

2 Lavish election campaign events are off the menu



6 Two thirds of school-age kids without Internet access: UN



13 BTS' 'Life Goes On' debuts at No. 1 on US chart in first



16 F1 world champion Lewis Hamilton COVID-positive



# 80,000 domestic helpers to return directly to Kuwait

600 workers to return daily over 4 months • First flights from India, Philippines



KUWAIT: Directorate General of Civil Aviation Director General Youssef Al-Fawzan (center) holds a press conference with other DGCA officials yesterday. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said the return of foreign domestic workers to the country on direct flights will begin on Monday, Dec 7, with plans for a 14-day COVID-19 mandatory state quarantine for 80,000 individuals put in place. The plan will save on costs for employers (sponsors), paving the way for direct flights back instead of being subject to costs pertaining to a quarantine period abroad as was the case before the decision, DGCA Director General Youssef Al-Fawzan said in a press statement.

The huge endeavor, which will witness the entry of 600 people a day, has been given a four-month timeframe. It will begin with India and the Philippines, followed by other unspecified countries, according to Fawzan, and will include logistical services, shelter, catering and security. The workers will stay at one of 58 state quarantine buildings, where they will undergo three PCR tests and receive three meals a day under health ministry supervision. Men and women will be housed in separate facilities.

"The success of the plan, in its initial stages, will move us to other stages for the return of the rest of the categories of residents in an orderly manner in coordination with concerned government agencies and in cooperation with the private sector," added Fawzan.

State carrier Kuwait Airways and locally-owned Jazeera Airways will be in charge of airlifting the workers and have been urged to provide competitive prices for the flights, Acting Deputy Director Saleh Al-Fadaghi said. Kuwait-based aviation services provider NAS has been handed the roles of transportation, housing, catering, cleaning and security, with costs reduced to KD 270 per person from KD 550, he added.

On Monday, the Cabinet decided to allow domestic helpers to start returning to the country from Dec 7, according to government spokesman Tareq Al-Mazrem. He added the Cabinet set the cost of each returning maid at KD 270 to cover quarantine expenses. The amount does not include airfare, Mazrem said. — KUNA

## News in brief

### MoH licenses two COVID drugs

KUWAIT: The health ministry has authorized the drug bamlanivimab for emergency use to treat mild to moderate cases of COVID-19 in adult patients and children over 12 years old who have risk factors that make them more vulnerable. Assistant Undersecretary for Drug and Food Control Affairs Dr Abdullah Al-Bader said bamlanivimab was licensed to be used as an added drug to remdesivir to treat COVID-19 cases in adult patients and children over two years old receiving hospital treatment with ventilators. — KUNA



### China probe lands on Moon

BEIJING: An unmanned Chinese spacecraft landed on the Moon yesterday, state media reported, marking only the second time the country had successfully placed a probe on the lunar surface. The Chang'e-5 spacecraft "landed on the near side of the moon late Tuesday", the Xinhua report said. The mission's goal is to shovel up lunar rocks and soil to help scientists learn about the Moon's origins, formation and volcanic activity on its surface. — AFP

### Car tears through pedestrian zone

TRIER, Germany: At least two people were killed and several injured when a car tore through a pedestrian shopping street in the German city of Trier yesterday, police said, adding that the driver had been arrested. Police spokesman Karl-Peter Jochem told reporters that the driver was a 51-year-old German from the local area and that "the danger is over". Smartphone footage showed the driver lying face down on the street, being held down by several officers next to the damaged SUV. — AFP

### Bahrain delegation in Israel

TEL AVIV: A 40-strong Bahraini delegation arrived in Israel yesterday for two days of talks on boosting economic cooperation and tourism after the two countries normalized relations in September. Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi had been due to visit Bahrain this week but the trip was cancelled, diplomatic sources told AFP. The two states will sign today a memorandum of understanding that includes the establishment of a bilateral forum to promote mutual tourism. — AFP

## Election rallies return as low turnout seen

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A number of candidates, including ex- MPs, have broken a total ban on the traditional election campaigns to contain the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, hosting hundreds of voters

to rallies and dinner banquets. At least 10 candidates, most of them from the predominantly tribal fourth constituency, held such rallies and published pictures on their Twitter accounts showing large crowds many of whom without face masks.

The new development comes amid a lackluster election campaign that almost entirely depended on social media and television interviews. Authorities have slapped a total ban on public rallies and dinner banquets to prevent contacts between people.

Authorities have advised voters to abide by strict health measures on election day on Dec 5, especially after a sharp drop in new coronavirus cases in the

country. The government has also made preparations to allow people infected with the coronavirus to cast their ballots by allocating special isolated voting booths. Analysts meanwhile are predicting a low turnout because of the pandemic. Election specialist Saleh Al-Saeedi, writing in Al-Qabas Arabic daily, said he expects the number of voters who cast their ballot to be low due to coronavirus concerns. Saeedi said this will benefit Islamists and tribal candidates because they have more committed and loyal voters, who will likely brave pandemic concerns to vote for their candidates.

Continued on Page 2

## Economy back to pre-COVID level in 2021: OECD

PARIS: The global economy may get back to pre-pandemic levels by the end of next year as vaccines help propel recovery, but growth is likely to be uneven, the OECD said yesterday. Signs that vaccines could now be weeks away from distribution have injected cautious optimism as the year limps to a close with COVID-19 having claimed some 1.4 million lives.

"For the first time since the pandemic began, there is now hope for a brighter future," OECD Chief Economist Laurence Boone wrote in her introduction to the organization's latest review of the global economic outlook. "Progress with vaccines and treatment have lifted expectations and uncertainty has receded," she said, acknowledging that virus containment measures would likely be necessary for some months to come.

Continued on Page 2

## Mystery still shrouds origin of COVID-19

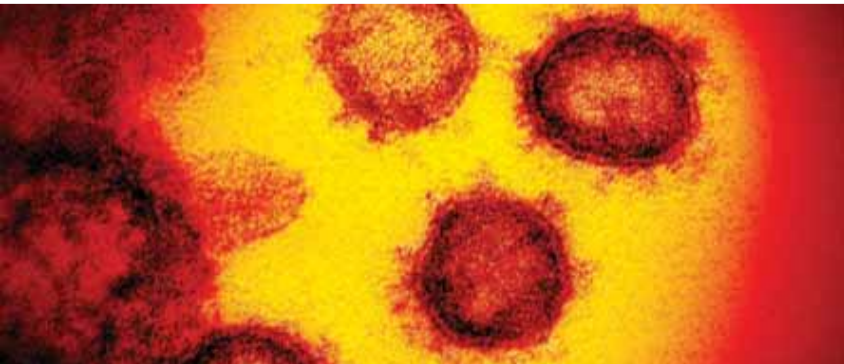
PARIS: While many scientists are racing to find vaccines to tame the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, other researchers are probing the past, trying to unravel one of the greatest mysteries of the virus: Exactly where it came from. The World Health Organization has assembled an international team of 10 scientists to trace the origins of the virus. They will have to investigate both the suspect animals and how the first patients may have been infected. "We want to know the origin and we will do everything to know the origin," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters on Monday.

But success is by no means assured. The first cases were reported in the Chinese city of Wuhan a year ago, before countries across the world began to record growing infections. The WHO said the first cases in Wuhan are believed to date from the beginning of December.



TOKYO: Skyscrapers in Tokyo's Shinjuku area are seen during sunset yesterday. — AFP

Continued on Page 2



WASHINGTON: This transmission electron microscopic image shows the virus that causes COVID-19, isolated from a patient in the US, emerging from the surface of cells cultured in a lab. — AFP

## Local

# In Kuwait, lavish election campaign events off menu

## Online platforms take place of traditional campaigning

**KUWAIT:** Lavish banquets served in opulent marquees are nowhere to be seen this election season in oil-rich Kuwait, where the coronavirus pandemic has forced a ban on traditional over-the-top campaign events. Lambs on spits, mountains of rice, and platters of sweets usually attract hordes of potential voters to campaign events in the small Gulf state, which holds parliamentary elections on Saturday.

Unlike its more authoritarian neighbors, Kuwait has a dynamic political life with an active parliament that doesn't hesitate to take the government to task. Its election campaigns are equally lively — in normal years.

In elections past, Fahd Mohammed Al-Moutairi used to organize feasts for half a dozen candidates, all aiming to impress voters with their generosity, in his restaurant "Tayba", located north of the capital Kuwait City. "We usually prepare grilled lamb and rice for dinners during the campaign that can run for up to two months. But the coronavirus blew it all away," he said.

The loss of business is another blow to restaurateurs who suffered during months of lockdown to stem the spread of the virus in Kuwait, which has registered more than 142,000 infections and nearly 900 deaths. Campaign events can cost between KD 3,000 and KD 7,000 (about \$10,000-23,000), and draw as many 2,000 guests in the country's tribal regions, according to the Kuwaiti Federation of Restaurants.

Along with restaurants, companies that organize banquets under large tents, serving coffee and dates to voters, will be the big losers in this campaign,

said the association's director, Fahd Al-Arbach. "This period is usually the main driver of their business in normal times," he said.

### Online shift

The weekend elections are the first since the new Amir His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah took office on September 29 following the passing of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. A few electoral banners dotted through the streets

are the only reminder of the nation's political calendar. Instead, this year's campaign is mainly being fought on social networks and in the media.

Tweets, Snapchat videos, Instagram "lives" and electoral meetings via Zoom have taken the place of traditional campaigning, and candidates are pumping the money saved on catering into virtual campaigns.

The cost of advertising has shot up as a result, said Faysal Al-Sawagh, head of the Kuwaiti Federation of Electronic Media. "Kuwaitis are using social networks to make their voices heard and hear ideas from the candidates," he said.

The usual themes of election campaigns are a constant though, from promises to fight corruption and plans for youth employment to freedom of expression, housing, education and the thorny issue of the 'bedoon', Kuwait's stateless minority.

### Silver lining

The frugality imposed by the health crisis has saved politicians a fortune, considering the average expense of fighting an election campaign can reach KD 100,000 (about \$327,000), said one contender, Ali Al-Ali.

Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel, briefed ministers on means to address the deficiencies mentioned in the various government agencies. The Cabinet assigned its ministers to monitor observations recorded by the Financial Supervisory Authority on its affiliated bodies, and to take the necessary measures against those who prove their negligence or in violation.

It also assigned the Civil Service Commission, in coordination with the Ministry of Finance, the Financial Observers Authority and the authorities it deems appropriate, to carry out several matters. These include linking the renewal of the positions of senior officials to clear measurement performance indicators, which measure the extent of compliance with financial laws and instructions, the extent of compliance with the requirements of the develop-

ment plan and the number and type of violations recorded by authorities. Also, reassessing texts regulating administrative and financial work, taking into consideration the public interest and safeguarding state funds, along with a commitment to prevent the appointment of officials in financial affairs, who lack the sufficient expertise.

The Cabinet also discussed the committee's recommendations regarding the Ministry of Finance's request to transfer COVID-19 state quarantine and meal expenses to the budget of the Ministry of Health, with the Cabinet deciding that the Ministry of Finance would continue to bear these costs, in coordination with the Ministry of Health. It also allowed the Ministry of Health to use the Kuwait International Fairgrounds, during the pandemic, free of charge for the matter. — KUNA

could look out for an animal with a virus receptor, a protein called ACE2, similar to the one found in humans. It is through this receptor that the virus latches onto cells. Some animals such as mink and ferrets have been found to have a very similar receptor to humans, while others are quite different.

Another origin theory that swirled in conspiracy rumors for months was that the Wuhan Institute of Virology was involved in the outbreak. Against the backdrop of diplomatic tensions, US President Donald Trump touted the idea, claiming the virus could have leaked from the biosafety lab. China has rejected the accusations. While Simon-Lorieri said it was not yet possible to completely rule out the idea that the virus escaped accidentally, he stressed that there was "no indication it was manmade". "All the elements of its genome have already been observed in nature, mainly in bat coronaviruses," he said. — AFP

than their weight in the global economy. Despite the expected imminent distribution of vaccines, the global economic outlook remains "exceptionally uncertain" said the OECD given the difficulties of rolling out massive vaccination campaigns, uncertainties about how long the vaccines will provide protection and the need to impose restrictions in the meantime.

The OECD also sounded the alarm about the social impact of the pandemic crisis which has seen many people thrown out of work. "Despite the huge policy band-aid, and even in an upside scenario, the pandemic will have damaged the -economic fabric of countries worldwide," said Boone. She urged governments not to let up on support measures as COVID-19 vaccines become available even as public debt levels soar to unprecedented levels.

"Heightened policy activism need not be a concern if deployed to deliver higher and fairer growth," Boone said, noting that the cost of debt is at record lows. The OECD urged governments to focus their efforts on essential goods and services such as education, health, physical and digital infrastructure that lay the foundations for growth. It also called for decisive actions to reverse the rise in poverty and income inequality and a return to international cooperation. — AFP

former opposition MP Bader Al-Dahoum and others can take part in the election. Dahoum's lawyers had demanded that the court's judges be replaced because they had participated in a similar case in 2016, but the court rejected the request and set today to issue its ruling. An interior ministry commission last month disqualified 34 candidates from contesting the polls, but the court reinstated 15 and is likely to add some more to the total. In total, 322 candidates are running in Saturday's polls.

passing through a delicate juncture. Former MP Hasan Jowhar, bidding for a comeback from the first constituency, strongly lashed out at the government agency for stateless people (bedoons). He said when the agency was established 10 years ago, its director promised to resolve the crisis within five years. But the crisis has become even more complicated and the sufferings of thousands of bedoons have increased.

Meanwhile, the court of cassation yesterday said it will issue its final ruling today on whether



**KUWAIT:** A billboard featuring candidate Alia Al-Khaled, who is running for Kuwait's parliamentary elections, is seen in Kuwait City on November 22, 2020. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

orate dinners that politicians would normally throw a couple of times a week in the lead-up to the vote. The philosophy professor, who is campaigning on a platform of defending women's rights, said she is redoubling her efforts to promote herself on Twitter and Instagram. "This time, social networks have become the battleground of the parliamentary elections," she said. — AFP

## Cabinet examines financial observer office report

**KUWAIT:** The Cabinet examined the recommendations of the Economic Affairs Committee meeting regarding the financial observer office report for the fiscal year 2019-2020. This came during the Cabinet's weekly meeting Monday, chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

The Economic Affairs Committee's chairwoman, Minister of Social Affairs and the State Minister for

## Mystery still shrouds origin...

Continued from Page 1

But "where an epidemic is first detected does not necessarily reflect where it started", it added in a November report.

In recent months, researchers in various countries have suggested that cases may have gone unnoticed long before Dec 2019, based on analysis of wastewater or blood samples. But there is a lack of "clear evidence" to back up these claims, said Etienne Simon-Lorieri, of the virology department at the Institut Pasteur in Paris. To establish a virus family tree, researchers rely on

## Economy back to pre-COVID level...

Continued from Page 1

"The road ahead is brighter but challenging," Boone added.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development now sees world output dropping by 4.2 percent this year thanks to the months-long lockdowns that slowed the spread of the coronavirus but threw a wrench into the global economy. But it forecasts the world economy to snap back with 4.2 percent growth in 2021. The forecasts for the contraction and the recovery are both more modest than those its September update, despite many countries imposing new restrictions to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

The OECD, which advises its 37 member nations on stimulating economic progress and world trade, credited the quick recovery to "unprecedented" action by governments and central banks. "Without massive policy support, the economic and social situation would have been calamitous," Boone said.

## Election rallies return as low...

Continued from Page 1

Leading opposition MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri, contesting from the fourth constituency, yesterday warned against attempts by the interior ministry to interfere in the election, adding that Kuwait is

### News in brief

#### Amir congratulates UAE on national day

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah addressed yesterday a cable to UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan on his country's 49th national day. In his cable, His Highness praised the brotherly and historical bonds that ties both countries. Moreover, His Highness also exalted all the great achievements done by UAE in all various fields. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the President of UAE Sheikh Khalifa. — KUNA

#### Cabinet congratulates UAE

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's government congratulated the UAE on its national day during the Cabinet's weekly meeting on Monday. It offered its sincere congratulations to President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed Al-Maktoum and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, along with the Emirati people. The ministers praised the great achievements made by the UAE and the evident development and progress it has made on various levels. — KUNA

#### Kuwait condemns attacks

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Cabinet expressed its strong condemnation of the recent deadly terrorist bombings that occurred in Bamyán and Ghazni Province in Afghanistan, the violent armed attack that took place last Saturday in the village of Kushoy, in northwestern Nigeria and the terrorist bombing at the Somali capital, Mogadishu. The ministers underlined Kuwait's position in rejection of all acts of violence and terrorism, regardless of the motive or form, which violate international conventions, norms, religious and Islamic values and principles, and target innocent lives and destabilize nations. The Cabinet also condemned the terrorist attack carried out by ISIS, which targeted a Chinese-owned oil refinery in Iraq's Salaheddine Governorate, reiterating its rejection of such terrorist acts, and its call for the international community to tackle terrorism in all its forms. — KUNA

#### Kuwaiti oil price down

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil went down by 29 cents to \$46.88 per barrel (pb) on Monday, after it was at \$47.17 pb last Friday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Globally, the price of Brent crude went down by 59 cents to \$47.59 pb, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which decreased by 19 cents to \$45.34 pb. — KUNA

## Local

# Kuwait's Foreign Minister meets GCC Secretary General

## Sheikh Dr Ahmad receives new Philippines, Malta ambassadors



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf. —KUNA photos



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah receives the credentials of the new Ambassador of the Philippines to Kuwait Mohd. Noordin Pendosina N. Lomondot.



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah receives the credentials of the new Ambassador of Malta to Kuwait Raymond Sarsero.

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister and Acting Minister of Information Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received yesterday Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf. The two officials discussed during the meeting issues pertaining to the GCC in the upcoming period and also touched on recent regional and international developments. Senior officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attended the meeting.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Ahmad received Mohamed Nouredine Le Mondotot who presented a copy of



### Kuwait, Kyrgyz FM's discuss collaboration

his credentials as the new Ambassador of the Philippines to Kuwait. Sheikh Dr Ahmad wished the new ambassador success in his tenure and for relations between both sides to further progress and prosper, a foreign ministry statement said. Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah, Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocols Dhari Al-Ajran, Assistant Foreign Minister for the Minister's Office Saleh Al-Loughani and a number of senior foreign ministry officials attended the meeting. Sheikh Dr Ahmad also received yesterday the credentials of the newly appointed Maltese Ambassador to

Kuwait Raymond Sarsero. Sheikh Dr Ahmad welcomed the Maltese diplomat and wished him success in his current tenure. Senior officials from the Foreign Ministry attended the meeting.

