



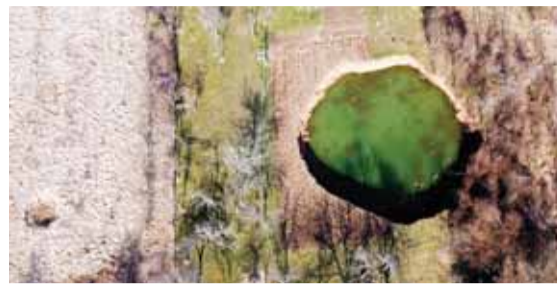
3 Recruitment of Filipino domestic helpers to commence from April



5 Afghan sewing factory offers lifeline to widows



12 Dozens of sinkholes pock Croatia's quake-hit villages



14 Skid and spin: Libyan drift drivers burn rubber for 'unity and peace'





Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf

REGISTER TODAY

for the **COVID-19 vaccine**

[See Page 16](#)

Court rejects petitions against partial curfew

MPs demand quick debate on bill to pardon opposition activists

Zain pays out dividend of 33 fils per share

KUWAIT: Zain Group Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held yesterday at Zain Group's headquarters in Kuwait, with a livestreaming available for shareholders and qualified parties, attended with a quorum of 72.49 percent that approved the recommended cash dividend of 33 percent (33 fils per share) to the shareholders already registered in the company's record as of April 1, 2020. Cash dividends will be paid to shareholders commencing April 7, 2021.

Zain Group Chairman Ahmed Al-Tahous said: "The COVID-19 pandemic broadly affected economies across the globe, which were plunged into a state of uncertainty. On its part, Zain Group mobilized all its resources to provide vital and meaningful connectivity during the lockdowns, implementing more digitalization initiatives to better serve businesses, governments, and societies, aiming to lessen the impact of the pandemic on society."

Zain Group Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi said: "2020 has been a turbulent year in ways that governments, businesses, and individuals could not have imagined or predicted at the start of the year."



Zain Group Vice-Chairman and CEO Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi

Zain Group stands in solidarity with the multitudes around the world who have been affected by the scourge of the COVID-19 pandemic and expresses its heartfelt sorrow for those who have and continue to succumb to the virus." Kharafi began his speech at the General Assembly with a tribute to six Zain employees who passed away during the pandemic. (See Page 8)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The lower court yesterday rejected two petitions challenging the government's order to impose a partial curfew to combat the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. The court said the health minister is authorized by law to recommend such measures to combat the spread of serious diseases.

The court however called on authorities to continuously review the restrictions and measures in a bid to establish a balance between serving public interests, securing the safety of the society and safeguarding the health system on one hand and preserving the rights of individuals and their economic and social rights on the other. The court specifically called on authorities to revise the duration of the curfew and restrictions on travel.

Meanwhile, seven lawmakers yesterday submitted a petition calling on the National Assembly to debate a draft law granting a pardon to opposition activists during the first Assembly session. MP Farz Al-Mutairi said he and six other MPs filed the request, which requires the Assembly to give top priority to debating the pardon bill. If approved and signed by HH the Amir, the bill will release dozens of activists from jail.

The bill will also allow over a dozen former opposition MPs and activists, who have been living in self-exile in Turkey, to return to the country, as it will revoke hefty jail sentences issued against them. The former lawmakers - who include Musallam Al-Barrak, Faisal Al-Mislem and Jamaan Al-Harbash - were convicted of storming the Assembly building following a demonstration in Nov 2011 and were handed several years in jail. The men had left Kuwait before the verdicts were passed in the summer of 2018.

A majority of lawmakers had placed passing the pardon bill at the top of their agenda in the runoff to the Dec 5 Assembly polls. To give priority to the draft law, the Assembly must vote and approve the motion.

In a related development, the Assembly's interior and defense committee will debate today amendments to a highly controversial law that bars people convicted of insulting the Amir or religions from contesting general elections. The constitutional court on Sunday based its ruling to revoke the membership of leading opposition MP Bader Al-Dahoum on the law. If the panel completes studying the amendments, it could also be debated in the next session, expected to be held on Tuesday.

News in brief

Kuwait reports 1,504 cases, 8 deaths

KUWAIT: Kuwait yesterday reported 1,504 new coronavirus infections, taking total cases to 213,673, while eight people died, taking the death toll to 1,194. Up to 9,277 virus tests were conducted in the past 24 hours, as total PCR tests reached 1,933,173. Earlier, the health ministry confirmed the recovery of 1,452 people, as total recoveries climbed to 198,273. — KUNA

Oil demand to reach record

PARIS: Global oil demand will return to pre-pandemic levels in two years and reach record heights by 2026 unless governments take swift action to meet climate goals, the International Energy Agency said yesterday. Oil markets and the world economy are recovering from the massive collapse in demand caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the IEA said, adding as people get vaccinated and restrictions are lifted, demand will return to its 2019 level by 2023. — AFP (See Page 9)

6 get death for maiming teen

AMMAN: Jordan's state security court sentenced six men to death yesterday after convicting them of maiming a 16-year-old boy in a case that triggered public outrage. The victim has since regained the use of one eye after receiving specialist treatment, but he lost both hands to his assailants' vendetta against his father. A total of 17 people were implicated in the teenager's abduction from the city of Zarqa last October. — AFP

Three Iran revelers killed

TEHRAN: Three people were killed and nearly 1,900 injured celebrating Iran's traditional fire festival in the run-up to this weekend's Persian New Year, emergency services said yesterday. The Chaharshanbe Suri celebrations, during which participants jump over bonfires to purify themselves and ward off evil spirits, are part of Iran's pre-Islamic heritage. They are popular with young people, many of whom who make their own fireworks for the event. — AFP

Philippines to shut border to foreigners

MANILA: The Philippines will close its border to foreigners and restrict the number of Filipinos entering the country as authorities battle to contain a spike in coronavirus infections. The temporary measures come after the number of daily cases hit a seven-month high of 5,404 on Monday and experts predict the figure could dou-

ble by the end of March.

Most of the active infections are in Metro Manila where targeted lockdowns, night-time curfews and a stay-at-home order for all children are being used to curb the spread. The ban on overseas arrivals was announced late Tuesday by the government's COVID-19 task force and takes effect March 20. Overseas Filipino workers will be exempt, but the number of passenger arrivals will be limited to 1,500 a day, it said.

Authorities have blamed the infection surge on poor compliance with health protocols, such as wearing a

Continued on Page 2

West Bank hospitals overwhelmed

RAMALLAH: As Israel pushes ahead with one of the world's most intense coronavirus vaccination campaigns and normality slowly returns, nearby Palestinians without access to vaccines are flooding hospitals already at breaking point. "We have reached the red line," said Palestinian minister Mai Al-Kaila. "The alarm has been rung in Palestine, the epidemiological situa-

tion is very dangerous."

In Israel more than 4.3 million people - nearly 46 percent of the population - have been fully inoculated against the coronavirus with twin doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech jab. The country is gradually reopening hotels, along with restaurants, bars and cafes. That is in stark contrast to the occupied West Bank, where aside from medical staff and some 90,000 workers with permits to enter Israel, only a handful of the 2.8 million residents have received jabs.

Yesterday, the Palestinian Authority took delivery of 60,000 Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca

Continued on Page 2

Asian women among 8 shot dead in Atlanta

ATLANTA: Six Asian women were among eight people shot and killed at spas around the US city of Atlanta, raising fears yesterday that it might be the most violent chapter yet in a wave of attacks on Asian-Americans. A white man is in custody on suspicion of staging all three attacks, police said as a

Georgia state Democratic party leader suggested the attack matched "a pattern" of violence on Asian-Americans during the pandemic.

Four of the victims were killed at Young's Asian Massage near Acworth, a suburb of Georgia state capital Atlanta, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported. Captain Jay Baker of the Cherokee County sheriff's office told the paper the victims were two Asian women, a white woman, and a white man, while a Hispanic man was wounded.

Adriana Mejia, niece of one of the victims, said the family was "devastated" after her uncle was shot and that



MANILA: A city employee disinfects a street at an informal settlers area on Tuesday. — AFP



DURA: An intubated COVID-19 coronavirus disease patient receives an injection while lying in an intensive care unit of Dura Public Hospital west of Hebron on Tuesday. — AFP



ATLANTA: This handout booking photo shows shooting suspect Robert Aaron Long. — AFP

they were praying for his recovery. "We never know when we're at the wrong place at the wrong time because this was so all of a sudden," she said. Police separately confirmed that four women had been killed in attacks on two other spas in the northeast of the city. Describing the scene in northeast Atlanta, the city police department said: "Upon arrival, officers located three females deceased inside the location from apparent gunshot wounds." While on the scene, officers were advised of shots fired across the street, where they found a fourth female victim. Police told

Continued on Page 2

Local

Deputy Amir receives Speaker, Prime Minister



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. His Highness the Deputy Amir also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos

GCC ministers condemn Houthi attacks, affirm unity

RIYADH: The GCC ministerial council, at end of its 147th session yesterday, affirmed commitment to the final statement of the latest GCC summit declarations — alluding to the resolutions of the summit that was hosted by the Saudi town of Al-Ula on January 5. In the highlights of the meeting statement, the GCC foreign ministers and officials condemned the Houthis' recurring attacks on Saudi Arabia, namely its vital oil installations, Iran's occupation of UAE islands and affirmed that the council member states have remained solidly unified. Security of the GCC member states is inseparable, in line with the GCC constituent law and the joint defense treaty stipulating that these countries would stand together in the face of any external danger the meeting final statement said — read by the GCC Secretary General Nayef Al-Hajraf. The ministers decried the March 7 attack with a drone that swooped from the sea targeting petroleum tanks in Ras Tannura (Saudi Arabia) and targeting facilities of the Aramco oil company in Al-Dharan with a ballistic missile, as well as the recurring spates of Houthi terrorist attacks on Saudi Arabia. They affirmed support for the kingdom with respect of the measures it may take against such provocative acts that target civilians, civil sites, ports, key oil installations and sources for global energy. These acts breach international laws and conventions, threaten the region security and stability, the statement said, lauding preparedness of the Saudi forces and calling on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities toward these acts of terrorism and sabotage and the powers behind them.

GCC achievements

The ministers acclaimed the GCC achievements over the past, affirming that the council has remained unified hoping that more accomplishments would be made for further prosperity, progress and sustainable development for the GCC peoples. The ministers during the meeting examined efforts undertaken by the GCC Secretariat General for implementing resolutions of the GCC Supreme Council 41st Session (the Summit of Sultan Qaboos and Sheikh Sabah), and visionary plans advocated by Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz for boosting joint action, strengthening the GCC economies, completing the requirements for the joint custom

union, the common gulf market as a prelude to achieve the GCC economic unity by 2025. The ministerial council applauded the continuing efforts exerted by the GCC armed forces to implement all resolutions related to the joint military action particularly with regard to activating the joint military command and pursuing work for attaining military integration of the GCC countries' forces.

At the health level, the ministers praised the ongoing efforts by the health authorities in the council member countries to cope with repercussions of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), affirming necessity of exchanging expertise, also lauding citizens' cooperation and their effective contributions in this regard. As to Iran's occupation of the three UAE islands, the council underlined the GCC unwavering stance, rejecting the Iranian occupation of Greater Tomb, Smaller Tomb and Abou Moussa, affirming the UAE sovereignty over the three islands, the UAE territorial waters, the territorial airspace, the continental shelf, the economic zone as inseparable parts of the UAE territories. The council has considered that any "practices or acts" on part of Iran on the islands as "cancelled and have no impact whatsoever on the UAE sovereignty on the three islands." The council called on Iran to respond to the UAE efforts to resolve the issue through direct negotiations or refer the question to the International Court of Justice.

On the Palestinian cause, the council affirmed the member states' call for establishing an independent Palestinian state with the June 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as the capital of this state, in addition to ensuring rights of the refugees according to the Arab Peace Initiative, international reference and resolutions of the international legitimacy. The ministers applauded a recent decision by the Palestinian president to hold elections in all Palestinian territories including East Jerusalem and hailed Egypt for hosting the Palestinian dialogue designed to tackle rifts among Palestinian factions. They greeted a resolution by the first preliminary circuit of the International Criminal Court, stipulating that the regional jurisdictions of the court in Palestine cover the Palestinian territories that have been occupied by Israel since 1967, including Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Moreover, the ministers condemned Israel's construction of settlements, the demolishing of Palestinians' houses, altering the demographic status in the occupied territories that explicitly breach the international law and relevant international resolutions.

Relations with Iran

The GCC ministers, in their statement, noted the GCC unwavering stances with respect of the rela-



RIYADH: GCC foreign ministers attend the 147th session of the GCC ministerial council in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia yesterday. — KUNA

tions with the Islamic Republic of Iran, stressing on the necessity that future negotiations with Tehran must be in a single package, incorporating "Iran's conducts that undermine security and stability in the region, the world, its sponsorship of terrorism, its missile program namely the Ballistic and Cruise missiles, the drones, the nuclear program, the safety of navigation in the Gulf," noting the necessity that the GCC states must partake in such negotiations. The ministerial council denounced Iran's continuing support for terrorist militias and sectarian militias that threaten the Arab national security and seek to undermine stability in the Arab states. On the Syrian question, the council affirmed the GCC stances and unwavering resolutions regarding the Syrian crisis according to Geneva Principles (I), Security Council Resolution 2254, expressing support for the fifth convention for supporting future of Syria and the region, due in Brussels on March 29-20.

On Yemen, the ministers voiced backing for missions by the UN and US envoys to halt the fighting and pave way for talks on the basis of the national dialogue conference and the Security Council Resolution 2216. The GCC council affirmed support for the Yemeni Government that began its tasks in the interim capital Aden on December 30. It sternly

condemned attacks by the Iran-backed Houthi militias on civilians and civilian targets and the refugee camps in Maarib with ballistic missiles and drones. Moreover, it decried using refugees in Maarib as human shields. The council lauded the GCC financial contributions that accounted to 40 percent of the pledges during Yemen's donors conference that was held on March 1 to fund the UN relief scheme for the war-haggard country in 2021, also hailing the humanitarian efforts by King Salman Relief Program for Yemen's reconstruction. The GCC ministers condemned Houthis' bids to hamper the mission of the UN team tasked with examining status of the abandoned oil tanker Safer in the Red Sea, urging the UN to try again reach it and spare the region a looming environmental catastrophe.

On Iraq, the GCC officials expressed support for efforts aimed at restoring security and stability to the brotherly nation lauding efforts by the government and the international coalition to deter terrorist groups and armed militias. The council condemned recurring terrorist operations aimed at jeopardizing Iraq's security and stability and snagging efforts for holding elections. On Libya, the council applauded the recent conciliation agreement that led to the formation of a new government. — KUNA

West Bank hospitals...

Continued from Page 1

jabs via the UN's Covax program. But their arrival comes as hospitals battle to treat a flood of COVID-19 patients. In the emergency department of a Ramallah medical complex, an eight-year-old girl with COVID-19 struggles with her oxygen tube.

Close by, a man in his sixties watches from a resuscitation room as other patients groan in their beds. The ward is heavy with foul air. The emergency unit is swamped, so authorities have started to equip three large caravan trailers outside to cope with the influx of patients. "Sometimes, because of the coronavirus crisis, we have to wait for one of the patients to die in the hospital so we can transfer another one into the emergency room," said a hospital official, requesting anonymity.

The situation in this large hospital in Ramallah, the main city in the West Bank, some 15 km north of Jerusalem, is repeated elsewhere across the territory. When Israel launched its vaccination campaign in December, rights groups such as Amnesty International and Palestinian officials implored it to extend the vaccination campaign to the West Bank, which it has occupied since 1967.

But Israel refused, arguing it had no obligation to provide vaccines because health responsibilities fall to the Palestinian Authority. Today the number of daily cases in the West Bank, home to 2.8 million Palestinians, now slightly exceeds that of the whole of Israel - population nine million. That is pushing Palestinian hospitals to breaking point.

The PA said this week the health system was 100 percent full and a new wave of patients was exceeding its ability to cope. In the West Bank, more than 156,000 coronavirus cases have been recorded,

including 1,745 deaths. At the Dora hospital in Hebron, a large city in the south of the West Bank, medical director Mohammed Rabei said he was overwhelmed. The hospital usually has a capacity of 60 beds, but staff have squeezed in more to increase it to 80.

But the number needing hospital beds continues to rise, Rabei said. "We must find other solutions" to treat critically sick patients with coronavirus, Rabei told AFP. "There has always been a shortage of staff here... but these days, the teams are working under pressure, lacking days off, and they are exhausted."

In Silwad, north of Ramallah, more than 50 oxygen machines were donated by Palestinian-Americans, at a cost of around \$1,000 each, to help treat coronavirus patients at home. After 10 residents died in medical centres and hospitals in Ramallah, new patients now "refuse to go to the hospitals", said Ramallah's mayor, Osama Hammad. "We had no choice but to ask for oxygen machines... treating them in the local clinic, rather than them going to die in the big hospitals," says Hammad.

Israel, which has access to vaccine supplies through an agreement with Pfizer, has provided 5,000 doses to Palestinian medical personnel. It has also provided jabs for some 90,000 Palestinians who cross over to work in Israel, or in Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Meanwhile, the PA is waiting for 100,000 vaccine doses to be delivered from China. Many in Ramallah are gloomy about the future. "If we had started vaccinating at the same time as Israel, we would have no problem," said one health ministry official.

Earlier, some 60,000 doses of Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines allocated to the Palestinians under the Covax scheme arrived at Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv, according to an Israeli security source. The UN's Middle East envoy, Tor Wennesland, welcomed the delivery. "Those vaccines being sent to the West Bank and Gaza will be critical tools in our fight against the pandemic and for socioeconomic recovery," his office quoted him as saying. — AFP

Asian women among 8 shot...

Continued from Page 1

the Atlanta Journal-Constitution that all four were Asian women.

South Korea's Yonhap News Agency reported the country's foreign ministry had confirmed that four of the victims were of Korean descent. President Joe Biden was briefed on the "horrific shootings" in Atlanta. White House officials have been in touch with the mayor and will stay in contact with the FBI, press secretary Jen Psaki said. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, speaking during a visit to South Korea, said "We are horrified by this violence which has no place in America or anywhere."

Philippines to shut border...

Continued from Page 1

mask and face shield in public, and more contagious variants of the virus. A year after ordering the first lockdown that crippled the country's economy, threw millions out of work and triggered record hunger, President Rodrigo Duterte urged Filipinos to "not despair".

"It's a small thing in our lives. We went through (things that) are more severe, more difficult and brought more tears," Duterte said Monday. His remarks sparked anger among social media users and opposition lawmakers who accused him of belittling the suffering of health workers and people who have lost loved ones to the disease. Duterte's government has been flayed over its handling of the pandemic,

Authorities have identified Robert Aaron Long as a suspect in all three shootings. Based on the pattern of surveillance video from the shooting scenes, Atlanta police spokesman Sergeant John Chafee told AFP: "It is extremely likely our suspect is the same as Cherokee County's, who is in custody." "We are working closely with them to confirm with certainty our cases are related," he added.

Long was taken into custody after a "brief pursuit" about 240 km from Atlanta, according to a statement by the Georgia Department of Safety on Facebook. The Federal Bureau of Investigation was assisting in the investigation, a spokesman told AFP.

The shootings come as reports of attacks against Asian-Americans, primarily elders, have spiked in recent months - fueled during the COVID-19 pandemic, activists believe, by talk of the "Chinese virus" by former president Donald Trump and others. In an interview Tuesday evening before word of the shootings came out, Trump again used the term "China virus". — AFP

which has infected more than 630,000 people. Nearly 13,000 have died.

The hospital bed occupancy rate is at 59 percent in Metro Manila and surrounding provinces, presidential spokesman Harry Roque - who has tested positive for COVID-19 - said Tuesday. But at the Philippine General Hospital, one of the country's main facilities treating COVID-19 patients, 80 percent of beds for patients diagnosed with the disease were occupied and its intensive care wards full, a spokesman told local media.

