

Friday Times

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An aerial view showing a part of Salmiya.

EXPATS WEIGH IN ON SALMIYA AS 'THE WORST CITY'

By Chidi Emmanuel

There seems to be diverging views over the InterNations 2020 ranking that rated Salmiya "the worst city for expats" in the entire globe. While some expats rejected this description, many felt Salmiya got what it deserved. Despite the bubbly nature of Salmiya, which has a beautiful coastline, the Scientific Center, Marina Mall and other shopping centers, InterNations - a global social network - in its latest research placed Salmiya at the bottom (66th), thus declaring it the worst city in the world for expats to live and work.

Other worst cities: Rome (65th), Seoul (64th), Milan (63rd), Nairobi (62nd), Paris (61st), Johannesburg (60th), Santiago de Chile (59th), Dublin (58th) and Hong Kong (57th). According to the survey, expats in Salmiya say they are unhappy with the local transportation (61st) and their health and environment (66th), as well as with climate and leisure (66th).

On the other hand, InterNations placed Abu Dhabi 10th globally, ahead of its neighbor Dubai (20th) and Muscat (14th), Riyadh (42nd) and Jeddah (52nd). These cities were ranked on information about five areas of expat life - quality of urban living, getting settled, urban work life, finance and housing, and local cost of living. The data was collected in March 2020, just before coronavirus turned into a global pandemic. Meanwhile, on the list of best cities, the Spanish city of Valencia came on top, followed by Alicante, Lisbon, Panama City, Singapore, Malaga,

Buenos Aires, Kuala Lumpur, Madrid and Abu Dhabi in 10th place.

Reacting to the report, some Salmiya residents voiced their total disapproval of the report, while many agreed with it. "I have lived in Kuwait for over 17 years; I think the report totally represents the views of the people living here. The traffic is so frustrating. More so, most of the houses here (in Salmiya) are getting old - and lack maintenance. This is not the Salmiya of 17 years ago that we used to call the Dubai of Kuwait," lamented Rina, a Filipina.

Buttressing Rina's viewpoint, her husband (who prefers to remain anonymous), blamed a lack of planning and the large influx of people from Farwaniya and Khaitan as the cause

of the problem. "A lot of people moved from Farwaniya and Khaitan to Salmiya in recent years. There are additional structures and partitions now in most buildings. This is choking everything and straining the infrastructure. A building meant for 20 people is now housing over a hundred people," he said, adding that most foreigners are really not happy with their quality of life here.

Farouk Kamal, a Pakistani expat, blamed what he called the "decay of Salmiya" on the dirty lifestyle of some of the foreigners living there. "Most of the buildings in Salmiya are very filthy. People hang their dirty clothes in the corridors and even on the staircase - thereby making the whole place look unkempt. In the elevators of most buildings,

you can visibly see disgusting red salivary substances. All these are causing the decay of Salmiya," he pointed out.

On the other hand, Tony Albeit and his friends completely disagreed with the InterNations 2020 ranking. "First of all, Salmiya is not a city. If InterNations was talking about Jleeb or Mahboula, I would have agreed to an extent - but not Salmiya. Salmiya is one of the best areas of Kuwait. Although it is congested, it still didn't deserve the worst rating," Tony argued.

Supporting Tony's view, Felix Thomas, an Indian expat, slammed the InterNations ranking as completely flawed. "I was expecting cities like Mumbai, Dhaka, Manila, etc to be in the bottom 10. How can Salmiya - which is even seen as the Dubai of Kuwait - be 'the worst city for expats'?" he queried. His friends voiced similar objections as they waited for a meeting in Salmiya.

Salmiya is an area in Hawally Governorate divided into 12 blocks. The blocks located closer to the interior of the district tend to be mostly residential, while those located besides the Arabian Gulf coastline have a great deal of commercial and upscale residential real estate. The residential areas are home to a huge population of foreigners, consisting mainly of expats from the Indian subcontinent, Filipinos, Arabs, Westerners and Africans. Salmiya's population is estimated to be around 220,000.



A view of the beach and adjacent buildings in Salmiya.

Kuwait Times

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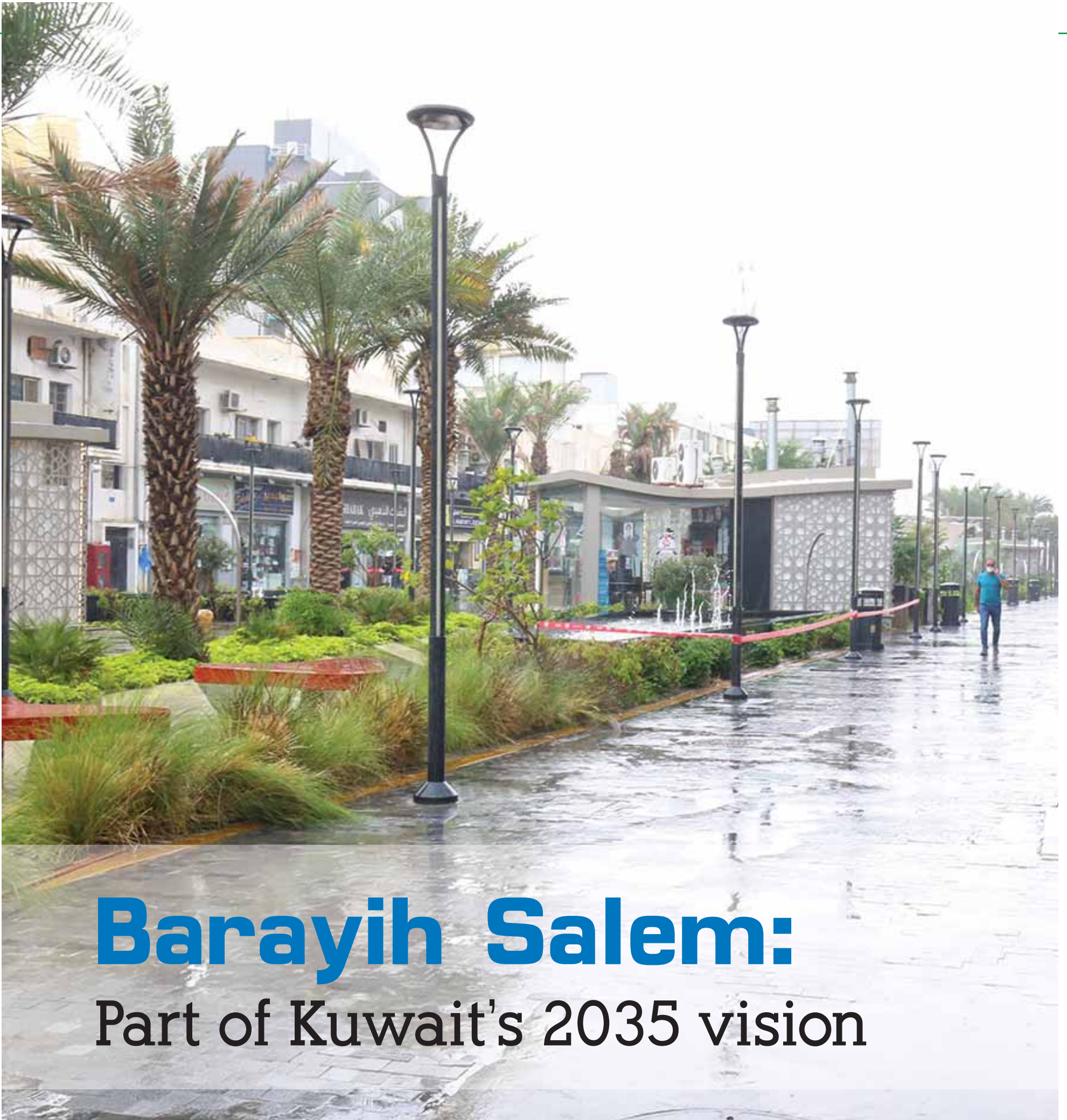


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Tel: 24833199 - 24833358 - 24835616/7 | Fax: 24835620 - 24835621

E: info@kuwaittimes.net



Barayih Salem:

Part of Kuwait's 2035 vision

Local

Friday, December 4, 2020

By Ben Garcia

The old Souq Salmiya is now called Barayih Salem after a public-private partnership deal was sealed in April 2019 to manage the area after it was refurbished. Barayih Salem is a commercial and business hub in Salmiya with a total area of 24,000 square meters. It houses 13 commercial establishments, which are currently occupied by around 570 companies.



Abdulrahman Al-Fawaz

Barayih Salem is located in the heart of Salmiya along the famous Salem Al-Mubarak Street. A new management took over the area as part of the government's 2035 vision to diversify and create more economic hubs.

Barayih Salem is headed by CEO Abdulrahman Jassim Al-Fawaz. His task is to oversee the day-to-day operations of the area, including programs and activities suitable for the newly-renovated market. Fawaz told Kuwait Times the project is new to Kuwait in terms of a contractual relationship between the government and the private sector.

"The development of this area is basically connected to Kuwait's 2035 vision, wherein the government will enter into joint ventures with the private sector, hoping to earn revenue from other sources other than oil," he said.

Supporting Kuwait's SMEs

"Barayih Salem is the first major joint venture with the Kuwaiti government, represented by the Municipality - the owners of Barayih Salem - and the national fund supporting small and medium enterprises. The intention is to support small and medium businesses as part of the strategy of the country to help startups thrive in the current setup. That is why Kuwait established the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise Development in 2013. The project is for a short-term period only under our management - three years as per the law. After three years, the process of tendering it again will begin," Fawaz said.

As the developer and management of the area, they deeply thought about how to implement the Municipality's vision by converting the place into a hub for entrepreneurs and SMEs and for people visiting the area. He said several programs and activities were in place for 2020, but they were put on hold due to the coronavirus.

Cultural activities on hold

"If not for the pandemic, we would've held several activities including cultural programs for various nationalities, bazaars, shopping festivals and lots more. On top of these programs are five types of membership under Barayih Salem. The cultural and commercial club focuses on various social, cultural and commercial activities. We have membership for government entities, business owners, visitors, vendors and residents," Fawaz said.

The beautification and development of the area started in 2018 and it was turned over to the new management in April 2019. "We have three major steps that we were supposed to implement in the first quarter of 2020, but the coronavirus pandemic has slowed our efforts. Right before the pandemic, we were able to convert the place into an artistic hub for budding artists. We turned the place incredibly beautiful with several artistic designs on the walls of

establishments. In February, we painted murals on the walls of Barayih Salem - we have around 25 murals with more to come. We will paint the place with more beautiful colors and attractive images for visitors of various nationalities to behold," Fawaz said.

Shopping, recreation and leisure

"When we started operating Barayih Salem, our objective was to turn it into a beautiful place for shopping and recre-

the pandemic, which we believe will come to an end hopefully early next year, we will implement some of the rules we agreed upon and heavily fine those who are illegally parking their cars at Barayih Salem," Fawaz said. "We have several warning signs inside Barayih Salem to avoid using the area as a playground for scooters, motorbikes and bicycles. We do not want any accidents to happen to visitors - safety is our priority."



ation, and make it as open as possible for easy access and easy shopping. We know this area will be busy, but we consider the people living nearby. We want residents to be involved in all our activities because they are the ones to benefit. Residents can get direct benefits, from discounts to deliveries of products," he added.

Part of the plan is to have more parking spaces. "We have several multi-level parking areas already, but people still want to park near the place they want to visit. After

By the first quarter of 2021, around 500 bikes will be stationed around Barayih Salem, and people can use them by subscribing to an app for a minimal fee using a QR code. "These bikes will be deployed and anyone who wants to use them around the vicinity of the area can use them. They can be returned to any of our bike stations around the area," he concluded.



— Photos by Yasser Al Zayyat

Local

Kuwait always a backer to Lebanon: Prime Minister

\$30 million allocated to rebuild blast-damaged grain silos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah said on Wednesday that Kuwait has been backing Lebanon through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED). This came during His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled's speech at the second international aid conference on Lebanon that was held virtually, upon calls by French President Emmanuel Macron and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres. "Today's meeting came after the first one on August 9, as evidence of our common determination to save Lebanon and our keenness to find a way out of the crisis facing the sis-

terly country in order to preserve its security and stability, and provide a dignified life to its people," he said.

The State of Kuwait has pledged providing humanitarian aid worth \$11 million to Lebanon in the first edition of the conference held on August 9, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, who led a delegation to the video-conference, said, addressing President Macron and UN Chief Guterres as well as the attendees. Kuwait, consistently helped Lebanon and stood with it, began its contacts through the KFAED with officials in Lebanon to start implementing the development commitment to allocate \$30 million to rebuild the grain silos destroyed in the Beirut Port explosion, he stressed.

He added that Kuwait was the first country that provided such humanitarian aid via an air bridge to Beirut International Airport, and the aid was distributed to the brotherly Lebanese people. He urged the Lebanese people to put their country's interest ahead of anything else so as to achieve their unity, security, safety and sovereignty. He extended his sincere thanks to Macron and Guterres for their invitation to this key meeting, which came, as he said, in light of the continuing



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah speaks during the second international aid conference on Lebanon, held via videoconference. — KUNA

bitter suffering of the brotherly Lebanese people. The unemployment and poverty rates have increased in Lebanon, and the economic and monetary collapse have become clear due to the decline in the economic conditions

and political tensions, he noted. Meanwhile, the huge explosion in Beirut Port has exacerbated these conditions in that country, in addition to the repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic. — KUNA

News in brief

Amir sends condolence to French president

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable to French President Emmanuel Macron, expressing heartfelt and sincere condolences over the death of the Former French President Valerie Giscard d'Estaing. 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 French President. — KUNA

Kuwaiti, Egyptian PMs talk

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received a phone call from his Egyptian counterpart Mostafa Madbouly yesterday. The two sides discussed developing relations and the recent regional and international developments. — KUNA

Kuwait oil drops

KUWAIT: Kuwait oil dropped 48 cents during Wednesday's trading sessions to stand at \$46.78 per barrel (pb), Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Brent futures gained 83 cents to \$48.25 pb and West Texas Intermediate jumped 73 cents to \$45.28 pb. — KUNA

Kuwait re-affirms support for Palestinians' rights

NEW YORK: The State of Kuwait has re-affirmed its commitment to continuous support for rights of the Palestinian people and all efforts aimed at enabling them attain their legitimate rights. "I renew my country's unwavering and principled stance of standing alongside the Palestinian people to end their plight and support their options for attaining all their legitimate rights," said the State of Kuwait's Minister Plenipotentiary Talal Al-Fassam during a session of the United Nations General Assembly on Palestine. The session has coincided with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People that fell on November 29. This day is being observed in response to a call by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1977.

Kuwait's Minister Plenipotentiary Fassam has expressed distress that the Palestinian people have been simultaneously suffering from affliction of the novel coronavirus and the Israeli occupation. Fassam has denounced Israel's schemes of speeding up construction of illegal settlements in explicit breach of the international law and relevant UN resolutions, namely Security Council Resolution 2334. This resolution, adopted in 2016, re-affirmed that

Israel's establishment of settlements in Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, had no legal validity, constituting a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the vision

of two States living side-by-side in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders.

After than seven decades since adopting the UN Resolution 181, UN reports have continued to affirm ongoing Israeli breaches in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, Fassam noted, alluding to the 1947 UNGA's resolution that called for partition of Palestine into two parts; one for the Palestinians and the other for the Jews. Elaborating further on the current conditions in the occupied territories, Fassam has noted during the session that along with the expansion of settlements, Israeli settlers have continued to attack unarmed Palestinians, with many losing their properties and the perpetrators escaping justice.

Fassam has affirmed Kuwait's adherence to the call for establishing an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital with the June 4, 1967, borders, according to the relevant UNSG resolutions and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. In his conclusion, Fassam called for ongoing efforts to re-launch peace negotiations according to a timetable for reaching comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East. — KUNA



NEW YORK: Kuwait's Minister Plenipotentiary Talal Al-Fassam speaks during a session of the United Nations General Assembly on Palestine. — KUNA

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Local

Cabinet discusses upcoming election's latest arrangements

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Cabinet held a meeting yesterday chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, in which it discussed the upcoming parliamentary election's latest arrangements and preparations. The Cabinet called on all candidates and voters to cooperate with the Ministry of the Interior and other concerned parties with the need to adhere to the provisions of private law under the COVID-19 pandemic unusual circumstance.

Furthermore, Minister of Health Dr Sheikh Basel Al-Sabah briefed the meeting on the latest development concerning the coronavirus (COVID-19) in Kuwait. In the meantime, Minister of Social Affairs, Minister of State for Economic Affairs Maryam Aqeel shed light on the plan of the first quarter for 2020/2021 after its adoption

by the Supreme Council for Planning and Development. The Cabinet expressed its appreciation for the efforts made in following up the implementation of the annual development plan, and assigned Minister Aqeel to refer it to the National Assembly.

Minister of Oil and the Acting Minister of Electricity and Water Dr Khaled Al-Fadhel briefed the Cabinet with the measures taken to deal with the recommendations contained in the first report of the Parliamentary Investigation Committee regarding what was raised about alleged violations in Kuwait Petroleum Corporation. The minister affirmed that the report was referred to the concerned authorities to study it and take the necessary measures in its regard. —KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's meeting. — KUNA

KRCS distributes gifts to disabled

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The International Day of Persons with Disability was marked yesterday at Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) in Shuwaikh. As part of the celebration, KRCS invited some family members and distributed gifts to about 100 people with disabilities. They distributed some tools and equipment needed by people with disabilities, including portable sinks, blood and sugar test kits, wheelchairs and food voucher. "Mostly expats were called because all Kuwaitis who are with disabilities are receiving regular assistance from Kuwaiti government," said Jaafar Jamali, KRCS volunteer.

The ceremony was attended by some KRCS officials including Mariam Al-Adsani who is the current head of the local support department at the society. This year's theme was 'Building Back Better: Towards an Inclusive, Accessible and Sustainable Post-COVID-19'. The International Day of Persons with Disabilities is celebrated annually on Dec 3, and is also called World Disability Day in other countries.

On this day, WHO joins partners to celebrate "a day for all". This theme reflects a growing understanding that disability is part of the human condition. Almost everyone will be temporarily or permanently impaired at some point in life. Despite this, few countries have adequate mechanisms in place to respond fully to the needs of people with disabilities.

Ahmed, a recipient from Egypt, told Kuwait Times that he received a call from KRCS last week. "I only found out about this when I got a text message, in which they said they were giving away a gift," Ahmed said. According to Jamali, as per KRCS record, they only have about 5,000 persons with disabilities in their database, and only 100 persons were called to get the gift.

Zain joins global effort to improve digital inclusion of persons with disabilities

LONDON/KUWAIT: To mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Zain became a signatory and was part of the advisory board in the GSMA's global effort to launch the 'Principles for Driving the Digital Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities'. The Principles aim to inspire the mobile industry to help close the mobile disability gap.

According to the World Health Organization, one billion people live with a disability; around 15 percent of the world's population, and only 1 in 10 people have access to the assistive technology they need to live independent lives. By combining multiple assistive technologies in a single device, mobile phones are cost effective tools for persons with disabilities to enable greater inclusion and participation.

The 'Principles' set out a framework for action together with recommended activities to help address the barriers that currently prevent people with disabilities from accessing and using mobile-enabled products and services. Research conducted by the GSMA shows that many persons with disabilities are less likely to own smartphones and use mobile internet than persons without disabilities.

Action is required to address the barriers and requirements of persons with disabilities, drive innovation, place persons with disabilities at the heart of the design process and realise the social and commercial opportunity of reaching this underserved segment of the population. By doing so, the mobile industry can make meaningful change and help ensure no one is left behind in an increasingly digital world.

Jennifer Suleiman, Zain Group Chief Sustainability Officer said: "The launch of these noble Principles by the GSMA complements Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO, Bader Al-Kharafi's dedication to and vision of Diversity and Inclusion, that recognizes the real and positive contribution people with disabilities can make to society if only given the opportunity. In many ways, the Principles reinforces our own efforts under our 'WE ABLE' disability inclusive program, whereby Zain pledges to become disability inclusive across all operations by 2022. Zain urges other like-minded organizations across all sectors, to embrace systematic change and implement initiatives that help speed up the narrowing of the mobile disability gap."

Suleiman added, "Embedding sustainability and meaningful connectivity in every aspect of Zain's business, we were proud to be the first company from the GCC in July 2020 to join 'The Valuable 500', an international initiative striving to put disability on the leadership agenda within corporates. Similarly, one year earlier, in July 2019, Zain was a signatory into the International Labor Organization (ILO) Global Business and Disability Network Charter, whereby the company implemented a policy of integration of people with disability, including them in all facets of Zain's policies and culture."

"Removing the barriers faced by persons with disabilities requires informed action from all stakeholders," said Mats Granryd, Director General, GSMA. "It's time for the mobile industry to take steps to ensure our products and services are accessible, unlocking the power of connectivity so that all people thrive. I am delighted that Dialog Axiata PLC, Optus, Orange Group, Safaricom PLC, Telefonica Group, Turkcell, Vodacom South Africa and Zain Group have already signed up to the Principles, and I look forward to many more industry participants joining us in this commitment." The Initiative sets out three core principles for advancing the digital inclusion of persons with disabilities:

1. Embrace disability inclusion at every level of their organization;
2. Understand how to reach and better serve persons with disabilities;
3. Deliver inclusive products and services that meet the varied needs of people with disabilities.

Digital accessibility is recognized as a key priority across a range of global commitments, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy. The core ambition of all these projects is to ensure that no one is left behind in an increasingly digital world. Signing up to the GSMA's 'Principles' is an important step towards achieving this goal.

The framework has been endorsed by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the Mobile and Wireless Forum's (MWF) Global Accessibility Reporting Initiative (GARI), Global Disability Innovation Hub, the International Disability Alliance (IDA), the ILO Global Business and Disability Network, the Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (CIPESA), PurpleSpace and The Valuable 500.



Local

Election silence imposed online in Kuwait as voters go to polls

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Interior issued a notice to electronic media in Kuwait forbidding all interviews and reports of candidates for the upcoming parliamentary polls on the day of the election, Saturday, December 5 or the day before that, Friday.

The 'Elections Silence' memo requires the implementation of election silence on the "publication, republication or publishing of any interviews or programs of 2020 National Assembly candidates on the day of the election or the day that proceeds it." The memo, sent to all media in Kuwait on Thursday, was signed by Lafi Al-Subaie, Director of Electronic Publications. Tomorrow, 395 candidates, including 33 women, will stand for election in the nation's parliamentary polls. A total of 567,694 registered voters, according to Al-Jarida newspaper, are eligible to vote.

