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## REGISTER TODAY

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# MoH: Return to normal life, reopening of schools in Sept

No cinema for non-vaccinated • Shops will be closed if employees not inoculated



**KUWAIT:** People consume food in the trunk of their cars in Kuwait City yesterday as dine-in is banned in restaurants due to COVID-19 restrictions. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah yesterday said life in Kuwait will go back to normal and all schools will reopen in September after some two million people are expected to be vaccinated. The minister said so far some 400,000 people have taken the vaccination, including around half the elderly among Kuwaitis and a quarter of elderly people among expats.

Sheikh Basel said by the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan (around mid-May), the number of vaccinations will reach one million and double by September. He said all schools will reopen in September after the completion of a ministry plan to vaccinate all teaching staff. In addition, people working in cooperative societies, barbershops, salons and banks will also be vaccinated soon.

The minister called on people to get vaccinated, saying it is the best way to save lives and prevent being infected by the deadly coronavirus. He said after Ramadan, only people who have been vaccinated will be allowed to go to cinemas, adding that shops whose workers have not been vaccinated will be closed.

The health ministry yesterday registered 1,332 COVID-19 cases over a 24-hour span, taking total infections to 210,855, while seven fatalities were recorded, raising the death toll to 1,179. Active cases amounted to 14,169 with 219 in intensive care units, ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. Health authorities conducted 7,365 swab tests, taking total tests to 1,914,579, which meant 18.1 percent of swab tests performed in the past 24 hours were positive, he revealed.

Continued on Page 2

## News in brief

### Birthrate fell in 2020

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait registered the lowest birthrate in 15 years during the "corona year", with 50,409 births in 2020, the lowest since 2005, when the number of births was 45,459. Births dropped in 2020 by 2.9 percent (1,517 births) compared to 2019, during which the number of births was 51,926. Kuwaiti births dropped in 2020 by 1.8 percent (572), with 31,295 births compared to 31,870 in 2019. Expat births dropped 4.69 percent (942) to 19,114 in 2020, compared to 20,056 in 2019. — Al-Rai

### Hamas elects first woman

**GAZA CITY:** Hamas elected a woman to its political bureau for the first time ever, the movement said Sunday. Hamas revealed the identity of the 20 members of its political bureau following an internal vote, including two women, Jamila Al-Shantee and Fatima Shurab, the latter president of the "women's commission". While Shurab was appointed to her position, Shantee became the "first woman elected" to the political bureau. — AFP

### Israel unveils mortar system

**JERUSALEM:** Israel unveiled yesterday a laser-guided mortar system that it said could reduce civilian collateral damage, as the state faces an International Criminal Court investigation into possible war crimes. The "Iron Sting" system, developed by the Israeli military with local firm Elbit Systems, will use laser and GPS technology to provide maximal accuracy to 120mm mortar rounds, the defense ministry said in a statement. — AFP

### US consulate in HK closes

**HONG KONG:** The United States temporarily closed its consulate in Hong Kong yesterday after two staff tested positive for the coronavirus during a new outbreak that has rippled through the city's well-heeled "expat" community. The two cases emerged during an "ambush lockdown" - a tactic used by Hong Kong authorities to descend overnight on apartment blocks where they suspect there may be cases and test everyone inside. — AFP

## Idlib marks 10 years since Syria uprising

**IDLIB, Syria:** Thousands took to the streets in Syria's last major rebel bastion of Idlib yesterday to mark 10 years since the nationwide anti-government protests that sparked the country's devastating civil war. Crowds marched through the jihadist-dominated stronghold's main city, with some protesters waving the opposition's three-star flag or holding up images of those killed during the conflict. "Freedom, freedom," they sang in Idlib city, just as the first protesters did

in 2011 at rallies demanding an end to President Bashar Al-Assad's rule. "The people want the fall of the regime," they shouted, echoing the slogan adopted by protesters elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa in the spring of 2011.

"We came to renew the pledge we made in 2011 when we decided to oust Assad," said one of those marching, Hana Dahneen. "We had hoped to topple the regime from day one," she added. "But it unleashed all kinds of weapons against the innocent people to crush the revolution."

Syria's war has killed more than 388,000 people and displaced millions of Syrians inside the country and abroad. But today, Assad is back in control of more than 60 percent of the

Continued on Page 2



**IDLIB:** Syrians wave the opposition flag during a gathering in this rebel-held city yesterday as they mark 10 years since nationwide anti-government protests began. —

## Libya's new interim premier takes office

**TOBRUK, Libya:** Libya's new interim Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah pledged to unite divided Libya as he was sworn in yesterday, preparing to steer the war-torn country to December elections. The North African nation descended into conflict after dictator Muammar Gaddafi was toppled and killed in a NATO-backed uprising in 2011, with an array of forces battling to fill the void.

A United Nations-supervised process is working to unite the country, building on an October ceasefire

between rival administrations in the country's east and west. Dbeibah, selected at UN-sponsored talks in February alongside an interim three-member presidency council, took the oath of office in front of lawmakers in the eastern city of Tobruk. More than 1,000 km from the capital Tripoli in the west, Tobruk has been the seat of Libya's elected parliament since 2014.

Dbeibah's swearing-in comes after parliament last week approved his cabinet, in a move hailed by key leaders and foreign powers as "historic". The government pledged to "preserve the unity, security and integrity" of Libya with Dbeibah insisting that his cabinet "will be the government of all Libyans". "Libya is one and united," he said.

Continued on Page 2



**TOBRUK:** Libya's new interim Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah speaks after being sworn in yesterday. — AFP

## Philippines faces 'crisis of learning'

**MANILA:** A year after the coronavirus pandemic sent the Philippines into a months-long lockdown, classrooms across the country remain empty and children are still stuck at home. Fearing youngsters could catch the virus and infect elderly relatives, President Rodrigo Duterte refuses to lift the restrictions until vaccinations are widespread - something that

could take years.

A "blended learning" program involving online classes, printed materials and lessons broadcast on television and social media was launched in October, four months after the school year was supposed to start. It has been plagued with problems: Most students in the Philippines don't have a computer or Internet at home.

"I can't do it, it's difficult for me," said Serrano, sitting in his shack next to a polluted river, a photo of him wearing a class graduation gown hanging on the wall behind him. "It's fun in school. It's easier to learn there."

Continued on Page 2



**QUEZON CITY:** In this photo taken on Feb 11, 2021, Filipino teacher Kristhean Navales conducts an online class on his mobile phone at his home in suburban Manila. — AFP

## Local

# Kuwait, Manila still in talks over recruitment of domestic helpers

## Returning helpers to follow 14-day quarantine rule

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** The Philippines and Kuwait are close to signing a final agreement on the recruitment of Filipino domestic helpers. Meanwhile, an official from the Philippine Embassy's labor office in Kuwait denied a report that hundreds of contracts have been signed for the recruitment of domestic helpers. "No, there is no truth to that. We are still holding (online) meetings to finalize documents and some more issues," the official said.

The Kuwaiti government allowed the entry of newly-recruited domestic helpers from labor-exporting countries such as the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka and elsewhere from Jan 16. But negotiations between the Philippines and Kuwait with regards to the so-called 'unified contracts' are ongoing. According to a Kuwait Times source, if the unified contract agreement is signed, deployment of new domestic helpers will resume immediately.

Under the new unified contract, provisions will be added such as prohibiting employers from confiscat-

ing the passports of their housemaids. Domestic helpers will also have the right to have a phone, work not more than 12 hours a day and get enough rest and a weekly day off. They are also prevented from being transferred to other employers without written consent from the worker.

Philippine Labor Attache to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia Nasser Mustapha arrived in Kuwait recently from his Riyadh-based office to resolve issues surrounding the unified contracts. According to the source, until such a document is signed, there will be no deployment of new Filipino domestic helpers. Only returning Filipino domestic helpers can re-enter Kuwait, although they need to follow the 14-day quarantine procedure set by the government, plus the two required PCR tests upon arrival and at the end of the quarantine period. This too was eventually suspended due to the spread of the coronavirus.

On Sunday, the Chairman of Kuwait Union for Domestic Labor Offices (KUDLO) Khaled Al-Dakhnan was quoted by Al-Rai Arabic newspaper as saying that the first batch of Indian domestic helpers

will arrive in about 10 days' time - the first to arrive after almost a year and a half of suspension due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dakhnan however admitted that it will take time to meet the need for domestic helpers in the local market. The shortage of domestic helpers in Kuwait has reached an alarming level, according to KUDLO, especially as Ramadan begins next month.

"I've been talking to my Filipino friends if they have contacts of Filipinos willing to work as domestic helpers. I am ready to pay a salary of KD 200 to KD 250. My wife is giving birth next month, so I need one or two Filipina housemaids. For the past three months, I have got no reply from recruitment agencies and even from individuals. It's really hard to find a housemaid now. I hope they will be able to reach an agreement so we can hire domestic helpers as soon as possible," a Kuwaiti man married to a Filipina noted.

For the Philippines, which sends the largest number of household workers to Kuwait after India, there are still pending issues to be settled. These issues

were all resolved during talks, but officials are not ready yet to divulge the details of the new agreements. As of June 2020, there were nearly 680,000 domestic workers in Kuwait - 325,000 from India and nearly 150,000 from the Philippines. Local and their international partner agencies are allowed to charge employers up to KD 990 for hiring new domestic helpers.

On Jan 3, 2020, the Philippines implemented a ban on sending domestic workers to Kuwait following the killing of a housemaid named Jeanelyn Padernal Villavende on Dec 28, 2019. The ban was lifted a month later after consultations with the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the filing of appropriate charges against the perpetrators and after Manila and Kuwait City agreed the full implementation of a harmonized employment contract for Filipino domestic workers. On Dec 30, 2020, a death verdict by hanging was handed by the criminal court to a Kuwaiti woman who killed Villavende. The woman's husband was sentenced to four years in jail for covering up and not reporting the crime.



KUWAIT: Pictures show limited activity at Kuwait International Airport during curfew hours, as people are advised to avoid travel unless necessary. — KUNA photos

## Philippines faces 'crisis...

Continued from Page 1

The nine-year-old's science teacher, Kristhean Navales, runs a class over Facebook Messenger but less than half of his 43 students have access to a device.

Using heart and thumb emojis, those that can join signal if they have understood or have questions about the lesson Navales has pasted into the group chat. They don't always have Internet and what data they have isn't enough for video calls. "Subjects that require hands-on activity like science, mathematics - how can we do that in the messenger?" Navales asked.

The rest of his students rely on printed materials that have been simplified by the school to ease the burden on children. After class, Navales visits Serrano and other students who are struggling to keep up - and delivers bags of vegetables to their families. He worries that his students are not learning much and he's frustrated by the government's failure to prepare schools for a return to in-person classes. "Their right to education should not be hampered by this pandemic," he told AFP.

Fifteen-year-olds in the Philippines were already at or near the bottom in reading, mathematics and science, according to OECD data. But since the school shutdown enrolments have dropped by more than a million, the UN's children agency estimates. Experts worry many students are falling even further behind and those that have dropped out might not come back to the classroom.

"COVID is affecting all school systems in the world, but here it is even worse," said Isy Faingold, UNICEF's education chief in the Philippines. Classroom closures also leave children at greater risk of sexual violence, teenage pregnancy and recruitment by armed groups, he said. A stay-at-home order for children under 15 makes it even more dangerous.

Many parents have flouted the order, allowing their

children to play in parks or on the street. But it's taking a toll on their development. The rule was briefly lifted for some children in January but Duterte quickly reimposed it, telling them to watch television instead. Plans for a limited reopening of schools in January were scrapped after a more infectious coronavirus variant emerged. Data show the virus largely spares children, but it remains unclear how much they transmit.

Duterte's own economic managers have warned of "permanent scarring" to children that could hurt their earning potential if home-based learning is prolonged. "Not being able to see and relate physically face to face with their classmates and friends has had a tremendous impact on the emotional development of children," said clinical child psychologist Maria Lourdes Carandang. She has seen "alarming" levels of depression and anxiety.

Parents and grandparents are also feeling the strain. Every week Aida Castillo, 65, picks up printed lessons from school for her five grandchildren and supervises their study while their parents work. Only the eldest has access to a smartphone for online classes when their mother comes home. "It's like you're the one teaching them and what if you don't know about (the subject)?" said Castillo, who left school after sixth grade. She wants face-to-face classes to resume, but only "if the pandemic is over" - something that seems even more distant as infections soar again.

School closures have affected all students, but the country's devastating rich-poor divide has made the impact unequal. Parents with money can hire tutors for their children - or even a live-in teacher. Recruitment company Ikon Solutions Asia has placed dozens of qualified teachers to live in a "bubble" with wealthy families during the pandemic, said managing director Paolo Martel.

For poor students like Maria Fe Morallos, who lives in a smoky charcoal-making neighborhood, such opportunities don't exist. The tenth grade student can't afford a smartphone so she sits under a naked lightbulb writing answers on worksheets, skipping lessons she doesn't understand. "The rich have everything they need," said Morallos. "It's hard for the poor because we don't have a gadget or the money to buy it." — AFP

virus and maintain social distancing. He recommended everyone should access the health ministry's official social media accounts and those of official authorities in the country to view instructions, recommendations and everything that will contribute to defeat the virus. Earlier, the ministry confirmed 1,335 more recovery cases, taking total recoveries to 195,507.

## Libya's new interim premier...

Continued from Page 1

Several ambassadors attended the ceremony alongside parliament speaker Aguila Saleh. "The time has come for us to shake hands," Saleh said, calling on Libyans to "turn the page on the past" and seek national reconciliation. The EU's envoy to Libya, Jose Sabadell, welcomed the signing-in with the Arabic word "mabrouk": "Congratulations". "Proud to have been part of this event in Tobruk," he tweeted, adding that the ceremony carried "strong messages... on the need for elections" in December.

Dbeibah's government includes two deputy prime ministers, 26 ministers and six ministers of state, with five posts including the key foreign affairs and justice portfolios handed to women, a first in Libya. The new administration is expected to replace both the UN-recognized Government of National Accord, based in Tripoli, and a parallel cabinet headquartered in the east, under the de facto control of forces backing military strongman Khalifa Haftar.

Turkey has propped up the GNA, while Haftar's administration has drawn on support from the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Russia. Outgoing GNA head

Fayez al-Sarraj has said he is "fully ready to hand over" power, while Haftar last month offered "the support of the armed forces for the peace process". But the new executive faces daunting challenges to unify the country's institutions, end a decade of fighting marked by international interference and prepare for elections on Dec 24.

Mohamed Al-Manfi, who heads the presidency council selected with Dbeibah last month also vowed to help cement unity before elections. "We must be the nucleus of reconciliation ahead of the elections," Manfi said. Dbeibah, 61, a wealthy businessman from the western port city of Misrata, once held posts under Gaddafi but has shown no clear ideological position.

During Gaddafi's rule, his family was one of the many beneficiaries of an industrial and economic boom in Misrata. Dbeibah is also known to be supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood and close to Turkey. He holds a master's degree from the University of Toronto in engineering, expertise which introduced him to Gaddafi's inner circle and led him to head a company managing huge construction projects.

Dbeibah was considered an outsider compared to other candidates vying for the job, and his election process has been marred by allegations of vote-buying. But he has jumped into his role even before his inauguration. On Saturday he launched a national conference on combatting coronavirus, while in a bid to battle corruption he has ordered investment and other financial firms to freeze all their operations. — AFP

## Idlib marks 10 years since...

Continued from Page 1

country after a string of Russia-backed victories against rebels and jihadists. A decade on, Assad looks set to win a new presidential election this summer in regime-held areas.

Idlib, whose 2.9 million inhabitants have been protected by a ceasefire since March 2020, is one of the few key areas still holding out against the Damascus government. It was a protest hub in 2011 and it officially came under full opposition control some four years later. A Russian-backed regime offensive in 2019 saw the Syrian government retake more than half the province.

Areas that remain outside its control are dominated by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group, which is led by Al-Qaeda's former Syria affiliate. Despite the regime victories, protesters yesterday were defiant. "We will remain committed to our... revolution even if it takes 50 years," Dahneen said. Yaman, a 30-year-old protester

echoed a similar sentiment. "We couldn't change much in the past 10 years, and this is painful, but we can't but continue on the path we have started, because Syria needs change," he said. "It is an existential issue."

Around him, protesters carried signs condemning the inaction of the international community. "A decade of disappointment," read one banner. Yahya, a 28-year-old demonstrator, said he would press on with his activism "until the regime is toppled and its leaders are tried in international courts".

As the conflict entered its 11th year, the head of the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR looked back on what he said was "one of the largest refugee crises in modern times". "Ten years of the Syrian crisis have inflicted unimaginable human suffering and pain," UNHCR head Filippo Grandi said in a statement on Friday. "The world has failed Syrians," he added, while acknowledging the huge efforts made to accommodate Syrian refugees.

The war has displaced some 6.7 million people inside Syria, with almost 5.6 million Syrians fleeing abroad, mostly to neighboring countries, according to UN figures. Endless rounds of UN-backed peace talks have failed to stem the bloodshed, and have in recent years been overshadowed by a parallel negotiations track led by Moscow and rebel backer Ankara. — AFP

## MoH: Return to normal life...

Continued from Page 1

Sanad urged everyone in Kuwait to comply with the precautionary measures against the

Local

## 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 swabs 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

# Lawmaker says grilling against premier ready

By B Izzak

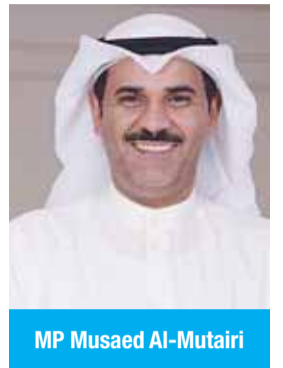
**KUWAIT:** Opposition MP Musaed Al-Mutairi said yesterday he will file to grill Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah after the National Assembly resumes regular sessions. He said the planned grilling will focus on a proposed general pardon for ex-opposition MPs and activists who have been living in self-exile for almost three years to escape harsh jail terms after being convicted of storming the Assembly building in Nov 2011.