The government hopes to inoculate 70 million people by the end of this year. More than a million doses of vaccines developed by China's Sinovac and British-Swedish drug maker AstraZeneca have been delivered in the past two weeks. The government hopes to have "a stable supply of vaccines starting April or May", said retired general Carlito Galvez, who is overseeing the effort. About 216,000 health workers have received their first jab so far, he said. Authorities aim to inoculate 1.7 million medical staff by mid-April before distributing vaccines to the elderly and poor. — AFP

Local

Recruitment of Filipino domestic helpers to Kuwait commences April

Final decision pending resolving issues by end of March, says labor attache

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Philippines and Kuwait have finally agreed to open the recruitment of new Filipino domestic helpers from April. "Everything has been ironed out except for a few technical issues, like the inspection of accommodations of domestic helpers to be provided by the foreign recruitment office in Kuwait, and some more briefings with the secretaries of recruitment agencies to explain to them the tripartite contract which we will be using from now onwards," said Nasser Mustafa, Philippine Labor Attache to Kuwait, in an exclusive interview with Kuwait Times yesterday.

Mustafa said recruitment could start by April if all issues are resolved by the end of March. "Last Monday we had the last and final Zoom meeting with Philippine Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III, along with the Local Recruitment Agency (LRA) and Foreign Recruitment Agency (FRA) owners. Our labor secretary in his opening statement reiterated his firm stand on all the provisions of the tripartite contract which we all agreed and signed. He said it must be implemented," he said.

"In fact those who are returning domestic helpers and are coming to the embassy for the contract, we are now using the tripartite contract. We have been asking employers to sign this contract since I arrived here last week," he said. Mustafa is the labor attaché of the Philippines to both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. "These tripartite contracts will be used by new recruits and will be our standard for hiring domestic helpers from the Philippines," he emphasized. "The final say will always come from our secretary of labor, so we have a meeting scheduled in a few days' time. So maybe by April

we can start the recruitment."

Before the virtual meeting last Monday, Mustafa also held several meetings with officials from the Ministry of Interior and the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM). "I also met several officials from the Talha Deportation Center and several other agencies in charge of the affairs of domestic helpers. They were very cooperative and are willing to accept all the requests of the Philippine government," Mustafa said.

"Since Kuwait will not allow the Philippine Embassy to maintain a shelter to house runaway domestic helpers, PAM has committed to accept at least 30 domestic helpers daily. PAM will serve as their transit point before they are sent home. Since they are running away from their employers' homes, our primary concern is the safety and well-being of our people. We will make sure that these individuals endorsed by us are ready to go home at any given time, so maybe they will stay a maximum of one or two weeks only at the PAM shelter," he added.

Provisions in the tripartite contract include providing the housemaid with decent and appropriate housing equipped with all the necessities, providing suitable food and clothing, providing medical treatment in case of sickness pursuant to the healthcare insurance system of Kuwait, salary must be paid at the end of the month - not less than the designated amount signed by both parties, compensating the housemaid in case of injury while during work, employers must issue a valid residency for the duration of contract, handle all the expenses to bring the housemaid, and in case of death, the employer must also bear the expenses of the deceased body.



KUWAIT: Philippine Labor Attache to Kuwait Nasser Mustafa.

The new tripartite contract also mentions that the employer is not allowed to assign the worker outside Kuwait without an agreement from the worker. The housemaid is also allowed to use the phone outside working hours, provided that she maintains the privacy of the household and in a manner consistent with public morals. Working hours must be 12 hours daily and employers must allow the housemaid to rest for eight continuous hours. They must have a fully-paid weekly day off, annual leave, end-of-service benefit or one full month for every year of service, plus a bonus equivalent to one month's salary annually. The employer is not allowed to keep the passport in their possession. The employer needs to provide an economy ticket to the worker at the end of her contract, and in case of conflict the case will be referred to the Public Authority of Manpower.

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, 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.

Omaria 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

Interior Minister meets several ambassadors

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah met yesterday a number of Ambassadors to discuss topics of common interests. The ministry's department

of security media and public relations said in a statement that the minister met individually with Senegal's Ambassador to Kuwait Abdulhad Embaki and Bahrain's Ambassador to Kuwait Salah Al-Maliki.

The statement noted that all sides tackled topics of common interests and ways to enhance cooperation on the security level. Both Ambassadors expressed gratitude to Kuwait for its generous hospitality and its efforts in reserving security and peace in the area, it added.

Minister Al-Sabah later met with

Kuwait's Ambassador to NATO, EU, and Belgium Jasem Al-Budaiwi, Kuwait's Ambassador to Germany Abdulrahman Al-Bader, Kuwait's Ambassador to Azerbaijan Saud Al-Romi.

During the meetings, all sides discussed a number of subjects of mutual grounds and a coordination plan to enhance cooperation between Kuwait's institutional security and its embassies abroad in order to increase facilitation to Kuwaitis. All ambassadors expressed thanks to the Minister of Interior for his warm hospitality and efforts. —KUNA



Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah

'MUNA' system to accredit PCR tests for passengers to Kuwait

KUWAIT: Passengers from 11 countries are required to submit a PCR test result before their arrival to Kuwait that is approved by the Medical Utility Network Accreditor (MUNA) system, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation said. In circulars released yesterday

and Monday, all airlines operating at Kuwait International Airport were notified that passengers must obtain a PCR test from a clinic approved by the MUNA system conducted no more than 72 hours prior to their departure. In addition, the passengers must not have any symptoms such as cold, sneezing, high temperature or a cough. The MUNA system identifies approved laboratories abroad to ensure that there is no forgery or tampering with the result of the PCR test.

The system is already applied on passengers coming from India, Philippines,

Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal, and will be applied on passengers from Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey starting from March 25th, Qatar and Oman from March 27th and Saudi Arabia from March 28th, the DGCA explained in the circulars signed by Deputy Director General for Kuwait International Airport Affairs Saleh Al-Fadaghi. Entry of expatriates to Kuwait remains suspended until further notice, as only returning Kuwaitis, their first degree relatives and accompanying domestic helpers are allowed to enter the country.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf

KuwaitTimes 94488888

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: People race to catch the bus at a bus stop in Kuwait City in this file photo. Finding public transportation remains a daily struggle for people who try to reach home in time before the curfew starts at 5:00 pm. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

News in brief

Forged license plates

KUWAIT: Ministry of Commerce and Industry inspectors shut down a shop that sold forged license plates for vehicles and motorcycles, the ministry announced yesterday. The operation was carried out in coordination with the Ministry of Interior.

Kuwaiti oil price down

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went down \$1.66 to \$67.21 per barrel Tuesday as oppose to \$68.87 pb since last Friday, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. The price of the Brent crude down by 49 cent to \$68.39 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which went down by 59 cents to \$64.80 pb.

One official website

KUWAIT: Spokesman for the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Essam Al-Rowaih stated Tuesday that there is only one official website for the state-run news agency KUNA: <https://www.kuna.net.kw>. "KUNA is not responsible for any other website alleging that it is linked to the agency," Rowaih said in a press statement. He laid it bare that there is no link between KUNA and any website that uses similar address with minor changes to confuse users and deceive them into believing it is the KUNA website. He vowed that KUNA will take all required legal actions in this regard.

ACK hosts virtual workshop with KIU

KUWAIT: The Health and Safety Department at the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) coordinated with the Kuwait Industries Union (KIU) to deliver a virtual training course titled 'Health and Safety at the Workplace.' The course has been delivered virtually within 'The Industrials' project by KIU; it aimed to train and qualify fresh graduates to work within the industrial sector, and equip them with a variety of tools and skills in different areas relevant to the sector, in addition to health and safety knowledge.

The course covered various aspects of health and

safety that are essential for industrial sector employees. The training encompassed background on workplace health and safety laws, regulations governing workplace health and safety, elements of a successful health and safety program at work, and it helped fresh graduates to learn basic tools and mechanisms to identify workplace risks and hazards. At last, the program also proposed control measures to lower the risk of identified hazards in accordance to the hierarchy of control pyramid. Overall, 60 delegates attended the virtual training program.

Mariam Al-Maraghi, Health and Safety Manager at ACK, highlighted the importance of health and safety protocols to ACK as an organization and stressed on its efforts to spread awareness for the benefit of the society as a whole. She added: "As a college, it is both our moral duty and aim to increase awareness amongst



Kuwait's society. Our philosophy has always been to enable human potential within a culture of care. We will do what we can to help imprint a positive health and safety culture into Kuwait's workplace community."

Civil Aviation to boost navigation systems at airport

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation signed a deal yesterday with the Canadian Intelcan Technology System Company worth a total of KD 3.170 million (\$10.1 million) to operate the newly developed third runway at Kuwait International Airport and improve its navigation systems. The contract was signed by President of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation Sheikh Salman Al-Hmoud Al-Sabah and Sami Al-Amer, the Director of Al-Muntaha Real Estate and Construction Contracting Company, which is the Intelcan's local agent in Kuwait, in the presence of the General Director of Civil Aviation Yousef Al-Fawzan. Civil

Aviation Spokesman Saad Al-Otaibi said in a statement to the press on the sidelines of the signing ceremony, that the agreement would also provide the design, supply and provision of training and maintenance services, which in its entirety represent the implementation of the Kuwait International Airport development plan. Otaibi added that the agreement contributes to the technical support for the Automated Landing Aid System (ILS) and the modernization and modification of the system's locations on the eastern runway at Kuwait International Airport. Otaibi noted that the implementation period is 550 days, and the project will be implemented under the supervision of DEERNS. The spokesman indicated that this project is part of a package of projects being proposed by the General Administration of Civil Aviation to operate the new third runway and develop air navigation and meteorological systems at Kuwait International Airport. The project includes training Kuwaiti cadres on operating and maintaining the system. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Sheikh Salman Al-Hmoud Al-Sabah (right) and Sami Al-Amer sign the deal. —KUNA

FRONTLINE HEROES OF KUWAIT

Student Art Competition 2021



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

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

Strategic Partner

Kuwait Times
The Leading Independent Daily in the Arabian Gulf

ZAIN

Sponsored by

HUAWEI



KUWAIT: A Kuwait Airways high-profile team led by Chairman Ali Al-Dakhnan visited the Interior Ministry's aircraft protection department, where they were briefed on the latest technologies used and staff training protocol.



Myanmar's biggest town a battle zone as junta enforces martial law

On Texas border, a new migrant rush under Biden administration

Page 6

Page 7



SEOUL: US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin (right) talks with South Korean Defense Minister Suh Wook (left) as they inspect honor guards during a welcoming ceremony at the Defense Ministry in Seoul yesterday. —AFP

Top US envoys in Seoul to boost alliances

Beijing raps US and Japan for 'collusion' against China

SEOUL: Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin and top US diplomat Antony Blinken met their South Korean counterparts in Seoul yesterday to bolster a united front against an increasingly assertive China and the nuclear-armed North. The South is the second leg of the US officials' inaugural overseas trip, and like their first stop, Japan, a leading security ally of the United States.

The Biden administration is focused on rallying alliances with its key Asian partners to counter a rising China. Before leaving Tokyo, Secretary of State Blinken accused Beijing of acting more repressively at home and "more aggressively abroad", citing its activities in the East and South China Seas and towards Taiwan. "It's important for us to make clear together that China cannot expect to act with impunity," Blinken said. And Austin told South Korean defense minister Suh Wook that their alliance faced "unprecedented challenges posed by both the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and China". North Korea is moving up the agenda in

the South, where the US stations 28,500 troops to defend it against its neighbor.

The allies kicked off joint military exercises last week and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's influential sister warned Washington this week against "causing a stink at its first step" if it wants to "sleep in peace for coming four years". The statement by Kim Yo Jong, a key adviser to her brother, was the reclusive state's first explicit reference to the new leadership in Washington, more than four months after Joe Biden was elected to replace Donald Trump—although it still did not mention the 78-year-old Democrat by name. The US envoys will meet today with President Moon Jae-in, who brokered the talks process between Kim and Trump in 2018.

Policy review

Trump's unorthodox approach to foreign policy saw him trade insults and threats of war with Kim Jong Un before an extraordinary diplomatic bromance that saw a series of headline-grab-

bing meetings.

But ultimately no progress was made towards Washington's declared aim of denuclearizing North Korea, with a second summit in Hanoi in early 2019 breaking up without an agreement and Pyongyang still under multiple international sanctions for its banned weapons programs. Blinken and Austin will consult on a review of Washington's policy towards the North being carried out by the new administration.

But subtle differences between Washington and Seoul could be seen in their readouts of the defense chiefs' meeting yesterday.

Meanwhile, China yesterday accused the United States and Japan of colluding to interfere in its internal affairs after the two countries joined forces to warn of "destabilizing behavior" by Beijing in the region.

Beijing's response comes just a day before China's top diplomats are set to meet top US officials in Alaska in their first face-to-face talks since

President Joe Biden's administration came to power. But temperatures are rising ahead of the Alaska meet which will pit US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan against senior Chinese official Yang Jiechi and Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

On Tuesday, US and Japanese foreign and defense ministers warned against "coercion and destabilizing behavior" by China in a joint statement after high level talks in Tokyo. The comments from a nascent alliance that aims to hem in China's regional aspirations drew a swift rebuke.

"The US-Japan joint statement maliciously attacks China's foreign policy... and is an attempt to harm China's interests," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters yesterday. He added that the two countries had "no right to unilaterally define international relations" or impose their own standards. "This is just another clear example of the US and Japan working in collusion to interfere in China's internal affairs," said Zhao. —AFP

Afghan factory offers lifeline to war widows

KABUL: Dozens of women widowed by the Afghan war have been given a lifeline by the army, stitching military uniforms indistinguishable from the ones their husbands died in.

Around 120 women are employed by the defense ministry to make uniforms for servicemen and prisoners at a factory in Kabul. Many are widows, but all are related to someone who was serving in the military and either died or was invalidated out.

Roya Naimati, a 31-year-old with four children, was given an apartment in the capital and a job at the factory when her husband drowned in a river during a military operation. "Initially I lost hope and was wondering how to feed and bring up my little chil-

dren," she said. "I'm thankful to the defense ministry for this job."

With her five-year-old daughter next to her at the sewing machine, Naimati is now the breadwinner of her family, earning 12,000 Afghanis (\$155) a month. In deeply conservative Afghanistan, families usually rely on men for financial support.

Afghanistan has fought a two-decade insurgency by the Taliban since the Islamist militants were ousted by a US-led invasion in 2001. Despite supposed peace talks between the warring sides, violence has surged across the country with thousands of soldiers and civilians killed.

The exact number of Afghan security personnel killed in the war is unknown, but in 2019, President Ashraf Ghani said more than 45,000 had "paid the ultimate sacrifice" since his election five years earlier. "I feel sad when I'm sewing because this was the uniform my son was killed in," said 37-year-old Mahbooba Sadid Parwani. "Though my son died, I am



KABUL: Women who lost their husband or relatives in the ongoing war in Afghanistan with the Taliban stitch military uniforms at a factory in Kabul. —AFP

happy that other young people are fighting against the traitor Taliban."

Samira, who like many Afghans goes by one name, shares the same conflicting emotions provoked by the work

that has allowed her to support her family. "The Taliban might wear this prisoner uniform that I'm sewing... I do not want to even touch it, but am helpless—I have three children." —AFP

Crime rattles Arab Israelis ahead of vote

JALJULIA, Israel: It had been days since 14-year-old Mohammed Adas was shot dead outside his home in Israel, but his mother Suheila couldn't bear to wash his scent off his clothes. Mohammed's killing was just the latest chapter in a crime epidemic ravaging Israeli Arabs - many of whom blame police racism. "No one knows who shot him or why," his father Abdelrazak told AFP at the family's home in Jaljulia, near Tel Aviv.

"What I do know is that the police are 20 meters from here and if my son was Jewish there would be helicopters everywhere." Tackling the crime wave among the minority has become a political flashpoint ahead of March 23 elections. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has demonized Arab voters in the past, has pledged action as he looks for support in a community that has traditionally rejected him and his right-wing Likud party.

Most Arab Israeli leaders scoff at the suggestion that Netanyahu can ease the crisis, insisting the solution lies in tackling police prejudice against Arabs - something that has proliferated during the premier's 12-year tenure. The night he died, Mohammed Adas had gone out for pizza with a friend. Shortly afterwards, Suheila and her husband Abdelrazak heard gunshots.

Twenty minutes later, they found Mohammed lying in a pool of blood, behind a car a few meters from their home. Suheila has since been inconsolable. Abdelrazak finds himself popping into his son's room, desperately hoping someone is there. According to the Abraham Initiative, a civil society group that promotes social cohesion between Arabs and Jews in Israel, Mohammed Adas was the 23rd Arab killed in the country so far this year. A 24th was killed this week.

In 2020, more than 90 percent of shootings in Israel took place in Arab communities, according to police. Arab Israelis, Palestinians who stayed on their land following Israel's creation in 1948, currently account for around a fifth of its population. In Israel's last election a year ago, Arab parties united as the Joint List coalition, securing a record 15 seats in the 120-member parliament.

But the Joint List has splintered amid ideological divisions, creating a possibility that some Arab votes may be up for grabs. That has put the spotlight on the violence rocking the country's Arab communities. Kifah Aghbaria, who lives in the northern city of Umm el-Fahm, lost four relatives to crime last year.

She has demonstrated outside the city's police station every Friday for weeks, with portraits of her dead relatives, all in their 20s and 30s, under her arm. They were killed, she said, because they stood up to local mafia. Solving the crisis would mean addressing police discrimination against Arabs, she said. "They have cameras everywhere. How can they not find the criminals? The fight against crime in Arab cities is a war and we are going to win it," she added.

But she insisted that re-electing Netanyahu will not help. Police spokesman Wassim Badr rejected accusations of inaction, telling AFP that officers were working "around the clock" to solve such crimes and had made arrests in connection with 19 of this year's murders. The collapse of the Joint List was partly triggered by Arab lawmaker Mansour Abbas, of the conservative Islamic Raam movement, suggesting he was open to supporting Netanyahu in order to address crime. —AFP

'De-radicalization' law draws flak in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka faced renewed criticism yesterday over a new "de-radicalization" law which rights groups see as another weapon targeting dissidents and minorities in the fractured nation.

New York-based Human Rights Watch said new regulations expanded the "draconian and abusive" Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) — which a previous government promised to scrap but never did. On Friday, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa announced new rules under the PTA allowing the detention of anyone suspected of causing "acts of violence or religious, racial or communal disharmony".

HRW said Colombo should immediately withdraw the rules, which the government said was aimed at the "de-radicalization" of religious extremists. It also asked the international community to force Sri Lanka to protect its religious and ethnic minorities and ensure accountability for previous abuses.

Human rights lawyer Bhavani Fonseka said the new regulations — which allow suspects to be held for up to two years without trial — were worrying as they could be used to quash dissent. "The regulations are worded in a broad manner that can be used to target political opponents and others," Fonseka said.

"The legacy of how the PTA and emergency regulations have been used in the past is a worrying reminder as to how this too can be used." Within four days of the new regulations, police arrested a prominent Muslim politician, Azath Salley, a vocal critic of the Rajapaksa administration. Police said he was arrested under the PTA in connection with the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings that killed 279, but the state prosecutor had earlier asked police to detain him over a speech critical of the island's laws. The arrest and the new regulations came ahead of a UN Human Rights Council resolution in Geneva, scheduled for next week, censuring Colombo over its treatment of minorities and alleged failure to investigate atrocities during Sri Lanka's civil war. —AFP

International

On Texas border, a new migrant rush under Biden administration

New approach threatening to become a huge political liability at home

BROWNSVILLE, US: In a gusty, open-air bus depot in Brownsville, Texas, Febe Carillo-Ramos speaks easily after a journey of hundreds of miles from her home in Guatemala: for the first time in 20 days on the road, she can now move without worry. Her three-year-old son Wuermer on her lap, she shows a document given to her the day before by the US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) that allows them to travel to Houston where her husband is, to settle and work, without immediate threat of deportation.