Meanwhile, the court of cassation yesterday issued a ruling allowing 13 candidates to run in Saturday's general polls as candi-

dates stepped up campaigning to lure voters. With less than two days left for the polls, the top court, whose rulings are final, confirmed the court of appeals' verdict that the candidates are allowed to contest the polls. An interior ministry commission last month disqualified 34 candidates for political and financial reasons.

Candidates have stepped up their campaigns, mostly through social media and television interviews, but some in tribal areas held rallies and dinner banquets that attracted hundreds of potential voters despite a total ban by authorities on election rallies to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease.

At a public rally in Farwaniya, a former MP, running from the fourth constituency, said if he gets elected, he will contest the post of the assembly speaker. Another former MP running from the first constituency called for drastically changing the cyber-crimes law which he says poses a real danger to the society. The law stipulates tough penalties on violators.

The candidate also vowed that "the pocket of citizens is a red

line and we will not allow the government to impose taxes or charges on public services, even if that led to dissolving the national assembly." A new candidate contesting from the third constituency, criticized the lack of transparency on the country's finances, saying that details about Kuwait's wealth and investments are scarce.

Another former MP, bidding for a comeback from the first constituency, said there can be no real, serious and effective reforms in the presence of rampant corruption in the country. A new Islamist candidate said that the Anti-Corruption Authority will not succeed under the current circumstances in the country because key parameters are lacking.

He said the Authority lacks real independence and it is under the supervision of the government and that prevents its independence. The Authority also lacks a real power for accountability and the way the Authority functions prevents popular participation.

History of Kuwait's elections

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti people will be electing 50 parliament members (MPs) from five constituencies to represent them in the 16th legislative session of the National Assembly. Hundreds of thousands of eligible voters will cast ballots on December 5 to select 50 representatives out of hundreds of candidates. The Kuwaiti people practiced different types of democracy through what is known as Shura, or consultations, with their rulers regarding affairs of the state, long before the first National Assembly elected after the 1961 independence. Kuwait is known to have 'diwanias,' places of assembly for people either from one or multiple family members, or friends, to discuss affairs of the State in complete transparency and freedom of expression.

The first Municipal Council was elected in 1930, consisting of 11 members. This was followed by election of departments of knowledge, health and awqaf. In 1938, the ruler and people of Kuwait agreed to establish a council with a mandate of running affairs of the State. Elections were held and 14 people out of 20 candidates won the elections. Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah was chosen as head of the council. Late Amir Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem signed, following independence, a decree on August 26, 1961 to hold elections for the Constituent Assembly.

Elections were held on January 20, 1962 and people elected 20 members, who were joined by 11 ministers with a mandate of writing a constitution to organize the affairs of the State alongside obligations and duties of citizens. The first parliamentary elections were held on January 23, 1963. Elections saw 250 candidates running for 50 seats. There were 16,889 eligible voters distributed over 10 constituencies. The first session was held on January 29, and the last was on January 3, 1967.

Elections for the second legislative session

were held on January 25, 1967, which saw 220 candidates and 27,296 eligible voters. The National Assembly held its first session on February 7, 1967 and the last on December 30, 1970. Elections for the third legislative session were held on January 23, 1971, when 40,649 eligible voters selected their representatives out of 180 candidates. The first session was held on February 10 and the last was on January 8, 1975.

Elections for the fourth legislative session were held on January 27, 1975. These saw 256 candidates and number of eligible voters increased to 52,994. The first parliamentary session was held on February 11 and the concluding session on August 29, 1976. Elections for the fifth legislative session were held on February 23, 1981. There were 477 candidates with 42,008 eligible voters distributed over 25 constituencies. The first session was held on March 9, 1981 and the last on January 19, 1985. February 20, 1985 witnessed elections for the sixth legislative session, where 56,845 eligible voters were selecting their representatives out of 231 candidates from 25 constituencies. The first session was held on March 9. This house was dissolved on July 3, 1986.

On April 22, 1990, the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah signed a decree to establish the National Council. Elections were held on June 10. Eligible voters were 62,123. The late Amir signed a decree on June 28 to appoint 25 members in the National Council. The National Council came to a halt on August 2, 1990, the day Iraq invaded and occupied the State of Kuwait. The first session of the National Council was held on July 9, 1991 and the last on August 1, 1992. Elections were held for the 7th legislative session on October 5, 1992, in which 81,440 eligible voters selected their representatives out of 278 candidates. The first session was on October 20 and the last was on October 5, 1996. October

7, 1996 witnessed elections for the 8th legislative session. Candidates were 230 and eligible voters were 107,169. The first session was on October 20.

This National Assembly was dissolved on May 4, 1999. Elections were held for the 9th legislative session on July 3, 1999. There were 288 candidates and 112,882 eligible voters distributed over 25 constituencies. The inauguration session was held on July 17 and the last was on May 31, 2003. Elections for the 10th legislative session was held on July 5. Up to 264 candidates were running for the house, and there were 136,715 voters. The inauguration session was on July 19 and the last was on May 21, 2006. June 29 saw elections for the 11th legislative session, where 327,287 eligible voters selected their representatives out of 288 candidates. The first session was on July 12. The house was dissolved on March 19, 2008. On May 17, 2008, elections were held for the 12th legislative session with 275 candidates running and number of eligible voters increased to 361,684.

The number of constituencies were reduced from 25 to five. The inaugural session was held on June 1. This parliament was dissolved on March 18, 2009. Elections for the 13th legislative session were held on May 16, 2009, where 210 candidates were running. There were 384,790 eligible voters. The inaugural session was on May 31. The house was dissolved on December 6, 2011. Elections for the 14th legislative session were held on July 27, 2013, which saw 321 candidates and 439,715 eligible voters. The first session was held on August 8 and the National Assembly was dissolved on October 16, 2016. The elections for the 15th legislative session were held on November 26, 2016. The number of voters increased to 483,186 and candidates running for the 50 seats were 293. The inaugural session was on December 23 and the last was on October 20, 2020. —KUNA

Kuwait sees 314 new COVID-19 cases, two deaths



KUWAIT: Kuwait said yesterday that 314 new coronavirus infections were registered in the previous 24 hours, raising the total to 143,574, while two deaths recorded over the same period upped its death toll from the outbreak to 884. The ministry earlier revealed that 540 patients recovered in the same period, raising total recoveries to 138,674. The number of patients hospitalized stood yesterday at 4,016, with 84 of them in intensive care units, according to ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, who revealed that 11,039 swab tests were conducted over the previous 24 hours, pushing the total number of tests to 1,118,620. —KUNA



France mourns former president Giscard as reformer, European

Cyclone Burevi hits Sri Lanka as southern India hunkers down

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An undated handout picture released by the University of Oxford shows a health professional (right) administering a dose of the University's COVID-19 candidate vaccine, known as AZD1222, co-invented by the University of Oxford and Vaccitech in partnership with pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca, during its trial. — AFP

Iran surpasses one million COVID cases

Global death toll reaches 1,495,205; infections 64,522,200

TEHRAN: Iran said its novel coronavirus infections surpassed one million cases yesterday as the authorities consider easing restrictions in many parts of the Middle East's hardest hit country. The Islamic republic has recorded 1,003,494 COVID-19 infections since announcing its first cases in February, ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on state television.

The novel coronavirus has killed 49,348 people in Iran over the same period of time, according to official figures. But by the admission of some officials, including Health Minister Saeed Namaki, these figures are much lower than the actual number. In the past 24 hours the virus caused 358 new deaths in the country with a population of more than 80 million, and 13,922 new cases of infection, Lari said.

The number of fatalities, however, appears to have slightly eased in past days after soaring to a daily average of more than 400 for much of November. COVID-19 first surfaced in Iran on February 19, when authorities said it claimed the lives of two elderly people in Qom, a Shiite holy city south of the capital.

They were the first confirmed deaths from the

disease in the Middle East. In response, the authorities have taken a series of measures aimed at halting the spread of the virus.

Faced with the dual challenge of US sanctions and the pandemic, however, they have never imposed full lockdowns for fear they would cause further damage to Iran's economy. US President Donald Trump has imposed wave after wave of sanctions on the Islamic republic since 2018, when he unilaterally withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal. Like most countries affected by the pandemic, Iran—which began developing its own vaccine in the spring—is awaiting the availability of a vaccine against the virus. Namaki announced on Wednesday that an Iranian company had “obtained a license to test a vaccine on humans”.

Minou Mohraz, a medical epidemiologist with the National Coronavirus Control Committee, announced this week that an animal testing phase has been completed. They have yet to specify when testing will be carried out on humans. But Namaki said that if the step was successful, “we will be one of the major producers (of COVID vaccines) in the region by early next spring”.

Global toll

Meanwhile, the novel coronavirus has killed at least 1,495,205 people since the outbreak emerged in China last December, according to a tally from official sources compiled at 1100 GMT yesterday. At least 64,522,200 cases have been registered. Of these, at least 41,049,400 are now considered recovered. The tallies, using data collected by AFP from national authorities and information from the World Health Organization (WHO), probably reflect only a fraction of the actual number of infections.

Many countries are testing only symptomatic or the most serious cases. On Wednesday, 12,445 new deaths and 632,957 new cases were recorded worldwide. Based on latest reports, the countries with the most new deaths were the United States with 2,731 new deaths, followed by Mexico with 800 and Brazil with 698.

The United States is the worst-affected country with 273,847 deaths from 13,925,350 cases. At least 5,322,128 people have been declared recovered. After the US, the hardest-hit countries are Brazil with 174,515 deaths from

6,436,650 cases, India with 138,648 deaths from 9,534,964 cases, Mexico with 107,565 deaths from 1,133,613 cases, and the United Kingdom with 59,699 deaths from 1,659,256 cases. The country with the highest number of deaths compared to its population is Belgium with 146 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Peru with 109, Spain 98 and Italy 94.

China-excluding Hong Kong and Macau—has to date declared 86,567 cases, including 4,634 deaths and 81,667 recoveries.

Latin America and the Caribbean overall has 452,112 deaths from 13,192,939 cases, Europe 426,588 deaths from 18,851,590 infections, and the United States and Canada 286,148 deaths from 14,312,344 cases. Asia has reported 196,793 deaths from 12,526,145 cases, the Middle East 80,028 deaths from 3,405,066 cases, Africa 52,594 deaths from 2,203,759 cases, and Oceania 942 deaths from 30,363 cases. As a result of corrections by national authorities or late publication of data, the figures updated over the past 24 hours may not correspond exactly to the previous day's tallies. — AFP

International

Coronavirus revives traumas of many IS survivors in Iraq

Out of Iraq's 40m citizens, one in four is mentally vulnerable: WHO

BAJET KANDALA CAMP, Iraq: For half a decade, Zedan suffered recurring nightmares about jihadists overrunning his hometown in northern Iraq. The 21-year-old Yazidi was just starting to recover when COVID-19 revived his trauma.

Zedan had lost several relatives when the Islamic State group stormed into Sinjar, the rugged heartland of the Yazidi religious minority in Iraq's northwest. The jihadists killed Yazidi men, took the boys as child soldiers and forced the women into sexual slavery.

Zedan and the surviving members of his family fled, finding refuge in the Bajet Kandala camp near the Syrian border where they still live today. "We used to be farmers living a good life. Then IS came," he said, wringing his hands.

In a pre-fabricated building hosting the camp's mental health clinic, Zedan shared his traumas with Bayda Othman, a psychologist for international NGO Premiere Urgence.

Zedan refers to the violence of 2014 vaguely as "the events". The United Nations says they may constitute something much more serious: genocide. "I started having nightmares every night. I would see men in black coming to kill us," Zedan said, telling Othman that he had attempted suicide several times. He has been seeing her for years, learning how to cope with his Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) through breathing exercises that she taught him.

Earlier this year, his nightly panic attacks stopped. Finally, he could sleep again. But only for a few months. In March, Iraq declared a nationwide lockdown to try to contain the spread of COVID-19. Zedan broke down. "I fear that my family could catch the virus or give it to me," he said. "It obsesses me."

The nightmares returned

As lockdown dragged on, Zedan's brother lost his job at a stationery shop on the edge of the camp. "There's no more money coming into the family now. Just thinking about it gives me a panic attack," he said. "The nightmares returned, and so

did my desire to die."

Out of Iraq's 40 million citizens, one in four is mentally vulnerable, the World Health Organization says. But the country is in dire shortage of mental health specialists, with only three per one million people.

Speaking about trauma or psychological problems is widely considered taboo, and patients who spoke to AFP agreed to do so on the condition that only their first names would be used. In camps across Iraq, which still host some 200,000 people displaced by violence, the pandemic has pushed many people with psychological problems into remission, Othman said.

"We noticed a resurgence of PTSD cases, suicide attempts and suicidal thoughts," she said. In October, there were three attempted suicides in Bajet Kandala alone by displaced people, who said their movements outside the camp were restricted by the lockdown, or whose economic situation had deteriorated even further.

A tissue factory who fired people en masse, a potato farm that shut down, a haberdashery in growing debt: unemployment is a common thread among Othman's patients. "It leads to financial problems, but also a loss of self-confidence, which rekindles trauma," she said.

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), about a quarter of Iraqis who were employed prior to lockdown have been permanently laid off. Youth were particularly hard hit: 36 percent of 18-24 year olds who had been employed were dismissed, the ILO said.

'I feel all alone'

A new patient in her forties walked towards the clinic, her hair covered in a sky-blue veil. Once settled in a faux-leather chair, Jamila revealed that she, too, feels destabilized by the pandemic.

The Yazidi survivor lives in a one-room tent with her son and four daughters.



Zedan, a patient suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), is in medical consultation at the mental health center of the Bajet Kandala camp for displaced Yazidis near Dohuk, 430 kilometers (260 miles) northwest of the Iraqi capital, by the border with Syria. — AFP

But she doesn't feel at home. "I have totally abandoned my children. I feel all alone even though they're always at home. I hit them during my panic attacks—I didn't know what else to do," she said.

Othman tried to soothe Jamila, telling her: "Hatred is the result of untreated sadness. We take it out on relatives, especially when we feel devalued—men prey on women, and women on children."

But the trauma is not just an issue for the displaced, specialists warn. "With the isolation and lack of access to care, children who have lived a genocide develop difficulties as they become adults," said Lina Villa, the head of the mental health unit at a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in northern Iraq. "We fear suicide rates will go up in the years to come." — AFP

Italy curbs Christmas travel to avoid virus 'third wave'

ROME: Italy yesterday announced national travel restrictions for the Christmas holidays designed to limit the spread of Covid-19 in the European country first hit by the pandemic.

The new rules, together with an existing curfew and other regulations already in place, seek to curb circulation throughout the country during the festive period by limiting the number of gatherings.

Earlier this year, a punishing lockdown of all Italy's 60 million residents helped bring the outbreak under control, but the government is trying to avoid missteps made over the summer after the lockdown lifted, when the return of vacationers fuelled a new rise in cases.

"If we let down our guard now, the third wave is just around the corner," Health Minister Roberto

Speranza told parliament on Wednesday. Travel between Italy's regions will be prohibited from December 21 through January 6, with people barred from travelling outside their own towns on December 25, 26 and January 1. The decree includes the "strong recommendation" to avoid hosting those who do not live together.

Other regulations set to be signed later are expected to mandate a 10-day quarantine for those arriving in Italy from foreign countries, beginning on December 20. The move is in part designed to prevent Italians from travelling to ski slopes that are still open in neighboring EU countries.

The government is expected to retain a color-coded risk-based system that imposes varying levels of anti-coronavirus restrictions on different regions. Bars and restaurants are expected to remain closed in regions in red or orange zones. A current 6 pm closure in yellow zones may remain, as may a nationwide 10 pm curfew.

In yellow zones, where eateries are open but required to shut at 6 pm, the government is debating whether to allow restaurants to serve lunch on Christmas Day and December 26. Ski slopes are expected to be off-limits, as well as cruises. The health ministry reported 20,709 new cases on Wednesday and 684 deaths, bringing the cumulative toll to more than 1.6 million infections. — AFP

UAE launches tourist visas for Israelis

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates launched tourist visas for Israeli citizens yesterday, official media said, in the latest move following the normalization of ties between the two countries.

Abu Dhabi's foreign ministry "announced the activation of tourist entry visas through airlines and travel and tourism offices for Israeli passport holders", the WAM news agency reported. The measure is a stop-gap until a mutual visa waiver agreement is put in place meaning Israelis visiting the UAE will be eligible for visas on arrival. The same will apply to Emiratis visiting the Jewish state.

"The move falls within bilateral cooperation between the UAE and the State of

Israel following the signing of the Abraham Accords and aims to facilitate travel to the UAE for the time being," the report added. With their economies hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic, the UAE and Israel are hoping for rapid dividends from the US-brokered normalization deal signed in September.

They have already signed treaties on direct flights and visa-free travel, along with accords on investment protection, science and technology. The UAE was only the third Arab country to normalize ties with Israel following Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994.

However, its move was quickly followed by Bahrain and in October Sudan also announced it would normalize relations with Israel. The agreements, which have been roundly condemned by the Palestinians, break with years of Arab League policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The consensus had been that there should be no relations with Israel until it makes peace with the Palestinians. — AFP

International

Where is Ethiopia going after 4 weeks of fighting in Tigray?

Abiy's decision to send troops into Tigray fueled tensions

ADDIS ABABA: On November 4, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced a military offensive against the leaders of the dissident northern region of Tigray. On Saturday, Abiy claimed the conflict was over after capturing the regional capital Mekele, although Tigrayan leader Debretsion Gebremichael insists his forces continue to fight.

Here's a snapshot of the crisis:

Who is fighting?

The conflict pits the Ethiopian federal army against forces loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the northern region's ruling party. Despite representing less than six percent of Ethiopia's 110 million people, the TPLF wielded outsized power in the country for decades after the overthrow of Mengistu Hailemariam, leader of the brutal Derg regime, in 1991.

But its influence over security and politics began to wane after Abiy—the first prime minister from the Oromo ethnic group, Ethiopia's largest—came to power in 2018, gradually wresting control from the TPLF.

In 2019, Abiy was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his overtures towards longtime foe Eritrea, which neighbours Ethiopia and remains a sworn enemy of the TPLF.

Abiy's decision to send troops into Tigray—following an alleged TPLF assault on federal army bases in Mekele and Dansha—was the culmination of mounting tensions between his government and the TPLF.

Where are they fighting?

Troops, tanks and air strikes prosecuted the Ethiopian military assault on Tigray from the south and west. In just over three weeks, Abiy declared victory, saying his forces had seized control of Mekele, the seat of the TPLF. Ethiopia has denied TPLF claims Eritrean troops joined the fight on the government side.

Abiy on Monday warned Tigrayan leaders that he would continue to hunt them down, claiming they had fled to the west of Mekele. However TPLF leader Debretsion this week said "the fighting has continued", insisting his forces would not stop "as long as these invaders are on our land". A security briefing note seen by AFP said Mekele was calm from Monday but that looting had been reported.

What is the impact?

Thousands have been killed so far, according to the International Crisis Group, and the UN has warned of a humanitarian catastrophe as civilians flee the fighting in Tigray. So far an estimated 45,500 have crossed Ethiopia's western border into Sudan, according to the UN refugee agency.

Some refugees say Ethiopian soldiers stationed along border roads are discouraging people from leaving the country. Around 600,000 people living in Tigray depended on food handouts for survival even before the fighting began—among them 96,000 Eritrean refugees—and the UN has warned that restrictions on humanitarian access to the re-



A four-year-old Ethiopian girl who fled the Tigray conflict as a refugee is measured at a malnutrition center at Village Eight transit center near the Ethiopian border in Gedaref, eastern Sudan, on Wednesday. —AFP

gion and the ability to deliver aid are putting them at dire risk. Food, fuel and cash are in short supply, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), while the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) says basic medical equipment is lacking. The government has indicated its intention to "respond quickly to the needs of the population of Tigray".

On Wednesday the UN announced it had been given access to deliver aid for the first time since the fighting began. Meanwhile, a communications blackout has kept Tigray cut off since the start of the conflict, hampering the work of humanitarians. But some Tigray residents reported Tuesday that communications had been partially restored. —AFP

Life in Gaza 'difficult' for disabled: HRW

GAZA CITY: People with disabilities can face an "extraordinarily difficult" life in the Gaza Strip due to the Israeli blockade and lack of assistance from Islamist rulers Hamas, Human Rights Watch warned yesterday. Two million Palestinians live in the poverty and conflict-plagued enclave wedged between Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea.

In a report released on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, HRW said the 2007 blockade Israel imposed on the territory following Hamas's rise to power had "robbed people with disabilities in Gaza of their freedom of movement". Emina Cerimovic, senior researcher in HRW's disability rights division, said Israeli control of Gaza's eastern border had also impaired "access to the devices, electricity, and technology they need to communicate or leave their homes."

Israel limits the entry into Gaza of goods that could be used for military purposes and controls the flow of fuel needed to power the enclave's sole electricity plant. The report noted the impact of recurring power cuts on people with disabilities who need light to communicate through sign language, or electric lifts or scooters to get around. Hamas, which has fought three wars with Israel since 2008, has failed to provide sufficient ramps or lifts in many buildings in the enclave, according to the report. —AFP

South Africa fears virus comeback as cluster outbreaks flare

JOHANNESBURG: Localized coronavirus outbreaks in parts of South Africa have raised fears that the country could see a resurgence in cases compounded by gatherings during the upcoming festive season. Officials in Africa's hardest virus-hit country are scrambling to contain infections after a flare-up was reported in the impoverished Eastern Cape province and adjacent Western Cape province last month.

The national number of new daily cases crept over 3,000 last week, up 50 percent from an average of 2,000 earlier in November. More than half the increase is driven by infections in the Eastern Cape and around 25 percent by cases in the Western Cape. "(The) small cluster outbreaks which we are seeing... are transient," Health Minister Zweli Mkhize said during an emergency trip to the Eastern Cape last week.

Hospitals 'overwhelmed'

"Something has to be done," he stressed. South Africa's coronavirus transmission rate had slowed significantly after infections peaked in July, with less than three daily cases detected per 100,000 people between the end of August and the start of November.

"We are not in a second wave, but in these two

provinces... we are in the midst of a resurgence," said the government's chief COVID-19 advisor Salim Abdool Karim.

If the new outbreaks are not contained, he warned, it would be "just a matter of time" before the uptick hits the whole country. Hospitals in the Eastern Cape's largest city of Port Elizabeth are already struggling, although local government officials insist they are coping.