The government is currently discussing legislation to pardon all opposition activists and ex-MPs over expressing political opinions. Another grilling against the prime minister had been submitted by MPs Mohammad Al-Mutairi and Bader Al-Dahoum, whose membership in the Assembly was revoked by the constitutional court on Sunday. MP Hamdan Al-Azemi said he will replace him in the grilling.

MP Yousef Al-Fadhlah said that the constitutional court ruling against Dahoum must be respected and implemented

because it is a court verdict. Opposition MPs have criticized the ruling, claiming it breached the rules of the law and the constitution.

Meanwhile, opposition MP Thamer Al-Suwait claimed yesterday that 18 MPs have entered into an alliance with the government to form a majority in the Assembly to counter opposition MPs. He said the alliance will reject grillings against the prime minister and send them for debate to the Assembly's legal and legislative committee.



MP Musaed Al-Mutairi



**KUWAIT:** People consume food in the trunk of their cars in Kuwait City yesterday as dine-in is banned in restaurants due to COVID-19 restrictions.

—Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

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## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A view of Kuwait City's skyline at sunset. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## News in brief

Wafra poultry farm closed  
three months as precaution

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) closed down a chicken farm in Wafra after culling birds infected with avian flu, Al-Jarida Arabic daily reported yesterday, quoting sources. According to the sources, 300,000 egg-laying birds were destroyed and the farm will remain closed as a precautionary measure for three months or until the temperature rise, which will eradicate the disease. They said teams are continuing their inspection of the area surrounding the farm and taking random samples to make sure the area is completely free of bird flu, adding that all swabs taken in the past days show that infection did not reach the surrounding farms or employees there. As for compensating the affected farm, sources said PAAAFR will discuss the matter after inspections are complete to determine whether farm owners deserve compensation or the cases were due to negligence, adding the number of cases is not small.

## US Dollar stable at KD 0.301

KUWAIT: The exchange rate of the US Dollar was stable at KD 0.301, and the same case was also with the Euro at KD 0.360, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) said yesterday. CBK added in its daily bulletin that the British Pound Sterling also was stable at KD 0.420, same as Swiss Franc at KD 0.324, while the Japanese Yen remained at KD 0.003. Currencies' exchange rates as declared by the CBK reflect average rates and do not actual trades.

KFH hails efforts  
of frontline heroes

KUWAIT: Continuing its ongoing commitment towards social responsibility, Kuwait Finance House (KFH) organized a visit to the heroes of the frontlines while performing their national duty. This initiative aims at recognizing their dedication to work for the service of Kuwait and the safety of its people, but also for appreciating their crucial role in the current exceptional circumstances.

It also contributes in encouraging all personnel in the frontlines, while emphasizing on the importance of adhering to governmental procedures and measures, and following the instructions of the official authorities in this regards.

The initiative affirms KFH's keenness in continuing its national and social role as a leading Islamic financial institution at the level of the private sector, carrying out its obligations towards society, governmental bodies, and official agencies in various circumstances. This also reflects the keenness to enhance the fruitful collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and stressing the importance of continuing the strategic partnership.

KFH emphasized its pioneering national role dur-



KUWAIT: KFH team's visit to Ministry of interior frontline workers.

ing its support for various social and national efforts, as it contributed to supporting the efforts of the Ministry of Interior by providing 30 automobiles that serve the ministry's personnel and the ministry's workers while performing their duties towards the country and society.

The bank also contributed to supporting the Red

Crescent Society in providing a large number of mobile security points to serve the security authorities in the health quarantines and various security sites.

KFH's community programs in various fields confirm its leadership in national and community responsibility and reflect the success of its initiatives that were appreciated by global and local authorities.

## 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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Study supports  
ultrasound treatment  
for eye pressure

By Abdullatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Ophthalmologist at the Health Ministry Dr Yousuf Al-Dhafiri said he published a study in the British Biomed medical magazine proving the efficacy of ultrasound to treat eye pressure during the cataract removal procedure. Dhafiri said in a press statement that he carried out a study with 60 patients in Kuwait - ultrasound was used during cataract removal for 30 of them, while the removal for 30 others was done without the use of ultrasound. All patients were suffering from open angle glaucoma.

Dhafiri said the research continued for two years and eye pressure was checked with and without the use of eye drops. During the monitoring period, it was proven that for patients for whom ultrasound was used to treat eye pressure while removing the cataract, their eye pressure dropped significantly. Most of them did not even use eye drops anymore. Dhafiri advised the use of ultrasound and removal of cataract in one procedure, so patients can benefit in the long run, while the use of glaucoma eye drops, which cause damage to the optical nerve, can be reduced.



Dr Yousuf Al-Dhafiri

Kuwait strongly  
condemns continued  
Houthi attacks

KUWAIT: Kuwait yesterday strongly condemned and denounced the continued Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia and the targeting of the civilian areas, said the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry. In a statement, the ministry stressed that the continuation of these crimes by the Houthi militia harmed the security of the Kingdom and undermined the stability of the region in defiance of international and humanitarian laws and norms. The ministry reaffirmed Kuwait's solidarity with Saudi Arabia and its support to all the measures it took to preserve its security, stability, and sovereignty. —KUNA



## In my view

Think of the psychological  
health of people

By Azzah Al-Ghamdi

local@kuwaittimes.com

In this article I would like to focus on the coronavirus, which we have been facing for more than a year. Doctors around the world have tried to find a suitable solution to stop the spread of this pandemic, but until now they haven't found one.

The World Health Organization made a plan and gave guidance to countries to follow to control the spread of COVID-19, but these instructions were not successful and COVID-19 cases are still rising. Victims of this pandemic are also increasing day by day.

We all thought vaccination might control the pandemic, but all vaccines have not given expected results, as many who got the vaccine fell sick and some of them died. So the suitable solution for this pandemic is to forget about it and continue with our lives without thinking about it.

Because all solutions have been applied and none of these managed to control COVID-19, so it is not reasonable to continue to follow the same steps which have no benefit, because even if people do not die from the pandemic, they will die from fear and stress, and this is more dangerous than COVID-19. Many states have returned to curfews, although it has no effect on the spread of COVID-19. The stress of the curfew is more dangerous than COVID-19, because it has negative effects on the psychological health of the people and has caused many dangerous social problems.

We can't force people to stay at home for many reasons, particularly because it is against human rights. People are free to move because we can't make the community a prison. This is not acceptable at all. If countries couldn't control it in the beginning, they will not in the future, because this pandemic does not have an expected expiry date.

The question is until when will we make the community a prison? Now we are in the second year of the pandemic and people have started to become nervous and bored. This anger is dangerous for relations among families and between governments and their peoples.

I think the suitable solution is to forget about this pandemic and deal with it like any other illness, especially since the percentage of recovery is high. So there is no reason to continue pressuring people, because the result will be more dangerous than COVID-19.

We know that symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to the flu, so after we have introduced vaccines, we should return to normal life again, especially since no one will die before the day God has ordained. The stress from all the instructions of the WHO suggest they are not acceptable and not successful in controlling COVID-19. So it is useless to continue to follow these instructions.

We should think of the psychological health of people. Many crimes have taken place because of stress and the financial crisis. Children's psychological health is affected because schools are closed and they are home all the time with no entertainment.

Countries should think of these dangers more than COVID-19, because the high rate of recovery gives us a sign that this pandemic is not dangerous, so there is no excuse for the continuation of the curfew or closing schools and entertainment places.

• Al-Chandi is a law graduate from Kuwait International Law School.



Biggest sandstorm in decade turns Beijing skies yellow

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TOKYO: US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin (second right) gets off a plane upon his arrival at the US Yokota Air Base in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

# Top US officials head to Asia

## Austin and Blinken to boost alliances in first foreign trip

TOKYO: Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin arrived in Japan yesterday as he and top US diplomat Antony Blinken began their first overseas trip, looking to rally key Asian allies as a bulwark to China.

The pair, who travelled separately, will meet in Japan for the first leg of their trip, holding talks with their counterparts as well as Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga. They will both continue on to South Korea, before Defense Secretary Austin heads separately to India and Secretary of State Blinken holds talks back in the United States with Chinese officials.

President Joe Biden's team has been deliberately slow to start the usually hectic pace of diplomatic travel that marks a new administration, hoping to set an example discouraging travel during the pandemic. But the administration has also made clear it wants to reset US relations with the rest of the world, particularly traditional allies, after the tumult of the Donald Trump era.

In a joint opinion piece in the Washington Post yesterday, Austin and Blinken said they would look

to "revitalize our ties with friends and partners". The visit will also be about presenting a united front on the challenges posed by China. "Our combined power makes us stronger when we must push back against China's aggression and threats," they wrote.

"Together, we will hold China accountable when it abuses human rights in Xinjiang and Tibet, systematically erodes autonomy in Hong Kong, undercuts democracy in Taiwan or asserts maritime claims in the South China Sea that violate international law. "If we don't act decisively and lead, Beijing will."

### Talks with Chinese officials

Speaking in Hawaii before heading to the region, Austin said he and Blinken would be "listening and learning", as well as looking to enhance US military capacity with allies to increase Washington's "competitive edge" over Beijing. "Our goal is to make sure that we have the capabilities and the operational plans... to be able to offer a credible deter-

rence to China or anybody else who would want to take on the US." A senior US defense official, speaking to reporters travelling with Austin, said discussions with Japanese officials would include talks on "China's role in the region, China's behavior in the region".

Beijing's increased presence in the waters around the disputed Senkaku islands-administered by Japan but claimed by China, which calls them the Diaoyu-islands-will also be on the table. "That's an important part of the conversation because we have treaty commitments with Japan," the official said, referring to US defence obligations to Japan under a joint security treaty. "It's a sensitive part of the conversation that we'll have."

The pair arrive in Asia after an unprecedented summit of the leaders of the so-called Quad-an informal alliance of the United States, Japan, India and Australia, seen as a counterbalance to China's increasing influence. Blinken's events in Tokyo and Seoul will be largely virtual, with addresses to

Japanese business leaders and journalists by video conference, though his talks with officials will be in person. In Seoul, he will consult on Biden's review of policy towards Pyongyang in the wake of Trump's summits with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The Pentagon said Austin would meet Defense Minister Rajnath Singh in Delhi and seek a deepening partnership with India, whose relations with China have worsened following a deadly Himalayan clash last year. Blinken will return from Seoul to the United States and join Biden's national security advisor Jake Sullivan for talks in Anchorage with their Chinese counterparts.

Blinken said last week he expected to "lay out in very frank terms many concerns that we have with Beijing's actions and behavior". Any future engagement would "really have to be based on the proposition that we're seeing tangible progress and tangible outcomes on the issues of concern to us with China", he told the House Foreign Affairs Committee. —AFP

## Lapid emerges top challenger to Netanyahu

JERUSLAEM: He's a former prime-time news anchor once known largely for his chiseled good looks, but Israel's Yair Lapid has emerged as one of the strongest challengers to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

When Lapid founded his Yesh Atid (There is a Future) party in 2012, some dismissed him as the latest in a series of media stars seeking to parlay his celebrity into political success. Yesh Atid, a fiercely secularist centrist party, claimed a surprising 19 seats in Israel's 120-member parliament in 2013 elections, earning Lapid a brief turn as finance minister under Netanyahu and establishing him as a credible force in politics. That credibility is now reaching new peaks.

Yesh Atid joined the centrist Blue and White coalition formed in 2019 under the leadership of former military chief Benny Gantz. Blue and

White then battled Netanyahu's right-wing Likud in three elections-all inconclusive-in less than a year.

When Gantz decided last spring to enter a Netanyahu-led coalition, citing the need for unity as the coronavirus pandemic was gathering pace, Lapid bolted. He accused Gantz of breaching a fundamental promise Blue and White had made to its supporters: that it would fight to oust Netanyahu.

In an interview with AFP in September, Lapid said Gantz had naively believed that Netanyahu would work collaboratively within the coalition. "I told (Gantz), 'I've worked with Netanyahu. Why don't you listen to the voice of experience... He is 71 years old. He is not going to change,'" Lapid said.

After exiting Blue and White, Lapid entered parliament as the head of Yesh Atid and leader of the opposition. He described the short-lived Netanyahu-Gantz unity government as "a ridiculous coalition", in which cabinet ministers who disliked each other did not bother to communicate.

He also predicted the coalition would collapse in December, which it



NETANYA, Israel: Workers hang election campaign posters for Israel's Likud party bearing a portrait of its leader Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (bottom), and opposition party leader Yair Lapid (top) on a billboard in the Israeli coastal city of Netanya. — AFP

did, amid bitter acrimony between Netanyahu and Gantz.

Lapid is the Tel Aviv-born 57-year-old son of the fiercely secular former justice minister Yosef "Tommy" Lapid, another journalist who left the media to enter politics. His mother, Shulamit, is a novelist, playwright and

poet. Yair Lapid, an amateur boxer and martial artist who has also published a dozen books, including thrillers, children's literature and non-fiction, was a newspaper columnist before becoming a presenter on Channel 2 TV, a role that boosted his stardom. — AFP

## Merkel party in crisis after defeat in polls

FRANKFURT: German Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative party was in crisis mode yesterday after suffering heavy losses in two regional polls, seen as a rebuke of its pandemic management six months before a general election.

Merkel's center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) scored its worst-ever results in elections in the southwestern states of Baden-Wuerttemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate, according to estimates from public broadcasters. Sunday's rout raised questions about the conservatives' chances in the September 26 general election, when Germans will choose a successor to outgoing leader Merkel.

"It can't go on like this," said Der Spiegel weekly, saying Merkel's house was "on fire". The rout was blamed on growing public anger over a

sluggish vaccine rollout, a delayed start to mass rapid testing and higher infection numbers despite months of shutdowns. In the days leading up to the regional votes, Merkel's CDU and its CSU Bavarian sister party were also rocked by revelations of lawmakers apparently profiting from deals to procure face masks in the early days of the pandemic. Three conservative MPs have since resigned, and the CDU/CSU alliance has forced all its lawmakers to declare any financial gain from the coronavirus crisis, vowing "zero tolerance".

### 'Wake-up call'

CSU secretary general Markus Blume called Sunday's drubbing a "wake-up call" for the CDU/CSU. If Germany's largest bloc wants to stay in power when Merkel bows out after 16 years, it urgently needs to "win back trust", he said. "We need clear decisions and a clear course in the fight against the coronavirus," he added. The first order of business should be to decide the bloc's candidate for chancellor, media outlet

Spiegel said. New CDU chief Armin Laschet is the obvious choice but he lacks broad support. Critics say he has failed to carve out a political profile beyond representing continuity in the post-Merkel era.

Laschet needs to "free himself from Merkel's shadow" and "say what the party stands for", Andreas Roedder, a historian at Mainz university and a CDU member, told the Bild daily. Opinion polls suggest Germans would prefer to see popular Bavarian premier and CSU leader Markus Soeder in the top job, but he has yet to declare a willingness to run. If Soeder genuinely has chancellor ambitions, "he must strike now", said Handelsblatt financial daily.

Merkel's CDU garnered just 24 percent of the vote in the wealthy state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, down from 27 percent five years ago, estimates showed. The state is an outlier in Germany because it has been run by a premier from the Green party for over a decade, Winfried Kretschmann. — AFP

## MSF denounces widespread attacks on Tigray clinics

ADDIS ABABA: The medical charity MSF yesterday condemned a "deliberate and generalized" program of targeting clinics in the conflict-hit Tigray region of Ethiopia. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed launched a military campaign in Tigray last year after blaming the region's ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), for attacks on army camps. Abiy, winner of the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, leaned on forces from Amhara to secure western and southern Tigray once the TPLF retreated from those areas, and multiple reports have already emerged of dire conditions. A statement issued yesterday by Doctors Without Borders, known by its French initials MSF, said "treatment structures in the Ethiopian region of Tigray were looted, vandalized and destroyed in a deliberate and generalized manner" according to its observers in the area.

The group said it had visited 106 sites between mid-December and early March, and that 70 percent had been looted. Only 13 percent "functioned normally", the French-language statement added. "One health establishment in five visited by MSF teams were occupied by soldiers. In certain cases, this occupation was temporary, while in others, it continued during the visit," the group said. Last week, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Congress that "acts of ethnic cleansing" had been committed in western Tigray, with Ethiopia quickly rejecting the charge as "unfounded and spurious".

According to MSF in Abiy Addi, a town in central Tigray, the hospital was occupied in early March by Ethiopian forces to treat their wounded, while in Mugulat to the east, "Eritrean soldiers" used a local clinic as a base. Both Addis Abeba and Asmara have denied the presence of Eritrean soldiers in the region, despite persistent reports. In late November, Abiy declared victory in Tigray after capturing the regional capital Mekele, but TPLF leaders fled and the fighting continues. —AFP

## International

# Biggest sandstorm in decade turns Beijing skies yellow

## City residents use goggles, masks and hairnets to protect themselves

**BEIJING:** Beijing was cloaked in thick yellow smog yesterday with pollution levels surging off the charts as the worst sandstorm in a decade descended on China's capital from the Gobi desert. City residents used goggles, masks and hairnets to protect themselves from the choking dust and sand, with landmarks including the Forbidden City partly obscured behind an apocalyptic-haze.

draped buildings in an eerie glow, Beijing residents fretted over the health risks of a storm which compounded days of hazardous PM 2.5 pollution in the capital.

