fathia Youssouf. Zadi's film, "Tout simplement noir", plays on racist clichés about black people in France, while 14-year-old Youssouf won for her part in the controversial Netflix film "Mignonnes" about teenage girls caught between the pressures of Senegalese society and social media.

"The rules of the game are changing, not so that the game stops, but so that it



French film producer Sidonie Dumas accepts the Best Feature Film award on behalf of French actor and film director Albert Dupontel for the movie "Adieu les cons" (Bye Bye Morons) next to French film producer Catherine Bozorgan (left) and Belgian actress Virginie Efira (right) during the 46th edition of the Cesar Film Awards ceremony at The Olympia concert venue in Paris on Friday. — AFP photos

can be played fairly this time," said host Roschdy Zem at the start of the evening. But the big winner on the night was "Bye Bye Morons", a comedy drama about a seriously ill woman searching for her long-lost child, which took home seven awards including best film and best director for Albert Dupontel.

Elsewhere, the foreign film award went to Danish cult favorite Thomas Vinterberg for "Another Round" starring Mads Mikkelsen as a binge-drinking high school teacher. There were no major controversies to match Polanski's inclusion

last year, though some noted that much more work was needed on equality given the presence of only one woman in each of the best film and best director categories. Much of the drama this year has been behind the scenes, as the academy scrambled to rebuild itself and its reputation with a new board under Veronique Cayla, former head of cultural channel Arte, and director Eric Toledano. — AFP



This file picture shows Dutch Lou Ottens - the inventor of the cassette tape - posing during a photo session in Eindhoven on Jan 23, 2013. — AFP

## Father of the cassette tape dies at 94

Tributes rolled in Friday after Dutch engineer Lou Ottens, credited with inventing the audio cassette tape and helping create the compact disc, died at the age of 94. Created by Ottens while working for electrical giant Philips, cassettes made music truly portable for the first time and allowed a generation of music fans to make mix-tapes of their favorite songs.

Versatile if infuriatingly easy to unspool, more than 100 billion cassette tapes were produced worldwide in their heyday from the 1960s to the 1980s and have even enjoyed a recent retro resurgence. "It saddened all of us to hear about Lou Ottens' passing," Olga Coolen, director of the Philips Museum in Eindhoven, said in a statement supplied to AFP. "Lou was an extraordinary man who loved technology, even as his inventions had humble beginnings." He died on March 6 in the village of Duizel near the Belgian border, Philips said.

Born in 1926 in the Dutch city of Bellingwolde, Ottens showed his interest in technology at a young age during the occupation of the Netherlands by Nazi Germany in World War II. He built a radio to receive the "free Dutch" Radio Oranje with a special antenna that he called the "Germanenfilter" because it could avoid Nazi jammers, Dutch newspaper NRC reported. Ottens joined Philips after studying engineering at university where he and his team developed the world's first portable tape recorder, according to Philips. But he became frustrated with the bulky reel-to-reel system that needed manual winding and so invented the cassette in 1962. "The cassette tape was invented out of irritation about the existing tape recorder, it's that simple," Ottens was quoted as saying by NRC in one interview.

The technology that made the portable cassette player possible and filled millions of teenage bedrooms with music started in the humblest of ways, said Coolen. "During the development of the cassette tape, in the early 1960s, (Ottens) had a wooden block made that fit exactly in his coat pocket," she added. "This was how big the first compact cassette was to be, making it a lot handier than the bulky tape recorders in use at the time." — AFP

## Music world to honor its best at toned down Grammys

With a Black Lives Matter protest song and one of the year's hottest hits, Beyonce will strive today to end her streak of snubs at the Grammys, as the music world attempts to turn the page on a devastating 2020. The normally glitzy gala will be toned down, like all major awards shows, to a primarily virtual affair, with a mix of live and pre-taped performances in compliance with restrictions of the coronavirus era, which left the industry flailing and forced the ceremony to be pushed back. The 63rd annual Grammys falls nearly a year to the day after venues big and small were forced to close, as COVID-19 infections flared across the United States. Ahead of today's show, Beyonce - whose repeated losses in the top categories have stirred heated controversy - leads the pack with nine nods, followed by Taylor Swift, Dua Lipa and Roddy Ricch with six each.

Beyonce is the most nominated female artist ever with 79, tied with Paul McCartney and just one behind the duo with the most nods: her husband, Jay-Z, and Quincy Jones, who each have 80. Her sweeping "Black Parade" - released in June amid explosive nationwide anti-racism protests after another spate of deadly police violence targeting African Americans - is up for Record and Song of the Year honors. Many critics nevertheless favor the chances of Lipa, who took an ultimately successful risk in dropping a sparkly disco ball of a dance album just as the pandemic took hold.

## Hot girls and women who rock

Onetime Grammy darling Swift bagged a handful of nominations for releasing the surprise cottagecore quarantine album "folklore," which earned the pop shapeshifter commercial and critical acclaim. Rapper Ricch - who won a trophy last year for his collaboration with the late artist Nipsey Hussle - has six chances at Grammys gold, including for Song of the Year, which honors songwriting, for his hit "The Box." Bluesy rocker Brittany Howard - known for fronting the band Alabama Shakes - seized the spotlight on her own with her first solo album "Jaime," which earned five nominations. She is among the top contenders in the rock categories, which for the first time are almost all dominated by women. Last year's big winner Billie Eilish could strike gold again, with Post Malone, Justin Bieber and rapper DaBaby all also in the mix. And "hot girl summer" ruler Megan Thee Stallion is likely to slay, with four nominations including Record of the Year - a collaboration that helped Queen Bey jump to the front of the pack. Also eyeing Best New Artist is Phoebe Bridgers, the Californian indie artist who is one of the women leading the charge in the rock categories. Fiona Apple - whose album "Fetch The Bolt Cutters" was hailed by critics - is also leading that charge, after many years when women were sidelined by the Recording Academy's voters. In addition to Beyonce's Black power anthem, Lil Baby's "The Bigger Picture" - released during the summer's Black Lives Matter protests - is twice-nominated. — AFP



In this file photo taken on June 3, 2019, CFDA Fashion Icon Award recipient US singer Jennifer Lopez and fiance former baseball pro Alex Rodriguez arrive for the 2019 CFDA fashion awards at the Brooklyn Museum in New York City. — AFP

## Coin and stamp could reach \$15m each at US auction

A single gold coin and a one-cent stamp could be sold for up to \$15 million each at auction in June, after Sotheby's announced on Thursday the sale of rare treasures set to break new records. The auction house described the 1933 Double Eagle as the "world's most famous and storied coin." It set a world record when it last sold in 2002, and is the only example legally sanctioned by the United States for private ownership.

The British Guiana One-Cent Magenta stamp, dubbed the "world's most famous and valuable stamp", is the sole-surviving item of its type. Along with Inverted Jenny Plate Block stamps valued at \$5-7 million, the three lots are from the collection of fashion designer Stuart Weitzman, who said proceedings from the sale would go to charity. Sotheby's expert Richard Austin said that "offering all three one-of-a-kind treasures together in the same sale is a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence."