On Monday, Sheikh Dr Ahmad held virtual talks with Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Minister Ruslan Kazakbaev on bilateral cooperation to fighting the coronavirus pandemic. The two senior diplomats also discussed ways of further promoting bilateral relations and cooperation, and regional and international issues of mutual interest, the foreign ministry said in a statement. —KUNA

## New blood donation branch opens in Farwaniya Hospital

KUWAIT: The Blood Transfusion Services Department at the Ministry of Health (MoH) inaugurated yesterday a subsidiary blood donation bank in Farwaniya Hospital, as part of its strategic plan to provide new branches in every health area and increase the overall bloodstock. Assistant Undersecretary at MoH for Medical Services Dr Mohammad Al-Khashti said, on the sidelines of the opening, that the increase in blood donation branches is part of MoH's development plan and its interest in improving and developing the health services provided. He commended the efforts of the Blood Transfusion Services Department in improving and developing the services responsible for it.

In a similar statement, Director of the Department of Blood Transfusion Services at MoH Dr Reem Al-Radwan said that the Farwaniya Hospital branch contained four beds. The overall number of beds in all branches equals to 93, she noted, adding that the branch receives donors during official working hours from Sunday to Thursday, from 07:30 am to 08:30 pm. The Kuwait Central Blood Bank and its branches have collected about 75,000 blood bags and 8,000



Officials pose for a group photo in front of the new blood donation branch in Farwaniya Hospital.

platelet bags since the start of 2020, using the latest international technologies in terms of safety and quality, she said.

She indicated that the opening of the new blood branch will contribute to increasing the daily collection of donating blood by 4 percent, which will relieve pressure on the main bank. The department faced significant challenges to continue donating and providing its services, in accordance with the highest safety standards and the application of health requirements to ensure an adequate, safe and sustainable supplies of blood considering the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also able to attract donors and maintain the strategic blood stock, she added. —KUNA



A man donates blood in Farwaniya Hospital.



KUWAIT: Assistant Undersecretary at MoH for Medical Services Dr Mohammad Al-Khashti inaugurates the new blood transfusion branch in Farwaniya Hospital yesterday. —KUNA photos

## Kuwait sees 357 new COVID-19 cases, one death

KUWAIT: Kuwait listed 357 new coronavirus infections yesterday, in addition to one death which increased the country's COVID-19 death toll to 881. The new cases, which the ministry said yesterday were recorded over the previous 24 hours, raise total infections since the outbreak of the disease to 142,992. Meanwhile, the ministry confirmed 554 recoveries over the same period, increasing total recoveries to 137,625. The number of hospitalized patients stood yesterday at 4,486, with 82 of them in intensive care units, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad. He further revealed that 5,572 swab tests were conducted over the same period taking the total to 1,101,146. Dr Sanad further urged the public to follow health precautions, mainly social distancing, in order to help limit the spread of the virus. —KUNA

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357 إصابة جديدة NEW CASES الإجمالي 142,992	1 حالة وفاة جديدة NEW DEATHS الإجمالي 881	554 حالة تعافى جديدة NEW RECOVERIES الإجمالي 137,625
82 إجمالي الحالات في العناية المركزة TOTAL SERIOUS CASES	4,486 إجمالي الحالات التي تتلقى العلاج TOTAL ACTIVE CASES	5,572 مسحة جديدة NEW TESTS الإجمالي 1,101,146

## Local

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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com  
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director meets  
Indian ambassador

KUWAIT: General-Director of the Public Authority of Manpower (PAM) Ahmed Al-Mousa on Monday stressed the authority's commitment to providing legal protection and ensuring an appropriate work environment for all workers in the private and domestic sectors. While receiving India's Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George and his accompanying delegation, Mousa said Kuwait's labor market is hiring workers who serve the market and meet its needs. Mousa lauded the historical and distinguished relations between the two countries, stressing keenness on keeping these ties good. He affirmed that Kuwait is making continued efforts to develop the process of recruiting skilled workers in a method that serves Kuwait's developmental and economic interests, and benefits at the same time the workers and the countries.

Meanwhile, the Indian envoy expressed his gratitude and appreciation to Kuwait for its efforts made in this regard, emphasizing his desire to boost cooperation between the two countries in labor. During the meeting, the Kuwaiti and Indian sides discussed mechanisms of mutual cooperation in the field of recruitment and employment of Indian workers in the State of Kuwait. Deputy Director General of PAM Mubarak Al-Azmi, head of PAM International Relations Department Director Jaber Al-Ali and legal researcher Abdulaziz Khalifa attended the meeting. — KUNA

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A photo taken yesterday shows parts of Kuwait City and Shuwaikh Port. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Grieving mother seeks help receiving  
deceased baby from Kuwaiti hospital

## Absconding case stands in way of infant's burial back in Philippines

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: A grieving mother has been refused the right to bury her baby back in the Philippines due to an absconding case against her in Kuwait. Melba, a 45-year-old Filipina, gave birth to a baby girl on Oct 25, 2020 at Sabah Maternity Hospital. Sadly, the baby died 22 days later due to birth complications. Melba and her husband Toti would like to bury the child in their home country, but due to the absconding case, the hospital is refusing to release the infant's remains.

Melba's troubles started in 2018 when she partnered with another Filipina to open a restaurant in Farwaniya. Melba had been running restaurants in Kuwait for several years and had good experience in the industry. But a dispute arose between her and her partner, who is married to a Kuwaiti. As a result,

her partner filed an absconding case against Melba in early 2020.

From then on, Melba's life has only gotten more

Only sponsor  
can drop  
absconding case

difficult. Unable to resolve the legal matter or renew her residency, Melba became an illegal resident.

Already pregnant, she had no choice but to go to the hospital when she went into labor. "This part of my life is very painful and I could not imagine why I was tested with this type of trial in my life. I am crying every day; the sponsor wants me out of Kuwait for a fault that can be fixed by dialogue. I am in pain because of the sudden loss of my baby," said Melba, who is ready to leave Kuwait but not without her infant's remains and her residency issue fixed.

Her husband, who is a legal resident of Kuwait, has tried to help resolve the situation. Even the Philippines Embassy tried to resolve the matter, but only the sponsor can cancel an absconding case. "The problem is I cannot take the body of my daughter. I feel very frustrated. I keep praying that I overcome this painful chapter of my life and for a change of heart by my business partner and sponsor," she said.

Are teeth removals  
necessary for  
dental braces?

By Dr Saud Al-Anezi, Consultant Orthodontist

KUWAIT: Orthodontics (braces treatment) is a branch of dentistry which deals with problems of teeth alignment or jaws. It aims to improve the facial appearance and the smile of the individual. Removing teeth, or teeth extraction, to make space before the orthodontist starts the treatment is one of the most extensively debated topics among doctors all over the globe. The current standard suggests that each individual case should be considered on its merits. That is to say, there is no such thing as saying that removing teeth is always required, or vice versa.

Certainly, a decision not to remove teeth before treatment has its advantages, such as the fact that the patient would not have to go through this process (which is not a pleasant experience to most people), and treatment time would theoretically be shorter. Nonetheless, it must be stated that removing teeth is

sometimes required; not only to make space to align all the teeth, but also in individuals with certain facial features, such as people with prominent cheekbones, where it could also improve their facial appearance and smile. The risk of attempting braces' treatment without taking teeth out in individuals with prominent cheekbones could make the facial appearance worse.

The decision to remove teeth or not is based on several factors that the doctor has to bear in mind. Examples include crooked teeth, if there is a discrepancy of the facial jaws, i.e. the maxilla (top jaw) and the mandible (bottom jaw), and how wide the jaws are. If the jaws are narrow, then there are special and contemporary devices that widen the jaws, which provide space, allowing the doctor to align the teeth without removals. In conclusion, I personally examine my patients thoroughly before making the decision. Although removing teeth prior to braces still exists, it is minimally required now with the advancements in technology.



Dr Saud Al-Anezi



KUWAIT: Pictures showing the teeth of a 13-year-old girl that were treated by Dr Saud Al-Anezi, illustrating how a patient with severe crooked teeth can be treated successfully with dental braces.

Kuwaiti-funded clinic  
opens in Yemen

ADEN: Authorities in Yemen's Taiz governorate opened a Kuwaiti-funded medical clinic to benefit about 50,000 people. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Governor of Taiz Abdulhakim Aoun expressed gratitude to Kuwait, His Highness the Amir, the government and people for this generous humanitarian backing to the Yemeni people, mainly Taiz's citizens. He added that this generous humanitarian step represents a great value to the Yemeni citizens that will help them benefit from several services close to their homes. He noted that Kuwait's popular interaction in the humanitarian side to support the Yemeni people in these circumstances is an extension of the official governmental role in encouraging humanitarian action, as part of the approach adopted by Kuwait. He stated that it is not a new approach in the Kuwaiti-Yemeni relationships as they date back more than six decades. He appreciated this generous humanitarian



support from the International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO) that supervised the project funded by the Kuwaitis who, as their government and leaders, have been standing with the Yemenis in various circumstances and phases. Meanwhile, Mohammad Al-Akhrash, head of Al-Hikma Al-Yamaniya Association for Charity in Taiz, said that the clinic is part of 'Kuwait by your side' campaign that has been carrying out projects for six years. The facility will enable at least 50,000 citizens to take advantage of health and medical services, he added. — KUNA

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**KD. 0.910**

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From 02 to 05.12.2020

**Nutella**  
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**Kitco**  
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**KD. 0.475**

**Grapes Black seedless**  
(Lebanon) per kg

~~1.195~~  
**KD. 0.895**

**Pineapple**  
(Philippines) pc

~~0.695~~  
**KD. 0.495**

**Cabbage**  
(Saudi) per kg

~~0.375~~  
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60% OFF

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Box

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**New Zealand**  
Chilled Lamb Leg Bone-in /Kg

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**KD. 3.490**

From 02 to 05.12.2020

**Pakistan**  
Chilled Beef Bone -in /kg

~~2.390~~  
**KD. 1.790**

From 02 to 04.12.2020

**Sheri**  
/ kg

~~1.990~~  
**KD. 1.990**

From 02 to 05.12.2020

**Norwegian Whole Salmon**  
/ kg

~~4.590~~  
**KD. 3.390**

From 02 to 05.12.2020

**Prawns**  
(Kuwait) /kg

~~4.390~~  
**KD. 3.890**

From 02 to 05.12.2020

**Ariel**  
Washing Powder 2.5kg 2's

~~4.190~~  
**KD. 2.495**

40% OFF

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Dishwash Liquid 750ml 2's

~~0.990~~  
**KD. 0.990**

**Pampers**  
Pants 76,84,92,105s

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Baby Lotion 200ml 2's

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Hand Wash 245ml Free

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Prison pen pals: Hong Kongers keep in touch with jailed protesters

## Mum in Sweden arrested for locking son up for decades

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LOS ANGELES, California: A healthcare worker collects a self-administered coronavirus test at a testing site on Monday following the Thanksgiving holiday. — AFP

# Vaccine hopes given a new boost

## Trump’s controversial coronavirus adviser quits

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump’s controversial coronavirus adviser resigned Monday, while hopes for a first wave of vaccinations before the end of 2020 received a further boost with an announcement from US firm Moderna. Scott Atlas, a favored coronavirus adviser of the US president, who tweeted in October “Masks work? NO,” has submitted his resignation, effective as of December 1, Fox News reported.

Lacking relevant experience or qualifications in public health or infectious disease, he also called in November for people in Michigan to “rise up” against COVID-19 measures. Atlas stepped down as hopes rose for a first wave of vaccinations before the end of the year after Moderna said it was filing for emergency authorization of its vaccine in the United States and Europe. After top US scientists warned Americans to brace for a “surge superimposed on the surge,” Moderna reported full results had confirmed a high efficacy estimated at 94.1 percent.

It was set to join American pharmaceutical maker Pfizer and Germany’s BioNTech, which applied for similar approvals last week, and have predicted their vaccine could be greenlit in the US shortly after December 10. If the US Food and Drug Administration agrees Moderna’s product is safe and effective, the first of the drug’s two doses could be injected into the

arms of millions of Americans by the middle of December. Health Secretary Alex Azar told CBS News: “We could be seeing both of these vaccines out and getting into people’s arms before Christmas.”

Co-developed with the US National Institutes of Health, the jabs were generally well tolerated, with the most common side effects including injection site pain, fatigue, muscle pain, joint pain and headache. Moderna expects to have approximately 20 million doses of the vaccine available in the US by the end of 2020, and between 500 million to a billion doses globally in 2021. The news came after leading US scientist Anthony Fauci voiced his fears as millions of travelers returned home after the Thanksgiving holiday.

The United States is the worst-affected country, with more than 267,000 COVID-19 deaths, and the Trump administration has issued conflicting messages on mask-wearing, travel and the danger posed by the virus. “What we expect, unfortunately, as we go for the next couple of weeks into December is that we might see a surge superimposed on the surge we are already in,” Fauci said Sunday.

### Fourth wave

More than 1.4 million people have died worldwide since the outbreak in China last December, accord-

ing to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP. The World Health Organization (WHO) insisted Monday it was doing everything possible to find the animal origins of the virus, although it hasn’t yet sent a full team of expert investigators to China. Observers have voiced concern the agency has bowed to Chinese pressure and dragged its feet over the investigation, but WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus hit back and urged critics to stop “politicizing” the issue.

At a briefing, Tedros added he was alarmed over a rapid worsening of the COVID-19 situations in Brazil and Mexico, urging them to be “very serious” about halting the spread. Europe meanwhile is still battling to lower the daily toll of death and infection with a variety of curbs, lockdowns and tests after fatalities topped 400,000 at the weekend.

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced a total weekend lockdown and a curfew for the rest of the week. In Asia, Hong Kong on Monday announced social distancing measures at some of the strictest levels in the city since the start of the pandemic, as authorities battle a fourth wave of infections. “This new wave of COVID-19 has hit Hong Kong very quickly,” chief executive Carrie Lam said. Anger over rising infection numbers sparked a

riot in a Sri Lankan prison where guards shot dead eight inmates and wounded at least 71 others.

However, Australia’s success against the pandemic saw international students arrive for the first time since it shut its borders in March, with a charter flight touching down in Darwin on Monday. The situation in former global epicenter New York remains precarious, with Governor Andrew Cuomo warning small gatherings are now responsible for 65 percent of the spread. “We are now worried about overwhelming the hospital system,” Cuomo said, warning a new lockdown could be needed. California Governor Gavin Newsom said his state’s hospital intensive care units could be overloaded in just a couple weeks.

COVID risk across most of the US is now considered “critical” and more than 93,000 people are hospitalized, according to the COVID Tracking Project. Scientists estimate around 70 percent of the population will need to be vaccinated to bring an end to the outbreak, and this may not be achievable until the second half of next year. Amid signs of growing global vaccine skepticism, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies president Francesco Rocca warned Monday: “To beat this pandemic, we also have to defeat the parallel pandemic of distrust.” — AFP



MEKLADIDA, Ethiopia: In this file photo, young children drink a high-protein mix provided by the World Food Program (WFP) during a school feeding program at the Mekladida refugee camp. — AFP

## 2 thirds of school-age kids without Internet

GENEVA: Two thirds of school-age children worldwide have no internet at home, a UN report found yesterday, even as pandemic-induced school closures have made online access vital to getting an education. In all, an estimated 1.3 billion children between the ages of three and 17 do not have internet connections in their homes, said the joint report from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The report also found that a similar lack of access among youths and young adults, with 63 percent of all 15 to 24-year-olds unconnected at home. “That so many children and young people have no internet at home is more than a digital gap, it is a digital canyon,” UNICEF chief Henrietta Fore warned in a statement. Lacking connectivity prevents young people from “competing in the modern economy. It isolates them from the world,” she said.

The report’s findings are particularly worrying, she said, at a time when school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic remain widespread, forcing hundreds of millions of students to rely on virtual learning. “Put bluntly: Lack of internet access is costing the next generation their futures.” The report cautioned that even before the pandemic struck, the digital divide was deepening inequalities, allowing children from the poorest households and from rural or low-income

countries to fall ever further behind their peers with little chance to catch up.

### ‘Formidable challenge’

It found that fewer than one in 20 school-age children from low-income countries had access to the internet at home, compared to nine out of 10 in wealthier nations. Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are the regions where children are least able to get online, with a full nine out of 10 children without internet access at home.

There are also clear differences between internet access in towns and cities and in the countryside, with 60 percent of children living in urban settings without an internet connection at home, compared to 75 percent in rural areas. “Connecting rural populations remains a formidable challenge,” ITU chief Houlin Zhao said in the statement. The report warned that even in homes with an internet connection, children may not actually be able to get online. It pointed to pressure to do chores or to work, lack of sufficient devices in households and also cautioned that girls may have less access to the internet than boys.

The two UN agencies did not have specific numbers showing the difference in internet access among girls and boys, but their data showed a clear difference in how easy it is for males and females overall to get online. Worldwide, 55 percent of males and 48 percent of females were using the internet in 2019, but the differences are far starker in low-income countries and in poorer regions. In Africa, for instance, 37 percent of men and boys and only 20 percent of women and girls were using the internet last year, ITU data showed. — AFP

## Syrian graduate doctors battle COVID in rebel hub

AZAZ: Mohammed Mostafa Al-Mohammed started studying medicine in rebel-held northern Syria to help the victims of war, but instead he has graduated into a world battling the novel coronavirus pandemic. The 29-year-old graduate from an opposition-backed university had expected to be tending to the wounded under the threat of bombardment by the Russia-backed Damascus regime. But after endless regime offensives against Syria’s last major rebel bastion of Idlib, a ceasefire took hold in March, just as COVID-19 started spreading worldwide.

“Our dream is to build Syria and treat the sick,” Mohammed, 29, told AFP at his graduation ceremony in the town of Azaz in a part of Aleppo province controlled by pro-Turkey rebels. But “we’re facing a difficult challenge” with the coronavirus, said the rescue worker turned doctor. Humanitarian workers fear any further rise in novel coronavirus cases would be disastrous in northwestern Syria, where around half of three million people live in overcrowded camps or temporary shelters after being displaced by conflict.

In Idlib and adjacent parts of Aleppo province, opposition officials have recorded almost 15,766 novel coronavirus infections in total, including 166 deaths. Around two-thirds of all confirmed Covid-19 cases in northwestern Syria have been announced over the past month. Mohammed was among the first 32 doctors who graduated from the “Aleppo University in Liberated Areas”, an institution founded in 2014 and backed by Syria’s political opposition.