"I feel every breath will give me lung problems," Beijing resident Zhang Yunya said. It was the worst sandstorm in a decade to hit a capital, which had pegged its hopes of rebuilding a natural barrier to

belts is disputed against the prevailing desertification of the country's northwest.

### 'Very fierce'

Pan Xiaochuan, a Beijing-based environmental health expert, told AFP that the lack of recent rain or snow meant the ground was extra dry and made the sandstorm "very fierce." "If there is less moisture, more dust will be scraped up," he said. "Since the sandstorm is blown from a high altitude, the general windbreak tree belts won't be very effective, so it has been blown over ... very quickly." Sandstorms blowing into the capital are a result of extreme weather conditions and desertification, said Li Shuo of Greenpeace China. But he told AFP that "intense" industrial activities had also contributed to bad air in Beijing over recent weeks, with the production of steel, cement and aluminum already overtaking pre-pandemic levels as the economy bounces back into action.

Discussion of the orange haze lit up online discussions—with 230 million views on social media platform Weibo by yesterday afternoon. "This orange red sandstorm makes it look like the end of the world," said one Weibo user. Pollution in the city was at "hazardous" levels, according to air quality monitoring website Aqicn, as the reading soared off the scale for many apps. Aqicn said levels of PM 10 large particulate matter were nearly 20 times the World Health Organization's recommended daily maximum exposure.

But the state-run Global Times said PM 10 pollution in the six downtown districts was "over 8,100" yesterday morning—a figure which would be 160 times the recommended limit. Smaller PM 2.5 particles, which seep deep into human lungs and cause respiratory illnesses, were also at a hazardous level yesterday morning. China cut its national average level of airborne PM 2.5 dramatically between 2015 and 2019 and the government has announced an ambitious target to reach carbon neutrality by 2060. But in a tweet Li warned that Beijing is "what an ecological crisis looks like." "It's hard to claim we are moving forward when you can't see what's in front," he tweeted. — AFP



**MEXICO CITY:** Mexican doctor Yesenia Leyva and widow of Colombian doctor Christian Andres Cruz, poses with a picture of her husband, during an interview with AFP. — AFP

## Families mourn Mexican doctor lost to COVID

**MEXICO CITY:** Christian Cruz specialized in intubation. Jesus de la Torre gave advice over the telephone to colleagues treating coronavirus patients. Diego Gutierrez worked long days examining tumors through a microscope. The three doctors are among several thousand health workers who have died from COVID-19 in Mexico—which has the highest such toll in the Americas. The loss is not only irreparable for their families but also devastating for Mexico, one of the countries hardest hit by the pandemic and facing a shortage of specialists.

Cruz was an anesthesiologist of Colombian origin who specialized in inserting tubes in patients' airways to help them breathe. As the pandemic ripped through Mexico he found his services in ever higher demand in both the public and private hospitals where he worked. Cruz, who was 32 years old when he died on December 12, suffered from systemic sclerosis, an autoimmune disease that put him at heightened risk from the coronavirus. "We took extra care of ourselves," his widow Yesenia Leyva told AFP next to her husband's picture and the laryngoscope he used to intubate patients. "We all have a chance of getting sick from being exposed for so long, especially in our work," said Leyva, a 33-year-old pediatric oncologist.

### 'Heroic efforts'

As of March 1, Mexico had recorded 3,471 confirmed deaths among health workers from the coronavirus—nearly half of them doctors—and 230,000 infections. In total, around 195,000 lives have been claimed by COVID-19 in the country of 126 million people, which has the world's third highest death toll. The Pan American Health Organization reported in February that the number of health workers killed by COVID-19 in Mexico was more than twice that in the United States, which has the highest overall fatality toll. It said that 17 countries in the Americas had reported a total of 6,645 deaths among health workers as of last month.

The organization's director, Carissa Etienne, paid tribute to the huge sacrifices made by health workers—not just doctors and nurses but also orderlies, ambulance crews and cleaners. "Many have risked their own lives and those of their families to care for those who are sick, and their heroic efforts have saved many COVID patients," she said. Such dangers were part of the job for de la Torre, one of Mexico's most prominent emergency physicians who died on December 18 aged 67. "He was very dedicated," said his 43-year-old son Federico, who keeps one of his father's gowns and his laryngoscope to remember him by. "He sometimes missed birthdays and other family events to go into surgery or deal with medical issues."

In the first months of the pandemic, de la Torre kept going to the hospital where he worked in the central state of Morelos. Later, due to his age, he stopped but he still wanted to help. "He wanted to be there because it was something new for most of his colleagues," his son said. De la Torre decided to offer guidance by telephone to doctors on the frontlines, but even so he eventually caught the virus.

Ariadna Bautista sometimes wonders how the virus infected Gutierrez, her husband, who analyzed biopsies, mainly of tumors. His microscope still sits on his desk and his robe hangs on the chair where he would spend hours working until he fell ill and died on August 5. "I don't know how the virus got into the house," Bautista said. "I was the only one who went out." — AFP

those who are vulnerable to coronavirus to vote early, with most people including party leaders expected to wait until Wednesday to cast their ballots. Exceptions to the 9:00 pm to 4:30 am curfew will be made over the next three days so people can vote "without hindrance", Rutte said last week. His coalition partners, the conservative Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and Christian Union, are vying for third place in the election, meaning they could likely return to government too. But with a large group of others including the Greens (GroenLinks) not far behind, the shape of any eventual coalition remains uncertain—and after the last elections in 2017 coalition talks took seven months.

Voters said however that the key issue was the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic: initially liberal but with increasingly tough restrictions, and a slow start to vaccination. Dubbed the "Teflon" premier for emerging unscathed from crises, Rutte recently shrugged off the fact that he had to resign in January over a scandal in which thousands of parents were falsely accused of scamming childcare. He has since continued in a caretaker role. — AFP



**BEIJING:** People cross a street during a sandstorm in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

The city government ordered schools to cancel outside sport and events and advised the public to stay inside where possible, as hundreds of flights were cancelled. Chinese weather agencies blamed the poor air quality on a sandstorm sweeping across northern China from northern Mongolia, where authorities there said it had left several dead, before being carried south by winds and reducing visibility in Beijing to less than 500 meters. Under heavy skies, which

such phenomena on intensive tree replanting in stripped forest areas, also known as the "green great wall". Beijing said last year it expected fewer and weaker sandstorms to hit northern China due to its reforestation efforts. A 2019 study published in the journal Nature Sustainability found some two million square miles of vegetation had been added to the surface of the earth since 2000, a quarter of which was contributed by China. But the impact of those green-

## Orban's largesse wins over Romania's Hungarians

**CARTA, Romania:** In the village of Carta, deep in Romania's Transylvania region, the fruits of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's generosity towards the country's Hungarian ethnic minority are plain to see. Attila Nagy walks proudly along the hallways of the modern medical center he manages, part of the ice hockey academy built in Carta with money from the Hungarian government. The complex also boasts an ice skating rink and a hotel, and is overseen by the Mens Sana foundation, a Romanian NGO which receives funding from Budapest. Of the 10 million euros (\$11.9 million) Mens Sana spent on the center, 90 percent came from Hungarian taxpayers.

Since he returned to power in 2010, Orban has pumped millions of euros through grants and NGOs towards Hungarian communities in Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine, with the influx of money increasing after 2016. More than 250 million euros have so far reached Hungarian communities in Romania alone. The cash has flowed to schools, stadiums and small factories across Transylvania, home to most of Romania's 1.2 million ethnic Hungarians—over six percent of the country's population.

The money has created a loyal voter bloc for Orban's Fidesz party, with 96 percent of diaspora Hungarians voting for the party in 2018 elections.

But the largesse has irked the Romanian government. The foreign ministry said recently that "granting economic aid goes beyond the sphere of preferential treatment that a state can offer to a minority living in another country". On a visit to Bucharest last month, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto ruled out any change of course.

### Budapest's 'moral support'

"Orban is animated by a nationalist ideology" aimed at "maintaining compact ethnic communities, which allows them to obtain a certain autonomy", Tamas Kiss, a sociologist at the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, said.

The Pro Economica Foundation, one of the vehicles Budapest uses to allocate the money, rejects accusations of discrimination, insisting that it "never checks the ethnicity" of those who receive its funds. It does however say that part of its mission is to ensure "sustainable economic development and job creation", describing this as "crucial for Romania's ethnic Hungarians to be able to stay in the country".

The wave of westward emigration that has decimated Romania's population for the past three decades has not spared the Hungarian minority, which has lost a quarter of its members in 20 years. One of the recipients of Pro Economica grants is the Csiki Chips crisp factory in Transylvania's Harghita region, which is trying to help stem that tide. — AFP



**Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban**

## Bolivia's Anez says to be held for four months in 'coup' probe

**LA PAZ, Bolivia:** Former Bolivian president Jeanine Anez said Sunday she had been sentenced to four months pre-trial detention after she was arrested on charges linked to the ousting of her predecessor Evo Morales in what he claims was a coup d'etat. Anez, who was arrested on Saturday on terrorism, sedition and conspiracy charges—tweeted as opposition groups called for protests against the moves widely denounced as political score-settling. "They are sending me to detention for four months to await a trial for a 'coup' that never happened," she wrote, after hearing the order from Judge Regina Santa Cruz in a virtual hearing. In an indictment seen by AFP, prosecutors had originally asked for Anez, 53, and two ministers in her year-long caretaker government to be held for six months as a "precautionary" measure.

Anez, who will be transferred to a women's prison in La Paz, added in her tweet: "From here I call on Bolivia to have faith and hope. One day, together, we will build a better Bolivia."

Earlier she told reporters that rule of law was being "undermined" and that Bolivia could become a "no man's land." As the most senior parliamentarian left after Morales and his allies fled the country in November 2019 following weeks of demonstrations over disputed elections, rightist conservative Anez took over as caretaker president. Her arrest came months after Morales returned to Bolivia from exile on the back of a fresh election victory in October 2020



**LA PAZ, Bolivia:** Former interim Bolivia's President Jeannine Anez (center) is escorted by police members of the Special Force against Crime (FELCC) after being arrested in La Paz. — AFP

## Dutch vote in COVID dominated election

**THE HAGUE, Netherlands:** The Netherlands began three days of voting yesterday in one of the first major tests of a European government's coronavirus policies, with Prime Minister Mark Rutte expected to win another term in office. With the country under its tightest COVID-19 restrictions including an overnight curfew, polling stations opened at 7:30 am mainly for at-risk people yesterday and today before the main election day tomorrow. A trickle of people could be seen voting at a polling station in the miniature theme park Madurodam in The Hague after it opened its doors, an AFP journalist said.

Police used water cannon to break up anti-Rutte protests on the eve of voting, and riots against the

introduction of the country's first curfew since World War II rocked the Netherlands in January. But Rutte in power since 2010 and one of Europe's longest serving leaders—is expected to emerge as head of his fourth coalition government owing to his steady handling of the pandemic. It has drowned out previously dominant issues such as immigration, and opinion polls show Rutte's liberal VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) party with around 25 percent of the vote. "It seems that right-wing voters really like the VVD and Rutte or particularly actually the prime minister," Andre Krouwel, who teaches political science at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, told AFP. "So they're getting not only what we call the 'prime minister bonus', that being in the office of prime minister provides, but also the 'corona bonus', because he was the spokesman during the pandemic." Rutte is far ahead of his closest rival, the anti-Islam PVV (Freedom Party) of Geert Wilders, which is on around 13 percent, making it likely to remain the second biggest party in parliament.

### 'Teflon PM'

Dutch authorities have urged the elderly and

International

# Suu Kyi court hearing postponed over Myanmar's Internet block

## China 'very concerned' for safety of its citizens in Myanmar

**YANGON:** A block on mobile data networks across Myanmar yesterday scuppered a scheduled video court appearance by ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi, as protesters returned to the streets after the bloodiest day since the military coup six weeks ago. At least 44 protesters were killed Sunday as security forces cracked down on pro-democracy demonstrations, taking the death toll since the coup to more than 120, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) monitoring group.

Myanmar has been in uproar since the putsch, with daily protests demanding a restoration of democracy despite the junta's increasingly forceful attempts to quell dissent. Meanwhile, Beijing said it was "very concerned" for the safety of its citizens in Myanmar yesterday, after several Chinese factories were attacked amid a bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Yangon. China "is very concerned about the impact on the safety of Chinese institutions and personnel", said foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, urging Myanmar to take actions to "resolutely avoid a recurrence of such incidents".

The court hearing for Suu Kyi—who spent more than 15 years under house arrest during previous military rule—was scheduled for 10 am (0330 GMT) in Myanmar's capital Naypyidaw, but it was postponed until March 24, her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw said.

"There's no court hearing because there's no internet and the hearing is conducted by video conference... We cannot do video," he said. Myanmar authorities have throttled the internet every night for several weeks, normally restoring services in the morning, but monitoring service Netblocks said mobile data networks were kept offline yesterday.

Suu Kyi faces at least four charges: possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies, violating coronavirus restrictions, breaching telecommunications laws, and intent to cause public unrest. Military authorities have also accused her of accepting illegal payments of \$600,000 in cash as well as a large quantity of gold—allegations her lawyer says are "groundless".

Khin Maung Zaw had previously complained he was not allowed to meet Suu Kyi, who has been in custody since the coup, and yesterday said police have



**NAYPYIDAW:** Police inspect the identification card of motorists entering Zabuthiri township court in Naypyidaw yesterday. — AFP

appointed two junior lawyers on his team to have the power of attorney. "The police have no right to decide who represents the defendants," he said, adding that the whole situation is "strange"—from the lack of Wi-Fi in the court to the appointment of junior lawyers.

### Martial law

Suu Kyi's postponed hearing came a day after violent clashes between security forces and protesters, and the torching of several Chinese-owned factories in a textile-producing district of commercial hub Yangon as many protesters believe Beijing is supportive of the coup. The AAPP yesterday said six more deaths had been confirmed to add to an overnight toll of 38, making Sunday the deadliest single day since the military seized power. Six Yangon townships were under martial law by morning—anyone arrested there faces trial by military tribunal rather than civilian courts, with sentences ranging from three years' hard labor to execution. But protesters were undeterred yesterday, with local media publishing images showing crowds gathering in Karen state and a sit-in protest in Myanmar's second-largest city Mandalay.

State-run television confirmed yesterday that a police officer was shot dead in the city of Bago, 60

kilometers (37 miles) northeast of Yangon, during a protest. The Chinese embassy in Myanmar issued a statement condemning the actions of "destroyers" after the violence in Yangon's garment-producing townships, urging the police to "guarantee the security" of Chinese businesses. Taiwan, meanwhile, advised its companies in Myanmar to fly the island's flag to avoid being targeted.

### 'Junta leaders don't belong in power'

International alarm over the bloodshed is growing, but so far Myanmar's generals have shown no signs of heeding calls for restraint. Tom Andrews, United Nations special rapporteur on rights in Myanmar, tweeted that he was "heartbroken/outraged" at Sunday's events. "Junta leaders don't belong in power, they belong behind bars," he wrote. "Their supply of cash & weapons must be cut now." UN envoy for Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener also condemned Sunday's bloodshed, while the country's former colonial ruler Britain said it was "appalled" by the use of force "against innocent people". Last week, Andrews said there was growing evidence that the junta was committing crimes against humanity—including murder, forced disappearances and torture. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Biden, Pelosi skip questions on NY gov

**WASHINGTON:** US President Joe Biden sidestepped questions Sunday on whether New York Governor Andrew Cuomo should resign over sexual misconduct allegations, while House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said the state leader should "look inside his heart" to decide if he can govern. The pair stopped short of joining a growing list of other politicians, including many fellow Democrats, in demanding Cuomo's resignation. Exiting Marine One Sunday, Biden told a reporter that "the investigation is underway and we should see what it brings us." Eight women have come forward since last month to denounce what they said were inappropriate words and gestures from Cuomo. — AFP

#### Greek far-left hitman ends fasting

**ATHENS:** Jailed Greek far-left hitman Dimitris Koufodinas on Sunday ended a 66-day hunger strike, his lawyer said, a day after doctors warned he risked "sudden death" from disruption to multiple vital organs. "We persuaded him to end the strike," Koufodinas' lawyer Ioanna Kourtovik told AFP. In a statement released through Kourtovik, Koufodinas thanked "progressive people" for having shown their support in multiple protests around the country in the past months. The demonstrations were often marred by violence. "What is happening out there is more important than what initiated it," he said. — AFP

#### UK PM to curb violence against women

**LONDON:** Britain's prime minister vowed on Sunday to take action to better protect women after a national outpouring of grief and outrage over the death of a woman who went missing after setting out to walk home in London earlier this month. Boris Johnson also promised several reviews into the policing of a vigil for the woman on Saturday night, after male officers were seen scuffling with and restraining female demonstrators—further souring the national mood. Sarah Everard was found dead days after she went missing on March 3. A police officer was later charged with her kidnap and murder. — AFP

#### Ecuadoran court rejects vote recount

**QUITO:** An electoral court in Ecuador ruled Sunday against the appeal for a recount by indigenous leader Yaku Perez, who narrowly missed making it into the country's upcoming second round of presidential elections. Left-wing economist Andres Arauz and former right-wing banker Guillermo Lasso won the February 7 first round, according to the National Electoral Council (CNE), the body that organized the vote. Perez, who missed inclusion in the April 11 runoff by just 32,600 votes, alleged there were irregularities and demanded a recount. But the electoral court said it "denied the appeal and ratified the content of the resolution issued by the National Electoral Council." — AFP

## Afghan officials reverse ban on girls singing

**AFGHANISTAN:** A ban on girls singing in public imposed by education officials in the Afghan capital last week has been overturned after a social media campaign that included local women uploading videos of themselves belting out their favorite songs. Schoolgirl choirs are a regular feature of official Afghan events, but when education authorities in Kabul banned the participation of teenagers it prompted an immediate backlash.