## Mystery buyer of \$69m digital artwork known as 'Metakovan'

The buyer of a landmark work by the digital artist Beeple, which sold for \$69.3 million, is a leading collector of new technologies who operates under the pseudonym Metakovan, the auction house Christie's announced Friday. The sale of "Everydays: the First 5,000 Days", a virtual mosaic created by Mike Winkelmann - the US artist's real name - caused upheaval on the art market, where digital art was still a niche just six months ago.

Only two artists have achieved a higher price during their lifetimes in the history of the arts, the British painter David Hockney and the US visual artist Jeff Koons. The purchaser of the digital collage, Metakovan, is one of the oldest investors in "NFT", or "Non-Fungible Tokens", which are virtual objects like "Everydays," whose authenticity and traceability are deemed to be inviolable.

## J-Lo, A-Rod split

Singer Jennifer Lopez and former New York Yankees baseball star Alex Rodriguez have called off their engagement, US media reported on Friday. Lopez, 51, and Rodriguez, 45, had been a couple for nearly four years and had just last year bought a \$40 million home in Miami. The pair have not confirmed the break up reported by the New York Post's Page Six and TMZ.

Lopez was in the Dominican Republic filming a movie and posted

Thursday on social media saying "Find a good reason to laugh today". Rodriguez, for his part, posted a picture of himself aboard a boat in Florida. While the news caught many fans by surprise, the split had apparently been in the works for a while. "This has been a long time coming," a source told People magazine. "They are tied in their business worlds so it's not a cut and dry break up. It's taken a while for them to even think about untangling it all." — AFP



A Sotheby's employee holds a 1933 Double Eagle Gold Coin during the "Three Treasures - Collected by Stuart Weitzman", a dedicated live auction of three treasures from the personal collection of the fashion designer and collector at Sotheby's on March 11, 2021 in New York City. — AFP photos

The 1933 Double Eagles were the last American gold coins struck, but were never legally issued as President Franklin Roosevelt took the country off the gold standard. Weitzman bought the coin at Sotheby's in 2002 for \$7.59 million. The British Guiana One-Cent Magenta has established a record price each of the four times it has sold at auction, last selling to Weitzman in 2014 for \$9.48 million, nearly one billion times its original face value. The stamp's story dates back to 1855 when a shortage of the imported stamps threatened to disrupt the postal service in British Guiana, and the postmaster turned to the printers of the local newspaper to commission a limited supply. The sole-surviving example of the one-cent magenta was first rediscovered



The iconic 24-Cent inverted Jenny Plate Block stamp is on display at Sotheby's.

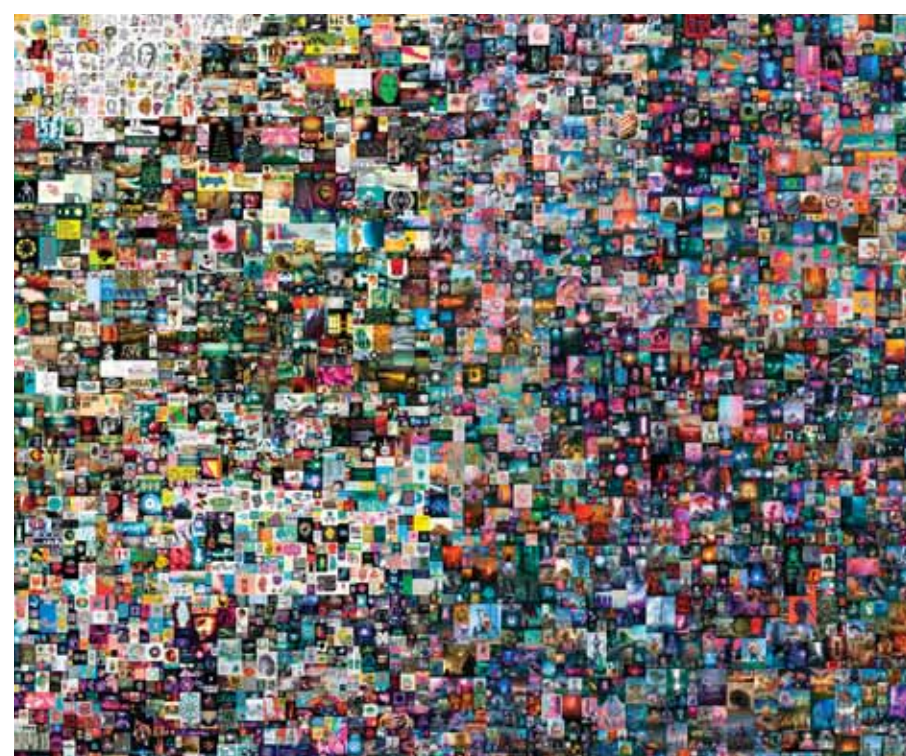


The British Guiana One-Cent Magenta stamp is seen on display at Sotheby's.

in 1873 when a 12-year-old boy found it among some family papers. The 1918 24-Cent Inverted Jenny Plate Block is from a single sheet of 100 stamps with the biplanes appearing upside-down due to a printing error. — AFP

"NFTs" are based on so-called "blockchain" technology, which is also used by cryptocurrencies like bitcoin. In 2017, together with his partner, who goes by the pseudonym Twobadour and whose

identity is also a closely guarded secret, Metakovan created Metapurse, the main investment fund in "NFT" virtual objects, of which he is the main financier. — AFP



This undated handout image obtained March 10, 2021 courtesy of Christie's shows a digital art collage by Beeple in New York. — AFP



## Lifestyle | Features

## VAST 'INDIAN LAND' SIGN DRAWS VISITORS TO DESERT X ART FESTIVAL



US artist Nicholas Galanin's piece "Never Forget" is on display during the media preview day of the Desert X exhibit in the Coachella Valley near Palm Springs, California, on March 11, 2021. —AFP photos

The giant, white letters standing astride a California mountainscape look a lot like the Hollywood sign, but their message could hardly be more different - this is "INDIAN LAND". The monumental work is part of Desert X, which Friday became one of the first large-scale art festivals to reopen in the pandemic, welcoming visitors to outdoor installations scattered across 65 km of the Coachella Valley.

Indigenous Alaskan artist Nicholas Galanin placed his project "Never Forget" at the entrance to Palm Springs - a playground getaway long favored by movie stars - as a reminder of Hollywood's role in whitewashing US culture. The 45-foot-high structure is identical in scale and material to the Los Angeles landmark, which originally spelled "Hollywoodland" and was a 1923 "real-estate advertisement for white-only communities," he told AFP at Thursday's preview.

"The iconography of Hollywood, of the sign, the history of indigenous misrepresentation in media and movies plays a large role in the erasure of our communities," said Galanin. "Even the term 'Indian'... was specific to indigenous people in America's colonial experiences of mistitling and of removing our own place names." Galanin's work directs visitors to a GoFundMe page aiming to raise \$300,000 to restore Native American ownership of a plot of land in the mountains behind the sign, part of a broader "LandBack" movement.