### Hippocratic Oath

Dressed in dark blue and green graduation gowns,



MAREA, Syria: This picture taken on Nov 26, 2020 shows Syrian students from the “Aleppo University in Liberated Areas” sitting with microscopes at a laboratory facility in the rebel-controlled northern countryside of Aleppo. — AFP

caps, and facemasks, the new doctors lined up on stage in a hall packed with friends and family. Extending their right hand in front of them, they recited the Hippocratic Oath in unison in Arabic. Mohammed, who hails from eastern Syria, was delighted to finally be graduating after the war forced him to put on hold his studies in 2012.

For two years, he volunteered as a rescue worker to help those wounded in bombardment on rebel-held areas, before resuming his studies from scratch in 2014. “We were constantly exposed to air strikes and artillery fire,” he said of his time with the Syrian Civil Defense first responders known as the “White Helmets”. Syria’s war has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced millions from their homes since starting in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests. It has also ravaged a large part of the health sector and pushed 70 percent of health workers to flee the country. Doctors who stayed behind have had to battle COVID-19.

‘Our duty’

The dean of the faculty of medicine, Jawad Abu Hatab, said confronting a pandemic in a country already battered by nearly a decade of war was no small feat. “Coronavirus is a challenge for all health sectors even in stable countries,” said the doctor and former head of the opposition “Syrian Interim Government”. “So imagine a region like ours where the medical sector has been destroyed and healthcare centres set up instead are not enough.”

The World Health Organization has recorded 337 attacks on healthcare facilities in northwestern Syria between 2016 and 2019. By March, it said only half of 550 health facilities in the region remained open due to damage, insecurity or people having fled the surrounding area. Over the past months, humanitarian actors have scrambled to help increase testing capacities and the number of beds ready to receive patients suffering from COVID-19. — AFP

## International

# Azerbaijan forces raise flag in last district handed back by Armenia

## Turkey, Russia seal deal for Karabakh ‘peacekeeping centre’

**LACHIN:** Azerbaijani soldiers yesterday hoisted their country's flag in the final district given up by Armenia under a peace deal that ended weeks of fighting over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. A column of Azerbaijani military trucks entered the Lachin district overnight, taking over the last of three regions around Karabakh handed over by Armenia under the Russian-brokered agreement. AFP journalists saw soldiers raising the Azerbaijani flag over an administrative building in the town of Lachin in the early hours.

Armenia agreed to hand over the three districts - Aghdam, Lachin and Kalbajar - as part of the November deal that stopped an Azerbaijani offensive that had reclaimed swathes of territory lost to Armenian separatists in a 1990s war. Under the agreement, some 2,000 Russian peacekeepers deployed between the two sides and along the Lachin corridor, a 60-kilometre route through the district that connects Karabakh's main city Stepanakert to Armenia.

Russian military vehicles accompanied Azerbaijani trucks driving along the corridor overnight and were deployed at the main crossroads in Lachin. Most of the town's residents fled in advance of the takeover, but 48-year-old Levon Gevorgyan, the owner of a local grocery store, said he had decided to stay. "I am afraid only of God. I have been here for 22 years, I started from nothing, I built everything," he said. "I hope I will be able to continue, I still have a loan to pay. If I have to leave, I will burn everything."

### 'New reality'

In a televised address yesterday, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev celebrated the dawn of "a new reality". "We've driven the enemy out of our lands. We've restored our territorial integrity. We've ended the occupation," he said. Nagorno-Karabakh broke from Azerbaijan's control in a war after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union that left some 30,000 people dead. The region declared independence but it was never recognised by any country, including Armenia, which



LACHIN, Azerbaijan: An Azerbaijani soldier fixes a national flag on a lamppost in this town yesterday. — AFP

strongly backs the separatists.

The peace accord signed on November 9 was reached after six weeks of fighting that saw Azerbaijan's army overwhelm separatists forces and threaten to advance on Stepanakert. Under the agreement, Armenia is losing control of seven districts that it seized around Karabakh in the 1990s. The separatists are retaining control over most of Karabakh's Soviet-era territory but have lost the key town of Shusha. Aliyev said that nearly 50,000 Azerbaijanis had lived in the Lachin district before the 1990s war and that they would be returning in "the nearest future".

In Baku yesterday, crowds carrying Azerbaijani flags celebrated the takeover of Lachin, an area glorified in a popular Azerbaijani folk song. Olesya Vartanyan of the

International Crisis Group told AFP that while the handover of the last district signalled that the peace deal was "working", the new status quo remains "unclear". "The Moscow-brokered agreement is very precise when it comes to the territories' handover, but is ambiguous on a number of aspects such as the mandate of Russian peacekeepers and how the life of the local population, both Armenian and Azerbaijani, will be organized," she said.

### Russia's role grows

In addition to deploying peacekeepers, Russia is helping some of the tens of thousands who fled the fighting to return to Karabakh itself. Moscow's defense ministry yesterday said it had so far assisted in the return of more than 26,000 people. It said its peacekeepers had also cleared mines along the Lachin corridor and helped restore a power line destroyed during the fighting.

Moscow's peacemaker role has overshadowed France and the United States - the three countries that form the Minsk Group, which led talks on the Karabakh conflict for decades but failed to achieve a lasting agreement. France's position in future negotiations may be further under threat after Azerbaijani lawmakers last week demanded the country be expelled from the Minsk Group. The move came after the French Senate adopted a non-binding resolution calling on France to recognize Karabakh as an independent state.

While Azerbaijan has also called for its staunch ally Turkey to play a role in the peacekeeping mission, Moscow has repeatedly said that Ankara will have no troops on the ground. Yesterday Russia and Turkey agreed to monitor the truce from a joint peacekeeping centre, Ankara's defense ministry said. The deployment is set to last a year and its size will be determined by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Azerbaijan's defense ministry on Monday said that Turkish military specialists were providing assistance in clearing mines from the districts Baku had retaken. — AFP

## COVID 'longhaulers' behind a global patient movement

**PARIS:** Snatching moments of clarity through the brain fog that was among the lingering symptoms of her coronavirus infection, Hannah Davis joined a team of similarly ill researchers and launched a study of what is now called "long COVID". The survey was initially "for ourselves, to understand what was happening with our own bodies", Davis said. But with so little data available, it was soon informing global policymakers. Davis is part of an international patient-led movement of people who, when they were struck down with unexplained, debilitating symptoms, developed social media networks, research and advocacy from their sick beds.

The 32-year-old likens her neurological symptoms to a "brain injury" that meant she could not drive for months and was barely able to look at a screen. But she said the online community and her work with Patient-led Research for COVID-19 - led by a team of five people who have never met in person - has been "awe-inspiring". "I really don't think that I've ever done any work that has been nearly as meaningful," said Davis, who specializes in machine learning and AI, whose group is working on a new study supported by University College London.

We now know that the novel coronavirus, which has killed at least 1.4 million globally, can leave even otherwise-healthy young people with lingering symptoms for weeks or months. "To a significant number of people, this virus poses a range of serious long-term effects," World Health Organization director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in October. He listed fatigue and neurological symptoms as well as inflammation and injury of major organs - including the lungs and heart.

### Fatigue and brain fog

But in the early days of the pandemic most people believed that infection would either result in hospitalization, or a "mild" respiratory illness that would pass in around two weeks. Soon thousands of people were turning to social media, desperate to understand why they were not getting better. Many share the date of their first symptoms - Day One - to mark the beginning of a journey with an indeterminate end. For Davis that was March 25, when she struggled to decipher a text message from friends and later found she had a fever. In "a hotspot within a hotspot" in Brooklyn, New York, she quickly realized it was COVID-19 and expected the illness to pass quickly. It did not.

In April, as her neurological symptoms worsened, Davis found a Slack support group run by queer feminist wellness collective Body Politic that was attracting members from around the world. Within days, Davis joined several other members with research backgrounds to launch a patient survey, hoping data would help sketch out a clearer picture of coronavirus recoveries. The study involved 640 people - mainly women in the US who most readily responded - and was completed at lightning speed. It flagged symptoms like fatigue and brain fog that were not yet widely recognized.

In London, Ondine Sherwood was suffering fatigue, post-exertional malaise and gastrointestinal problems when she discovered the Body Politic group and was "astonished" to see so many people with similar - or worse - symptoms. She was among a group of British members who decided to form their own organisation, Long COVID SOS, to send a message to the government. "We thought we might march on parliament, which of course would have been impossible because most of us wouldn't have had the strength or the ability to march, so we thought maybe we would go in wheelchairs, but it was lockdown," said Sherwood, a systems developer. In the end they made a film montage of "long-hauler" stories called "Message in a Bottle" and shared it online, hoping to raise the profile of long COVID. — AFP



SINOP, Brazil: This file photo taken on Aug 7, 2020 shows an aerial view of a deforested area. — AFP

## Amazon deforestation surges to 12-year high

**SAO PAULO:** Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon surged again over the past year, hitting a 12-year high, according to official figures released Monday that drew a chorus of condemnation of President Jair Bolsonaro's government. A total of 11,088 square kilometers of forest was destroyed in Brazil's share of the world's biggest rainforest in the 12 months to August, according to the Brazilian space agency's PRODES monitoring program, which analyzes satellite images to track deforestation. That is equivalent to an area larger than Jamaica, and was a 9.5-percent increase from the previous year, when deforestation also hit a more than decade-long high.

"Because of such deforestation, Brazil is probably the only major greenhouse gas emitter that managed to increase its emissions in the year the coronavirus pandemic paralyzed the global economy," said the Brazilian Climate Observatory, a coalition of environmental groups. Forests such as the Amazon play a vital role in controlling climate change because they suck carbon from the atmosphere. However,

when trees die or burn, they release their carbon back into the environment. Bolsonaro, a far-right climate-change skeptic, has presided over rising deforestation and wildfires since taking office in January 2019.

His government is pushing to open protected lands to mining and agribusiness, and has slashed funding for environmental protection programs. Environmentalists say those policies fuel the destruction of the Amazon, about 60 percent of which is in Brazil. "The Bolsonaro government's vision of development for the Amazon is a throwback to the rampant deforestation of the past. It's a regressive vision that's far from the effort needed to deal with the climate crisis," Greenpeace spokeswoman Cristiane Mazzetti said in a statement.

Vice President Hamilton Mourao, who presented the figures in a press conference, defended the government's commitment to fighting deforestation. "The message I bring in the name of President Bolsonaro is that we will continue working with science and technology to support the work of environmental protection agencies," said Mourao, a retired army general who heads Bolsonaro's Amazon task force. The latest annual deforestation figure was the highest since 2008, when 12,911 square kilometers of forest were destroyed in the Brazilian Amazon. — AFP

Police tape was stretched across the apartment's door on Tuesday, and crime scene technicians were seen leaving the scene around midday, an AFP photographer said. The apartment is located in a non-descript grey and yellow low-rise building in the working class suburb of Handen in Haninge municipality. The unidentified relative who found the man said the apartment looked like it had not been cleaned in years.

"There was urine, dirt and dust. It smelled rotten," she told Expressen, adding that she had to wade through piles of junk to get through the hallways. "No one could have cleaned that home for many years." "I'm in shock, brokenhearted, but at the same time relieved. I've been waiting for this day for 20 years because I figured out that she was totally controlling his life, but I never imagined the extent of it," she said. — AFP



STOCKHOLM: Police tape is fixed on the door of an apartment in Haninge yesterday, a day after a man in his 40s who was kept locked by his mother was found there. — AFP

### 'Urine, dirt and dust'

Doctors at the hospital had alerted police to the case.

### News in brief

#### Outrage in Haiti over kidnappings

**PORT-AU-PRINCE:** Staff at multiple Haitian healthcare facilities went on strike Monday to protest the kidnapping of an intern, part of widespread public outrage at a recent increase in abductions on the island. Hans David Telemaque was kidnapped early Saturday morning in a street near the State University of Haiti Hospital (HUEH), in Port-au-Prince. He was freed Sunday evening following a ransom payment of an unknown amount, local media reported. "When you leave your home, you have doubts about whether you're going to return. Mothers, fathers, spouses, parents... We all live in daily and constant anxiety," said Bead Charlemagne Charlorin, an HUEH intern who joined the protests Monday in the streets of Port-au-Prince. In solidarity with the demonstration by interns at the island nation's main hospital, multiple healthcare facilities suspended all non-urgent care activities Monday. — AFP

#### Petrol bombs hurled at police

**HONG KONG:** Petrol bombs were hurled at a Hong Kong police recreation club in the early hours of yesterday, a rare attack on a police facility since Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law. Police said they received a report of three men dressed in black hurling Molotov cocktails into the car park of the Police Sports and Recreation Club in Mongkok, a district that saw many clashes during last year's huge democracy protests. Local media images showed the front of a truck was burned out but no further damage. An 18-year-old man was later arrested a short walk away from the club carrying pepper spray, police said, although it was not clear if he was a suspect. Hong Kong was convulsed by seven straight months of huge and often violent rallies last year calling for democracy and greater police accountability. — AFP

#### Angry Guatemalans block roads

**GUATEMALA CITY:** Thousands of indigenous Mayans blocked a major highway in western Guatemala on Monday, the latest in a series of protests calling for the resignation of President Alejandro Giammattei. The ruling party-dominated Congress was forced to withdraw a controversial business-friendly budget last week amid opposition claims it favored private business interests over badly needed health and education funding. The impoverished Central American country's Congress needed "to act in accordance with the needs of the country," Santiago Cux, one of the leaders of the protest, told a local radio station. He said Monday's demonstration was supported by 83 communities in Guatemala's western Solola department - an area with a population of around half a million - "to let the central government and the deputies know that the actions they have taken lately with the 2021 budget leave much to be desired." — AFP

#### Sri Lanka releases prisoners

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka freed hundreds of prisoners and said it would release thousands more after a riot sparked by anger over coronavirus cases at one of its many overcrowded jails left nine inmates dead and 113 wounded. Guards opened fire at the high-security Mahara prison outside Colombo on Sunday night after prisoners went on the rampage demanding to be freed because of soaring coronavirus cases in jails. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa yesterday granted an amnesty to 637 convicts across the country and Justice Minister Ali Sabry said the government was working on expediting the release on bail of thousands of remand prisoners to ease congestion. Rajapaksa meanwhile sacked Prison Reforms Minister Sudharshini Fernandopulle and shifted her to a new ministry dealing with the pandemic. — AFP

#### Mexico's AMLO marks 2 years

**MEXICO CITY:** Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador marks two years in office yesterday faced with a soaring coronavirus death toll and economic crisis that have had little obvious impact on his popularity. The leftist leader known as AMLO came to power on December 1, 2018 promising to "transform" the country after sweeping aside the two political parties that had ruled for decades. The former Mexico City mayor's first year in office was dominated by his pro-austerity, anti-graft crusade, as well as concerns over a stagnant economy and violent crime. Then came the coronavirus pandemic, which the 67-year-old this week described as the biggest challenge of his second year by far. The World Health Organization warned Monday that Mexico was "in bad shape" after a spike in the number of Covid-19 cases and deaths. — AFP

## International

# Lebanese students abroad fall prey to financial crisis at home

## In some cases, students have returned home to work

**BEIRUT:** Lebanese medical student Lara Mustafa faces eviction from Russia and the end of her dream of becoming a doctor if her parents, hit by Lebanon's worst financial crisis in decades, cannot send her money to pay for rent and expenses. Another medical student, Wassim Hachem, 24, had to drop out from his fourth year of university in Russia to return to Lebanon and work as a delivery driver after his father, who lost his job, was no longer able to support him.

Mustafa and Hachem are among thousands of university students caught up in Lebanon's financial crisis, which started in 2019 with popular protests against leaders whom demonstrators blamed for corruption and mismanaging the economy. An insolvent banking system, which had lent more than two thirds of its assets to the central bank and state, shut out all depositors from their dollar accounts, and Lebanon defaulted on its debts.

The COVID-19 pandemic added to mass job losses and business collapses. Lebanon traditionally prides itself on its education system. American and French missionaries set up schools and universities in the 19th century that became platforms for young Lebanese to further their studies abroad. That is now becoming a dream for all but the richest, who managed to keep enough of their wealth outside Lebanon. Some students are struggling to make ends meet even in relatively low-cost countries like Russia.

"You can say that my parents sank into debt in order to be able to send me money," Mustafa, 23, who is on a scholarship, told Reuters from Russia via Zoom. "I live in the student dorms. The system at our university is that if I can't pay the dorm fees not only will I be evicted but I will be forbidden from taking

the end-of-semester exam. "Now I live in austerity, now I calculate every penny."

### No access to money

Some parents of the thousands of Lebanese students abroad have been protesting outside the Banque du Liban (BDL), Lebanon's central bank. They insist the central bank forces commercial banks to implement a government decree to allow families with students abroad to transfer up to \$10,000 a year at the official exchange rate of 1,500 Lebanese pounds to the dollar to cover tuition and expenses.



### Many struggle to survive as hardship bites

Until now parents and students say the law is being ignored, with banks and exchange dealers refusing to make transfers at the set rate and instead demanding the market rate, currently around 8,300 Lebanese pounds. Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh told Reuters that "the law needs applications decrees from the government not from BDL." Officials at the Lebanese banking association could not immediately be reached for comment.

Mustafa's mother Nidaa Hassan, 47, said they used to send her between \$300-\$700 a month but



BEIRUT: A woman withdraws money from an ATM machine at the entrance of a bank yesterday. — AFP

now manage much smaller amounts. She has taken her other children out of a private school and enrolled them in a state school because her husband's salary, which was worth \$2,000 a month last year, is now equal to \$370 after the collapse of the Lebanese pound. "We are not only borrowing money from here, but also from (family) abroad to be able to send her money. I don't know how much debt we have accumulated so far," she said in Beirut.

In a cruel twist, banks that can no longer honor their debts have for over a year denied depositors

access to money, so even those with substantial funds cannot withdraw them. Lebanon's middle class is being squeezed, and, like many other Lebanese, Nidaa blames the government. Lebanese politicians are trying to secure foreign aid to help them reduce huge debts, but they have yet to carry out the reforms that potential donors are demanding. The fact that they have been unable to form a government since the last one resigned in August over what it called endemic corruption is exacerbating the problem, according to Western diplomats. — Reuters

## Govt meets with farmers after days of Delhi protests

**NEW DELHI:** India attempted to calm nearly a week of raucous protests by meeting with farmers yesterday after rallies against agricultural reforms sparked violent clashes with police on the outskirts of the capital. The plight of farmers is a major political issue in India with thousands committing suicide in recent years due to debt and increasingly erratic weather patterns blamed on climate change.

