



3 Political crisis brews over Dahoum's membership



8 Turkish lira, stocks sink after top banker fired



13 Time stands still at Cairo watch shop



16 Olympics overseas fan ban hits Japan tourism



REGISTER TODAY
for the COVID-19 vaccine [See Page 16](#)

Restaurants can deliver till 10 pm; curfew eased slightly

Walking allowed till 8 pm • Vaccinated arrivals exempt from hotel quarantine

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The Cabinet yesterday slightly eased the nightly curfew to 11 hours and exempted vaccinated travelers from institutional quarantine. In a statement following its weekly meeting, the Cabinet said the nightly curfew imposed two weeks ago to curb a spike in coronavirus cases will now extend from 6 pm to 5 am the next day, instead of 12 hours. The new decision is effective from today.

The Cabinet also allowed deliveries by restaurants and cafes to continue until 10 pm and allowed walking from 6 pm to 8 pm daily, provided people

remain in their areas and do not use vehicles. The Cabinet also replaced hotel quarantine with home quarantine for travelers who have been vaccinated.

Travelers who have taken two doses of the vaccine at least two weeks ago or those who took just one dose five weeks ago will be asked to spend only seven days in home quarantine. The same applies to people who have recovered from COVID-19 and have taken one vaccine dose two weeks ago. All the three categories must undergo a coronavirus test on the seventh day of the quarantine and produce a negative result.

Students studying abroad only need to produce a certificate from their universities to be exempted

from hotel quarantine, the Cabinet said. Expats who have valid residencies in Kuwait continue to be barred from entering the country since a ban was placed on Feb 7. Only foreign diplomats and medical staff and their families are exempted from the ban. MP Khaled Al-Otaibi called on the government to abolish hotel quarantine altogether and accused authorities of introducing it to benefit merchants at the cost of people.

Meanwhile, the government yesterday sent a draft law proposing financial support for small and big businessmen affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The bill stipulates that local banks will pro-

vide loans at reduced interest to businessmen harmed by the pandemic, provided the loans are used to support the companies' operations like payment of salaries.

The loans must be repaid in easy installments over seven years for small businesses and four years for big merchants, while the government will bear part of the interest on the loans. The Assembly's legal and legislative committee meanwhile approved a draft law to delay the repayment of loans for six months, while the financial and economic affairs panel approved a series of bills calling to aid small and medium businesses harmed by the coronavirus.

Jordan makes US defense pact public

AMMAN: Jordan on Sunday made public a defense agreement with the United States that allows free entry of US forces, aircraft and vehicles onto the kingdom's territory. Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi told parliament that the defense accord was "the fruit of long negotiations". The agreement was signed in January and the government approved it last month, but in an exceptional move it bypassed parliament. The royal decree was published in the official journal this week.

Continued on Page 2

Saudi offers ceasefire to Houthi rebels

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia yesterday offered Yemen's Houthi rebels a "comprehensive" UN-supervised ceasefire, as part of a series of new initiatives aimed at ending a catastrophic six-year conflict. But the Iran-backed Houthis, who have recently stepped up attacks on the kingdom, including its oil facilities, dismissed Riyadh's initiatives as "nothing new".

The insurgents have also been pushing to seize the Saudi-backed

Yemeni government's last northern stronghold, in an escalation of the country's six-year conflict. The initiative includes "a comprehensive ceasefire across the country under the supervision of the United Nations", a Saudi government statement said.

Riyadh also proposed reopening the airport in Sanaa, the rebel-held capital, and restarting political negotiations between the Yemeni government and the Houthis, the statement added. "We want the guns to fall completely silent," Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan told reporters in Riyadh. "The initiative will take effect as soon as the Houthis agree to it."

The Houthis dismissed the Riyadh initiatives as "nothing new"

Continued on Page 2



RIYADH: Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan speaks during a press conference yesterday. — AFP

News in brief

Israel seizes travel pass

RAMALLAH: The Palestinian government yesterday said Israel had stripped its foreign minister Riyad Al-Maliki of a travel permit after he met with the International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda on Thursday. On his return to the occupied West Bank on Sunday, Maliki had his "VIP card" withdrawn, Palestinian officials said. The Hague-based ICC tribunal this month opened a formal investigation into alleged war crimes in the Palestinian territories. —AFP

Mauritania restores Qatar ties

NOUAKCHOTT: Mauritania re-established diplomatic relations with Qatar, its foreign ministry announced Sunday, almost four years after breaking them off in the midst of a Saudi-led freeze on ties with Doha. "After intensive contacts over the past week and with much appreciated support from the Sultanate of Oman, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and Qatar decided to resume diplomatic ties," the ministry said in a statement. — AFP

Trump to launch own platform

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump plans to return to social media soon, using "his own platform" after being banned from Twitter and other outlets, a former advisor said Sunday. "I do think that we're going to see president Trump returning to social media in probably about two or three months," Jason Miller told Fox News. "This new platform is going to be big, and everyone wants him. He's going to bring millions and millions - tens of millions of people to this new platform," Miller said. — AFP

Tunisia reaches for stars with satellite launch

TUNIS: Tunisia celebrated the launch yesterday of its first domestically made satellite, hoping it would inspire young engineers to reach for the stars at home rather than join those emigrating overseas. Challenge-1, built by a team from telecommunications giant TelNet, blasted off along with 37 other satellites aboard a Russian Soyuz rocket from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan yesterday.

That made Tunisia the sixth African

country to manufacture its own satellite and see it reach space. "It's a source of pride to have taken part in this project," said Khalil Chiha, 27, who trained at Tunisia's National Engineering School in the central city of Sfax. "Working in the aeronautical or aerospace sector is a dream."

Video published by Russian space agency Roscosmos showed the Soyuz blaster launching against grey and cloudy skies at 0607 GMT. Later yesterday, Roscosmos said in a statement that the rocket had successfully placed into orbit the 38 satellites from more than a dozen countries, including South Korea, Japan, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Germany, Italy and Brazil.

Continued on Page 2



TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied and Telnet CEO Mohamed Frikha attend the launch of Tunisia's first satellite Challenge-1 yesterday. — AFP

Scores flock to Iceland volcano

FAGRADALSFJALL, Iceland: Thousands of curious onlookers have flocked to an erupting volcano in Iceland to marvel at the hypnotic display of glowing red lava, the bravest of them grilling hot dogs and marshmallows over the smoldering embers. The eruption of a fissure near Mount Fagradalsfjall, which began late Friday, was the first in the same volcanic system in about 900 years.

The volcano is located only about 40 km from the capital Reykjavik and can be reached after a 90-minute hike from the nearest road. The incandescent lava bubbles and spurts from a small cone in the Geldingadalur valley, piling up in the basin and slowly turning a thick black as it cools. Some 300,000 cu m of lava have poured out of the ground so far, according to experts, although the eruption is considered relatively small and controlled. Access to the site was blocked in the first hours after the eruption. Authorities then lifted the roadblocks but discouraged visits, but by Saturday afternoon visitors were allowed - under strict guidelines. — AFP (See Page 5)



GRINDAVIK, Iceland: Hikers look at lava flowing from the erupting Fagradalsfjall volcano on Sunday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Amir, Chinese President exchange greetings on diplomatic ties' 50th anniversary

Ties with Beijing moving forward constantly: Ambassador

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable yesterday to Chinese President Xi Jinping, on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Kuwait and China. His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah also sent similar cables.

Steady steps

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Ambassador to China Samih Jawhar Hayat confirmed that the Kuwaiti-Chinese relations are continuously taking steady steps forward and as a result strengthening strategic partnership in many fields and levels. In a statement to the press on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between both countries which falls today, Hayat said that these bilateral ties are characterized by



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah



Chinese President Xi Jinping

responsibility and historical, as well as rooted friendship at all levels. The 50th anniversary is a new stage in the development of bilateral ties, as it officially began on March 22, 1971, but the ties

between both nations are much older than this date, he added.

Over five decades have passed since the establishment of these relations, in which the traditional friendship between

the leaderships of the two countries has been established, and senior officials have exchanged many official visits, which culminated in many vital results and achievements in the areas of bilateral cooperation, he pointed out. In the past four years, Kuwaiti-Chinese bilateral ties have developed in various fields, as Kuwait has in China the largest diplomatic presence in the world, represented by four diplomatic missions that include the embassy in the capital Beijing and three general consulates in the areas of Quanzhou, Shanghai and Hong Kong, he mentioned.

There is a vital Kuwaiti representation in China, including the Kuwaiti Military Office, the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation Representative Office in Beijing, the Kuwaiti Investment Office in Shanghai, and KUNA office in Beijing, he pointed out. The existing strategic ties between both countries witnessed great cooperation in various fields, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, he said, under-

lining that there are other potentials for coordination between both sides to create opportunities in different fields. Hayat appreciated the efforts of the Chinese leaders and officials aimed at promoting those ties and making the bilateral dialogue between both sides smoother.

Strategic partnership

In the meantime, Kuwaiti Consul General in Shanghai Mishal Al-Shamali stressed his country's keenness in developing bilateral ties with China in various fields to ensure real strategic partnership. Shamali added that there is a desire between the two friendly countries and at all levels to move forward in promoting various areas of cooperation. Kuwait is one of the first countries to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with China on the 'Belt and Road Initiative' launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, as this "creative" initiative opens new fields of cooperation with Kuwait, he added. — KUNA

UN office in Kuwait marks World Water Day

KUWAIT: The United Nations office in Kuwait marked yesterday the World Water Day to raise awareness of the global water crisis. The celebration also supports the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number six, which calls for water and sanitation for all by 2030, and also to enhance food security and nutrition in the world. The theme of World Water Day 2021 is valuing water. The commemoration is an occasion to value water and raise awareness of the water crisis that is affecting around 2.2 billion people living without access to

safe water. Dr Tarek El-Sheikh, Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Resident Coordinator, said in a press release, "One of the seven pillars of Kuwait Vision 2035 revolves around achieving a Sustainable Living Environment."

"Kuwait is one of the world's most water-stressed countries, with the lowest per capita renewable internal freshwater availability of any country. The country is highly water-stressed with internal renewable less than 70 mm/y, and high dependency on trans-boundary aquifers. Due to the large and continuous increases in population size, urbanization rates, income levels and economic activities, consumption of potable water in Kuwait has witnessed record increases since the start of production of water desalination plant," he said.

"Rising per capita income together with government-fixed low prices have caused a steep rise in average per capita water consumption. Alternative

measures should be seriously considered to reform the water saving system and the new smart metering system to ensure balanced water and rational use, and to develop innovative awareness plans that have a greater impact on reducing the current consumption pattern and saving water," said Sheikh. Meanwhile, Jassim Mohammed Al-Nouri, the under-secretary of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Electricity, Water and Renewable Energy, also mentioned that Kuwait "Joins the world in celebrating World Water Day, where water is the main pillar of life and all related aspects of movement, work and energy."

"Wherever there is water, the more it is available, cities have been established, land has been repaired, crafts, industries and trade are active," he indicated. He added, "This year's World Water Day theme is 'Valuing Water', which is part of the 2010 United Nations Recommendations and is the sixth United Nations Sustainable Development Goal, providing

sustainable water management for all by 2030, which provides safe drinking water to disadvantaged communities."

"The way of valuing water determines how water is managed and shared, is much more than its financial worth. Water is of enormous and complex value to our families, culture, health, education, our economy and the safety of our environment, and if we ignore any of these values, we may mismanage this limited and irreplaceable resource. This theme reminds us of the continuous efforts of the State of Kuwait and belief on its noble mission in maintaining peace and security and spreading the principles of justice and equality by ensuring a decent living and the welfare of the peoples of the world. The ministry is developing its future plan to meet the needs of the state, with the ministry's water production reaching nearly 1 billion gallons per day by 2035," Nouri said. — KUNA

Jordan makes US defense...

Continued from Page 1

The terms of the agreement, published on Jordanian news site Ammon, stipulate that "US forces may possess weapons and circulate with them on Jordanian territory while exercising their duties". It also states that US forces may transport and stock equipment and that personnel, their aircraft and ships are authorized to "freely enter and exit Jordanian territory".

Islamist lawmaker Saleh Al-Armuti decried the lack of parliamentary oversight and called on the govern-

ment to cancel the accord, claiming it "violates the constitution and affects Jordan's sovereignty". But Safadi pushed back, saying the agreement "in no way affects Jordan's sovereignty, and everything it contains is subject to Jordanian law and is compatible with international law".

"The agreement does not authorize American forces to carry out combat actions within the kingdom," he told lawmakers. "The agreement aims to frame defense cooperation and reinforce US support for defense programs and the kingdom's security and stability through military training and equipment," Safadi said.

The US State Department considers the Hashemite kingdom "a vital US partner on a wide range of regional security issues". Jordan is a key recipient of American financial aid - including \$425 million in military assistance annually, according to Safadi. — AFP



BAABDA, Lebanon: Lebanese President Michel Aoun meets prime minister-designate Saad Hariri at the presidential palace yesterday. — AFP

Tunisia reaches for stars with...

Continued from Page 1

Tunisia had been struck by an economic crisis and skyrocketing unemployment even before the coronavirus pandemic, and recent months have seen growing anti-government protests. Several thousand engineers leave each year to seek work abroad. Many of the Challenge-1 engineers were educated in Tunisia and are aged between 25 and 30 years old. Officials hope the success will show young people there is a future for them in the North African nation.

The Challenge-1 is set to collect data including temperature, pollution and humidity readings over areas without internet coverage, as part of efforts to gather such information from areas beyond terrestrial phone networks. "We are very emotional, after three years of intense work," said engineer Haifa Triki, 28, who followed the flight live from Tunis.

Saudi offers ceasefire to...

Continued from Page 1

and reiterated their demand that a Saudi-led air and sea blockade on Yemen be lifted first. "Saudi Arabia must declare an end to the aggression and lift the blockade completely," said Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdulsalam, according to the rebel's Al-Masirah television.

In April last year, the Saudi-led military coalition battling the rebels began a temporary ceasefire in war-ravaged Yemen to prevent the spread of coronavirus, but the Houthis dismissed the initiative as political maneuvering. The latest proposal follows a renewed push by the US administration of President Joe Biden to revive stalled peace talks.

The United States, which has pulled support for the kingdom's offensive operations in Yemen, has condemned a spike in Houthi drone and missile attacks on the kingdom. A drone strike sparked a fire at a Riyadh oil refinery on Friday, in the second major assault this

"We made a lot of sacrifices, but it was worth it".

President Kais Saied, joined engineers and journalists to watch the launch live on screen at TelNet headquarters in Tunis. "Our real wealth is the youth who can face obstacles," Saied said, stressing that Tunisia lacks not resources but "national will" amid its dire social and political crises. "We are proud of our youth," he said.

The Challenge-1 team was supported by expatriate Tunisian engineers, one of whom took part in NASA's Mars Perseverance mission. "It really is a dream come true," TelNet project manager Anis Youssef told AFP, ahead of the launch. While the aerospace industry is in full development in the Arab world, and 11 countries have launched satellites across Africa, making a homemade satellite is a harder task.

"The club of those who manufacture them is quite closed," said Tunisian aerospace engineer Ahmed El-Fadhel, based in Belgium and president of Tunisian Space Association, a collective of scientists, experts and students interested in space technology. TelNet intends to launch within three years, in partnership with other African countries, a network of over 20 satellites. — AFP

month on Saudi energy installations claimed by the Iran-backed insurgents.

The Houthis are also battling towards Marib, the government's last northern stronghold, piling pressure on Saudi-backed forces. At the weekend, the Saudi-led coalition said it had launched air strikes in support of pro-government forces battling a quickening Houthi rebel advance on Marib, the capital of an oil-rich region.

The loss of the city would be a huge blow for the Yemeni government, but would also threaten catastrophe for civilians, including at least one million displaced people sheltering in the region, many in desolate camps in the surrounding desert. Riyadh led a military coalition into Yemen in 2015 to prop up the government, but it has struggled to oust the highly motivated rebels.

The coalition enforced a naval and air blockade to prevent the smuggling of weapons to the rebels from Iran - allegations Tehran denies. The UN, which says Yemen is facing the world's worst humanitarian crisis, warned last month of disastrous consequences for civilians if the fight for Marib continues. Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have already been killed and millions displaced in Yemen's long war, which has crippled the economy and healthcare system. — AFP

Hariri lashes out as wrangling delays govt formation

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri and President Michel Aoun failed again yesterday to agree on a new government line-up after seven months of deadlock, as the country sinks deeper into economic crisis. "I asked the president to listen to the woes of the people and to give this country its final chance of having a technocratic government capable of reform," Hariri said from the presidential palace after his proposed cabinet line-up was rejected.

Hariri's remarks crushed hopes for a government breakthrough, as political leaders continued to wrangle over cabinet shares despite widespread anger at an economic crisis that has reignited street protests against a decades-old ruling class. Hariri said Aoun and the party he founded are pushing for a third of all cabinet seats, which would give them veto power over government decisions.

Aoun "sent me last night a line-up that grants his team a third of cabinet seats", Hariri said. "This is not acceptable." The three-time premier, who was selected in October to form a new government, made public an alternative line-up he said he had submitted to the president more than three months ago.

Hariri's proposal was comprised mainly of experts and included fresh names, such as Firas Abiad, the head of Lebanon's main coronavirus hospital, Nasser Yasin of the American University of Beirut and prominent political scientist Fadia Kiwan, according to a list published by his office. He said the line-up was turned down because it didn't give the president's set privileged power.

'No hope'

The outgoing government of premier Hassan Diab resigned in the wake of an Aug 4 explosion at Beirut's port that killed more than 200 people and ravaged swaths of the capital. Lebanon's leaders have since traded blame for the government delay, with Aoun calling on Hariri to step down if he is incapable of forming a government suitable to all parties.

Hasan Nasrallah, the leader of the powerful Shiite

Hezbollah movement and a close ally of Aoun, has also criticized the hold up. In a speech on Thursday, Nasrallah called on Hariri to abandon his push for a 18-member cabinet comprised entirely of technocrats. "A government of technocrats that is not backed by political groups won't save the country," Nasrallah said, calling for established parties to also be represented. In a report published ahead of yesterday's meeting, the pro-Hezbollah Al Akhbar daily said there is "no hope for a breakthrough". "Nothing has changed."