The order raised fears that education officials were "Talibanizing" the country, heralding a return to when the authoritarian Islamist group barred the participation of women in almost all parts of society outside their own homes. Late Sunday, the education ministry issued a statement saying the ban "does not reflect the positions or policies of the Ministry".

The announcement followed a furious backlash from social media users using the hashtag "#IAmMySong" to raise awareness. "In Afghanistan today the Ministry of Education suffocated the voices of our little girls by making it illegal for them to sing," tweeted Shamila Kohistani, former captain of the national women's football team.

"They are quite literally teaching girls that they have no voice. #IAmMySong." On Facebook, Tayeb Safa wrote: "I feel the Taliban are making a comeback." The controversy comes amid fears for a possible Taliban return to power as the US mulls pulling its remaining troops from the country in the coming weeks in accordance with a landmark deal signed with the insurgents last year. Peace talks between the Taliban and the government have largely stalled in recent months, while a targeted assassination campaign—including the murders of high-profile Afghan women—has further rattled the country. Afghanistan continues to be one of the most oppressive countries for women despite decades of international aid and the fall of the Taliban. —AFP

## Australia reckons with sexual assault amid #MeToo wave

**BRISBANE:** When the #MeToo movement began shaking the globe in late 2017, the reverberations Down Under were relatively muted. Constrained by Australia's strict defamation laws, women came forward in droves online but the allegations of sexual assault and harassment only trickled into the news media. In recent weeks however the country has been forced to reflect anew on the scourge of sexual assault, as rape scandals struck at the heart of Australian politics.

Former government staffer Brittany Higgins publicly alleged last month she had been raped by a male colleague in a minister's Parliament House office, weeks before a general election in 2019.

The 26-year-old said that she was treated like a "political problem" by her bosses, including now-Defence Minister Linda Reynolds, who was later forced to apologize and pay damages for calling Higgins a "lying cow". Sexual assault allegations also emerged against Attorney-General Christian Porter, 50, who denies raping a 16-year-old when they were both attending a Sydney school debating competition in 1988.

The woman died last June, reportedly by suicide, after taking her complaint to police then withdrawing from the investigation. Canberra has been repeatedly criticized for a "toxic" workplace culture that has spawned persistent allegations of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct against women in recent years.

Few women in politics appear immune. Former deputy prime minister Julie Bishop sensationally said last week that a group of men in the conservative ruling Liberal Party who called themselves the "big swinging dicks" attempted to thwart her political aspirations. But the seriousness of the latest allegations—and perceptions the government has mishandled them—has sparked fresh public outrage at the treatment of women in politics and wider Australian society.

A petition by 22-year-old Sydneysider Chanel Contos calling for consent to be included in school sexual education earlier has attracted more than 35,000 signatures—as well as thousands of testimonies from female students detailing sexual assault. Many have flocked to social media in recent weeks to call for action, with organizers expecting tens of thousands to demand gender equality at more than 40 protests across the country yesterday.

Janine Hendry, an academic and arts consultant who founded the #March4Justice, said she had initially expected just seven friends to protest with her outside Parliament House in Canberra but had been overwhelmed by the response. "The anger is visceral, there really are so many women, and men, who have really had enough," she told AFP.

University of Sydney media studies professor Catharine Lumby said the country was "in the middle of a reckoning" spurred by women who have "unlocked a collective voice" online. "I think #MeToo was like (version) 1.0 and now we're at #MeToo 2.0," she told AFP. "I think the reason is that a number of very powerful men have been called out for (alleged) behaviors." —ADP



**SYDNEY:** Protesters attend a rally against sexual violence and gender inequality in Sydney yesterday.—AFP

## Australian women rally against sexual violence, inequality

**CANBERRA:** Tens of thousands of women protested across Australia against sexual violence and gender inequality yesterday, as outrage grew over rape allegations that have convulsed the conservative government. The #March4Justice rallies were held in more than 40 Australian cities and towns, with a major demonstration in Canberra following allegations of sexual assault in the nation's parliament.

Dressed mostly in black, the crowd gathered outside Parliament House holding aloft placards with slogans including "You're Not Listening", "How Many Victims Do You Know?" and "I Believe Her".

Protester Kathryn Jamieson, who travelled from Melbourne to take part, said she was "fuming with rage". "I wanted to be at the heart of the matter, I've completely had enough," she told AFP. "We need immediate change—I'm sick of women not being believed." Former government staffer Brittany Higgins alleged publicly last month that she had been raped by a colleague in a minister's office in 2019.

And earlier this month, Attorney-General Christian Porter vigorously denied swirling accusations he had raped a 16-year-old girl in 1988 when they were both students. The controversy has placed growing pressure on Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who critics say has fumbled the government's response to the scandals. The latest gaffe came yesterday when he told parliament: "Not far from here such marches, even now, are being met with bullets, but not here in this country"—drawing furious interjections from opposition politicians and stunned reactions online.

"The prime minister thinks women should be grateful that we weren't shot for rallying for our own safety," Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young tweeted. Public anger at Morrison's government was reflected in a new opinion poll yesterday showing voter support has fallen to levels not seen since 2019 when he vacationed in Hawaii while massive bushfires were raging in Australia.

The government has ordered an independent inquiry into parliament's workplace culture and estab-

lished new staff support services but activists say systemic change is now needed—not just in politics but across Australian society. Higgins told the crowd in Canberra her story was "a painful reminder to women that it can happen in Parliament House, and can truly happen anywhere".

"We fundamentally recognize the system is broken, the glass ceiling is still in place," she said. "We are here because it is unfathomable that we are still having to fight this same stale, tired fight."

### 'Toxic' workplace culture

No senior government ministers attended yesterday's rallies and organizers refused Morrison's offer to speak in private, saying a closed-door meeting would be "disrespectful" to alleged victims.

"I think the prime minister, if he really cared about women, really cared about our voices... he (could) open the door, walk across the forecourt and come and listen to us," organizer Janine Hendry told the ABC. An estimated 10,000 joined the protest in Melbourne, with thousands more in major cities including Canberra, Sydney and Brisbane. Several thousand also rallied in Porter's hometown of Perth on Sunday. "Evil thrives in silence," sexual abuse survivor and Australian of the Year Grace Tame told a crowd in the Tasmanian capital, Hobart. "Behavior unspoken, behavior ignored, is behavior endorsed."

The #March4Justice is demanding a raft of measures including independent investigations into all cases of gendered violence, a boost in public funding for prevention and the implementation of recommendations from a 2020 national inquiry into sexual harassment at work. Australia's parliament has been repeatedly criticized for a "toxic" workplace culture that has allegedly spawned persistent bullying, harassment and sexual assault. The ruling coalition has been accused of not doing enough to support female party members, including after a spate of women quit parliament ahead of the 2019 election, with several citing bullying as a factor. Local media also reported that women in the opposition Labor party had recently set up a Facebook page that details alleged sexual harassment by male colleagues and politicians. A group of independent and minor-party female politicians on Monday announced they would attempt to amend a "loophole" in legislation that shields members of parliament and the judiciary from liability for workplace sexual harassment.—AFP

# Business

TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2021

## Arms exports stop rising for first time since early 2000s: Report

### Arms deliveries to Mideast grow; Saudi Arabia world's largest importer

**STOCKHOLM:** The number of international arms transfers has leveled off in the last five years, but a more peaceful world is not necessarily the reason as some nations shun imports and have begun producing their own weapons, researchers said yesterday.

Comparing the period of 2011-2015 to 2016-2020, three of the world's five largest exporters—the US, France and Germany—actually increased their exports, but these rises were offset by a drop in exports from the other two major exporters, Russia and China. While exports remain at their highest level since the end of the Cold War, this is the first time since the period of 2001-2005 they haven't risen overall.

"Demand remains high, but it hasn't grown," Siemon Wezeman, a senior researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), told AFP.

Yearly comparisons are often less informative since individual years can include major weapons systems like submarines or fighter jets, causing spikes and drops that are not the result of policy changes, Wezeman said. The United States, the world's largest exporter of weapons by far, saw its share of international arms transfers increase from 32 to 37 percent.

The rise further widened the gap to the number two, Russia, whose exports shrank by 22 percent, largely due to a drop in exports to India, though it still accounted for a fifth of the world's arms exports.

France's exports grew by 44 percent, leading it to account for 8.2 percent of global exports. Germany's arms exports grew by 21 percent while China's

declined 7.8 percent, giving them a 5.5 percent and 5.2 percent share respectively.

#### Rise in Middle Eastern demand

There were also shifts in where arms deliveries go, with a noticeable growing demand in the Middle East, which saw 25 percent growth for the period. Saudi Arabia was the world's largest importer in the period, receiving 11 percent of arms imports, 79 percent of them from the US.

The Middle Eastern kingdom for instance strengthened its air capabilities with 91 combat aircraft from the US. In contrast, the world's second largest importer, India, decreased its imports by 33 percent, "mainly due to its complex procurement processes, combined with an attempt to reduce its dependence on Russian arms," the authors said.

A decrease in a nation's weapons imports does not always signify a shrinking appetite, Wezeman stressed. In some cases, it's a question of pure budgetary limitations, or a cyclical effect of having recently upgraded a system, meaning it won't need to be updated for some years.

But another trend that has emerged is countries looking to substitute imports with domestically produced weaponry. "That means that the arms imports, or the demand for arms imports go down, as they are able to do more on their own," Wezeman said.

In 2020, few areas of society escaped the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and while there were initial fears it would hit supply chains, those have largely not materialized.

"You would think it, and especially the economic



**STOCKHOLM:** Comparing the period of 2011-2015 to 2016-2020, three of the world's five largest exporters—the US, France and Germany—actually increased their exports, but these rises were offset by a drop in exports from the other two major exporters, Russia and China.

effect that comes after, would have a very strong effect, but we haven't seen it," Wezeman said, noting that it was still early days. In the longer term, COVID-19 will likely see countries reassessing their budgets, and military spending will compete against other needs. "But on the other hand they have to balance that with their view on threats and tensions," Wezeman noted. In

many parts of the world, including Europe, there is "a very clear feeling that the world isn't getting safer," he added. One potential compromise for countries, according to the researcher, could be that they would reshift to importing weapons, rather than the costly process of developing their own, which would then see arms transfers increasing again. —AFP

## China industrial output, retail sales rebound

**BEIJING:** China's industrial output and retail sales surged in the first two months of the year, official data showed yesterday, underscoring the country's recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

Industrial production spiked a forecast-busting 35.1 percent on-year, the biggest bounce in decades, while retail sales also beat expectations with 33.8 percent growth. But the National Bureau of Statistics said the latest surge was in part due to distortions from last year's "low base in the same period".

Both indicators plunged in the early months of 2020 after COVID-19 surfaced in central China and spread rapidly around the country. However, the world's second-largest economy became the first to bounce back globally after imposing strict lockdowns and virus control measures, clocking a full-year economic growth of 2.3 percent. "After removing the base effect, the growth of main indicators is stable and macro indicators are in a reason-

able range," said the NBS.

Data for January and February were released together to eliminate the influence of uncertainties brought about by China's Lunar New Year holiday, which typically falls within this period.

Industrial output in the first two months was up almost 17 percent from the corresponding period in 2019, authorities said. Industrial activity was likely boosted by the fact that many migrant workers were discouraged from returning to their hometowns because of COVID-19 restrictions, meaning some factories remained open through the holiday or reopened sooner.

"We expect activity to remain strong in the near-term, as the easing of virus restrictions boosts consumption and fiscal stimulus among key trading partners should keep exports strong," said Capital Economics senior China economist Julian Evans-Pritchard. Urban unemployment rose to 5.5 percent in February, up from 5.2 percent in December, yesterday's data showed, but experts warn that the real rate might be higher owing to the high number of workers in unofficial employment.

"Even though we do see improvement on the global economic environment, they are still very cautious," said OCBC Bank's head of Greater China



An employee works on a truck assembly line at a factory for the vehicle manufacturing company Jianghuai Automobile Group Corp. (JAC) in Qingzhou in eastern China's Shandong province yesterday. —AFP

researcher Tommy Xie, on the issue of unemployment. He noted that the urban unemployment rate remains within the government's target, adding that the caution was likely due to another potential record number of graduates entering the job market this year.

He added that there is an "uneven recovery" ongoing as well, with smaller firms and industries such as travel not fully recovered from the coronavirus hit. Iris Pang, chief economist for

Greater China at ING, said: "All in all, this set of data shows the Chinese economy is recovering from COVID, especially in terms of consumption. But the very low base also masked the degree to which these strong figures are driven by underlying growth. "These low base-effects could last until April as economic activity started to pick up in May last year." She tipped the economy to expand 12 percent on-year in the first quarter. —AFP

## Markets mixed ahead of key Fed meeting

**LONDON:** European stock markets opened higher yesterday while Asia markets were mixed as an early rally lost momentum with attention on this week's Federal Reserve policy meeting, which comes as investors fret that economic recovery will fan inflation and force an interest rate hike earlier than thought. European stocks rose on hopes that vaccines and stimulus would fuel global economic recovery from the coronavirus crisis, dealers said.

In initial deals, London's benchmark FTSE 100 index of major blue-chip companies added 0.4 percent to 6,788.60 points. In the eurozone, Frankfurt's DAX 30 firmed 0.2 percent to 14,535.65 and Paris won 0.5 percent to 6,077.57.

Asian bourses however diverged as an early rally lost momentum before Wednesday's US Federal Reserve monetary policy meeting. "Investors continue to anticipate speedy economic recoveries as the powerful forces of accelerating vaccine rollouts and significant financial assistance combine," said Richard Hunter, head of markets at online trading firm Interactive Investor.

The general mood across trading floors in Asia is of a blockbuster surge in global growth this year as coronavirus vaccine rollouts and easing of lockdowns allow life to return to a semblance of normal.

Bets on a strong rebound this year increased last week as Joe Biden signed off on his \$1.9 trillion stimulus, which includes big cash hand-outs for struggling Americans. The president's pledge to ramp up the US inoculation program with an aim for herd immunity around the summer also provided some cheer to traders.

However, the government stimulus combined with an expected boost in consumer spending has also ramped up inflation expectations. That is reflected in the spike in government debt yields, particularly benchmark 10-year Treasury notes—a canary in the coal mine for coming price increases—fanning worries the Fed will be forced to hike borrowing costs.

And while yields remain relatively low, Charles-Henry Monchau of FlowBank SA said: "It's not just a question of level, it's a question of pace. "Are we going to move on the bond yields too quickly too fast for the market to adjust or is it going to be a smooth journey to higher bond yields?"

The Fed's reaction to market angst over rising yields will be closely watched when it holds its two-day policy meeting from today. The bank's ultra-loose monetary policies, including record-low interest rates, have been a key pillar of the surge in equities over the past year but fears of possible tightening moves have seen that wobble in recent weeks. —AFP

## Bank employees begin two-day strike in India

**NEW DELHI:** Nine bank unions in India yesterday started a nationwide two-day strike against the privatization of public sector banks and regressive banking reforms initiated by the federal government. As many as one million bank employees are expected to participate in the strike.

Banks in the country were already closed on March 13 and March 14, leading to a four-day break till today in regular banking operations. The strike has been called by the United Forum of Bank Union (UFBU), an umbrella body of nine bank unions.

The unions participating in the strike are: All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC), All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA), National Confederation of Bank Employees (NCBE), All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC), Bank Employees Federation of India (BEFI), Indian National Bank Employees Federation (INBEF), Indian National Bank Officers' Congress (INBOC) and National Organization of Bank Officers (NOBO) and the National Organization of Bank Workers (NOBW).

Apart from bank unions, all the unions in four general insurance companies will be on strike tomorrow. All the unions in Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) are on strike on March 18, while unions of four insurance companies have called for a strike against the privatization of public companies.



**AMRITSAR:** Banks' employees take part in a protest during a two-day nationwide bank strike in Amritsar yesterday. —AFP

Branches of private-sector lenders like ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank are open as they are not part of the strike. Services such as deposits and withdrawal at branches, cheque clearance, and loan approvals likely to be affected due to the strike. However, ATMs are likely to remain functional. Many public sector lenders, including the State Bank of India (SBI), had informed their customers that their normal working could be affected at the branches

and offices if the strike materializes.

Banks said that they are taking necessary steps for the smooth functioning of bank branches and offices. Money markets and stock markets are also going to face problems as payments would be impacted. In the union budget presented last month, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had stated two public sector banks (PSBs) would be privatized as part of the government's disinvestment plan.



## Business

# British city where Romans bathed begins to penalize polluting cars

## Initiative aims at cutting health-threatening emissions

**BATH, UK:** Famed as a spa town where the Romans soaked in the waters, the British city of Bath has long been a magnet for the health-conscious visitor.

But in the age of the car, nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) levels, mainly caused by diesel and older petrol vehicles, regularly exceed legal limits. The toxic emissions can trigger asthma attacks, a condition that affects about 12,000 people in the city in southwestern England and surrounding areas.

From midnight, however, under a new initiative, polluting cars will have to pay a daily charge of between £9 and £100 (\$13-\$139, 10-139 euros) to drive in the center of Bath, with its Roman ruins and majestic neo-classical buildings. The overhaul—the first of its kind in Britain outside of the capital London—is aimed at cutting health-threatening emissions.