"They told me that with these papers I can go anywhere," the 29-year-old says. It's the new normal for migrant families under President Joe Biden, after the harsh "zero tolerance" approach of Donald Trump dashed the dreams of hundreds of thousands hoping to escape endemic poverty and violence in Central America. Biden's pledge of a more humane approach has helped spark a new rush to the border—and is threatening to become a huge political liability at home.

Republicans are accusing him of opening the country's doors to illegal border-crossers and sparking a "crisis" on the US-Mexico frontier, marked in Texas by the meandering Rio Grande. They say Biden's easier approach toward immigrants will exacerbate COVID-19 and let "terrorists" in, as House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy claimed Monday. The mounting criticism saw Biden tell migrants bluntly: "Don't come over ... Don't leave your town or city or community," during an interview with ABC News on Tuesday.

Catch and release

In Brownsville, a loosely-packed city of 180,000 located about 20 miles (32 kilometers) west of where the Rio Grande ambles into the Gulf of Mexico, there is no sense of crisis. Under cover of dark migrants like Carillo-Ramos cross the river from Mexico with their children, and then turn themselves in to the Border Patrol.

They believe that if they get a foot on US soil, Biden will let them stay. And while CBP said it sent back many of the 100,000 migrants caught trying to enter in February—most of them single adults—hers is a good bet.

For families, mainly mothers with small children, the policy in the Brownsville area is "catch and release." And every day dozens like her legally board buses to wherever they want to go in the United States.

Sharp turnaround

Also guaranteed able to stay are children who cross the border without parents. According to social workers in Matamoros, the Mexican city opposite Brownsville, the kids are brought by parents or relatives to the border and sent across alone, some as young as six. Once across, they too are processed by CBP, and then handed over to the Department of Health and Human Services, which



Migrants mostly from Central America wait in line to cross the border at the Gateway International Bridge into the US from Matamoros, Mexico to Brownsville, Texas. — AFP

helps them connect with family contacts inside the United States. But their numbers are overwhelming the system. In February the CBP picked up 9,457 unaccompanied children along the frontier. According to media reports, currently more than 12,000 are in government hands awaiting settlement.

That is a sharp turn from Trump's approach. Aiming to deter migrants, his administration separated families, keeping the children in the United States for resettlement while shipping the parents back over the border, with no contact. Unaccompanied children were detained for months, some even lost in the system.

Now, in Brownsville, it's a smooth process that local activists say is more humane. Around 150 migrants who landed as families pass through every day. After registering with CBP, they get dropped off at the bus station or the airport. Mayor Trey Mendez said Monday that they are treated like guests and usually leave for their destinations within 24 hours. At the station, volunteers from Team Brownsville, an NGO, give them clothes and toys for the children. A nearby homeless shelter, Good Neighbor Settlement House, sends over boxed meals and kits of toiletries. And another group, funded by donations, gives each migrant a Covid-19 test. So far, said Mendez, 7.3 percent have tested positive. "The rate is less than our community rate; it's less than the state average," he said.

Stories interchangeable with war refugees

The migrants all have relatives somewhere across the United States—a husband in Virginia, an uncle in Indiana, or cousins much closer in Houston. Several that AFP spoke to said that Biden's more open policy encouraged their journey. One said her husband,

already inside the United States, said it would be easier and safer under Biden.

But all also say they are fleeing the lack of jobs and money, and constant threat of violence—"delinquents and narco-traffickers who nobody messes with," said Carillo-Ramos. Sam Bishop, who works with Global Response Management, which provides medical support for migrants in Matamoros, said they sound like the refugees fleeing violence that he dealt with as a US military medic in the Middle East. "Many of the people there in Syria, who are recognized refugees fleeing violence by ISIS, have stories that would be interchangeable with the stories of people that we see here," he said.

Arriving with hope

Defending the government's policy, Biden pointed to earlier surges, including in 2019. He spoke hours after his of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas admitted what previous administrations have all found: that "The situation at the southwest border is difficult." Mayorkas blamed Trump's harsh and haphazard stance approach for the current problems. "We are on pace to encounter more individuals on the southwest border than we have in the last 20 years," he said. And while he claimed that most migrants from Central America were being expelled, he admitted that in areas like Brownsville, the families were being let through—acknowledging that Mexico doesn't want to take them back. "I came to this country as an infant, brought by parents who understood the hope and promise of America," said Cuba-born Mayorkas. "Today, young children are arriving at our border with that same hope. We can do this." — AFP

New era beckons for Cuba, without a Castro in power

HAVANA: Cuba will emerge from the April congress of its all-powerful Communist Party without a Castro at the helm for the first time in over 60 years. And while the country is unlikely to abandon its military, socialist approach to government any time soon, observers expect some nods, albeit meek ones, to economic modernization and social liberalization in future.

The country's de-facto leader, Raul Castro, 89, is handing over the reins after 13 years in the seat he inherited from his revolutionary leader brother Fidel, who was in charge for almost 50 years before that.

In Cuba's one-party system, the Castros have consecutively held the top position in the Communist Party and the country—that of first secretary—since 1959. The first secretary is more powerful than the president—a position both Castros also held. Then in 2018, Raul Castro ceded the Cuban presidency to Miguel Diaz-Canel, a major shift for the country that still largely sees Fidel Castro as its revolutionary father and savior.

In a shuffle of the top brass that has long been sewn up, Diaz-Canel will become the first non-Castro elected first secretary at the party's five-yearly congress to be held in Havana from April 16 to 19. This will see Castro officially enter retirement and voluntarily give up any claim to political power.

New constitution

A new constitution adopted in May 2019 with almost 80 percent approval among eligible voters 18 and older, states that the country's commitment to socialism was "irreversible." Yet, there are signs of change to come. Sixty-year-old Diaz-Canel, like many other members of the party's new decision-making politbureau, was born after the Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro, who died in 2016. And the new executive team "will have the task of building its own legitimacy, which could come from a political project that brings economic prosperity and social justice to Cuba," said Michael Shifter of the Inter-American Dialogue think tank in Washington DC. — AFP



HAVANA: In this file photo taken on April 19, 2018 outgoing Cuban President Raul Castro (right) raises the arm of Cuba's new President Miguel Diaz-Canel after he was formally named by the National Assembly, in Havana. — AFP

In Ghana, fears over pandemic rise in teenage pregnancies

ACCRA, Ghana: Gifty Nuako has just turned 18, an age when a young person stands on the threshold of life. Instead, her future looks bleak. Last December, she became pregnant—"a mistake," she says in a whisper. She wanted to have an abortion, but her boyfriend's family refused. Today, in the back streets of Jamestown, one of the poorest neighborhoods in the Ghanaian capital Accra, the teenager hides her barely rounded stomach under a long skirt and scarves. "Now I can't work, I can't go back to school. I don't know what to do any more," she said. Unwanted teenage pregnancy is a major problem in Ghana, simultaneously disempowering girls and entrenching them in poverty, say campaigners.

Activists estimate that nearly one woman in seven in the country becomes pregnant before the age of 19. And, they say, anecdotal evidence suggests the numbers soared last year after the authorities closed schools to help curb the spread of COVID.

"Schools were a form of protection," said Sarah Lotus Asare, who volunteers with disadvantaged teenage girls. The schools also gave a sense of purpose to many girls—a crucial compass point that was taken away when education was shut down.

"Many found themselves idle, without adults to supervise them," she said. Classes reopened in mid-January after a 10-month closure—one of the world's longest continuous educational shutdowns prompted by the coronavirus crisis.

In Spain, a victory for euthanasia campaigners

A POBRA DO CARAMINAL, Spain: In 1998 Ramona Maneiro helped her friend Ramon Sampedro, paralyzed from the neck down following an accident, to die, a tale told in the Oscar-winning Spanish film "The Sea Inside". Now over two decades later she will celebrate the expected passage today of a bill allowing euthanasia in Spain under strict conditions. Maneiro, 60, recalled how she put a glass of water mixed with a bit of cyanide with a straw in front of Sampedro, so he could sip it while a video camera recorded his final moments and his explanation for wanting to die.

"He had decided to go," she told AFP near the port of Vigo in the northwestern region of Galicia, her salt and pepper hair gently swaying in the marine breeze. "After, I put myself behind the camera, against the wall almost... until the end," she added.

A national debate

Sampedro's death at age 55 stirred a national debate over assisted suicide and fuelled calls for it to be legalized. He was a 25-year-old merchant marine



ACCRA: Sarah Lotus Asare (second left), a volunteer who works with disadvantaged teenage girls, interacts with a girl in a boxing gym in James Town, Accra, Ghana. — AFP

Contraception

While teenage sexual activity increased during the school shutdown, the vast majority of girls in Ghana do not have access to birth control. According to a study by the Ghana Health Service in 2020, only 18.6 percent of sexually active adolescents use contraception.

Often, abortion is not an option either. In this conservative and religious country, pregnancy termination is illegal except in cases of rape, incest, foetal impairment or danger to the mother's physical or mental health. Ghana's lack of sex education is also a problem, said Esi Prah, a member of the NGO Marie Stopes, which works with the government to develop family planning. "The sexuality of young girls is still stigmatized here," she said. "Ghanaians in general are rather hostile to the idea of sex education. There is a tendency to think that it encourages sex between teenagers, and that the best contraception is abstinence." — AFP



BARCELONA: Colombian nurse Sofia Malagon, 60, who suffers from Parkinson's disease, reads during an interview at her home in Barcelona. — AFP

when in 1968 he dived into a shallow creek near his home in a village near Vigo and broke his neck, leaving him a bedridden tetraplegic.

Frustrated at the thought of being dependent on his family for the rest of his life, he fought an unsuccessful 30-year court battle to be allowed to end his life with dignity. His case gained international attention thanks to the success of "The Sea Inside" which won the best foreign language film at the 2005 Academy Awards. In it Sampedro is played by one of Spain's leading actors, Javier Bardem. If euthanasia had been allowed at the

EU regulator 'convinced' AZ jab benefits outweigh risks

THE HAGUE: The EU's medicines regulator said Tuesday it was "firmly convinced" the benefits of AstraZeneca's vaccine outweigh potential risks, insisting there was no evidence linking it to blood clots after several nations suspended the shot over health fears. The suspensions have provoked intense debate over whether it was prudent to put AstraZeneca inoculations on hold just as vaccination campaigns were beginning to gather pace.

Experts at both the World Health Organization and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) met Tuesday to discuss the vaccine, with the European organization expected to publish conclusions today.

While millions of doses of the vaccine developed with Oxford University have been administered, small numbers of people have developed blood clots, prompting countries including the EU's three largest nations—Germany, France and Italy—to suspend injections. The EMA insisted that countries should continue using the vaccine. "We are still firmly convinced that the benefits of the AstraZeneca vaccine in preventing COVID-19 with its associated risk of hospitalization and death outweigh the risk of these side effects," EMA chief Emer Cooke said Tuesday.

Cooke noted however that the regulator was "looking at adverse events associated with all vaccines". France and Italy welcomed the news. The preliminary statements from the EMA "are encouraging," read a joint statement from French President Emmanuel Macron and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi.

French Prime Minister Jean Castex vowed he would be vaccinated "very quickly" with the AstraZeneca vaccine to give the public confidence in the jab if it is ruled as safe by the EU medicines agency. Castex also said that new restrictions could be put in place for the Paris region, such as the weekend lockdowns already imposed in the Nice and Calais regions.

"We are in a worrying and critical situation and, clearly, measures of the type that have been used in other parts of the territory are on the table," he told BFM TV in a live interview.

COVID, not jab, to blame?

In Britain, which has administered more than 11 million AstraZeneca doses, experts see no evidence of more frequent blood clots among the inoculated. Prime Minister Boris Johnson wrote in The Times newspaper that the shot "is safe and works extremely well".

One British scientist argues that COVID-19 itself—and not the vaccine—could be to blame, as it was known to cause such problems. The "very likely" explanation of at least some of the clotting disorders seen are a result of COVID-19 rather than the vaccine," said Stephen Evans, professor of pharmacoeconomics at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

"Hence, even if there were a problem, acknowledged to be very rare with the AZ vaccine, the overall benefit would be so much greater than any speculative harm," he added.

Coronavirus deaths across Europe meanwhile passed the 900,000 mark, making it the worst-hit global region in absolute terms, according to an AFP tally. In the world's hardest-hit country, the United States, former president Donald Trump encouraged his Republican supporters—one of the main groups resistant to COVID-19 vaccines—to get their shots. "I would recommend it," Trump said in a late Tuesday interview on Fox News. This was Trump's most explicit endorsement for the national mass vaccination campaign since he left office in January. — AFP

time, Maneiro wouldn't have risked prison to help her friend. She was arrested but released due to lack of evidence. Seven years later, after the statute of limitations had expired, she admitted her role in Sampedro's death in a TV interview. While Sampedro's family blamed her for his death, the former fish cannery worker said she did not feel "guilty of anything". The legalization of euthanasia was coming late, but it was a "victory" for those who "could benefit from it" as well as "for Ramon", she added.

'Like a vegetable'

The bill, set to get final approval in parliament today, will allow someone suffering from a "serious or incurable disease" to receive medical assistance to die. Sofia Malagon, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2014, said the law gives her "peace" in case she "needs it one day".

The progressive disease, which produces tremors and stiffness as well as problems walking, has already forced the 60-year-old Colombian who lives in Barcelona to give up her job as a nurse.

"Dying or living badly worries me... if I get dementia I won't be Sofia anymore," said Malagon, who has a masters in bioethics and has been active in the fight to legalize euthanasia. "I don't want to be left there like a vegetable," she added in front of her huge library at her flat near Barcelona's iconic Sagrada Familia basilica. "Medicine should not only cure, it should also avoid suffering." — AFP

International

Myanmar's biggest town a battle zone as junta enforces martial law

Traumatized residents flee Yangon's industrial neighborhood

YANGON: Plumes of smoke rose yesterday a part of Myanmar's biggest city that has turned into a battle zone, with burning barricades and security forces firing at unarmed anti-coup protesters to enforce martial law. Traumatized residents have fled the industrial neighborhood in Yangon that has become one of the flash-point sites in a nationwide uprising against the military's coup nearly seven weeks ago.

The junta has increasingly deployed heavier force to quell the demonstrations, with more than 200 protesters reported to have been killed in the crackdown. Sunday was the deadliest day since the coup, with a local monitoring group documenting more than 70 people killed—the bulk of them in the industrial Hlaing Tharyar township in Yangon that has become the battle zone. The junta on Sunday imposed martial law on Hlaing Tharyar and later on other protest hotspot townships—effectively placing nearly two million people under complete control of military commanders. Residents—many of them migrant workers—have since fled back to their home states, piling their belongings and families onto flat-bed trucks and the backs of motorbikes. Those who stayed reported scenes akin to war.

"There was constant gunshots the entire night and we didn't get to sleep," one resident told AFP, adding people were worried about even walking on the streets for fear of getting targeted by security forces. "Currently there are very few people out on the streets." Hardline anti-coup protesters had camped on a bridge leading into the township's main roads on Tuesday evening, wearing hard hats, gas masks and carrying shields. They have also erected barricades made out of tires, wood, sandbags and bamboo poles. Some of those barricades were burnt, leading to heavy black smoke rising above the mostly deserted streets.

Some protesters threw petrol bombs at the security forces, but otherwise appeared defenceless as they hid



YANGON: The mother (center) of Khant Nyar Hein reacts at his funeral in Yangon on Tuesday after the first year medical student was shot dead during a crackdown by security forces on protesters taking part in a demonstration against the military coup. — AFP

behind makeshift shields. In a residential area of a neighboring township, video footage verified by AFP showed volleys of gunfire going non-stop for roughly 15 seconds.

Information blackout

Information on arrests and violence have been trickling out of the conflict areas on social media—the flow slowed due to the junta's throttling of mobile data. Much of Myanmar has not been able to use their mobile internet since the early hours of Monday. The country is also placed under a nightly internet shutdown for eight hours.

More than 200 people have died in anti-coup unrest, according to the Assistance Association for

Political Prisoners, a local monitoring group. The United Nations on Tuesday again condemned the deaths in Myanmar, adding that it was worried of reports of torture and deaths of those in custody.

"The death toll has soared over the past week in Myanmar, where security forces have been using lethal force increasingly aggressively against peaceful protesters," UN rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told reporters. "Deeply distressing reports of torture in custody have also emerged." The office had determined that "at least five deaths in custody have occurred in recent weeks," she said, adding that "at least two victims' bodies have shown signs of severe physical abuse indicating that they were tortured." — AFP

Anti-China outrage pulls Beijing into Myanmar coup crisis

BANGKOK: Chinese factories torched as mainland workers hunker down under martial law—Beijing is being pulled into the ulcerous crisis in Myanmar, an unravelling country it had carefully stitched into its big plans for Asia. During a January 2020 visit to Myanmar, Chinese President Xi Jinping elevated the Southeast Asian neighbor to "country of shared destiny" status, Beijing's highest diplomatic stripe.

The aim was to nudge Myanmar decisively towards China—and away from the United States—and drive through projects worth billions of dollars under the Belt and Road Initiative, including an oil and gas pipeline and a port to the Indian Ocean.

Fast-forward one year, and the strategically located country has tipped into bloody chaos after a coup took out Aung San Suu Kyi's government. The massive pro-democracy movement which has since unfurled accuses China of wading through the generals' power grab and trading Myanmar's freedom for its own strategic gain. As Myanmar security forces kill protesters—nearly 150 so far—Beijing faces a dilemma: back the men with guns or side with an increasingly anti-China public. "China doesn't really care who is in government, but it wants a government that will protect Chinese projects and interests," said Richard Horsey, a Myanmar political analyst.

But "this is a military that Beijing doesn't think can bring stability... and the more China tries to build a relationship with that regime, the more the public will be put offside." That is laden with danger for Chinese interests. At least 32 China-owned textile factories were burned down in several Yangon townships on Sunday, according to Chinese state media, causing around \$37 million in damage. A foreign ministry spokesman in Beijing demanded the immediate protection of "Chinese institutions and personnel." —AFP

COVID-hit PNG calls for 1m emergency AstraZeneca doses

PORT MORESBY: Papua New Guinea's health minister yesterday said the country's record wave of coronavirus infections will "spike" further in coming weeks, calling on drug-maker AstraZeneca to urgently deliver one million vaccine doses to staunch the looming crisis. Jelta Wong warned his under-resourced nation was already "running at full throttle" to prevent a wave of coronavirus cases from running out of control, saying new lockdowns and overseas help were urgently needed. "In the next couple of weeks, there is going to be a spike in the cases," he said, amid rising fears of an impending health disaster in the impoverished South Pacific nation of nine million.

Papua New Guinea rapidly shut its international borders at the beginning of the pandemic, limiting infections to just a few hundred and dodging the worst ravages of the global crisis. But more than 1,000 new cases have been uncovered this month alone, and with testing rates still low, there are fears the real total is much higher. "The community transmission is out there, and I'm pretty sure that we haven't detected a lot of it," Wong admitted. "But we're running at full capacity just to ensure that we do get to all places."

With hospitals reporting a surge in patients and emergency staff falling sick, Australia yesterday said it was rushing 8,000 doses to its northern neighbor to inoculate frontline workers.

In Canberra, Prime Minister Scott Morrison also

Court censures Japan for not recognizing same-sex marriage

TOKYO: Japan's failure to recognize same-sex marriage is unconstitutional, a court ruled yesterday, in a landmark first verdict on the issue that campaigners welcomed as a major victory. Lawyers for plaintiffs in the case said the ruling should pile pressure on lawmakers to accept same-sex unions, but the path to any such recognition is still likely to be lengthy.