Laws rushed through parliament earlier this year by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government mean growers are now free to legally sell their produce anywhere in India instead of getting guaranteed prices from state-run markets. Farmers were met with tear gas and water cannon when they marched on New Delhi last week and are now facing-off against heavily-armed security forces at two major entry points to the city.

Many of the demonstrators come from northern Punjab state which is

controlled by the Congress party, the main opposition to Modi's administration. Congress leaders have argued the farming reforms will give private corporations free rein to exploit farmers, an argument echoed by the protesters. "As big players... enter the field, our existing government agriculture markets will become redundant and private players will exploit the farmers," said Harmandeep Singh, who joined the demonstration from Punjab.

Singh said the farmers are calling for a written guarantee from the government that the existing minimum price for crops would not be removed. Addressing a rally on Monday, Modi accused the opposition of spreading "misinformation" about the reform package. But his government brought forward talks with farmer group representatives by two days in an effort to forestall more rallies after protesters announced plans to blockade other routes into the city. Elsewhere police



GHAZIPUR, India: Farmers offer bananas and jaggery to the Indian security personnel at a roadblock stopping farmers from marching to New Delhi at the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh state border yesterday. — AFP

set up roadblocks and arrested demonstrators trying to march into the capital.

### Trudeau 'concerned'

The protests have also provoked a diplomatic spat between India and Canada, which is home to a large Punjabi-origin diaspora. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau published a video message on Twitter in

which he said the demonstrations were "concerning" and defended the right to peaceful protest. "We've reached out through multiple means directly to the Indian authorities to highlight our concerns," he added. India's foreign ministry responded by hitting out at "ill-informed comments by Canadian leaders relating to farmers in India", without directly naming Trudeau. — AFP

## Prison pen pals: Hong Kongers keep in touch with jailed protesters

**HONG KONG:** When Hong Kong protester Hei saw fellow activists put behind bars for taking part in last year's democracy protests, she was determined to keep the flame burning by writing them letters. Thousands have been arrested and held in custody for a range of offences during the huge and sometimes violent protests that convulsed the financial hub last year.

The city's prison system strictly controls inmate access to information about life outside, so Hei decided to keep them up to date on the democracy movement by putting pen to paper. Her mailing list now has almost 60 people on it. "It's a relationship between comrades-in-arms and we have trust in each other," the 22-year-old told AFP, asking to use just one name to protect her identity. "We share the same pain. I hope letter-writing can strengthen people's confidence in the movement."

As well as writing handwritten letters, Hei puts together a DIY newspaper called "Pass the Day", which includes a summary of headlines, social media posts and political memes from online forums popular with protesters. She also pays visits to activists, bringing books, snacks and daily necessities. Her friends jokingly refer to her as being "half jailed" by her commitment. Of the more than 10,000 people arrested during protests since June 2019, more than 2,300 of those cases have proceeded to prosecution, according to authorities. Hundreds are either held on remand ahead of their trials or are serving post-conviction sentences.

### Letters like 'candlelight'

One of those jailed was 43-year-old Max, convicted of arson for throwing a book on a barricade bonfire lit by protesters. During the four months he spent in prison, Max likened the letters to "nutrients" and recalled that he would like to reply to them immediately, while they were still "fresh and hot". "When I was inside, it was like walking in a tunnel and I couldn't see any light," he recalled, speaking on condition that only his first name be



HONG KONG: In this picture taken on Nov 23, 2020, 22-year-old pro-democracy activist Hei packs items at her home which she will deliver to prisoners. — AFP

used. "These letters were like candlelight showing me the way to the other end." Compared to permitted twice-monthly, half-hour visits, the letters were "the kind of support one can hold on to".

Without a proper desk and chair, he would spend hours writing letters on his cell bed, burning through three pens per month. Prison regulations allow convicted inmates to send one free letter a week. Those wanting to send more must earn money for stamps through work. Incoming letters - as well as books - are also screened. Since his release, Max continues to write to inmates and activists who are still in jail. "I don't have much expectation on how these letters could extend the movement, but I do hope comrades can live a good life inside and find some mental support," he said.

### 'Not alone'

The letter-writing campaign has been championed by former lawmaker Shiu Ka-Chun. Since January, more than 5,000 letters from the public have been sent and 500 pen pals have been paired up. "This is the beauty of this movement. People find their own positions and roles to show support," Shiu told AFP. Aside from writing letters, Shiu was also involved in campaigns to help inmates send flowers to their loved ones outside and arrange learning materials for younger inmates. "I hope more people can continue to write to our friends in custody and let them know they are not alone," he said. — AFP

## Rebel shelling kills 7 Yemen children

**DUBAI:** Rebel shelling of government-held districts of Yemen has killed seven children over the past two days, medics and relief agencies said. In Yemen's third largest city Taez, which is government-held but almost surrounded by rebel forces, two young girls, one just nine months old, were pronounced dead on Monday evening after a rebel bombardment that also wounded seven other people, medics said.

There was no immediate reaction from the rebels, who have repeatedly played up the high civilian death toll from air strikes by a Saudi-led coalition that has been supporting the beleaguered government. Relief organization Doctors without Borders appealed to "all armed groups to abide by international humanitarian law and take all necessary precautions to avoid civilian casualties".

On Sunday, five children were among eight civilians killed in rebel shelling of the government-held district of Al-Durayhimi on the Red Sea coast, medics and government source said. The United Nations confirmed the death toll from the bombardment, which it said was part of an uptick in fighting in and around the nearby aid port of Hodeida, where a fragile UN-brokered truce has largely averted major fighting. A total of 74 civilians were killed or wounded in Hodeida province in October as hostilities escalated, the UN mission said.

"Five children and three women were killed and another three children and three women were injured when artillery shells hit a house in Al-Ghaza village in Al-Durayhimi," said Altaf Musani, UN humanitarian coordinator for Yemen. "This attack on women and children is unacceptable and unjustifiable." A total of 74 civilians were killed or wounded in Hodeida province in October as hostilities escalated, the UN mission said. The United Nations says all sides have been responsible for multiple war crimes in the conflict that has gripped Yemen since 2014, creating what UN agencies describe as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. —AFP

## UN: Emergency aid needs exploding due to COVID

**GENEVA:** The UN said yesterday that \$35 billion would be needed for aid in 2021, as the pandemic leaves tens of millions more people in crisis, and with the risk of multiple famines looming. The world body's annual Global Humanitarian Overview estimated that 235 million people worldwide will need some form of emergency assistance next year - a staggering 40-percent increase in the past year.

"The increase arises almost entirely because of COVID-19," United Nations emergency relief coordinator Mark Lowcock told reporters. Next year, one in 33 people worldwide will be in need of aid, the report found, stressing that if all of them lived in one country, it would be the world's fifth largest nation. The annual appeal by UN agencies and other humanitarian organizations usually presents a depressing picture of soaring needs brought on by conflicts, displacement, natural disasters and climate change.

But now, it warned, the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed more than 1.45 million people worldwide, has disproportionately hit those "already living on a knife's edge." "The picture we are presenting is the bleakest and darkest perspective on humanitarian need in the period ahead that we have ever set out," Lowcock said. The money requested in the appeal would be enough to help 160 million of the most vulnerable people across 56 countries, the UN said.

### 'Alarm bells are ringing'

For the first time since the 1990s, extreme poverty is set to rise, life expectancy will fall and the annual death toll from HIV, tuberculosis and malaria could potentially double. "Possibly the most alarming thing... is the threat of the return of famines, potentially in multiple locations," Lowcock said. With only one true famine so far in the 21st century - in Somalia nearly a decade ago - mass starvation had appeared to have been "assigned to the dustbin of history," he said.

But now, he warned, "the red lights are flashing and the alarm bells are ringing." By the end of 2020, the number of acutely food-insecure people worldwide could swell to as much as 270 million - an 82-percent increase over the pre-COVID-19 number. Conditions in Yemen, Burkina Faso, South Sudan and northeastern Nigeria indicated they are already on the brink of famine, while a range of other countries and regions, including Afghanistan and the Sahel, were also "potentially very vulnerable", he said.

"If we get through 2021 without major famines, that will be a significant achievement." Yesterday's appeal shows that war-ravaged Syria and Yemen top the list of the countries most in need of humanitarian assistance. The UN is seeking close to \$6 billion to help millions of Syrians inside and outside the country wracked by a decade of conflict. And it is asking for nearly \$3.5 billion to help nearly 20 million Yemenis caught up in the world's worst humanitarian crisis. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2020

# Business

## A new regional gaming powerhouse: 'Zain esports' to boost online gaming ecosystem

### Middle Eastern Challenge powered by Zain esports between 1-16 December

**KUWAIT/RIYADH/AMMAN/MANAMA:** Zain Group, a leading telecom innovator in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, announces the highly transformational development of the launch of the 'Zain esports' brand, marking the beginning of a year-long calendar of large and exciting regional online esports tournaments comprised of multiple Flagship events as well as smaller, regular community tournaments with attractive cash and devices prize pools.

#### EA SPORTS FIFA 21 PS4 tournaments: Middle East Challenge Dec 1-16

The new Zain esports brand will be initially associated with a multi-nation and newly launched EA SPORTS FIFA 21 PS4 tournaments: Middle East Challenge powered by Zain esports, the first in the region, being held under an official partnership with EA SPORTS, a global leader in digital interactive entertainment and PlayStation. FIFA 21 is a football simulation video game published by EA SPORTS as part of the FIFA series, representing the 28th installment in the FIFA series, and was released October 9, 2020 for PlayStation consoles.

The inaugural regional tournament will see qualifying rounds taking place between 1-5 December as qualifying rounds, with playoffs and finals occurring over two consecutive weekends, on 8-9 and 15-16 December, 2020.



diversification strategy and investment outside of areas related strictly to telecom. This initiative meets a number of different goals for Zain, including youth development, enriching the brand, fostering innovation and digital opportunities on our 4G, 5G and Fiber networks, and creating shareholder value."

Hammoud continued, "Zain is a pioneer by nature, and the introduction of this latest initiative reiterates our outlook on being first-to-market with products and services that enhance the lives of the people in the communities we serve and beyond. We have every expectation that Zain esports is going to develop into a regional and international gaming powerhouse, and we are highly pleased and motivated to be working with recognized gaming partners and developers."

#### Zain esports to create opportunities for youth across region

Zain esports plans to identify and foster local talent in numerous ways, including by creating a competition to select commentators for Arabic commentary, as well as creating a conducive environment for esports content creators aiming to create popular YouTube channels. Moreover, Zain esports will support and use local social media influencers to promote leagues among local gamers. This manifestation of Zain's digital lifestyle

strategy is geared towards empowering society and driving socio-economic development by creating multiple opportunities for young people right across the Middle East. Regional amateur gamers will also have the opportunity to win prize money and devices in a fair and competitive environment.

The best gamers will represent their countries on a regional platform supported by Zain esports, and on the global stage with partner leagues; while selected casters and commentators will have the opportunity to showcase their talents to audiences from multiple nations. Zain plans to create an esports Incubator creating opportunities for aspiring coders and producers to contribute technically to the Zain esports initiative on an ongoing basis.

Hammoud concluded, "Zain esports marks a phenomenal opportunity for us to drive the business in new areas, while delighting our customers, especially the youth. The global pandemic has changed life as we know it and has created further demand for online connectivity and access to digital content. We are confident that the variety of esports games

received, the UK operations will close," it added.

Debenhams, which has already been shedding thousands of jobs ahead of and during the pandemic, currently employs around 12,000 staff—mostly being paid by the government under its Covid furlough scheme. "All reasonable steps were taken to complete a transaction that would secure the future of Debenhams," said Geoff Rowley, one of the administrators acting on behalf of the group. "However, the economic landscape is extremely challenging and, coupled with the uncertainty facing the UK retail industry, a viable deal could not be reached."

#### Tragic

Debenham's collapse comes as the future of Arcadia hangs by a thread. Arcadia, which owns a number of brands including Topman, Evans and Wallis which sell also in Debenhams' stores, blamed its tumbling into administration largely on coronavirus fallout. However like Debenhams, Arcadia has struggled to adapt from a bricks-and-mortar business into an leading online company.

Senior government minister Michael Gove yesterday queried the nature of Arcadia's collapse. "The Arcadia story is a tragic one, I'm not going to criticize any individual but there's been a lot of reporting that points out some of the missteps by the management there," the key ally of Prime

of cocoa in addition to the market price and is intended to better remunerate cocoa farmers, many of whom live in poverty.

But a reported large purchase of cocoa by Hershey's on the US futures market recently "clearly indicates your intention to avoid paying the living differential income", the CCC and Cocobod said in a joint letter. As a result, the producers said they had "been left with no choice but to cancel all sustainability programs with which your company is involved".

The schemes certify that the chocolate is ethically produced—allowing firms to sell it at higher prices. Production must avoid deforestation and be free of child labor. In a separate statement, the CCC and Cocobod accused Mars of modifying its cocoa butter procurement processes to avoid paying the LID. The CCC and Cocobod denounced Hershey's and Mars' "breach of confidence" in the scheme designed to help millions of African farmers. In a



- **Malek Hammoud:** This initiative meets many goals for Zain, including youth development, enriching the brand, fostering digital innovation opportunities, and creating shareholder value"
- Launch of 'Zain esports' reconfirms company's evolution to a digital services provider
- Zain esports to host multiple flagship and community events over the next 12 months, with attractive cash and device prize pools
- FIFA eWorld champion, MsDossary partnering Zain esports

and attractive prize money offered by Zain to the wider regional community, will act as a catalyst to drive our progress in this domain further."

#### Growth of gaming boosted by Zain's 4G, 5G and Fiber networks

Zain has seen a 300 percent rise in gaming-related data usage since February 2020 across all its operations, with customers benefiting from the high-quality 4G, 5G and Fiber to the Home (FTTH) services offered by Zain. The size and potential of the online gaming market internationally is huge, with market estimates forecasting the industry could generate \$196 billion in revenues by 2022, making it one of the fastest growing industries on the planet. Games and e-sports analytics and market research company Newzoo estimated that of the \$152 billion in revenues generated by online games globally in 2019, \$34.7 billion, or 23 percent, of the global total was generated from Europe, Middle East, and Africa.

#### Zain esports to provide live streaming and content on social media channels

Beyond the financial benefits accruing from participating in online gaming for the players, Zain's participation in this area also makes one the strongest single largest use cases for 5G and fiber-to-the-home (FTTH), supporting Zain operating

companies to connect with the gaming community to offer 5G, fiber and similar high-value services. Spectators will be able to watch the gaming and content live over Zain esports social media channels, predominantly Twitch and YouTube, as well as regular posts on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Former FIFA e-World champion, MsDossary, said "I'm super excited to be partnering with Zain esports to help launch their entry into gaming with this momentous EA SPORTS FIFA21 PS4 Middle Eastern Challenge. There's tons of great prizes including PS5's and cash. Winning the FIFA eWorld cup was one of my greatest achievements, and it's fantastic to see companies like Zain bringing more esports and gaming opportunities to the region to uncover some amazing talent."

Promoting the launch of Zain esports and the upcoming EA SPORTS FIFA21 PS4 tournament, Zain will be undertaking numerous marketing initiatives across all media channels, targeting all those involved in the regional esports ecosystem and inviting them to participate in tournaments and other activities in this exciting new venture.

For more details on the EA SPORTS FIFA 21 PS4 Middle East Challenge, please visit [www.zainesports.com](http://www.zainesports.com) or register through the tournament dashboard on PS4, or via the competition center at [compete.playstation.com](http://compete.playstation.com)

## Collapse of two UK retailers puts 25,000 jobs at risk

**LONDON:** Debenhams and Topshop-owner Arcadia, two of Britain's biggest clothing retailers, stood on the brink of collapse yesterday following coronavirus fallout and fierce online competition, risking the loss of 25,000 jobs. British department store chain Debenhams said it was set to close for business save for an unlikely rescue, meaning around 12,000 jobs were set to go.

The business, which had been struggling long before the pandemic, made its announcement after British clothing retailer Arcadia fell into administration late Monday, putting at risk a further 13,000 roles. The news comes on the eve of England exiting a second lockdown which has battered in particular the nation's retail and hospitality sectors. Debenhams, whose history dates back to the late eighteenth century, said in a statement that it would continue to trade through its 124 UK stores and online to clear stock after retailer JD Sports pulled out of rescue talks. "On conclusion of this process, if no alternative offers have been

## Mars and Hershey's accused of avoiding fair pay for cocoa farmers

**ABDIJAN:** Two of the world's largest cocoa producers have accused Hershey's and Mars of avoiding paying a bonus that helps boost poor farmers' incomes, and have cancelled sustainability schemes run by the confectionary giants. West African nations Ghana and Ivory Coast account for two-thirds of global cocoa production, but there have been long-running tensions with US multinationals over pricing.

The Coffee Cocoa Council (CCC) and the Ghana Cocoa Board (Cocobod) on Monday accused Mars and Hershey's—two of the world's top chocolate sellers—of not paying the so-called living income differential (LID). The LID gives a bonus of \$400 per ton



A Debenhams store is pictured following the outbreak of the coronavirus disease in Harrogate. —Reuters

Minister Boris Johnson told Sky News. "We know more broadly, to be fair, that the high street is facing unprecedented pressure, significant part of that of course is COVID."

"A nightmare before Christmas is unfolding for 25,000 employees who will lose their jobs if buyers are not found for parts of both businesses," said Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown. "Arcadia group's collapse has set off a domino effect, with JD Sports pulling out of talks to buy Debenhams. —AFP



statement to AFP, Hershey's said it was "unfortunate" that the countries had decided to "distribute a misleading statement this morning and jeopardize such critical programs that directly benefit cocoa farmers". Mars Wrigley denied that it had avoided paying the LID, and said it had long supported the initiative. —AFP

## OPEC delays talks with allies until Thursday

**LONDON:** The members of the OPEC oil producers cartel decided yesterday to delay by two days talks with their allies over a possible extension to output cuts to support the pandemic-stricken market.

An OPEC source told AFP that while the 13 members of OPEC proper may continue informal discussions yesterday, no formal ministerial conference along the lines of that on Monday was planned. The organization confirmed that the meeting of the broader OPEC+ grouping—which includes Russia—had been delayed to tomorrow at 1300 GMT. Cartel members had failed to reach agreement on Monday after around four hours of videoconference talks. Despite expectations before the meeting that an extension of output cuts was on the cards, analysts have taken the delay as a sign of splits within the grouping.

Some members are still of the opinion that as the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic continues to rage in many countries it would be premature to introduce almost two million additional barrels per day onto the market, as envisioned in the deal struck in April by OPEC and its partners. However, the recent rise in crude oil prices—which have picked up by 25 percent over the past month—as well as positive news on vaccine development means others see light at the end of the tunnel and are arguing for keeping to the current calendar. The production cuts and resulting fall in revenues have been painful for some states, even if the cuts have helped support prices.