Shop owner Michele Dicorato is one of those affected by the change. He keeps his brand new ecologically-friendly white van parked near his business in front of the local market in the heart of city. The hardware store owner had not been looking for a new vehicle, until he learned local officials were planning a new charge on the most polluting vehicles.

"If I'd had it my way, I wouldn't have changed it... but I got good financial support," he told AFP of the new purchase, ahead of the levy coming into force yesterday. Backed by government support, similar measures are on the way in Birmingham, central England, Bradford, in the north, and Bristol also in the southwest. The UK government has been criticized in court—most recently in 2018—over its consistent failure to cut illegal levels of pollution.

As the COP26 climate conference being hosted by Britain in November draws closer, the country has sought to put itself at the forefront of international efforts to confront the worsening situation.



**BATH:** Famed as a spa town where the Romans soaked in the waters, the British city of Bath has long been a magnet for the health-conscious visitor. — AFP

It has pledged to go carbon neutral by 2050 ahead of the international conference, which is due to be held in the Scottish city of Glasgow.

### 'Not the right time'

Under the new initiative, the limits of the new pollution charge area—the "Clean Air Zone"—are shown on signs bearing a cloud on a green background. Cameras have been installed to track license plates. "Even

about the listing, which is planned for April.

Deliveroo, in line with other home-delivery companies, has seen demand soar in the past year owing to lockdowns during the coronavirus pandemic. The company confirmed in January that it would target a London IPO after a fundraising round valued it at more than \$7.0 billion (5.8 billion euros).

Monday's statement comes one week after the group said it had slashed losses last year on booming demand from locked-down customers. Alongside the results, Deliveroo—founded in London eight years ago—confirmed its "intention to list" in an IPO that will target institutional investors outside the United States.

The sale will also offer UK-based customers, including delivery riders and restaurant partners, an opportunity to participate. The UK-based company made an underlying loss of £223.7 million in 2020, hit by heavy investment, but that marked an improvement from a loss of £317 million in 2019. — AFP

though we've been locked down for the last year, so lots of us have been at home and there's been a lot less traffic, we know that there are still four sites within the city center that are above legal levels of nitrogen dioxide," local councillor Sarah Warren said. Private vehicles and motorcycles are exempt from the charge after a consultation showed the "public felt strongly that they were concerned about the impact on the most vulnerable," Warren said.

## Volkswagen announces more job cuts

**BERLIN:** Carmaker Volkswagen will shed up to 5,000 jobs between now and the end of 2023 as part of cost-cutting to finance its transition to electric vehicles, the company said in a statement Sunday.

Up to 900 employees would opt for an early retirement scheme while others would leave the company as part of a gradual halting of their activities, it said. It did not give a precise figure for those employees, saying only that it would be in the lower end of a "four-digit number", an expression usually used to mean between 2,000 to 4,000. The job losses were intended to make a major contribution to managing the company's costs, said the statement. "Thanks to our high level of investment in the expansion of electromobility and digitisation, Volkswagen has been able to establish itself as a pioneer of automotive change," human resources director Gunnar Killian said in the statement.

"We now want to consolidate our position of strength," he added. "This will require a continuation of a strict cost management in order to finance the necessary investments in the future." In 2020, Volkswagen lost its top ranking in the world automobile market to Toyota, selling 9.3 million vehicles, down 15 percent on 2019. Like all car makers, it has been hit hard by the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic but has said it expects a significant rise in turnover in 2021.

This latest round of jobs cuts follows the 2019 announcement of up to 7,000 job losses by the group's leading brand, VW. Earlier this month, Volkswagen said it hoped electric vehicles would account for 70 percent of its European sales by 2030, doubling its previous target in the face of ever stricter legislation. The efforts are part of a strategy which has seen the Volkswagen group invest more than 30 billion euros into e-mobility in order to comply with stricter environmental rules in the EU. — AFP

billion to take a stake of over three percent in the firm to make it the third-largest shareholder.

Ahead of Monday's move, investors had already split Faber's dual roles of both board president and chief executive to improve accountability. While searching for a replacement "with an international profile", Danone named a trio of top managers to head the firm. The Paris stock market welcomed Faber's departure, with Danone shares trading more than four percent higher in early business yesterday. — AFP

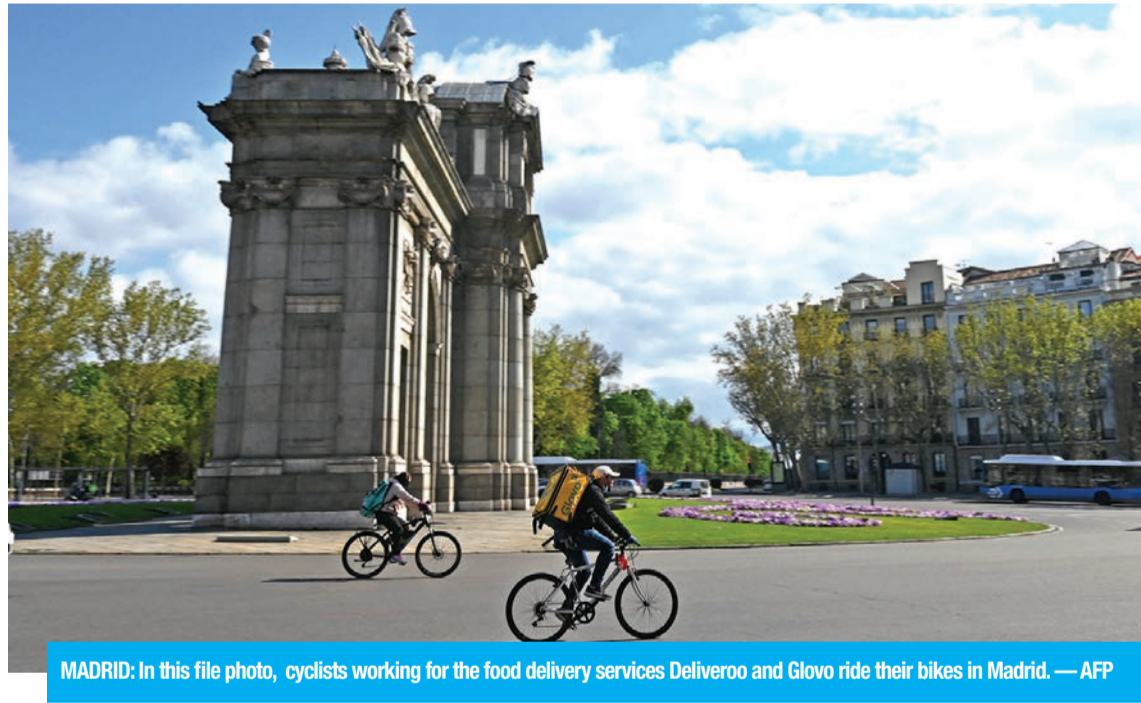


**In this file photo, Danone CEO Emmanuel Faber poses ahead of a press conference in Paris. — AFP**

## Deliveroo says London share sale will raise £1.0bn

**LONDON:** Takeaway meals app Deliveroo said yesterday that its upcoming London stock market listing would raise £1.0 billion (\$1.4 billion, 1.2 billion euros).

The company has already picked London for its initial public offering (IPO) but has not yet indicated the amount of shares nor the total valuation of the listing. "The offer will comprise of new shares to be issued by the company—raising gross proceeds of approximately £1 billion—and existing shares to be sold by certain existing shareholders," the firm said in a statement



**MADRID:** In this file photo, cyclists working for the food delivery services Deliveroo and Glovo ride their bikes in Madrid. — AFP

## Xiaomi soars as US judge lifts it from blacklist

**HONG KONG:** Shares in Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi surged more than 10 percent in Hong Kong yesterday after a US judge removed it from a blacklist that barred American companies from investing in it. The firm's stock price has been hammered since mid-January when Donald Trump, in his last days in office, included it in a group the White House considered a threat to US national security.

The move classified Xiaomi, which is among the biggest smartphone makers in the world, as one of nine "Communist Chinese military companies" that also included state oil giant CNOOC, and popular social media app TikTok. But US District Judge Rudolph Contreras ruled Friday that the Department of Defense and the Treasury "have not made the case that the national security interests at stake here are compelling".

He removed Xiaomi from the blacklist and suspended the investment ban after the firm appealed against the blacklisting. The news sent shares in the firm surging 12 percent in Hong Kong morning trade Monday, having lost more than 40 percent since Trump's order.

However, while Xiaomi was removed, US regulators listed Huawei and ZTE among Chinese telecom equipment makers considered a threat to national security, signalling that a hoped-for softening of relations is not on the cards. Washington claims Huawei has close ties to China's military and that Beijing could use its equipment for espionage—accusations the company denies. — AFP

## Danone sacks chairman after investor onslaught

**PARIS:** Danone said yesterday it had dismissed its chairman, a move that follows months of complaints from foreign shareholders about the French food giant's underperforming share price.

Activist investors took aim at Emmanuel Faber, who became Danone's boss in 2017, and his management team, demanding his departure and a revamp at the top as the company struggles to plot a post-Covid recovery strategy. Last month, US fund Artisan Partners said it had built up a sizeable stake in Danone in the hope of prompting strategy and personnel changes, weeks after another hedge fund, London-based Bluebell Capital, revealed it had also acquired shares to force changes.

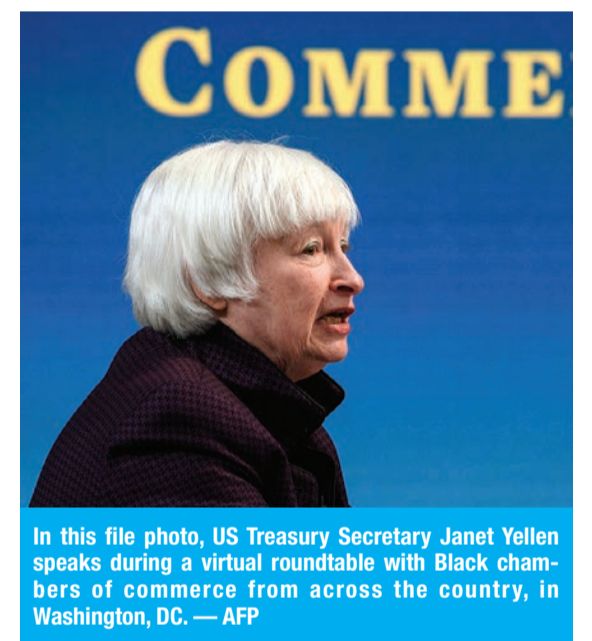
During Faber's reign at Danone, which is one of the world's biggest food companies, it added a mission statement to its statutes combining profitability with social responsibility and environmental targets.

"We want finance to serve the economy, and the economy to serve the people," Faber once said, a view that one unnamed analyst said "certainly irritated financial markets a bit". But despite Faber's professed care for social issues, Danone in November announced plans to lay off around 2,000 of its 100,000 employees worldwide as part of a project to "reinvent" the company—and stem a decline in the share price which dropped by about a third in 2020. "Unfortunately, the financial performance of Danone is not consistent with the quality of its assets," Artisan wrote to other shareholders in February, adding that it had spent some \$1.6

Taxi drivers, like Tim Elbehiry, were critical of the measures. "It is not the right time to do that. We are struggling," the 49-year-old said, waiting for a hoped-for customer in the deserted city center with strict coronavirus lockdown rules still in place. "We barely can get our heads above water," he added. "We don't have enough business." With a family to support, Elbehiry said he was lucky to avoid the charge. The black Mercedes he bought in 2015 is ineligible for the £9 levy on more polluting cabs.

### 'Fastest way'

The zone, which applies 24 hours a day and seven days a week rises to £100 (116 euros) for polluting buses, coaches and trucks. Chris Ashley, head of policy, environment and regulation at the Road Haulage Association called the measures "blunt" and criticized them for "condemning vehicles that are only five, six or seven years old". Despite subsidies to facilitate the purchase of cleaner vehicles, Ashley added members of his road haulage association were struggling to adapt due to a shortage of environmentally-friendly trucks. But Imogen Martineau, the manager of the Clean Air Fund in the UK, told AFP that low emission zones like Bath's had been identified as "the fastest way of reducing nitrogen dioxide level within legal limits". If Britain could reduce air pollution to the limits recommended by the World Health Organization, it would prevent 17,000 premature births each year, according to the fund, which raises awareness of air pollution worldwide. Martineau added the positive impact for health was linked to improved economic outcomes. "Three million working days are lost each year as a result of air pollution causing workers to become sick or taking time off to care for sick children," she said. — AFP



**In this file photo, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen speaks during a virtual roundtable with Black chambers of commerce from across the country, in Washington, DC. — AFP**

## Yellen says Biden has yet to decide on a wealth tax

**WASHINGTON:** Amid reports that the richest Americans have grown far richer during the pandemic year, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Sunday the Biden administration had yet to decide on imposing a new wealth tax. "That's something that we haven't decided yet," Yellen said on ABC's "This Week" program. She said that President Joe Biden "hasn't proposed a wealth tax, but he has proposed that corporations and wealthy individuals should pay more in order to meet the needs of the economy, the spending we need to do."

Senator Elizabeth Warren, a liberal Democrat, has called for an annual tax of two percent on every dollar of people's wealth above \$50 million, and three percent on every dollar above \$1 billion. Last month, Yellen told the New York Times that a Warren-style wealth tax would have "very difficult implementation problems." But she said she would consider other approaches that might have a similar effect.

A recent study by the humanitarian group Oxfam found that the world's richest 10 people—including Americans Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk and Bill Gates—had collectively seen their fortunes grow by \$540 billion since the pandemic began, even as millions of Americans suffered. The trillions of dollars spent in government stimulus plans during the pandemic have greatly swollen the federal deficit, and Republicans—who supported stimulus spending during the Trump administration—now warn that the deficits risk becoming unsustainable.

Not one Republican supported Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus plan, and the president could face similar resistance as he seeks to push through massive infrastructure or green-energy plans.

But, Yellen noted, the current exceptionally low interest rates have greatly reduced the cost of government borrowing. "Interest payments relative to the size of the economy have remained quite low," she said, "no higher than they were back in 2007."

The secretary did add that "in the longer run we need to get deficits under control to make sure that our fiscal situation is sustainable." Yellen, a former chair of the Federal Reserve, again played down fears that stimulus spending could fuel dangerous levels of inflation, especially as the coronavirus vaccinations of millions of Americans raise hope of an economic boom.

"I think there's a small risk of inflation," she conceded. But "the most significant risk we face is a workforce that is scarred by a long period of unemployment." Yellen said she "absolutely" does not expect a return to the runaway inflation of the 1970s. And if lower levels of inflation should emerge, the secretary said, "We have the tools to address it." — AFP

## Business

# Ooredoo Group becomes a top 40 global telecoms brand for first time

## Group features in top 50 list for fifth consecutive year

DOHA: Ooredoo Group has announced it has now climbed to number 40 in the top 50 global telecommunications brands, up one place from 41 in 2020, as confirmed by the Brand Finance Telecoms 150 2021 report.

Ooredoo Group appears in the ranking list for the fifth consecutive year, with a total brand value of more than \$3.22 billion. The Group's Brand Strength Index also improved over the year - reaching its highest ever figure - and the company maintained its brand rating of AA+ for the third consecutive year.

The Group has also maintained its predominance in the region, remaining in the top three most valuable brands in Middle East. Industry valuation and strategy consultancy Brand Finance produces the rankings list annually according to valuations of telecommunications companies across the globe. Brands are first evaluated to determine their strength - based on factors such

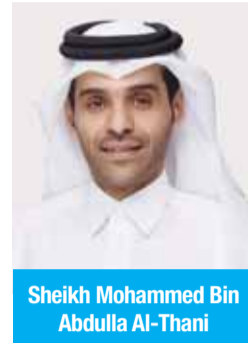
as marketing investment, familiarity, loyalty, staff satisfaction and corporate reputation - and this strength is then used to quantify the brand's value, by calculating the proportion of a business's revenue that is contributed by the brand. Information from each process is used to create rankings of the world's most valuable telecoms brands.

Brand Finance has closely monitored Ooredoo Group's brand value since its global brand roll-out in 2013, with the Group featuring in the top 50 global telecommunications brands for five consecutive years. The Doha-based telecommunications operator is now active in 10 markets across the Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Asia.

Despite the challenges due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, Ooredoo Group continued to make significant investments across its operations in 2020, including an ongoing complete digitalisation program and substantial network

upgrades. The Group's commitment to complete customer satisfaction, especially evident in its efforts to support communities and governments in the fight against the pandemic, also strengthened overall brand value.

Speaking of the rise in ranking, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulla Al-Thani - Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer at Ooredoo - said: "We are delighted to confirm that not only are we recognized again as one of the top 50 global telecommunications brands, but that we have moved up one rank from last year, and have also reached a new Group record with our Brand



Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulla Al-Thani

Strength Index. All of these factors demonstrate our significant contribution to the telecommunications industry, and such industry recognition of this contribution gives us great pride. We attribute our success to our exemplary leadership team, with the solid backing of our progressive board of directors and our visionary leaders in Qatar, and of course our many dedicated employees across our global footprint."

He continued: "Putting the challenges of 2020's global pandemic behind us, we look to the future with a continuation of our plan to meet the needs of new customers and new markets around the world, developing our products and services with progressive, innovative technologies. We are proud to be pioneers of full commercial 5G, proud that our brand is increasing in reach and reputation, and proud that we can look forward to another year of progress, confident in our brand value and strength."