Lebanon is in the grips of its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war. More than half the population lives below the poverty line and the national currency has lost more than 85 percent of its value against the dollar on the black market. The Lebanese pound, pegged at 1,507 to the greenback since 1997, sold for 15,000 to the dollar on the black market last week at an all-time low. The rapid currency plunge reignited street protests that started in 2019 but were temporarily snuffed out last year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

'Going in circles'

Demonstrators criticized officials for wrangling over cabinet posts instead of coming together to form a government capable of spearheading reforms long demanded by donors and the international community. "There are no signs indicating we are heading towards a solution," Lebanon's French-language daily L'Orient-Le Jour reported yesterday. "Talks are going in circles."

The international community has also denounced the performance of Lebanese officials. "Lebanese authorities should act urgently to halt the deepening crisis and ensure good governance," United Nations humanitarian coordinator Najat Rochdi told the Security Council last week. French President Emmanuel Macron, who is leading the international charge against Lebanon's under-fire politicians, said last week he would push for a new approach to "prevent the collapse of the country".

The European Union and the United States should also ramp up pressure on Lebanese politicians, said a French diplomatic source, who did not rule out the possibility of sanctions. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian yesterday pressed his European counterparts to take action to stave off Lebanon's collapse. "I want us to be able to discuss together the levers that would allow us to put pressure on the Lebanese authorities," he said in Brussels. — AFP

Local

Kuwait curfew: What you need to know

KUWAIT: Kuwait imposed a one-month partial curfew from 5:00 pm to 5:00 am starting from March 7, 2021 to help curb the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases registered in recent weeks. The curfew hours have been changed to be from 6:00 pm to 5:00 am starting today. During the curfew hours, pharmacies, medical stores, co-operative societies and supermarkets are allowed to continue operation only through delivery services. The government has allowed co-ops and supermarkets to serve shoppers from the start of the curfew to 10:00 pm every day, and has also allowed restaurants and cafes to deliver food from 6:00 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, and the government later allowed people to practice walking and jogging from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. 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. Meanwhile, taxis are allowed to carry only two passengers.

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.

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

Kuwait reports 1,330 new COVID-19 cases, 7 deaths

KUWAIT: Kuwait registered 1,330 new cases of COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, bringing the total number to 220,455, while seven deaths were recorded, putting the total at 1,233, the Ministry of Health announced yesterday. Ministry spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said that the number of people receiving treatment in intensive care reached 246 cases as of yesterday, up from 232 the day before, while there were 14,244 cases receiving necessary treatment, down from 14,360 a day earlier. Dr Sanad added that the number of

swabs that were performed in the same period reached 9,079, raising the total to 1,976,289 tests.

He renewed the call to the public to continue adopting all preventive measures, to avoid contact with others, and to ensure the implementation of the social distancing, and to visit the official accounts of the Ministry of Health and official authorities. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health announced earlier that 1,439 cases had recovered in the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of recoveries to 204,978. —KUNA



Political crisis over Dahoum membership

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A serious political-constitutional crisis is looming over the National Assembly and is likely to drag in the government. The new problem was triggered by the removal of leading opposition MP Bader Al-Dahoum's name from the list of lawmakers on the assembly website. The constitutional court last week revoked the membership of Dahoum because he was convicted in a political case in 2014.

Opposition MP Thamer Al-Suwait said that he was informed by the assembly secretary that the removal was done on orders from the speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. Suwait and a large number of opposition lawmakers strongly criticized the

move, saying the speaker has no right to do so because the assembly must vote on the issue.

The issue is very complicated since Dahoum was allowed to run in the election by the court of cassation and his membership revoked by the constitutional court, meaning two contradictory court rulings. Opposition MPs say the conflicting rulings must be resolved by the assembly in a floor voting and not by the speaker alone.

Dahoum said on Twitter that he is still a member of parliament and his issue must be decided in a vote in the assembly. Over 30 lawmakers have vowed to vote in favor of Dahoum remaining a member when the assembly resumes regular sessions, highly expected next week. Ghanem has not commented on the issue so far.



KUWAIT: People race to catch the bus at a bus station in Kuwait City. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf



Local

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

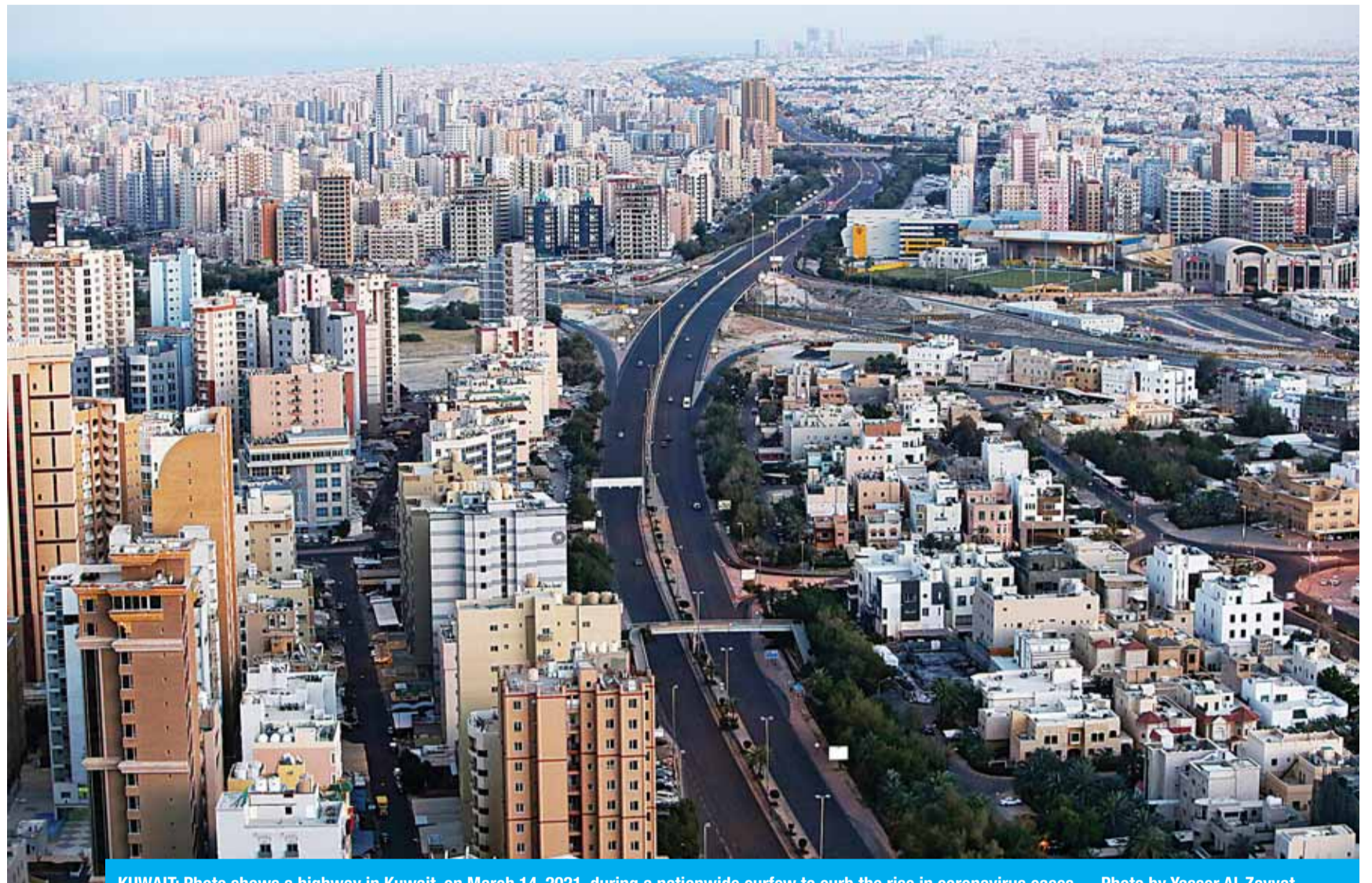
Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Photo shows a highway in Kuwait, on March 14, 2021, during a nationwide curfew to curb the rise in coronavirus cases. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

News in brief

Kuwaiti, Saudi FM's discuss ties

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud discussed yesterday all possible means to enhance ties between the State of Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In a phone conversation, the two officials also touched on recent regional and international developments. —KUNA

Yemeni crisis

RIYADH: The Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf affirmed yesterday the GCC position to end the Yemeni crisis through political solutions represented by the Gulf Initiative, the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference and UNSC resolution 2216. This came during a meeting with the Saudi Arabia Ambassador to Yemen Mohammad Al-Jaber. The two officials discussed the latest developments in Yemen and the efforts of the GCC to support Yemeni legitimacy in all political, economic, developmental, relief and humanitarian fields. —KUNA

Shooter wins

ABU DHABI: Kuwait's Bader Al-Munaifi on Sunday finished second place in the trap competition at the World Shooting Para Sport World Cup in the United Arab Emirates' oasis city of Al-Ain, as the competition reaches its halfway stage. The Kuwaiti para shooter, with a total of 22, was held off by gold medalist Roman Ponomarenko of Russia, while the bronze medal went to Ponomarenko's compatriot Aleksei Pasternak. Munaifi's impressive showing was a testament to how far the sport of Paralympic shooting has come in Kuwait, Duaij Al-Otaibi, the chief of the country's shooting federation, said via phone. —KUNA

Teachers' vaccination to start next week: Report

KUWAIT: Amid expectations that the health ministry will start vaccinating employees in the education and university sectors, the education ministry renewed its call for teachers and school employees to register on the vaccination platform.

This coincided with a health ministry announcement that the percentage of those from the teaching and administrative departments who registered on the platform reached 50 percent of the total number of employees the education ministry had given, Al-Jarida Arabic daily reported yesterday.

Educational sources said the health ministry told the education ministry that employees at government and private schools have priority in receiving the vaccine, as they were included with frontline workers who are currently being inoculated. Meanwhile, health sources said the health ministry will start vaccinating those in the education sector next week, including teachers, administrators, technicians, laborers and others, in addition to employees of universities and the higher education ministry, estimating their number to be over 100,000.

8,000 expats left in 3 months

KUWAIT: The Public Authority of Manpower said 8,000 expats left the country during the past three months, while 17,000 residency permits were cancelled because their holders are out of the country. Meanwhile, 199 expats transferred their residency from the government to the private sector since the start of January till March 20, 2021, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday quoting authority statistics. In the meantime, 1,048 expats on dependent visas joined the private sector, the figures showed. Statistics showed the authority approved 18,858 university degrees according to the new automated system and more than 181,000 work permits for employees residing in the country. The authority also issued 735 no-objection work permits, besides 459 work visas.

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

ZAIN

Sponsored by

HUAWEI



ACK holds new staff induction program

KUWAIT: The Human Resources Department at the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) organized its annual new staff induction program to welcome new joiners onboard. The induction program hosted a combination of overseas staff members who attended virtually through the "MS Teams" platform. As well, local new staff members were welcomed personally at ACK premises: whereas the health and safety precautions were applied to the highest standards to ensure the safety and wellbeing of local attendees.

The meeting started with a welcome note by the President of the College, Prof Isam Zabalawi, who praised the efforts made by all departments to face the current circumstances, and the efforts made by all Academic Departments in developing the college's e-learning platform.

Prof Zabalawi added, "I would like to take this

opportunity to remind you that the only constant in our lives is change. Things around us are changing at a very fast pace. In recent times, we are experiencing a vivid example of this, which is that we have moved from face-to-face learning to e-learning within a very short period of time. Our main role is to develop an appropriate and beneficial environment to enable you to adhere to the vision, mission, goals, objectives and core values of the college."

The Vice President for Academic Affairs, Prof Hussein Abdullah, welcomed the attendees and said that organizing this program is a joint effort by the academic administration and the Human Resources Department to qualify the academic cadres and ensure their readiness through the various workshops that will take place during this program.

The induction program unfolded and focused on the fundamentals of e-learning, philosophy of teaching and learning, academic advising, and academic policies and procedures, in addition to the rules and regulations of scientific research. The attendees praised this meeting in terms of organization and the availability of information that provided the employees with a comprehensive overview of the different processes and operations in the various departments at the college.

Antibody test baseline to identify vaccine response

KUWAIT: Virologist, associate professor at the College of Medicine and head of the virus lab unit at the health ministry's Yaqoub Behbehani Center Dr Haya Altawala said the antibody test is considered as a baseline for an individual to find out whether their body responded to the vaccine or not.

She said although antibodies are not the only factor that help in immunity, it is a measurable factor, because other factors are difficult to measure since they are at the research level. Altawala said if a person's result is negative before vaccination, then becomes positive after vaccination, it means that their body responded to the jab. "We then check if we have reached a certain number, which means the person has immunity, bearing in mind that this number varies from one person to another," she said.

Altawala said diagnostic tests instantly determine

whether a person has COVID-19 or not, but the antibody test gives the result after a time period, and this is an indication that the person had COVID-19 recently. She said the coronavirus vaccine is safe and does not cause any dangerous symptoms, and what some people feel is the result of the body's response to vaccination.

She added the vaccine is part of the virus and not the virus itself, and cannot cause COVID-19.

Altawala said the role of antibodies becomes very important under the current circumstances following the emergence of virus variants, because they give an idea about the patient's current condition. She said the vaccination does not permit anyone to abandon precautionary measures. She said test equipment available in Kuwait is highly advanced, adding that antibody tests will be implemented at the health ministry soon.



Dr Haya Altawala



Thousands evacuate as Sydney sees worst floods in decades

Biden pushes back amid criticism over bungled immigration policy Page 6

Page 7



REYKJAVIK, Iceland: Sunday hikers look at the lava flowing from the erupting Fagradalsfjall volcano some 40 km west of the Icelandic capital Reykjavik. —AFP

Thousands flock to Iceland's erupting volcano

Hypnotic display of glowing red lava excites crowding onlookers

FAGRADALSFJALL, Iceland: Thousands of curious onlookers have flocked to an erupting volcano in Iceland to marvel at the hypnotic display of glowing red lava, the bravest of them grilling hot dogs and marshmallows over the smoldering embers.

The eruption of a fissure near Mount Fagradalsfjall, which began late Friday, was the first in the same volcanic system in about 900 years. The volcano is located only about 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the capital Reykjavik and can be reached after a 90-minute hike from the nearest road.

"It's absolutely breathtaking," says Ulvar Kari Johannsson, a 21-year-old engineer who spent his Sunday visiting the scene. "It smells pretty bad. For me what was surprising was the colors of the oranges: much, much deeper than what one would expect," he tells AFP.

The incandescent lava bubbles and spurts from a small cone in the Geldingadalur valley, piling up in the basin and slowly turning a thick black as it cools. Some 300,000 cubic meters (10.5 million cubic feet) of lava have poured out of the ground so far, according to experts, although the eruption is considered relatively small and controlled. "For me it's the heat that really surprised me. When we approached the lava flowing on the ground, the temperature rose by 10-15 degrees and our faces flushed," says Emilie Saint-Mleux, a French exchange student in Iceland who came with two friends. "It reminds you a little of a barbecue in summer," jokes her friend Lucille Fernemont. Access to the site was blocked in the first hours after the eruption. Authorities then lifted the roadblocks but discouraged visits, but by Saturday afternoon visitors were allowed under strict guidelines.

"We are just here to look after the people and see that everything is okay. And just watch that the people are not going too close to the lava and asking them step back," explains Atli Gunnarsson, a 45-year-old police officer, donning a yellow hardhat with a gas mask in hand. Rescue

teams also had to help dozens of freezing and exhausted people find their way back to the road on Sunday in the dark as weather conditions deteriorated. A small recurring beep can be heard around the emergency crews. They're carrying devices that measure gas pollution, especially sulfur dioxide, which can pose a danger to health and even be fatal. Early yesterday, authorities again blocked the site due to high levels of gas pollution.

Rare opportunity

This is the first volcanic eruption on the Reykjanes peninsula in more than 800 years, and it has been more than 900 years since the Krysuvik volcanic system, to which Fagradalsfjall belongs, has erupted.

While eruptions are common in Iceland, with one taking place about every five years on average, they usually occur far from populated zones, in inaccessible areas. Others are too dangerous to allow public access. This time, the curious can inspect the lava up close after a six-kilometre (four-mile) hike from a road near the fishing port of Grindavik, the closest populated town with 3,500 inhabitants, not far from the famed tourist destination, the Blue Lagoon geothermal spa. By Sunday, the throngs of hikers trodding across the volcanic moss had already left a visible trail to the Geldingadalur valley. Others chose to break their piggybanks for a spot in the many helicopters flying over the volcano at the weekend.

While the number of tourists in Iceland has plunged because of the pandemic—tourism usually accounts for more than eight percent of the economy—the island is trying to kick-start the industry. It recently opened its doors to any international travellers who can prove they have either been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or recovered from the illness. It remains to be seen however if Iceland will be able to capitalize on the volcano. According to experts, the eruption could die out quickly, possibly within a few days. —AFP

strongly deny. Prosecutors in Sicily have investigated Doctors without Borders (MSF) and Save the Children over the allegations, and are expected to demand a trial.

Italy is a prime entry point for Europe-bound migrants, but the sea stretch between Sicily and North Africa is one of the world's deadliest migration routes. Almost 530,000 migrants have landed on Italian shores since the start of 2015, including some 6,000 in the year to date, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Since January, there were also 232 migrants who died or went missing on the sea journey to Italy or Malta, compared to 983 over the course of 2020, the UN agency estimates.

Child migrant dies

Meanwhile, a two-year-old girl from Mali who had to be resuscitated after being rescued from a boat packed with migrants off Spain's Canary Islands last week died on Sunday in hospital, local authorities said. The girl was one of 52 sub-Saharan Africans found onboard a vessel near the island of Gran Canaria on Tuesday who were brought by Spain's maritime rescue service to the port of Arguineguin.

Rescuers handed the unconscious girl, whose name was Nabody, to a team of Red Cross nurses who worked frantically to revive her on the pavement of the port, images broadcast on Spanish TV last week showed. She was then rushed to a hospital in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, the capital of Gran Canaria, where she died on Sunday, said a spokeswoman for the health department of the regional government of the Atlantic archipelago. The girl had been in a critical condition in the hospital's intensive care unit since her rescue, the spokeswoman added without giving further details. —AFP

Italy coastguard blocks German migrant rescue ship

ROME: A German rescue ship that took nearly 400 migrants to Sicily earlier this month has been impounded by the Italian authorities because of safety issues, the charity that operates it said yesterday.