SAPPORO, Japan: Supporters hold the "unconstitutional decision" flag in front of the Sapporo District Court in Sapporo, Hokkaido prefecture yesterday. — AFP

The verdict was the first to emerge from lawsuits filed by more than a dozen couples last year in district courts across Japan, in a coordinated action challenging the only G7 government not to recognize gay unions. The court in northern Sapporo ruled that the government's current failure to offer same-sex couples ways to "enjoy even a part of the legal effects that arise from marriage... violates article 14" of the constitution, which mandates equality under the law.

Opposition lawmaker Kanako Otsuji, one of the few openly gay Japanese politicians, said in a tweet she was "truly, truly happy" about the verdict. "With this ruling, I urge the Diet, as the legislative branch of the government, to deliberate a proposed amendment to the civil code to make same-sex marriage possible,"

called for AstraZeneca to divert one million Australian-bought doses to Papua New Guinea as soon as possible. Wong said those doses were needed "just to control the spread" before the situation gets out of hand. "I'd rather have it here than wait for it to come when we're really down," he said. Papua New Guinea's rough terrain of high mountain valleys, dense jungles and a lack of infrastructure make gauging the scale of the emergency difficult.

But Australia's chief medical officer Paul Kelly said there were reports hospitals in the capital Port Moresby were detecting the virus in about half of new patient admissions. "Half of women who are coming in due to pregnancy are positive. We're seeing a large number of healthcare workers on the front lines in

she wrote. The plaintiffs had requested damages of one million yen (\$9,000) per person, arguing they were being denied the same legal rights as heterosexual couples. The court rejected the request, saying lawmakers may have struggled to legislate on the issue as the matter has only become a topic of parliamentary debate in recent years. But the wording of the verdict—which ruled that sexual orientation is like gender or race and is not chosen at will—sparked celebrations outside the courthouse. Lawyers for the plaintiffs, surrounded by rainbow flags, held up a sign declaring the ruling "a huge step towards equality in marriage". "I was a bit disappointed when I heard the phrase 'turn down' in the verdict, but later I couldn't stop my tears when the presiding judge said it lacks reasonable foundation and is discriminatory," said Ryosuke Kumimi, one of the plaintiffs.

'Partnership' certificates

While Japan has some protections for sexual minorities, many same-sex couples struggle to rent apartments together and are even banned from hospital visits. A November poll by the Yomiuri newspaper found 61 percent of people in Japan are broadly in favor of same-sex marriage, with 37 percent against.

The country's 1947 post-war constitution says that "marriage shall be only with the mutual consent of both sexes". The government says this means same-sex marriage is "not foreseen" in the constitution or civil law. But lawyers for the plaintiffs and other legal experts argue the language of the constitution is only meant to ensure equality between prospective spouses and prevent forced marriages.

In a statement, they said they hoped the ruling would prompt parliament to take up the issue. "We think it is necessary to urge parliament to take swift legal measures by clarifying the current illegal situation, which they have neglected and have not rectified despite their legal duty," they said. Courts in Tokyo, Osaka and Fukuoka are still considering cases filed by other same-sex couples on the issue. —AFP

Papua New Guinea now coming down with COVID-19," he added. "These are all signs that there is a major epidemic in the community."

Officials in Queensland told AFP that about half the state's hospitalized COVID-19 patients had come from Papua New Guinea, while a recent batch of 500 tests sent from Port Moresby showed a 50 percent infection rate. Wong said vast nationwide memorial services this month for Papua New Guinea's first prime minister and "father of the nation" Michael Somare would likely contribute to the surge in cases. At one event in Port Moresby, throngs of people lined Independence Boulevard throwing flowers onto the passing motorcade carrying the body of the "Grand Chief" as it approached parliament. — AFP



PORT MORESBY, PNG: This picture taken on March 14, 2021 shows a crowd of people - none wearing face masks, nor social distancing - gathered outside Jacksons International Airport in Port Moresby to bid farewell to the casket of Papua New Guinea's first prime minister Michael Somare, who died late February. — AFP

News in brief

Dutch vote on last day of election

THE HAGUE: Dutch voters cast their ballots at bike-through polling stations and museums yesterday on the final day of a coronavirus-dominated election that could return Prime Minister Mark Rutte to power. Europe's first COVID election of 2021 has taken place over three days, with the elderly and at-risk voting at selected locations on Monday and Tuesday before the polls opened for everyone else yesterday. People have also been allowed out past a 9 pm (2000 GMT) nationwide curfew to ensure they can vote—the controversial health restriction in January sparked the Netherlands' worst riots for decades. — AFP

Child deaths in S Asia alarming: UN

NEW DELHI: The coronavirus pandemic may have indirectly contributed to around 228,000 additional child deaths in 2020, 11,000 maternal fatalities and 3.5 million unwanted pregnancies in South Asia, the UN said in a report yesterday. The study commissioned by UNICEF blamed "drastic cuts in the availability and use of essential public health services" because of the pandemic across India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, home to 1.8 billion people. "The fall-off of these critical services has had a devastating impact on the health and nutrition of the poorest families," said UNICEF regional director George Laryea-Adjei. — AFP

France's Sarkozy on trial again

PARIS: Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy goes on trial over claims of illicit financing for his failed 2012 re-election bid, just two weeks after a landmark conviction for corruption. On March 1, the 66-year-old became France's first post-war president to be sentenced to prison when he was given a three-year term, two years of which were suspended, for corruption and influence peddling. That case was one of several hanging over him since he left office. —AFP

EU visit to Uighur academic stalls

BEIJING: A visit by European Union ambassadors to the Xinjiang region of China has stalled over their request for access to jailed Uighur academic Iham Tohti, a diplomatic source confirmed yesterday. Since 2019, China says it has invited foreign diplomats and UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet to visit Xinjiang, where rights groups allege more than one million Uighurs and other Muslim minorities are detained in internment camps. But there has been little sign of progress. A European diplomat told AFP it was because the mission wants to visit Tohti, a Uighur economist jailed for life on separatism charges in 2014. — AFP

New leader seeks to save Israel's Labor

JERUSALEM: Israel's Merav Michaeli, the feminist now leading Labor, says she is hoping to bring the party back from the brink of extinction in elections next week. Once Israel's dominant party, Labor had slumped so far that polls following December's snap election said showed it winning no seats at all in the next parliament. But Michaeli's sweeping win in a January 24 primary sparked hopes of a recovery. Labor's third female leader in its 50-year history now has the party comfortably projected to pass the threshold required to join parliament. Recent polls have given it up to six seats in the 120-member Knesset, double what it won in elections a year ago. —AFP

US expands list of Chinese officials stifling HK freedoms

HONG KONG: The United States yesterday identified 24 more senior Chinese officials it classifies as being instrumental in quashing Hong Kong's freedoms as it warned foreign banks were now banned from doing any business with them. The decision came just hours before talks were set to begin between senior US and Chinese officials in Alaska, the first such meeting since President Joe Biden took office.

US relations with China have plunged in recent years over a swathe of issues, including Beijing's crackdown on dissent in Hong Kong after the city was rocked by huge and often violent democracy protests nearly two years ago. Under the Hong Kong Autonomy Act—a law enacted last year with bipartisan support—the State Department has to identify any Chinese and Hong Kong officials involved in eroding the financial hub's freedoms.

The report added two dozen new names bringing the total number listed to 34. "Foreign financial institutions that knowingly conduct significant transactions with the individuals listed in today's report are now subject to sanctions," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 2021

Zain pays out dividend of 33 fils

Bader Al-Kharafi: 77% payout ratio of earnings one of the highest in the region

KUWAIT: Zain Group Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held yesterday at Zain Group's headquarters in Kuwait, with a livestreaming available for shareholders and qualified parties, attended with a quorum of 72.49 percent that approved the recommended cash dividend of 33 percent (33 fils per share) to the shareholders already registered in the company's record as of 1 April 2020. Cash dividends will be paid to shareholders commencing April 7, 2021.

Excerpts from Zain Group Chairman Ahmed Al-Tahous' statement at the AGM:

On behalf of the Board of Directors I would like to welcome you to the AGM. The COVID-19 pandemic broadly affected economies across the globe, which were plunged into a state of uncertainty. Society, governments and all economic activity relied more than ever on telecommunication networks and digital platforms, as the exceptional circumstances increased the demand for data use, especially to remain in contact with loved ones and access other vital day-to-day services and important information, given the limitations on mobility, locally and travel abroad.

On its part, Zain Group mobilized all its resources to provide vital and meaningful connectivity during the lockdowns, implementing more digitalization initiatives to better serve businesses, governments, and societies, aiming to lessen the impact of the pandemic on society. During these challenging times, Zain Group undertook proactive measures to drive efficiencies and improve costs, such as renegotiating contracts and managing cash flows. The company used its infrastructure and digital solutions for quick access to clients and followed through on key operational activities across all operations to mitigate the impacts of the economic slowdown.

I would like to thank all the government ministries and regulatory authorities across our markets for their wisdom and understanding of the emerging industry dynamics, supporting us in overcoming challenges faced by the telecom sector during these unique times.

Excerpts from Zain Group Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi's AGM statement:

It is an honor to address shareholders in these exceptional times, which have been impacted so profoundly by the global pandemic. 2020 has been a turbulent year in ways that governments, businesses, and individuals could not have imagined or predicted at the start of the year. Zain Group stands in solidarity with the multitudes around the world who have been affected by the scourge of the COVID-19 pandemic and expresses its heartfelt sorrow for those who have and continue to succumb to the virus.

Like many businesses, we were faced with the twin responsibilities of protecting our own staff from the ravages of the virus, while also ensuring we continued to provide meaningful connectivity with minimal disruption given the central importance the telecom sector has continued to play in keeping people socially distanced while remaining connected and productive.

I am pleased to report that Zain Group's response to the modified operating circumstances has been nothing but exemplary. We refocused on digital transformation to better serve businesses, governments, and societies, granting increased digital access to essential medical, commercial and financial services.

We took numerous proactive measures across our footprint to ensure we take into consideration the needs and challenges that our communities face during this global pandemic. Early on, we equipped and empowered staff across our operations to be able to work from home, while also improving our digital sales channels to enable customers to stay connected and continue dealing with us from the safety of their homes.

Our fixed and mobile broadband networks responded well to the increased data traffic being exchanged as remote learning and working became the norm. Since March 2020, we experienced over a 50 percent increase in high-speed broadband data traffic across various markets across our footprint. To guarantee network resilience and continued connectivity at high service quality levels, Zain continued to actively engage with national regulatory authorities. Zain collaborated closely with government entities across various sectors to ensure that additional internet capacities and ICT solutions are provided to support educational and health services online.

Internally, we took a decision not to reduce salaries of Zain staff during the pandemic in a move aimed at expressing our appreciation for their ongoing efforts despite difficult circumstances, as well to incentivize them to keep giving their best. It is this type of regard for the well-being of staff that saw Zain as the only company from Kuwait to be included in Forbes magazine's The World's Best Employers list for 2020. The list saw Zain ranked fourth across all employers in the Middle East, and as the region's highest ranked telecom group.

Delivering on our dividend commitment of 33 fils

Last year, in a first by any corporate entity in Kuwait, the Board of Directors recommended a new cash dividend policy committing the company to a minimum 33 fils for three years commencing 2019. Despite the USD 417 million loss of revenues due to the impact of COVID-19 on the business and a foreign currency translation impact of USD 110 on revenue, I am pleased to reaffirm the Board's commitment for 2020 will be fulfilled. This 33 fils represents a 77 percent payout ratio of earnings, which is one of the highest in the region.

This confirmation is a result of the impressive operational performance attained by the Group, that saw the company achieve a relatively stable consolidated revenues of USD 5.3 billion, an EBITDA of USD 2.2 billion (41 percent margin) and a net income of USD 605 million.

This achievement was supported by our decisive efficiency drive that succeeded in reducing operational expenses by USD 168 million since the beginning of the pandemic. It is also a result of several beneficial regulatory initiatives that we achieved and the healthy revenues we attained from our strategic and forward-looking investments in 5G, fiber and network upgrades across key markets, which supported the ever-increasing demand for mobile and fixed broadband services by individuals, businesses and governments during the pandemic.

Huge investments to drive digital transformation and enhance mobile experience

Despite the unprecedented market conditions, Zain maintained robust commercial activity throughout 2020, investing USD 1.4 billion in its 5G and 4G networks as well as spectrum and license fees across its footprint, and producing strong financial results that reflected our continuing market leadership. Seeking to exploit the multiple and lucrative opportunities in the B2B space and provide customers an enhanced mobile experience, we launched 5G services in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia during 2019, followed by Bahrain in June 2020.



Zain extends its deepest condolences to the families of six colleagues lost during the pandemic and shares their grief - may they rest in peace.



Zain Group Chairman Ahmed Al-Tahous, Zain Group Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi and other officials are seen during an Annual General Meeting held at Zain Group's headquarters.

How Zain fulfilled its commitment to distribute 33 fils

Bader Al-Kharafi elaborates why the Board of Directors recommend the distribution of cash dividends of 33 fils, representing the second year of the new dividend policy that was approved by the General Assembly, that also represents a 77 percent payout ratio of earnings, which is one of the highest in the region.

- During 2020, cash flow is estimated at USD 350 million and debt reduction by about USD 625 million. Accordingly, the total net debt was reduced by nearly USD 1 billion.

- The Group reduced the net debt / EBITDA (including Guarantees) which currently stands at 2.0x, compared to 2.2x in 2019.

- An increase in initiatives with all operations resulted in the upstream of approximately USD 900 million.

In addition, Zain continued to focus on 4G LTE technology in multiple operations. In Iraq and South Sudan, we paved the way for the introduction of LTE by modernizing the network, with Jordan and Sudan expanding their LTE and FTTH networks to meet the demand for broadband during the pandemic. We launched 4G LTE in Iraq in early 2021, which will contribute immensely to the socio-economic development of country and we forecast the Iraqi community to heavily subscribe to the technology.

Notable regulatory highlights

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the critical importance of fixed and mobile telecommunications infrastructure and the use of digital data and digital services as an essential economic and social enabler. Across the Zain footprint, in order to support the upsurge in demand, national regulatory authorities granted Zain temporary spectrum or rights to use existing frequencies on a technology-neutral basis. Moreover, Zain acquired additional spectrum in several of our countries.

The region also witnessed the enactment of various forms of legislation and regulations by the telecom and financial services sectors regulators to accelerate digital transformation including in the areas of cloud computing, electronic payments, enforcement of electronic contracts through the judicial system. These initiatives will serve to boost the take-up of digital services going forward, and Zain is primed to exploit the unlimited opportunities in this space.

4Sight strategy gaining momentum

Zain made significant progress on its '4Sight' strategy, centered on evolving the company's core telecom business to maximize value for shareholders and building on its many strengths to selectively invest in growth verticals beyond standard mobile services to support Zain's vision of becoming a leading ICT and digital lifestyle provider.

We aim to become one of the leading trendsetters in the digital revolution in the region and provide our customers an exceptional mobile experience. During the year we made several substantial investments and announced significant developments. We also identified new business areas, value-adding strategic partnerships, accretive acquisition opportunities and synergistic corporate venturing investments which, collectively,



Zain Group Vice-Chairman and CEO Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi

ly, will create new revenue streams to fully maximize the Group's high-speed broadband networks, customer assets, network intelligence and payment and billing infrastructure.

The sale and leaseback of the passive physical infrastructure of Zain Kuwait's mobile tower portfolio for USD 130 million (KD 40 million) in February 2020 confirmed Zain's pioneering role in the region, as the transaction was the first sale and leaseback of telecom towers in the Middle East by a licensed mobile operator.

In order to take advantage of the full potential of our infrastructure investments across our footprint, we have entered into strategic partnerships with respect to digital infrastructure and rolled out Zain Data Park (ZDP) in Kuwait and Jordan, providing our government and enterprise customers with the very best IT support services focused on cloud hosting and managed services across the ICT stack, including applications, cybersecurity and networking.

Zain is constantly setting up new structures and entering into key partnerships in the fintech, e-Health, esports, and insurance arenas, and opening our APIs across key markets to offer appealing entertainment and gaming services, so as to reap the lucrative opportunities in the digital space. Throughout 2020, Zain remained focused on our digital strategy of monetizing our broadband infrastructure and the Group API platform through compelling initiatives and packages for the B2B sector covering government, business, IoT, and smart city sectors, as well as focusing on gaming, entertainment, fintech and e-health services.

This focus proved instrumental in countering the negative impact of the global crisis prompted by COVID-19, with data revenues (excluding SMS and VAS) growing 9 percent year-on-year in 2020, representing 41 percent of the Group's consolidated revenue at the end of the year.

New growth areas

Continuing our efforts to reach out to the youth of the region and find better propositions for the broadband services being offered by Zain operations, Zain esports was launched in December 2020. It has held several major tournaments to date, and plans to organize more throughout 2021 to bolster the gaming ecosystem and build an active community for gamers in the region. Zain is confident that Zain esports will develop into a regional and

international gaming powerhouse.

The first week of January 2021 witnessed a milestone in our regional Fintech ambitions with the Saudi Central Bank (SAMA) granting Zain fintech subsidiary, 'Tamam', the first consumer micro-financing license in region. This Sharia compliant platform offers consumer micro-finance in less than 5 minutes via a seamless digital customer experience through a mobile app. Innovation is key and investing in viable digital services such as the fintech sector is critical to Zain's sustained evolution and success.

Sustainability, Gender Diversity and Inclusion are an intrinsic part of our DNA

Zain recognizes that contributing to the socio-economic development of our operating countries, providing meaningful connectivity, aligning to the climate change target and developing our employees, ultimately leads to a more successful and profitable organization. Through digitization, our wide range of services, and reach, we aim to unlock the many opportunities that the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer, as both Sustainability and Diversity & Inclusion are an intrinsic part of our DNA.

On a final note, on behalf of the Executive Management team, I would like to express my deep, personal gratitude to Zain workforce, our individual and business customers, the Board of Directors, and government agencies and bodies we cooperate with across our footprint.

More than USD 900 million investment in networks and technology

Bader Al-Kharafi said Zain Group expanded its strategy and strengthened its digital capabilities, investing more than USD 900 million in 5G and 4G networks. This has created the lucrative environment to focus on digital transformation monetization initiatives such as Fiber to the Home (FTTH), e-stores platforms, and opening our APIs across key markets to offer appealing entertainment and gaming services, so as to reap the lucrative opportunities in the digital space as well as fintech services. As an example, Zain Cash in Iraq saw the platform transferring Iraqi government employees' salaries of USD 500 million in 2020, and similarly with Jordan's Zain Cash platform transferring USD 600 million.

Key achievements futureproof Zain Saudi Arabia

Bader Al-Kharafi noted the successful completion of Zain KSA's capital restructuring during Q4 2020 and the massive demand in the remaining priority rights subscription that was oversubscribed by an unprecedented 469 percent, reflected the confidence of shareholders and investors in the operator's operational strategy and future growth plans, reinforced by the company's profitability over the last four years. The transaction enhances Zain KSA's ability to expand its strategic investments in the Kingdom's telecommunications sector, growing its profitability and paving the way for dividends.

This followed the successful signing of an agreement to reschedule the Zain KSA's SAR 3.85 billion syndicated Murabaha financing facility with a consortium of eight banks on preferential terms that also extended the term for a period of five years to 2025, with facilities of up to SAR 7 billion, which will provide additional liquidity to finance the company's business growth plans. Regarding the selling and leaseback of Zain KSA's mobile towers, this is still ongoing, as the operator is seeking the necessary approvals to complete this transaction in a way that best serves shareholders and the operator's targets.

Optimism in the Sudanese market

Al-Kharafi noted the Sudanese market is one of the most promising markets in the region, as the operation there saw impressive growth on all financial indicators during 2020 in both USD and local SDG terms. Moreover, Zain Sudan is preparing to invest in home fiber optics (FTTH) and expand digital services. Despite the impact of the recent float of the local currency has increased the pressure on our operations, we have great optimism about the future of our operations in Sudan, where the market enjoys a wide segment of the youth category, and there are positive economic indicators that seem to be on the horizon that will positively reflect on the economic and social conditions there.