Doctors still reeling from the first wave have asked international medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) to assist at three main public facilities. "Hospitals indeed are overwhelmed with much higher numbers of patients... some say even higher than in July," said MSF doctor Colin Pfaff, project medical response coordinator in the province. "Facilities are struggling with lack of staff," he added, blaming "chronic deficiencies" and coronavirus infections among healthcare workers.

Private facilities are also feeling the pinch. "Our Eastern Cape hospitals are incredibly full at the moment," Richard Friedland, head of South Africa's leading private healthcare provider Netcare, said. More beds are being added, "so we still have capacity to treat cases," he added. While the provincial government insists hospitals are neither "full" nor "overflowing", the national doctors association this week accused the health ministry of failing to adequately support "overworked" staff.

In the Western Cape, authorities are pondering targeted restrictions. "We must first do everything possible, through our individual and collective action to ensure the resurge is rolled-back," Western Cape Premier Alan Winde said. —AFP

International

Azerbaijan says 2,783 soldiers killed in Karabakh fighting

Erdogan plans Dec 9-10 visit to ally Azerbaijan after Karabakh truce

BAKU: Azerbaijan said yesterday that nearly 2,800 of its soldiers were killed in recent fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh, the first details it has released of military losses in weeks of clashes with Armenian forces. The defense ministry in Baku said in a statement that “2,783 servicemen of the Azerbaijani armed forces were killed in the patriotic war,” adding that the identity of 103 troops is yet to be established though DNA analysis. One hundred more Azerbaijani soldiers are missing, the statement said.

Azerbaijani soldiers “showed courage and heroism in the Great Patriotic War and inflicted crushing blows on the Armenian armed forces,” it said. Yerevan had earlier announced that 2,317 Armenian troops died during the conflict, which also claimed the lives of at least 93 Azerbaijani and 50 Armenian civilians.

Up to 90,000 people—some 60 percent of the population—fled the disputed Karabakh region during the fighting. Fresh clashes erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan in late September, rekindling the Caucasus neighbors’ decades-long conflict over the ethnic Armenian enclave of Azerbaijan.

Fierce fighting persisted for six weeks despite efforts by France, Russia and the United States to broker ceasefires, before Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a Moscow-brokered peace deal on November 9.

The agreement was signed after Baku’s army overwhelmed separatist forces and threatened to advance on Karabakh’s main city Stepanakert. It has sparked celebrations in Azerbaijan and fury in Armenia, where Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is facing mounting criticism for agreeing on the deal.

Under the agreement—which leaves Karabakh’s



BAKU: An Azerbaijani soldier stands guard at a checkpoint on a road entering Fizuli from Hadrut on Wednesday a day after Baku’s army entered the final district given up by Armenia under a peace deal that ended weeks of fighting over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. — AFP

future political status in limbo—Armenia lost control of parts of the enclave as well as seven adjacent districts that it seized during the 1990s war.

Yerevan has thus lost territories it had hoped to use as a bargaining chip to pressure Baku towards the recognition of Karabakh’s independence. Nearly 2,000 Russian peacekeepers have deployed between the two sides and along the Lachin corridor, a 60-kilometre (35-mile) route through the district that connects Stepanakert to Armenia. Karabakh broke away from Baku in a war in the early 1990s that left some 30,000 people dead and displaced tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will visit staunch ally Azerbaijan on December 9 and 10, his office said yesterday, following a truce that ended fighting over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. The planned visit is the first by a foreign head of state to Baku since the ceasefire last month, which ended six weeks of heavy fighting and saw ethnic Armenians agree to withdraw from large parts of the contested region of Azerbaijan.

Turkey is a regional ally of Azerbaijan and has fervently defended its right to reclaim the Nagorno-Karabakh lands that Baku lost to ethnic Armenian separatists in a 1988-94 war.—AFP

Greece’s skeptical Church faces hard coronavirus reality

ATHENS: Many Greek clerics have treated lockdown restrictions with skepticism or even hostility. But when several prominent members—including its leader—fell ill with the virus, the powerful Orthodox Church had to face reality. At least five senior clerics have been hit with the virus in the past month, one of whom died. Among them was Archbishop Ieronymos, the 82-year-old head of the Orthodox Church of Greece, who had to be hospitalized for nearly two weeks. “I was scared and in pain, as other people were,” the archbishop said after being discharged on November 30.

There was even an outbreak on Mount Athos, the reclusive monastic community in northern Greece.

“At first, (the Church) failed to realize the scope of the problem,” Chrysostomos Stamoulis, professor of dogmatic theology at Thessaloniki’s Aristotle University, said. “In several cases, arrogance prevailed, with many (clerics) thinking themselves invulnerable.”

Days after the latest lockdown was announced, the association of Greek priests complained that the measures were “excessive” and “stymied religious freedom”. Ieronymos, a moderate by nature, has urged his flock to “reverentially follow the rules and measures of the competent health authorities”. In general, however, the clergy’s response to the pandemic has been “problematic to say the least”, said Alexandros Sakellariou, adjunct lecturer on religion at the Hellenic Open University. “One could argue that as Orthodox priests... they hope to meet their maker,” he said.

Holy water as ‘medicine’

Between May and October, especially in rural areas, priests would go as far as mocking people coming to church wearing a mask, Sakellariou said. Church leaders conspicuously went maskless while officiating at important national events, including the investiture of new ministers in August and a top religious celebration in Thessaloniki in October. And one retired bishop who recovered from the virus even said his “regular medicine” had been holy water.

The conservative government of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis faced criticism during the first lockdown in the spring when he shut down businesses and schools while allowing churches to self-regulate. The ruling New Democracy party has close ties to the Orthodox Church and the government was mindful of the political cost of antagonizing the clergy, said Sakellariou. Even so, he said, “the Church created obstacles rather than facilitate the state”, which also pays their salaries. “No other religious community (in Greece) expressed such objections.”—AFP

First in line for COVID vaccine? Some US health workers say no

NEW YORK: They can move to front of the line for a COVID-19 vaccine if they want, but some US health care workers are skeptical about taking a vaccine that was developed in record time—even as the pandemic rages on. Some want more time, despite assurances from experts that they trust the vaccine vetting process carried out by the US Food and Drug Administration. “I think I would take the vaccine later on, but right now I am a little leery of it,” nurse Yolanda Dodson, 55, told AFP. Dodson works at the Montefiore Hospital in New York City and spent the spring in the heart of the deadly fight against the virus.

Vaccine studies so far “look promising but I don’t think there is enough data yet,” Dodson said.

“We have to be grateful to those who are willing to subject themselves to take that risk” to participate in the studies, she said. “It is a very personal decision.” Diana Torres is a nurse at a Manhattan hospital who saw several of her co-workers die of the novel coronavirus this spring.

She is particularly suspicious of vaccines rushed

for approval under the Trump administration, which she says has handled the entire pandemic like “some sort of joke.” “This is a vaccine that was developed in less than a year and approved under the same administration and government agencies that allowed the virus to spread like a wildfire,” Torres said. “They didn’t have enough time and people to study the vaccine,” she said.

“This time around I will pass and watch how it unfolds.” Data from clinical trials have shown that two vaccines—one developed by Pfizer and BioNtech, the other by Moderna and the US National Institutes of Health—are about 95 percent effective.

Normally the FDA requires six months of follow up, but if no adverse reactions appear in the first two months, it is rare to see anything in the next four—and the raging pandemic has altered the risk-benefit calculations. There were 44,000 volunteers in the Pfizer trial, and 30,000 in Moderna’s, and the data was firewalled from the companies and analyzed by experts free from political pressure.—AFP



NEW YORK: Medical workers deliver a patient to the Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn on Wednesday in New York City. — AFP

International

France mourns former president Giscard as reformer, European

Veteran statesman dies of COVID at the age of 94

PARIS: France yesterday mourned its former president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing after he died from COVID-19 aged 94, with tributes hailing him as an ambitious social reformer and great European statesman. Giscard, who had been in hospital several times in the last months for heart problems, died surrounded by his family Wednesday at the family estate in the Loire region, his family said in a statement. He ruled France for a single seven-year term from 1974-1981, during which the country made great strides in nuclear power, high-speed train travel and legalized abortion.

He ensured that Paris was at the heart of Europe in a post-war partnership with Germany and also played a key role in what would become the G7 group of major world powers. In contrast to his predecessors Georges Pompidou and Charles de Gaulle, he was an accessible and media-savvy modern politician who enjoyed meeting voters. But he also never shook off a sometimes haughty demeanor that belied his aristocratic background. His ambitions to carve out a deep place in history were derailed in 1981 when he lost a tightly-contested election to his Socialist rival François Mitterrand, who would rule France for the next one-and-a-half decades.

'Guides our way'

"His seven-year mandate transformed France," President Emmanuel Macron said in a statement. "The direction he set for France still guides our way..."

his death has plunged the French nation into mourning," Macron said.

Macron will address the nation to pay tribute to Giscard at 1900 GMT, the Elysee said.

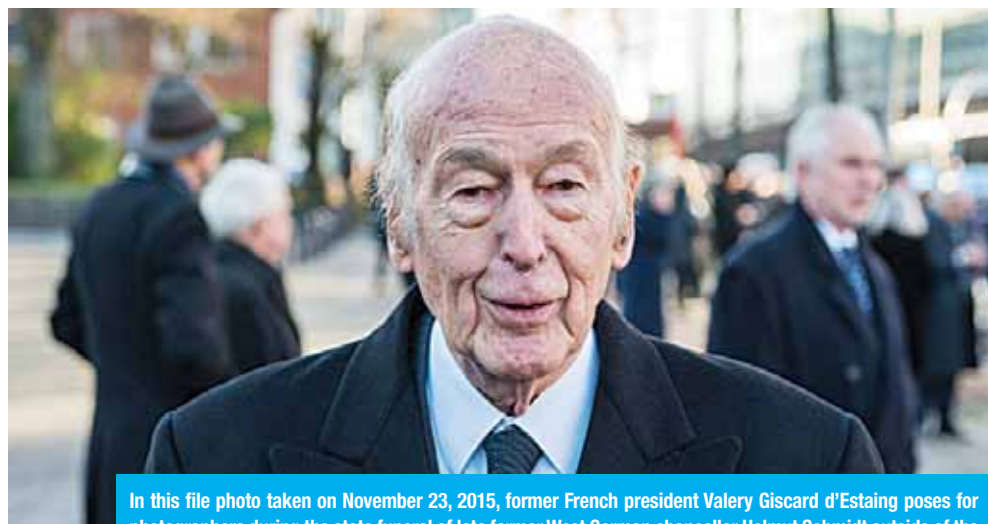
German Chancellor Angela Merkel mourned the loss of a "great European". Giscard launched a radical reform drive which included legalizing abortion, making it easier for couples to divorce and lowering the voting age to 18.

In Europe, Giscard helped drive moves towards a monetary union, in close cooperation with then German chancellor Helmut Schmidt, launching the system that was a precursor to the euro.

The europhile president was born in the German city of Koblenz while it was under French occupation in the aftermath of World War I. It was at his initiative that leaders of the world's richest countries first met in 1975, an event that evolved into the annual summits of the Group of Seven (G7) club.

Some commentators have compared Macron to the center-right Giscard, who until the incumbent president arrived at the Elysee aged just 39 in 2017 was modern France's youngest head of state having won office aged 48. French Prime Minister Jean Castex hailed a "man of progress" whose social reforms remained "deeply relevant" for young people and women.

He "succeeded in modernizing political life in France," added former president Nicolas Sarkozy.



In this file photo taken on November 23, 2015, former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing poses for photographers during the state funeral of late former West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt outside of the Sankt Michaelis church, in Hamburg. —AFP

Not always understood

Tall and slender, with an elegant, aristocratic manner, he studied at France's elite Ecole Polytechnique and Ecole Nationale d'Administration. Aged just 18, he joined the French Resistance and took part in the World War II liberation of Paris from its Nazi occupiers in 1944. He then served for eight months in Germany and Austria in the run-up to the capitulation of

the Third Reich. He launched his political career in 1959, becoming finance minister in 1969. With a more relaxed presidential style than his predecessors, "VGE" was sometimes seen in public playing football, or the accordion. Giscard involved his family in his political appearances, had the blue and red of France's "tricolore" flag toned down, and the Marseillaise national anthem slowed. —AFP

US Jewish doctor tweets on treating COVID patient with Nazi tattoos

LOS ANGELES: A Jewish doctor working with coronavirus patients in California shared his shock about the moment he saw neo-Nazi tattoos on the body of a severely ill man he was treating. As his team - which included a Black nurse and a respiratory specialist of Asian descent - prepared the man to be intubated Taylor Nichols said on Twitter he spotted the Nazi tattoos.

"The swastika stood out boldly on his chest. SS tattoos and other insignia that had previously been covered by his shirt were now obvious to the room," he tweeted Monday. "We all saw. The symbols of hate on his body outwardly and proudly announced his views. We all knew what he thought of us. How he valued our lives," said Nichols, who was later interviewed about his experience by various media outlets. Nichols talked about the conflicting emotions he felt, after months of battling the disease and seeing patients die, while living in isolation to avoid contaminating loved ones, constantly in fear of falling ill himself. —AFP



California doctor Taylor Nichols shares his experience with the media

How the world has sped up vaccine approvals

PARIS: Britain has become the first Western country to approve a Covid-19 vaccine for general use, giving the green light to the Pfizer/BioNTech drug. As authorities in the US and Europe probe other candidates, here is how countries have sped up their approval procedures to face up to the pandemic.

Britain: 'Rolling reviews'

Britain was able to approve the Pfizer vaccine after the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) gave its all-clear. The MHRA used a "rolling review" process from June to assess the vaccine in record time. Teams of scientists had worked "around the clock" on different aspects of the safety assessment, often tackling several topics in parallel, MHRA chief June Raine said.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock and others claimed that Britain's departure from the EU had allowed it to approve the vaccine faster than its continental neighbors. "Unlike the EMA (European Medicines Agency), they can ask questions as they go and obtain responses faster as a single agency," said Penny Ward, professor in pharmaceutical medicine at King's College London.

Raine insisted that "no corners whatsoever have been cut" in the vaccine approval process.

Jonathan Van-Tam, deputy chief medical officer for England, told the BBC on Thursday that "I actually don't expect other regulators... to be very far behind with this vaccine," saying approvals elsewhere were likely "a matter of days".

EU: Accelerated procedures

The Amsterdam-based EMA, which regulates medicines across the 27 EU countries, has also turned to a "rolling review" process for safety and effectiveness data from Covid-19 vaccine developers. All three of the most advanced candidates—Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna and Oxford/Astrazeneca—have been subject to the scheme for several weeks already. According to the EMA, the accelerated procedures are granted for medicines "that fulfil an unmet medical need on the basis of less complete data than normally required."

The normal pipeline for vaccines would see all the data collected and submitted at the very start of the authorization process.

An EMA decision on Pfizer/BioNTech's vaccine is expected "by December 29 at the latest", while a ruling on Moderna's version should follow by January 12. It is up to the European Commission in Brussels to issue the final green light.

US: Advisory committee

Both Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna have requested emergency use authorization (EUA) for their Covid-19 vaccines from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). But the American process is slower than the British one and involves a public consultation.

The FDA carries out its own analysis of the vaccine and calls on an independent advisory committee. "The FDA process is a completely transparent process with independent experts commenting and asking questions and recommending or advising the agency," Moncef Slaoui, scientific advisor to Washington's Operation Warp Speed (OWS) program, said Wednesday. The advisory committee is scheduled for a December 10 meeting on the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and for Moderna on December 17. FDA decisions on the two drugs should follow those meetings. If the agency approves them, the vaccines could be available in the US—the world's hardest-hit country with more than 270,000 deaths—in December. —AFP

International

Reviving diplomacy, Biden seeks Iran talks after rejoining deal

Biden still backs 2015 deal negotiated under Obama

WASHINGTON: President-elect Joe Biden has signaled he will return the United States to a nuclear accord with Iran before quickly launching talks on other concerns, reviving diplomacy to ease soaring tensions.

In his most substantive remarks on Iran since his victory, Biden told The New York Times that he still backed the 2015 deal negotiated under Barack Obama from which defeated president Donald Trump withdrew. Biden told the newspaper's columnist Thomas Friedman that "it's going to be hard" but that if Iran returned to compliance, the United States would rejoin the agreement.

The top US priority should be to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapon, Biden said, explaining, "The last goddamn thing we need in that part of the world is a buildup of nuclear capability."

After re-entering the agreement, "in consultation with our allies and partners, we're going to engage in negotiations and follow-on agreements to tighten and lengthen Iran's nuclear constraints, as well as address the missile program." Biden also seeks to address US concerns about Iran's support to militants in Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon and to the Syrian regime.

A return to the agreement, known formally as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), would delight US allies in Europe which note that Iran was in compliance until

Trump pulled out.

Friedman wrote that Biden also wanted to bring into discussions Iran's US-allied Arab neighbors such as Saudi Arabia that have been critical of US engagement with their neighbor. Staunchly opposed to the agreement is Israel, which was widely suspected in the assassination Friday on the outskirts of Tehran of Iran's leading nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrazadeh.

Sanctions as leverage?

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif last month said that his country would immediately return to its JCPOA commitments if Biden removes crippling sanctions imposed by Trump. Analysts widely expect Biden to use the sanctions, which include US attempts to stop all of Iran's oil exports, as leverage, at least initially.

"No one that I can think of in Iran thinks Biden is going to be a pushover," said Alex Vatanka, director of the Iran program at the Washington-based Middle East Institute. "They're expecting him to come in and try to milk the situation as much as he can. But he's more realistic and, more important, he's someone who hasn't called them names, so you don't lose face by talking to him," he said.

Ironically, Vatanka said, Iran may have secured a more favorable deal with Trump, who was famously eager to showcase diplomatic



WILMINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden waves as he arrives for a virtual roundtable with workers and small business owners at The Queen Theatre in Wilmington, Delaware. — AFP

victories but was toxic by seeking to "humiliate" Iran.

Outgoing Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had insisted that the 2015 deal was dangerously narrow and demanded that Iran stop missile activity and regional proxies-conditions that went

unmet and were seen by many as code for seeking to topple the regime, an arch-nemesis of Washington since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Vatanka said that Biden, like Obama, "loses sleep not over what Iran is doing in Syria but over Iran's nuclear program." — AFP

Indian action hero Rajinikanth enters political fray

CHENNAI: Indian film superstar Rajinikanth yesterday became the latest in a long line of big-name actors to enter politics, vowing to bring in "corruption-free" government to his home state.

The action hero, one of Asia's best-paid actors, said on Twitter that with "huge support from people" he would be launching a political party in January that is expected to contest elections scheduled in Tamil Nadu state next year. The 69-year-old former bus conductor said the public wanted "honest, transparent, corruption-free, caste-less, secular and spiritual politics" in the state.

"Wonderful and amazing things will happen!" he added without stating explicitly that he would stand himself. The actor enjoys a cult-like following across India where he is called "The Superstar" or "Thalaivar" (leader).

Every new film sends Tamil Nadu into a frenzy, with fans getting haircuts like his most recent character or having his face tattooed on their bodies. Rajinikanth, who worked on buses in the southern city of Bangalore before moving into acting in 1973, proved his political muscle in 1996 when he called on fans to oppose the Tamil Nadu government, which was then voted out of power.

Rajinikanth said in 2017 that he wanted to enter politics to bring "change in Tamil Nadu". His fans set off fireworks in celebration but have been waiting since for the formal moves.

He launched his own movement, Rajini Makkal Mandram



Rajinikanth

(RMM), which has since been putting in place the political launchpad for the film hero. He has carried on making films and had health scares which led some to believe that he would give up his political ambitions. Rajinikanth is following a well-worn path from the cinema into Indian politics. Hindi star Sunny Deol is a member of parliament and another Tamil star, Kamal Haasan, formed his own party in 2018 but failed to win a seat in a national election last year. Jaya Bachchan, the actor wife of Bollywood's best-known star Amitabh Bachchan, has served four terms as a member of the Rjya Sabha upper house.

Comedy actor Govinda was a member of parliament from 2004 to 2009 and actress Rekha was a member of the Rajya Sabha parliament but stood down in 2018 following criticism of her attendance record. — AFP

World food prices jump to six-year high, says UN

ROME: Global food commodity prices rose sharply in November to their highest level in nearly six years, the UN food agency said yesterday, due in part to adverse weather conditions. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) said prices of the most globally traded foodstuffs were up across the board, putting extra pressure in particular on 45 countries that need outside help feeding their populations.

The FAO Food Price Index averaged 105 points during the month, up 3.9 percent from October and 6.5 percent from a year earlier. "The monthly increase was the sharpest since July 2012, putting the index at its highest level since December 2014," the Rome-based agency said.

The biggest rise was in the vegetable oil price index, which jumped 14.5 percent because of low palm oil stocks.

The cereal price index rose 2.5 percent from October — making it nearly 20 percent higher than a year ago. Wheat export prices were also up, because of reduced harvest prospects in Argentina, as were maize prices, with lower output expectations in the US and Ukraine and large purchases by China, the FAO said.

The sugar price index was up 3.3 percent month-on-month amid "growing expectations of a global production shortfall" as bad weather sparked weaker crop prospects in the EU, Russia and Thailand. Dairy prices also rose 0.9 percent to near an 18-month high, in part because of a boom in sales in Europe. Meat prices were up 0.9 percent from October, but significantly down on a year ago, the report said. — AFP

International

Philippine prisoners ink over tattoos to combat violence

Improvised tattooing machines being used to cover up gang symbols

MANILA: Heavily tattooed Philippine prisoners wince in pain as fellow inmates use improvised tattooing machines to cover up gang symbols—an effort to reduce jail violence that skeptics say is only skin-deep. Deadly clashes between rival clans are common in the country's notoriously overcrowded and under-resourced jails, where belonging to a gang can be a lifeline to food, medicine and protection.

Conditions inside prisons have worsened under President Rodrigo Duterte, whose anti-narcotics crackdown has sent thousands of people to jails already several times over their capacity.

Prisoners who join a gang get inked inside their congested cells, leaving them with a distinctive design signalling their solidarity. Authorities hope that defacing these markings will stop inmates from being dragged into cellblock wars and strip them of loyalty to a particular group, making it harder for leaders to mobilise their network of followers to riot or trade in drugs.

"When inmates belong to a group or a gang, they have a sense of security," said Gabriel Chacag, spokesman for the Bureau of Corrections, who insisted the program that started in October was voluntary. "But on the other hand, if you joined a gang that does bad things, you will also be a target of their rival gang."