But even its presence in this patch of desert is remarkable at a time when few art projects are able to open, with museums in southern California still closed due to COVID-19. Desert X co-curator Cesar Garcia-Alvarez said forging ahead was a "practical decision" to support artists in "a year where every-

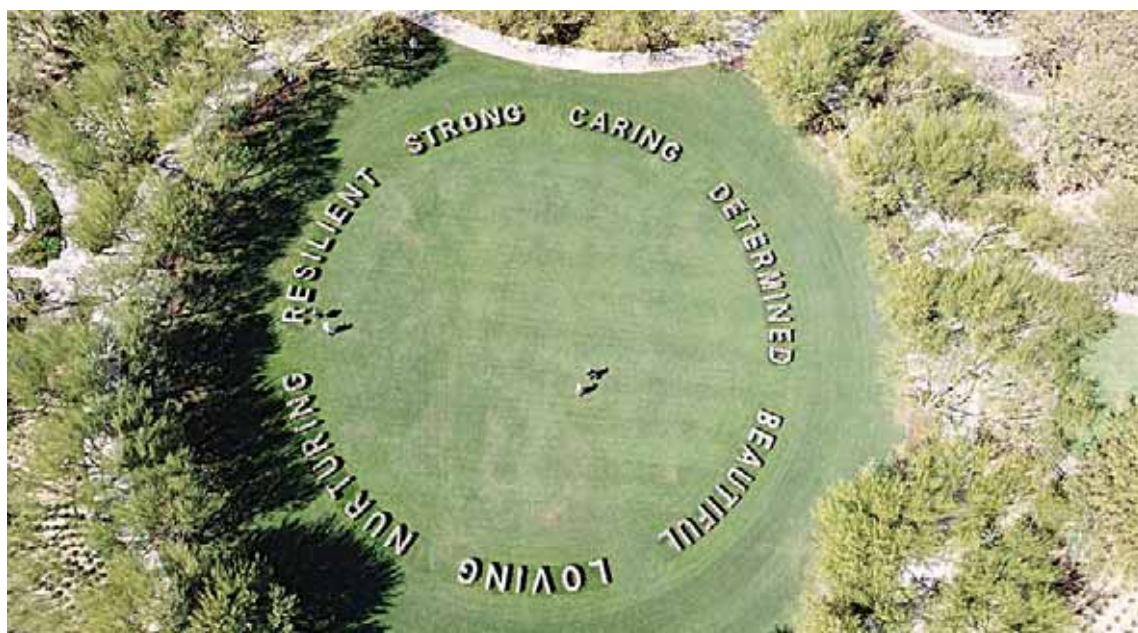


"The Wishing Well" art installation by artist Serge Attukwei Clottey from Ghana is seen on the opening day of the Desert X exhibit on Friday.

thing got canceled," but admitted it was not easy despite the socially distanced setting.

"Working remotely with artists, not being able to do as many site visits, delays in shipping because there's so many things backed up, ensuring safety... but we did it!" he said. "I'm glad we did because at some point we're also going to have to pivot to what it means to experience art in this new world. And I hope that this can be a case study in a way for other large-scale exhibitions."

Founded in 2017, Desert X drew 400,000 visitors to its previous edition in the valley east of Los Angeles, and this time "health ambassadors" have been hired to monitor face coverings and social distancing at peak hours. Still, the exhibition was delayed by just over a month due to California's severe winter COVID-19 spike.



People see Egyptian artist Ghada Amer's "Women's Qualities" piece at the Sunnylands Center & Gardens on the opening day of the Desert X exhibit in Rancho Mirage, California on Friday.



Visitors tour US artist Eduardo Sarabia's piece "Passenger" in the Coachella Valley near Palm Desert.

#### 'A trigger'

Aside from Galanin's, several other artworks sound-ed political notes, including a tall, thin section of wall that spikes incongruously out of the arid landscape, composed by Saudi artist Zahrah Al-Ghamdi from 6,000 tiles containing local soils. Visitors are encouraged to walk around the structure entitled "What Lies Behind the Walls," which draws links between her desert homeland and the California valley's rugged landscape and architecture. But the symbolism of a barrier so close to the US-Mexico frontier - and devised during Donald Trump's presidency - is clear. "I definitely was inspired by what happened... there should never be walls in between people, in between countries," said Ghamdi. "I took it as a sign that I have to create a wall that shows our similarities and how we can join as a culture and not separate from each other."



Saudi Arabian artist Zahrah Al-Ghamdi poses in front of her piece "What Lies Behind the Walls".

On the far side of the valley, Eduardo Sarabia's arrow tip-shaped maze is constructed of traditional Mexican woven-palm rugs, used by travelers to rest during long journeys as far back as Aztec times. "Immigration... and the dialogue about Mexicans in general, with the last administration - it was definitely a trigger," said US-Mexican Sarabia, whose mother made the perilous journey across the frontier.

Creating "The Passenger" in a pandemic involved checking that the maze's corridors were wide enough for visitors to socially distance, but ultimately the project was cleared to proceed with its original design. "To have something like this open during these complicated times, I felt really lucky," said Sarabia. "All my other exhibitions have been postponed." Desert X 2021 runs through May 16. —AFP



This picture taken on Feb 25, 2021 shows a man preparing to feed a raccoon at a raccoon coffee shop in Shanghai. —AFP photos



This picture taken on Feb 26, 2021 shows an iguana crawling on a customer's shoulder at a reptile coffee shop in Shanghai.



A woman observes a snake at a reptile coffee shop.



A customer holds a bearded dragon on her shoulder.

## Raccoons to snakes: SHANGHAI ANIMAL CAFES EXPAND TO EXOTICS

Baby raccoon to stroke while you sip your skinny latte? Or a snake to coil around you after your capuccino? Forget dog or cat cafes, Shanghai's animal cafe scene has expanded to include a wider - and more exotic - kingdom. The fad in dining alongside all manner of species - from raccoons to pigs and reptiles - comes despite pandemic-fuelled concerns about the dangers of deadly viruses jumping from wild animals to humans.

There are dozens of animal cafes in China's biggest city, with visitors helping to drive the craze by posing for photos with the creatures and sharing them on social media. Tucked away in central Shanghai, Raccoon Cafe is home to eight of the mammals. The biggest of them, weighing about 10 kilos, jumps up and down by a window, seemingly agitated by customers.

"I think it's really cute," said Qin Siyu, a 27-year-old professional volleyball player who found out about the cafe from a friend's pictures. Customers pay from 98 yuan (\$15) for entry but it is debatable how much of the venue actually functions as a cafe. The raccoons' behavior is too unpredictable for people to have hot drinks around them and the menu is limited.

The cafe's owner, Cheng Chen, admits she had no first-hand experience of raccoons before taking over the establishment at the end of last year. They can be aggressive, she says, and has the scars on her wrists to prove it. The 36-year-old understands why some people may question whether it is fair for the raccoons to be kept in a cafe, eating dog food.

