



4 Amir welcomes momentous agreement to heal Gulf rift



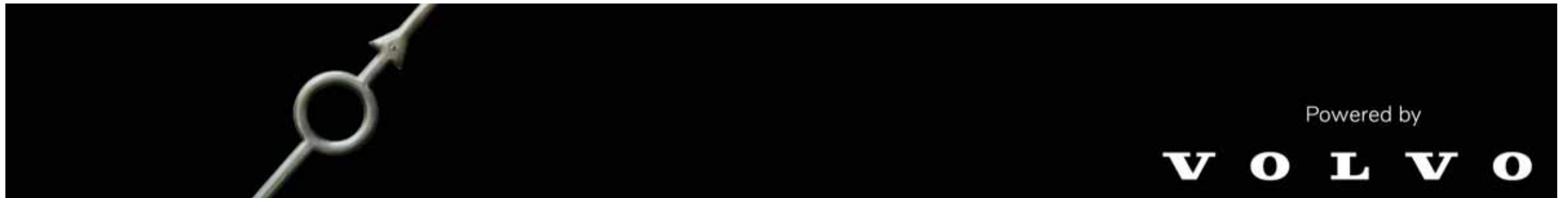
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Kuwaitis brave coronavirus, weather to vote for change

Veteran lawmakers punished • Voters turn out in large numbers



KUWAIT: Marzouq Al-Ghanem celebrates with his supporters in Abdullah Al-Salem after his victory in the National Assembly elections early today. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Badr Al-Dahoum celebrates his election win with supporters in Jaber Al-Ali early today.

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti voters defied rain and coronavirus measures and turned out in large numbers yesterday to vote for a big change, reelecting only 18 of the 50 members of the outgoing National Assembly in what appears to be the result of frustration over a lack of performance, according to early results. Turnout was close to 70 percent and exceeded 80 percent in some centers as Kuwaiti male and female voters waited for a long time under scattered rain throughout the day.

It was a sweeping change across the board and in all the five constituencies, as a number of prominent veteran MPs failed to get reelected. They included Adel Al-Damkhi and Saleh Ashour in the first constituency, Riyadh Al-Adasani and Omar Al-Tabtabaei in the second, and Safa Al-Hashem, Ahmad Al-Fadhil, Khalil Abul and Mohammad Al-Jabri in the third constituency, along with Abdulwahab Al-Babtain.

In the fourth constituency, the biggest upset was the failure of MP Mohammad Hayef to be among the top 10 winners in the fourth constituency. Others in the district who failed to make a comeback include MPs Ali Al-Deqbasi and Faraj Al-Arbeed. In the fifth constituency, MP Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei was not among the 10 winners, along with MP Faisal Al-Kandari.

According to unofficial results which could change, at least 14 pro-government lawmakers failed to get re-elected in all the five constituencies. At the same time, at least seven opposition figures also failed to retain their seats. The Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, appeared headed to maintain its strength of four MPs, and its supporters were also in a strong position.

The two candidates fielded by pro-government Salafists were losing, while Salafists

place in the first and fifth constituencies respectively. The opposition, formed mainly of Islamists, appears headed to win around 20 seats, and is expected to have a few more supporters. At least 10 Islamists are certain to have seats in the Assembly. Final results are expected later today.

Earlier yesterday, authorities set up security barriers around the country's 102 polling stations to prevent gatherings, with designated lanes for entry and exit. Mask-clad voters, who were also forced to wear gloves, were subject to temperature checks before entering the facilities where election officials stood behind glass barriers. In an effort to respect their right to vote, authorities had designated five polling stations - one in each electoral district - for coronavirus patients and those in quarantine to cast their ballots. The polls opened at 8:00 am and closed at 8:00 pm.

With more than 144,000 novel coronavirus cases to date, including 889 deaths, the election campaign was toned down, with only a few banners hoisted over the streets. Instead, this year's campaign was mainly fought on social networks and in the media. Yet the normal themes remained: Promises to fight corruption and address youth employment, along with debates over freedom of expression, housing, education and the thorny issue of the stateless "bedoon" minority.

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A woman reacts as she arrives to cast her vote at a polling station in Abdullah Al-Salem yesterday.



Strict health precautionary measures were in place during the elections amid the coronavirus pandemic.



HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah votes at a polling station in Jabriya yesterday.



A judge and his aides count ballots at a polling station yesterday.



Kuwaitis turn out to vote in good numbers in 2020 elections

Over 45 percent men voted in Salwa by 2:00 pm



Kuwaiti men, wearing protective masks amid the COVID-19 pandemic, arrive to cast their votes at a polling station. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Kuwaiti women, wearing protective masks amid the COVID-19 pandemic, wait to cast their votes at a polling station.



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti women, wearing protective masks amid the COVID-19 pandemic, display their passports as they wait to cast their votes at a polling station.



A Kuwaiti woman, wearing a protective mask amid the COVID-19 pandemic, casts her ballot at a polling station.



A Kuwaiti man, wearing a protective mask amid the COVID-19 pandemic, casts his ballot at a polling station.

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The 2020 elections were held under exceptional circumstances. Unlike in previous elections, when representatives of candidates stood outside the centers distributing pins with photos of the candidates or drinks for voters, all gatherings were banned this year due to the pandemic.

Some analysts had predicted turnout would be lower than the previous elections in 2016, but after visiting some precincts, it seemed attendance was good. The pollsters had assumed most elderly people would avoid voting due to the fear of COVID-19, but the interior ministry had assured people that health precautions were fully adhered to.

In Salwa, turnout was high, especially by noontime. At 2:00 pm,

“ Voting was proceeding smoothly ”

over 100 people were standing outside Mughera bin Noufal School to cast their ballots. In this school, male candidates were voting in seven committees according to their names. The main committee alone includes 858 voters, out of which 380 had already voted by 2:00 pm, which is over 45 percent. Deputy General Prosecutor Abdulrahman Al-Rifai provided these numbers to Kuwait Times, adding voting was proceeding smoothly.

In Khaldiya, male voters were voting at Abdullah Al-Otaibi School, which consists of one main committee and two subcommittees. The main committee includes 896 voters, and 421 had already voted by 3:00 pm. There were no lines of voters waiting by that time. In Adailiya, male voters were voting at Ahmad Al-Adwani School. The main committee there includes 849 voters, and 351 of them had voted by 3:00 pm, while a few voters were waiting in line.



Kuwaiti women wait to cast their votes for the parliamentary elections at a polling station.



Deputy General Prosecutor Abdulrahman Al-Rifai is seen at the Mughera bin Noufal School in Salwa.



A Kuwaiti woman, wearing a protective mask, casts her vote at a polling station.



A Kuwaiti man, wearing a protective mask, looks for his name on the electoral roll at a polling station.



A Kuwaiti woman, wearing a protective mask and gloves, displays her passport as she waits to cast her vote at a polling station.



Kuwaiti women, wearing protective masks, wait to cast their votes at a polling station.



Kuwaiti men, wearing protective masks amid the COVID-19 pandemic, wait to cast their votes at a polling station.



Prime Minister content with medical preparations, elections turnout

COVID-19 patients voted under special health, safety precautions



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah stands next to a police officer during a visit to the Um Al-Khair School in Ardiha, which was allocated for female voters from the fourth constituency.



Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah tours the Bin Rushd School in Al-Faiha.



A COVID-19 patient casts his vote at the Abdullahif Al-Omar School in the first constituency. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat, Fouad Al-Shaikh and KUNA



Kuwaiti men, wearing protective masks amid the COVID-19 pandemic, have their temperature checked before entering a polling station.



Kuwaiti women, wearing protective masks amid the COVID-19 pandemic, have their temperature checked before entering a polling station.



A police officer looks on as voters put gloves on before entering a polling station.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah said he was satisfied with medical preparations for yesterday's parliamentary elections, which were "different than the previous 60 years." These elections were "different than the previous 60 years because of the health crisis and the measures that needed to be adopted," His Highness the Prime Minister told reporters while visiting Khabab Ibn Al-Arat school in Jabriya, which was made a polling station. "I am happy with the reports I have been receiving about the participation in this constitutional procedure to elect representatives of the Kuwaiti people," he said. "We see a big turnout and we hope to see compliance with the health requirements during elections, and to refrain from celebrations following the announcement of results," said His Highness the Prime Minister. "The victory is for us to preserve public health," he added. His Highness the Prime Minister was accompanied by Ministry of Interior's Undersecretary General Essam Al-Naham.

Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah had meanwhile underlined the importance on abiding by the electoral process and adhering to the precautionary measures setup in order to maintain safety for all and to reach the desired results. Sheikh Basel made the remarks after a tour in Bin Rushd School Committee in Al-Faiha, which is an area designated for coronavirus patients, adding that he made several tours to various schools with each of the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Justice and other senior officials of the Ministry of Interior to check on the extent of commitment to follow health procedures. The minister mentioned that he witnessed at first

hand the extent of everyone's response in following health procedures and requirements despite the fact that some schools witnessed some large crowds in specific periods, noting that the committees witnessed physical distancing and the commitment by voters to wear masks.

Kuwaiti voters infected with COVID-19 practiced their democratic right despite the disease. The government had allocated one polling station in each of the five constituencies for COVID-19 patients who were in quarantine, where they could cast their ballots in a safe environment. People who were in quarantine were instructed to take a permission to go vote through Shlonik smart phone applications. Ministry of Health spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad had urged infected voters to always wear masks and avoid removing the masks unless requested by officials supervising the voting process, and then return home immediately after casting the ballots.

Adherence to precautions

Officials running parliamentary elections in the second constituency expressed satisfaction over the level of adherence to the anti-coronavirus precautions. The voting kicked off early yesterday, starting with elderly citizens amid full abidance by the anti-COVID measures, said judge Khaled Al-Busairi, head of the main electoral commission at Al-Asmaa bint Al-Hareth School, one of the schools that have been transformed into voting centers. All who turned up to cast their votes wore protective masks, Busairi said, while Justice Ahmad Al-Hajri, in charge of the main commission at Ibn Rushd School in Faiha that was

dedicated solely for eligible voters who have been infected with the coronavirus, affirmed that all people that were present at the station wore masks, gloves and maintained social distancing. Voters entering the center were obliged to change their masks and put on the gloves before being subjected to a temperature test, Hajri said.

Minister of Justice Dr Fahad Al-Afasi affirmed that parliamentary elections had proceeded smoothly and without any obstacles due to excellent efforts by personnel of all involved state departments. In a statement to the press, Dr Afasi, also Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, said personnel of the ministries of justice, interior and health, played a key role in facilitating the electoral process. Members of the electoral commissions, namely judges and personnel of the judiciary, have exerted extraordinary efforts in the shadow of the health measures due to the novel coronavirus. This high turnout since early hours of the balloting affirms the Kuwaiti citizens' awareness of their constitutional rights and positive interaction with public affairs of the homeland, he said.

Rigorous planning preceded Kuwait's parliamentary elections to ensure it would be in line with the country's 'favorable image,' Kuwait Municipality Chief Ahmad Al-Manfouhi said, describing the vote as a 'democratic spectacle.' "We face a legal and constitutional obligation to hold these polls," the official said, adding that His Highness the Prime Minister has personally surveyed polling stations since the wee hours of morning to ensure the smoothness of the electoral



Kuwaiti women, wearing protective masks amid the COVID-19 pandemic, cast their ballots at a polling station.

process. Manfouhi, who heads a government committee in charge of national health precautions, pointed to the "plummeting numbers" of coronavirus cases in Kuwait, which proves "large-scale compliance" with health guidelines. Designating polling centers for voters carrying the virus has been among measures the health ministry has taken to avert a resurgence of the pandemic in the wake of the vote, he added. Expressing his satisfaction with the voter turnout, the official went on to commend the electorate for keeping health precautions in mind as they cast their ballots.



KRCS volunteers lend hand during elections

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society had 200 volunteers contributing to organizing National Assembly elections, thus reflecting humanitarian role of Kuwaiti youth, Head of the Public Relations Department at KRCS Khaled Al-Zaid said. Zaid added in a press statement that the volunteers' participation in the electoral process came to help voters and government agencies by providing assistance to the elderly and people with special needs, including first aid, spreading health instructions, and distributing masks and sterilizers. KRCS formed committees to set role of volunteers and distribute them to polling stations according to number of voters, he added. The KRCS volunteers had attended courses on first aid, training programs and instructions on how to provide humanitarian services on election day, Zaid noted. Volunteers helped people in the polling centers and explained administrative and organizational procedures that must be applied and observed in the polling centers, he said. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Abdulaziz Al-Yaqoub, Mohammed Al-Mesbah and Fadi Qawar.

Ooredoo Kuwait revives patriotic consciousness

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has released a new song dedicated to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah congratulating him on his new role. The song represents the feeling of passionate love and devotion one has to a homeland and delivers a sense of belonging, highlighting a spirit of unity. Indeed, Ooredoo Kuwait succeeded in developing the spirit of patriotism and creating an enthusiastic feeling through the song's infrastructure, music, and lyrics.

The passionate song was performed by Mohammad Al-Mesbah, written by Abdulaziz Al-Abkl, composed by the talented Mohammad Hamam, and produced and executed by Senyar Group. Hence, Ooredoo Kuwait has worked on the song for the past few months, to be the first telecom company that congratulates His Highness the Amir on his new leading role. "The patriotic song expresses national pride and is a critical part of

Ooredoo's social responsibility towards the local society. More and above, the lyrics of the song deliver a shared sense of national identity and nostalgic nationalism, highlighting the Amir's humility and closeness to the people of Kuwait," said Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain, Chief Executive Officer, Ooredoo Kuwait.

He added: "I take this opportunity to personally congratulate His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah wishing him the utmost success in leading the country towards stability and prosperity." Through this patriotic song and its rich content, Ooredoo Kuwait inspires feelings of pride and pays tribute to Kuwait in so many unique ways. On top of that, Ooredoo Tower lights up in a distinctive classy style in tribute to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The building was illuminated with a smiling picture of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf.



Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

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News in brief

EU lauds Kuwait's efforts

BRUSSELS: The European Union yesterday welcomed and praised Kuwait's efforts at resolving the crisis within the GCC. "The European Union welcomes the announcement by Kuwait's Foreign Minister (Sheikh Dr) Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Friday that efforts aimed at resolving the crisis within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have been fruitful," said EU lead spokesperson for foreign affairs and security policy, Peter Stano, in a statement. "The EU commends the role played by Kuwait, as well as by the US, in facilitating this statement. The EU continues to support Kuwait's ongoing mediation efforts," the spokesperson said. — KUNA

Arab bloc praises Kuwait

CAIRO: The Arab League welcomes Kuwait-led progress towards resolving a lingering dispute involving Gulf states, the bloc's chief said on Friday. "Any genuine Arab initiative that aims to quell regional feuds is tantamount to a show of unity," Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul-Gheit said in a statement, adding that the bloc's efforts to get Arab states on the same page are "undermined" if quarrels persist. He went on to say that "rebuilding trust" and getting to the "root cause" of friction are surefire ways towards Arab unity. — KUNA

OIC welcomes statement

JEDDAH: Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Yousef Al-Othaimeen on Friday welcomed the statement made by Kuwait's foreign minister on the recent "fruitful talks" to heal the Gulf rift. Othaimeen lauded the reconciliation efforts previously made by the His Highness late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and are currently carried out by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as well as efforts by the Gulf countries' friends topped with US President Donald Trump to solve the crisis. He affirmed OIC's keenness on solidarity and stability of the Arabian Gulf, which represents a source of security and stability of the OIC member states. — KUNA

Kuwait's Amir welcomes historic agreement to heal Gulf rift

Sheikh Nawaf recalls late Amir's great mediation efforts

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has welcomed and expressed pleasure for the historic achievement which was made through continued, constructive mediation efforts to reach a final agreement to resolve the Gulf crisis. "This agreement has shown that all concerned parties are keen on retaining the pan-Gulf and the pan-Arab solidarity, unity and stability," His Highness the Amir said. "It has also demonstrated their eagerness to meet their peoples' aspirations to security, stability, progress and welfare," he said.

On this occasion, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf recalled the late Amir His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's great mediation efforts since the first day of the crisis to resolve it. These efforts have set the basis for this agreement, he pointed out, adding that the late Amir's efforts will always be alive in "our minds and history pages." His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf congratulated the leaders of the region on their historic and blessed step to achieve the aspiration of their peoples. He also thanked and voiced appreciation to friends from all over the world who supported the Kuwaiti mediation, particularly US President Donald Trump. His support has reflected the US commitment to the security and stability of the Gulf region, he said.

'Fruitful' talks

Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Acting Information Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah had said Friday that "fruitful" talks were held recently, in regards to achieving reconciliation and supporting Gulf and Arab solidarity and stability. "Within the framework of reconciliation efforts, previously led by His Highness (the late Amir) Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and in continuation of the efforts currently being carried out by His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of Kuwait, and President Donald Trump of the friendly United States of America to resolve the crisis, fruitful discussions took place recently, in which all parties affirmed their keenness on Gulf and Arab solidarity and stability and to reach a final agreement that would achieve the aspirations of lasting solidarity between their countries and achieve what is good for their people," he said in public address on state TV. The minister went on to express his "appreciation to Jared Kushner, Senior Advisor to the US President, for the valuable efforts he has made recently in this regard."

Key efforts

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is greatly appreciative to Kuwait for its efforts to iron out differences related to the Gulf crisis. "We look with great appreciation to the Kuwaiti efforts to reach conver-

gence of opinions on the Gulf crisis," tweeted Prince Faisal bin Farhan on his official Twitter account. In his tweet, he also thanked the US administrations for its endeavors in this regard. The Saudi official hoped that these sincere efforts will prove successful for the good of the whole region and its interests.

Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani affirmed on Friday that the Kuwaiti statement is "an important step for solving the Gulf crisis." "We thank the sisterly Kuwait for its mediation since the start of the crisis and also appreciate the US efforts made in this regard," the Qatari minister tweeted. He went on to say that "we emphasize that our priorities were and will remain the interests and security of people of the Arabian Gulf and the whole region."

Sheikh Mohammad also expressed optimism about an end to the Gulf crisis, in an address to a special online session of the Rome Mediterranean Dialogues conference. "There are some progress (in mediation efforts) that we hope will contribute to ending this crisis," Sheikh Mohammad said during

“Eagerness to meet peoples' aspirations”

the conference, which was organized by the Italian Foreign Ministry. The minister voiced hope that things will go in the right direction, adding that Qatar cannot anticipate whether this will be imminent or not as the rift raged for a long time: nearly three and a half years. "I think, we also need time after the solution to address everything that happened in that dispute," he said. He stressed that any solution must be comprehensive. "Any kind of decisions that will be taken must be a comprehensive solution," he said, adding that Qatar believes that the unity of the GCC is extremely important to the security and stability of the region.

The Qatari top diplomat said that his country is very positive and always treat any initiative that brings peace in the region positively. "Qatar wants to see the Gulf Cooperation Council united and most importantly, since the beginning of the crisis, Qatar has been calling for an open dialogue, and also wants to participate constructively with any efforts to resolve and ease tension in the region," he affirmed. He argued that the unity of the Gulf will be in the interest of all GCC people, as well as in the interest of the international community. The Qatari

minister hailed the Kuwaiti and US sincere efforts to resolve the Gulf crisis over the past years. "During the three years since the beginning of the Gulf crisis there have been many serious attempts to solve it on the part of the His Highness the late Amir of Kuwait (Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah), which is continued now by His Highness the current Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah along with the American administration and the American President (Donald Trump)," he said. He stressed the need to end this crisis on the basis of mutual respect and the equal rights of all countries and all peoples of the region, and to achieve the interest of our people.