The Sea-Watch 3 vessel, run by the Sea-Watch organization, is being held by the Italian coastguard in the Sicilian port of Augusta, where it docked on March 3 with 363 migrants on March 3 picked up in the Mediterranean. The action was ordered after the ship was found in breach of regulations on navigation safety, on board fire prevention, environmental protection and crew training, a coastguard statement said. "Since last night #SeaWatch3 is under administrative detention in Augusta. They are again accusing us of having rescued too many people," the Sea-Watch charity tweeted. "Should we have let 363 human beings die because of the indifference of the authorities, which continue to provide no alternative to our presence at sea?"

Meanwhile, the Ocean Viking, another charity vessel that picked up 116 migrants in the Mediterranean last week, was stuck in high seas south of Malta, waiting for permission to enter a port. It is not the first time that the Italian coastguard has blocked charity vessels, and groups targeted by the measures have routinely called them unjustified and politically motivated. The aid groups have also faced accusations of colluding with Libyan migrant traffickers to bring people to safety on European shores—charges they

KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN
Ministry of Housing

مملكة البحرين
وزارة الإسكان

The Ministry of Housing would like to announce the tender for the following works:

Tender Title	Tender No.	Tender/Initial Bond	Documentation Fee	Closing Date & Time	
Construction of 256 Social Apartment Units & its associated External Woks & Infrastructure in Village C1/C2 at East Hidd in the Kingdom of Bahrain funded through the Kuwait Grant under the GCC Development Program to the Kingdom of Bahrain. (Package – A)	HP/07/20	BD 50,000 /-	BD 100 /- (non-refundable)	Sunday, 09-May-2021	1:30 PM (Bahrain local time)
Construction of 264 Social Apartment Units & its associated External Woks & Infrastructure in Village B1/B2 at East Hidd in the Kingdom of Bahrain funded through the Kuwait Grant under the GCC Development Program to the Kingdom of Bahrain. (Package – B)	HP/08/20	BD 50,000 /-	BD 100 /- (non-refundable)	Sunday, 09-May-2021	1:30 PM (Bahrain local time)

- Suitably eligible and qualified contractors are invited to participate in the above-mentioned Tender Packages. Eligibility to participate shall be given to Kuwaiti Grade 'A' Contractor registered with the Kuwaiti Central Tender Committee; and Contractors registered in Bahrain should be categorized as Grade A with the Ministry of Housing and/or Grade AA in Building Construction Projects with the Ministry of Works, Kingdom of Bahrain in a Joint Venture with any Kuwaiti Eligible Contractor. Full details of the tenderer's eligibility and qualification criteria are provided in the Invitation for Qualification document.
- This is a public tender whereby the prequalification of tenderers is combined with the submission of their technical and financial proposals. Full details are provided in the Invitation for Qualification Document no. QD EHH-HP-2020 attached to each of the tender Packages. This tender is a two-envelope tender and the prequalification & technical bids will be opened first and the financial bid of technically qualified tenderers only will be opened later.
- This tender is through the Bahrain Tender Board E-Tendering System and eligible contractors who wish to participate for above mentioned Project shall have to purchase and download the Documents online through the Bahrain Tender Board's portal <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.bh>. The tender documents shall be available for purchase and download beginning from Sunday, 21-Mar-2021 up to Sunday, 18-Apr-2021.
- Contractors who are not yet registered in the Bahrain Tender Board's e-tendering system shall be required to register through the below-mentioned link. Details of registration are provided online at the Bahrain Tender Board website. For technical assistance please contact the Tender Board through email address helpdesk@tenderboard.gov.bh or call on Tel No. +973-17566666.

<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.bh/Tenders/registerUser>

- The completed Tender which comprise of the Application for Qualification, Technical and Financial Proposal documents shall be submitted online in accordance with the Instruction to Tender and the E-Tendering Guidelines of the Bahrain Tender Board. The Tenderer should include and enclose in his offer the Tender Bond for the amount specified above. The Tender Bond should be in the form and manner as prescribed in the tender document valid for 180 days from the closing date.
- This Tender is in accordance with the provision of the Kingdom of Bahrain's Law Regulating Government Tenders & Purchases No. (36) of 2002 and Its Implementing Regulations issued by Decree No. (37) of 2002; and is subjected to the Unified Rules for Giving Priority to National Products and Products of a National Origin (Article 8, Prime Ministerial Edict No. 21 of 1987).
- For any query regarding the invitation, please contact: Cost Engineering Section, Ministry of Housing, P.O. Box 5802, Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain, Tel. No.: +973-17533000-ext.519, Email: Chandramohan.Krishnapilla@housing.gov.bh.
- This advertisement shall be a supplementary to the Tender Document.

International

Biden pushes back amid criticism over bungled immigration policy

15,000 migrant children or teenagers already in federal custody

WASHINGTON: "The border is closed": With those words, a top Biden administration official pushed back Sunday against fast-mounting criticism that it has bungled immigration policy, spurring an influx of migrants in the biggest crisis to emerge under the new president. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said the administration's message to would-be border-crossers was simple: "Now is not the time to come. Do not come. The journey is dangerous. We are building safe, orderly and humane ways to address the needs of vulnerable children," he said on ABC's "This Week."

But with an estimated 15,000 migrant children or teenagers already in federal custody—roughly a third of them in facilities meant for adults—and with the United States on pace to see two million undocumented migrants arrive this year, the problem has become impossible to ignore. Biden himself vowed Sunday to visit the border and said he was stepping up the message to migrants to stay home. "We're in the process of doing it now, including making sure that we reestablish what existed before, which was they can stay in place and make their case from their home country," he told reporters.

Bipartisan criticism

Many Republicans, but also a growing number of Democrats, have criticized the administration's border policies. Mayorkas, appearing on three television networks, insisted that the administration was doing everything it could to address the influx, but said the task was complicated by policies inherited from Donald Trump's administration and by the COVID-19 pandemic. "We have a plan. We are executing on our plan and we will succeed," the Havana-born Mayorkas said on ABC. "But one thing is also clear, that it takes time."

Mayorkas repeatedly placed blame on Biden's predecessor Trump, who imposed an array of anti-immigration policies. "The entire system... was dismantled in its entirety by the prior administration" and had to be rebuilt, Mayorkas said. He said three new facilities had been opened to handle border arrivals just last week.

'Irresponsible'

But Republicans flatly rejected that analysis, with Michael McCaul, a Texas lawmaker, calling Mayorkas's comments "very irresponsible." "They've created the crisis. He says he has a plan. I haven't seen a plan," he said, also on ABC. Trump issued a statement claiming his border policies had been a success, and attacking Biden. "All they had to do was keep this smooth-running system on autopilot," Trump said. "Instead, in the span of a just few weeks, the Biden Administration has turned a national triumph into a national disaster."

A bipartisan group of US lawmakers visited immigration facilities in the El Paso, Texas area last week, and several emerged with sharp criticism. Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat, said he saw hundreds of children packed into a "big, open room," and "fought back tears" as he listened to a 13-year-old girl who was distraught after being separated from her grandmother. Mayorkas, who traveled with the group to El Paso, said that under the previous administration, such a girl would have been "turned away and turned into the desert of Mexico or sent back to the very country from which she fled, by reason of fear or prosecution."

Biden said early on that he wanted to roll back some of the harsher policies imposed by Trump, but that first he needed to impose "guardrails" to prevent



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden walk across the South Lawn upon return from Camp David, Maryland, to the White House in Washington, DC.—AFP

a huge influx of migrants. But in a departure from the previous administration, he began allowing unaccompanied children into the country. More than 10,000 unaccompanied children are now in the care of the Department of Health and Human Services. The Customs and Border Protection agency is car-

ving for 5,000 others. The influx had begun to grow even before Biden came to office in January, propelled partly by deteriorating conditions in parts of Central America. And in January, Mexico stopped taking back some families being expelled by the United States.—AFP

Espionage trial starts for second Canadian detained in China

BEIJING: The trial for Michael Kovrig, the Canadian detained more than two years ago in China on espionage charges, started yesterday, with relations between Ottawa and Beijing in freefall. The hearing comes days after the closed-door trial of another Canadian man, with both detained in apparent retaliation for Canada's arrest on a US extradition warrant of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou. Yesterday police cordoned off an area outside the Beijing court as Canadian diplomats were denied entry and turned away.

Kovrig, a former diplomat, was detained in 2018 and formally charged last June with spying at the same time as his compatriot, businessman Michael Spavor. Jim Nickel, the charge d'affaires of the Canadian embassy in Beijing, told reporters that the hearing had started and that access for diplomats "has been denied." "We're very troubled by the lack of access and lack of transparency in the legal process," he said. A court official told reporters no entry was allowed because the trial is a national security case. Representatives of 26 countries had gathered outside the building yesterday, Nickel said, and were "lending their voice" for Kovrig's immediate release.

The US is "deeply concerned at the lack of minimum procedural protections granted the two Canadian citizens", William Klein, Acting Deputy Chief of Mission of the US Embassy in Beijing, told media outside the court. Canadian diplomats were also barred from attending Spavor's trial in the northern city of Dandong on Friday, which lasted less than three hours and ended without any verdict being announced. Following that closed-door hearing, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau slammed the two men's detention as "completely unacceptable, as is the lack of transparency around these court proceedings."

The cases have sent relations between Ottawa and Beijing to their lowest point in decades. The court dates for the two Canadians come as an extradition hearing for Meng enters its final months, and alongside fiery high-level talks between the US and China in Alaska. Meng, whose father is Huawei founder and CEO Ren Zhengfei, has been fighting extradition to the US on charges that she and the company violated US sanctions on Iran and other laws.—AFP

Taiwan pilot killed, another missing after jets collide

TAIPEI: A Taiwanese air force pilot was killed and another was missing yesterday after their fighter jets disappeared in a suspected mid-air collision off the island's southern coast, officials said.

The two F-5E jets disappeared from radar around 3 pm (0700 GMT) some 2.6 kilometers (1.6 miles) off the coast of rural Pingtung county, the National Rescue Command Centre said. They were among four F-5Es that took off some 30 minutes earlier for a routine training mission, the centre said, adding helicopters and coastguard ships had joined the search.

One of the pilots was found unconscious in the sea but could not be resuscitated and was pronounced dead at hospital. Rescuers were still searching for the remaining pilot. Police confirmed they found a seat with parachute attached

Philippines accuses China of 'incursion' in disputed sea

MANILA: The Philippines on Sunday accused China of "incursion" after more than 200 militia boats were spotted near a disputed reef in the South China Sea, in a rare rebuke of its superpower neighbor. The Philippine coast guard detected the boats "in line formation" at the boomerang-shaped Whitsun Reef around 320 kilometers (175 nautical miles) west of Palawan Island on March 7. "We call on the Chinese to stop this incursion and immediately recall these boats violating our maritime rights and encroaching into our sovereign territory," Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said in a statement.

"This is a clear provocative action of militarizing the area. These are territories well within Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone," Lorenzana said the government was considering "appropriate action" to take to protect Filipino fishermen, the country's marine resources and maintain peace and stability in the area.

Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin said on Twitter he had lodged a diplomatic protest

Bolsonaro takes birthday swipe at COVID restrictions

BRASILIA: Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro used the occasion of his 66th birthday Sunday to renew his attacks on COVID-19 stay-at-home measures, telling supporters he would fight for their "freedom." The far-right leader has defied expert advice on social distancing and face masks to slow the spread of the new coronavirus though he has recently adopted a more pragmatic tone, under pressure amid a deadly surge of COVID-19 in Brazil. That included appearing in a face mask—formerly a rarity—to greet supporters wishing him a happy birthday outside the presidential palace in Brasilia.

However, many in the crowd were maskless, and Bolsonaro used his impromptu speech to renew his attacks on stay-at-home measures ordered by mayors and governors worried their health systems are

on a local highway.

Taiwan's ageing fighter fleet has suffered a string of fatal accidents in recent years as the island's air force is kept under constant pressure by China. Beijing views democratic and self-ruled Taiwan as its own territory and has vowed to one day seize it, by force if necessary.

Under President Xi Jinping, China has become markedly more hostile towards Taiwan and last year, incursions by Beijing's fighter jets reached record highs. The incursions force outgunned Taiwan to regularly scramble its jets and keep pilots trained on a round-the-clock war footing that takes its toll on ageing aircraft and those flying them.

In October, an F-5E pilot was killed when his plane crashed off the island's eastern coast. A month later, Taiwan temporarily grounded all F-16 fighters for safety checks after one went missing during a training exercise. Last year, Chinese military jets made a record 380 incursions into Taiwan's defense zone, with some analysts warning that tensions between the two sides were at their highest since the mid-1990s. The F-5E is an older generation fighter with a design that dates back to the 1960s.—AFP

over the ships.

The Chinese embassy in Manila did not respond to a request for comment. A government task force charged with monitoring the contested waters announced Saturday the detection of around 220 "Chinese Maritime Militia Vessels" earlier this month.

"Despite clear weather at the time, the Chinese vessels massed at the reef showed no actual fishing activities," the agency said. The United States has previously accused China of using maritime militia to "intimidate, coerce and threaten other nations" over its claims to almost the entire South China Sea.

The resource-rich waterway is also contested by several countries, including the Philippines.

China has ignored a 2016 international tribunal decision that declared its assertion as without basis. Philippine-China relations have improved under President Rodrigo Duterte, who has tried to steer his country away from the ambit of the United States—its former colonial master—to pursue greater economic cooperation with its giant neighbor and American rival.

But Duterte's shift has failed to stem Chinese ambitions in the sea or unlock much of the billions of dollars of promised trade and loans. He has repeatedly said conflict with China would be futile and that the Philippines would lose and suffer heavily in the process.

Lorenzana, however, has been more outspoken.

approaching collapse. "They're picking a fight," Bolsonaro told his backers, some of whom gave him a cake in the green, yellow and blue of the Brazilian flag. "If anybody thinks we're going to give up our freedom, they're wrong. Some tyrants out there are trying to restrict your freedom. But you can be sure, our army is olive-green, and it's all of you, too," he said. "You can count on our armed forces to defend your freedom and democracy."

Bolsonaro argues the economic damage caused by lockdowns is worse than the virus itself. But in a sign of the pressure he faces, nearly 200 economists and business leaders, including several former finance ministers and central bank presidents, published an open letter Sunday urging the government to accelerate Brazil's lagging vaccination campaign and implement a nationally coordinated social distancing policy.

"The controversy around the economic impact of social distancing reflects a false dichotomy between saving lives and guaranteeing livelihoods," they said. "In reality, it is unrealistic to expect an economic recovery in the middle of a runaway epidemic," they added, calling the situation in Brazil "desolate." The pandemic has claimed 294,000 lives in Brazil, second



This undated handout photo taken by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and received from the Philippine Communications Operations Office (PCOO) yesterday shows Chinese Maritime vessels anchored at the Whitsun Reef, around 320 kilometers (175 nautical miles) west of Bataraza in Palawan in the South China Sea.—AFP

In August he accused China of illegally occupying Filipino maritime territory, saying the nine-dash line used by Beijing to justify its alleged historic rights to the key waterway was a fabrication. His remarks at the time came amid a fresh row over the disputed Scarborough shoal, which China seized from the Philippines in 2012 following a tense standoff. In 2019, the Philippines also complained after hundreds of Chinese ships were seen near Pag-asa island, also known as Thitu, which the country branded as "illegal".—AFP



BRASILIA: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro waves at supporters who gathered outside the Alvorada Palace to celebrate his birthday, in Brasilia.—AFP

only to the United States. Authorities report intensive care units are more than 80-percent full in 25 out of 27 states, and nearly saturated in key flashpoints including Brazil's largest cities, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.—AFP

Slovak PM says willing to quit to solve govt crisis

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia: Slovakia's Prime Minister Igor Matovic on Sunday said he was willing to step down to save the coalition government led by his party as junior partners slammed his handling of the coronavirus pandemic. Junior members of the four-party coalition have threatened to quit the government if the centrist Matovic does not step down by next Wednesday. President Zuzana Caputova, a liberal, demanded he find a solution. "I am willing to resign as prime minister of this government and remain as one of its members," Matovic told journalists on Sunday.

However, he made his resignation conditional on other party leaders in the coalition also giving up their ministerial posts. "To calm the situation, we consider the departure of Minister Richard Sulik from the government to be absolutely necessary," said Matovic, pointing to the economy minister and liberal SaS party

leader. Sulik has threatened to quit the coalition should Matovic refuse to step down.

Responding to Matovic on Sunday, Sulik said he would not accept him staying on as a minister in the government. "We will not agree with such proposals, whose main motive of is obviously his (Matovic's) personal revenge," Sulik said. None of the parties want to trigger an early election as polls show opposition left-wing parties on track to win.

The political crisis comes as Slovakia, a eurozone country of 5.4 million people, is struggling with one of the world's highest per capita rates of COVID deaths and infection, according to an AFP tally based on official data.

The grim toll and Matovic's decision to buy Russia's Sputnik V vaccine triggered an uproar among coalition partners governing with his OLaNO party. Opinion polls published on Sunday suggested that more than 80 percent of Slovaks agreed that Matovic should resign. OLaNO party member Eduard Heger, the current finance minister and acting health minister, has been floated as a possible candidate to replace Matovic. Heger has not revealed whether he would consider taking over as prime minister from Matovic, his party boss.—AFP

International

Thousands evacuate as Sydney sees worst floods in decades

Torrential rains push communities to breaking point; rivers in spate

SYDNEY: Torrential downpours lashed Australia's east yesterday, forcing thousands to flee the worst flooding in decades and pushing communities already battling drought, bushfires, and the coronavirus pandemic to "breaking point".

Around 18,000 residents were told to evacuate their homes, as days of relentless rainfall caused rivers in Australia's most populous state, New South Wales, to their highest levels in 30 years. "The devastation is quite unbelievable," said Port Macquarie cafe owner Marten Clark, who waded through waist-deep water to find his furniture washed away, and freezers, fridges and cooking equipment destroyed.

Aerial images from hard-hit areas showed the flood consuming rows of houses, with only their roofs above the water. As some coastal communities received three months' worth of rain in a few hours, emergency services said they rescued hundreds from floodwaters and fielded more than 8,800 calls for help. In some areas, emergency workers travelled inland on "Surf Lifesaving" ocean rescue boats to reach stranded people. So far, no fatalities or serious injuries have been reported.