Cheng, who seems to have a genuine affection for the

raccoons, is an animal lover and has several dogs and cats at home. She hopes the government will make it more difficult to own and breed such animals, to prevent them from falling into the hands of people who are less concerned about their welfare. "Generally there's no special regulation. In fact, especially in China, the regulation for pets may be relatively weak," she said.

#### 'Huge suffering'

In another Shanghai cafe, snakes, iguanas and geckos wait to delight customers. Owner Wang Liqun has 30 snakes, among them Corn snakes and Kingsnakes - neither is venomous but they can bite. Wang is yet to have such an incident with a customer. A visitor who gave only her surname Tang said the cafe helps people to get over their fears. "After coming here they will feel that it's not what they thought and may find reptiles actually quite lovely," said the 27-year-old.

But Evan Sun, a scientist with World Animal Protection, said that he was "deeply concerned" about such cafes. "Wild animals are having a miserable life in these cafes, enduring huge suffering and pressure," said Sun, the charity's wildlife campaign manager for China. "The close interactions with wild animals not only fuel suffering and cruelty, but also creates a hotbed of diseases that could exacerbate the likelihood of zoonotic diseases' emergence and spread. "Most customers visit animal cafes are animal lovers, but they do not know that their consumption choices have such a negative impact to both wild animals and humans." —AFP

## FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION IN INDIA, ONE PURSE AT A TIME

The sound of men punching holes into colorful rubber sheets reverberates across a tiny studio in India's largest slum - an unlikely birthplace for luxury handbags made by a marginalized community seeking to reclaim its identity. "Chamar Studio" owes its name, derived from the Sanskrit word for 'skin' and long used locally as a slur, to leather craftsmen who lie at the bottom of the Hindu caste hierarchy.

As members of the Dalit caste, formerly known as untouchables, life has always been a struggle for India's leather workers, who are largely Hindu Chamars or Muslim. Then came Prime Minister Narendra Modi's war on beef consumption, which destroyed their livelihoods by cutting off access to raw materials. It also raised the threat of lynchings by so-called cow vigilantes - Hindu hardliners fighting to protect the animal they deem sacred.

"Chamars have been oppressed for so long," the brand's founder Sudheer Rajbhar told AFP. An artist by training, Rajbhar - who is lower-caste though not Chamar - sought to offer the community a new lease on life by designing minimalist handbags made of recycled rubber - a sustainable substitute for leather.

#### 'Such a weird name'

But first he had to weigh the legal risks, after India's Supreme Court banned the "highly offensive word" in 2008 over its widespread use as a term of abuse. Then he had to convince the community, with many craftsmen fearing the potentially incendiary - and loss-making - implications of marketing a luxury product with lower-caste associations. "I thought it was such a weird name for a brand," said Rahul Gore, who faced discrimination while growing up in a village 300 km from Mumbai.

"We were allowed to play with upper-caste children but their parents would not allow us to visit them at home or share food. I used to feel very bad about it," Gore, now 35, told AFP. The use of rubber instead of leather meant that virtually every step - from the cutting to the stitching - needed to be performed by hand rather than with sewing machines.

The absence of tanning and the use of organic colors to dye the bags in the brand's signature hues of cobalt blue, red and emerald green make the process much less toxic for workers, said Rajbhar. The purses are so durable they can even withstand a spin in a washing machine, he added.

#### 'I get more respect'

Rajbhar used his savings and bank loans to invest around one million rupees (\$13,700) into launching the brand in 2017, turning to local cobbler Sachin Sakhare for help in training craftsmen. Sakhare started working on Mumbai's crowded pavements as a 13-year-old when his father, also a cobbler, was killed in a hit-and-run accident. He told AFP he wanted to "improve the lot of my people".

"The caste system has created so much discrimination that people just don't respect certain types of work," said Sakhare, who used to earn 400 rupees a day as a cobbler. The father-of-two now leads a team of Chamar and Muslim craftsmen making unisex totes, shoulder bags and clutches, and says his sense of self-worth has expanded. "Now that I get more respect (for my work), I feel more like an artist," he added. The purses don't come cheap, with prices ranging up to 39,000 rupees for an intricately woven oversized tote that takes a day to make.



In this photo taken on Feb 2, 2021, founder of 'Chamar Studio' Sudheer Rajbhar (left), gives instructions to artisan Sahdev Vishvnath Netake to design a new recycled rubber bag at a workshop inside Dharavi slum in Mumbai. —AFP photos



Artisans Rahul Dattatreya Gorey (left) and Kalamuddeen Ansari stitch new recycled rubber bags.



Netake burns the stitches of a new recycled rubber bag for 'Chamar Studio'.

#### 'We are artists'

Customers have not balked at the cost however, with the bags stocked at high-end boutiques in Mumbai and Frankfurt as well as the brand's own online store. But the company is confronting new challenges, with sales down since the pandemic. Many craftsmen remain fearful about returning to Mumbai, the Indian city hit hardest by the coronavirus.

Although Rajbhar's Chamar Foundation has managed to support the families of his employees during India's months-long lockdown, his colleagues worry for the future. "Why would anyone buy handbags when they are worried about running their households?" mused Sakhare, who also works as a sweeper to pay the bills. Still, he refuses to give up hope. "I never imagined we would make a difference to society," he said. "It feels really good to tell the world that we are Chamar and we are artists." —AFP



## Sports

## Photo of the day



Gigi Ruf during the Natural Selection Tour in the USA. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Million COVID-19 vaccine given in 15 NFL stadiums

**NEW YORK:** More than one million doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in 15 NFL stadiums as of Friday, the league announced, with more venues opening next week. The milestone was reached Friday as more than 10 percent of the US population has been fully vaccinated against the deadly virus. "With gratitude to health care workers across the country, the NFL is proud that our stadiums and facilities have been used to administer one million vaccinations," the league tweeted.

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said last month that league stadiums would be made available as mass vaccination sites. Cities with stadiums used for COVID-19 vaccinations include New York, Los Angeles, Seattle, Phoenix, Houston, Detroit, Tampa, Charlotte, Miami, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Baltimore and suburban Boston and San Francisco.

Green Bay's famed Lambeau Field will begin administering vaccines on Wednesday with Nashville, home of the Tennessee Titans, to open for vaccinations on March 20. The Pro Football Hall of Fame also announced Friday that several members are producing public service announcements to inform and encourage people to get the vaccination. —AFP

# Joel Embiid injures knee in return game, Lakers rally against Pacers

## Thunder acquire Mykhailiuk from Pistons for Diallo: Report

**LOS ANGELES:** NBA MVP candidate Joel Embiid emerged from quarantine Friday only to exit in the third quarter with a left knee injury as the Philadelphia 76ers beat the Washington Wizards 127-101 in Washington.

Embiid, who missed Sunday's All-Star Game because of COVID-19 restrictions, threw down a dunk and landed awkwardly on his left knee before falling to the floor halfway through the third quarter. He was attended to by Sixers trainer Kevin Johnson before getting up and walking to the dressing room on his own. The team said he had a hyperextended left knee and would not return.