Tier III data center in Kuwait

Al Kharafi noted that the rollout of Zain Data Park (ZDP) in Kuwait and Jordan will provide government and enterprise customers with the very best IT support services focused on cloud hosting and managed services across the ICT stack, including applications, cybersecurity and networking.

In Kuwait, in the South Sabahiya area, situated a safe 30km outside of the city in case of emergency, Zain has built the country's first uptime-certified Tier III co-location data center that will change the digital landscape in the country. ZDP is to contribute to Zain's offer of world-class telecom and IT infrastructure to Kuwait's business and SME community. Zain is currently planning to expand ZDP to another location in Kuwait and we are working closely with the visionary team at CITRA to achieve this.

In Jordan, ZDP's platforms are hosted in The Bunker, a nuclear-grade regional data and disaster recovery center in Amman, which is the first-of-its-kind in the region. As a certified Tier III Data Center, The Bunker gives comfort to ZDP's clients that their data will be preserved under all circumstances.

Acknowledging the Kuwait Clearing Company

Zain Group would like to express its sincere gratitude and appreciation to Kuwait Clearing Company (KCC) for the support and cooperation that led to the success of the ordinary general assembly. Zain's general assembly was held virtually via the electronic system provided by Kuwait Clearing Company. The Group recognizes the continuous efforts of KCC to develop the mechanisms for holding general assemblies in light of the current world pandemic, and in accordance with the safety measures that the state and the regulatory authorities have imposed.

Remembering the six colleagues we lost during the pandemic

Bader Al-Kharafi began his speech at the General Assembly with a tribute to the six Zain employees who have passed away during the pandemic. Al-Kharafi said, "We are all deeply saddened by the loss of our colleagues, we share the grief of their families and relatives, and we pray to God to have mercy on their souls". To honor their memory, Al-Kharafi mentioned the name of each employee in recognition of their efforts and achievements during the course of their employment at the company.

Business

With migrant workers stuck at home, Russia leans on its own

Russian firms forced to hire more expensive workers domestically

MOSCOW: Russian construction executive Vitaly Lychits bemoans a shortage of cheap foreign workers during the coronavirus pandemic as he walks across frost-covered ground at a building site in southwest Moscow. For years, Russia has relied on migrant laborers to do some of the hardest and worst paying jobs, especially in industries like construction and agriculture that face chronic labor shortages. Now, with millions of foreign laborers from the former Soviet Union stuck at home due to pandemic-induced border closures, Russian companies have had to adapt, hiring more expensive workers from the country's regions. "Migrants worked until the end of the year, then they went home for the holidays and now it's problematic for them to come back," Lychits, deputy director of construction at Granelle, a Moscow-based developer, told AFP. "We're hiring workers from Russian provinces despite the fact that we have to factor in extra labor costs." Granelle, which is mainly active in and around Moscow, typically employs workers from Armenia, Ukraine, Belarus, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

With temperatures hovering around minus 14 degrees Celsius (6.8 degrees Fahrenheit) at the Moscow construction site, several Armenian workers huddled around a makeshift fire pit. Aged between 20 and 50, they said they missed home. Some have been able to visit Armenia and come back since the start of the pandemic; others have been stuck in Russia for nearly a year. The tiny Caucasus nation has been reeling from six weeks of bloody clashes with neighbor and arch enemy Azerbaijan that broke out last year, and the workers said it was especially important for them to be back at home now. "We all know people who died in the war," one laborer said. "We would have preferred to be there rather than here."

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, Russia had around 10 million migrant workers and roughly 70 million Russian employees, according to estimates from migration experts. Migrant workers' remittances are essential for the economies of their countries of origin, particularly poor ex-Soviet nations like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Russia's interior ministry said last year

that nearly half of all migrants living in the country before the pandemic had left.

Alarm over shortages

Russian authorities have sounded the alarm over labor shortages, and President Vladimir Putin in January ordered the government to simplify entry requirements for migrant workers. In late December, Deputy Prime Minister for Construction and Regional Development Marat Khusnullin said that nearly 1.5 million migrants working in construction had not returned to Russia after border closures were put in place in March 2020. Granelle's Lychits said that roughly half of the company's workers now come from Russian provinces but their wages are up to 20 percent higher than those of foreign laborers. "The state is actively working to simplify procedures for attracting migrant workers, including issuing electronic permits," added Lychits. But progress has been slow. Only around 14,000 foreign workers were able to reach Russian construction sites between the end of 2020 and February thanks to the simplified procedures.—AFP



MOSCOW: A laborer works at a housing construction site of Granelle, a Moscow-based developer, in southwest Moscow. — AFP

Gulf Bank announces 20 winners of Al-Danah draws for Jan and Feb

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank announced that March 31 is the last date to enter the semi-annual draw for one million Kuwaiti dinars, which will be held on July 15. This will be the first of two millionaire draws for 2021, as it will be followed by the yearly KD 1.5 million draw. The last date to enter the KD 1.5 million yearly draw is September 30, and it will be held on January 13, 2022.

Additionally, Gulf Bank would like to announce that it held two Al-Danah monthly draws on Monday, to announce the winners for both January and February of this year. The 20 lucky winners received cash prizes of KD 1,000 each.

The winners for January are:

Tareq Mohammed Hassan Al-Baghli
Ibrahim Habeeb Abdullah Shukrallah
Ahmed Rashed Musa Al-Saad
Fahad Musallam Fahad Al-Muwaizri
Manaf Yousef Abdulla Al-Omani
Hajer Faisal Baron Abdulla
Ehssan Moammed Malek Malek

Raies Khan Wazer Khan
Hussain Farhan Sayyah Farhan
Mohammed Jamal Abdulmohsen Al-Thuwaini

The winners for February are:

Aeshah Abdulhameed Abdullaalamzi
Saadi Lafi Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mutairi
Tareq Mohammed Hassan Al-Baghli
Mansour Ibrahim Abdulrahman Al-Mansour
Musaed Nazal Radam Saoud
Wael Ahmad Abu Husiny
Amna Mohammed Abdullah Al-Awadi
Kaleem Adnan Al-Qoutli
Abeer Maaiof Al-Rifai
Mahmoud Mohammad Al-Salibi

The Al-Danah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and multiple benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD

100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 1,500,000.

Numerous benefits

The Al-Danah account is the only account that rewards customers for their loyalty by providing loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the Bank.

Accordingly, all chances gained by existing Al-Danah customers in 2020 (from January 1 to December 31, 2020) have been transferred to the 2021 draws. It is also worth noting that all account draws are attended by a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, with the quarterly and annual draws also reviewed by Ernst & Young. Customers can deposit to win Al-Danah cash prizes throughout the year as part of the draws listed in the following table:

Annual grand prize

To increase their chances of winning, account holders must either keep their account with a minimum deposit amount of KD 200, or increase their Al-Danah savings - the more deposits into an account, the more chances accumulated over time. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account holders also have the opportunity to enter and

win cash prizes all year long through monthly, quarterly and annual draws.

Opening an Al-Danah Account

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

Deposit more for more chances to win!

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. A minimum of KD 200 is required to open an account and the same amount must be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to the account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter Gulf Bank's Al-Danah draws throughout the year, for cash prizes totaling up to more than KD 2 million.

Key developments in BoP of Kuwait for third quarter 2020

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) published yesterday the preliminary data of the State of Kuwait's Balance of Payments (BoP) for 3Q 2020, and the revised data of 2Q 2020. The data revealed a surplus during 3Q 2020 of KD 2,475.3 million in the Current Account (that sums up receipts and payments on transactions between the domestic economy and other economies in terms of goods, services and income) against a surplus of KD 4,154.3 million during the previous quarter, ie a drop by 40.4 percent equivalent to KD 1,679.0 million. This downturn is attributable to the decline in the total value of receipts on the credit side of the Current Account by KD 328.3 million or 4.2 percent compared with the previous quarter, and the increase in the total value of payments on the debit side of the Current Account by KD 1,350.6 million or 36.7 percent compared with the previous quarter.

Furthermore, preliminary data indicated an increase in the surplus of the Balance on Goods by KD 1,048.4 million or 339.2 percent to reach KD 1,357.5 million during 3Q 2020, against KD 309.1 million during

the previous quarter.

The Services Account (net value of services transactions between residents and non-residents that include transportation, travel, communications, construction, other services as well as government services and goods) recorded an increase in the deficit by KD 480.6 million or 141.2 percent to reach KD 820.9 million during 3Q 2020, compared with a deficit of KD 340.3 million during the previous quarter.

Regarding the Financial Account (recording transfers of financial assets and liabilities between residents and non-residents), preliminary data indi-

cate net capital outflows (growth in residents' net investments abroad) of KD 3,404.5 million during 3Q 2020 against net capital outflows of KD 3,223.5 million during the previous quarter. As a result, the overall position of Kuwait's BoP recorded a surplus of KD 680.2 million during 3Q 2020 against a surplus of KD 1,782.0 million during the previous quarter.

From a broader perspective, and taking into consideration the change in the net value of external assets of some institutions listed under "General Government" and changes in CBK's reserve assets, the BoP's overall position, in a broad definition, indicates a surplus of KD 2,503.8 million during 3Q 2020 against a surplus of KD 294.9 million during the previous quarter.

Summary of the Balance of Payments of the State of Kuwait (KD Million)

Item	2Q 2020	3Q 2020
Current Account, of which:	4,154.3	2,475.3
- Balance on Goods	309.1	1,357.5
Capital Account*	-11.7	-28.2
Financial Account**	-3,223.5	-3,404.5
Overall Balance	1,782.0	680.2

Source: Central Bank of Kuwait.

* Negative numbers of Capital Account data indicate net capital outflows, while positive numbers indicate the opposite.

** Negative numbers of Financial Account data indicate capital outflows, i.e. an increase in external assets or a decrease in foreign liabilities. Positive numbers indicate the opposite.

Oil demand to reach record by 2026: IEA

PARIS: Global oil demand will return to pre-pandemic levels in two years and reach record heights by 2026 unless governments take swift action to meet climate goals, the International Energy Agency said yesterday.

Oil markets and the world economy are recovering from the massive collapse in demand caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the IEA said in an annual report. "The COVID-19 crisis caused a historic decline in global oil demand-but not necessarily a lasting one," IEA executive director Fatih Birol said in a statement. As people get vaccinated and restrictions are lifted, demand will return to its 2019 level by 2023, according to the report.

The IEA's five-year projections estimates global demand will rise each year to reach 104 million barrels a day (mb/d) by 2026, a gain of four percent from the level in 2019. The outlook for demand,

however, has shifted lower as the pandemic has forced changes in behavior, with people working from home and travelling less, the report said.

More governments are also focusing on a potential "sustainable recovery" to move quickly towards a low-carbon future. This raises the prospect of reaching a peak in oil demand sooner than expected "if governments follow through with strong policies to hasten the shift to clean energy," according to the report.

"Achieving an orderly transition away from oil is essential to meet climate goals, but it will require major policy changes from governments as well as accelerated behavioral changes," Birol said. "Without that, global oil demand is set to increase every year between now and 2026," he said.

"For the world's oil demand to peak anytime soon, significant action is needed immediately to improve fuel efficiency standards, boost electric vehicle sales and curb oil use in the power sector." Asia is expected to lead renewed growth in global demand and account for 90 percent of the increase from 2019 to 2026, according to the agency's base scenario. "By contrast, demand in many advanced economies, where vehicle ownership and oil use per capita are much higher, is not expected to return to pre-crisis levels," the IEA said.—AFP

Sour Alsain Arab International General Trading Co. provides Covid-19 medicine Lianhua Qingwen to employees of the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait

interview with Mr. Cheng Yongru Economic and Commercial Counselor, Chinese Embassy

Q1 Tell us about the pharmaceutical industry in the friendly People's Republic of China?

China's pharmaceutical industry is driven by innovation to recent years, the number of clinical trials, the scale of innovative drug R&D pipelines, and the number of innovative drugs approved for marketing in China have increased year by year. Chinese pharmaceutical enterprises rejuvenate and develop rapidly through innovation.

At the same time, adhering to the combined use of Chinese and Western medicine is a major feature of the development of China's medical and health industry. Traditional Chinese medicine has been playing an important role in the prevention, control and medical treatment of the COVID-19, and other infectious diseases.

Q2 Has the drug been approved by the Chinese Ministry of Health and has been approved in all hospitals in China for viral cases?

Lianhua Qingwen Capsules is dedicated to the treatment of diseases including cold, flu and COVID-19. It is developed in 2003, and formally approved in 2004. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Lianhua Qingwen Capsules has been recommended in the Diagnosis and Treatment Protocol for COVID-19 released by China's national authorities and over 20 provinces and cities, making it the most frequently recommended Chinese medicine for COVID-19 treatment.

In April 2020, Lianhua Qingwen Capsules were approved to add "mild and moderate coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)" to its original indications by the National Medical Products Administration of China. It is widely

used in designated hospitals for COVID-19 patients across the country.

The "efficacy and safety of Lianhua Qingwen capsules, a repurposed Chinese herb, in patients with coronavirus disease 2019: A multicenter, prospective, randomized controlled trial" carried out by the three distinguished academicians of Zhong Nanshan, Li Lanjuan, and Zhang Boli from the Chinese Academy of Engineering partnering with 23 hospitals admitting admitting COVID-19 patients were published on the European renowned magazine phytomedicine in May 2020. It shows that Lianhua Qingwen can greatly relieve the clinical symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, fatigue, cough, etc., obviously improve the pulmonary imaging lesions, shorten the duration of symptoms, and promote the clinical cure rate.

Currently, Lianhua Qingwen Capsules has obtained registration certificate in 21 countries and regions including Canada, Russia, Singapore, Kuwait, Ecuador, Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Brazil, etc., and launched applications for registration in dozens of countries around the world.

For 17 years since its access to market, Lianhua Qingwen has been recommended in China's national-level treatment protocols for more than 20 times in major viral public health events such as Influenza A, Influenza B, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and COVID-19. And has become a representative drug in response to public health threats of viral infectivity.

We hope that Lianhua Qingwen can play an important role in Kuwait's fight against the pandemic and benefit the people of Kuwait.

Business

DHAMAN signs strategic agreement with InterSystems for its new EMR

Digital transformation is a fundamental pillar of DHAMAN's strategy

KUWAIT: As part of its strategy aiming at developing the infrastructure for Digital healthcare and the enhancement of its services, Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) announced the signing of an agreement for its new Electronic Medical Record system (EMR) with InterSystems, a creative data technology provider dedicated to helping customers solve the most critical scalability, interoperability, and speed problems.

The agreement was signed during a virtual signing ceremony by Dr Mohammad Al-Qenai, DHAMAN Acting CEO and Ali Abi Raad, Country Manager for the Middle East and India at InterSystems. This agreement is part of a holistic strategy to implement an EMR system (InterSystems TrakCare) and equip DHAMAN's healthcare facilities with the latest technologies and applications to launch an integrated electronic medical system to meet the needs of its healthcare network, medical staff and patients. This agreement is part of a comprehensive Digital Healthcare transformation strategy of an advanced digital solution for DHAMAN's healthcare network which consists of the EMR, as well as its infrastructure for the issuance of DHAMAN's medical health insurance policy. In addition, DHAMAN will deploy the EMR in two phases where the first begins with the primary healthcare centers located in Hawally, Farwaniya and Dhajeej areas, while the second occurs in parallel to consecutively extends to 12 similar centers and three hospitals spread over the governorates of Kuwait.

Commenting on this agreement, DHAMAN Corporate Information Technology Director Eng.



Abdullah Al-Najjar said: "As one of the key projects in the national development plan (New Kuwait 2035), DHAMAN's vision is to contribute to the development of the healthcare sector in Kuwait in terms of quality, indicators and services. To reach such objectives, modern scientific systems with top global practices and standards are key elements to ensure practical

smart healthcare through digital transformation."

Al-Najjar noted that since its inception, DHAMAN has taken proactive steps towards activating electronic and information systems in its endeavor to build and sustain a digital healthcare operation that addresses the and foresees the future trends of the healthcare industry. Health facilities were equipped, from the

beginning, with technical and logistical requirements that helped the medical and administrative staff to implement the vision for a digital healthcare system as a prelude to receiving the targeted segment of private sector expatriate employees and their families representing about two million people who will receive DHAMAN's healthcare services.

Al-Najjar added: "This agreement represents an additional milestone in DHAMAN's journey in the field of information technology, which is based on a long-term outlook for establishing and developing digital healthcare as DHAMAN's EMR that allows the patients to access their files at anytime and anywhere via multiples electronic channels. It also provides the medical team with the ability to know and analyze the health issues of each patient separately".

Al-Najjar concluded: "DHAMAN's new system is in compliance with the standards of the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS) relevant to the application of digital healthcare industry. These are international standards in the field of information technology to meet the needs of health enterprises and our goal is to achieve HIMSS EMRAM Stage 6 on opening, and later reach the highest stage, Stage 7". "It is a particularly exciting time for the healthcare industry in Kuwait with a focus on digital transformation and investment in healthcare being two essential pillars of the new Kuwait 2035 vision. Our partnership with Dhaman will support them with the needed technology to transform and enhance the healthcare experience for their patients," said Ali Abi Raad, Country Manager for the Middle East and India at InterSystems.

Gulf Bank to reward 15 winners with 100% of their spends as cashback

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has launched its cards campaign, which gives credit & prepaid cardholders the chance to win 100 percent of their spends as cashback when they use their Gulf Bank prepaid or credit cards locally and internationally. During the course of the campaign, which is scheduled to run from March 1 until April 30, 2021 cardholders who use their Gulf Bank credit or prepaid cards will automatically be entered into the final draw. For every KD 10 spent locally on a Gulf Bank prepaid or credit card, customers will receive one entry into the draw. For every KD 10 spent internationally using a prepaid or credit card, customers will receive three entries into the draw.

Gulf Bank will be announcing 15 lucky winners at the end of the campaign, each of whom will receive 100 percent of their card spends with a cap of KD 1,000 as their cashback prize. The draw will take place on May 23, 2021 in the presence of a representative of the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, and the winners will be notified by text, phone call, and email.

Gulf Bank is constantly working to offer its customers the very best banking products and services, including the Bank's latest 100 percent cashback campaign for its prepaid and credit cardholders. Throughout this campaign, cardholders can enjoy all the benefits of Gulf Bank's prepaid and credit cards

while being entered into the draw for the chance to win the campaign prizes.

Gulf Bank credit cards provide customers with a variety of travel offers and benefits which include discounts on hotel bookings, flights, and car rentals. Additionally, Gulf Bank credit card customers can also take advantage of complimentary airport lounge access at over 600 airports across the world. Moreover, Gulf Bank credit cardholders can also access the Gulf Points program, the fastest rewarding program in Kuwait that gives cardholders valuable points to use for free airline travel, hotel accommodation, and exclusive seasonal travel packages. To further ease the travel planning process, Gulf Bank credit card customers can also receive free travel insurance for themselves and their families, which can be used for the Schengen Visa application.

As customer experience and satisfaction are the primary focus of the Bank's products, a number of benefits have been added to Gulf Bank's Prepaid Card to enhance customer experience. These benefits include fraud protection with Gulf Bank 3D secure, online shopping, and instant discounts of up to 20 percent at over 300 renowned restaurants and coffee shops, and discounts of up to 25 percent at over 150 retail outlets in Kuwait across travel, entertainment, health, beauty, and lifestyle segments.



Fed 'balancing act' between inflation, faster growth

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve has made it clear it is too soon to think about pulling back on stimulus for the pandemic-battered economy, but finds itself stuck between an improving outlook and inflation fears. The US central bank will wrap up its two-day policy meeting on Wednesday, where it will likely comment on the accelerations in Covid-19 vaccine campaigns and reopening of businesses, which are fueling optimism that life in the United States can return to normal. And into that improving economy comes a flood of government funds: a \$1.9 trillion relief package President Joe Biden signed last week, and the remainder of the \$900 billion measure approved in December.