But with more rain expected, eight million residents in Sydney and across the state were yesterday told to work from home if possible and avoid unnecessary travel. "The water is still rising," said Jo Dunstan, who owns a florist shop in the outer Sydney suburb of Windsor, as she watched debris-littered stormwater race past neighboring homes.

"It's scary, very eerie to say the least." Just over 12 months ago the region was parched: suffering prolonged drought, water restrictions and unprecedented bushfires. "When you have been through three or four incidents that are life-changing on top of each other, it can make you feel like you are at breaking point," said New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian.

"I don't know any time in a state history where we have had these extreme weather conditions in such quick succession in the middle of a pandemic."



SYDNEY: A man looks at a road inundated by floodwaters in Richmond suburb yesterday as Sydney braced for its worst flooding in decades after record rainfall caused its largest dam to overflow and as deluges prompted mandatory mass evacuation orders along Australia's east coast. — AFP

Australia 'tested once again'

Scientists have warned Australia can expect more frequent and more extreme weather events as a result of climate change. Prime Minister Scott Morrison, whose conservative government has been accused of dragging its feet on climate action, said Australia was "being tested once again" by a "terrible event".

He told parliament that Australia's defense force was expected to be called in to assist with the clean-up and recovery. New South Wales's Mid North Coast has been particularly badly affected, with Berejiklian declaring the region had been struck by a "one in 100 year" disaster. In Sydney's vast Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley, swollen rivers were at levels not seen since 1990, after the Warragamba Dam, the city's main drinking water source, spilled over Saturday.

Around 500 gegalitres of water were drained from the dam—roughly equivalent to 200,000 Olympic size

swimming pools or the total volume of water in Sydney Harbor. Residents in some affected areas were allowed to return to their homes yesterday after waters receded, but others were placed on high alert as floods moved toward their regions. Education authorities said more than 200 schools were closed, including some that were damaged in the floods. Andrew Hall, CEO of the Insurance Council of Australia, said it was too early to understand the extent of destruction and to "estimate the insurance damage bill".

The Bureau of Meteorology has forecast "treacherous" conditions yesterday before the wild weather eases later in the week. Flood operations manager Justin Robinson warned the rain was expected to cause flooding in previously unaffected areas as well as "renewed flooding in many of those communities that have already been impacted". —AFP

BBC journalist freed in Myanmar as protests roll on

YANGON: A BBC journalist held in Myanmar has been freed, the broadcaster said yesterday, as demonstrators took to the streets for fresh anti-coup protests against the military. Myanmar's junta has unleashed deadly violence on protesters who have risen against the military's ousting of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi last month. More than 2,600 people have been arrested and 250 killed, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a local monitoring group that has warned fatalities could be even higher.

Aung Thura, a journalist with the BBC's Burmese service, was detained by men in plain clothes while reporting outside a court in the capital Naypyidaw on Friday. The broadcaster confirmed on Monday in a news story on its website that he had been freed but gave no further details.

Scores of people, including teachers, marched yesterday through the pre-dawn streets of Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, some carrying placards calling for UN intervention in the crisis. Mandalay has seen some of the worst violence of the crackdown and



In this file photo taken on January 27, 2020 shows Aung Thura, a BBC News Burmese journalist, posing for a photo during his coverage of a Myanmar Parliament meeting in Naypyidaw. — AFP

Brazil clears use of full vaccine stock as first doses

BRASILIA: Brazil said Sunday it was lifting its requirement for local authorities to reserve half their coronavirus vaccine stockpiles for second doses, seeking to accelerate its lagging immunization campaign and curb a deadly COVID-19 surge. Outgoing health minister Eduardo Pazuello said the goal of the policy switch was to get at least one vaccine dose to the maximum number of people as fast as possible.

Brazil, which has the second-highest death toll in the pandemic, is so far using the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine and Chinese-developed CoronaVac, both of which require two doses. "By freeing the full stockpile of vaccines for immediate use, we will be able to double the number of doses applied this week, saving and protecting more lives," Pazuello said in a statement.

The ministry said it had received guarantees from suppliers that enough vaccines would arrive to ensure all recipients receive their second dose on schedule. There has been international debate over whether it is

recorded eight more deaths on Sunday, a medical source told AFP, adding that as many as 50 people were injured.

Machine guns rang out late into the night across the city of 1.7 million. "People were really scared and felt insecure the whole night," a doctor told AFP by phone. To protest the brutality of the crackdown, a group of doctors in Mandalay staged a "placard only" demonstration by lining up signs in the street, Voice of Myanmar reported.

A group of monks staged a similar "monkless" protest. There were also early morning protests in parts of Yangon, the commercial capital and largest city, where drivers honked their horns in support of the anti-coup movement. Residents in Yangon's Hlaing township released hundreds of red helium balloons with posters calling for a UN intervention to stop atrocities, according to local media. One man was also killed during daytime clashes with security forces in the central city of Monywa Sunday and hundreds turned out to protest a day later, local media reported.

EU sanctions

International concern has been growing over the junta's brutal approach as the death toll climbs, with a senior UN expert warning the military is likely committing "crimes against humanity". But so far the generals have shown little sign of heeding calls for restraint as they struggle to quell the unrest.

In a fresh bid to step up pressure, the European Union is expected on Monday to hit 11 junta cadres with sanctions—in the form of travel bans and asset freezes. The United States and Britain have already taken similar steps. Myanmar's regional neighbors have also weighed in, with Indonesia and Malaysia calling for an emergency summit of the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations to discuss the crisis. Following the call, Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan embarked on a whistle-stop diplomatic tour including meetings in Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia. On the commercial front, French energy giant EDF announced that a \$1.5-billion hydropower dam project in Myanmar had been suspended in response to the coup. Australia and Canada have confirmed they are providing consular assistance to two business consultants detained in Myanmar. It is understood that Matthew O'Kane and Christa Avery, a dual Canadian-Australian citizen, are under house arrest after trying to leave the country on a relief flight Friday. The couple run a consultancy business in Yangon. The Canadian and Australian foreign ministries have refused to comment further on the case. — AFP

better to administer as many first doses as possible or reserve some supply for second doses. Countries such as Britain have shown promising results adopting the first strategy.

Brazil has issued at least one dose to around 5.5 percent of the population so far—way off pace to meet the health ministry's goal of vaccinating the entire adult population by the end of the year. In a boost to the immunization campaign, Brazil received its first shipment Sunday of vaccines secured through the United Nations Covax program for low- and middle-income countries. Just over one million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine were shipped to Sao Paulo, officials said. The health ministry said another 1.9 million doses were expected by the end of the month under the program.

In a setback, however, public health institute Fiocruz, which is partnering with AstraZeneca to distribute and eventually produce the vaccine in Brazil, confirmed that eight million doses it was expecting from India had been delayed. It said the British-Swedish pharmaceutical firm's Indian partner, the Serum Institute, had not indicated when it would be able to supply them.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro faces mounting pressure to accelerate the vaccination drive and get a handle on the pandemic, which has claimed 294,000 lives in Brazil, second only to the United States. — AFP

News in brief

India making 200m Sputnik V jabs

MOSCOW: The backer of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine said yesterday it had signed an agreement with an India-based pharmaceuticals giant for the production of up to 200 million doses of the jab a year. The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), the country's sovereign wealth fund, said in a statement it has partnered with the Virchow Group to produce up to 200 million doses of the two-dose vaccine in India every year. Virchow Biotech, a subsidiary of the Virchow Group, is expected to start full-scale commercial production in the first half of 2021, it said. — AFP

Venezuela forces clash with gang

BOGOTA: Venezuela's military clashed Sunday with an armed group near the frontier with Colombia, the mayor of a Colombian border town said. The confrontation, which occurred in the southwestern Venezuelan state of Apure, resulted in several casualties, said the mayor of Arauquita, Eteiv Torres. "This Sunday we were awakened, the residents of Arauquita, by detonations from the Venezuelan air force" that continued through the afternoon, Torres told local media, adding that the confrontation had resulted in "a significant number of injured and dead." — AFP

Cops hurt at protest in England

LONDON: A demonstration in southwest England against increased police powers turned violent Sunday, leaving several officers hurt, authorities said. "Horrendous scenes in Bristol," said John Apter, head of the police federation of England and Wales. "Number of officers badly injured, police vehicles damaged and a police station under attack. This is not protest, it's just mindless violence," he tweeted. The clashes erupted after a rally against the new "Police and Crime Bill"—drawn up by the government to grant the police greater powers to crack down on disruptive protests—when hundreds of protesters converged on a local police station. — AFP

Niger court confirms new president

NIAMEY, Niger: Niger's constitutional court on Sunday confirmed Mohamed Bazoum as the country's new president with more than 55 percent of the votes cast in last month's run-off. Former interior minister Bazoum was the preferred successor and right-hand man of outgoing president Mahamadou Issoufou. "The court confirms and declares the definitive results of the second round presidential poll of February 2, 2021," said President of the Court Bouba Mahamane, adding that he had received 55.6 percent of the vote while turnout was 62.9 percent. — AFP



TAIPEI: This handout picture taken and released by the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) yesterday shows Taiwan's Premier Su Tseng-chang gesturing after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine at the National Taiwan University Hospital in Taipei. — AFP

Taiwan starts vaccination drive with AZ

TAIPEI: Taiwan kicked off its coronavirus inoculation drive yesterday with two top officials getting AstraZeneca shots in a bid to boost public confidence in a vaccine that has had a troubled rollout. Premier Su Tseng-chang and health minister Chen Shih-chung sat for jabs at a Taipei hospital after local authorities cleared the Anglo-Swedish pharmaceutical giant's vaccine for use. "I am not feeling any pain at the spot or any soreness... I hope everyone can feel at ease after seeing my condition," said Su, 73, in footage televised live.

Earlier this month, countries ranging from France to Venezuela to Indonesia temporarily suspended use of AstraZeneca's vaccine over fears it may cause blood clots and brain hemorrhages. But many resumed their rollouts after Europe's medical regulator last week called the vaccine—which is among the cheapest available and easiest to store—"safe and effective".

Taiwan went ahead with its rollout after a committee of local experts ruled that "clinical benefits" of the vaccine outweigh risks of adverse reactions. But certain groups, including those in hormone therapy or taking contraceptive pills, are advised against the jab.

Taiwan-population 23 million—has been held up as a model in containing the coronavirus with just over 1,000 cases and 10 deaths. — AFP



This file photo shows then-interim president of the Congolese Movement for Democracy and Integral Development (MCDDI), Guy-Brice Parfait Kolelas, addresses his supporters in Brazzaville ahead of the 2016 presidential elections. — AFP

Republic of Congo oppn candidate dies of COVID-19

BRAZZAVILLE, Congo: Republic of Congo opposition candidate Guy-Brice Parfait Kolelas died of COVID-19 as he was being transferred to France for treatment, his campaign director said yesterday, the day after presidential elections in which he was the main challenger. Kolelas was seen as the main rival to veteran leader Denis Sassou Nguesso, who was expected to win Sunday's vote. The election was boycotted by the main opposition and under an internet blackout, with critics voicing concerns over the transparency of the polls seen as tilted towards Sassou Nguesso. Kolelas "died in the medical aircraft which came to get him from Brazzaville on Sunday afternoon," his campaign director Christian Cyr Rodrigue Mayanda told AFP.

The sixty-year-old tested positive for COVID-19 on Friday afternoon, and was unable to host his last campaign meeting in Brazzaville. On Saturday, he posted a video from his sickbed, declaring he was "battling against death". "Rise up as one person... I'm fighting on my deathbed, you too fight for your change," he urged his supporters, saying the election was "about the future of your children". Mayanda called on supporters of Kolelas to rally at 11 am local time (1000 GMT). "We'll continue to count the ballots. He was ahead in a number of areas," he said.

'Atmosphere of peace'

Kolelas came second in the presidential election of 2016, picking up 15 percent of the vote according to official results. He had pledged to release the two candidates from that vote sentenced in 2018 to 20 years in prison for "undermining state security", former army general Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko and ex-minister Andre Okombi Salissa. He was only serious contender left facing the president on Sunday after a string of boycotts, withdrawn candidacies and exclusions. Provisional election results are not expected for days.

There were no reports of major incidents before polling stations closed, but AFP correspondents said access to the internet and social media, as well as text messages, was cut. In some areas voters complained that their names weren't on the electoral list. "The only uncertainty is what score Mr. Sassou will tell the electoral commission to give him," said Congolese novelist Emmanuel Dongala, contacted by AFP at his US home. Sassou Nguesso, 77, a former paratrooper, first rose to power in 1979 and has since accumulated 36 years in office, making him one of the world's longest-serving leaders. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 2021

Turkish CB tries to calm market turmoil after top banker sacked

Lira pares losses after central bank intervention

ANKARA: Turkish officials yesterday tried to calm the turmoil triggered by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's abrupt decision to sack his reformist central bank chief, insisting they would stick with free market rules. The lira lost as much as 17 percent against the dollar on the first day of trading after Erdogan replaced market-friendly economist Naci Agbal with former ruling party member Sahap Kavcioglu at the key post.

The Turkish lira collapsed more than 17 percent yesterday after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan sacked the country's market-friendly central bank chief. The currency fell to as low as 8.47 per US dollar in early trade, having closed at 7.22 at the end of last week, after Naci Agbal was replaced by former ruling party lawmaker Sahap Kavcioglu at the weekend.

It later recovered slightly to sit at 8.09. While a presidential decree on Friday did not explain why Agbal had been removed, it came just a day after the bank hiked interest rates more than two percentage points to 19 percent as it looked to fight inflation. Kavcioglu has written columns for a pro-government newspaper heavily criticising Agbal's propensity to raise rates. Analysts say the new central banker subscribes to Erdogan's unorthodox belief that higher interest rates cause inflation. Most economists believe it slows inflation down by raising the cost of doing business.

The currency clawed back some of its losses and was down roughly eight percent at 7.85 to the dollar



ISTANBUL: A currency exchange office worker counts Turkish Lira banknotes in front of an electronic panel displaying currency exchange rates at an exchange office in Istanbul. — AFP

after analysts said the Turkish central bank intervened to support the lira by selling foreign currencies.

The carnage on Turkish financial markets carried over to the Istanbul stock exchange. The Borsa Istanbul suspended trading for 35 minutes after automatic circuit breakers kicked in when an early sell-off approached seven percent. Finance Minister Lutfi Elvan issued a statement early yesterday to try and reassure investors. "There will be absolutely no move away from the free market mechanism," Elvan said in a statement. "We will continue with determination to

implement the liberal exchange system."

Elvan also reiterated Turkey's commitment to fighting inflation which has been gathering pace for months. Consumer prices were up by 15.61 percent on an annualized basis in February.

Short reign

The lira was changing hands at around 7.22 to the dollar before Agbal was sacked last week after less than five months on the post. He was appointed after Erdogan dismissed his predecessor and the president's

son-in-law Berat Albayrak resigned as finance minister in November. The change to the finance team offered hope to the markets that Turkey would tread a more orthodox path, hiking interest rates to combat inflation. Erdogan's decree did not provide a reason for Agbal's dismissal, but the move came two days after the central bank raised its benchmark interest rate by a larger-than-expected 200 basis points to 19 percent.

While the hike was welcomed by the markets, pro-government newspapers and a columnist close to Albayrak targeted Agbal on Friday. Erdogan often rails against high interest rates, subscribing to the unconventional belief that they cause inflation instead of control it. He once even dubbed them the "mother and father of all evil". The new bank governor Kavcioglu is a former ruling party lawmaker and columnist for the pro-government Yeni Safak newspaper.

Just last month he echoed Erdogan's thinking, writing that higher interest rates "indirectly" lead to higher inflation. Already nominally independent, Kavcioglu's appointment throws further doubt about the central bank's powers to ensure price stability and raise interest rates if needed under Erdogan.

Kavcioglu is the bank's fourth governor in two years after similar dismissals. In a statement on Sunday, he sought to reassure the markets over the bank's commitment to fighting inflation. The bank "will continue to use monetary policy tools effectively in line with its main objective of achieving a permanent fall in inflation," Kavcioglu said. — AFP



In this file photo taken on February 25, 2020 an employee of German car maker Volkswagen (VW) fixes a VW logo on a Volkswagen ID.3 electric car at an assembly line of the Volkswagen car factory in Zwickau, eastern Germany. — AFP

'Das Auto' goes electric as VW takes on Tesla

FRANKFURT: When Volkswagen chief executive Herbert Diess joined Twitter in January, he used his first tweet to warn pioneering electric car maker Elon Musk that he was coming after him. The bold proclamation raised some eyebrows, coming from a carmaker better known for its 2015 "dieselgate" emissions cheating scandal than its green credentials.

But all that has changed since the German group announced an offensive to dominate the electric car market globally by 2025, vowing to set up six battery factories in Europe by the end of the decade.

"Volkswagen is the new Tesla," declared the Financial Times, referring to the now dominant Californian e-car group founded by billionaire maverick entrepreneur Musk in 2003. "Our transformation will be fast, unprecedented and on a scale not seen in the automobile industry in a century," Diess said at VW's inaugural "Power Day" last Monday, where he fired off a flurry of announcements.

Industry watchers say it's a credible bet. Bloomberg Intelligence auto analyst Tatsuo Yoshida said Volkswagen "has (the) potential to overtake Tesla's number one position... in a few years". Karl Brauer, an analyst with CarExpert.com, said VW's "combination of financial resources and manufacturing capacity make it a prime challenger for Tesla's dominance" — even if catching up with its US rival is "not going to be easy".

'Saving face'

Diess, who has headed the 12-brand VW group since 2018, has never hidden his admiration for Musk, whose brash and unconventional ways have a habit of disrupting markets. The two men have a friendly relationship and regularly exchange emails, according to an insider. If the aim of Diess's carefully choreographed "Power Day" was to capture some of the enthusiasm of a Battery Day Tesla held late last year, particularly in the United States, it appears to have worked.

Diess's announcements saw US investors flock into Volkswagen shares, including many small traders using online platforms. In just a week, the Wolfsburg-based car giant gained 15 percent on Frankfurt's blue-chip stock exchange, giving the group a market capitalization of more than 130 billion euros (\$155 billion). The rise puts Diess's 200-billion-euro target within reach but he has a way to go before matching Tesla's \$619 billion valuation. VW's "forced transition" towards more environmentally friendly cars has now been "recognized by the market", said Eric Kirstetter, an auto sector expert at the Roland Berger consulting firm. — AFP

Two Americans accused of aiding Ghosn escape indicted in Japan

TOKYO: Two Americans accused of helping former Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn jump bail and escape from Japan were indicted yesterday and face up to three years in prison. The father-son pair arrived in Japan earlier this month from the United States after losing their battle to avoid extradition.