At Manila's New Bilibid Prison—the country's largest, with more than 28,000 inmates squeezed into a complex designed for about 6,000 — the vast majority of prisoners belong to a gang.

Bare-chested convicts wearing disposable

masks sit on white plastic chairs in the visiting room as other inmates draw thick black crosses over their gang symbols. A sound like a dentist's drill can be heard as the five amateur tattooists use confiscated devices to destroy what may have been their own original handiwork. "Before, you had to help your fellow gang member when they were in a fight but not anymore," said Mark, a convicted murderer, whose real name could not be used.

He joined the Batang Mindanao (Children of Mindanao) gang when he entered the prison this year. "Now it's just brotherhood, we are all brothers," he added, after the gang tattoo on his back was covered. Another prisoner told AFP conditions would "certainly be better" with the defacing of gang tattoos.

Gangs are like family

Authorities acknowledge the program will not put an immediate stop to the violence. Previous efforts to reduce clashes, such as peace pacts between gangs, have had a limited impact. Recent fights at Bilibid have left at least 13 inmates dead and scores wounded after warring gangs attacked each other inside the jail.

"You cannot eradicate it overnight. You cannot change (gang) culture overnight, so we do it slowly and gradually," said Chacag. Lex Ledesma, a psychologist and author of the book "Finding Freedom Inside: Survival Stories of Growth and Rebirth" about prisoners in Bilibid, said dismantling the gang structure would take more than just covering up tattoos.



MANILA: In this photo taken on November 23, 2020, an artist removes a tattoo of an inmate at the New Bilibid Prison in Manila. Heavily-tattooed Philippine inmates wince in pain as fellow prisoners use improvised tattooing machines to cover up symbols identifying their gang affiliation in a skin-deep effort to reduce jail violence. — AFP

He said gangs filled the void left by the government's inadequate provision of basic services inside the jails. They also provided social support for inmates who have not been visited by their loved ones for years. "Gangs serve as the only family of forgotten inmates inside the prison, they are the only ones that take care of them," said Ledesma, who has been involved in a peer-

support program at Bilibid for 10 years.

Ledesma warned that gangs would persist unless the situation improved. "The bigger problem is that there is really no intention to rehabilitate, even before the time of Duterte," he said. "Once you became an inmate it's as if you are now a half-human, as if you are no longer a human being." — AFP

Japan prosecutors seek to grill Abe on spending scam

TOKYO: Japanese prosecutors are seeking to question former prime minister Shinzo Abe over a scandal involving the cost of events held for his supporters, local media said yesterday. Under Japanese law, spending on political events must be reported, but prosecutors allege that Abe's office failed to do so for dinners his political group organized on the eve of government-sponsored cherry blossom viewing parties.

Public broadcaster NHK said the group paid more than eight million yen (\$76,000) for the events over five years until 2019. The Tokyo Prosecutors Office, which declined to comment on the story, has already questioned Abe's secretaries for allegedly failing to properly report the cost of the dinners.

NHK and Jiji Press agency said prosecutors wanted to question Abe about his knowledge of the payments. Abe, who has

not yet responded to the prosecutors' request, has already denied any wrongdoing, saying guests, including voters in his constituency, attended at their own expense.

Abe resigned in September over health issues after becoming the country's longest-serving premier. He weathered several scandals while in office, including over the cherry blossom parties, a decades-old tradition intended to honor the great and good for their achievements.

Abe's government was accused of stacking the event with supporters, and even inviting a member of Japan's infamous Yakuza mafia. When the opposition demanded a guest list be produced, it emerged the list had been shredded. While the government denied wrongdoing, Abe's successor Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has said he will not hold the event next year. — AFP

US tightens travel rules for Chinese party members: NYT

WASHINGTON: Washington issued new entry rules for Chinese Communist Party members traveling to the United States, the New York Times reported yesterday, citing the State Department.

The new policy—which took immediate effect on Wednesday—caps visas of Communist Party members and their immediate families to one month and a single entry into the country, the report said. "For decades we allowed the CCP free and unfettered access to US institutions and businesses while these same privileges were never extended freely to US citizens in China," a State Department spokesperson said in a statement quoted by the Times.

Applicants had previously been able to obtain 10-year visitor visas. The report estimated the new restrictions could theoretically apply to around 270 million people. Tensions have soared between the world's two largest economies on a range of fronts

and both countries have stepped up travel restrictions on each other's citizens.

Both countries have restricted journalist visas, with Washington curbing the number of Chinese nationals from state-run news outlets in the United States earlier this year.

China responded in March by expelling more than a dozen American journalists from the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal. The Trump administration has also revoked the visas of more than 1,000 Chinese students under a policy introduced in June that accused some of espionage and stealing intellectual property.

Beijing did not confirm the new restrictions yesterday, but said earlier reports that the US was considering travel restrictions showed its "hatred and abnormal mindset towards the Communist Party." "Some extreme anti-China forces in the US, driven by a strong ideological bias and deep-rooted Cold War mentality, are politically oppressing China," said foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying at a routine press briefing Thursday.

"This is an escalation of their political oppression towards China and China is firmly opposed to that," she said. Beijing has previously accused Washington of "political persecution and racial discrimination" over visa restrictions. — AFP

International

Cyclone Burevi hits Sri Lanka as southern India hunkers down

Kerala readies 2,500 relief camps to relocate people

COLOMBO: Cyclone Burevi hit Sri Lanka overnight, rattling the island nation but leaving it relatively unscathed on its way to southern India, officials said yesterday. Burevi, the second cyclone in the southern Bay of Bengal in a week, slammed into north-eastern Sri Lanka just before midnight (1830 GMT).

Packing winds up to 100 kilometers (60 miles) an hour, it soaked parts of the country but caused no casualties and less devastation than feared. "There was rain and strong winds, but the cyclone did not cause any major damage in our area," Mangalanath Liyanarachchi, a local reporter in Trincomalee, 260 kilometers (160 miles) from Colombo, said by telephone.

Thousands of people living along the coast had been asked to seek temporary shelter inland, but they have now moved back to their homes, Liyanarachchi said.

Sri Lanka's Disaster Management Centre (DMC) had issued a red alert and asked fishermen not to venture out to sea. Sri Lanka also ordered the closure of schools along the path of the cyclone for three days. However, DMC officials said there were no reports of casualties and the damage was minimal as the

cyclone weakened on its way through sparsely populated areas.

The weather system was expected to make landfall in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu overnight yesterday to Friday and move westwards into Kerala, Indian forecasters said.

India's National Disaster Response Force said Wednesday that they had deployed around two dozen relief and rescue teams for the two states, for any emergency response after the cyclone. Kerala's chief minister Pinari Vijayan said around 2,500 relief camps had been identified to relocate people from coastal and low lying areas. Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted that the central government was ready to provide "all possible support". "Praying for the safety and well-being of those staying in affected areas," Modi said.

Last week, a more powerful cyclone skirted northern Sri Lanka but hit Tamil Nadu with full force, uprooting trees and delivering 30 centimeters (12 inches) of rain in some areas. But more accurate forecasting and the timely evacuation of several hundred thousand people were credited with keeping the number of people reported killed to three, a



Fishermen prepare to go out in sea in Trincomalee yesterday. Cyclone Burevi hit Sri Lanka overnight, rattling the island nation but leaving it relatively unscathed on its way to southern India, officials said yesterday. — AFP

fraction of the death tolls in previous years. Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh depend on the monsoon for power generation as well as

irrigation, but excessive downpours and storms cause casualties and destroy property almost every year. — AFP

S Korean students take exam with virus precautions

SEOUL: South Korea fell quiet yesterday as hundreds of thousands of students sat the high-stakes national university entrance exam, with the added tension of strict anti-coronavirus measures.

Success in the day-long test—which teenagers spend years preparing for—can mean a place in one of the elite colleges seen as key to future careers, incomes, and even marriage prospects.

And the coronavirus epidemic added to the pressure, delaying and disrupting the school year in the South, forcing all classes online for a time. The usual scenes of freshmen and juniors gathering at the gates to cheer on their schoolmates as they arrived for the exam were absent on Thursday, barred under coronavirus precautions. At the elite Ewha Girls' Foreign Language High School many students arrived on their own or with their test-taking friends, and some parents seemed more nervous than their children.

"I'm actually quite relieved now that it's all going to be over soon," said 18-year-old Kim Chae-eun.

"This exam is important because Korean society makes you study your whole life up till this point for this one exam." The South brought its outbreak broadly under control with its "trace, test and treat" approach, but in recent weeks has seen new infections jump from around 100 a day to more than 500.

By global standards the figure remains extremely low but the rise has alarmed authorities, who have tightened social distancing measures.

The exam itself is a particular concern, with nearly 500,000 pupils gathering in test centers across the country. Plastic see-through dividers were set up on each desk and students were required to wear facemasks throughout the test. Students were checked on arrival and those showing temperatures of 37.5 C or higher or other coronavirus symptoms had to take the test in a separate designated area. All were advised to refrain from gathering and talking during breaks, with exam rooms to be ventilated after each session.

Quiet please

The exam itself was delayed for two weeks due to the earlier disruptions to teaching, and all high schools across the country have returned to online classes for a week to try to prevent school clusters. "It will be even more difficult and worrisome to take the exam in the coronavirus situation," President Moon Jae-in wrote in a good luck message posted on social media. "I'd like to put warm scarves around your necks." South Korea pulls out all the stops to ensure the test takers are not disturbed. Government offices, businesses and even Seoul's stock market opened an hour later than usual to reduce traffic and help the students arrive on time, and police escorts were available for any running late—no admissions are allowed after the exam begins. All take-offs and landings at South Korean airports are suspended for 35 minutes during an English listening test, when all aircraft already in the air must maintain an altitude higher than three kilometers. — AFP

Pakistan ex-PM Jamali, who served after military coup, dies

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's former prime minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, who served under military leader Pervez Musharraf, has died, his family announced. The 76-year-old died in the city of Rawalpindi outside Islamabad on Wednesday after recently suffering a heart attack, his son Mir Muhammad Khan Jamali said. Jamali was elected prime minister but with limited powers in November 2002, when president Musharraf allowed parliamentary elections to take place after he took power in a bloodless 1999 coup. Musharraf went on to rule the country until 2008 but was forced to resign the same year after pro-military parties lost parliamentary elections and the country transitioned back to a democracy.

Jamali stepped down in the summer of 2004 after developing differences with the party leadership and Musharraf, paving the way for one of his cabinet ministers, Shaukat Aziz, to fill the post until the next parliamentary election in 2008. Hailing from an influential political family, Jamali was the first and only prime minister to come from the oil-and-gas-rich



In this file photo taken on July 3, 2004, former Pakistani Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali waves to supporters as he boards a train to return to his home town in south-west province Baluchistan at the Rawalpindi railway station. — AFP

province of Balochistan, which has seen several long-running Islamist and separatist insurgencies.

He was to be buried yesterday in his ancestral town of Rojhan Jamali. "Sad-denied to hear of the passing of Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali. My condolences and prayers go to his family," Prime Minister Imran Khan wrote on Twitter. — AFP

International

Bangladesh begins controversial transfer of Rohingya to island

Refugees being moved to a low-lying island prone to cyclones, floods

COX'S BAZAR, Bangladesh: Bangladesh began transferring hundreds of Rohingya refugees yesterday to a low-lying island in an area prone to cyclones and floods, with rights groups alleging people were being coerced into leaving. Almost a million Rohingya—most of whom fled a military offensive in neighboring Myanmar in 2017—live in a vast network of squalid camps in south-eastern Bangladesh.

With many refusing to return, and with violent drug gangs and extremists active on the sites, the Bangladeshi government has grown increasingly impatient to clear out the camps.

On Thursday more than 20 buses carrying almost a thousand people left the camps in the Cox's Bazar region, headed for the port city of Chittagong, said Anwar Hossain, regional police chief. "Twenty buses left in two shifts. There were 423 people in the first 10 buses and 499 in the second 10 buses," he told AFP. From Chittagong the refugees were due to be taken by military landing craft to the island of Bhashan Char, officials said. The island, measuring 13,000 acres (52 square kilometers), is one of several silty strips to have surfaced in the Bay of Bengal in recent decades. The Bangladesh Navy has built shelters there for at least 100,000 Rohingya refugees as well as a nine-foot (three-metre) flood embankment. But locals say high tides flooded the island a few years ago and that cyclones, a regular occurrence in the region, can cause storm surges of four or five meters.

'Smashed teeth'

Police said more buses would leave later yesterday, with officials saying earlier they planned to transfer a total of 2,500 people in a first phase. But rights groups including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International alleged that some of the refugees had been coerced into going. This was borne out by some family members that AFP spoke to yesterday. "They beat my son mercilessly and even smashed his teeth so that he agreed to go to the island," said Sufia Khatun, 60, who came to see off her son and five other relatives. "I have come here to see him and his family probably for the last time," she told AFP in tears.

Hafez Ahmed, 17, came to say goodbye to his brother and his family. "My brother has been missing for the last two days. We later learnt that he is now here (transit camp), from where he will be taken to the island. He is not going willingly," Ahmed said. The United Nations office in Bangladesh issued a terse statement on Thursday saying it was "not involved" and had "limited information".

Family of S Korean dictator's assassin seeks acquittal

PAJU, South Korea: Forty years after South Korea's spy chief was executed for shooting dead his boss, dictator Park Chung-hee, the assassin's sister is seeking to clear him of treason, arguing the killing was in the service of the country. But she is not seeking to overturn his murder conviction or death sentence, in a reflection of how the South still grapples with Park's complex legacy. "A person needs to be punished for killing," Kim Jae-gyu's grey-haired sister Jung-sook, 81, told AFP.

"But my brother did not kill the president so that he could become president or to commit treason against the state," Park took power in a 1961 military coup and established a regime that transformed South Korea into a manufacturing powerhouse, but ruthlessly crushed opposition. He hand-picked Kim Jae-gyu, a friend from their days as military academy classmates, to head the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), responsible for fending off espionage plots from the North and ensuring the president remained unopposed domestically. In October



Relatives of Rohingya refugees gather outside the transit camp before the start of the first mass relocation of refugees to an island, in Ukhiya yesterday. — AFP

It said the UN had not been allowed independently to assess the "safety, feasibility and sustainability" of the island as a place to live. It said the refugees "must be able to make a free and informed decision about relocating" and that, once there, they should have access to education and health care—and be able to leave if they wish.

'Better facilities'

But Bangladesh's Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen called the rights groups' claims "a damn lie", and said the facilities on the island were "much better" than in the camps. "Bangladesh government has decided to take around 23,000 families to Bhashan Char voluntarily," he said. "The current camps are very congested... They are going voluntarily." Several local rights activists said some families have agreed to move to the island because of the prevailing law and order situation in the camps.

At least seven Rohingya were killed and many houses were torched in recent months in attacks by suspected Rohingya extremist groups. Since May the island has been home to 306 Rohingya refugees who were intercepted from boats on treacherous sea routes to Malaysia and Indonesia. — AFP

1979, major rallies against Park's rule broke out in the second city Busan and nearby Masan, infuriating the dictator.

According to Kim, Park's chief bodyguard Cha Ji-cheol was urging a swift and merciless crackdown, a move the spy boss opposed but the leader was leaning towards. Questions and controversy over Kim's motives still persist, but what is not in doubt is that he stepped away from the trio's private, Chivas Regal-fuelled dinner at the KCIA compound in Seoul, fetched a handgun from his office and shot both men dead. He fled but was arrested hours later.

'Vain desire'

Park's assassination stunned the country and domestic security chief Chun Doo-hwan was appointed to investigate, announcing a week later that a "delusional" Kim had been driven by a "vain desire to become president" and fears his influence was waning. Within two months, Chun took power in a military coup of his own. At his trial—which began 41 years ago on Friday—Kim told the court that henchman Cha had suggested "one to two million casualties" in Busan "shouldn't be an issue", since Cambodia's Khmer Rouge had already set such a precedent.

Park was ready to order troops to open fire if the situation worsened, he added, insisting he acted "to restore democracy and save lives", and that otherwise the consequences in Busan would have been "horrifying". Convicted of murder and conspiracy to commit treason, he was hanged on May 24, 1980. — AFP

HK pro-democracy media tycoon denied bail on fraud charge

HONG KONG: Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai was remanded into custody yesterday after being charged with fraud, the latest in a string of prosecutions brought against high-profile Beijing critics and democracy campaigners. Lai, 73, is the owner of Hong Kong's best-selling Apple Daily, a popular tabloid that is unashamedly pro-democracy and fiercely critical of authorities. He and two of the firm's executives—Royston Chow and Wong Wai-keung—face fraud charges that court documents say are related to the paper's offices allegedly being used for purposes not permitted by the building's lease. Police raided Apple Daily's headquarters in August and arrested a string of senior company figures, including Lai, on suspicion of "collusion with foreign forces" under a vaguely worded new national security law that Beijing imposed on the city.

None has so far been charged with any national security breaches. But Victor So, the magistrate overseeing yesterday's hearing, is from a group of judges selected by Hong Kong's chief executive to try such cases. So denied Lai bail but granted it to Wong and Chow, setting the next court date for April. The decision means Lai, who was later photographed arriving at prison with his hands cuffed, faces months behind bars as police continue their investigation. China's clampdown on Hong Kong has dramatically accelerated since it imposed its sweeping security law in June, with opposition politicians disqualified and dozens of activists charged or investigated. On Wednesday, three prominent young democracy campaigners—including Joshua Wong—were jailed for taking part in last year's democracy protests. Lai is also being prosecuted for his alleged part in those rallies in a separate prosecution.

Judges have also denied bail to other activists prosecuted for their political views. Radio DJ Tam Tak-chi has been in custody since mid-September after he became the first person since the 1997 handover from Britain to be charged with "uttering seditious words" under a colonial era law. — AFP



HONG KONG: Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai (center), 73, owner of the Apple Daily newspaper, arrives at Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre after he was remanded into custody in Hong Kong yesterday. — AFP

Lifestyle

Friday Times

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2020

www.kuwaittimes.net



A falcon hunts a houbara bustard bird at the desert oasis of Al-Ain, in the United Arab Emirates. — AFP

**Lebanon basketball players
ditch game for better future**

See Page 20

Lebanon basketball players ditch game for better future

Basketball player Charles Tabet was once a national hero blocking shots for Lebanon, but a crumbling economy has forced him into a new life selling cars in Michigan. After a decade playing in his country of origin, the 33-year-old Lebanese-American last month returned to his native US state to start a new career. "I sold my first vehicle today," the 2.05-metre-tall (6 feet 9 inches) player wrote on social media, posting a snapshot of himself, eyes smiling above a face mask, next to a much shorter woman and her new white SUV. Basketball was once the sporting pride of Lebanon, with the national team qualifying for several world cups and two clubs that were dominant forces in the Middle East and Asia two decades ago.

In its heyday, basketball could draw huge crowds and TV audiences in Lebanon, whose football team never made it past the Asian Cup group stages in two participations, let alone qualify for the World Cup. But with the economy in free fall, the tiny nation is now losing some of its best basketball players, who are emigrating or swapping their jerseys for business shirts. "It wasn't an easy decision to retire," Tabet told AFP. "I've played 10 years in Lebanon. I've made some great friends who I call family." But "playing basketball was how I supported myself and my family. With the economic crisis, it's better for me to start my career in the States". Over the past year, players have seen the Lebanese basketball league suspended, their dollar savings trapped in the bank and buying power plummet amid the country's worst financial crunch in decades. "It's sad and not the way I wanted to retire, but I'm excited for my next chapter in life," Tabet said.



File photo shows Riyadi players celebrate after winning the Finals against Beirut 4-2 to clinch a record-extending 28th league title. —The Daily Star

New day jobs

Basketball fast gained popularity in Lebanon after the end of the civil war in the 1990s, with Lebanese clubs Sagesse and Al-Riyadi racking up big wins on the regional stage. Interest in the sport further flourished as the national team made it to the World Cup in 2002, 2006 and 2010, the second time winning a game against former colonial power France. During this golden era, Lebanese basketball attracted players from as far as the United States. Some of the league's "stars" could earn up to

\$250,000 per season, according to press reports. But over the past year the economy has deteriorated-sparking mass protests from last autumn-and the novel coronavirus pandemic has brought the country to a standstill.

The 2019-2020 Lebanese basketball league season has been suspended since October 2019, and four of the country's international players have quit. Tabet has started selling cars. Fellow Lebanese-American Daniel Faris, 33, has returned to the US state of New Mexico to peddle medical supplies. Lebanese

player of Armenian origin Gerard Hadidian, 25, is off to play for an Armenian team.

And Elie Chamoun, 26, has remained in Lebanon, but has hung up his jersey to become a management consultant. Lebanese coach Ghassan Sarkis said the past year had been bleak. "While many players once returned from the diaspora to play in the Lebanese league, today you can't convince a single player to come," he said. Like several others of his peers, Sarkis has thrown in the towel, and is heading to a new job in the oil-rich Gulf.

'Drive to succeed'

In Lebanon, the pound has lost up to 80 percent of its value against the dollar on the black market. To make matters worse, the capital on August 4 was rocked by one of the largest non-nuclear blasts in history. Lebanon's team captain Elie Rustom, 33, said fellow players have been scrambling to find a plan B. "The game is heading from bad to worse because it's linked to everything that's happening in the country, so we're all looking for a chance to leave the game," he said. "I started to work for a real estate company, on top of my investments in restaurants in Beirut." He said basketball was no longer his priority.

"I only play for the national team to raise my country's profile and remind the public that the game exists." Back in the United States, Tabet was optimistic, however. He said basketball had given him key life skills to succeed, starting at the Michigan car dealership alongside his finance director brother. "I believe athletes will make great business people," he said. "We are competitive, we know what hard work consists of, we are driven to succeed." —AFP



In this file photo taken on June 17, 2014, a player (right) of the Riyadi ("sportive") basketball team goes up for a dunk during his final match against the Hekmeh ("wisdom" in Arabic) as part of the Lebanese Basketball Championship in the capital Beirut. —AFP



In this file photo taken on August 15, 2009, Hu Xuefeng of China (center) looks to score between Ali Mahmoud (second left) and Matt Freije (right) of Lebanon during their semi-final match in the Asian Basketball Championships in Tianjin, northern China. —AFP



A cleaning staff member disinfects chairs at the Hotel Claris that is reinventing itself amid the coronavirus pandemic in Barcelona. —AFP photos



A picture shows the rooftop of the Hotel Claris that is reinventing itself amid the coronavirus pandemic in Barcelona.