Economists expect that influx of cash to shore up

businesses and boost spending, but markets worry it will bring with it an upward spiral of prices. Fed Chair Jerome Powell will have a chance at his post-meeting news conference to allay those concerns and repeat his assertion that while prices will rise this year, any spikes from the depressed levels of 2020 will be transitory and no reason for the bank to take action. In fact, the Fed wants prices to rise to some extent, since they have lagged below its two percent target for years. The Fed faces "a delicate balancing act," BNP Paribas chief economist William De Vrijlder said.—AFP

Some businesses thrive, others ache during pandemic

PARIS: The coronavirus pandemic initially brought the global economy to a halt but business adjusted, with the more nimble taking advantage of the move online while others struggle to find a way forward. Here are some of the economic winners and losers of the Covid era so far:

Amazon, online champion

Lockdowns, curfews and travel restrictions all seemed to play to the strengths of Amazon, which pioneered the transition to online retail. The company headed by Jeff Bezos, who started out selling books and losing massive amounts of money, seemed perfectly suited to the changed times as bored and anxious consumers confined to their homes stocked up. The results were stunning—a 40 percent increase in sales to \$387 billion dollars last year.

Food delivery

The home food delivery business also came of age as people dined-in instead of out, with restaurants and bars either restricted or closed completely. Anglo-

Entertainment

What else is there to do if one cannot go out except slump on the sofa to watch television and play video games while munching on your latest dine-in delight? With the cinema out of bounds, the home-based version took off big time, with Netflix building an audience of 200 million on an offer of high-class films and series typified by "The Crown," the story of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II. Disney, not to be left behind, launched its Disney+ service late 2019 and had 95 million subscribers by early 2021. Among the game makers, Sony and Microsoft launched new consoles and ramped up sales. Families also played more classic games, with Danish toy brick maker Lego enjoying a new lease of life in helping keep children and adults-amused and busy for long periods of time. The family-owned business chalked up a 19 percent rise in net profit to a record 1.3 billion euros last year.

Airlines, tourism ache

Air transport was probably the worst hit sector, with thousands of aircraft mothballed worldwide. Predictions for a return to a semblance of normality have progressively been put back, with industry groups now looking to 2023 or even 2024. Legacy flag carriers such as Air France and Lufthansa chalked up



Mijbil Al-Ayoub receiving the honor

Ooredoo honored for sponsoring KuwaitTech 2021

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, was honored for its participation at the KuwaitTech Virtual Event (KTE), Kuwait's largest virtual expo and summit, and for its remarkable achievements and great participation in this prestigious event. During the event, Abdelfatah Samara, CEO of UCS Group, honored Mijbil Al-Ayoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait. The virtual event gathered tech-enthusiastic, developers and leading national and international companies from different sectors and showcased the latest innovations, information and communications technology (ICT) products and services, high-tech gadgets, consumer electronics and advanced smart technology across all sectors. The expo also explored the efforts of the government in order to position the State of Kuwait a leading regional financial, commercial, cultural and trade hub, which goes in line with Kuwait vision 2035 "New Kuwait".

Mijbil Al-Ayoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "Our sponsorship came to confirm our effective role in the progress and prosperity of Kuwait. We at Ooredoo Kuwait are always keen on participating in different activities that contribute to the improvement of the national economy and support the governmental efforts in achieving its goals."

huge losses-of 7.1 billion euros and 6.7 billion euros respectively-and required huge state bailouts to keep them going.

The low-cost operators such as EasyJet and Ryanair adapted faster than their older peers but could not escape the impact of the near total collapse of air travel. Ryanair's Michael O'Leary lambasted governments for bailing out the older carriers he believes do not deserve to be in business and he insisted the crisis was also an opportunity to finally restructure the industry. According to the International Air Travel Association (IATA), airlines lost some \$118 billion last year and while there is great hope vaccination programs will make a difference this year, losses are still expected at \$38 billion.

Oil majors suffer, recover

With the global economy stalled in the second quarter last year at the height of the first pandemic wave, oil prices fell off a cliff, even turning negative at one point. But production cuts, supported by non-OPEC producers such as Russia, slowly helped steady the market and prices began to rise on hopes for a strong economic recovery this year. That was not enough however to stop the five majors-BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Shell and Total-from chalking up combined 2020 losses of \$77 billion. Oil prices so far this year have been well supported, flirting with \$70 a barrel in recent trade on the hope massive stimulus packages, especially in the US, will support demand.—AFP

Burgan Bank celebrates Mother's Day with Jawaherji Al-Arbash

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced the launch of a special campaign to celebrate "Mother's Day" in partnership with "Jawaherji Al-Arbash", in appreciation of the leading role of mothers in the society and to celebrate this momentous occasion. Burgan Bank customers will enjoy 20 percent discount on selected items from "Jawaherji Al-Arbash", starting from 17th of March until Saturday, 20th of March 2021.

On this occasion, Dana Al-Nesef, Manager-Product and Segments in Burgan Bank said: "Burgan Bank continues to support and empower mothers and all women's vital role in society through various social initiatives as well as special offers directed at them as a thank you for their invaluable contributions."

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, commitment, 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.

The bank also obtained the prestigious ISO/IEC 27001: 2013 Information Security Management Systems certificate (ISMS), ensuring continuous business resilience and in compliance with regulatory obligations to support the highest standard of information and data security. In addition, the bank has been re-certified with Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI-DSS) Version 3.2.1 for the 2nd consecutive year, enabling the organizations in the card payment industry to reduce fraudulent transactions and increase payment protection for cardholders.

The bank also has to its credit the distinction of being the only Bank in Kuwait to have won the JP Morgan Chase Quality Recognition Award for twelve consecutive years. Burgan Bank, a subsidiary of KIPCO (Kuwait Projects Company), is a strongly positioned regional Bank in the MENA region.



Dana Al-Nesef

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199

HADI CLINIC
Ophthalmology Services

Dr. Rany Essam Mitwally
Senior Registrar

Dr. Ahmed Hosni Abd Elhamid
Consultant

Dr. Abeer Khattab
Specialist

Cataract Surgery Glaucoma Retina General Ophthalmology Follow-Up All Treatments

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA @hadclinic
Tel: 1828282
Whatsapp Us +965-8000 2184

REQUIRED
Nurses for a beauty and aesthetic clinic in Kuwait

- Medical nurses
- Dental assistants and hygienists
- Dental nurses

kindly send us your cv at
ahc.kwt13@gmail.com

مطلوب
REQUIRED

إطلاقاً من سياستنا التوسعية ، تعلن أفضل و أكبر عيادة أسنان تخصصية بالكويت و الشرق الأوسط (عيادة الميدان) ، عن رغبتها بتعيين التخصصات التالية :

- أطباء أسنان (جميع التخصصات)
- ممرضات
- فنيي تركيب أسنان

Competitive salary packages await for the right candidates. Interested applicants may send their CV to applyforhiring@gmail.com

DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
Consultant Pediatrician

Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American Board in Pediatrics-Canadian Board in Pediatric Emergency

Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368 Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B

Dr. Hamoud Abdullah Alarouj
ENT Consultant, Laryngologist

- ◆ Kuwait Board of Otolaryngology.
- ◆ Laryngology Fellowship, McGill University- Canada.
- ◆ Fellow of the European Board of Otolaryngology – Head & Neck surgery.
- ◆ Member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.
- ◆ Member of the British Laryngological Association.
- ◆ Member of the European Laryngological Society.
- ◆ Member of the Canadian Society of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.

Experienced In:

- Management of benign and malignant vocal cord lesions.
- Vocal cord augmentation.
- Diagnosis and treatment of spasmodic dysphonia.
- Adenotonsillectomy using latest techniques.
- Myringotomy and ventilation tube insertion.
- Surgery for the deviated nasal septum.
- Endoscopic sinus surgery.
- Diagnosis and treatment of allergic rhinitis.
- Tympanoplasty.
- Diagnosis and treatment of vertigo.
- Thyroid surgery
- Diagnosis and treatment of snoring.

2536 0000
www.royalehayat.com

DR KHALED ALMERRI
Consultant Interventional Cardiology
Department: Heart & Vascular Center

Specialized in:

- 1-Diagnostic and therapeutic cardiac catheterization (Angiography and Angioplasty). Aortic valve implantation.
- 2- Diagnosis and treatment of coronary artery diseases
- 3- Diagnosis and treatment of heart failure, cardiomyopathies and valvular diseases.
- 4-Diagnosis and treatment of high blood pressure and high cholesterol.
- 5- Diagnosis and treatment of syncope, palpitations and cardiac arrhythmias.
- 6- Non-invasive diagnostic procedures echocardiography, exercise stress test, and 24 hour blood pressure and Holter monitoring

Tel: 1830003 Ext: 2400 alsalam.int.hospital

DR. MOHAMMAD AL HAJRY
Canadian Board of Otolaryngology
Head & Neck Surgery and Facial Plastics.
Fellow of Royal College of Surgeons-Canada
A rare Subspecialty in Microscopic Ear Surgery, Cochlear implant & Ear diseases

- ◆ Diagnosis/Treatment of General Ears, Nose, and Throat conditions in adults & pediatrics
- ◆ Minimally invasive Endoscopic sinus surgery including Balloon sinuplasty
- ◆ Minimally invasive Microscopic & Endoscopic Ear surgery
- ◆ Diagnosis & treatment of Otology and Audiology (Hearing loss, Tinnitus & balance disorders)
- ◆ Facial Plastic and reconstructive surgeries (Rhinoplasty, Otoplasty, Fillers & Botox injections)
- ◆ Diagnosis & treatment of snoring & obstructive sleep apnea in clinic without surgery
- ◆ Diagnosis & Treatment of voice and swallowing disorders.
- ◆ Diagnosis & Treatment of Head and Neck benign & malignant tumors.

Salmiya, Belajat Street, Tel: 1881122

IC INTERNATIONAL CLINIC
American Board Certified in General Surgery
Member of the Society of American Gastrointestinal & Endoscopic Surgeons (SAGES)
Higher specialization in Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary surgery & Organ Transplantation
Member of many prestigious surgical societies.

- ◆ Day case surgeries
- ◆ Diagnosis, treatment and follow up of all surgical emergencies
- ◆ Surgery for morbid obesity (sleeve, gastric bypass)
- ◆ Hernia repair
- ◆ Surgery for reflux disease
- ◆ Minor surgeries (lipoma, sebaceous cyst, ingrowing nail)
- ◆ Hemorrhoids, fistula & anal fissure surgeries
- ◆ Breast surgeries
- ◆ Thyroid & adrenal surgeries
- ◆ Cholecystectomy & laparoscopic appendectomy
- ◆ Liver, pancreas & bile ducts surgeries

Dr. Hani Haider
General Surgery Consultant
<http://www.international-clinic.com> Tel: 1886677

DR. FAHAD S BUHAIMED
Consultant Cosmetic Dermatologist & Hair Transplant, NY

ACADAMIC CERTIFICATES:

- o Dermatology board certified.
- o Fellowship training program in cosmetic dermatology and hair transplant, New York, USA.
- o Member of American cosmetic dermatology society.
- o Referee reviewer of International Journal of Dermatology.

SPECIALIZED IN:

- o Dermatology & Cosmetic Treatments.
- o Laser Treatments.
- o Hair Transplant & Restoration.
- o Body & Face Contouring.
- o Injectable Fillers & Botox.

SHARQ, Ahmad Alalber st., Building bb, Floor 13.
Tel.: (+965) 22060777
[@Renovabb](mailto:Drbuhaimed), @dardonabb
Email: drbuhaimed@beautybeyond.com.kw
www.beautybeyond.com.kw

DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laprosopic and Bariatric Surgery

Academic Certificates – Training

- ◆ Kuwait Board of General Surgery.
- ◆ (IFSO) member .
- ◆ Faculty member of (BEST).
- ◆ Member of Kuwait Surgical Association.

Scope of clinical Practice.

- ◆ Bariatric surgeries.
- ◆ Gallbladder stones surgeries.
- ◆ Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- ◆ G.I. surgeries.
- ◆ Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- ◆ Anal surgeries.

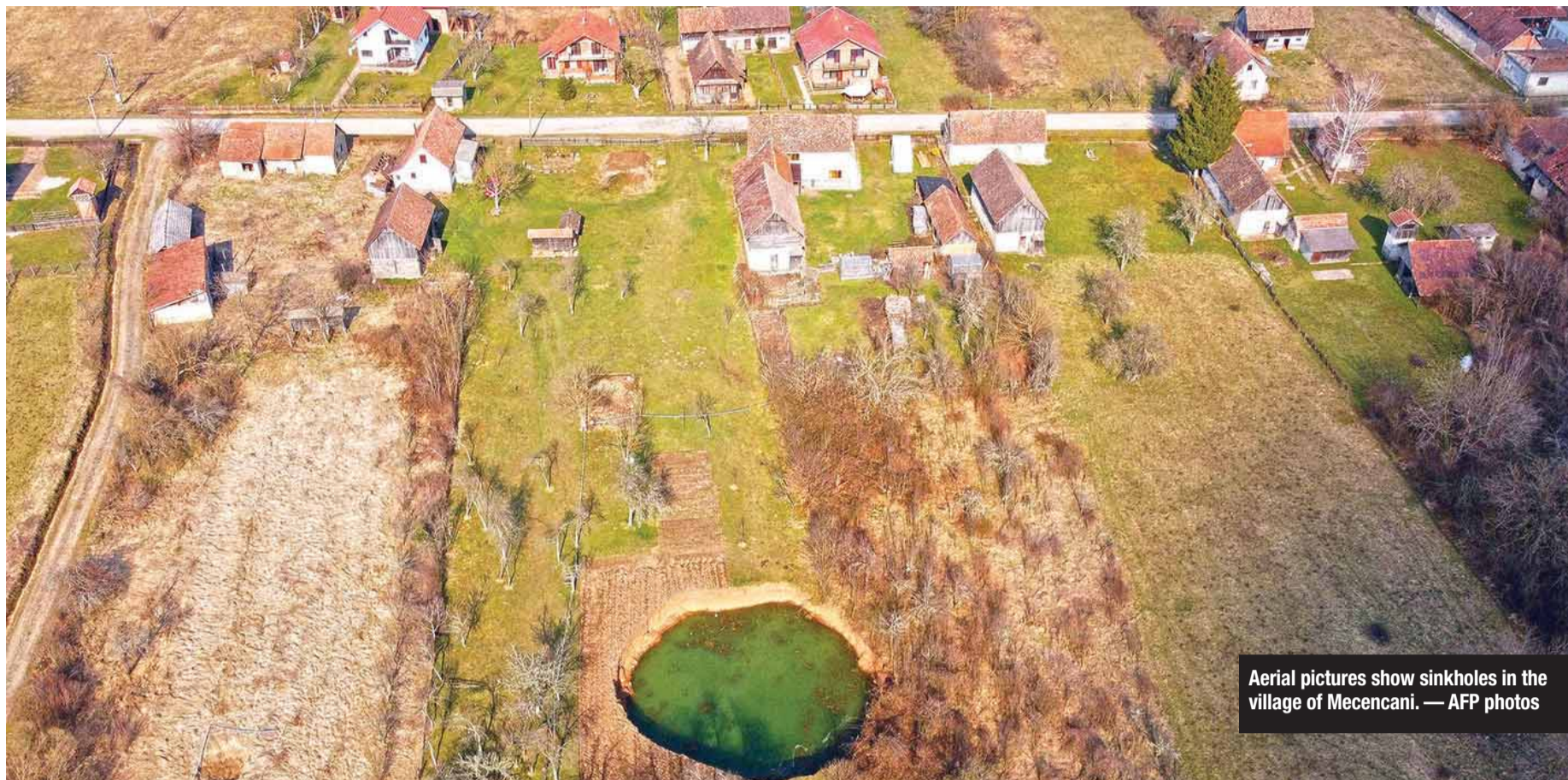
email: wbuhaimed@gmail.com Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228 Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building

Dr. Ahmad Alaeddine
Head of Cardiology departmenta at Dar Al Shifa hospital

- Consultant Interventional and conventional cardiologist.
- Specialised in the Diagnosis and treatment of all adult cardiac diseases, including those cases that need urgent intervention in Cath lab (primary angioplasty).

مستشفى دار الشفاء
Dar Al Shifa Hospital
Tele: 1802 555

Lifestyle | Features



Aerial pictures show sinkholes in the village of Mecencani. — AFP photos



DOZENS OF SINKHOLES POCK CROATIA'S QUAKE-HIT VILLAGES

A cluster of around 100 sinkholes has opened up across farmland in central Croatia, some of them just meters from homes, in the aftermath of a deadly quake that rocked the area in December. The holes started appearing days after a 6.4 magnitude quake struck killing seven people and tearing down hundreds of buildings around the town of Petrinja on December 29. With the largest

opening measuring 25 meters across, the sinkholes pose yet another danger for communities still rebuilding from the disaster. The sudden depressions are triggered when groundwater erodes the bedrock below to a point where it can no longer support the soil above. A chief engineer at Croatia's national geological survey Stjepan Terzic told AFP that while sinkholes are a normal phenomenon, the

high concentration of them "in such a small location" is unusual.

The quake's aftershocks—which are still shaking the area—caused the normally slow formation of sinkholes to accelerate dramatically. "Thus in a short period of time numerous holes have emerged for which, in normal conditions, decades if not longer periods would be needed." The holes, many of which look like small

round ponds as they have filled with emerald groundwater, have emerged in farm plots around the villages of Mecencani and Borojevici. Experts have called for additional caution in the coming weeks as groundwater levels are expected to rise in spring, threatening further collapse of the terrain. — AFP



French astronomers seek volunteer army for meteorite hunt

Space fans in France are being urged to join forces to find an apricot-sized meteorite that fell to Earth last weekend in the southwest of the country. The rock, estimated to weigh 150 grams (just over five ounces), was captured plunging through the atmosphere by cameras at an astronomy education facility in Mauraux falling at exactly 10:43 pm last Saturday near Aiguillon, about 100 kilometers from Bordeaux. The site is part of the Vigie-Ciel (Sky Watch) project of around 100 cameras in the Fireball Recovery and InterPlanetary Observation Network (FRIPON), which aims to detect and collect the 10 or so meteorites that fall on France each year.

"Meteorites are relics of the solar system's creation, with the benefit of never being exposed to the elements," said Mickael Wilmart of the A Ciel Ouvert

(Open Sky) astronomy education association that operates the Mauraux observatory. "A fresh meteorite like this, which fell just a few days ago, hasn't been altered by the Earth's environment and therefore contains very precious information for scientists," he said. The search is already underway but calls for help have been issued on social media, and posters have been put up in areas where the rock is most likely to have fallen. But Wilmart acknowledged that the chances of success are slim. "It's a bit like searching for a needle in a haystack," he said. "We're really counting on people to look in their gardens, or along the side of the road, they might just stumble on this rock that's wanted to badly," he said. — AFP

In the can: Armed Hong Kong toilet roll heist gang jailed

Knife-wielding men who stole hundreds of toilet rolls during panic-buying shortages in the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic in Hong Kong were jailed for more than three years last Thursday. The three were each sentenced to 40 months in prison over the armed robbery in February last year in which some 600 toilet rolls were taken, Mingpao newspaper reported. Toilet rolls became hot property in densely packed Hong Kong when the coronavirus first spread from central China and hit the finance hub. Panic-buying set in with supermarket shelves cleared of

many household essentials as well as staple foods.