Philadelphia coach Doc Rivers spoke to Embiid after the game and said the all-star was upbeat. Rivers said team doctors would examine Embiid further on Saturday once the swelling went down. "He fell off balance. I am not going to speculate," Rivers said of Embiid, who finished with a team high 23 points. "He was in the locker room. He is in pretty good spirits. Let's hope for the best."

The victory kept Philadelphia atop the Eastern Conference, moving them a full game ahead of the second-place Brooklyn Nets. Embiid shot eight-of-11 from the floor and had seven rebounds and three assists in 20 minutes of playing time.

The Sixers led the Wizards 80-60 when Embiid was hurt. He had surgery on the same knee in 2017 causing him to miss part of the season. "It looked like a hyper-extension. That's what we all hope it is," said teammate Tobias Harris. "We're just praying that he'll be OK and be healthy tomorrow."

Embiid, who turns 27 on Tuesday, was playing in his first game after receiving a negative test for COVID-19 earlier Friday. Teammate Ben Simmons, who also missed the All-Star Game last weekend, has not yet been cleared to play, needing another negative test to be green lighted after he and Embiid were exposed to a Philadelphia barber who tested positive for the coronavirus last Sunday.

Embiid entered Friday averaging 30.2 points and 11.6 rebounds in 30 games this season. Simmons is averaging 16.1 points, 7.9 rebounds and 7.6 assists in 31 games. Despite missing Embiid for almost half the game and Simmons for the whole game, the Sixers still managed to win their fourth straight.

Shooting guard Shake Milton came off the bench to score 18 points and Tobias Harris tallied 14 points and eight assists in the win. Russell Westbrook led the Wizards with 25 points, eight assists and five rebounds while Bradley Beal added 19 points.

### Lakers rally

Elsewhere, Kyle Kuzma finished with a team high 24 points and 13 rebounds while Kentavious Caldwell-Pope made a clutch steal with 10 seconds left as the Los Angeles Lakers clawed their way back in the final quarter to beat



WASHINGTON: Joel Embiid of the Philadelphia 76ers reacts after getting injured in the second half against the Washington Wizards at Capital One Arena on Friday in Washington, DC. —AFP

the Indiana Pacers 105-100.

LeBron James finished with 18 points and 10 assists and Montrezl Harrell had 17 points for the Lakers, who were playing their first game since the all-star break. The time off seemed to help the Lakers who had lost two straight heading into the break and are now 4-7 over the team's last 11 games. "The break did exactly what I expected it to do," said Caldwell-Pope. "I recovered. I caught up on rest and I'm mentally prepared."

The Pacers led for most of the game and had an opportunity to send it into overtime. But with Los Angeles ahead 103-100, Caldwell-Pope stole a pass from Indiana with 10 seconds left. He then sunk a pair of free throws to seal the win. Also the Lakers learned Friday that Anthony Davis is still bothered by a sore calf muscle and is going to be out for at least two more weeks. Davis missed his 10th straight start.

In Memphis, Nikola Jokic finished with 28 points, 15 rebounds and seven assists and defended a Ja Morant layup attempt with three seconds left as the Denver Nuggets defeated the host Memphis Grizzlies 103-102. In

over a longer period.

That will save the Buccaneers \$19 million on Brady's salary for the 2021 season, when he was due to cost \$28.4 million under NFL payroll limit rules and his original two-year deal. The savings will allow Tampa Bay to spend more on keeping the talented supporting cast around Brady that helped deliver a 31-9 victory over Kansas City in last month's Super Bowl at Tampa.

Brady, a five-time Super Bowl Most Valuable Player and three-time NFL MVP, has long said he wanted to play until he was 45 and his championship results with a new club after 20 seasons with New England showed he still has the skill to produce success. Brady's new deal was unveiled after the Buccaneers applied a franchise tag to wide receiver Chris Godwin and signed a new extension with linebacker Lavonte David.

Brady's move should allow the club a strong chance to re-sign free agents such as top pass rusher Shaquil Barrett, tight end Rob Gronkowski and defensive end Ndamukong Suh for a title-defending campaign. Last season, Brady completed 401 of 610 passes for 4,633 yards and 40 touchdowns with 12 interceptions. —AFP

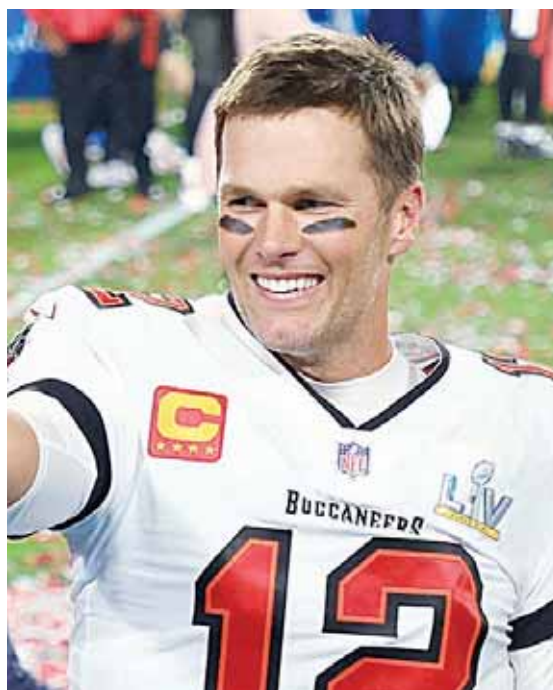
Salt Lake City, Donovan Mitchell scored 28 points as the Utah Jazz handed the hapless Houston Rockets their 15th straight defeat with a 114-99 victory.

### Mykhailiuk to OKC

The NBA's Oklahoma City Thunder are poised to acquire Ukrainian forward Sviatoslav Mykhailiuk in a trade with Detroit that will send Hamidou Diallo to the Pistons, US media reported on Friday. The Thunder are giving up third-year guard Diallo to get Mykhailiuk and a future second-round draft pick, sports broadcaster ESPN said.

Mykhailiuk, 23, is averaging 6.9 points, 2.1 rebounds and 1.6 assists in 36 games this season. Mykhailiuk was chosen 47th overall by the Los Angeles Lakers in the 2018 draft. Diallo, whose parents are both from Guinea, has played 32 games this season, tallying 11.9 points, 5.2 rebounds and 2.4 assists per game for the Thunder.

He was drafted by Brooklyn in the second round (45th overall) in 2018. The Nets traded him to Charlotte, who then dealt him to Oklahoma City. Diallo did not play in the Thunder's last five games because of a sore groin. —AFP



Tom Brady

## Brady eyes eighth Super Bowl after inking extension

**NEW YORK:** Tom Brady signed a contract extension with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers Friday and immediately set his sights on an eighth Super Bowl crown. After media reports indicating Brady had agreed terms on a new deal with Tampa Bay, the 43-year-old quarterback confirmed the move on social media. "In pursuit of 8," Brady wrote on Instagram alongside a photo of him putting pen to paper on a new contract. "@buccaneers we're keeping the band together."