Strength and cohesion

Gulf Cooperation Council Secretary-General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf has also welcomed Kuwait's Foreign Minister's about the keenness on solidarity reached in recent reconciliation talks between Gulf Arab states. "This reflects the Gulf Cooperation Council's strength and cohesion, and its ability to overcome obstacles and challenges with the grace of God and the wisdom and sophistication of its leaders," he said in a statement on Friday. "The people of the Gulf Cooperation Council, as they are proud of this statement, seek to strengthen the Gulf house and look forward to what the future may bring of hope, aspirations and opportunities amid an interconnected and united Gulf entity that works to serve its countries and peoples and pushes forward the wheels of development, progress, security and prosperity."

The GCC chief recalled, with "appreciation and gratitude, the sincere efforts led by the late Amir of Kuwait His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, since the beginning of the affair, and the continued efforts of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, which we are witnessing through the statement issued (Friday)." He also praised US President Donald Trump support for the mediation efforts and his belief in the unity of the Gulf Arab bloc, its strength and its pivotal role in promoting regional and global peace, security and development. He went on to extend his gratitude, appreciation and congratulations to GCC leaders on a day, he described as "blessed" and to its nations, who he said are "witnessing the beginning of a new phase of our blessed march, led by the leaders of the GCC, with the help and success of God, to achieve development, security and prosperity." Speaking to the people and the media, he urged to "look positively to the future and avoid things that may provoke dispute," and to instead, "focus on things that aim to strengthen and support solidarity." He prayed for the protection of GCC leaders so they may perform their duties in strengthening Gulf and Arab solidarity and supporting security and stability. — KUNA

Oman welcomes statement on GCC reconciliation efforts

CAPITALS: The Sultanate of Oman welcomed on Friday Kuwait's statement on the "positive outcomes" of the reconciliation efforts on the Gulf crisis that were previously led by the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Oman has welcomed the efforts made also by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and US President Donald Trump, Oman News Agency (ONA) reported. These efforts mirror keenness of all parties on the Arab and Gulf solidarity and stability, with the aim of reaching a final deal that achieves the permanent solidarity amongst all countries to make growth and prosperity to the region's nations, it said.

Jordan welcomed the statement by Kuwait's Foreign Minister, which it said was imperative for enhancing the Gulf stability and the Arab comprehensive security to face the common challenges. Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Al-Safadi stressed the importance of this step in meeting the aspirations of peoples of the Arabian Gulf regarding growth and prosperity. He commended the

"big efforts" made by the late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to put an end to the crisis and achieve the Gulf solidarity which is a main pillar to achieve the Arab solidarity and activate mechanisms of the joint action. He lauded keenness of all Arab brothers on bolstering the Gulf and Arab solidarity and stability by reaching a final deal that strengthens solidarity and guarantees achieving the best for the Arabian Gulf states and their peoples.

The Lebanese foreign ministry has meanwhile hailed Kuwait's efforts and role in resolving issues between the Gulf states and achieving reconciliation. In a statement yesterday, the ministry said it is pleased with the recent development in the Gulf reconciliation talks and expressed appreciation for the efforts of Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on the matter. Meanwhile, the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres has lauded Kuwait's mediation efforts to narrow differences among Gulf countries. "The Secretary-General welcomes the efforts and contributions of Kuwait in building bridges of understanding in the Gulf region and beyond," Spokesman for the Secretary-General Stephane Dujarric said in a press statement Friday. He added that the UN chief is encouraged by the statement by the Foreign Minister of Kuwait and other reports that the Gulf rift is close to a resolution. — KUNA

British-Kuwait Friendship Society awards book prizes

LONDON: The British-Kuwait Friendship Society Book Prize held a virtual award ceremony recently to honor the winners of 2020 prizes for the Best Scholarly Work in Middle Eastern Studies. The Society, founded in April 1996 with an endowment from Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah Foundation, awarded the best Book Prize in Middle Eastern Studies to "Electric News in Colonial Algeria." The book, authored by Arthur Asseraf, a historian of modern North Africa, France and the Mediterranean at University of Cambridge, was published by Oxford University Press in August 2019. It examines a range of sources in multiple languages across colonial society and offers a new understanding of the spread of news. News was a whole ecosystem in which new technologies such as the printing press, telegraph, cinema and radio interacted with older media like songs, rumors, letters and manuscripts. The French government used to watch anxiously over these developments, monitoring Algerians' reactions to news through an extensive network of surveillance that often ended up spreading news rather than controlling its flow.

The second prize for best scholarly work was shared by Leor Halevi's "Modern Things on Trial: Islam's Global and Material Reformation in the Age of Rida" and Luke B Yarbrough's "Friends of the Emir: Non-Muslim State Officials in Pre-modern Islamic

Thought." Published by Columbia University Press (1865-1935), "Modern Things on Trial" tells the story of the Islamic trials of technological and commercial innovations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Halevi focuses on the communications of an entrepreneurial Syrian interpreter of the sharia named Rashid Rida, who became a renowned reformer by responding to the demand for authoritative and authentic religious advice. Published by Cambridge University Press in June, 2019, "Friends of the Emir" traced the influence of Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian and other non-Muslim state officials on Muslim Caliphs. Yarbrough explores for the first time medieval sources in the realms of law, history, poetry, entertaining literature, administration, and polemic.

On the award ceremony, Kuwait Ambassador and Dean of Diplomatic Corps in the United Kingdom Khaled A Al-Duwaisan lauded the role of the Book Prize in the cultural relations between both countries. "The fact that the Abdullah Al-Mubarak Foundation continued awarding this prize annually and successfully over the last two decade signals the strength of the Kuwaiti-British relationship," he affirmed. Duwaisan, also Chairman of the Friendship Society, wished continuing success for the Prize and its contribution to mutual understanding and scholarship. Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak said the aim of the prizes is to boost the scholarly works, written in English, and addressing major issues relating to the Arab and Muslim world. "In so-doing, we aim to build bridges of understanding between the Arab and Western countries," Sheikh Mubarak noted in a press release. Sheikhha Dr Suad Al-Sabah and Prince Charles, of Wales, are the honorary presidents of the Friendship Society. — KUNA



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Mustachioed 'Spice King' dies aged 97 in India

Iraqis renew protests in solidarity after violence

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MOSCOW: A nurse wearing a face mask vaccinates against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) with the Sputnik V (Gam-COVID-Vac) vaccine at a clinic yesterday amid the pandemic. — AFP

WHO warns virus crisis not over

Vaccine rollout starts • Companies preparing for massive logistical effort

WASHINGTON: The World Health Organization warned that vaccines were no magic bullet for the coronavirus crisis, as Russia started vaccinating its high-risk workers yesterday and other countries geared up for similar programs. The WHO warned about what it said was an erroneous belief that the COVID-19 crisis is over with jabs on the horizon, nearly a year after the start of the pandemic that has killed 1.5 million people worldwide.

"Vaccines do not equal zero COVID," said WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan, adding that not everyone will be able to receive it early next year. "Vaccination will add a major, major, powerful tool to the tool kit that we have. But by themselves, they will not do the job." WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus also cautioned against the "growing perception that the pandemic is over" with the virus still spreading fast, putting enormous pressure on hospitals and health care workers.

Health officials in Moscow said they had opened 70 coronavirus vaccine centers in the Russian capital that would initially offer jabs for health, education and social workers. The WHO caution came as the United States clocked a record number of COVID-19 cases for a second day in a row Friday,

with the country preparing for what US President-elect Joe Biden has called a "dark winter".

America's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended "universal face mask use" indoors and Biden said he would scale down his January inauguration ceremony to mitigate the virus risk. It comes as countries prepare for the approval and rollout of several vaccines that have proven effective in trials.

Massive logistical effort

The WHO says 51 candidate vaccines are currently being tested on humans, with 13 reaching final-stage mass testing. Britain on Wednesday became the first Western country to approve an inoculation, from a Pfizer-BioNTech, for general use, piling pressure on other countries to swiftly follow suit. The United States is expected to give a green light later this month. Belgium, France and Spain have said jabs will begin in January for the most vulnerable.

With the imminent arrival of vaccines that need storage at ultra-low temperatures, US companies are preparing for a massive logistical effort to aid their distribution. Firms specializing in insulating

containers are on a war footing after Pfizer and BioNTech said their vaccine needs to be stored at -70 Celsius. Meat processing giant Smithfield said it was ready to put the cold rooms at its abattoirs at the disposal of vaccine rollout operations. And US logistics giant UPS is producing 500 kg of dry ice an hour in its depots and has developed portable freezers capable of storing the vaccines at temperatures down to -112 Fahrenheit.

'Follow the science'

Standing in the way of success are growing signs of vaccine skepticism, with misinformation and mistrust coloring public acceptance of inoculation. In Russia, Levada polling agency recently found that only 36 percent of respondents were prepared to be vaccinated against the coronavirus. Several high-profile figures have pledged to receive the vaccine in public in an effort to build confidence, including Biden, Tedros and former US presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

The United States recorded 225,000 new infections on Friday - the second daily record in a row for the world's worst-hit nation. Biden said the surging number of cases meant he would scale back

his inauguration ceremony set for January. "We're going to follow the science and the recommendations of the experts," Biden told reporters.

Christmas spike expected

More than 65 million people have contracted COVID-19 globally with the death toll from the disease topping 1.5 million since it first emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan late last year. British medical chiefs said the arrival of a vaccine should see deaths reduce "significantly" by early next year but warned social mixing over Christmas could cause another spike before then. "By spring the effects of vaccination will begin to be felt in reducing COVID admissions, attendances and deaths significantly but there are many weeks before we get to that stage," they said.

Italy is seeing a dramatic resurgence of infections after it largely tamped down an earlier outbreak by enforcing a strict lockdown, while Latin America and the Caribbean region has seen an 18 percent spike in cases in a week. Other countries are also unveiling holiday restrictions, with Switzerland banning Christmas caroling in the streets and Madrid cancelling most New Year events in the city center. — AFP

Massive funeral for teen killed by Israeli soldiers

RAMALLAH: Hundreds of Palestinians attended the funeral yesterday of a teenager killed in clashes with the Israeli army, defying a curfew imposed on the occupied West Bank to stem the coronavirus. Ali Ayman Nasr Abu Aliya, 13, died on Friday after he was "shot with live rounds in the stomach" during clashes in the village of Mughayir, north of Ramallah, the Palestinian health ministry said.

The boy, whose death drew Palestinian condemnation and was deplored by the United Nations and the European Union, was hit during a protest against the construction of a Jewish settlement. A funeral cortege joined by hundreds of mourners took the body from a hospital in Ramallah to Mughayir where Abu Aliya was buried.

His body, draped in the Palestinian flag and a traditional keffiyeh headscarf, was carried shoulder high by mourners, who also waved yellow flags of the Fatah movement of president Mahmoud Abbas. The mourners defied a weekend curfew imposed by Palestinian authorities to stem the rise in coronavirus cases to pay their respects.

The West Bank has recorded 71,703 COVID-19



RAMALLAH: Mourners carry the body of Palestinian teenager Ali Abu Aliya during his funeral in the village of Mughayir in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday. — AFP

infections, including 678 deaths, since the first cases emerged earlier this year. The European Union delegation to the Palestinians on Saturday denounced the "shocking" killing of Abu Aliya in a tweet. "This shocking incident must be swiftly and fully investigated by the Israeli authorities in order to bring the perpetrators to justice," it said. "How many more Palestinian children will be subject to the excessive

use of lethal force by the Israeli security forces?"

UN Middle East envoy Nickolay Mladenov said on Friday he was "appalled by the killing" and also called on Israel to investigate the death of Abu Aliya calling it an "unacceptable incident". The Israeli army denied live rounds were used during Friday's protest and clashes, but said dozens of protesters had thrown rocks at security forces. — AFP

Trump orders troop pullout from Somalia

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has ordered the removal of most US military and security personnel from Somalia, where they have been conducting operations against the Al-Shabaab militant group, the Pentagon said Friday. After ordering major troop reductions in Iraq and Afghanistan recently, Trump's new move reflects his drive to disengage US forces from what he calls endless wars abroad, making good on a campaign pledge in the final weeks of his presidency.

Trump "has ordered the Department of Defense and the United States Africa Command to reposition the majority of personnel and assets out of Somalia by early 2021," the Pentagon said in a statement. The Defense Department stressed the United States was "not withdrawing or disengaging

from Africa," amid concerns of a pullback from various areas in the continent. "We will continue to degrade violent extremist organizations that could threaten our homeland while ensuring we maintain our strategic advantage in great power competition," it said.

The US Africa Command has maintained some 700 troops, personnel from other US security operations, and private security contractors in Somalia, both conducting attacks on Al-Shabaab and training Somali forces. US troops have conducted operations against extremist groups in Somalia since the early 2000s, killing hundreds in mostly conventional aircraft and drone strikes that have caused significant civilian deaths.

US personnel meanwhile have sustained some casualties, including the death of a CIA officer in late November. Acting Defense Secretary Chris Miller visited Somalia a week ago, where he "reaffirmed US resolve in seeing the degradation of violent extremist organizations that threaten US interests, partners, and allies in the region," the Pentagon said. On Wednesday Joint Chiefs Chairman General Mark Milley confirmed that the Defense

Department was reviewing the size of its posture in the country.

"We recognize that Al-Shabaab in the Lower River Jubba Valley is a threat. We know that it's an organized, capable terrorist organization. It's an extension of Al-Qaeda, just like ISIS was," he said. He called the US presence relatively small, "relatively low cost in terms of numbers of personnel and in terms of money". "But it's also high risk," he said. Yet, if US forces do not keep up pressure on Al-Shabaab, he said, they could threaten to attack US interests outside the Horn of Africa region.

"Most people probably don't know what that small force has been doing, but they've helped prevent Shabaab - a prolific branch of Al-Qaeda - from forming an Islamic emirate and disrupted terrorist operations," said Thomas Joscelyn, an expert on Islamist extremist groups at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies think-tank. Shabaab's main goal, he said on Twitter, "is to create an Islamic emirate in Somalia and export jihad throughout the region". "The group has also experimented with sophisticated explosives to attack airplanes and international plotting can't be ruled out." — AFP

US judge orders Trump admin to restore DACA

WASHINGTON: A US judge ordered the Trump administration Friday to fully reinstate a program that protects from deportation immigrants who came to the country illegally as children. The administration must allow newly eligible immigrants to apply to the so-called DACA program, Judge Nicholas Garaufis of the US District Court in Brooklyn wrote.

Over the summer, the administration had issued a memo limiting the program to those who were already enrolled. Then-president Barack Obama instituted DACA by executive order in 2012 to help some of the more than 10 million people estimated to be living in America without documentation. DACA protected an estimated 700,000 people known as Dreamers, offering protection at renewable two-year periods, including authorization to work.

It applied to people who were brought into the United States illegally as children and then grew up here. For many it is the only country they have ever known. DACA stands for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. As part of his crackdown on all kinds of immigration, Trump moved to end the program in 2017, calling it unconstitutional. The case ended up in the US Supreme Court, which ruled in June that the Trump administration had not followed proper administrative procedures to end the policy.

But in response, the Department of Homeland Security reinstated it only partially. It limited DACA to those already enrolled, rather than allow new applicants as well. And it cut the length of DACA permit renewals to one year, rather than the two years the program had allowed. On Friday, Garaufis said Homeland Security must announce the full reinstatement of DACA on its website by Monday. More than 300,000 new applicants could now be eligible for DACA, the Center for American Progress think tank said. "This is a really big day for DACA recipients and immigrant young people," said Karen Tumlin, director of the Justice Action Center, who litigated the class-action case. Immigration is a hot button issue in the US, and Congress over the years has failed repeatedly to pass reform legislation dealing with the millions of people living in the country without authorization. — AFP

International

Macron urged to press ally Sisi on rights in Paris visit

Sisi arrives in France on a three-day state visit

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron hosts Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi from today for a three-day state visit with France facing calls from activists that Egypt should not be "indulged" despite the close alliance between Cairo and Paris.

Egypt and France have enjoyed an increasingly close relationship under the secular rule of former army general Sisi, with common interests in the Middle East and a shared suspicion of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Sisi will dine with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian today evening before holding talks with Macron at the Elysee tomorrow. Meetings with other political leaders are due to stretch into Tuesday.

France's close relationship with Egypt at a time when Cairo stands accused of serial human rights violations has concerned activists, who want Macron to make the issue central to the discussions. "French diplomacy has, at the highest levels, long indulged President Al-Sisi's brutal repression of any form of dissent," a dozen human rights groups including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) said in a joint statement ahead of his visit.

"It is now or never for President Macron to stand up for his self-declared commitment to promote human rights in Egypt." The statement said that as well as being Egypt's main arms supplier by selling warships and fighter jets, the French government has also allowed French companies to provide Cairo with surveillance and crowd control tools.

"We are amazed that France is rolling out the red carpet for a dictator when there are more than 60,000 prisoners of conscience today in Egypt,"

Antoine Madelin, international advocacy director of the FIDH, said.

'Positive sign'

Sisi came to power in 2014 in the wake of the overthrow in 2013 of the president Mohamed Morsi by the military which he then led.

Those caught in the crackdown include Islamist supporters of the ousted Morsi, but also leftists and liberals. Concern over Sisi's visit to Paris was amplified when three Egyptian activists were arrested last month following a meeting with foreign ambassadors. However, following an international campaign backed by celebrities such as Scarlett Johansson, all three campaigners from the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights have been freed. Rights NGOs are set to hold a protest outside the French parliament on Tuesday denouncing the "strategic partnership" between France and Egypt.

A French presidential official, who asked not to be named, described the release of the trio as a "positive signal" and emphasized that rights issues would be brought up by Macron.

Macron had raised human rights concerns during a visit to Cairo in January 2018, saying "respect for individual freedoms, dignity of everyone and the rule of law." The French leader had been criticised by rights groups after saying in October 2017 during a visit by Sisi to Paris that he would not "lecture" Egypt on liberties.

Those jailed in Egypt include Palestinian-Egyptian activist Ramy Shaath, husband of French national Celine Lebrun, and held since July 2019 on accusations of acting against the state. "His case is completely empty and the accusations are devoid of any proof," Lebrun said, saying she had only been



PARIS: A woman watches a live stream interview of French President Emmanuel Macron to the digital news platform Brut on Friday in Le Raincy, on the outskirts of Paris. — AFP

able to speak to her husband twice by phone.

'Strategic partnership'

Both Macron and Sisi are wary of the regional ambitions of Turkey under Erdogan which has intervened militarily in the conflicts in Libya and Syria and sought to bolster the Turkish footprint in Africa. The Muslim Brotherhood-aligned Morsi was a close ally of Erdogan and the Turkish president has

repeatedly expressed dismay over his ousting.

Tensions between Ankara and Paris grew further in the run-up to the visit with Erdogan saying that France should "get rid of" Macron "as soon as possible". France's priority is the reinforcement of the "strategic partnership" with the most populous country in the Arab world which is considered a center of "stability" in a volatile region, said the French official. — AFP

French ex-president Giscard laid to rest in low-key ceremony

AUTHON, France: France's former president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, credited with leading social and technological reform of the country and placing it at the heart of Europe, was laid to rest yesterday in a low-key funeral attended only by family and his close circle.