A cleaning staff member prepares a room at the Hotel Claris that is reinventing itself amid the coronavirus pandemic in Barcelona.

Without tourists, some Barcelona hotels get creative to survive



"Two people maximum" signs are pasted on the floor next to elevators at the Hotel Claris that is reinventing itself amid the coronavirus pandemic in Barcelona.



A cleaning staff member turns on a disinfection lamp inside a room at the Hotel Claris that is reinventing itself amid the coronavirus pandemic in Barcelona.



A picture shows the rooftop swimming pool at the Hotel Claris that is reinventing itself amid the coronavirus pandemic in Barcelona.

Sergi Pino recently moved to Barcelona, but rather than renting a flat, he's staying at a hotel which has been forced to get creative to compensate for the absence of tourists. Hugely popular with international visitors, the city has seen most of its hotels close as the pandemic has kept tourists away, and the few that remain open have had to repurpose themselves to stay afloat. Some have adapted their premises to suit telecommuters, while others have dropped the price for long-term stays in order to compete with the traditional rental market. Still others are offering a deluxe experience to residents who, unable to travel, get to play the tourist in their own city. At his new "home" in the Gallery Hotel, Pino not only has his room, but enjoys the use of the gym, the pool, the spa and an open space for teleworking all for 900 euros (\$1,080) a month. "There's more space, I'm happy and focused on my work," he says, sitting in front of a screen in the shared working space wearing a grey suit and white trainers. "Nothing bothers me."

More affordable than a flat

A former basketball player who is two me-

ters (six foot, five inches) tall, Pino used to commute from his home 70 kilometers (43 miles) away. But when he looked for a flat, he realized that staying in a hotel would be more affordable. And he's not alone: among other long-term "guests" at the hotel are couples whose homes are being renovated and people who were going to move abroad but found their relocation put on hold because of the pandemic. "We have eight people living with us and we're about to take in another 24 reservations," says Marta Golobardes, director general of the Gallery group, which includes hotels in the southern resort of Malaga and Mallorca in the Balearic Isles.

Shuttered by the pandemic in March, the hotel reopened in October after being refitted for distance working with shared working spaces and rooms converted into offices with a desk instead of a bed for those who cannot concentrate at home. Although they are making just a fraction of what they would have done in a normal year, the income goes some way to compensating for the losses incurred by the pandemic, "providing the staff with jobs,

and meaning less money lost", Golobardes says. Several hotels have taken a similar approach, offering rooms for as little as 600 euros (\$730) a month, which is cheaper than renting a studio in Barcelona. Others are offering a taste of luxury, with one hotel, the Ohla, promising a free overnight stay for those paying to have dinner in its Michelin-starred restaurant.

The Detroit effect?

The pandemic has caused "tragedy" in a city that last year welcomed 9.5 million visitors, says Jordi Mestre, head of the Gremio de Hoteles representing the hotel and tourist accommodation sector in the Barcelona area. More than 75 percent of hotels remain closed and the few that are open barely manage an occupancy rate of 10 percent, leaving many on the verge of bankruptcy and attracting vulture funds. This year, only 1.5 million visitors have stayed in hotels in the city, 12 percent of whose wealth normally relies on tourism.

In the local press, some are already speaking of Barcelona as "the Detroit of tourism",

referring to the fate of what was once among America's wealthiest cities as the capital of its car industry. "I don't think it's the same situation, although it's true that the sector is going through a very, very complicated time," said Remei Gomez, who runs the five-star Claris hotel in central Barcelona. Although in July the Claris achieved occupancy rates as high as 50 percent, fresh pockets of infection swiftly ended that, leaving the hotel more silent and empty than ever. "At this time of day, the restaurant would normally be full of people having breakfast, with customers sunbathing outside on the patio and a lot of people in the reception area. Under normal conditions, the hotel would be full of life, but now, sadly, it is very quiet," she says.

Outside, bellboys are loading a suitcase into the boot of a car belonging to one of its few guests, a German businessman who says he knows the city well. "It's really strange, I went to the Ramblas this morning and it was almost empty," said Matt Wittberg, 48, after handing his key back at reception. "I've never seen it like that, it was a bit scary."—AFP

Sundance festival unveils screenings across US and online due to virus

The Sundance film festival unveiled plans Wednesday to screen premieres at drive-ins and arthouse theaters across the United States and online, as the movie industry continues to adapt to the crippling effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Co-founded by actor-director Robert Redford some four decades ago and known for introducing indie classics from Quentin Tarantino's debut "Reservoir Dogs" to the Oscar-winning "Whiplash," Sundance typically takes place each January and February in the



In this file photo President and Founder of the Sundance Institute, Robert Redford, attends the opening day press conference to kick-off the 2016 Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. — AFP

mountains of western state of Utah. But with theaters closed across much of the nation and a deadly third wave of the disease showing little sign of abating, festivals have become just one key element of the film industry upended by the crisis.

Utah has suffered over 200,000 infections including 900 deaths, with Governor Gary Herbert declaring a state of emergency last month as new daily cases hit record levels. "Even under these impossible circumstances artists are still finding paths to make bold and vital work in whatever ways they can," said festival director Tabitha Jackson. Online screenings and socially-distanced premieres at venues from California to New York "gives us the opportunity to reach new audiences, safely, where they are," she added. A theater in the festival's traditional Park City, Utah home, along with two drive-ins in the Los Angeles area, are scheduled to host physical events featuring artists, while online premieres will be followed by live virtual Q&As.

This year, major summer and fall festivals—with the exception of Venice—scrapped most of their physical events, or in the case of Cannes and Telluride were canceled entirely. Toronto-North America's largest movie gathering—took place largely online. The shortened Sundance festival will run from January 28 through February 3. Its lineup of 70-plus movies is yet to be announced, but may include films eligible for next year's delayed Oscars which are set to take place on April 25. — AFP

The New Normal

By Engineer Yousef AL-Samhan
Interior design consultant and CEO of MY12 Creations Interior Design and contracting Co.

For sure, we are living in a moment of big changes. In addition, what is for sure is that our spaces became the protagonists of the particular moment we are living in. Needless to say, this is going to change the way we live in our homes, the way we work in our offices and the way we manage our companies, as well as the way we design them. So, the question we are trying to reply today is: How will the pandemic affect our spaces and how will be the new normal living style? Due to the coronavirus outbreak, the Milan Design Week 2020 has been postponed to 2021. Most of the trends and designs we saw last year, however, still relevant in 2020 and most probably it will be accelerated until the next year 2021.

In this article, we will list some of the interior design trends that we expect to spread in the future because of the impact of this current crisis, which should help us live our lives in the New Normal Way that will be the natural way of life. Including design trends for homes, which will have a large share of our focus as designers and interior design consultants in the current and future period, and we mention from these directions the following:

1) The strong focus on comfort elements due to what we have experienced together from the experience of staying at home for very long periods.



2) We see that isolating the entrance area of the house has become a necessity to get rid of everything we have upon our return from shopping or work, as it will be the main cleansing area and the first line of defense for your space.

3) Paying attention to the work space in our houses (home office).

4) Privacy and sound insulation, most of us discovered this important point recently and that many of us do not have the minimum audio privacy in his space, especially when talking on the phone or working from home and conducting online interviews.

5) The use of anti-bacterial materials in home furniture.

6) The healthier area, and focus on having green interior spaces.

7) We will not forget about central control and its good distribution over space and smart space as well.

8) Maintain only practical and important pieces and dispose of those occupying spaces unnecessarily.

9) Good natural ventilation and lighting and its natural sources.

Moreover, of no less importance than the home is the workspace as an office, company headquarters, or our own project, and there are several things that will be normal in any workspace that will make you and your employees feel safe within the work area and we will list them to you as follows:

1) The most spacious and one-way corridors to reduce direct friction between employees or clients.

2) Ventilation and air purification will be among the things that cannot be overlooked in workspaces.

3) Use of antibacterial and antimicrobial materials in office and corporate furniture.

4) Focusing on providing all means of technologies that allow remote work and interviews with clients without the need for their personal presence.

5) Natural lighting and sunlight will be an intuitive thing and priority for any designer.

6) The new arrangement and redistribution of workspaces in a manner that gives more privacy to each employee.

7) Avoid using shared workspaces, so the designer's experience comes to how to solve this point, with available space, no matter how limited.

8) Providing medical protection facilities within the reach of all those in the area.

Do not worry and leave it to us, it is our duty to provide you with ideas and designs that make your spaces a truly safe and beautiful place and reflect the personality of each of you.



Billie Eilish has got her first tattoo

The 18-year-old singer revealed she got inked with a mystery design earlier this year but she insisted it's not something anyone else will get to see. Speaking in her annual Vanity Fair video interview, she said: "I did get a tattoo... You won't ever see it." While Billie had a lot of her plans for the year disrupted due to the coronavirus pandemic, she's had a very productive few months as she and her brother Finneas O'Connell have written 16 new songs and she's grown more confident in her abilities. She said: "I have made and created things that I don't think I would have ever created. I feel so much more confident in my writing. I feel like I know myself better... I love it [songwriting] so much more, I actually really do it enjoy now and I do feel I'm pretty good at it now, to be honest with you." And her long break has made Billie more positive about the idea of being able to perform live. She said: "I never thought I wouldn't be able to do shows someday. — Bang Showbiz

Jennifer Lopez delayed wedding twice



Jennifer Lopez and Alex Rodriguez have postponed their wedding twice. The couple had originally planned to tie the knot in Italy over the summer but the big day was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic, and now the 'On the Floor' hitmaker has revealed the global health crisis also forced them to axe another ceremony. She told 'Access': "You know, we've talked about so many different things cause we had to cancel the wedding last year because of COVID, because of the quarantine, and we actually did it twice, which people don't know, where we had it in different times. "First one cancelled and then second one cancelled as well... We kind of have let it go for a second." But Jennifer insisted she and the retired baseball star - who popped the question in March 2019 - are in no rush to get hitched. She said: "I think we just feel like, 'Let's just wait it out'. There's no rush. We're good. Everything's cool. It will happen when the time is right. "I feel like it's not a huge priority to go and have a big wedding right now. — BangShowbiz

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Lord of the rings cast reunites to buy \$6 million home of author J.R.R. Tolkien

The 'Lord of the Rings' cast want to save the house where J.R.R. Tolkien wrote 'The Hobbit'. Sir Ian McKellen, John Rhys-Davies and Martin Freeman - who play Gandalf, Gimli and Bilbo Baggins in the film series - have come together as part of Project Northmoor to save the Oxford house, 20 Northmoor Road, where the famed author penned the novel that inspired the movies. Project Northmoor - backed by the three actors - has begun crowdfunding this week in a bid to raise a whopping \$6 million to create a literary centre in honor of Tolkien at the address. Speaking to People magazine, John Rhys-Davies said: "This is just an opportunity that can't be ignored."

If people are still reading in 1,000 years, Tolkien will be regarded as one of the great myth-makers of Britain and it will be

evident within a matter of years that not to secure this place would have been such an act of arrogance and ignorance and folly on our part." The actors have filmed a promotional video to save the house, with 'Gladiator' star Sir Derek Jacobi and singer Annie Lennox, who penned 'Lord of the Rings' theme 'Into the West', also backing the project. Rhys-Davies added: "If The Lord of the Rings is about anything, it's not so much about Hitler and his rise, it is about the fact that generations may peacefully go by but now and again there emerges a threat that actually will challenge your very civilization and a generation must arise to deal with that threat."

This is a wonderful opportunity to preserve that. If you had been able to get Jane Austin's house just 30 to 40 years after her death, what a snip it would have been. Future generations



will thank us. I can't honestly see any reason why one would not want to support this." For anyone that makes a donation over £20, the project owners have confirmed they will put together a Red Book of Funders that would sit in Tolkien's study on the property. — BangShowbiz

Cyrus had 'too much conflict' with Hemsworth

Miley Cyrus had "too much conflict" in her marriage to Liam Hemsworth. The 'Wrecking Ball' hitmaker - who split from the 'Hunger Games' actor in August 2019, less than a year after they tied the knot - is looking for someone who will "anchor" her and hates being in a relationship where there's too many arguments. She



Miley Cyrus and Liam Hemsworth

said: "There was too much conflict....When I come home, I want to be anchored by someone. "I don't get off on drama or fighting." The 28-year-old star got engaged to Liam in May 2012, but they split in September 2013, before reuniting in 2016. And Miley admitted she didn't know if she and the 30-year-old actor would have gone through with tying the knot if it hadn't been for the devastation of her home in Malibu being destroyed in a fire in 2018. Speaking on 'The Howard Stern Show', she said: "We were together since 16. "Our house burned down. "We had been like, engaged - I don't know if we really ever thought we were actually going to get married, but when we lost our house in Malibu - which if you listen to my voice pre- and post-fire, they're very different so that trauma really affected my voice."

"And I was actually in South Africa, so I couldn't come home, and like, my animals were tied to a post at the beach. I lost everything. I had polaroids of Elvis, like front row, passed on from, I got a couple grandmas to give me their Elvis polaroids. I always became friends with my friends' grandmas so I could get the goods from the artists I love. "I had so much and it was all gone, every song I had ever written was in that house. "Every photograph of me that my parents had given to me, all my scripts, I lost everything. "And so in trying to put that back together, instead of going, 'Oh, nature kind of did something I couldn't do for myself; it forced me to let go,' I ran toward the fire. "Which is not abnormal, a lot of animals do this and end up dying, like deers run into the forest. You're attracted to that heat and me being an intense person and not wanting to sit with it, and not wanting to go, you know, 'What could be purposeful about this?' I just clung to what I had left of that house, which was me and him." But the 'We Can't Stop' singer insisted she will "always" love Liam. She added: "And I really do and did love him very, very, very much and still do, always will." — Bang Showbiz

Justin Bieber wants to have a 'little tribe' of kids

The 26-year-old pop star is already looking forward to starting a family with his wife Hailey Bieber, but he conceded she will ultimately decide their long-term plans. Justin said: "I'm going to have as many as Hailey is willing to push out. I'd love to have myself a little tribe. It's her body and whatever she wants to do." Asked how many kids Hailey would like to have, he said: "I think she wants to have a few." However, Justin revealed that his wife still wants to achieve a few things before she turns her focus towards starting a family. He said on 'The Ellen DeGeneres Show': "There's not really an issue, but I think Hailey still has some things she wants to accomplish as a woman. And I think she just is not ready yet, and I think that's OK."

In 2019, Hailey admitted she didn't want to have kids for at least a couple of years. The 24-year-old model also acknowledged that their romance isn't always a "magical fantasy". She shared: "I'm fighting to do this the right way, to build a healthy relationship." I want people to know that. We're coming from a really genuine place. But we're two young people who are learning as we go. I'm not going to sit

here and lie and say it's all a magical fantasy." Hailey thinks a successful marriage requires hard work and patience. She explained: "It's always going to be hard. It's a choice. You don't feel it every single day. You don't wake up every day saying, 'I'm absolutely so in love and you are perfect.' That's not what being married is. "But there's something beautiful about it anyway - about wanting to fight for something, commit to building with someone." — Bang Showbiz



Queen Elizabeth loves to do the washing up

The 94-year-old royal relishes the chance to put on some Marigold gloves and start scrubbing pots and pans, according to former royal butler Paul Burrell. He explained: "She likes to wash up. She puts on the Marigolds and when she goes out to the log cabin at Balmoral she is stood there with her Marigolds on and washes up and the lady-in-waiting dries. She likes to get her hands wet in the sink." Paul, 62 - who was Princess Diana's butler - also revealed that the monarch only ever eats tiny portions of food. He observed that the Queen has "great self-discipline". Speaking to 'The Secret To' #podcast, he explained: "She only ever eats very little portions. She doesn't eat a Christmas dinner like we do where it is piled high and you can't see each other across the table. "She doesn't eat like that. If you say anything about the Queen, she has something which the rest of them don't have - she has great self-discipline." Meanwhile, Paul has rubbished the suggestion that the Queen and Prince Philip have a stuffy relationship. He also dismissed the idea that they sleep alone, as depicted in the hit Netflix series 'The Crown'. Paul said: "They both have a suite of rooms. But there is a joint bedroom in the middle and that is the bedroom they use. "So to think the Queen is all alone, all the time in this cold, unfeeling relationship is absolutely not true. Prince Philip adores the Queen." What's more, the former butler insisted that the Queen dresses much more "elegantly" than the Netflix show suggests. He told The Sun newspaper: "She's an elegantly dressed woman who wore pink, flowing silk to bed."

A Red-Bellied Woodpecker is perched on a weathered wooden fence post. The bird has a white body with a red cap and a black and white checkered pattern on its back. It is looking upwards and to the left. The background is a dark, out-of-focus forest.

BIRDING

IS SOCIALLY DISTANCED NEW YORK'S HOTTEST HOBBY

A Red-Bellied
Woodpecker stands
on a fence.

On a recent sunny morning in New York a few dozen people gathered in Central Park's wooded Ramble area with a common goal: zero in on an elusive owl. Autumn leaves crunch under their shoes as "Birding Bob"-a guide who has been organizing bird watching tours in the park for more than three decades, with

interest jumping since the coronavirus pandemic hit the city in March-leads them along winding paths. Suddenly the avian enthusiasts raise their binoculars and cameras with powerful telephoto lenses to view Barry, a barred owl peering through the pines, who arrived about a month ago to the delight of New Yorkers.

Each year some 220 bird species frequent Central Park, which remarkably is considered one of the best spots in the world for birding despite the city's 8.6 million residents, with especially good viewing during migration periods. In pandemic times bird-watching has grown in popularity, with theaters and clubs indefinitely

closed due to coronavirus, which has killed more than 24,200 people in the city since spring. "There's fewer things to do in New York City-and the things that you could do inside are either limited or canceled," Birding Bob-the tour guide born Robert DeCandido told AFP.

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Bird watchers use binoculars and cameras to see a Great Horned Owl at The Ramble in Central Park during a tour offer by Robert DeCandido also known as “Birding Bob” in New York . — AFP photos



Robert DeCandido also known as “Birding Bob” leads a group of bird watchers during a tour in Central Park.

“So people are doing things outside. That’s good. And these walks are only \$10 so that’s a really good deal... try to find something for \$10 or less in New York City, you know it’s impossible!” The recent arrival in Central Park of the barred owl that meanders from one side to another-or perhaps there are two of the species, one of the city’s current mysteries-along with a great horned owl have triggered curiosity and filled DeCandido’s tours with New Yorkers who have trouble spotting the birds themselves. The Ramble is the park’s best birding locale; it was also there that Amy Cooper, a white woman walking her dog off-leash, wrongfully called the police on a Black man who was bird-watching and requested she restrain her dog. The incident-which happened the same day in May that George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis-triggered outrage and resulted in charges against Cooper for filing a false police report.

Democratization of birding

Tarini Goyal, who moved to New York a

few months ago, said her new hobby helps her handle the stress of the pandemic and has also helped her socialize as the city experiences a resurgence of the virus. “It’s helped me feel like I’m more connected to the community and to nature,” the 28-year-old doctor said, offering nuts from the palm of her hand to a black-hooded chickadee and tufted titmouses. David Barrett, who founded the Twitter account “Manhattan Bird Alert”-which soared to local celebrity status for its tracking of the exotic mandarin duck, a non-native bird whose presence fascinated New Yorkers two years ago-said his handle has grown “tremendously” since the pandemic’s onset, now boasting some 30,000 followers. “Birding is an activity you can do on your own. You can do it in parks where you can maintain distance from people,” said the 56-year-old mathematician and investor, who says he’s spotted 282 species in his life, the second most in the specialist e-Bird database. “It’s a great thing to do during these times.”



Bird watchers feed Tufted Titmouse birds.



A bird watcher holds a Tufted Titmouse bird.



Robert DeCandido also known as “Birding Bob” is attacked by a Red-Bellied Woodpecker as he leads a group of bird watchers.



A Barred Owl stands on a branch.



A Great Horned Owl stand on a tree.



A Blue jay stands on a branch.



A Blue jay stands on a branch.



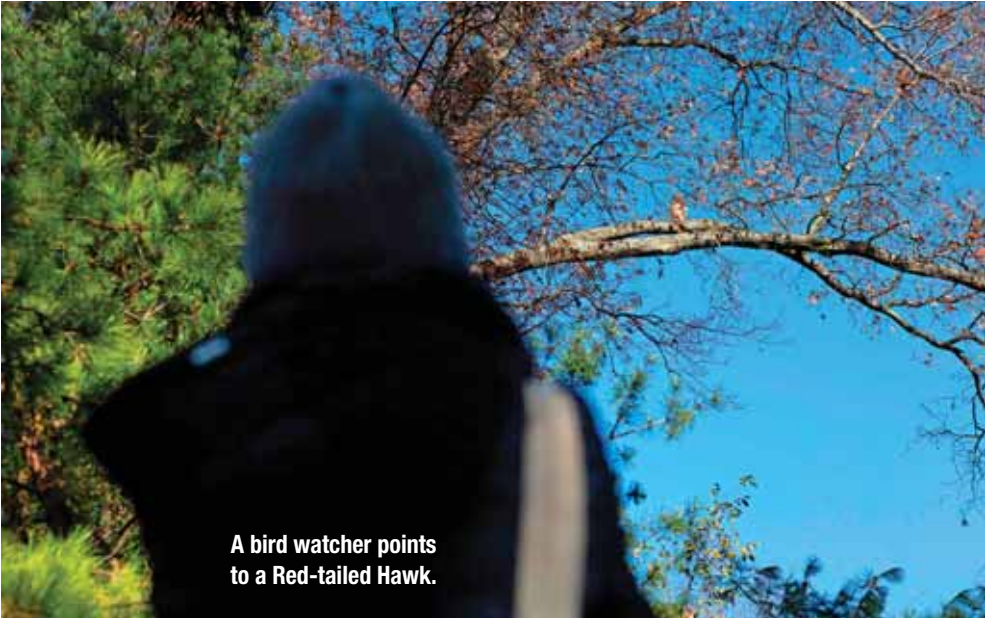
A Tufted Titmouse stands on a branch.

In an isolated section of the park Birding Bob dashes back and forth evading a red-bellied woodpecker he has attracted with a recorded song, as onlookers scramble to snap photos. “This guy has testosterone issues,” the guide laughs, referring to this particular bird’s aggression. Some critics argue that Birding Bob shouldn’t use pre-recorded sounds to attract the birds, or that popularizing the hobby was to the detriment of the once unfrequented Ramble. But others, like Barrett, say DeCandido is respectful of the environment, and that democratizing the pastime is positive: “The more people we have, the more chances that rarities get found.”