Both Michael Taylor and his son Peter face a single charge of helping a criminal escape. The pair, along with a third man still at large, is believed to have masterminded the operation that saw former international jet-setter Ghosn packed into an audio-equipment case and onto a private jet to jump bail in December 2019. Ghosn is now beyond the reach of Japanese justice in Lebanon, which does not have an extradition treaty with Tokyo.

But the Taylors were arrested in the US last year after Japan issued a warrant for them. They sought to block Tokyo's extradition request by claiming they would face torture-like conditions while in custody in Japan, but the US Supreme Court struck down their



This undated combination of file photos courtesy of Rudy Michael Taylor shows his father, former US special forces member Michael Taylor and his son Peter, posing together years apart at unknown locations. — AFP

appeal in February.

'Brazen and well-orchestrated escape'

Ghosn was a global business superstar and head of an auto alliance joining Nissan, Renault and Mitsubishi Motors before his career came crashing to an abrupt end in November 2018, when Tokyo investigators stormed his private jet to arrest him. The French-Lebanese-Brazilian national was eventually charged with four counts of financial misconduct over claims he hid compensation and misused Nissan funds.

Having spent months in detention, Ghosn was out on bail awaiting trial on the charges—which he denies—

Deliveroo eyes £8.8bn valuation at London float

LONDON: British meal delivery app Deliveroo is aiming for a higher-than-expected valuation of up to £8.8 billion when it launches shortly on the London stock market, the company said yesterday following a pandemic-fueled boom in demand.

The Amazon-backed company, in line with other home-delivery firms, says it has seen demand soar in the past year as locked-down households called in food. The big listing, expected in April, is seen as a major boost to London's financial sector which has been hit by Brexit turmoil.



London's financial sector, known as the City, recently lost its European share trading crown to Amsterdam following Britain's exit from the European Union. Eight-year-old Deliveroo's market capitalization on listing is set to be between £7.6 billion and £8.8 billion (\$10.5 billion-\$12.2 billion, 8.9 billion euros-10.3 billion euros), it said in a statement yesterday. — AFP

day. "We are proud to be listing in London, the city where Deliveroo started," company founder and CEO Will Shu said.

"Becoming a public company will enable us to continue to invest in innovation, developing new tech tools to support restaurants and grocers, providing riders with more work and extending choice for consumers," he added. The offer price range has been set at between £3.90 and £4.60 per share, Deliveroo said.

It will sell around £1.0 billion worth of new shares, while current investors in the company plan to sell part of their holdings. The share price range "is higher than previously expected and makes it the biggest IPO in London for some time," said Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at Markets.com. A recent fundraising round had valued the company at more than \$7.0 billion.

'Strong start to 2021'

The listing update was published alongside news that Deliveroo's app transactions ballooned by 121 percent in the first two months of 2021. "We have seen a strong start to 2021 and we are only at the start of an exciting journey in a large, fast-growing online food delivery market, with a huge opportunity ahead," Shu said.

Deliveroo earlier this month announced that it made an underlying loss of £223.7 million in 2020.

That was despite the value of transactions rocketing 64 percent to £4.1 billion. Since its London launch in 2013, Deliveroo has expanded into mainland Europe, Asia, Australia and the Middle East.

Last year, more than six million people ordered food and drink every month via its app from 115,000 cafes, restaurants and stores. However, its business model has come under scrutiny, including in Britain, France and Spain, as its freelance delivery riders complain about working conditions, reflecting wider concerns over their rights in the gig economy.

Britain's antitrust regulator last year approved Amazon's 16-percent investment in Deliveroo after an in-depth probe concluded it would not harm competition. Deliveroo has said that some £50 million of its shares will be made available for customers, with delivery riders and restaurant partners also able to participate. — AFP

when he fled the country in what Japanese prosecutors termed "one of the most brazen and well-orchestrated escape acts in recent history". Having spent months in detention, Ghosn was out on bail awaiting trial on the charges—which he denies—when he fled the country in what Japanese prosecutors termed "one of the most brazen and well-orchestrated escape acts in recent history".

The details of his escape proved embarrassing to Japanese authorities—with the former tycoon allegedly having boarded a train to Osaka before evading security checks at Kansai airport by boarding a private jet packed into an oversized box that was not scanned. After his arrival in Lebanon, Ghosn claimed that he had been forced to escape because he feared he would not get a fair hearing.

While Ghosn remains at large, the repercussions of both the original case against him and his escape from Japan continue. In Tokyo, his former close aide at Nissan, Greg Kelly, is currently on trial for his alleged role in underreporting Ghosn's income. Nissan itself faces charges in the case and has pleaded guilty.

And a Turkish court has sentenced two pilots and another employee of a small private airline to four years and two months in prison for their role in Ghosn's escape.

Ghosn transited in Turkey, switching planes on his way to Lebanon, and the three Turks were charged with involvement in conspiracy to smuggle a migrant. Two other pilots and two flight attendants on trial in Turkey were acquitted. — AFP

NZ drafts plans for Australia travel bubble

WELLINGTON: New Zealand is finalizing a long-awaited travel bubble with neighboring Australia and will reveal next month when trans-Tasman trips can resume, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said yesterday. Speaking almost exactly a year after New Zealand closed its borders as COVID-19 swept across the globe, Ardern acknowledged many Kiwis were impatient for quarantine-free travel to and from Australia. But she said the government would exercise the cautious approach that has seen New Zealand largely contain the virus, with just 26 deaths in a population of five million. "Many New Zealanders are nervous, they don't want to put everything we've fought so hard for at risk," she said during a press conference.

Before the pandemic, Australia was New Zealand's largest source of overseas visitors and many Kiwis have relatives living across the Tasman. All overseas arrivals to New Zealand must currently undergo two weeks quarantine, but Ardern said she would make an announcement on April 6 about when the requirement will be waived for arrivals from Australia. She said aspects of the plan were still being finalized, including contact tracing arrangements and making sure airlines were ready. She said a key consideration was what would happen if there was a major virus outbreak in Australia, prompting thousands of visiting New Zealanders to try to rush home. Australia has allowed quarantine-free travel for New Zealand arrivals since October, although the arrangement has been briefly suspended a number of times due to virus outbreaks in Auckland. — AFP

Business

Blackstone launches \$6.2bn takeover bid for scandal-tainted Crown Resorts

Bid comes after Crown was denied license to run a Sydney casino

SYDNEY: US private equity giant Blackstone has launched a takeover bid for scandal-tainted Crown Resorts, just weeks after the Australian group was denied a license to run a multi-billion-dollar Sydney casino, the gaming group said yesterday.

Crown shares soared more than 20 percent on the Australian Stock Exchange after the pre-trading announcement it had received the "unsolicited, non-binding and indicative proposal" from Blackstone on Sunday. The casino operator, which is subject to multiple inquiries into allegations of money-laundering and ties to organized crime, said the bid was for Aus\$11.85 per share, valuing the company at Aus\$8.02 billion (\$6.2 billion). Crown shares closed up 21 percent at Aus\$11.97. The Blackstone bid came after regulators refused to grant Crown a license to run its flagship casino in a gleaming 75-storey tower that dominates Sydney's waterfront owing to suspected links to organized crime. Authorities acted on the recommendations of a public inquiry, which reported Crown had been "facilitating" money-laundering through so-called "high roller" gambling junkets linked to Chinese triads and other organized criminal groups.

The company and its largest shareholder, media scion James Packer, had been in the spotlight since

media reports last year alleged that Crown casinos in Melbourne and Perth were used to launder profits from human trafficking, drugs, child sexual exploitation and terrorism. State authorities have announced probes into the operations of Crown in the two cities. Crown has also been suffering from a sharp drop in business caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Crown's CEO and three long-time directors resigned in the wake of the Sydney inquiry, while executive chairman Helen Coonan accepted its findings as "warranted" and said steps were being taken to improve the company's governance, compliance and culture.

The company last week also announced it was ceasing all political donations in Australia. Blackstone already has a 9.99 percent stake in Crown, which it bought in April 2020. It also has made forays into the hotel and casino business and currently owns the Cosmopolitan resort and casino in Las Vegas. The takeover bid is subject to conditions including due diligence, debt financing and Crown board support. If its takeover bid is successful, Blackstone will have to convince Australian regulators that it is a suitable entity to run casinos in the country. Crown said the board was yet to form a view and "will now commence a process to assess the proposal". — AFP



MELBOURNE: People walk past signage at the Crown Casino in Melbourne yesterday after Crown Resorts received a takeover bid from US investment manager Blackstone just weeks after being denied a license to run a multi-billion-dollar Sydney casino, the Australian gaming group said.— AFP



WASHINGTON: The Canadian Pacific Railway plans to merge with US-based Kansas City Southern (KCS) to create the first rail network linking Canada, the United States and Mexico, the companies announced Sunday.

Firms set merger to create 'first US-Canada-Mexico railroad'

WASHINGTON: The Canadian Pacific Railway plans to merge with US-based Kansas City Southern (KCS) to create the first rail network linking Canada, the United States and Mexico, the companies announced Sunday. The deal is valued at \$29 billion, including the assumption of \$3.8 billion in outstanding KCS debt, a joint statement said. "This transaction will be transformative for North America, providing significant positive impacts for our respective employees, customers, communities and shareholders," said CP president and chief executive Keith Creel. "This will create the first US-Mexico-Canada railroad."

The combined network of 20,000 miles (32,000 kilometers) will give Calgary-based CP access to the American heartland via Kansas City, from which a vast rail network reaches from the farms of the US Midwest to the ports of the Gulf of Mexico. The resultant network will also link the ports and factories of Mexico to the ports and energy resources of Canada and the factories of the Northeast US.

Mexico is a major exporter of automobiles, electronics and agricultural products, while also importing

large amounts of grain and manufactured goods. By enlarging market access and providing new transportation options, the joint statement said, the deal is expected to boost North American economic growth. It said the merger would benefit from the United States-Canada-Mexico Agreement on trade ratified a year ago by the three countries.

The USMCA "makes the efficient integration of the continent's supply chains more important than ever," Creel said. The boards of both companies have approved the deal, which still requires green-lighting from regulators of the US Surface Transportation Board. Canadian Pacific, the second largest Canadian rail operator after CN Rail, will offer KCS shareholders \$275 per share, in cash and CP shares. That is a 23 percent premium above the KCS closing price on Friday. KCS shareholders will hold one-fourth of the capital of the Canadian company once the deal is concluded. The combined company will employ nearly 20,000 people and generate total revenues of \$8.7 billion, based on 2020 revenues, the statement said. — AFP



The Shweli-3 671-megawatt project, still at an early planning stage, is run by a consortium of EDF-which is majority-owned by the French state-the Japanese Marubeni conglomerate and local company Ayeyar Hinthar.

France's EDF halts Myanmar dam project over coup

PARIS: An international consortium has suspended a \$1.5-billion hydropower dam project in Myanmar in response to last month's military coup, consortium member Electricite de France, a French utility, said Sunday. Nearly 250 people are confirmed dead in protests since the February 1 military coup, according to tolls compiled by NGOs, and more than 2,300 others have been arrested.

International condemnation from Washington, Brussels and the United Nations has so far failed to halt the bloodshed. "The project is suspended," an EDF spokesman told AFP on Sunday of the dam project.

The Shweli-3 671-megawatt project, still at an early

planning stage, is run by a consortium of EDF-which is majority-owned by the French state-the Japanese Marubeni conglomerate and local company Ayeyar Hinthar. NGOs welcomed the decision, with Justice for Myanmar calling Shan state, where Shweli-3 is located, a region with "ongoing conflict and systemic grave human rights violations". In a letter to Justice for Myanmar and published on the NGO's website, EDF said "the respect of fundamental human rights" was a condition for all of its projects.

Several NGOs have also been pushing French energy giant Total to pull out of Myanmar, with Greenpeace accusing the company of being one of the military regime's main financial contributors.

Total issued a statement Friday in which it said it conducts its activities "in a responsible fashion, with respect for the law and for universal human rights". "We are concerned by the current situation and we hope that a peaceful resolution, reached through dialogue, will allow the Myanmar people to pursue their quest for peace and prosperity," the statement said. — AFP

Opinion

Hydrogen: Rhetoric rapidly turning into reality

By John Roper

A staggeringly fast rise in energy stakeholders' appetite for hydrogen - potentially the world's 'new oil' - means blueprints in the Arab Gulf are transforming into real progress. In Saudi Arabia, Air Products, ACWA Power, and NEOM's deal for a \$5bn world-scale green hydrogen-based ammonia production facility powered by renewable energy is a momentous step in a greener direction for the world's biggest oil exporter. What will be the world's largest green hydrogen project will supply 650 tons per day of carbon-free hydrogen for global transport, as well as saving three million tons of CO2 per year. The kingdom's blue ammonia shipment - another global first - to Japan in late 2020, intended to co-fire coal power generation plants, was significant in bolstering sustainable hydrogen usage and a circular carbon economy.

Hydrogen development is also high on the UAE's agenda as OPEC's third biggest member accelerates its decarbonization plan. One of the several recent initiatives is Mubadala, ADNOC, and ADQ's deal to create the Abu Dhabi Hydrogen Alliance, which aims to establish the UAE's capital as a leader in low-carbon green and blue hydrogen in emerging and international markets. Building a national green hydrogen economy is also on the cards. To the east, DEME Concessions and OQ Alternative Energy plan to partner in a major green hydrogen plant in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm in the Sultanate of Oman, in cooperation with The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

Quick, quick...

Putting its stamp on this burgeoning market is a clever move for Arab Gulf leaders. Home to some of the world's largest oil and gas producing companies, the region wants to remain relevant and be a significant stakeholder in the 21st century's energy transition. Blessed with high levels of solar irradiation and significant wind resources, the region has all the ingredients to deliver renewable electricity, which can enable it to become a global exporter of green hydrogen and its carrier products. Still, much more must be achieved quickly in order for the Arab Gulf to emerge as one of the world's leading hydrogen markets by the 2030s. This is especially true when considering the lead time of research and development, pilots, project construction, and sourcing finance and talent resources.

So far, there are more than 30 countries with hydrogen roadmaps worldwide, with 228 large-scale hydrogen projects announced across the value chain. Of those, 85 percent are located in Europe, Asia, and Australia, according to the Hydrogen Insights 2021 report. If all the projects come to fruition, total investments will exceed \$300bn in spending through 2030 - prosperity that the Arab Gulf can benefit from. Of the \$300bn, just

over a quarter (26 percent) can be considered mature, which means the projects are in the planning stage, have passed a final investment decision (FID), or are under construction, already commissioned or operational.

Europe calling?

A natural two-way hydrogen relationship is potentially developing between Europe and the Arab Gulf. On one side is Europe's Hydrogen Strategy, the world's most developed such roadmap. One of the latest projects supporting the continent's ambitions is between Uniper and the Port of Rotterdam Authority. Both are exploring the potential of the large-scale production of green hydrogen at the Maasvlakte area in Rotterdam - home to the world's second largest bunkering hub - with plans to realise a hydrogen plant on Uniper's site by 2025 with 100MW of capacity. In time, capacity will be upped to 500MW. On the other side of the relationship is the Arab Gulf's vast production potential and deep-rooted government support for hydrogen growth - and critically, its export ambitions.

Germany's needs may see a natural marrying of this international supply-demand dynamic. For example, Europe's biggest economy expects up to 110TWh of hydrogen will be needed by 2030. In order to cover part of this demand, Germany plans to establish up to 5GW of generation capacity, including offshore and onshore energy generation facilities, detailed the country's National Hydrogen Strategy. This corresponds to 14TWh of green hydrogen production and will require 20TWh of renewables-based electricity. Still, even with further additions up to 2040, Germany's domestic generation of green hydrogen will not be sufficient to cover all new demand, which is why most of the hydrogen needed will have to be imported. As such, the Middle East could become the long-term partner of choice for Germany and Europe if it responds in a timely manner to these international needs.

Transport also needs consideration. For longer distances, ammonia ships are currently the most economically viable solution. But using pipelines for shorter distances - i.e., approximately 1,800 kilometers - is the lowest-cost option, according to Strategy&. A potential import-export pathway between the UAE and Germany, for example, stretches more than 6,000 kilometers. So, shipping to Europe, followed by a land-based route needs choreographing.

Still, many questions must be answered for all regions to have success, not just the Arab Gulf. How to cut the cost of green hydrogen and make it financially comparable to other renewable energy types? How to bolster the scale of blue and green hydrogen? How to build the necessary infrastructure affordably and quickly, for both national use and export plans? The sooner the Arab Gulf can answer these questions, the greater its competitive stake in hydrogen - potentially the 21st century's biggest energy market.

Note: John Roper is CEO Middle East, Uniper Global Commodities SE

Economists see Fed hiking lending rate sooner than expected

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve has vowed it won't raise its benchmark lending rate anytime soon, but US economists in a survey released yesterday believe the central bank could be forced to enact a hike as soon as next year. The National Association for Business Economics (NABE) reported 46 percent of participants surveyed see the central bank's policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) raising its lending rate in 2022, while 28 percent think they'll up it in 2023. Only 12 percent think the rate will be changed after that year, despite most officials at the conclusion of the

FOMC's two-day meeting last week saying that they don't expect to raise it though at least 2023.

The NABE survey is the latest sign of rising expectations for inflation, after Congress rolled out massive stimulus measures over the past year to keep the world's largest economy afloat as COVID-19 disrupted business. President Joe Biden earlier this month signed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, which was the third major relief measure passed during the pandemic and drew protests from some economists who said it could overstimulate the economy and drive up prices.