## ICT talent to push Kuwait's digital transformation

By Rico Lin

KUWAIT: Kuwait has long been at the forefront of technology adoption, enabling a digitally-savvy community to thrive in an increasingly connected era. National digital transformation was accelerated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as businesses, educators, and public sector entities turning to advanced technologies to stay connected while keeping the population safe. In order to maintain the momentum of development within the information and communications technology (ICT) sector that we've seen in the past year, it is essential to invest more in building talent capacity - because a digitally-driven country needs knowledgeable, talented individuals in order to move it forward into the next era of connectivity.

The digital ecosystem comprises several major components, most prominent amongst which is physical infrastructure and talent. One cannot exist without the other. As the past year has shown, technology has a vital role to play in keeping things moving throughout Kuwait's society, from fighting against the pandemic to ensuring business continuity during a difficult time, to driving the development of vertical sectors and industries business and services.

While it has undoubtedly been a key factor during the pandemic, the ICT sector has perhaps an even bigger role to play in the future of Kuwait socio-economic development. The 'New Kuwait' Vision 2035 strategy aims to see the country become a financial and trade hub both regionally and internationally, while increasing attractiveness to investors. A solid ICT ecosystem will contribute towards achieving this, enabling economic growth, a competitive environment, and increased productivity and efficiencies as a result of next-generation technologies.

With the solid ICT infrastructure in place, what is needed now is to turn our attention towards building a strong ICT talent pool that will enable continued progression, innovation, and the adoption of the newest tech solutions as they become available. An increasingly connected Kuwait will require digitally-savvy talent to not only drive the evolution of technology, but to take on future jobs that will be technology-centric. Understanding advanced technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and cloud computing will create a competitive advantage in tomorrow's work environment, where these solutions will shape many, and most likely in the near future all workplace functions, across all sectors and industries.

Inspiring young people to pursue careers in technology is necessary in order to meet the future demand for ICT talent. There is currently a global shortage of adequately skilled people to meet the requirements of the future workforce, but this is something that can be addressed today by instigating collaborations between public and private sector entities, educators, and technology companies. By working together, we can determine the skills that are needed not only for future technologies, but to meet Kuwait's vision for the future. Based on this the right curriculums and courses can be designed and implemented to ensure that more local talent is given the opportunity to learn essential skills for tomorrow's world. There are ICT training programs in place throughout the country, but with technology constantly evolving there is always more that can be done, and there will always be a demand for people skilled in this dynamic field. Investing in ICT talent development will not only provide Kuwait with the much-needed workforce of its connected future, but will also contribute towards innovation throughout the country, enabling the growth of the digital economy, contributing towards increased GDP, and enhancing Kuwait's competitiveness on a regional and global scale. Huawei has enjoyed a long-term relationship with many partners in Kuwait's public and private sector to build ICT infrastructure and talent, and we look forward to continuing this in the future by empowering more young people with the skills needed to take full advantage of advanced technologies. All ICT stakeholders need to strengthen ties and collaborative work on nurturing Kuwait local talents and creating the future leaders.

Note: Rico Lin is CEO of Huawei Kuwait



Rico Lin

## Jazeera Airways launches flights to Addis Ababa

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways yesterday announced the launch of a new route to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, starting today. This will be the second new service for the airline in 2021. The route will connect Kuwait and Addis Ababa twice a week, offering connections to the rest of the Middle East and Asia.

Rohit Ramachandran, CEO Jazeera Airways said, "We are pleased to continue with our network expansion plans. There is a significant Ethiopian expatriate population living in Kuwait and the across the region and opening this new route will provide them with a great value option. Jazeera Airways has plans to launch a number of new routes during the year as travel gradually returns around the world thanks to vaccinations rolling out."

Passengers arriving in to Ethiopia must hold a negative RT PCR test certificate for COVID-19 and must self-isolate for 14 days on arrival, either at their home or at a hotel. Flights to Addis Ababa will be on Jazeera's expanding fleet of new Airbus A320neo aircraft, all equipped with hospital grade HEPA air filters. Jazeera Airways has also taken every safety and precautionary measure on its aircraft and at Jazeera Terminal T5 in Kuwait to ensure passengers fly safely.

Since the start of the pandemic, the airline has been at the forefront of supporting government efforts to prevent its spread. Jazeera placed its fleet at the disposal of the State of Kuwait and participated in the largest air bridge repatriation

## NBK assigns mobile branch during curfew hours

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) always strives to be closer to its customers despite the exceptional circumstances, especially in view of the prevailing health crisis and the precautionary measures followed. In this context, NBK has assigned a mobile branch to reach customers at the different areas of Kuwait during the partial curfew hours to enable them make their banking transactions in a convenient way, while abiding by all precautionary measures, in line with the instructions of the Ministry of Health and concerned authorities, to protect both customers and employees.

The mobile branch is a truck vehicle equipped with an ATM and an ITM providing the following services to customers: cash withdrawal and deposit, debit card issuance and NBK check deposit and cashing. The NBK mobile branch will provide cash withdrawals from KD 1,000 up to KD 5,000, cash

## Burgan Bank announces winners of Yawmi account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

The lucky winners are:

1. Meenaz Faisal Newrekar
2. Ishtiaq Ahmad Muhammad
3. Mohammad Abdullah Alwazzan
4. Fouz Adeeb Sari

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account



Flights schedule to between Kuwait and Addis Ababa:

Flight Number	Frequency	From	To	Departure (Local Time)	Arrival (Local Time)
J9-781	Saturday & Tuesday	Kuwait	Addis Ababa	09:35	13:35
J9-782	Saturday & Tuesday	Addis Ababa	Kuwait	14:20	18:10

program ever launched by the State of Kuwait. The airline operated over 60 flights bringing home over 6,800 Kuwaiti citizens from around the world, as well as converted its Park & Fly facility in record time into the first drive-through COVID-19 center in Kuwait for the use by the Ministry of Health. A second drive-through testing facility has also been constructed by the Jazeera Airways team at the Jaber Al-Ahmad national stadium. The airline also continued to serve business without interruption by operating

deposit from KD 1,000 up to KD 3,000, and NBK check cashing from KD 1,000 up to KD 5,000, in addition to providing printed account statement.

The branch also includes an ITM that allows customers to interact through audio and video with an NBK Agent to help them with their banking transactions.

To ensure the highest safety standards during the prevailing circumstances, the bank is taking all necessary precautionary measures including checking customers' temperature before entering the mobile branch, and providing them with masks and gloves. In addition, an NBK staff will be available inside the branch to assist customers and facilitate their banking transactions. The mobile branch services customers from 6 to 10 p.m.

On this occasion, Ali Al-Mulla, Head of Domestic Branches, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "NBK is committed to serve its customers and enable them make all their transactions while keeping them safe. This was clearly manifested during the prevailing exceptional circumstances resulting from the coronavirus pandemic."

"During all the stages of the crisis, we were closer to our customers through our initiatives, digital channels and services as well as advanced payment

holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws.

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.

Established in 1977, with a significant focus on the corporate and financial institutions sectors, as well as having a growing retail, and private bank customer base, Burgan Bank has majority owned subsidiaries in the MENAT region supported by one of the largest regional branch networks which include Gulf Bank Algeria - AGB (Algeria), Bank of Baghdad - BOB (Iraq & Lebanon), Tunis International Bank - TIB (Tunisia), and fully owned Burgan Bank - Turkey, (collectively known as the "Burgan Bank Group"). Furthermore, Burgan Bank has a presence in the UAE through its corporate office ("Burgan Financial Services Limited) which had helped the bank to participate in multiple financing opportunities in the UAE.

The Bank has continuously improved its performance over the years through an expanded revenue structure, diversified funding sources, and a strong capital base. The adoption of state-of-the-art services and technology has positioned it as a trendsetter in the domestic market and within the MENA region. Burgan Bank's brand has been created on a foundation of real values - of trust, com-

mitment, excellence and progression, to remind us of the high standards to which we aspire. 'People come first' is the foundation on which its products and services are developed.

solutions," he added. Al-Mulla noted that NBK was the first bank to provide this service in Kuwait during the peak of the crisis, as part of its efforts to enable customers make their essential transactions during the curfew hours.

Al-Mulla concluded by emphasizing that NBK abides by all precautionary measures, in line with the instructions of the concerned government authorities, to protect both customers and employees. Customers can easily request this service through NBK WhatsApp on 1801801. The mobile branch will arrive directly to their doorsteps and provide them with various banking services, then move to service the next customer. The schedule of the areas to be serviced by the mobile branch was announced in advance on the bank's social media accounts nbkgroup, so that customers can book their appointment ahead of time. This service is available for NBK Customers who should also have their Civil ID to avail it.



Ali Al-Mulla

## CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK Bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 290 million for three months with a rate of return at 1.125 percent.

# CLINIC PAGE



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## Lifestyle | Awards



In this handout photo US singer Beyoncé accepts the Best Rap Performance award for "Savage" onstage during the 63rd Annual Grammy Awards at Los Angeles Convention Center. — AFP photos



In this handout photo Megan Thee Stallion, winner of the Best Rap Performance and Best Rap Song awards for 'Savage' and the Best New Artist award, poses in the media room.



In this handout photo (from left) Laura Sisk, Jack Antonoff, Taylor Swift, Aaron Dessner, and Jonathan Low, winners of the Album of the Year award for 'Folklore.'

# BEYONCE MAKES HISTORY, TAYLOR WINS TOP PRIZE AND MEGAN SLAYS AT GRAMMYS



US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift, winner of the Album of the Year award for "Folklore" poses in the media room.



Billie Eilish, winner of the Record of the Year award for 'Everything I Wanted' and the Best Song Written for Visual Media award for 'No Time to Die,' poses in the media room.

Women won every major Grammy at Sunday's history-making gala, a joyful night for music's biggest stars after a devastating year for the industry, with Beyoncé, Megan Thee Stallion and Taylor Swift triumphing at the socially distanced event anchored by electrifying performances. It was a monumental night for Beyoncé, who broke the record for most career wins by a female artist with 28. Swift became the first woman to win the coveted Album of the Year prize three times, this year for "folklore," the first of her twin quarantine releases. And rap sensation Megan Thee Stallion charmed while accepting her three awards including Best New Artist and disarmed viewers with a performance that set the Los Angeles stage ablaze.

Megan and Queen Bey earned two awards together, for their remix of the rapper's smash hit "Savage." The Houston rapper teased with that track along with her single "Body," before serving up a thirst trap of a duet with none other than Cardi B, both of them in metallic gear that left little to the imagination. The audacious duo performed "WAP," a gyrating, thigh-baring celebration of female sexuality that ended atop an enormous bed. The night featured a host of impressive performances featuring Dua Lipa, DaBaby, Swift, Bad Bunny and Record of the Year winner Billie Eilish, among others—a line-up that kicked off with chest-baring Harry Styles, who won his first ever award.

The ceremony, which fell nearly a year to the day after Covid-19 grounded tours and forced performance venues to close, stood as a concerted effort by the music world to try to move past a crushing 2020 by celebrating its biggest stars. And there is perhaps no one bigger than Queen Bey, whose Best R&B Performance award for her summer track "Black Parade," an homage to Black power and heritage, sent her into the Grammy record books. It was not even clear initially that Beyoncé would attend the event, when she did not Zoom in to



(From left) Tiaara Thomas, Jeff Robinson, and H.E.R., winners of Song of the Year for "I Can't Breathe", poses in the media room.

accept her first trophy of the day, which she shared with her daughter Blue Ivy, for best music video for "Brown Skin Girl."

But she set social media alight when she was spotted in the audience and then took the stage in a figure-hugging black leather mini wrap-dress alongside Megan Thee Stallion to accept their prize for Best Rap Song. "As an artist, I believe it's my job and all of our jobs to reflect the times. And it's been such a difficult time," Beyoncé said, with her husband Jay-Z looking on, as she received her history-making award. "So I wanted to uplift, encourage, celebrate all of the beautiful Black queens and kings that continue to inspire me and inspire the whole world."

#### Eilish strikes again, honors Megan

But it was Billie Eilish who took Record of the Year—a category in which Beyoncé had two nominations, one with Megan Thee Stallion—a moment that brought to mind Beyoncé's controversial losses to Adele in 2017. In accepting her second straight Record of the Year prize, the 19-year-old Eilish nodded to Megan, who

she said had an "untoppable" year and deserved to win. "You deserve it, honestly, genuinely, this goes to her—can we just cheer for Megan Thee Stallion," she told the small audience of mainly nominees and performers. The soulful 23-year-old R&B performer H.E.R. pulled an upset in scooping the Grammy for Song of the Year for her justice-minded song "I Can't Breathe," which tackles Black pain and police brutality.

"I didn't imagine that my fear and that my pain would turn into impact," the musician said in accepting her trophy. And Swift snagged Album of the Year while losing all of the other five awards she was up for. She thanked her fans, saying: "You guys met us in this imaginary world that we created, and we can't tell you how honored we are." It was a less shiny night than predicted for British star Dua Lipa, who was shut out of the major categories but won Best Pop Vocal Album, for her sparkly disco ball of a record released just as the pandemic took hold. "I felt really jaded at the end of my last album, where I felt like I only had

to make sad music to feel like it mattered," she said. "And I'm just so grateful and so honored because happiness is something we all deserve and need in our lives."

Brittany Howard—known for fronting the band Alabama Shakes—won Best Rock Song, as Fiona Apple scored two awards for her album "Fetch the Bolt Cutters," which many critics hailed as a masterpiece. Though most of the rock fields were unprecedentedly dominated by women, The Strokes won for Best Rock Album for "The New Abnormal," their first Grammy ever. Rap legend Nas also won for the first time after 14 nominations, with his "King's Disease" winning Best Rap Album. And Nigerian superstar Burna Boy scored his first trophy for Best Global Music Album, ecstatically accepting the prize which he said "is a big win for my generation of Africans all over the world." But it wouldn't be the Grammys without controversy. The Weeknd has pledged to stop submitting music for awards consideration after he surprisingly received no nominations, despite a big year commercially. — AFP



In this screengrab John Legend, winner of the Best R&B Album award for "Bigger Love" performs.



(From left) Billie Eilish and Finneas accept the Record of the Year award for "Everything I Wanted" from Ringo Starr onstage.



In this screengrab Brittany Howard accepts the Best Rock Song award for 'Stay High'.



In this screengrab Harry Styles, winner of the Best Pop Solo Performance award for "Watermelon Sugar."



In this screengrab Burna Boy accepts the Best Global Music Album award for 'Twice as Tall' from Chika.

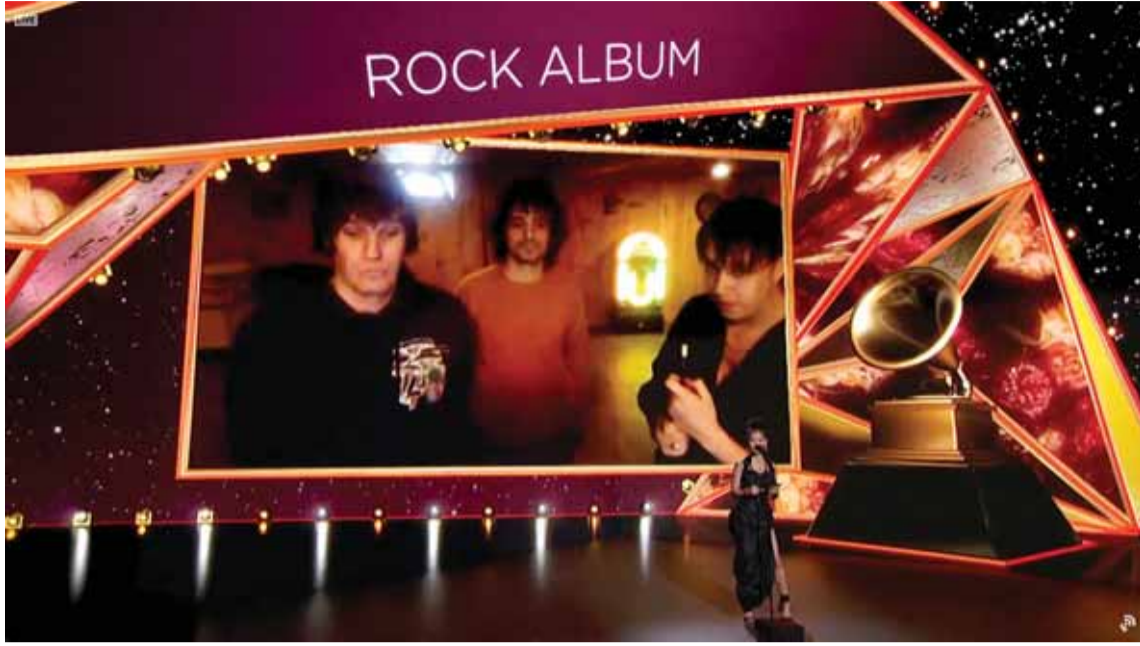


In this screengrab Lupita Infante names 'Jesus Is King' by Kanye West as winner of the Best Contemporary Christian Music Album award onstage.



In this screengrab Chika announces Tiffany Haddish as winner of the Best Comedy Album for 'Black Mitzvah' onstage.

Lifestyle | Awards



In this screengrab (from left) Nikolai Fraiture, Fabrizio Moretti and Julian Casablancas of The Strokes accept the Best Rock Album award for the "New Abnormal" from host Jhene Aiko.



Miranda Lambert accepts the Best Country Album award for 'Wildcard' onstage.



Dua Lipa, winner of Best Pop Vocal Album for 'Future Nostalgia' poses in the media room.