Tranquility

Barrett took his hobby to the extreme in 2012, competing with prominent ornithologist

Andrew Farnsworth to see who could spot the most species in Manhattan. Barrett won, and recounted the experience in his book “A Big Manhattan Year: Tales of Competitive Birding.” For DeCandido, Barrett and others like Deborah Allen—a 60-year-old photographer who has worked with “Birding Bob”—the leisure activity has effectively turned into a full-time job. “When I first moved to New York, I was a little bit intimidated by the urbanness of it,” Allen said. “Everything’s happening and everybody’s busy and hurrying... there’s glass and steel. “But then, you know, I would go to Central Park on my lunch hour,” she said. “And then I noticed birds.” “So that was it for me. I was all over it.” — AFP



A bird watcher points to a Red-tailed Hawk.



A Red-Bellied Woodpecker stands on a branch.



In these file photos a section of the original Eiffel Tower's stairs, displayed in front of the Artcurial auction house in Paris. — AFP photos

Eiffel Tower steps fetch 274,000 euros at auction

A 14-step chunk of the Eiffel Tower's spiral staircase was sold for 274,475 euros (\$328,427) in Paris on Tuesday, nearly 10 times the guide price, auction house Artcurial said. The nearly-three-metre-high artefact was part of the original 1889 staircase that connected the second and third floors of the monument for nearly a century before a lift was installed in 1983. The staircase was taken down and cut up into 24 chunks. Twenty pieces were sold to private

collections, three were given to French museums and the last was put on display on the first floor of the Paris landmark dubbed the Iron Lady. Today, parts of the staircase can be found next to the Statue of Liberty in New York and at the Yoshii Foundation in Japan.

The chunk sold on Tuesday by a Canadian art collector had been expected to fetch between 30,000 and 40,000 euros but a European collection forked out 274,475 euros (\$328,427) for a slice of the original tower.

The price was not a record for a piece of the staircase, with a sale at Artcurial in 2016 triggering a bidding frenzy that ended at 523,800 euros. The 324-metre Eiffel Tower was built by engineer Gustave Eiffel for the 1889 World Fair in Paris. Little loved by Parisians at the time, it has since become a much-loved emblem of the French capital. — AFP

UN TOURISM BODY URGES UNIFORMITY IN VIRUS TRAVEL RULES

The World Tourism Organization called for the standardization of traveller health checks and the establishment of air corridors to ease international travel during the pandemic. The call came at a conference in Spain's Canary Islands as the global tourism industry reels from a year in which travel restrictions to slow the coronavirus pandemic have decimated the sector. "We call for the adoption of international protocols for Covid-19 tests before departure and the acceptance of the results upon arrival," the UN body said in joint statement with the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) and the Spanish tourism ministry.

The statement came at the end of a one-day conference grouping representatives of more than 95 countries and more than 100 companies that was held in Las Palmas on Gran Canaria. It also called for agreements to develop "international travel corridors to facilitate tourism and business travel between countries and cities with similar epidemiological situations". The text also warned that until a vaccine or treatment for Covid-19 was widely available, "tens of millions of jobs (in tourism) would likely be lost". And it called for "an international standard for contact tracing". — AFP

The bookseller of Kinshasa: A lone fight to help DR Congo's bookworms

In the aircraft hold, Alpha Ramazani has stowed a precious cargo. In Europe, its contents may seem banal. But in the chaotic, rundown capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, they are revered as nectar for the brain. The 33-year-old bookseller is bringing with him the latest big-name novels from Europe, along with political treatises, Michelle Obama's memoirs, a new biography of Joe Biden and a selection of other hot-off-the-presses books sought by a tiny but devoted following in Kinshasa. When Ramazani goes on a trip to Brussels-usually using up his holiday time-he brings back dozens of kilos (pounds) of extra luggage, all of it crammed with books.

Six thousand kilometers (3,700 miles) later, his suitcases are shepherded through customs, carefully unpacked and the titles put on sale at Book Express, Ramazani's tiny 30-square-metre (322-square-foot) shop, located on a street with bustling bars and pavement terraces. Despite the extra cost and hassle, his books are sold at roughly the same price as in Europe, although in the DRC this figure can be many times higher than the average daily income. The customers "are primarily intellectuals-politicians,

university professors, who come only to buy political books, then there are mothers who come in to buy books for their children," said Ramazani, a father of two.

It may seem odd that an ad-hoc system to provide newly-published books can exist today, at a time of globalized trade and ultra-fast deliveries. This seems especially so, given that the DRC is a former Belgian colony of some 80 million people where French is a national tongue. But the country's poverty also makes it of marginal interest for publishing giants used to operating in the smoother and wealthier francophone world. A book that typically sells in Kinshasa for the rough equivalent of \$20 (17 euros) amounts to nearly half of the DRC's average per capita wage, which is \$43 per month.

Labour of love

But the gap in the market has become Ramazani's to fill. The books he brings back help to pad out his main income, which comes from selling schoolbooks to students at the Belgian School of Kinshasa. He opened Book Express in Kinshasa, his home town, in 2019 after working at a bookshop in Brussels. He reassured his partner, a



Alpha Ramazani holds a book in the bookstore he runs called Book Express, in Kinshasa. — AFP

Belgian, that it was just a "whim". Hauling the books back is a labor of love. "It's an eight-hour flight, and then you have customs when you arrive-that's a bit complicated," said Ramazani. He said he sometimes offered a cartoon book or a children's book to zealous customs officials to help smooth things over, but never money. New books are sold in several other outlets in Kinshasa, including France's cultural shop window, the Institut Francais, as well as by publishing outlets such as Mediaspaul and Cepas that are Catholic-owned.

Fiction is country cousin

Books that are published in the DRC are sold at the Grands Lacs bookshop, on a main avenue-the biggest book store in the country in terms of shelf space. There is also a thriving market in second- or third-hand books, enlivened by street hawkers pitching ancient works on law, the economy, management and history. But there is little interest in fiction, in a country where for the many poor, every day is a struggle.

"There's no demand for general literature," said Ramazani rather sadly, eyeing unsold titles by novelists Amelie Nothomb, Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt and Alain Mabanckou, which he will probably have to take back on his next flight to Belgium and resell to the publisher. Kinshasa's small community of bookworms hold regular gatherings in a literary cafe run by a woman called Missy Bangala, who last week joined with others to launch an association gathering DRC writers. "This country needs its literature," she said. "There's a thirst for reading," said Ramazani, who spoke of plans for a book festival. — AFP

Word Search

There are more kangaroos than humans in Australia.



Australian Animals

DIRECTIONS: Find and circle the animal names in the grid. Look for them in all directions including backwards and diagonally.

I	Y	W	L	L	C	B	Q	X	K	S	N	Q	A	Z	S	W	J	K
Z	K	A	I	X	R	I	Y	B	B	A	Y	K	P	V	W	Z	X	X
M	F	L	V	W	O	L	I	T	T	L	E	P	E	N	G	U	I	N
P	R	L	E	B	C	B	H	I	E	Y	C	L	L	O	U	Q	U	
G	I	A	D	O	O	Y	U	J	K	M	H	W	N	T	O	L	A	R
I	L	R	Y	G	D	P	B	W	D	I	I	T	A	I	I	L	N	
A	L	O	N	R	I	V	S	U	Z	A	D	N	Z	B	G	V	A	X
N	E	O	R	N	L	R	G	T	P	Z	N	I	D	M	D	E	O	R
T	D	T	O	O	E	O	B	L	O	Z	A	I	G	U	E	D	K	O
C	N	T	H	L	N	W	A	L	L	A	B	Y	Q	N	F	N	O	O
L	E	C	T	G	D	T	G	C	Z	A	U	J	C	P	O	A	O	T
A	C	E	U	L	Y	P	Q	A	J	X	W	I	E	P	Q	I	R	A
M	K	X	A	P	C	F	U	S	J	S	Q	S	W	E	P	N	A	K
R	L	U	U	K	G	B	M	S	W	M	U	S	S	O	P	A	G	C
C	I	S	C	U	X	U	T	O	S	X	O	Q	R	G	Z	M	N	O
E	Z	D	R	A	D	A	M	W	K	P	K	E	O	N	Z	S	A	C
M	A	O	O	B	D	B	X	A	C	F	K	M	H	I	T	A	K	R
U	R	G	V	F	A	F	C	R	Q	O	A	J	E	D	D	T	G	J
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- BILBY
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- DINGO
- DUGONG
- ECHIDNA
- EMU
- FRILLED NECK LIZARD
- GIANT CLAM
- KANGAROO
- KOALA
- LITTLE PENGUIN
- NUMBAT
- PLATYPUS
- POSSUM
- QUOKKA
- QUOLL
- TASMANIAN DEVIL
- THORNY DEVIL
- WALLABY
- WALLAROO
- WOMBAT
- YABBY

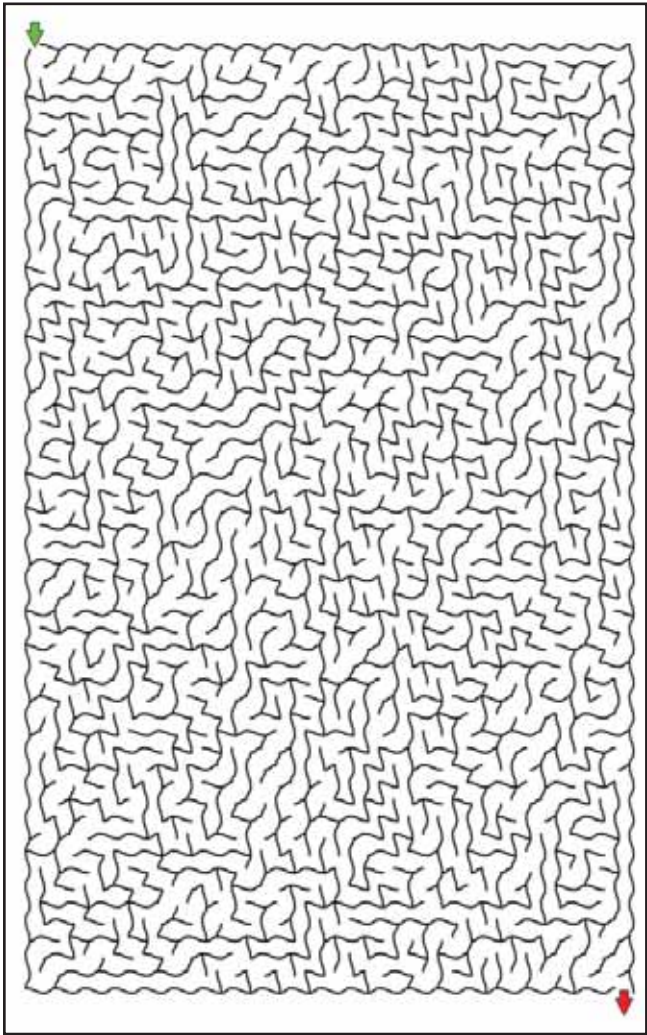
Numbats eat up to 20,000 termites each day.



Color It



Kids Mazes



Join the dots



Word Scramble

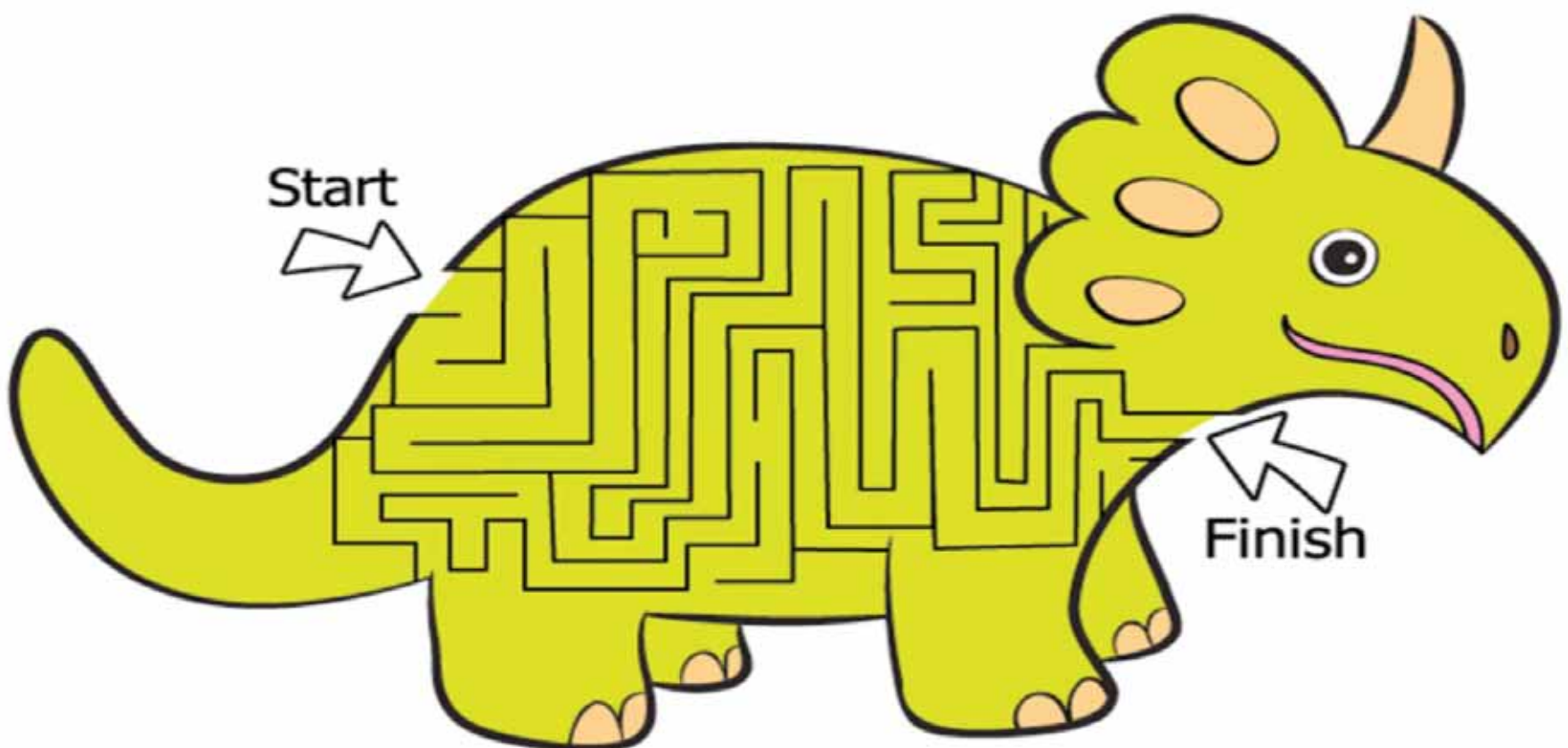


Happy Birthday
Scramble

How many of these terms all relating to a birthday celebration can you unscramble?

OOLBLNA	_____	CELAND	_____
NSIOE	_____	ONBRIB	_____
ORNTGFIS	_____	GEA	_____
CKEA	_____	ITNETFOC	_____
SURREPIS	_____	WOB	_____
REIDSFN	_____	EAPPR	_____
SGMEA	_____	CNOWL	_____
GTIF	_____	HSIW	_____
GGINSIN	_____	THA	_____
WGNRAPIP	_____	ORVFA	_____
CMCERIAE	_____	SRNEPET	_____
REYA	_____	SMTREARE	_____
VRPS	_____	DFOO	_____
ITNTAIVINO	_____	REDAOECT	_____
YNACD	_____	TSUGE	_____

Find the way



CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199

Friday, December 4, 2020

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Canadian Board of Otolaryngology
Head & Neck Surgery and Facial Plastics.
Fellow of Royal College of Surgeons-Canada
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Consultant Cosmetic Dermatologist & Hair Transplant, NY

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Department: Heart & Vascular Center

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- 2- Diagnosis and treatment of coronary artery diseases
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Dr. Hamoud Abdullah Alarouj
ENT Consultant, Laryngologist

- ◆ Kuwait Board of Otolaryngology.
- ◆ Laryngology Fellowship, McGill University- Canada.
- ◆ Fellow of the European Board of Otolaryngology – Head & Neck surgery.
- ◆ Member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery.
- ◆ Member of the British Laryngological Association.
- ◆ Member of the European Laryngological Society.
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Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad
Surgery Department
Consultant General Surgery, Laparoscopic & Colo – Rectal Surgeon

Scope of Clinical Practice:

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- ◆ Single Port Surgery
- ◆ Treatment of Colo-Rectal Diseases, including Colonctal Cancer
- ◆ Surgical Treatment of Inflammatory Bowel Abscess
- ◆ Treatment of Perianal Fistula & Complex Perianal Fistula (complications)
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- ◆ Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
- ◆ Colonoscopy & Gastroscopy
- ◆ Stomach Balloon Insertion & removal
- ◆ Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
- ◆ Gallstones & Abdominal Hernias Surgery

Academic Certificates, Trainings & Fellowships:

- ◆ American Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of American College of Surgery
- ◆ Canadian Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
- ◆ American Board of Colo – Rectal Surgery
- ◆ American Board of Surgical Critical Care

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

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Friday, December 4, 2020

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

Academic Certificates - Training

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

Scope of clinical Practice.


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

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Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building


Stars

STAR TRACK




Aries (March 21-April 19)

Maintain a positive attitude, Aries, and things will naturally flow your way. Tell a few jokes and keep things light and energetic. You will find that you can multitask very well, and you have the ability to make everyone smile. Don't shy away from things - move toward them. Put away your self-doubt and be more proactive in your approach to everything you encounter.




Libra (September 23-October 22)

You might need to spend time alone in order to reset your programming, Libra. Other people's influence may be seeping into your psyche. There's no reason to always do or say what other people dictate. Your sensitivity helps you understand things about others, but it can also bring you down if you start to take on their burdens. Try to counterbalance this tendency with more of your own energy.




Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You may be reluctant to commit to anything major today, Taurus. Your natural tendency is to look askance at those who promise grand and wonderful things. You're smart to question such talk. Don't be surprised if someone's new idea garners all the acclaim. Don't buy into it without first hearing the facts. It isn't a good day for you to gamble, either.




Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You will find that discipline, organization, and a bit of a dramatic flair are exactly the things needed to be successful today, Scorpio. Just because you have to be practical doesn't mean that you have to be stern and grumpy. Remember that taking care of serious matters can actually be fun as long as you maintain a positive attitude about the situation. A smile goes a long way.




Gemini (May 21-June 20)

This may be one of those days when you feel completely alone even if there are hundreds of people around, Gemini. No one seems to understand your perspective. Your incredible sensitivity and emotionalism are putting you in a category all your own. Try not to ostracize yourself from the group. Reach out instead of pulling away. You have more in common with other people than you think.




Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You might find it difficult to deal with people on an emotional level today, Sagittarius. Others could seem too demanding of your attention and want to keep the focus on themselves. At the same time, you will probably need a bit more attention than usual. Try not to be so stubborn! Give people the love they need, and you will find that the love you require will come to you as well.




Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Balance your boisterous, adventurous nature with a bit of discipline today, Cancer. It's important to laugh, but it's also important to stay on task with your duties. The good news is that both of these things can work in tandem. They aren't mutually exclusive. In fact, one will help you achieve the other. Be serious but have a good time and keep things in perspective.




Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You might find your emotions a bit dampened today, Capricorn, but this may not be a bad thing. Try not to blow things out of proportion so much. Don't feel that you need to turn every small story into a major headline. There's no need to exaggerate the truth just to get more attention. Take a more reserved approach to your actions and reactions to all situations.




Leo (July 23-August 22)

There may be a thousand things for you to do today, Leo, but you can only get them done if you concentrate on one at a time. Take a lighthearted approach. You will never finish by focusing on the sheer amount of work you have to do. Break it up into smaller pieces and delegate tasks if you can. Try to see the fun side of things. Schedule in breaks and snacks.




Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Make sure you get your daily dose of laughter and try to come out of your shell a bit more, Aquarius. This is an important time for you to let go of your inhibitions and open up to the world. You may find that there's a sober tone to your emotions, but you can overcome this easily as long as you keep your chin up. There's no reason for you to be gloomy.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

No matter what you're doing today, have fun, Virgo. Whistle a tune. Turn the stereo up to full volume and dance around the kitchen as you make dinner. You can find amusement in just about anything, so keep this in mind as you tackle even the menial tasks. You're responsible for your own attitude, so don't blame anyone else for a sour mood. Turn yourself around and have fun.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

This is an important day for you to give thanks for all that you have, Pisces. Give your loved ones extra hugs and let them know how much they mean to you. If things start to get a bit too serious and somber, you're the one who can pull others out of the rut. There is no need to be sad when you have so much to be happy about.