The NFL Network and ESPN reported earlier that the seven-time Super Bowl winner Brady, who turns 44 in August, had agreed to a deal which will ease salary cap issues for the Bucs. The new contract keeps Brady in Tampa Bay through the 2022 season, when he will be 45, and features voidable years at the end of the contract allowing the club to spread Brady's salary cap hit

## Archer determined to clinch World Cup place despite elbow worries

**AHMEDABAD:** England's emphatic win over India in their opening T20 showdown revealed concerns for both sides as they seek to build momentum before this year's World Cup. Top-ranked side England must worry about the elbow of their star bowler Jofra Archer, while number two India will be fretting about their batting — with captain Virat Kohli in the spotlight after failing to score for the third time in five international innings.

Archer was declared man of the match after taking three wickets in Friday's eight wicket trouncing of India, who could manage only 124-7 against England's disciplined bowlers. But after the game he revealed his struggle with a troublesome elbow that made him miss two of the four Tests in India — that England lost 3-1. And there was no firm commitment for the World Cup to be held in India in October-November, and the Ashes tour to Australia after.

"It is still a way away, I need to take care of my elbow first before I think about what is going to happen," Archer told reporters. Archer said that on arriving in India he told the England management his arm was "not feeling great".

"I didn't have to say it twice," he said. "They jumped on it and already started making plans. We are all on the same page. So for me in the immediate, I am going to get through the series and then I will do everything in my power to make sure that I am going to the World Cup and the Ashes."

His captain Eoin Morgan praised Archer's performance in a bowling line-up full of quality pace with Mark Wood and Chris Jordan. "He is excellent, and I think our bowling unit today again similar to our batting unit has a lot of competition for places," Morgan said after the win.

### Kohli's duck

India faltered in the T20 opener after a successful Test season with Kohli keen to fix their problems in what will almost certainly be their last 20 over series before the World Cup. Kohli blamed a "lack of execution" by top batters whose poor shots gave Archer and spinner Adil Rashid key early wickets.

"These five games are the only ones we have before the T20 World Cup," said Kohli. "So we need to try a few things as well, but having said that we cannot take anything lightly, especially against a team like England which is so strong."

Kohli's own form remains a problem. The frustration was clear to see as he walked off after getting out to Rashid's leg-spin just three overs into the game. But the premier batsman said the flops have to be accepted and dealt with. His last big T20 score was an 85 against Australia in December, so analysts said there is no need to panic yet.

"It is part of the whole journey of international cricket. When you have played for that long you will have your ups and down, you have to accept that as a batsman," said Kohli. "On your day you will probably end up scoring much more. But the important thing is keep true to your intent and plan as a batsman and understand sometimes the bowling team will come out and execute better than your plans."

Shreyas Iyer top-scored with 67 to boost the Indian total and said the team's preparations are in place for the World Cup. "We have come with a plan and we need to execute it as much as possible because going into the World Cup we need to see that we have ticked all the boxes," Iyer said after the game. "This is a five-match series so it's a perfect time that we try out different stuff and see whatever suits us." The second match of the series is today. All five games will be at the Ahmedabad stadium to be used for the World Cup final in November. —AFP



## Sports

# Moyes enjoys renaissance after wilderness years

## ‘Impressive’ West Ham face Man Utd test in Premier League

**LONDON:** West Ham boss David Moyes returns to Manchester United tonight with his reputation restored after a long period in the wilderness following his Old Trafford nightmare. Moyes has West Ham flying high in the Premier League and a win at his old club would boost their unexpected bid to qualify for the Champions League via a top four finish.

The fifth placed Hammers have won four of their last six league games, closing within two points of fourth placed Chelsea and six behind second placed United, with a game in hand on both. “If we can go to Old Trafford and pick up three points that would be an incredible achievement for us,” Moyes said. “We have been on a really good run since the start of this year. We are in good form, the players have taken on all the games and we want to keep that record going.”

This time last year, Moyes was fighting to steer West Ham away from the relegation zone after taking charge of the east London club in December 2019. Moyes has revamped his squad with a series of astute signings, including Czech duo Tomas Soucek and Vladimir Coufal, promising winger Jarrod Bowen and, most recently, Jesse Lingard on loan from Manchester United.

Lingard is not eligible to face United this weekend, but Moyes’ ability to revitalize the midfielder’s stalled career, together with his development of Declan Rice, prove he has rediscovered the midas touch that made his name at Everton.

When Moyes was hired by United in 2013, the Scot was widely regarded as one of the brightest young managers in the Premier League after his impressive 11-year reign at Goodison Park. Although he was unable to deliver any silverware, he had led Everton to a top four finish in 2005 and

consistently kept them in the top half of the table on a limited budget.

Moyes’ appointment at United had been endorsed by Alex Ferguson, who recommended his compatriot before retiring. Inheriting a title-winning team, Moyes signed a six-year contract and was expected to refresh an ageing squad while maintaining the success of the Ferguson era.

But he never looked comfortable in the harsh glare of the Old Trafford spotlight, with each decision picked apart by fans, pundits and even his own players in an unforgiving way he never had to endure at Everton.

### Remarkable rehabilitation

He was criticized for his cautious tactics and ridiculed after signing Everton midfielder Marouane Fellaini, a player whose rudimentary style contrasted with United’s purist principles. Moyes soon wore the anguished expression of a man who knew his dream was fading before his eyes.

After less than a season in charge he was sacked in April, 2014 with United languishing in seventh place and destined to miss out on a Champions League place for the first time since 1995. Moyes was back in management at Real Sociedad just months later, but once again he was a fish out of water.

The often terse Moyes was a bad fit in the cultured environment of La Liga and he was sacked after just 12 months. That lost year in the Basque country was followed by an even more chastening experience at Sunderland.

Taking over at the Stadium of Light in 2016, Moyes’ return to the Premier League was a disaster as Sunderland were relegated in his first season. At that point it was hard to imagine Moyes salvaging



**LONDON:** The television camera follows West Ham United’s Scottish manager David Moyes as he leaves after the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Leeds United at The London Stadium, in east London on March 8, 2021. —AFP

his crumbling career. But the 57-year-old has been rewarded for sticking to his belief that work ethic and team-spirit are the foundations for any successful team.

Moyes has also been helped by the coronavirus lockdown removing fans from stadiums, allowing

him to work in peace without the pressure of the notoriously demanding Hammers’ faithful. Beating United tonight would be another feather in his cap, but whether West Ham reach the Champions League or not, Moyes’ remarkable rehabilitation is one of the stories of the season. —AFP

## Solskjaer unsure about De Gea’s return after Spain trip

**LONDON:** Ole Gunnar Solskjaer says David de Gea is “touch and go” for Manchester United’s Premier League clash with West Ham tonight after returning to England following the birth of his first child. Despite the potential coronavirus-related quarantine headaches, the Red Devils boss allowed the 30-year-old to fly to Spain to be with his partner.

Dean Henderson has had a run in the side in the absence of United’s number one, who has been inconsistent this season. He impressed in last week’s 2-0 win against Premier League leaders Manchester City but was criticized for allowing an injury-time header to beat him as AC Milan snatched a 1-1 draw in the first leg of the last-16 tie in the Europa League on Thursday.