Key winners at the  
2021 Grammy Awards

- Album of the Year:** Taylor Swift, "folklore"
- Record of the Year, recognizing overall performance on a song:** Billie Eilish, "Everything I Wanted"
- Song of the Year, for songwriting:** H.E.R., Dernst Emile II and Tiara Thomas, "I Can't Breathe"
- Best New Artist:** Megan Thee Stallion
- Best Music Video:** Beyoncé, "Brown Skin Girl"
- Best Rap Album:** Nas, "King's Disease"
- Best Rap Song:** Megan Thee Stallion featuring Beyoncé, "Savage"
- Best Rap Performance:** Megan Thee Stallion featuring Beyoncé, "Savage"
- Best Rock Album:** The Strokes, "The New Abnormal"
- Best Rock Song:** Brittany Howard, "Stay High"
- Best Rock Performance:** Fiona Apple, "Shameika"
- Best Pop Vocal Album:** Dua Lipa, "Future Nostalgia"
- Best Pop Solo Performance:** Harry Styles, "Watermelon Sugar"
- Best Pop Duo/Group Performance:** Lady Gaga with Ariana Grande, "Rain on Me"
- Best R&B Album:** John Legend, "Bigger Love"
- Best R&B Performance:** Beyoncé, "Black Parade"
- Best Alternative Music Album:** Fiona Apple, "Fetch the Bolt Cutters"
- Best Global Music Album:** Burna Boy, "Twice as Tall"
- Best Country Album:** Miranda Lambert, "Wildcard"
- Best Contemporary Christian Music Album:** Kanye West, "Jesus Is King"
- Best Comedy Album:** Tiffany Haddish, "Black Mitzvah"
- Best Song Written for Visual Media:** Billie Eilish, "No Time to Die" (for "No Time to Die") — AFP



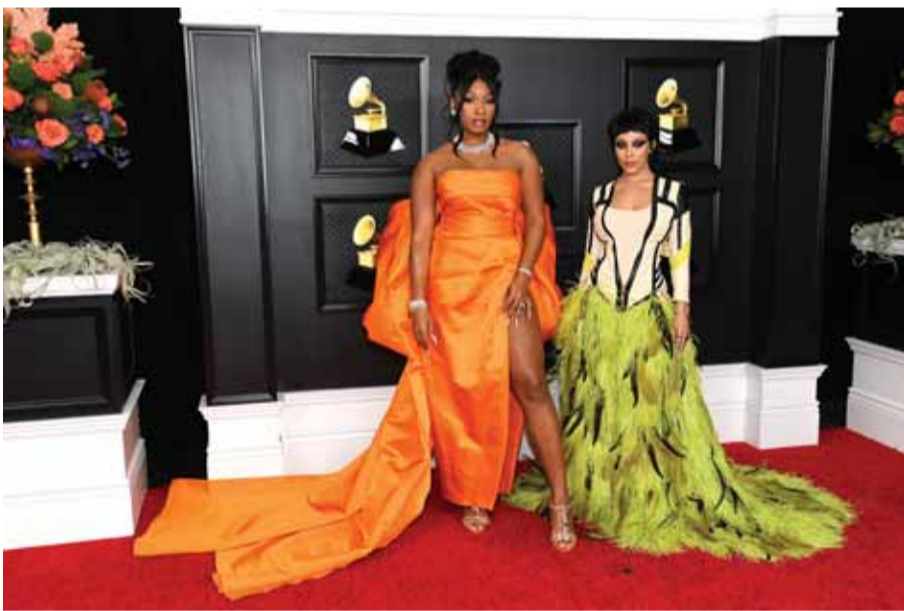
(From left) In this screengrab Jin, J-Hope, Suga, Jungkook, V, Jimin, and RM of BTS perform onstage during the 63rd Annual GRAMMY Awards broadcast.

# MUSIC'S STARS STAGE BIG RETURN TO RED CARPET FOR GRAMMYS

Rapper Megan Thee Stallion, the queen of the hot girl summer, sized on the Grammys red carpet Sunday as music's biggest stars emerged from a year of pandemic lockdowns in their best couture. At the Emmys last year and the Golden Globes last month, red carpets were muted affairs, with only a few stars actually in attendance-and the rest Zooming in from home, in either gowns or pajamas. But music's biggest night-always the event with the boldest looks-featured a more traditional fashion parade, as many of the industry's top names attended the socially distanced gala in Los Angeles and performed.

Megan, who won three awards on the night including the coveted Grammy for Best New Artist, slayed in a bright orange strapless Dolce & Gabbana gown with a high leg slit, a dramatic bow on the back-and tons of diamonds. Dua Lipa, who won for Best Pop Vocal Album, got the memo on the high slit-she donned a barely there gauzy spaghetti-strap Versace confection with a pastel butterfly bodice, cut-outs and a see-through skirt. And then on stage, she wore even less, shedding a voluminous fuchsia cape to reveal... a pink bikini, thong back and all.

Nominated singer and rapper Doja Cat paid tribute to one of the most iconic Grammys looks ever-Jennifer Lopez's dramatic plunging Versace gown-in a Roberto Cavalli gown with a moto jacket bodice unzipped to her navel and a skirt of neon feathers.



(From left) Megan Thee Stallion and Doja Cat. — AFP photos

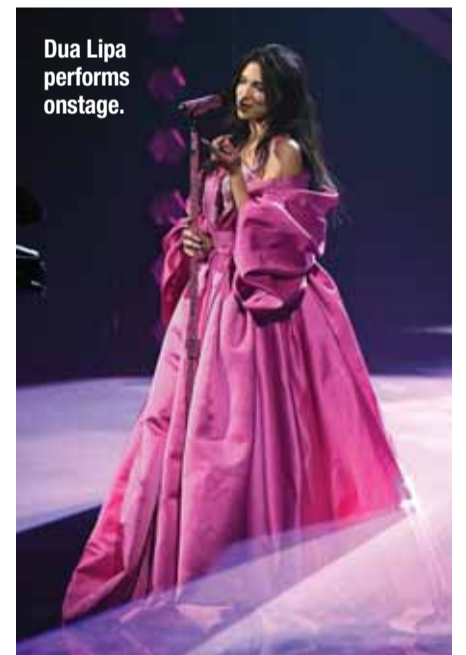
Sister act Haim delivered a symphony of coordinating iridescent lavender Prada outfits on the red carpet, and then changed to basic black and gold for their stage performance.

Rocker Phoebe Bridgers wore one of her signature skeleton outfits-but this one was a Thom Browne dress studded with plenty of sequins, pearl beads and crystals. She told E! network that the Thom Browne creation in fact was the initial inspiration for what became her look, noting: "I asked for it... I basically stole it." Of course, there was mask couture-Taylor Swift-a winner for Album of

the Year-perhaps did it best, with flower appliques all over her face covering to match her blossoming Oscar de la Renta mini dress. But the biggest star of the night slipped into the gala without walking the red carpet-Beyoncé.

Queen Bey, who made history Sunday when her four wins helped her set a record as the female artist with the most Grammys wins at 28, sported a fierce off-the-shoulder black Schiaparelli leather mini dress with a plunging neckline.

**Feather boas and studded gloves**  
Of course, the men of music were not



to be outdone. British singer Harry Styles, who won his first-ever Grammy for Best Pop Solo Performance for "Watermelon Sugar," donned a leather jacket, matching pants and a green boa-all by Gucci-to sing the song. On the red carpet and to accept his award, Styles wore a yellow-checked jacket and a purple boa. "This is Harry's first Grammys, and so we wanted to do something that felt British and eccentric," his stylist Harry Lambert told Vogue. "A little bit rock 'n' roll and a little bit camp."

Nominated rapper DaBaby hit the red carpet in a wild patterned suit with a green and red hat. When he hit the stage to perform "Rockstar," he changed into a white suit with studded gloves. And finally, joining Lipa for "Levitating," he rocked a pale pink suit to match her dreamy pastel look. Latin trap star Bad Bunny-a winner for best Latin pop or urban album-certainly took the prize for best accessory of the night: a black knit hat with ears. — AFP



(From left) Alana Haim, Danielle Haim and Este Haim of HAIM.



US singer-songwriter Phoebe Bridgers and Jackson Bridgers.



Puerto Rican rapper Bad Bunny.



US singer-songwriter Taylor Swift.



US rapper DaBaby

## Sports

# Saints quarterback Drew Brees announces NFL retirement

## One-time Super Bowl champion closes curtain on 20-year career

LOS ANGELES: New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees announced his retirement from the NFL on Sunday after a prolific 20-year career that included one Super Bowl triumph. Brees retires as the league's all-time leader in passing yards with 80,358. His decision, announced on social media, came almost two months after the Saints were eliminated in the playoffs by Tom Brady and the eventual 2021 Super Bowl champion Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

"After 20 years as a player in the NFL and 15 years as a Saint, it is time I retire from the game of football," Brees said in a post on his Instagram account. "Each day, I poured my heart and soul into being your Quarterback. Til the very end, I exhausted myself to give everything I had to the Saints organization, my team, and the great city of New Orleans. We shared some amazing moments together, many of which are emblazoned in our hearts and minds and will forever be a part of us. You have molded me, strengthened me, inspired me, and given me a lifetime of memories."

Reports had swirled throughout the playoffs that Brees, 42, would call it a career when the Saints season ended, even if that came without a Super Bowl shot. After the loss to the Bucs — who went on to win the Super Bowl in Brady's first season with the club — Brees said he would give himself time to mull the decision, although he added that he had "no regrets" about returning for a final campaign.

The 2020 season was Brees' 15th with the Saints. In 12 regular-season games, he completed more than 70 percent of his passing attempts for 2,942 yards, 24 touchdowns and six interceptions. He missed four games after suffering multiple bro-

ken ribs and a collapsed lung last November. Brees said battling through injury and the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic made the season especially rewarding.

His Instagram post included a video featuring his four children, who said: "After 15 years with the Saints and 20 years in the NFL, our dad is finally going to retire. So he can spend more time with us! Yay!!" Added Brees: "This is not goodbye, rather a new beginning. Now my real life's work begins!"

### Super Bowl MVP

Brees' NFL journey began in 2001, when he was taken in the second round of the draft and launched his career with the San Diego Chargers. In his last game with the Chargers in 2005, Brees suffered a severe shoulder injury that required surgical repair, but he was on the field for the Saints for the opening game of the 2006 campaign, when the city was still reeling from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

Saints coach Sean Payton, who arrived at the same time, said Brees, "with a burning desire to win" was vital in building a winning culture at the club. Brees led the Saints to the NFC Championship game that season and three years later was named Super Bowl Most Valuable Player after piloting the Saints to victory.

Although he never returned to the NFL's championship showcase, Brees retires not only as the league's all-time leader in passing yardage but ranking second in touchdown passes with 571 and second in completion percentage at 67.7 percent.

"He was a magnificent leader both on and off the field," Payton said. "His attention to detail and



NEW ORLEANS: In this file photo Drew Brees #9 of the New Orleans Saints warms up prior to the NFC Divisional Playoff game against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Mercedes Benz Superdome on January 17, 2021 in New Orleans, Louisiana. —AFP

competitive spirit were infectious. For all of us that have had the chance to coach him, it has been our privilege, we are better for it."

Brees finished his career with a record of 172-114 as a starting quarterback in the regular season and 9-9 in the playoffs. He threw for more than

5,000 yards in a season five different times, something no other quarterback has done more than once. "Congrats my friend on an incredible career," Brady tweeted. "Thank you for the inspiration and dedication on and off the field! Look forward to seeing what's next Drew Brees." —AFP

## Verstappen tops F1 testing as Tsunoda makes mark

SAKHIR: World champion Lewis Hamilton saw Max Verstappen top the times in Formula One testing on Sunday and predicted the Dutch star's Red Bull team will be "a different animal" when the season starts in two weeks' time.

Verstappen, who was third behind Hamilton and the Briton's Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas in the 2020 championship, timed a best lap of 1:28.960 on Sunday. That proved to be the fastest time of the three-day session.

However, rookie Yuki Tsunoda, the first Japanese driver to compete in Formula One since Kamui Kobayashi in 2014, also laid down a marker. His time on Sunday of 1:29.053 in his AlphaTauri was the second best overall of the week.

Verstappen had also topped the charts on Friday on the opening day at the dusty Sakhir circuit which will also stage the season opener on March 28. "They are looking strong," said seven-time champion Hamilton. "They're going to be a different machine or animal this year with, I think, a really good, strong line-up for two drivers and a really good car."

However, Hamilton insisted he was unconcerned as Verstappen had won the last race of 2020 in Abu Dhabi and had momentum on his side. "Having seen them winning the last race you can only assume they're going to be right there if not at the front, at the first race. It's going to be a great, long battle with them through the year," he added.

Verstappen, too, was keen to douse expectations that this could be the year that Red Bull break Mercedes' stranglehold. "I don't think we are the favorites," Verstappen said. Carlos Sainz, in a Ferrari, Alfa Romeo's Kimi Raikkonen and Hamilton rounded out the top five on Sunday in what also proved to be their top times of the week. —AFP



SAKHIR: Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen drives during the third day of the Formula One (F1) pre-season testing at the Bahrain International Circuit in the city of Sakhir on Sunday. —AFP

## Fans barred from Tokyo Olympics torch relay start

TOKYO: Spectators will be barred from the start of the Tokyo Olympics torch relay, organizers said yesterday, announcing a pared-back launch as the countdown to the postponed Games begins in earnest. Fans were told to stay away from next week's "simplified" starting ceremony and first leg of the nationwide relay, which was put on hold a year ago when the Olympics

## Birthday boy Curry lifts Warriors, rookie 'Poku' powers Thunder

LOS ANGELES: Golden State star Stephen Curry celebrated his 33rd birthday Sunday with a 32-point performance that propelled the Warriors to a 131-119 victory over the NBA-leading Utah Jazz and snapped a four-game skid.

Curry got off to a sizzling start, connecting on 63 percent of his shots in a 14-point first quarter in which the Warriors seized a lead they wouldn't relinquish. He finished 10-of-20 from the field with six three-pointers. "It's like that ageing wine, right?" Curry said. "Keep it in the cellar and watch it get stronger and better, so I'm just enjoying the ride."

Andrew Wiggins added 28 points and Draymond Green put up a triple-double of 11 points, 12 rebounds and 12 assists for the Warriors, who bounced back from a 130-104 loss to the Los Angeles Clippers on Thursday in which Curry made just one three-pointer.

The Warriors hadn't won since February 26 — before the NBA's All-Star break. They also reversed their fortunes against a Jazz team that had beaten

them five straight times. "Our whole team played amazing tonight," Curry said. "We took it personally to come out and play aggressive, focused defence. Everybody contributed."

In Oklahoma City, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 30 points and Serbian rookie Aleksej Pokusevski added a career-high 23 as the Thunder beat the Memphis Grizzlies 128-122 despite having just nine available players. Trailing by 10 going into the fourth quarter, Oklahoma City scored 38 points in the final frame, their 58 percent overall shooting helping them offset 24 turnovers. A three-pointer from Pokusevski gave the Thunder a 109-108 lead with 6:10 remaining and they wouldn't trail again.

The 19-year-old made five from beyond the arc, the second-youngest player after LeBron James, when he was 18, to make five three-pointers in a game. "My teammates believe in me," Pokusevski said. "They kept talking to me, every time I missed a shot (they said) just keep playing and everything is going to be good. When I have teammates like that, everything's great." "Poku" also pulled down 10 rebounds, surpassing former NBA Most Valuable Player Kevin Durant as the youngest player in franchise history to notch a double-double.

Elsewhere, the Philadelphia 76ers had Aussie guard Ben Simmons back in action for the first time since a positive coronavirus test forced him out of the All-Star Game in a 134-99 beat-down of the San Antonio Spurs. Despite the absence of Joel Embiid,

## March Madness ready for return after COVID-19 wipeout

WASHINGTON: March Madness, the annual US college basketball tournament that was wiped out last year by COVID-19, returns with a challenge unlike any it has faced after the bracket was revealed Sunday.

The 68-team event, usually spread across the nation, will be played entirely at Indianapolis, with safety protocols in place to protect teams as they complete games from Thursday to April 5 in the basketball-mad state of Indiana. The billion-dollar spectacle is a US television sports staple, where future NBA stars are showcased and predicting outcomes has become an American tradition.

"This is a great time of year where we get to see the adulation, victories and everything that goes on with college basketball," said Mitch Barnhart, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) men's basketball committee chair. "What we're seeing is this thing our country loves. We forget what these coaches and athletes missed last year. They didn't get a chance to celebrate."

Instead of spreading the event across the country, officials created a bubble atmosphere in the heart of a state where the boys' high school basketball tournament is known as "Hoosier Hysteria" and a small town team's rags-to-riches state title run became "Hoosiers" the Hollywood movie.

were delayed over the coronavirus.

"The grand start ceremony and the first section of the Fukushima torch relay... will not be open to the public," organizers said in a statement, adding that the festivities would be broadcast live online. The announcement comes ahead of a decision on whether fans from overseas will be allowed to enter Japan for the postponed Games, expected to be taken before the torch relay begins on March 25. Reports last week suggested the Japanese government is set to ban fans from abroad over fears of a rise in infections. The torch relay will begin in Fukushima prefecture, which last week marked the 10th anniversary of the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster that left 18,500 dead or missing.

With past champions Virginia, Duke and Kansas among teams knocked out of conference tournaments last week by positive COVID-19 tests, the need for safety protocols is clear. One team per floor will be housed in area hotels with only one person per room. Masks, social distancing and social tracing devices will be used. "Once we get people here, we feel confident we will be able to progress on and get through the rounds of the tournament," Barnhart said.