The Federal Reserve one year ago slashed its benchmark lending rate to zero, then months later said it would keep it there until inflation hit a sustained level of 2.0 percent - a pledge Fed Chair Jerome Powell reiterated this week at the conclusion of the FOMC meeting. However, economists are skeptical. The NABE survey reports 61 percent of respondents believe inflation risks are greater than in the past two decades, while 37 percent disagree.—AFP

Business

NBKE Economic Report

Kuwait GDP recovers slightly in Q3 2020 as restrictions eased

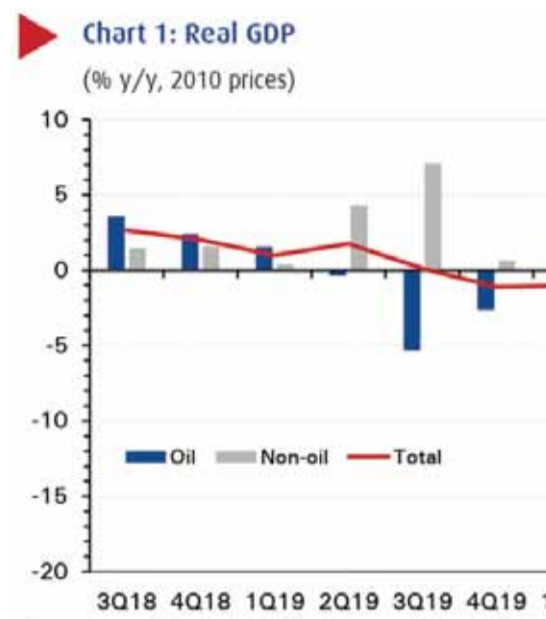
Economy contracted by 11.5% y/y in 3Q20

KUWAIT: Kuwait's economy remained in recessionary territory in the third quarter of 2020, according to data recently released by the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB). Headline real GDP declined by 11.5 percent y/y in 3Q20, a fourth consecutive contraction in the quarterly series since 4Q19. While the economy did grow 1.2 percent q/q from the previous quarter, the CSB release reveals for the first time the scale of the contraction brought about by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. Output in 2Q20 was especially hard hit, declining by 13.4 percent y/y (-12.5 percent q/q), amid the most stringent lockdown measures introduced last year.

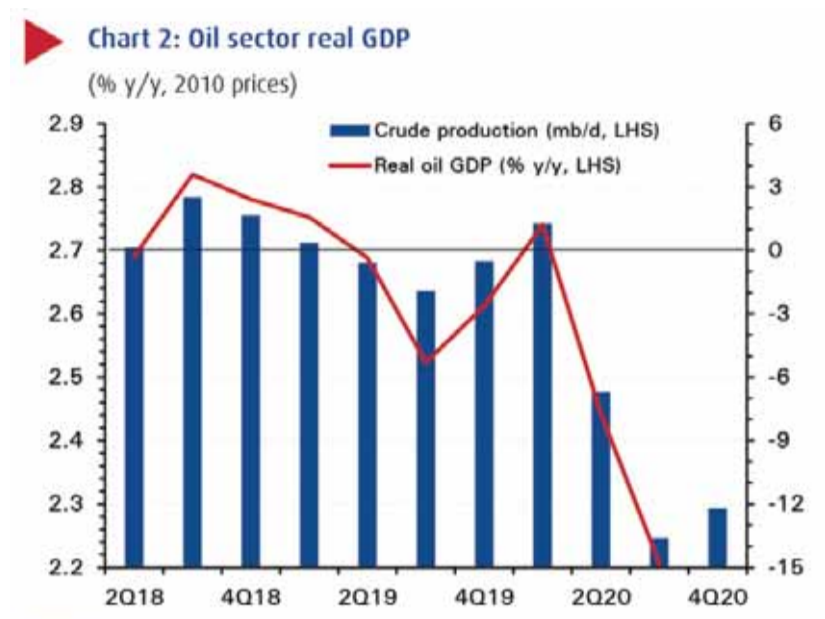
OPEC+ policy

With Kuwait's oil sector comprising more than 51 percent of the country's total economic output in real terms, headline economic activity is therefore highly sensitive to the performance of the oil sector and changes in crude oil production. Real oil GDP in 3Q20 fell for the second quarter in a row in 3Q20 (-14.8 percent y/y; -8.2 percent q/q) as crude production declined almost 15 percent y/y (from 2.64 mb/d in 3Q19 to 2.25 mb/d in 3Q20) due to Kuwait's participation in the OPEC+ production cuts.

Production is likely to remain well below potential capacity until at least April 2022, when the current OPEC+ deal, signed in April 2020, is due to expire. Non-oil activity fell for a third consecutive quarter in 3Q20 (-7.7 percent y/y) though it did improve on 2Q20, increasing by 13.3 percent q/q, lifted by pent-up consumer demand. The almost 20 percent annual decline in economic activity in the second quarter of 2020 was unprecedented, with severe coronavirus mobility restrictions imposed in May forcing businesses to shutter and consumers to remain housebound. Construction, trade (wholesale and retail) and hospital



Source: Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau (CSB), Refinitiv



Source: CSB, Joint Organizations Data Initiative (JODI), OPEC

tality (hotels and restaurants) were the three sectors worst affected by the pandemic in annual growth terms, contracting, by 65.9 percent, 47.8 percent and 44.4 percent, respectively. Little surprise, therefore, that once restrictions were eased from July onwards, these sectors recorded the quickest quarter-on-quarter turnaround in activity.

The release of pent-up demand was especially visible in the quarterly increase in consumer spending, as measured by KNet data, which jumped almost 68 percent q/q (+26.2 percent y/y) to KD6.1 billion—a level that was also maintained in 4Q20.

While almost all sectors in Kuwait's non-oil economy posted quarter-on-quarter gains in 3Q20, only a few recorded positive year-on-year output increases. Chief among these was public administration and defense, historically the largest component and contributor to the non-oil economy, which expanded by 3.9 percent y/y. The 'household with employed persons' (domestic workers) and education sub-sectors also grew, by 10 percent y/y and 0.7 percent y/y, respectively.

Looking ahead to full year real GDP outturns, headline growth is likely to come in at around -8 percent y/y, helped by expected improvements in the per-

formance of both the oil and the non-oil sectors in the still-to-be-released 4Q20 results. The rate of decline in both sectors should moderate to around -8 percent y/y, with non-oil activity improving in on the back of further easing in COVID-19 mobility restrictions, the resumption of normal business operations and robust consumer spending. Government consumption, the lynchpin of the economy, is also likely to increase in 4Q20, according to preliminary fiscal data. Oil sector output gains, on the back of higher crude oil production in the fourth quarter, will also feed into the improved picture.



Khalaf: Private sector is the right place to achieve career ambitions

KUWAIT: As part of the activities of "Tamakan" career readiness program sponsored by the bank, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) held a seminar in which Ghada Khalaf, Director of Investment Advisory at Asiya Investments gave a lecture and answered a number of questions raised by participants. During the seminar, Khalaf stressed the importance of developing education considering this as a shared responsibility for all parties in society, starting from the family to civil society organizations and the government.

Continuous development

In her discussion with the youth navigating their career path, Khalaf accentuated the importance of continuous development of skills and capabilities, teamwork and not rushing in pursuit of alluring benefits, as these will be attainable in the future with time and effort, and advised attendees saying: "You have to be flexible and persistent throughout your career and focus on self-realization."

Khalaf pointed out that every person has unique talents and capabilities similar to the genetic footprint, which should be explored and continuously developed, as these skills represent the key factor for excellence in work and life. She explained that academic degrees and professional experience are necessary for achieving career success, but it is required to possess various skills to sustain this success, basically teamwork, initiative-taking, creative thinking and commitment.

Education first

Khalaf stressed the importance of education, being the cornerstone of the progress of nations, highlighting the various risks resulting from closure of educational

institutions due to the coronavirus outbreak. She called on all concerned parties, including government authorities, the private sector and civil society, to resume the educational activity, subject to all necessary precautions, to put an end to the losses resulting from closure of this sector at all levels, emphasizing that the gradual return to normal life should begin with education.

"Education first" should be the motto of the next stage, as it is the only way to achieve the progress for nations. This is only attainable through the cooperation of all parties including government authorities, civil society organizations and the private sector, in shaping a new vision and an ambitious plan to promote the educational sector, and revitalize education which is the foundation for the progress and flourishing of Kuwait, she noted.

Private sector's leadership

Khalaf praised NBK's role in enhancing the skills of young national cadres from fresh graduates and qualifying them to join the labor market, in addition to the numerous contributions reflecting its commitment to perform its social responsibilities as a leading national institution, representing a role model for other institutions. Khalaf mentioned that the Kuwaiti private sector is always proactive in accommodating creativity, enhancing skills, unleashing the potentials of the youth, leading all government and civil society sectors and supporting all their activities in this regard. Khalaf advised attendees: "If you are pursuing a career ambition, you should join the private sector where competitiveness, development, learning and opportunities are available for serious people aspiring for success."



Ghada Khalaf during the lecture

KIB acts as lead arranger in \$235m facility for Oman firm

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) continues to be committed to developing and expanding its financing footprint on local, regional and international levels. Accordingly, the bank has participated, as a Mandated Lead Arranger, in the \$235m syndicated Ijarah facility for Mazoon Electricity Company in Oman, along with a consortium of local and regional banks. This one-year bridge facility, which can be extended for an additional year, aims to support Mazoon's pre-approved CAPEX plans for 2021, related to the expansion of the electricity distribution network.

Commenting on the successful closure of this transaction, Mohamed Khadiri, General Manager of the International Banking and Large Corporate Department at KIB, said: "The successful syndication of this debut Islamic facility is a major milestone in Mazoon's efforts to tap Islamic funding. Against a backdrop of challenging market conditions, the facility was 2.4 times oversubscribed which reflects Mazoon's strong business fundamentals and confirms its strong credit appetite".

Khadiri added: "Our participation in this syndicated



Mohamed Khadiri

facility comes as part of KIB's strategic vision to provide Islamic financing solutions to semi-government and government-affiliated entities, as well as large private conglomerates across the region." Khadiri concluded by saying: "This deal adds to KIB's portfolio of noteworthy achievements and its strong track record in providing Sharia-

compliant financing products and services, as well as financial advisory to the corporate sector. We will continue our efforts to pursue KIB's strategic objectives in order to strengthen and cement our position as a leading banking institution amongst local and regional banks, as we continue to fulfill the needs and requirements of our customers."

Established in 2005, Mazoon is part of the main electricity grid referred to as the Main Interconnected System in Oman and holds the monopoly and exclusive license to distribute and supply electricity in Dakhliya, Sharqiya and South Al Batinah regions. Mazoon is a closely held Omani Joint Stock Company indirectly wholly owned by the Government of Sultanate of Oman through its holding company for the electricity and water sector, Electricity Holding Company SAOC ("Nama Holding"), which is in turn fully owned by Oman's sovereign wealth fund Oman Investment Authority.



Gulf Bank encourages women to invest

KUWAIT: In light of International Women's History Month and following the Central Bank of Kuwait awareness campaign "Diraya", Gulf Bank would like to take this opportunity and state its social duty towards supporting women's financial goals and investment awareness.

We aim to encourage women to save and invest in an effort to enable them to achieve various goals, including financial independence and family well-being. With the improvement of gender equality and women earning higher salaries in today's modern world, women are able to invest more than ever before. In turn, technology has led to the creation of various low-risk, income generating investment products that are tailored to women's investment needs.

Women make up 40 percent of the investment clients at Gulf Bank, with their portfolios tending to take a balanced to low-risk approach, whilst choosing easy to understand and transparent investment products. When compared to their male counterparts, female investors also tend to show a higher commitment to their investment goals. Having studied the investment tendencies and behavior of our female client base we are proud to offer them tailor made investments that meet their individual needs.

Therefore, suitable for women, Gulf Bank's digital investment platform "WISE Investments" provides its

clients with the opportunity to invest in a globally diversified portfolio with a long-term approach. By filling out a simple questionnaire, WISE determines customers' financial goals, risk appetite, and investment horizon to recommend a portfolio that is customized to their needs and risk level. For our female clients, we can offer low-risk, income-generating investment products that will not only support our clients' financial goals, but also enable them to achieve additional sources of income. Over the course of the investment period, Gulf Bank's investment managers continuously monitor and review their clients' portfolios, in an effort to safeguard and increase their wealth.

It is worth noting that women make up 50 percent of Gulf Bank's Investment Management department, headed by Dalya Al-Qassem, Head of Investment Management. Al-Qassem commented: "At Gulf Bank, we are constantly striving to provide the best services for our clients, across our various sectors and departments. We work diligently to deliver the best investment products that are tailored to each customer segment. Taking this into consideration, we invite all women in Kuwait to explore Gulf Bank's various investment products and start investing as soon as possible."

Female empowerment is among the top priorities of Gulf Bank, which seeks to support both its female clients and employees. The Bank recently launched a Mastercard Rose Gold credit card with tailored benefits and exclusive discounts designed to reward the modern woman while remaining keen to employ women in all departments of the Bank and in various positions.

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199

HADI CLINIC
Ophthalmology Services

Dr. Ahmed Hosni Abd Elhamid
Consultant

Dr. Rany Essam Mitwally
Senior Registrar

Dr. Abeer Khattab
Specialist

Cataract Surgery **Glaucoma** **Retina** **General Ophthalmology** **Follow-Up All Treatments**

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA @hadclinicw

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

مستشفى رويال هايات ROYALE HAYAT HOSPITAL

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), [@dardardonabb](mailto:dardardonabb)
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

[daralshifa](https://www.instagram.com/daralshifa)

'COOPERATIVE AND ACTIVE': PANDA COUPLE MATES IN FRANCE

A couple of giant pandas in captivity engaged in a rare weekend of love-making with the hoped-for result, an even rarer panda offspring, still too early to call, a French zoo said on Sunday. Huan Huan, a female panda on loan from China at the Beauval zoo in central France, was "put in contact" eight times on Saturday with partner Yuan Zi, it said. Female pandas are fertile only 24 to 48 hours per year and, in the wild, usually give birth every two years.

But in captivity, the tiny window of opportunity thwarts most attempts to procreate, as male pandas often appear to lose interest in the act or, lacking practice, don't know how to perform. But, as it turned out, the Beauval couple were "cooperative and rather active" as they got close, the zoo reported. Yuan Zi was "more at ease with the approach and the mating than in previous years", while Huan Huan, in heat, was "very interested". The pandas' keepers and vets won't be holding their breath for success, as there are no guarantees of pregnancy even after several rounds of



The young male Yuan Meng eats bamboo inside his enclosure at the Beauval Zoo in Saint-Aignan, Central France.



Female panda Huan Huan (left) and male panda Huan Zi meet during an attempt to mate the pair in their enclosure at the Beauval Zoo in Saint-Aignan, Central France. — AFP photos

amorous activity. But the team felt that the performance "was rather good", and gave kudos to the panda male who "has made progress" since last year, according to the zoo's chief vet, Baptiste Mulot. "He has a better idea of what to do," he said.

The zoo said "high-pitched sounds" from the female and "more husky" ones from the male gave the encounters their

rhythm, "which is normal and a good sign". But for good measure the team added an artificial insemination during the night with the help of German specialists flown in for the operation which involved anaesthetizing the pandas briefly. Any pregnancy should be detected within two weeks, but even that would not necessarily spell success, as pandas often experience pseu-

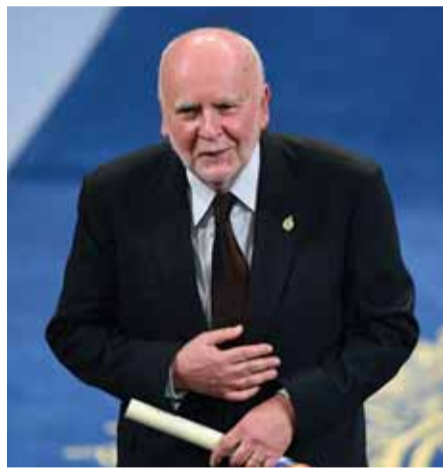
do-pregnancies that fail to produce an embryo. Huan Huan in 2017 gave birth to Yuan Meng, the first panda born in France, after an artificial insemination. Now grown to around his mother's size, the young panda is this year to be sent to China where 500 pandas live in captivity, and 2,000 in the wild. — AFP

First ever tweet turns 15 years old

Fifteen years ago Jack Dorsey typed out a banal message—"just setting up my twttr"—which became the first ever tweet, launching a global platform that has become a controversial and dominant force in civil society. The short tweet on March 21, 2006 by the Twitter CEO is now being sold at auction, with bidding reaching \$2.5 million. It has been a long, strange journey for the social network, which in January deleted former president Donald Trump's account after he was blamed for inciting the violent insurrection on the US Capitol in January by extremist supporters seeking to overturn his election loss.



The banning of a head of state from the platform was both welcomed and denounced in a sign of the thin line Twitter and other social media networks often try to walk between neutrality, freedom of expression, and moderation and prevention of abuse. Bidding on Dorsey's tweet ends later Sunday. He has said he will donate the funds to charity. Dorsey's tweet will be sold as an NFT, or a non-fungible token. NFTs use the same blockchain technology behind cryptocurrencies to turn anything from art to sports trading cards into virtual collector's items that cannot be duplicated. — AFP



In this file photo Polish poet Adam Zagajewski walks on stage after receiving the 2017 Princess of Asturias Award for Literature. — AFP

Poland's Adam Zagajewski, 'poet of 9/11' dies aged 75

Polish poet Adam Zagajewski, known for his work focused on the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the US, died aged 75 on Sunday in Krakow, Polish media reported quoting his publisher. Born in 1945 in Lviv,

Zagajewski was one of Poland's most celebrated contemporary authors, winning numerous awards and was short-listed for the Nobel Prize for literature. He had divided his time between Poland and the United States, where he taught literature at the University of Chicago and was known as "the poet of 9/11".

He earned the moniker after the New Yorker magazine selected one of his poems—"Try to Praise the Mutilated World"—for the final page of its special issue on the September 11 terrorist attacks on the US in 2001. "You've seen the refugees going nowhere, / you've heard the executioners sing joyfully," reads the poem he wrote months before the Twin Towers fell. "You should praise the mutilated world." Zagajewski's poems and essays were laced with history but also humor, and he was known

for shunning the limelight and poking fun at himself.

He was a prominent member of the Polish New Wave literary movement, inspired by the post-war communist regime's brutal suppression of a wave of student protests across Poland in March 1968. Zagajewski moved to Paris in 1982, soon after Poland's last communist leader, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, tried to strangle Solidarity, the Soviet bloc's first free trade union with a brutal military crackdown. By the time he returned to Krakow in 2002, he had earned several awards and honors, including the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, the Prix de la Liberte and a Guggenheim Fellowship. — AFP



TOKYO FASHION WEEK



Models display creations from fashion brand Requal? by designer Tetsuya Doi.