Country Codes

Afghanistan	0093	Iran	0098
Albania	00355	Iraq	00964
Algeria	00213	Ireland	00353
Andorra	00376	Italy	0039
Angola	00244	Ivory Coast	00225
Anguilla	001264	Jamaica	001876
Antiga	001268	Japan	0081
Argentina	0054	Jordan	00962
Armenia	00374	Kazakhstan	007
Australia	0061	Kenya	00254
Austria	0043	Kiribati	00686
Bahamas	001242	Kuwait	00965
Bahrain	00973	Kyrgyzstan	00996
Bangladesh	00880	Laos	00856
Barbados	001246	Latvia	00371
Belarus	00375	Lebanon	00961
Belgium	0032	Liberia	00231
Belize	00501	Libya	00218
Benin	00229	Lithuania	00370
Bermuda	001441	Luxembourg	00352
Bhutan	00975	Macau	00853
Bolivia	00591	Macedonia	00389
Bosnia	00387	Madagascar	00261
Botswana	00267	Majorca	0034
Brazil	0055	Malawi	00265
Brunei	00673	Malaysia	0060
Bulgaria	00359	Maldives	00960
Burkina	00226	Mali	00223
Burundi	00257	Malta	00356
Cambodia	00855	Marshall Islands	00692
Cameroon	00237	Martinique	00596
Canada	001	Mauritania	00222
Cape Verde	00238	Mauritius	00230
Cayman Islands	001345	Mayotte	00269
Central African Republic	00236	Mexico	0052
Chad	00235	Micronesia	00691
Chile	0056	Moldova	00373
China	0086	Monaco	00377
Colombia	0057	Mongolia	00976
Comoros	00269	Montserrat	001664
Congo	00242	Morocco	00212
Cook Islands	00682	Mozambique	00258
Costa Rica	00506	Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Croatia	00385	Namibia	00264
Cuba	0053	Nepal	00977
Cyprus	00357	Netherlands (Holland)	0031
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392	Netherlands Antilles	00599
Czech Republic	00420	New Caledonia	00687
Denmark	0045	New Zealand	0064
Diego Garcia	00246	Nicaragua	00505
Djibouti	00253	Nigar	00227
Dominica	001767	Nigeria	00234
Dominican Republic	001809	Niue	00683
Ecuador	00593	Norfolk Island	00672
Egypt	0020	Northern Ireland (UK)	0044
El Salvador	00503	North Korea	00850
England (UK)	0044	Norway	0047
Equatorial Guinea	00240	Oman	00968
Eritrea	00291	Pakistan	0092
Estonia	00372	Palau	00680
Ethiopia	00251	Panama	00507
Falkland Islands	00500	Papua New Guinea	00675
Faroe Islands	00298	Paraguay	00595
Fiji	00679	Peru	0051
Finland	00358	Philippines	0063
France	0033	Poland	0048
French Guiana	00594	Portugal	00351
French Polynesia	00689	Puerto Rico	001787
Gabon	00241	Qatar	00974
Gambia	00220	Romania	0040
Georgia	00995	Russian Federation	007
Germany	0049	Rwanda	00250
Ghana	00233	Saint Helena	00290
Gibraltar	00350	Saint Kitts	001869
Greece	0030	Saint Lucia	001758
Greenland	00299	Saint Pierre	00508
Grenada	001473	Saint Vincent	001784
Guadeloupe	00590	Samoa US	00684
Guam	001671	Samoa West	00685
Guatemala	00502	San Marino	00378
Guinea	00224	Sao Tome	00239
Guyana	00592	Saudi Arabia	00966
Haiti	00509	Scotland (UK)	0044
Holland (Netherlands)	0031	Senegal	00221
Honduras	00504	Seychelles	00284
Hong Kong	00852	Sierra Leone	00232
Hungary	0036	Singapore	0065
Ibiza (Spain)	0034	Slovakia	00421
Iceland	00354	Slovenia	00386
India	0091	Solomon Islands	00677
Indian Ocean	00873	Somalia	00252
Indonesia	0062	South Africa	0027

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2020

Business

34 Safe trip? Aboard the revamped Boeing 737 MAX's 1st public flight**35** Romania's mining heartland faces up to post-coal future**36** Biden set to revamp US trade tactics, but not to alter policy

OPEC, allies meet to thrash out deal

An agreement looks hard amid doubts over 'V-shaped' recovery

LONDON: The members of the OPEC group of oil producers were meeting with their allies yesterday to see if they could reach an accord on extending production cuts over the coming months. The video-conference meeting was pushed back from Tuesday and comes after three days of inconclusive discussions among the 13 members of OPEC proper.

Observers say the postponement points to an agreement being harder to reach than initially thought. The first wave of the coronavirus pandemic sent oil demand and prices plummeting in the spring, with the benchmark American contract even going into negative territory for the first time in history. After tough negotiations in April, OPEC+ — which includes Russia — agreed on drastic production cuts in order to try to put a floor under oil prices. Despite hitting producers' revenues hard, those cuts did help drag prices back up again.

However, the second wave of the pandemic has dashed hopes of a rapid "V-shaped" recovery for the economy and for oil demand. Most producers, including OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia, therefore favor an extension of the current agreement, which entails a cut of 7.7 million barrels per day (bpd) and was scheduled to be eased to 5.8 million bpd on January 1.

"OPEC and allies are said to be leaning towards a rollover of current cuts with a gradual increase in output," according to analyst Neil Wilson from Markets.com.

"Whether the easing would begin in January or after the three-month delay discussed before the meeting is unclear," wrote Stephen Innes of Axi. After rising on Wednesday on hopes of a deal and after the UK's approval of a coronavirus vaccine, prices for both the US crude oil benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) and Europe's Brent North Sea were down slightly on Thursday at \$45.13 and \$48.15 respectively.



VIENNA: In this file photo taken on March 06, 2020 a car drives in front of the OPEC office building during the 178th meeting of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in Vienna.— AFP

Thorny subjects

Markets were expecting producers to be able to agree on an extension of three to six months, with many viewing Monday's meeting as a formality to sign it off. But a recent surge in crude prices — up by 25 percent over the course of November — together with positive news from several companies on coronavirus vaccines means some countries may need more convincing of the need for further sacrifices.

Meanwhile, the perennially thorny subject of whether all members are respecting pro-

duction quotas laid down in previous agreements seems to once again be on the table. Some insist that those who are currently overproducing be made to comply before further restrictions are imposed.

"It is unlikely that the strict implementation of the agreed cuts... will be achieved, which will undermine their effectiveness and confidence in the group," according to Eugen Weinberg of Commerzbank. The cartel will also have to pay attention to developments in the three members which have been granted exemptions from quotas —

Libya, Iran and Venezuela. Libya's production had been almost wiped out by civil conflict but has spiked since October and now stands at over one million bpd, according to the country's National Oil Corporation (NOC).

In the longer term, Iran's offer on the oil market may also increase if the incoming US administration pursues a policy of detente with Tehran and relaxes sanctions. That would lead hundreds of thousands of barrels coming on to the market, exerting a fresh downward pressure on prices. —AFP

Business

Safe trip? Aboard the revamped Boeing 737 MAX's 1st public flight

87 passengers take first public flight after a 20-month grounding of 737 Max

TULSA, US: Will this plane land safely?

That question was very much on the minds of the 87 passengers on the revamped Boeing 737 MAX's first public flight Wednesday following a 20-month grounding after two fatal crashes. US authorities last month gave the green light for the plane to return to service after upgrades in the wake of the two calamities that killed 346 people.

Wednesday's promotional American Airlines voyage between Dallas, Texas and Tulsa, Oklahoma was intended to reassure the public before American resumes commercial service on the jet on December 29. The trip began with American flight attendants reviewing security procedures before distributing bottled water.

As he welcomed passengers, pilot Pete Gamble testified to the plane's safety and reliability.

"The systems changes, the scrutiny the airplanes are going through, plus the training that we've enforced, has really brought back the confidence level," Gamble said.

"It needed to go through the scrutiny. It did." Before flying the MAX, each American pilot is required to undertake a two-hour training course on a computer tablet, followed by an hour of flight simulator training, followed then by two hours with a colleague when pilots react to different flying scenarios.

Aside from some turbulence along the way, Wednesday's 50-minute flight to Tulsa pro-

ceeded uneventfully. Throughout, passengers donning face masks because of the coronavirus and separated by a seat due to social distancing betrayed no obvious anxiety.

The everyday passenger not steeped in aviation will see no obvious markers of the MAX. The seats give only the numbers 737, though the wheel labels the jet as a "73-8x."

American has said that all customers who buy tickets on the plane will be notified of flights employing the MAX. The carrier will provide alternative trips to passengers who don't want to fly on the plane. "Safety is our number one priority," said American Chief Operating Officer David Seymour. "There are no exceptions."

Strict regimen

In Tulsa, Roger Steele, a 34-year veteran at American Airlines, is overseeing the process of readying the jets so they can return to the skies. Steele said he has always loved the Boeing 737 MAX and was present when the giant US carrier received its first MAX jets.

All the jets must go through four days of intense work before being cleared for service. Teams work 24 hours a day at a warehouse on two planes at a time to check the pressure on the tires, the hydraulic systems, the motors and other plane parts. Staff also update plane software systems in the cockpit and modify plane cables.

All of these steps are mandated by the US



TULSA: The cockpit of an American Airlines Boeing 737 MAX at American Airlines' main maintenance base in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on Wednesday. — AFP

Federal Aviation Administration, which last month authorized the plane to return to service under strict protocols. "We started the very same day," Steele said. Around 20 MAX planes have already been cleared for the tarmac.

Maintenance crews were on hand "to make sure that this aircraft is ready for your family, for my family, all of our loved ones, to get on board," said Erik Olund, who manages base maintenance. — AFP

European stocks slip on poor data

LONDON: Europe's equity markets slipped yesterday on survey data indicating the region's economy continued to be battered by coronavirus fallout, despite recent vaccine-driven optimism, dealers said.

Investors weighed Covid-19 vaccine hopes against rising infections and uncertainty surrounding a post-Brexit trade deal, OPEC oil output and a US stimulus package. In late morning deals, London's benchmark FTSE 100 index edged down 0.1 percent, having rallied the previous day after a sliding pound pushed up shares in multinationals.

Confirmation that Britain will next week start rolling out the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine against Covid-19 has meanwhile led to traders booking profits following big share-price gains in recent weeks on expectations of mass inoculations before 2021. In eurozone trades Thursday, Frankfurt's DAX 30 index dipped 0.6 percent and the Paris CAC 40 shed 0.5 percent.

Oil prices slid before a crucial OPEC production gathering that starts at 1300 GMT, while the British pound clawed back some of the previous day's losses amid troubled post-Brexit deal talks between the UK and the European Union.

Virus impact

"A more cautious mood has descended on stock markets

in Europe... after final PMI readings provided a less than stellar outlook for the region," noted analyst Chris Beauchamp at trading firm IG. "The rash of figures confirmed the pessimistic near-term view of the eurozone economy and for the UK as well.

"Losses on stock markets are still relatively modest (because) everyone can see it will have been tough month thanks to (virus) lockdown measures bearing down on economic performance," Beauchamp added. Data provider IHS Markit said its closely-watched composite eurozone purchasing managers' index (PMI) index fell to 45.3 points in November from 50 points in October, according to final estimates. Britain's services PMI dropped to 47.6 from 51.4. Any reading above 50 points indicates that activity is expanding — but a level below 50 points indicates contraction.

Asia upbeat

In contrast to Europe, Asian stock markets mostly rose Thursday as investors tracked renewed US stimulus talks in Washington, while the mood remains upbeat owing to vaccine developments. Traders are now focusing on regulators in the US and Europe, and the global vaccine rollout that will allow life to get back to normal and the world economy back on track. Wall Street enjoyed another broadly positive day, with the S&P 500 chalking up another record close, while the Dow also advanced, though the Nasdaq inched down from Tuesday's all-time high. Speaker Nancy Pelosi threw her support behind a \$908-billion compromise virus relief package proposed by a bipartisan group of lawmakers on Tuesday. The proposal is however half what Democrats had previously been pushing for. — AFP

Asia tech conference ditches Hong Kong for Malaysia

HONG KONG: A major Asia-focused tech conference announced yesterday it is ditching Hong Kong in favor of Malaysia in a fresh blow to the Chinese financial hub's push to attract tech talent.

The annual RISE Conference brings together CEOs, startups and investors and has been held in Hong Kong over the last five years. But organizers said they would move their annual conference to Kuala Lumpur in 2022. "Hosting RISE in Kuala Lumpur is going to expand the event into an exciting region of Southeast Asia," Casey Lau, co-host of RISE said in a statement.

The decision comes as major tech firms fret over the accelerating crackdown by Beijing on dissent in Hong Kong after last year's huge and sometimes violent democracy protests.

In June, Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law that grants authorities significant powers to access company servers and networks. The crackdown prompted the United States to declare Hong Kong no longer sufficiently autonomous from authoritarian China, which blocks access to many of the world's top tech companies. After the law was enacted, major tech companies like Facebook, Google and Twitter said they were suspending requests from the Hong Kong government and law enforcement authorities for information on users. — AFP

Business

Romania's mining heartland faces up to post-coal future

Jiu Valley region to bring an end to 160 years of coal-mining history

PETROSANI, Romania: In the large, dark locker room of southern Romania's Lonea coal mine, 20-year-old Liviu dons his uniform and helmet before embarking on a six-hour shift in a vanishing industry.

"I found this job interesting because you retire faster, when you reach 45 years old," Liviu says before descending 400 meters underground in an elevator dubbed "the birdcage" by his fellow miners. But whether he gets to retire as a miner may be out of Liviu's control as Romania tries to bring an end to 160 years of coal-mining history in the Jiu Valley region.

Out of 15 mines active there before the fall of communism in 1989, only four are still operating today and two are already scheduled to close. While the rest of Romania gears up for parliamentary elections on Sunday, the prevailing mood in the Jiu Valley is one of apathy and mistrust.

"What hope can I have? Who has ever tried to do something for this valley", says 38-year-old miner Lucian Iganescu, from nearby Vulcan.

'Hard and dangerous'

The sector historically enjoyed support from the communist regime and thereafter from left-wing president Ion Iliescu, who in the 1990s deployed miners against street protesters on several occasions. But since joining the EU in 2007, Bucharest has wound down subsidies for the loss-making coal sector and production has plummeted from 22 mil-

lion tons in 1992 to just 600,000 tons last year.

The Jiu Valley now counts just 4,500 miners down from some 54,000 in 1990. Alin Udvar, manager of the Lonea mine, expects the last ton of coal to be extracted as soon as 2024.

While he hopes that some of his 543 employees will then be transferred to neighboring sites, they are scheduled to close in 2030. Udvar echoes Liviu in giving one of the main attractions of the profession: "You become a miner to retire early."

In Romania, one of the EU's poorest countries, a miner with 20 years experience receives a pension of 4,000 lei (830 euros or \$1,000), almost 10 per cent more than a miner's average salary.

But there is a high price to pay. According to Udvar, the average life expectancy for the men of the Jiu Valley is around 55 years. "I wouldn't hire my 18-year-old boy in the mine for all the money in the world. This job is hard, dangerous and eats away at your health," 44-year-old miner Ferenc Balog told AFP at the end of his shift, his face covered in coal dust.

"There are no options here for young people other than emigration." According to a study carried out by PwC auditors, the region's population has fallen from around 170,000 inhabitants in 1997 to 133,000 last year.

Breathless due to silicosis, a lung disease that decimates miners, 63-year-old Petre Brait says he covered up his bad health when he was younger to



Miners pose for a photo in the locker room prior to entering the shift at Lonea coal mine in Petritu, Romania, one of the coal mining cities located in the mountain area of Valea Jiului (The Jiu's Valley). —AFP

keep going down the mine.

"I had no choice, my children were still small," he says. But now he knows that there is no future for mining. "Romania must reduce emissions, it cannot continue to move against the grain," he says.

'A healthy future'

Danut Buhaescu, mayor of another town in the

valley, Uricani, criticizes successive governments for "lying" about the future of mining, without preparing the area for the industry's disappearance. The country's hopes of coping with the upheaval are pinned in large part on the EU's Just Transition Fund, designed to help coal-dependent regions as the bloc tries to become carbon neutral by 2050. —AFP

Fed sees more signs activity slowing as optimism wanes

WASHINGTON: More US regions saw economic activity stall or slow in November as Covid-19 cases surged, and businesses were less upbeat about their prospects, the Federal Reserve said Wednesday.

The US is enduring the world's largest coronavirus outbreak, and cases have spiked above the worst days of the spring, forcing authorities in many regions to reimpose restrictions on businesses.

The Fed's "beige book" survey of economic conditions said four of 12 regions saw little or no growth, while four others saw activity begin to dip last month. Even in some of the regions reporting growth, activity remained below pre-pandemic levels, the central bank said in the report produced about every six weeks. While firms in most districts still have positive outlooks, "optimism has waned" amid "concerns over the recent pandemic wave, mandated restrictions (recent and prospective), and the looming expiration

dates for unemployment benefits and for moratoriums on evictions and foreclosures," the report said.

The Fed said that while nearly all districts saw employment continue to rise, "for most, the pace was slow, at best, and the recovery remained incomplete." With most schools still limiting in-person classes, the report notes that, "providing for childcare and virtual schooling needs was widely cited as a significant and growing issue for the workforce, especially for women."

The beige book report is prepared in advance of the Fed's monetary policy meetings, and the next one is scheduled for December 15-16. The central bank slashed the benchmark lending rate back to zero early in the pandemic and has pumped trillions of dollars into the economy to help stabilize financial markets and sustain the flow of credit to businesses and households. —AFP

US labor board challenges Google moves

SAN FRANCISCO: Google has been given two weeks to respond to a US labor board complaint accusing the internet giant of using surveillance, interrogation and other tactics to spy on activist employees. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) complaint filed late Wednesday stemmed from the dismissal a year ago of a quartet of employees dubbed the "Thanksgiving Four."

The workers sought a federal investigation into their dismissal, alleging they were sacked in retaliation for their labor organizing efforts, while Google maintained that the employees had violated data security policies. A copy of the NLRB complaint seen by AFP contended that Google "surveilled" employees by peeking at slides being preparing in support of unionizing workers.

Google also "interrogated employees about protected activities" and threatened reprisals for venturing outside official company channels for handling complaints on such matters as workplace conduct, according to the complaint.

In addition, Google selectively applied rules to workers who participated in activist activities, it con-

tended. "It's vindicating," Laurence Berland, one of the employees in the complaint, told AFP.

"It's become clear that Google's actions are not defensible, and not just legally." Google has until December 16 to file an answer. A hearing is slated for April 12 in San Francisco. "We strongly support the rights our employees have in the workplace, and open discussion and respectful debate have always been part of Google," a spokesperson said. "We're proud of our culture and committed to defending it against attempts by individuals to deliberately undermine it—including by violating security policies and internal systems," the spokesperson said.

Google added that it will continue to provide information to the NLRB about its decisions to terminate or discipline employees. Unhappy with the way the company was behaving, Berland said he and other workers had "acted together to do something about it."

Thousands of Google employees joined a coordinated worldwide walkout late in 2018 to protest its handling of sexual harassment. The protests took shape after Google said it had fired 48 employees in the previous two years—including 13 senior executives—as a result of allegations of sexual misconduct. Google employees have also protested against the company's business contracts related to war or policing of the US border, and against creation of a search engine for China's censored market. "Employees who speak out on ethical issues, harassment, discrimination and all these matters are no longer really welcome at Google in the way they used to be," Berland said. "I think it is part of a shift in culture there." —AFP

Business

Biden set to revamp US trade tactics, but not to alter policy

President-elect to address issues of aerospace industry, digital taxation with EU

WASHINGTON: President-elect Joe Biden undoubtedly has plans to roll back many of President Donald Trump's policies when he takes charge of the White House next month, but when it comes to trade, he has signaled little may change—at least at first.

In an interview with The New York Times published Wednesday, Biden, who defeated Trump in last month's presidential election, made it clear his first job will be reviving the beaten-down US economy, not radically shifting trade policy. "I want to make sure we're going to fight like hell by investing in America first," Biden told the newspaper.

"I'm not going to enter any new trade agreement with anybody until we have made major investments here at home and in our workers," including in education. The statements carry major implications for US friends and foes alike, perhaps none more than China.

Trump started a trade war with Beijing amid complaints of unfair subsidies and intellectual property theft. A "phase one" deal signed earlier this year cooled tensions, and Biden's comments indicate he plans to stick to that agreement initially, and will not end the tariffs slapped on Beijing.

Analysts say the comments show the incoming president understands the risk of upending Washington's trade relations at a time when the economy is reeling from the damage inflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic, or of angering the coalition of domestic allies that helped him win election.

"On China, this is no surprise," Eswar Prasad, an economics professor at Cornell University said.

"Biden would have received enormous push-back from the labor unions and from the China hawks in the Republican Party if he had removed the tariffs without demanding concessions from China."

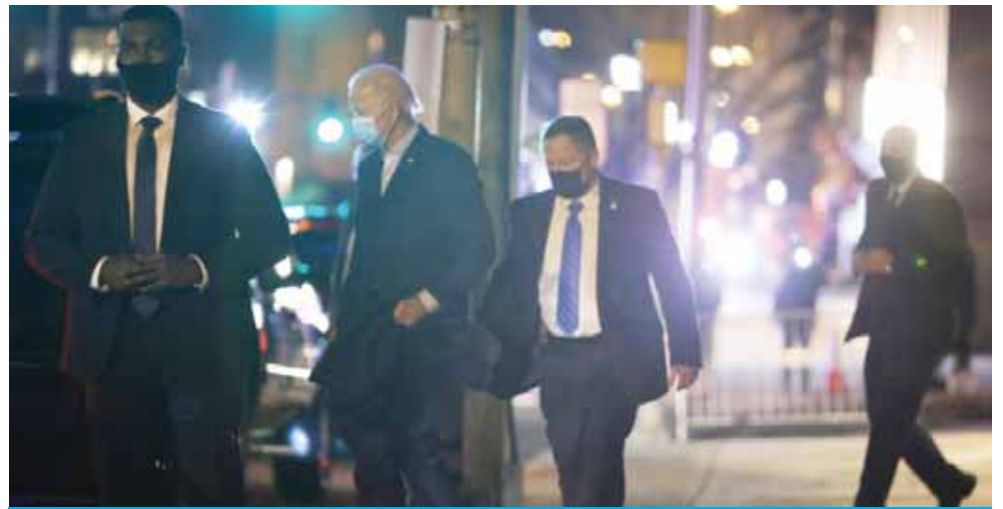
Making friends again

Trump's erratic diplomacy left Washington going it alone in its spat with Beijing, and Biden in the interview said he would focus immediately on mending fences. "The best China strategy, I think, is one which gets every one of our—or at least what used to be our—allies on the same page. It's going to be a major priority for me in the opening weeks of my presidency to try to get us back on the same page with our allies," he said.

He acknowledged that when it comes to "leverage" over Beijing, "we don't have it yet."

Improved relations with allies, particularly the European Union, likely would give Washington a stronger position to press China for further concessions. Prasad said Biden's team "will be handed a baseline for trade and economic negotiations with China that is heavily skewed toward conflict rather than cooperation." "The new administration will feature significant shifts in strategy and tactics compared with the Trump administration's approach, but the overall hostile posture toward China is likely to remain unchanged," Prasad said.

Another key issue will be Biden's approach to



WILMINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden leaves the Queen Theater after a virtual roundtable with workers and small business owners in Wilmington, Delaware. — AFP

the EU, which also was hit with a series of tariffs under Trump, and is locked in numerous disputes with the US on issues ranging from the aerospace industry to digital taxation. The regional bloc seems willing to cooperate: the Financial Times reported that Brussels is working on a plan to revitalize its partnership with Washington to tackle everything from stopping the pandemic to deforestation.

"I think the Biden administration will be amenable to such an initiative," said Edward Alden of the Council on Foreign Relations, noting that an agreement on digital taxation could bring Washington revenues it sorely needs.

But Biden's comments also indicate a new free trade deal that Britain has wanted from Washington post-Brexit will not happen anytime soon. — AFP

Chinese firms may lose access to US stock markets

NEW YORK: The House of Representatives on Wednesday passed a bill that could close US stock and money markets to Chinese firms. The "Holding Foreign Companies Accountable Act" could be quickly placed on the desk of US President Donald Trump for final approval, since it was already passed by the Senate.