Teams must test negative for seven days before arriving in Indianapolis and are subject to daily tests thereafter. Ten arrived on Saturday and 17 more were due on Sunday. Teams will be allowed to compete with as few as five players. Teams can be replaced in the bracket due to COVID-19 for 48 hours with a stand-by squad for 48 hours before the bracket becomes final. College venues in and near Indy will be used as well as the home of the NBA's Indiana Pacers and the domed stadium where the NFL's Indianapolis Colts play, where the final is set to be played on April 5.

### 'Such a long hiatus'

Top-ranked and undefeated Gonzaga, 26-0, was made the top overall seed. The Bulldogs have a chance to become the first unbeaten champion since Indiana University's 32-0 title run in 1975-76. Gonzaga will open against the winner of a play-in game between Norfolk State and Appalachian State. Baylor, Illinois and Michigan were awarded the other number one seeds. Gonzaga coach Mark Few told ESPN the wipeout of last year's NCAA tourney when his team was a title contender was like having "1,000 feet on concrete poured on your shoulders — just

But the torch, headed for the Olympics opening ceremony on July 23, will get a more muted send-off than originally planned. "In order to allow all possible COVID-19 countermeasures to be taken, the number of participants travelling from Tokyo to the site is being substantially curtailed," Tokyo 2020 said. "In addition, the program has been simplified and the number of performers at the ceremony has been reduced."

About 3,000 spectators had been expected to attend the relay's starting ceremony, which will feature a children's choir and decorations made from flowers from disaster-affected areas. Members of Japan's women's football team will light the torch using the Olympic flame — which has been kept in Japan since the Games were postponed in March 2020. —AFP



SAN FRANCISCO: Stephen Curry of the Golden State Warriors smiles during the game against the Utah Jazz Sunday at Chase Center in San Francisco, California. —AFP

who suffered a bone bruise in his knee in an awkward landing from a dunk on Friday, the Sixers dominated in their fifth straight win, improving their Eastern Conference-leading record to 27-12.

The Sixers were relieved the injury wasn't worse than first feared. "He was happy that it isn't as bad as a lot of people thought it was, probably including himself," Philadelphia coach Doc Rivers said. "Now that he knows all it takes is rehab, he has a game plan, we have a game plan and we're moving forward with it." —AFP



LAS VEGAS: The San Diego State Aztecs celebrate their 68-57 victory over the Utah State Aggies in the championship game of the Mountain West Conference basketball tournament at the Thomas & Mack Center Saturday in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP

crushing." The Bulldogs, whose only finals appearance in 2017 ended with a loss to North Carolina, feature five players from outside the United States, including two starters — French junior guard Joel Ayayi and Canadian junior guard Andrew Nembhard.

Ayayi averages 11.8 points, 7.0 rebounds, 3.0 assists and 1.2 steals a game for Gonzaga while Nembhard averages 9.2 points, 2.4 rebounds, 4.2 assists and 1.1 steals a contest. International reserves include Mali freshman 7-foot (2.13m) center Oumar Ballo, Lithuanian sophomore guard Martynas Arlauskas and Russian sophomore forward Pavel Zakharov. —AFP



FUKUSHIMA: In this file photo taken on March 24, 2020, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic flame is displayed outside Fukushima railway station, Fukushima Prefecture. —AFP

## Sports

# Man City's rich resources make 'impossible' quadruple quest a reality

## City holds 2-0 ahead of tonight's Champions League showdown

**LONDON:** Two seasons ago as Manchester City won the first ever domestic treble of trophies in England, Pep Guardiola branded the possibility of ever doing a quadruple "almost impossible". A season characterized by injuries, fixture congestion, player fatigue, coronavirus infections, and for City no pre-season, should have made the feat more improbable than ever.

Yet, City remain on course to prove Guardiola's prediction wrong. A commanding 14-point lead at the top of the Premier League means it is a matter of when not if a third title in four years is sealed. Tonight, Guardiola's men head to Budapest for what should have been the home leg of their Champions League last 16 tie holding a 2-0 first leg advantage over Borussia Moenchengladbach.

Next weekend they travel to Everton in the FA Cup quarter-finals, while a League Cup final with Tottenham awaits in April. City's 23rd win in 24 games in all competitions at Fulham on Saturday exemplified how Guardiola has managed his side into this position.

Fresh from beating Liverpool at Anfield and just one defeat in six games, Fulham were swatted aside 3-0 despite City making seven changes. That took Guardiola's tally of changes in the Premier League this season to a league high 94.

Kevin De Bruyne, Ilkay Gundogan and Riyad Mahrez were among the star names to spend the full 90 minutes resting on the bench, while Raheem Sterling was not even included in the matchday squad. "What we have done the last two, three, four months, everybody is involved," said Guardiola. "Sometimes it is difficult but everyone has to make a contribution to win games and we will arrive at the

end of the season fighting as best as possible."

### Pandemic proof squad

As the crunch of a year without fans through the gates due to Covid-19 restrictions has hit even European football's wealthiest clubs, it is perhaps no surprise that backed by Abu Dhabi state wealth, City have proved more pandemic proof.

After being thrashed 5-2 at home by Leicester in their second game of the season, Guardiola was afforded the funds to splash out £62 million (\$86 million) on center-back Ruben Dias from Benfica. City had already previously spent over £300 million on defenders in Guardiola's reign on Kyle Walker, Benjamin Mendy, Joao Cancelo, Aymeric Laporte, John Stones and Nathan Ake.

On top of the arrivals of Dias and Ake, the signing of Ferran Torres took City's summer spend over £120 million. But it is Dias' presence that has had a transformational impact. The Portuguese international is one of the few men Guardiola refuses to rotate, starting all but one Premier League game since he joined the club in September.

Dias has also brought the best out of John Stones after two poor seasons since a starring role at the 2018 World Cup for the England international. "We all know our roles and responsibilities," said Stones after opening the scoring against Fulham. "We've all played so many games. We know the squad's rotated because of the schedule or whatever it might be the manager decides."

For all City's domestic success, Guardiola's team selection at the weekend made it perfectly clear that the Champions League remains the priority. The only major trophy to escape the Catalan since he



**MOENCHENGLADBACH:** Moenchengladbach's players warm up during a training session in Moenchengladbach, western Germany yesterday, one day ahead of the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg football match between Borussia Moenchengladbach and Manchester City. —AFP

arrived in Manchester five years ago is the one the club's owners brought him to the club to deliver.

But rarely have City's resources also given them such an advantage in Europe. With Bayern Munich, Real Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain still involved

in tight title races and Barcelona and Juventus already out of the competition, City can afford the luxury of cruising towards the finishing line in the Premier League, while saving their energy for the Champions League. —AFP

## Ramos returns amid doubts over future as Madrid face Atalanta

**MADRID:** Sergio Ramos returned for Real Madrid on Saturday but the bigger question is whether he is back for good. After two months out with a knee injury, Ramos played an hour in Madrid's win over Elche, with the plan to blow away the cobwebs ready for a start against Atalanta in the second leg of the Champions League tonight.

His availability should be a significant boost for Madrid, who have a 1-0 advantage from last month's first leg in Italy and will be confident of being Spain's first, and perhaps only, survivor in the tournament's quarter-finals.

And yet Ramos's reemergence has been pinpointed less as a boost to his team than a bolstering of his case to stay, every week he was absent another blow to his hope for a contract extension beyond the summer. Madrid president Florentino Perez has reportedly offered Ramos a two-year deal with a 10 per cent pay cut or a second option, the continuation of his current wages but for only one more year.

## PSG loss overshadowed by thefts at Di Maria, Marquinhos homes

**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain forward Angel Di Maria was the victim of a burglary during Sunday's loss to Nantes, while robbers also targeted the family home of captain Marquinhos, the latest in a spate of thefts at the club. Thieves stole jewelry and watches from the house of Argentine international Di Maria in the western Paris suburbs, but "there was no violence" involved, sources said yesterday.

According to the police's special anti-robbery squad, the player's family was home at the time but "didn't come across" the thieves, a source close to the case explained. They "didn't hear anything" during the ransacking of a safe located upstairs in the home in Neuilly, a police source added. The value of stolen goods has yet to be assessed but is said to be less than 500,000 euros (\$600,000).

Di Maria last week signed a one-year extension

to his PSG contract until 2022. He was replaced an hour into the 2-1 loss to Nantes following a discussion between sporting director Leonardo and coach Mauricio Pochettino. The family home of Brazil international Marquinhos was also robbed in the Paris region.

The player's father and two sisters were home during the break-in. A police source said the father was struck in the ribs by the attackers but no injuries were sustained. Several bags containing valuables were stolen, the contents of which have yet to be determined. PSG forward Mauro Icardi was the victim of a break-in at his home last month. Thiago Silva, Dani Alves and Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting were also robbed in recent years while playing for the club.

The commotion off the field seemed to affect PSG's players as Nantes dealt the French champions a seventh Ligue 1 defeat of the season. "It's not an excuse but there has been an unusual drop in energy," Pochettino said after the match. "We spoke with the players but not about what happened in terms of the football."

"There are situations outside the game which must be considered," Di Maria previously admitted that an attempted robbery on his family's home during his one year at Manchester United, in 2014-15, had left him keen to leave the Premier League club. —AFP

Leipzig travel to Arminia Bielefeld next week ahead of their season-defining clash with Bayern on April 3. "We need to make sure we get all three points next weekend," Leipzig sporting director Markus Krosche told Sky.

### Bielefeld stun Leverkusen

Japanese stars also hogged the headlines in Sunday's earlier game as goals from Ritsu Doan and Masaya Okugawa fired Arminia Bielefeld to a surprise 2-1 win at Bayer Leverkusen. Okugawa's debut Bundesliga goal lifted Bielefeld out of the bottom three for the first time since January and dealt an untimely blow to Leverkusen's Champions League qualification hopes. "To score my first Bundesliga goal in such an important win is brilliant," Okugawa told broadcaster DAZN. Asked whether he would be having a drink to celebrate, the Japanese replied: "No! I don't like beer!"

While Arminia now sit one point clear of the drop zone, Leverkusen have dropped to sixth and are four points adrift of the top four. After a dominant first 15 minutes from the hosts, Bielefeld took the lead with their first shot on goal. Given acres of space on the right wing, Christian Gebauer's cross found the advancing Doan, who prodded the ball in off the bar to score his fourth league goal of the season.



**VALDEBEBAS:** (From left) Real Madrid's Spanish defender Sergio Ramos, Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema and Real Madrid's Spanish defender Nacho Fernandez warm up before the Spanish League football match between Real Madrid and Elche at the Alfredo Di Stefano stadium in Valdebebas, northeast of Madrid, on March 13, 2021. —AFP

themselves again facing a question of how to evolve, of where the balance lies between retaining current stars and making space for new blood. Ramos is the embodiment of that debate, the most iconic and charismatic figure of an era almost gone, who is also the most outspoken and most expensive. —AFP



**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain's Argentinian forward Angel Di Maria reacts during the French L1 football match between PSG and Nantes at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris on Sunday. —AFP

be considered." Di Maria previously admitted that an attempted robbery on his family's home during his one year at Manchester United, in 2014-15, had left him keen to leave the Premier League club. —AFP



**LEIPZIG:** Frankfurt's Japanese midfielder Daichi Kamada plays the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match RB Leipzig v Eintracht Frankfurt in Leipzig, eastern Germany, on Sunday. —AFP

Okugawa doubled the lead on the counter-attack just before the hour mark, slotting home his first goal since joining Bielefeld on loan from Salzburg in January. Patrik Schick's 85th minute tap-in gave Leverkusen brief hope of a late fight-back, but Bielefeld held on to claim their sixth win of the season. —AFP

## Ronaldo hits back with hat-trick, Inter move nine clear

**MILAN:** Cristiano Ronaldo hit back at his critics with a quick-fire hat-trick as Juventus brushed aside Cagliari 3-1 on Sunday, five days after their Champions League elimination, while Inter Milan moved nine points clear at the Serie A summit.

Portuguese star Ronaldo bore the brunt of the criticism for Juve's latest European flop after failing to score in either leg of the last-16 defeat by Porto, while also being partly at fault for what proved to be the goal which knocked them out.

But the 36-year-old scored a header in the 10th minute at the Sardegna Arena, added a second from the penalty spot 15 minutes later, and completed a 'perfect' treble on 31 minutes with a fine left-footed strike.

Defending champions Juventus are 10 points behind leaders Inter Milan, who beat Torino 2-1 earlier Sunday, but with a game in hand. Andrea Pirlo's side pulled just one point behind second-placed AC Milan, whose title hopes took a big hit following a 1-0 home defeat to Napoli.

"Our approach was spot on and it was important to get off on the right foot after being knocked out the other night," said Pirlo. "Ronaldo was angry like the rest of the team. He reacted like a true champion."

He could also have been sent off after a quarter of an hour, receiving only a yellow card for dangerous play as his boot struck Cagliari goalkeeper Alessio Cragnino in the face while attempting to meet a Federico Chiesa cross.

Ronaldo is the leading scorer in Serie A with 23 goals this season, ahead of Inter's Romelu Lukaku, who has 19. His career tally is now 770 goals, overtaking Brazil legend Pele's 767 scored in official matches which he matched earlier this month.

Before kick-off, Juventus chief football officer Fabio Paratici dismissed talk about Ronaldo's future with the club. "It makes me laugh. I would never have imagined discussing the value of Cristiano Ronaldo," said Paratici. "It's a privilege to have him with us, he's part of our future."

### Inter pull clear of Milan

Lautaro Martinez scored a brilliant 85th-minute winner in a tight game against 18th-placed Torino to keep Inter on track for a first league title since 2010. Antonio Conte's Inter once again needed their strike duo of Lukaku and Martinez to find a way to win in Turin. Christian Eriksen came off the bench on 56 minutes and had an immediate impact, playing a part in the move which resulted in Torino defender Armando Izzo fouling Martinez in the penalty area. Lukaku fired home the resulting spot-kick in the 62nd minute. —AFP



**CAGLIARI:** Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo heads the ball to open the scoring during the Italian Serie A football match Cagliari vs Juventus on Sunday at the Sardegna Arena in Cagliari. —AFP

## Man Utd close in on top-four finish

### McTominay left with title race regret

MANCHESTER: Manchester United tightened their grip on a return to the Champions League next season with a 1-0 win over West Ham on Sunday, but midfielder Scott McTominay lamented letting Manchester City storm clear at the top of the Premier League.

Victory over the fifth-placed Hammers moved United back above Leicester into second in the table and closed the gap on the runaway leaders to 14 points. City have won 17 of their last 18 league games with their only defeat in that run coming against Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men last weekend.

But United eased their local rivals' route to a third title in four years with a run of just two wins in eight games in prior to winning the Manchester derby. "It's difficult to look at top four at the minute because we had a time when we were looking at the league," said McTominay, who was the closest United player to Craig Dawson when the West Ham defender headed into his own net for the only goal at Old Trafford. "It was the chance for all of us to have a big push and show really what good players we are, but Man City have had a terrific run of games and we're just trying our best to keep on them."

Despite also having a game in hand on City, the Red Devils are unlikely to haul in Pep Guardiola's men but do now enjoy a nine-point cushion over West Ham in the battle for Champions League places. "It was a big weekend for us," said Solskjaer as Chelsea, Everton and Tottenham also lost ground in the top-four race over the past two days. "This is a big three points because we know West Ham are challenging to get into the top four."

Former United boss David Moyes has failed to win in 15 attempts as the visiting manager at Old Trafford and the Scot was left to rue an overly cautious approach before falling behind early in the second half.

Without the ineligible Jesse Lingard, who is on loan from United, Moyes also dropped Pablo Fornals and Said Benrahma as club captain Mark Noble returned with full-back Ben Johnson playing in a more advanced midfield role. "The way we set up



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Scottish midfielder Scott McTominay and English defender Harry Maguire contest a crossed ball as the ball goes in for the opening goal credited as an own goal to West Ham United's English defender Craig Dawson during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and West Ham United at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on Sunday. — AFP

didn't quite work," said Moyes. "We never really got up the park."

The home side were without the firepower of Anthony Martial and Edinson Cavani due to injury, so Mason Greenwood got the chance to lead the line and came closest to opening the scoring in a first half of few chances. Greenwood's fierce left-footed shot was brilliantly turned onto the post by Lukasz Fabianski as the 35-year-old Pole showed why he was handed a new one-year contract this week.

There was nothing Fabianski could do to stop the only goal as Dawson's header flashed into his own net from Bruno Fernandes's corner eight minutes into the second period. Fabianski produced another fine

save to deny Fernandes doubling United's lead shortly afterwards.

Moyes sent on Manuel Lanzini and Benrahma for the final 28 minutes and West Ham finally came to life as an attacking force. As the visitors pushed forward, though, United became more dangerous on the counter-attack and Greenwood smashed against the post for a second time after a lung-bursting run from inside his own half.

The second goal did not come for the hosts, but an improved defensive record has been key to another season of progress under Solskjaer, which is reportedly set to see the Norwegian rewarded with a new contract.

United held out for a fourth consecutive Premier League clean sheet to close in on the much-needed resources of Champions League football next season after a full year without crowds at their 75,000 capacity home.

Earlier on Sunday, Arsenal bounced back from Erik Lamela's stunning Rabona to open the scoring in the north London derby to beat Tottenham 2-1, while Leicester thrashed bottom-of-the-table Sheffield United 5-0. In the battle to beat the drop, Brighton edged three points clear of third-bottom Fulham with a game in hand by winning a frenetic south-coast derby 2-1 over Southampton thanks to goals from Lewis Dunk and Leandro Trossard. — AFP



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