It had been the wish of Giscard, who ruled France from 1974-1981 and died on Wednesday of Covid-19 aged 94, to have such a small-scale ceremony, which was attended by around 40 people. The ceremony, in the town of Authon in the Loire region of central France where he lived, contrasted with the lavish send-off for former president Jacques Chirac when he died in 2019.

Chirac was given a lying-in-state with thousands paying respects at his coffin in Paris before a funeral ceremony at the Saint Sulpice church attended by all France's living former

leaders. That ceremony in September 2019 was also the last time Giscard was seen in public. "The president (Giscard) wanted the funeral to take place in the strictest privacy with family," his son Henri Giscard d'Estaing told AFP on Friday.

"It turns out that the circumstances (due to the pandemic) mean that there would have been no other choice. We will therefore only have family members and the people who live around us in Authon," he said. With police standing guard outside, his coffin draped in French and European flags was carried into the Saint Hilaire church in Authon, an AFP correspondent said.

France will on Wednesday observe a day of national mourning in his memory decreed by President Emmanuel Macron, with people able to write tributes in books placed in town halls.



PARIS: French priest Don Stephane (center) and Blois' bishop Jean-Pierre Batut (second right) stand as pallbearers pull out the coffin of late former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing out of the hearse outside Saint Hilaire church during a funeral ceremony yesterday. — AFP

Under Giscard, France 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.

But ambitions to carve out a deep place in history were derailed in 1981 when he lost a tightly contested election to his Socialist rival Francois Mitterrand, who would rule France for the next 14 years. — AFP

Iran court to retry 3 sentenced to death over protests

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme court said yesterday it will review the cases of three young men sentenced to death over links to deadly November 2019 protests after a request from their lawyers.

Numerous calls had spread online after the verdict was announced, calling for a halt for executions in Iran, with the United Nations and European countries reaffirming their opposition to the death sentence. In July, Iran's judiciary halted the death sentences against the three a week after they were upheld by a tribunal over evidence the judiciary said was found on their phones of them setting alight banks, buses and public buildings during the wave of anti-government protests.

"A request to retry the three sentenced to death over the (November) incidents was accepted," the supreme court said on its official website. "The case will be reviewed in another tribunal," it added, without elaborating further on the decision. Four lawyers representing the accused made the request days after the young men's sentences were upheld in July, local media said at the time.

One of the lawyers identified the three as friends 26-year-old retain worker Amirhossein Moradi, Said Tamjidi, a 28-year-old driver for Snapp (Iran's Uber), and Mohammad Rajabi, also 26 and unemployed.

They were sentenced over "collusion to endanger national security" and "destroying and setting fire to public property with the aim of confronting the political system of the Islamic republic." Babak Paknia, who represents Moradi, told AFP in an interview in July. Paknia confirmed the supreme court's decision in a tweet yesterday.

The demonstrations erupted in November last year after authorities more than doubled fuel prices overnight, exacerbating economic hardship in the sanctions-hit country.

They rocked a handful of cities before spreading to at least 100 urban centers across Iran. Petrol pumps were torched, police stations attacked and shops looted before security forces stepped in amid a near-total internet blackout. — AFP



NASIRIYAH, Iraq: Iraqi demonstrators lift national flags as they gather in Habboubi Square in the southern city of Nasiriyah in Dhi Qar province, on Friday, to express anger after followers of Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr clashed with young protesters lately. — AFP

Iraqis renew protest after violence

NASIRIYAH, Iraq: Protesters hit the streets in several Iraqi cities on Friday, one week after clashes between supporters of a controversial Shiite cleric and anti-government demonstrators left nine people dead. On November 27, followers of militiaman-turned-cleric Moqtada Sadr turned out in a show of force in the Iraqi capital, southern hotspot of Nasiriyah and other cities. While the massive Baghdad protest ended peacefully, Sadrists in Nasiriyah clashed with the dwindling numbers of anti-government demonstrators who have been rallying there since October 2019.

Last week's clashes left nine people dead, medics said, including several who died of their wounds days later. On Friday, thousands in Nasiriyah held a protest and funeral march for those lives lost.

"The violence last week won't prevent us from carrying on in our protests. Our only option is achieving the goals of this uprising," Hussein al-Saidi, a demonstrator in Nasiriyah's Habboubi square, told AFP.

Habboubi Square is the heart of the anti-government uprising in Nasiriyah and the site of last

week's clashes. Security forces on Friday had sealed off streets leading to the square to keep a Sadrist rally from reaching it. Thousands of followers of Sadr, a firebrand cleric who tweets often but is rarely seen in public, held their own prayer-protest on Friday for the second week in a row.

'Under the government's nose'

Other cities also held rallies in solidarity, with a small flash protest held in Baghdad's Tahrir Square.

In the southern city of Diwaniyah, hundreds gathered to condemn ongoing violence against demonstrators. "The militias and armed groups are attacking us right under the nose of the government security forces-this government seems to be subject to militia power," said Mustafa al-Jubeir, a lawyer demonstrating in Diwaniyah.

Since anti-government rallies broke out in October 2019, nearly 600 people have died in protest-related violence. One of the bloodiest incidents was on November 28, 2019, when more than three dozen people died in Nasiriyah. Those deaths sparked outrage across Iraq and prompted the resignation of then-premier Adel Abdel Mahdi, paving the way for Mustafa Al-Kadhemi to succeed him. Kadhemi has tried to reach out to youth by setting early parliamentary elections for June 2021 and vowing to hold those responsible for protester deaths to account. — AFP

News in brief

Canada sees 100,000 new cases

OATTAWA: Canada's second wave of COVID-19 infections has led to 100,000 new cases reported in just the last two weeks, data compiled by public broadcaster CBC showed Friday. There has now been a total of 400,031 cases in the country of 38 million people. The illness has been blamed for 12,470 deaths. It took just 18 days to go from 300,000 to 400,000 cases in a second wave of Covid-19 that has prompted several regions to reintroduce measures to curb its spread. They include Quebec province cancelling Christmas plans for many people with new rules restricting holiday gatherings and Alberta looking to set up field hospitals to help treat patients. — AFP

Brazil bus plunge kills 16

RIO DE JANEIRO: A bus in Brazil plunged off a viaduct from a height of 20 meters (70 feet) Friday after the brakes apparently failed, crashing onto rail tracks below and killing at least 16 people, officials said. Another 27 people were hurt in the accident near the town of Joao Monlevade in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais. Photos released by firefighters showed the crushed ruins of the bus at the foot of the viaduct. The driver lost control of it after the brakes allegedly failed, officials said. Six people managed to scramble out of the bus before it fell, including the driver, the fire department said. On November 25, a total of 41 people died when a truck and a bus crashed into each other near the city of Taguai in Sao Paulo state. — AFP

UK eyes fall in COVID deaths

LONDON: The arrival of a vaccine should see coronavirus deaths in Britain reduce "significantly" by early next year but social mixing over Christmas could cause another spike before that, UK medical chiefs said Friday. Britain on Wednesday gave emergency approval to the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine and will begin the world's first roll-out from next week. "We think it likely that by spring the effects of vaccination will begin to be felt in reducing COVID admissions, attendances and deaths significantly but there are many weeks before we get to that stage," the chief medical officers of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland said. — AFP

Zimbabwe opposition leader released

HARARE: Zimbabwean police briefly detained a former finance minister and top opposition official late Friday on a charge of assaulting a Russian national last month, his party's spokeswoman said yesterday. Tendai Biti, 53, was freed on \$10,000 bail after a night behind bars, after having been charged with assault. Provincial head magistrate in Harare, Vongai Muchuchuti, set his case to January 18 for trial. The charge against Biti, a lawmaker who is vice-president of Zimbabwe's main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Alliance, arise out of an alleged incident following November 30 a court hearing. — AFP

Nicaragua mine collapse traps 10

MANAGUA: A mudslide in an unlicensed gold mine in Nicaragua trapped at least 10 workers Friday, state-run media reported. Crews began work to try to rescue the miners after the accident in the La Esperanza region of southern Nicaragua. Vice President Rosario Murillo, who is also the government spokeswoman, did not say how many miners were in the shaft when it collapsed or if there were fatalities. "We hope not to have bad news," she said, according to the government news site El 19 Digital. — AFP

International

Bangladesh ships 1,600 Rohingya refugees to controversial island

First phase of a controversial planned relocation of 100,000 people

CHITTAGONG, Bangladesh: Bangladesh transported more than 1,600 Rohingya refugees to a low-lying island on Friday in the first phase of a controversial planned relocation of 100,000 people.

Almost a million Rohingya—most of whom fled a military offensive in neighboring Myanmar three years ago—live in squalid camps in southeastern Bangladesh. Any return to Myanmar appears unlikely for now. Dhaka wants to move 100,000 of the refugees to Bhashan Char, a silt island that critics say is prone to flooding and in the path of cyclones that frequently wreak havoc in the region.

Rights groups have alleged that many of those sent in the first wave on Friday were coerced into going with threats or sweeteners. This was borne out by some family members that AFP spoke to at camps in the Cox's Bazar district on Thursday as they said tearful goodbyes to their relatives.

"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. At the United Nations, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said there had been "some reports from the camps that some refugees may be feeling pressured into relocating" or had changed their minds about going.

"If so, they should be allowed to remain in the camps in Cox's Bazar," he said. But Bangladesh's Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen called the claims "a damn lie", and said the facilities on the island were "much better" than in the camps.

'All modern amenities'

Bangladesh has spent some \$400 million from its own coffers building shelters and a nine-foot (three-meter) flood embankment around the facilities. The government said the facilities are "strongly built with concrete foundation which can withstand natural disasters such as cyclones and tidal waves."

The island "has all modern amenities, year-round fresh water, (a) beautiful lake and proper infrastructure and enhanced facilities," the foreign ministry said Friday. "These include uninterrupted supply of electricity and water, agricultural plots, cyclone shelters, two hospitals, four community clinics, mosques, warehouses, telecommunication services, police station, recreation and learning centers, playgrounds, etc," it said. Bangladeshi authorities say the relocation will ease congestion in the vast network of camps where deadly landslides—as well as violence by drug gangs and extremists—are common.

But it is unclear whether the refugees will be able to leave if they wish to. The United Nations office in Bangladesh said it had been prevented from independently assessing the "safety, feasibility and sustainability" of the island as a place to live. The UN spokesman in New York echoed that claim, saying: "We have not been involved."

"Any movement of refugees needs to be done voluntarily and in safety and dignity," Dujarric said.

Mohammad Jubaer, 28, who was on one of the ships with three family members on the three-hour sea journey from Chittagong to the island on Friday,



Rohingya refugees disembark from a Bangladesh Navy ship to the island of Bhashan Char in Noakhali on Friday. Bangladeshi authorities set more than 1,640 Rohingya refugees on the final leg of their journey to an allegedly dangerous island Friday, in the first phase of a controversial planned relocation of 100,000 people. —AFP

said he was happy to go. "I hope there will be enough work for me in the island. I wish they

would also bring my brother and his family to the island," he told AFP by phone. —AFP

'Rubber duck revolution' takes off in Thailand

BANGKOK: Bangkok has been gripped by a rubber duck frenzy since pro-democracy protesters used giant inflatables to shield themselves from water cannon spray last month. When police mounted a crackdown on a November rally, deploying tear gas and water cannon outside parliament, footage of demonstrators hiding behind giant ducks went viral.

Within days, duck-themed paraphernalia became a staple among street vendors at protests, the birds featuring on everything from hats to hair clips. Protesters are calling for Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha to resign, a rewrite of the army-drafted constitution and for reforms to the monarchy — a taboo-smashing demand in a country where the ultra-wealthy royal family has long been untouchable.

The toy's emergence as a protest symbol happened by accident. Protesters had intended to float on inflatable ducks down Bangkok's Chao Phraya River behind parliament as lawmakers

inside debated proposals for constitutional change. But since their redeployment as protection from tear gas and chemical-laced water fired from cannons, some demonstrators say the ducks have helped the pro-democracy movement win the PR war with authorities.

"To put it simply, they're the guards of the people who use peaceful ways in protesting. We have cute ducks to fight against fully armed police, and it shows that we're better," said a 30-year-old protester named Sam. Rattikarn Saehor, 39, sells duck bubble blowers from a stall and said her products help lighten the mood at rallies.

"We want the protest to be less stressful, full of creative ideas that show we truly like to protest with peace, and do not want any violence to happen — so the ducks have helped make everything look lighter and softer," she said. She said proceeds from her sales had supported volunteer medical teams at protests.

It is not the first time the bath-time buddies have been used as symbols of defiance and protest. In 2013, Dutch artist Florentijn Hofman's 16-metre inflatable duck sculpture floated in Hong Kong's harbor but swiftly became mired in controversy. A Weibo user edited a famous image from the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, replacing tanks with ducks prompting a Chinese government internet



BANGKOK: Royalists wait for the start of a ceremony to commemorate the birthday of the late Thai king Bhumibol Adulyadej at Sanam Luang in Bangkok yesterday. —AFP

search ban on "big yellow duck".

Giant inflatable rubber ducks featured in protests in Brazil in 2016 during a push to impeach then president Dilma Rousseff and highlight the economic "quackery" of her government amid a downturn. And they became a symbol of protest in Russia in 2017 when it emerged then prime minister Dmitry Medvedev had multiple luxury estates — including one that featured a special house for ducks on a pond. —AFP

Mustachioed 'Spice King' dies aged 97 in India

MUMBAI: Dharampal Gulati, a former refugee who became India's "Spice King" running an empire whose ready-to-use blends transformed kitchens around the country, has died at 97, his firm said.

The fifth-grade school dropout spawned dozens of internet memes thanks to his swaggering presence in advertisements for his Delhi-based Mahashian Di Hatti Spices brand, better known as MDH. Usually sporting a red turban, a pearl necklace, and a luxuriant moustache, his visage was hard to miss and helped MDH become the second-most popular spice brand in India.

"Respect & Honour to The King of Spices,"

the brand tweeted Thursday, announcing his death from a cardiac arrest, as Indian politicians offered their condolences. "Saddened by his demise. He was a well-known personality who had done commendable social work," President Ram Nath Kovind tweeted.

MDH, whose full name means "shop of a respectable man" in Punjabi, was founded by Gulati's father in 1919 in the city of Sialkot, now in Pakistan. Partition forced the younger Gulati to move to India, where he drove a horse-cart to scrape a living until he was able to restart the family business.

The company's success was often attributed to his cheerful presence living up the brand's TV adverts during the 1980s and onwards, touting the quality of the spices.

Social media turned him into a star, as his face popped up in memes as a symbol of longevity.

He was only too happy to represent his brand, dismissing rival firms for hiring Bollywood celebrities to hawk their products. "People ask me why I don't get Shah Rukh Khan or Amitabh



Dharampal Gulati

Bachchan to promote my masalas," he told the Hindustan Times in an interview in 2009. "Why should I ride on their success to promote my brand? I am the man behind the success of my product, so shouldn't I be promoting it?"

He was also a committed philanthropist, building schools and hospitals, and was awarded the Padma Bhushan, India's third-highest civilian honor, last year. —AFP

US House backs decriminalizing cannabis in vote

WASHINGTON: US House legislators voted for the first time Friday to decriminalize cannabis, a key step towards bringing federal laws in line with states and other countries that have freed up use of the drug. The House of Representatives, controlled by Democrats, easily passed the bill by 228 votes to 164. It stands little chance however in the Senate, which is controlled by Republicans.

The bill would remove marijuana from the federal Controlled Substances Act, which listed it beside heroin and cocaine as a dangerous narcotic and mandated tough penalties. The drug's inclusion on the list has left the US federal government out of line with the many states which have legalized marijuana for medical use and some, like Colorado, which have completely freed and regulated it for recreational use.

The bill was the culmination of five decades of supporters lobbying to have the federal government recognize the relatively low harm inflicted by cannabis usage compared to other drugs, as well as the failure to stifle the trade while jailing hundreds of thousands of people for minor offenses.

It would see the records of many people arrested for marijuana use expunged, and calls for the review of the sentences of those currently jailed on federal cannabis charges. And it would let states set their own laws but also launch federal regulation and taxation of the industry, as it does for alcohol.

"For far too long, we have treated marijuana as a criminal justice problem instead of as a matter of personal choice and public health," said senior House Democrat Jerry Nadler, who sponsored the legislation. "Growing recognition in the states show that the status quo on this issue is unacceptable."

Out of step

Democrats argued that Black Americans have suffered legally much more than whites for arrests and convictions: that federal decriminalization would allow injured veterans better access to medical marijuana; and that longstanding federal blocks on marijuana research would end. Democrat Earl Blumenauer noted that marijuana usage tests by employers and police are not completely reliable.

"We don't have a good test and the federal prohibition on research stands in the way of this."

Some Republicans argued that the bill will encourage usage. Others said it would create another layer of bureaucracy and taxation in the Treasury department. One noted that it will place a federal tax of only five percent on cannabis, a fraction of that for tobacco.

But California Republican Tom McClintock said he

avored the bill because legalizing and regulating cannabis would take the industry out of the hands of violent growers and traffickers.

McClintock represents a district covering a large section of the Sierra Nevada mountains, where illegal marijuana plantations are relatively common guarded by heavily armed gangs. "I think marijuana use is a pretty bad idea. My wife and I have never gone near the stuff," McClintock said before the vote.

But he added: "We have to recognize that the prohibition law has done far more harm. It has spawned a violent underground economy. "Radish farmers don't kill each other over territory."

US out of step

The 50-year-old National Organization for reform of Marijuana Laws called it "a historic day." "By going on the record with this vote, House members have set the stage for a much-needed legislative showdown in 2021" they said, noting that on January 20 a Democrat, Joe Biden, will occupy the White House. Increasingly the US federal approach is out of line with international trends. Northern neighbor Canada fully legalized marijuana in 2018, and has a number of large companies growing it commercially.