Supermarkets were unable to restock quickly enough, leading to sometimes lengthy queues across the city and packets of toilet rolls being snapped up within minutes of opening. Photos posted online showed some people proudly stuffing their cramped city apartments with packets of hoarded toilet rolls. During the robbery, the three men admitted to using a knife to threaten a delivery driver outside a major supermarket chain in the working-class district of Mongkok. They made off with 50 packets of toilet paper worth around HK\$1,700 (\$220) but were soon tracked down by police. Mingpao reported that the gang of three admitted to the robbery, apologized to the delivery driver and paid for the toilet rolls they made off with. The paper quoted the trial judge as saying the crime was pre-meditated and deserved a custodial sentence.—AFP



This undated handout photo shows a rare Australian songbird, a female regent honeyeater, at the Capertee National Park in New South Wales.—AFP

Endangered Australian songbird 'losing its song'

Australia's endangered regent honeyeater bird is losing its song, a sign that it could be nearing extinction, scientists warned in new research released on Wednesday. A rapid decline in the rare songbird means its young are struggling to learn mating calls as adults disappear, according to researchers at

the Australian National University. Male regent honeyeaters sang rich, complex tunes in more populated habitats, but resorted to simplified songs elsewhere, the scientists wrote in a study published in the peer-reviewed journal Proceedings of the Royal Society B.

Lead author Ross Crates said the findings were a "major warning sign the regent honeyeater is on the brink of extinction"—and the loss of song knowledge could also reduce chances of mating. "It could also be exacerbating the honeyeater's population decline, because we know a sexy song increases the odds of reproduction in songbirds." Scientists found 18 regent honeyeaters, or around 12 percent of the total remaining male population, who could only mimic other species' songs—not their own. "This lack of ability to communicate with

their own species is unprecedented in a wild animal," study co-author Dejan Stojanovic said. "We can assume that regent honeyeaters are now so rare that some young males never find an older male teacher."

Scientists estimate just a few hundred regent honeyeaters remain in the wild. The rare bird, with its black and yellow markings, was once found across much of eastern Australia but is now largely confined to eucalyptus forests in the country's southeast. The study also found regent honeyeaters born in captivity have different songs that could reduce their attractiveness to wild birds. The scientists now hope to teach the captive birds to sing like their wild counterparts, by playing them audio recordings.—AFP

Scientists unearth meteorite from the birth of the solar system

Scientists believe they have identified a meteorite formed in the first million years of our solar system, making it the oldest known meteorite of volcanic origin. The space rock, which began its journey some 4.5 billion years ago, has already proved an "exceptional" witness to the building blocks of the planets. Known as Erg Chech 002, the meteorite was discovered in May 2020 by meteor hunters in the Algerian Sahara desert. It had rested undisturbed for "at least 100 years", according to Jean-Alix Barrat, a geochemist at France's Brest University.

In a recent study published in the Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences journal, Barrat and his colleagues describe its discovery and several rare features. There are 43 officially documented fragments, but "probably about a hundred" either still in the ground or unaccounted for, said the study. The largest ones are "as big as a fist," Barrat told AFP. With its greenish exterior and brownish interior, Erg Chech 002 might not appear extraordinary at first glance. But it is, in fact, extremely rare.

Of the roughly 65,000 meteorites so far documented on Earth, only around 4,000 contain what is known as "differentiated matter". This means they came from celestial bodies large enough to have experienced tectonic activity. Of those 4,000, 95 percent come from just two asteroids. But Erg Chech 002 is among the remaining five percent. "It's the only one out of 65,000 meteorites that is like it is," said Barrat. "Such rocks were quite common at the very beginning of the history of the solar system."



The meteor-known as Erg Chech 002—was discovered in May 2020 by researchers working in the Algerian Sahara desert.

There are two possible explanations for Erg Chech 002's rarity. The type of protoplanet from which it originated provided raw material "for the growth of terrestrial planets" such as Earth, said Barrat. Others were pulverized in the great cosmic billiard game of the formation of the solar system. The surface of the Moon, pockmarked with innumerable asteroid impacts, is a relatively recent witness to this second type of protoplanet. "No asteroid shares the spectral features of EC 002, indicating that almost all of these bodies have disappeared, either because they went on to form the building blocks of larger bodies or planets or were simply destroyed," the study said.

'Thrown into space'

The so-called "parent body" of Erg Chech 002 could have measured around 100 kilometers across. It was formed in the first million years of the solar system, according to the study's co-authors, March Chaussidon, from the Paris Globe Institute of Physics and Johan Villeneuve, a researcher from France's National Centre for Scientific Research at the University of Lorraine. Metallic meteorites "correspond to the nuclei of protoplanets," said Barrat.

But Erg Chech 002 is volcanic in origin, meaning that it was part of the crust of a protoplanet, rather than its core. The experts believe that its unique composition was the result of a string of fortunate events. On the protoplanet in question, lava must have accumulated on the surface, fuelled by the heat of its aluminum core. The crust containing the meteorite solidified briefly but—because it showed evidence of a sudden cooling—instead of remaining on the parent body, some violent force cast it asunder.—AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) conservator Tanya Bitler displays recently-discovered 2000-year-old biblical scroll fragments from the Bar Kochba period, after completion of preservation work at the authority's Dead Sea conservation lab in Jerusalem.



Recently-discovered 2000-year-old biblical scroll fragments from the Bar Kochba period, are displayed at the Israel Antiquities Authority's (IAA) Dead Sea conservation lab in Jerusalem. — AFP photos



A handout picture shows a picture of scroll fragments found in the Cave of Horror in the Judean Desert.

Israel unearths fragments of 2000-year-old biblical scroll

Israel said Tuesday it had discovered pieces of a biblical scroll dating back some 2,000 years, describing the find as one of the most significant since the Dead Sea Scrolls. "For the first time in approximately 60 years, archaeological excavations have uncovered fragments of a biblical scroll," the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) said in a statement. Following a years-long dig in caves and cliffs in the Judean desert, the authority said it had also discovered a cache of rare coins, a six-millennia-old skeleton of a child and basket it described as the oldest in the world, at over 10,000 years.

The finds are a result of survey of some 80 kilo-

meters of cliffs in a desert area spanning southern Israel and the occupied West Bank. Using drones, mountain climbing gear and rappelling equipment, Israeli archaeologists searched caves they said were used by Jews rebelling against the Romans during the failed second-century Bar Kochba revolt. The fragments of the scroll include passages written in Greek from the Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets, part of the Hebrew Bible, the IAA said. One fragment from the book of Zechariah reads: "These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to one another, render true and perfect justice in your gates."

Although most of the text is in Greek, the name of God appears in ancient Hebrew script, the IAA said. Israeli archaeological excavations in occupied Palestinian territory have sparked controversy, but the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities did not respond to requests for comment. The IAA cooperated on the project with the military branch responsible for civil affairs in the Palestinian territories (COGAT). Spokeswoman Yoli Schwartz said it was one of the most significant discoveries of a Biblical text since the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Those scrolls include some 900 manuscripts

found between 1947 and 1956 in the Qumran caves above the Dead Sea in the West Bank. They are some of the earliest biblical texts ever discovered. IAA director Israel Hasson said the survey had begun in response to looters who slipped into the caves. In a statement, he called the finds "a wakeup call" for devoting more resources to continue the project, which has only surveyed about half of all the cliffs in the desert. "We must ensure that we recover all the data that has not yet been discovered in the caves, before the robbers do," Hasson said. —AFP



In this file photo Singer/songwriter Demi Lovato attends the Billboard Music Awards 2018 at the MGM Grand Resort International in Las Vegas, Nevad. — AFP

Demi Lovato reveals teen rape as tell-all documentary opens SXSW

US singer Demi Lovato revealed she was raped as a virgin during her teenage years as a Disney Channel actress and pop star, in a tell-all documentary that opened the online South By Southwest festival Tuesday. "Demi Lovato: Dancing with the Devil," a YouTube Originals series, centers on Lovato's notorious 2018 fentanyl overdose that caused her brain damage and partial blindness, and her ongoing battles with addiction. The four episodes, presented as the opening night film of a SXSW forced online by the pandemic, also contained new details of sexual assaults suffered by Lovato, including an attack on the night of her overdose.

"I know what I'm about to say is going to shock people too. But when I was a teenager I was in a very similar situation—I lost my virginity in a rape," says Lovato. "We were hooking up but I said, Hey, this is not going any further. I'm a virgin and I don't want to lose it this way," she recounts. "And that didn't matter to them—they did it anyways." Lovato, now 28, does not name her attacker, but says the rape happened when "I was part of that Disney crowd," and that she "had to see this person all the time" following the assault. Dubbing the incident "my #MeToo story," Lovato says she reported the attacker but "they never got in trouble for it—they never got taken out of the movie they were in."

Lovato shot to fame with the Disney Channel movie "Camp Rock," filmed when she was 15. She has long spoken of her struggles with depression, eating disorders and addiction, belying her happy persona as a smiling star of the children's show "Barney and Friends." In the documentary, which features input from Elton John, music mogul Scooter Braun and actor Will Ferrell, Lovato says quitting cold turkey has proven not to work for her, and she now allows herself to smoke marijuana and drink in moderation.

Her 2018 overdose prompted a flurry of statements of solidarity from fellow stars who praised her personality—although the attention also triggered a backlash by social media users, who noted that many non-celebrities suffer from drugs with little fanfare. SXSW Online 2021 opened earlier Tuesday with a virtual performance from Janelle Monae before a keynote talk with Stacey Abrams, the former Georgia lawmaker credited with recent key Democratic victories in the state. The film, television, music and technology conference runs until Saturday. — AFP

Spike Lee to head Cannes Film Festival jury

US director Spike Lee will head the jury at the Cannes Film Festival in July, organizers said Tuesday, making him the first black person to take on the role. The feted New York film-maker was supposed to perform the function at last year's event, but it was cancelled due to the pandemic. Accepting the invitation in a recorded Twitter message, Lee said he was "very humbled". "Way back in 1986, my very first film 'She's Gotta Have It' played there and it was my introduction to the world of cinema, so Cannes will always have a deep, deep spot in my heart," he said. With COVID-19 still circulating at high levels in France, and the country making slow progress in its vaccination campaign, doubts remain over whether this year's edition will go ahead as planned from July 6 to 17, having already been delayed from its usual slot in May.

It would be the biggest get-together for the global industry in more than a year, with most other festivals either cancelled or relegated to online versions in recent months. Lee, 63, has been a fixture at Cannes over the years, premiering seven of his films there and winning the second-place Grand Prix in 2018 for "BlacKkKlansman" about a black police officer infiltrating the Ku Klux Klan. "Throughout the months of uncertainty we've just been through, Spike Lee has never stopped encouraging us," said

festival president Pierre Lescure in a statement. "We could not have hoped for a more powerful personality to chart our troubled times."

'Great impact'

With a back-catalogue that has thrown a spotlight on issues of race and politics in the US, Lee was seen as a symbolic choice at a time when the French film industry has been mired in controversies over the representation of minorities. The Cannes jury, which selects the winner of the coveted Palme d'Or, has rarely displayed much diversity in the president's chair.

Hong Kong auteur Wong Kar-wai is the only Asian to have had the honor, while French-Algerian actress Isabelle Adjani was the first of African descent in 1997. Lee has tried his hand at many genres, but is best known for films that put the African-American experience front and center. Those have ranged from slice-of-life classics such as "Do the Right Thing" to more overtly political works such as "Malcolm X" and his most recent Netflix hit "Da 5 Bloods" about black veterans from the Vietnam war. "BlacKkKlansman" served as a powerful anti-Trump statement and won him his first Oscar, not counting an honorary award he received in 2015.

Spike at Cannes

Lee exploded on to the film scene at Cannes in 1986 with "She's Gotta Have It", which took home the Youth Award. Shot on a shoestring in New York, the story of a young New Yorker trying to choose between three men has become a cult classic and was recently remade as a Netflix series. When he returned to the Cote d'Azur three years later, he was in the main competition with "Do The Right Thing", his landmark film about one sweltering day of



In this file photo Best Adapted Screenplay winner for "BlacKkKlansman" Spike Lee attends the 91st Annual Academy Awards Governors Ball at the Hollywood & Highland Center in Hollywood, California. —AFP

charged race relations in Brooklyn. "Jungle Fever" (1991), "Girl 6" (1996), "Summer of Sam" (1999), "Ten Minutes Older" (2002) have also featured at the festival.

"I have a special place in my heart for Paris, for France and for the Cannes Film Festival... Book my flight!" he said in the Twitter message. The official selection for this year's festival, along with the rest of the jury are due to be named in early June. The last Palme d'Or winner was South Korea's Bong Joon-ho for "Parasite" in 2019. —AFP



In this file photo (from left to right) Britain's Prince William, Duke of Cambridge holding Prince Louis, Prince George, Princess Charlotte, Britain's Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, Britain's Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, Vice Admiral Timothy Laurence, Britain's Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, Britain's Princess Beatrice of York, Britain's Princess Anne, Princess Royal, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, Britain's Princess Eugenie of York, Britain's Lady Louise Windsor, Britain's Prince Andrew, Duke of York, Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, Britain's Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, James, Viscount Severn and Isla Phillips stand with other members of the Royal Family on the balcony of Buckingham Palace to watch a fly-past of aircraft by the Royal Air Force, in London. —AFP

Harry speaks to Charles, William after bitter TV interview

Prince Harry has spoken to his father and brother after he and his wife Meghan Markle raised allegations of racism in the royal family during an explosive TV interview, a friend said Tuesday. In the interview, Harry said that his father Prince Charles had cut him off financially and at one point stopped taking his calls, and he also described his damaged relationship with Prince William. Harry and Meghan, whose father is white and mother is Black, now live in California after stepping away from royal duties.

The British monarchy has been rocked by the couple's allegations that an unnamed royal asked

how dark their child's skin would be before he was born. "I did actually call them to see how they were feeling, and it's true Harry has talked to his brother and he has talked to his father too," Gayle King, a US television presenter and friend of the couple, said on CBS. "The word I was given was that those conversations were not productive, but they are glad they have at least started a conversation." King said the couple were "frustrated" that alleged racism in the royal family had dominated the news agenda since the interview was broadcast on March 7.

"All they wanted all along was for the royals to intervene and tell the press to stop with the unfair,

inaccurate, false stories that definitely have a racial slant," King said. She added that Harry and Meghan wanted "healing" in the family, but that Meghan had "documents to back up everything" she had said in the interview with Oprah Winfrey. The allegations, which the royal family said would be investigated, have plunged the monarchy into its biggest crisis since the death of William and Harry's mother, princess Diana, in 1997. Meghan, a former actress, told Winfrey she was "naively" unprepared for life as a royal and had contemplated suicide while pregnant with their first child. —AFP

Sports

Lillard's 50 seals Blazers comeback, Jazz bounce back

Sixers survive Knicks; Lakers cruise past T'Wolves

LOS ANGELES: Damian Lillard delivered a 50-point performance and led a remarkable fourth quarter comeback as the Portland Trail Blazers defeated the New Orleans Pelicans 125-124 on Tuesday. Lillard drained six three pointers and made 13-of-20 from the field with six rebounds and 10 assists to give the Blazers an improbable victory at Portland's Moda Center Arena.

The Pelicans looked to be cruising to victory after surging into a 17-point lead with just over six minutes remaining, up 115-98 thanks to big performances from Brandon Ingram and Zion Williamson. But Lillard then seized control of the contest down the stretch, rattling off 15 points in a 25-7 run for Portland including two ice-cool free throws with 1.2 seconds remaining to seal the Blazers comeback.

"In the huddles we just kept telling each other that we were the more experienced team, and these are the kind of games we're capable of winning," Lillard said afterwards. "We just stayed the course and showed a lot of resilience. When it seemed it was getting worse, I felt our communication and our trust in each other just kept building."

Lillard's masterpiece leaves the Blazers in sixth place in the Western Conference standings. The Portland talisman was backed with 22 points from Gary Trent Jr and 10 apiece from Derrick Jones Sr, Enes Kanter and CJ McCollum. The Pelicans scoring was led by Ingram (30 points) and Williamson (28 points).

Utah bounce back

Elsewhere Tuesday, Donovan Mitchell scored 20 points as the Utah Jazz bounced back from a run of disappointing recent outings with a battling 117-109 road victory over the Boston Celtics. Utah arrived at Boston's TD Garden still smarting from a

12-point loss to the Golden State Warriors on Sunday, a fourth defeat in six games for the Western Conference leaders.

However after a sluggish start on Tuesday, which saw the Celtics race into an 11-point lead midway through the first quarter, normal service resumed as Utah asserted themselves late on. A 40-point fourth quarter wrapped up a morale-boosting victory which saw the Jazz improve to 29-10 at the top of the Western Conference.

While Mitchell led the scoring for Utah, Jordan Clarkson provided an invaluable stint off the bench with 20 points — including five three-pointers — in just over 30 minutes on court. Clarkson said Utah had been determined to regroup after Sunday's defeat to the Warriors.

"This is our last big road trip, and after losing that one to the Warriors we just wanted to come back and get something tonight," Clarkson said. "We're just trying to string these wins together. We know we can handle our business at home, but on the road we've got to take everything into account, do all the small things well, and that's going to help us win."

Point guard Mike Conley had 17 points and French international Rudy Gobert added 16 points with 12 rebounds for Utah. Jayson Tatum led the Boston scoring with 29 points while Jaylen Brown added 28 as the Celtics fell to 20-19 to remain in sixth place in the Eastern Conference.

Sixers pip Knicks

Elsewhere Tuesday, the New York Knicks pushed the Eastern Conference-leading Philadelphia 76ers all the way before losing their road game 99-96. The Knicks, who ran the second-placed Brooklyn Nets close on Monday, led for long periods but were overpowered in the



PORTLAND: Damian Lillard of the Portland Trail Blazers drives to the basket on Steven Adams of the New Orleans Pelicans as Zion Williamson looks on during the second half at Moda Center on Tuesday in Portland, Oregon. —AFP

fourth quarter as the Sixers outscored their opponents 26-14.

Tobias Harris led the Sixers scoring with 30 points while Ben Simmons had a double-double with 16 points and 13 rebounds. Seth Curry had 20 points as Philadelphia improved to 27-12. Julius Randle and Alec Burks led the New York scorers with 19 points apiece.

In Los Angeles, LeBron James had 25 points as the Lakers cruised to a 137-121 victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves. In Miami meanwhile, Jimmy Butler had 28 points as the Heat extended their winning streak to five games with a comfortable 113-98 win over the Cleveland Cavaliers. Miami improved to 22-18 with the win to remain in fourth place in the Eastern table. —AFP

Ovechkin bags 718th goal, sixth on all-time NHL list

WASHINGTON: Washington Capitals star Alex Ovechkin moved up to sixth place in the NHL's all-time goalscoring list on Tuesday, netting his 718th career goal in a 3-1 win over the New York Islanders. The 35-year-old Russian ace passed Phil Esposito in the scoring rankings after bagging his 12th goal of the season on a power play with 4:36 left in the second period.

Ovechkin's 718th career goal came in his 1,177th regular season game for the Caps, where he has spent his most of his career since being recruited by the club with the No.1 pick in the 2004 Draft. "It's history. It's pretty good numbers and happy to be in that category," Ovechkin was quoted by the Washington Post as saying. "It's done. How I say, it's history."

Only five players stand ahead of Ovechkin in the rankings — Marcel Dionne (731), Brett Hull (741), Jaromir Jagr (766), Gordie Howe (801) and Wayne Gretzky (894). A message of congratulations from Esposito was played on a video screen at the Capital One Arena on Tuesday to mark Ovechkin's scoring milestone. "You are a fantastic hockey play-



Alex Ovechkin

er, and I don't know how you score all those goals with the way these guys block shots with the great

equipment that they wear," Esposito said. "Good luck. Keep it going." —AFP



LOS ANGELES: LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers calls a play during the third quarter against the Minnesota Timberwolves at Staples Center on Tuesday in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

LeBron adds Red Sox, race team to empire

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James has added ownership stakes in baseball's Boston Red Sox and a US stock car race team to England football champions Liverpool in his sports empire, according to multiple reports Tuesday. The superstar playmaker for the NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers and business partner Maverick Carter have become partners in the Fenway Sports Group, according to the Boston Globe, USA Today, ESPN and other US reports.