"While some see the market as still too fragile to accept more barrels, others are keen to ramp up production and make the most of rising prices," said analyst Avtar Sandu of Phillip Futures.

After falling a little on Monday evening after talks broke up without agreement, the prices for both the US crude oil benchmark, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), and Europe's Brent North Sea contracts were stable yesterday. —AFP

## Business

# Biden taps Janet Yellen to lead barrier-breaking economic team

## If approved, Yellen to be the first female US Treasury secretary

WASHINGTON: President-elect Joe Biden announced Monday he will nominate former Federal Reserve chair Janet Yellen to lead the Treasury, topping a slate of economic officials who would break racial and gender barriers in the US government. The rollout of Biden's economic team comes after running mate Kamala Harris made history as the first woman, first Black person and first person of South Asian descent to win the vice presidency.

If they win Senate approval, Yellen would be the first female Treasury secretary, and would be joined in the executive branch by the first African Americans to serve as her deputy and as head of the White House economic council, as well as the first South Asian in a key budget role.

"We face great challenges as a country right now. To recover, we must restore the American dream—a society where each person can rise to their potential and dream even bigger for their children," Yellen tweeted following the announcement. "As Treasury Secretary, I will work every day towards rebuilding that dream for all." Job number one for the 74-year-old, who previously made history as the first female Federal Reserve chief from 2014 to 2018, will be helping the US economy recover from the sharp downturn in growth and mass layoffs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unless lawmakers are able to overcome their differences in the closing weeks of the year, she will likely be tasked with convincing Democrats and Republicans in Congress to pass another spending bill to power the recovery amid a months-long deadlock on new aid. "As we get to work to control the virus, this is the team that will deliver immediate economic relief for the American people during this economic crisis and help us build our economy back better than ever," Biden said in a statement announcing his appointments.

He has stressed that he would strive for diversity while choosing staff for when he takes office in January. Biden has pushed ahead with naming his team despite Donald Trump's continuing refusal to concede defeat and his unfounded claims of voter fraud that have been repeatedly rejected by courts.

Reality is, however, closing in step-by-step on Trump, and on Monday two more key states—Wisconsin and Arizona—certified their election results showing Biden won there.

The Electoral College is all but certain to formalize Biden's nationwide victory when it meets on December 14.

### Confirmation in question?

Yellen's nomination was first reported last week, and Biden and Harris was to

present the nominees at an event later Tuesday.

Chuck Grassley, the Republican senator currently leading the Finance Committee that would hold Yellen's confirmation hearing should the party maintain its current control of the chamber following two January elections in Georgia, told reporters she would likely get a "favorable view." Many of the others tapped for Biden's economic team are veterans of former president Barack Obama's administration.

Nigerian-born Wally Adeyemo, a former deputy national security advisor and current president of the Obama Foundation non-profit, was picked as deputy Treasury secretary. He would be the first African American in that role. Neera Tanden, president of liberal think tank Center for American Progress, was picked to head the Office of Management and Budget. If confirmed, she would be its first South Asian leader. However, Tanden—a former adviser to Hillary Clinton, who lost to Trump in the 2016 presidential election—faces criticism from conservatives and progressives alike that could jeopardize her chances of confirmation by the Senate.

Also named was Cecilia Rouse, the dean of the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, tapped to chair the Council of Economic Advisors (CEA), who



President-elect Joe Biden on Monday announced key members of his economic team, including Janet Yellen (bottom right), Secretary of the Treasury; Neera Tanden (top left), Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Jared Bernstein (top right) and Heather Boushey, members of the Council of Economic Advisers. — AFP

would be the first African American in that post. Jared Bernstein, who previously advised Biden when he was vice president

under Obama, will join the CEA, as will Washington Center for Equitable Growth President Heather Boushey. — AFP

## Fed's Powell stresses economic uncertainty, Mnuchin hails recovery

WASHINGTON: Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell offered mirror images of the state of the US economy as it navigates the COVID-19 downturn in testimony released Monday ahead of appearances before Congress.

Mnuchin, serving his final weeks on the job before President-elect Joe Biden's administration takes office in January, hailed the country's recovery thus far, but Powell warned of continued uncertainty.

Both noted progress on job gains, and Powell pointed to hopeful news about new vaccines that could be coming soon, but added a note of caution.

"The rise in new COVID-19 cases, both here and abroad, is concerning and could prove challenging for the next few months," Powell said in his testimony prepared for delivery to the Senate Banking Committee yesterday.

Powell, who is generally upbeat about the gains so far, also repeated his warning that "A full economic recovery is unlikely until people are confident that it is safe to reengage in a broad range of activities."

Mnuchin touted the achievements of the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act in helping to boost hiring and lower the unemployment rate to 6.9 percent. But with just half of the more than 20 million job losses caused by the pandemic recovered, he acknowledged that "our



Steven Mnuchin

job will not be complete until we get every American back to work."

The Treasury secretary noted that "Additional economic shutdowns, however, continue to impair this remarkable progress and cause great harm to American businesses and workers," and called on Congress to approve "a targeted fiscal package." The statements for the first of two days of joint testimony gave few signs that the officials could be at odds over the fate of several of the Fed's lending programs, which Mnuchin refused to continue beyond the end of the year.

The Fed earlier Monday announced it was extending four pandemic emergency lending programs for three months through March 31, with approval from the Treasury. The extended programs dealt mostly with corporate debt. However, Mnuchin would not allow extension of the Municipal Lending Facility or Main Street Lending Program that helps small- and medium-sized businesses that have been hard hit by the pandemic due to shutdowns, restrictions and changes in consumer behavior. — AFP

## Lebanon plunged into 'deliberate depression': WB

BEIRUT: Lebanon's economy is sinking into a "deliberate depression", the World Bank said yesterday in a damning report stressing the authorities' failure to tackle the crisis. The fall 2020 edition of the Lebanon Economic Monitor predicted the economy will have contracted by 19.2 percent this year and projected a debt-to-GDP ratio of 194 percent next year.

"A year into Lebanon's severe economic crisis, deliberate lack of effective policy action by authorities has subjected the economy to an arduous and prolonged depression," a World Bank statement said.

Lebanon's economy started collapsing last year as a result of years of corrupt practices and mismanagement. The crisis was made worse by a nationwide wave of anti-government protests that paralysed the country late last year and the Covid-19 pandemic this year.

The August 4 Beirut port blast, one of the largest



BEIRUT: A picture shows a man standing at the booth of a money exchange company in the city of Jounieh north of Beirut yesterday. Lebanon's economy is sinking into a "deliberate depression", the World Bank said yesterday in a damning report stressing the authorities' failure to tackle the crisis. — AFP

non-nuclear explosions in history, brought the country to its knees and further fuelled public distrust. "Lebanon is suffering from a dangerous depletion of resources, including human capital, with brain drain becoming an increasingly desper-

ate option," the World Bank warned. In 2020, Lebanon defaulted on its debt, banks imposed capital controls and inflation has reached triple-digit rates, dragging the country into its worst ever economic crisis. — AFP

## US telecom regulator stepping out as Biden steps in

SAN FRANCISCO: The chief US telecom regulator said Monday he will leave his post the same day President-elect Joe Biden takes office, clearing the way for a shift in oversight of the internet.

Ajit Pai's tenure as chair of the Federal Communications Commission has been defined by a pro-industry stance, particularly in regard to "net neutrality," leaving telecommunications firms free to block or throttle traffic. Pai's decision to step down on January 20, Biden's inauguration day, clears the way for the creation of an FCC board dominated by Democrats who may elevate the interests of users and entrepreneurs above those of telecom titans.

His departure also comes amid intense debate in Washington over internet regulations including social media liability and online privacy. One key area of contention is "Section 230" of a 1996 law which protects online services from liability related to content posted by others. The provision has been a target of both the left and right, even as digital rights activists warn it is the cornerstone of online free speech.

Biden has said Section 230 should be "revoked" but has offered no details of any plan to reform the



SAN FRANCISCO: The chief US telecom regulator Ajit Pai said Monday he will leave his post the same day President-elect Joe Biden takes office.

legislation. US President Donald Trump appointed Pai as FCC chairman in 2017.

"I am proud of how productive this commission has been," Pai said in a statement announcing his resignation. "This FCC has not shied away from making tough choices." Under his leadership, the FCC scrapped a 2015 order aimed at forcing broadband firms to treat all online traffic equally after a politically-charged debate over net neutrality debate. Backers of net neutrality argue the rules, which were challenged in court, prevented powerful internet providers like Comcast and AT&T from shutting out rival services and creating "fast" and "slow" lanes for online services. — AFP

## Eurozone inflation remains stuck in negative territory

BRUSSELS: Eurozone inflation remained in negative territory for the fourth consecutive month, official data said yesterday, with the European economy impaired by the second wave of the coronavirus.

The EU's Eurostat data agency said inflation remained at -0.3 percent in November, way off the official target set by the European Central Bank of just under two percent. The descent into deflationary territory has put pressure on the ECB to draw up further stimulus measures, already at 1.35 trillion euros (\$1.58 trillion), and should encourage governments to spend more.

Europe's economy is heading back into recession in the fourth quarter, after a short recovery over the summer failed to take hold as coronavirus cases shot back higher. Policymakers worry about falling prices as they can encourage consumers to hold off making purchases in hopes they fall further, which can lead to a spiral of dropping economic activity, employment and prices.

ECB chief Christine Lagarde has already

### News in brief

#### Exxon Mobil assets writedown

NEW YORK: Exxon Mobil said Monday it will write down as much as \$20 billion in assets as the oil giant slashes capital spending due to low oil prices amid the coronavirus pandemic. ExxonMobil, which has reported losses the last three quarters, said it will account for a \$17-20 billion write-down in the fourth quarter based on shifting assets from the United States, Canada and Argentina out of its development plan. To raise money, the company also plans to divest less strategic assets, depending on market conditions. — AFP

#### BofA no to financing Arctic drilling

NEW YORK: Bank of America said Monday that it would not finance oil and gas drilling projects in the Arctic, the latest large US bank to take the step long sought by environmental advocates. A Bank of America spokesman confirmed the decision to AFP after it was initially reported by Bloomberg. Environmental protection organization the Sierra Club welcomed the news. "Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Chase, Wells Fargo and Citi have all announced similar policies this year," the NGO said in a statement. — AFP

#### Facebook buys online startup Kustomer

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook on Monday announced it is buying a startup specializing in helping businesses interact with customers online. The acquisition of five-year-old Kustomer comes as the leading social network continues to weave e-commerce into offerings, particularly its WhatsApp and Messenger messaging services. More than 175 million people contact businesses via WhatsApp daily, and the number is growing, according to WhatsApp chief operating officer Matt Idema and Facebook vice president of business products Dan Levy. — AFP

pledged to bolster the economy with fresh stimulus at the central bank's December meeting. The first wave of virus cases in March prompted the ECB to roll out its unprecedented bond-buying scheme to keep borrowing costs low and boost the economy.

Expectations are that the same scheme, known as PEPP, will be beefed up at the next monetary policy meeting on December 10, though Lagarde said other measures were available.

Even before the virus, inflation in the 19-nation eurozone has stayed stubbornly low, leaving the two-percent target well out of reach and fuelling calls for a rethink at the ECB. Pursuing a less strict inflation target would follow in the footsteps of the US Federal Reserve, which has pledged more leeway, allowing inflation to rise above 2.0 percent.

#### Italy's growth jumps

Meanwhile, Italy's economy, which plunged into recession by the coronavirus outbreak, returned to growth in the third quarter as GDP jumped 15.9 percent on the previous quarter, the national statistics agency estimated yesterday. This is a slight downgrade on the initial estimate of 16.1 percent made by Istat in late October. While the economy rebounding strongly from the spring, when many businesses were closed, economic output was still five percent smaller than during the third quarter of 2019. In the first nine months of the year, GDP in the eurozone's third largest economy fell by 8.3 percent. — AFP

## Business

# Markaz: Industries Qatar leads top GCC M&A transactions in Q3 2020

## Financials, Industrials and IT sectors witness highest number of transactions

**KUWAIT:** Qatar's industrials sector leads the top GCC M&A transactions during Q3 2020 as per a report recently issued by the Investment Banking Department at Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz". Industries Qatar announced they intend to acquire an additional 25 per cent stake in Qatar Fertilizer Company (QAFCO) for a total consideration of \$1.0 billion. QAFCO was established in 1969 as a joint venture between the Qatari government and a number of foreign investors with an aim to diversify the economy and utilize the nation's immense gas reserve. Moreover, the company's current shareholding structure is as follows: Industries Qatar (75 percent), Qatar Petroleum (25 percent). Upon the successful completion of this transaction, Industries Qatar would increase its total ownership to 100 percent, becoming the sole owner of QAFCO.

The second largest transaction involves National Petroleum Construction Company (NPCC) and National Marine Dredging Company (NMDC), who are in the midst of evaluating the opportunity to combine their operations upon receiving an offer from General Holding Corporation and other minority shareholders of NPCC. The key terms of the offer states that NPCC shareholders will transfer NPCC to NMDC in exchange of the issuance of an instrument that is convertible into 575.0 million ordinary shares, or 70 percent of NMDC's issued share capital. At a convertible share price of \$1.2, the transaction would result in an estimated value of \$688.8 million.

Moreover, Raha AlSafi Consortium has been awarded a bid for the First Milling Company, one of four milling companies to be privatized by the Saudi government, for a total consideration of \$540.0 million. The consortium is comprised of the following parties: Almutlaq Group, Al-Safi Abunayyan Holding and Essa Al-Ghurair Investment Company. The next transaction oversaw Delivery Hero acquire 100 percent of Instashop, a leading online grocery platform, for a total consideration of \$360.0 million. It is worth noting that this value is comprised of two components including a cash payment of \$270.0 million and a deferred payment of \$90.0 million, which is dependent on meeting certain milestones. Lastly, the UAE's Edge Group announced its intention to acquire a 40 percent stake in Advanced Military Maintenance Repair and Overhaul Center (AMMROC) for a total consideration of \$307.0 million. AMMROC offers maintenance, repair & overhaul and support services for fixed and rotary wing military aircraft in the MENA and South Asian regions.

Sector-wise Classification of Deals – Q3 2020

Sector	GCC Acquirers	Foreign Acquirers	Other*	Grand Total	%
Financials	4	0	1	5	22
Industrials	3	0	0	3	13
Information Technology	1	2	0	3	13
Consumer Discretionary	1	0	1	2	9
Consumer Staples	2	0	0	2	9
Logistics	2	0	0	2	9
Healthcare	0	1	1	2	9
Energy	1	0	0	1	4
Insurance	0	0	1	1	4
Media	1	0	0	1	4
Real Estate	0	0	1	1	4
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100</b>

### GCC M&A Growth

According to Markaz's report, the number of closed M&A transactions in the GCC during Q3 2020 decreased by 23 percent relative to Q3 2019 however it remained stable relative to Q2 2020. Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates each recorded a growth in the number of closed transactions relative to the previous quarter whereas Bahrain and Saudi Arabia each witnessed a decline in the number of transactions that closed throughout this time period. Oman on the other hand did not report any closed transaction throughout the quarter.

### Acquirers and targets

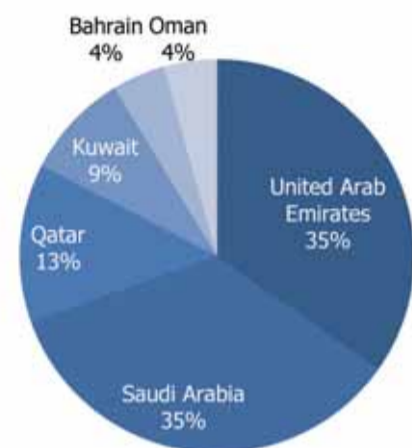
A majority of the transactions completed during Q3 2020 and Q2 2020 were carried out by GCC acquirers, accounting for 65 percent of the total number of transactions that closed during Q3 2020, while foreign acquirers accounted for 13 percent. The remaining 22 percent represents transactions for which the buyer information was not available. GCC acquirers also dominated the market during the previous quarter as they accounted for 65 percent of the total number of closed transactions while foreign acquirers accounted for 22 percent. Once again, the remaining 13 percent represents transactions for which the buyer information was not available.

Furthermore, GCC acquirers actively acquired both regional and international companies, whereas in the previous quarter, they primarily invested in the regional market. With that being said, GCC acquirers closed a slightly lower number of transactions relative to Q2 2020. Throughout Q3 2020, GCC acquirers closed a total of nine transactions that involved international companies, which is 31 percent lower in comparison to Q2 2020, which oversaw a total of 13 closed transactions that involved foreign targets. Moreover, Saudi and UAE buyers each accounted for 30 percent of these transactions, followed by Bahraini, Kuwaiti and Qatari acquirers, who accounted for the remaining transactions. Lastly, Omani acquirers did not close any cross-border transaction throughout the quarter.

### Foreign buyers

The GCC market received a slightly weaker level of interest from foreign buyers in Q3 2020 when compared to the previous quarter. Throughout Q3 2020, foreign buyers closed three transactions whereas in Q2 2020, they completed five transactions, which translates into a 40 percent decline quarter-over-quarter and a 67 percent decline year over year. The UAE continued to be the most attractive target out of the regional markets, which is a trend that has persist-

Geographical Distribution by Number of Announced Pipeline Transactions (Q3 2020)



ed throughout the past few quarters. It is worth noting that all closed transactions throughout the quarter purely targeted UAE companies.

### Sectorial view

In addition, the closed transactions throughout the quarter spanned across multiple sectors which was also observed in the previous quarter. More importantly, the sectors that witnessed the greatest level of activity throughout Q3 2020 were the Financials, Industrials and IT sectors. Collectively, these three sectors accounted for 48 percent of the total transactions that closed throughout the quarter. The Financials and Industrials sectors were also among the sectors that witnessed the greatest level of activity in Q2 2020.

### Deals pipeline

By the end of Q3 2020, there was a total of 23 announced transactions in the pipeline, which is significantly higher relative to Q2 2020. As witnessed last quarter, the majority of these transactions involved Saudi and UAE targets, each of whom accounted for 35 percent of the total number of deals announced. The remaining transactions primarily included Kuwaiti and Qatari targets whereas Bahrain and Oman each announced one transaction throughout the quarter.

## China factory activity sees fastest growth in decade: Survey

**BEIJING:** Activity in China's factories expanded at its fastest pace in a decade last month, data showed yesterday, the latest sign that the world's number two economy is well on track to recovery from the coronavirus. The purchasing managers index released by Chinese media group Caixin came just a day after official PMI figures showed growth at its fastest in more than three years.