And Mexico also took a step closer to legalizing marijuana for recreational and medicinal use last month as the Senate approved a bill aimed at undermining the violent gangs that control supply of the drug, much of it destined for the United States. —AFP

News in brief

18 Chinese miners killed in gas leak

BEIJING: Eighteen miners were confirmed dead yesterday after a carbon monoxide leak at a coal mine in southwestern China, state media reported, with rescue efforts under way to reach five others still trapped underground. Twenty-four miners were caught up in the accident at the Diaoshuidong mine in the city of Chongqing after the gas leak occurred on Friday, state broadcaster CCTV reported. As of yesterday morning, one survivor and 18 victims had been found, said CCTV, citing the local emergency rescue command headquarters. The accident occurred while workers were dismantling underground mining equipment, CCTV reported. The mine had been closed for the previous two months. —AFP

US ends China-funded programs

WASHINGTON: The US State Department said Friday it was terminating five Chinese-funded exchange programs with the United States, calling them propaganda tools for Beijing. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement that these programs, conducted under a US law called the MECEA that permits American government employees to travel using foreign government funds, were "disguised as 'cultural exchanges.'" "While other programs funded under the auspices of the MECEA are mutually beneficial, the five programs in question are fully funded and operated by the PRC government as soft power propaganda tools," Pompeo said, referring to the People's Republic of China. —AFP

Peru repeals farm law after blockades

LIMA: Peru's Congress on Friday repealed a farming law that had triggered days of road-blocks and other protests by striking workers. The protesters erupted with joy and immediately began lifting the blockades that had choked many stretches of the north-south Pan-American Highway. "We did it!" protesters chanted at one blockade site in Ica, around 155 miles (250 kilometers) south of Lima. There, an estimated 2,000 trucks and buses had been stuck for days. The strikers were demanding wage increases and the repeal of a decades-old law, recently extended until 2031, that sought to boost farm exports and gave exporters tax breaks. The strikers also said it set their wages unfairly low. —AFP

India summons Canada envoy

NEW DELHI: India on Friday summoned Canada's ambassador and warned of serious damage to diplomatic ties after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau commented on growing protests by farmers, authorities said. Trudeau however refused to back down, saying Ottawa would always back the rights of peaceful demonstrators. Tens of thousands of Indian farmers have been trying for more than a week to encircle the capital New Delhi in protest at new laws on farm produce trading. There have been clashes with police and Trudeau released a Twitter video this week calling the events "concerning" and saying farmers should be allowed to stage peaceful protests. The protests are led by farmers from Punjab, an Indian state which accounts for many migrants in Canada. —AFP

Business

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2020

Mosul market revives trade legacy

Historic wholesale market battling odds from extremists to epidemic

MOSUL: Mountains of kitchen supplies, back-to-back butchers: the historic wholesale market in Iraq's Mosul is battling the odds—from extremists to epidemic—to revive the city's reputation as a trading hub. The northern city was a commercial hub for centuries, strategically located along transport routes linking Baghdad to the south, Syria to the west, Turkey further north and Iran in the east.

Thirty years ago, Mosul opened a bulk market known as "Al-Bursa," whose shops sold food, home-ware and other goods directly to consumers as well as to smaller shops.

"The market raked in around 12 to \$13 million every month," said economist Mohammad Naef, a native of Mosul. But those golden days came to a screeching halt in 2014, when the Islamic State (IS) group began a brutal reign over Mosul that ended in 2017 after months of fierce fighting.

West Mosul, where Al-Bursa lies, was left in ruins—but its entrepreneurial residents have worked hard to revive it. The first to return was young Abdallah Mahmud, who sells cleaning supplies and is proud of Al-Bursa's heritage.

"The Bursa opened in 1990 and as the years went by, these simple little shops became the most important market in the whole province," said Mahmud, 27. Of the 500 shops there in 2014, around 300 have already reopened with individual financing, he said. The level of trade has made an impressive recovery but has yet to reach pre-IS levels.

"Today, Al-Bursa's monthly transactions cap at between eight to ten million, as many businessmen fled and never came back," said Naef.

Why this destruction?

Mosul and the broader Nineveh province saw the highest rates of displacement during the war against IS. Even after the guns fell silent, many

families hesitated to return as large parts of the city still lacked key services including water, electricity or schools. Al-Bursa represents a return to normalcy. "Residents started to return, and it helped bring life back to the whole area," said Obeida Al-Aysha, another 27-year-old trader who frequents the market.

On any given morning, shoppers flood Al-Bursa on foot, in cars or by motorcycle to pick up everything from children's toys to coffee or freshly ground spices. Customers say it's a one-stop-shop for all their needs, but wholesalers find it convenient, too.

"It saves me crazy amounts of time and tons of energy. Before, I had to go sell at each of the little markets in the towns outside of Mosul," said farmer Khalaf Oweid. "Now, I come here early in the morning and the owners of the little shops all come to me to stock their own stalls. I don't have to put myself out like before." Yunes Abed, 50, shops at Al-Bursa to stock his food store in the city's west.

"I can find everything here, but some shop-owners still haven't returned," Abed said, adding they were hoping to be compensated for assets lost in the war. Mosul's residents have applied for compensation from the government for homes, cars and storefronts destroyed in fighting, but few have been reimbursed in three years.

Indeed, some 200 of Al-Bursa's original shops remain abandoned, their metal doors still blown off and pockmarked walls tagged with graffiti. "Why this destruction?" reads one message scrawled in black on a collapsed concrete beam near Al-Bursa.

COVID takes a toll

Shopkeepers are also struggling to compete with cheaper, mass-produced imports from Iraq's neighbors, including Turkey. IS's takeover of Mosul and



MOSUL: An Iraqi salesman sits at a shop at the "Al-Bursa" wholesale market in the northern city of Mosul. — AFP

surrounding farmland in 2014 cut off farmers and local producers from the Iraqi market, creating a gap that Turkish goods swiftly filled.

"About 90 percent of the products available now at Al-Bursa are imported," estimated one of the district's businessmen, 42-year-old Ahmad Al-Shammari. And, of course, there's the economic slowdown caused by the novel coronavirus and the collapse in oil prices, which slashed the state's monthly revenues.

With government coffers drained, Iraq's four million public sector workers have seen wages delayed by weeks at a time. That has had an impact on Al-Bursa's shoppers. "Economic activity has slowed down at Al-Bursa because of the delay in salaries," said a shopkeeper who identified herself as Umm Saad. Umm Saad buys spices from Al-Bursa to sell at her nearby shop. "There are a lot of passersby, but most are just looking—their purchasing power has dropped." — AFP

Ivory Coast cocoa producers end chocolate war with Hershey's

ABIDJAN: Ivory Coast's cocoa producers have ended their row with Hershey's after the US chocolate giant committed to paying a premium above the market price under an initiative to help lift the incomes of poor farmers, according to a letter to the firm.

Ivory Coast and Ghana, the world's number one and two cocoa producers respectively, on Monday accused confectionery giants Hershey's and Mars of sidestepping a deal to pay the living income differential (LID), a bonus of \$400 per ton of cocoa, the raw material for chocolate. Millions of small farmers in Ivory Coast and Ghana, which together grow 60 percent of the world's cocoa, live in grinding poverty.

The LID is part of a program run by the multinationals to certify that their chocolate is ethically produced—meeting standards of sustainability and free of child labor—allowing them to sell it at higher prices to Western

consumers. Ivory Coast's Coffee Cacao Council said Friday it had lifted the suspension of Hershey's sustainability certification programs after the firm committed to paying the premium, according to a letter to the US company.

"This lifting of the suspension follows your final commitment to pay the LID," CCC head Yves Kone wrote to Hershey's. Ivory Coast and neighboring Ghana on Monday had launched an unprecedented media offensive against Hershey's and Mars, accusing the chocolate titans of avoiding paying the LID after Hershey's reportedly made a large cocoa purchase on the US futures market.

The two firms had denied the charges and assured that they supported the mechanism, imposed by Ivory Coast and Ghana in 2019. In his letter, Kone indicated that lifting the suspension was decided following a video interview with Hershey officials on December 1, the day after the public



In this file photo women sort cocoa beans at a cocoa exporter's in Abidjan. — AFP

denunciation.

The CCC hopes that "in the interest of producers, in your own interests and those of the cocoa sector, our organization will no longer have to suspend the Hershey programs in Ivory Coast again," Kone wrote. It was not immediately known whether Ghana had also lifted its sanctions.

The public accusations, which escalated Thursday as Ivorian cocoa farmers threatened to boycott multinational chocolate makers, could be

costly in terms of image and sales to the groups, already in the hot seat for several years over ethical issues. The world's chocolate market is estimated to be worth more than \$100 billion, concentrated in a small number of multinational corporations. But only six percent of the bonanza trickles down to the farmers in tropical countries which grow the raw product. Half of Ivorian growers live below the poverty line, according to the World Bank. — AFP

UK, EU leaders to hold call in bid for Brexit breakthrough

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen will hold talks Saturday to try to break the deadlock in post-Brexit trade deal negotiations, with time running short.

The crunch phone call, expected during the afternoon, follows UK and European Union envoys pausing last-ditch talks late Friday and acknowledging that the conditions for an agreement had not been met.

In a joint statement, top British negotiator David Frost and his European counterpart Michel Barnier said "significant divergences" remained over several key issues that have stalled talks since the summer. Pressure is growing on both sides to strike a deal with just weeks left until the 11-month Brexit transition period ends on December 31.

A deal is seen as essential to avoid deep disruption on both sides—but especially in Britain—to economies already damaged by the coronavirus pandemic. Returning to Brussels from London on Saturday to brief von der Leyen before the call, Barnier told reporters his team would "keep calm, as always".

"If there is still a way, we will see," he added. Johnson and EU Commission President von der Leyen last spoke on November 7, but a month later Britain and the bloc remain divided over so-called level playing field provisions, governance and fish-



BRUSSELS: EU chief negotiator Michel Barnier, wearing a protective face mask, arrives at Brussels Midi station, yesterday after the last round of Brexit talks in London. — AFP

eries. A European source told AFP on Friday of "serious difficulties" at this crucial late stage in the process. Johnson may also try to speak with other European leaders over the weekend, including French President Emmanuel Macron, according to the Financial Times.

EU leaders will hold a summit on Thursday, by which time many expect to know whether reaching a Brexit deal is still possible.

'Failure of statecraft'

Britain formally left the EU in January, nearly four years after a referendum on membership that divided the nation. But it has remained bound by most of its rules until the end of the year, as the two sides try to agree the exact nature of their future relationship.

Without a deal, the bulk of cross-Channel trade

will revert to World Trade Organization terms, an unwanted return to tariffs and quotas after almost five decades of deepening economic and political integration. Talks through this year have finalized most aspects of an agreement, with Britain set to leave the EU single market and customs union, but the most thorny issues have remain unresolved.

European capitals have remained remarkably united behind Barnier through the fraught Brexit process, but some internal fractures have now begun to surface. France on Friday threatened to veto any deal that fails short of their demands on ensuring fair trade and access to UK fishing waters. Meanwhile a European diplomat told AFP that Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and Denmark share Paris's concerns that the EU side could give too much ground on rules to maintain competition. — AFP

TikTok keeps ticking in US as deadline for asset sale passes

SAN FRANCISCO: TikTok continued serving up short videos in the US despite missing a Trump administration deadline to come up with an acceptable deal to put its American assets into US hands.

Talks between TikTok parent ByteDance and government negotiators were continuing despite the missed deadline set by the Committee on Foreign Investment to carry out an executive order by President Donald Trump, according to a source familiar with the matter. "The committee is engaging with ByteDance to complete the divestment and other steps necessary to resolve the national security risks arising from the transaction, consistent with the president's August 14 order," said a spokesperson for the Treasury, which oversees the committee.

TikTok declined to comment. ByteDance, based in China, had been given until midnight Eastern time on Friday to come up with a plan to sell its US operations to American buyers.

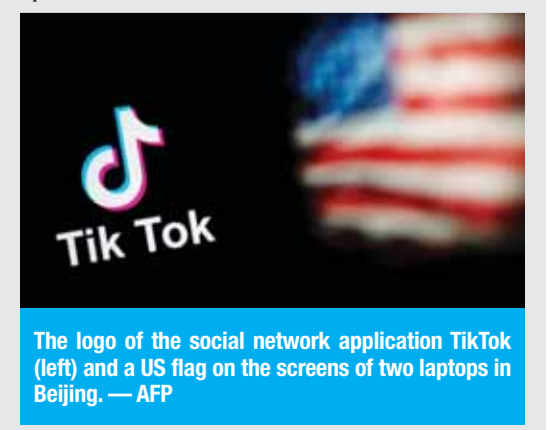
But after the deadline passed, users could still tap into the smartphone app for a seemingly endless stream of video snippets, an AFP visit to the platform showed.

The White House claims TikTok is a national security risk because of potential links to the Chinese government through ByteDance. TikTok has repeatedly defended itself against allegations of data transfers to the Chinese government, saying it stores user information on servers in the United States and Singapore.

Ban stalled

The US had already backed off enforcing a ban on TikTok, in compliance with a court order in favor of the social media sensation. A US federal judge in late October issued an injunction temporarily blocking an executive order by Trump aimed at banning TikTok.

The judge's ruling put the brakes on a Trump threat to knock TikTok offline by cutting it off from US businesses providing website hosting, data storage and other fundamentals needed to operate. — AFP



The logo of the social network application TikTok (left) and a US flag on the screens of two laptops in Beijing. — AFP

Business

US job gains and recovery stall in November as COVID-19 cases rise

Pressure on politicians to agree on a new package to help businesses and families

WASHINGTON: The US economy showed more signs that its recovery is stalling as hiring slowed amid a surge in Covid-19 cases, ramping up pressure on politicians to agree on a new relief package to help struggling businesses and families.

Employers added a disappointing 245,000 new jobs in November, the Labor Department reported Friday, and 10.7 million workers remain unemployed. The ranks of long-term unemployed—those jobless for 27 weeks or more—increased by 385,000 to 3.9 million, the data showed.

President-elect Joe Biden called the jobs report “grim” and urged Congress to act immediately to provide more aid to help the growing number of families who cannot pay rent and shops that are having to shut down.

“If we don’t act now, the future will be very bleak. Americans need help and they need it now,” Biden said in a briefing in Wilmington, Delaware. Though the unemployment rate dipped to 6.7 percent from 6.9 percent, the lowest since the pandemic struck, the decline was caused by more Americans leaving the workforce entirely, the report said, as the coronavirus returned with a vengeance.

Economists warn the situation could worsen if Republicans and Democrats fail to agree on an aid package to replace the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act passed in March. Many of the provisions of that measure have expired and millions of workers are set to lose unemployment benefits just after Christmas. And an eviction moratorium also is set to expire, meaning thousands of families will be at risk of becoming homeless.

Political compromise?

Congress also is under pressure to approve a budget by December 11 to avoid a government shutdown, but Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell indicated the sides have made

progress. He told reporters he had a “good conversation” with Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Friday.

“I think we’re both interested in getting an outcome, both on the omnibus and on a coronavirus package,” said McConnell, who had been insisting on a limited relief plan of about \$500 billion.

Pelosi, too, said she was pleased with the conversation, which she said indicates “momentum” towards a deal. Democratic leaders have thrown their support behind a \$908 billion bipartisan compromise proposal introduced early this week, at least as a starting point for discussions.

“It’s less money, but over a shorter period of time, and we need to do it to save lives and livelihoods,” Pelosi said at a press conference Friday.

Biden, who takes office on January 20, said that would just be a down payment and more help will be needed early next year. While he said the package would be better if it included a second round of \$1,200 checks to every American, he warned against holding out for more provisions.

“If you insist on everything, we’re likely to get nothing on both sides,” said Biden, who served as a senator from Delaware for more than three decades. With only a few weeks left in office, President Donald Trump said Thursday he would sign a new relief bill, and “I believe we are getting very close to a deal.”

Risk of more declines

Gregory Daco of Oxford Economics said the CARES Act was a “critical lifeline” to the economy, and that without additional aid, economic conditions could deteriorate. “We fear the next couple of months will prove difficult for the economy, with downside risks from the looming expiry of unemployment benefits for millions of Americans and the end of the eviction and foreclosure moratoriums,”

explain Gebru’s dismissal along with the reason for ordering her to withdraw her research.

The letter demanded Google make an “unequivocal” commitment to research integrity and academic freedom. “Instead of being embraced by Google as an exceptionally talented and prolific contributor, Dr Gebru has faced defensiveness, racism, gaslighting, research censorship, and now a retaliatory firing,” the letter contended.

‘Difficult moment’

In response to a request for comment, Google referred AFP to an email by AI division leader Jeff Dean to researchers at the company that he posted publicly on Friday. Dean said in the email it was a “difficult moment” and he wanted to clear up what he saw as “a lot of speculation and misunderstanding on social media” about Gebru’s departure from the company.

The research paper authored by Gebru and other researchers was shared for review just a day before a submission deadline and “had some important gaps that prevented us from being comfortable putting Google affiliation on it,” Dean said in the email, a copy of which was posted online. Gebru responded with conditions—including that Google give her the names of everyone involved in reviewing the paper—saying she would leave if they were not met, Dean contended.

“We accept and respect her decision to resign from Google,” Dean said in the email.

“Given Timnit’s role as a respected researcher and a manager in our Ethical AI team, I feel badly that Timnit has gotten to a place where she feels this way about the work we’re doing,” Gebru, who

is Ethiopian American, earned engineering degrees and a doctorate from Stanford University in Silicon Valley. She has worked at Apple and conducted research at Microsoft. Gebru’s research has included showing the likelihood of facial detection technology making mistakes when identifying people of color. Her dismissal came just days after a US labor board complaint accused Google of using surveillance, interrogation and other tactics to spy on activist employees.

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) complaint 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 the employees had violated data security policies. —AFP

giant Shell, France’s Engie and Austria’s OMV. Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic states are also fiercely opposed to the pipeline, fearing it will increase Europe’s reliance on Russian energy supplies, which Moscow could then use to exert political pressure. —AFP

already producing 1100 lbs (500 kilos) of dry ice an hour in its depots and has developed portable freezers capable of storing the vaccines at temperatures of between -4 to -112 Fahrenheit.

But companies not directly linked to the manufacture, storage or transport of vaccines are also stepping up. “We have assessed our ultra-low freezer capabilities and capacity and are ready and willing to assist health agencies if storage capacity becomes constrained,” said meat giant Smithfield’s chief administrative director, Keira Lombardo.

The meatpacker, which suffered a large number of cases of COVID-19 in some of its US slaughterhouses, said it now stands ready to help authorities distribute the vaccine, particularly to workers in the agricultural and food-supply sector, Lombardo said. For its part, Ford has ordered a dozen ultra-cold freezers in anticipation of the arrival of vaccines, to offer them to employees who want them when they are available.

When the virus began to spread in the spring in the United States, the company had to temporarily



US employers added a disappointing 245,000 new jobs in November, the Labor Department reported Friday, and 10.7 million workers remain unemployed.

Daco said. The pandemic impact was reflected in the loss of nearly 35,000 retail jobs last month, workers on the frontlines of the hardest hit sector, according to the new data. Government employment fell by 99,000, largely due to layoffs of temporary census workers, while private hiring rose by 344,000, the report said.

Manufacturing and construction each added

27,000 jobs and transportation and warehousing jumped 145,000. The number of temporary layoffs dropped by 441,000 to 2.8 million, but that is 2.0 million higher than the pre-pandemic level.

Diane Swonk of Grant Thornton said, “the slowdown in employment gains is even worse than it appears at first glance,” and warned it “will get worse before it gets better.” —AFP

Backlash at Google over firing of Black researcher

SAN FRANCISCO: More than 1,400 Google employees on Friday demanded that the tech giant explain why it dismissed a Black artificial intelligence ethics researcher.

Timnit Gebru tweeted early in the week that Google told her a resignation she had not proffered was accepted, after she sent a message to an internal group lamenting the “silencing of marginalized voices.” She had also told the “Brain Women and Allies” group in the email that she had been ordered to retract a research paper.

Gebru is an outspoken diversity advocate and co-founder of a group devoted to increasing Black talent in artificial intelligence. Until Tuesday, she was a staff researcher and co-lead of an ethical AI team at Google. Gebru tweeted what she said was the dismissal message from Google, which noted that “aspects of the email you sent last night to non-management employees in the brain group reflect behavior that is inconsistent with the expectations of a Google manager.”