James, 36, already had a two percent stake in Liverpool but now likely has a firmer share in the Premier League team as well as a stake in Major League Baseball's Boston Red Sox, a sports management firm, a regional sports cable network and Roush Fenway Racing of NASCAR, the closed-cockpit series that is the most popular form of US auto racing. Liverpool is also among the group's holdings, having been taken over by Fenway in 2010. James also owns an entertainment production company in Hollywood and has a movie debuting later this year, "Space Jam: A New Legacy". —AFP

Japanese rookie Tsunoda vows to attack in F1 debut

TOKYO: Japanese Formula One rookie Yuki Tsunoda plans to throw caution to the wind when he makes his race debut next week in Bahrain, vowing to "give everything" in the season-opener. New AlphaTauri recruit Tsunoda outperformed his hero Lewis Hamilton and a host of others to clock the second-best time in pre-season testing last week, beaten only by Red Bull's Max Verstappen.

And the 20-year-old doesn't plan to let up when he makes his Formula One debut in Bahrain on March 28, promising to attack even if his mistakes ending up costing him. "I just want to give everything I've got in my performance," Tsunoda, who replaced Russian Daniil Kvyat at AlphaTauri, said during an online press conference yesterday. "I want to push from the start. I don't want

to worry about making mistakes. I just want to go for it and attack."

Tsunoda set his best time of 1min 29.053sec from 91 laps on Sunday during the three-day test session at Sakhir, the venue for the Bahrain Grand Prix. That was quicker than seven-time world champion Hamilton, who was fifth-fastest overall in the all-conquering Mercedes. Tsunoda is reading nothing into the test results as he prepares to make his race debut, but he admits it has put a spring in his step.

"It was just a test, but I'm happy to finish in the top three and that gives me confidence," said Tsunoda, who will become the first Japanese driver to compete in Formula One since Kamui Kobayashi in 2014. "Each team does things differently so I don't know what form anyone is in, but I was able to improve my times and concentrate on my driving. I'm feeling quietly confident after finishing in the top three."

The diminutive 1.59 metre (5ft 3in) Tsunoda admitted in December he would have to hit the gym over the winter to cope with the Formula



SAKHIR: AlphaTauri's Japanese driver Yuki Tsunoda drives during the third day of the Formula One (F1) pre-season testing at the Bahrain International Circuit in the city of Sakhir on March 14, 2021. —AFP

One car's superior power and downforce. He complained that he "couldn't even lift" his head after driving 123 laps during his Formula One test in Abu Dhabi in

December, but the extra training appears to be paying off already. "I didn't feel so tired in Bahrain, and I think that's a big step forward for me," he said. —AFP

Libyan drift drivers burn rubber for 'unity and peace'

BENGHAZI: Burning rubber in eastern Libya's Benghazi, drivers from across the country took part in a drifting championship this month, a rare unifying event as the country seeks to end years of conflict. "We have excellent drivers," said Marwan al-Manfi, a spectator from the eastern city of Tobruk. "It's time the world knew about it."

In souped-up BMWs, competitors lined up on the asphalt for their turn to tear up the track near the Benghazi seafront, tyres screeching as they swerved around barrels and markers. The enthusiastic crowd of mostly young men watched on and took photos as the cars, some with lights flashing or splashed with advertising, sent up clouds of smoke as they skidded and spun.

Popularised in Japan in the 1970s, the motor sport, which involves deliberately oversteering the car to slip, skid and spin, and is popular among Libyan youth. Libya, sitting atop Africa's largest proven crude reserves, has been mired in chaos since the 2011 ouster and killing of dictator Moamer Kadhafi in a NATO-

backed uprising that began in Benghazi.

For years it has been divided between rival forces, with a Tripoli-based UN-recognised Government of National Accord in the west and a parallel administration headquartered in the east, backed by military strongman Khalifa Haftar. But it has been taking steps towards normalcy since a ceasefire between warring parties came into effect in October.

Libya's new interim Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah was sworn in this week, pledging to re-unite the country and steer it towards December elections. At the drifting championship, organized under the theme "unity and peace for Libya", judges rated the competitors on their style, technique and vehicle speed. —AFP



BENGHAZI: Libyans watch a driver put his drifting skills to the test during a competition in the coastal city of Benghazi, on March 12, 2021. —AFP

Sports

Real Madrid's old guard see off Atalanta to reach Champions League last eight

Zidane's side reach quarter-finals for first time in three years

MADRID: Real Madrid avoided another early Champions League exit on Tuesday by beating Atalanta 3-1 to win the tie 4-1 on aggregate and reach the quarter-finals for the first time in three years. Sergio Ramos marked his return from injury by converting a penalty after Karim Benzema continued his scoring streak by capitalizing on a glaring error from Atalanta goalkeeper Marco Sportiello.

Sportiello's scuffed clearance in the first half resulted in Benzema being given an easy finish at the Alfredo di Stefano stadium and after an electric start, Atalanta never really recovered. Luis Muriel pulled one back for the visitors late on but any hopes of a comeback were quickly dashed as substitute Marco Asensio fired in a third for Madrid.

Zinedine Zidane's side will be in Friday's draw for the last eight and with their old guard fit and firing again, they will be hopeful of exceeding what are now dampened expectations of La Liga's reigning champions. "We showed tonight how much hunger there still is in this team," said Luka Modric. "We can go far. How far let's see but today was an important step."

Ramos played just over an hour in his second appearance since recovering from a knee injury while Benzema's goal was his eighth in as many games and 70th in the Champions League, making him only the fifth player to reach that number.

The 35-year-old Modric and Toni Kroos were dominant in the absence of the suspended Casemiro. "I feel 27!" joked Modric. "The years on your passport don't matter, it's about what you do on the pitch." How Madrid's veterans would fare against more polished opposition remains to be

seen, after they came up short against Manchester City last year and Ajax the year before that, both in the last 16.

Madrid punish Atalanta errors

They will be unlikely to benefit from the same generosity Atalanta afforded them across the two legs. Remo Freuler's red card and a late goal spoiled the Italians' night in Bergamo and it was individual errors from Sportiello and then Rafael Toloi for the penalty that let them down again here. "We started strong and we were succeeding with our pressing," said Muriel. "It's a shame because from our two mistakes came the two goals that cut our legs from under us."

Atalanta tore into Madrid early on, with the intensity of their press giving their opponents no time to settle and Robin Gosens could have scored, only to fail to connect with Muriel's cross. The early storm weathered, Madrid found their feet as Kroos began to dictate from deep and the tireless Modric popped passes around Atalanta's midfield.

The lively Vinicius Junior took too long after a neat one-two with Benzema, who then showed the youngster how it should be done. Sportiello's clearance was tamed by Modric, whose second touch pushed the ball into the box before a third cut the ball back to Benzema, who had an open net.

The goal killed Atalanta's belief and Vinicius almost added a second after half-time, only to prod wide after a surging run to the edge of Atalanta's six-yard box. But the warning was not heeded and Vinicius raced past Toloi, whose dangling leg made enough contact to concede the penalty, which



MADRID: Real Madrid's Spanish defender Sergio Ramos (R) celebrates his goal during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 second leg football match between Real Madrid CF and Atalanta at the Alfredo di Stefano stadium in Valdebebas, on the outskirts of Madrid on Tuesday. —AFP

Ramos whipped into the corner.

Ramos signaled to the bench that his work was done and he departed shortly after, before Benzema headed Lucas Vazquez's cross at Sportiello and the

rebound against the post. Muriel gave Atalanta hope by curling in a superb free-kick with eight minutes left but in an instant it was gone again, as Asensio drove in a third. —AFP

Man City cruise into Champions League last eight

BUDAPEST: Pep Guardiola told his Manchester City players to forget their previous Champions League failures after cruising into the quarter-finals with a 2-0 win over Borussia Moenchengladbach on Tuesday that sealed a 4-0 aggregate victory. The Champions League is the one trophy that has remained elusive to Guardiola during his five years in Manchester with City failing to ever get beyond the last eight under the Catalan.

But the runaway Premier League leaders will get the chance to break that barrier next month as they showed why they are the bookies' favorites for the competition with another classy performance in Budapest, which hosted both legs of the tie due to coronavirus restrictions on travel between England and Germany.

Early goals from Kevin De Bruyne and Ilkay Gundogan killed off any hope of a fightback from the Germans as City recorded a 24th win in their last 25 games in all competitions. "What happened in the past is the past," said Guardiola, who won the Champions League twice as coach of Barcelona but has been unable to replicate that success with Bayern Munich or City. "In the quarter-finals

one bad game, (a few) bad minutes can punish you. Now it is the best teams in Europe. The quality every time is higher and hopefully we can maintain this mood."

De Bruyne and Gundogan were two of a host of first-team regulars left out by Guardiola for Saturday's 3-0 win at Fulham and City looked refreshed in a fast start. De Bruyne blasted in the opener from outside the box off the underside of the bar on 12 minutes. Six minutes later a flowing move from back to front saw Phil Foden release Gundogan in behind the Gladbach defence to score his 15th goal of the season.

"The start obviously helps a lot," said De Bruyne. "We were patient in the beginning and then scoring the two goals gives us a bit of a cover knowing they need to come out a little bit more. I think we controlled the game." Gladbach have now lost all seven games since manager Marco Rose announced he will be leaving the club at the end of the season to join Borussia Dortmund.

Rock solid City

Defensive frailties have been the cause of City's previous Champions League exits under Guardiola. They conceded six goals to Monaco over two legs in 2017, five to Liverpool a year later, four to Tottenham in 2019, and suffered a shock 3-1 defeat to Lyon last season in a one-off tie in Lisbon.

However, the signing of Ruben Dias



BUDAPEST: Manchester City's Belgian midfielder Kevin De Bruyne (not pictured) scores a goal past Borussia Moenchengladbach's Swiss goalkeeper Yann Sommer during the UEFA Champions League, last 16, second-leg football match between Manchester City and Borussia Moenchengladbach at the Puskas Arena in Budapest on Tuesday. —AFP

has transformed Guardiola's men into the complete team this season as they remain on course for an unprecedented quadruple of Premier League, Champions League, FA Cup and League Cup.

City have now kept seven consecutive Champions League clean sheets. "We cannot deny Ruben and John (Stones) make an incredible step forward for the team," added Guardiola. "But we need everyone. Everyone runs a lot, the important thing is to understand we defend with the ball."

With no key players missing through injury, the wealth of options

Guardiola has to choose from is another reason this could finally be City's year for a major breakthrough in Europe. Fernandinho, Oleksandr Zinchenko, Aymeric Laporte, Sergio Agüero and Raheem Sterling were all introduced off the bench in the second half to give Dias, Joao Cancelo, Gundogan, Rodrigo and Bernardo Silva an early night ahead of Saturday's trip to Everton in the FA Cup quarter-finals. By then, City will know their next Champions League opponents. On this form, they are the side to avoid in Friday's quarter-final draw. —AFP

Ibrahimovic back in Sweden squad

STOCKHOLM: Zlatan Ibrahimovic will return to Sweden's squad after an almost five-year hiatus to play in World Cup qualifiers at the end of March, head coach Janne Andersson said on Tuesday. The player, known for his not-so-humble ways, also announced his own return, posting a picture of himself on Instagram in the Swedish team kit.

The highly-anticipated announcement comes just three months before the European Championship in June-July. The 39-year-old AC Milan striker retired from the Swedish squad after the 2016 European Championship, with 116 caps and 62 international goals.

Media had speculated about Ibrahimovic's possible return to the national team, but the Swedish Football Association had refused to comment until Tuesday, when he was announced among the players selected for the qualifiers against Georgia on March 25 and Kosovo on March

28, as well as a friendly against Estonia on March 31.

'Not done yet'

The Swede has made headlines over the years with cheeky hints that he could be returning to the Swedish team. But things took a more serious turn last autumn when, after being awarded Sweden's Footballer of the Year award for an astonishing 12th time in late November, he said that he missed playing for the team.

"The one who does not miss it, he has already finished his career. And I have not finished my career," he told Swedish daily Aftonbladet. Ibrahimovic and coach Janne Andersson then met for talks. Andersson told reporters Tuesday: "I think we'll be a better team with Zlatan, that's why he was selected."

And in a statement he developed that thought, saying the towering 1.95m (6foot 4in) forward had been selected "first and foremost because he's a very good football player, the best we've ever had in Sweden."

"So it's of course great that he wants to come back. In addition to what he



NICE: In this file photo taken on June 22, 2016 Sweden's forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic grimaces during the Euro 2016 group E football match between Sweden and Belgium at the Allianz Riviera stadium in Nice. —AFP

can contribute on the pitch, he has loads of experience and can also share that with other players on the team," he added. Without "Ibra", Sweden reached the 2018 World Cup quarter-finals and qualified directly for Euro 2020, which

has been postponed to June-July 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first round Sweden will face Spain, Poland and Slovakia in Group E. Andersson said he would announce the squad for the Euro in May. —AFP

CAF: Sundowns, Wydad, Esperance reach last eight

JOHANNESBURG: Mamelodi Sundowns, Wydad Casablanca and Esperance on Tuesday became the first qualifiers for the CAF Champions League quarter-finals, and title-holders Al-Ahly are set to join them. Sundowns of South Africa are the only club

boasting a perfect record after matchday 4 as Lebohlang Maboe scored on 28 minutes in a 1-0 Group B win over TP Mazembe from the Democratic Republic of Congo in Pretoria.

Wydad of Morocco dropped points for the first time in Group C after a 0-0 draw at second-place Horoya of Guinea in Conakry, but the stalemate did not prevent them securing a sixth consecutive last-eight place. Esperance of Tunisia completed a Group D double over 2020 runners-up Zamalek of Egypt by winning 1-0 in Cairo via a 73rd-minute goal from Libyan Hamdou Elhouni.

Record nine-time champions Ahly put poor recent Group A form behind them to triumph 3-0 over V Club of DR Congo in Kinshasa through goals from Mohamed Sherif, Mohamed 'Afsha' Magdy and Taher Mohamed.

Not even the most partisan Sundowns supporters could have imagined the team holding a nine-point lead with two rounds remaining, especially as five-time champions Mazembe were in the same section. But the Congolese are bottom the standings and will be eliminated if they lose away to Chabab Belouizdad of Algeria next month. —AFP

Stage set for Ibra's return in Milan's decider with United

PARIS: Zlatan Ibrahimovic looks set to face Manchester United in AC Milan's Europa League showdown with the English giants tonight as the resurgent 'Rossoneri' aim to announce their return to the big stage. The Swede should be in good spirits after announcing his return to international football after nearly five years away on Tuesday, and appears to be winning the race to face his old club in the second leg of their last-16 clash at the San Siro.

The tie is locked at 1-1, with Milan having the slight advantage thanks to Simon Kjaer's stoppage-time away goal in the first leg at Old Trafford last week.

Italian media reported on Tuesday that the veteran forward trained with the rest of the Milan squad and should be available for the first time since he left his side's 2-1 win at Roma with a thigh injury at the end of last month. Since then he has made headlines on a different kind of stage, co-hosting the Sanremo music festival which is possibly Italy's biggest pop cultural event.

With 14 goals in 14 league games, the 39-year-old was a major reason behind Milan occupying top spot in Serie A for large periods of this season and his return to Old Trafford for the first leg had been highly anticipated before he picked up his injury. Coach Stefano Pioli knows that he doesn't need Ibrahimovic to get past United after a superb display in Manchester last week, and his side could well start the game with their talisman on the bench.

However to ensure passage to the last eight, Milan will need to turn around a dismal recent record at the San Siro which has contributed to their slipping nine points behind Serie A leaders Inter Milan having been top themselves little more than a month ago.

Milan wobbling

Sunday's 1-0 defeat by Napoli was their fourth straight match without a win at the San Siro, preceded by draws against Udinese and Red Star Belgrade and a 3-0 derby thumping at the hands of Inter. Five defeats in 13 league matches in 2021 also has second-placed Milan looking over their shoulders at a series of rivals for a place in the Champions League, a competition in which the seven-time European champions have not played since 2014.

The next few days will also be crucial for United's chances of silverware this season. They follow their trip to Italy with an FA Cup quarter-final at Leicester City on Sunday, putting their season at a crossroads with Manchester City 14 points clear of their local rivals at the top of the Premier League.

United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has Marcus Rashford back after the England forward played the full 90 minutes of their 1-0 win over West Ham at the weekend. Of the remaining ties, only Rangers' with Slavia Prague looks to be in the balance as they will kick off at Ibrox all square at 1-1 following their draw in the Czech Republic last week.

Steven Gerrard's side have already been crowned Scottish champions, although they will also have one eye on the Old Firm derby with Celtic at the weekend. Four-time European champions Ajax and Roma are both virtually assured of passage into the next round as they are 3-0 ahead in their ties with Young Boys and Shakhtar Donetsk. —AFP

Hakas, foghorns as Kiwis win America's Cup

Thousands celebrate yachting's most prestigious trophy win

AUCKLAND: Team New Zealand sailed out from Auckland harbor yesterday to the sounds of a Maori haka and returned to an almighty roar as they once again clinched the America's Cup. Even the sound of foghorns blaring from hundreds of boats could not drown out the cheers from tens of thousands of Kiwi fans celebrating their team's victory in yachting's most prestigious trophy.

Crowds thronged Auckland's waterfront Viaduct precinct, with few signs New Zealand's largest city emerged from COVID-19 lockdown just 11 days ago. Notices urged spectators to scan into contact tracing apps, but that reminder of the virus did little to quell the party atmosphere among the maskless crowds.

With no social distancing needed in a country that has largely contained the virus, open-air bars and fan zones were packed shoulder-to-shoulder as crowds intently watched the race on big screens. A lucky few queued up early to secure spots on charter boats heading out as part of a huge spectator fleet to view racing between team New Zealand and Italy's Luna Rossa live on the water.

"The atmosphere is brilliant, electric," Irishman Mark Moynahan said, celebrating an America's Cup-St Patrick's Day double. "Being out of lockdown is fantastic. It feels like people are breathing again, enjoying themselves, which is what it's all about."

'We pulled it off'
The pandemic did have an impact

on the regatta, forcing the cancellation of some warm-up events and preventing overseas sailing enthusiasts from attending. There were only a few super-yachts dotted around Auckland's docks, rather than the 150-plus organizers had hoped to attract with their big-spending, mega-wealthy owners.

"It's a little disappointing. If borders were open there would have been so many more people here," long-time sailing fan Garry Allport said. "We've got a great atmosphere here today but overall, because of the situation, the event hasn't got the international visitors it deserves."

A knot of Italian fans gathered at Luna Rossa's base to give the day's events a much-needed international flavor. The Italian crew were up against it, with Team New Zealand needing just one more race victory to reach the seven wins needed to claim the best-of-13 trophy. They remained defiantly upbeat heading out to the racecourse, blowing kisses and playing the national anthem as their supporters yelled "Forza!"

Anna Smyk-Grosso originally hailed from Poland but said she was flying the flag for Europe and her Italian husband. "Luna Rossa haven't had much support and the Kiwis have had a lot," she said, with Italy's tricolore flag draped around her shoulders. "For me, they've also been very unlucky at times."

But the day was essentially a victory lap for Team New Zealand, who cruised around the shore to give fans a better view of their hi-tech yacht



AUCKLAND: Italy's Luna Rossa (right) competes against Team New Zealand during day six of the America's Cup in Auckland yesterday. — AFP

instead of making their way straight to the racecourse. "It's amazing, just amazing," Lois Madgwick said. "I came along today because I'm 75 and probably won't be here for the next

America's Cup. "I'm so glad I did and so proud to be a Kiwi today."

Madgwick said New Zealanders had overcome numerous challenges just to stage the regatta, let alone win it.

"We're this little country at the bottom of the world and it's been really, really hard for everyone," she said. "But we did it, we kept everything together and we pulled it off." — AFP



Kuwait Times
Established 1961

The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf

REGISTER TODAY
for the **COVID-19 vaccine**

Free for all residents of Kuwait. To register visit:

www.moh.gov.kw

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

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