PMIs are a key gauge of activity in the country's factories, and the Caixin survey covers small and medium-sized enterprises. It is seen by some as a more accurate reflection of China's economic situation than the official government figures, which more closely track the condition of large state groups. The 54.9 reading for November smashed

expectations—which were for a result around the same as October's 53.6 — and is the strongest since November 2010. Anything above 50 is considered growth.

The data suggested that manufacturing firms logged a "sharp and accelerated rise in production" in November, with companies attributing this to greater order volumes and recovery from COVID-19 disruptions earlier in the year.

"Underlying data suggested that the upturn continued to be led by firmer domestic demand," said Caixin. But it added that despite a substantial rise in purchasing activity, the time taken to receive goods continued to lengthen, with reports of stock shortages at suppliers.

The official November PMI came in at 52.1, data showed Monday, beating the 51.4 seen the month before and back at levels last seen in September 2017. Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at consultancy Capital Economics, said the employment component was "particularly encouraging", adding that improvements in the labor market will drive further recovery in consumption.

during the pandemic, the food delivery startup said in a prior filing. The startup reported losses totaling \$149 million in the first nine months of 2020 on revenues of \$1.9 billion as sales more than tripled from the prior year.

"We have a history of net losses, we anticipate increasing expenses in the future," the company said in a filing. "We have expended and expect to continue to expend substantial financial and other resources on developing our platform... expanding into new markets and geographies, and increasing our sales and marketing efforts." The startup boasts having more than a million delivery people, referred to as "Dashers," and more than 18 million customers. It will begin the traditional "road show" of presentations to investors on Monday.

DoorDash has said surveys showed it with a 50 percent share of the US meal delivery market in October, twice as big as the number two service, Uber Eats. DoorDash co-founder and chief executive Tony Xu said in a filing that the startup fulfills the American dream for his family, which came to the US from China when he was five years old.

"DoorDash exists today to empower those like my mom who came here with a dream to make it on their own," he wrote. The company will make its

percent of GDP, over three years, our government will make carefully judged, targeted and meaningful investments to create jobs and boost growth," she said. The pandemic shut down large swathes of the Canadian economy in March, and several regions are now under lockdown again as a second wave of COVID-19 — worse than the first—sweeps across the country. The government has spent hundreds of billions to support out-of-work Canadians and businesses that were forced to close temporarily.

Notably, Can\$1 billion was spent on vaccine agreements to secure 429 million doses from seven pharma-



Workers in a motorcycle parts factory in HuaiBei, in China's eastern Anhui Province. —AFP

Exports are also a factor. "Taken together, both surveys suggest that foreign demand for Covid-19 related products remains strong, amid fresh lockdowns abroad and hints at a further acceleration in export growth in the near-term," Capital Economics added in a report. —AFP



debut on Wall Street on the New York Stock Exchange under the stock symbol DASH before Christmas. DoorDash has followed in the footsteps of other tech startups regarding company governance, offering an assortment of share types that will result in co-founder Xu maintaining control. A slew of tech startups including Airbnb, Roblox and Wish are on track to make Wall Street debuts by the end of this year. —AFP

ceutical firms, and Can\$322 billion went to Canadians directly, so far. As a result, the government's debt is set to rise to more than Can\$1.2 trillion. The debt as a percentage of GDP will increase from 31.2 percent last year to 50.7 percent this year, and 52.6 percent next year, according to the finance department. Freeland's fall economic statement—essentially a mini-budget—also signaled the government's intent to move ahead on charging a sales tax on video streaming subscriptions like Netflix, and to restrict stock option deductions, as well as support home energy retrofits and more electric car charging stations. —AFP

## US hits China firm over Venezuela internet curbs

**WASHINGTON:** The United States on Monday imposed sanctions on a major Chinese electronics and engineering company for assisting Venezuela in curbing dissent on the internet. The US said it was restricting transactions with the China National Electronics Import and Export Corporation (CEIEC), and blocking assets of any firm in which the state-owned company holds a 50 percent stake or higher. The Treasury Department said CEIEC provides expertise to Venezuela's state-owned telecom company—which has blocked independent media as well as livestreams by opposition leader Juan Guaido, who is recognized as interim president by at least 50 countries, including the US.

"The United States will not hesitate to target anyone helping to suppress the democratic will of the Venezuelan people and others around the world," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in a statement. The Treasury Department described CEIEC as offering a "commercialized version of Beijing's 'Great Firewall,'" that scrubs out politically sensitive material from the internet accessible to ordinary people.

CEIEC on its website describes itself as selling "solutions that protect the most basic rights of every citizen," and also mentions business interests in Bolivia and Ecuador. China is a major supporter and commercial partner of oil-producing Venezuela, helping leftist leader Nicolas Maduro survive a nearly two-year US-led campaign to topple him as he leads an economy in shambles. Beijing slammed the US sanctions yesterday as a "pure pretext to suppress the relevant Venezuelan and Chinese companies". "We are also firmly opposed to the abuse of unilateral sanctions and other means to coerce the Venezuelan people to change their development path," Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said at a routine briefing.

"China will take the necessary measures to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of its own enterprises," she added, without specifying further. Venezuela on Sunday will hold legislative elections in which Maduro hopes to take back the National Assembly, the only institution controlled by the opposition, with Guaido boycotting what he and several international observers see as a rigged process. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that CEIEC "has been supporting the Maduro regime's malicious efforts to repress political dissent and undermine democratic processes since 2017."

"Maduro's desperate attempts to manipulate the democratic processes should leave no doubt that any elections organized by the illegitimate regime, including the December 6 parliamentary elections, will be neither free nor fair," Pompeo said in a statement.

The Venezuelan government, for its part, denounced the "illegal actions of the United States government" that it said seek to "destabilize" the country on the eve of parliamentary elections. President Donald Trump's administration has been ramping up sanctions against adversaries Iran and Venezuela as it prepares to hand over on January 20 to President-elect Joe Biden. —AFP

## Canada measures push deficit to record Can\$382bn

**OATTAWA:** Canada's budget deficit is projected to balloon to a record Can\$382 billion (\$284 billion) as government spending skyrockets to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus, the finance minister announced Monday. The amount for the 2020-2021 fiscal year, which began on April 1, is higher than an estimate of Can\$343 billion announced in July and almost 20

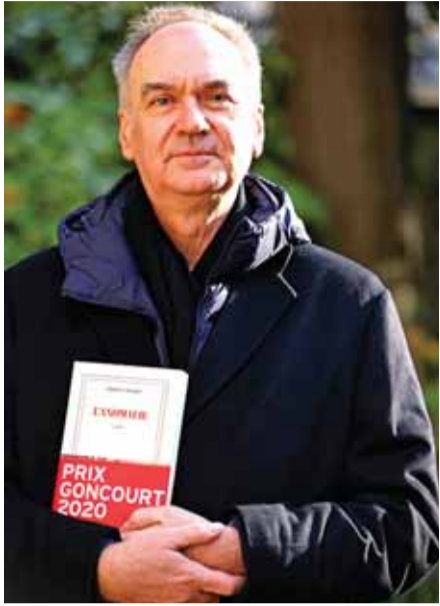
times higher than the shortfall in the last budget released in March 2019, before the pandemic.

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland also said the government was preparing to spend another Can\$70 billion to Can\$100 billion over three years to jolt the economy once the pandemic is over. The aim, she said, is to build back the economy to be greener, more inclusive, more innovative and more competitive. "When the virus is under control and our economy is ready for new growth, we will deploy an ambitious stimulus package to jump-start our recovery," Freeland told the House of Commons.

"Spending roughly three to four

## Lifestyle | Features

## Futuristic thriller wins top French literary award



French writer Herve Le Tellier poses after being awarded the Prix Goncourt, France's most prestigious literary prize, for his novel "L'Anomalie" in Paris. — AFP

A futuristic thriller about the double lives of passengers aboard a flight from Paris to New York won France's top literary award, the Prix Goncourt, which was awarded by video link on Monday. The winner was announced two days after the French government eased a monthlong coronavirus lockdown, allowing bookshops, which had complained bitterly about the restrictions, to reopen. Herve Le Tellier, a 63-year-old former journalist and mathematician, won the country's oldest literary prize for "L'Anomalie," his eighth novel. Tellier had been tipped for glory with a page-turner of a novel in which a hit man, a Nigerian pop star and a writer land in New York only to find that their flight and other versions of their selves had already arrived three months earlier.

The former Reuters journalist said Monday that it could be read as a parable for life after Donald Trump. "The idea is that since Trump is there and is the cause of the world's destruction, the vision of the book is to propose another version of the world, where Biden is pres-

ident. "That's one possible way of reading it," he said by video link. Jury chairman Didier Decoin said that the novel had a "real cinematic dimension" and that he hoped it would be adapted for the big screen. Because of the Covid-19 restrictions, the 10-person Goncourt jury was forced to forgo its traditional slap-up awards lunch at the Drouant restaurant in central Paris. Instead, they huddled over video link from their homes. They had been due to name the winner on November 10, but to show solidarity with booksellers they held off until bookshops were allowed to reopen at the weekend, along with vendors of other "non-essential" goods. Restaurants and cafes remain closed. Tellier won eight of the 10 votes cast by the jurors.

#### Whiff of scandal

Two members of the academy chose the fictional memoirs of a senior Moroccan civil servant by Mael Renouard, a former speech writer for French ex-prime minister Francois Fillon. Previous winners of the Prix Goncourt, which was

set up in 1903, include Marcel Proust, Simone de Beauvoir, Marguerite Duras and Michel Houellebecq. While Tellier gets a paltry 10 euros (\$12) in prize money, the award invariably catapults the winner to the top of the best-seller lists.

The ceremony comes as the closed world of French literature comes under rare scrutiny following allegations of abuse against paedophile writer Gabriel Matzneff. Matzneff won the Renaudot prize widely seen as the runner-up to the Goncourt in 2013, despite never making a secret of his preference for sex with adolescent girls and boys. He faces a trial next year on a charge of promoting paedophilia. The New York Times on Saturday criticized "the insular world that dominates French literary life", saying the fact that it had changed little since Matzneff was charged showed "just how entrenched and intractable it really is". This year's Renaudot winner was Marie-Helene Lafon for "L'Histoire du Fils" (The Son's Story). — AFP

## Why are French literary tricksters Oulipo now so hot?

The winner of France's top literary prize Monday is a mind-bending bestseller called "The Anomaly", whose brilliant time-shifting tricks have sparked comparisons with "The Matrix". Even before the work by mathematician and journalist Herve Le Tellier picked up the Prix Goncourt, critics were saying its story of a flight to New York that is lost in time demanded to be made into a television series. Le Tellier heads a secretive group of literary tricksters called Oulipo...

#### Ouli what?

Oulipo, or more accurately OuLiPo, which stands for "Ouvroir de Litterature POtentielle"-meaning workshop for potential literature. Don't worry, even in French it sounds pretentious. Originally a secret society, and still shrouded in mystery, it was founded in 1960 by a group of mostly French writers and mathematicians. They believe mathematical techniques and rules and constraints are the mother and father of all real invention.

#### Like what?

Words games and palindromes (words that read the same both backwards and forwards) are their bread and butter. Take "The Void": the French novelist and Oulipo member Georges Perec famously wrote the 300-page novel in 1969 without using the letter "e"-the most common letter in French. While his reputation has since fallen into a void in English, the Italian Italo Calvino also experimented with Oulipo as did the granddaddy of conceptual art Marcel Duchamp-he of the urinal fame.

#### Sounds a bit complicated?

Not always. Sometimes it can be simple and ingenious, like Oulipo co-founder Raymond Queneau's classic "Exercises in Style", which is one story re-told 99 different ways. But it has to be said that "snowball" poems, where each line is a single word that gets one letter longer every line, or lipograms with verses that omit letters that go below the line such as "p", "i" or "y", might not be everyone's cup of tea.

#### Why would you want to do that?

For the hell of it, of course. Queneau's "A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems" (1961) includes 10 sonnets that if divided into strips can be recombined 100,000,000,000,000 different ways and still rhyme. — AFP



Olena Shcherban, Ukrainian ethnologist and historian, who studies borscht and has 365 of its unique recipes from all over Ukraine in her private collection, wearing Ukraine's traditional clothes and headdress cooks borscht in clay, pots in the wood stove in the village of Opishnya in Poltava region.



This picture shows traditional clay pots in the house yard of Olena Shcherban. — AFP photos

# BATTLE OVER BORSCHT: NEW FRONT IN RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

Ukrainian chef Ievgen Klopotenko never expected to find himself at the center of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. But that's just what happened when the 33-year-old pushed to have borscht-the traditional beetroot and cabbage dish-recognized as part of Ukraine's historical heritage. "I don't really like to call it a war for borscht, but in fact that's what it is," Klopotenko, a graduate of the Le Cordon Bleu culinary school, told AFP in his renowned Ukrainian restaurant in central Kiev. The chef said he was fed up with how restaurants around the world-including those serving "so-called Ukrainian cuisine"-were referring to borscht as Russian soup.

So last month he brought a pot of borscht to Ukraine's culture ministry to convince officials to submit an application to United Nations cultural body UNESCO to list borscht as an intangible part of the country's cultural heritage. The list already includes French gastronomy, Neapolitan pizza and Georgian wine. The ministry agreed and said it was preparing the application to UNESCO before the March deadline, so it can be examined in December next year. And suddenly Moscow bristled. "Borscht is a national food of many countries, including Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Moldova and Lithuania," Russia's embassy in the United States said on Twitter.

#### 'Borscht unites us'

The Russian government soon followed on its own Twitter account, calling borscht "one of Russia's most famous



This picture shows clay pots with borscht in the wood stove.

and beloved dishes and a symbol of traditional cuisine". Ukrainians claim that borscht was first mentioned in 1548 in the diary of a European traveller who tasted the soup in a market near Kiev. They say it arrived in Russia much later with Ukrainian settlers. Tensions between Kiev and Moscow have flared in the decades following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. After a pro-Western popular uprising in Kiev in 2014 followed by Russia's annexation of Crimea and support of separatists in the east, the confrontation has intensified.

For Klopotenko, the battle over borscht is really about Ukraine's identity. The country has been closely tied to Russia for most of its history. Much of what is now Ukraine was part of the tsarist Russian empire and later the country became part of the Soviet Union. "When I started studying Ukrainian food and cuisine, I realized

that Ukrainian cuisine does not exist in Ukraine. It's all Soviet," Klopotenko said. The Soviet Union "swallowed" Ukraine, "chewed it and spat it out... We don't know who we are or what we are," he added.

But there is one thing for Klopotenko that is quintessentially Ukrainian: the beetroot and cabbage soup. "I realized that borscht is what unites us," he said. "We may be different, we eat different types of borscht cooked to different recipes, but it's borscht." The application will not contain a recipe for borscht as "nobody knows the authentic one", Klopotenko said.

#### 'More than just food'

"We will register something bigger. We will register the culture of borscht in Ukraine," he said, adding that the soup "is much more important than just food". Olena Shcherban, a Ukrainian ethnolo-

gist and historian, said it is "absurd" to associate borscht with Russia. "Borscht is the second dish that I ate after my mother's milk. We wean the baby and then feed him with borscht," Shcherban said as she stood over her stove cooking the soup. The 40-year-old says that Ukrainians do not know their history well and have a "lack of pride" in their gastronomy, unlike the French or Italians.

She has tried to promote the dish through a festival in the village of Opishnya in central Ukraine that she has organized for seven years. And this month, she opened a museum dedicated to borscht. "Borscht is art, borscht is language, borscht is culture, borscht is the history of my Ukraine," Shcherban said.— AFP



This picture shows three different borscht, cooked according to traditional recipes in the wood stove by Olena Shcherban.



In this file photo US actor George Clooney takes part in a press conference in central London to present a report on atrocities in South Sudan. — AFP

## THE SECRET TO GEORGE CLOONEY'S HAIR? THE FLOWBEE

Pandemic hair getting out of control? Take a tip from George Clooney: the Hollywood style icon has revealed he trims his signature silver locks with a Flowbee-a quirky home-styling device that attaches to a vacuum cleaner. The Flowbee has long been the butt of jokes since it appeared on late-night television infomercials in the late 1980s. But in promoting his new movie, "The Midnight Sky," Clooney, 59, disclosed he was a long-time fan of the much-mocked gadget, when asked during a CBS interview if he had been cutting his own hair during the coronavirus lockdown. "I've been cutting my own hair for 25 years," said the Oscar-winner, whose name is synonymous with red-carpet glamor. "My hair's really like straw, and so it's easy to cut. You can't really make too many mistakes." "So, years ago, I bought a thing called a Flowbee, which when we were," he said, at which point his stunned interviewer broke in with: "You did not!" The Flowbee cuts hair and sucks up the clippings at the same time, which has led to its use by astronauts on long-haul space missions in the past. —AFP



Olena Shcherban wearing Ukraine's traditional clothes and headdress cooks borscht in clay pots in the wood stove in the village of Opishnya in Poltava region.



Ievgen Klopotenko cooks borscht in his restaurant.

## Lifestyle | Features



This handout photo shows newly arrived Asian elephant Kaavan (left) touching trunks with another elephant in his new enclosure at the Kulen Prom Tep Wildlife Sanctuary in Cambodia's Oddar Meanchey province. — AFP photos



Newly arrived Asian elephant Kaavan drinks water in his new enclosure at the Kulen Prom Tep Wildlife Sanctuary in Cambodia's Oddar Meanchey province.

# Lonely no more: Kaavan the elephant makes new friend

It was his first contact with another elephant in eight years. Reaching out with his trunk, Kaavan tentatively greeted a fellow inhabitant of the Cambodian sanctuary where he is beginning his new life after being rescued from grim conditions in a Pakistani zoo. The 36-year-old bull elephant-dubbed the "world's loneliest"-was the sole Asian elephant at Islamabad's dilapidated zoo. Animal rights groups launched a campaign to save him from the substandard condi-

tions there, boosted by spirited social media support from US actress and musician Cher. He arrived in Cambodia on Monday to much fanfare-including a welcome from Cher herself, who not only travelled to see him off from Pakistan, but also arrived ahead of him at Siem Reap airport.

Yesterday saw Kaavan settling into his enclosure at Kulen Prom Tep Wildlife Sanctuary, where he was seen touching trunks with another elephant, captured in

images provided by rights group Four Paws. "First contact with an elephant in eight years-this is a huge moment for Kaavan," said Martin Bauer, a spokesman with the Austria-based group that worked for months to get him ready for the flight. "Kaavan will finally have the chance to live a species-appropriate and peaceful life," Bauer said, adding that the entire team was extremely moved to witness the interaction. "He has a very bright future ahead of him." Once Kaavan

has adjusted to a "controlled setting", he will be released into the wider sanctuary, where there are three female elephants, an environment ministry official said on Monday. The plan is to breed Kaavan with local elephants to "conserve the genetic fold".