The research paper Gebru was told to retract looked at potential for an AI tool used by Google and other tech firms to imitate human writing of hate speech and biased language, according to an NPR report. Slightly more than 1,400 Google employees were among the nearly 3,300 names on an online letter calling on the tech giant to

US calls for ‘moratorium’ on Nord Stream 2 pipeline

BERLIN: The United States is asking Germany and the EU to halt construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline linking Russia to Europe, which Washington sees as a “political tool” of the Kremlin, a top envoy said in a German newspaper interview yesterday. “Now is the time for Germany and the EU to impose a moratorium on the construction of the pipeline,” the US acting ambassador to Germany, Robin Quinville, told business daily Handelsblatt.

That would send a strong signal to Russia that Europe was not willing to accept “its ongoing mali-

US firms gear up for distribution of COVID vaccines

NEW YORK: With the imminent arrival of coronavirus vaccines that will need to be stored at ultra-low temperatures, US companies are gearing up for a massive logistical effort to aid their distribution. Automaker Ford has ordered its own freezers while meat processing giant Smithfield said it is ready to put the cold room at its abattoirs at the disposal of vaccine roll-out operations.

Companies specializing in insulating containers have been on a war footing for weeks after Pfizer and BioNTech said the vaccine they had jointly developed needs to be stored at -94 degrees Fahrenheit (-70 Celsius). US logistics giant UPS is



A woman passes by a Google themed barrier in front of a Google data center in Fredericia, Denmark. —AFP

‘Millionaire’s tax’ for virus relief passes Argentina Senate

BUENOS AIRES: Argentina’s Senate passed a tax on about 12,000 of the country’s richest people on Friday, to pay for coronavirus measures including medical supplies and relief for the poor and small businesses. In a session streamed live on YouTube, and after a long and polarizing debate, the so-called solidarity contribution was signed into law with 42 votes in favor and 26 against, as the pro-government alliance flexed its majority.

The government of President Alberto Fernandez hopes to raise 300 billion pesos (\$3.75 billion) with the one-off levy, which earlier passed the Chamber of Deputies with 133 for votes to 115 against. Argentina’s 44 million population has been badly hit by the coronavirus, with more than 1.4 million cases and over 39,500 deaths, according to figures from Johns Hopkins University. The pandemic has exacerbated already high unemployment and poverty rates in a country which has been in recession since 2018. Under the scheme also dubbed the “millionaire’s tax”—people with declared assets greater than 200 million pesos will pay a progressive rate of up to 3.5 percent on wealth in Argentina and up to 5.25 percent on wealth outside the country.

Of the proceeds, 20 percent will go to medical supplies for the pandemic, another 20 percent to small and medium-sized businesses, 15 percent to social developments, 20 percent to student scholarships and 25 percent to natural gas ventures. Director of the tax agency Mercedes Marcú del Pont said it will affect almost 12,000 taxpayers.

“The tax reaches 0.8 percent of total taxpayers,” said one of the authors of the project, legislator Carlos Heller. “Forty-two percent have localized assets, of which 92 percent is located abroad.” He said the plan was “far from taxing productive activity.”

On the opposite side, Daniel Pelegrina, president of the powerful Argentine Rural Society (SRA), warned that Heller “wants to present it as a contribution of the richest, but we know what happens with all those unique taxes, they stay forever.” The neoliberal Juntos por el Cambio coalition, of former president Mauricio Macri, said it was a “confiscatory” measure. —AFP



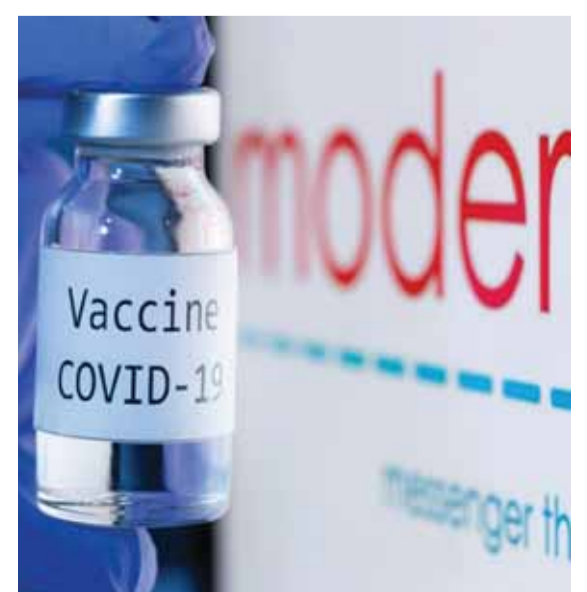
giant Shell, France’s Engie and Austria’s OMV. Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic states are also fiercely opposed to the pipeline, fearing it will increase Europe’s reliance on Russian energy supplies, which Moscow could then use to exert political pressure. —AFP

close its factories. The group has since resumed its activities but with strict health precautions.

“The health and safety of our workforce is our top priority,” a spokesman said. General Motors has not gone as far as procuring freezers but said it was in contact with US government agencies and health officials to “coordinate as needed when the distribution plans are made available.”

Meanwhile, US refrigerator manufacturer So-Low reported a “tremendous surge” in orders for its freezers that can maintain temperatures as low as -120 Fahrenheit. The company, which supplies industry and research centers, was deluged with orders beginning in late September, sales manager Danny Hensler said. It has also seen a jump in demand for its freezers that get down to -22 Fahrenheit, suitable for storing the vaccine made by Moderna. —AFP

“We now have a backlog of orders to produce,” Hensler said. “Our employees are working overtime five days a week and we added Saturday to the production schedule.” —AFP



Business

Markaz: Vaccine optimism propels GCC markets; oil prices edge higher

S&P GCC composite index gains 8.2% for November

KUWAIT: Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz" recently released its Monthly Markets Review report for the month of November 2020. The report stated that all GCC equity markets ended the month positively as oil prices jumped by 27 percent for the month after pharmaceutical firms Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca announced the eminent release and availability of COVID-19 vaccine, which rose investor's hopes for a quick recovery of the global economic.

Kuwait Main Market index registered a gain of 1.6 percent for the month. Kuwait All Share index gained 0.3 percent while the index's P/E ratio stood at 20, a premium of 33 percent compared to that of the S&P GCC index. Market liquidity in November rose by 64 percent over previous month, averaging a daily trade of \$323 million during November.

Among Kuwait sectors, the report indicated that investors, encouraged by signs of economic recovery, shifted their positions from defensives in favor of cyclical shares. Oil & Gas were the top gainers, rising 7 percent, while the Consumer Goods index saw the biggest decline, down 5.2 percent for the month. Among blue chips, Kuwait Finance House gained the most at 2.7 percent, while Agility Public Warehousing lost 3.5 percent for the month. Meanwhile, MSCI included Kuwait to its Emerging Markets Index on November 30. Seven Kuwait stocks - National Bank of Kuwait, Kuwait Finance House, Zain, Agility, Boubyan Bank, Mabane and Gulf Bank have been added to the MSCI Emerging Market Index at an aggregate weight of 0.58 percent. According to Reuters, this is expected to result in at least \$2 billion of investment flow from

passive funds into Boursa Kuwait.

Regionally, the S&P GCC Composite Index gained 8.2 percent, with all markets ending the month in positive territory. Both Saudi Arabia (Tadawul) and Dubai equity markets gained 10.6 percent in November followed by Abu Dhabi and Qatar, which gained 6.5 percent and 5.9 percent respectively. Saudi Arabia's Tadawul Stock Market also became the first GCC stock market to post gains for 2020, rising by 4.3 percent. S&P GCC Composite Index has also recovered most of the losses for the year, and is now down by just 2.4 percent for the year. All GCC sectors were in the green with Healthcare index gaining the most at 11.4 percent for November, followed by Basic Materials with a gain of 9.8 percent.

Among the GCC blue chip companies, Al-Rajhi Bank (Saudi Arabia) share price rose by 13.7 percent in November. Saudi Aramco, the largest GCC listed company by market capitalization, rose by 6.6 percent for the month and is approaching a market capitalization of \$2 trillion. Other significant gainers among GCC blue chips include Industries Qatar, which rose 22 percent for the month, followed by Emirates NBD Bank (UAE), which gained 15.3 percent in November.

The performance of global equity markets was also positive, with the MSCI World Index gaining 12.7 percent in November. US market (S&P 500) gained 10.8 percent in November after former Vice-President Joe Biden was projected to win the US Presidential Election and on hopes of an orderly transition. The UK (FTSE 100) markets gained 12.4 percent for the month, and Emerging markets increased by 9.2 percent for the month due to the

Regional Market Trends – November 2020

Equity	Last close	November, % (MTD)	2020, % (YTD)
S&P GCC	113	8.2	-2.4
Saudi Arabia (TASI)	8,747	10.6	4.3
Qatar (QE Index)	10,262	5.9	-1.6
Abu Dhabi (ADI)	4,965	6.5	-2.2
Kuwait (All Share PR Index)	5,459	0.3	-13.1
Dubai (DFMGI)	2,420	10.6	-12.5
Bahrain (BAX)	1,478	3.5	-8.2
Oman (Muscat SM)	3,644	2.4	-8.5
Commodities			
IPE Brent(\$)	47.6	27.0	-27.9
Gold(\$)	1,777.0	-5.4	17.1

Source: Refinitiv

vaccine development and continued monetary easing measures by central banks in the US and Europe.

Oil prices closed at \$47.6 per barrel at the end of November, posting a gain of 27 percent for the month. Oil markets were buoyed by favorable

results in COVID-19 vaccine trials, which rose hopes of swift demand recovery for oil as governments around the world could fully reopen their economies and oil-dependent sectors like travel and tourism could make a comeback.

Wall St at records as stocks gain on vaccine, stimulus optimism

NEW YORK: Investors pushed stock markets higher Friday with US equities ending at all-time highs as continued optimism over vaccines and signs of progress on new US stimulus offset worries about rising coronavirus cases. All three major US stock indices finished at fresh records after European bourses also posted gains.

Oil prices also climbed to nine-month highs following the latest production agreement by petroleum exporters. The rally on Wall Street came even following government data showing the jobs recovery stalled, as US employers added just 245,000 new jobs in November.

And though the unemployment rate dipped to 6.7 percent from 6.9 percent, the lowest since the pandemic struck, that was due to Americans leaving the workforce. Noting that new Covid-19 cases are "raging" in the US, FHN Financial's Chris Low warned that "job growth will be sluggish for the next three or four months, minimum."

The United States recorded more than 210,000 new cases in a 24-hour stretch to Thursday evening, and more than 2,900 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University. Still, Low said US approval of the first coronavirus vaccine could come as soon as next week. And analysts said the weak jobs data provides further impetus for Congress to enact a new stimulus package, and Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi have revived efforts to hash out a deal for more aid.

President-elect Joe Biden reiterated the need for immediate support, saying "if we don't act now, the future will be very bleak. Americans need help and they need it now." Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at Markets.com, said the soft employment report "is seen as a positive for stocks since it ought to incentivize Congress to pass a stimulus bill this year."

Brexit talks ongoing

Meanwhile, the British pound gyrated as traders monitored the latest in months-long talks on a post-Brexit trade deal between London and the European Union. British and EU negotiators broke off their talks without agreement Friday and handed off the task of clearing the logjam to Prime Minister Boris Johnson and EU chief Ursula von der Leyen. The leaders will hold a telephone call after their envoys Michel Barnier and David Frost broke up after an arduous week of day and night meetings without a breakthrough. Oil prices ended at their highest level since March, with Brent futures close to \$50 a barrel, after OPEC and its oil-producing allies struck a deal on Thursday to offer flexibility over changes to production in the coming months. —AFP

Goldsmiths mold a profit out of virus in Malaysia

KOTA BHARU, Malaysia: In a backroom workshop in Malaysia, goldsmiths with blowtorches and chisels sit at wooden desks as they melt and mold the precious metal into glittery jewelry. Demand for the safe-haven commodity has soared during the coronavirus pandemic and it is not only professional investors who are cashing in, but small businesses too.

The Makmur Gold company, which is based in northern Kelantan state and mainly makes jewelry, has enjoyed brisk business this year even as the Southeast Asian nation's economy fell into recession.

"We've seen good developments during Covid, our sales were much better," company director Muhammad Nur Hisyam Che Mahmood told AFP. Gold surged this year as the pandemic accelerated and stock markets tumbled, hitting a record above \$2,000 an ounce in August, although it has since slipped back to about \$1,800.

Makmur Gold recorded strong sales of about 80 million ringgit (\$19.5 million) over the past eight months as buyers sought to park their cash somewhere safe. The business sells goods directly to customers from its four outlets as well as online, offering items ranging from bracelets and rings to small gold bars. Most of its gold is sourced in the form of jewellery from a small number of suppliers in the country or bought second-hand from customers, before being melted down and fashioned into new products.

Brexit casts shadow over Gibraltar's future

GIBRALTAR, UK: With its traditional British red phone boxes, pubs serving fish-and-chips and tax-free shopping, Gibraltar has long drawn day-trippers from neighboring Spain.

But the easy flow of people across the border from Spain which underpins the economy of this tiny British territory on the southern tip of the Iberian Peninsula risks ending when Britain leaves the European Union's single market on December 31.

Along Gibraltar's pedestrianised Main Street whose buildings feature decorative Portuguese tiles, Genoese shutters and British wrought-iron balconies, shopkeepers worry business will be hurt by tighter controls at what will be a new border

between Britain and the EU. "It is going to put people off visiting Gibraltar I think," said 41-year-old Prem Mahtani at his jewelry shop on Main Street, one of four tourism-dependent stores run by his family in the enclave. Along with gambling and offshore banking, tourism is a cornerstone of the economy for Gibraltar, one of the most prosperous regions in Europe which is home to 34,000 people and is historically claimed by Spain.

Located at the mouth of the Mediterranean, the British enclave welcomes around 10 million visitors per year, mainly day-trippers who cross from Spain under the shadow of the Rock of Gibraltar, a massive limestone block whose white cliffs soar more than 400 meters (1,300 feet) above the sea.

In addition, some 15,000 people cross into Gibraltar every day to work, accounting for half of the territory's workforce. While most are Spanish, this labor force includes dozens of other nationalities, including about 2,500 Britons who live in Spain where housing is cheaper than in Gibraltar.

hours a day, the population will not need to rush to them," Crivella told a press conference.

The measure will come into effect today and remain in force throughout December, the mayor said on Twitter. The only restrictions announced are the closure of municipal schools only weeks after they reopened. The mayor's office and the Rio state government have also announced an increase in hospital capacity with intensive care occupancy rates at over 90 percent for the past week.

Infectious disease specialist Celso Ferreira Ramos Filho, head of the Society of Medicine in Rio, said the measures are "questionable." "We really think that

Gold rush

In addition to regular customers, the business has agents who sell on its behalf and then keep a share of the profits. One such agent is Tuan Zubaidah Tuan Abdul Rahman, who made half a million ringgit (\$120,000) in sales during three months of buying and reselling gold jewellery part-time.

"People are seeing that rather than hold on to their money in the bank, it is better for them to buy gold," said the woman, who is also a teacher. "People can wear it, and it can be a valuable asset."

Nurse Nor Fazilah Jamaludin said she sold gold jewelry during the pandemic to increase her income.

"Women will buy these for beauty, but the benefit of buying gold is more towards our investment for the future," she said. Malaysians began rushing to buy gold in May as authorities allowed businesses to reopen after a six-week virus lockdown, said Steven Siow, president of the Federation of Goldsmiths and Jewelers Associations of Malaysia. People had extra cash after not spending much for a while and due to a six-month government moratorium on repaying loans aimed at boosting the economy, and gold shops doubled or even tripled their sales, he said.

The gold price has slipped as hopes rise that vaccines will be rolled out soon, but experts believe the world economy faces a bumpy recovery and the precious metal will remain a safe bet for some time.

"Gold, in any crisis, would be the key asset to look out for," said Yeah Kim Leng, economics professor at Sunway University Business School. —AFP



A jewelry craftsman heating a ring with a torch at the Makmur Gold workshop in Kota Bharu in Malaysia's Kelantan state. —AFP



A customer trying on a bracelet at the Makmur Gold shop in Kota Bharu in Malaysia's Kelantan state. Demand for the safe-haven commodity has soared in Malaysia during the coronavirus pandemic and it is not only professional investors who are cashing in, but small businesses too. —AFP

With a land area of just 6.8-square kilometers (2.6-square miles), Gibraltar imports all of its food, which will take longer if administrative checks are increased at the border. A desire to keep things flowing smoothly at the border explains why in 2016 nearly 96 percent of voters in Gibraltar backed staying in the EU, while in Britain proper the referendum vote was 52-48 percent in favor of leaving the bloc.

Reduced influence

Speaking to AFP, Gibraltar's Chief Minister Fabian Picardo said his government was seeking a deal with Spain which would maintain the "maximum possible level of fluidity" at the frontier, and was working with suppliers to ensure goods crossed in easily to avoid "economic collapse".

While reaching an agreement is "not easy", it is still within reach, Picardo said, without giving details of the talks. In the event there is no deal, Gibraltar has extended its port facilities to be able to handle more ships carrying goods. —AFP

Malls in Brazil's Rio to open 24 hours for Christmas

RIO DE JANEIRO: Rio de Janeiro's shopping malls will stay open 24 hours a day through Christmas, authorities announced Friday, hoping to avoid overcrowding amidst a second wave of coronavirus.

The move goes against the recommendations of

the shopping centers will remain open in the middle of the night, with few customers and more energy and staff costs? It won't have any real affect," said Ramos Filho, who is also a member of the city council's scientific committee.

"That said, anything that can reduce gatherings is welcome," he said.

Apart from the compulsory use of masks in public places, life has returned almost to normal in Rio, with crowded beaches and bars at weekends. Non-essential businesses remained closed for several months from March, before gradually reopening in June. —AFP

Classifieds

Sunday, December 6, 2020



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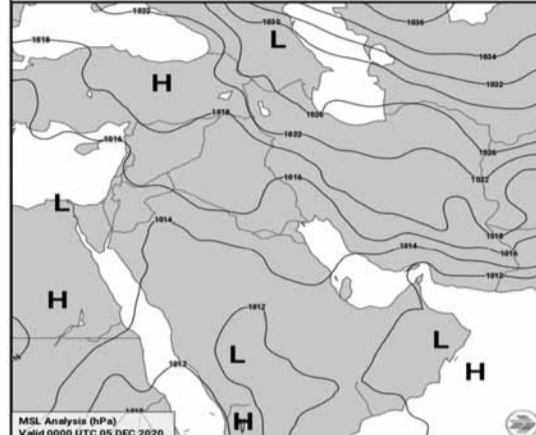


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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair and Partly cloudy to cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate freshening at times north easterly wind with speed of 08 - 40 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery later on.

BY NIGHT: Cloudy to partly cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate freshening at times north easterly wind with speed of 08 - 40 km/h with a chance for thunder rain at times with a chance for fog forming.