The measure introduced in 2019 by Louisiana Republican Senator John Kennedy would mandate that foreign companies listed on US stock exchanges comply with accounting requirements of the US Securities and Exchange Commission. Many foreign companies already conform to the standard, but Chinese firms do not. In addition, Chinese groups on the US Stock Exchange will have to disclose whether one or more of their board members are members of the Chinese Communist Party.

According to figures from a congressional commission, 217 Chinese compa-

nies were listed on US stock exchanges in early October, valued at a total of \$2.2 trillion based on share prices.

A small number of those firms are also on the Asian markets and could fall back to these stock exchanges in the event of delisting in the United States. One of the heavyweights on the list is e-commerce colossus Alibaba, which in 2014 had the biggest all-time initial public offering on the New York Stock Exchange, raising \$25 billion. Its rival JD.com is listed on the Nasdaq, an index rich with technological firms, and also on a Hong Kong exchange.

The bill passed by Congress is part of a commercial and political duel between Washington and Beijing, and takes aim at opaque accounting practices used by Chinese firms listing shares for trade on US exchanges. The SEC has already crafted a proposal similar to the measure that passed the House of Representatives on Wednesday. — AFP

German aid for virus-hit firms 'not endless'

FRANKFURT: Germany's generous support for companies hit by the coronavirus crisis can't go on indefinitely, Economy Minister Peter Altmaier said yesterday, warning of stricter rules to come from January.

A day after Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that Germany's current shutdowns would last until January 10, Altmaier told broadcaster NTV that the massive aid pledged to help firms through November and December "cannot continue endlessly". Merkel's traditionally frugal government has pledged over a trillion euros in aid to shield German workers and companies from the pandemic fallout, among the biggest rescue packages in Europe.

But Altmaier said it was wrong to think "the state can spend money without limits".

A second coronavirus wave forced Germany to introduce another round of restrictions in November, shutting down bars, restaurants and hotels as well as cultural and leisure centers. Businesses hit by the closures are entitled to claim aid amounting to up to 75 percent of their revenues for November and Decem-

ber 2019, expected to cost the government some 30 billion euros (\$36 billion).

But from January, Altmaier said, the aid will once again be more targeted and largely focused on reimbursing firms for their fixed business costs such as office rent or car and insurance payments.

Merkel late Wednesday also said that support for German firms could "not continue as in November and December". Altmaier urged Germans to "take a realistic view of the situation".

"When you're going through one of the worst recessions since World War II, a lot of people are going to pay a price. "We can make it easier," he said. "But we cannot absorb the decline in economic activity and pretend nothing has happened." The government plans to borrow more than 300 billion euros in 2020 and 2021 to combat the pandemic impact, blasting through its constitutionally enshrined "debt brake".

It expects to return to its usual fiscal rigor in 2022. Echoing Altmaier, lawmaker Eckhardt Rehberg, the budgetary expert from Merkel's conservative CDU party, on Thursday said the government "does not have bottomless pockets". The goal to restore the "debt brake"—which limits new borrowing to 0.35 percent of gross domestic product—in 2022 is "ambitious enough", he told Deutschlandfunk radio. Germany anticipates that the economy will shrink by 5.5 percent in 2020 before rebounding next year, a less painful recession than other European countries are forecasting. — AFP

Sports

Friday, December 4, 2020

Disjointed Steelers hold on to beat short-handed Ravens

Match postponed three times due to COVID-19

LOS ANGELES: The Pittsburgh Steelers moved to 11-0 with a jumbled 19-14 victory over a severely-depleted Baltimore squad in a NFL contest that was postponed three times because of a coronavirus outbreak on the Ravens.

Ben Roethlisberger threw for 266 yards and a fourth quarter touchdown as the Steelers cobbled together a win over a semblance of the Baltimore roster. The Ravens were missing 17 players who were on their Covid-19 injury list, including reigning NFL MVP quarterback Lamar Jackson, both centers and all their tight ends.

Baltimore ended up having to promote 10 players from their practice squad for Wednesday's game at Heinz Field. The contest was close until Roethlisberger connected with receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster for a touchdown in the fourth quarter to give the Steelers a 19-7 lead.

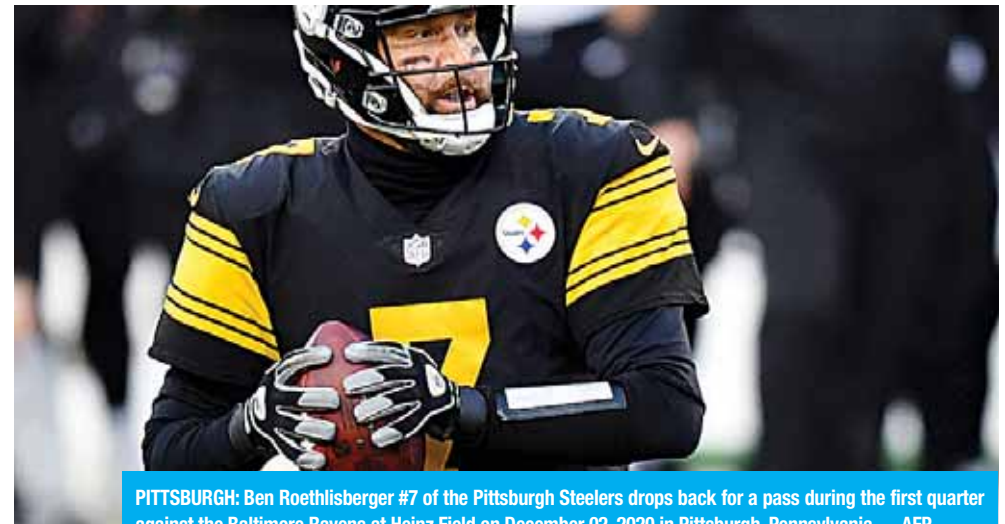
Roethlisberger said they would take the win but was obviously upset they didn't win by more than five points and allowed the Ravens challenge late in the final quarter. "I

am happy with the win but not happy with the way we played," said Roethlisberger. "We didn't play good enough. The hardest thing about this week was the mental aspect. No knowing when the game is and moving it around."

With a victory, the Steelers effectively eliminated Baltimore from the division race as they fell to 6-5. The game was supposed to be held on US Thanksgiving but was then moved to Sunday. The Ravens' outbreak worsened prompting another move to Tuesday and then to Wednesday with many questioning why the league was insisting on it being played at all.

Commissioner Roger Goodell defended the decision on Wednesday to hold the game, saying there was no danger of the virus spreading any further. "In the Baltimore case we were concerned with number of positives over last 10 days. By having the delays it allowed us to understand where virus was coming from and that it was in the last stage. We were comfortable the game could be played safely," Goodell said.

Goodell also said despite the rash of coro-



PITTSBURGH: Ben Roethlisberger #7 of the Pittsburgh Steelers drops back for a pass during the first quarter against the Baltimore Ravens at Heinz Field on December 02, 2020 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. —AFP

navirus outbreaks among the teams that there is no reason to think they can't finish the pandemic-disrupted season. "We think it is safe to go forward," he said. "We believe the protocols are working. We continue to see what improvements we can make. Our objective is to finish 256 games safely."

The game is the first NFL contest played

on a Wednesday since the 2012 season opener. The schedule changes means the Ravens game Thursday against Dallas has been moved to next Tuesday. Backup quarterback Robert Griffin started for Jackson against the Steelers and completed seven of 12 passes for 33 yards. Roethlisberger was 36 of 51 with an interception. —AFP

18 percent of Olympic tickets sold in Japan to be refunded

TOKYO: About 18 percent of tickets sold in Japan for next year's coronavirus-postponed Olympics will be refunded, Tokyo 2020 organizers said yesterday, with over 3.6 million seats still reserved domestically for the Games. A three-week refund window for domestic tickets closed November 30, and organizers said about 810,000 of the 4.45 million tickets sold in Japan would be refunded and resold at a later date. A refund application window for Paralympics tickets bought in Japan will run from December 1-21. People who purchased tickets elsewhere in the world have been told to seek refunds from local retailers. The Games were postponed in March in the first peacetime delay of an Olympics, and are now scheduled to start on July 23, 2021.

Organizers this week laid out a raft of safety measures they said would make it possible to hold the Games, even if the pandemic has not been brought under control. While International Olympic Committee boss Thomas Bach has said he is "very confident" spectators will be allowed at next year's event, he has also warned full stadiums may not be possible as the pandemic rages on. A decision on the number of spectators allowed is not expected until next spring. Organizers have promised more reimbursements if events are cancelled, or fewer seats are available because of coronavirus safety measures. —AFP

Kazma beat Arabi in Kuwait Football League

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The 10th round of Kuwait Football League witnessed three clashes on Wednesday. In the first match, Kheitan played Burqan to a goalless draw. Kheitan took control over the first half after a strong start, but allowed Burqan to come back in the second half. However, Kheitan's goalkeeper managed to stop all chances to score that Burqan players had.

The second match saw Kazma defeat Arabi. Omar Hubaiter scored in the 47th minute of the match. The three points raises Kazma's total to 19, placing them in second place in the league's standings, while Arabi remained at the 15th place after the loss. Both teams' performance was below average during the match as they played in heavy rain, and many passes were interrupted. The first half ended 0-0. In the second half Arabi, had several attempts to score only to see Kazma's Omar Hubaiter score after Arabi's goalkeeper deflected a strong shot by Kazma's Bandar Burisli. In the third match, Shabab defeated Tadhamon 2-1, raising its point total to 15 while Tadhamon remained at 8.



KUWAIT: The Shabab vs Tadhamon match in action.

Rockets ship Westbrook off to Wizards in exchange of Wall

Lakers battles Clippers on opening day Dec 22

LOS ANGELES: The Houston Rockets agreed to send disgruntled point guard Russell Westbrook to the Washington Wizards for former first round draft pick John Wall, the Wizards announced on Wednesday. The Wizards also received a first round draft pick in the blockbuster deal which reunites Westbrook with former Oklahoma City Thunder coach Scott Brooks.

The trade ends a single season in Houston for the 32-year-old Westbrook, who spent the previous 11 years with the Thunder. After the underachieving Rockets were eliminated in this season's playoffs by the Los Angeles Lakers, head coach Mike D'Antoni decided to leave the team. Westbrook and James Harden then reportedly told the Rockets they wanted to be traded.

"Russell's accomplishments and honors on the court speak for themselves, but his drive and will to win are what separate him as a truly unique player," Brooks said. "As much as I'm looking forward to reuniting with him, I'm equally sad to say goodbye to John. He is one of the toughest and most gifted players I've ever been around and we all wish him nothing but the best moving forward."

Wall was originally the first overall pick by Washington in the 2010 entry draft. In 573 career games for the Wizards, he averaged 19.0 points, 9.2 assists, 4.3 rebounds, and 1.70 steals. Wall joins Magic Johnson and Oscar Robertson as the only players in NBA history with career averages of at least 19.0 points per game, 9.0

assists per game, and 4.0 rebounds per game. Over the past six seasons, Wall is the only player in the league to have averaged at least 20.0 ppg and 10.0 apg. The five-time all-star ranks sixth in NBA history in assists per game and is second to Chris Paul among active players.

Westbrook has career averages of 23.2 points, 8.3 assists and 7.1 rebounds in 878 games (861 starts). He has 146 career triple-doubles, which ranks second all-time behind Hall of Famer Robertson's 181. Westbrook is slated to make \$41.4 million in 2020-21.

"Having the opportunity to acquire a player of Russell's caliber and character was something that we could not pass up when looking at both the immediate and long-term future of our team," Wizards general manager Tommy Sheppard said.

"With that said, the decision to part ways with John, one of the greatest players in franchise history, was extremely difficult. What he has meant to our organization and our community is immeasurable and will not be forgotten."

Lakers vs Clippers

The NBA season will tip off Christmas week with two games on opening night, highlighted by the Los Angeles Lakers champi-

onship ring ceremony, the league announced on Wednesday. The Lakers will battle the Los Angeles Clippers on December 22 to open the season just 10 weeks after they beat the Miami Heat in six games to win in their 17th NBA championship.

The league decided to hold off on announcing its full schedule and is doing it in a piecemeal fashion instead. Three days of the schedule came out Wednesday and another batch will be revealed on Friday.

The other opening night game features the Golden State Warriors visiting Kevin Durant's Brooklyn Nets at Barclays Center arena. Durant hasn't played since June 2019, when he ruptured his Achilles tendon. Weeks later, Durant signed as a free agent with Brooklyn, ending a three-year stint with the Warriors in which he won two finals MVPs and a pair of NBA titles. The league also confirmed earlier reports of a five game slate for Christmas Day also involving the Lakers, Nets and Warriors.

LeBron James and the Lakers host Luka Doncic and the Dallas Mavericks and the Clippers visit Denver to face the Nuggets. Zion Williamson and the New Orleans Pelicans visit the Miami Heat, the Warriors are at the Milwaukee Bucks and the Boston Celtics host the Nets.



48 players test positive to COVID-19

Positive tests

The NBA also announced Wednesday that 48 players have tested positive for the coronavirus, a dramatic increase over the zero positive tests reported during last season's quarantine bubble in Florida. The league said the positive tests are the result of 546 tests carried out between November 24-30 as the NBA gets set to begin preseason games in nine days.

The zero positive tests were from the beginning of last season's quarantine bubble to the end of the season in mid-October. One team, the Golden State Warriors, has already delayed the beginning of their individual workouts by a day this week because of players testing positive.

This was the initial round of tests for players as they returned to their teams ahead of the start of individual workouts on Tuesday. The NBA says it will be testing all of its players daily throughout the season.

The infection rate number is also higher than the 46 players that tested positive for Covid-19 in the weeks ahead of the start of the pandemic-disrupted season. The new results show the league has a positivity rate of 8.8 percent, which is high.

Under the league's tough new COVID-19 protocols, a players who tests positive has to refrain from workouts for at least 10 days and more if he is showing symptoms. The NBA's first preseason games are December 11 with the regular season scheduled to begin less than two weeks later. —AFP

Union's Kruse in spotlight for Berlin derby

BERLIN: Hertha Berlin host capital-city rivals Union Berlin behind closed doors at the Olympic Stadium in today's derby, with former Germany striker Max Kruse in stunning form for the visitors, who are on an eight-match unbeaten run. This will be the third Bundesliga clash between the clubs since Union's promotion in 2018/19 and the second behind closed doors due to the coronavirus pandemic. East Berlin-based Union won a fiery confrontation at home last season with a 90th-minute penalty in November 2019, only for Hertha, who play in the west, to exact revenge with a 4-0 thumping in May. To make their presence felt, Hertha had tens of thousands of flags in the club's blue and white colors planted across Berlin on Monday.

"We're playing a derby without fans, we wanted to create a little derby atmosphere, a little derby fever," a Hertha spokesman said on Wednesday. Rival fans were soon posting pictures either posing proudly with their flag or dumping them in the nearest bin — depending on their loyalties.

However, the PR stunt happened without the necessary permit, putting Hertha offside with city authorities, who threatened to fine the club. Union's unbeaten run has taken them to sixth in the table, six points behind leaders Bayern Munich, who they host the following weekend. In contrast, Hertha are 13th and yet to win a home game this season, having been thrashed 5-2 by



BERLIN: Union Berlin's German forward Max Kruse celebrates scoring during the German first division Bundesliga football match 1 FC Union Berlin vs Eintracht Frankfurt in Berlin, on November 28, 2020. —AFP

Borussia Dortmund a fortnight ago with Erling Braut Haaland scoring four goals. Union took a gamble this season by signing the ageing Kruse, 32, a renowned card player who has competed in the World Series of poker, but the transfer has paid dividends. He made the last of his 14 appearances for Germany five years ago, yet Kruse has banged in five goals and made four assists in his last four games. He came to the rescue last Saturday by scoring twice, including a late equalizer to salvage a point in a 3-3 home draw with Eintracht Frankfurt. "Hopefully Max will be important in the derby," said Union coach Urs Fischer. "He's a great guy and he's shown that he knows when he has to work hard. I'm happy. He's there for the team and it's gone exactly as I expected." —AFP

		Matches on TV (Local Timings)	
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE			
Aston Villa v Newcastle United		09:00	
beIN Sports			
SPANISH LEAGUE			
Athletic de Bilbao v Celta de Vigo		23:00	
beIN Sports HD 3			
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA			
Hertha Berlin v FC Union Berlin		22:30	
beIN Sports			
FRENCH LEAGUE			
Nimes Olympique v Olympique Marseille		23:00	
beIN Sports HD 6			

Sports

PSG puts Man Utd to the sword as Dortmund advance, Giroud scores four

Frappart makes history as first woman to referee men's CL game

PARIS: Neymar's brace helped Paris Saint-Germain to a vital 3-1 win over Manchester United on Wednesday that took the French club to within touching distance of the Champions League last 16, while Borussia Dortmund secured their qualification for the next round and Olivier Giroud scored all four goals in Chelsea's 4-0 thumping of Sevilla.

PSG could have been on the brink of elimination from Group H with a defeat at Old Trafford but Neymar put last season's runners-up ahead in the sixth minute and the world's most expensive player sealed their victory in stoppage time. In between, Marcus Rashford's shot went in off Danilo Pereira to bring United level in the first half, and Edinson Cavani hit the bar against his former club.

Marquinhos prodded the French champions back in front midway through the second half and the game appeared up for Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side when Fred was sent off for a second yellow, having been fortunate to escape a red card early on.

Neymar's late clincher could prove crucial as it gives PSG the head-to-head advantage following United's 2-1 win in Paris in October. "We had some big chances, big moments and that's the difference when you get to the big games," said Solskjaer.

There is a three-way tie on nine points at the top of the group with RB Leipzig right in contention after Norwegian striker Alexander Sorloth scored in injury time to give them a 4-3 victory at Istanbul Basaksehir. Irfan Can Kahveci's superb hat-trick looked to have rescued a draw for Basaksehir as they came back from 3-1 down to draw level. Yussuf Poulsen, Nordi Mukiele and Dani Olmo also scored for Leipzig.

It all means PSG now need only draw at home to Basaksehir next week to qualify. "We

have almost qualified, which means we have not qualified yet. That is the reality. Being almost pregnant does not mean you are pregnant," said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel. United also only require a point when they visit Leipzig, but will be out if they lose, while the Germans would in that case go through.

Dortmund secured their progress after a 1-1 draw at home to Lazio in Group F, despite losing Erling Braut Haaland to a leg injury. Raphael Guerreiro put the Germans in front but Ciro Immobile's penalty against his old side brought Lazio level. Lazio will join Dortmund in the next round if they avoid defeat against Club Brugge next week.

The Belgians are two points back and still in contention after beating Zenit Saint-Petersburg 3-0, with teenage Belgian international Charles De Ketelaere putting them ahead, Hans Vanaken adding a penalty and Noa Lang also scoring.

'Amazing' Giroud

The performance of the evening came from Giroud, as the France striker scored all four goals in Chelsea's 4-0 win away to Sevilla. On just his second start this season, Giroud produced two lovely finishes before heading in to make it 3-0 and then winning and converting a late penalty.

The 34-year-old is the oldest player to score a hat-trick in the competition since Hungarian great Ferenc Puskas in 1965 for Real Madrid against Feyenoord. Both teams were already through but the win allowed Chelsea to secure top spot in Group E.

"Amazing solo performance from Olivier. Delighted with him, delighted with the team," Chelsea manager Frank Lampard, the last Chelsea player to score four goals in a game in 2010, told BT Sport. In the same group, Marcus Berg's goal gave Krasnodar a 1-0 win over



TURIN: French referee Stephanie Frappart gives a yellow card to Dynamo Kiev's Ukrainian midfielder Nicholas Shaparenko (C) during the UEFA Champions League Group G football match Juventus vs Dynamo Kiev on December 2, 2020 at the Juventus stadium in Turin. — AFP

Rennes, meaning the Russians will play in the Europa League in the new year.

Frappart makes history

History was made in Turin as France's Stephanie Frappart became the first woman to referee a men's Champions League game when Juventus beat Dynamo Kiev 3-0. The game was also notable for Cristiano Ronaldo scoring his 750th career goal, his record-extending 132nd

in the Champions League.

Federico Chiesa and Alvaro Morata also scored for Juve, who had already qualified from Group G before the game, along with Barcelona. The Catalans kept up their perfect record and stayed on course to win the group by beating Ferencvaros 3-0 in Budapest without the rested Lionel Messi. Antoine Griezmann and Martin Braithwaite netted before Ousmane Dembele converted a penalty. — AFP

Neymar keen for Messi reunion

MANCHESTER: Neymar dropped a bombshell on Wednesday as he followed up scoring twice for Paris Saint-Germain in their 3-1 Champions League win over Manchester United by revealing his desire to reunite with Lionel Messi next season. The Brazilian enjoyed four successful seasons alongside the six-time Ballon d'Or winner at Barcelona before making a world record 222 million euro (\$264m) move to the French capital in 2017. "It's what I most want, to enjoy being with him on the field again," Neymar, whose contract at PSG runs until 2022, told ESPN. "I want to play with him for sure, next year we have to do it."

Neymar was heavily linked with a return to Barcelona in 2019, but the Catalan giants were unable to fund an acceptable offer for PSG. Barca have had to agree salary cuts worth 122 million euros in players' salaries this season to help offset the financial

hole left by the coronavirus pandemic and are highly unlikely to be in a position to bring Neymar back next year.

Instead, it is Messi who could be on the move as the Argentine is out of contract at the end of the season and publicly expressed his desire to leave in August. Then Barca president Josep Maria Bartomeu would not free Messi from the final year of his deal at the Camp Nou, but Bartomeu has since resigned with new presidential elections scheduled for January 24.

Manchester City were the favourites to land Messi's signature earlier this year, but PSG could be an alternative for a player who will turn 34 at the end of this season. "He can play in my position, there is no problem," Neymar joked. "Take me out."

Neymar's partnership with Kylian Mbappe is yet to deliver PSG's first ever Champions League title, but the French champions should have another shot in this season's knockout stages after a vital victory in Manchester.

Thomas Tuchel's men are now level on points with United and RB Leipzig with one game in Group H to come. But PSG are in the driving seat as they host already-eliminated Istanbul Basaksehir next week, while United travel to Germany needing a point to reach the last 16. — AFP



MANCHESTER: Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian forward Neymar reacts during the UEFA Champions League group H football match between Manchester United and Paris Saint Germain at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on December 2, 2020. — AFP



PSG down Man Utd, Dortmund advance in Champions League

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