Transporting an adult elephant by plane is no small task, and has only been undertaken a handful of times. Helpers packed his trunk with 200 kilograms (450 pounds) of food to snack on during the

seven-hour flight aboard a jumbo Russian cargo plane. A tube system was installed in his transport crate to handle up to 200 liters (58 gallons) of urine. Activists have accused the zoo in Islamabad of chaining Kaavan up, and of not properly sheltering him during the searing summers there. Conditions were so bad that in May, a judge ruled that all the zoo's animals should be relocated. — AFP



Dr. Joseph Varon comforts a patient in the COVID-19 intensive care unit (ICU) during Thanksgiving at the United Memorial Medical Center in Houston, Texas.



Dr. Joseph Varon comforts a patient in the COVID-19 intensive care unit (ICU) during Thanksgiving at the United Memorial Medical Center in Houston, Texas.



Dr. Joseph Varon eats a meal in the nursing station in the COVID-19 intensive care unit (ICU) during Thanksgiving at the United Memorial Medical Center. — AFP photos

## Photo of Texas doctor comforting elderly Covid patient goes viral

Joseph Varon, a doctor treating coronavirus patients at a Texas hospital, was working his 252nd day in a row when he spotted a distraught elderly man in the Covid-19 intensive care unit (ICU). Varon's comforting embrace of the white-haired man on Thanksgiving Day was captured by a photographer for Getty Images and has gone viral around the world. Varon, chief of staff at United Memorial Medical Center in Houston, told CNN he was entering the Covid ICU when he saw the elderly patient "out of his bed and trying to get out of the room." "And he's crying," Varon said. "So I get close to him and I (ask) him, 'Why are you crying?'" "And the man says, 'I want to be with my wife.'" So I just grab him and I hold him," Varon said. "I was feeling very

sorry for him. I was feeling very sad, just like him."

"Eventually he felt better and he stopped crying," Varon told CNN on Monday, which he said was his 256th consecutive day of work. "I don't know why I haven't broken down," the doctor said. "My nurses cry in the middle of the day." Varon said the isolation of the Covid unit was difficult for many patients, particularly the elderly. "You can imagine," he said. "You are inside a room where people are coming in spacesuits. "When you are an elderly individual, it's more difficult because you are alone," he said. "Some of them cry. Some of them try to escape," he said. "We actually had somebody who tried to escape through a window the other day." Varon said the elderly man in the

picture is "doing much better." "We are hoping that before the end of the week he'll be able to get out of the hospital," he said. Varon also had a message for people who are not taking precautions amid the pandemic.

"People are out there in bars, restaurants, malls," the doctor said. "It is crazy. People don't listen and then they end up in my ICU. "What people need to know is I don't want to have to be hugging them. "They need to do the basic things-keep your social distance, wear your masks, wash their hands, and avoid going to places where there are a lot of people," he said. "If people would do that, healthcare workers like me could hopefully rest." — AFP

## Pop star Rita Ora 'embarrassed' after breaking London lockdown

British singer Rita Ora apologized on Monday for breaking coronavirus lockdown rules after holding a 30th birthday party with friends in a London restaurant. Writing on the social media platform Instagram, Ora called the party, which took place on Saturday in Notting Hill, west London, a "serious and inexcusable error of judgment". "It was a spur of the moment decision made with the misguided view that we were coming out of lockdown and this would be OK," Ora wrote on Instagram. "I feel particularly embarrassed knowing first hand how hard people have worked to combat this terrible illness. "Even though this won't make it right, I want to sincerely apologize," she added. London police confirmed that officers had been called to Notting Hill over a breach of Covid-19 regulations.

"Officers continue to assess the allegations and are liaising with the local authority regarding a potential breach of regulations at the premises. Enquiries continue," a Metropolitan police statement said. The singer of hits that include "Let You Love Me" and "How to Be Lonely" has volunteered to pay a fine. Police in England can issue fines of up to £10,000 (\$13,352, €11,168) for breaches of the lockdown curbs. England was placed under four weeks of restrictions to stop the spread of coronavirus in November. Restaurants and pubs were among businesses affected.

Individuals were also banned from meeting indoors with people from other households. The lockdown is set to end on December 2 and be replaced by a tiered system allowing hospitality venues to reopen in certain areas under social distancing rules. The Sun newspaper published photos of Ora and other celebrities arriving at a restaurant. "It's important that everybody in society sets an example by following the rules - that is for every member of the public, including celebrities," the Prime Minister's official spokesman said. "But it's up to police to decide what action to take." — AFP



Rita Ora



In this handout image courtesy of ABC South Korean band BTS performs during the 2020 American Music Awards aired from the Microsoft theatre in Los Angeles. — AFP

## BTS'S 'LIFE GOES ON' DEBUTS AT NO. 1 ON US CHART IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE FIRST

Trailblazing South Korean boyband BTS have become the first group to have a foreign-language song enter the US Billboard chart at number one, in the latest musical record to be re-written by the K-pop sensation. "Life Goes On", sung predominantly in Korean, topped the US Hot 100 in its debut week, Billboard said Monday, the first foreign-language song to do so in the chart's 62-year history. BTS-or Bangtan Sonyeondan, which translates as Bulletproof Boy Scouts-have become one of the biggest acts in the world since they launched seven years ago, and made a billionaire of their managing agency's founder.

Their latest single is also the first mainly-Korean song ever to top the chart. The band's success marks the growing appeal of the South's popular culture in the US, after the subtitled Korean movie "Parasite" won four Oscar awards in February, including Best Picture. BTS' earlier track "Dynamite" debuted atop the chart in September but it was sung entirely in English, making it radio-friendly in Anglophone countries. "Dynamite" is still in the chart at number 3 and they have another five tracks in the Top 100. "Life Goes On" is the band's third number one in three months, after "Dynamite" and a BTS remix of "Savage Love" by Jawsh 685 and Jason Derulo. —AFP

## Berlin's KitKat club to become Covid-19 testing centre

Berlin's legendary KitKat fetish nightclub will reopen to the public on Friday, but visitors might be disappointed to discover that the only latex on show will be medical gloves. Closed for the past eight months because of coronavirus restrictions, the nightclub is to be transformed into a Covid-19 testing centre. "Since it is practically impossible to

get a rapid test in Berlin at the moment, we will be offering this possibility at the club from Friday," the management announced on its Facebook page on Monday. Located in the heart of Berlin, KitKat is famous for its sexually uninhibited club nights, with punters often dressed in latex, leather or indeed nothing at all. The tests will be carried out by a doctor

and "trained personnel", the club said, and results ready within 25 minutes.

"Be wild and come naked! (Please don't. Would be funny, but would probably lead to reports of suspected parties)," said the club, a pillar of Berlin nightlife since it was opened by an Austrian in 1994. Punters can register online for the swab tests, which will be conducted from

Wednesday to Sunday. A test costs 24.90 euros (\$30) and if the result is positive, the infected person should immediately quarantine and contact their doctor, the club said. Clubs and bars across Germany, especially in Berlin, are reeling from months of closure due to coronavirus restrictions. Despite financial support from the city, short-time working and

crowdfunding campaigns, many are fighting for survival. The famous Berghain club has been keeping the spirit of Berlin nightlife alive by offering an exhibition of work by local contemporary artists. Berlin's reputation as the capital of German nightlife and techno music attracts tens of thousands of tourists every year.— AFP

## Sports

## Photo of the Day



Tommy Tibajia performs in Odessa, Ukraine. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Bollywood star's IPL team buys into US Major League Cricket

**NEW DELHI:** The Premier League's Kolkata Knight Riders, co-owned by Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan, have become a key partner in the bid to launch Major League Cricket in the United States, the team said yesterday. The two-time IPL champions have signed on for a "long-term strategic partnership (that) will include financial investment and significant expertise", a statement said. Major League Cricket, featuring six city-based franchises, is aiming to launch in 2022, bringing "world-class T20 cricket to America for the very first time", it added.

"For several years now, we have been expanding the Knight Riders brand globally and closely watching the potential for T20 cricket in the USA," Khan said in the statement. "We are convinced that Major League Cricket has all the pieces in place to execute on its plans and we look forward to making our partnership an enormous success." The announcement did not say whether the Knight Riders will hold a controlling stake in the new Twenty20 league whose parent company, American Cricket Enterprises, aims to bring in top players from around the world.

ACE last month said an unused baseball stadium in Texas will be converted into a permanent cricket venue as part of plans to bring the T20 World Cup to America by 2031. Efforts to popularize cricket in the United States have been sporadic. In 2015, Indian batting great Sachin Tendulkar and Australian spin legend Shane Warne played an All-Stars series in New York, Houston and Los Angeles. In September, American fast bowler Ali Khan joined up with the Knight Riders at the IPL in United Arab Emirates, but was unable to play because of injury. Khan, 29, played a key role in the US gaining ODI status at the World Cricket League Division Two event in Namibia last year. — AFP

# Bach unopposed in bid for 2nd term as IOC president

## Giant Olympic rings return as Tokyo bids to build excitement

**LAUSANNE:** Thomas Bach will stand unopposed to serve a second term as International Olympic Committee president, the body said yesterday. Bach, a 66-year-old German lawyer, is set to be confirmed for a second and final four-year term at an IOC session in March in Athens. Bach was initially elected for an eight-year term as Olympic chief in September 2013, taking over from Belgian Jacques Rogge. If re-elected, Bach's term will end in 2025, a year after the Paris Olympics.

The next term for the IOC presidency will start after the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, which will now take place from July 23-Aug 8, 2021, having been postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic. Bach, who won gold for West Germany in the foil fencing team event at the 1976 Olympics, was elected an IOC member at the age of 37 and went on to play a series of influential roles within the organization, notably as a founding member of the IOC's Athletes' Commission, before being elected its ninth president.

Under his reign as IOC chief, Bach has had to grapple with several political challenges, and has notably overseen the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics and the 2016 Rio Summer Games, both perceived as the most troublesome in recent years. He has also

been a key player in the ongoing Russian doping saga, although the IOC came in for criticism from some quarters for not issuing Moscow with a blanket ban over its state-sponsored doping system.

Bach also came under fire for reinstating the Russian National Olympic Committee after the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics despite failed drugs tests there. He is credited, however, with having put in place the Olympic Agenda 2020, featuring reforms aimed at cutting costs and streamlining bidding processes to better attract potential host cities. The IOC, however, is arguably facing its biggest challenge in Bach's tenure in the form of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the rescheduling of the Tokyo Games meaning Beijing will host the 2022 Winter Olympics just six months later.

### Giant Olympic rings

Meanwhile, a giant set of Olympic rings returned to Tokyo's waterfront yesterday after maintenance, with officials hoping the symbol will help build enthusiasm for the coronavirus-postponed Games. Promising vaccine trials have boosted Tokyo's hopes of holding the Olympics, now scheduled to open July 23, 2021 after the pandemic forced the

unprecedented decision to delay. The 69-ton interlocking rings were installed in Tokyo's Odaiba bay area at the start of the year as the city began the final countdown to the Games, but were towed away in August for maintenance and inspections. They returned yesterday with a fresh coat of paint and plans to light them up at night.

"We are working very hard so that we can hold an Olympic Games in which people will feel safe," Tokyo city government official Atsushi Yanashimizu told reporters. "With the installation of the Olympic symbol, we would like more people to feel that the event is approaching soon and to feel excited about it." A poll in July showed that just one in four people in Japan wanted to see the Games held in 2021, with most backing either a further delay or a cancellation. There are also reportedly concerns among sponsors, with organizers tightlipped on how many will extend their contracts.

Olympic and Japanese officials have said they remain committed to holding the Games next year, and International Olympic Committee head Thomas Bach said in Tokyo last month he was "very, very confident" that spectators will be able to attend. The rings will stay in place until the end of the



International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach

Olympics, and will then be replaced by the Paralympics symbol in mid-August. "We would like many people to come here and see it and feel the momentum, while being cautious about virus prevention" said Yanashimizu. — Agencies



## Kuwait Open Table Tennis tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Head of women's committee at Kuwait Table Tennis Federation Khalida Al-Ali said preparations for the Open Table Tennis refresher tournament are proceeding as planned, and will be held from December 9th until 11th at Salwa Club Hall with the participation of 4 clubs - Arabi, Salwa Al-Sabah, Fatayat Al-Oyoun and Al-Fatat Clubs.

She said the women's committee (Shahad Abdelraheem, Ishtiaq Sanad and Fatima Al-Maie) is continuously working to ensure the tournament's success. Khalida Al-Ali said any table tennis player can register her name online or register at the federation's office. She said that 11 players have registered for their direct individual participation in addition to 20 players from the



Khalida Al-Ali

four clubs. The door is still open for registration until December 4th.

She said that KTTF board of directors headed by Ali Al-Dahbous approved the contract with the Belarussian coach M Anderea to coach Kuwait women's National team. Khalida Al-Ali thanked chairwoman of Salwa Al-Sabah Club Sheikhha Naeema Al-Ahmad for her cooperation and keenness to ensure the success of the refresher championship. She also thanked Kuwait Olympic Committee and its women's committee headed by Fatima Hayat.

## Golf talking points: Desert storms and Dustin's millions

**HONG KONG:** Sportswashing, a player awash with cash and a country's unlikely hero feature in AFP Sport's golf talking points this week:

### Casey's Saudi flip

Paul Casey's decision to play in Saudi Arabia next year has laid him open to charges of hypocrisy after he previously shunned the country over its poor human rights record. World number one and Masters champion Dustin Johnson will tee up in February's European Tour event in Saudi Arabia alongside US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau, Open champion Shane Lowry and other global stars such as Patrick Reed, Justin Rose, Tommy Fleetwood and Phil Mickelson.

But the big surprise among the 2021 Saudi International entries was England's former world number three Casey, who pointedly refused to play when the tourna-

ment began in 2019. His stance was echoed by Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy, who both turned down reported \$3 million appearance fees. "I just don't want to go," said McIlroy at the time, calling it "a morality issue".

Saudi Arabia has hosted a number of high-profile events recently and will hold its first Formula One grand prix next year, bringing accusations of "sportswashing" - using sport to divert attention away from human rights issues. Casey, a UNICEF ambassador, told the UK's Independent newspaper in January 2019 that he "would be a hypocrite" if he accepted Saudi appearance money. But this week the world number 23 defended his U-turn. "This is not a decision I've taken lightly," Casey said in a statement. "I wasn't comfortable going in the past, but I have always been open-minded and willing to learn. I believe sport has the power to effect change."

### Johnson's golden 2020

Dustin Johnson has pulled out of this week's Mayakoba Classic, the final US PGA Tour event of 2020, meaning a strange but highly successful playing year



GEORGIA: Dustin Johnson of the United States reacts during the Green Jacket Ceremony after winning the Masters at Augusta National Golf Club in Augusta. — AFP

has come to an end. The world number one endured some bizarre ups and downs after the sport returned from shutdown in June. He was forced to sit out two big-purse events after contracting Covid-19, and posted back-to-back rounds of 80 for the first time in his career, but also became FedEx Cup champion and won a small matter of four times - including the Tour Championship and his first Masters at Augusta, his second major title. — AFP

Guido Petti and replacement hooker Santiago Socino.

"The Argentina Rugby Union forcefully rejects the discriminatory and xenophobic comments published by members of the Pumas squad on social media," a statement read, after offensive post dating from 2011-2013 came to light. In the tweets, since deleted, Matera spoke of "running over blacks" with his car and disparaged Bolivian and Paraguayan domestic workers with racial stereotypes. Petti referred to his domestic worker as a "primate" and spoke of "blacks" stealing mobile phones and wallets.

Argentina have endured a turbulent year including lockdowns and a coronavirus-hit build-up to the Tri Nations, where they stunned New Zealand and drew with

Australia before going down 38-0 to the All Blacks on Saturday. The rugby union said that although the posts were several years old and did "not represent the personal integrity that the three have shown during their current period with the Pumas", action had to be taken. "The Argentina Rugby Union condemns any instance of hate speech and considers it unacceptable that anyone expressing those views would represent our country," the statement said.

Matera, who captained Argentina at last year's World Cup and plays club rugby for top Paris side Stade Francais, apologised for his "barbarisms". "I'm sorry to everyone who was offended by the barbarisms I wrote," the 27-year-old wrote on Instagram. "At that moment, I could never imagine who I would become. — AFP

## 'Ashamed' Matera loses rugby captaincy over racist posts

**SYDNEY:** Argentina rugby skipper Pablo Matera said he was "deeply ashamed" yesterday as he was stripped of the captaincy and suspended along with two other players over racist tweets. Just weeks after leading the Pumas to their first win over the mighty All Blacks, the Argentina Rugby Union "revoked" Matera's captaincy and suspended him, along with second row

## Sports

## Yoon double puts Ulsan in last 16, Beijing stay perfect

## Shanghai Shenhua draw 3-3 with Perth Glory

DOHA: Yoon Bit-garam struck once in each half to send Ulsan Hyundai through to the round of 16 in the Asian Champions League with a 2-1 win over FC Tokyo on Monday. The 30-year-old's efforts ensured top position in Group F for Ulsan with 13 points from five matches, while Tokyo are level on seven points with Shanghai Shenhua, who drew 3-3 with Perth Glory.

Ulsan though were in for a massive shock immediately after kick-off when Tokyo's Kensuke Nagai scored in the first minute from a seemingly routine move on the right flank. Shuto Abe poked the ball into the path of the advancing Nagai, who capitalized on uncertain Ulsan defending with a measured low drive that beat goalkeeper Jo Su-huk via the upright.

Although Tokyo held the lead, it was Ulsan who largely dominated the match, keeping the Tokyo defense on edge constantly. But after several attempts at goal, the equalizer came only in the 44th minute as Yoon curled in a free-kick from 25 yards following a foul on him by Joan Oumari. Ulsan never lost their grip on the match after the resumption and sealed the win in the 85th minute, Yoon profiting from an assist by Won Du-jae and slamming the ball past Tokyo goalkeeper Go Hatano for his fourth goal of the tournament this year.

"I'd like to congratulate our players for qualifying for the next round. I am so happy," said Ulsan Hyundai coach Kim Do-hoon. "We conceded an early goal and tried to recover it as quickly as possible, which was a good point for us. We fought as one team." Perth Glory blew their chance for a first win in five Group F matches as Shanghai Shenhua overcame a two-goal deficit

before conceding a late equalizer.