WEATHER WARNING			Thunder Rain	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 05/12/2020 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	21 °C	18 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	22 °C	18 °C		
ABDALY	24 °C	15 °C		
BUBYAN	21 °C	16 °C		
JAHRA	24 °C	17 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C		
SALMIYAH	21 °C	19 °C		
AHMADI	- °C	- °C		
NUWAISIB	24 °C	17 °C		
WAFRA	23 °C	17 °C		
SALMY	23 °C	15 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	12/06	Partly cloudy with a chance for thunder rain at times	20 °C	19 °C	VRB-NW	08 - 40 km/h
Monday	12/07	Fair	20 °C	14 °C	NW	15 - 35 km/h
Tuesday	12/08	Fair	20 °C	13 °C	NW	12 - 35 km/h
Wednesday	12/09	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	21 °C	13 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 30 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:04
Sunrise	06:28
Zuhr	11:38
Asr	14:31
Sunset	16:49
Isha	18:11

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	22 °C
MIN. Temp.	18 °C
MAX. RH	98 %
MIN. RH	71 %
MAX. Wind	N 32 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	01 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated. UP:0

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khalidiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
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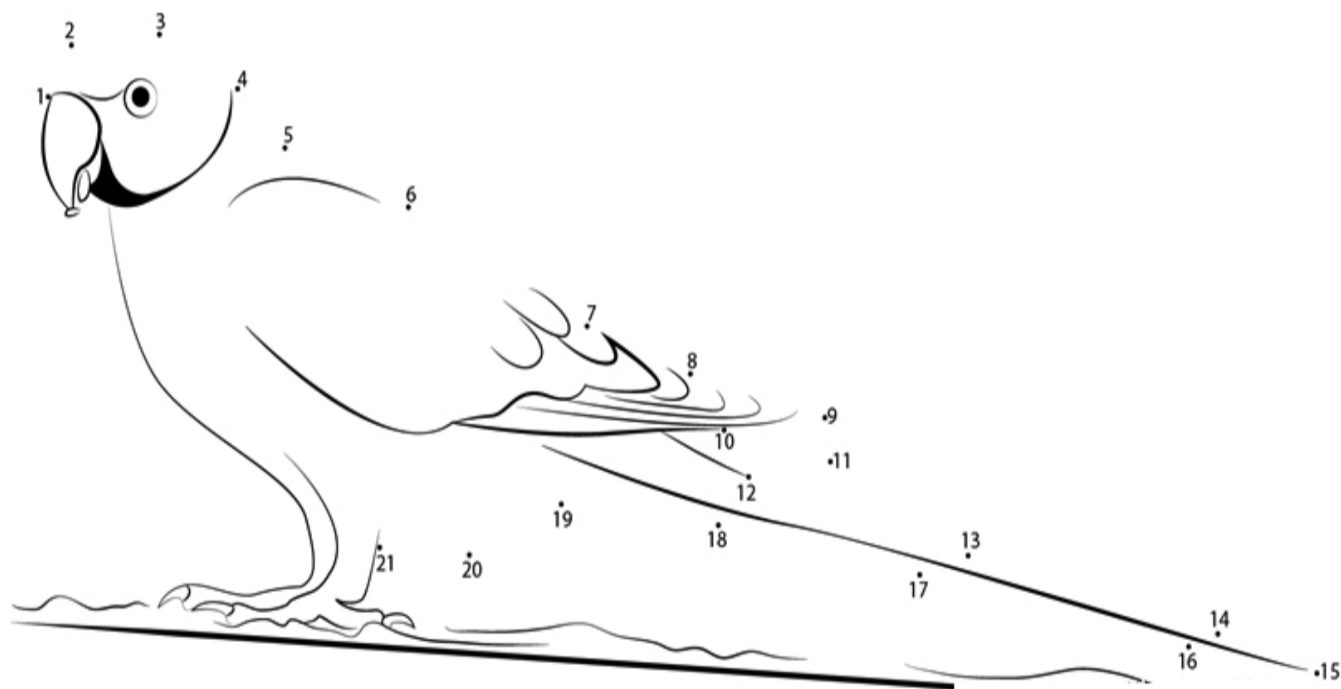
Light as a Feather

Find all of the hidden words and the letters that remain spell out a funny saying about our feathered friends.



BLUE JAY	HERON	QUAIL
CANARY	IBIS	QUETZAL
CRANE	KINGFISHER	RAVEN
CROW	KIWI	ROBIN
DOVE	LARK	STORK
DUCK	LOON	SWALLOW
EAGLE	MACAW	SWAN
EGRET	MAGPIE	TERN
EMU	ORIOLE	TOUCAN
FALCON	OWL	TURKEY
GOOSE	PELICAN	WREN
GULL	PENGUIN	
HAWK	PUFFIN	

Join the Dots



STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)
You will float today, Aries. You won't talk, you will be sleepy, and your mood won't be the best. OK, perfect! Get back into your novel, take several siestas, and do as little as possible, because that's what you want to do. Don't worry, busy beaver, this period will pass. And you know what? You aren't alone here. It happens to everyone from time to time. Flow with it.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)
Because you tend to brood over everything right now, Cancer, a day like this can't be anything but beneficial. It has been difficult for you to find satisfaction within the realm of the known world lately, but today offers you a journey into another perception, one that's intangible and unreal. You may find it gratifying, especially if you try some artistic, esoteric, or religious activity.

Libra (September 23-October 22)
You will probably be perfectly in tune with the day ahead, Libra. Of course, it's tempting to run away from the reality and hardships of the moment. But at other times, when you're so compassionate and find it easy to listen, like today, life is really rewarding. People find your company soothing and pleasant, and they're likely to thank you for it. Aren't days like this great?

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)
Do other countries represent real openings for you? This is a question that you will soon have to answer. This may be true, but it may also be an illusion that gives you a simplistic explanation for the dissatisfaction you feel now in your professional life. Think about it because some important decisions you're about to make depend on it. You aren't the only one to consider, either.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)
You're certainly in a strange mood today, Taurus. True, things have been going smoothly for the past few days but be careful not to be fooled. Pride goes before a fall, as they say. Today you should be wary of your behavior toward your lover. Your partner's attitude may dismay you, but you're the one who has strayed from reality.

Leo (July 23-August 22)
There are days when you feel wonderful without being able to attribute the feeling to any real event. Of course, your rational mind will search for a reason for your happiness. But if you count the number of times when you do things against your will, it becomes obvious that logic and reason don't always apply to this world. Don't even try to understand. Just enjoy!

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)
Don't try to control what happens today, Scorpio, because you won't be able to fathom what's going on. How could it be otherwise when collective currents are interfering with your life? You may do some soul-searching because you may feel that you're only a grain of sand in a vast universe. Don't spend too much time staring at your belly button. Look around you for some of the answers.

Aquarius (January 20-February 18)
You're going to think this is a strange period. It isn't, Aquarius. It's just that today won't be like others. Look around and you will see that people are either depressed or trying to keep up a good façade. It's as if lots of people - you in particular - are being confronted by their dreams without being able to act on them. This isn't an easy situation to be in.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)
It will be as though you're in a new and hopeful world today, Gemini. The people you meet will be cordial and caring, and the future will seem like a bright, attractive place to live. In other words, it's like a fabulous dream, and the alarm clock is bound to wake you up soon. True, the glorious feeling won't last long, so take advantage of the day. Reality is sweet at times.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)
The day ahead should be excellent, Virgo. For the past several days you've been searching for meaning in life. There have been changes in your chief occupation, new relationships, bursting ambitions. Today you can let all of that soul-searching go. You're likely to whip up a huge mixture of the whole experience and be grateful for the thrilling life you lead right now!

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)
This kind of strange day doesn't come around often, Sagittarius. It will seem as though you no longer know what you want. Do you have a yen to take off for the other side of the globe? People won't understand you, and you will think that explaining yourself is pointless. The best thing to do may be to unplug from your usual activities and go for a walk. You have nothing to lose.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)
Today, Pisces, you might get the chance to take a trip around the world to visit fabulous palaces and experience a timeless love, and all - get this - totally free! This could be called a sensitivity test to the universe of Walt Disney. Goodness knows that you aren't a total stranger to it! By now, you've learned from hard experience that fantasyland is for Mickey Mouse.

Lifestyle | Features



Photographer Allan Tannenbaum poses with his photographs of John Lennon and Yoko Ono in his SoHo studio in New York City. — AFP photos

'Que pasa, New York?': John Lennon and the city that set him free

On December 8, 1980 the filigree gates of New York's Dakota residence across from Central Park went down in history as the spot John Lennon was shot dead. But for nearly a decade prior to his shock murder, the former Beatle's adopted hometown was where he rediscovered life. The New York Lennon moved to in 1971 was near economic collapse, struggling with rampant crime and entrenched poverty. Yet it was a city flush with artistic energy that maintained a blasé attitude towards celebrities, where the already legendary musician could grab a coffee at his corner "Cafe La Fortuna" without facing mobs.

And he strolled hand in hand with his wife Yoko Ono, free from the British tabloid racism the Tokyo-born conceptual artist once called "inhuman." "We really felt like we were on the same page with New Yorkers," Ono, now 87, said in the 2010 documentary "LENNONYC." "I've met a lot of New Yorkers who complain about it, but nobody moves out," Lennon said. "It's the greatest place on earth."

'Regular person'

The couple moved to 105 Bank Street in Greenwich Village, a neighborhood by then well-known as the haunt of creatives. "He didn't want to be John Lennon, former Beatle, famous guy," said Susan Ryan, a Bronx resident and writer who conducts Beatles walking tours in the city. Standing in front of the two-room basement flat, Roger Middleton—the current tenant for 25 years, who once hosted Ono for a visit—was typically cool about sleeping where Lennon once did. "You just are cognizant of the legacy," the 79-year-old said. "And it becomes an everyday thing."

Lennon and Ono quickly fell in with the era's leftist radicals, releasing in 1972 "Some Time in New York City," a politically charged album centered on racism, sexism and incarceration. The FBI began wiretapping the artist over his activism as the Richard Nixon administration ordered his deportation, a demand that mushroomed into a years-long legal battle. It wasn't until 1976 that he secured permission to stay. "Que pasa, New York?" Lennon sang on that album, paying homage to his new environs and referencing the case. "If the Man wants to shove us out / We gonna jump and shout / The Statue of Liberty said, 'Come!'"

Jokester John

During the songwriter's standoff with the US government Bob Gruen thought to photograph Lennon flashing



Roger Middleton, the current resident, stands in the apartment in Greenwich Village that John Lennon and Yoko Ono once lived in.

a peace sign in front of Lady Liberty, a now iconic picture. Gruen's classic images of Lennon also include the superstar sporting his signature circular glasses and long wavy locks, in a muscle shirt emblazoned with the words "New York City." Gruen said Lennon was a delight to photograph for obvious reasons but emphasized the singer "was always turning words into puns and making jokes."

"I would've loved to have seen what John would do on Twitter nowadays, because he was so good with the one-liners," the 75-year-old said. Allan Tannenbaum, whose work includes intimate portraits of Ono and Lennon, also noted the musician's wry humor, which flecked even poignant moments. He recalled taking stills while the pair filmed a video, undressing completely to "simulate making love." Lennon kissed Ono, "going and going and going," Tannenbaum said, until the Liverpool-born artist turned and said "What is this, Ben-Hur?" referring to the nearly four-hour long film with an expletive. "That broke the ice, everybody cracked up," Tannenbaum recalls. "And I have the photo of that moment, him with a big grin on his face while he's on top of Yoko. And she's laughing. It was the best."

'House husband'

That photo shoot in November 1980 came as Lennon was returning to music, weeks earlier releasing with Ono "Double Fantasy"—what would be his final studio album released in his lifetime. Five years earlier the couple's son Sean was born, approximately nine months after they reconciled following a break known as Lennon's "lost weekend." The pair reunited

that took Lennon's life, later perfumed by the flowers from fans and mourners who gathered there in the days and years to come. "What strikes me, is besides the tragedy of him losing his life and his family losing him and the city losing him and all his fans losing him, was how much work he would've created," the 76-year-old Tannenbaum said. "It makes you want to cry, to think about that loss."

'Where it's at'

After Lennon's death, Ono funded the construction of the tranquil Strawberry Fields living memorial in Central Park, across from the Dakota. Its central feature, the "Imagine" mosaic donated by craftsmen from Italy, is now a place of pilgrimage. Ryan, who was a 19-year-old college student when Lennon passed, said the murder wounded the world but cut particularly deep in New York.

"Everybody in the city knew he wanted to live here, wanted to be part of our town, and wanted to be one of us," she said. "New Yorkers loved John." The feeling was mutual. In 1972 Lennon told the New Yorker that "everywhere's somewhere, and everywhere's the same, really." "Wherever you are is where it's at," he told the magazine from his stoop. "But it's more so in New York." "It does have sugar on it, and I've got a sweet tooth." — AFP



Susan Ryan, who conducts Beatles walking tours around New York, points at The Dakota apartment building, where John Lennon and Yoko Ono lived, across from Central Park.



Photographer Allan Tannenbaum holds up his photograph of John Lennon and Yoko Ono in his SoHo studio.



A bottle with flowers adorns the "Imagine" mosaic at the Strawberry Fields Memorial for John Lennon.



An employee stands outside The Dakota apartment building's gates.

BEATLES SURVIVORS MACCA AND RINGO STILL MAKING MUSIC

Forty years after John Lennon died at the hands of an evangelical Christian assassin, surviving Beatles Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr are still making music, now on their own. Sir Paul may be 78 years old but he is bringing out his 18th solo album "McCartney III" on December 18. It will be the third album McCartney has released on which he has not only written the songs but also played everything from piano to drums. Fab Four drummer Ringo is 80 and does not enjoy the same level of global fame as Lennon and McCartney, or perhaps even the late George Harrison, but he too is still going strong.

'Home studio pioneer'

"McCartney III" refers back to "McCartney", released in 1970 — the first time he did everything himself-and "McCartney II" from 1980. "McCartney is a pioneer of the 'home studio' where everything is done at home, because he knows how to play every instrument," said Stan Cuesta, author of "The Beatles". "He blazed the trail for this type of production, as Prince did later on." The first solo album unleashed a firestorm with McCartney publishing a "self-interview" saying he would no longer work with John, George and Ringo, at a time when the split had never been formalized.



In this file photo taken on September 1, 2019 Ringo Starr performs during the Ringo Starr and his All Starr Band concert at The Greek Theatre in Los Angeles, California.



In this file photo taken on April 13, 2016 Paul McCartney performs on Opening Night of the One On One Tour at Save Mart Center in Fresno, California. — AFP photos

This time, he locked himself away on his property in Sussex, southern England, as much because of the novel coronavirus as the workload. "I was living lockdown life on my farm with my family and I would go to my studio every day," McCartney said in notes released by his US music publisher Capitol. "I had to do a little bit of work on some film music and that turned into the opening track and then when it was done I thought what will I do next?"

"Each day I'd start recording with the instrument I wrote the song on and then gradually layer it all up, it was a lot of fun." It was about making music for yourself rather than making music that has to do a job. So, I just did stuff I fancied doing. "I had no idea this would end up as an album," he said. The result is a fine surprise as were the albums earlier this year of Bob Dylan, aged 79 and Bruce Springsteen 71. "McCartney is ageing like nobility by continuing to turn out albums," said Cuesta.

'Your best mate'

Meanwhile, if Covid-19 permits, Ringo will be on a US tour in June 2021 fronting his "All Starr Band". The group is sprinkled with greats such as Joe Walsh, of the Eagles, and Steve Lukather from Toto who provide a musical platform for Ringo to belt out "Yellow Submarine" among other all-time Beatles favorites. "Ringo is your best mate, the good guy," Cuesta told AFP.

After the break-up of the Beatles half a century ago, his own band proved the saving of Ringo who had struggled to adapt. "There was a time he was lost... his albums were a disaster," Cuesta said. The All Stars enable Ringo to tour and regularly put out live recordings and videos, Cuesta said. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



In this file photo taken on June 30, 1966 shows British band The Beatles, (from left to right) Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, George Harrison and John Lennon, performing during their concert at the Budokan in Tokyo. — AFP photos



In this file photo taken on June 29, 1966 the British band The Beatles, (From left to right) Paul McCartney, John Lennon, Ringo Starr and George Harrison, holding a press conference in Tokyo at the start of their tour.



In this file photo taken on May 17, 1971 Music legend John Lennon and his wife Yoko Ono pose for photographers in Cannes where they presented their movies 'Apotheosis' and 'The Flu'.

JOHN LENNON: ROCKERS' TROUBLED MUSE, 40 YEARS ON

John Lennon's career was cut short 40 years ago when he was shot dead in New York-but he lives on in the songs and attitudes of other artists. Many sing his tunes, some mention him in their lyrics, while others question his legacy or even admit... they really prefer his songwriting partner Paul McCartney.

'Roll on John'

Perhaps the greatest tribute to Lennon in recent years came from Bob Dylan, the US folk-rock giant who was a personal acquaintance. The closing track of Dylan's 2012 album "Tempest" was titled "Roll On John". The seven-minute dirge recounts Lennon's murder on December 8, 1980, and early life as a touring musician. "From the Liverpool docks to the red-light Hamburg streets".

Among the countless direct cover versions of Lennon's solo and Beatles songs, Ozzy Osbourne's 2010 tribute stood out: a version of "How?" from Lennon's classic album "Imagine". The ex-leader of heavy metal pioneers Black Sabbath strolled through New York streets in a black leather trench coat and laid a wreath at Lennon's memorial in Central Park.



In this file photo taken on October 07, 2020 a statue of John Lennon and members of the Beatles stands in central Liverpool, northwest England.

Rolls Royce rebel

For all the nostalgia, Lennon was a divisive and contradictory figure. Sceptics questioned his status as a counterculture icon and the sincerity of his positions on gender equality and capitalism. "Lennon had a 'teddy boy' side to him," said Stan Cuesta, author of a book about The Beatles, referring to the Liverpool musician's slick-haired, working class rebel beginnings. "He once had a Rolls Royce. He was complex."

"John was always the provocateur of the group. He caused a terrible scandal when he said The Beatles were more popular than Jesus," said Cuesta. "But he only got political and

started going to art galleries with Yoko Ono," the Japanese artist he married in 1969.

Favourite Beatle?

Even Lennon's undisputed musical legacy leaves room for discussion. As a songwriting partnership, Lennon and McCartney changed the face of music through their harmonies, singer Sharleen Spiteri of British band Texas told AFP. Even so, the "who's your favorite Beatle" debate is as old as the group itself.

"Lennon had a rather surreal artistic side to him. He was more political, rebellious, intellectual," said Laurent Voulzy, a French rocker of The Beatles' generation. "But as a guitarist and bass-player myself I have always liked Paul's graceful arrangements, the sensitivity of his melodies and lyrics."

Cuesta highlights another track from the "Imagine" album: "Jealous Guy", a wistful ballad-notably covered by Bryan Ferry with Roxy Music. Lennon "was a natural musical genius, more intuitive than the other Beatles," Cuesta said, citing also the band's psychedelic hit "Strawberry Fields". Like Che Guevara, Lennon's face ended up on souvenir T-shirts-sometimes inscribed with the title of



In this file photo taken on May 17, 1971 music legend John Lennon poses for photographers in Cannes 17 May 1971 where he presented his movies 'Apotheosis' and 'The Flu'.

his song "Working Class Hero". That anthem sums up Lennon's legacy for Yves Bigot, a television executive and former rock critic and record producer. "It tells you to think for yourself," he said. — AFP



In this file photo taken on December 09, 2002 a Japanese couple place bouquets in front of a big portrait of former Beatle John Lennon at the John Lennon Museum before a charity concert to commemorate the 22nd anniversary of his death in Saitama, suburban Tokyo.



Racing pigeons rest in their enclosure in Dakar. — AFP photos



Racing pigeons pass over a roof top during their morning training in Dakar.