Asked on Friday about De Gea’s availability for

the visit of West Ham, Solskjaer said: “David is back in Manchester. He is quarantining or self-isolating. ‘He’s just touch and go for Sunday, I think. I can’t really know when he came back, so I’m not really sure if it was Monday or Tuesday that he arrived back in Manchester.”

Current regulations allow travellers from Spain to be released from quarantine if they test negative for COVID-19 after five days of isolation. Pushed to clarify De Gea’s situation, the United boss added: “I think the rules are that he’s got to stay at home. ‘He’s not training with us anyway. It’s different if you travel away and compete so, no, he’s not been training since he came back.”

United, second in the Premier League, are counting the cost of a spate of injuries in forward positions. Anthony Martial is a doubt after a hip complaint forced him off at half-time on Thursday, compounding the absence of fellow frontmen Marcus Rashford and Edinson Cavani.

“Anthony, he got a whack on his hip so that’s another forward that we need to scan and have to look at,” Solskjaer said. “Definitely hope Marcus is back for next Thursday in Milan. I’m not sure if he’ll make Sunday, but fingers crossed because we will

north London derby win.

“It’s very difficult because the level of quality, precision, understanding and chemistry that they have between them makes them probably one of the most special (attacks) in Europe,” Arteta said. “And they don’t need much. They are able to create their own chances, they are able to link as a team. So it is really difficult to do, but we will prepare the game well to try to stop them obviously.”

Kane, Son and Bale have hit 34 Premier League goals between them in the first 27 games of the current campaign. They will be expected to add to that tally against an Arsenal defense which has kept just one clean-sheet in their last 12 matches.

Asked if defense was the biggest area for his side to improve on, Arteta said: “Well, yes because the amount of chances that we are conceding has been really low. But the amount of chances that we have given to the opponent has had a big impact in the goals that we have conceded. So it depends on us a big part, which is a really positive thing, but we know that it is a part that we want to eradicate to be more consistent with results.” —AFP

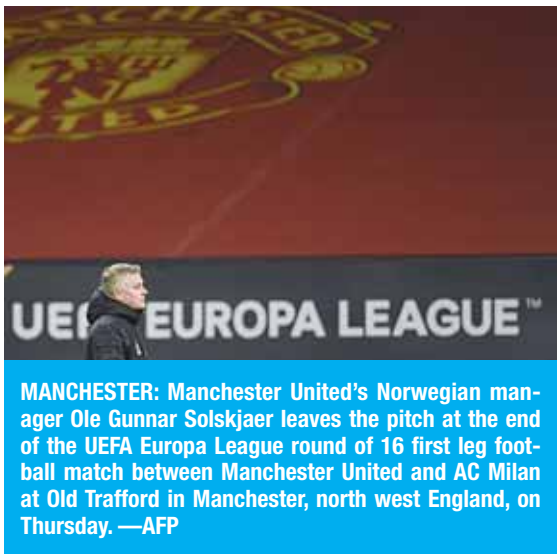
The former Manchester United defender has been involved in a dressing room row with Newcastle winger Matt Ritchie, while feuding with the media and enduring criticism from frustrated fans.

“There is no question managing Newcastle is always difficult. There’s a huge spotlight and that’s the way it should be. I’m ready for the challenge and my experience I hope will prove vital,” Bruce added. In the absence of the injured Callum Wilson, Newcastle striker Dwight Gayle was handed just a second start of the season.

Newcastle had failed to win any of six league games when Wilson was absent this season and once again they were impotent without him. Villa had the upper hand in the first half and Martin Dubravka had to race off his line to stop Watkins in his tracks.

Dubravka was called into action again to repel Trezeguet’s stinging strike from a tight angle. Bruce’s men desperately needed a stroke of luck to get on the scoresheet and Villa defender Matt Targett nearly gifted them one when his miscued header forced Emiliano Martinez to save.

Jacob Murphy came off the bench for Newcastle and nearly made an instant impact, cutting inside the Villa area for a curling strike that cannoned back off the bar. Villa snatched the lead in the 86th minute when Watkins stooped to meet Targett’s cross with a header that hit Clark on the knee and went in off the woodwork.



**MANCHESTER:** Manchester United’s Norwegian manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer leaves the pitch at the end of the UEFA Europa League round of 16 first leg football match between Manchester United and AC Milan at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on Thursday. —AFP

need him. Edinson I don’t think will be ready for Sunday.” Paul Pogba, Donny van de Beek and Juan Mata are also set to be unavailable to face the high-flying Hammers. —AFP



**PIRAEUS:** Arsenal’s Spanish manager Mikel Arteta claps during the UEFA Europa League round of 16 first-leg football match between Olympiacos FC and Arsenal FC at the Karaiskakis Stadium, in Piraeus, near Athens on Thursday. —AFP



**NEWCASTLE:** Newcastle United’s English defender Jamaal Lascelles jumps to head the ball to score a late equalizer during the English Premier League football match between Newcastle United and Aston Villa at St James’ Park in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, north east England on Friday. —AFP

Newcastle refused to surrender and Joelinton’s effort was saved by Martinez before Lascelles saved the day. In the fourth minute of stoppage-time, the defender rose highest to thump his head-er past Martinez from Murphy’s cross. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Di Maria signs extension

**PARIS:** Argentina star Angel Di Maria has signed a one-year extension to his contract with Paris Saint-Germain, tying him to the club until June 2022, the French champions announced on Friday. In a statement on the club’s website, PSG said the deal included the option for an extra season. Di Maria, who turned 33 last month, joined PSG from Manchester United in 2015 having previously starred for Real Madrid. He has also played for Benfica and Rosario Central. PSG’s main focus is on extending the contracts of superstar forwards Kylian Mbappe and Neymar, both of whom will see their existing deals expire at the end of next season. The Qatar-owned club this week ousted Barcelona to qualify for the quarter-finals of the UEFA Champions League, while they currently sit second in Ligue 1, two points behind leaders Lille. —AFP

#### Lazio struggle past Crotone

**ROME:** Lazio beat rock-bottom Crotone 3-2 in the Italian top flight on Friday, just days ahead of facing Bayern Munich in the Champions League. Simone Inzaghi’s team are already 4-1 down to the defending European champions after the first leg of their last 16 tie. Despite Friday’s win, Lazio are still only seventh in Serie A, while Crotone are anchored to the foot of the table seven points adrift of safety. Lazio took the game to the Stadio Olimpico visitors but were pegged back the first two times they went ahead. A cool finish from the six-yard line from Sergei Milinkovic-Savic on 14 minutes gave Lazio the lead before Nigerian forward Simeon Tochukwu Nwankano levelled. Luis Alberto restored Lazio’s lead on 39 minutes only for Nwankano to equalise again with a 50th-minute penalty. However, substitute Felipe Caicedo secured the three points for Lazio six minutes from time. —AFP