Lifestyle | Features



Postcard enthusiast Gesa Funke poses with postcards she has received over the years, in her flat in Berlin. — AFP photos



Postcard enthusiast Gesa Funke writes on a postcard.

'WISH YOU WERE HERE': POSTCARDS HELP GERMANS CONNECT IN PANDEMIC

Brightly coloured rectangles of cardboard fill almost every wall of Gesa Funke's apartment in southern Berlin, with piles more stashed in corners and drawers-some from places as far-flung as French Polynesia. The 29-year-old student has been sending and collecting postcards for years. But, like many Germans, she has found herself putting pen to paper more often as a result of travel and other restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic. "It's a little less effort than writing a letter, and it's still nice to receive something from another person, to have a bit of contact," she says.

While many Germans have embraced digital technology in the virus

era, others have turned to more traditional forms of communication to keep in touch with loved ones. In December, Deutsche Post said it had carried 11 percent more postcards than during the same month the previous year "probably due to corona and Christmas". Funke told AFP that she had started sending more cards to her friends in Germany during the pandemic, "friends whom I would otherwise meet in person but that's not possible at the moment". She continues to send lots to both her grandmothers too, she says.

Birthday wishes

Overall last year, 120 million postcards were sent, down from 2019's

147 million, the German postal service said. However, the drop was less than expected, given international post was severely disrupted in the first wave of the pandemic. Holidays-usually a key reason for writing-had also largely evaporated because of stringent travel restrictions. But at the same time, there was an increase in people sending postcards for other reasons, according to the German MyPostcard app, which lets users print their own customized postcards. In 2019, the traditional "wish you were here" holiday note was the most common type of card sent. Last year, birthdays took the lead as the most popular reason.

New hobby

In October, around 66 percent of respondents to a YouGov survey for MyPostcard said they sent postcards regularly-compared with 57 percent of respondents to the same survey in 2019. Funke is a member of Post crossing, an international postcard exchange project with around 800,000 members in 207 countries. At more than nine million, Germany has sent more postcards than any other country under the project since it was founded 15 years ago.

People may have turned to postcards in the pandemic because they "have more time and simply want to try out a new hobby that they didn't know before", Funke suggests. "Others might

have discovered this hobby for the first time because they travelled a lot before and that's no longer possible, so they have started to write postcards simply to see something of the world," she adds.

According to Postcrossing founder Paulo Magalhaes, the number of postcards sent under the project declined during the first wave of the pandemic because of snags in the postal system but picked up again later in 2020. "We are seeing this both in terms of number of (new) users and of postcards exchanged which is accelerating," Magalhaes said.— AFP



Ashod Papazian, a 64-year-old Armenian Egyptian watchmaker, poses for a photo outside his family-owned business - the Francis Papazian watchmaker's shop - in Attaba district, Cairo. — AFP photos



Samy Taha, a 63-year-old Egyptian watchmaker, repairs a watch.



Refaat Makary, a 58-year-old Egyptian watchmaker, repairs a watch at the Francis Papazian watchmaker's shop in the central Attaba district of Egypt's capital Cairo.



Samy Taha, a 63-year-old Egyptian watchmaker, repairs a watch at the Francis Papazian watchmaker's shop.



TIME STANDS STILL AT HISTORIC CAIRO WATCH SHOP

Time seems to have stood still at Papazian's, an Armenian Egyptian watchmaker whose almost 120-year-old Cairo shop has withstood the decades, surviving political upheavals and urban transformations. Sheltered from the hustle and bustle of the capital's unforgiving traffic and surrounded by street vendors in Attaba Square, the unassuming shop housed under the arcades of an old Haussmannian building is a time capsule of Cairo's rich cosmopolitan history.

It is a rare museum-like site where old clocks, watches and timepieces are meticulously repaired. "I have spare parts from my grandfather's days,"

Ashod Papazian, the current 64-year-old owner who inherited the family business, told AFP. The shopfront with patinated wooden frames boasts an impressive array of pocket watches and wrist models with ageing bracelets, as well as yellowed advertisements of the vaunted watchmaker. At the turn of the 19th century, Egypt had become a popular destination for Armenians who specialised in delicate manual crafts such as jewellery-making, along with a thriving European community that included Italians, Greeks, Jews and French citizens.

The Armenian community, estimated to have numbered between 40,000 and 60,000 before Egypt's 1952 anti-

monarchy revolution, mostly living in Cairo and Alexandria, has dwindled to only around a few thousand now. In his small office surrounded by a quaint mess of archives, books and clocks of all kinds, Ashod is the keeper of precious memories. Two black-and-white portraits hang behind his armchair: of his grandfather Nerses, known as Francis, the founder of the store, and of Ashod's own father Sarkis.

Under the more than century-old counters, dozens of wooden drawers contain spare parts of almost every imaginable brand of watch. Antique comtoise pendulum chimes or cuckoo clocks-some from the 19th century-occupy every inch of available wall space. They belong to customers who have entrusted him to repair them or owned by the watch enthusiast himself-who refuses to part with his rarest timepieces.

The Rich and Famous

In 1893, Nerses Papazian, drafted into the Ottoman army, escaped by jumping on a boat without knowing his final destination, his grandson told AFP. He ended up in Alexandria on Egypt's Mediterranean coast. Ten years later, he opened the watch shop in Cairo that carries his name on the storefront to this day. Building a reputation, he attracted several stars from the golden age of Egyptian cinema such as Youssef Wahbi, Fouad el-Mohandes and Abdelmoneim Ibrahim as customers.

Papazian also said the family of King Farouk, Egypt's last monarch, called his father Sarkis to the royal palace to have their pick from a wide array of watches.



Karam Iskandar, a 56-year-old Egyptian watchmaker, repairs a watch at the Francis Papazian watchmaker's shop.

Later when Egypt's Free Officers movement led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the country's first president, overthrew the monarchy, the newly-established republic's elite also adopted Papazian. "After the revolution there were (army) officers who dropped by, they were friends with my dad. They loved watches," he said. Papazian's retains many loyal customers, but there are no succession plans on the cards for his two sons in their 20s.

"Most of the clients have become friends. We don't have anyone just passing through here," he explained. Talaat Farghaly, 71, said he has been frequenting the shop ever since 1965.

The Armenian watchmaker is "very reliable", he said. "We respectfully call him 'Khawaga' (the foreigner)," said Farghaly, who works in import-export. Ahmed el-Melegy, 62, a printer, is also an aficionado with more than 35 in his watch collection. "My passion for clocks began in 1984," he told AFP. "I often passed Ashod's shop and was fascinated. One day I decided to buy myself a clock for my wedding. Since then I haven't been able to stop," he recalled. — AFP



Ashod Papazian, a 64-year-old Armenian Egyptian watchmaker, poses for a photo at his family-owned business - the Francis Papazian watchmaker's shop.

Sports

Euro teams start World Cup qualifying campaign amid COVID-19 chaos

France host Ukraine behind closed doors tomorrow

PARIS: Holders France begin their defense of the World Cup this week as European qualifying for the 2022 finals in Qatar gets underway against a backdrop of confusion and chaos over the release of players in a worrying health context across the continent.

While this month's scheduled qualifiers in South America were called off and most matches in Asia were postponed, players in Europe are having to work their way around travel restrictions in order to join up with national teams.

FIFA's decision to relax rules forcing clubs to release players during an international window remains in place until the end of April, with world football's governing body unable to ignore the wider context of the COVID-19 crisis. The consequences of that have largely been confusion and plenty of backtracking by clubs and authorities in recent days. Winners in 2018, France host Ukraine behind closed doors tomorrow before flying 5,500 kilometers (3,418 miles) to Kazakhstan and stopping off on the way back in Sarajevo for another game against Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The trip has caused some controversy in France, with authorities allowing members of the French team to go to Central Asia and then the Balkans while the French league said it would not release players to travel out with the 27-nation European Union or European Economic Area (EEA), which also includes Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

That was due to clubs being worried about players having to self-isolate for a week on their return, thereby missing their team's next league game. A row ensued, with the decision affecting several European nations with players based in Ligue 1, but also many African national teams looking to call up players for Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers.

U-turns

"I'm not a politician, I'm just an ordinary guy, but it's not fair. It is not wise at the moment either. We need to stick together and not show discrimination or racism. It doesn't give a good image," said Lyon captain Memphis Depay, with the Dutch international at risk of missing his country's qualifier in Turkey as a result.

Realizing it was not a good look, the French sports ministry announced over the weekend that all players could be released after all, saying they would be "exempt from a seven-day isolation as long as they respect a strict health and medical protocol" on returning.

U-turns have happened elsewhere, with Bayern Munich announcing on Saturday that star Polish striker Robert Lewandowski and Austrian defender David Alaba would be released for international duty due to a change in Germany's COVID-19 travel restrictions.

Lewandowski can now play for Poland against England at Wembley on March 31, while Alaba can feature for Austria against Scotland in Glasgow on Thursday. Bayern had initially said neither player would be released to play in the UK as Germany had insisted on a two-week quarantine for anyone travelling from Britain. "We gave the go-ahead for both players," confirmed Bayern coach Hansi Flick.

Punishing schedule

Some countries have been forced to take quite drastic action to get around possible restrictions. Portugal moved their qualifier against Azerbaijan to Turin in Italy. Had the game gone ahead in Lisbon, they feared having to leave out 10 Premier League-based players who faced having to self-isolate for 10 days on



SAINT-DENIS: In this file photo taken on October 07, 2020 France's forward Kylian Mbappe (right) is congratulated by France's forward Antoine Griezmann after scoring a goal during the international friendly football match between France and Ukraine in Saint-Denis, outside Paris. —AFP

their return to the United Kingdom.

The decision to make teams play three qualifiers in seven days just before the run-in to the club season, despite the travel difficulties, also raises eyebrows as it means no let-up for elite players in a punishing schedule. It is worth pondering what kind of physical condition they will be in by the time the delayed Euro 2020 starts on

June 11. For now it is all about the road to Qatar.

Despite qualifying automatically as hosts, Qatar have already taken part in the Asian qualifying tournament and will now be involved in the European competition too. They will be sparring partners for teams in Group A and will play games in Hungary against Luxembourg, Azerbaijan and the Republic of Ireland. —AFP



TURIN: Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo reacts during the Italian Serie A football match Juventus Turin vs Benevento on Sunday at the Juventus stadium in Turin. —AFP

Juve's title hopes rocked, Milan keep pressure on Inter

MILAN: Juventus' hopes of winning a 10th consecutive Serie A title took another blow on Sunday with a 1-0 home loss to lowly Benevento as AC Milan closed the gap on leaders Inter Milan with a hard-fought 3-2 win at Fiorentina.

Adolfo Gaich scored the only goal in the 69th minute at Juve's Allianz Stadium following a bad pass across his own penalty area by midfielder Arthur. Andrea Pirlo's side stay third, 10 points behind Inter whose match against Sassuolo was postponed because of a COVID-19 outbreak at the league leaders.

Second-placed Milan are four points ahead of the reigning champions after they recovered from their Europa League exit to Manchester United by cutting the deficit to Inter to six points with a 3-2 win over Fiorentina.

For Juve, who have 11 games left to play this season, it was another blow after being dumped out of the Champions League at the last 16 stage by Porto earlier this month. "We performed poorly, in every aspect," said Pirlo. "We have to continue to believe in the title. The objective does not change, it's the mindset which must."

Serie A top scorer Cristiano Ronaldo, who has netted 23 times in the league this season, drew a blank in Turin a week after reaching 770 goals to beat Pele's all-time mark of 767, with Benevento goalkeeper Lorenzo Montipò pulling off a string of fine saves.

Benevento broke the deadlock following Arthur's horrendous pass across the face of goal towards Danilo, which allowed Gaich to pounce and score his second goal in five games since arriving on loan from CSKA Moscow.

Montipò denied Ronaldo twice late on as Juve pushed for a leveler, first from close range with 10 minutes to go and again in the final minute, with Danilo sending the subsequent rebound over the bar. Benevento now sit seven points away from the drop zone in 16th. —AFP

PSG beat Lyon to go top in France Ligue 1

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe warned he is "only just getting started" after scoring his 100th goal in France's top flight as Paris Saint-Germain swept aside title rivals Lyon 4-2 on Sunday to move to the top of Ligue 1 following a shock defeat for previ-

Leicester rock Man Utd to reach FA Cup semis

LONDON: Leicester sent Manchester United crashing out of the FA Cup as Kelechi Iheanacho's double sealed a 3-1 win, while Chelsea will face Manchester City in the semi-finals after beating Sheffield United on Sunday. Brendan Rodgers' side can look forward to meeting Southampton in their first FA Cup semi-final since 1982 thanks to Iheanacho's predatory finishing at the King Power Stadium. He put Leicester ahead in Rodgers' 100th game in charge before Mason Greenwood equalized late in the first half.

Youri Tielemans restored Leicester's lead and Nigeria striker Iheanacho wrapped up only their second win over United in 23 years and their first since 2014. Leicester, who have never won the FA Cup and last reached the final in 1969, will head to Wembley to face Southampton in April. "I'm obviously delighted. It was a great performance. Every aspect of the game was complete," Rodgers said. "We showed courage to play against one

of Europe's greatest teams. I told the players they were three games from history. Now it's two."

United's limp exit ended their run of 29 away games without defeat in all domestic competitions since losing at Liverpool in January 2020. Without a trophy since the 2017 Europa League, that competition is now their last realistic chance of winning the first silverware of boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's reign.

"We didn't have the spark but it's understandable. We played every three days and been on a great run. It just caught up with us, all the games and travels," Solskjaer said. "Thursday in Milan was a big night and took a lot of out of us physically. We didn't have the extra zip, authority and confidence today. We've got the Europa League and Premier League to concentrate on. Yes we would've liked to go to Wembley but now all the focus is on the games we do have."

After reaching the Europa League quarter-finals with a win at AC Milan in midweek, Solskjaer made five changes and United's reshuffled line-up never looked comfortable. Fred paid the price for a woeful mistake in the 24th minute. When Harry Maguire played a risky ball out to Fred on the edge of the United area, the Brazilian's

Messi on song as Barca thrash Real Sociedad

MADRID: Lionel Messi scored twice on Sunday as Barcelona trounced Real Sociedad 6-1 to keep the pressure on Atletico Madrid, who squeezed past Alaves thanks to a late penalty save from Jan Oblak. Oblak's 86th-minute heroics ensured Luis Suarez's 500th career goal was enough for a 1-0 victory at the Wanda Metropolitan, meaning the gap at the top of La Liga remains at four points, with 10 games left to play.

But the contrast between Atletico's nervy win against 19th-placed Alaves and Barca's demolition of a Real Sociedad side with hopes of qualifying for Europe spoke volumes about where the momentum lies in the Spanish title race.

Atletico will hope Oblak's save can prove to be a turning point after a challenging few weeks, while the interna-

tional break might offer Diego Simeone's side a chance to reset and refresh ahead of the run-in. "There are games where you suffer but that's what makes football beautiful," said Oblak. Simeone said: "Like all great teams, there is always one that scores a lot of goals and one that makes a lot of saves. They are both decisive players who make the team stronger."

Barcelona have hit their stride, their six goals against Real Sociedad no less than they deserved for a scintillating attacking display, and perhaps their best since Ronald Koeman took charge. "The team has improved a lot recently," said Koeman. "We've gone a lot of games without losing in the league, which was the only way to get back in the fight for the title. "But we're still behind Atleti. Real Madrid are stronger. We have to keep going to the end."

Messi breaks record

Messi scored his 11th and 12 goals in his last 10 games, and made it 16 in 12 this year. The 33-year-old has also now passed Xavi Hernandez's record of 767 Barcelona appearances, which he had

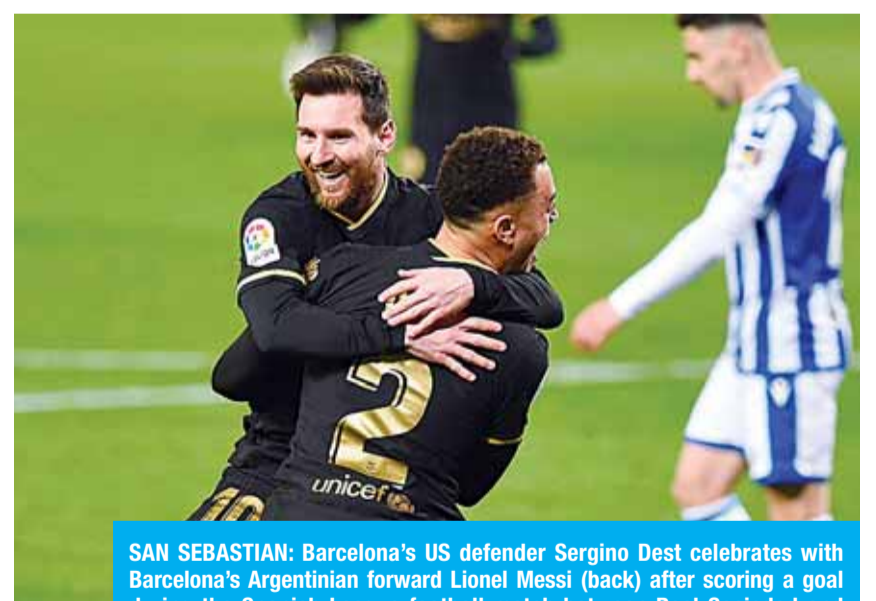


LEICESTER: Manchester United's English defender Harry Maguire is consoled by ex-teammates from Leicester after the English FA Cup quarter-final football match between Leicester City and Manchester United at King Power Stadium in Leicester, central England on Sunday. —AFP

panicked response was a weak back-pass towards United keeper Dean Henderson.

Iheanacho nipped in to intercept it before rounding Henderson and tapping into the empty net to make it eight goals in his last nine games. United equalized in the 38th minute when Pogba's cross was cleverly dummied by Donny van de Beek and Greenwood slammed his shot past

Kasper Schmeichel from 12 yards. Lacklustre United were still out of sorts and Tielemans put Leicester back in front in the 52nd minute. The Belgian midfielder advanced unchecked as United backed off and he took full advantage with a fine low finish from the edge of the area. Iheanacho killed off United in the 78th minute with a clinical header from Marc Albrighton's free-kick. —AFP



SAN SEBASTIAN: Barcelona's US defender Sergino Dest celebrates with Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (back) after scoring a goal during the Spanish League football match between Real Sociedad and Barcelona at the Anoeta stadium in San Sebastian on Sunday. —AFP

equaled against Huesca last week.