Uruguayan Bruno Fornaroli scored in first-half stoppage time to put Perth ahead and Carlo Armiento increased their advantage nine minutes after the break. But Shanghai had other ideas as they fought back with three goals in 12 minutes with Giovanni Moreno scoring a brace and Yu Hanchao also on target as Perth fell a goal behind for the first time. However, Neil Kilkeny scored from the penalty spot with seven minutes remaining to give the already eliminated Australians their first point.

## Beijing march on

Meanwhile form team Beijing Guoan maintained their unbeaten run at this year's competition with their fifth consecutive win in Group E, easing past FC Seoul 3-1. Beijing had already qualified with two matches to spare, but didn't take their foot off the pedal on Monday as goals from Jonathan Viera and Renato Augusto gave them a 2-0 advantage at half-time.

Yun Ju-tae pulled one back for Seoul in the 89th minute but Zhang Yuning put the issue beyond doubt for Bruno Genesio's men with a stoppage-time effort. "Today's match, before the game, I asked the players to play with a serious attitude and respect the opponents," said Genesio. "We played well and we knew we had to fight hard and score goals. Even after we conceded (late in the second half), we responded by scoring again."

Seoul coach Lee Won-jun was despondent after his team fell nine points behind Beijing, although they are still in second place. "After the defeat to Beijing in the first match I told the players to play without



AL-RAYYAN, Qatar: Shanghai's forward Giovanni Moreno (center) clears the ball during the AFC Champions League group F football match between China's Shanghai Shenhua and Australia's Perth Glory on November 30, 2020. —AFP

pressure, which they did today," said Lee. "But they also committed some mistakes and we were punished by three goals." The second qualifying spot from the group is still up for grabs after Melbourne Victory

wasted a 2-0 lead in a 2-2 draw with Thailand's Chiangrai United. Melbourne have four points and will need to beat Seoul in their last match to make the round of 16. —AFP

## Messi imitated Maradona's skills - but not his lifestyle

BARCELONA: Lionel Messi is the only Argentine to truly live up to being described as the next Diego Maradona so it was little surprise the Barcelona captain should dedicate his goal in Sunday's 4-0 Liga win over Osasuna to his late compatriot. Argentina's two iconic players may be contrasting characters but they shared many traits including a bond with Newell's Old Boys and the Barca captain removed his shirt to reveal the red and black of the Rosario club before pointing to the sky.

Messi was born a year after Maradona captained Argentina to World Cup glory in 1986 in Mexico but he was at Newell's stadium as a fan in 1993 when Maradona made his debut for the club. Messi's goal on Sunday was striking in its similarity to one Maradona scored that day against Emelec, both players dribbling across the edge of the area before finding the top corner. It was not the only time Messi imitated Maradona. His solo effort against Getafe in 2007 was a carbon copy of Maradona's second against England in the '86 World Cup quarter-final also remembered for the Argentine's "Hand of God" goal.

Sparked by a dance past two players near the halfway line, it was finished off with a dribble round the keeper and a slide to the ground as the ball trickled into the net. That same season, Messi produced his own "Hand of God" moment by punching the ball into the net against Espanyol,

prompting an Argentine commentator to yell: "That's Maradona dressed up as Messi. He has been reincarnated." The two players also shared a low centre of gravity, incredible passing range and vision plus a magical left foot, although their characters often seemed worlds apart.

## Eventful career

Maradona craved the spotlight throughout his eventful career and was often in the news for his off-field activities. Yet that often helped his image, particularly in Argentina where thousands of people have defied COVID-19 restrictions to mourn their hero, who died aged 60 on Wednesday. While Messi sampled the Barcelona night life as a youth, he is a private family man, having had three boys with childhood sweetheart Antonela Rocuzzo who he married in 2017. The biggest scandal was when he was found guilty of tax fraud, a charge also faced by Maradona whose stellar career was truncated by years of drug use, overeating and alcoholism.

But who ranks as the better player? Maradona scored 346 goals in 679 matches for his clubs and country in all competitions but two drug bans plus health and injury problems meant he only spent eight years at the very top of his game. Messi, who began his career in 2004, has played 855 matches and scored 712 goals, with still a few years left in him at



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Argentinean forward Lionel Messi pays tribute for late Argentinean football legend Diego Maradona during the Spanish League football match between FC Barcelona and CA Osasuna on November 29, 2020. —AFP

33. He is Barca's record scorer and most decorated player, hoisting 10 La Liga titles and four Champions League trophies.

## Dominant player

Maradona never won Europe's top club prize but he did drag an ordinary Napoli side to two Serie A titles and a UEFA Cup triumph, while he was equally talismanic for Argentina and the dominant player at the 1986 World Cup. Messi is Argentina's all-time top scorer but luck has deserted him when it matters most. He was on the losing side in the 2014 World Cup final which was lost to Germany in extra time and tasted defeat in two Copa America finals on penalties. "Maradona is definitely the best player I ever saw, but

Messi fans shouldn't get angry about that because he lives in a different era," Argentina's president Alberto Fernandez said earlier this year.

"But you could put Maradona alongside 10 broomsticks and he would still make the team win." Former players find it harder to choose who was the best. "Diego was more artistic and more passionate, but Messi has achieved more," said Maradona's ex-Argentina team mate Jorge Valdano. Current Atletico Madrid manager Diego Simeone, who played with Maradona for Sevilla and Argentina added: "It doesn't make sense to choose between them, they played in different eras. "Diego was much more emotional but Leo scored many more goals. —Reuters

## Lazio ace Immobile tackles past demons on Dortmund return

MILAN: Ciro Immobile returns to the scene of one of his unhappiest spells as a player when Lazio take on the goal ace's former club Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League today. Dortmund were Italy forward Immobile's first club outside of his home country and that disappointing time in the Bundesliga was followed by an similarly unsuccessful six months at Sevilla, before returning to Serie A. Lazio are just one point behind their German hosts who lead Group F with two games to play, and four ahead of third-placed Club Brugge.

The Italians are well-positioned to advance to the last 16 in their return to the Champions League after a 13-year absence. Last season's European 'Golden Shoe' winner thanks to his 36 league goals in Italy, Immobile's strikes powered Lazio to a fourth-place finish in Serie A. This campaign he has scored three Champions League goals in two games — one in a 3-1 win over Dortmund in Rome and twice against Zenit with the same scoreline last time out in the Stadio Olimpico.

In between, Immobile missed two games, both 1-1 draws, against Club Brugge and away at Zenit, because of positive coronavirus tests. "He is important for our football," said coach Simone Inzaghi. "He'll make the fortunes of Lazio, and also those of Italy." In total, Immobile has seven Champions League goals from 12 appearances between Lazio, Dortmund, Sevilla and Juventus. He was also top scorer in

the Europa League in 2017-2018.

But despite his record performances with Lazio, the player known as 'King Ciro' to fans, has been criticized for his failure to perform well outside of Italy. An 18 million euro (\$22 million) move to Jurgen Klopp's Dortmund in 2014 reaped just three goals in 24 appearances, before a transfer after just one season to Sevilla, who loaned him to Torino. "I arrived at Dortmund at the wrong time, during a generational change," said Immobile. "There were some difficulties, but I don't want to say anything about this. I know when I deserve praise or criticism."

He returned to Lazio in 2016 for less than 10 million euros, the same year former 'Biancocelesti' forward Inzaghi took over as coach. And the 30-year-old has flourished in a system tailor-made to his strengths, alongside Luis Alberto and Joaquin Correa, and midfielders Sergej Milinkovic-Savic and Marco Parolo.

Immobile extended his contract with Lazio by two years through 2025, after last season matching Gonzalo Higuain's single-season Italian league record of 36 goals. Immobile also led the Serie A scorers in 2013-14 with 22 goals for Torino and with Lazio in 2017-18 with 29. This season he has scored eight goals in nine games in all competitions. Lazio are ninth in Serie A. If he continues his current pace, the player from Naples is on track to become Lazio's all-time leading scorer. With 133 goals across all competitions, he currently sits second on the Roman club's scoring chart behind Silvio Piola's 159 goals.

He has 108 league goals for Lazio to Piola's 143 between 1934 and 1943. The arrival of five-time Ballon d'Or winner Cristiano Ronaldo's at Juventus in 2018, and Zlatan Ibrahimovic joining AC Milan this year has provided a boost. "Ronaldo's arrival



ROME: Lazio's Italian forward Ciro Immobile celebrates after scoring a goal during the UEFA Champions League Group F football match. —AFP

in Italy was an extra stimulus for me," said Immobile who scored five more goals that the Portuguese star last season. "When these great champions arrive, they push you to give more, to understand if you too you can be at that level. "It happened with Ibra too, I studied him because he is a great champion. I hope to still be like this when I'm Ibra's age." —AFP

## Embattled Loew to stay on as Germany coach for Euros

BERLIN: Joachim Loew will remain in charge of Germany for next year's delayed European Championship despite a series of poor recent results, the German football federation (DFB) announced Monday. "In a conference call, the DFB presidential board unanimously agreed to unequivocally back the direction of Germany coach Joachim Loew in his efforts to rebuild the national team, which have been ongoing since March 2019," the DFB said in a statement, following a meeting with Loew and the federation's top officials.

Loew, 60, has been in charge of the Germany team since taking over from Jurgen Klinsmann following the 2006 World Cup. He led the nation to a fourth world title, and first since reunification, in Brazil in 2014 when the Germans defeated Lionel Messi's Argentina in the final. However, Germany are in crisis following a 6-0 defeat to Spain on November 17 and recent draws with Switzerland, twice, and Turkey. The recent hammering by Spain, Germany's heaviest loss in 89 years, capped a poor three-year spell, which included an embarrassing group-stage exit at the 2018 World Cup in Russia after which the DFB gave Loew their backing.

Loew has made some controversial decisions since the debacle in Russia, none more so than the one to end the international careers of World Cup winners Thomas Mueller, Jerome Boateng and Mats Hummels. The DFB's 14-member presidential committee had initially been due to meet Friday to determine Loew's fate. However, the group brought its decision forward, following the "recommendation of the presidential committee and of national teams and academy director Oliver Bierhoff", the DFB added.

"The DFB presidential board was in agreement that key sporting goals have already been achieved in the run-up to the European Championship in 2021," the statement read. "These include qualifying for the tournament, remaining in League A of the Nations League, and being placed in the first pot for World Cup qualification.

"As a result of this, Joachim Loew will continue to receive the backing of the DFB presidential board." Loew held crisis talks with DFB president Fritz Keller in Munich earlier this month following Germany's worst loss since a 6-0 friendly defeat by Austria in 1931. —AFP

Live			Matches on TV
			(Local Timings)
UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE			
FK Krasnodar v Stade Rennais	beIN Sports HD 2	20:55	
Istanbul Basaksehir v RB Leipzig	beIN Sports HD 1	20:55	
Sevilla FC v Chelsea	beIN Sports HD 2	23:00	
Juventus FC v Dynamo Kiev	beIN Sports HD 4	23:00	
Ferencvárosi TC v FC Barcelona	beIN Sports HD 3	23:00	
Borussia Dortmund v SS Lazio	beIN Sports HD 5	23:00	
Club Brugge v Zenit St Petersburg	beIN Sports HD 6	23:00	
Man United v Paris Saint-Germain	beIN Sports HD 1	23:00	

# Sport Times

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**15** Yoon double puts Ulsan in last 16, Beijing stay perfect



## Seahawks down Eagles 23-17

Seahawks keep their NFL division lead



PHILADELPHIA: Dallas Goedert #88 of the Philadelphia Eagles is tackled by the Seattle Seahawks during the fourth quarter at Lincoln Financial Field on November 30, 2020. — AFP

**NEW YORK:** Seattle's Russell Wilson threw for 230 yards and a touchdown to spark the Seahawks over the Philadelphia Eagles 23-17 on Monday and keep them alone atop their NFL division. The Seahawks improved to 8-3, one game ahead of the Los Angeles Rams atop the NFC West, while the Eagles fell to 3-7 with one drawn, a half-game behind Washington and the New York Giants in the NFC East. "Our team was prepared," Wilson said. "We're playing championship football. Our defense has picked it up the past few games. We had a lot of

big plays. "We kept battling. We did it together. That's what championship teams do."

Seattle's attack, the top-scoring unit in the NFL, was denied twice on fourth-down plays by the Eagles in the first quarter, but struck early in the second. Wilson, who completed 22-of-31 attempts, threw a 52-yard pass to DK Metcalf to the Eagles' 1-yard line and then flipped a touchdown pass to David Moore to open the scoring. Metcalf made 10 catches for 177 yards in all to seize the NFL season receiving yardage lead with 1,039. "DK Metcalf had

a great night," Wilson said.

Chris Carson broke tackles and battled into the end zone on a 16-yard run to give the Seahawks a 14-0 lead with 5:27 remaining in the second quarter. The Eagles needed 25 minutes to manage a first down and 26 to reach Seattle territory, but Carson Wentz made the march pay off. Wentz drove Philadelphia 75 yards in 15 plays over 5:15, ending with a 3-yard touchdown pass to Dallas Goedert just 17 seconds before the end of the quarter, but a missed conversion kick attempt left the Eagles

down 14-6 at half-time.

Philadelphia's Jake Elliott kicked a 42-yard field goal midway into the third quarter, but Seattle's Jason Myers answered from 44 yards to give the Seahawks a 17-9 edge entering the fourth quarter. Seattle added field goals by Myers from 33 and 39 yards for a 23-9 lead before Wentz threw a deflected 32-yard touchdown pass to Richard Rodgers with 12 seconds remaining, and Miles Sanders ran for a 2-point conversion to create the final margin. — AFP

## COVID: World champion Hamilton tests positive

**SAKHIR:** World champion Lewis Hamilton said he was devastated to miss this weekend's Sakhir Grand Prix in Bahrain having tested positive for coronavirus. Hamilton, who on Sunday won the Bahrain Grand Prix, the first of back-to-back races in the Gulf state, has already secured a record-equalling seventh world championship this season.

"I am devastated that I won't be racing this weekend," he said in a statement. "Since we started the season in June my team and I have been taking all the precautions we possibly can and following the regulations everywhere we have been in order to stay safe. Unfortunately, even though I returned three negative results this past week, I woke up yesterday morning with mild symptoms and requested another test which came back positive. I have immediately gone into self-isolation for 10 days."

Hamilton faces a tight race to be able to compete in the season-ending finale in Abu Dhabi the following weekend. Due to strict COVID-19 rules in Abu Dhabi, all personnel involved in the F1 event must travel from Bahrain on December 7. Yas Island, where the race is being staged on December 13, will then effectively be locked down. "I am gutted not to be able to race this weekend but my priority is to follow the protocols and advice to protect others," said Hamilton.

"I am really lucky that I feel OK with only mild symptoms and will do my best to stay fit and healthy," Hamilton, 35, sealed his seventh title in Turkey two races ago to equal the all-time record of Michael Schumacher. He then cruised to his 11th win this year and record-increasing 95th victory on Sunday in a race overshadowed by Romain Grosjean's horrific crash, which left the Frenchman receiving hospital treatment for burns after his car exploded in flames after ploughing into a barrier.

"It was such a shocking image to see," said Hamilton, who like all of the drivers had a near 90-minute wait for the restart after the opening-lap crash. Hamilton and teammate Valtteri Bottas were having to "live like hermits" earlier this season to avoid COVID-19, revealed Mercedes boss Toto Wolff after the team recorded two positive cases at the Eifel Grand Prix in Germany in October.

Wolff said both drivers were confined to their rooms. "They are the most restricted of the whole group, of the whole team," he said. "It's certainly not a great situation for them because you need almost to live like a hermit-and that is what they are doing. They are at home, they are not going out for dinners and they are not meeting other people. When we do de-briefs, by Zoom or Microsoft Teams, they are not sitting with their engineers in the room." — AFP

## Fulham climb out of relegation zone; West Ham go 5th

**LONDON:** Fulham climbed out of the Premier League relegation zone on Monday after finally solving their penalty woes in a shock 2-1 win at Leicester, while West Ham rode their luck to move into fifth place with a dramatic 2-1 victory against Aston Villa. Scott Parker's side won for just the second time in the league this season thanks to Ademola Lookman's 30th minute opener and Ivan Cavaleiro's penalty eight minutes later.

Fulham had missed three of their four previous penalties this term, but Cavaleiro held his nerve to convert from the spot for the crucial second goal. Harvey Barnes scored for Leicester in the 86th minute, but Fulham held on and move one point above the bottom three. "Cav slipped last week and I'm not on Twitter or Instagram but I can only imagine what was being said, the jokes at his expense and Cav would have seen that," Parker said of Cavaleiro's recent penalty miss against Everton.

"I said to him: 'Are you ready to take one if we get it?' He looked at me dead in the eye and said: 'I'm ready'." "The courage to step up there are the things we need. There's no denying there's relief. I've spoken to them about not letting defeats cripple us." It was an emotional success for the Cottagers, with Lookman celebrating his goal by displaying one of Papa Bouba Diop's Senegal shirts after Fulham's former midfielder died aged 42 at the weekend.

"That was a decision we as a club made



LEICESTER: Fulham's French goalkeeper Alphonse Areola grabs the ball under the bar during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Fulham on November 30, 2020. — AFP

and the players were happy to do it. For someone to lose their life at a young age is tragic," Parker said. Leicester would have gone second with a win, but instead they remain fourth-three points behind leaders Tottenham-after a second successive league defeat.

### Watkins woe

At the London Stadium, West Ham earned a third successive victory after Villa striker Ollie Watkins missed a late penalty and then saw a stoppage-time equalizer disallowed by VAR. West Ham got off to the perfect start in the second minute when Angelo Ogbonna made an astute run to the far post and rose above Matt Targett to head a corner past Emiliano Martinez.

Villa drew level in the 25th minute when Jack Grealish ran at the West Ham defense before letting rip with a 20-yard drive that took a slight deflection on its way past

Lukasz Fabianski. West Ham regained the lead in the 46th minute after an inspired substitution from David Moyes. Moyes sent on Said Benrahma at half-time and with his first touch the winger chipped in a cross to Jarrod Bowen, who glanced a deft header over Villa keeper Emiliano Martinez for his fourth goal of the season.

Villa winger Trezeguet won a penalty in the 74th minute when Declan Rice tugged at his shirt to prevent him having a shot. Watkins has been in fine form this season, but he let West Ham off the hook as his penalty hit the bar. There was more misfortune to come for Watkins in the final moments when he swept home from close-range, only to see the goal chalked off for the narrowest of offside decisions. "We got fortunate that in some way it was offside. I think we can play much better, but I'm taking tonight's result," Moyes said. — AFP