#### Lyon survive Reims

**REIMS:** A stoppage-time goal from Zimbabwe international Tino Kadewere rescued a point for title-chasing Lyon in a 1-1 Ligue 1 draw at Reims on Friday. Lyon stay third in the table, level on 60 points with Paris Saint-Germain but behind on goal difference. Lille lead the way on 62 points. Mathieu Cafaro gave Reims the lead after 33 minutes with a sharp half-volley from a cross by Thomas Foket. Reims were indebted to goalkeeper Predrag Rajkovic who pulled off three memorable saves in the second half. Lyon’s pressure paid off in the second minute of injury time when Kadewere headed in a cross from Memphis Depay for his 10th league goal of the season. Lille clash with fifth-placed Monaco on Sunday while PSG, fresh from reaching the Champions League quarter-finals at Barcelona’s expense, are at home to relegation-threatened Nantes. Lyon and PSG clash next weekend in a key top of the table clash. —AFP

#### Gladbach crash again

**BERLIN:** Borussia Mönchengladbach slumped to a fifth consecutive Bundesliga defeat on Friday, losing 3-1 at Augsburg just four days before they face Manchester City in the Champions League. Borussia are now in the 10th spot, 10 points off the Champions League places. Borussia haven’t won since mid-January and are without a victory since it was announced Marco Rose will coach Dortmund next season. They are also facing Champions League misery in Budapest on Tuesday when they will attempt to overturn a 2-0 deficit in the second leg of their last-16 tie against runaway Premier League leaders City. On Friday, they squandered a chance to take a first-half lead when Lars Stindl missed a penalty. Substitute Ruben Vargas gave Augsburg a 52nd-minute lead which was cancelled out 15 minutes later by German international Florian Neuhaus. Marco Richter restored the home team’s lead with Andre Hahn adding a third goal in the dying moments. —AFP

## Arteta fears ‘special’ Spurs attack in London derby

**LONDON:** Mikel Arteta has warned his Arsenal players they will face one of the most “special” attacks in Europe when they take on Tottenham in tonight’s north London derby. Tottenham have scored 102 goals in all competitions this season after Harry Kane struck twice to seal a 2-0 win against Dinamo Zagreb in the Europa League last 16 first leg in midweek.

Only Bayern Munich have scored more across Europe’s top five leagues so far this season and Arsenal boss Arteta knows Kane, Son Heung-min and Gareth Bale pose a formidable threat to his team’s hopes of winning at the Emirates Stadium. The trio are likely to start for Jose Mourinho’s side as Tottenham go in search of a third successive

## Lascelles rescues priceless point for struggling Newcastle

**NEWCASTLE:** Jamaal Lascelles rescued Newcastle with a last-gasp equaliser as the Premier League strugglers earned a 1-1 draw in a dramatic finale against Aston Villa on Friday. Steve Bruce’s side fell behind with only four minutes left at St James’ Park when Newcastle defender Ciaran Clark deflected Ollie Watkins’ header into his own net.

But Newcastle captain Lascelles bailed out his troubled team just seconds from the final whistle at St James’ Park. “The goal they scored was a bit of a fluke. Then you have to show desire to get back into it and we did that. We at least deserved that,” Bruce said.

Despite the nerve-jangling escape, Newcastle are without a win in their last five league matches and the threat of sinking into the Championship grows more serious by the week. “There are still 10 games to go. We’ve got to show the same attitude. I’m still convinced we’ll be OK,” Bruce said.

The Magpies were 10 points clear of Fulham last month, but now Bruce is fighting to avoid the sack as a turbulent season reaches boiling point.



## Chelsea frustrated by Leeds stalemate

**LEEDS:** Chelsea missed a chance to cement their place in the Premier League's top four as Leeds held them to a frustrating 0-0 draw yesterday. Thomas Tuchel's side had plenty of chances but couldn't deliver the knockout blow in a hard-fought clash at Elland Road. The Blues remain in fourth place and fifth-placed West Ham are just three points behind them with two games in hand as the race to qualify for the Champions League looks set to go down to the wire.

Tuchel is now unbeaten in 12 matches in all competitions since replacing the sacked Frank Lampard in January. With clean sheets in their last five games, Chelsea have conceded only two goals in that period. However, their goal-scoring issues under Tuchel resurfaced as opportunities came and went in the Yorkshire rain. They have yet to score more than two goals in any match in the Tuchel era.

Wednesday's Champions League last 16 second leg against Atletico Madrid at Stamford Bridge—with Chelsea holding a 1-0 lead—will be another stern test of their renaissance under the former Paris Saint-Germain boss.

Tuchel made six changes from Monday's win against Everton as Christian Pulisic replaced Timo Werner after reports the United States winger was unhappy with his lack of action since the German took charge. On Friday, Tuchel had urged Pulisic to seize his chance when it came, saying of a player he worked with at Borussia Dortmund: "He is in my plans. When the moment comes you have to be ready."

Leeds and Chelsea have been fierce rivals since their brutal FA Cup final clash in 1970, but the absence of fans due to the coronavirus lockdown diluted the Blues' first league visit to Elland Road since 2003. The poor quality of the



**LEEDS:** Chelsea's French-born Senegalese goalkeeper Edouard Mendy saves a shot from Leeds United's Brazilian midfielder Raphinha Dias Belloli during the English Premier League football match between Leeds United and Chelsea at Elland Road in Leeds, northern England yesterday. — AFP

Elland Road pitch was almost reminiscent of the battles on fields of mud that defined Chelsea's encounters with Leeds in the 1970s.

### Stroke of luck

Pulisic wasn't fazed by the rutted surface as he scampered down the right and whipped over a low cross that Kai Havertz poked straight at Leeds keeper Illan Meslier. Leeds launched a penetrating counter immediately after Havertz's miss and Patrick Bamford's cross was

turned in by Tyler Roberts, only for the offside flag to come to Chelsea's rescue.

If that was a stroke of luck for Chelsea, Leeds benefitted from their own good fortune moments later when Diego Llorente whacked a clearance against team-mate Luke Ayling, with the ball looping onto the crossbar before falling into the grateful Meslier's arms.

As ever with Leeds and their wide-open style, chances came thick and fast and Roberts was inches away from opening the scoring when Chelsea keeper

Edouard Mendy tipped his curler onto the bar.

Chelsea defender Ben Chilwell fired just wide from the edge of the area before Mason Mount's 25-yard drive was pushed out by Meslier. Havertz finally delivered an influential display against Everton after a wretched first season with Chelsea.

But the Germany forward was back to his diffident worst here and shot tamely at Meslier from Hakim Ziyech's pass. Granted space by the statuesque Leeds defence, Havertz should have done better with a

close-range blast that Meslier palmed over early in the second half. Mendy saved well when his former Rennes team-mate Raphinha had a sight of goal from Rodrigo's knock down.

Chilwell had a golden opportunity to break the deadlock, but he scuffed wide with just Meslier to beat after surging into the area. Antonio Rudiger's hopeful effort from 30 yards sent Meslier sprawling to save, while Callum Hudson-Odoi was denied by the keeper as Chelsea's challenge petered out. — AFP






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