A young man looks on at racing pigeons during their morning training in Dakar.

'Like a drug': Pigeon racing takes flight in Senegal

Oumar Johnson ducks to enter his cramped dovecote, built atop a city apartment block, and snatches his favourite pigeon from dozens of birds fluttering and cooing around him. "This pigeon is called Super King," he says, holding the animal proudly aloft. The pedigree bird is the most expensive pigeon in Senegal, which Johnson bought at auction to inject a competitive edge into the country's fledgling pigeon-racing scene. The 30-year-old scientist is one of a small but growing number of Senegalese men who have fallen for the charms of breeding and racing homers, some to the point of obsession. Super King cost the equivalent of about 650 euros (\$813), a hefty price in a country where the minimum wage is some 90 euros a month.

"We have a sort of addiction to this animal, the homing pigeon," says Johnson, the president of the Senegalese federation of pigeon fanciers. "It's another way of life." Long established in countries such as Belgium, France and China, pigeon racing took off in Senegal only over the past decade after ornamental bird breeders stumbled across the sport online, according to Johnson. The West African nation now boasts some 350 enthusiasts, many of whom ignore protests from family and loved ones and devote most of their free time, and sizeable sums of money, to their pigeons. Most, like Johnson, keep their lovingly tended birds in wooden dovecotes on rooftops in dense urban areas.

From his roof in a suburb of the capital Dakar, 40-year-old shopkeeper Moustapha Gueye releases scores of

pigeons from their acrid-smelling loft. They rush into the air and are quickly out of sight. "They are athletes so they need to train," he says, explaining that the pursuit demands both time and brainpower. He not only feeds and exercises the pigeons each morning, but he also handles veterinary care and develops cross-breeds suitable for flying in hot weather. "It's something that can't be explained," Gueye says, smiling as he describes his feelings when his pigeons return after a long race.

'Like a drug'

Senegal's racing season, featuring nation-spanning contests, began in November after the end of the rains. In late October, dozens of mostly young men brought crates of homers to a suburban Dakar rooftop to register them for a pre-season test race-one of several that took place that weekend. Volunteers registered and tagged the birds in a lively atmosphere, joking and chatting until well

after midnight. Then, so-called convoyeurs drove the tagged pigeons to the city of Diourbel, about 160 kilometers (100 miles) east of Dakar, to be released early the next morning.

"It's like a drug," says Johnson, who attended the pre-race registration, explaining the appeal of the sport. The next day, race participant Mamadou Diallo is standing on his Dakar rooftop with several friends, scanning the crystal-blue skies for his pigeons. The 33-year-old electrical engineer, a self-professed pigeon fanatic, is pacing back and forth in anticipation. Suddenly a shout goes up. Pigeons on the horizon. Diallo, in excitement, skits around the rooftop blowing a whistle and rattling a plastic bottle to lure the pigeons back into their dovecote.

He carefully notes their arrival times, which the race organizers will later compare with other pigeons that raced from Diourbel. Afterwards, a more relaxed Diallo describes pigeons as his passion

but jokes that his wife chastises him for wasting his time. On top of work and family obligations, he frets about his animals' welfare. "It's normal because... I put them in a cage, I am responsible for them."

'Greatest pigeon nation'

Senegalese pigeon-racing enthusiasts are keen to turn others on to the sport, and some hope to ultimately turn professional. It has already grown apace. About 15 people practiced the sport in 2010, according to Diallo, compared with more than 300 today. Teenagers are also increasingly interested. "It is my one and only dream to bring pigeon-racing to the (rooftops)," Diallo says, adding that he wants his children to get involved too. He worries that the time commitment and costliness of keeping pigeons could distract youngsters from their studies, however.

Johnson, the pigeon-fanciers' president, shares his concerns, noting that some people take their dedication too far. "When you're too busy with pigeons, things risk going badly," he says, adding that the federation is considering less time-consuming races for youngsters. Young people are nonetheless the future of the sport, Johnson says, adding that their devotion will make Senegal "one of the greatest pigeon-racing nations" one day. "In Europe, you have to motivate young people to get involved," he says. "Here, young people are rushing into it." — AFP



Moustapha Gueye, 40, looks on as his racing pigeons mack their way back to their coop after their morning training in Dakar.

INDIAN JEWELER'S 12,638-DIAMOND RING SETS WORLD RECORD

An elaborate floral-shaped ring sporting 12,638 tiny diamonds has earned a place in the Guinness World Records-but its Indian creator has no plans to sell his priceless design just yet. Called "The Marigold - The Ring of Prosperity", the chunky circular band weighs a little over 165 grams (5.8 ounces). "It's wearable and comfortable," said 25-year-old Harshit Bansal, who described his audacious creation as a dream project. Bansal said he got the idea two years ago while studying jewelry design in the western city of Surat, India's diamond hub.

"My target was always more than 10,000 diamonds. I trashed many designs and concepts over the years to finally zero in on this," Bansal told AFP. In a statement, his company said that each tiny petal in the ring's eight-layer flower design was unique. Bansal said he had already knocked back requests from prospective buyers. "We have no plans of selling it right now," he said. "It's a matter of pride for us. It's priceless." The previous record determined by Guinness, also set in India, was for a ring containing 7,801 diamonds.— AFP



These undated handout photographs show a ring called the Marigold-the ring of prosperity, the circular band with 12,638 diamonds that weighs a little over 165 grams is pictured in Meerut. — AFP photos

Photo of the Day



Lukas Kubrican and Juri Ragnoli perform during the Red Bull Dolomitenmann in Austria. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

Ligue 1: 5th straight win as Marseille thump Nimes 2-0

PSG lifted by crucial Champions League success; Neymar courts Messi

NIMES: Marseille's 2-0 away win at Nimes on Friday saw them climb second top of Ligue 1 with a game in hand on all their closest rivals. Paris Saint-Germain are top on 25 points with Marseille a point behind and four clubs, Lille, Lyon, Monaco and Montpellier all on 23. After a defeat and a draw in their last two games PSG face the prospect of being knocked off top spot with a tough away clash at Montpellier while fellow front-runners Lille and Monaco face-off today.

After the weekend Marseille will have two games in hand on all of them, and a Champions League game with Man City coming up in midweek. "This group is starting to show some collective force," Marseille's coach Andre Villas-Boas. "We have got our confidence back. And we can have a go at Monaco and Rennes in our coming games," he said. Argentina's Dario Benedetto got OM's opener Friday with a classic centre-forward's control on the chest and a flying snap-

shot as the former Boca Juniors forward produced a second goal from consecutive outings after a 15-match personal dry patch. Nimes were down to 10-men before Valere Germain wrapped up the precious three away points.

Neymar courts Messi

Meanwhile, Paris Saint-Germain this week averted a crisis by beating Manchester United to revive their Champions League campaign and the club's followers might even be getting giddy at the possibility of seeing Lionel Messi in the French capital next season. Neymar scored twice in Manchester and then publicly stated his wish to team up again with his old Barcelona teammate next season, telling ESPN: "I want to play with him for sure, next year we have to do it."

With Messi having spent the last close season trying to engineer a move away from Barcelona, who are

suffering badly from the economic impact of the coronavirus, Neymar perhaps feels a reunion in Paris is more likely than his return to the Camp Nou. Meanwhile PSG are pondering how to deal with Neymar's contract, and that of Kylian Mbappe, which both expire in 2022.

The Qatar-owned club are also feeling the effects of the pandemic, which has slashed ticket revenue in particular, with games in France being played behind closed doors. Qualifying for the Champions League last 16 would provide a financial boost. Thomas Tuchel's team only require a draw at home to Istanbul Basaksehir next week to seal their progress. "I didn't come to Paris to play in the Europa League," Neymar told Brazil's Esporte Interativo. However, Tuchel warned: "We have almost qualified, which means we have not qualified yet. That is the reality. Being almost pregnant does not mean you are pregnant."

Last season's Champions League runners-up are a work in progress and they have allowed the chasing domestic pack to catch up. A loss at Monaco and a draw with Bordeaux in their last two matches have left PSG just two points clear of Lille, Lyon, Monaco and Montpellier in Ligue 1. PSG go to Montpellier this weekend knowing a defeat would knock them off top spot. Montpellier, though, are without their top scorer Andy Delort after he tested positive for coronavirus for the second time in three months.

One to watch: Nice

The ambitious Cote d'Azur club reacted to suffering their fifth straight defeat against Bayer Leverkusen in the Europa League on Thursday by sacking coach Patrick Vieira. The France 1998 World Cup-winning midfielder took the club to seventh and then fifth in the last two seasons but had been under pressure with Nice in the bottom half of Ligue 1, despite being expected to progress this season following considerable investment from the club's British owners Ineos.

Appointed in 2018, Vieira had been hampered in recent weeks by the loss of veteran captain Dante to a serious injury. He has been replaced by his assistant, Adrian Ursea. The 53-year-old Romanian, who has spent much of his playing and coaching career in Switzerland, had been an assistant to previous Nice coach Lucien Favre and returned last year to work under Vieira. Ursea's first game in charge will be away at struggling Reims today. — Agencies



GARD: Marseille's Argentine forward Dario Benedetto (center) scores a goal during the French Ligue 1 football match between Nimes Olympique and Olympique de Marseille on December 4, 2020. — AFP

Kuwait Football League roundup

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: In an important match between Jahra and Sulaibkhat to improve their status in the ranking phase

of the Kuwait Football League, both teams failed to score, and came out with one point each in the 10th round of the league. Activities during most of the match were at midfield though Jahra had much ball possession. Jahra ended with 11 points while Sulaibkhat grabbed 5 points.

In another match, Kuwait had control in their match with Fahaeel despite the fact that the match remained scoreless until the 90th minute when Kuwait's Fahad Humoud scored the lonely goal which gave Kuwait

three points - raising their total points to 15 while Fahaeel remained at 10. Kuwait has an attacking plan - sending Ahmad Al-Akaishi up front with support from Ahmad Hizam, Ahmad Al-Zanki and Jay Dembly. Kuwait attempted a different strategy in the second half and made several substitutions but were not able to score until the final minute when Fahad Humoud was able to head the ball into the net from a corner kick as the match ended 1-0.

A third match between Qadisiya and Yarmouk ended

ed in a 3-3 draw. Yarmouk's Udai Al-Dabbagh, who previously played for Qadisiya, scored in the 23rd minute of the match, while Wisam Al-Edreesi scored from the penalty spot in the 77th minute. Another goal followed in the 79th minute. Qadisiya was first to score as veteran Saleh Al-Sheikh scored in the 7th minute, Lucas in the 64th and Minwer Al-Mutairi in the 85th. Yammouk remained at the tail end of the list with only two points while Qadisiya grabbed second place with 19 points.



News in brief

NFL bans in-person meetings

NEW YORK: In a bid to contain the spread of COVID-19, NFL clubs will be banned from conducting in-person meetings for two days following games, the league announced Friday. The measure would not apply to clubs with a short week, such as those playing on Sunday who then face a Thursday night matchup, but all others must comply with solo work only or virtual meetings to begin new game weeks. Starting Monday, in-person meetings are prohibited, including between a player and coach, coaches with each other or staff-only sessions. Virtual meetings are allowed. Coaches can access team facilities to work alone and players will be allowed into weight rooms or onto fields but cannot work out together. Locker room and cafeteria areas must be closed with only "grab-and-go" meal options permitted. — AFP

Rozner claims maiden Tour win

DUBAI: France's Antoine Rozner powered to a two-shot victory at the Golf in Dubai Championship yesterday to claim his first European Tour title. The 27-year-old started the final round four strokes adrift of Englishman Andy Sullivan, but carded an eight-under 64 to finish the event on a winning score of 25 under par. Rozner's triumph caps a strong rookie season on the European Tour, having won two titles on the second-tier Challenge Tour last year. "It means a lot. It's been such a strange year, we have been through so much all over the world and to be able to get it done in such nice fashion, eight under, it's amazing," the world number 204 told europeantour.com. Sullivan, bidding for a wire-to-wire win after starting the tournament with an 11-under 61 on Wednesday, led Rozner's compatriot Mike Lorenzo-Vera by two shots heading into the back nine. — AFP

Davies retires from Vendee

PARIS: British skipper Sam Davies yesterday was in port in Cape Town for repairs on her boat's keel which has forced her to retire from the Vendee Globe. Davies' Imoca 60 monohull hit an unidentified floating object on Wednesday, the force of the collision sending her and the dinner she was eating at the time flying. "It was as if I had run aground on a rock at the time," the 46-year-old said. She confirmed in a video with race organizers yesterday that although officially now out of the race she hoped to continue her solo round the world odyssey 'hors course' (unclassified) after repairs to her boat. The rules of the solo-round-the-world race prevent competitors seeking any outside assistance. Davies is determined to continue back to the French port of Les Sables d'Olonne for her own personal satisfaction but also to continue raising awareness for her sponsor-charity supporting cardiac surgery for children. — AFP

Minnesota stuns Kansas City

LOS ANGELES: Kevin Molino scored two goals for the second straight postseason game as Minnesota United extended their unbeaten string to 10 straight by upsetting top-seeded Kansas City 3-0 in a MLS playoff game on Thursday. Fourth seeded Minnesota advanced to their first MLS semi-final in their three year franchise history and won for the first time in Kansas City after losing five straight at Children's Mercy Park field. They move on to play the second seeded Seattle Sounders on Tuesday. Molino became the third player in MLS history to score two goals in consecutive postseason games. Emanuel Reynoso dished out three assists for the second straight match. Molino scored in the 27th minute to give Minnesota the lead. — AFP

Ogier keeps wheels on title quest

MONZA: Sebastien Ogier kept alive his world title bid by taking the lead in the last round of the world rally championship at Monza after yesterday morning's three opening stages. The French driver clocked the fastest time in the season-closing rally's seventh special, with Dani Sordo taking the next and Ogier's Toyota teammate and title favorite Elfyn Evans, annexing the next. The morning's action left Ogier in command by 6.7seconds from Sordo, with Evans third at 7.5sec. Evans arrived at Monza with a 14 point advantage over Ogier in the title race to this coronavirus-disrupted season. Whilst the permutations are plenty, Welsh driver Evans is guaranteed his first WRC crown-should Ogier win-if he finishes second. If Ogier wins and Evans finishes third or fourth then it all goes down to Sunday's closing Power Stage with its five-point bonus. — AFP

Sports

Suwon grab last-16 spot; ACL heads to knockouts

Cannavaro on the brink of sack again at China's Guangzhou

DOHA: Suwon Samsung Bluewings grabbed the last available round-of-16 spot in the Asian Champions League with a 2-0 win over Vissel Kobe in the competition's final group stage game on Friday. The South Koreans needed to win by a two-goal margin to overtake China's Guangzhou Evergrande on goal difference and that was exactly what they did as Kim Gun-hee and Lim Sang-Hyeob each struck in the second half at the Khalifa International Stadium in Doha.

Vissel Kobe were the first team to qualify for the next phase in the three-team Group G while two-time champions Guangzhou Evergrande had already completed their four matches with five points and were hoping Suwon slipped up in their last-gasp bid to make the cut. But Fabio Cannavaro's frustrations only grew as he watched Suwon progress from his bio-secure hotel room in the Qatari capital, capping a disappointing year during which Guangzhou were dethroned as Chinese Super League champions by first-time winners Jiangsu Suning.

Suwon, who lost 1-0 to Guangzhou when they clashed in February before the Covid-19 pandemic forced the Asian Football Confederation to stop proceedings, had only 43-percent possession on Friday but made good of the opportunities that came their way. Kim struck first in the 49th minute with a header from an excellent corner taken by Lee-Ke-je while Lim scored from the penalty spot in the 68th after Vissel Kobe's Takuya Yasui handled the ball inside the box.

Suwon then hung on tenaciously to earn a last-16 clash with Yokohama F. Marinos on Monday, to the relief of coach Park Kun-ha. "It was a difficult situation and I was aware of that and the players were too," said

Park. "We were talking for the past couple of days that the players should not give up and I think that played a role in us winning today," he added.

Jeonbuk save pride

Earlier on Friday, Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors outclassed Shanghai SIPG with a 2-0 victory, a result that helped the two-time champions from South Korea bow out of the competition with some pride intact. Sydney FC meanwhile claimed a 1-1 draw with Yokohama F. Marinos by holding the group toppers from Japan despite finishing bottom with five points from six matches, which included just one win. With Shanghai SIPG and Yokohama F. Marinos already in the last 16, Friday's Group H matches were only meant to complete the formalities.

Also playing at the Khalifa International Stadium, Jeonbuk were served well by Cho Gue-sung whose first-half double helped the South Koreans establish an early foothold on the match against the Chinese giants who fielded several untested players. Cho put Jeonbuk ahead in the 16th minute with a header from the centre of the box from a measured cross from Lee Sung-hoon, catching the Shanghai SIPG defence by surprise.

As Shanghai SIPG struggled to gain control, Jeonbuk consolidated their advantage, scoring from a penalty in the 32nd after another Lee pass found Cho, but his shirt was pulled preventing him from taking a shot. Cho fired home with a confident shot from the spot to give the Koreans a comfortable cushion, which they maintained until the end. Jeonbuk's Portuguese coach Jose Morias was in a positive mood after the three points despite coming to the end of his contract with the side, having already announced his intention to



DOHA: Kobe's midfielder Takuya Yasui (left) is tackled by Suwon's midfielder Han Suk-Jong during the AFC Champions League group G football match between Japan's Vissel Kobe and Korea's Suwon Samsung Bluewings on December 4, 2020. — AFP

move back to Europe after leading them to the K League title last month.

"Today I am smiling for the effort of the players and because it was our last game together. It's good to end things with a positive memory," said Morais, who has

worked as Jose Mourinho's assistant at Inter Milan, Real Madrid and Chelsea. "I believe in the future of the club. Some of the young players in the team have a lot of quality and I know the club has the right set-up to enable them to be successful." — AFP

Berlin derby ends Union's unbeaten run; Piatek shines

BERLIN: Hertha Berlin replacement striker Krzysztof Piatek scored two goals in three second-half minutes to seal a 3-1 win over 10-man FC Union in the Bundesliga derby on Friday night. "It's an amazing feeling to get two goals in the derby," Piatek told broadcaster DAZN. Union's eight-match unbeaten run came to an abrupt end behind closed doors at the Olympic Stadium as Hertha enjoyed their first home win this season. Union played for more than an hour with ten men after midfielder Robert Andrich was shown a straight red for going into a challenge with his foot up.

Union took the lead when Nigeria striker Taiwo

Awoniyi got between two defenders and hit the bottom corner of the net on 20 minutes. However, Union were down to ten men just three minutes later. Andrich went into a tackle on Hertha midfielder Lucas Tousart with his foot up, making no attempt to pull out of the challenge. It stayed 1-0 at the break, but the numerical disadvantage took its toll on Union as Piatek came off the bench at half-time and Hertha managed three unanswered goals.