Messi did not plough a lone furrow at the Reale Arena, where Sergino Dest scored twice either side of half-time after Antoine Griezmann slammed in the

opener. Ousmane Dembele and Real Sociedad's Ander Barrenetxea — with arguably the goal of the night — both registered between Messi's double in the second half. —AFP

ous leaders Lille earlier.

Mbappe netted twice at the Groupama Stadium with Danilo Pereira and Angel Di Maria also on target before Islam Slimani and Maxwel Cornet pulled goals back for the home side. The result allowed Mauricio Pochettino's team to move into first place on goal difference from Lille, who were beaten 2-1 at home by struggling Nimes in a huge blow to their own title hopes.

Lyon would have gone top themselves with a victory but instead they remain three points off the lead in third place, while

Monaco are another point back in fourth after winning 4-0 at Saint-Etienne on Friday. Mbappe is Ligue 1's leading scorer with 20 goals this season and has reached a century of goals in France's top flight in 142 appearances at the age of just 22.

"I knew I was just two goals away. It's a new step in my career, another step towards history. These are things that stay with you," Mbappe told Canal Plus. "I am only just getting started. I still have a lot of years in front of me to perfect and improve my game so I think it can only get better."

It was a perfect night for PSG, as the reigning champions bounced back from a surprise 2-1 home loss to relegation-threatened Nantes last week and claimed a win against a direct rival in the title race for the first time this season.

They also saw Neymar return after a month and a half, and nine games, out injured. The world's most expensive player came on as a substitute, replacing Mbappe midway through the second half. Mbappe was close to his electrifying best and the World Cup winner opened the scoring 15 minutes in, fol-

lowing up to find the net after Marco Verratti's shot was parried by Lyon goalkeeper Anthony Lopes.

Marquinhos then nodded down a Presnel Kimpembe cross for Pereira to slam in and make it 2-0 just after the half-hour mark, and any hopes Lyon had of a comeback were blown away at the start of the second half. First Di Maria whipped in a free-kick from wide on the right that evaded everyone on its way into the net, and then Verratti released Mbappe to break clear and finish for his second of the game on 52 minutes. —AFP

Sports

Hamilton faces serious challenge in pursuit of eighth Formula One title

Season begins Sunday with record 23-race global calendar

LONDON: Lewis Hamilton begins his bid for an unprecedented eighth drivers' world championship next week facing a cluster of challenges to his crown, as Formula One launches its cost-cutting era with a record 23-race global calendar.

The defending champion passed his 36th birthday in January and struggled this month in pre-season testing, which was dominated by Max Verstappen and a reinvigorated Red Bull, having after long delays committed to only a one-year contract, for 2021, during the sport's brief off-season.

After contracting COVID-19 and duly missing the Sakhir Grand Prix last year, Hamilton had returned to be beaten in the season-ending Abu Dhabi race by Verstappen — a 'blip' that may be seen by some as an early signal of a decline in his powers, which will have encouraged not only the young Dutchman, but others. After reeling off seven consecutive constructors' championships — and seven 'doubles' of team and driver titles — Hamilton's 'black arrows' are under serious threat and both he and teammate Valtteri Bottas know it.

"They're going to be a different animal this year," Hamilton said of Red Bull, after testing at Sakhir's Bahrain International Circuit, where the jumbo-sized 2021 season, a second in succession to run under pandemic protocol conditions, begins. "They've had some really good running with a strong line-up of the two drivers and a really good car. Having seen them win the last race, you can only assume they're going to be right there, at the front, in the first race. It's going to be a great long battle with them this year."

The prospect of a long-awaited wheel-to-wheel 'battle royal' between the sport's most outstanding drivers, notwithstanding Fernando Alonso's return, will be welcomed by F1 fans worldwide as an antidote to the predictability of last year when Hamilton won 11 and team-mate Bottas two of the 17 races. As Verstappen and his new Red Bull teammate

Sergio Perez ran smoothly through 369 trouble-free laps in testing, Mercedes struggled to complete 304, Hamilton spinning off twice and suffering gearbox problems. The team's chief strategist James Vowles admitted: "No-one up and down the paddock will be able to pin-point where they are exactly, but there are a few trends — and I would say Red Bull are ahead on performance.

"They are the class act from this test, but it is only a test. It is not a race." He conceded that a close season is in prospect, as Hamilton also forecast as he digs into his reserves for a 15th consecutive year and, this time, in direct competition with a ferocious competitor who is 13 years his junior.

Verstappen was delighted by his team's powerful signal of intent in recruiting Perez and then shining in testing, but he said nothing could indicate their competitiveness until after qualifying at the opening race, the first to run with 'financial regulations' embedded in the rule book.

An early result of the cost cuts was that testing was reduced to only three days while team spending in operational budgets this year is capped at \$145 million (122 million euros). A further reduction to 140 million is planned for 2022 when the sport's latest radical overhaul is set to be introduced.

That means this season will see only minor tweaks to the rules affecting the cars, but the combination of reduced budgets and other changes may provide a greater challenge to big factory teams like Mercedes or Ferrari, than their smaller opponents.

Speed in testing

Red Bull know how to win titles — they won four drivers' championships in succession with Sebastian Vettel — and in Adrian Newey possess arguably the finest car designer of the modern era. Verstappen's speed in testing suggested they have a car to match his talent and ambitions this year.

Randle — a call that brought a stream of complaints from the Knicks. Randle would have one more chance to seize victory for New York, but his shot at the buzzer bounced out. He was still steaming after the game when he said officials had "blown" the call on the foul that sent Harris to the line.

"Yeah, it's ridiculous," said Randle, who led the Knicks with 24 points and drained a three-pointer with six seconds left in regulation that knotted the score at 86-86. "They've got to do a better job. It's too many games like this."

Harris said he just tried to go to the line and do "what I normally do. I just wanted to win a game, because we had too much going on," he said. "I was like 'Man, we've got to put this one down and win the game.'"

Shake Milton led the 76ers with 21 points off the bench. Harris added 20 points and guard Ben Simmons returned from a one-game injury absence to score 16 for a Philadelphia team still without star big man Joel Embiid and sharp-shooter Seth Curry. The victory kept the Sixers a game ahead of the Brooklyn Nets, who beat the Washington Wizards 113-106 thanks to 28 points from Kyrie Irving and 26 from James Harden.

Former All-Star Blake Griffin played his first game for Brooklyn since signing with them as a free agent, scoring his only basket of the night in the fourth quarter on a two-handed dunk that had his new Nets teammates cheering. Nicolas Claxton added 16 points for the Nets, who rallied from a 20-6 first-quarter deficit and withstood Russell Westbrook's triple-double of 29 points, 13 rebounds and 13 assists.

Lu Dort was the hero for Oklahoma City, scoring 23 points and coming up with a "heroic" late block on Houston's John Wall as the Thunder handed the Rockets a 20th straight defeat, 114-112. The Thunder led by one when Dort missed a three-point attempt and the Rockets snaggged the rebound with 15.8 seconds remaining.

Wall drove past Dort to the rim, but Dort managed to swat the ball cleanly away from behind, denying Wall's layup with nine seconds remaining. "Honestly that was a heroic play," Thunder center Moses Brown said. "I've never seen anything like it and it was so clutch." Dort acknowledged that Wall "kind of beat me, so I just had to recover and not give up on that play." —AFP

Suns set down LeBron-less Lakers, 76ers edge Knicks

LOS ANGELES: The Los Angeles Lakers got a hard look at life without injured superstar LeBron James on Sunday in a 111-94 NBA loss to the Phoenix Suns. Devin Booker and Deandre Ayton scored 26 points apiece and Chris Paul had a triple-double of 11 points, 10 rebounds and 13 assists for the Suns, who led wire-to-wire against a Lakers team that coach Frank Vogel acknowledged must find a "new identity" as James recovers from a high ankle sprain suffered in a loss to Atlanta on Saturday.

With 17-time All-Star James sidelined, the Lakers struggled to get their offense going. Montrezl Harrell led Los Angeles with 23 points off the bench and Dennis Schroder added 22, but the Lakers connected on just 41.2 percent of their shots from the field.

"I'm optimistic," Vogel insisted after the game. "I think our guys really fought tonight. We didn't shoot the ball that well, but I thought we competed at a very high level. It's going to take a little time to adjust and figure out where the shots are coming from, what our new identity is going to look like."

No timeline has been given for James's return, and Vogel said before the game that he wasn't counting on a quick recovery. "Those things take a while to heal," Vogel said. "They are slow recoveries. We're prepared to be without him indefinitely." Phoenix took full advantage in posting their eighth win in 10 games. It was a milestone game for Paul, whose alley-oop pass to Ayton for a dunk in the third quarter made him just the sixth player in NBA history with 10,000 assists.

Randle riled

The Eastern Conference-leading Philadelphia 76ers escaped with a 101-100 overtime victory over the New York Knicks, with Tobias Harris draining two free throws with 5.3 seconds remaining to seal the victory. Harris went to the line after a foul by New York forward Julius



JEDDAH: A handout picture provided by the Saudi Ministry of Sports on March 18, 2021, shows the circuit design for the Jeddah Street Circuit where the 2021 Saudi Arabian Grand Prix is planned to be held. —AFP

If that proves true, Hamilton's assault on the records could be paused in a season that sees the arrival of two 'new' teams in Aston Martin, a re-branding of Racing Point, and Alpine, formerly Renault, and two additional races at Zandvoort, for the first time since 1995, and Jeddah, in Saudi Arabia where a high-speed street circuit is anticipated.

In addition to two-time champion Alonso returning with Alpine, several drivers will be making debuts — Mick Schumacher, son of seven-time champion Michael, lines up alongside Russian Nikita Mazepin for Haas while highly-rated Japanese Yuki Tsunoda has replaced Daniil

Kvyat at Alpha Tauri.

Furthermore, as a changing of the guard appears to be in the air, Perez's switch to join Verstappen at Red Bull made room for Vettel at Aston Martin while Carlos Sainz left McLaren and took the German's seat at Ferrari. In turn, Daniel Ricciardo joined McLaren and was replaced at Alpine by Alonso.

After a year in the doldrums, Ferrari hope to lead the chase behind the leading duo ahead of a resurgent McLaren, ambitious Alpine and Aston Martin, where Vettel seeks to recover his mojo. Hamilton, perhaps distracted by his many off-track causes and commitments, will hope his well-oiled team can recover to stay beyond their reach. —AFP

F1 welcomes return of the Schumacher name

PARIS: For the winner of the Formula Two world championship to make the step up to F1 is a natural progression that would not normally raise an eyebrow — but when that driver carries a famous name things are bound to be a little different.

Mick Schumacher, son of the seven-time world champion Michael, is the young driver in the spotlight as he makes his Formula One debut for Haas in Bahrain on Sunday, but he thoroughly merits his drive. After starting his career in karting, Mick went on to win the Formula 3 European championship in 2018 and the Formula Two title in 2020.

Not a bad CV for a young man who turned 22 yesterday. But next week, the noise around him will echo with reminders of his father whose last race in a glittering career came in Brazil at the end of the 2012 season.

The 52-year-old Michael Schumacher has not been seen in public for more than seven years after a skiing accident, witnessed by Mick, in the French Alps left him with severe brain injuries. But he remains the touchstone for his son. "I definitely look at what he achieved, and I try to learn from it," said Mick in February.

For the younger generation who arrived on the scene too late to see Michael in action, or those who only remember him from his underwhelming comeback with Mercedes, it is easy to forget how Schumacher dominated the sport every bit as much as Lewis Hamilton does today.

He won two titles with Benetton before taking the big move to Ferrari with whom he won another five titles. "He's been the benchmark for so long and for me he's still the benchmark, so I'll always refer to him,"

said Mick. "That's on the sporting side, and on the human side, I'll always admire how his consistency across all those years and how he kept his feet on the ground. That's something I appreciate very much, but also something I can learn from and carry through my career."



Mick Schumacher

'Not easy'

Former world champion Nico Rosberg, whose father Keke had won the title in 1982, 24 years before he debuted in F1, highlighted the extra pressure that Mick would face having a famous father. "It's not easy to be the 'son of,'" Rosberg told website Sport1. "And with Mick, it is 10 times more difficult, because Michael's era was not so long ago and he was much more successful. I hope Mick can put that aside and concentrate well on his job — because otherwise it takes a lot of the fun away."

Even without the pressure of the spotlight, it was never going to be an easy entrance for Mick. His Haas team are likely to feature in the middle and rear of the pack while his teammate, fellow rookie Nikita Mazepin perhaps faces even greater pressure. He is also a 'son of' although not Formula One aristocracy. Rather, his billionaire father Dmitry Mazepin is a non-executive director of Russian company Uralkali, who are the main title partner of the Haas team.

There is a good chance, however, that Mick will fare better than his dad did when he turned out for Jordan in his first Grand Prix in Belgium in 1991. Michael Schumacher did brilliantly to qualify in seventh but a failed clutch meant he did not make it beyond the opening lap of the race itself. Whether he will come anywhere close to 91 race wins and seven world titles, only time will tell. No pressure at all. —AFP

Classifieds

HOSPITALS

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Adaliya	22517144
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Khaldiya	24848075
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Kaifan	24849807
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Shamiya	24848913
Chest Hospital	24849400	Shuwaikh	24814507
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Adan Hospital	23940620	Nuzha	22526804
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Qadsiya	22515088
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Dasmah	22532265
Clinics			
Kaizen center	25716707	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Rawda	22517733	Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
		Mirqab	22456536



NOTICE
February 18, 2021

Mr. Ketan Namdev Kuttikar, son of Mr. Namdev Kuttikar, resident of H NO 20/228/2, Kevnem, Taleigao Tiswadi, North Goa, Goa 403002 and Ms. Lachan Santosh Amonkar, daughter of Mr. Santosh Tulsidas Amonkar, resident of HNO 740/1 Godkatad, Surla Bicholim, North Goa, Goa 403505, both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

(Ranveer Bharti)
Second Secretary (Cons) and Marriage Officer.
Embassy of India, Kuwait.
Email: cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in



NOTICE
March 21, 2021

Mr. Jaman Jacob, son of Mr. Jacob Akkalayil Paily, resident of Ekkalayil House, Kizhacambu PO, Koothattkullam, Ernakulam, Kerala Pin: 686662 and Ms. Thajitha Thankachen, daughter of Mr. Thankachen, resident of Srambical House, Kunthirickal PO Thalavady, Alappuzha, Kerala both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

(Dr. Vinod Gokwad)
First Secretary (CA) and Marriage Officer.
Embassy of India, Kuwait.
Email: cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in

Olympics' overseas fan ban hits Japan tourism

Government hoped event might bring 600,000 visitors

TOKYO: Toshiko Ishii spent \$180,000 renovating her traditional Japanese inn in expectation of a flood of tourists for the Tokyo Olympics, but now she won't be hosting a single overseas fan. After Olympics organizers announced a ban on spectators from abroad, those working in Japan's tourism industry are counting their losses.

Experts say the impact will be limited compared to the much larger blow brought by the pandemic, adding there is hope that tourism will rebound as life moves towards normality. But it is a big setback for an industry that had high hopes for the Games after a dizzying upswing in business during the 2019 Rugby World Cup. "I am guessing foreign visitors won't be allowed until at least September. You have to look ahead and plan ahead to run a business," said Ishii.

"If you react emotionally at every turn of events, then you cannot sustain yourself," she added. In preparation for the influx, Ishii doubled the size of her hotel's restaurant and upgraded the antique decor and kitchen. "I was thinking, 'Next year with the Olympics, everything is going to be going up and up,'" she told AFP. "Now all of a sudden everything has evaporated."

Bolstered by the Rugby World Cup, Japan welcomed a record 31.9 million foreign visitors in 2019, and was on track to achieve its goal of 40 million in 2020. But last March strict virus border rules were imposed, all but barring foreign tourists, and the Tokyo Olympics were postponed for a year.

'Major economic loss'

Yui Oikawa, a manager at Tokyo Rickshaw, which operates tours in the historic Asakusa district, had assumed the Olympics, now starting in July, would bring roaring sales and customers from around the world. "I was sad and disappointed... but you cannot stand still," he said, saying his company is implementing strict sanitation measures to keep domestic customers coming.

"We are looking at this period as a time to build up our strength," added Oikawa, saying that staff were working on their customer pitches and knowledge of the area. Organizers hoped to sell around 630,000 tickets outside Japan for the Games. Japan's government hoped the event might bring 600,000 overseas visitors to the country.

But the boost from Olympic visitors is often overestimated, analysts say. Their spending would probably have totaled 95 billion yen (\$870 million), equivalent to 0.02 percent of Japan's GDP, research firm Capital Economics said in a November estimate.

A decision on whether to limit domestic fans has not yet been made, but crowd restrictions and the exclusion of foreign fans could mean losses of around 200 billion yen (\$1.8 billion), according to Takahide Kiuchi, an executive economist at Nomura Research Institute. "That is not big enough to sway the Japanese economy, but it still is certainly a major economic loss," he wrote in a report.

Rooms at the inn

The world's third largest economy is looking to other ways to grow this year, from exports to government stimulus measures, after a GDP contraction of 4.8 percent in coronavirus-hit 2020. The tourism drought looks set to continue, even after the end of a virus state of emergency which included early closing for bars and restaurants.

Domestic travel ticked up in the second half of 2020 thanks to a controversial government campaign that ended in late December as infections rose. Polls show most in Japan back the ban on foreign fans, and economists say the country should be looking to increased consumption for economic growth as the pandemic wanes.

Meanwhile, the tourism industry can do little more than hope for better days ahead. "You cannot blame this on anyone," said Hideyuki Sato, a



TOKYO: In this picture taken on March 12, 2021 Toshiko Ishii, who runs Andon Ryokan, a traditional style Japanese hotel, poses on the rooftop of her hotel in Taito district of Tokyo. — AFP

senior director at the Japan Ryokan and Hotel Association. "Once this ends and travel resumes, we believe that there will be strong international demand for tourism to Japan," he told AFP.

Inn owner Ishii is keeping busy learning recipes and sharing her new culinary creations

online with regular clients abroad. She's dependent on public loans to stay afloat, and her hopes for the future are tempered by anxiety about her finances and whether tourism will recover. "I'll work hard to pay off what I borrowed, but worry about what may happen after that." — 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