They equalized when Matheus Cunha shot from range and although his shot was parried, right-back Peter Pekarik was on hand to tap home the rebound. It was 2-0 on 74 minutes when Piatek's shot deflected off defender Marvin Friedrich and wrong-footed Union goalkeeper Andreas Luthé. Piatek grabbed his second in style 13 minutes from time when he smashed a volley past Luthé. The visitor's miserable night was summed up when Union's former Germany striker Max Kruse limped off with a knee injury in added time. The result lifts Hertha to 11th in the table with Union sixth. — AFP



BERLIN: Hertha Berlin's Polish forward Krzysztof Piatek (2nd left) scores the 2-1 goal during the German first division Bundesliga football match Hertha Berlin v Union Berlin at the Olympic stadium in Berlin on December 4, 2020. — AFP

Patrick Vieira sacked as Nice coach after run of defeats

MARSEILLE: Patrick Vieira has been sacked as coach of Nice and replaced by his assistant Adrian Ursea following a run of five consecutive defeats, the French Ligue 1 club announced on Friday. The final straw for the former Arsenal player and France 1998 World Cup winner was Thursday's 3-2 defeat at home to Bayer Leverkusen, which confirmed Nice's elimination from the Europa League. Ursea will take over from Vieira for at least the rest of this season, Nice president Jean-Pierre Rivere confirmed.

"That is for sure. We will have time to decide beyond that. Our ambitions and our project remain the same," said Rivere. The 53-year-old Romanian Ursea, who has spent much of his playing and coaching career in Switzerland, had been an assistant to previous Nice coach Lucien Favre and returned last year to work under Vieira. "In a meeting after last night's match, the Nice board informed Patrick Vieira of its decision to put an end to their collaboration," the club said in a statement confirming the sacking.

"Patrick Vieira put all his heart and professionalism into his service for OGC Nice over the last two and a half years." Appointed in 2018, Vieira had been under growing pressure after last week's shock home defeat by struggling Dijon left the ambitious Cote d'Azur club in the bottom half of Ligue 1. His side had been badly hampered by the loss of veteran captain Dante, the former Brazil defender, to a serious knee injury.

Now 44, Vieira had not worked in France since leaving Cannes for AC Milan in 1995 but joined Nice in June 2018 after two and a half years in charge of MLS side New York City FC. Before that he had been coaching the development squad at Manchester City, where he ended his playing career in 2011.

Ambitious Ineos

Vieira took Nice to seventh in Ligue 1 in his first season and then fifth place and European qualification in the last campaign, which was curtailed because of the coronavirus pandemic. Nice had been hoping to build on that and challenge towards the top of the table this season following considerable investment from the club's owners Ineos. The group chaired by Monaco-based British petrochemicals billionaire Jim Ratcliffe took over Nice last year, adding the club to a portfolio of sporting ventures which included Swiss side Lausanne-Sport but also cycling's Team Ineos, formerly Team Sky.

Ineos, which has also invested in the Mercedes Formula One team and an America's Cup sailing team, wants Nice to become regulars in European competition, a status that currently appears under threat, even if they are only six points off the top five in Ligue 1 with a game in hand. After Thursday's defeat, which was their fourth in five Europa League group matches, Vieira admitted he was "weakened as any coach who has lost five consecutive games is". "We are as disappointed as the supporters," he said. Born in Senegal, Vieira was capped 107 times by France between 1997 and 2009. He came off the bench in their win over Brazil in the 1998 World Cup final and then played a central role in France's victory at Euro 2000. Vieira also played in the team that reached the World Cup final in 2006, while at club level he enjoyed enormous success in nine years under Arsene Wenger at Arsenal, winning three Premier League titles. — AFP

Live Matches on TV	
(Local Timings)	
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
West Bromwich v Crystal Palace	15:00
beIN Sports	
Sheffield United v Leicester City	17:15
beIN Sports HD 1	
Tottenham Hotspur v Arsenal	19:30
beIN Sports HD 1	
Liverpool v Wolves	22:15
beIN Sports HD 1	
SPANISH LEAGUE	
Granada CF v Huesca	16:00
beIN Sports HD 3	
Osasuna v Real Betis	18:15
beIN Sports HD 3	
Villarreal CF v Elche	20:30
beIN Sports HD 3	
Deportivo Alaves v Real Sociedad	23:00
beIN Sports HD 3	
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE	
Hellas Verona FC v Cagliari Calcio	14:30
beIN Sports HD 4	
Parma v Benevento	17:00
beIN Sports HD 5	
Roma v US Sassuolo Calcio	17:00
beIN Sports HD 4	
Udinese Calcio v Atalanta	17:00
beIN Sports	
Crotone v SSC Napoli	20:00
beIN Sports HD 4	
Sampdoria v AC Milan	22:45
beIN Sports HD 4	
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA	
SV Werder Bremen v VfB Stuttgart	17:30
beIN Sports	
Schalke 04 v Bayer 04 Leverkusen	20:00
beIN Sports	
FRENCH LEAGUE	
LOSC Lille v AS Monaco	15:00
beIN Sports HD 1	
Angers SCO v Lorient	17:00
beIN Sports HD 10	
Bordeaux v Stade brestois 29	17:00
beIN Sports HD 6	
FCO Dijon v Saint Etienne	17:00
beIN Sports HD 8	
Nantes v RC Strasbourg	17:00
beIN Sports HD 9	
Stade Reims v Nice	19:00
beIN Sports HD 6	
Metz v Olympique Lyonnais	23:00
beIN Sports HD 6	

Under-fire Zidane asks Real's players to stand up and be counted

MADRID: Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane takes his side to Sevilla this weekend after insisting he has no intention of resigning despite a disastrous recent run. Madrid have won just once in La Liga since October and crashed to a 2-0 defeat at Shakhtar Donetsk in the Champions League on Tuesday, meaning they must beat Borussia Moenchengladbach next week to advance from the group stage. In La Liga, Real have drawn with in-form Villarreal, were edged out at lowly Alaves and were hammered at Valencia since their last league victory, leaving the champions in fourth place, seven points off leaders Real Sociedad.

"I have the strength needed to turn the situation around and I am going to give everything to do that, so are the players," Zidane said after the loss in Ukraine. "We have to lift ourselves up and think about the next match. We're on a bad run, there's nothing else to do other than think about the next match and move on. "In difficult moments, you have to show character," he added. Spanish press reports have linked former Tottenham boss Mauricio Pochettino and ex-Madrid forward Raul forward to the Frenchman's job.

According to AS, Real's captain Sergio Ramos called a squad meeting this week, exhorting his teammates to give "an extra push until the end of the year." "This is Real Madrid, gentlemen. Together, we've come out of worse," Ramos reportedly said ahead of the trip to the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium where they have lost on six of their last eight visits. Yesterday's hosts went unbeaten in the Spanish top-flight throughout November, hitting form after a sluggish start to the season under former Madrid boss Julen Lopetegui. Spain playmaker Suso is set to return for the Europa League champions after being sidelined for six weeks with a muscle injury.

Player to watch: Joao Felix

The Atletico Madrid attacker is on the verge of already equaling his goal tally for last season, when he hit nine, finally showing justifying his 126 million euros fee. The price tag for his move from Benfica made him the second most expensive teenager in history, behind only what Paris Saint-Germain paid for Kylian Mbappe. In his first season at Atletico, Felix appeared to feel the burden of the transfer fee and his progress was also hampered by missing 13 games through injury. Yesterday, Atletico hosted 17th-place Real Valladolid and a win could send them top temporarily with Sociedad heading to Alaves a day later. — AFP



Real Madrid's French coach Zinedine Zidane

14 Ligue 1: 5th straight win as Marseille thump Nimes 2-0



15 Piatek shines; Berlin derby ends Union unbeaten run

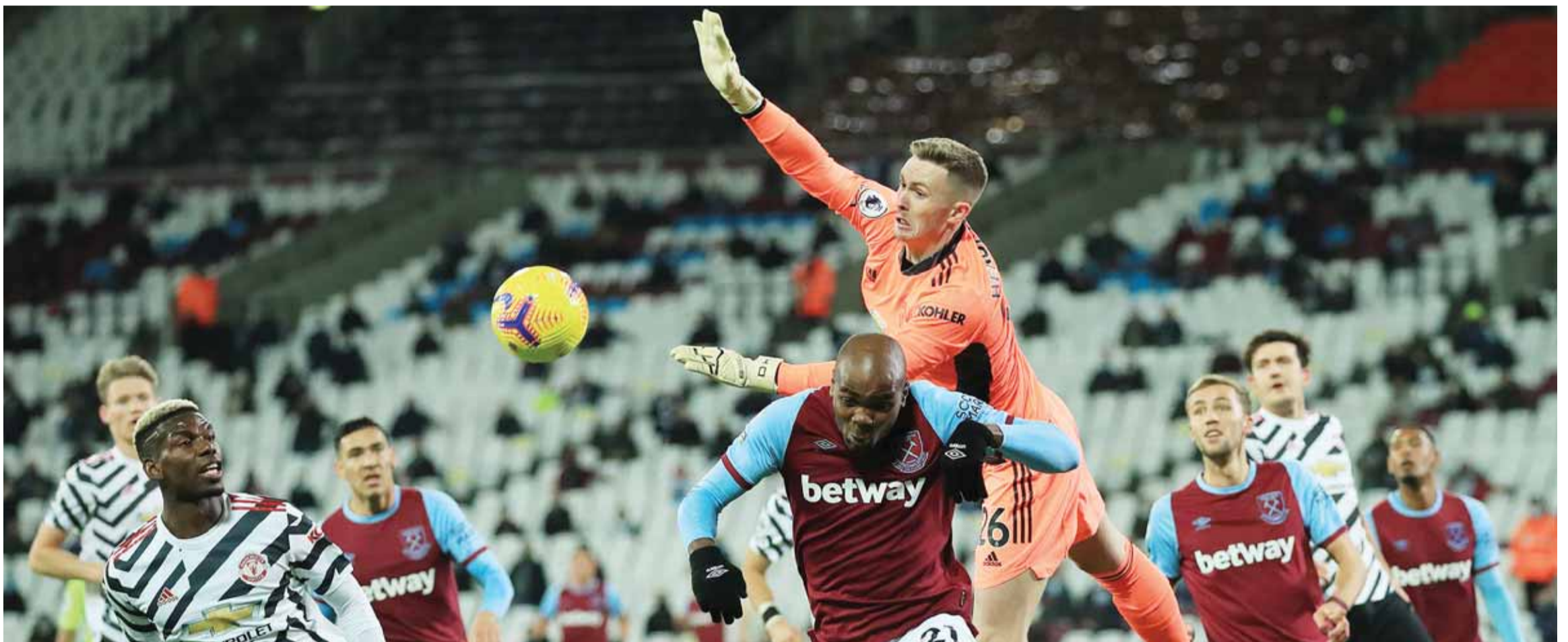


15 Suwon grab last-16 spot; ACL heads to knockouts



Man United climb into top four

City sweep aside Fulham • Premier League welcomes back fans



LONDON: West Ham United's Italian defender Angelo Ogbonna (center) vies with Manchester United's English goalkeeper Dean Henderson during the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Manchester United yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: Manchester United roared back to beat West Ham 3-1 yesterday and climb into the top four of the Premier League as fans returned to the English top-flight for the first time in nine months. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men fell behind at the London Stadium but a three-goal blitz from Paul Pogba, Mason Greenwood and Marcus Rashford turned the tables at the London Stadium. United, who have won nine successive league games on the road, are now fourth in the table, one point ahead of Manchester City, who earlier cruised past Fulham 2-0.

United, who started with Bruno Fernandes and Rashford on the bench, were second best in the first half and fell behind to a Tomas Soucek goal seven minutes before half-time. But, with 2,000 fans inside the ground, Solskjaer threw on Rashford and Fernandes for the start of the second half and United were a changed side. Pogba equalized in the 65th minute with a superb strike from distance and minutes later United were ahead, Greenwood turning and fir-

ing home in the area. Rashford struck a post as United looked to extend their lead, and it was the England striker who made it 3-1 12 minutes from time.

City cruise

Pep Guardiola's Manchester City have had a patchy start to the season but are now just three points behind leaders Tottenham after a dominant display at the Etihad. City, who had won just four of their opening nine matches, are showing ominous signs they are returning to their best form after building on their 5-0 mauling of Burnley last week.

They made a superb start at the Etihad, with Raheem Sterling putting them ahead inside five minutes to end his recent goal drought. The England forward, who had already had one shot saved by Alphonse Areola, raced through on goal from a measured Kevin De Bruyne pass and calmly side-footed into the far corner. De Bruyne, in Guardiola's 700th game as a manager, doubled the lead from

the penalty spot after Sterling was brought down by Joachim Andersen. The Belgian rattled the bar early in the second half as City continued to dominate but they could not add to their lead.

"We struggled at the beginning of the season for many reasons," Guardiola told the BBC, bemoaning his side's wastefulness in front of goal. "Now four games, four clean sheets. It's so important for us to maintain this solidity." "This season looks like there will be a lot of teams in contention," he added. "Everyone can beat everyone. In this month it was important to get qualification for the Champions League, now we focus on the Premier League. It will be a long season." Earlier, Dominic Calvert-Lewin scored his 11th Premier League goal of the season to rescue a point for Everton in a 1-1 draw against struggling Burnley.

Carlo Ancelotti's side trailed at Turf Moor after a fine strike by midfielder Robbie Brady before England forward Calvert-Lewin leveled on the stroke

of half-time. Premier League chiefs issued advice to supporters on coronavirus safety measures, including a warning for fans not to get carried away when their team scores a goal. "Fans can celebrate but should remain socially distanced from people outside their social bubble," said the advice. "Hugging of other fans and high-fives should be avoided and fans are asked to be respectful to those around them, including avoiding excessive shouting or singing."

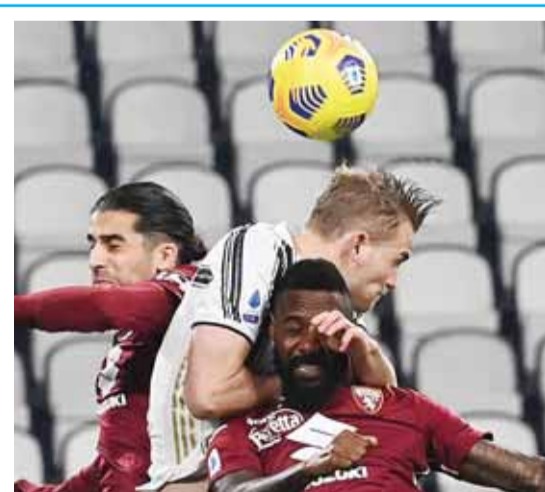
London and Liverpool are among the areas to have been placed into the Tier-2 category based on COVID-19 rates, meaning up to 2,000 fans will be able to attend matches. But clubs based in Tier-3 areas, such as Manchester and Birmingham, are still not allowed to open their gates. Chelsea boss Frank Lampard goes toe to toe with Marcelo Bielsa in the late yesterday kick-off in the first league meeting between the bitter rivals for 16 years. Leaders Tottenham and Liverpool, who are both on 21 points, are in action today. — AFP

Juventus hit back to beat Torino

MILAN: Juventus came from behind to beat Torino 2-1 yesterday with US midfielder Weston McKennie among the scorers for the first time since he joined the Italian champions on loan. McKennie's close-range header on 78 minutes put Juve level after Nicolas Nkoulou had given Torino a first-half advantage. After McKennie's equaliser, Leonardo Bonucci produced an 89th-minute winner to lift Juve to second in the table, three points behind AC Milan who visit Sampdoria on Sunday.

Inter Milan can overtake Juve by beating Bologna in yesterday's late match. Before the game in Turin, Cristiano Ronaldo was presented with a special jersey commemorating his 750th career goal. But Ronaldo played a supporting role for once as 22-year-old McKennie, on loan from German club Schalke 04, scored a first Serie A goal and was mobbed by his teammates. Juve travel to Barcelona in their final Champions League group game on Tuesday, but both clubs are already assured of place in the last 16.

Earlier yesterday, Ciro Immobile scored his 10th goal of the season as Lazio won 2-1 at Spezia to climb to seventh. The capital-city club bounced back from last weekend's 3-1 home loss to Udinese to make it four wins in six league outings. Simone Inzaghi's side will now turn their attentions to Tuesday's crucial Champions League clash with Club Brugge at the Stadio Olimpico, where they need to avoid defeat to reach the knockout rounds



TURIN: Juventus' Swedish forward Dejan Kulusevski (center) fights for the ball with Torino's Swiss defender Ricardo Rodriguez (left) during the Italian Serie A football match Juventus vs Torino yesterday. — AFP

for the first time since the 1999-2000 campaign. Lazio took the lead in the 15th minute as Immobile was played in on goal by Sergej Milinkovic-Savic before slipping the ball through the legs of Spezia goalkeeper Ivan Provedel. Milinkovic-Savic doubled the advantage 12 minutes before half-time, whipping a fine free-kick into the top corner. Spezia pulled one back with M'Bala Nzola's powerful 64th-minute strike, but Lazio held on to move level on points with sixth-placed Roma, despite Andreas Pereira seeing an injury-time goal ruled out by VAR. — AFP

Zidane gets breathing space after Sevilla win

MADRID: Under-pressure Zinedine Zidane said Real Madrid's 1-0 win at Sevilla yesterday, their first in La Liga since October, was significant after a testing run of games. Sevilla goalkeeper Bono guided Vinicius Junior's effort into his own net in the second half, allowing Zidane's side to take the three points and move up to third in the table. Following two defeats in the past three games, including a 2-0 defeat to Shakhtar Donetsk in midweek that leaves Real's Champions League qualification hopes in the balance, Spanish press reports have linked former Tottenham boss Mauricio Pochettino and ex-Madrid forward Raul to Zidane's job.

Zidane said his side could be satisfied with their narrow win after a "difficult" time: "These are three very important points for us. It's a well-deserved win, against a very good opponent, who can put you in trouble at any time. We got through this. "It has been a bit difficult lately, today we have to enjoy it, be happy, but nothing more," he added. Zidane made two changes from the debacle in Ukraine with Casemiro and Vinicius replacing Martin Odegaard and Marco Asensio.

Ex-Madrid boss Julen Lopetegui brought back Bono into the starting lineup after he missed four games with coronavirus which included Wednesday's heavy European defeat to Chelsea. Morocco's Bono made a shaky start as his attempted clearance inside his own box was blocked by Vinicius. He made up for the error on his own line despite Karim Benzema's efforts. The former Girona keeper kept the sides equal at the break with a tidy save from Benzema's 38th-



SEVILLE: Real Madrid's Croatian midfielder Luka Modric (left) challenges Sevilla's Croatian midfielder Ivan Rakitic during the Spanish League football match between Sevilla and Real Madrid yesterday. — AFP

minute shot, but his crucial mistake came 10 minutes into the second half.

Ferland Mendy played a low cross into the area before Vinicius slid in to guide it towards the goal. Bono came out to close the space but deflected Vinicius' limp attempt into his own goal as the ball spilled off his arms. The hosts' Suso, making his first appearance since late October, and Lucas Ocampos had late chances to equalise but Zidane's men held on for a morale-boosting win before Wednesday's crucial Champions League group game against Borussia Muenchengladbach.

Atletico Madrid, unbeaten since the start of the Liga season, moved to the top of the table with a 2-0 win over Real Valladolid. France forward Thomas Lemar and Spain midfielder Marcos Llorente scored for Diego Simeone's men, who are among five clubs to remain without a domestic defeat in Europe's main five leagues. Lionel Messi's Barcelona head to Cadiz in the day's final game while Real Sociedad, who have lost just once in the league this term but now trail Atletico by two points, traveled to Deportivo Alaves today. — AFP